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The Life of Hugh T. McElrath

AN ONLINE EXHIBIT ON THE
20TH CENTURY HYMNOLOGIST
THROUGH HYMNALS

CURATOR, DEVELOPER, AND DESIGNER:
JENNIFER NICHOLSON

Who was Hugh T. McElrath?

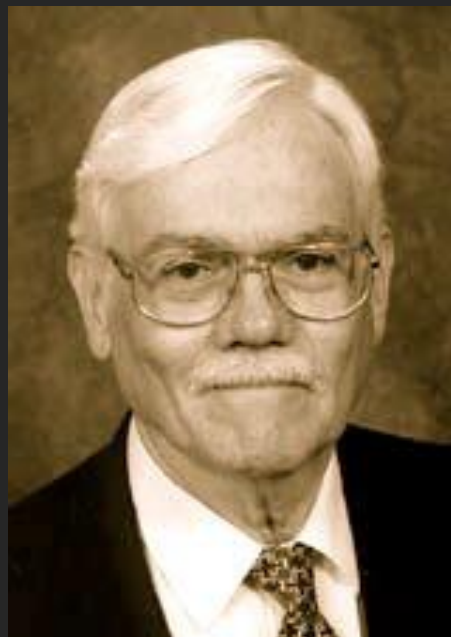


Photo Source:
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. (2008).
In memoriam Hugh Thomas McElrath
November 13, 1921 – May 8, 2008. *Jubilate!*, 2(2).
<https://repository.sbts.edu/handle/10392/4316>

Hugh T. McElrath (1921-2008) was a prominent scholar and church musician who taught hymnology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Born in 1921 in Murray, Kentucky, McElrath was the oldest of four children (Wishall, 2008). Both of his parents could play the piano and were highly involved in the local Baptist church; Christian hymn singing at home was a regular part of family life (Jones, 2001, pp. 11-13). McElrath graduated as valedictorian from Murray High School in 1939 (Jones, 2001, p. 14).

Join us in this exhibit and explore the rest of his life of scholarship in Christian hymnody through notable hymnals he owned.

A Hugh T. McElrath Collection Exhibit

This exhibit features selected Christian hymnals from the Hugh T. McElrath Collection at the Robert E. Webber Institute of Worship Studies (IWS) in Jacksonville, FL. Hymnals are a collection of hymns, or religious songs, in the form of a book. McElrath retired to his winter home in Penney Farms, FL and subsequently donated his collection of personally owned books to IWS.

His collection includes hymnals, songbooks, and books on the history and study of hymns published during his lifetime. Many items in the collection feature hand-written notes by McElrath, including McElrath's signature, year of purchase, and location of where he acquired the book. The collection is currently not cataloged, but a list of books in the collection can be given upon request.

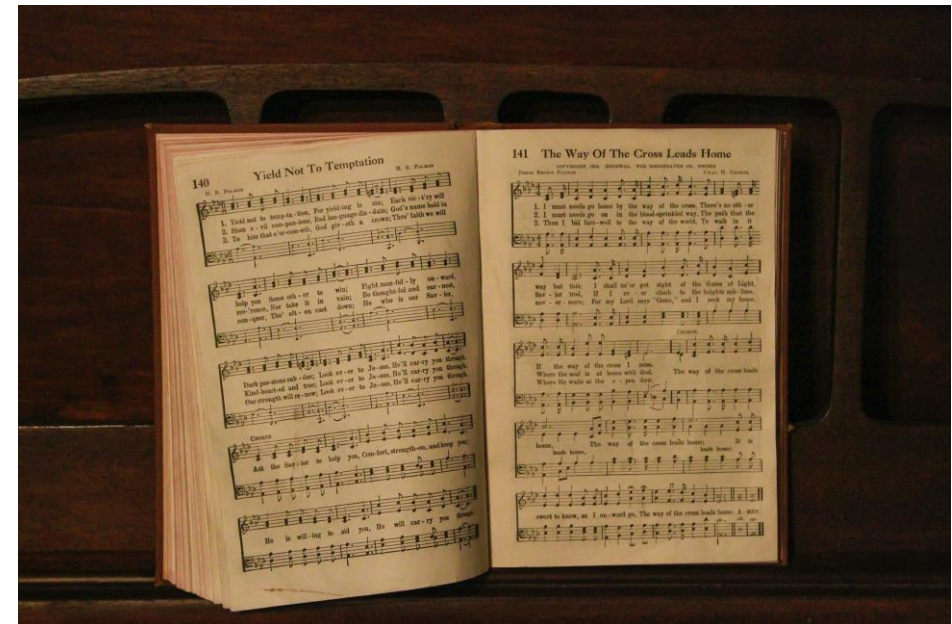


Photo by [Mick Haupt](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The Life of Hugh T. McElrath Exhibit

Description

The exhibit explores the scholarly life of Hugh T. McElrath through the hymnals he owned. Each decade of McElrath's life is surveyed and paired with a hymnbook he purchased during that decade.

Beginning with his undergraduate work in the 1940s, the exhibit concludes with his death and information about his legacy through publications. The selected hymnals reveal the depth and breadth of hymnology that McElrath studied throughout his life.

Exhibit Sections

1940s – Beginning of Studies

1950s – Starting His Career

1960s – Gaining a Ph.D.

