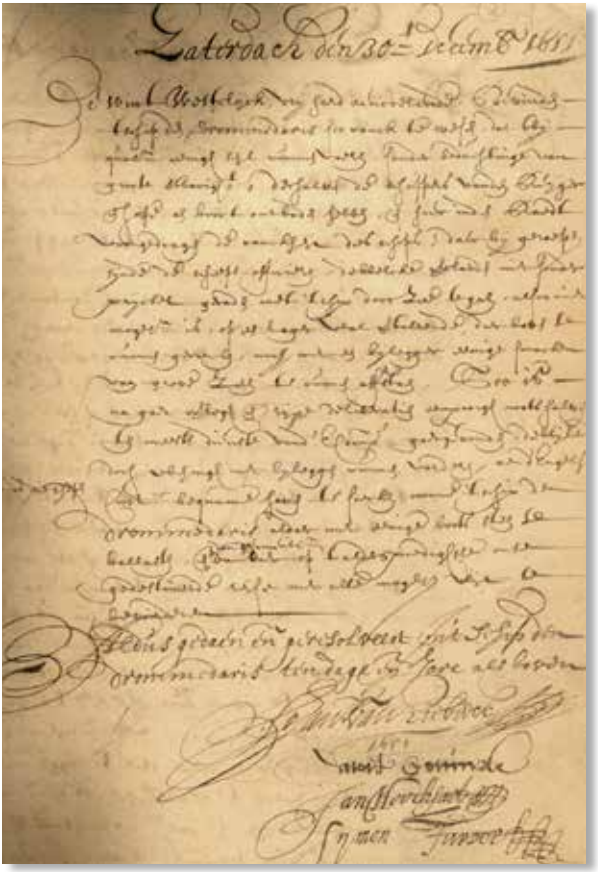
Western Cape Government

Cultural Affairs and Sport

Western Cape Archives and Records Service

DOCUMENTING LIVES

How people make history



Minutes of Ship Council meeting held on board the "Drommedaris", Saturday 30 December 1651 – the oldest original document (C 1, p. 3)

Our opening hours

Mondays to Fridays 08:00 to 16:00.

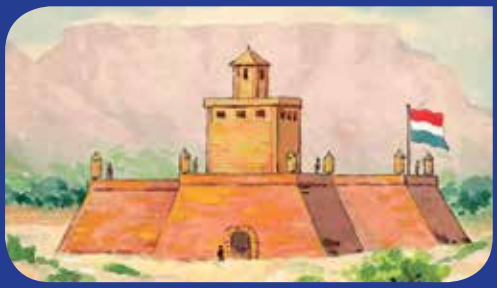
Our extended reading room opening hours

Every Thursday from 08:00 to 19:00.
The first Saturday of each month from 09:00 to 13:00.

To help you plan your visit, we recommend that you contact us in advance to find out when we will be open.

Please also see our website www.westerncape.gov.za/dcas or e-mail us on archives@westerncape.gov.za or readroom@westerncape.gov.za.

"Adderley Street and the Dutch Reformed Church about 1857" by TW Bowler (J 3217)



First fort at Cape Town (A 263 No. 9)

Overview

The Western Cape Archives and Records Service is the country's oldest archives service. We hold South Africa's earliest written records, starting from 1651.

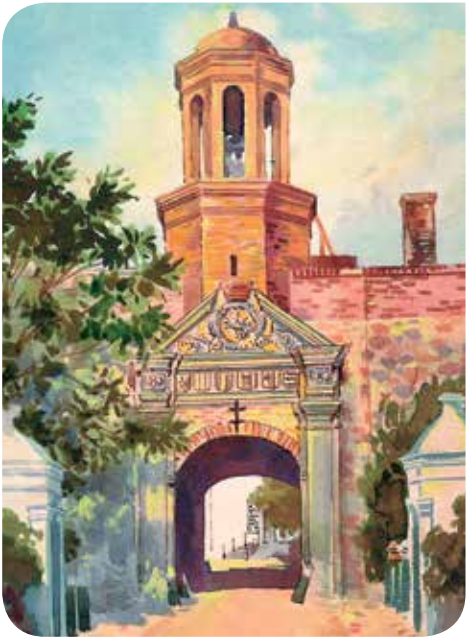
The Provincial Archives and Records Service of the Western Cape Act, 2005 (Act 3 of 2005) sets out the four core functions of the Archives Service as follows:

- Providing access to records;
- Records management;
- Preserving records; and
- Promoting the use of archives.

