

Rafael Casanova's House

Visit





Historical synthesis

Rafael Casanova, Chief Councillor of Barcelona and hero of the defence of the city during the siege it was subjected to in 1714 by Bourbon troops during the War of the Spanish Succession, was born in this 16th-century house.

The exhibition is about the history of the Casanova family and of Moià, as well as about Rafael Casanova and his political and military activity, especially during the siege of Barcelona during the War of the Spanish Succession.

As well as this exhibition, the building also contains the municipal archive of Moià and the town's museum, which contains an archaeological collection, mostly from the cave at Toll.



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"That 11 September..."

Rafael Casanova and the War of the Spanish Succession (1705-1714)

Rafael Casanova i Comes (Moià, circa 1660; Sant Boi de Llobregat, 1743), was the last Chief Councillor of the city of Barcelona. As such, despite being a man of peace, a man of the Law and a man willing to reach a compromise, he became one of the pillars and leaders of the city's resistance against the troops of Phillip V, king of Spain.

Side by side with Villarroel, Dalmau, Feliu de la Penya, Moragues and so many others, Casanova represents the struggle of an entire people to preserve the rights and liberties it had taken them centuries to achieve.

This is the reason why, over the course of the years, he has become a referent and symbol of Catalonia's struggle to recuperate its liberties.



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Family origins

Rafael Casanova i Comes was born in Moià around 1660. He was one of the eleven children of Rafael Casanova i Solà, a native of Moià, and Maria Comes i Sors, who was from Granollers. At the time he was born, the Casanovas were the prosperous owners of farms and land and their activities were centred on trade in grain and wool.

The family had a long tradition of involvement in public affairs. His grandfather Francesc Casanova had been a captain in the Santa Unió and had fought against bandits, and his father Rafael Casanova had been head of the Moianès district militia (1650), town councillor (1652), deputy chief magistrate for Moià and the Moianès district (1659) and, shortly before his death in 1682, he became the town's mayor.

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Moià at the time of the first Casanovas

15th to 17th centuries

The first Casanovas found in Moià a town that was economically very prosperous. It had a market, a fair and an incipient quarter for craftsmen who, through great economic sacrifice, had managed to free themselves from the feudal yoke.

During the mid-15th century the town of Moià was formed by the streets named Joies, Forn, Rectoria, El Palau de Dalt and Jussà (the modern-day Carrer Carreró) as well as a number of narrow thoroughfares or alleys. It had been a walled town since the 14th century and it had four gates named Barcelona, Riquer, Murat and Rodórs. There were two defence towers: the Barcelona tower and the Rodórs tower. Beyond the walls were the Hospital and two open spaces called the "Joc de la Pilota", where ball-games were played, and the "Camp de la Fira", where fairs and fêtes were held.

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The Casanovas, a wealthy family

An important source of income for the Casanova family came from the sale of wool which, either from their own flocks or purchased elsewhere in Catalonia, they sold in Moià and towns in the surrounding area.

We know of the existence of weavers in Moià from a 13th-century document, but its period of greatest splendour was between the 17th and 18th centuries when more than 100 looms were in operation and employment was provided for approximately 1,300 people, most of them women who were spinners. As a sign of their social ascendancy, the Casanovas endowed the Mare de Deu del Roser altar, a work by the sculptor Pau Sunyer, in the church of Santa Maria de Moià. At the same time they exercised functions as church administrators and workers and various members of the family entered the Church.

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From Moià to Barcelona

Like many younger sons of well-to-do families, Rafael Casanova was sent to study and this he did at the Estudi General in Barcelona where he read philosophy and civil and canon law.

The choice of a career in law was no accident. At that time it was highly prestigious and, furthermore, it was a sure way of achieving rapid social ascent. Having a jurist in the family could also only have benefited the Casanovas' interests.

In 1696, Rafael Casanova married Maria Bosch i Barba, the daughter and heiress of an important family in Sant Boi de Llobregat. The couple had four children: Francesc, who died in 1710; two twins, Pau and Teresa, who died in infancy, and Rafael, who would remain at his father's side all his life.

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A king for Spain

Charles II, king of Spain, died in 1700. His will named as his heir Philip of Anjou, nephew of Louis XIV of France. A few months later, on 18 February 1701, Philip entered Madrid and was proclaimed king as Philip V. The designation of Philip of Anjou as king, although it suited the Castilians very well, was not accepted by the European powers that feared the bloc thus formed between Spain and the France of Louis XIV.

In September 1701, the Grand Alliance of the Hague was formed between England, Holland and the Austro-Hungarian empire, which put forward the candidature of archduke Charles, son of the emperor Leopold of Austria. In March 1702 the allies declared war on Philip V and on France. The following year they were joined by Portugal and Leopold, in Vienna, proclaimed archduke Charles king of Spain.



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Vigatans and botiflers

At first, Philip V was accepted by the Catalans. The new king made a number of significant gestures to Catalonia, such as going to Barcelona to pledge to observe the Constitutions.

In 1701 the king called the Corts. Although the principality received important concessions, there was serious tension between Catalan representatives and the new king's ministers, particularly because of his absolutist methods. Understanding between the institutions further deteriorated because of the haughtiness and repressive policies of the new viceroy of Catalonia, Francisco Fernández de Velasco.

Soon, the Hapsburg option began to receive greater support in Catalonia, particularly amongst the minor nobility and rural landlords, the emerging middle class and the lower clergy. It was fuelled by, amongst other factors, a strong Francophobe sentiment accumulated over years of constant French aggression on Catalonia.

Supporters of the archduke became known as "vigatans", while members of the Philip V faction were known as "botiflers".

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Long live Charles III!

