A MINNESOTA FOOTNOTE TO THE 1944 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

OR A SMALL STATE Minnesota has enjoyed unusual prominence in presidential politics of the 20th century. Some cases in point: In the turbulent year of 1968 when Vietnam was the focus of political debate, Minnesota Senator Eugene I. Mc-Carthy, a Democrat, challenged the policy and leadership of his own party's incumbent president. Mc-Carthy's win in the New Hampshire primary laid to rest the re-election hopes of Lyndon B. Johnson, whose withdrawal from the race opened the door for a contest between two long-time political cohorts-Senator Mc-Carthy and Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey. Humphrey beat out McCarthy for the Democratic party's nomination but lost the election. Two decades before, in 1948, another Minnesota political legend was launched when former governor, Harold E. Stassen, made his first of many unsuccessful bids to be the standard-bearer for the Republican party. For over 40 years, he has pursued the presidency as an independent political entrepreneur. More recently-in 1980-another vice-president from Minnesota won the Democratic endorsement. Walter F. Mondale's selection of Geraldine Ferraro as the first woman vice-presidential candidate on a major political ticket was perhaps the

Barbara Stuhler, whose articles have appeared before in Minnesota History, is executive associate dean of continuing education and extension at the University of Minnesota. For 15 years she broadcast a weekly progran of public affairs commentary over KUOM, and she is the author of two books published by the Minnesota Historical Society. most notable event in what proved to be a losing campaign against popular GOP incumbent Ronald Reagan.¹

These are, of course, some of the more dramatic Minnesota influences involving the presidency of the United States. There are others, less sweeping in their effect, but nonetheless of some interest in completing the record of Minnesota's mark on the course of American presidential politics. This is one such tale.

IN THE SUMMER of 1944 the nations of Europe had been at war for five years, the United States and Japan for nearly three. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Thomas E. Dewey were nominated by the Democratic and Republican parties as contenders for the presidency. Wendell L. Willkie, the unsuccessful GOP choice in 1940, had hoped for a second chance but was rejected by his party as too liberal. Roosevelt's fourth-term nomination was less controversial than his precedent-breaking third. The real contention was over the vice-presidency. A very reluctant nominee, Senator Harry S Truman of

¹ In the last 88 years, Minnesota has proved to be bipartisan in its presidential choices (voting Republican in 10 elections, Democratic in 12, and for Progressive candidate Theodore Roosevelt in 1912). The state was on the winning side in all but four of those elections; on one occasion (1984), it went against the national grain when it was the only state (joined by the District of Columbia) to vote for native son Mondale. See Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1989, 241 and *Minnesota Legislative Manual*, 1987-88, 309-310.





Fala and his master, driving on the Roosevelt estate in Hyde Park, New York, October, 1944

Missouri, who was the last-minute choice of movers and shakers in the convention's proverbial smoke-filled back room, won over the unpopular incumbent, Henry A. Wallace.²

Roosevelt gave his acceptance speech to the Chicago convention by radio from San Diego on the eve of his departure for Hawaii and Alaska. Now that the war in Europe seemed to be going the allied way against Germany, it was time to give more attention to a Pacific strategy. In the president's entourage was his dog, Fala, a Scotch terrier, who—thanks to a Minnesota congressman—was to become a legend in his own time.

The four-year-old "Murray of Falahill" had been acquired as a young puppy a month after the 1940 election. Eleanor Roosevelt remembered that "No dog was completely happy in the White House until Fala came, and he became a really satisfactory part of Franklin's life." The noted journalist, Joseph Alsop, noted that "Fala and FDR were inseparable." So Fala was on board the cruiser, *Baltimore*, and quickly found happiness with crew members who fed and pampered him. But that association was put in jeopardy after the sailors began snipping off bits of his wirey coat to send home as mementos. Fala was simultaneously gaining weight and losing hair. Orders went out that Fala's new friends should confine their activities to those with less dire consequences than feeding and shearing.³

Once in Hawaii, the president met with Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, General Douglas A. MacArthur, Admiral William D. Leahy, and other top military leaders concerning next steps in the Pacific. He then set sail for Alaska. On his return, he gave a speech at the Puget Sound Navy Yard in Bremerton, Washington, to

['] Willkie died on October 4, 1944, before the election. James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* 1940-1945 (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 503-507.

