

A “unique” collection

CATALONIA TODAY
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Catalonia Today readers will be familiar with Josep Bosch and his spectacular collection of newspapers marking some of the key moments in modern history. Every month, the Front Pages through History section features an historical front page from the collection along

Josep Bosch's Collection of some 18,000 historical newspapers finds new home at Swiss foundation

with a commentary written by Josep himself. Over 50 years, Josep amassed 18,000 newspapers reflecting major historical events in 70 countries.

Yet, the Josep Bosch Collection now has a new home, after the Martin Bodmer Foundation in Geneva, Switzerland, acquired it thanks to the support of a patron, meaning that this valuable academic asset will become publicly available to historians, researchers and students alike. The Martin Bodmer Foundation houses some of the great texts of world literature and history, from first editions of Gutenberg's Bible and Shakespeare to papyrus scrolls from ancient Egypt.

A new home overlooking Lake Geneva

JOSEP BOSCH
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In 2014, Swiss radio called it “an incredible collection, probably unique in the world”. The Times of London branded a 2002 exhibition in Madrid as “riveting”. Different newspapers have said it is full of gems. The Spanish government paraded over a hundred front pages in exhibitions in Madrid and Latin America to promote the Historical Memory Law of 2007 and stress the need to restore the dignity of all those who suffered political persecution and learn from past political conflicts. The Swiss federal government sponsored an exhibition in Geneva in 2014, the centenary year of the First World War, to convey the message of Switzerland's commitment to peace.

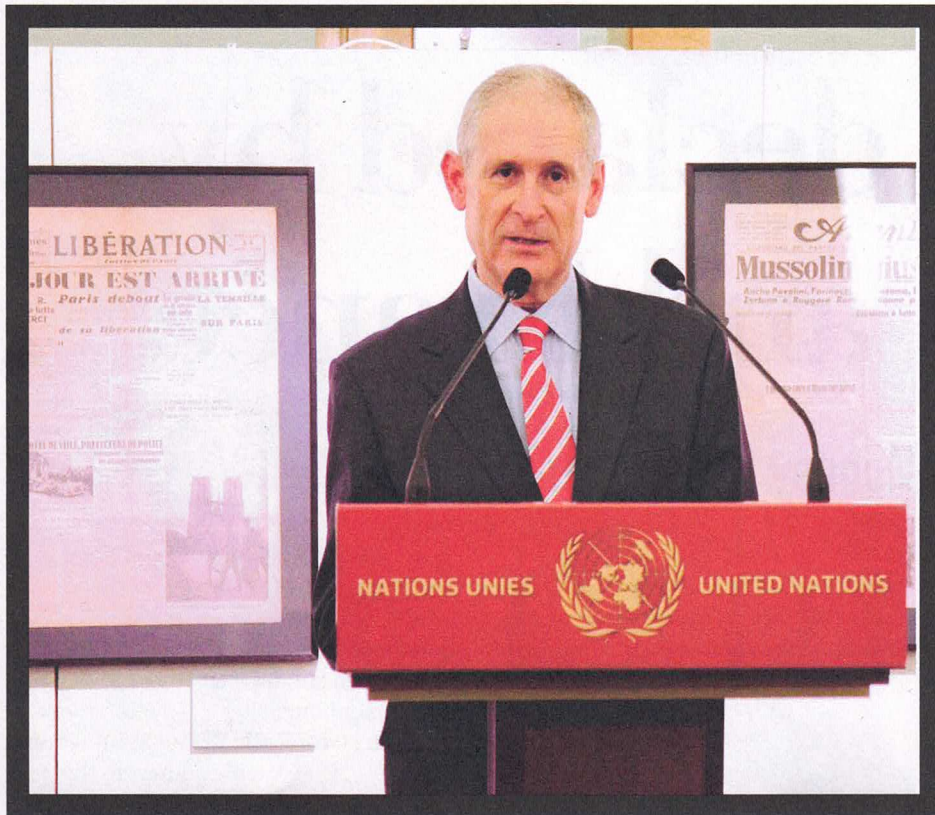
What convinced the Swiss that they wanted to own the Josep Bosch Collection was an article last September in the Tribune de Genève with the headline: “Une collection unique pourrait quitter Genève” after I told a friend at the newspaper that I was about to move the collection to Spain after my retirement as head of media of the World Trade Organization.



