



The National Archives of Iceland

Fólks Registor i Borgar
hrepp. Anno 1703.

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The National Archives of Iceland – Locations 1882 - 2001

- 1882 The National Archives are founded and housed in the Cathedral loft in Reykjavík.
- 1900 The National Archives move to the Parliament Building. By 1902 these new facilities are already too small.
- 1908 The National Archives move to the Archives and Library Building on Hverfisgata.
- 1934 Storage space in the Archives and Library Building is full.
- 1953 The first storage facilities are rented. Documents are stored in the loft of the church at Bessastaðir.
- 1973 After the Vestmannaeyjar eruption, storage space is rented at Laugavegur 168.
- 1982 Storage facilities rented on Geirsgata. Documents moved from the church at Bessastaðir.
- 1985 The Dairy Co-Operative buildings at Laugavegur 162 are purchased, December.
- 1986 Records moved to storage facilities at Hesthals 2-4.
- 1987 Start of the move from the Archives and Library Building to Laugavegur 162.
- 1995 Purchase of the ice-cream factory of the Dairy Co-Operative for additional storage facilities.
- 1998 Last materials moved from the Archives and Library Building to Laugavegur 162.
- 2001 Committee appointed to examine the needs of the archives regarding premises and to review the National Archives Act.

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Front cover:

Seal of the Althingi on Iceland's Constitution of 1944.

To the left:

First page of the 1703 census for the district of Borgarhreppur, Mýrasýsla County.



The loft of Reykjavik Cathedral.



The Parliament Building (Alþingishús), Reykjavik.



The Archives and Library Building, Reykjavik.

National Archives of Iceland – Milestones

The Governor of Iceland, Hilmar Finsen, announced the establishment of the National Archives on 3 April 1882. The National Library and the National Museum had been moved from the loft of the Cathedral to the new Parliament Building (Alþingishús), and the governor took this opportunity to use the Cathedral loft for the new archives, so bringing together the archive materials that had accumulated in various government departments and providing them with better facilities for preservation.

Great changes have taken place since this beginning, and the archives have moved to new premises three times: first to the Parliament Building in 1900, then to the new Archives and Library building on Hverfisgata in 1908 and finally to their present location at Laugavegur 162 in 1987-98.

Obviously a period of over 120 years has seen immense changes in the size and facilities of the archives. Initially there was no special staff, the various departments each being in charge of their own materials in the Cathedral loft. The first archivist, Jón Þorkelsson, was appointed in 1900. There is now a staff of over 25, and the materials, comprising sources on Icelandic history from the 12th century to the present day, now occupy more than 30,000 metres of shelf space. As records of the rights and duties of individuals and society, these materials play a key role in historical research.



The present National Archives Building in Reykjavik.

Structure

The National Archives are divided into the following departments:

- **Administration and Finance.** This department is in charge of financial administration, personnel management and daily running of the office and premises.
- **Research.** This department examines individual archives or groups of documents, and also undertakes extensive historical studies of public administration and the development of individual institutions.
- **Record management.** This department gives advice on document management, supervises record management in government departments, receives new accessions of materials, catalogues materials and sees to their conservation.
- **Information and Publishing.** This department is in charge of the archives' computer and information systems in the broadest sense of the word. It handles publications, both in print and on the Internet, and receives electronic data from state bodies.
- **Services.** This department is in charge of services to users, including facilities in the Reading Room, copying and assistance to researchers.

What is a document?

The National Archives Act states:

Whenever records and documentary material are mentioned in this Act, it refers to any kind of records, written as well as in any other form, which contain information and has their origin in the functions performed by an institution or an individual, whether written records, maps, plans, photographs, films, slides, sound recordings, machine-readable material, tapes or any parallel material.

In the Archives' storage rooms.



Users

Those who use the archives can be divided into two broad groups. Private individuals approach the National Archives for a number of reasons. Frequently, they are looking for materials relating to them or their relatives: many need certificates or copies of records issued by institutions that have since made their records over to the archives. Most private users are interested in genealogy and many are looking for records of property rights. For the most part, their enquiries are dealt with in the Reading Room. Many researchers, particularly historians, come to the archives in search of materials. The other main user group consists of

staff of public bodies and institutions who come for information in materials they have made over to the archives, or for advice on document management and deposition. Copies of records, or reading access to materials, are available subject to the provisions of law and other rules.

The National Archives of Iceland publish catalogues and guides to their holdings for institutions and the general public. They also publish academic works, and maintain a website: www.skjalasafn.is.

The Reading Room.





The effects of the informatics revolution

Developments in informatics are having an ever-increasing influence on the work of the National Archives. The spread of Internet access has created both new possibilities and new demands regarding access, which the archives seek to meet through their website. This includes an electronic document catalogue, information pages of various types, pictures of documents, a site for schools, a census database, etc. Digital technology is being used increasingly to copy and display materials in the archives.

The use of electronic technology in public administration poses a new challenge to the National Archives. Preparations are currently under way for the reception of electronic data from state bodies – a new venture in the archives' activities. Special rules have to be set regarding electronic document management and the making over of records in machine-readable form. Computerised records are becoming more and more common in public administration, and it is only natural that they should be preserved for future access. This calls for special measures, however, and little is known for certain about the durability of media such as CDs and magnetic tapes. On the other hand, electronic data occupies only a fraction of the space of paper copies and also offers an exciting potential as regards access and searching.

Vellum, paper, the compact disc – the perfect means of preserving information has yet to be found. How long anything will last depends largely on careful handling and proper storage conditions.

Back cover: Map showing the farm buildings and homefield of the farm Hlíðarendakot, Rangárvallasýsla County, southern Iceland, drawn in 1919.

HLÍÐARENDAKOT.

