

## **Pre-colonial times**

The keeping of important written records in Namibia dates back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when missionaries had introduced the skill of reading and writing to the various communities of pre-colonial Namibia. Not only the missionaries, but also indigenous leaders started keeping records of their correspondence. Some of these have survived to this day and are now kept in the National Archives. Apart from the written records, oral traditions were kept and communicated from mouth to mouth, often in formalized genres of recited praise poems and genealogies. The *Treaty of Hoachanas* (1859), the *Ryksboek of Bethanien* (1847-1916), the *Vaderlike Wette of Rehoboth* (1874), the *Maharero Papers* (1860-1887) and the *Hendrik Witbooi Papers* (1884-1904), all of them now available in the National Archives, bear testimony to these efforts. In particular, the Hendrik Witbooi Papers are an example of a conscious effort to preserve historical evidence by copying important incoming and outgoing correspondence and other documents into a book, instead of keeping loose papers that could easily get lost. This is one of the reasons why they have been inscribed on Unesco's Memory of the World List.