1970s – Service and Professorship

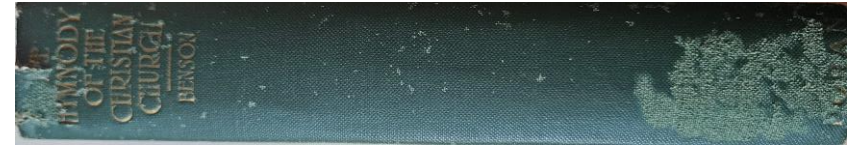
1980s – Travel and Teaching

1990s – Awards and Honors

2000s – Retirement and Death

The Legacy Lives On: Explore McElrath Publications

Beginning of Studies

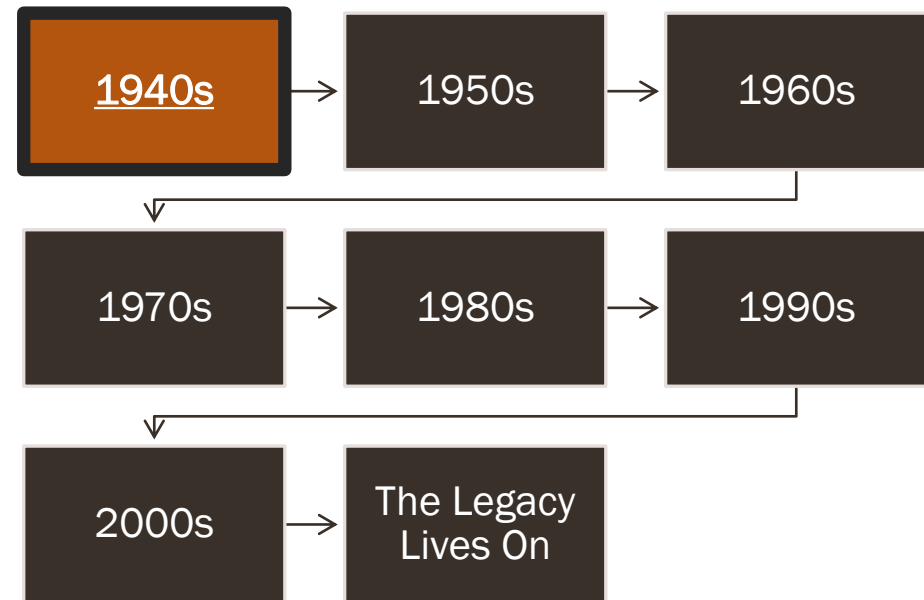


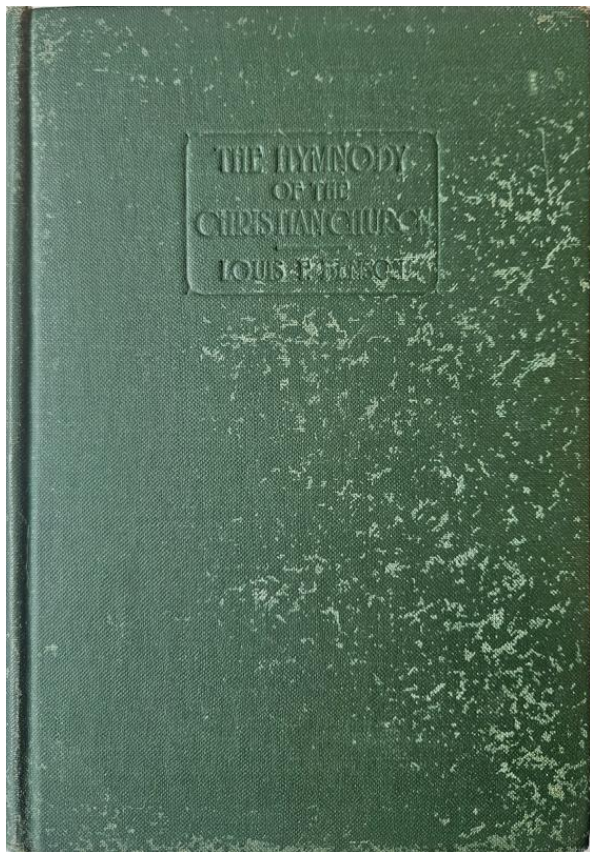
Spine of *The Hymnody of the Christian Church*
(photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

Before McElrath embarked on a career in hymnology, he attended Murray State University and graduated in May 1943 with a major in English (Jones, 2001, p. 15).

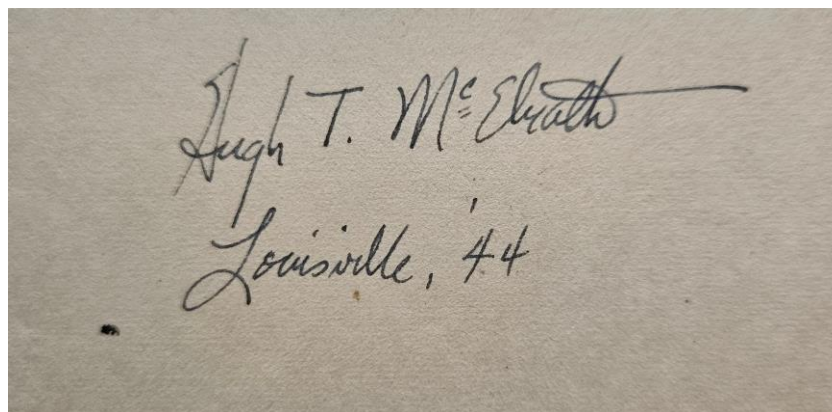
In 1944, McElrath enrolled in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), and was among the first class of undergraduate students to begin the seminary's new Bachelor of Sacred Music degree in Louisville, Kentucky (Jones, 2001, pp. 16-17).

In 1947, McElrath finished his bachelor's and then obtained a Master of Sacred Music degree in 1948 from SBTS (Wishall, 2008). He married his classmate, Ruth Garcia, in 1948 and was appointed to SBTS faculty in 1949 (Jones, 2001, pp. 18-19).





Above: Book cover of *The Hymnody of the Christian Church*
(photo by Jennifer Nicholson)



Above: McElrath's signature and Louisville, '44
written at the head of the free endpaper in
The Hymnody of the Christian Church
(photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

Book Information:

Benson, L. F. (1927). *The Hymnody of the Christian Church: The Lectures on "The L. P. Stone Foundation"*, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1926. United States: George H. Doran Company.

The full text of a different copy of the same book title can be viewed online on [Google Books](#).

McElrath in 1944: *The Hymnody of the Christian Church*

McElrath owned this copy of *The Hymnody of the Christian Church* by Louis FitzGerald Benson, published in 1927. It is most likely that McElrath purchased this hymnbook during his first year as a student at SBTS, and perhaps used it for his classes, as indicated by his writing of the city and year *Louisville, '44* on the book's free endpaper.

Starting His Career

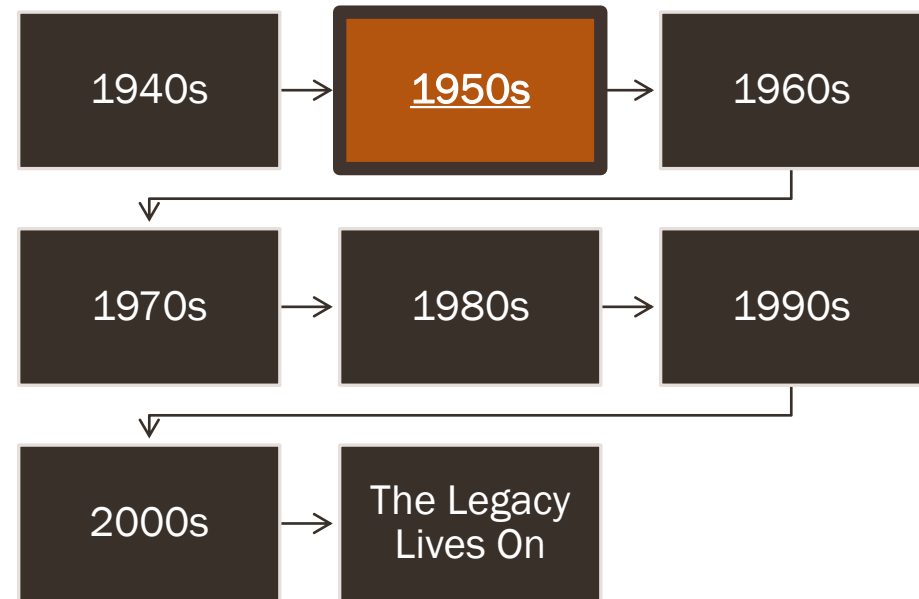


In 1950, McElrath started his Ph.D. at Eastman School of Music in musicology, and in 1954-55, he moved to Rochester, New York during a leave of absence at SBTS to study for his Ph.D. (Jones, 2001, pp. 19, 22).

McElrath returned to SBTS in 1955 as an assistant professor and also took a music minister position alongside his wife at Beechwood Baptist Church, a position he would hold for 22 years (Jones, 2001, p. 23).

His three children, Hugh, Douglas, and Margaret, were also born during this decade (Jones, 2001, p. 22).

