For most Protestants, singing praises to God has taken the form of psalms or hymns. Early American Presbyterian governing bodies left the decision of singing psalms or hymns up to the individual congregations. As a result, Presbyterian churches across the young United States used a variety of psalters and hymnals in their worship.

These early psalters contained words but rarely music. Initially most psalms were “sung” in a “metered” rhythm using only a few melodies. In early American churches, the congregation and the church leaders both lacked musical education. As a result, singing schools sprang up across America to provide musical training.

While early Presbyterian governing bodies overturned all efforts to form a sanctioned hymnal committee, in 1819 the PCUSA General Assembly finally granted approval. After much work and several revisions, the 1830 publication of the *Psalms and Hymns Adapted to the Public Worship* became the first official American Presbyterian hymnal.

Other Presbyterian denominations continued to sing only psalms. The United Presbyterian Church of North America, for example, didn’t publish its first volume that included hymns until 1927. As musical tastes and worship practices changed, denominations compiled and used new hymnals and collections of sacred songs providing Presbyterians with a rich heritage of ways to “sing to the Lord a new song.” (Psalm 96:1).
Isaac Watts,
London: 1772.

Timothy Dwight,
New Brunswick [NJ]: A Blauvelt, 1804.

John Newton,
Olney Hymns in Three Books.
Burlington [VT]: Isaac Neale, 1795.

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The School Hymnal.
Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1901.

Children’s Praise.
Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1904.

The Hymnal for Youth.

Hymns from The Hymnal.

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