

THE PALIMPSEST

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A Date to Remember

December 3, 1963 was a day marked for history in Iowa — a special election day when Iowans voted on the Shaff Plan, a proposed constitutional amendment to change the formula for periodic apportionment of seats in the legislature. Having been passed by the 59th General Assembly in 1961, and by the 60th in 1963, this plan was now ready for submission to the people. It was identified in the 59th General Assembly as Senate Joint Resolution 16, and in the 60th as Senate Joint Resolution 1, but was commonly known for its chief sponsor, Senator David O. Shaff, Clinton Republican.

No sooner had the 60th General Assembly ended than a Great Debate started over the Shaff Plan, spreading through Iowa like a giant grass fire. Democratic and Republican state committees said "hands off," so two new non-partisan groups — Citizens for Reapportionment, December 3 and Iowans Against the Shaff Plan — were formed to provide a comfortable home for "pros" and

"cons," regardless of party affiliations. They met in resounding face-to-face debates seldom heard in Iowa since the turn of the century.

Others entered the fray. The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation and the Iowa Manufacturers Association favored the plan, while the Iowa Federation of Labor AFL-CIO and the League of Women Voters of Iowa opposed it. Iowa State Medical Society members argued among themselves after newly-elected officers, as individuals, came out for the plan and promptly were called to task by those advocating a non-involvement policy.

Through the long summer and into the fall the Great Debate raged. It was stilled momentarily over the sad weekend of November 22 with the tragic assassination of President Kennedy. Then, on December 3, nearly half a million Iowans went to the polls and rejected the Shaff Plan, 272,382 to 190,424. Citizens of the 17 largest counties, containing 50.03% of the people, voted against it on grounds it failed to provide them their fair share of the legislature's seats. The defeat triggered a series of events climaxed by an Extraordinary Session of the 60th General Assembly. It took seven weeks to pass "temporary" and "permanent" apportionment plans as directed by the Federal District Court.

If one wondered why so much time was required, all he needed to do was to look back into Iowa history for the reasons. There were many.