Above: Spine of *New Baptist Hymnal*
(photo by Jennifer Nicholson)



NEW
BAPTIST
HYMNAL



Left: Book cover of *New Baptist Hymnal* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

CHAPEL- 1955-56

Above: CHAPEL 1955-56 written on the head of the paste-down endpaper of *New Baptist Hymnal* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

Book Information:

New Baptist hymnal : containing standard and gospel hymns and responsive readings. (1926). Broadman Press.

The full text of the second printing of this book title can be viewed online on [Internet Archive](#).

Right: McElrath's signature in red with *The Seminary Hymn* attached on the free endpaper of *New Baptist Hymnal* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

H. M. McElrath

*The Seminary Hymn

MENDON. L. M.

BASIL MANLY, JR., 1825-1892

German traditional melody
Arr. D.W.

1. Sol - diers of Christ in truth ar-rayed A world in ru - ins needs your aid:
2. His Gos - pel to the lost pro-claim, Good news for all in Je - sus' name;
3. Morn-ing and eve - ning sow the seed God's grace the ef - fort shall suc - ceed.
4. We meet to part, but part to meet, When earth-ly la - bors are com - plete,

A world by sin de-stroyed and dead; A world for which the Sav-iour bled.
Let light up - on the dark-ness break That sin-ners from their death may wake.
Seed times of tears have oft been found With sheaves of joy and plen - ty crowned.
To join in yet more blest em - ploy, In an e - ter - nal world of joy. A-MEN.

*(Written for the first commencement of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky in 1860, by Dr. Basil Manly, Jr., and sung at every commencement since.)

McElrath in 1955: *New Baptist Hymnal*

McElrath owned this copy of the first printing of *New Baptist Hymnal*, published in 1926. It is most likely that McElrath used this book in chapel services as an assistant professor at SBTS, as indicated by CHAPEL - 1955-56 written on the paste-down endpaper. It also appears that McElrath cut out and pasted a copy of *The Seminary Hymn* of SBTS on the free endpaper of this hymnal to have for easy reference.

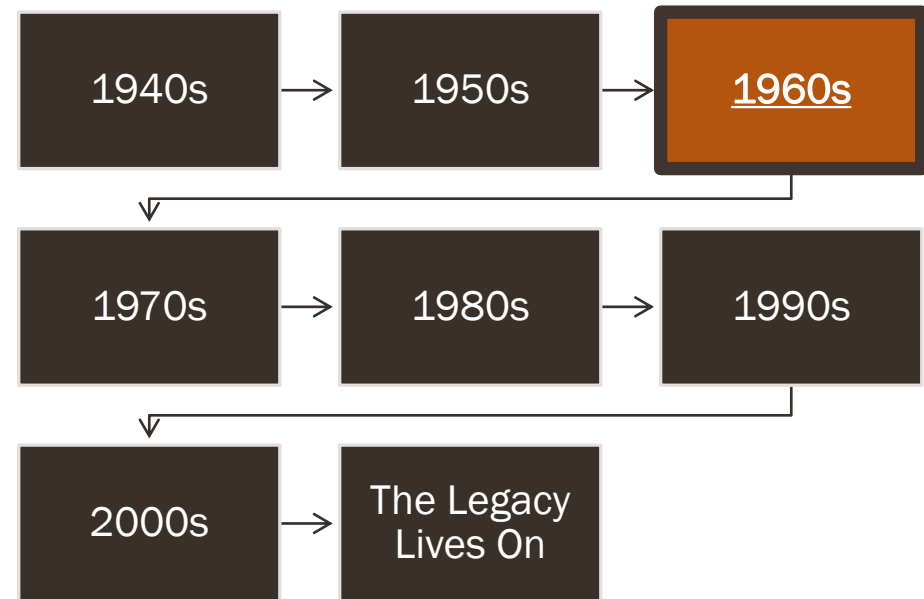
Gaining a Ph.D.

In 1960, McElrath took a sabbatical to study for his Ph.D. in Italy; administration at SBTS urged him to finish his Ph.D so as to have a degreed professor in musicology for the SBTS music program (Jones, 2001, p. 24).

McElrath would eventually graduate in 1967 with his Ph.D. in musicology and also became Associate Professor at SBTS (Jones, 2001, pp. 24-25).



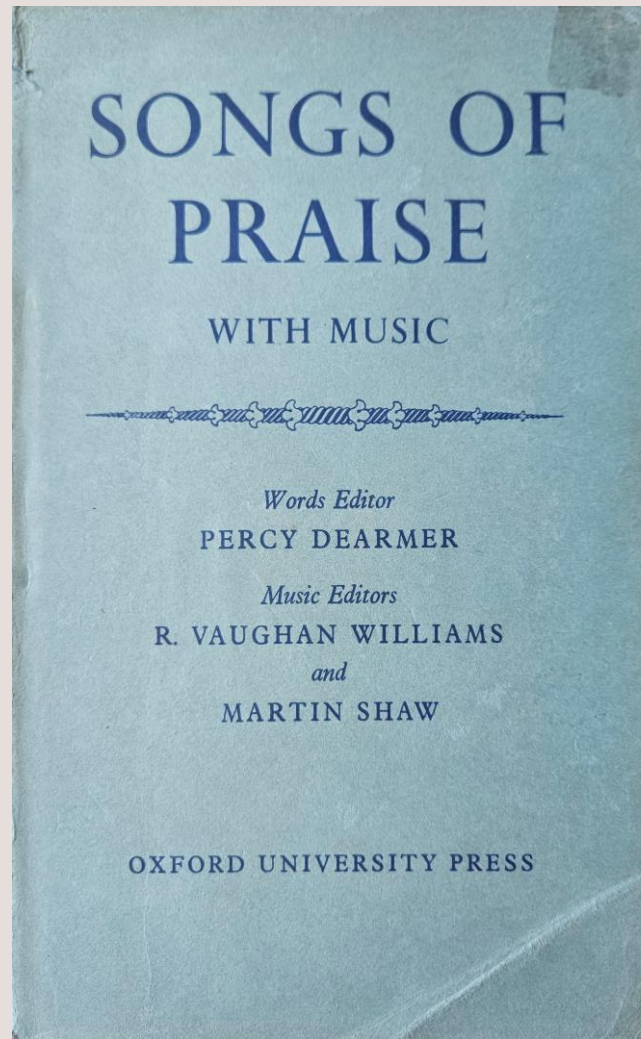
Above: Spine with dust jacket of *Songs of Praise*
(photo by Jennifer Nicholson)



McElrath in 1965: *Songs of Praise*

McElrath owned a copy of *Songs of Praise*, which includes hymns from the British Commonwealth and the United States. He acquired this copy in 1965.

It is most likely that McElrath used this book for his professorship or his personal research. The book is not referenced in his doctoral thesis from Eastman, but it is later cited in McElrath's prominent book he coauthored, *Sing With Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology* (McElrath 1967; Eskew & McElrath, 1980, p. 287).



Above: Front cover with dust jacket of *Songs of Praise* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)



Above: McElrath's signature and Louisville, '65 written at the head of the free endpaper of *Songs of Praise* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

Book Information:

Dearmer, P., Vaughan Williams R., & Shaw M. (1931). *Songs of praise : enlarged edition* (Full music ed. rev. and enl). Oxford University Press.

