

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Keepsakes for 1956

We are continually indebted to the Book Club of California for interesting, educational items which always interest those readers who appreciate a good bit of Californiana. We are now in receipt of the last four of the club's Keepsakes for 1956, and how delightful they are!

For today's column we have picked "The Infamous Tapeworm Ballot of 1871," which was chosen by Allen R. Ottley as a treasure in the California State Library at Sacramento, reproduced for the Book Club membership by Lawton Kennedy of San Francisco and edited by Robert de Ross.

State Librarian Ottley states in his text: "In the collection dotted with interesting books, diaries, letters, newspapers, and early prints, it is a little audacious to try to select a single item of outstanding worth. There is one item in the California section of the state library, however, which seems particularly appropriate in election year, and that is the original 'tapeworm ballot.'"

It should be noted first that ballots originally were printed by each political party and were far from uniform according to the librarian. Of various sizes, they carried, besides a list of candidates of that party and the offices they sought, various patriotic symbols, slogans, or distinctive designs so that party hacks at the polls could easily recognize the party ticket each voter used.

Ottley goes on to tell how around the polls party henchmen distributed these ballots and exhorted voters to vote the straight ticket. Voters could, however, substitute other names by pasting gummed "stickers" or "pasters," bearing the name of another candidate, over printed names on the ballot. This use of "pasters" was a constant source of annoyance to party leaders, and they resorted to various typographic stratagems to outwit the independent voter. Names of the candidates were often printed in circles, wavy lines, or in small type so that a "paster" would not cover up the name or would cover up several names and so void the ballot.

Attached to the Keepsake is a facsimile of the "Infamous Ballot." It is a copy of the Republican state ticket of 1871, showing the tapeworm ballot. In that

year Newton Booth was running for governor and Romualdo Pacheco for lieutenant governor.

This nefarious practice culminated in the so-called "tapeworm ballot" used in the general election of Sept. 6, 1871, at Vallejo. Printed on thin cardboard, as described by Ottley, it measured only 19/32 inch in width and five and 3/32 inches in length. On the back were printed oblique broken green lines, and on the face, in the smallest type available, the names and offices of some 26 candidates from governor down to constable, as well as two constitutional amendments. There was, of course, no space for a "paster." The following month, in a judicial election of Oct. 18, an even smaller ballot was used at Vallejo, with five names and offices on a narrow strip of thin cardboard only 7/32 inch wide and 3 and 17/32 inches long.

We also learn from the text that the use of these two ballots, climaxing a trend among all parties to hinder the independent voter, brought a storm of protest that could not be ignored. The next year the "Commissioners to Revise the Laws recommended that in a revised Political Code the Secretary of State supply the ballot paper, ballots be of uniform size of four inches wide and 12 inches long, names and offices be printed in black straight lines, and there be no distinguishing marks or devices on the ballots." A ballot not less than five by 12 inches, printed in black straight lines became assured by a bill signed by Gov. Booth in March 1874.

At last, in 1891, Gov. Markham signed a ballot reform bill which is substantially the law of the Australian ballot we use today. Achieved only after 20 years of political resistance, it owes its existence largely to the storm of indignation following the use of the infamous tapeworm ballot back in 1871. That little strip of cardboard had an influence far greater than its original purpose.