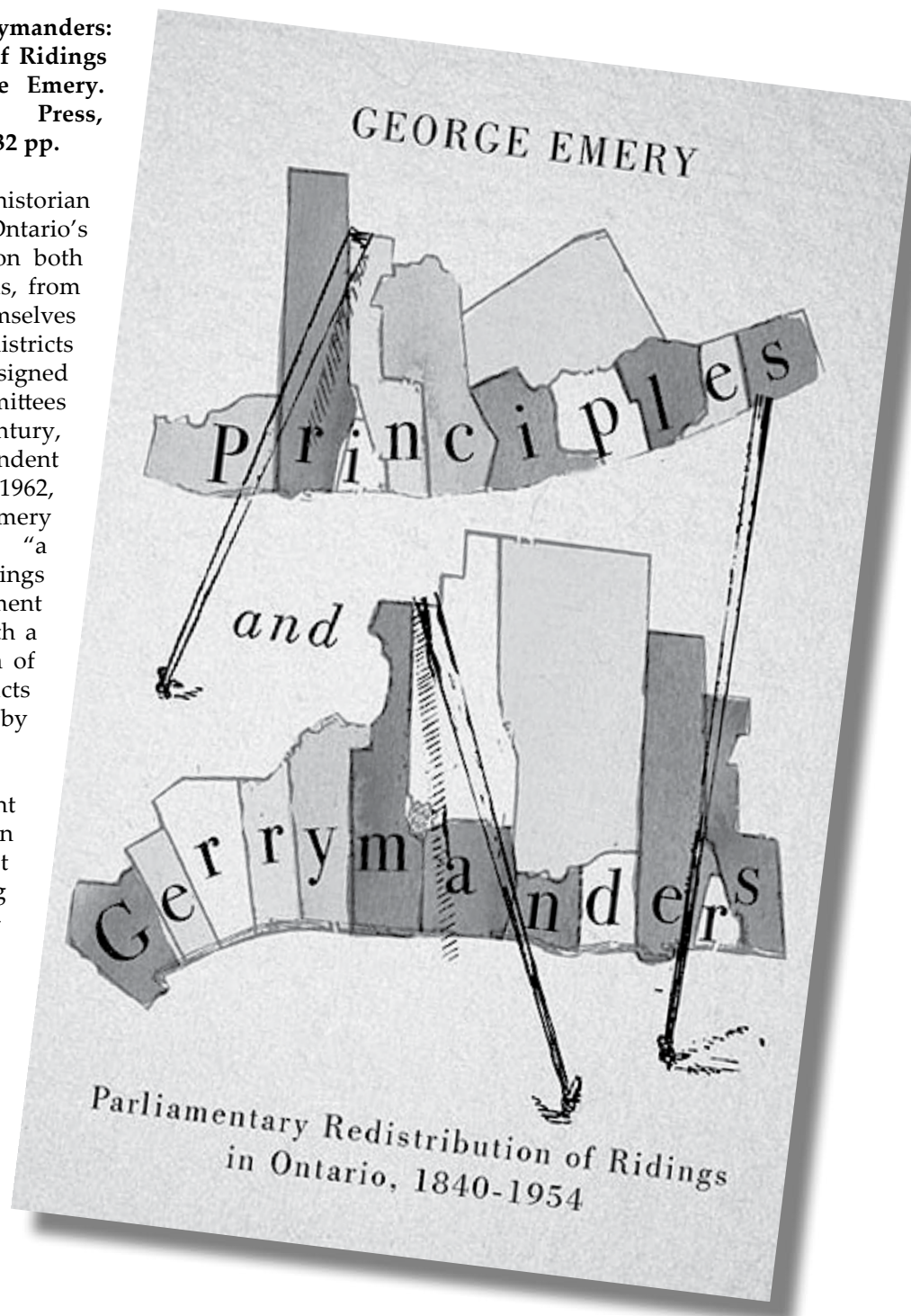


Principles and Gerrymanders: Parliamentary Redistribution of Ridings in Ontario, 1840-1954. George Emery. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 2016, 332 pp.

