

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU

Archives History Lessons

Archives

2009

Stephen B. Humphrey and Saint John's Auditorium

Peggy L. Roske

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, proske@csbsju.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/archives_history_lessons

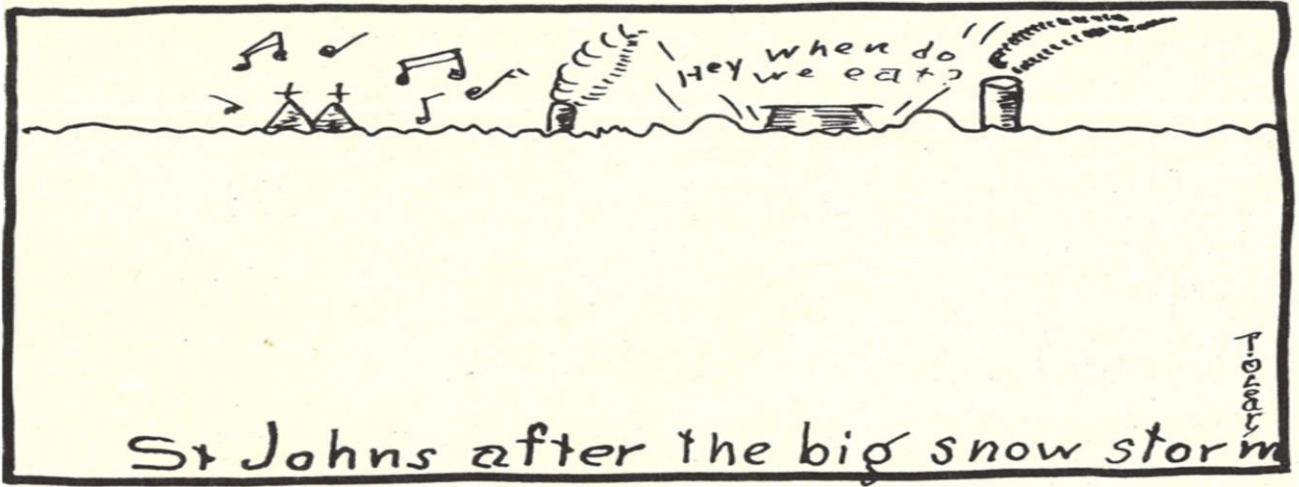
Recommended Citation

Roske, Peggy L., "Stephen B. Humphrey and Saint John's Auditorium" (2009). *Archives History Lessons*. 85.

https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/archives_history_lessons/85

