

# The Electoral College; Its History And Functions

## Electors Now Only Figureheads To Register Popular Vote For Presidents

The United States News

About 44 million voters went to the polls on Nov. 3 to elect a President and Vice President.

But they didn't elect either. They elected a group of 531 electors. Not until "the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December" as the law has it—which will be Dec. 14 this year—will the Presidential election actually be consummated. And not until Jan. 6 will the results be officially known.

On Dec. 14 the 531 electors will meet and cast their votes. But they won't meet together—rather in 48 separate meetings in the capitals of the 48 different States. For though they are referred to as the "electoral college"—an unofficial term that first came into use in 1821—they form a body that never has gotten together nationally. The separate State elector groups simply communicate their decision by register mail to the central Government.

Six certified sets of their votes are made. One goes to the Vice President—and that's the set that really is counted—while two sets are sent to the State Department in Washington and three sets are retained in the respective States where they originate.

### NEWS IN FUTURE TENSE

On Jan. 6, Congress will meet in joint session to open and count the electoral returns from the States and break the news to the nation that Messrs. Roosevelt and Garner have been elected.

Presumably the count will be 523 for Messrs. Roosevelt and Garner and eight for Messrs. Landon and Knox. But not necessarily that way. Considerations of honor and custom bind the electors to vote as their States have directed them to. Technically, however, they are still free agents.

Twice in our history—but only twice—have independent spirits broken over the traces and disregarded the electoral instructions. Thus one elector, chosen in Pennsylvania in 1796 for John Adams bolted Adams to vote for Thomas Jefferson instead. His defection was almost ruinous to Adams' chances, too, for as it turned out Adams got only 71 electoral votes—and he needed to win the election! In the other instance, in 1820, the victory was so overwhelming for James Monroe that one elector's broken pledge was of negligible importance.

### EVOLUTION OF ELECTORS

In becoming mere "yes men" to register the expressed popular will the electors have traveled a long way down the road of political evolution since the founding fathers in Independence Hall drafted the Constitution. It was their idea that the electors would really be leading men of their States who would have some discretionary leeway in making their choices.

It wasn't conceived at that time that parties, in the modern sense, would arise, to focus choice on predetermined presidential candidates. Nor was it contemplated at a time when ideas of pure democracy were distrusted, that all cast ballots binding the electors. The Constitution does not specify how the State shall "choose" their electors, electing them

by popular vote came about as a gradual change in State process. Thus it was not until 1824 that an attempt was made to compile the popular vote for President—and even in that year; the electors were chosen by popular vote in only 18 States, while in the remaining six States they were appointed by the legislatures. One State, South Carolina, clung to the method of letting the State legislature choose the Presidential electors down to and including the election of 1860.

The original method of operating the electoral system proved clumsy. In their faith that the electors would pick the outstanding man for the Presidency, without party machinery controlling the decision, the Constitutional framers gave each elector two votes, which he was expected to cast for two different men for President. The candidate receiving the most votes then was to be declared elected President and the one getting the next highest number of votes would be the Vice President.

### SYSTEM BREAKS DOWN

This worked well enough in two elections—as long as George Washington was the choice for the Presidency. But rival political parties developed before the Father of His Country had retired. Consequently in 1797 John Adams, a Federalist came to the Presidency with Thomas Jefferson, a Democrat, who had received the second highest number of votes, as his Vice President.

By the time the next Presidential year came round in 1800, there was more party solidarity. Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr had been decided upon as the Democratic candidates for President and Vice President, respectively. But all the Democratic electors divided their votes equally between Jefferson and Burr, with the result that both had the same number—73. With neither having a majority to put him into the White House, the House of Representatives had to decide the election. They, of course, chose Jefferson—but not until Burr had made a threatening bid for the main prize against his running mate, Jefferson's hated Federalist rival, Hamilton (for in those days "democracy" and "federalism" were not synonymous) chiefly helped defeat the machinations of Burr, who Hamilton thought would make a worse chief magistrate than the great Virginia.

