

# bulletin



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# Photography collection of the Corporate Archives of Erste Group Bank AG

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The Corporate Archives of Erste Group Bank AG hold the historic collection of Erste Group Bank AG in Vienna. At the beginning of 2016, our archives opened at Erste Campus, the new headquarters of Erste Group located at the Central Train Station of Vienna, as the central depository for the bank's historical materials. The archives house selected documents, objects and audio-visual materials from the past two centuries dating back to the foundation of Erste oesterreichische Sparkasse. The materials are prepared for long-term storage and are selected in accordance with our collection strategy. Today, the collection of the Corporate Archives includes some 100,000 archival objects, of which around 13,000 items constitute the photography collection.

We are a relatively young institution and our holdings are being rapidly augmented. We regularly receive new materials from company departments and private collections to analyze and record. One of our key tasks is to conduct a thorough assessment before adding new archival materials to our collection. Today, our standard procedures are routine, but in the beginning when Corporate Archives had just started up and we were collecting materials from a wide variety of company units and collections, our work was not only time-consuming and challenging, but also very exciting.

In line with the latest developments in digitalization, we use Scope (ISO-certified archiving software)<sup>1</sup>

for recording and presenting the archival materials. This software makes it easy to find and access material held in the archives, and provides a digital platform for the presentation of archived material. We are converting analogue materials into digitized formats step by step. Materials already in digital format are analyzed and a selection is made available online. At present, only our staff have access to our database. However, we plan to make our archives available to external users on the internet.

In this article, we present an overview of the origins and work of Corporate Archives and its collection with a particular focus on photography.

## The memory of Erste Group

An essential aspect of the work of Corporate Archives is our role as a communications service provider within the company and for external partners.

Around eighty per cent of our services are performed in collaboration with the relevant business departments, such as the corporate affairs and governmental affairs, the brands and marketing, internal and external communications, the group legal; we also cater to the requests from local branches as well as responding to individual inquiries from staff members. Our range of services includes publications, films, TV ads as well as archival research in response to short-term inquiries. Twenty per cent of our work consists of collaborative projects with

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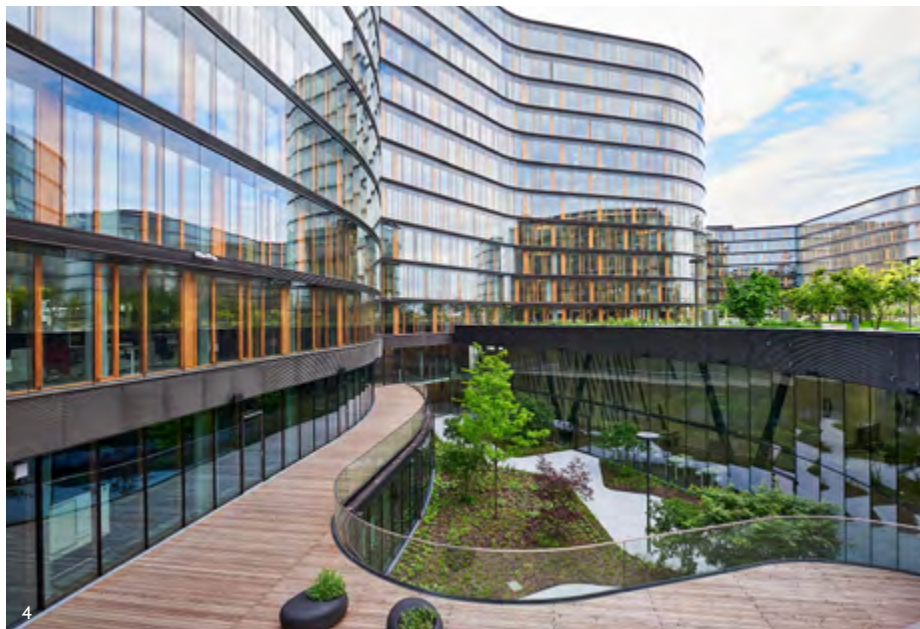