"The Entrance to the Castle approximately 1857" by TW Bowler (J 3220)

Our purpose

- **To foster a provincial identity through the preservation of provincial archival heritage for use by the government and the people of South Africa; and**
- **To promote an efficient, accountable and transparent government by means of the proper management of records.**



Castle entrance (A 263 No. 13)

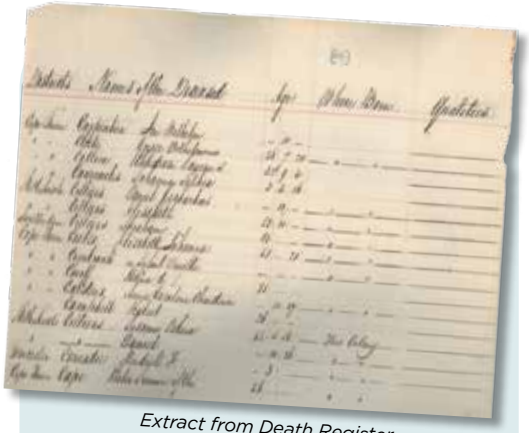
About our records

The Western Cape Archives and Records Service preserves public records received from governmental bodies in the Western Cape (government departments and local authorities). Public records with value qualify for transfer to an archives repository.

Archival records are classified as recorded information regardless of form or medium, e.g.

- printed paper;
- written manuscripts;
- maps and plans;
- photographic images; and
- sound and electronic data.

Archival legislation in South Africa distinguishes between public and non-public records.



Extract from Death Register, 1822–1833 (MOOC 6/3, vol. 1)

Public records

Public records are created by governmental bodies in the execution of their duties.

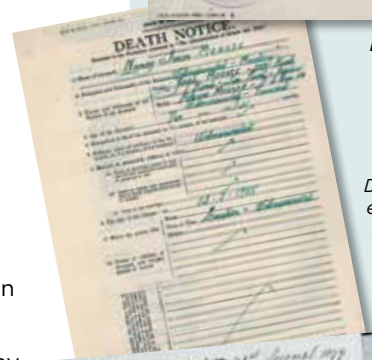
Public records document many aspects of a person's life, for example:

- Births, marriages and deaths;
- Insolvencies, the settling of deceased estates and court cases, e.g. divorces; and
- Naturalisation and immigration papers.

Other aspects of life covered by public records include:

- Town planning, the building of schools, housing and other infrastructure; and
- Health care, sanitation, education and other public services.

Death certificate from the estate file of Nancy Iran Mogoye, 1945 (2/OBS 3/1/14, No. 2/14/81–45)



Death notice from the estate file of Nancy Iran Mogoye, 1945 (2/OBS 3/1/14, No. 2/14/81–45)

List of immigrants as found in the Immigration Papers, 1873–1885, of the Department of Public Works, Cape Colony (PWD 2/751)

Plans of Cape Town

End of 17th century
(A 263 No. 20)

Circa 1760 (M 1/338)

1832 (A 263 No. 147)

Non-public records

Non-public records are private records and papers created by private individuals and organisations, that are donated to the Western Cape Archives and Records Service.

Shipwreck of "De Vis", Table Bay, 1740s
(A 263 No. 132)

Our collection of historical records

Our collection of historical records dates from the first Dutch colonial settlement to establish a refreshment station at the Cape.

From 1652 until 1910 the Cape was a colonial possession. The Dutch and English occupations each left a record of their administration at the Cape.

One of the most significant colonial record collections is that of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), 1651-1795.

Wale Street, Cape Town, 1892 (E 1939)

Early Muizenberg (R 1136)

Our historical photographic collection

Our historical photographic collection consists of approximately 85 000 negatives, photographs and colour slides. Some of these negatives are glass plate originals made in the 19th century.

