

THE PALIMPSEST

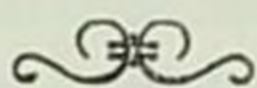
EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XLVI

ISSUED IN NOVEMBER 1965

No. 11

Copyright 1965 by The State Historical Society of Iowa



Government and the Voter

The state governments have always been and will always be the key units in the American federal system. A noted political scientist, Iowa-born Professor Charles E. Merriam, once said:

The fact is that if we did not have the states, it would be necessary to create them, with the same fundamental purpose that is now our goal, of maintaining the balance between liberty and authority, between central and local, and with an adequate division of functions and responsibilities. We need not apologize for our American states.

Americans have rightly felt that there is something gratifying and inspiring in the spectacle of the common people rising to the height of self-government. Ours is a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people"—a government which receives its powers from the voters and moves and operates under popular impulses. Because government is ever with us—directing, guiding, shielding, and stimulating our activities, it may be well to note its influence on our daily lives.

Government is derived from the consent of the

governed. In a democracy, elections are essential in making effective the demands of the majority or the plurality, as the case may be. Every citizen of the United States, of the age of twenty-one years, who has been a resident of Iowa six months, a resident of a county for sixty days, and a resident of a precinct for ten days, is entitled to vote.

In Iowa, as elsewhere, elections have become so commonplace that citizens sometimes neglect the privileges and duties that are theirs on election day. Although Iowans vote in relatively larger numbers than do the citizens of most of the other states, even here many electors do not exercise their voting privileges as they should. In the primary election of 1964, for instance, the vote for the major party candidates for the office of Governor was only about 500,000. At the general election in that year, however, the two major party candidates received unofficially 1,159,976 votes. Thus, there were more than twice as many votes cast at the general election as in the primary.

There are elections of many types and for many purposes—national elections, state elections, municipal elections, and school elections. There are elections for granting of franchises, for the development of community interests, for the issuing of bonds to pay for local improvements, and for other purposes. First let us consider only those elections in which state officers are elected.

Many of the state officers—the Governor, the

Lieutenant Governor, the administrative officers such as the Treasurer, Auditor, Secretary of State, Secretary of Agriculture, Attorney General, and state and national Representatives and many local officers—are elected for terms of two years.

Beginning in 1966, primary nominating elections are to be held throughout Iowa on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in September in the even-numbered years, and the general elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of the same year. Nominations are made by the voters at the primary elections, which, in reality, may be more important than the general elections. If a complete ticket of good and efficient candidates is selected by each party, then good and efficient men will be named at the general election regardless of which party may win.

Names of candidates are placed on the primary ballots by means of petition. A candidate for a state office must obtain and file with the Secretary of State, the signatures of at least one percent of the voters of his party in at least ten counties of the state. These signatures must equal not less than one-half of one percent of the total vote of his party in the state as shown by the last general election. In this situation each political party may have on the ballot, in any primary election, one or more candidates for a given office. In the primary election of 1964, for instance, only two men filed petitions as candidates for the office of Governor

of Iowa. Evan Hultman filed in the Republican primary and Harold Hughes in the Democratic. Mr. Hughes had no opposition in the primary election, therefore he was named as the Democratic party candidate for the office of Governor in the general election of 1964. Since there was only one candidate for nomination on the Republican ballot, Mr. Hultman became the Republican candidate for Governor at the ensuing general election.

Other candidates for the various offices, including state administrative officials, members of Congress, members of the Iowa General Assembly, and county officers, are nominated at the primary elections in the same manner. For the general election the names of all these nominees are placed on a single ballot, in vertical columns under the party name. In Iowa there are two major political parties—Republican and Democratic. Frequently there are also minor party candidates, but they are named by a convention rather than in a primary election. Since 1960 was a presidential election year, the party column on the general election ballot was headed by the names of the candidates for President, Vice President, and United States Senator, and was followed by the names of candidates for state officers, beginning with the office of Governor. One could vote a straight party ticket by placing an "X" in the circle at the head of the party column, or he could vote for the individual candidates by placing an "X" in the square in

front of each name. A straight party ticket vote indicates that the voter believes that party issues are more important than personalities.

Some state officials are elected on a state-wide ballot; others are selected by districts. Thus, while the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, state administrative officers, and the United States Senators are elected by the state at large, for the purpose of electing United States Representatives the state is divided into seven Congressional districts—one Congressman being elected from each district. For the election of 61 State Senators, the state is divided into 53 Senatorial districts and into 71 districts for the 124 House members.

Popular elections are held in order that every voter may participate in government, by helping to select the public officials who shall become servants of the people. Separate ballots are printed for each county and for each city ward, so that voters will receive ballots with the proper names on them. A glance at the maps and a sample ballot shown herewith will indicate that a voter in Iowa City would receive a ballot with the names of candidates for state officers, Representative of the First Congressional District, the State Senatorial District, and the State Representative District. The ballot thus prepared makes voting a very simple matter, but it is an extremely important function of government in a democracy.