2



3

DER GRABEN



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3. 1840, Hauptanstalt Erste oesterreichische Spar-Casse, Lithography. A short time after opening in the parish office St. Leopold in 1819, the premises became too small due to exceptional customer demand. The move to the building Deutschordenshaus' Vienna's city centre took place in 1822. The building located on Am Graben 21 was purchased in 1824 and construction work was completed in 1838. The external appearance of the old main bank building has hardly changed since then. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives

4. 2016, Erste Campus, Erste grew from around 3,500 employees in the 1980s to 48,000 after the expansion into Eastern Europe. It became necessary to build new headquarters. The complex was designed by the architects Henke & Schreieck and opened in 2015. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, @Toni Rappersberger



5

5. Employee magazines from the 1960s to the 2000s are an enormous source in photography research. Graben 21, Year 1965. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives



6. Photograph (undated) 1960s, exterior design, Gablenzgasse 54 branch in Vienna. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives



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7. Photograph (undated) 1960s, customer service area, Gablengasse 54 branch in Vienna. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives





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8. Photograph (undated) 1960s, customer service area, Gablenzgasse 54 branch in Vienna. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives

9. 1972, exterior design, Elisabeth Allee branch in Vienna. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives

10. 1940, Nußdorferstraße 15. With the advent of National Socialism, the renovation of the branches began to show modernist influence tempered by the Nazi ideology of the time: 'A healthy mind in a healthy body.' The project soon failed due to war spending. Until the 1950s, the 'old' customer service areas still had grills in front of the teller counters. Photo Credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives

external customers and outside inquiries: we provide support for research projects, students, publications and the media. The mission of Corporate Archives is to strengthen the bank's corporate identity.

We have become the long-term memory of Erste Group. A company history dating back two centuries is a valuable asset. Erste oesterreichische Spar-Casse was founded on 4 October 1819. The bank's establishment was almost a revolutionary act in the context of the Habsburg Empire. Spar-Casse was a pioneer: it created the opportunity for all—the lower classes included—to open a personal bank account and begin to manage their finances individually for the first time.

Looking at the statutes from 1819, reveals that the aim was to give 'factory workers, tradespeople, unskilled workers, domestic servants and other hard-working and thrifty persons regardless of age a way to start saving small amounts from their hard-earned money to build up assets (...) No age, no gender, no class, no nation is excluded from the benefits offered by Spar-Casse to all savings account holders'. It was a large-scale social project: helping people help themselves—a highly enlightened notion. 'Banking the unbankable' is how it is referred to today. For Erste Group, with 201 years of history, this is still part of its DNA.

In the past 201 years, a lot of material has been collected. However, there was no consistent collection strategy, no inventory system, and the materials were never stored at a central location. With the creation of a Group structure under the umbrella of Erste Group in 2008, it became clear how important it was to create a modern, centralized archive system to overcome this. At the end of 2010, the Management Board of Erste Group issued the instructions to set up the 'Corporate Archives'. The task was to obtain and install the necessary equipment and technology for storage facilities, and to collect the historically relevant materials from the diverse corporate business areas and archives.

For us as 'beginners', the first priority was to create a network of persons who were able to provide the crucial assistance needed to collate materials for our archives. The search for materials covered the entire territory of Austria. In Vienna, we discovered thirty locations including two large archives and numerous smaller ones. In the other eight provinces, the archives were usually much smaller. Often, they consisted only of small rooms, or in some cases, just filing cabinets.

### **The structure of the photography collection**

Research into photographic materials was time-consuming and involved a lot of work. Most of the historical photographs were stored in boxes and cartons without any

systematic order; sometimes materials were better organized in document portfolios, envelopes and office binders.

Assessing historical importance and selecting material to be included in Corporate Archives was our responsibility. The materials were selected only if they were directly related to the history of Erste. Photographic and film materials that could not be saved were separated on site (Photograph 1).

