

Voting Machine

Q: Do [00:00:02] you want to first sort of give us a description of the larger machine or do you want to start with how they work?

Response: Let's talk about the [00:00:09] real machine and we'll move from the general to specific without actually having—

Q: . . . [chit-chat] . . .

Response: Okay. The larger [00:00:39] machine has a range of patents that are actually painted onto the side of it from throughout the 1890s. [00:00:49] I think the earliest is 1890. The last is 1899 and these machines were continuously in development from the late 1880s up through the [00:01:01] 1960s really and one of the first machines was actually developed by a man whose profession was making— Well, he was a locksmith basically but actually he made [00:01:14] the tumblers for safe combinations and he was very much attuned to the political world and the times and with the problems with elections, particular [00:01:26] in New York City in the 1880s and the dominant metaphor then was the political machine, meaning the Tammany Ring of Boss Tweed and so how do you fight [00:01:42] corruption in politics, how do fight a political machine. Well, the answer was you make a voting machine and so they began to experiment with these kinds [00:01:52] of— what eventually turned out to be a— it's described as a gear and lever voting machine and it had a couple of sort of remarkable [00:02:00] features, the first of which it was inordinately heavy and because with the complexity of the mechanism and it really couldn't be stolen or misplaced. [00:02:12] That was the first advantage. That was also it turns out a disadvantage because they were so large and very expensive to service and to maintain.

The [00:02:24] particular machine that we have in the collection basically takes the form of an Australian or what would we could call a blanket ballot and simply renders [00:02:34] that in steel so you have a table of electors or elected officials and they're organized in rows by party or columns by party. [00:02:48] There're also places with little sliding little slots that you can actually write in a candidate and what is interesting about this machine is it's the first [00:02:57] to combine the movement of closing a curtain that actually hits a lever that unlocks the machine and prepares it to be manipulated for voting and while the curtain [00:03:11] is closed, you then move the levers that you— for the candidates that you wish to select or the referenda that you choose [00:03:22] and then when you open the curtain, the levers were turned to the neutral position and the counters are moved ahead one for each of the offices [00:03:34] that you selected, so it combines the features of a closeted kind of curtained voting booth which were also used when people went in to mark ballots [00:03:45] with crayons or pencils or pens with a curtain, with the actual business of a machine, so this machine that we'll be looking [00:03:57] at is really the first to combine all of those elements and all

of those elements would've been familiar with anybody that still votes on that [00:04:06] kind of a machine today.

It's the same three steps to vote—you close the curtain, simultaneously unlock the levers, move the levers and [00:04:16] when you're satisfied with that, then you open the curtain, the third step, and then you're done and at the end of voting, the backs of the machines are opened [00:04:27] and the counters are visible and they're manually recorded, physically tallied up and then the machine is sealed and not reset until the next election, [00:04:38] so the machines are pretty much left inviolable until then.

The only flaw in this process is sometimes the— They consistently [00:04:49] check. People who over time recorded these votes, they had to check for vote tallies ending in 999 which were always suspect because that meant typically [00:05:02] that the trip was not rolling over from 999 to 000 so that's one of the flaws and the other was, of course, the large size of the machine and the complexity [00:05:19] in servicing such a thing and then moving it and storing it, but in its day, those machines were really the symbols of kind of a progressive [00:05:30] reform. It could— A single machine as expensive as that might be, could service an entire election district, precincts and more, and so this [00:05:44] contributed to precincts being enlarged, lines being redrawn to fit any number of machines that previously you would only be able to service by a hand [00:05:53] count, a hand tally of physical paper ballots, so there were advantages to them with, of course, with the expense, but this was pretty much the [00:06:04] forward-looking thinking local government, the election district, the supervisor of elections, people who administer, administrate election look [00:06:17] to the machine as a symbol of this modern progressive reform.

Q: Can you say something about who those people are who are sort of in charge of elections [00:06:28] now and who's making the decisions about adopting the machines, sort of who the constituents are that we're talking about in these decisions?

