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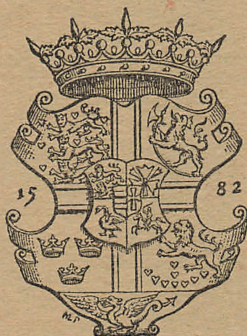
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# DENMARK'S NATIONAL RECORD OFFICE



COPENHAGEN  
BIANCO LUNOS BOGTRYKKERI  
1948

DENMARK'S NATIONAL  
RECORD OFFICE



Fig. 1. The National Record Office seen from Tøjhusgade.

## 1. History.

In the Middle Ages the Kings of Denmark seem to have carried their correspondence with them on their travels round about in the country. Later the national archives were deposited in the royal castles in Kalundborg and Vordingborg, and were placed under the supervision of a “Custos Capellæ”. Not for a generation after the introduction of the Reformation (1536) can one speak of the establishment of a permanent Central Archives or Record Office in Denmark, the most important national archives being collected together in Copenhagen Castle in 1582. Here they were, in any case to an extent, made accessible for historical research, and were used both by the royal

historiographers and by Arild Hvitfeldt for the purpose of his great “Danmarks Riges Krønike” (“Chronicle of the Kingdom of Denmark”). After the introduction of absolutism in 1660 the Archives came to be regarded in a special sense as the King’s Archives, were thereafter called “Gehejmearkivet” (the “Privy Archives”), and in 1720 were transferred to a special building in immediate connection with the still-preserved administration building of the Government. In the course of the 18th. century they were supervised by a number of prominent privy-archivists, some of whom, including HANS GRAM, JACOB LANGEBEK and GERHARD SCHØNING, were also historians of considerable significance. Although access to the Record Office was far from open to all, it became, thanks to the work of these men, a central point in historical research. It also received valuable additions, especially the joint archives of the Duchies and the archives of the Dukes of Gottorp (1734 and 1736). There were also sent a large quantity of newer archive papers from the various Government departments. With the introduction of the free constitution (1848) there came also a new epoch for the Privy Archives, which, under the leadership of the historian C. F. WEGENER, acquired a larger personnel and became generally available for historical investigators. The issue of the archives publications was commenced, and the delivery of the ministerial records was conducted in a more regular manner. Of decisive significance were the royal resolution of December 22, 1882, and the law of March 30, 1889, under which the “*Rigsarkivet*” (State or National

Record Office) was established as the organisation of the whole archives service of the State, comprising a Central Record Office (Hovedarkiv) in Copenhagen for the archives of the central administration and Provincial Record Offices (Provinsarkiver) for the archives of the local authorities. At the same time an extensive work of rearrangement was started after a new and modern principle (Proveniens principle), and under the leadership of the prominent chief archivists A. D. JØRGENSEN (1883—97) and V. A. SECHER (1903—15). In the course of the 19th. century the National Record Office grew extensively in its scope, but it also had to surrender important archive documents. After the separation of Denmark and Norway the Danish National Record Office gave up large quantities of documents concerning Norway in 1820—22, 1848, 1851 and in 1937. The relinquishment of the Duchies involved similar large surrenders in 1873—76. As the arrangement thus brought about was not especially rational, a new distribution of records was carried through under a special agreement in 1936, after the close of the first world war and the reunion of Denmark with North Slesvig. At the same time Denmark received records concerning North Slesvig up to 1864. It may be also mentioned that in 1927 Denmark gave up a number of records to Iceland, and in 1929 there was an exchange of documents with Sweden, the National Record Office thus acquiring the manuscript of the famous “Kong Valdemar’s Jordebog” — a sort of parallel to the English “Domesday Book”.



