

## Samuel Augustus Ward (1848-1903)



Born: 1848 (Newark, NJ)  
Died: 1903 (Newark, NJ)

### FAST FACTS

- Played accordion and piano
- Opened a music store in New Jersey for teaching piano and selling music and instruments
- Wrote and arranged music for a male singing group that he formed
- Composed the music for *America, the Beautiful*

Samuel A. Ward was a modest yet important figure in American musical history. Not much is known about his life or career, but Americans owe him gratitude for his simple, yet beautiful song depicting our country's majestic landscape.

Ward was born in New Jersey, and was known as a brilliant young man. He played the accordion from age 6, and taught piano lessons to help support his family financially. When he turned 16, Ward became a church organist in New York City. He later returned to Newark, his birthplace, and opened a music store, where he taught piano and sold instruments and sheet music.

In 1890, Ward formed a male singing group called The Orpheus Society. The performing group became famous throughout New York. Ward wrote and arranged most of the music the group performed, in addition to directing it.

Ward did not actually write the lyrics to the song, "America, the Beautiful", but composed the music for it, which was taken from his hymn-tune "Materna". Katherine Lee Bates, a college English professor in Boston, transcribed the lyrics as she traveled from Niagara Falls in New York to Colorado Springs, CO. In Colorado, she stood atop Pike's Peak, and was deeply moved by the fertile landscape and vast skies before her.

Although a few different pieces have actually been used to accompany the words Katherine Lee Bates wrote for "America, the Beautiful," Samuel Ward's music, written in 1888, was eventually chosen for the way it perfectly characterizes the simple yet stirring beauty of our nation.



### Let's Listen!

- Andre Rieu, professional violinist, performs *America, the Beautiful* at Radio City Music Hall in New York City: [click here](#).
- Watch a video where an author describes a book she wrote about *America the Beautiful*: [click here](#).