

### **German colonial regime (1884-1915)**

When imperial Germany claimed Namibia as a “Protectorate”, it introduced a sophisticated system of record-keeping. A central registry office was set up, a filing system was made mandatory for the officials, and each correspondence item was sewn by hand into standard blue cardboard folders. However, these were current active files. Although the establishment of an archives was being discussed in 1912, the German administration never managed to set it up during their 30-year long rule over Namibia. Not only at the central administration in Windhoek, but also at the various district administrations, at separate government institutions such as the railway administration (Eisenbahnverwaltung), the military (Schutztruppe), the courts of law, and the mining office (Bergamt), and finally at the municipalities that were established in 1909, extensive records were kept. The Schutztruppe records of the war of 1904-1908 were however speedily sent to Germany in order to write a history of the war, and perished in air bombardment during World War II. During the many colonial wars between 1892-1908, all indigenous record-keeping (with the exception of the Rehoboth community) was effectively discontinued, and most records were either destroyed or captured and often taken abroad. For example, different sections of the Hendrik Witbooi Papers were looted and taken to Germany at three different occasions in 1893 and 1904. They have, however, meanwhile been repatriated and re-united at the National Archives.

### **South African take-over 1915-1990**

During World War I, South African troops invaded Namibia and defeated the German Schutztruppe within less than a year. Unlike in other German colonies, most German records in Namibia were left intact during the invasion. The central German administrative records remained in the administration building “Tintenpalast” (today’s Parliament Building). Subsequently, the central German records remained neglected but relatively safe and undisturbed in the Tintenpalast. Only some German record groups which the South African officials considered as “of no use” were regrettably destroyed to make space (among them the customs records and the papers of the commission to compensate German settlers for losses during the 1904/08 war). Some records deemed important by the leaving German administrative staff, in particular the government employment records (staff files), were sent to Germany. They are now kept at the Bundesarchiv Berlin (Fonds R1001 Behörden des Schutzgebiets Deutsch-Südwestafrika) and should be restituted to Namibia. The remaining German military records that were captured by the South African forces in 1915 were initially kept, but inexplicably later destroyed under unclear circumstances. The new South African administration – first a military administration, then from 1920 onwards a civil administration – set up their own record-keeping system. Although legally a mandate under supervision of the League of Nations, the “Mandated Territory of South West Africa” was subsequently ruled like a colony through an Administrator installed by South Africa.