

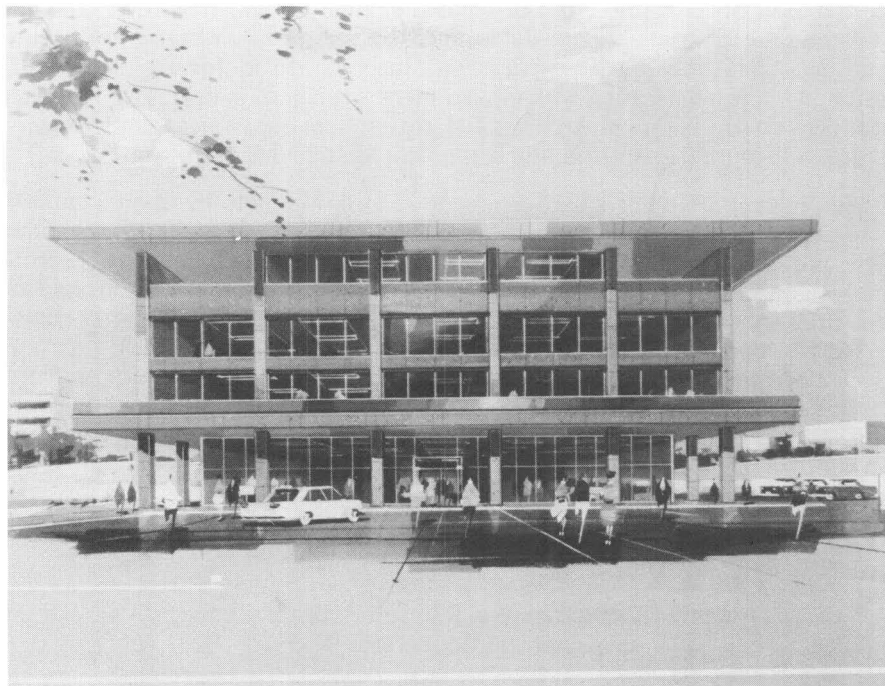
Archives of Japan

by NORIO IWAKURA

Slightly more than one hundred years have passed since Japan adopted the Western system of modern government administration. Consequently, Japan lagged far behind many Western nations in the development of a national archives based on current conceptions of such institutions. In fact, the National Archives of Japan was established at Tokyo in July 1971.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the official documents generated by administrative activities of the central government were placed under the Record Bureau which was charged with their arrangement and preservation. However, following the introduction of the cabinet system of government, it became customary for each department and official agency to hold its own documents, both issued and received. Over the course of time, this arrangement led to the loss, dispersal, or uncontrolled disposal of documents each time departments and agencies were reorganized or abolished. Even changes of personnel and relocations of offices resulted in unfortunate losses. Disposal by individual departments was based on arbitrary decisions that if documents were non-operational, they were valueless. The toll on documents of course, was increased by repeated fires and earthquakes, and by bombings during World War II. This state of affairs for much of the last one hundred years and its effect on the government records was largely inevitable or the result of accidents beyond control. However, some of the losses and dispersals of archival material must also be attributed to a bureaucracy-oriented dogma that each government department could dispose of its own documents as it saw fit.

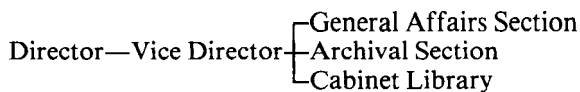
After the War, the traditional notion that "the government records belong to the generating government department and agency" became transformed into the idea that "the government records are the assets of the people of the nation". Simultaneously, there were persuasive opinions expressed, chiefly by historians, to the effect that government records were valuable not only as administrative reference materials but also as important historical documents. As a result, in November 1959 the Science Council of Japan submitted a recommendation to the Prime Minister calling for the establishment of a nationally-owned archival institution to check any further dispersal or loss of official documents. The government of the day responded promptly, and instructed all departments and agencies to take adequate measures for safe-guarding the official records. Preparatory work for the establishment of the National



Artist's conception, National Archives of Japan.

Archives was also begun, and the institution was officially inaugurated almost seven years ago as a statutory auxiliary organ of the Prime Minister's Office.