In *Principles and Gerrymanders*, historian George Emery outlines Ontario's parliamentary redistributions, on both the federal and provincial levels, from the 1840s to the 1960s. Politicians themselves carried out changes to electoral districts until that responsibility was assigned to by-partisan legislative committees in the early-twentieth-century, and thereafter to an independent provincial commission in 1962, and a federal one in 1964. Emery defines a "gerrymander" as "a redistribution of two or more ridings that unfairly benefit the government party." The term originated with a blatantly partisan redistribution of Massachusetts' legislative districts in 1812, which was approved by state governor Elbridge Gerry.

The author's major achievement is to demonstrate that partisan gerrymandering was not widespread in Ontario riding redistributions in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century. Instead, the practice was used by government parties in very specific ways: to target individual opposition members (i.e. "political assassination"), to maintain small but pro-government ridings, and to redistribute areas of opposition support in order to maximize the number of winnable government ridings (i.e. "hiving").

Emery also helpfully defines several commonly-held principles in Ontario's political culture towards parliamentary redistricting, such as the belief that municipalities should be kept intact, or the consensus that urban voters should be underrepresented vis-à-vis rural ones (this practice is called "passive gerrymandering" when it is allowed to continue, despite population changes between ridings). These



principles could often come into conflict with each other, especially the ideal of population equality between ridings (i.e. "representation by population"). With this nuanced conceptual framework, Emery shows that Ontario's politicians acted in a specific cultural and political context and could not undertake gerrymanders in any way they wished.

Principles and Gerrymanders relies on a very careful analysis of election results, down to the township level. The book's method is to review the principles underlying each redistribution of Ontario's federal and provincial ridings, to determine if gerrymandering took place, and to use changes in vote totals at the local level to judge if a gerrymander worked to the benefit of the government party. Notably, many of the most blatant gerrymanders, such as Sir John A. Macdonald's 1882 federal redistribution, failed to deliver more seats and additionally may have damaged the reputation of the government party. But Emery concludes that most intentional or "thinly disguised" gerrymanders were successful in delivering or defending a limited number of ridings for the majority party.

With his focus on specific gerrymanders and their consequences in specific ridings, Emery may neglect larger political developments. For instance, he does not take into account regional or province-wide changes in partisan support, and how these may have impacted intentional or passive gerrymanders. (Emery judges the efficacy of each gerrymander by using the vote totals of the previous election). Aside from shifts of support between the Conservatives and Liberals, the occasional rise of third parties like the Patrons of Industry or United Farmers complicated the stability of the province's two-party system and may have undermined the intended results of gerrymandering. Also deserving further investigation are the forces that drove reforms to the practice of redistribution (e.g. the adoption of by-partisan

legislation committees in the early-twentieth-century, or independent commissions in the 1960s).

A very minor omission is the possibility of political assassinations *within* government parties. Although fairly rare, members of government parties may have used their power over redistribution to eliminate particular individuals from their caucuses. For instance, there is an old rumour that Sir Adam Beck used his influence within the Conservative caucus to redistribute the North Essex riding of a rival, Dr. J.O. Reaume, in order to deny him the party's re-nomination for the 1914 provincial election.¹ But of course, given the nature of such inter-party factionalism, it is an issue for which there is not a large body of evidence.

Principles and Gerrymanders is an important study of a neglected facet of Ontario's (and Canada's) political history, and should provoke further research on political culture and the electoral system. Bridging disciplinary boundaries, the book will be of great interest to historians and political scientists alike. Emery concludes with a cautious note: "Although the commission system seems to be entrenched in Canada's parliamentary democracy, it remains fragile." He notes that a recent debate over federal redistribution in Saskatchewan should remind us that these issues are not historical artifacts.

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1 See W.R. Plewman, *Adam Beck and the Ontario Hydro*. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1947, p. 154.