IN WHICH MR. PICKWICK EXPLAINS THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE, RUNS FOR OFFICE, AND ATTENDS A BASEBALL MATCH.

THOMAS J. ROBINSON

Taken from the minutes of the Pickwick Club

October 22, 18–. Joseph Smiggers, Esq:–

Mr. Pickwick observed first the origins of the electoral college. Never mentioned by name in the United States Constitution, nonetheless it there appeared as a college of electors. Having settled this most subtle foundational point, Mr. Pickwick pointed out that the several states had in good time adopted a rather different system as allowed by the discretion left to the several states of the choice of electors. This brought him (Mr. Pickwick) to the present day in which, as he explained, a national popular election is held and the winner determined by electoral tallying. That is, each state’s electors up to minor inconsiderable exceptions which his humble (No! No!) presentation must perforce admit, themselves rather inconsiderate (They Are! They Are!) to what he hoped was an otherwise elegant treatment (It is! It is!), yes each state’s electors are chosen by the popular winner within said state and then all the perfunctory electors are added up. Esoteric, indirect, bizarre, anachronistic, indeed downright stupid, but only to the unversed eye. Clearly, to any trained antiquarian scholar the electoral college preserves a worthy relic of an older time, a useful remembrance of the early republic, a most necessary prompt for the education of the good citizen to consider the deep intricacies of representative government, and as history shows, it nearly always produces the correct winner anyway. Indisputably, to the trained mind, the rare exception only highlights the general rule and only the vulgar mundane of mind would care to worry about any minor passing discrepancy (Agreed! Agreed!).

Here the official entry terminates. But the following true account has been pieced together from the various available primary documents archived in Rutgers’ Alexander library, which more than fully convey the genuine history of what followed during Mr. Pickwick’s extended sojourn in New Jersey.

With my apologies to Mr. Charles Dickens, whose characters I have stolen and imported to a new world.
Mr. Pickwick burst forth from slumber on the 4th day of November, the day of his election to County Historian Laureate, a post for which he had agreed to run on account of the ceaseless entreaties of his coterie. He doubted not the outcome. The sun was shining bright. The ballot had only his name. He had not even bothered to wake himself early after the previous evening’s delightful repast, ending with an extra bottle of the innkeeper’s wine, drunk to toasts of the impending victory to be added to the long and illustrious list of enviable Pickwickian achievements.

Upon throwing open the shutters of his room, down the provincial lane he spied his friend Mr. Winkle. He hailed him, beaming with anticipation, but Mr. Winkle looked away. Odd, most odd, but Mr. Pickwick assumed for the sake of his friend that something had merely caught his eye. Yes, Mr. Winkle must have noticed something of overpowering interest in...in...well in the gutter.

“Hallo, what’s that?”
“What’s what?”
“That.”
“Oh that?”
“Yes that.”

Not sure just what to answer at this awkward and most unwelcome juncture, Mr. Winkle looked about himself for something which ‘that’ might be. But as seems always to be the case in such instances, Mr. Winkle found nothing but the most nondescript, ordinary, blank, dull avenue as ever he had laid eyes upon.

“Er, it’s nothing.”
“Extraordinary.”
“Why yes.”
“A meditative calm beyond any I have normally experienced.”
“Indeed.”
“Like the calm before a storm, the still before the final coup de grace, the announcement of the outcome. It is one of those moments that calls for rumination, eh Winkle.”

Elderberry Lane stood empty, not a door opened or closed, not a window was budged. The soft wind had come to a complete standstill. Not a cloud was in the sky. The nearby birds rested on silent perches. Pedestrians respectfully waited to enter. The very elms stood their watch in rows of straight majesty. The two men held their breathes.

“You’ve lost.”

The situation was soon explained by Mr. Winkle. An electoral system was used in Tewksey Park County, New Jersey and although Mr. Pickwick had won the popular vote, a write-in candidate by the name of Blotton had won the county electoral college.

“Blotton?”
“Yes, Blotton.”

“That upstart who was nearly expelled from the Pickwick Club for behaving in a manner... un-Pickwickian?”

“The self-same.”
But Mr. Pickwick was not yet dismayed. It would take more than a small, mundane setback as this to ruffle his dignified composure. He knew that he ought yet to prevail over the people to count the popular vote. Of course, in a national election, such an irregularity was too confusing, but in a small county, where the voters could assemble en masse at the voting poll, Mr. Pickwick was certain that this slight error could be rectified by the rational and civilized denizens of Tewksley Park.

He quickly dressed and, together with Mr. Winkle, hurried to the town square where the majority of the citizens were assembled to hear the results. Mr. Pickwick found the nearest available soapbox on which to stand and eloquently made his case to the cheers of his so recently dejected supporters. The situation was nearly rectified when all of a sudden on a second soapbox, kitty-corner to Mr. Pickwick and his assembled crowd, appeared Mr. Blotton.

"IF, I say IF we had a countywide popular vote, THEN we could see how each district voted during the course of the election, but gentlemen the CONVERSE is NOT true. One cannot add up the votes of the several districts in an electoral college election and call the result a countywide vote."