This experience demonstrated the clumsiness of the electoral method as originally planned and brought about the first reform in procedure, through adoption of the twelfth Amendment to the Constitution. Since then each elector has cast not two votes for President, but one vote for President and one for Vice President.

### REFORM BY AMENDMENT

Seventy-two years later the electoral system got another wracking test that led to minor legislative repairs. When the closely contested election of Tilden and Hayes developed rival sets of electoral returns from four States, the Electoral Commission into being to unscramble the mess, an extraordinary agency, unknown to the Constitution, was summoned. It consisted of 10 members of Congress and 5 Supreme Court justices. The two major parties had equal representation on the commission, so far as the members from Congress were concerned. But to Democrats' dismay, one of the scheduled

## Maggie Club Enjoys Monthly Meeting

The Home Demonstration Club of Maggie met December third for its monthly meeting with Mrs. Kenneth Lowe. Those present at the meeting were: Mrs. Herbert Platt, Mrs. C. D. Ketner, Mrs. J. R. Platt, Mrs. Cordell Evans, Mrs. W. H. Setzer, Mrs. J. P. Cuthshaw, Mrs. Berl McGaha, Mrs. Kenneth Lowe, and the agent, Miss Mary M. Smith.

After the minutes were read and the

Democratic members from the Supreme Court in the midst of the middle got elected to the Senate from Illinois, and so couldn't serve. Thus the Court's contingent on the commission consisted of three Republicans and only two Democrats. The commission decided Hayes had been elected President by the close margin of one electoral vote. Great was consternation and loud the outcries in the camp of the disgruntled Democrats.

### "LAST MINUTE PRESIDENT"

The problem in the Hayes-Tilden contest had largely arisen over lack of sharpness of definition as to who should decide which set of electoral returns from a State was valid, when contesting sets of returns were filed. Legislation was passed in 1887 to clarify this point and lay down better rules for the State to decide such contests well in advance of the date on which Congress counts the ballots. The election of Hayes was not finally decided until 4 o'clock in the morning of March 2, 1877. That was the closest the nation ever came to not having a duly elected President ready to take up his task on Inauguration Day.

As a means of measuring relative popular strength of rival Presidential tickets, the electoral system is, of course, an exceedingly inaccurate gauge. Thus this year while Mr. Roosevelt has about 60 per cent of the popular vote, he will get 98 per cent of the electoral vote. Probably the strangest case of distortion of a national popular verdict was in 1888 when Grover Cleveland (Dem.) though he had 98,017 more popular votes than Benjamin Harrison (Rep.), had them distributed so badly among the States that he received 65 fewer electoral votes than Harrison, with the consequence that the latter was elected. Eighty years earlier, James A. Garfield (Rep.), had only 7,018 more votes than Winfield S. Hancock (Dem.), yet Hancock trailed by 59 votes in the electoral college.

### RARE EXAMPLES OF UNITY

Only three times in history has the electoral college been more thoroughly united on an election than it is certain to be on Dec. 14. Both in 1788 and in 1792, George Washington had a vote from every elector. In 1820, during the "era of good feeling," when partisanship was at low ebb and President Monroe, up for re-election, was virtually speaking, the only candidate in the field, he came near being, like Washington, the unanimous choice. One elector, however, said he thought that was an honor that should be reserved exclusively for the Father of His Country. Consequently, like the Pennsylvania elector who bolted, he broke his instruction to vote for John Adams' son, John Quincy Adams. So if one Adams was victim, another was beneficiary of a broken electoral pledge in the only two instances of the sort in our history.

Realizing that voters nowadays, whatever the technical implications of the system, mean to vote for actual candidates in November rather than for an intermediary set of electors, a number of States have realistically passed laws to take the name of the electors off the ballots, substituting therefore only the names of the Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates of the various parties. At last reports, 12 States had adopted this practice.

### VARIETY OF METHODS

The great majority of States, however, still present the lists of all electors of the various parties. Most of these States permit the electors to be voted for either individually or as a group. Twelve States, though, while printing the lists of electors on the ballots, require that the voter must cast his ballot for the electors of a political party as a group. From such States, as well as the States that print only the names of Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates and chance of a divided State vote being cast in the electoral college.

