

# Arolsen Archives

International Center  
on Nazi Persecution

Bad Arolsen:  
December 13, 2020  
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## Arolsen Archives International Center on Nazi Persecution

The Arolsen Archives are an international center on Nazi persecution with the world's most comprehensive archive on the victims and survivors of National Socialism. The Arolsen Archives provide a broad base of knowledge about Nazi persecution, forced labor, the Holocaust, and the consequences of discrimination and racial hatred. Founded in 1947 by the Allies, the institution has spent decades collecting documents on all the victim groups targeted by the Hitler regime.

The collection has information on about 17.5 million people and belongs to UNESCO's Memory of the World. It is an important source of knowledge for society today. The Arolsen Archives also serve as a resource for research and education. In order to do justice to these tasks, they cooperate with memorials, archives, and research institutions at international level.

### **The collection of the Arolsen Archives focuses on three key themes:**

- Documents from National Socialist concentration camps, ghettos and penal institutions
- Documents about forced laborers
- Documents from the early post-war period about Displaced Persons, mainly Holocaust survivors, former concentration camp prisoners, and forced laborers. People who had fled the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union for political reasons were also included.

### **The principal tasks of the Arolsen Archives include the following:**

- to search for and supply information to survivors, relatives of victims of Nazi persecution, researchers, and journalists
- to carry out research and education and support commemoration
- and to preserve, conserve, catalog, and index the important collection of documents.

**The Arolsen Archives in numbers:**

- 17.5 million names are documented in the Arolsen Archives
- 30 million historical documents
- 27 million documents online
- Over three million files on the fates of individual victims
- Around 16,000 inquiries are received every year about more than 23,000 individuals
- Every year, the Arolsen Archives receive inquiries from over 70 countries
- Documentation can be provided in response to over 50% of inquiries

**Comprehensive online archive**

In 2019 the Arolsen Archives published a new online archive in partnership with the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, Yad Vashem. People from all over the world can now conduct research online to discover the fates of victims of National Socialist persecution. The database contains a comprehensive collection of documents from concentration camps, including prisoner cards and death notices. It also has large holdings on Displaced Persons. In the first twelve months alone, more than half a million people accessed our online archive.

The online archive is available in English and German. You can find it here:  
[collections.arolsen-archives.org/en](http://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en)

In 2020 the Arolsen Archives received Europe's highest award in the field of cultural heritage, the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award, for their online archive.

Quote:

"Our archive bears testimony to the atrocities perpetrated by the National Socialists. Soon there won't be any survivors left to tell us about them. That is why it is so important that the original documents can speak to coming generations in their place." Floriane Azoulay, Director of the Arolsen Archives, uses these words to describe the significance of the online archive.

## Additional information

### Expanding the online archive

Preparations are currently underway to ensure that all the documents and all the names are online by 2025. The collections are currently being prepared for publication to include a description of their contents which is easy to understand and to provide basic searchability. The last holdings that have not yet been digitized will be scanned in parallel in order to make the complete archive available online.

### For relatives

Every year, many thousands of people get in touch with the Arolsen Archives to find out more about the fate of their relatives. The inquiries come from all over the world because the crimes of the Nazi regime tore families apart.

If the Arolsen Archives contain pertinent documents, copies are given to the person who submitted the inquiry. Even when very little information is available, the Arolsen Archives can still provide relatives with important answers: How many days passed between an individual's deportation and their murder? What do the documents tell us about conditions in the camp? Sometimes the documents and information from the archive provide clues as to where the relatives can carry out further research.

### For researchers

The collections of the Arolsen Archives offer great potential for researching Nazi crimes and their aftermath, and people come to us with very different questions and approaches. Our users range from committed local historians to academic researchers working with digital humanities methods, for example.

The greatest opportunities for innovative research are offered by the key themes of the holdings of the Arolsen Archives, which are very comprehensive and include the history of concentration camps and of concentration camp prisoners in particular, forced labor under the National Socialists, the emigration and later lives of survivors as well as the question of compensation.

The Arolsen Archives organize tailor-made research seminars for students as well as seminars and workshops for young academics. They also give lectures presenting the archive and its work at conferences and colloquiums. The aim behind all of these activities is to inspire interest in trying out new methodological approaches and exploring the potential of the archive.

## For educators

The Arolsen Archives develop educational offerings as well as supporting teachers and other educators in the work they do. Our approach centers on historico-political learning, multi-perspective education, and cultivating a vibrant culture of remembrance.

### In the area of education, the Arolsen Archives offer:

- Workshops for educators
- Teaching materials and toolkits
- Advice and support for educational projects and memorial initiatives from an archive educational perspective

### #StolenMemory: a campaign and exhibition

The Arolsen Archives, still hold nearly 2,500 personal effects from German concentration camps: pocket watches and wristwatches, rings, wallets, family photos, everyday items such as combs, powder compacts or razors, etc. Often they were the last remaining belongings of the victims of Nazi persecution, the things they had with them at the time of their arrest by the National Socialists. They belonged to people from more than 30 countries — many of them from Poland and the former Soviet Union.

In 2016, the Arolsen Archives launched a campaign to return these stolen memories to as many families as possible. Since then, more than 400 families have had the personal belongings of their loved ones returned to them — along with the memories of the victims of Nazi persecution. The #StolenMemory exhibition uses large posters to convey what it means to people to be able hold these objects in their own hands and appeals for volunteers to help at the same time.

### The #everynamecounts crowdsourcing project

The Arolsen Archives launched the #everynamecounts crowdsourcing project at the beginning of 2020 with around 1000 school students. The idea is for the names of Nazi victims noted on the documents in the online archive to be entered manually into a database. Only once this has been done, can the digitized documents be searched for individual persons. The goal is to ensure that all the names in the online archive of the Arolsen Archives can be found.

This lighthouse project provides a simple way for anyone to take part in active remembrance without even leaving the house. By the end of 2020, our community had digitized over 2.5 million documents already.

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Transcribing the victims' names gives participants a very vivid impression of the extent of the crimes and tragedies that took place during this period of history. At the same time, it involves them in an active process of remembrance that will continue to have an impact in future as the names remain permanently available to all in the Arolsen Archives database and can be called up online.

The Arolsen Archives help teachers to integrate the #everynamecounts project in their lessons and provide supplementary material to be used in connection with the project on request.

## The history of the Arolsen Archives

Between 1933 and 1945, millions of people were deported and murdered under National Socialist rule both in Germany and in the states that were occupied during the Second World War. In order to search for missing persons and clarify their fates, one of the world's most comprehensive collections on the victims of Nazi crimes was built up in Arolsen in the early post-war period. In January 1946, the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) moved the Central Tracing Bureau to Arolsen in northern Hesse. On July 1, 1947, the mandate was handed over to the IRO (International Refugee Organization). The name of the organization was changed to "International Tracing Service" on January 1, 1948. While the ITS had initially operated under Allied control, an International Commission took over this task in 1955. The ITS was managed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on behalf of the Commission until the end of 2012. In 2013, Prof. Dr. Rebecca Boehling, a US American historian, was the first Director to be appointed by the International Commission. The current director is Floriane Azoulay, a French native and human rights expert who took on the role in January 2016.

Research, education and the preservation of the documents for future generations: these are new tasks that have been added through the years. Coinciding with the publication of the new online archive in the spring of 2019, the institution changed its name to "Arolsen Archives – International Center on Nazi Persecution."

The Arolsen Archives are financed by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. The International Commission still oversees the work of the Arolsen Archives today. It is made up of representatives from the eleven member states (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America).