We have many images of Cape Town, the Cape Colony, the Cape Province and the Western Cape, dating back to the 1850s.

Jan de Bray, Groot Constantia, Cape Town (E 1319)

18th century bell tower on a farm (A 263 No. 75)

Watercolour entitled "In the Malay Quarter, Cape Town" by Sydney Carter (J 3209)

Maps, plans and sketches

The maps, plans and sketches document the different land administration systems used at the Cape since colonial times, as well as regional, municipal and farm boundaries, and architectural drawings of buildings and houses.

This repository is in possession of approximately 16 000 maps, plans, and sketches dating from the 17th century.

Researching your family history

Many of the records in the Archives Repository can help you to trace your family history.

Birth, marriage, and death registers from the Department of Home Affairs (circa 1895–1972) are very helpful, as are estate papers from the Master's Office in Cape Town, Kimberley and Grahamstown, which include wills and death notices.

The Archives hold estate papers from 1689 to 1961 and death notices from 1834.

Naturalisation papers, before 1910, and immigration papers, after 1903, are also available for research in the reading room.

Descendants of slaves can also make

"A Mosque in the Malay Quarter" by GS Smithard (J 3246/2)

Gcaleka tribesman in tribal dress (AG 628)

use of the slavery era records, for example, those of the Court of Justice and the Slave Office.

Many researchers use our records to investigate land claims and traditional leadership disputes to reassess existing narratives of history and heritage in the Cape.

Many descendents of slaves are today using colonial-era Slave Office records to trace their family histories.

Additional records for research include:

- original farm title deeds;
- loan farm registers;
- quitrent farm registers; and
- municipal and magistrate's records.

Our services and functions

Governmental bodies are required by law to transfer records after 20 years if those records have enduring value. Making these records available to the public is possible because archivists perform a number of archival functions; functions which are largely conducted outside the public eye. Archival records must be sorted, arranged and properly described in order for them to become accessible.

Sundial, Klapmuts (E 474)

Adderley Street, Cape Town as seen from the corner of Castle Street, 1892 (E 1950)

Coon Carnival, Green Point Stadium, Cape Town (E 259)

Groot Constantia after the fire, 1925 (E 499)

Vissershoek, Koeberg (E 1031)

These processes underpin the ability of the Western Cape Archives and Records Service to provide a service to the public. Without this work, the archives would simply be a mass of undifferentiated paper and other materials on shelves.

As archival records are described, they are data-coded to allow for the capturing of record references on the National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS), which is accessible via the internet at www.national.archives.gov.za.

Managing government's records

Managing records is a critical part of ensuring efficient, accountable and transparent functioning of all aspects of government.

Records management is concerned with the management of government records during the entire life cycle of the

Scene at Blaauwberg Strand (E 269)

record, from creation to disposal through transfer of records to the archives repository, or physical destruction.

On a practical level this is about how records are arranged, filed and stored. File plans, records management policies and registry procedure manuals of Western Cape governmental bodies are approved by our Records Management Section.

Thus the care of important records begins even before records of enduring value arrive at the archives repository.

The Section works to promote sound records management principles that allow for the control of government records. It conducts training courses for registry staff in governmental bodies to ensure sound records management practices. The Section also conducts inspections of records and records systems at governmental bodies.

View of camp at Green Point Common, Anglo Boer War (1899–1902). The Cape Town Stadium currently stands here (E 9356)

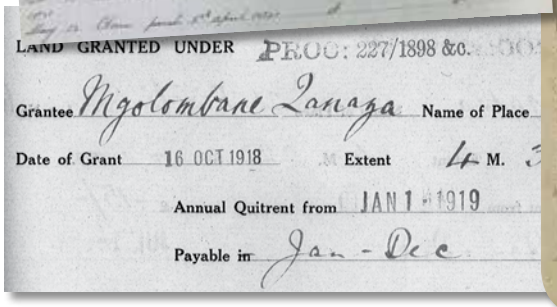
Montagu Baths (R 1359)

Map of the Cape settlement, 1690 (M 1/273)

An example of a damaged record (CO 2369)

Map of Malmesbury District, 1915, showing the Saldanha Bay area (M 3/4829)

