

False Start: Rigdon McCoy McIntosh and the Failed Attempt to Bring Vocal Music to Vanderbilt University

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The year Vanderbilt University was founded (1875) the south was still rebuilding from the Civil War and the effects of economic depletion. Higher education was particularly debilitated. Landon C. Garland (1810-1895), soon to be the first chancellor of Vanderbilt, experienced first-hand the devastating effects of the war when in May of 1865 he wrote to his father describing personal and professional losses. These included the personal loss of his library to fire when Union troops came into Mississippi and the total destruction of the University of Mississippi. He stated his belief the university would eventually be rebuilt, but construction would take years. His own financial circumstances put him in a position where he needed greater stability from a steady salary. He wrote, "I cannot wait the final results, but must look for some employment" (Stetar, 1985a). Eight years later in 1873, he reluctantly accepted the position of chancellor of the developing Vanderbilt University in Nashville.



Figure 1. Chancellor Landon C. Garland

Garland's duties left him largely responsible for the structure of the university, and thereby determining what courses of study would be offered. The Board of Trustees respected his opinions and experience so highly, the president of the Board, Bishop Holland McTyeire, told him the board felt they could not choose another person for the role of Chancellor. They looked to him "more than any other man, for the shaping of our course" (Conkin, 1985). Garland took his responsibility very seriously, unfortunately some of his decisions likely created problems that plagued the university for several years hence. One example is the hiring of Rigdon McCoy McIntosh (1836-1899) as the university's first instructor of vocal music.

Chancellor Garland made it a priority to include music as a part of Vanderbilt's curriculum for training ministers and thus needed to hire a music teacher. Garland began negotiations with McIntosh by a series of letters for the position of instructor of music. The earlier letters that included how Garland came to be acquainted with McIntosh, have been lost, but later surviving letters give some clues to the relationship.

It is not known whether McIntosh's previous publications and teaching provided the reason for Chancellor Garland's attention. It does seem they had prior communication before the eventual employment offer was made. In a letter dated October 15, 1875, Chancellor Garland refers to terms McIntosh had previously proposed for his employment, but states the Board is unable to meet those terms during the present term (Garland, 1875b). Some hope remained that

the Board would be able to meet those terms in the future, but it seems McIntosh did not find that possibility to be likely. McIntosh did accept the less than favorable terms via letter in October 1875 and made his way to Nashville. He left Vanderbilt before the next year's term, however, eventually making his way to Emory College where he took a similar role as a professor of music.

McIntosh's eventual appointment to Vanderbilt as the first teacher of vocal music was short-lived, and may have left him bitter. The purpose of this paper is to examine McIntosh's appointment to Vanderbilt compared to a similar employment later established at Emory College, and thereby arguing that if McIntosh had been given a better situation at Vanderbilt, the university could have had a successful music program beginning in 1875.

Biography

Rigdon McIntosh grew up in Tennessee to a farming family. He attended Jackson College, graduating in 1854, soon after he became a traveling singing school teacher with the Everett brothers from Boston (Oswalt, 11). *Tabor: or the Richmond Collection of Church Music* contained several hymns written by McIntosh during the years he worked with the Everett brothers as well as during his short time of service in the Civil War and was published in 1866. This tune book featured standard notation instead of the commonly used shape notes, and went through at least three editions by 1870 (Oswalt, 47).

University Structure

Garland's design of Vanderbilt established four departments or colleges, each with its own head professor and course of study. These divisions included the Department of Philosophy, Science, and Literature, the Biblical Department, the Law Department, and the Medical Department (*Vanderbilt University: By-laws and Course of Study*, 1875). Students could choose the two-year college course or the four-year university course. Three types of bachelor's degrees, one master's degree, and three professional degrees were offered. Garland put the School of Vocal Music in the Biblical Department. In the *Bulletin* of 1875, two and a half pages outline the course work in the School of Vocal Music, beginning with a statement of how important schooling in vocal music could be to future ministers of the gospel (*Announcement of Vanderbilt University: First Session*, 1875). Professor McIntosh was listed as sole instructor. The courses divided into two parts, vocal music and theory and composition, with an optional third normal course for those who would desire to be teachers of vocal music (*Announcement of Vanderbilt University: First Session*, 1875).

