

Olaf C. Christiansen



1976 F. Melius Christiansen Lifetime Achievement Award

Olaf C. Christiansen (1901-1984)

Olaf C. Christiansen - professor of music at St. Olaf College, respected composer and arranger of sacred song, eminent clinician, internationally acclaimed conductor of the St. Olaf Choir - was a giant in the world of choral music. A graduate of St. Olaf College, he went on to study voice in New York and earned the master of sacred music degree from Union Theological Seminary in 1940 and was honored later in life with several honorary doctorates.

He taught conducting and voice at Oberlin Conservatory, founded the A Cappella Choir there, the Elizabethan Singers, and the Oratorio Society. He returned to St. Olaf in 1941 to succeed his father as professor of music and director of the St. Olaf Choir. Throughout the years his goal was to present sacred music sung beautifully, without distraction, so the listener would be sensitized to the Holy Spirit's message.

He helped to spread the St. Olaf choral tradition to high school and church choirs through appearances as guest conductor at music festivals and clinics. He led the choir on coast to coast tours for 27 years.

Olaf Christiansen retired in June of 1968, after which he was able to spend more time enjoying his hobbies, which included golf, painting, and hybridizing day lilies. He died of bone cancer in 1984.