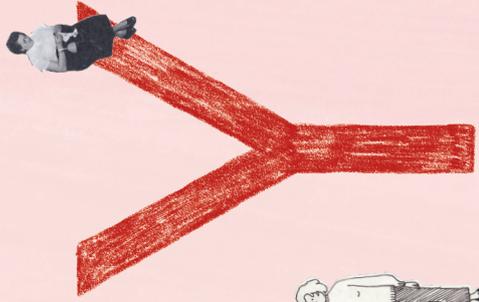
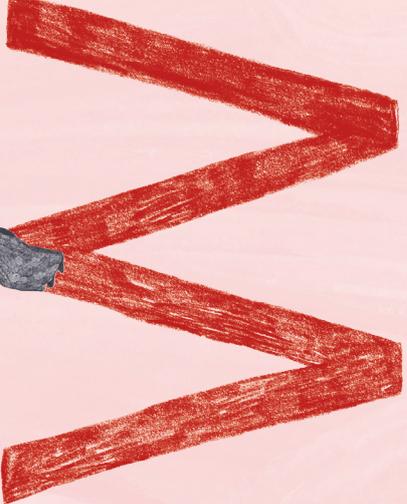
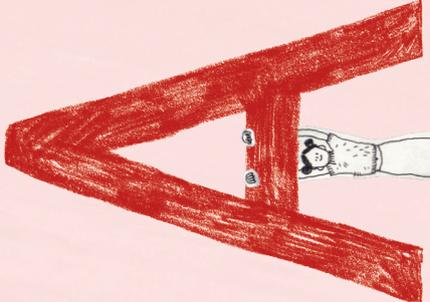
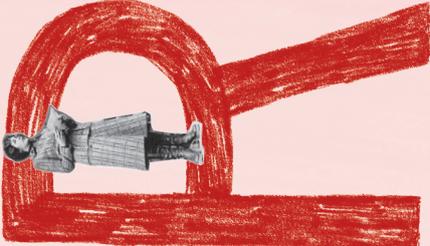
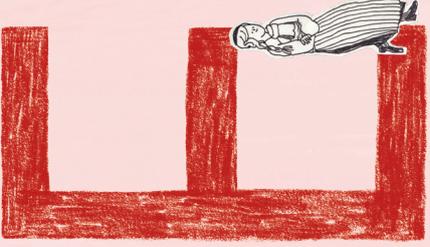


W E A R Y
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WE ARE MANY

WE ARE MANY is an exhibition put on by the Women's History Archives that celebrates the 50-year anniversary of the collection's foundation.

The Women's History Archives was established on January 1st 1975, in a 4th-floor flat on Hjarðarhagi, Reykjavík, that was home to Anna Sigurðardóttir. The founding of the Archives was the first event held in Iceland in support of the United Nations International Women's Year, first held in 1975. The year 2025 has likewise been designated a Women's Year in Iceland by grassroots organisations for gender equality and labour unions.

The aim of the Women's History Archives was, and is, to collect, document and preserve women's history in Iceland, and to encourage research in the field. The operational principle was the conviction that the life of the housewife who boils fish in a pot is just as an integral part of Icelandic history as that of the male politician who steps onto the podium in Parliament. From 1996, the Women's History Archives has been part of the National and University Library of Iceland: this was Anna Sigurðardóttir's dream from the start – as women's history is part of the history of the Icelandic nation.



Women's strikes

In the summer of 1907, women in Iceland went on strike for the first time, for half a day. Women working at a fish factory in the town of Hafnarfjörður laid all the fish out in the morning but refused to gather them again in the afternoon unless their pay was raised. When it started to rain, their employer had no choice but to agree to their demands.

Since then, Icelandic women have often gone on strike to demand better conditions and wages. To begin with, many labour unions refused to admit women into their organisations, leading women to found their own unions. Women typically got paid less than male employees for doing the same jobs. Work traditionally considered women's work was also paid less than work typically done by men. Many saw men as the breadwinners of the home, and as such, men were prioritised in the work environment. In reality, though, many women were working in order to provide for their families. The working-class struggle of women was thus entwined with the women's rights movement from the beginning.



