

The archives of the Department of Sports of the city of Geneva: an essential part of the Geneva sports memory Towards a coordinated acquisition policy for the Geneva sports archives?

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As in many cities, sport took off in Geneva in the last quarter of the 19th century. Although the city of Geneva¹ initially provided and maintained the stadiums and sports fields after the Second World War, in response to an ever-increasing demand from the population, clubs and associations, its involvement acquired a new dimension. In 1950, after a reorganization within the City Council, the authorities created a “Sports Department”. Modest in its beginnings, it diversified its activities over the decades and developed strongly, becoming a key element in sporting life in Geneva².

The archives of this Department are almost completely preserved. After archival evaluation, they were transferred to the Archive of the City of Geneva (AVG) three times (2010, 2015 and 2024). The collection consists of more than 1,800 articles, and occupies more than 150 linear meters of shelving. Although it is still pending processing, its contents can be seen in the deposit slips. Rich and diverse, it contains information relating to the Department’s management and administration, accounting, human resources, infrastructure, security, planning, communication and promotion, grant processing, and also the financing or organization of sporting events and others. In addition, a rather large batch of photographs completes this set.

In terms of events, the city of Geneva has not limited itself to local and national competitions, and has also supported important international events, including several European and world championships³. It has also co-operated in several stages of cycling races, such as the Tour de France. A large number of documents preserved in the collections bear witness to this international commitment. Over time,

¹ The city of Geneva is one of the 45 municipalities that make up the canton of Geneva. With more than 200,000 inhabitants, it is the most populated. The total population of the canton currently exceeds 500,000 inhabitants.

² To give us an idea of this metamorphosis, we mention the fact that from 6 employees and an annual budget of about 300,000 CHF (Swiss francs) [1 CHF = 1.05 EUR, in June 2024] it had in 1950, the Department has grown to the 189 employees and more than CHF 51 million it has currently. The annual grant allocation has steadily increased to CHF 6.1 million (2024 budget). The number of infrastructures managed by the Department has increased significantly.

³ Like the ice hockey world championships in 1961 and 1971, figure skating in 1968 and 1986, curling in 1993, climbing in 1994 or even pétanque in 1964, 1972, 1982 and 2003; to name just these examples.

the city has not only supported elite athletes⁴, but has also promoted the practice of sports among citizens of all ages and conditions, through various initiatives, such as sports schools, the “Leisure and sport” program (aimed at the over 55’s), the “Sports badge”, introductory courses in different sports and, of course, the provision of sports facilities.

In Switzerland, it is the municipalities that take the lead in sport. As a result, the city council’s collections are particularly important in Geneva’s sporting scene. Once discussed and described, it will undoubtedly constitute a fundamental source both for studying the development of sport and for studying the public policies supporting sport in Geneva. We hope that long-term co-operations can be established to enrich the collections through studies and exhibitions.

Unfortunately, the knowledge we have of the history of sport in Geneva is still considerably incomplete. One of the reasons is that there are few archives related to this topic in public institutions. Apart from the collection of the Department of Sports, there are only three sets available in the Archives of the City of Geneva (AVG), for example.⁵ Our colleagues at the State Archives (in French Archives d’État, AEG), for their part, also keep a few collections. Furthermore, there is no institution in Geneva that collects sports archives, nor, to my knowledge, a source guide or inventory of sports-related archives. Sports archives are still largely *uncharted territory*. An identification and awareness campaign would be needed to promote the conservation of sports archives and athletes. In some cases transfers (donations) of documents to public archives could be considered. Only if in concert with the institutions, or in a partnership with the federations, associations and clubs could it be possible to establish a true policy in the matter. This essential work remains to be done. The city of Geneva could play a decisive role in this process. The time has come to act.

For more information about the Department of Sports of the City of Geneva:

<https://www.geneve.ch/themes/sport>

<https://www.geneve.ch/publication/plan-directeur-sports-2022-2030>

For more information about the Archives of the City of Geneva (AVG): <https://archives.geneve.ch/>

⁴ In terms of professional sports, it should be mentioned that on February 20, 2024, the Genève-Servett HC hockey club was proclaimed European Ice Hockey Champion at the Patinoire des Vernets, a building constructed and managed by the City Council of Geneva. In 1958, when it was inaugurated, this ice rink was considered a model example.

⁵ All three are linked to mountaineering, namely the collections of the Geneva section of the Swiss Alpine Club (CAS), the Gentiane, a “women’s mountain club”, and the Climbers’ Club of Geneva.