During the period until we moved to our 'own archives' at Erste Campus in March 2016, a 'conservation conveyor belt' was set up in the vicinity of Vienna. The main task was to make the materials suitable for long-term archiving. All archival materials were moved there. The processing of the photographs essentially followed the steps below.

#### **Conservation:**

- Examination of the materials for damages and smudges
- Removal of plastic sleeves, paper clips, plastic covers
- Removal of prints from backgrounds, frames and folders unless these were of relevance as albums
- Cleaning of the photographic materials if soiled/dusty
- Sorting into protective photo sleeves made of acid-free archival paper
- Sorting into archival photo binders made of acid-free archival cardboard

#### **Inventory procedures according to the General International Standard Archival Description ISAD(G):**

- Assignment of a unique archive signature
- Assignment of a caption (as written or based on image)
- Recording of all recognizable information such as dates, provenance, owner, photographer/atelier, writing on front/back or on cover
- Recording of known copyrights and photography credits
- Identification and recording of photographic technique as well as negatives/diapositives/prints/film formats, etc.
- Definition of keywords/tags that can be derived from the images or from captions
- Recording of condition and successful conservation measures
- Assignment of archive box number for finding in the repository

Taking inventory of the 13,000 prints, diapositives and negatives presented a great challenge. At the time, it was not possible to capture the content, or more precisely, the context of the images available from the different business areas and time periods. Nonetheless, it was important to record all of the information 'visible' and

'legible' at the time of the initial inventory. The professional and committed team of conservationists succeeded in creating a high-quality identification book that still serves us well today when researching photographic material in our archives. The materials were recorded in the inventory in the original order the photographic material was found, with many of the photographs being recorded individually to optimize searches (Photograph 2).

### **Storage / Repository**

We are in the fortunate situation of being able to adapt the premises of our photography archives to ideal conditions for long-term archiving. The room is air-conditioned and complies with the latest standards with respect to cooling and humidity conditions.

### **The photography collection—History in images**

The comprehensive initial inventory of the photography collection makes it possible for us to classify it more easily and precisely. This enables us to identify the thematic areas within the photography collection and respond faster and better to internal and external queries. The photographs are viewed, and additional information is recorded in the course of research work and specific projects.

As regards the documentation of the history and development of Erste österreichische Spar-Casse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there are only few historic photographic documents that we can rely on. Our view of this historic era is based largely on paintings, engravings, lithographs and drawings (Photographs 3 and 4).

A large part of our photography collection is from the post-World War II era, especially from 1950 to around the end of the 1970s. The scope and also the quality of the photographs shows that during these decades it was important to document the economic upswing and the social changes of the time. Today, photographs are often taken for short-time use especially for public relations and marketing purposes. Therefore, the photography collection reflects not only press relations and public events, but also documents developments in the architecture of bank buildings and the technological progress of the company. An interesting theme during this period was also the 'documentation' of staff activities. Company excursions, competitions, staff balls, art and cultural events, and other

similar events: a precursor to 'work-life-balance'.

A great source of photographic materials are the bank's internal publications held in our library. These photographs, together with texts, are featured in our projects and in our public relations work, and we often use them in the digital form of scans (Photograph 5).

### **Digitalization—Upside down**

As of the end of 1970s, the approach to photography changed with respect to both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Snapshots began to be taken by amateur photographers and these started to replace the work of professional photographers.

From then on, hardly any pictures were collected and stored. This gap closed again at the end of 1990s. This trend was driven mainly by digitalization and the creation of new business units and the restructuring of existing business units. In recent decades, the trend has shifted back to professional photography.

Digitization is confronting us with new challenges. Classic photography is losing ground. Formerly, the motto

was to save as many photographs as possible. In the age of digitization, this approach has been turned upside down. Now, the focus is on selecting from the huge amounts of information that reaches us from the many business units. What is worth saving for the longer-term? At present, we are developing a strategy for our digital photography collection.

Essentially, it is about creating optimal filters and a relevant referencing system for the Corporate Archives.