The chairman of a powerful Geneva philanthropic organisation, which patronises art, culture and medical and humanitarian activities among others, read the newspaper article and said: “No! this does not leave Geneva!” Et voilà. One day I got an early morning phone call informing me that the patron had found a place to host my collection. And the place could definitely not be better.

The place is none other than La Fondation Martin Bodmer, the Martin Bodmer Foundation, in Cologny, overlooking Lake Geneva, which is like a sacred temple for historical books and documents, and whose Bibliotheca Bodmeriana hosts 150,000 items from 80 different cultures spanning thousands of years of human civilization. The foundation was delighted to find a patron who would foot the bill for acquiring the 20,000 historic newspapers that make up the collection. And I was also delighted. I know that in the foundation's library, where the newspapers will be kept, documents, books and papers are treated with the utmost care and attention. My beloved yellowing newspapers will be side by side with some of history's most valuable paper relics, at the disposal of researchers, students and experts.

I felt some regret to see my treasured newspapers, which I've lived with for over 50 years, leave my garage in Grand Saconnex, in Geneva. But I'm sure “Tricky”, the family cat, will see it differently, as it can go back to spending time in the garage, its favourite spot, where the aroma of old paper will linger for a few more weeks now the newspapers have gone.



Josep Bosch talking about his newspaper collection at a UN exhibition in Geneva./ ACANU

JOSEP BOSCH COLLECTOR AND WRITER

The first draft of history

NEIL STOKES

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How did the collection start?

The first newspaper I bought and still keep as a collector's item is a French newspaper no longer published (France-soir) with a huge headline on the May 1968 student marches and disturbances in Paris. From then on, I decided to keep newspapers of important historical events. Later, I decided to keep them in different languages, with a particular emphasis on the newspapers published in the city or the country in which the event took place. At a certain moment I started digging into the past in flea markets, old books stores and the internet. This idea came to me when I was in London and I saw there was a market for old newspapers in Camden Town market. That was in the late seventies, when I was there as a foreign correspondent.

What has the collection taught you about newspapers, and collecting?

It's true that newspapers are the first draft of history. You can see the passions of the

moment reflected in the pages of newspapers depicting historical events. I learned a lot of history through collecting these newspapers and I became even more interested in history in general. I also saw the power of dictatorial regimes to influence newspapers and try to manipulate events and change history. And I realised that collecting can become an incredibly rewarding passion that can also become a dangerous – and costly – one if you don't know how to control it.

Did travelling the world for your work help your collection?

Indeed, I would always devote some time during my trips to look for particular newspapers or specialised shops or even other collectors with whom I would exchange items.

Could you pick out a few newspapers you think are worth highlighting?

I have a good sequence of the events that led up to the First World War, including two special editions of a newspaper from Sarajevo (in German) with the news of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in June 1914. Some collectors say this is one of

the best newspapers in the Collection, timely, rare and extremely difficult to find. I also have a good sequence on the Russian Revolution of 1917, both the abdication of the czar and the Bolshevik uprising, all in Russian. I also have clandestine French and Belgian newspapers from the Second World War, the last newspapers published in Berlin the week before the end of that war, and also a publication in Chinese by the students during the protest of Tiananmen Square, in Beijing, before the massacre that took place there in 1989. From the Spanish Civil War, I have about 4,000 newspapers from both sides. Difficult to pick one.

What does the collection mean to you?

A lot. Spending time looking at the newspapers can transport me to important events in the past and how newspapers reported them. It's particularly interesting to see a change of regime or the victory of a revol-

YOU SEE THE PASSIONS OF THE MOMENT REFLECTED IN THE PAGES OF NEWSPAPERS COLLECTING CAN BECOME A REWARDING PASSION BUT IT CAN ALSO BE DANGEROUS

ution. That's what I like most. The newspapers the day before something and the newspapers the day after. I have many examples of this. The Cuban revolution, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War.

What will happen to the collection?

The new owners have a lot of plans to use it for cultural purposes. They are planning a major exhibition in three years' time to introduce the best items to the public. They know how to organise these kinds of events. I look forward to it.

What advice do you have for anyone starting a collection like this?

Whoever likes history and journalism would understand the merits of a collection like this. It's only a matter of searching like an archaeologist. There are places to look and there is a market for buyers and sellers.

What's next for Josep Bosch?

Now I write books: historical reports. I'm writing a biography of a Spanish journalist, a Galician woman, Sofia Casanova, who witnessed and reported the first and second world wars and the Russian Revolution. A remarkable achievement for a woman in those days.