The People's Choice
Reflections of the Political Process
In MHS Collections

SO FAR in the political process Minnesota has not contributed one of its own to the United States presidency — but it has had no lack of capable and willing candidates. In some memorable election years, more than one candidate from the state has openly aspired to that high office. But perhaps more important, Minnesota has produced noteworthy public figures in other offices and also political movements "whose national influence has been out of all proportion to the state's age and population," according to Russell W. Fridley. Minnesotans are typically in the thick of things politically.

The state's traditions of grass roots participation and generally honest politics have elicited favorable (and sometimes astonished) comments from national observers. These traditions date from the early incorporation of the area. The people who founded the Minnesota Historical Society in 1849 were in the political activist mold and helped perpetuate that attitude. As public life participants they early recognized the importance of preserving the papers and records of the individuals and groups involved in politics and government.

Much of this material, generated by people and the state machinery, is in the Historical Society's division of archives and manuscripts. By next fall, all the records in the formerly separate manuscripts division and state archives will be consolidated under the direction of State Archivist Lucile M. Kane and under one roof — the MHS Research Center, 1500 Mississippi Street, St. Paul.

A presidential election year such as this is a good time to look into at least some of the division's holdings. Among them are some basic "nuts-and-bolts" kinds of records like candidates' filing and withdrawal statements, affidavits of nomination, and certificates of election. Then there are those that reflect the will of the people: abstracts of votes in general and primary elections made by the state canvassing board from 1855 to 1918 and abstracts made by county canvassing boards (these include ward and township breakdowns) from 1890 to 1958. And there are records which seem not to have been properly studied but which might yield a gold mine of information — candidates' expense statements from 1898 to 1960. (Later statistics and expense statements are in the secretary of state's office.)

Historical Society researchers found much of this material invaluable recently in compiling a book — a compendium of selected Minnesota voting statistics — to be published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press. It will provide, for the first time, accurate, county-by-county statistical returns for president, governor, United States senator, and congressman for every election from 1857 through 1974. It will correct mistakes found in other published works and restore some heretofore neglected third- and fourth-party candidates to the historical record. The book will not analyze state voting patterns or elections; it will give the organized, published, raw statistics from which researchers, historians, and others can extrapolate their own interpretations. (Acknowledgment is herewith given to Bruce M. White and Burt Cannon for facts and voting statistics used in this article. White and Eugene D. Becker took the pictures.)

Various other collections of the society include material on elections. Some of it is of a primary source nature, some consists of published works, and some in both original and secondary sources will require a fair amount of digging. The society's library, of course, is usually an initial stop. It contains biographies, general histories, and other works bearing on elections. The newspaper division has the most extensive collection of Minnesota papers to be found anywhere — virtually all
daily and weekly journals published in the state from 1849 to the present.

The Public Affairs Collection in the division of archives and manuscripts includes papers of many prominent public figures in Minnesota, from Alexander Ramsey to Hubert H. Humphrey. There are also papers from organizations which in one way or another affected or involved elections and campaigns. They range from the Minnesota League of Women Voters to the Socialist Labor party of Minneapolis. A collection of broadsides also helps give a portrait of past elections. Other holdings are three-dimensional items from the museum — campaign and convention buttons and badges, a few of which are reproduced here. And the audio-visual library has a large collection of photographs of politicians, campaigns, rallies, parades, and other political events.

**Virginia L. Martin**

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN** heads the ticket on this 1864 Republican party ballot for Winona County. Political parties printed their own ballots until the late nineteenth century when Minnesota adopted a uniform, state-printed ballot. Each party listed only its own slate of candidates. Voters could mark their selections on a combination of ballots if they wished or could write their names on a blank piece of paper.

**ANTI-MONOPOLY STATE TICKET.**

For Governor,

ARA BARTON.

For Lieutenant Governor,

EBENEZER AYERS.

For Secretary of State,

JOHN H. STEVENS.

For State Treasurer,

EDWIN W. DIKE.

For Attorney General,

WILLIAM P. CLough.

LEGISLATIVE TICKET—30th District.

For Representative,

J. N. GRALING.

IGNATIUS DONNELLY helped found the Anti-Monopoly party in 1873 with support from Grangers around the state. At its convention in Owatonna on September 2, the party nominated a slate of candidates for state offices consisting of both Democrats and Republicans. Barton, Stevens, and Clough were Democrats; Ayers and Dike were Republicans.

A reform group opposed to the corrupt Grant administration then in power formed the Liberal Republicans, who met later with the Democrats. Both factions simply endorsed the Anti-Monopoly slate. The regular Republicans nominated Cushman K. Davis, who beat Barton 40,633 votes to 35,144. Liberal Republicanism was a national movement at this time; Horace Greeley, the Liberal Republican candidate in 1872, was also endorsed by the Democrats.