Response: Well, [00:06:36] every— I hate to say state— Well, each state has a supervisor of elections that oversees voting in the state and then within each county [00:06:48] typically there is a county supervisor of elections. That's who is responsible for rolling out the machines, making sure things are maintained [00:06:59] and also vouching for the results. There are no federal laws that mandate— Well, beginning with the Constitution, it says that we will have an election every [00:07:09] two years, we'll have a presidential election every four years. It doesn't tell you how you're to record the votes. That's left up to the states, so each state has [00:07:19] that decision to make and the decision to use whatever technology is made at the state level and sometimes left down to the county level, so we have any [00:07:32] number of voting systems in the United States. There're just thousands of districts that they can all be different. They can all be the same, but it's [00:07:43] pretty much left up to be— It's a local decision.

Q: So, in the 1890s when this machine gets invented and [00:07:51]—

Response: In New York, New York state.

Q: In 1890 and it's a direct response to sort of Boss Tweed Republican machine politics?

Response: Well, yes, to election politics [00:08:03] and voting discrepancies in general.

Q: Can [00:08:09] you say a little bit about what those kinds of discrepancies— Sort of what was the prevalent voter fraud going on at that point?

Response: Well, I mean I'm not saying that— I mean, there are flaws in any one of these systems because there're [00:08:19] people involved in these, but what it replaced would have been a system of paper ballots that, say, going back to the mid 19th century in the 1850s, [00:08:35] 1860s, '70s would have been a slip of paper with candidate names printed on it that would be called a ticket and these could be— And these were [00:08:46] actually distributed by the parties and even sometimes by the candidates, so you would pick up a ticket and put into a ballot box and that box [00:08:58] could be a slot-top box that was— you couldn't see through it, it could be a kind of a fishbowl, it could be— And the ballots were sometimes [00:09:05] printed on color paper to make them easier— more easily identifiable, and then they were hand-counted physically at the— and tallied [00:09:15] up at the end of the day's voting and there were—

I mean, the potential for fraud are manifest. I mean, it would be possible to fold up multiple copies of [00:09:29] that ticket and vote it as one but it would be counted as three, four, five. Also, there were instances where in San Francisco for a [00:09:44] city election, a ballot box was discovered with a false bottom that had paper ballots hidden inside it and although the top of the box remained locked, it was [00:09:59] possible to open the slot and mix those ballots in with the general population of voted ballots, you know, if necessary, so there were all kinds of— almost as [00:10:13] inventive as making a machine, things that were done.

Q: Do you feel like if you think about sort of the way that voter reform went in the 1890s, [00:10:28] do you feel like there were certain populations that it advantaged in certain populations, that disadvantaged as far as voters?

Response: Well, first [00:10:39] of all, you had— For most of this, you have to read. I neglected to mention there's a— sort of a reform that replaced these party slips or [00:10:52] party ballots. It was called the Australian or the blanket ballot and this removed the distribution of these party slips from the candidates and from the parties [00:11:07] and put the responsibility for distributing a ballot squarely in the hands of the local government and the blanket ballot covered all of the candidates, all of the offices. [00:11:18] You had to go to the polling place to pick it up and you marked it and left it in the polling place and this was a— typically these [00:11:26] things are rather large, almost the size of a full-page newspaper sheet, in some instances. Certainly no larger than that and they could [00:11:34] be printed in German. They could be printed in German and English. They could be— But they included every candidate and every office. It [00:11:45] became an official ballot and it was laid out in a table format column

row kind of arrangement and all of the candidates were listed under their respective parties and then all of the offices would've been listed accordingly.

Now, at the top of those, the party columns, for example, they often [00:12:16] added symbols. For example, the Democratic symbol would be a rooster; a Republican symbol might be a kind of a hammer, an anvil [00:12:24] like a workman's hammer. Another symbol would be an eagle and so you really— it could be just be sort of a functional illiterate [00:12:33] and just pick up on the symbol, put your mark by the symbol and you've automatically voted for the entire party ticket which was what the parties [00:12:44] preferred and some districts, though, would print ballots without symbols and this was— To get to your question, this was used [00:12:55] as an example of a kind of discriminatory practice because that instantly ruled out people who couldn't read. You had to then negotiate the [00:13:06] ballot, each one of these little columns and each one of these offices and what are you voting for and also another device that was sometimes used is any [00:13:16] stray marks that appeared on a ballot would disqualify it. There was no reading of voter intent into it.