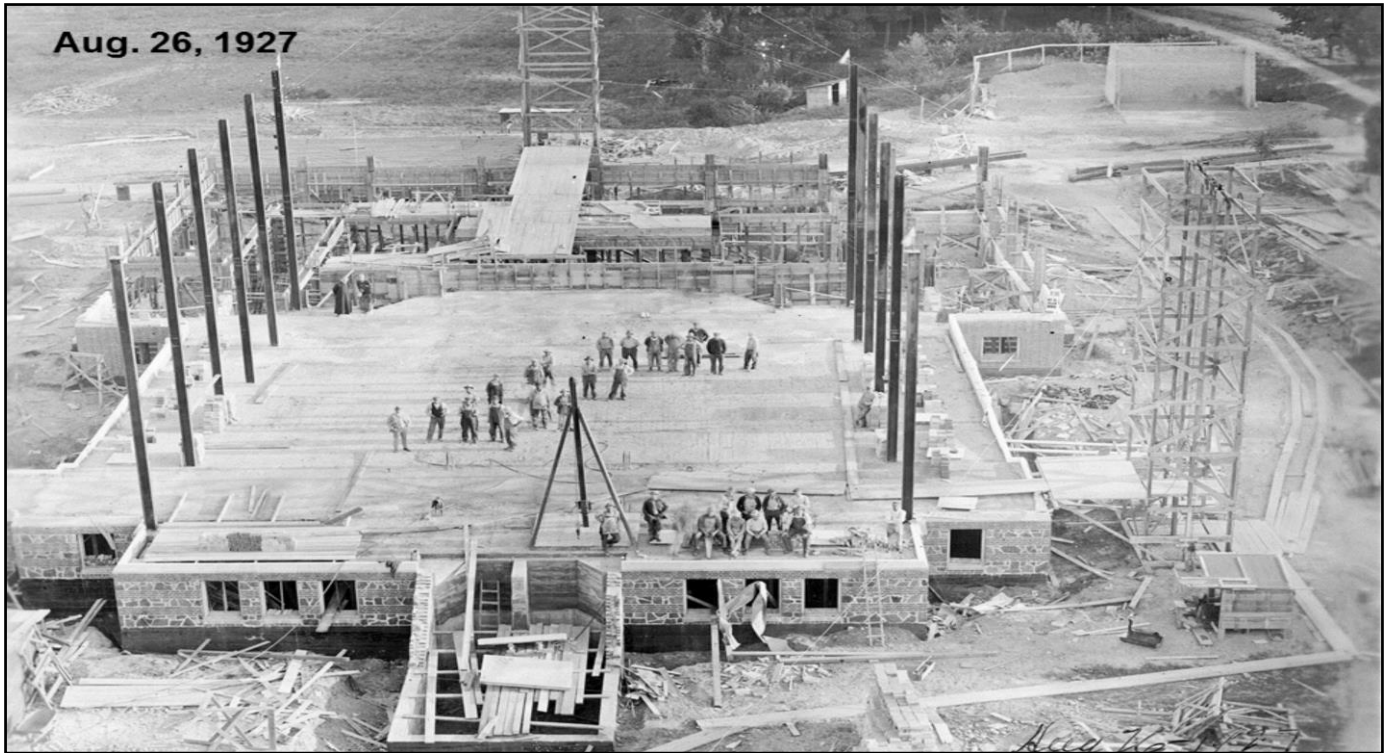
This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Archives History Lessons by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

From the 1929 Sagatagan:

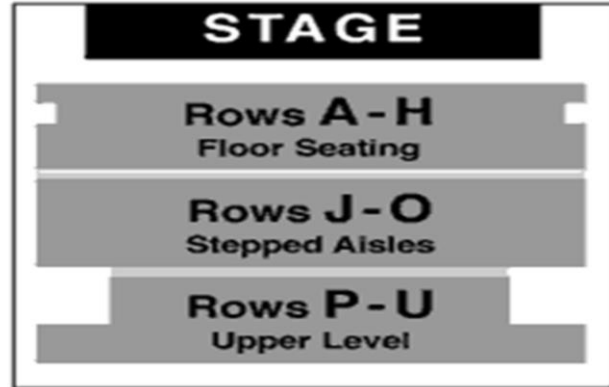


December 9, 2009

Next week is the 25th anniversary of the death of Stephen Humphrey, in whose honor the St. John's Performing Arts facility was named. (And whose funeral was poorly attended due to a snowstorm like today's!)



In the old days, campus buildings weren't named after big donors. They were generally named after a saint (Greg House, Frank House) or called what they were: the Quad, the Library, the Science Hall. In 1927 the Auditorium was built, with no fancier name.



Seating for the
STEPHEN B. HUMPHREY THEATER
(Saint John's University)

- http://www.csbsju.edu/finearts/box_office/maps.htm

I think it's probably not unique to these campuses that having a building named after oneself can be as much a function of one passing away at an opportune time as anything else. Stephen Humphrey happened to pass away just when the auditorium was being renovated. (And S. Firmin Escher passed away last June...)

As anyone who has tried to name a baby knows, names matter. So do nicknames, and initials—often used in class schedules to designate buildings, for example. I think it must have been quite deliberate on the part of the IA people in the mid-80s to make sure Stephen Humphrey's middle initial was included in the renaming of the Auditorium! (But I also wonder whether anyone gave thought to grouping the rows into the "AH" front section and the "PU" rear section!)

ST. JOHN'S 1929 SAGATAGAN



STEPHEN HUMPHREY, B. A.
Minneapolis, Minn.
Philosophy

American by birth, English by desire, intellectual by endowment, capable by application and amiable by nature is a brief, unjust and inadequate delineation of Stephen B. Humphrey. No description, no matter how graphic, could aspire to a true estimate of this Plato who held sway over Benet Hall philosophers and who expounds metaphysical theories with as much facility as Mussolini does political decrees. Many a philosophical controversy occurred in Steve's *sanctum sanctorum* where the lamp of learning was supplied by midnight oil. In all of these nocturnal excursions to the Pierian spring the protagonist was always Humphrey.

