

provincial conventions held between 1774 and 1776 and in the House of Delegates from 1777 to 1784. The proceedings of the conventions and the journals of the house cause immediate confusion because the distinguishing titles appended to Samuel's name ("Jr.," "of Samuel," "Major") follow no pattern. Preliminary research into Charles County probate, land, court, and assessment records produced six recognizable Samuel Hansons, with the hint of a seventh. Of the six definite possibilities, three customarily added their father's name as a distinguishing characteristic (i.e., "of Walter," "of William," and "of John"). This evidence, along with their military service in the War for Independence, which indicated that they were either too young for legislative service or had enlisted in the Maryland Continental Line, eliminated them from consideration. After further study it became clear that all three of the other Samuel Hansons—Samuel (1716–1794), Samuel of Samuel (1752–1830), and Samuel (ca. 1738–1817)—were members of the Lower House, and legislative service was assigned as it appears in their respective profiles.

Such a systematic exploitation of sources, even in the most difficult cases, was extraordinarily successful. It led to the isolation, with a reasonable degree of certainty, of all but one-half of one percent of the 1,445 legislators studied. Moreover, profiles constructed of men who ultimately proved not to be legislators contributed clues about men who were, and made it possible later to assign correctly further biographical details. The process of identification also clarified one of the salient characteristics of Maryland's political life, namely, the labyrinthine interconnections among legislative families.

With basic linkage solved, the next step was to create more complete profiles, adding data not already ascertained through the identification process, including birthplace, residence during adulthood, family, marriages, education, church membership, occupation, officeholding, landholding, and wealth. Lawrence Stone has called such an endeavor "prosopography," defining it as "the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of a collective study of their lives."⁴ It might be argued that a new word, "profilography," understood as the writing of biographical sketches or profiles, more appropriately encompasses what we attempted here. But "profilographical" is as difficult to pronounce as "prosopographical," and possibly both words should be abandoned for the more comprehensible phrase "collective biography." Whatever term is adopted, we cannot claim to have written full biographies of the men included in this *Dictionary*. For example, we omitted embellishments that would color, but not add substantively to, a profile. The sketch of Charles Carroll of Carrollton does not reveal that before the bombardment of Fort Mchenry by the British in 1814, he invested heavily in the fund that built the British navy; nor does the entry for the last proprietary governor of Maryland, Sir Robert Eden, show his greater concern with a "bedfellow" and duck hunting than with the fast-approaching revolution. Such miscellany are in the working files of the project, which are organized in such a way as to encourage corrections and additions as well as further study.

By its very nature prosopography, profilography, or collective biography demands sensitive evaluation of sources and clear guidelines on how far to carry the investigation of a given man. The lack of personal papers for legislators in Maryland is compensated by an abundance of public records that must be sifted with discretion to prevent unproductive and expensive forays in pursuit of elusive details. We adhered to strict criteria governing the parameters of research and severely limited the average time spent on files. The biographies are thus not definitive, but they are as rounded as available material and self-imposed constraints allowed.

4. Lawrence Stone, "Prosopography," *Daedalus* (Winter 1971): 46.