## 2. Organisation.

By the law of 1889, which is the basis of the now operating arrangement, the Danish archive service became an organic unit, with a Central Record Office in Copenhagen and three local Record Offices (“Provinsarkiver” — from 1907 “Landsarkiver”) in Copenhagen, Odense and Viborg respectively. After the reunion with North Slesvig a fourth local Record Office was set up in Aabenraa (from 1931). In 1948 the Record Office personnel comprises 1 State archivist, (“Rigsarkivar”) 2 senior archivists (who since 1939 have each led their own departments in the Central Record Office), 4 provincial archivists, 5 1st. grade archivists, 12 2nd. grade archivists, besides 7 registrars, 1 bookbinder, 1 photographer, 2 custodians, and 10 assistants. In the financial year 1947—48 the Record Office service had a total budget of Kr. 608,000 (£ 31,417).

In the Central Record Office are preserved letters and documents and also all records originating from the central administration, the royal court and the supreme court. In the Provincial Record Offices are preserved records of local origin, those of the counties, municipalities, law courts, bishoprics and parishes, including the important “church books” (lists of persons christened, confirmed, married and buried right back to the first half of the 17th. century.)

The Central Record Office (the old Privy Archives building with subsequent large extensions made since 1910) has shelf

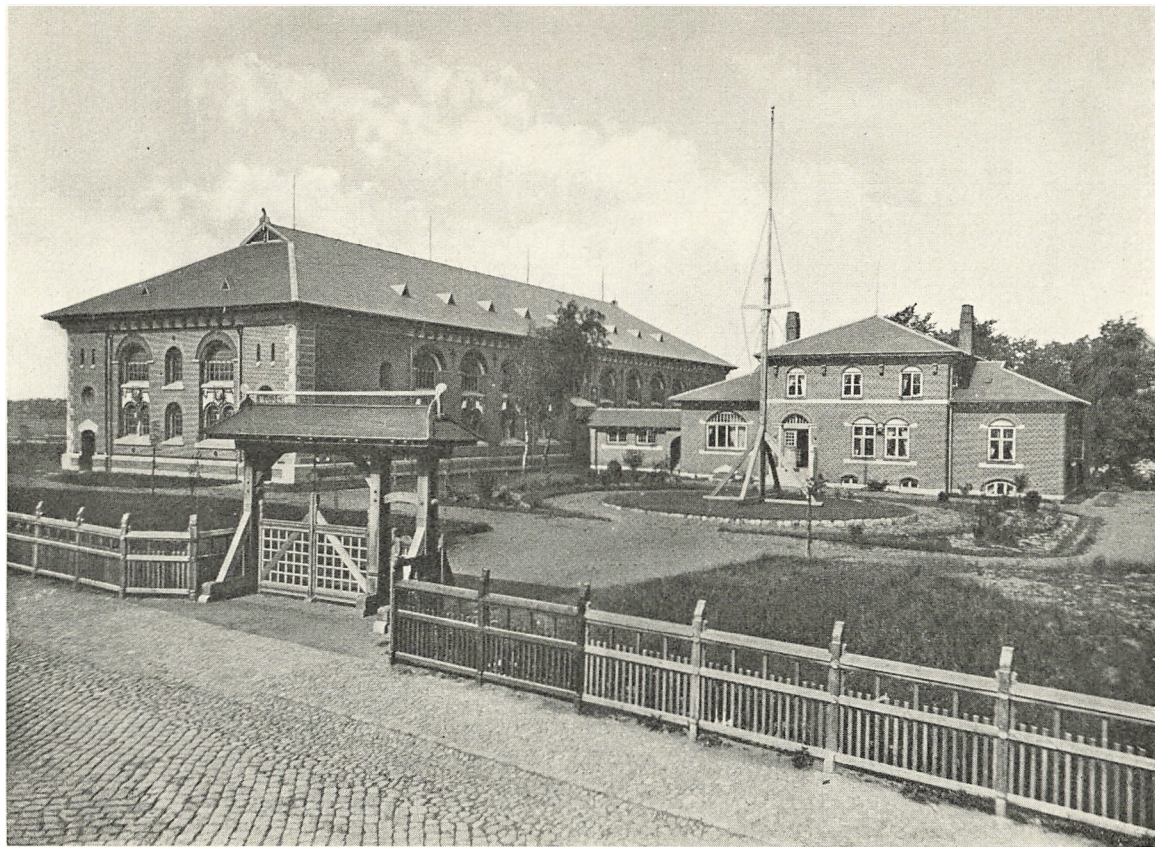


Fig. 2. The Provincial Record Office for North Jutland. Viborg.