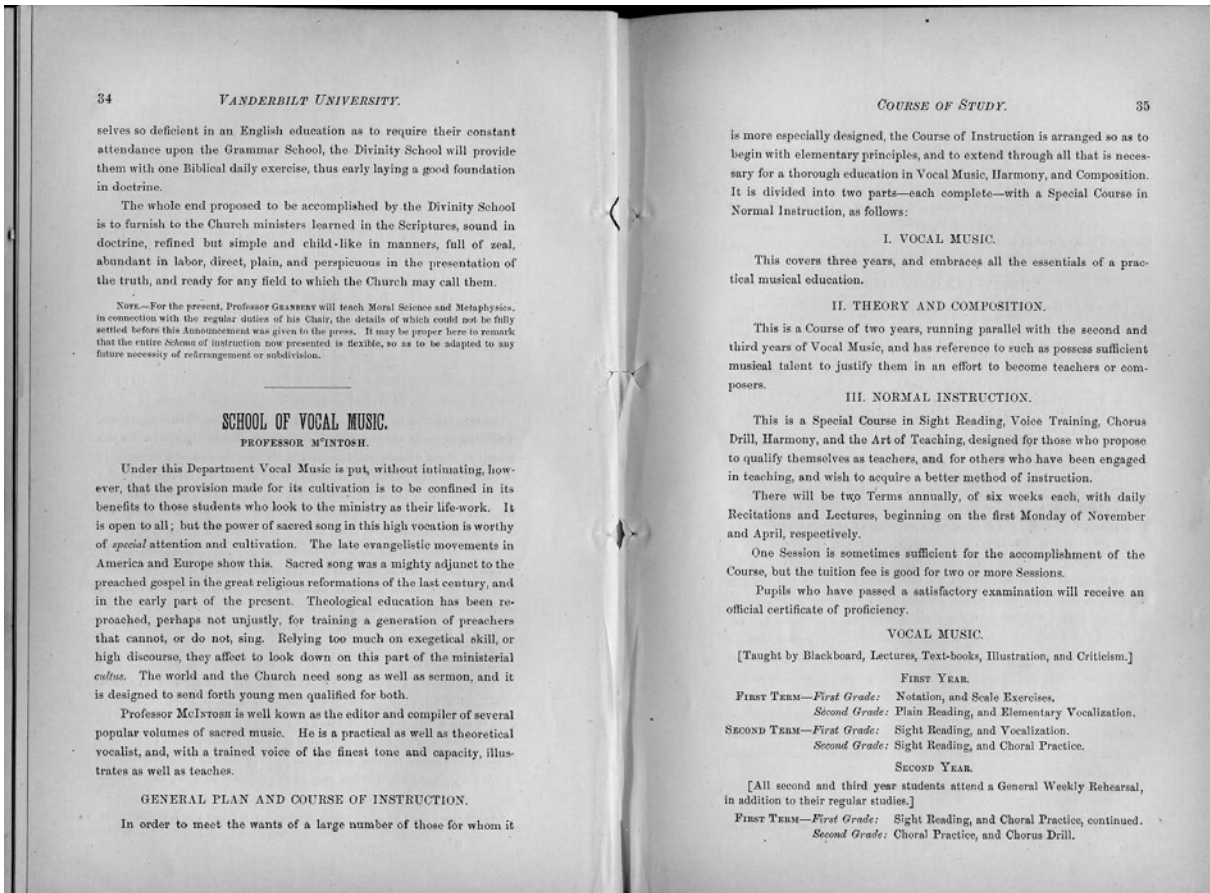
The various parts of the vocal program were not unlike current university music programs in overall design. The Vocal Music track was a three-year course, divided into two semesters each year, with each semester having its own topic of focus. Students divided into first grade or second grade, presumably on their previous ability or present skill level. First grade students in the first year studied notation and scale exercises in the first term, and sight reading and vocalization in the second term. Second grade students studied a slightly more advanced course in the first year. The first term included "plain" reading and elementary vocalization, and sight reading with choral practice during the second term.