Extract from Slave Office Register, Stellenbosch, 1829 (SO 6/98)



Land grant certificate to M Zanaza, 1918 (Quitrent register, Umtata, QRR 236)

Title deed of the farm "Wittenberg", north of Paarl Mountain, granted to Schalk Willem van der Merwe, 21 September 1717 (CTD 17)

Extract from Loan Farm Register, 1794, showing two farms of the fieldcornetcy Honingberg, Swartland district. Owners prior to 1794 are also indicated (1/STB vol. 11/19)

Cape Town Docks, where the Waterfront is today (R 1112)

Cape Town Pier and Jetty (R 1108)

Langalibalele, Chief of the AmaHlubi Tribe (M 1061)

Greenmarket Square, Cape Town (E 2072)

Sekukuni, a Pedi paramount chief, circa 1814-1882 (E 392)

People on the beach in the early 1900s, Strand (R 1213)

Cellar, Laborie, Paarl (E 1104)

Clock Tower, Victoria Basin, Cape Town Docks (S 81)

Green Point in the early 1900s, where the Cape Town Stadium now stands (R 1126)

Chief Maqoma and his wives (E 3250)

An archival volume that needs repair

A staff member making holes to rebind a broken volume

A broken volume is prepared for rebinding

A staff member presenting a workshop on family history sources

Web access to archival records (NAAIRS)

Go to www.national.archives.gov.za

- Select National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS).
- Select Search.
- Select the KAB database for records of governmental bodies.
- Select the MAN database for photographs, maps, library materials and non-public records.

Accessing archival records

Access to archival records is free to any member of the public who visits the Western Cape Archives and Records Service.

You will be able to consult archival records in the reading room. The reading room is equipped with online access to the National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System, power points for laptop computers, and archivists are on hand to assist with queries. Records may only be consulted in the reading room.

Please note that you will be expected to adhere to the strict rules and regulations of the reading room regarding the use of historical records and researcher conduct.

We host many scholars in the reading room pursuing research for academic purposes. The range of subjects researched in the Archives Repository makes for fascinating reading. Examples of completed research documents are: “African Nationalism and Resistance to Apartheid in Eastern Cape, 1960–1985”; “Land Administration in Tribal Authorities, 1913”; “The Cape Hanged (Executions in the Cape Colony), 1879–1888”; “The Langeberg Uprising, 1896–1897”; “Practices of Black Nationalism and African Independent Churches”; “Rivonia Trial, 1963–1964”; “Anti-Apartheid Politics in Transkei, 1960–1994”; “Capital Punishment in the 1800s”; “The History of the Wine Industry, 1900–2009”; “Use of Convict Labour to Construct Mountain

Passes in South Africa"; "Health and Immigration to the Cape, 1875–1920"; and "The Black Consciousness Movement in King William's Town, 1969–1977".

The results of research done in the Archives can be found in our library in the form of publications and dissertations.

Preserving our historical records

Archives are unique. Once records are lost, they can never be replaced. Preservation of archival records is a complex undertaking. There are many factors that affect the condition of archival records. Some records are old and have been roughly used for a long time. Other records were made of inferior materials and are slowly crumbling.

Damaged records can be repaired with specialised repair paper and adhesives. This is a slow and painstaking process that needs to take into account the many reasons for paper becoming damaged and the differences between old and modern paper. Vulnerable records are housed in protective enclosures that prevent further damage.

Preservation of records also looks at the wider environment in which records are stored. We seek to minimise risks to records through identifying and eliminating such risks.

Reaching out to the community

The Western Cape Archives and Records Service promotes its services and functions via an outreach programme.

Outreach section staff members visit schools, societies, associations or groups to speak about the services and functions of the Service.

Please contact us if you would like to have a visit from our representatives or if you would like a tour of the Archives building and its holdings.

A staff member repairing a document

A group of people viewing the exhibition about 'Ibuyambo' (Going back to our roots)

A group of learners on a guided tour of the building

Staff of the television programme "Who do you think you are?" filming narrator Riaan Cruywagen in the reading room.

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Government

Cultural Affairs and Sport