

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

TO THE HONORABLE
THE HALL OF RECORDS COMMISSION
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

Gentlemen:

For some years now all of the old Maryland records formerly held by state, county and municipal governments have been in the Hall of Records, and the new ones as they become older, come of themselves and by schedule. Those only are still missing which are held by private individuals covertly and by institutions openly, here and elsewhere. Is it not time that we think of bringing them home?

Only yesterday I received a sharp reminder of this state of affairs from a young scholar who has been combing the recordkeeping establishments of the Eastern Seaboard. He said: "Maryland records are certainly well-represented in the autograph collections up and down the East Coast. Looking at them I often visualized where they once must have fitted in among your records."

Although I have long known this unhappy truth, it was nonetheless shocking to hear it from someone outside the family. While it was not so intended, the bare statement had the earmark of a reproach, a reflection on our custodianship. But the reproach was not altogether merited.

In the first years of the Hall of Records, in 1937 to be precise, the combined efforts of Carroll T. Bond, Chief Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals and first Chairman of the Hall of Records Commission, George L. Radcliffe, Junior Senator from Maryland, and James A. Robertson, first Archivist, failed to persuade the Librarian of Congress to return even one record of the many created by Maryland government and now in the Library of Congress. Renewed efforts on my part in 1941 and again in 1961 were equally fruitless.

Nor is the Library of Congress unique in its attitude. Almost all institutions are hoarders, especially those which are public or semi-public. Once acquired, a picture, a book, a manuscript becomes public property to be kept forever. Some of these institutions have become