accommodation altogether for 40,000 meters of records, includes a lecture room and a reading room of 120 square meters, and is provided with the best possible technical equipment. When the Record Office building was reconstructed one reckoned that the accommodation would be sufficient to cover the growth of quite a long time. But the development of the State authorities and the inclination to constantly take up new activities has put this expectation quite out. The establishment of the Provincial Record Offices involved — at a cost of about Kr. 537,000 (£ 27,766) — the erection of three large special buildings, in Viborg (1890—91), in Copenhagen (1891—93, for the Sjælland provincial archives), and in Odense (1892—93), with shelf accommodation of about 6,000, 7,500 and 3,000 meters respectively. The Provincial Record Office in Aabenraa (erected 1932—33) with 3,000 meters shelf accommodation, costs about Kr. 160,000 (£ 8,273).

For the central administration, the ministries and the thereto connected institutions, the supreme court and the royal court, there do not exist any fixed regulations as to the delivery of documents. Old practice, however, has involved that the official departments are generally very willing to hand over their records. The fact that the Danish National Record Office regularly year after year receives records of quite new matters from the different ministries undoubtedly gives it a special position among the big central archives in Europe. The Provincial Record Offices receive their deliveries under fixed rules. The law of

1889 provides that all local administrative organs, as well as the superior and lower courts, shall hand over their archives when they have reached a certain age — from 40 to 10 years. In the years that have passed since 1889 the circle of official posts on which rests the obligation to deliver records has been steadily extended. Also documents emanating from the older local self-government authorities are for the main part delivered up. Only Copenhagen has its own independent Record Office under professional leadership.

Those responsible for the management of the Danish National Record Office have not rested content with having acquired and collected together records that lay filed away in the manifold official departments of the central and local administrations. Contrary to the German archives service, there never in Denmark has been any endeavour to lay down a theoretical definition of the nature and tasks of a Record Office, but the National Record Office has been regarded as an institution the general purpose of which it is to look after the preservation of all manuscript sources of historical information regarding the Fatherland that are not distinctly literary in character. In increasing degree — especially in recent years — and possibly more than is the case in other countries, emphasis has been laid on the collection of private records — letters, memoranda and other papers left by men and women who have been of historic significance. While the National Record Office can demand the delivery of archive documents that emanate from the State administration depart-

ments but in one way or another have gone out of the possession of the State, private records have always come as gifts and have been subject to conditions stipulated by the donors.

During these years — as a new link in the organisation of Danish state archives — a special *Economic Archive* is going to be founded in Aarhus, the object of which is to receive both the archives of great economic organisations and documents belonging to private commercial and industrial enterprises.

### 3. Activities.

The Danish Record Office is not only of service for historical research purposes but also to the administration authorities themselves. Whilst formerly there was a disposition to one-sidedly emphasise the latter purpose, accentuation more recently has been laid on the character of the National Record Office as a scientific institution. There is, however, nodoubt that the steady delivery of quite new documents brings the Record Office into a special relationship to the administration, and gives it essential tasks in the service of the administration. Besides extensive deliveries there are numerous lendings. In 1947 the National Record Office made no less than 93,548 loans of documents to the ministries.