### **Our collection—Highlights**

We would like to present some of the highlights of our collection based on its main themes (see Facts & figures).

#### **History of architecture**

Our section on the history of architecture makes up a large portion of our photography collection. Comprehensive photographic series in the form of prints or large format diapositives not only reveal trends in urban architecture, but also developments and changes in the exterior and interior design of bank buildings and customer service areas (Photograph 6–8).

As the collection contains a wealth of photographs on the subject of architecture, we published the first volume of our Corporate Archives publication series

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11. 1969, Simmering branch in Vienna, Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives



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14



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12. 1972, Tram. Advertising in public spaces for World Savings Day was widespread. For example, in Graz for Steiermärkische Sparkasse. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives / Rauchenwald Collection, Steiermärkische Sparkasse

13. 1954, World Savings Day: A big crowd, Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives

14. Erste österreichische Spar-Casse invites you to visit the new branch at Gersthofe-Straße 20. Photo Credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives

15. Germany works and saves. Foto credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives/Rauchenwald Collection, Steiermärkische Sparkasse



16

16 & 17. 1968, SPARDAT, construction of the computing centre SPARDAT, from transport to implementation. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives



18. 1968, Computing centre: The electronic data storage devices are prepared at the SPARDAT computing centre that contain the journal entries for same-day entry and are sent to all branches in the country through the SPARDAT electronic network. Photo credit: Erste Group Bank AG, Corporate Archives

in 2020: *A short history of the long development of Erste branches.* It covered the establishment of branches ranging from the first branch established in 1819 at the parish office St. Leopold in the second district of Vienna up until the present day. Our focus was to analyze different ways of interacting with customers ranging from the era of teller counters with metal grills to contemporary customer service areas (Photographs 9 and 10).

In the late 60s Erste became a pioneer in displaying contemporary art and embraced the avant-garde. The gallery which opened in the branch in the working-class district of Simmering was an innovative institution in Austria at the time. The aim was to bring Austrian and international contemporary art to the working class. Inclusion is a relatively new concept in museum discourse and practice. This was also true of our savings banks at the time (Photograph 11).

### **World Savings Day**

The World Savings Day is an excellent example of the business and savings culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from our large collection of posters and World Savings Day gifts, photographs help us communicate the importance of this significant institution.

At the International Savings Bank Congress in Milano in 1924, the resolution was passed to launch an 'International Savings Day' starting in 1925. After a long phase of hyperinflation, the initial aim of the savings banks and commercial banks was to regain the trust of customers and savers, and in this manner strengthen the economy. The project was highly successful.

Between 1938 to 1944, the day was renamed 'German Savings Day' and savings were requisitioned to finance the war. After the monetary policy turmoil of the immediate post-war period, the World Savings Day was reintroduced in 1952. From then on, it turned into a type of holiday for savings banks and their customers and was a great success in the ensuing decades. Gifts handed out at the World Savings Days were very popular. Main target group for these gifts were children and young people. Besides their 'bright eyes', the Savings Day gifts were an important instrument of financial education, or 'financial literacy' as we call it today (Photographs 12 and 13).

After 1980, World Savings Day lost its holiday atmosphere and became an 'open-house day'. Adults were informed of new banking products, especially about alternative saving forms and securities. We still aim to encourage young people to save money and to promote their financial literacy.

### **'Kinodia' (Cinema advert slides)**

For many decades, movie theatres were 'the' central location for visual communication and served an important social function. Before the start of a movie, many companies used the possibility of advertising with cinema slide ads. During the Nazi-Regime commercial cinema ad slides were replaced by propaganda slides. After World War II slides slots returned to their original advertising purposes.

We are proud at Corporate Archives that we have been able to compile a representative cross-section of the period from the 1930s until the early 1970s. A particularly interesting aspect of these slides is that they often combine photographic and graphic elements. A major benefit was that apart from using the advertising images throughout Austria, ad slides could also be used to advertise new local or regional branches in many districts and regions (Photographs 14 and 15).

