

THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM

Congress decided, in 1787, that a constitutional convention was needed to consider amendments to the Articles of Confederation which constituted the basic charter of our government. The convention began its deliberations in May of that year. The first order of business, after adopting the rules of procedure was to receive recommendations for an entirely new framework of government.

Various plans were considered such as the Virginia Plan, submitted by Edmund Randolph and the New Jersey Plan, sponsored by William Paterson. These, and other plans were adopted, amended, rejected and studied for several months, until, on September 6, a final decision was reached to have the President selected by electors chosen by the state legislatures. The Constitution was sent to the states for ratification on September 17, 1787; the first electoral college met on February 4, 1789, to cast ballots for the President and Vice President of the United States.

The framers of the electoral college system believed that this method would bring the election close to the people and would be free of pressures to tamper with or corrupt the vote. It was specified that all electors would meet on the same day in their states to vote for President and for Vice President, respectively, in the manner prescribed by the Constitution; to sign six certificates of all the votes cast; to seal the certificates and certify upon each that the lists and votes were contained therein; and, to dispose of the certificates in the following manner:

one copy to the President of the Senate of the United States,
two copies to the Secretary of State in the State where the electors were chosen,
two copies to the Administrator of General Services of the United States,
one copy to the Chief Judge of the United States District Court in the jurisdiction where the electors assemble.

When these duties are completed the responsibility of the electors and the state officials is fulfilled.

The final ceremonial act of electing the President and the Vice President of the United States takes place in January. The federal code instructs Congress to be in session in the House of Representatives where tellers receive and tally the certificates in the alphabetical order of the States. The results are then delivered to the President of the Senate who announces the votes and enters the results in the journals of the two Houses. The President and Vice President of the United States are then officially elected.

It is interesting to note that the Maryland Constitution of 1776, established the Maryland Electoral College for the purpose of electing state senators; this system was in use until 1836. Senators were chosen by forty electors, selected by the voters of the county in which they lived. Two electors were selected from each County with the exception of the Cities of Annapolis and Baltimore, entitled to one each.

According to students of Maryland's history, it is reasonable to believe that the electoral college plan finally adopted by the Founding Fathers was patterned, at least in part, after the Maryland system of electing state senators. Having been in operation for eleven years at the time of the Federal Constitutional Convention in 1787, the delegates to those deliberations had an impressive structure to study and use as a model.

McMahan, in "Historical Review of the Government of Maryland" quotes Alexander Hamilton's reference to Maryland's system of electing state senators: "If the federal Senate, therefore, really contained the danger which has been so loudly proclaimed, some symptoms at least of a like danger ought by this time to have been betrayed by the Senate of Maryland; but no such symptoms have appeared. On the contrary, the jealousies at first entertained by men of the same description with those who view with terror the correspondent part of the