

## RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The General Assembly of Maryland enacted legislation in March 1953, which provided for a State Records Management Program to be administered by the Hall of Records Commission. On the first of July of the same year, the Records Management Division was established within the Hall of Records to carry out this Program. An account of our efforts to improve the records management practices of State and local agencies of government has been given in each *Annual Report of the Archivist* since then. In this Report, it also seems appropriate to call attention to what has been accomplished thus far and what remains to be done before the program attains maximum effectiveness.

A comprehensive records management service for State and local agencies of government should provide assistance in every phase of records administration. These phases include: (1) control of the creation of records; (2) effective handling while they are in current use; (3) wise selection for retention and disposal; and (4) retirement by transfer to intermediate storage, transfer to the archives, or disposal. Attention to these phases as parts of an integrated process will make for more efficient operations and will do much to protect the interests of the government, the taxpayers, and historians and other researchers.

In the initiation and development of such a program, however, it is seldom possible to begin intensive work at the same time in all phases of the program. Emphasis must be placed on those phases which will provide immediate relief for the agencies that are to be served. Because the proliferation of records had created a crisis of the first order in the procedures of many State agencies, emphasis first was directed toward bringing the records of these agencies under the control of retention and disposal schedules. By establishing control over these records, those which should be preserved could be identified and secured against loss, and those which were of temporary value could be destroyed as soon as they were no longer needed. In addition to the space and equipment that would be released by the destruction of unneeded records, the information gained in the surveys necessary to establish control schedules would be of value in assisting these agencies in other phases of records administration.

The proper selection of current records for retention or disposal is never an easy task. Since those records that represent vital interests of the government or the people and those that adequately document the operations of governmental agencies must be preserved, it requires knowledge both of the agencies that produce the records and of the probable use to which they may be put. It further requires recognition of the public need to preserve records for legitimate users even though these records may no longer be of value to the agency which created them. The cost of preserving records in relation