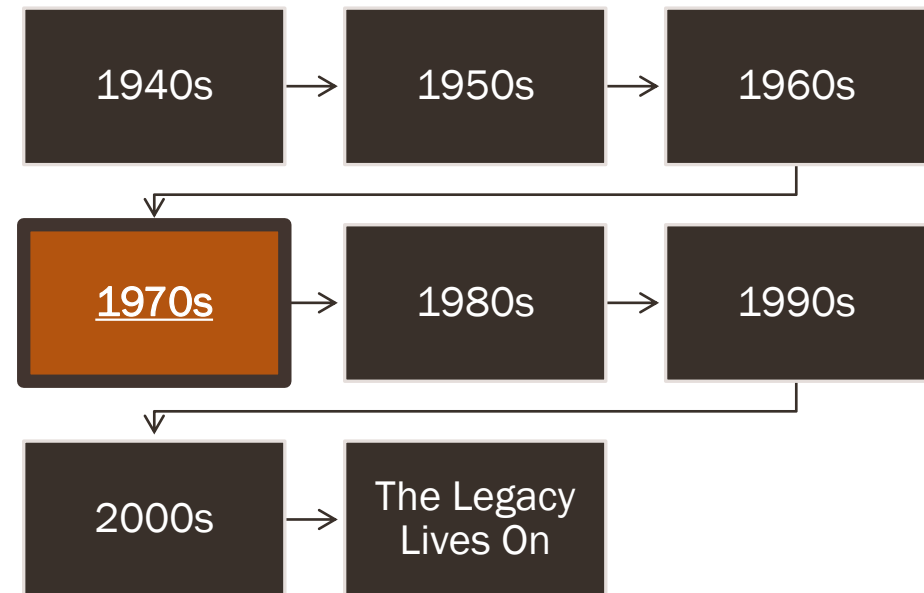
Service and Professorship

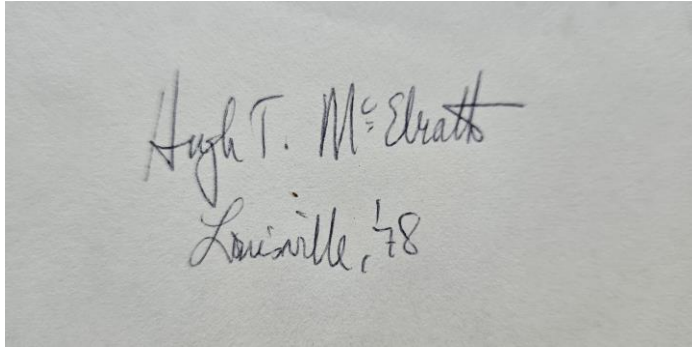


Above: Spine of *Lutheran Book of Worship*
(photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

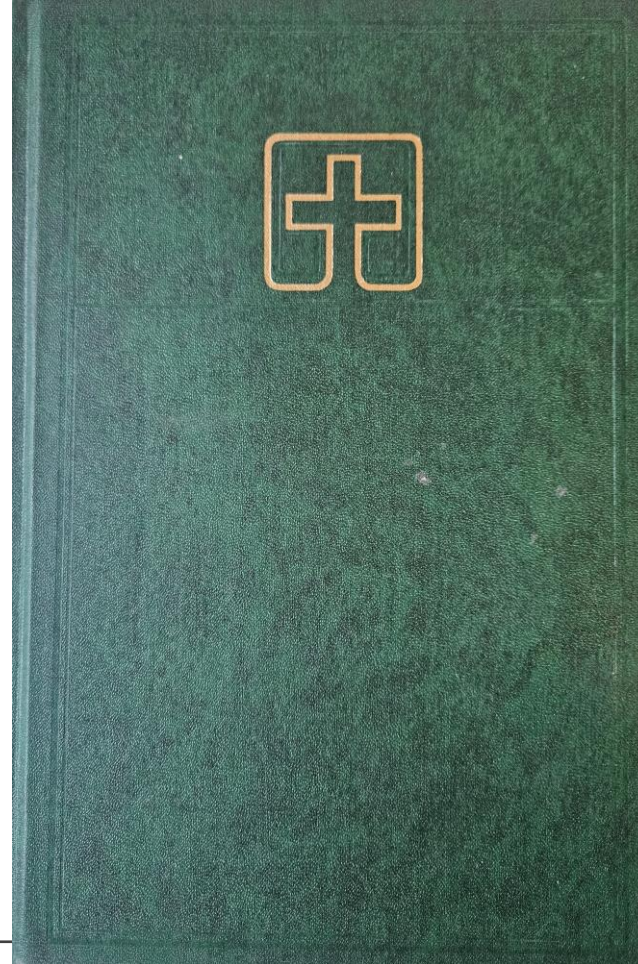
During the 1970s, McElrath studied on sabbatical at Oxford University, performed in numerous sacred works in Britain, and eventually became full Professor of Church Music at SBTS in 1976 (Jones, 2001, pp. 26-28). He began research for what would eventually become his most prominent work, *Sing With Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology* (Jones, 2001, pp. 26).

McElrath was also involved in multiple professional organizations. In the 1970s, McElrath served as the President of the Greater Louisville Music Teachers Association, Vice President of The Southern Baptist Church Music Conference, editor of *The Music Journal*, and on the editorial board of *The Review and Expositor* (Jones, 2001, pp. 27-28).





Above: McElrath's signature and Louisville, '78 written on the free endpaper of *Lutheran Book of Worship* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)



Left: Book cover of *Lutheran Book of Worship* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

Book information:

Lutheran book of worship ([Congregation ed.]). (1978). Augsburg Pub. House.

Information and contents of this hymnal can be viewed online through [Hymnary.org](https://www.hymnary.org).

McElrath in 1978: *Lutheran Book of Worship*

McElrath owned this copy of *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Unlike other hymnals explored thus far, McElrath bought and dated this book in the same year it was published, 1978. It is most likely that McElrath used this copy for his research, as it is cited in McElrath's prominent book he coauthored, *Sing With Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology* (Eskew & McElrath, 1980, pp. 56, 57, & 256).