Another thing that [00:13:22] could disqualify a ballot would be over-voting. In other words, you voted twice for president. You voted for a Democrat and a Republican. That invalidates [00:13:35] the choice, so— But the advent of the machines which simply replicated in steel that kind of table row column arrangement, the way those [00:13:49] machines worked is it eliminated the possibility of voting, over-voting. You could always leave the lever untouched and under-vote, but you could [00:13:58] not vote for more than one candidate in an office where you wanted to elect one

Q: Was there resistance to the adoption of these machines? Was that sort of a [00:14:10] big controversy over them?

Response: No. The only— I mean, there were controversies. I mean, well, historically, there have been controversies [00:14:22] but they're sort of self-serving controversies. In other words, manufacturers will sue to establish conditions that are ripe to be exploited by [00:14:37] their particular brand of machine and from time to time, the cost becomes an issue in adapting or adopting this kind of machine, but they're marketed [00:14:54] and sold as machines for all time and in many respects, that was true. These machines were used for just years and years and years and years until they couldn't [00:15:05] be repaired anymore.

Q: Was there a Tammany Hall sort of reaction to them? Was there a campaign against them?

Response: No. No, not in that sense. [00:15:22]

Q: If you sort of look at the machine and are there particular historical themes that you associate with it, things that you draw out of it?

Response: Well, [00:15:40] as a generalization, you could say that people in our country in the United States, the voting machine speaks to a certain— to my way of thinking, a kind of a mindset [00:15:53] that you can fix a political problem with a machine or that there is some mechanical solution. Now we might think of it as an electromechanical solution [00:16:08] for the kind of problem-solving that involves counting, that gets at this issue of the one man one woman one vote which is the essence of democracy [00:16:26] and so in that sense, you could say, you could make a case that these machines are the perfect distillation or reflection of that. They're not [00:16:37] perfect and sometimes we do make mistakes, but, of course, this is sort of an aspiration or at least something that's driving toward that, toward [00:16:49] that goal, the one day in which everyone will vote and that not only will they vote, but their votes will be recorded and counted.

Q: If you had [00:17:01] to describe sort of in the 1890 when the machines sort of first appears, who the voting population is, who's actually— not necessarily who's qualified to [00:17:15] vote, but who's actually voting?

Response: Who's actually voting. I don't know. I just don't feel comfortable. It isn't anything that I've studied. [00:17:28] I mean, there's certainly not women until near the turn of the century and beginning in states, mostly western states where they're building a case— [00:17:39] The territories are building cases for statehood so they're enlarging the concepts of who is eligible to vote, but the doubling of the electorate [00:17:53] with the 19th Amendment allowing women to vote which instantaneously just balloons the voting population upwards. That's something that was handled with these [00:18:05] kinds of machines.

And I should also point out that the kinds of machine, because of the expense of the machine, these were never used in lightly populated [00:18:14] election districts. These are functions of city precincts for the most part, places that are processing large amounts of information in terms of who's voting and [00:18:26] where the potential for fraud would be greatest by the manipulation of a result was shading it by a couple of hundred votes, that kind of thing, [00:18:38] so this is really the market for this kind of machine.

Q: So, let's say in the rural south, what is voting— If we're using this [00:18:47] sort of machine in New York at this time, what is the rural south voting with?

Response: They would be voting on Australian ballots. They would be voting on things that people [00:18:56] marked in a booth with a pen or a crayon or some kind of a permanent marker and then it would be counted by hand and there're still places [00:19:05] in the country where that's true today and it's just a matter of cost consciousness and what is effective and what's accepted.

Q: If you were to sort [00:19:18] of center an exhibit around the voting machine, what sorts of things would you like to put with it?