The observation was met with confusion. The citizens pondered what to do. Mr. Pickwick observed that the county electoral college was an anachronism whose remaining purpose of existence was being abused to cheat the people of their duly chosen County Historian Laureate. At the mention of the word ‘cheat,’ the crowd became focused and angered.

Mr. Blotton, singularly unperturbed, noted that Mr. Pickwick had campaigned to win the county electoral college. He, Mr. Blotton had done likewise. The voters had also played that game, the game to win the electoral college. Therefore it was Mr. Pickwick who was cheating. Mr. Pickwick was trying to change the rules of the game after the game had been played.

A second mob appeared behind Mr. Blotton, equally angered as the first. Mr. Pickwick blanched somewhat and gauged the size of the two mobs. His rule, a rule born of age, experience and deep wisdom was always to join the bigger of two mobs. Mr. Blotton continued.

"I had numerous supporters in the county seat of Bumberton who could have, nay WOULD have assembled had they not known beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mr. Pickwick had an unbeatable lead in that one lone district, which meant that their votes would not count. And so reasoning, their intelligence lead them to waste not their time casting pointless votes but instead attended to their regular business.

Therefore it is INCORRECT, even morally UNFAIR, to say that Mr. Pickwick has won the popular vote, because there has not even been a popular vote. The will of the people has been measured by an electoral vote instead."

The mob behind Mr. Blotton thickened.

"Eligible voters–Bumberton polls–not counted–damned nonsense–unfair unfair." It was Mr. Jingle, who it happens, being nomadic by habit and zealous by nature, had himself voted in every district once, half his votes for Mr. Blotton and half his votes for Mr.
Pickwick, each vote for a drink and a dollar, making him therefore the most impartial and disinterested observer of the unfolding events.

The mob behind Mr. Pickwick began passing out pitchforks filched from Evert McCreddy’s general store.

Mr. Blotton insisted that this was missing the point, which the crowd menacingly took to be a condescending insult, but quickly recovered his fumble by adding that those uncounted voters in Bumberton were his supporters after all, which naturally temporarily restored the uneasy equilibrium of the assembled electorate.

Nonetheless emboldened, Mr. Pickwick majestically blusted that Mr. Blotton was cheating on an implicitly understood compact with the people, by use of a cheap esoteric excuse.

Pitchforks were raised.

Mr. Blotton protested that Mr. Pickwick had lost fair and square and repeated that now he was merely attempting to change the rules unfairly to manipulate the vote and to rob everyone of the right to ANY election by the people AT ALL and was using trickery, a cheap slight of hand, based on a manufactured misunderstanding of a lying statistic to obtain an arbitrary result, thus cheating everyone entirely.

Even a man of the most pure equanimity could not have stood such impudent calumny as this and Mr. Pickwick, the seams of his coat bursting, the flush of his face redding, finally at long last became enraged.

“The people have chosen me to be the County Historian Laureate, Blotton, me, me, me, ME, and your phantom voters are nothing but a figment of your jealous indigestion.”

To which the reply–

“The results, sir, are these (results which Mr. Pickwick in the absolute necessity of the rush of emergency had, as is only to be expected even of the most intrepid Pickwickian in such a dire emergency in the midst of an impossibly busy schedule, yes had neglected, just yet, to peruse): I won the vote in every district except Bumberton where my supporters far from being phantoms, intelligently refrained from wasting their time and instead went about enriching the history of Tewksey Park county with their daily substantive innovation. Are we to penalize innovation, practical history-making and common sense? Are we to further accept that the Bumbertons alone are to decide elections in Tewksey Park? Are we to submit ourselves to the tyranny of the urban metropolis over the entire countryside? Are we to allow the usurpation of the right to rewrite our own history? The usurpation, sir?”

The pitchforks were turned on Mr. Pickwick, who, against what would normally have been his better judgment and before he had been able to bother himself with seeing what was happening, exclaimed,

“Bumbertons unite.”

And they did, but somehow not in quite the expected way and, not a one to stand on sanctimonious principle, Mr. Pickwick, at heart a most jolly old gentlemen, upon putting on his spectacles so that he might view the spectacle before him, promptly conceded the election while adding an invitation for everyone to attend a pick-nick at his expense.
Thus saving himself from the pitchforks, Mr. Pickwick unfortunately found himself briefly incarcerated at the Burlington Prison for the mountainous debt he had put himself under paying for the proceeding merriment, but for such a graceful and kind soul as Pickwick, the price was but a small burden.

Mr. Pickwick found that Mr. Jingle was soon also a fellow inmate at Burlington and since he, Mr. Pickwick, was always a most generous gentleman and since he found out that Mr. Jingle was terribly keen on watching the match between the Orange Stockings of Cowbridge NJ and the Scarlet Mittens of Loxford NJ, he arranged payment for the gaoler for the necessary amount so that they might together attend all seven days of the (Delaware and Raritan) Canal Series.

The weather was inviting and the stands at Piscator’s Ballpark were overflowed with spectators and vendors of hot dogs and Jersey lightning, which Mr. Jingle first observed and Mr. Pickwick kindly purchased. The reader may recall that this series, a most dramatic one, was the first ever of its sort, played in the Colonial League, which pioneered the overhand pitch. The competition was fierce yet collegial.

