

Introduction

No facet of American history is more thoroughly scrutinized than the political. Studies of institutions, celebrated individuals, and conspicuous events abound. Paradoxically, with the exception of preeminent legislators the thousands of participants who contributed to the evolution of representative government remain faceless. To understand the dynamics of our political system it is imperative to know more about each of these men—their education, social background, economic position, values, and public and private lives. Perhaps it is not surprising that scholars have made scant effort to compile a substantial biographical profile of any American legislature.¹ The sheer magnitude of such an undertaking, abetted by often incomplete records, can be a formidable deterrent.

Despite the obstacles, Maryland presented an irresistible challenge. The number of legislators formed a manageable population that, because of the state's geographical location, economic development, and remarkably full records, seemed likely to permit generalizations applicable to other areas. Neither wholly northern nor southern, Lord Baltimore's colony contained aspects of both regions. Though it was initially an English-settled, tobacco-growing area, by the late eighteenth century Maryland possessed a culturally varied population, a predominantly rural but diversified economy, and the beginnings of urban, commercial, and administrative centers such as Baltimore and Annapolis.

The nature, scope, and extent of the records, coupled with their excellent preservation, rendered Maryland an ideal choice for a legislative dictionary and analytical history. Unlike some states, Maryland has long had a strong local records program to complement its distinguished collection of state records. Directed by Morris L. Radoff, state archivist from 1939 until 1975, the Hall of Records staff generated tens of thousands of index references to the records that, in ever increasing numbers, were systematically brought under archival control. A similar but computer-assisted endeavor is the newly issued *An Inventory of Maryland State Papers, Volume 1: The Era of the American Revolution, 1775–1789*, a massive finding aid to more than 31,000 previously inaccessible loose papers vital to any legislative history of that period.² These and other finding aids enabled the project team to extract biographical data more efficiently than perhaps could be accomplished elsewhere.

The first prerequisite of research was to create a master list of all men who held legislative office between 1635 and 1789, including proprietors, governors or acting governors, parliamentary commissioners, members of the Upper House (or the Senate, as it was reconstituted in 1776 by the ninth Maryland Convention), members of the Council, Executive Council, and Council of Safety, members of the Lower House (renamed the House of Delegates after 1776), and members of the nine provincial conventions held between 1774 and 1776.³ The second

1. Two notable exceptions to this generalization are the *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774–1961* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), and Walter B. Edgar, ed., *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives*, 2 vols. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1974, 1977).

2. Annapolis, Md.: Maryland Department of General Services, Hall of Records Commission, 1977.

3. For an early version of this list, see Edward C. Papenfuss et al., comps., *Directory of Maryland Legislators, 1635–1789* (Annapolis, Md.: Maryland Department of Economic and Community Development, 1974). David Jordan and