Stephen Humphrey came to SJU in 1927, the year the auditorium was built. He was a St. Thomas transfer.

This is his page in the Sagatagan in 1929, the year he graduated.

The 1928 yearbook had this comment about him: "If anyone doubts his ability to contend with those who wish to show how much, or how little, they know of philosophy, let him step to the fore. He will soon be squelched with such a natural flow of verbosity that he will soon "hit for home."

ST. JOHN'S 1923 SAGATAGAN



He was in the cast of "Officer 666"

He graced the stage that would later be named after him: he performed in a play in the auditorium, "Officer 666," October 1928.

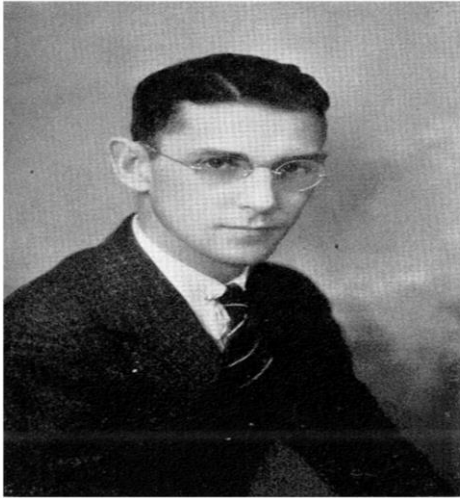
He was a member of the "August Alexian Literary Association, most ancient and elite organization of its kind at St. John's, ... the melting pot for oratorical ambitions."



Ford, Zaic, Himsl, Kolbeck, Doell, Caveney, Ludowese, Felker, Evans, Tegeder, Ryan
Frey, Axtmann, Father Rembert, O.S.B., Humphrey, Steiner, Williams, Gmeinder, Strauss

The Record

He became the Features editor for *The Record* when he came.



His first photo in the *Sagatagan* as a member of the faculty, 1936-37



Master Sergeant Humphrey's
Army photo, WWII

He earned his Master's at the U of MN in 1936 and briefly joined St. John's faculty
He served in the Army in WWII, attaining the rank of Master Sergeant

The Record

Official Newspaper of St. John's University and Organ of the Alumni

Volume 69

Collegeville, Minnesota, Friday, June 29, 1956

Number 10

Humphrey Gets Relief After 10 Years As 'Record' Moderator

●The making of the *Record* is a modest endeavor. It has been going on regularly, 10, these last 69 years, ever since Father Chrysostom Schreiner, OSB, founded the "official newspaper of St. John's University and organ of the alumni."

Changes have taken place over the years: photography, the tabloid format and new types have left their imprint, and circulation has improved. But the internal work of putting out a *Record* is essentially the same. There is the

planning period, sifting the news-worthy stories and drumming up features, making assignments, writing, re-writing. Pictures must be taken, selected, cropped, engraved. Monday night, copy in and red-penciled. Tuesday night, galley proofs corrected, pica sticks wielded, make-up, headlines. Wednesday night, page proofs corrected. Printing and final checks on Thursday. Friday, delivery to the Johnny public, followed by triumphant staff relaxation in the glow of appreciation. Saturday, work begins on the