The second year required a weekly rehearsal in addition to the regular classes that carried through to the end of the program. First grade students studied sight reading and choral practice in the first term, and “chorus drill” with higher [sic] vocalization in the second term. Second grade students participated in choral practice and “chorus drill” in the first term, adding light oratorio practice in the second term. The third year both first and second grade students studied the same topics, consisting of physiology of the voice and oratorio practice in the first term and solo and oratorio singing in the second term. Courses were described in the course catalog as taught via blackboard, lecture, textbooks, demonstration, and private instruction (*Announcement of Vanderbilt University: First Session, 1875*).

Theory and composition comprised a separate two-year course, divided into terms similar to the vocal music courses. Classes were taught by blackboard, lecture, textbooks, and written exercises. In the first year students studied an introduction to theory and rudimentary studies in harmony in the first term and harmony and composition in the second term. The second year courses included simple counterpoint and fugue in the first term and double counterpoint, double fugue, and canon in the second term (*Announcement of Vanderbilt University: First Session, 1875*). (Stetar, 1985b)

The “Normal Instruction” did not have a prescribed curriculum. Rather, it was a six-week course offered twice a year with “daily recitations and lectures.” The *Bulletin* description indicates for some, one time through the course would be sufficient to pass, but for others it could require repeat enrollments. Tuition, however, covered two or more sessions as needed. Students who passed an examination received a certificate of proficiency (*Announcement of Vanderbilt University: First Session, 1875*).

Finally, the *Bulletin* lists a schedule of fees for all three courses. Vocal Music and Theory and Composition cost \$40 per session or \$25 per term, and the Normal instruction was \$100, with the option of repeating the course as many times as needed without paying extra tuition. Students entering Christian ministry were awarded a fifty-percent reduction in fees. Considering the mission of the School of Music stated in the *Bulletin* to use vocal music to train future ministers, it may be likely most if not all students considered themselves future ministers, and thus accepted the offer of reduced tuition (*Announcement of Vanderbilt University: First Session, 1875*). It is unknown how many students enrolled in the courses during the 1875 session.



selves so deficient in an English education as to require their constant attendance upon the Grammar School, the Divinity School will provide them with one Biblical daily exercise, thus early laying a good foundation in doctrine.

The whole end proposed to be accomplished by the Divinity School is to furnish to the Church ministers learned in the Scriptures, sound in doctrine, refined but simple and child-like in manners, full of zeal, abundant in labor, direct, plain, and perspicuous in the presentation of the truth, and ready for any field to which the Church may call them.

NOTE.—For the present, Professor GRANBRY will teach Moral Science and Metaphysics, in connection with the regular duties of his Chair, the details of which could not be fully settled before this Announcement was given to the press. It may be proper here to remark that the entire Scheme of instruction now presented is flexible, so as to be adapted to any future necessity of rearrangement or subdivision.

SCHOOL OF VOCAL MUSIC.

PROFESSOR M'INTOSH.

Under this Department Vocal Music is put, without intimating, however, that the provision made for its cultivation is to be confined in its benefits to those students who look to the ministry as their life-work. It is open to all; but the power of sacred song in this high vocation is worthy of special attention and cultivation. The late evangelistic movements in America and Europe show this. Sacred song was a mighty adjunct to the preached gospel in the great religious reformations of the last century, and in the early part of the present. Theological education has been reproached, perhaps not unjustly, for training a generation of preachers that cannot, or do not, sing. Relying too much on exegetical skill, or high discourse, they affect to look down on this part of the ministerial *cultus*. The world and the Church need song as well as sermon, and it is designed to send forth young men qualified for both.

Professor McIntosh is well known as the editor and compiler of several popular volumes of sacred music. He is a practical as well as theoretical vocalist, and, with a trained voice of the finest tone and capacity, illustrates as well as teaches.