Women's Day Off

The best-known strike in Iceland is the Women's Day Off, first held on October 24th, 1975. On that day, a huge number of Icelandic women walked out of their workplaces and boycotted housework to demonstrate the importance of women's work efforts. The protest was so successful it brought the mechanisms of society to a halt. Demonstrations were held across the country, with speeches and solidarity sing-alongs. The organisers estimated that 90% of women in Iceland stopped work that day, and that 25,000 people had gathered together at Lækjartorg square in Reykjavík, making it one of the largest open-air demonstrations in the history of Iceland.

The Women's Day Off was organised by various women's associations and organisations, and women across the political spectrum participated in the strike. Though the initiative was Icelandic, it was closely linked to international women's movements. The year 1975 had been designated International Women's Year by the United Nations; moreover, October 24th is, in fact, the annual commemorative United Nations Day.

The Women's Day Off has been repeated six times, in 1985, 2005, 2010, 2016, 2018 and 2023. The papers of all the committees of the Women's Day Off are preserved at the Women's History Archives.



Women's work

For centuries, Icelandic women managed household chores like cooking, cleaning, washing and childcare. However, they were also active in chores outside the home, such as haymaking and animal husbandry.

As modern civil society began to take shape in 19th century Iceland, women started edging their way into the professional workforce. Some held jobs traditionally considered women's jobs, such as nursing and teaching children. Others ventured beyond the conventional fields of women's work and became housepainters, doctors and drivers.

The home was still an important workplace for women. Some women took on paid work they could do at home, such as sewing or washing, or worked in the homes of others. When their workday ended, the housewifery role and chores usually still awaited them at home.



Women's groups

In 1871, women in Iceland founded their first association: the Women's Association of the Rípurhreppur district in Skagafjörður, north Iceland. Before the founding of this association, women in the district had met and held meetings to discuss their interests and thoughts, such as the education of women and cleanliness in the home.

Subsequently, Icelandic women have founded groups around all kinds of issues: charities, Christian and abstinence clubs, women's rights groups and unions, professional associations and political parties, hobby and sports clubs. Some of these groups are small and local, while others are large national federations. The women in these groups have often disagreed within their own associations and have debated policies and directions: women are not a homogeneous group and various other issues other than gender mark their lives, ideas and opinions. These groups have nevertheless been a place of solidarity and powerful cooperation in trying times.



Anna Sigurðardóttir and The Women's History Archives

The Women's History Archives of Iceland was founded on New Year's Day 1975 in the home of Anna Sigurðardóttir at Hjarðarhagi 26, Reykjavík. Anna was the head of the Archives and established the collection with the help of the librarians Else Mia Einarsdóttir and Svanlaug Baldursdóttir.

Anna had started to collect documents relating to women's history in 1946. At the time she was a teacher, housewife and a women's rights advocate in the town of Eskifjörður in east Iceland. To begin with, the gathering of materials was random. Anna scribbled notes on scraps of paper she had at hand, such as the paper packaging for fish. The idea of founding the Archives came much later, in 1968, under the influence of Nordic historians of women's history.

The Women's History Archives has typically only had a single full-time employee. A special interest group focusing on the preservation and proceedings of the Women's History Archives was founded in 1987, and it worked towards the Archives being housed at the National and University Library of Iceland, which was Anna's goal from the beginning. Anna passed away in January 1996. On her birthday, the 5th of December that same year, her dream became reality.



WE ARE MANY

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Photographs:
Women's History Archives, Photograph and Print Collection at the National Museum of Iceland, Byggðasafn Dalamanna

Assistance on behalf of the National and University Library of Iceland:
Guðjón Pálmarrsson, Halldóra Kristinsdóttir, Helgi Braga, Hildur Ploder Vigfúsdóttir, Jón Ingimar Jónsson, Jökull Sævarsson, Sigríður Jónsdóttir

Special Thanks:
Emily Lethbridge, Árni Magnússon Institute, National Museum of Iceland, National Film Archive of Iceland, Íslandsbanki

Printing of Brochure:
Ísafold

Printing of Exhibition:
Bræðurnir Baldursson
Sýningakerfi

Published by:
National and University Library of Iceland, October 2025

ISBN 978-9935-434-28-9



Kvennasögusafn
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National and University
Library of Iceland