³ Fala was born in kennels owned by Roosevelt's distant cousin, Margaret Suckley, and was a gift from her to him. Eleanor Roosevelt, *This I Remember* (New York: Harper, 1949), 119; Joseph Alsop, *FDR*, 1882-1945: A Centenary Remembrance (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 219; Samuel Rosenman, *Working with Roosevelt* (New York: Harper, 1952), 455.

report on his 21-day trip. The speech turned out to be a near disaster. None of his regular speech writers such as Samuel Rosenman, who had already returned to Washington from Hawaii, had been present to help. For the first time in many months, he wore his leg braces but because he had recently lost weight, they no longer fit him well. He was in pain, the place where he stood was not level, the blowing wind made it difficult for him to hold and turn the pages—all these factors increased his sense of insecurity and contributed to the public's perception of FDR's growing ineffectiveness. The result was the spread of a gossipy prediction that Dewey would make mincemeat of the president as the campaign got underway in earnest.⁴

Candidate Dewey's first campaign swing around the country after Labor Day played to mixed reviews. Determined to take the high road of political rhetoric, Dewey failed to inspire either his supporters or persuade the undecided. But he did have some success, reducing the margin of Roosevelt's lead from nine to five points.⁵

Meanwhile, the Democrats were nervously considering whether their candidate could recoup his losses. In August, he had announced that he would address the International Teamsters Union at Washington's Statler Hotel on September 23. In the aftermath of the Bremerton speech fiasco, it was with some trepidation that party stalwarts anticipated the event. But they need not have worried—the old master had found fodder for his speech in the remarks of a veteran congressman from Minnesota.

HAROLD KNUTSON had succeeded Charles A. Lindbergh as the representative from the sixth district in Minnesota in 1917, and he would serve 31 consecutive years until he went down to electoral defeat in 1948. Born in Norway, he migrated to the United States when he was ten years old and was raised on a dairy farm in Sherburne County. After high school and some agricultural studies, he started as a printer's apprentice, rising through the newspaper ranks to positions of editor, publisher, and owner. In keeping with the isolationist

⁶ The other three were Republicans Charles R. Davis of the third district, Ernest Lundeen of the fifth, and Democrat Carl C. Van Dyke of the fourth. Barbara Stuhler, *Ten Men of Minnesota and American Foreign Policy 1898-1968* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1973), 54–57. tradition of his constituency, his first vote in Congress was against President Woodrow Wilson's request for a declaration of war against Germany—one of 50 congressmen so voting, four of them from Minnesota. Throughout the long period of his congressional service, Knutson remained true, with only occasional deviations, to his isolationist precepts.⁶

Harold Knutson kept his political fences well tended, did favors for his constituents, remembered names, and was friendly and informal. *Business Week* reported that he had "a grip on his district that other legislators regard with awe and envy." Apparently the representative from the sixth district was content with that; he exerted no special leadership and his rare venture into other activities such as serving as a vice-chairman of the National Committee to Keep America Out of War prompted *The Nation* to place him first on its list of "Worst Congressmen" in 1942.⁷

On August 31, 1944, Democratic Congressman Michael J. Bradley of Pennsylvania had risen on the floor of the House of Representatives to take issue with a recent article by Representative Clare Booth Luce. Bradley was outraged at Luce's charge that the president was callous with regard to the welfare of men

Congressman Harold Knutson, about 1946



⁴ Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt, 461–462. Burns, Soldier of Freedom, 508, states that in addition to the pain of standing in ill-fitting braces, Roosevelt had an attack of angina pectoris during the first 15 minutes of his speech.

⁵ A Fortune magazine poll quoted in Richard Norton Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey and His Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 420.

⁷ Stuhler, Ten Men of Minnesota, 74-75.

fighting in the Pacific and took particular umbrage at her statement that "Admiral Nimitz urged the President not to go to Hawaii on the grounds that it would place a needless strain on the Air Force and naval personnel responsible for the President's safety and would accomplish nothing militarily."⁸

The Pennsylvania congressman retorted that he had it on high naval authority that the statement "is absolutely and unequivocally untrue." After some additional, bitter exchanges among Bradley, Bertrand W. Gearhart of California, and minority leader Joseph W. Martin, Jr., of Massachusetts (both Republicans), Harold Knutson was recognized.

