

Minneapolis mayor under fire

BY CHARLIE MAGUIRE

RETURNING HOME from a dinner on February 6, 1947, Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey asked armed police chauffeur Vern Bartholomew to pull to the curb in front of his modest but distinctive looking home in a student neighborhood near the University of Minnesota. In order to save time for his fellow passengers, Hennepin County aldermen, Humphrey waved off Bartholomew's offer to walk him to the front door.

Armed bodyguards had become common for Minneapolis mayors. Their homes had been targets for mayhem, like the attempted dynamiting of Mayor George Leach's home 16 years earlier.² Even though Humphrey had been elected by the largest margin in city history to that point,³ city officials were wary. Humphrey's championship of civil rights and for honesty in government had stoked anger in some quarters.

Humphrey walked quickly along the sidewalk and up the steps to his front door. He was eager to see his wife, Muriel, and their two children, Nancy, age eight, and Hubert "Skip" Humphrey Jr., age five.

The night air hovered around 2 below zero. Mature trees hugged the front and sides of Humphrey's yard, adding to the wintry gloom. Humphrey fumbled hurriedly for his keys. He looked over his shoulder and up the street and noticed a nearby streetlight was



Mayor Humphrey, 1946.
Courtesy Hennepin County Library.



"Why would anyone shoot at me?"¹

—HUBERT HUMPHREY

out but did not "think it significant."⁴

Suddenly, three shots rang out. Humphrey turned to his right, thinking they came from somewhere between his home and the house next door. "I don't remember hearing the whizz of the bullets," Humphrey recalled, "but they may have been fired in my direction. I am pretty certain the noise didn't come from an automobile backfiring because the reports were too close and too evenly spaced. I got into my house and stayed there."⁵

Remembering the incident 30 years later in his book *The Education of a Public Man* Humphrey changed his story a little, saying that he "went back outside" after calling the police, "to poke around looking for footprints or the used shells."⁶ He did not find anything, nor did police inspector Fred Ahr the next morning. There were no traces of bullet marks in trees or houses, nor evidence of an assailant.

Humphrey may have disturbed the crime scene with any search. Or the weather could have played a factor.

According to historical weather data provided by University of Minnesota professor emeritus Dr. Mark Seeley, about an inch of fresh snow fell between February 6, and February 7, 1947. Total accumulations on the ground were measured at 6 inches on the evening of February 6 and 7 inches the next day. "Even a half inch of snow, plus the combination of blowing and drifting," Seeley said, "could easily cover up footprints."⁷



Humphrey and chauffeur, Minneapolis police officer Vern Bartholomew outside the mayor's home.

Courtesy StarTribune Archives.

