



*Dr. William B. Munro (right), Caltech Professor Emeritus of History and Government, and Robert O. Schad, Curator of Rare Books at the Huntington Library, look over the Munro collection of election ballots which were on exhibit at the Huntington Library this fall.*

## ON THE BALLOT

**D**R. WILLIAM B. MUNRO, Caltech's Professor Emeritus of History and Government, and Treasurer of the Board of Trustees, is a collector of election ballots. As an indication of how unique a hobby this is—in all the years that he's been tracking down old ballots, Dr. Munro has never come across another collector in the field.

His collection includes ballots from all over the world, including some from Persia, Peru, China and Greece. Most of the ballots, however, are from the United States—and the Munro collection graphically demonstrates the development of our election procedures.

More ballots have been printed in the United States than in any other country in the world; and more experiments with different types of ballots have been tried here than anywhere else. Still, the ballot is just about the most ephemeral piece of printed matter imaginable. It's against the law for an election officer to give one out before election. After election, unused ballots are usually destroyed, while used ones are locked up in case of a recount.

National election ballots prior to the Civil War are especially rare in this country, though occasionally one still turns up in some old family papers. The oldest presidential ballot in the Munro collection is an 1840 one, used to cast a vote for Martin Van Buren.

Printed ballots weren't used in the United States until at least late in the 18th century, and there doesn't seem to be any reliable record of when they first appeared.

The earliest elections in this country, in Massachusetts, were held in town meetings, and votes were taken by a show of hands. A little later some towns began to use the "corn and bean" ballot. Voters who attended town meetings each received one grain of corn and one black bean. When a candidate was nominated for the Great and General Court, the ballot box was passed. If, on inspection, it contained more grains of corn than it did black beans the candidate was elected. The Massachusetts Historical Society still elects members by the corn and bean system.

Though written ballots were sometimes used even in Colonial days, no official ballots were printed until long after the Civil War. Each party had its own ballot, with its slate printed on it. Sometimes these ballots contained only the presidential and vice-presidential candidates' names, with those of the electors pledged to them.

Prepared by the party, the ballot was mailed to the voter, or thrust into his hands as he approached the polling booth on election day. This made it easy to "stuff the ballot box," since anyone with a mind to could put more than one ballot in the box.

No strict count was kept of the used and unused ballots. There was no "X" to be marked on the ballot. It was just dropped into the box, or, in some cases, was first signed on the back by the voter. If the voter wanted to vote the straight ticket, he used the ballot as it was; if any of the candidates didn't please him,

**ELECTORAL TICKET.**  
**FOR PRESIDENT.**  
**MARTIN VAN BUREN.**  
**FOR VICE PRESIDENT.**  
**RICHARD M. JOHNSON.**

1st District.—ARTHUR SMITH, of Isle of Wight.  
 2d District.—JOHN CARGILL, of Sussex.  
 3d District.—JAMES JONES, of Newberry.  
 4th District.—WM. R. BASKERVILLE, of Mockenburgh.  
 5th District.—CHARLES YANCEY, of Buckingham.  
 6th District.—RICHARD LOBBIN, of Halifax.  
 7th District.—ARCHIBALD STUART, of Patrick.  
 8th District.—WILLIAM JONES, of Gloucester.  
 9th District.—AUSTIN BROCKENBROUGH, of Essex.  
 10th District.—JOHN GIBSON, of Prince William.  
 11th District.—J. D. HALYBURTON, of New Kent.  
 12th District.—THOMAS J. RANDOLPH, of Albemarle.  
 13th District.—WALLER HOLLADAY, of Spottsylvania.  
 14th District.—INMAN HOBNER, of Fauquier.  
 15th District.—*and his* *Magister*  
 16th District.—WILLIAM A. HARRIS, of Page.  
 17th District.—JACOB D. WILLIAMSON, of Rockingham.  
 18th District.—WILLIAM TAYLOR, of Rockbridge.  
 19th District.—AUGUSTUS A. CHAPMAN, of Monroe.  
 20th District.—JAMES HOGE, of Pulaski.  
 21st District.—WM. DYARS, of Washington.  
 22d District.—BENJAMIN BROWN, of Cabell.  
 23d District.—JOHN HINDMAN, of Brooke.

1840

This is the earliest ballot in the Munro collection, and the ink signature written across its face indicates it was used to cast a vote for Van Buren and Johnson, running on the Democratic ticket—against William H. Harrison and John Tyler, on the Whig ticket. Van Buren and Johnson headed a winning ticket in 1836, but in 1840 they were defeated by “Tippecanoe and Tyler too.”

