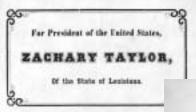
ANDREW JACKSON,

the reduced of the process made,

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON,

OF THE STATE OF ORDER



ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

These "cards" are actually the ballots cast by members of the Electoral College.

# Voting

BY GARY BUGH

Politics and New York's Electoral
College have always gone hand in
hand, from the earliest days of
state government to the supremacy
of the two-party system. Blame it
on the Constitution...

If you look closely at the fine print on the ballot at your polling place on November 2, you might see this short phrase atop the list of names of presidential candidates: "Electors for...." This means that although you'll be voting for the candidate of your choice, you're doing so via a slate of designated citizens who, well after the popular vote has been counted and the winner declared, will gather on December 13 in states across the country to actually elect the next president and vice president of the United States.

The large group to which these electors belong was established by the U.S. Constitution, and is called the Electoral College. While its electors confirm the decision made by the people in each state, they must also honor their pledge to cast their votes for the candidate chosen by the political party that also chose them. So when we vote for president, we are actually voting for strangers who have been selected by that party to elect a candidate for us.



Patricia Jaworowicz and Morton Haves cast their ballots at the 1976 Electoral College meeting.







Tee Trimitent of the United States Western Wilson State of Sew Jessey New York Electoral College 1913

# **Eyes on the Prize**

It's complicated, legal, local—and eminently political. Each state and the District of Columbia has its own Electoral College; the number of a state's electors is equal to the number of that state's congressional representatives (which reflects population) plus senators (two per state). New York currently holds thirty-one of the nation's 538 electoral votes. Its Electoral College is one of the oldest and largest in the country, and its history exemplifies, through the commonly used "winner-take-all" method, the

Electoral College meeting. This works to consolidate the major parties' power, since minor parties rarely receive electoral votes. But it is also a "loser-gets-nothing" method: a candidate who fails to win in a particular state receives no electoral votes at all in that state, no matter how many popular votes he or she has actually gotten. For example, independent candidate Ross Perot (whose Reform Party was not created until after the election) won 19% of the national popular vote in 1992, but received not a single electoral vote.

Knowing there's an ultimate "prize" to this system greatly boosts the influence and power of the two major parties, and helps them gain support for both candidate and party during campaign season. With their superior state and local organizations and financial resources, Republicans and Democrats have an easier time winning a state's popular vote than do smaller parties and independent candidates.





The only photographs among the Electoral College records at the State Archives are from 1976's Electoral College meeting. Electors Fred Stalbert and Aileen Ryan are shown here.

advantage that the presidential election system extends to the two major political parties, Republican and Democrat.

The winner-take-all system, used by every state (except Maine and Nebraska) and by the District of Columbia to transform its popular vote into electoral votes, allows the candidate (and by default, the party) who wins the most popular votes in a state in November to receive all of that state's electoral votes at the December

The Constitution protects the right of each state to determine how to appoint electors—a rule ultimately advantageous to major parties. New York's history illustrates this well. The state legislature chose electors for the first few elections, a practice that allowed partisan differences to divide the state's electoral votes among different candidates. Then in 1788, the Assembly and Senate could not agree on a slate of electors, which prevented the state from participating in the first presidential election. In 1828, New York's districts chose electors, but this also led to a split vote. Since the adoption of the winner-take-all method in 1832, a single party has won all of New York's electoral votes each election.

The actual Electoral College meeting in each state (which follows the presidential election) also benefits the major parties, providing an opportunity for consolidation and exercise of party power at best—and unabashed grand-



FOR PRESCRIPT OF THE UNITED STATES

Denneue Borren

standing at worst. In 1893 and 1897, electors introduced resolutions supporting candidates for the U.S. Senate. In 1889, patriotic Republicans mustered a 100-gun salute after the balloting. (Congress moved the date of the electors' meeting to January of the following year in 1887; in 1934, it was moved back to December). The meeting also sets the stage for future party wins by showing the strength and support of the parties.

For President of the United States

In New York, along with a few other states, state party committees appoint electors, generally party leaders and loyalists. Horace Greeley, founding editor of the New York Tribune and early leader of the Republican Party, was a New York elector in 1864. So was abolitionist Fredrick Douglass, a Republican who voted at the 1872 meeting and delivered New York's votes to the president of the U.S. Senate. Elector Horatio Seymour, former Democratic governor of New York and early presidential candidate, said of the contentious defeat in 1876 of popular vote winner Samuel Tilden by Republican Rutherford Hayes, "The Democratic Party, conscious of its strength and the justness of its position, and feeling that future power is theirs, will do no unwise nor unpatriotic act which will destroy its heritage." John Jacob Astor balloted at the 1880 Republican meeting, as did piano manufacturer William Steinway in 1893 and George Eastman of Rochester in 1901.

Other high-profile party leaders who served as New York electors have included Governors Averell Harriman, Herbert Lehman, Hugh Carey, and Mario Cuomo, as well as former National Democratic Chair James Farley and New York City Mayors Abraham Beame and David Dinkins. Albany's longtime mayor Erastus Corning II once filled in for an absent Democratic elector. Elizabeth Moynihan, wife of U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his 1988 re-election campaign chair, served in 1988 and 1992.