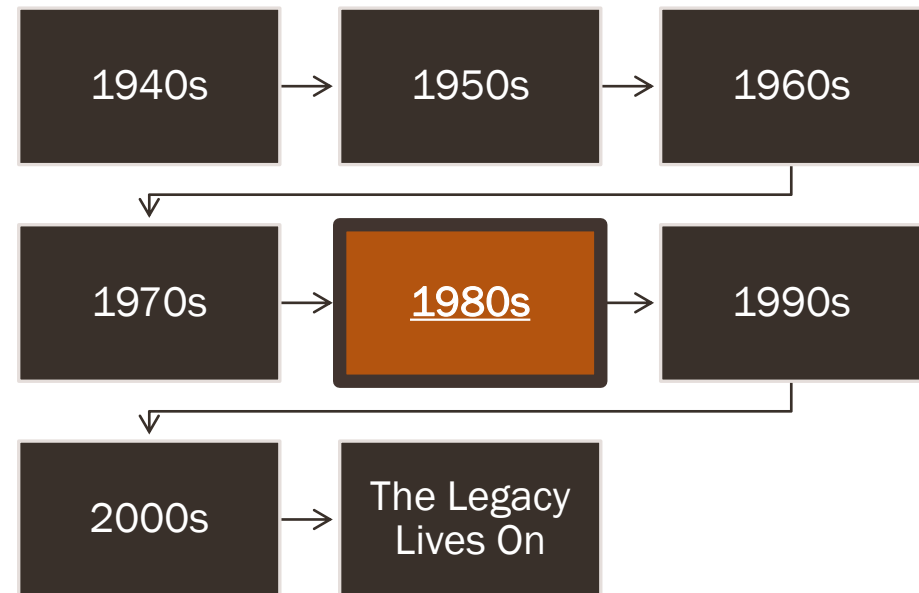
Travel and Teaching

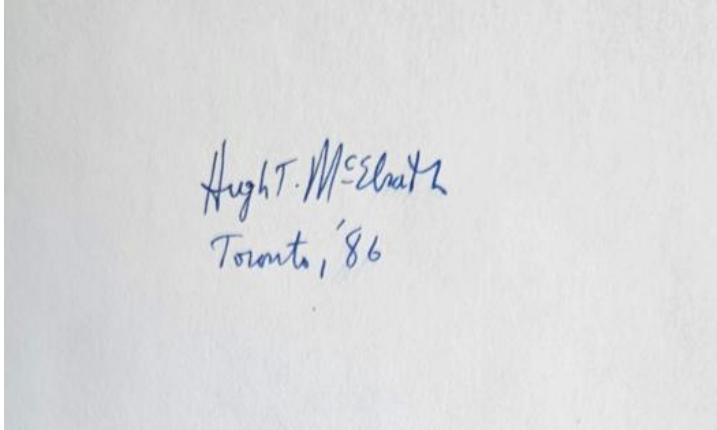


Above: Spine of *Hymns of the Saints* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

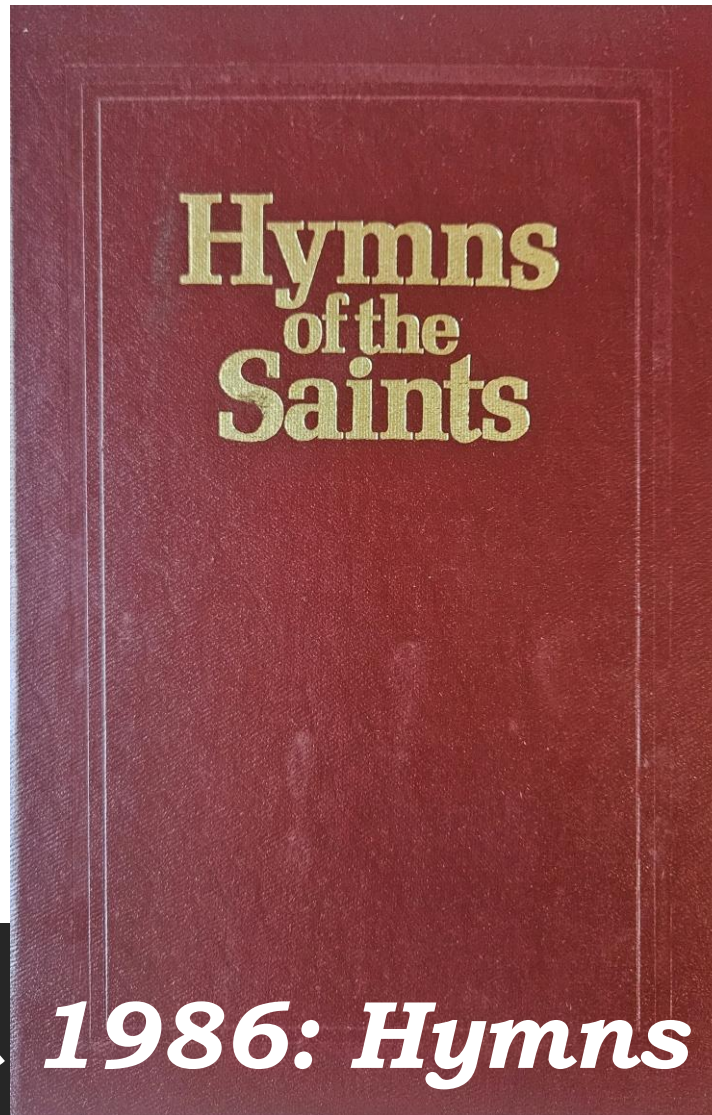
In 1980, McElrath and his coauthor Harry Eskew, published the first edition of their book *Sing With Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology* (Eskew & McElrath, 1980). Throughout the 1980s, McElrath traveled extensively around the world, including to Venezuela, the Bahamas, Europe, East Asia, and Southeast Asia, while teaching on various music missions and sabbaticals (Jones, 2001, p. 30).

McElrath had also been involved with ecumenical work in the late 1970s and appears to have continued that work into the 1980s with his travels (Jones, 2001, pp. 29-30).





Above: McElrath's signature and Toronto, '86 written on the free endpaper of *Hymns of the Saints* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)



Book Information:

1981 Hymnal Committee. (1981, Corrected Printing 1982). *Hymns of the saints: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*. Herald Publishing House.

Information and contents of the hymnal can be viewed online through [Hymnary.org](https://www.hymnary.org).

Left: Book cover of *Hymns of the Saints* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

McElrath in 1986: Hymns of the Saints

McElrath owned a copy of *Hymns of the Saints: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, received in Toronto in 1986 as indicated by *Toronto, '86* written on the paste-down endpaper of the book. This hymnal could reflect his extensive travels and diverse hymn and music interests during this decade.

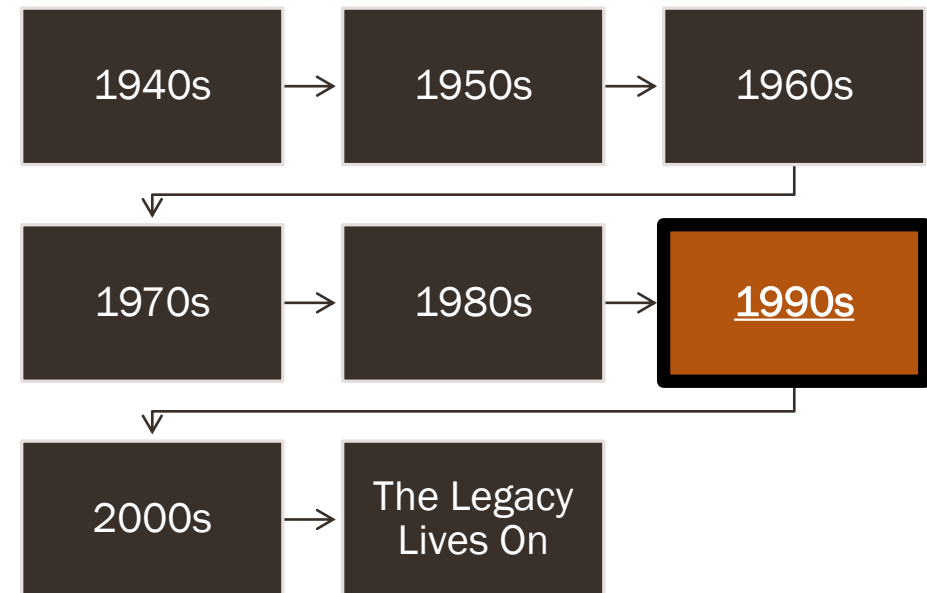
Awards and Honors



Above: Spine of *The Worshiping Church: A Hymnal Worship Leaders' Edition* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