The original plan for the National Archives was, however, considerably reduced in scale. The Archives is today staffed by forty-four persons, including the Director. The organizational structure is as simple as follows:



The "Cabinet Library" is a pure library, and its inclusion in the institution is a distinguishing characteristic of the National Archives of Japan. The Library holds about 500,000 volumes which include books and manuscripts in Japanese and Classical Chinese handed down from the Shogunate Government. It also houses foreign reference books accumulated by the young Meiji Government as a means of studying Western civilization.

The National Archives is charged with preserving administrative records and archives, and with providing them for public research as well as for the general business of the government. The non-operational records of national administrative organs are normally transferred immediately to the custody of the National Archives. Transfer of these records, however, is not made automatically by legal provision but rather by authority deriving from a Vice-Ministers'

Conference. Specifically, types of records eligible for transfer, their volumes and the date of transfer, are determined by individual consultation by the National Archives with each department concerned. In addition to this consultation, a "Liaison Meeting with Government Agencies" is held regularly each year between the National Archives and government departments and agencies to promote mutual understanding in the field of archival administration.

The current holdings of government records amount to about 250,000 volumes in the National Archives. Such significant documents as the original New and Old Constitutions of Japan, and of laws, Imperial edicts and ordinances government ordinances and promulgations, and many other irreplaceable primary documents are housed in proper conditions. All materials transferred to the Archives are first fumigated with methylbromide gas, then are given a preliminary arrangement, are repaired and bound if necessary, and are shelved in the stacks. The forty kilometres of shelving can hold about one million volumes, and stack areas are environmentally controlled with a room temperature of 22°C and humidity of 55%. Fire-protection facilities include smoke detectors and carbon dioxide fire extinguishers.

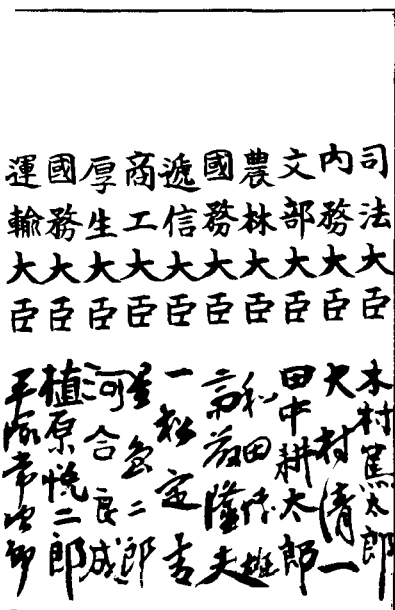
The basic building specifications of the National Archives are as follows:

Type of structure	ferro-concrete, four floors above ground, two basement floors (four layers)
Building site	approximately 4,000m ²
Total floor space	11,550m ²
above ground	2,710m ²
underground	8,840m ² (stack area: 7,000m ²)

After the preliminary arrangement of documents has taken place at the document receiving room, the records are arranged in their final form and classified under the name of the issuing agency. Suitable information is entered in the subject catalogue indicating the content of each bound volume, which is also labelled with a call number. The processed records shelved in sequence of arrival at the stacks are, as a rule, opened to anyone more than twenty years old wishing to use the material for scientific and administrative research purposes.

Daily visitors to the National Archives are not yet so numerous as to occupy all available seats in the reading room, but they already represent every part of the country; most are researchers pursuing specific fields of study and those compiling prefectural or municipal histories. Recently, foreign researchers have made occasional visits. Therefore, the staff is actively working to meet a growing demand for reference services in various subject fields.

In addition to daily services offered to users of the archives, public exhibitions are presented in the spring and autumn of each year. These exhibitions are open for about a week each. The spring display usually deals with books and manuscripts from the Cabinet Library; the autumn version handles



The Constitution of Japan. Detail

government documents. The following list of exhibition titles gives an idea of the variety of specific themes presented to the public:

SPRING	AUTUMN
1972	Government Records during the Early Years of the Meiji Period
1973 Documents Compiled by the Edo Shogunate Government	Government Records during the Later Years of the Meiji Period
1974 Momijiyama Collection	Government Records of the Taishō Period
1975 Topography and Maps of the Edo Period	Ninety Year Commemoration of the Cabinet System
1976 Science books of the Edo Period	Golden Jubilee of the Present Emperor
1977 Reference Materials for Japanese Literature	Government Records during the Early Years of the Shōwa Period
1978 Books written by the Daimyō (Feudal lords)	Seals and Stamps Used on Government Documents

Exhibition catalogues, which include brief explanations of items displayed, are prepared by the National Archives and distributed at no cost to visitors. These publications are considered to be very useful in stimulating public awareness and interest in archival materials.