"The CHAIRMAN. The Chair overrules the point of order. The gentleman from Minnesota is recognized.

"Mr. KNUTSON. I read the two articles written by the gentlewoman from Connecticut [Luce]. I thought they were very temperate. There were some things she might have said in connection with the President's recent trip—or should I say jaunt—to the Pacific that she refrained from telling. She did not inform the country that the President was accompanied by a flotilla of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers that should have been out in the far Pacific fighting the Japs. Neither did she comment upon the rumor that Falla [*sic*], that little Scotty dog, had been inadvertently left behind at the Aleutians on the return trip, and that they did not discover the absence of the little doggie until the party reached Seattle, and that it is rumored that a destroyer was sent a thousand miles to fetch him."

On the following day, Democrat John W. McCormack of Massachusetts responded to Knutson's charge. He noted that "Fala is the President's dog. A lot of people in this country have dogs that they love, and a lot of people admire the President for his affection for his dog." He continued, saying that he had checked with Admiral Leahy about Fala: "The story about the dog is made out of whole cloth. The dog was never lost. The dog was never sent for."¹⁰

The Minnesota congressman responded: "Mr. Speaker, if there is no foundation to the doggie story, of course I am happy. The fact nevertheless remains that in a statement by Drew Pearson in his radio broadcast a week ago, when he said that the President's trip cost the American taxpayers \$20,000,000, has not been challenged or denied."

In her memoirs, Eleanor Roosevelt observed that "It was this trip [to Alaska and the Aleutians] that gave rise to the extraordinary tale that Fala had been left behind on one of the islands and a destroyer sent back for him. [We] have no idea where this story started . . . though we supposed it was with some bright young man in Republican headquarters."¹¹

Before leaving in mid-September for Quebec, where he, Winston Churchill, and their combined

chiefs of staff were to meet, FDR had asked Samuel Rosenman and Robert Sherwood to work on a draft for his Teamsters speech on September 23. But, during the conference, Roosevelt did some composing as well and sent down some material to Rosenman which he described as "just a happy thought." Included in that "happy thought" was what proved to be the centerpiece of the speech—a memorable paragraph about Fala.¹²

THERE WAS an air of expectancy as Teamsters and other Democrats gathered at the Statler Hotel. Was the old magic still there? Would this be another Bremerton? Even Anna R. Boettiger, the president's daughter, asked Samuel Rosenman, "Do you think Pa will put it over?" The answer was soon to come. FDR was in top form, answering his political foes with wit and ridicule. The audience was laughing, cheering, applauding. And then, with mock solemnity and growing indignation, Roosevelt said: "These Republican leaders have not been content with attacks on me, or my wife, or my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala. Well, of course, I don't resent attacks, and my family doesn't resent attacks, but Fala *does* resent them.

"You know Fala is Scotch, and being a Scottie, as soon as he learned that the Republican fiction writers in Congress and out had concocted a story that I had left him behind on the Aleutian Islands and had sent a destroyer back to find him—at a cost to the taxpayers of two or three, or eight or twenty million dollars—his Scotch soul was furious. He has not been the same dog since. I am accustomed to hearing malicious falsehoods about myself—such as that old worm-eaten chestnut that I have represented myself as being indispensable. But I think I have a right to resent, to object to libelous statements about my dog."¹³

11 Roosevelt, This I Remember, 329.

^{1°} Expectations that the war in Europe might be over by year's end proved not to be true; Burns, *Soldier of Freedom*, 519. Robert E. Sherwood, best known as a Pulitzer prizewinning dramatist (*The Petrified Forest* and *Idiot's Delight*, for example) became Rosenman's chief speech-writing assistant during the 1944 election campaign. Another worker in FDR's rhetorical vineyards was the poet, Archibald Mac-Leish; Rexford G. Tugwell, *The Democratic Roosevelt* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 542–544; Rosenman, *Working with Roosevelt*, 473.

¹³ Time, Oct. 2, 1944, p. 22. The speech is quoted in Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt, 477, 478, and Burns, Soldier of Freedom, 523–524.

⁸ Luce had been filling in as a guest writer for gossipy, syndicated columnist, Walter Winchell, who was vacationing.