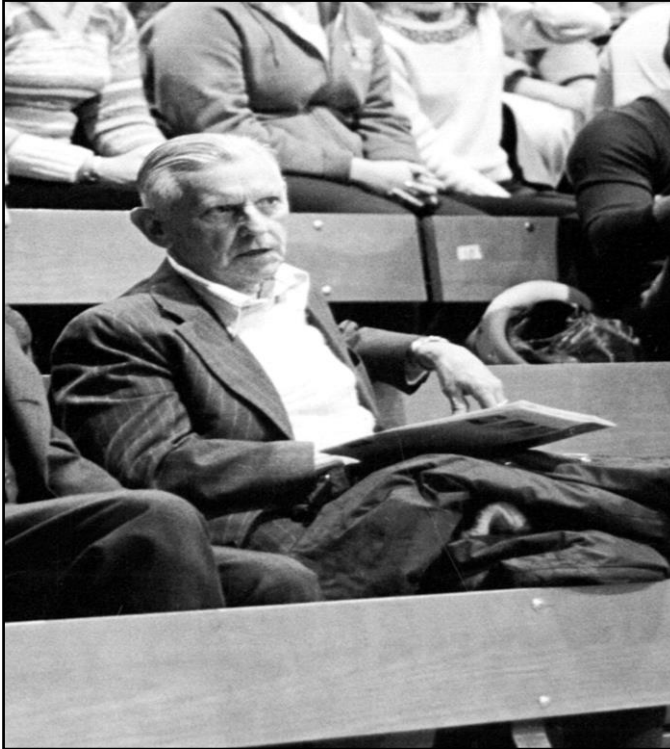
Stephen B. Humphrey

Mr. Humphrey not only taught at St. John's, he lived here.

He was the first lay faculty resident – first in Benet, then in Bernard Hall.

His room was also his office, always.

He rejoined the faculty in 1946. Among other things, he was the faculty advisor to *The Record* for 10 years. (This photo of him was used in the yearbooks for about 10 years, too.)



ca. 1970s,
in the
bleachers



Mr. Stephen Humphrey
English-Education

1961 *Sagatagan*

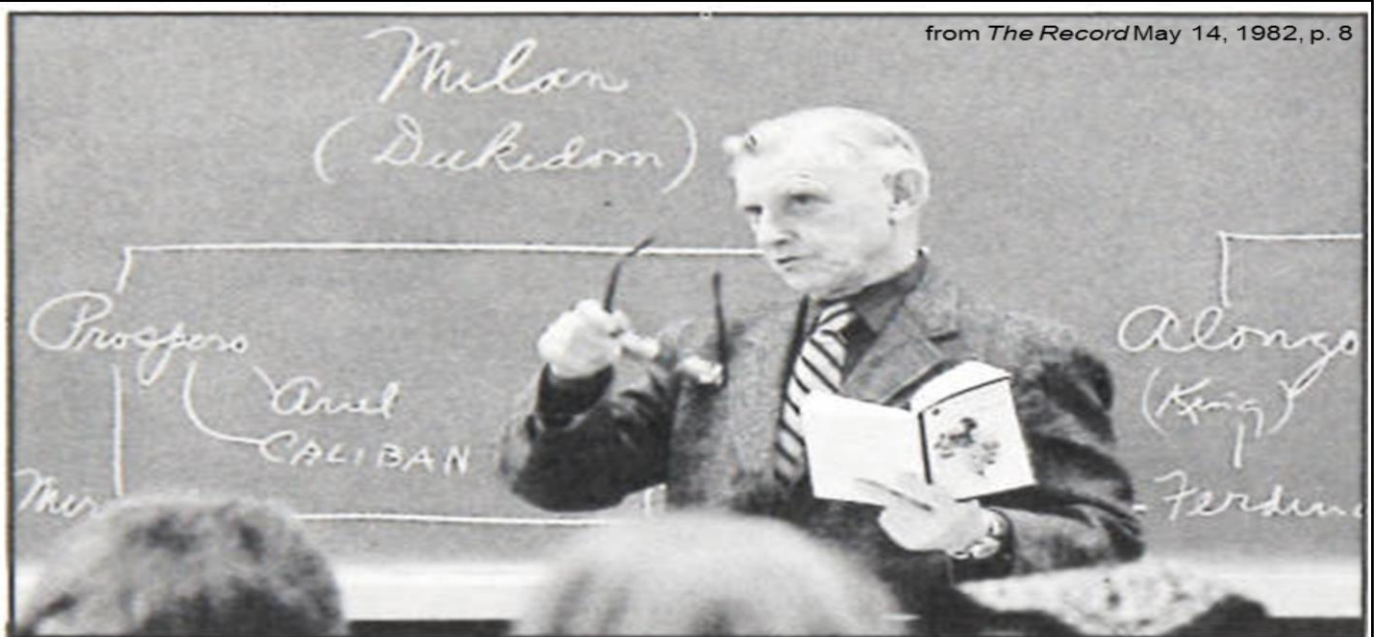
ca. 1981 with an alum's baby



He was a presence at events on campus. In his file there is some correspondence concerning his objection to Johnnie Rat antics at basketball games (which really did get out of line in the 70s!).