GENERAL PLAN AND COURSE OF INSTRUCTION.

In order to meet the wants of a large number of those for whom it

is more especially designed, the Course of Instruction is arranged so as to begin with elementary principles, and to extend through all that is necessary for a thorough education in Vocal Music, Harmony, and Composition. It is divided into two parts—each complete—with a Special Course in Normal Instruction, as follows:

I. VOCAL MUSIC.

This covers three years, and embraces all the essentials of a practical musical education.

II. THEORY AND COMPOSITION.

This is a Course of two years, running parallel with the second and third years of Vocal Music, and has reference to such as possess sufficient musical talent to justify them in an effort to become teachers or composers.

III. NORMAL INSTRUCTION.

This is a Special Course in Sight Reading, Voice Training, Chorus Drill, Harmony, and the Art of Teaching, designed for those who propose to qualify themselves as teachers, and for others who have been engaged in teaching, and wish to acquire a better method of instruction.

There will be two Terms annually, of six weeks each, with daily Recitations and Lectures, beginning on the first Monday of November and April, respectively.

One Session is sometimes sufficient for the accomplishment of the Course, but the tuition fee is good for two or more Sessions.

Pupils who have passed a satisfactory examination will receive an official certificate of proficiency.

VOCAL MUSIC.

[Taught by Blackboard, Lectures, Text-books, Illustration, and Criticism.]

FIRST YEAR.

FIRST TERM—First Grade: Notation, and Scale Exercises.

Second Grade: Plain Reading, and Elementary Vocalization.

SECOND TERM—First Grade: Sight Reading, and Vocalization.

Second Grade: Sight Reading, and Choral Practice.

SECOND YEAR.

[All second and third year students attend a General Weekly Rehearsal, in addition to their regular studies.]

FIRST TERM—First Grade: Sight Reading, and Choral Practice, continued.

Second Grade: Choral Practice, and Chorus Drill.