⁹ Congressional Record, 78th Cong., 2nd sess., 1944, p. 7463.

¹⁰ Here and below, see Congressional Record, 7500-7501.



The "Fala speech" inspired this cartoon by Tom Little in the October 2, 1944, Nashville Tennessean.

The audience ate it up. *Time* reported that "even the stoniest of Republican faces around U.S. radios cracked into a smile" (though how *Time* was in a position to observe them remains something of a mystery). Rosenman wrote that "No one could have delivered this short passage more effectively." Robert Sherwood regretted that he could not take the credit he was often incorrectly given for the famous reference to Fala. The Teamsters speech—or "that speech about Fala" as it was more often known—accomplished its objectives: it gave the campaign a badly needed lift, and it stimulated complacent Democrats to work to get out the vote. Above all, as Sherwood wrote, "it disrupted Dewey's carefully cultivated self-assurance and caused him

¹⁴ Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt, 477; Robert E. Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History (New York: Harper, 1948), 821, 823. Sherwood's use of the term, "artful dodger," was not pejorative; see Tugwell, The Democratic Roosevelt, 543–544.

¹⁷ Smith, Thomas E. Dewey, 422–425; Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt, 479; Life, Oct. 9, 1944, p. 100.

¹⁵ Stuhler, *Ten Men of Minnesota*, 127. Others were Harold H. Burton of Ohio, Wendell L. Willkie of Indiana, and Harold E. Stassen of Minnesota. to start swinging against the most artful dodger of them all."14

Frances Perkins, Roosevelt's secretary of labor, put the speech in a somewhat different perspective. "While I was not among those who thought it a great speech, I recognized, as I heard everybody on the streets saying it was the greatest speech he had ever made, that he had done the effective thing. In a witty and undisturbed way, he had put his finger on all the dirty, mean attacks on individuals being circulated underground. He had treated the problem perfectly. It was no longer a danger to his presidency."¹⁵

And Eleanor Roosevelt said that "It was at this dinner, I always felt, that Franklin really laid the foundation for Mr. Dewey's defeat by the way in which he told the story of Fala's indignation over the Republican accusation that he had been left behind . . and retrieved only at the cost of untold sums of taxpayers' money. By ridicule, Franklin turned this silly charge to his advantage. Fala with his austere but distinctly Scotch personality gave my husband great joy."¹⁶

FDR was on a roll. He paused in his campaign, probably because he knew that he no longer had to prove his mental acuity (later he would have an opportunity to demonstrate his physical vigor). Dewey, who labeled the speech "snide" was on the defensive, and the contest, some said, became one pitting Roosevelt's dog against Dewey's goat. Others described it as a test between a big man with a little dog and a little man with a big dog (Dewey had a 125-pound Great Dane called Canute). In any event, the New York governor was forced to abandon his high-road rhetoric for low-road accusations that fired his listeners but made the candidate exceedingly uncomfortable.¹⁷

ON THE FOREIGN POLICY front, meanwhile, another Minnesotan had challenged FDR. But Republican Senator Joseph H. Ball was coming from a very different vantage point than most GOP members of the time. His challenge to the president was to specify particulars that would enable the proposed postwar international organization to act effectively in future crises threatening world peace.

Two men could not have been more dissimilar than Joe Ball and Harold Knutson. They had three things in common: they were Minnesotans; they came to the Congress from the newspaper business; and they were Republicans. But their views of the world were very different. Knutson represented the old breed of what had come to be identified as midwestern, conservative isolationists. Ball represented a new breed of younger midwestern political figures who were internationalist in their outlooks.¹⁸

When Senator Ernest Lundeen of Minnesota was killed in an airplane crash in 1940, Governor Harold E.

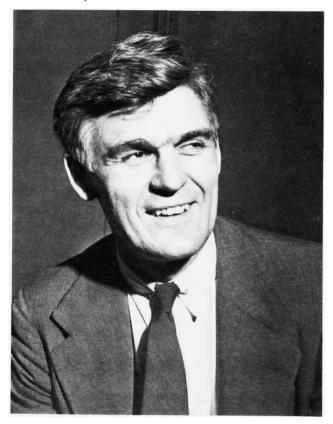
¹⁵ Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York: Viking Press, 1946), 114–115.