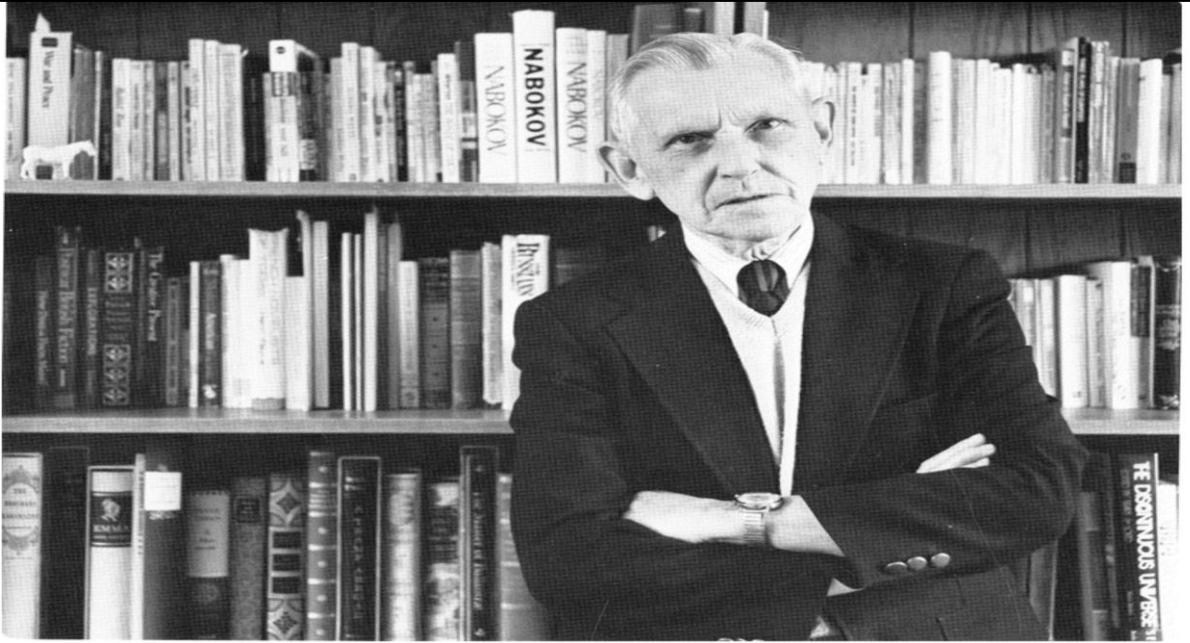
He also objected to the closing of the old road into campus, writing a letter to the editor of *The Record*...

He was sought as an advisor by students in every discipline, with his grasp of how liberal learning relates to careers and his discernment of each advisee's interests and aptitude.



He was known for his eloquent oral reading and enthusiasm for books and ideas.

"When stricken with laryngitis, as he occasionally was, he dazzled and amused his students by presiding over an entire class session using only a piece of chalk, a blackboard, facial expressions and a finger used as a pointer."



This Jay Graham photo was used on the cover of both *The Record* and the alumni magazine to announce Mr. Humphrey's retirement in May 1982. He was already ill with the lung disease that would kill him three years later.

The many tributes that poured noted his reputation for wit, wisdom, and for always having the right word or phrase to express a thought.

From the 1982 *Record* interview:

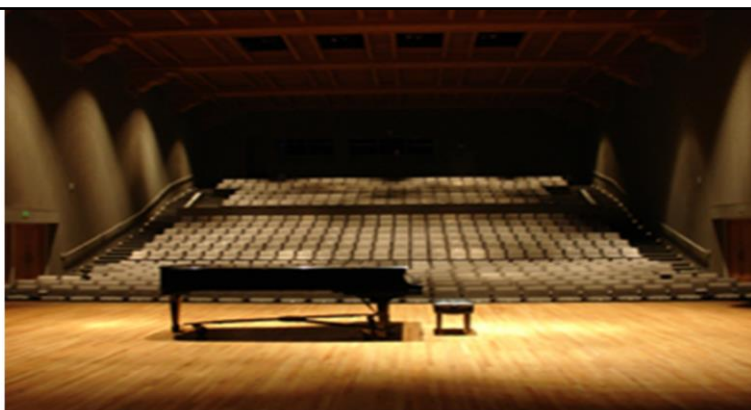
- “There are no women formally enrolled.”
- “Not formally enrolled, no, but I even cavil at that...”
(Does anyone know the meaning of “cavil”?)