Response: Well, we have all kinds of— First of all, [00:19:26] you have the actual existence of the different kinds of machines and today you have everything from the punch card machines to optical [00:19:36] scan reading kinds of machines and you still have the gear and lever machines, but historically you have the paper ballots and then you have the very simple boxes [00:19:48] and what's interesting is if you were doing an exhibit and you could represent historically all of the different kinds of ways that people have voted in [00:19:54] the United States and they're still in use in some small portion of the country yet today, so in the way the country still is pretty much a museum of [00:20:05] voting methods because it's all run locally by the states. I mean, the only thing that we don't do is stand on the courthouse steps and vote by voice. [00:20:19] That's the only way that we don't.

Q: When we stop doing that?

Response: Well, some places never did it [00:20:27] but other places, that was something that was done after the early 1800s.

Q: Do you feel like your historical interpretation of the [00:20:44] machine has changed over time since you sort of first started working with it? Or you've sort of opened up new areas of thought about it?

Response: Well, [00:20:57] when I began working on it, I guess I didn't fully appreciate the way that the machines are developed and the way that they're marketed. [00:21:08] It's not enough to come up with an idea or a machine or a new machine or a different machine. There has to be a pressing need for it so that it can [00:21:18] be sold and it can be adopted successfully and it seems that each technology and we'll consider the gear and lever machine a technology, was built upon the [00:21:36] thing it preceded and that it eventually displaced.

For example, the paper ballot, the straight party ticket, that was replaced by the blanket [00:21:46] ballot that took all of the party tickets and put it onto one piece of paper in a table and column arrangement and the gear and lever machine took [00:21:57] that arrangement and displaced that as a machine and in the 1960s, the gear and lever machine began to be displaced by a man, Joseph Harris, who [00:22:12] was a government professor at University of California, Berkeley. He invented the Votematic which he took a Hollarith card and put it in a kind of a paginated [00:22:24] ballot so that a voter could simply punch through the card and then the card could be fed into a computer reader and tallied that way and that [00:22:37] began to replace this because it was cheaper. You didn't have to store these large machines, but there were flaws in that and there are other kinds [00:22:48] of optically read and scanned machines that begin and end with a piece of paper that you mark and then run through a reader, but again, all of those devices [00:23:00] were based upon what they preceded which was this table and column arrangement and that's— I think that the real— the genius of it is that [00:23:11] simple column ballot. That's it and people have tried to improve on that, but they always begin with that and it usually ends up in something electronic [00:23:21] that you're just paging through.

Q: How did the 1890 machine come into the collection?

Response: Well, in the 1960s, the curators here were developing exhibits and they [00:23:33] began to look for a voting machine. It turns that there was a company in Rochester that was— . . . [chit-chat] . . . The company of record historically made [00:24:18] these machines has— They still have a collection of them and they parted with two of them, gave them to the museum in the early 1960s and the one that we'll [00:24:30] look at or that we have— we've put on exhibit is the one that I described with the curtain and the unifying action of the levers [00:24:42] and that sort of thing, but it actually came from the company that had made it and had kept it as part of its business collection for all these years in Rochester, [00:24:51] New York.

Q: How did you come specifically as a curator to be interested in these machines?

Response: Well, it was the Votematic controversy after the 2000 election. I went [00:25:03] down to— Well, I should back up. There're two curators. I'm one of two curators along with Harry Rubenstein that go out and [00:25:08] collect the campaign, the presidential campaign. We start off in New Hampshire. We try and get something from every [00:25:17] one of the candidates before they drop out. We go to the conventions. I even went to a Reform Party Convention one year just to document the process of how [00:25:28] the campaign works and if the candidates are doing something interesting, we'll go out on the road with them on a bus tour or on a plane, tarmac, ride, [00:25:38] something and so when the Florida recount developed and the election wasn't over yet, every day I would think should we be going to Florida and getting [00:25:53] something and the longer I put it off, the more significant it seemed to become, so finally I just said I just have to go down there and so I went [00:25:58] down there to Palm Beach County before Thanksgiving and it still wasn't settled yet and collected things that people were making, that they were [00:26:08] wearing. I was able to see the process of the county, the way they had organized the vote tallying and that was fascinating. It was [00:26:20] all just invented on the spot. They were just responding to a crisis and trying to just get through it and I put the bug in the ear of the [00:26:34] supervisor of elections that this is something, we wanted a Votematic with a butterfly ballot.