⁶ Roosevelt, This I Remember, 336.

Stassen surprised his fellow Minnesotans by appointing Ball to Lundeen's seat. Ball, a journalist with the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, was without political experience except as an observer of Minnesota politics. His coverage of Stassen as governor had led to such a close association between the two men that Ball was sometimes referred to as Stassen's Boswell. One of the most compelling of their common bonds was a commitment to a postwar international organization that would secure the peace. As a new senator, Ball supported the thencontroversial lend-lease bill. He and Representative William A. Pittenger of the eighth congressional district were the only Minnesotans to do so.¹⁹

In the fall of 1940, the administration was struggling with a way to aid Britain (which was facing a crisis of shipping, supply, and money) without seeming to depart from its posture of nonintervention. A letter from Winston Churchill pleading Britain's case was delivered to FDR vacationing in the Caribbean; it served as the catalyst for the idea that the United States would send Britain munitions without charge and be repaid, not in dollars, but in kind at war's end. In a press conference on December 17, the president likened lendlease to lending one's hose to a neighbor whose house is

Senator Joseph H. Ball



on fire and then having the hose returned after the fire is out. The policy was intended, he said in a year-end address, to avoid war by supporting the nations defending themselves against aggression. In this effort, America would become the arsenal of democracy.²⁰

It was a sign of the changing times that, despite Ball's internationalist bent, Minnesota voters elected him to a full Senate term in 1942. Soon thereafter, on March 16, 1943, Ball joined some of his colleagues in introducing Senate Resolution 114, an initiative endorsing the establishment of a postwar organization of nations united to preserve the future peace. The resolution came to be called B2H2, after its bipartisan sponsors, Republicans Ball and Harold H. Burton of Ohio and Democrats Carl A. Hatch of New Mexico and Lester Hill of Alabama.²¹

The resolution called for a program of economic rehabilitation, for means to settle disputes peacefully, and for the organization of a military force to respond to future aggressions. Uneasy about the idea of an international police force, Democratic Congressman J. William Fulbright of Arkansas introduced a toneddown version in the House. The House approved that resolution on September 21 with Harold Knutson the only member of the Minnesota delegation voting "nay." A somewhat stronger resolution (but not B2H2) passed the Senate on October 25.

But the junior senator from Minnesota remained dissatisfied. Even before the Senate acted, Ball had posed three questions to candidates Dewey and Roosevelt: he asked their views on U.S. participation in an international security organization; any reservations that would weaken such an organization; and their opinion of giving the organization the right to commit American military forces to actions without prior congressional approval. The last question was key for Ball because he and many others were convinced that in order to preserve the peace, the new United Nations unlike the League—needed real authority and power.²²

Candidate Dewey's response, in Ball's opinion, was inadequate. In effect, he addressed the first two questions satisfactorily but evaded the third. Robert Sherwood suggests that Dewey ducked the question because he discounted Ball's political influence and did not want to run the risk of losing isolationist votes. Roosevelt, on the other hand, would lose those votes anyway and although Ball was not a political power-

¹⁹ Stuhler, Ten Men of Minnesota, 128-129.

²⁰ Burns, Soldier of Freedom, 24-29.

⁹¹ Here and below, see Stuhler, *Ten Men of Minnesota*, 130–136. William A. Pittenger of the eighth district did not vote and Joseph P. O'Hara of the second answered "present." ²² Stuhler, *Ten Men of Minnesota*, 140.

house, his views represented those of voters who did want an international organization that would not fail for lack of authority to act.²³

On October 21 FDR resumed his personal campaigning in an open car in a chilling rain as he drove for four hours and 50 miles from Ebbets Field in Brooklyn through Queens to the Bronx, then to Harlem and mid-Manhattan and down Broadway. That evening he was to give a major speech to the Foreign Policy Association. The president, who spent a "great deal of time on it," had lots of helpers—ten in all.²⁴

One concern was how to make political hay out of a speech on foreign policy. But Senator Joseph H. Ball's third question would provide the means to that end. So after that long, wet day of campaigning (demonstrating his physical vigor), the president sat at the dais, addressing members of the Foreign Policy Association, and answered Joe Ball's key question:

"Peace, like war, can succeed only where there is a will to enforce it, and where there is available power to enforce it.