McElrath taught full time at SBTS from 1949 to 1992, and served as Senior Professor until 1998 (SBTS, 2008, p. 2). In 1998, McElrath retired from all positions at SBTS (Jones, 2001, p. 33). During the 1990s, McElrath's contributions to the field of hymnology were recognized with numerous honors and awards, including:

- 1991: Fellow of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada (SBTS, 2008, p. 2)
- 1992: SBTS's Findley B. and Louvenia Edge Award for Teaching Excellence (SBTS, 2008, p. 2)
- 1992: The Hugh T. McElrath Lectureship was established for the SBTS School of Church Music and Worship (SBTS, 2008, p. 2)
- 1992: Hines Sims Award by The Southern Baptist Church Music Conference (Jones, 2001, p. 33)
- 1995: *The Hallelujah Award* presented by the Center for Church Music of Carson-Newman College (Jones, 2001, p. 33)



McElrath in 1991: *The Worshiping Church: A Hymnal Worship Leaders' Edition*

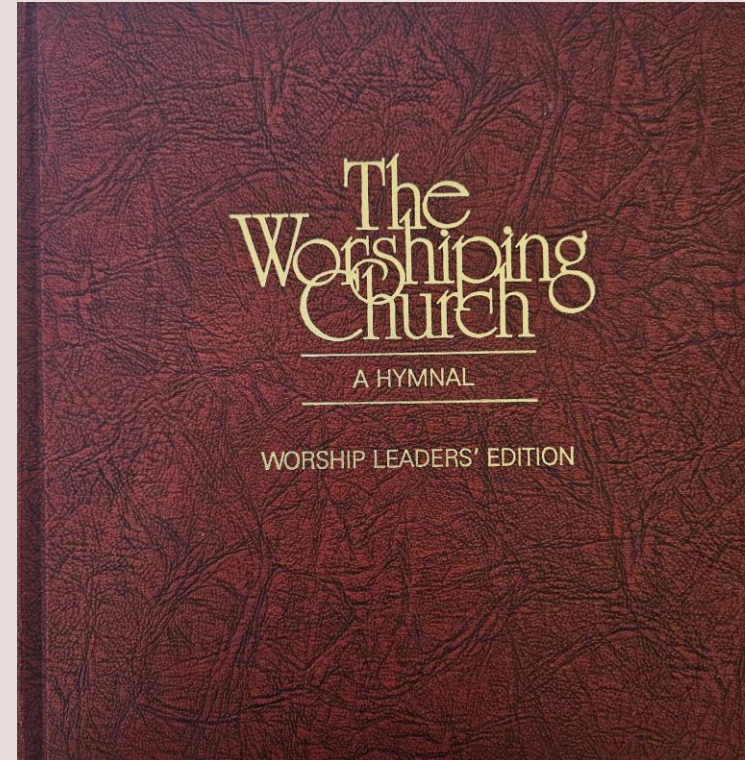
McElrath owned a copy of *The Worshiping Church: A Hymnal Worship Leaders' Edition* (1990), which he acquired in 1991 in Louisville.

Robert E. Webber, founder of IWS, served on the editorial committee of this hymnal (Hustad, 1990, v). A hymn McElrath wrote the lyrics for, titled *We Praise You with Our Minds*, is included in this hymnal (Hustad, 1990, Hymn # 401).

Book Information:

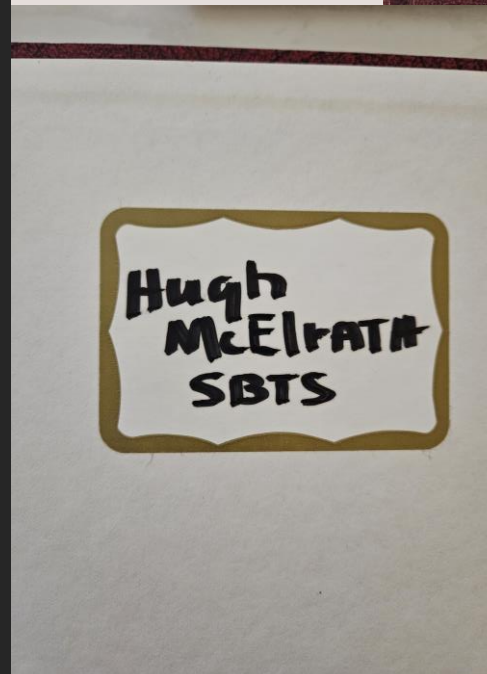
Hustad, D. P. (1990). *The Worshiping church : a hymnal Worship leaders' edition* / [Hymnal editor: Donald P. Hustad]. (Hustad, Ed.). Hope Publishing Co.

Below: Paste-down endpaper of *The Worshiping Church: A Hymnal Worship Leaders' Edition*. McElrath included a sticker with his name and SBTS (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

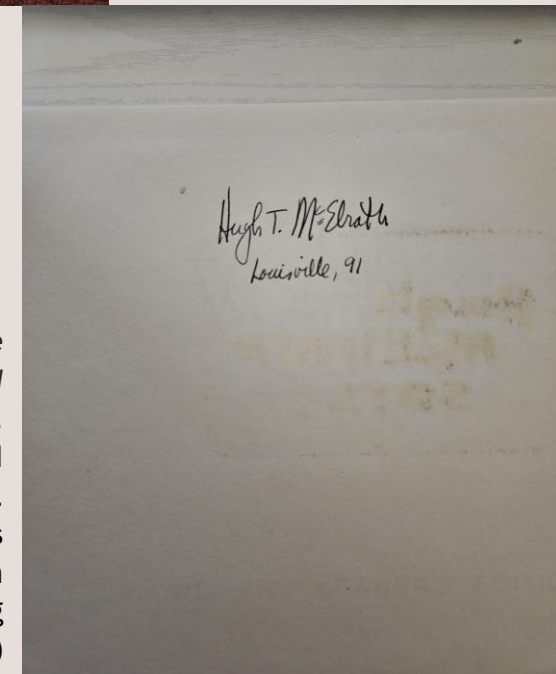


Left: Book cover of *The Worshiping Church: A Hymnal Worship Leaders' Edition* (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

The regular edition of *The Worshiping Church: A Hymnal* (1990) can be viewed online through [Internet Archive](#).



