

A Fabulous Napoleonic Donation

An event of extraordinary symbolic significance recently took place on the other side of the Atlantic. Doctor Ben Weider donated his incomparable Napoleonic collection to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, favouring his birthplace over many other cities in the running. It will be housed in a huge, exclusive gallery, intended to become the most important “Napoleonic Museum” outside France, under the skilful and attentive supervision of directors Bernard Lamarre and Nathalie Bondil.

Ben Weider has devoted over fifty years and spent an immense fortune to assemble his collection, considered one of most important on the planet and the focus of universal envy and admiration. Its enormous variety includes extremely rare items such as bronze and marble statues, many portraits and numerous personal effects of Napoleon 1, including the legendary hat worn during the Russian campaign. Also noteworthy are strands of hair that have been owned by George Sand and Marshal Bertrand.



Ben Weider proudly holds the hat that Napoleon wore during the campaign of Borodino [1812].

Doctor Weider is a passionate admirer of Napoleon and has worked for forty years to defend and promote the Emperor's slander-tainted memory. A generous patron, he promotes historical studies and publications on the Napoleonic period around the world. As part of this mission, he founded and still chairs the International Napoleonic Society (INS), a non-profit, cultural organization dedicated to genuine studies of the Napoleonic era. Established in 43 countries, the SNI reaches around the whole world via its Internet site, which is more and more widely consulted and currently receives 250,000 visitors per month from 130 countries. The Society is also active in providing partnerships in various Napoleonic celebrations.

Ben Weider has published many books on Napoleon 1, including *Napoléon est-il mort empoisonné?*, (in French), *Assassination at St Helena* (in English) translated and published in 44 languages, with over a million copies sold. Today, the question mark in the title is no longer needed, since the author has produced scientific proof of the Emperor's poisoning on Sainte-Hélène. His most recent work, *Napoléon défenseur immolé de la paix*, co-authored with your humble correspondent, is currently an immense success in the United States and all English-speaking countries under the title *The Wars against Napoleon: Debunking the Myth of the Napoleonic War*. It is also in circulation in Russia and India and will very soon appear in China, Korea and Spain.

The devotion of Ben Weider to Napoleon, to sport and to health, has earned him four honorary doctorates and, as far as we know, he is the only Canadian to have been awarded four prestigious decorations, namely, the Order of Canada, the National Order of Quebec, the rank of commander of the Order of St. John and, the most logically deserved of all because founded by Napoleon himself, the Cross of Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, recognizing in addition his renowned contribution to Franco-Canadian friendship.

The mission of a museum is to preserve for all time. By founding the Musée Napoléon, the fabulous Weider donation will for ever link the names of the legendary hero and the man who has devoted his life to him.