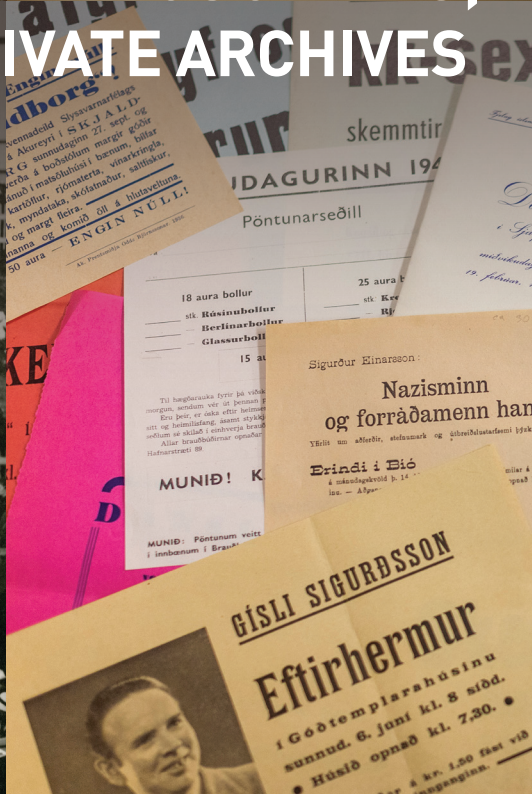




# PRINT, MANUSCRIPTS, AND PRIVATE ARCHIVES

A SELECTION FROM THE HOLDINGS  
OF THE NATIONAL AND  
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY OF ICELAND:  
MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION,  
SPECIAL COLLECTION, WOMEN'S  
HISTORY ARCHIVES AND THE  
ICELANDIC NATIONAL COLLECTION



## Printing in Iceland until the nineteenth century

Printing in Iceland began by the initiative of Bishop Jón Arason at Hólar around the year 1530. The church was the sole owner of a print press in Iceland until 1773. Its main emphasis was on the publication of religious material during that period. The printery was located in Hólar in Hjaltadalur, except for a short period in Breiðabólstaður and Núpufell, and then in Skálholt from 1685–1703 when it was moved back to Hólar.

A turning point came in 1773 when another printing press was established in Hráppsey, which published various secular titles in the spirit of the Enlightenment. In 1795, the printery was moved to Leirárgarðar and merged with the printery at Hólar in 1799. Book publishing at Leirárgarðar was under the auspices of the National Association of Educators under the direction of judge Magnús Stephensen. In 1816 the printery was relocated to Beitistaðir where it operated for three years until it was relocated to Viðey and finally to Reykjavík in 1844. Subsequently, more printeries began operations around the country: in Akureyri 1853, Eskifjörður in 1877, Ísafjörður in 1886 and elsewhere, along with others that were established in Reykjavík in the second half of the 19th century.

Icelandic books were also published abroad, especially in Denmark. The oldest Icelandic book that has been preserved in its entirety was printed in Roskilde in 1540, the New Testament, translated by Oddur Gottskálksson. All Icelandic books, newspapers and periodicals from the beginning to the present day can be found in the Icelandic National Collection, as well as various types of popular prints, advertisements, epitaphs and more.

## Coexistence of manuscripts and print

Manuscript culture thrived alongside the arrival of print in Iceland. It rested on the medieval manuscript tradition when secular and religious texts were produced within monasteries and under the auspices of individual chieftains. The advent of paper in the 16th century and the growing interest in ancient texts in the 17th century led to a revival in old Icelandic studies and literature and accelerated manuscript production.

The cultural tradition of the evening gatherings played an important role in Icelandic culture from the Middle Ages until the 20th century, when readings from manuscripts or printed books as well as oral narratives took place in most farms during the winter. A cross-section of this manuscript culture can be found in the manuscript collection: rhymes, sagas, hymns, magic symbols, folk medicine, folktales, memoirs, annals and much more, a total of approximately 15,000 manuscripts.

## Personal sources – Private archives

As writing skills became more common in the 19th century, people produced manuscript material in increasing numbers: correspondence, diaries, weather books, household accounts and other things that shed a variety of light on its time, especially as the 20th century progressed. The manuscript collection and the Women's History Archives, preserve numerous private archives from various social groups up to the present day.

## Women's History Archives

The private documents of women and their associations were given a special space with the establishment of the Icelandic Women's History Archives in 1975. Its establishment went hand in hand with the United Nations International Year of Women. The purpose of the Archives was and is to promote knowledge and research on women's history as well as to collect, record



and preserve sources on that history, old and new. It was founded in the home of Anna Sigurðardóttir who donated her documents on the history of women, which she had been collecting for decades, to the Archives. She also served as its first director for twenty years. The Women's History Archives moved to the National Library in 1996. It preserves numerous private archives of women from all social groups and their associations that shed a diverse light on Icelandic history.

## Special Collections

Collecting books was a popular hobby among Icelanders and the National and University Library of Iceland has received various special collections of books that have been kept separate from other library options. These include the Chess Collection of Willard Fiske, the Ragnar Þorsteinsson Bible Collection, the Jón Steffensen Medical Collection, Nonni's Special Collection and the Benedikt Special Collection, which formed the library of the University of Iceland in 1940. There is also an extensive collection of Icelandic maps from the beginning to the present day. The collections are often donated in memory of previous owners and are intended to promote research in their fields.



## Icelandic National Collection

The roots of the Icelandic National Collection can be traced to the establishment of the National Library in 1818. It collects all Icelandic material published in print: books, newspapers, magazines, brochures, posters and more, from the beginning of printing in Iceland to the present day, as well as material published abroad about Iceland and Icelanders.

## Manuscript Collection

The Manuscript Collection was established within the National Library in 1846 with the purchase of Valgerður Jónsdóttir's manuscript collection. Its collection increased gradually, especially with the manuscript collection of Jón Sigurðsson which was purchased for the library in 1877 and the collection of the Icelandic Literary Society in 1901. The Manuscript Collection houses manuscripts and private archives of individuals and associations and preserves a total of approximately 15,000 manuscripts and about 1,300 private archives. The manuscripts are diverse and provide insight into the scribal culture of post-medieval Iceland. The private archives contain information about the lives and work of Icelanders from various social groups from the 19th and 20th centuries. The Manuscript Collection also preserves a variety of medieval fragments. The role of the Manuscript Collection is to collect manuscripts and private documents, preserve them, catalog, research and make them accessible.

## Women's History Archives

The Women's History Archives was founded on January 1, 1975 at the home of Anna Sigurðardóttir on her initiative and with Svanlaug Baldursdóttir and Else Mia Einarsdóttir. It relocated to the National Library in 1996. The Women's History Archives aims to collect, record and preserve sources on women's history. It houses private archives and preserves them, both from individuals and NGOs, as well as disseminating knowledge about the history of women and furthering research in the field of women's history and gender studies.

## Special Collections

Special Collections preserves various libraries, mainly from individuals, which are kept separate from other collections of the National and University Library of Iceland. The largest of these is the collection of Benedikt S. Þórarinnsson, that served as the foundation of the library of the University of Iceland in 1940.

Materials from these units can be found at:  
[timarit.is](http://timarit.is) - [baekur.is](http://baekur.is) - [islandskort.is](http://islandskort.is) - [handrit.is](http://handrit.is)  
[kvennasogusafn.is](http://kvennasogusafn.is) - [bokaskra.landsbokasafn.is](http://bokaskra.landsbokasafn.is)