Right: Free endpaper of *The Worshiping Church: A Hymnal Worship Leaders' Edition*. McElrath wrote his signature and Louisville, '91 at the head. Residue from a sticker with his name and SBTS can be seen below McElrath's handwriting (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)



Retirement and Death

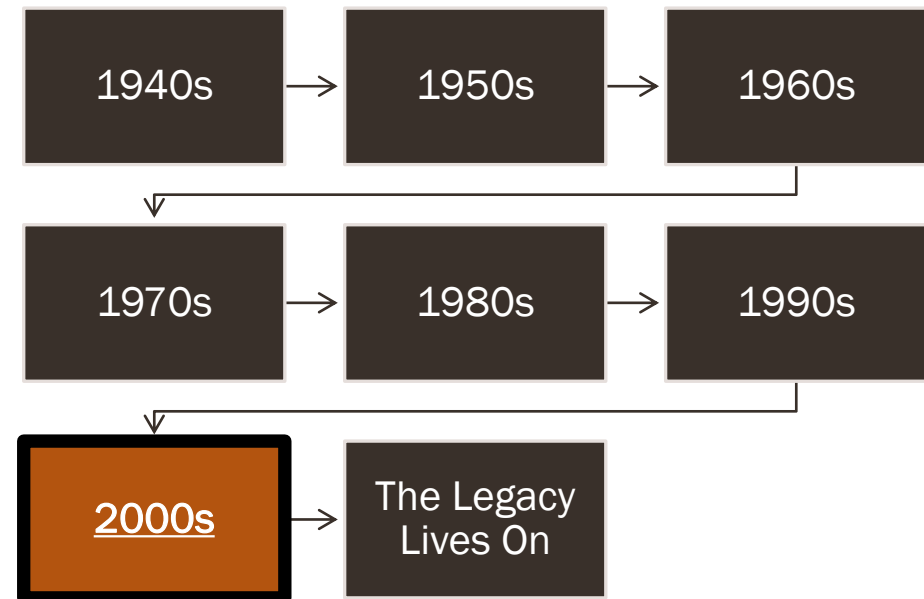
PEOPLE'S MASS BOOK

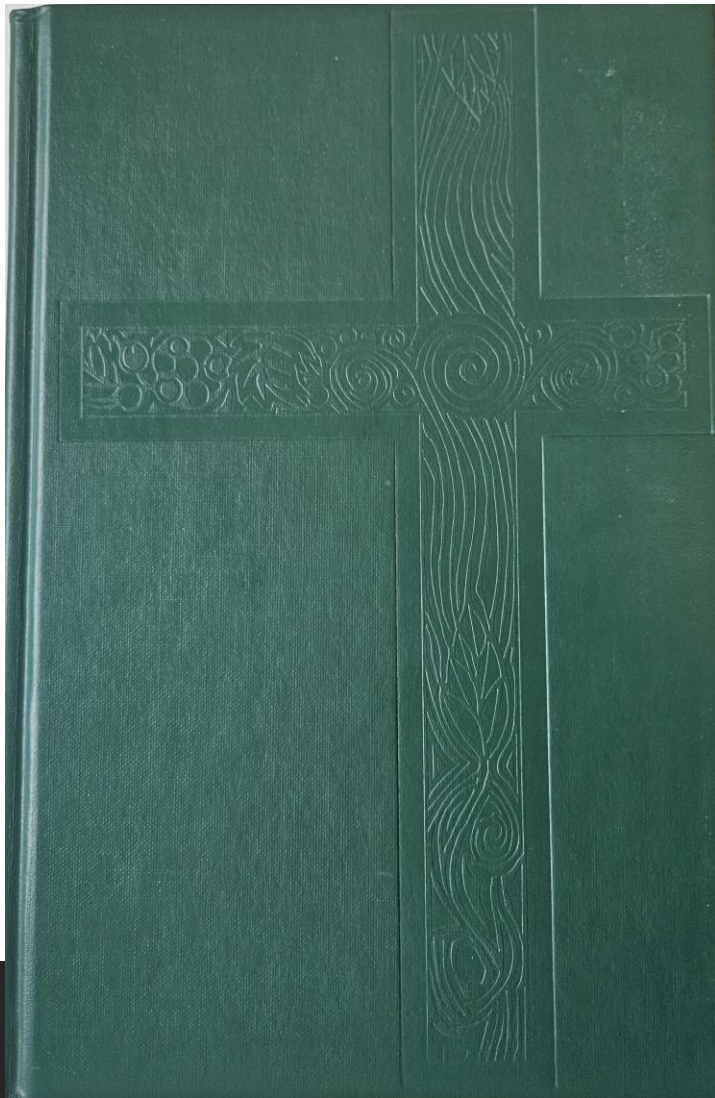


McElrath retired to his winter home in Penney Farms, Florida and lived there in the 2000s. During his retirement, McElrath directed an interdenominational church chorus in the Penney Retirement Community (Eskew, 2008, p. 5). Students of McElrath published *Minds and Hearts in Praise to God: Hymns and Essays in Honor of Hugh T. McElrath*; Deborah Loftis, one of the book's editors, presented the book to McElrath in December 2006 (Eskew, 2008, p. 5).

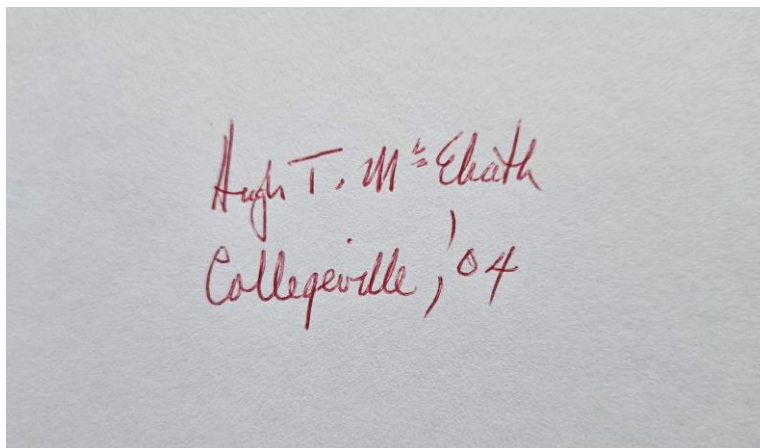
On May 8, 2008, McElrath passed away in Penney Farms, Florida; a service was held in the Alumni Chapel of SBTS on May 14, 2008 (Wishall, 2008).

Above: Spine of *People's Mass Book*
(photo by Jennifer Nicholson)





Left: Book cover of
People's Mass Book
(photo by Jennifer Nicholson)



Above: Free endpaper of *People's Mass Book*.
McElrath wrote his signature and Collegeville,
'04 at the head (photo by Jennifer Nicholson)

Book Information:

Strickland, T.,
Kunde-Anderson,
M.B., & Galipeau,
J. (2003).
*People's mass
book* (Pew ed..).
World Library
Publications.

McElrath in 2004: *People's Mass Book*

McElrath owned this copy of *People's Mass Book – Pew Edition*, a Catholic hymnbook acquired in Collegeville in 2004. This is the last hymnal that McElrath personally dated in the McElrath Collection. The hymnal reflects McElrath's continued travels and lifelong interest in hymnals of different denominations, even during his retirement.