**MINNESOTANS’ ‘fierce independence’ in voting habits has a long and respectable, if at times chaotic, history. The Republican party ticket for 1876 lists Democrat William W. McNair as the party’s choice for third district congressman. Many Republicans in Hennepin County refused to support the regular candidate, J. H. Stewart. Some were disappointed Scandinavians who wanted Knute Nelson (he was nominated for state senator instead); others opposed him because he was from St. Paul — another skirmish in the rivalry between the Twin Cities. There were only three congressional districts at this time, and Minneapolis and St. Paul were in the same one. Stewart won the election 22,823 votes to 20,717, even though McNair carried both Hennepin and Ramsey counties.**

**Hayes and Wheeler**

For Presidential Electors,

C. R. DAVIS, STEPHEN MILLER, A. J. EDGERTON, HANS MATTISON.

For Congress—Third District,

W. J. SHELDON.

For State Senate—30th District,

WILLIAM H. VICK.

**REPUBLICAN UNION TICKET.**

Winona County.

For Governor,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

For Lieutenant Governor,

ANDREW JOHNSON.

For Secretary of State,

JOHN H. STEVENS.

For Treasurer,

EDWIN W. DIKE.

For Attorney General,

WILLIAM P. CLough.

For State Senator—30th District,

WILLIAM H. VICK.

**For Congress—Third District,**

W. J. SHELDON.

**For County Auditor,**

FRED A. VON HAUMACH.

**For Treasurer,**

HARRY K. WHITE.

**For Register of Deeds,**

A. J. EDGERTON.

**For District Attorney,**

KNUTE NELSON.

**For Register of Voters,**

WILLIAM W. MCNAIR.

**For County Commissioner,**

H. N. KENNY.

**For County Commissioner,**

H. N. KENNY.
THE AUSTRALIAN ballot was adopted in Minnesota in the larger cities in 1889 and in the rest of the state in 1891. For the first time, voters had a ballot listing all candidates. This copy of a ballot was printed and distributed by the Democratic party and marked to show voters where to put their Xs. Instructions at the top were in Swedish, Norwegian, German, and English. With the introduction of the Australian ballot, candidates had to file their candidacy with the secretary of state in order to be placed on the ballot. For the general election, candidates had to have been nominated by a convention of delegates representing a political party which had polled at least 1 per cent of the vote cast in the state or district in question in the last election. Candidates for the newly formed political parties could get their names on the ballot by obtaining petitions signed by 1 per cent of the voters in the state or district. The petition for G. W. Bucklin, one of Eugene Debs's presidential electors in 1904, is an example of this.
MINNESOTA passed a corrupt practices act in 1895 amidst a national movement to reform campaign practices. Minnesota’s law limited the amount of money candidates could spend as well as the kind of expenses engendered. Every candidate for elective office had to file a statement of expense with the secretary of state, “setting forth in detail all sums of money contributed, disbursed, expended or promised by him.” Since 1895 these provisions have been considerably expanded and revised to take into account changing circumstances and now seek to define fair campaign practices rather than corrupt practices only. But candidates must still file a statement of expenditures. Here are examples of such statements. One is by John B. Richards (top), candidate in 1902 for

GROVER CLEVELAND’S 1884 victory over the “plumed knight” — James G. Blaine — was celebrated in Minneapolis’ Bridge Square, even though Blaine carried Minnesota 111,819 votes to 70,135. The campaign, according to Allan Nevins, was “one of the most vituperative in history.”

LINCOLN items are among the earliest campaign badges and buttons in the MHS museum. The white silk campaign badge with its romanticized portrait of Lincoln looking like a Italian poet could date from the 1860 campaign.

**EXPENDITURES.**

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**Summer 1976**
MINNESOTANS represented in the campaign items collection include William B. Merriam, a Republican, who was elected governor in 1888, and John A. Johnson, who, although a Democrat in the strongly Republican state, was elected three times. He died in office in 1909. Many thought the popular politician might have been the next president.

THIS MOOSE election pin marked its wearer as a supporter of Theodore Roosevelt’s Progressive party candidacy in 1912. The name “Bull Moose” was a tribute to Roosevelt who often used the term to describe his own strength and vigor. The Progressives had seceded from the regular-organization Republicans following the renomination of President William H. Taft. Roosevelt lost the election, but he carried Minnesota, 125,999 votes to Woodrow Wilson’s 106,431, Taft’s 64,342, and Eugene Debs’s 27,505. Debs was Public Ownership party candidate. After Charles Evans Hughes was nominated in 1916, most of the Progressives were reunited with the Republican party. Hughes carried Minnesota in the 1916 election, but just barely — 179,544 votes to Wilson’s 179,155.

MINNEAPOLIS was host to the Republican national convention in 1892 at which Benjamin Harrison was nominated the party’s presidential candidate. Once again the Republican candidate won the state — 122,766 votes to Cleveland’s 101,055 — but failed to carry the nation.

PEOPLE still remember Alfred M. Landon’s sunflower campaign buttons using the state flower of his native Kansas. This 4½-by-5-inch metal plate fastened to the license plate of a car. The cheerful yellow buttons were about the only bright spots in the 1936 Republican campaign. When the votes were counted, the results in Minnesota were 698,901 for Franklin D. Roosevelt, 350,461 for Landon, and 74,296 for William Lemke, Union party candidate.