

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

TO THE HONORABLE
THE HALL OF RECORDS COMMISSION
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

Gentlemen:

When the Hall of Records Commission was established thirty years ago, the General Assembly found it acceptable to outline the duties of the new agency in comprehensive terms. I quote from Chapter 18 of the Acts of 1935: "All papers, records, relics, and other memorials connected with the early history of Maryland not required for the necessary operations of any other office, shall be under the supervision of and belong to said Commission."

And to make this possible the new position of the original custodian *vis a vis* these "memorials" had to be spelled out in plain and simple terms:

"Every State, county, city, town or other public official in the State in Custody of public records or documents is hereby authorized and empowered, in his discretion, to turn over to the Commission and deposit for preservation all original papers, official books, records, documents, files, newspapers, printed books or portraits not in current use in his office, and when so surrendered and accepted by the Commission, copies may be made and certified under the seal of the Commission . . ."

This law, or one like it, had been passed in many states before Maryland; therefore, it was assumed that it would work here. The conclusion was faulty because the premise was imperfect. Other states had the law on their books but they were there because they had been on the books of other states.

Dr. James A. Robertson, the first Archivist of Maryland, nevertheless, took the law at its face value and acted accordingly. Some State officers were anxious to get rid of their records, and there were two county officers who reluctantly surrendered theirs. That was approximately the accomplishment of three and a half years. Immediately questions arose: what is current? what records are necessary? what is