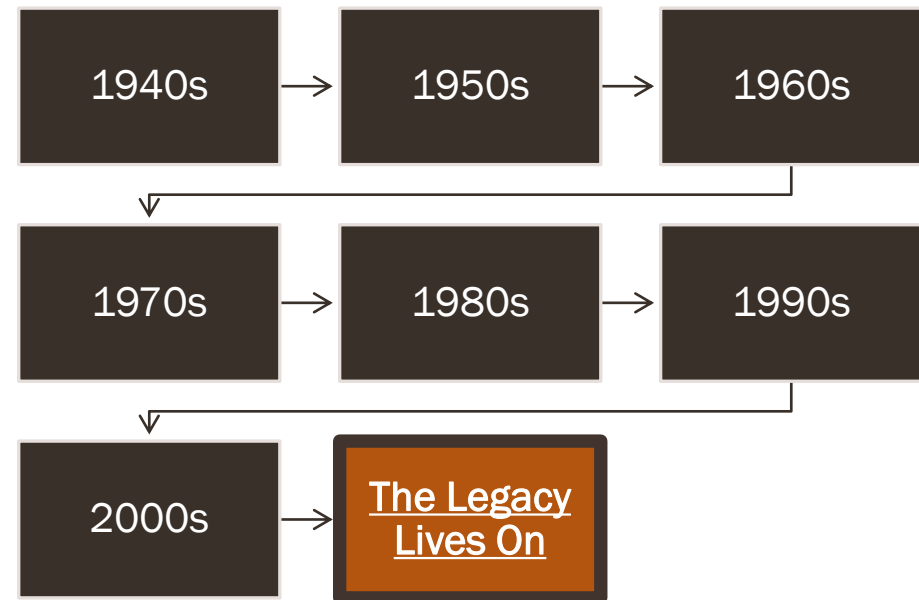
The Legacy Lives On



Photo by [Laura Seaman](#) on [Unsplash](#)

McElrath's legacy continues through the lives he touched, the students he taught, and the research he conducted. The Hymn Society has implemented the McElrath-Eskew Research Fund for the research of congregational singing and hymnology, named after McElrath and his coauthor Eskew (The Hymn Society, 2023).

The Hugh T. McElrath Collection is a special collection of the IWS Library. Guests are welcome to visit the collection in person by making an appointment with the IWS library. Publications by McElrath can be viewed online through various databases and repositories.



AT SBTS

AT IWS

AT HYMNARY.ORG

AT ATLA RDB® with ATLAS PLUS®

McElrath conducted numerous Oral History Interviews for the SBTS School of Church Music

Explore books for check out related to Hugh T. McElrath in the IWS Library. Guests may view and read resources for in-library use.

View McElrath's hymn, *We praise you with our minds, O Lord* online at Hymnary.org.

Explore reviews, books, and journal articles that Hugh T. McElrath authored in the Atla Religion Database® (Atla RDB®) with AtlaSerials PLUS® (Atlas PLUS®), available to current IWS students and faculty online [here](#).

Search by Author Name "Hugh T. McElrath" in the [Boyce Digital Repository online at SBTS](#).

- Minds and Hearts in Praise of God: Hymns and Essays in Church Music in Honor of Hugh T. McElrath. (2006). United States: Providence House Publishers. [View in IWS Library Catalog](#)
- Eskew H. & McElrath H. T. (1995). *Sing with understanding : an introduction to christian hymnology* (2nd ed. rev. and exp). Church Street Press. [View in IWS Library Catalog](#)

[We praise you with our minds, O Lord](#)
Author: Hugh T. McElrath (1964)
Tune: CLONMEL

Select AU Author and search "Hugh T. McElrath" to see an index of reviews, books, and journal articles he wrote.

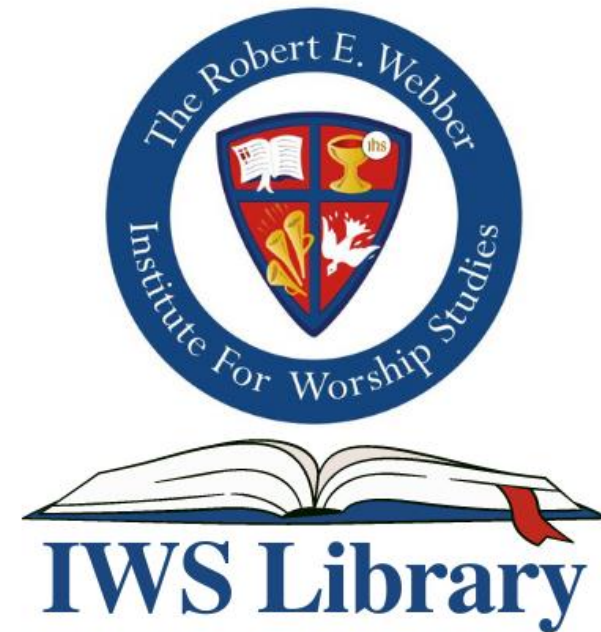
Explore McElrath Publications

The online resources above have been compiled to help you further explore Hugh T. McElrath's life, research, and publications.

Thank you for viewing this exhibit!

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 - [Instagram](#)
 - [YouTube](#)
- Bookmark the IWS Library [Website](#)
- [Contact us](#) if you have further questions about this exhibit.



References

Eskew H. & McElrath H. T. (1980). *Sing with understanding : an introduction to Christian hymnology*. Broadman Press.

Eskew, H., F.H.S. (2008). In Memoriam: Hugh Thomas McElrath. *The Hymn*, 59(3), 5. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/memoriam-hugh-thomas-mcelrath/docview/207367550/se-2>

Hustad, D. P. (1990). *The Worshiping church : a hymnal Worship leaders' edition / [Hymnal editor: Donald P. Hustad]*. (Hustad, Ed.). Hope Publishing Co

Hymn Society, The. (2023). *McElrath-Eskew research fund*. <https://thehymnsociety.org/resources/mcelrath-eskew-research-fund/>

Jones, W. J. (2001). *Hugh T. McElrath: Church music educator and hymnologist* (Order No. 3042373). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304722848). <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/hugh-t-mcelrath-church-music-educator-hymnologist/docview/304722848/se-2>

McElrath, H. T. (1967). *A Study Of The Motets Of Ignatio Donati (c.1575-1638) With Transcriptions* (Order No. 6708896). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (287949829). <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/study-motets-ignatio-donati-c-1575-1638-with/docview/287949829/se-2>

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS). (2008). In memoriam Hugh Thomas McElrath November 13, 1921 – May 8, 2008. *Jubilate!*, 2(2). <https://repository.sbts.edu/handle/10392/4316>

Wishall, G. E. (2008). *Longtime SBTS music professor McElrath dies in Florida*. <https://news.sbts.edu/2008/05/15/longtime-sbts-music-professor-mcelrath-dies-in-florida/>

McElrath Collection Books Pictured in Exhibit (in alphabetical order by author)

1981 Hymnal Committee. (1981, Corrected Printing 1982). *Hymns of the saints: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*. Herald Publishing House.

Benson, L. F. (1927). *The Hymnody of the Christian Church: The Lectures on "The L. P. Stone Foundation"*, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1926. United States: George H. Doran Company.

Dearmer P., Vaughan Williams R., & Shaw M. (1931). *Songs of praise : enlarged edition* (Full music ed. rev. and enl). Oxford University Press.

Hustad, D. P. (1990). *The Worshiping church : a hymnal Worship leaders' edition / [Hymnal editor: Donald P. Hustad]*. (Hustad, Ed.). Hope Publishing Co.

Lutheran book of worship ([Congregation ed.]). (1978). Augsburg Pub. House.

New Baptist hymnal : containing standard and gospel hymns and responsive readings. (1926). Broadman Press.

Strickland, T., Kunde-Anderson, M.B., & Galipeau, J. (2003). *People's mass book* (Pew ed..). World Library Publications.