It goes without saying that only a part of the manifold documents of the ministerial offices have lasting, historic significance. But on the other hand, to make sure that no exaggerated



Fig. 3. Reading Room in the National Record Office, Copenhagen.

discarding of documents should occur, it was determined by a royal resolution of July 22, 1902, that records must only be discarded after there has been secured the approval of the supreme leader of the National Record Office (the State Archivist); only when agreement on this point is not reached shall the State Archivist lay the question before the Ministry of Education. With regard to the local administration offices, a proclamation of March 10, 1891, provides that no official may discard any archive document on his own authority. Hitherto it has been essentially accounts that have been discarded. A Commission appointed in 1933 is still working on the drafting of permanent rules to cover the discarding of documents in the whole central administration.

In certain respects the Danish Record Office management has attained an influence on the condition, the preservation and the arrangement of the records also before they are delivered into the keeping of the big Record Offices themselves. Since 1887 fixed rules have applied as to the descriptions of paper and writing materials that may be used in the administrative departments. The proclamation of 1891 provides not only that each local official is under obligation to keep his records in good order, but decides also that at each change of officials there shall be a proper handing over of documents, generally in the presence of a representative of the Provincial Record Offices. This supervisory right of the Provincial Record Offices has been still further extended, and since 1919 the duty has been



**Fig. 4. Special Department in the National Record Office for the despatch of archives to Ministerial offices.**

imposed on them of undertaking a regular quinquennial supervision of the archives of the inferior judges and police directors.

Just as in all other European Archives, it is sought in the Danish Record Offices to bring about a rational arrangement of the individual documents. Over the whole work the effort is made to break away from the classifications of former times and to adopt a systematic arrangement according to the "Proveniens" principle. The more precise rules for this work, drafted by V. A. SECHER, rest in the main on Müller, Feith and Fruin: "Handleiding voor het ordenen en beschrijven van archieven".

For access to the records there are only very few fixed regulations. The ordinary man, seeking information about his lineage, has the same right of admission to the use of the records as the technically trained scientist. For the information sought there has not to be paid the least fee. Even in juridical proceedings raised against the State the information of the Record Office is at the disposal of both parties. In no case is there any supervision of the notes and memoranda taken by the investigator. Under certain circumstances, however, the Record Offices are authorised to ask the investigator to give an "express undertaking not to publish anything that could compromise still living persons and their nearest relatives". When it is regarded as purposeful the use of more recent records is made dependent on the permission of the ministry or other authority directly concerned. For the records of the royal court the time limit is 1839,

and for the use of the records of the royal house from the 19th. century a royal resolution is claimed. Documents in the Provincial Record Offices are accessible to all. The Record Offices are, however, under obligation to withhold the correspondence of official persons of such recent date that personal questions dealt with in them could not be disclosed to the public without causing harm; further, there must be withheld documents dealing with criminal matters, church books in so far as they contain reference to births outside of marriage, as well as documents “concerning questions of private property and legal relations which those principally concerned may wish withheld from the public”. These decisions, however, are very seldom brought into application.

In 1947 the reading room at the Central Record Office was visited by 10,786 persons, who made use of 41,099 different records. For the four Provincial Record Offices the figures were respectively: 6167 (40,882); 2105 (12,458); 2557 (18,547); and 1082 (12,480). The Central Record Office’s photographic atelier (opened in November 1941), was responsible in the financial year 1946—47 for 10,581 photographic reproductions and made 3,800 enlargements. During the war, from September 1939, the registers of the Central Record Office were photocopied, and in the last year of the war the most important of the protocols and the oldest church books were microphotographed. Altogether about 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> million photographic reproductions were made in the years 1945 and 1946.



Finally it ought to be mentioned that the National Record Office has also developed a very important literary activity. In the course of time there have been issued many volumes of Archive Registers, books dealing with the various public services and books about the most important sources of the history of Denmark. The largest of these publications is “Kancelliets Brevbøger” (“Chancery Letterbooks”), of which there have been issued so far 21 volumes, covering the years 1551—1639.

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### Litterature.

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