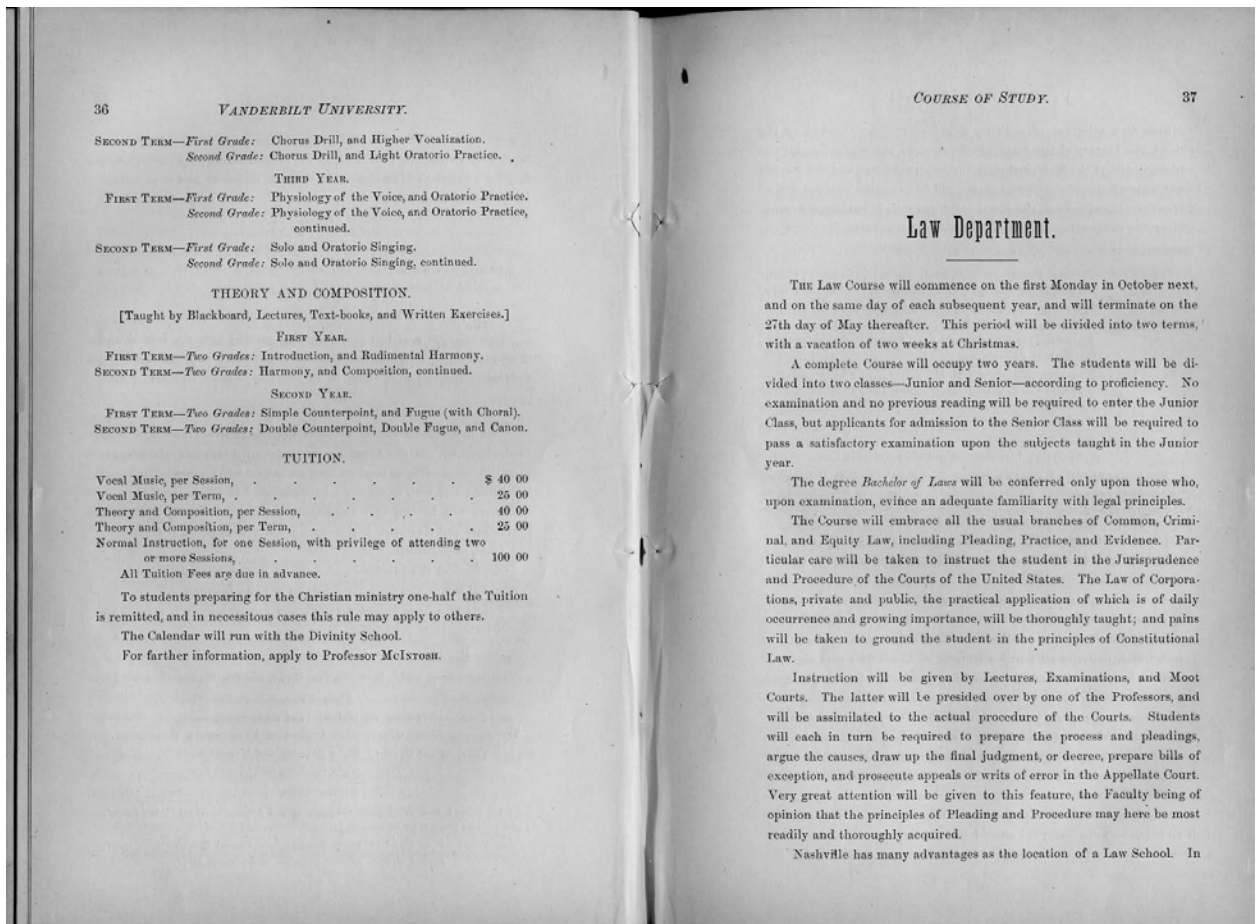


Figure 2. Pages of the *Bulletin* of 1875 listing of the School of Vocal Music

Clues from Chancellor Garland's October 15, 1875 letter to McIntosh suggested he encouraged McIntosh design the curriculum. Garland stated, "I have held the interview I promised with the Executive Committee in order to obtain its decision upon the terms you proposed for the organization of the Musical Dept. It was agreed on all [illegible] that the Dept. was necessary and that it was very desirable to maintain your connection with it" (Garland, 1875b). Garland reviewed the terms proposed by McIntosh, including a furnished residence, a thousand dollars, and the fees of the students who would enroll in the class. Garland continued by stating the terms did not seem "excessive" to the Board, but with the financial resources currently accessible by the university, McIntosh's terms could not be met. Garland expressed some doubt there would be many students to enroll in the music courses due to the crudeness of the financial resources available to the university and the imperfect organization of the various departments. Garland stated McIntosh's salary would come out of the endowment fund, which was already largely depleted.

The terms offered were perhaps much less than McIntosh desired or even needed to be financially stable, let alone profitable. Chancellor Garland offered a furnished hall for the "normal" class (the other courses of study were not specifically mentioned), the proceeds of the class fees, the title of Professor of Music, and the promise to make an effort in the next year to meet McIntosh's proposed terms for a salary. Essentially, McIntosh could come to Vanderbilt

with no promise of any residence or salary but with a professional title (Garland, 1875b). Because it is unknown how many students, if any, enrolled in the School of Music, it is impossible to determine what McIntosh made in student fees. Garland finished the letter by explaining he would have the letter delivered personally by someone who would more fully explain the Board's decisions. Perhaps Garland sent a messenger to provide extra pressure or encouragement to accept the position, even with such unfavorable terms.

Paul K. Conkin in his history of Vanderbilt University briefly mentioned the addition of a music teacher in the first year of the Biblical Department, although he does not mention McIntosh by name. He states the arrangement ended after a year with "some bitterness on the part of the young instructor," perhaps indicating the beginning of a trend of unhappy faculty associated with Vanderbilt. Conkin also reported several vocal teachers hired over the next decade stayed for short tenures, but none held the rank of Professor as McIntosh had been (Conkin, 48).