I mean, this is not what you want to hear—hi, I'm from [00:26:43] the Smithsonian, you know, when you're conducting a recount, but a year later I went back and it was a way for them to put it past them, that giving a Votematic [00:26:54] to the Smithsonian, it's past them now. It's history, but that's how I became interested in it, so—

Q: Do you feel like if— do [00:27:12] you want to sort of talk about the, if we can imagine a display in which we'd have the voting machine and the pin together. Looking [00:27:20] at those two things together might show you something as a visitor that you wouldn't get to see _____

Response: Well, I mean, museums' bread and butter are these interesting [00:27:34] cultural juxtapositions smash-up, if you will. The Jailed for Freedom pin to my way of

thinking is in almost a class by itself [00:27:46] and I'm sure [Liz] would be able to speak to that's. I mean, it's an intimate— It's a personal expression, something that you wear, that [00:27:55] it's a matter of identity. I guess it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to say that going in and closing in the curtain in a voting booth is a kind [00:28:04] of a way of identifying yourself by doing what's important and what your responsibilities are as a citizen and all of these sort of shopworn clichés that [00:28:18] you hear, but you really do get what you vote for and you even get what you don't vote for, so it's important that it not only it's something that you do, [00:28:28] but that it is actually recorded and reported accurately and fairly, so that's at least what— it gets at what these things are [00:28:38] which is sort of aspirations really. They're not perfect, but it's something that we try to do right.

Q: If you were with a group of visitors [00:28:49] and a display that included the machine, what would you point out to them that they might not see on their own about it?

Response: Well, [00:28:57] you could discuss the operating features. Maybe that's what we should do. This is a model. When you went in to vote in an election district, [00:29:10] if you were going to vote on a machine . . . [chit-chat] . . . so what we have here are two demonstration models. This is a salesman's sample that shows how the [00:29:39] innards of the machine actually work and this is a demonstration model that was used to acquaint voters who were voting in a 1944 election in which Franklin Roosevelt [00:29:52] was running against Thomas Dewey and this is not the actual machine. This is a facsimile or what we would call a replica that simply [00:30:01] is used to acquaint voters with the operating features of the actual machine, so the red lever here, the curtain is open. The red lever closes [00:30:16] the curtain and this frees the levers to be voted, so in this case, you're voting for a referendum issue.

Here's another one you're voting for. Then [00:30:33] you move down to the Democratic Party line, the Republican Party line, and the Socialist Party line in which you would vote for Roosevelt or [00:30:41] no, I've changed my mind, I think I want to vote for Thomas Dewey. Well, you can't over-vote. You have to release the Roosevelt lever [00:30:49] and then you can vote for this down here, and so on across the board for each individual candidate and office. Now, if you wanted to vote the entire [00:31:05] Democratic Party line, you could do that with this lever but first you're going to have to release the Republican levers and then you've got it and [00:31:21] none of these can be. Whoops. Well, we need some work on this machine. [noise] Let's just back up. Okay.

And when you're done voting, you [00:31:39] open the curtain, the levers return to the neutral position, the curtain's now open, and it's ready for another voter and at the end of the voting, end of [00:31:46] the day's voting, the machine would be opened in the back, the full-size machine, and the numbers would be tallied and recorded by hand and this is a salesman's sample [00:32:02] from the— I think it's from the '60s. It shows you the face of what the voter would see. This would— This device functions as the curtain which [00:32:17] you then close. You see how those cams were locked into place and let's vote for this guy here and as I push this lever down, you can see [00:32:30] that cam is going to engage the wheel. See how that popped into place.

Q: Can we do that again? Can you turn it more towards the camera?

Response: Oh, [00:32:38] I'm sorry.

Q: Yeah, like that.

