

Ralph Hunter

Ralph Hunter, 81, of Grinnell died Monday, June 3, at his home.

6-20-2002
H-R For the past four years, Mr. Hunter had served as an organist for the United Church of Christ — Congregational. Before moving to Grinnell, he lived in New Jersey and had a long career as a choral conductor and arranger.

Mr. Hunter was choral director and vocal arranger for New York City's Radio City Music Hall from 1951 to 1959 and served on the faculty of New York's Juilliard School of Music. He also served as choral director at Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart in Purchase, N.Y. He later became a professor of music and director of choral activities at Hunter College, a position from which he retired in 1987.

In the early 1960s, Mr. Hunter was conductor and music arranger for the popular singer Harry Belafonte, and he toured and produced records with Belafonte. Mr. Hunter also made coast-to-coast tours and produced five record albums with his own choir, The Ralph Hunter Choir.

Earlier in his career, he appeared as choral director of the "Church of the Air" radio program and with his own choir on "The Ed Sullivan Show." He prepared the choir in a series of NBC television performances with the late conductor Arturo Toscanini. For many years, he was musical director and conductor of the Collegiate Chorale, New York's amateur choral organization, and performed at New York's Carnegie Hall and Town Hall.

When Pope Paul VI visited New York and the United Nations in October 1965, Mr. Hunter was the only American composer whose specially commissioned work was performed to honor the visit.

He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Louise; two sons, Richard of St. Croix, Virgin Islands, and Christopher of Grinnell; four grandchildren; and one sister, Doris Dugan of Philadelphia.