

Coalition for Networked Information
Descriptive material for distribution at April workshop

People of the Founding Era: Mining the Data of the Founders Projects **Documents Compass / Virginia Foundation for the Humanities**

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Documents Compass was established in Fall of 2007 as an intermediary resource for publishers and scholar/editors. Created to help plan and develop documentary editions, the service locates, develops, and employs the tools best suited to each project's needs, and facilitates transcribing, proof reading, tagging, and copy editing.

Their first grant, awarded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, provides funds to explore the feasibility of creating People of the Founding Era (PFE), a biographical data source that will be the first electronic prosopography of the modern era. Unlike biography, which examines the life of a single person, prosopography is the study of groups of people, with special attention given to their common characteristics and patterns of activity.

This approach can be particularly useful for shedding light on the experiences of groups of individuals—for example, small farmers, artisans, free blacks and enslaved persons during the colonial period—who may be untraceable through more conventional biographical means. Prosopography will tell you something about who composes a group and how it became a force in history. Historians use prosopography as one of many tools.

With this support from the Mellon Foundation, Documents Compass will develop a database that includes native-born and naturalized Americans born between 1713 and 1815 as well as their children and grandchildren. By enabling scholars to study individuals and groups, the PFE will be an especially versatile research tool for better understanding America in the decades before, during, and immediately after its founding.

Especially important is the fact that the project will make use of data mining techniques to draw information from existing digitized material. The Founding Fathers documentary editing projects, which have been in place for decades, have been consistently verifying and tracking biographical information relating to the people of the founding era. The PFE project will not only use this data as a base, it will produce an interoperable source of biographical information which will inform the ongoing work of the editing projects.

We will describe the projects' concept, and the progress we have made in our start-up phase, showing our data source, our data mining results, the techniques we are employing to edit and expand the data, and our hopes for the results of this feasibility study as well as implications for ongoing data compilation.



❖ PFE Project concept

PFE is a result of the insight that the documentary editions of the Founding Era contain a wealth of disparately located, and variously named, biographical descriptions of individuals, and that short narratives can be extracted from these volumes and collected as capsule biographies. This information can then be employed in mutually reinforcing ways. On the one hand, the consequent list of people can form an expanding union list for the Founding Era. Each person can be uniquely identified, disambiguated, and portrayed. At the same time, information drawn from these capsules can be restructured to create a prosopography of the era that will include data such as name, date and place of birth and death, organizational membership, occupation, kinship affiliations, race, status, accomplishments, and so on.

❖ The Goals

PFE will provide historians of the Founding Era with important research tools that have no analog in the world of print publications. One result will be an informal encyclopedia that will encompass people who are difficult, some nearly impossible, to find. This will allow historians to extend the research they do to the people who now so often cast their shadow across the pages of their monographs and articles. Historians will be able further to expand their arguments about causation and contingency, and give texture and personal meaning to their stories. Another result will flow from the prosopography. As stated above, prosopography is often useful for social historians. Through PFE historians will be able to examine demographic shifts in the make up of a region or an organization. They will be able to follow marriage patterns, or use it as political historians to investigate political groups and their behavior. In short, PFE will provide a new research tool that will deepen our understanding of American history -- and provide a model for other eras.

❖ Data Source

PFE is tagging the data in XML using the prosopographical tag set from TEI P5 in order to mark parts of each name (forename, surname, married name, maiden name), as well as birth and death dates, gender, and occupation. This will enrich the data present in the capsule biographies by allowing researchers to retrieve information by category. Historians will be able to pull up all of the women identified in the Adams Papers, for example.

❖ Data-mining techniques

The first phase was to develop a program that would extract biographical information from the participating documentary editions of the papers of the founders—George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. This was possible because all of the volumes had been digitized. The programmer worked with the digitized book indexes to identify regular expressions (or index entries), that pointed to places in the documents where capsule biographies were located. The relevant block of text was extracted and the resulting files were programmatically tagged in TEI. All of this work was accomplished with no staff time required by the project other than establishing the parameters at the outset. Editorial vetting is now required by project staff to review the accuracy of the results.

❖ Drawing data from print

In this pilot project we have included one project that was published a half century ago and has yet to be converted into electronic format in order to test the possibilities of working with print-only sources. The project manually keyed into the content management system approximately 1,000 capsule biographies from a two-volume set of the Letters of Benjamin Rush. These records were also tagged by hand for the first level tagging that was applied to all of the records harvested

❖ Editing the data

The project aims to adhere to the content of the original capsule biographies as much as possible. However, some expansion of project-specific biographies will be required for the user interface as well as some contextual information to describe their creation. The project has expanded on this information in the realm of tagging and collecting like names into one record, thereby allowing users a central repository of names for current and future research.