Response: You want to hold it up like that? All right. So, let's [noise]. The curtain's open, so the levers [00:32:50] will pop into place for voting and unlock the levers on the outside when we open that. Then we're going to vote here and when I push this [00:33:00] down, you can see that lower cam kind of flop into place. See? And that sets— So, no wheels have been turned yet until [00:33:09] you open the curtain and then you'll see that counter move, you see that wheel move one and this is the functional back of the machine that shows that [00:33:20] you moved it up one.

Q: Can we see that number turn on the back?

Response: Sure. Okay. I'm opening the curtain. Okay? And you can vote again. Okay? [00:33:53] But you can see how— Just imagine. I mean, this is just for two offices. You can imagine what these— what the full complement of the machine must [00:34:03] look like inside.

Q: You said that the fellow in Rochester who invented it was sort of in tune with local politics. Do we [00:34:15] know anything more about him.

Response: You know, his name escapes me. I'd have to go back to the site, but the first time a machine was used [00:34:26], his machine was used, was 1882 in Lockport, New York. I can't even remember the— I can't even remember if that's correct or not, what the date was. I'd [00:34:41] have to go look it up. Don't quote me.

Q: Because the site has so much great stuff on it. We'll sort of fill in around [00:34:51] and that sort of thing. I sort of wanted to see if there's a way to talk about, if you feel like there's a relationship between the reform about machine politics [00:35:15] that sort of happens in the urban north and the concurrent disfranchisement of African Americans in the south.

Response: Oh, boy. I'm not an expert on that.

Q: There's [00:35:25] just sort of nothing that you've come across in the discussions of the technology about who they would serve or not serve.

Response: Yeah. I mean, most people are disenfranchised [00:35:36] before they even make it to the polling place, so it's sort of not an issue what they're voting on, although [00:35:49] in some cases you can make a case even today that districts that are served with older machines or technologies that tend to break down tend to be in [00:36:01] districts that are precincts that are basically under-financed and underserved so that is a

form of discrimination and it can be tied directly [00:36:14] to the kinds of technology that's being used or is not being made available to be used.

Q: Do you think there's— Again, same question I asked about [00:36:26] the Jefferson desk, what's like the most interesting thing about this object to you? Is it how it works? Is it—

Response: I've already spoken to it already. [00:36:37] It's now derivative it is of the preceding method in terms of just sort of encapsulating it and rendering a ballot in steel that basically began [00:36:49] as a paper Australian ballot. I mean, this is in effect a blanket ballot.

Q: Additional questions?

Q: Other objects you would want to put with the [00:37:06] voting machine?

Q: If you were to put together a display, what other kinds of artifacts you would put with it?

Response: Yeah, that was a good question. To [00:37:19] familiarize people with the kinds of conditions in which they're going to be making a vote, candidates historically would distribute flyers or literature, usually [00:37:32] literature that show some kind of a facsimile of it. In other words, they would present a voter with the graphic layout that looked like the inside of [00:37:45] a voting machine and these are kind of wonderful graphic expressions, but they would typically only show, if you were a Democratic voter, they [00:37:52] would only show one row or they would show— Wendell Wilkie actually distributed a long, very long I guess piece of novelty paper that had little levers [00:38:08] actually attached with grommets that showed what you were supposed to do, so, in many respects, the kinds of conditions that you expect to find, you've [00:38:23] already found them and they show you well in advance of the election, but it comes to you in a piece of political candidate literature which is in effect an advertisement, [00:38:37] so those are the kinds of things, just that help— they're designed to be inherently graphic and interesting so those are the kinds of objects that [00:38:43] you want to see in a museum in the first place, but they also help explain what you're going to see, so in a show where you have these machines, it's [00:38:52] helpful to show that kind of literature juxtaposed with the device that you're going to be actually voting [00:39:03] and it can be— You can use it as kind of campaign promotional literature but it also helps explain the objects that you're seeking to explain, [00:39:11] making it better understood.

Q: You have that kind of stuff in the collection?

Response: Yes. And some of it's on the website, too, [00:39:24] although we didn't make it that—

Q: Prominent.

Response: Well, it's prominent, but it isn't really— It's not explained that forcefully, [00:39:35] I guess.

Q: . . . [chit-chat] Any other thoughts you have on the machine?

Response: No, I can't—

Q: Where did they make them?

