How to search

Using this search function, you can search in records from the Danish West Indies across the public online systems of the Danish National Archives: Arkivalier Online (digitized records), Rigsarkivets Indtastningsportal (transcribed records), and in metadata from Daisy, the National Archives’ records database.

When conducting a search in the West Indian records, you are searching in digitized records comprising approximately 5 million image files spread over about 15,000 image series. You are also searching in records to which volunteers have added entries of transcribed records spread over more than 130,000 items. However, this figure is dynamic as volunteers regularly enter items.

The records of the National Archives follow a specific order to enable the Archives to keep track of them. The records are organised according to who has created them and this is called a record creator, for example the Government-General. There are different specific subjects divided into record series under the Record creator, for example Government-General, Copybooks concerning letters sent to the King.

All West Indian record creators and record series have been translated into English to make it possible for English-speaking users to navigate and search for information according to the order of the records. Most of the records that can be searched will, however, be in Danish and written in older Danish handwriting (Gothic script).

Since 2015, volunteers have helped to enter selected West Indian records to make it easier for English-speaking users also to search and read the records. Simply completing the entering of the approximately 200,000 image files of West Indian records now located in the transcription portal is an enormous amount of work. English-speaking users must therefore accept that in most cases their search results will be in Danish. However, the search results will be structured with an accompanying text in English where record creator and record series are translated into English.

If you are already familiar with the systems of the Danish National Archives, you can find the records directly here:

Arkivalier Online: Contains images of digitized records. You find The West Indian theme here.

Rigsarkivets Indtastningsportal: Is also called the crowdsourcing portal, contains entries of West Indian records where volunteers help with typing names and places, for example, to make them more searchable. At present, however, only a small part of the National Archives’ records have been entered in full. See the West Indian theme here.

Arkivdatabasen Daisy: Is the general records database and is only available in Danish. Daisy contains information about who has created the records (record creator), what records they have created (record series), what the records contain, and any other metadata: You find the general records database Daisy here.
How to search

You can write as many words as you want in the ”Search for” box. It’s a good idea to start by making a broad search with few words.

If your search results in many hits, restrict it by:

- Writing more words
- Limiting your search timewise by writing one or more years in ”date from” and “date to”. You can just write a starting year or a final year. And you don’t have to state day and month
- Restricting your search to certain types of items by ticking relevant boxes: “Transcribed Records” or “Digitized Records”
- Using permitted wildcard characters

You can search for dates in two different ways, either in the ”Date from” and ”Date to” boxes or in the ”Search for” box.

"Date from” and ”Date to”
If you use ”Date from” and ”Date to” when searching for data, you will get all the hits that timewise are anywhere within or overlap the time interval you state.

"Search for”
If you write dates in ”Search for”, the hits you get will correspond exactly to the dates you have stated. Therefore, if you know the precise dates, it is a good idea to write them in the ”Search for” box, because this will result in fewer hits than if you enter the dates in ”Date from” and ”Date to”.

Search characters - make your search more precise

"…"
(quotation marks)
Searches for items where the words you write appear in precisely that order.

Example
For example, if you write: "Jens Peter" you will find all items where the words Jens Peter occur in this particular order, but Jens F. Peter will not be displayed in your search result.
+ (plus)
Searches for items where all the entered words appear **in any order**.

*(Note* that there must be no space after the +).

*Example*
For example, if you write: Jens +Peter you will find all items where both words Jens and Peter appear.

-
(minus)
Searches for items where the entered words after minus **do not occur**.
*(Note* that there must be no space after the –).

*Example*
For example, if you write: Jens –Hansen, you will find all items where the word Jens occurs but Hansen does not occur.

* (asterisk)
Replaces one or more characters **at the end of a word** but not in the middle of a word.

*Example*
For example, if you write: Medic*, you will find all items containing words starting with “medic” in them, as it catches medicine, medicinal, medical etc.

||
(two vertical lines)
Searches for items where either the one **or** the other entered word appears.

*(Note - there must be a space on both sides of []).*

*Example*
For example, if you write: Jens | Peter, you will find all items whether either the word Jens **or** the word Peter occurs.

(...)
(parentheses)
Interprets more complex search terms.

*Example*
For example, if you write: Horsens Clausen | Klausen without parentheses, this will be interpreted as (Horsens AND Clausen) **OR** Klausen, while if you write: Horsens (Clausen | Klausen) you will find what you probably meant, namely: Horsens AND (Clausen **OR** Klausen).
~N after a word
(N indicates a number of characters)
Also includes words in the search result that deviate in the number of characters you have written after ~.

The deviation from the search word can be anywhere in the word. The deviation can be characters other than those you have written, but also be the number (+/- the number of characters you have entered).
(Note – there must be no space before or after ~).

Example
For example, if you write Nilsen~1, then you are searching for: Nilsen, Wilsen, Nelsen, Nissen, Nilson, Nisen, Ilsen, Nielsen etc.

Did you not find what you were searching for?
There can be several reasons why your search does not result in any hits or in a different result than desired.

Different word – same meaning
A subject can have changed its name over time. For example, "Land registers” were earlier called "land lists”.

Record series – name
You may have written a name for a record series that does not correspond to what is registered in the systems. If you know another name, try that instead. For example, "baptised” instead of "born”.

Record creator – name
The creator of the records may have had different names over time. If you know another name, try that. For example, the record series “Subject files: Puerto Rico (1767 - 1805)” had two record creators:

- German chancellery is the record creator in the period 1767-1770.
- Department of Foreign Affairs is the record creator in the period 1770-1852.

Have you written the name of the record series in the plural? Most of the names of record series in the systems are written in the singular, for example, Copybook, not Copy Books. Try writing the name of the record series in the singular.

Are the records in the Danish National Archives?
The National Archives have all records relating to the Danish West Indies from the central administration in Denmark, but only 60 percent of the records from the local administration in the colony. The remaining 40 percent are mainly to be found in the US National Archives in Washington DC and a small part in the US Virgin Islands.
Old/new spelling
Perhaps you have not written the name of the record creator or record series in the same way as it is registered in the systems. Most names in the systems are registered with contemporary orthography.

The order is irrelevant
You can write several words in the search box and the order of the words is not important: Whether you type "Christiansted sheriff" or "Sheriff Christiansted" makes no difference.

A word can have several meanings – also over time. For example, "Sheriff". The office of Sheriff covered several different roles such as Judge and Police Master.

Older references
If you search on the basis of an older reference, the records may have been re-registered. Try searching for the name of the record creator.

Questions
If you have any questions or comments send an email to: mailbox@sa.dk