On day one, the Orange Stockings went to bat first as the Scarlet Mittens arranged themselves in the field. Mr. Pickwick noticed the enormous difference in the sizes of the two teams.

“Uncommon discrepancy that. The Orange team must outweigh the Red team 2 to 1.”
“Scarlet, you mean, gent.” A nearby spectator corrected.
“Incontestably—but more’s the money—uniforms redundant—Cowbridge’s giants—special ordered socks—New York tailors—one whole crop for each orange sock—market stock soared—Wall Street’s delight.” Added Mr. Jingle.

“On the whole, I think I’d wager on the the Orange team.”

Mr. Pickwick’s prejudicial intuition was born out handsomely correct as is only to be suspected from such a Pickwickian dignitary when Cowbridge began trouncing Loxford 11-1 after the first couple of innings.

“What do you say to a small wager, Mr. Jingle?” Mr. Pickwick veritably chortled.
“A fiver it is—don’t say no—my pleasure—more’s the fun.” Replied Mr. Jingle in all cavalier seriousness.

“Er, what? You mean on Loxford?” Mr. Pickwick stammered.

“Most assuredly—finest fishing around—flies and baits and lines and nets and traps—caught a 20 pounder—fought for hours—noonday sun—height of summer—Izaak Walton lost to heatstroke—Geoffrey Crayon lost his line in a willow—pulled me under—fought like the Dickens—finest gefilte ever to swim the ford.”

Mr. Pickwick jovially accepted the bet and after the close of the first game at 40-2 Cowbridge, he suggested that they double the sum, nay quadruple the sum, which Mr. Jingle hemmed at a touch and then hawed at a wee bit and just as Mr. Pickwick was about to end what he felt truly was an overly cruel taunt and instead accompany Mr. Jingle to a refreshment stand, Mr. Jingle abruptly and heartily accepted the new wager,
for after all, as he reasoned, they were both in debtor’s prison really and what was less than nothing he could certainly afford to lose plenty of.

Loxford brought in a new starter for day two. He was a heretofore unknown rube from Bound Brook who, the crowd gossiped, found his full time employment as a maintenance keeper of the covered bridge.

“But aren’t covered bridges self maintaining. Why, isn’t that why they are covered?” Mr. Pickwick pondered aloud.

“Right that is—protected bridge—engineering wonder—King Posts, Queen Posts, Jack Posts—took shelter once—sweet lady present—won’t bother with the details—long story—tragic outcome—sigh—but one problem—cover’s got no cover.”

“Oh, I see now, most illuminating.” And Mr. Pickwick put down the curious fact in his notebook.

And just as he raised his eyes, Newt Tupsey let go the first pitch. It slowly corkscrewed threw the air, curling through the strike zone and veering off past batter, past catcher and stunned umpire too, only finally caught, most elegantly, by a young boy. The crowd gasped.

“STREEEEEIIIIIIIIIE ONE.”

“That’s almost Cricket.” Mr. Pickwick marveled.

“Like a Googly—spun which-way—but none on that one—pass a dog—history made—grilled to perfection—wash it with lightning—hip hip for Tupsey’s turvy.” Mr. Jingle gobbled his food and drink and led a cheer at which the crowd naturally obliged with a plethora of raucous ‘hips.’

Mr. Pickwick grew a bit nervous over his gamble, but most dutifully, conscientiously and scientifically he recorded and tallied the score of the historic series in his notebook as below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Game 1</th>
<th>Game 2</th>
<th>Game 3</th>
<th>Game 4</th>
<th>Game 5</th>
<th>Game 6</th>
<th>Game 7</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange Stockings</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlet Mittens</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Well, Mr. Jingle, despite the heroic efforts of the Mittens pitching, it seems that the Stockings were holding all the cards from the start.”

“It’s the games that count, professor,” a little boy explained as he peered out from under an oversized cap.

“What’s that?”

“Tell him, young Mack.”

“It’s the games that count, professor. Seven, nine inning games, not one, 63 inning game. Just like the electoral college, you know.”

“Who’s the kid genius? What did you say his name was?” a portly stranger in a rumpled brown suit asked.

“Cornelius McGillicuddy, Connie Mack for short, and he came all the way from Massachusetts for the game, eh, Mack.”
“I couldn’t miss it when I heard about Tupsey’s new pitch. They’re calling it a knuckle-ball.”

“I hear he’s moving to Philly, Tupsey is.” Said the stranger.

“Then Mr. Mack here will just have to cross this little garden walk and follow old Ben Franklin, won’t he.” The crowd gently teased the young aficionado.

“Deck stacked–Loxford’s all trump–the first game tested and tired out the giants–9 innings each, not 63–4 to 3, Scarlet Loxford wins the series.”

“But that’s not cricket.” Mr. Pickwick blubbed.

“No, sir, it’s baseball.”

The End

Department of Mathematics, Rutgers University, Piscataway, NJ 08854

E–mail address: thomasro@math.rutgers.edu