❖ Expanding the data

The information gathered from the capsule biographies is limited and varies from source to source. To accomplish some of the more ambitious goals listed above (tracking demographic shifts, for instance) it will often be necessary to carry out additional research. This is planned for future phases of the project.

◇ **Progress-to-date**

As of this meeting, the project has made a first pass of the tagging for two of its populations, the people from the Dolley Madison Digital Edition and the two volume Letters of Benjamin Rush. We are currently reviewing the combined populations of the Washington, Adams, and Jefferson volumes via the PFE web interface.

◇ **Plans for phase two and beyond:**

- Enhance XML tagging to include other values such as race/ethnicity, religion, place of birth and death, works, health, residence, marriage, children, possessions, etc.
- Expand data sources to include other populations that have been digitized by academic publishers to possibly include: Papers of James Madison [digitized by Rotunda in 2009-10]; Papers of Thomas Jefferson Retirement Series [born digital to be published by Rotunda in 2009-10]; First Federal Congress [digitized by Johns Hopkins Press, 2009-10], Papers of Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr [digitizing plans in progress]; Records of artisans and artists from MESDA;
- Include timeline (temporal modeling) through the use of historic or event markup language tied to the population in the PFE.
- Add geographic identifiers to allow interactive mapping exploration.
- Research web-based sources of biographical information and develop system for linking to vetted sites.
- Develop the user interface in ways which invite vetted scholarly contribution
- Create an interactive visualization of relationships among people and their life activities.

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Hypothetical User Screens

The following pages contain images of hypothetical screens which were submitted as part of the Mellon grant application, and show how People of the Founding Era might work. Significant modifications will likely occur by the time we have completed the pilot program.

People of the Founding Era: A Prosopographical Approach



People of the Founding Era:

- Who were they?
- What did they do?
- Where were they born / die?
- Where did they live?
- Who were they related to?
- What organizations did they belong to?
- What was the state of their health?
- Who were their friends and colleagues?
- What did they own?
- What events did they encounter?
- What works did they create?

A Prosopographical Approach:

What is prosopography?

Scholars engage in prosopography when they assemble group biographies to answer their analytical questions. Therefore the PFE is *both* a resource and a tool for future prosopographers, lowering the entry cost for creating a prosopographical study.

Please refer to p. 3 of the proposal for a more complete description of traditional prosopography and the way in which PFE engages and supports the prosopographical approach to research.





People of the Founding Era: A Prosopographical Approach

*Lives which touched the American continent
from 1713-1815*

People of the Founding Era brings together biographical data from many sources, including:

- The Papers of James Madison
- The Papers of Thomas Jefferson
- The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Retirement Edition
- The Dolley Madison Digital Edition
- The Papers of George Washington
- The Papers of Alexander Hamilton
- And others as they become available

By selecting a category from the navigation list the data may be searched or browsed to allow investigation by any of these various categories, or combinations.

Please explore People of the Founding Era and add your comments and wisdom to enlarge and enhance our scholarly understanding of this period.



People of the Founding Era: A Prosopographical Approach

Place your cursor on the map below (note- more appropriate map to follow) to select a location.



Selecting the Prosopography Factoids option leads to this screen:

Hypothetical OCCUPATION Search Result Screen showing multiple result types

12	anonymous
1	Jefferson, Thomas
1	Smith, John
1	Archer, William
1	Brown, Andrew

Results Screen:

Your search for ARCHITECT located the following:

- 16 [PFE_Prosopography_Factoids](#)
- 1 [Biographical_narratives_from_The_Dolley_Madison_Digital_Edition](#)
- 5 [Biographical_narratives_from_the_Papers_of_George_Washington](#)
- 12 [Biographical_narratives_from_The_Papers_of_Thomas_Jefferson](#)
- 4 [Citations_to_narratives_in_the_Adams_Family_Papers](#)

Selecting the Dolley Biographical narrative leads to this:

William Archer 1752 - 1815

From: The Dolly Madison Digital Edition

Architect, born in Boston, 1752, residence in Salem, MA. Dies in Salem, 1815. Apprenticed to Andrew Brown, 1766-1770. Built Richard Crowninshield residence; William Grey residence. Married to Sarah Chamberlain, two sons, Jonathan and Andrew.