## A Charitable Tradition

Even the meager pay electors still receive for attending the meeting has been subject to politicking. Democratic electors of 1913 began the tradition of donating their Electoral College earnings to charity when they gave their \$15 stipends and mileage reimbursements to three Albany hospitals. Electors at each of the four Franklin Roosevelt election meetings from 1932 to 1944 sent their money to the Warm Springs Foundation for Infantile Paralysis in Georgia, while 1992's and 1996's electors made contributions to the Children's Aid Society and Gay Men's Health Crisis, respectively. In 2000, they gave to Senior Services of Albany through the United Way.

In 1917, Republican electors declined to follow this practice and decided not to donate their stipends to charity. According to the Albany *Times Union*, one anonymous elector said, "We'll have nobody vote our money to anything or anybody. We're just against the principle

State party
committees often
appoint highprofile party
leaders as electors.
Samuel O.
Fredman and
Rev. Donald
Harrington line
up behind
New York City
Mayor Abraham
Beame to cast
their ballots.

THOMAS E. DEWEY

----

JOHN F. KENNEDY

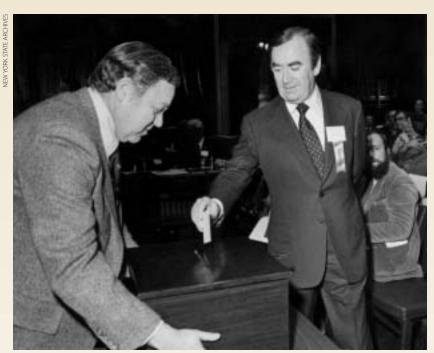
PEARS OF MARKETHAMETTE THE YORK BESCHOOLS CHILDREN 1993 HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

OF THE STATE OF CHORMAL SET TORS ELECTRONIA COLLEGE 1879

FOR PRESCRIPTION THE UNITED STATUS

JIMMY CARTER

OF THE STATE OF MINISTERNA NEW YORK SIZE/SHALL POLLEGE 1885



New York, as well as forty-seven other states and the District of Columbia, uses the winner-take-all system of assigning electoral votes: the winner of the popular vote receives all of the state's electoral votes. New York County Clerk Norman Goodman holds the ballot box while Governor Hugh Carey votes.

of the thing." The newspaper reported that electors "pocketed their checks and went home." But in 1972 and 1980, Republicans donated their stipends to Eisenhower College, and in 1984 they gave their pay to Catholic Relief Services for famine relief in Ethiopia.

# **Questioning Their Existence**

At the meeting, New York's electors have also traditionally announced their positions on Electoral College reform. In 1936, elector Daniel S. Quigley was ready to submit a resolution for the state's electors to condemn the Electoral College and call for election by popular vote, but was dissuaded from doing so after a request by Secretary of State Edward Flynn. As host of the state's 1944 meeting, New York Republican Secretary of State Thomas J. Curran supported elimination of the Electoral College. In his speech before the Democratic electors, Curran asserted that this would likely be the last such gathering, since so many Americans regarded

the procedure as outmoded. Elector Alice Campbell Good, however, attending her fourth meeting, disagreed with Curran's viewpoint, explaining that she had "always felt that the Electoral College was one of the finest examples of...checks and balances in state government."

In 1968 and 1972, Republican Secretary of State John P. Lomenzo argued for keeping the Electoral College but removing the independence of electors and the House contingency procedure outlined in the Twelfth Amendment (which, in case of no electoral majority for a presidential candidate, allows each state delegation in the House of Representatives one vote to choose from the top three candidates). Several Democratic electors at New York's 2000 meeting also favored amending the system. Elector and Attorney General Eliot Spitzer proposed several reforms to state election law, including same-day registration, a database of registered voters, and modernized voting machines.

Our will—and our votes—remain to be counted in 2004. While those votes may go to unnamed electors, every person's vote still matters in a system where the candidate with the most popular votes in each state moves ahead in the electoral vote tally. But the biggest winners in this process are the major parties, aided by the Electoral College—an unintended consequence of the freedom given to the states in the process of electing a president.

Sources for this article included documents, news articles, electoral meeting proceedings, interviews, books, journals, election tabulations both historical and contemporary, and state and federal election guides and procedural manuals. Particular collections of the New York Department of State, Electoral College, and the State Board of Elections in the State Archives and State Library were especially helpful.

### RONALD BEAGAN

SPATE OF EASLESSESS

Proc. St. A. Li or He same 3-1000-EE State of New Berk, on

at of the whole o

UNITED STATES

SILL CLINTON 40.104 ward or lables

THE PARTY OF THE PARTY OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE

**Facts About** the Electoral College

Article II of the Constitution established the Electoral College (although the term itself is not found in the Constitution), and guarantees every state, as well as the District of Columbia (added by the Twenty-Third Amendment in 1961), at least three electoral votes.

The "colleges of electors (the designation means decision-making body") perform three activities during a presidential election year: 1) Electors are appointed by political parties; 2) Electors are themselves "elected" by voters in every state in November; 3) Electors cast their ballots in December and deliver their totals to Washington D.C. Congress then officially counts the nations electoral votes in January.

Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia use the "winner-take-all" method of assigning electoral votes. Maine and Nebraska use district systems, whereby the statewide popular vote determines two at-large electors, and voting in the districts determines the rest.

A presidential ticket needs a majority of electoral votes to win the White House, currently 270 out of 538 electors.

This canvass of votes cast by New Yorkers in

the 1960 presidential election shows just

how close the Kennedy-Nixon race was.

www.nvsarchives.org