

National and University Library of Iceland: Annual Report 1999/2000

Landsbókasafn Íslands - Háskólabókasafn

National and University Library of Iceland

National Librarian: Einar Sigurðsson

Arngrímsgata 3, IS-107 Reykjavík

Telephone: +354 525 5600

Telefax: +354 525 5615

E-mail: einsig@bok.hi.is

URL: <http://www.bok.hi.is>

Introduction

Being created as a new institution on 1 December 1994, through the amalgamation of the National Library of Iceland (established 1818) and the library of the University of Iceland (established 1940), the National and University Library of Iceland celebrated its fifth anniversary on 1 December 1999. A formal celebration was held in the library and a monograph was produced tracing the main aspects of the library's first five years of operations, along with financial and other statistics. A booklet was also published explaining the library's new policy for the future.

Management of the library

A performance-related contract between the library and the Ministry of Education and Culture for the years 2000-2002 was signed in December 1999. The contract allows for closer relations with the ministry than ever before. The library will send the ministry an annual report on how successful the projects for the previous year have proved, especially as regards initial plans and results. Liaison meetings between the library and ministry should be held at least once a year. The contract does not, however, include any financial commitment on behalf of the government; the library's budget is determined annually, as previously, by the Althing (parliament).

The library's organisation chart has remained the same since the library's establishment in 1994 and was published, in a slightly revised form, on the library's fifth anniversary, a copy of which is attached to this report.

A growing emphasis has been laid on the development of staff training and a special plan for this was formulated in November 1999.

An increasing number of colleagues have come from foreign libraries for short stays at the library, either for training purposes or to study the library's operations. Six librarians from the Baltic States, for example, each spent two weeks at the library in April and May of 1999.

Policy development

The policy statement published on the library's fifth anniversary on 1 December 1999 is the result of eighteen months' work. The operations and policies of the library were analysed for the purpose of strengthening the library's infrastructure and to shape its development over the next few years. The document presents, on the one hand, a mission statement for the next ten years, and on the other hand, a strategic plan covering the library's development over the next three years. Regarding accommodation, a proposal for an extension to the present building has been put forward. The new building is expected to contain storage space, a student reading room with long opening hours, facilities for exhibitions and events, and also room for the Arnarnagnaean Institute of Iceland as well as other university research institutes in the humanities. The Minister of Education and Culture has appointed a committee to examine these future plans in greater detail.

Legal deposit of materials

A committee appointed in August 1997 by the Minister of Education and Culture and chaired by the National Librarian presented a draft proposal for new legislation on legal deposits to the Ministry of Education and Culture in December 1999. The minister laid the proposal unchanged before the Althing in February 2000. The bill will be under consideration and in committee stages in parliament throughout the year and it is hoped that the new legislation on legal deposits will become effective in the year 2001.

The present legislation on legal deposits is from 1977 and only refers to published materials and sound recordings. In the new bill electronic data is now included, both in hard form (e.g. CD-ROM) and from the Internet, although the receiving, conserving and making available of such material is extremely complicated, both technically and legally (copyright). It will be the role of the National Library to receive all electronic data, whereas the National Film Archive of Iceland will be made responsible for the reception of all film and videotape deposits, as well as television and radio broadcasts; indeed there has previously been no legal deposit legislation concerning this kind of material. According to special laws from 1984, the Film Archive had been responsible for the collection of Icelandic films and films relating to Iceland, but the new proposal now includes the collection of foreign films with Icelandic subtitles, or foreign films dubbed in Icelandic, or at least a selection of such films.

Technological developments

The SagaNet project is scheduled to be completed in the year 2000. This entails the conversion of several hundred pages of Saga manuscripts and printed material into digital form. In preparation is a project aimed at converting all nineteenth-century Icelandic

newspapers into digital form, both with scanned images and letter recognition (OCR) so that the material can be accessible through indexing.

The committee appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1998, with the task of making recommendations as to the selection of a library system that could be adopted by all Icelandic libraries, issued an invitation to tender in January of 2000 which was completed in April 2000; eight offers have been submitted from foreign vendors of integrated library systems.

Conservation/Preservation of collections

In the autumn of 1999 the library hired a conservator from the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge for two months to investigate the bindings of our manuscript collection. To quote from his report: „First contact with the collection is fascinating. Though I have no direct evidence for this, it is my belief that Icelandic collections must be the largest of historical amateur bindings, certainly in the western world. I can think of no other circumstances that would have produced such a collection. As such the bindings represent a uniquely valuable historical record in themselves distinct from their content." He adds that „some of the bindings in the collection bear a remarkable resemblance to the earliest bound manuscripts in existence, the 3rd and 4th century Gnostic manuscripts found at Nag Hammadi in southern Egypt in 1945." But as the conservator points out, not all binding structures within the collection are so basic, and a great number of them are in urgent need of repair, indeed the library has many lifetimes work for several conservators.

Exhibitions and cultural events

In this millennium year at least three major events are to be celebrated: Reykjavik is one of the nine European Cities of Culture for 2000; it is a thousand years since Christianity was formally adopted in Iceland; and it is also a thousand years since Leifur Eiriksson was the first European to sail to America. The library is celebrating this last event with an exhibition entitled „Living and Reliving the Icelandic Sagas" which was opened on 1 March 2000. The exhibition was prepared in cooperation with the Library of Congress, Cornell University and the University of Manitoba and will be on display at all of these venues later in the year. The exhibition is intended to illustrate the Icelandic saga tradition, both in traditional ways and with the use of multimedia technology. Several exhibitions will be staged in the library later in the year. The Cultural City of Europe programme began on 29 January with various events. The library began the programme early in the morning by having a package opened which had been sealed for fifty years and which proved to contain letters from well-known Icelandic authors and artists born early in the century. No such event in the library's history has attracted so much media attention.

The former National Library building

The original building housing the National Library was built in 1906-08 and was taken into use in 1909. Apart from the National Library it also housed the National Archives and, for a

while, the National Museum and the Natural History Museum. By a governmental edict it was decided to convert the building into a national cultural centre with both permanent and temporary exhibitions which would throw light on the development of Icelandic culture and society. The centre was opened to the public on 20 April 2000, after the building, which has a preservation order on it as a national monument, had been totally renovated. The centre is an independent institution, but the National and University Library has part of its book museum in the building's old reading room.

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