Response: Well, today they make them— [00:40:05] Well, they can be made almost anywhere today. I mean, they're— But historically they came out of upstate New York, Rochester, New York.

Q: Is there a reason [00:40:12] for that?

Response: Well, New York has— Well, one of the reasons is New York State has a population that's ready to be counted in this way and you have [00:40:27] people who make safes, make things to secure securities, that sort of thing, so it's a sort of a built-in population of people who are mechanically-minded [00:40:39] tinkers and also have a political need to do this and it kind of emanates out from New York State. Also, Chicago is another area where these things [00:40:54] found a ready and willing— I want to say audience. That's not true, electorate, to be serviced in [00:41:04] that way, so—

And in the 1960s, the first— among the first voting districts, precincts, to adopt the Votematic, the card-reading technology were in Los [00:41:21] Angeles, Orange County and up the Pacific Coast in Washington and Oregon and in the state of Georgia, for some reason, but— [00:41:33] But it's a very— It's a patchwork, really, the technology is just spreads out.

Q: Do you want to say something about the floor mat?

Response: What format?

Q: The [00:41:43] floor mat, the map of the United States . . . [chit-chat]

Response: I'm [00:41:57] trying to remember. You could probably get that but we reproduced as a floor graphic a large map of the United States and I can't remember how many different election [00:42:12] districts there are in the United States, but this number was on the tip of my tongue for months and now it's just gone, but we had every one of them drawn up to [00:42:19] date, accurate, in every detail and we color-coded each one to the kind of voting technology that was in use in that district or in the precincts, the individual [00:42:33] precincts, and this was a sort of— a kind of an amazement to people who came in and they would stand in their state and look at all of the pretty [00:42:42] colors and then what does this mean and then they would read the key and then they would just go, ohhhh. If you're familiar with voting with gear [00:42:50] and

lever machines all your life, it doesn't really occur to you that someone else isn't really doing that somewhere else, that there're [00:42:57] people actually still voting with pens and paper or somebody's using touch screen computers. I mean, this is not a common thing now, but—

Q: Did this [00:43:14] kind of technology win out among competing technologies? I mean, were there other vote counting machines that were failures?

Response: There were— When the [00:43:28] patents began to run out on this machine in the '20s and '30s, there were rival manufacturers that came into the market for voting equipment that were based pretty [00:43:40] much on the original patents and there were two manufacturers that went into it head to head and they pretty much had the market up until the 1960s when the [00:43:55] Harris Votematic which capitalized on the existing supply of computer card stock came in and began to displace these leviathan machines.

Q: Are there [00:44:12] sort of like election commissioners in 1892 sort of running on a voter reform platform? Are election commissioners, are they even elected?

Response: No, [00:44:25] supervisors of elections— That's a good question. No. They don't typically run for office. They're appointed by people who have won [00:44:34] office, as a rule. The state supervisor of elections serves at the pleasure of the governor, so— And that's really a local decision that's [00:44:47] made in that office and it's simply a matter of the budget that the state is willing to put for that and it's a long-term commitment and it's a very [00:44:58] serious decision that you have to make to commit to a particular technology. It has to have a lot going for it so you can be assured that you're not making [00:45:10] a mistake in choosing a technology.

Q: This is excellent.

Response: Well, there's one more detail to bore you with. In my little treatise on the patents running [00:45:30] out on the gear and lever machine and the rival manufacturers, two competing through the '60s until they were replaced by Harris's Votematic. Well, [00:45:44] the patents ran out on Joseph Harris's Votematic and rival manufacturers entered into making knock-off votematics and that became a problem because they [00:46:01] weren't as well made and that contributed to the poor reputation or the declining reputation of punch card voting and then finally that just was ended pretty [00:46:15] much or decided with the Florida election, but people had written about this as a problem for years.

Q: Do you sort of feel like this sort of evolution of technology [00:46:30] of voting has something particularly to say about American democracy and the way we sort of think about ourselves in the process?

