

## **Overview of Business Archives in Finland**

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### **Introduction**

The oldest surviving Finnish business archives date from the seventeenth century, but these are exceptional. Small ironworks, saw mills and different kinds of craft workshops were amongst the oldest industrial facilities in Finland of which some grew into greater industrial production.

Modern industrialization in Finland began in the mid-nineteenth century, when many of the restrictions constraining industrialization were removed. Steam-powered sawmills began to be established and many of the old water-powered sawmills were converted to steam-powered operation. Growing foreign demand increased the level of production of the ironworks. Ore was used as raw material in the western parts of Finland and lake or bog ore in the eastern parts.

The manufacture of paper from wood initiated the paper industry, based on river power. Many of the factories established in the late-nineteenth century are still fully operational and through mergers and have grown into global business enterprises.

In the beginning many of the factories were small independent family firms. Some of these companies grew gradually into large corporate groups with several different branches of activity.

The requirement to maximize efficiency and meet globalization has, however, forced many corporate groups to seek strength by consolidating and focusing on a main line of business.

The rather small Finnish markets have required the enterprises to become international and to seek global growth. This has also led many foreign enterprises to grow by buying Finnish enterprises. The Finnish industrial world has always worked on an open market policy since in many of the branches self-sufficiency has been practically impossible.

Some enterprises are still active in the same branch they started with 130 to 150 years ago, like UPM-Kymmene Group and Stora Enso Group which are still trading in the forestry industry.

Ahlstrom Corporation has changed its activity from wood processing to the metal industry.

Nokia Corporation started in the paper industry, moved from rubber boot and car tires to cable manufacturing and even further to a global cell-phone manufacturing.

Many of the industrial organizations started to share a growing concern that there would not be any home for private archives if companies closed down or were not capable for some other reason of taking care of their own archives. The matter was acknowledged to be important, but the idea of preserving business archives lacked the necessary financial support. The National Archives, the provincial archives and some libraries and museums accepted some business records, but it was not until the renewal of the law concerning archives of a private nature in 1974 that the collecting, preservation, centralization and safekeeping of these

archives in an archive specializing in business records became possible. The Central Archives for Finnish Business Records (ELKA) was established in Mikkeli in 1981 and since then many business records have been transferred to ELKA if enterprises themselves were unable or unwilling to keep the records.

There is no requirement in Finnish Archival Law to place business records which makes it possible for the donor company to transfer its records to the National Archives or to the Provincial archives. The law does not even force enterprises to preserve their records permanently. Therefore it is totally up to the companies' own free choice and will to preserve this part of the Finnish cultural heritage.

### **Changes on Records Creation**

Traditionally there has been no distinction drawn between active and historical archives in Finland. Immediately upon creation documents come under the influence of the archival regulations which define the time and place of their safekeeping, user permissions and such matters.

Business archives have changed through the decades in Finland. In the beginning archives were located with the business as a part of its activities. Through enlargement of activities to several different locations and abroad and as small businesses and companies have become large corporate groups the records may have been divided between places of business, specialized functions and central administration.

The main challenges today are the electronic documents and databases used in companies.

The preservation of documents in electronic form during the active phase and their transfer into permanent safekeeping to ELKA or some other archive is a serious problem since not all the files can be printed on paper. Reliable solutions to this problem are currently being investigated.

The goal of weeding the archives is to leave only the most important documents concerning the company in permanent safekeeping. Depending on the company the optimum rate of the material to be permanently kept is 15% of the records, although there is pressure to weed the most recent material even more thoroughly. Documents made in the year 1920 and before are kept permanently almost as they are.

### **Legislation Affecting Business Records**

In Finland there is strict legislation concerning government officials' records management and the Archives Act (831/1994) concerning permanently preserved records. There is no such law concerning private archives, but there are some special laws that affect private archives.

Accounting legislation binds enterprises to hold their accounting records for a prescribed time and legislation concerning historical archives forbids the removing of over 50-year-old Finnish cultural heritage from the country without an official authorization. There are no obligations in legislation to preserve the archives, but most of the enterprises have understood their moral obligation to preserve their own cultural history as an important part of preserving Finnish cultural heritage. Some information concerning private citizens has to be preserved for 50 years and all the registers concerning private citizens must be destroyed permanently within two months after the active use of the register.

In Finland private archives are a fundamental part of the national archival structure. The state has chosen 12 private fields of activity with great national importance and the central archives of these 12 fields get statutory state aid. A law has been drafted especially to cover these 12 archives that regulates the state aid for archives of a private nature (998/1974). The purpose of this law regulating state aid for archives of private nature is to secure the preservation of Finnish cultural heritage, including the private organizations unwilling or unable to preserve

their records themselves. The statutory state aid is 80% of the reasonable expenses of the private central archive. These reasonable expenses are based on advice from the National Archives within the amount of money available each year. The law relates to business archives which are donated to ELKA.

The law secures the future of those nationally relevant archives transferred to these 12 private central archives although it does not presuppose that all the organizations or enterprises must transfer their records to the relevant central archive, that being ELKA for business records. Transferring records is always based on free will and the willingness of the company to preserve their own company's history.