One might surmise why McIntosh might have been unhappy with the arrangement as offered. This arrangement perhaps left him less than hopeful for financial stability. As a married man with a young family, steady financial income was necessary. The design of the curriculum might have been similar to his previous work as a singing master, but would still likely take a great deal of effort and planning to prepare in a short amount of time for the beginning of the first term as a professor. To put in such effort for very little reward was perhaps very disheartening. Taking the position likely involved relocating to Nashville, taking his family to a new place. Relocating incurred new expenses in finding a residence not provided by the university. It is possible McIntosh lost money in taking this position by incurring expenses above what he could earn.

Another possible source of displeasure was the hiring process of other faculty at about the same time. In a letter dated October 18, 1875, Chancellor Garland offered employment to Mr. Julius E. F. Matthews for the coming session. Unlike McIntosh's offer merely three days before, Matthews is told "matters have taken a turn here," which gave Garland the impetus to offer Matthews an unfurnished residence room in the University building heated by steam, free tuition in any course of study he wished to pursue, and \$300 payable each quarter. His appointment consisted of teaching two classes in English grammar and one class of mathematics, seemingly far less than what McIntosh taught. Matthews is asked to accept by telegraph or to come straight to the university (Garland, 1875a). Garland gives no indication in this letter what matters have changed to allow him to make such an offer, but one wonders why Matthews earned an offer greater than what McIntosh asked for while being required to do what may have been less work. If McIntosh or other faculty were aware of the incongruence of these offers, it is feasible to surmise it could contribute to feelings of bitterness or unrest amongst the faculty.

While it is not known how many students came into the School of Music during the 1875 term, it is known the courses did not continue past the first year. The Bulletin of 1876 still contains a heading for the School of Music in the Biblical Department, and includes a truncated version of the introduction printed in the 1875 bulletin:

The Board of Trust expect, as soon as means are available, to establish in connection with the Biblical Department a School of Vocal Music. The power of sacred song in the vocation of the ministry is worthy of special attention and cultivation. The late evangelistic movements in American and Europe show this, as well as the early history of the Church. (*Announcement of Vanderbilt University: First Session, 1875*)

McIntosh's experience at Vanderbilt was short-lived, but did not dissuade him to end collegiate teaching entirely. By 1877 he relocated to Georgia where he joined the faculty of Emory College. He was largely in charge of developing a new music education program, teaching reading by note, which had been his emphasis both as a singing master and as a professor. He stayed in that position for the longest stint of his professional life, retiring in 1895 after his health had declined (Oswalt, 22).

Perhaps the inconsistency in the hiring practices of Chancellor Garland and the Board of Trust contributed to the future bitterness among the faculty, particularly with Rigdon McIntosh. The unusual and financially unstable nature of his employment likely was the overriding cause of his early departure from the university. Establishment of any formal music programs or ensembles at Vanderbilt did not come until after the turn of the 20th century. Conkin mentions an extra-curricular glee club established in 1909 (Conkin, 213), and the establishment of a fine arts department in 1935 (Conkin, 382). Sixty years passed from the first effort to bring vocal music to Vanderbilt until the successful establishment of a formal music department.

In the volatile economic environment during the Reconstruction of the South, a large part of the funding for higher education came from private donors. If those funds constantly fluctuated it would have been very difficult to plan for salaries and curriculum needs, much less have any kind of emergency reserve. That could explain the seemingly arbitrary employment situations of incoming faculty.

The less than desirable employment offer to McIntosh may have reflected the consideration of the Board and the Chancellor of the importance of the vocal music program. Even though the Chancellor wrote of the Board's agreement on the importance of including vocal music in the curriculum, the reality may have been the Board, the Chancellor, or both, gave only flattery to McIntosh in order to obtain his agreement to the position. They might have had less than high hopes the vocal music courses would have any real impact on the university or its mission, and therefore decided to reserve the money available for programs they deemed more important. It would be of interest to future research to analyze the treasurer's reports to determine what the university spent for salaries of professors in other departments and how other departments obtained funding.