### **Early computing centre Erste Bank and SPARDAT**

The history of comprehensive data collection and processing starts in 1963. The exponential growth in the number of giro accounts could no longer be handled locally by the branches or savings banks; this made it necessary to switch to a modern data management system.

In 1968, the computing centre for Erste Bank on Neutorgasse in the first district of Vienna was completed. In the same year, SPARDAT was founded as a service organization for the savings banks throughout Austria. So Erste played a pioneering role in the Austrian banking industry.

The introduction of a mainframe computer brought about speedier data processing and made it possible to handle the surge in customer demand. In a single day, it was possible to record all account data, evaluate it, process it and return it in perfect quality to the branches of Erste and the savings banks (Photographs 16–18).

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### Our project–Highlights

In this final section, we list several projects that have drawn on photographic materials from our collection. As mentioned, we record and analyze our photographs on a project-by-project basis. Many of the projects were started on the initiative of Corporate Archives, while others were launched in response to internal and external requests. Here is a small selection that illustrates the scope of our activities:

### 2020—200 years of Erste

We were able to make substantial contributions to our two-hundred-year jubilee:

- Jubilee Book *Arbeite, Sammle, Vermehre* (Work, Collect, Enlarge), 2019
- Internal publication for all employees, 2019
- TV spot Marie Schwarz, 2019<sup>2</sup>
- History Website ‘#GLAUBANDICH 200 – Eine Reise durch die Zeit’ (‘#BELIEVEINYOURSELF 200\_ A Time Travel’); Erste Group Bank AG, Erste Bank und Sparkassengruppe (produced by papabogner gmbh) on the 200-year anniversary of Erste, 2019<sup>3</sup>
- Exhibition at the Financial Life Park (FLip): ‘1819: Der Beginn unserer Zukunft. Wien im Gründungsjahr der “Ersten oesterreichischen Spar-Casse”’ (‘1819: The beginning of our future, Vienna in the founding year of “Erste oesterreichische Spar-Casse”’) The project, which was implemented in 2019, was especially targeting young people and aimed to depict the living conditions of different social classes around 1819

### Exhibitions

- Exhibition ‘Corporate Archives am Campus’ 2017
- Several exhibitions at branches and savings banks

### Publication Corporate Archives

Volume 01, Corporate Archives: *Von 1819 bis in die Zukunft: Eine kurze Geschichte der langen Entwicklung der Erste-Filialen* (‘From 1819 until the future: A brief history of the long development of Erste branches’), 2020

### Facts & figures

Archives - Equipment and technology

Depository size: 710 m<sup>2</sup> / 2.4 walking km / 6 archive rooms

Archive collection 07/2020: 100,000 (rounded)

Written materials: 28,000

Collection of objects: 20,000

Collection of posters: 1,000

Library: 7,000

Audio-visual media (images/film/sound): 31,000, of which

photographic material: 13,000

Archival materials not yet recorded in inventory: 13,000

Photography Collection - Themes

Architecture

World Savings Day/savings

Events

Advertising/marketing/sponsoring

IT development

### Authors’ profiles

Norbert Bacher studied history and German philology at the University of Salzburg. He was a freelance historian and project developer in the years 1989 to 2007. From 1997 to 2004 he was university assistant at ‘Institut für Design’, University for Applied Arts, Vienna, supporting a range of art projects. From 1997, he acted as CEO at ‘fourcon Culture Development Management GmbH’ where he developed exhibitions and museum projects and worked at the planning and creation of the archives. Since the beginning of 2018, he is a staff member of Erste Group Bank AG, Head of Corporate Archives.

Elisabeth Lukas studied image science at the Donau-Universität Krems and carried out projects in document management and collections management. Since 2017 she is an employee of Erste Group Bank AG, responsible for digital collections management, archival processes, digitization projects and strategies, photography and media archives.

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1 <https://www.scope.ch/en/>

2 The Future is yours [Langfassung] - YouTube

3 <https://www.sparkasse.at/sgruppe/wir-ueber-uns/200-jahre#1819>