Response: Well, I think [00:46:43] it's tied up in our sort of love/hate relationship with machines. When they work, you really tend to not think about them. You can even become ambivalent [00:46:55] about them and I'm thinking here of people who today

would compare a voting machine to an ATM machine. It's great when it works; when it doesn't, it really doesn't [00:47:09] work and that sometimes becomes the only time that we think about it. It's so efficient but yet at the moment that you may need it most, where [00:47:21] is it? And what happened to that friendly bank teller that I used to see that you no longer even have reason to go into a bank now. With this— [00:47:34] And I think people bring those attitudes about machines into polling places with them and there's a certain chip on your shoulder when you vote. [00:47:44] Are you're wondering did this really go anywhere? Why can't I have a receipt?

We're into this whole system of electronic voting [00:47:55] now and sort of the dirty little secret of American election administration is that most supervisors of elections don't like paper. They don't like to [00:48:04] have to store it. They don't have to maintain it. They don't like to drag it around and count it and so the moment you come up with this [00:48:19] paper, this trail, this is where they all go.

I mean, getting back to your map question, there was a portion of the map, I can't remember what [00:48:27] color it was, but it was one of the dominant colors on the map which were for touch screen voting systems and every one of those portions [00:48:43] of the country that had ordered a touch screen system had ordered them without printers except for the state of Nevada that for some reason its [00:48:52] 17 precincts had all ordered printers so that the voter could take away a kind of a receipt or at least a record, something physical [00:49:01] that they could have that counted their vote on a piece of paper. The rest of them—

So, there's this kind of this great ambivalence. There's [00:49:13] a love, there's a hate kind of thing going on about machines that you just bring with you to the polling place and it could be that your latest experience [00:49:22] with the ATM or the telephone call waiting center or whatever it was, your computer, you bring that with you into the [00:49:33] polling place and that affects how you relate to the technology that you're being asked to vote with.

Q: What about trust? Do you trust the [00:49:45] technology?

Response: Well, that's the whole thing.

Q: It becomes an act of faith.

Response: I mean, most people trust that they spend something, [00:49:52] they buy something with a credit card, they will be billed after the 11th of the month. You can pretty much count on that, so how does that translate [00:50:03] into polling and voting. What it suggests to me is if you can count on being billed for something you purchased, you can at least count on having [00:50:15] your vote tallied in a responsible manner—

Q: Perhaps.

Response: Yeah, perhaps. But it comes down to trust.

Q: . . . [chit-chat]

Response: The curtain's open. We're [00:50:39] going to close to curtain. Let's show with the curtain's open, none of the levers can be voted. The machine is locked when the [00:50:46] curtain's open. When the curtain is closed, all the levers are freed up to vote. If you wanted to vote the entire Democratic [00:50:55] Party line, you push this down and then you could not vote on any of the other levers. They're all locked, even the ones on the party individuals [00:51:05] are locked. You can't vote any other entity. If you want to change your mind and vote the whole Socialist Party ticket, you would have to [00:51:11] release the Democratic lever. Then you could vote the whole Socialist Party ticket and the same would be true. Things are locked [00:51:21] for the Republican Party ticket and then [00:51:31] you can't vote for Democrats. You can only vote.

And if you wished to split your ticket, split your ballot, you vote for Roosevelt. Excuse me. Let's vote for Roosevelt. Why is that like that? Okay. You can't vote— This [00:51:49] is where I'm having trouble. Let's vote for Roosevelt. There. Oh, it's a little more forceful action. You cannot vote for Dewey without [00:52:04] un-voting for Roosevelt and then you can freely select and split. If you wanted to vote for him, you have to un-vote for him and so forth [00:52:20] down the line, so you've got a pretty mixed up split ticket here. Let's vote for a couple of referenda issues here and then when you're done, you're [00:52:32] satisfied, the levers are returned to the neutral position when you open the curtain and the votes have been recorded. Then [00:52:49] the next person enters the booth and begins again.

Q: _____

Response: Oh, you want me to— The whole thing?

Q: Well, no.

Response: Just [00:53:04] go down—

Q: Just go down like that so I can see them all moving.

Response: Just the Democrats.

Q: Well, it doesn't matter. [end of recording] [00:53:06]