

**Peverill Squire.** *The Rise of the Representative: Lawmakers and Constituents in Colonial America.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017. xv, 344 pp. (\$85.00 cloth).

Peverill Squire's splendid research provides an exceptional portrait of representation in colonial American legislatures. His key message is that colonial assemblies served practical and political purposes. In these nurseries of republican politics, lawmakers and their constituents worked their way through the questions of how representatives should act, on whose behalf they should act, and how the mechanics of selection and representation should work. In the end, colonial representatives evolved into delegates who "came to defer to the wishes of their constituents" (199) rather than trustees of some common good. Squire uncovers the origins of many legislative issues that are as current as the headlines: gerrymandering, voting restrictions, legislative pandering, the power of organized interests, and the priority of parochialism. Squire draws on nearly four hundred government documents, three hundred contemporary news reports, and a host of secondary sources. The book is a wonderful source of information and data about these legislatures, and should be the standard work on the topic.

Squire is motivated by the glaring gap between the massive literature on representation and our very sketchy understanding of its birth in colonial America. Virginia established its House of Burgesses as early 1619. Massachusetts developed its General Court as a representative body in the 1630s. Each colony's representative assembly had a different origin story, but in every colony, such an assembly became accustomed institutions of colonial governance.

The vast landscape that the Europeans seized made representative assemblies a practical way to improve the flow of information and the acquiescence of the citizens. Male land holders elected these representatives; laws sometimes denied the franchise to Quakers, Roman Catholics, blacks, or "lyers" and "swearers." The polish and education of American voters often left British governors unimpressed, but the expansion of voting rights continued through American history. The apportionment of legislative seats also reflected practical politics. Seats were commonly apportioned by county, leaving cities (as well as counties that failed to send representatives) without much protection for their interests. Areas that sought additional influence hired the first lobbyists to represent them.

Then as now, elections experienced hitches and turnout problems. Mischief and intrigue sometimes marred the election process. Elections varied in the intensity of competitiveness, with less hotly contested elections drawing weak voter turnout. Voting by voice was common, but peer pressures on voters raised criticism of this practice. Colonies experimented with voting by ballots, but this reform made the discovery of invalid votes more difficult.

Over time, more colonial legislators sought reelection and more served for multiple terms. Often these candidates were prominent, wealthy landholders. Lawyers, however, were considered less respectable candidates; many voters assumed lawyers were wily manipulators using unintelligible language to hide their tricks. Eventually, candidates were recruited and slates developed, presaging the emergence of a key tool for political parties.

Gradually, the practice of election campaigning became more routine. Surrogates canvassed for their candidates. Candidates showed up at the polls to press for final votes.

Issues mattered more than we might think: “Incumbents revised policy positions in response to public opinion” (120), and voting records were scrutinized. Alcohol, a regular treat for voters, lightened the burden of rational voting. Sometimes, when alcohol mixed with smoldering political emotions, riots erupted and stopped elections altogether. A Pennsylvania political operative told supporters to gossip that they would come to the polls with weapons. Election fraud occurred, often aided and abetted by local sheriffs. Broadsides threw mud at opposing slates, with accusations of bribery, fraud, bullying, and a candidate who danced and kissed other males.

The length of a legislative term varied greatly across the colonies. One House of Burgesses session in Virginia lasted from 1661 to 1676. At the other extreme, Connecticut and Rhode Island held legislative elections twice a year. Regional differences in the length of time between elections would prove to be a stumbling block at the 1787 Constitutional Convention.

In New England and to a lesser extent in other colonies, constituents sometimes issued instructions about the positions they expected their representatives to advocate. Representatives generally complied. Pressed for what we would call transparency, most colonial legislatures began to publish journals of their activities.

Squire painstakingly proves his case that these institutional developments turned representatives into delegates instead of trustees. As early as 1640 in Massachusetts, elected representatives were acting as delegates of their voters. Colonial legislators increasingly responded to strong incentives “to advance the parochial interests of their constituents” (201). Carefully examined data show that the number of laws targeted to local interests increased over time. He finds that “even those who wanted to promote a trustee approach found themselves calling for delegate behavior” (188).

The growing preponderance of the delegate role “was not driven by a desire to replicate Tudor era representational norms: Rather it was a pragmatic response to emerging political realities” (233). The book suggests that the 1787 Constitutional Convention did more to ratify than to establish the delegate role of American legislators. What is so striking about the book is the timelessness of republican politics – the responsiveness to parochial interests, the efforts to manipulate electoral districts and voters, and the quest for reelection. Squire adds evidence to the idea that our dissatisfaction with legislatures is rooted deeply in the hyper-responsiveness of legislators to at least some of their constituents.

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