Along with the printing and distribution of the *Annual Report of the National Archives*, which reviews the Archives' administrative activities, *Kitanomaru* is published as the journal of the National Archives. Now in its tenth issue, as of 1978, *Kitanomaru* describes the contents of archival holdings and current research activities. Some of the subject catalogue series are also published yearly in book-form as a contribution to academic research. These works are distributed freely to related institutions in the country, and sold inexpensively to interested scholars.

The National Archives is the state-owned repository established by law, but it is not the only archives with national responsibilities in Japan. There are several other institutions with archival functions which preserve national administrative records in certain specific subject fields, thereby supplementing the function of the National Archives in the archival administration of the records of the nation as a whole. The additional institutions are:

ARCHIVAL INSTITUTION	TYPE OF HOLDINGS
National Diet Library: Constitutional and Material Room	Constitutional documents
Imperial Household Agency: Library Section, Archives and Mausolea Division	Records pertaining to the Imperial Court
National Defence Agency: War History Office, National Defence College	Military Records
Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Diplomatic Record Office	Diplomatic records
Tokyo University: Institute for Compilation of History Materials	Historical documents
Ministry of Education: National Institute of Japanese Literature, Historical Document Division	Historical documents

These repositories existed before the National Archives was established and each has a distinctive history and tradition related to the accumulation and preservation of materials in its own specialized field. There was no common basis governing the establishment of these archives; each was created to meet the special needs of the department or agency concerned. Therefore, no legal or hierarchical relationship exists among these institutions, but since their activities are closely related, they do cooperate as required on a voluntary basis in the exchange of the catalogue information and through inter-archives loans.

The National Archives and the other national archival institutions mentioned so far are all located in Tokyo. In addition to these establishments, there are

also prefectural and municipal archival institutions in Japan. Japan is divided into forty-seven prefectures as self-governing administrative districts, but not each of these prefectures has yet established an archives. The earliest archives of this type is the Yamaguchi Prefectural Archives founded in 1959—twelve years before the creation of the National Archives. In the 1970s, a growing recognition of the importance of archives led almost half of the prefectures to develop their own archives. Several more are now instituting or are contemplating the establishment of archives. These prefectural archives are not uniform in their natures or names: some are museums-oriented, while others are more like libraries; some are general centres for historical material, and yet others focus upon archival documents. In short, each reflects the special features of its constituency.

The central government has no particular control over these archives established under prefectural and municipal ordinances or through the provisions of the Prefectural Board of Education; nor is there any legally-based relationship among themselves or with the National Archives. The one type is nationally-owned, whereas the others are prefecturally-owned. Nevertheless, their functions are basically the same and are complementary. While the National Archives deals with central government records and some relating to prefectures, the prefectural concentrate exclusively on the local government records. In addition to a regular exchange of publications and other information between the central and local archives, nation-wide archival conferences and seminars are held annually to promote mutual understanding and integrated overall archival activities. These conferences are not legally required, but are based upon the voluntary wish of various institutions. The National Archives participates in such nation-wide meetings, usually as an observer, but has the right to speak in the same capacity as prefectural and other archival institutions. The National Archives may also preside over or organize country-wide conferences and seminars.

Japan, as a nation with an old history but a new experience with recent technological innovation, may be regarded as having a leading role in the field of archival administration. However, the archives service is but a modest and inconspicuous aspect of the overall national government administration. Indeed, there are still some people who consider the National Archives to be only a non-essential cultural facility. Therefore, any policy or measure relating to the improvement of archival facilities and equipment is usually treated lightly or may be considered as unimportant. This, then, summarizes the archival scene institutionally in Japan where the National Archives is a recent establishment and where many local services have just been initiated.

Résumé

Les Archives nationales du Japon ont moins de dix ans et sont en concurrence avec plusieurs autres institutions quasi-publiques et privées, cela avec un personnel très restreint. Elles ont pu cependant s'attirer une clientèle, en mettant des salles de recherche accessibles au public, dans un nouvel édifice spécialement conçu pour les archives. Elles ont aussi organisé quelques expositions.