

Electoral College novelist could be a member

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Two elections ago, Alan May wrote a novel about political skulduggery in the Electoral College, the almost invisible 535-member body which officially elects the president and vice president of the United States.

This year, the Bloomfield Hills attorney stands a good chance of being a

member of the Electoral College himself. That is, if the Republican Reagan-Bush ticket carries Michigan. May was nominated for presidential elector at last weekend's Republican State Convention in Detroit.

"When you get there, you have a sense of history," said Harry Greenleaf, Livonia Republican leader who was a presidential elector in 1980.



ART EMANUELE/Staff photographer

Alan May, a Republican nominee for presidential elector, wrote a novel in 1978 about skulduggery in the Electoral College during a tight election. Here the 18th District chairman is pictured on the state convention floor.

"I didn't realize how much it hits you."

MAY, 42, was selected from the 18th Congressional District caucus to be one of 30 presidential electors from Michigan. He is district chairman and was a delegate to the national convention in Dallas.

The 2nd District selected Michael Legg, 33, a Livonia attorney and district leader. A national convention delegate this year, Legg views the Electoral College post as "more of an honorary thing."

The 15th District picked Dan Dobbins, 32, an independent insurance agent from Taylor. As district Reagan-Bush chairman, Dobbins knows about the Electoral College "just from my reading of history."

The 17th picked Henry Dodge, northwest Detroit resident who is best known for his taxpayers group activities.

Typically, Electoral College nominations are given to older party workers like Dodge as a reward for years of faithful service. Selection of May, Legg and Dobbins was a departure from the pattern.

VOTERS DON'T actually vote for president and vice president, though

the Reagan-Bush and Mondale-Ferraro names appear on the ballot. Whichever ticket wins a plurality on Nov. 3 is awarded all 20 of Michigan's electoral votes — two for the senators and 18 for the U.S. representatives.

In 1980, Greenleaf recalled, Michigan members of the Electoral College met one December day in the state Senate chamber in Lansing. Greenleaf himself formally offered George Bush's name for vice president.

Ceremoniously, the electors cast their ballots and signed them. The ballots were sealed in an envelope, sent to the U.S. Capitol, read aloud and counted by House Speaker Thomas (Tip) O'Neill.

"It's probably an anachronism," Greenleaf said — but four years later he admits to still being in awe of the ceremony.

MOST WESTERN nations have parliaments, where members of the national legislative body select their party leader as prime minister. Voters pick only their MP, or member of parliament.

Article XII of the U.S. Constitution, however, didn't give that power to Congress. Rather, it designed the Electoral College as a kind of super-parliament

to pick the president and vice president. "The Founding Fathers contemplated a deliberative body," said Legg, a student of conservatism.

In practice, political parties were developed in the first half of the 19th century and monopolized the national ticket prior to the election. Most of the time, the presidential electors have nothing to do but travel to the state capital and rubber-stamp the voters' decision.

"You're committed to the party and the party's candidate," Legg said. "But what if the candidate isn't there?"

"You wonder," said Greenleaf, "what will happen if the president-elect or vice president-elect should become incapacitated" between election day and a month later when the Electoral College makes it official.

If, say, Ronald Reagan were re-elected Nov. 6 but died before the Electoral College met in the 50 state cap-

itals, the electors in theory would be entirely free to choose someone else.

THAT WAS what Alan May's novel was about.

"There is no legal obligation for the elector to vote for anyone," May said. "So it postulated the existence of a very close election where one elector decided to ignore his position and vote for a different candidate."

His novel, entitled "Article XII," was written in 1978. One agonized sleepless night, May wrote a novel to abolish the Electoral College. The agent felt May's book would be obsolete. The novel failed.

May found a publisher himself. "Unfortunately, the publisher decided to switch to just non-fiction and it (the novel) sits on the shelf."

May won't reveal the conclusion. He confesses there is "a little bit" to it.

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