### **Business Archives Institutions**

Business archives are kept in various different places around Finland. The most important archives for business records are:

1. The Central Archives for Finnish Business Records (Website: [www.elka.fi](http://www.elka.fi))
2. The National Archives (Website: [www.narc.fi](http://www.narc.fi))
3. The Provincial Archives (Website: [www.narc.fi/ma](http://www.narc.fi/ma))
4. The Private Archives Association (Website: [www.yksityisetkeskusarkistot.fi](http://www.yksityisetkeskusarkistot.fi))

#### *The Central Archives for Finnish Business Records*

Since 1981 the collecting of Finnish business records has been centralized at the Finnish Business Archives (ELKA) in Mikkeli. ELKA was established as a national centre for the preservation of business records and industrial organizations' archives, including the personal archives of leading businessmen. In a country the size of Finland was agreed to be a national institution maintained by a foundation. There have been vast advantages in centralizing the records in one place. ELKA has received approximately 1000 meters of records annually and the total amount of the business records held in ELKA in 2006 is over 19 kilometers.

ELKA has, in co-operation with the City of Mikkeli and Mikkeli Polytechnic, built a digital repository centre in which all the endangered video, film and photographic material of ELKA have been preserved in digitized format. The digital material of enterprises can also be held in this digital repository.

The information about the records kept in ELKA, the archive catalogues and photographic database, with over 33000 photographs, is to be found from the ELKA homepage. Video and audio tapes have been received from several different companies.

### **Special Format Business Archives**

In Finland special archives and museums have been established for records in special formats. These include special format records belonging to companies' and organizations' archives, like photographs, films and drawings. The Finnish Film Archives (Website: [www.sea.fi](http://www.sea.fi)) has focused on preserving film material and the Finnish Museum of Photography (Website: [www.fmp.fi](http://www.fmp.fi)) on photographic collections. The National Board of Antiquities (Website: [www.nba.fi](http://www.nba.fi)) also has a very diverse collection concerning companies in its photographic collections. The Museum of Finnish Architecture (Website: [www.mfa.fi](http://www.mfa.fi)) preserves construction drawings of Finnish factories and other business buildings. There are also small collections of business records held in municipal archives, libraries and small local archives. ELKA tries to operate in a manner that makes it possible to safely preserve all special formats.

In this way all the records concerning one enterprise can be held in one place and will not have to be divided amongst many different archives according to format. This makes customer service much more efficient.

### **Business Archives Associations**

In Finland there are many organizations supporting private archives. The Society of Finnish Archivists (Website: [www.arkistoyhdistys.fi](http://www.arkistoyhdistys.fi)) focuses on archival management of public administration, but it also supports the management of private archives. The Finnish Municipal Archives Association (Website: [www.kunnallisarkistoyhdistys.fi](http://www.kunnallisarkistoyhdistys.fi)) has focused on developing municipal archiving. The Talle Oy has focused in the archival problems of companies and it works especially to improve the microfilming of business records. The most important cooperational organization in archives management for companies is The Finnish Business Archives Association (Website: [www.liikearkistoyhdistys.fi](http://www.liikearkistoyhdistys.fi)), which operates as versatile improver of business archiving.

### **Training for Business Archivists**

In Finland the National Archives has a dual level degree in archiving of which the lower archival degree is the basic educational level for all archival work. The upper level degree is mostly meant for people in managerial positions in archives. The University of Tampere has a Bachelor's and Master's program of information studies, including optional theoretical archival studies. Mikkeli Polytechnic offers a more ground level education including courses on digital archiving and knowledge management. This postgraduate program has been executed in co-operation with the Provincial Archives of Mikkeli and ELKA.

The Finnish Business Archives Association provides training exclusively for business archival management in a course held in every second year. The course, which lasts for two weeks, is composed of five sections and a paper and is aimed at document management. The Finnish Business Archives Association also organizes annually some short courses and seminars on topical themes for business archivists.

In Finland there are also several private educational organizations working on commercial principles which organize education in co-operation with archival organizations about up-to-date topics.

### **Business Archives Literature**

The Finnish Business Archives Association distributes written information for business archives by publishing the membership magazine *Faili* four times a year covering the latest information on business archiving. An English summary of the magazine and some other archival information can be found from organization's homepage at [www.liikearkistoyhdistys.fi](http://www.liikearkistoyhdistys.fi).

More thorough information about archives and archiving in general can be found in a guidebook updated every second year and published by The Finnish Business Archives Association. This guidebook gives information about the current recommendations on preservation, the impact of accounting and other legislation, handling electronic documents, weeding and other important factors concerning good management of business archives.

The National Archives has its own quarterly magazine *Arkistoviesti*, which also covers topics related to business archiving. The National Archives also has a large amount of archival information concerning private archives on its website.

Nearly all of the guidebooks and informational leaflets concerning companies are either national or relate to one specific company. In Finland little information is distributed at a regional level.