**LINCOLN & HAMLIN**  
**WARD 6.**  
 Wright & Foster, Printers, 4 Spring Lane, cor. Tremontine Street, Boston.

**For Presidential Electors.**  
 At Large: GEORGE MOREY, of Boston.  
 REUBEN A. CHAPMAN, of Springfield.  
 Districts:  
 1—Alfred Macy, of Nantucket. 6—John G. Whittier, of Amesbury.  
 2—James H. Mitchell, of East 7—Cory W. Coburn, of Waltham.  
 Bridgewater. 8—John Nason, of Lowell.  
 3—John M. Poesia, of Milton. 9—Anna Walker, of N. Brookfield.  
 4—Charles B. Hall, of Boston. 10—Charles Field, of Athol.  
 5—Felix W. Chandler, of Boston. 11—Charles Marston, of Greenfield.

**FOR GOVERNOR.**  
**JOHN A. ANDREW,**  
 Of Boston.  
**FOR LIEUT. GOVERNOR.**  
**JOHN Z. GOODRICH,**  
 Of Stockbridge.  
**For Secretary of the Commonwealth.**  
**OLIVER WARNER,** of Northampton.  
**For Treasurer and Receiver-General.**  
**HENRY K. OLIVER,** of Lawrence.  
**For Auditors.**  
**LEVI REED,** of Abington.  
**For Attorney-General.**  
**DWIGHT FOSTER,** of Worcester.  
**For Representative to Congress, 5th District.**  
**ANSON BURLINGAME,** of Cambridge.  
**For Councilor, District 1.**  
**JACOB SLEEPER,** of Boston.  
**For Senator, District 3.**  
**FRANCIS B. CROWNSHIELD,** of Boston.  
**For Representatives, District 6.**  
**MARTIN BRIMMER,** **PHILIP B. SEARS,**

1860

In this year Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin, on the Republican ticket, defeated Stephen Douglas and Herschel Johnson, Democrats—as well as the candidates of the Southern Democratic Party and those of the Constitutional Union Party. Note on the ballot that Lincoln is clean-shaven. By inauguration day in 1861 he had grown the beard which he wore for the rest of his life.

Election, Wednesday, November 6th, 1861.

**FOR PRESIDENT.**  
**JEFFERSON DAVIS,**  
 OF MISSISSIPPI.

**FOR VICE-PRESIDENT.**  
**ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS,**  
 OF GEORGIA.

**Electoral Ticket.**  
**FOR THE STATE AT LARGE.**  
 JOHN R. EDMUNDS, Halifax.  
 ALLEN T. CAPERTON, Monroe.

**FOR THE DISTRICTS.**

1st District.—JOS. CHRISTIAN, Middlesex.  
 2d “ — C. W. NEWTON, Norfolk City.  
 3d “ — R. T. DANIEL, Richmond City.  
 4th “ — WM. F. THOMPSON, Dinwiddie.  
 5th “ — WOOD BOULDIN, Charlotte.  
 6th “ — WM. L. GOGGIN, Bedford.  
 7th “ — BEN. F. RANDOLPH, Albemarle.  
 8th “ — JAMES W. WALKER, Madison.  
 9th “ — ASA ROGERS, Loudoun.  
 10th “ — S. C. WILLIAMS, Shenandoah.  
 11th “ — SAMUEL McD. REID, Rockbridge.  
 12th “ — H. A. EDMUNDSON, Roanoke.  
 13th “ — JAMES W. SHEFFY, Smyth.  
 14th “ — HENRY J. FISHER, Mason.  
 15th “ — JOS. JOHNSON, Harrison.  
 16th “ — E. H. FITZHUGH, Ohio.

**FOR CONGRESS.**  
**ROGER A. FRYOR.**

1861

A rare item in the Munro collection—the ballot naming Jefferson Davis as the unopposed candidate for the presidency of the Confederate States of America.

he could “scratch the ticket” by crossing out names and substituting others.

It wasn’t until the late 1880’s that the Australian ballot came into use here. Politicians contemptuously referred to it as the “Kangaroo ballot” when it was first introduced from Australia. It was the first American ballot requiring a voter to mark a cross, but its most distinguishing feature was that it was official—printed by the election authorities, and not by the political parties.

The largest ballot in the Munro collection is one

for the 23rd Assembly District in the New York State primary election of March 26, 1902. It is 14 feet long.

A slightly smaller ballot, used in Yankton County, South Dakota, measures 8 feet, 3 inches. It contains the complete text of several statutes, including one on the reorganization of the South Dakota National Guard. It is set in 7 point type (three sizes smaller than what you are now reading). It contains 4-foot-square of reading matter. And it is mentioned here to give courage to Californians facing a ballot containing 24 propositions on November 4.