"The Council of the United Nations must have the power to act quickly and decisively to keep the peace by force, if necessary. A policeman would not be a very effective policeman if, when he saw a felon break into a house, he had to go to the Town Hall and call a town meeting to issue a warrant before the felon could be arrested.

"So to my simple mind it is clear that, if the world organization is to have any reality at all, our American representatives must be endowed by the people themselves, by constitutional means through their representatives in Congress, with authority to act."²⁵

In the aftermath of that speech, Republican Senator Ball endorsed Democratic candidate Roosevelt. Three days later Dewey, speaking in Minneapolis, made some effort to accommodate Ball supporters, say-

²⁴ Burns, Soldier of Freedom, 525, and Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt, 480. The ten helpers were Harry L. Hopkins, Robert Sherwood, Samuel Rosenman, Benjamin V. Cohen and Charles E. "Chip" Bohlen (both from the State Department), Archibald MacLeish, Adolf A. Berle, Jr., Russell Davenport, Dorothy Thompson, and Raymond G. Swing.

²⁵ Quoted in Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt, 485.

²⁶ Stuhler, Ten Men of Minnesota, 141.

²⁷ The electoral vote margin was 432 to 99, the lowest of his four terms in office. In 1932, his popular vote was nearly 23 million; in both 1936 and 1940, the popular vote was over 27 million. See World Almanac and Book of Facts 1982, 285. ing that while he "did not insist that the American delegate return to Congress to use force in a crisis," he did ask that "Congress be allowed to decide how much authority it would surrender to the President in regard to the use of force for collective security."²⁶

Actually, the two statements were not very far apart. But people were more likely to remember Roosevelt's homey analogy with the felon and policeman in their home town. And for whatever reasons politics or personal pique, as some have suggested— Ball stayed with his endorsement of FDR. And the incumbent president was returned to office receiving 25,602,505 votes versus Dewey's 22,006,278 and the electoral votes of 36 of the 48 states.²⁷

IN ALL PROBABILITY, Roosevelt would have won without the help of the silly allegation by Harold Knutson and without the endorsement of Joe Ball. But each event, in its own way, provided essential ingredients to the fourth-term campaign. Knutson gave Roosevelt material for a rousing campaign speech that put to rest any rumors that the president was no longer "with it" or in some sense lacking his old political verve or even his capability of running the country. Ball asked a question that helped him and others distinguish between the commitments of both candidates to an effective postwar collective security organization.

Thomas E. Dewey, campaigning in Minneapolis



²³ Before Willkie's death, there had been some skirmishes between him and Dewey over this issue of deploying American forces as part of an international peace-keeping force. Finally they agreed to disagree. Ball, though he voted for Dewey at the GOP convention, was a Willkie internationalist. Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey*, 413–414; Sherwood, *Roosevelt* and Hopkins, 825.

Four years later, in 1948 when Governor Dewey was once again the GOP standard-bearer, both Harold Knutson and Joe Ball went down to defeat. Dewey was upset by Harry S Truman in the most surprising election of the 20th century. Knutson's conservatism and isolationism of three decades were no longer representative of the constituents of the sixth congressional district. Joe Ball's support of FDR did not endear him to most Minnesota Republicans. Furthermore, his vigorous support of the Taft-Hartley bill antagonized organized labor. His opposition to the very popular Marshall Plan (he saw it as an inadequate and partial response to Soviet aggression) had bewildered middleof-the-road voters who applauded his internationalism. Finally, Joe Ball was to confront and lose out to a new party (Democratic-Farmer-Labor) and a new candidate (Hubert H. Humphrey).28

Two men of Minnesota—Harold Knutson in the House of Representatives and Joseph H. Ball in the U.S. Senate—played fascinating bit parts in the campaign history of the presidential election of 1944. It was not the first presidential campaign, nor would it be the last, with Minnesotans playing major or minor roles.

The photograph on p.28 appears through the courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.; the cartoon on p. 31 is from the Nashville *Tennessean*. All other pictures are from the MHS audio-visual library.



²⁸ Stuhler, *Ten Men of Minnesota*, 75, 139, 143–144. Minnesota voted for FDR in 1944 and for Truman by an even wider margin in 1948.



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