Emory College

Emory College offered McIntosh a more stable situation than Vanderbilt could afford. In July 1876, Emory Board of Trustees minutes mentioned the hiring of McIntosh as a Professor of Vocal Music. His compensation came from "voluntary patronage" of students in the vocal music program, beginning at \$1.50 per student. McIntosh began his tenure on May 1, 1877, and Board of Trustees minutes estimates the number of students enrolled in the vocal music program to be at least sixty students. These numbers would indicate McIntosh likely received around \$90 for the term (Donovan, 2012).

Why would McIntosh accept employment again under such uncertain terms? Ninety dollars is a far cry below the \$1,000 McIntosh asked for at Vanderbilt, yet the arrangement proved fruitful enough he stayed on Emory's faculty for 18 years. Emory had not yet established a vocal music program, so the arrangement could have proved just as volatile in Oxford, Georgia as it had been in Nashville, Tennessee. A major factor in McIntosh's decision to relocate may be related to the ascension of Atticus Haygood (1839-1896) to the presidency of Emory. Haygood worked with McIntosh previously as editors of hymnals published in Nashville (Oswalt, 23). Perhaps

Haygood knew of McIntosh's dissatisfaction in Nashville and wanted to offer help to his friend. Lewis Oswalt suggested the offer of employment as a way of offering charity disguised as an academic position (Oswalt, 23). Communication between the two men is not known. This resulted in McIntosh packing up his family yet again to move this time to Oxford, Georgia.

Enrollment of students in music programs at Emory College is not known precisely, although catalogs from 1877 and 1878 suggest large numbers of students participated (College, 1877-1878). McIntosh was apparently responsible for creating the curriculum which he modeled very closely after that proposed at Vanderbilt. The transition to Emory was likely made much smoother since the bulk of the work to prepare the curriculum was already done. Music classes did not lead to a degree in music, but student involvement appeared enthusiastic (Oswalt, 31). Reports in the Emory Student newspaper "The Phoenix" stated every student of the junior class in 1891 participated in preparations for music presented at the spring commencement (Oswalt, 31).

Still, enthusiasm from students does not a living wage make. McIntosh still needed to make enough money to support his wife and children. Exact sources of his income are unknown, but it is highly likely that he owned several lucrative copyrights, including those of the Everett brothers who fled to Canada at the outbreak of the Civil War (Oswalt, 16). The precise number of copyrights he may have owned is unknown, but would have likely included the Everett's compositions, his own compositions, and possibly other compilations distributed through his publishing company. Records of these copyrights are held at the Library of Congress and are currently not digitized.

McIntosh retired from Emory after the spring term of 1895. In an interesting similarity to Vanderbilt it appears the vocal music program at Emory disbanded at his departure (Oswalt, 45). Perhaps the force of his personality alone made for the success of vocal music at Emory during his appointment. Perhaps also this could account for the failure of vocal music to take a firm hold at Vanderbilt until the 20th century. Future research could look at McIntosh's personal letters from that time period, currently housed at Emory University, to see if he himself had any insights into the success of the vocal music program at Emory. It could also be interesting to note if he divulges any information about his other forms of income while a professor.

If the success of the vocal music program at Emory is any indication, Chancellor Garland and the Trustees of Vanderbilt University missed an opportunity to establish a vocal music program in what was arguably the church music capital of the United States. After McIntosh's early departure from Vanderbilt University, the vocal music program did not get the chance to flesh out and develop as planned. It is possible that if McIntosh were given a salary comparable to other members of the faculty and full support of the university, Vanderbilt might have created a musical legacy unique for its position as one of the first in the south, despite the economic and curricular difficulties. In a place such as Nashville, it might have proved fairly easy to find someone with McIntosh's experience and education to continue the music program after his departure, but it seems Vanderbilt did not create an environment that fostered music.

The hiring of Rigdon McCoy McIntosh as the first professor of vocal music at Vanderbilt had several potential problems leading to possible dissatisfaction on the part of the young professor. Perhaps the lack of financial stability and inequality in the hiring practices of the administration contributed to McIntosh leaving Vanderbilt after only a year, delaying the establishment of a music program as a part of the university curriculum by more than sixty years.



Figure 3. Rigdon McCoy McIntosh (1836-1899)

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