The question is often asked how on a number of occasions some States have divided their electoral votes between rival Presidential slates. This can happen in two ways. Two parties may make a fusion agreement and put up the same ticket of electors in a State, with the advance understanding that if the fusion ticket of electors is elected, they will split their Presidential votes between the presidential candidates of the two parties according to a predetermined ratio. Or, without fusion, a sufficient number of voters in a State may "scratch the ticket," that is to say, vote for electoral candidates on two or more different lists in a way to prevent any party from having all its electors in a State elected, as happened in Maryland in 1908 and California in 1912. Such instances, however, are rare.

The electors will meet and do their part of the job earlier than usual in this election. Formerly, when Inauguration Day was March 4, they met at the State capitals and cast the electoral votes in January. But now that the 20th or "lame duck" Amendment has pushed the inauguration ahead to Jan. 20, the other phases of the procedure have had to be advanced, too. So this time, and always hereafter, the 531 electors will have to take "time out" from their Christmas shopping to repair to their respective State Houses for the performance of their solemn, if superfluous, public duty.

## 4-H Council Met On Last Saturday

The 4-H County Council met at the court house Saturday, Dec. 5, at 2 p. m.

The meeting was called to order by the president. The minutes were read and approved.

Mr. Michener again urged the completion of project books.

The time for the meeting was set for the second Saturday in each month.

The program consisted of a report by the presidents of the various clubs on the work done during the year 1936 and a two-minute talk by each local leader on suggestions and improvements for the year 1937.

Miss Mary M. Smith presented a medal to Miss Tommie Davis for county honors in canning. Vivadean Swayngin won the \$2 for having the 3 prize cans in the club.

We played two Christmas games, sang a Christmas carol and adjourned.

Reporter, RUTH HOOKER.

## Shares Rail Control



Charles L. Braley

As one of those figuring importantly in industrial empire built up by the Van Sweringen brothers of Cleveland, Charles L. Braley, chairman of the board of the Erie railroad and the Cleveland Railway Co., is expected to share in control of the vast interests left without a director by the sudden death of O. P. Van Sweringen.

## Summer Resident Wins In National Esso Title Contest

Rev. Richard Close of Lake Junaluska and Coral Gables, Fla., was notified yesterday that he was one of the winners in the Esso Picture Title Contest which closed on September 30th. Mr. W. T. Huff, general salesman, of the Stanard Oil Company of New Jersey, told Rev. Close that the titles he had submitted were chosen from among thousands of entries to win a \$25.00 prize.

"We are particularly glad to see this prize go to Lake Junaluska," Mr. Huff said when he announced the local winner. "In view of the fact that thousands of persons submitted titles to the four cartoons in the Esso Picture Title Contest, Rev. Close is certainly to be congratulated."

His titles were passed upon by the nationally known judges.

### 34 W. N. C. MEN ENLIST IN ARMY IN NOVEMBER

During November, 34 from Western North Carolina enlisted at the army recruiting station in Asheville, according to H. E. Rader, recruiting officer in charge.

Men wishing to enlist, must be between the ages of 18 and 35 years, be single, in good health, and have a good character. The office is open daily except Sunday, from 8 to 4:30.

Gold and Platinum  
Gold is alloyed with baser metals, but platinum is usually alloyed with a more precious metal—iridium.

### Read The Ads

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MEN'S  
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**39c**



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Pajamas and Gowns  
Extra Values  
**98c**

CHILDREN'S  
Bath Robes  
Large Assortment  
**98c**

Quilt Cotton  
**39c**

3 lb. Wool Batts  
**75c**

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**79c**

A Big Lot Of Toys

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PISTOLS,

CANDIES, NUTS

And

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Coffee, lb . . . 10c

10 lb. Sugar . . 50c

8 lb. ctn. Lard 1.03

ROUND STEAK . . 17c

SIRLOIN STEAK . . 17c

T-BONE STEAK . . 17c

Sausage . . . 12½c

Roast Beef . 12½c

Pork Chops . . 25c

Pork Roast . . 23c

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