* * * * *

Mr. Humphrey wrote a letter to Lee Hanley, alumni magazine editor, referring to the magazine’s tribute as “ear-reddening.” He said:

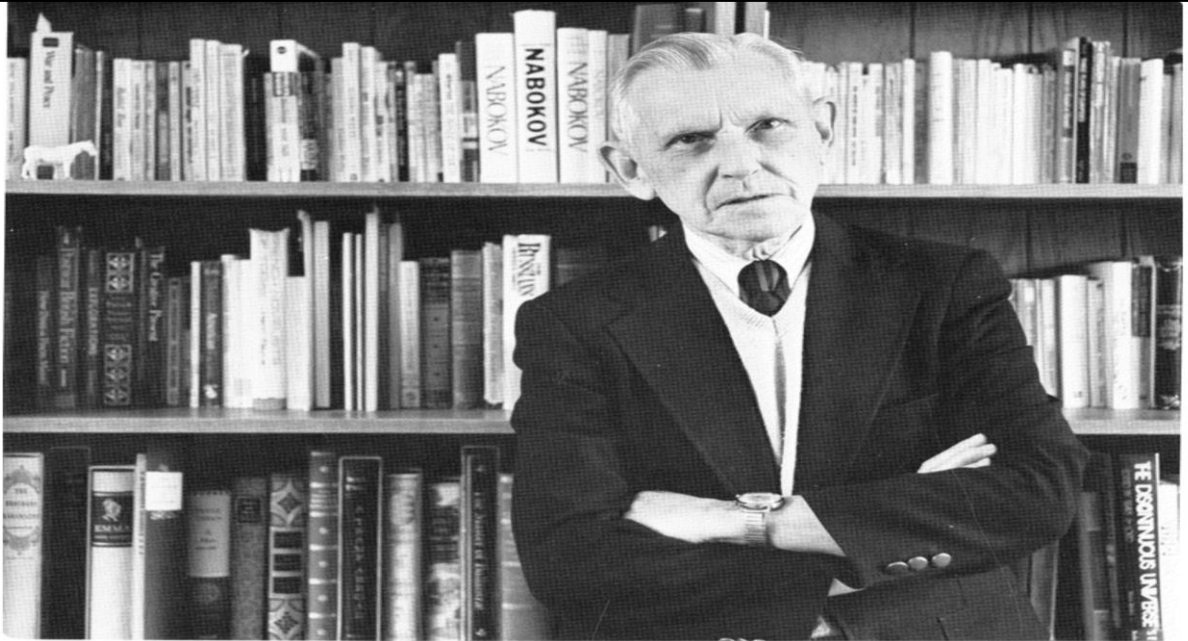
“This was not my idea of a small announcement. After last year’s stories in *Community* and *The Record* I thought that any more would amount to indecent exposure....After this, the obituary notice can be very brief.”

In 1985 a 2.5 million dollar renovation was completed in which organ and choral practice rooms were complete, the main theater was reshaped and remodeled and the basement was completely renovated. The Auditorium-Music Hall was dedicated to Stephen Benedict Humphrey.



Teacher, mentor, friend to three generations of students, Mr. Humphrey - as his students knew him - was a model of liberal education at its best. He was all of a piece, his mind as well groomed as his dress. His diction flowed from his thought, precise without pedantry, knowledgeable without arrogance. He was a connoisseur of people and occupations. He delighted in a well turned phrase and a good argument. Above all, he delighted in friends and has as many as a generous lifetime among colleagues and students could well allow. To him this theater is dedicated.

<http://www.csbsju.edu/Fine-Arts/General-Information/SBH.htm>



**Compiled in December 2009 by Peggy Landwehr Roske, CSB/SJU Archivist,
from resources in the St. John's University Archives**

Future Press Release?: CSB Presents Architect's Model for Next BAC Renovation ☺