Selecting Archer leads to this:

Sex	M
Life dates	1752-1815
Race	W
Birthplace	Boston, MA
Deathplace	Salem, MA
Residence	Salem, MA
Occupation	Architect
Offices	
Kinship	m: Sarah Chamberlain son: Jonathan Archer son: Andrew Archer
works	Richard Crowninshield residence William Grey residence

Selecting the Adams citations leads to this:

Adams Family Papers
4 Architects

When we have permissions, as we do from Virginia, we will bring the biographical narrative to the user:

Hypothetical Search Result Screen showing multiple results: prosopography, biographical narratives, and citations



Results Screen

Your search for **JOHN LANGDON** located the following:

- 1 [PFE Prosopography Factoids](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Dolley Madison Digital Edition](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from the Papers of George Washington](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Papers of Thomas Jefferson](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Edition](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Papers of Thomas Jefferson](#)
- 1 [Citations to narratives in the Adams Family Papers](#)

Selecting the Thomas Jefferson biographical narrative option brings up this screen:



John Langdon Biographical Narrative

From: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Presidential Series*, volume 34 published in 2007 (although first made an appearance in volume 8, he was not fully identified until 26 volumes later)

John Langdon (1741-1819) was a successful Portsmouth merchant and New Hampshire Republican. An ardent patriot during the Revolution, he sat in the Continental Congress to June 1776 (where he probably first made TJ's acquaintance), then became prominent in New Hampshire. He assumed a lead role in state politics during the 1780s. He represented New Hampshire at the Constitutional Convention and subsequently became a strong advocate. Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1789, Langdon initially supported the Federalist

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- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Dolley Madison Digital Edition](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from the Papers of George Washington](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Papers of Thomas Jefferson](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Edition](#)
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When we do NOT have permissions we will show the user the citation to relevant biographical narratives:

Hypothetical Search Result Screen showing multiple results: prosopography, biographical narratives, and citations



Results Screen:

Your search for **JOHN LANGDON** located the following:

- 1 [PFE Prosopography Factoids](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Dolley Madison Digital Edition](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from the Papers of George Washington](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Papers of Thomas Jefferson](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Edition](#)
- 1 [Biographical narratives from The Papers of Thomas Jefferson](#)
- 1 [Citations to narratives in the Adams Family Papers](#)



Selecting the Adams Papers citation option brings up this screen:

John Langdon Biographical Narrative

See: *The Adams Papers, Series III: General Correspondence and Other Papers of the Adams Statesmen. Vol.3, p 254.*

We DO have permissions to provide a biographical narrative from the Dolley Madison Digital Edition.

Hypothetical person biography screen for PFE showing both prosopography and one biographical narrative



Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte

Sex F

Life dates 1785-1879

Race W

Place of birth Baltimore

Place of death Baltimore

Residence by date

Baltimore 1785-1795

France 1795 - 1813

Baltimore 1813 - 1879

Occupation/role socialite

Real estate investor

Offices

Kinship

Married [Jerome Bonaparte](#)

Children:

[Jerome-Napoleon Bonaparte](#)

Religion

Health

Property

Works

Event

Education

From: The Dolley Madison Digital Edition

Bonaparte, Elizabeth Patterson (1785-1879)

A famous beauty and socialite born into a wealthy Baltimore family, she was the daughter of a merchant and shipowner, and her brother was the mayor of Baltimore. Along with beguiling beauty, she possessed charm and intelligence. Rosalie Stier Calvert viewed her as "a most extraordinary girl, given to reading Godwin on the rights of women, etc., in short, a modern *philosophe*." In 1803, she married Jerome Bonaparte, the younger brother of Napoleon, after meeting him just before he ended a visit to the United States and returned to France with the French Navy. Napoleon opposed the marriage, which was annulled in 1806 by a French ecclesiastical court. The Maryland legislature officially granted Bonaparte a divorce in 1813. During the next two decades, she lived in Europe, and though she enjoyed the notoriety she received in European high society, she returned to the United States in 1834 after her father's death. She subsequently engaged in real estate investment in Baltimore, which proved to be a profitable endeavor. Bonaparte nevertheless chose to live in "squalid seclusion" in a boarding house, and towards the end of her life, she commented, "Once I had everything but money. Now I have nothing but money." She died in 1879 at the age of ninety-four. Children: Jerome-Napoleon Bonaparte (1805-1870).