On 10 August 1705, the Alliance's forces landed at Altea (Valencia), thus initiating the occupation of the Catalano-Aragonese crown. At the same time, revolts broke out amongst the populace in various places throughout Catalonia and Valencia.

The flow of support for the archduke came to a head with the Pact of Genoa, signed in 1705 between Catalan representatives and ambassadors of queen Anne of England. Under the terms of the pact, the English promised military support to the Catalans and offered guarantees that Catalonia's constitutions would be maintained in return for the principality's rising in favour of Charles III. In compliance with this pact, alliance forces disembarked in Barcelona and on 7 November 1705 the archduke entered the city in triumph. Having pledged to observe the Constitutions, he was proclaimed king as Charles III. The monarch immediately called another sitting of the Corts.

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When the evil comes from Almansa...

The defeat of the Alliance forces at Almansa, on 25 April 1707, facilitated the Bourbon occupation of Aragon and Valencia and gave them military supremacy throughout the peninsula. Two months later, the special privileges of Aragon and Valencia were abolished by royal decree.

Even though subsequent campaigns brought some victories to the archduke's forces, even allowing him to occupy Madrid for a short time, the decisive encounters at Brihuega and Villaviciosa obliged him to retreat to Catalonia.

The occupation of Catalonia began, propitiated by the numerical superiority of the Bourbon forces and the degree of disorganization in the Alliance army: in 1707 Lleida was taken; in 1708, Tortosa; in 1711 Girona and eventually Tarragona was occupied in 1713 after a bloody siege. Bourbon occupation brought with it a systematic plan for the repression of Hapsburg sympathizers, with imprisonments and executions, as well as an abusive taxation policy towards towns regarded as disloyal.

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Privileges or death!

The death of the emperor of Austria in 1711 and archduke Charles' ascent to the imperial throne brought with it a change in the balance of Europe. England, which had waged the greater part of the war, was now alarmed by a possible union of the Austrian and Spanish crowns and from this time onward turned to diplomacy.

With the signing of the peace treaties of Utrecht and Rastatt (1713–1714) the war came to an end in Europe and Philip V was recognized as king of Spain. Immediately, the Alliance force evacuated Catalonia (March 1713).

With most of its territory occupied by the Bourbons, and abandoned by its allies, Catalonia was left to carry on the war on its own.

Nonetheless, seeing what had happened in Valencia and Aragon, members of the Catalan Corts, meeting in Barcelona in July 1713, decided to go on fighting, in a last, desperate attempt to save Catalan institutions, laws and liberties.

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Rafael Casanova, Councillor and Honoured Citizen of Barcelona

On 25 January 1706, Rafael Casanova was appointed, by the traditional method of drawing lots, Third Councillor of the city of Barcelona. A month later, archduke Charles granted him the title of Honoured Citizen of Barcelona.

On 30 November 1713, in spite of pressures to prorogue the Councillors' term of office because of the exceptional situation brought about by the siege of Barcelona, the normal procedure for the appointment of councillors was observed by the Council of a Hundred, the city's highest body of government. In this process, Rafael Casanova was chosen as Chief Councillor.

His acceptance of the post under these circumstances demonstrates Casanova's high degree of commitment to the Hapsburg cause and to the country.

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Catalonia resists

At the beginning of July 1713, Bourbon forces under the duke of Populi besieged Barcelona. A Franco-Spanish squadron blockaded the city from the sea. In spite of this the siege was often evaded and food and arms reached the city both by land and by sea. With the country practically under occupation, only the castle of Cardona remained as a stronghold. The Catalan forces who were still fighting in the interior used Cardona as a base.

In the middle of the summer of 1714 the siege still continued, but was making no progress. Louis XIV, now relieved of the pressure of war in Europe, sent Philip V large reinforcements under the duke of Berwick, who tightened the siege and subjected the city to constant bombardments, during which more than 35,000 projectiles fell on Barcelona.

On 3 September, the duke of Berwick demanded Barcelona's surrender. After a tense meeting, the city's Council of War, headed by Antoni de Villarroel and Rafael Casanova, opted for resistance.

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Casanova, defender of Barcelona

The post of Chief Councillor brought with it the command of the "Coronela" (the city's guild militia) and the governorship of the defending city, at least nominally. No sooner had he taken office, Casanova applied great energy and revealed an evident tendency to concentrate power in his own person, which brought him into conflict with the other military commanders in the city on more than one occasion.

Being aware of the weakness of the city's defences, he was in favour of listening to the conditions for surrender offered by the Bourbons on 3 September 1714. However, when the city decided to continue to resist, Casanova faced up to his responsibilities and, raising the city's banner, he was the first to join the fray in the most dangerous places, where the defence was wavering.

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That 11 September

The morning of 11 September, Bourbon troops penetrated Barcelona's defences. Rafael Casanova, raising the standard of Santa Eulàlia, the city's patron saint, went to the Sant Pere bastion where he was wounded by a bullet. After hours of fighting, Villarroel ordered the surrender to be sounded and then negotiations began about the terms. On 15 September came the capitulation of Cardona, the last bastion of resistance in Catalonia.

The king of Spain's troops occupied the city and the Catalans had to endure policies of repression, extortion and retribution. Thousands of people were executed, imprisoned or forced into exile and made to pay exorbitant taxes. Catalan institutions and laws were abolished and Catalonia lost all its rights as a nation.

Rafael Casanova escaped retribution by hiding for five years, and died in Sant Boi de Llobregat on 3 March 1743.

Rafael Casanova was taken up in the 19th century by the intellectuals and politicians behind the Renaixença (the movement for the revival of Catalan language and culture) as a symbol of Catalonia's struggle for its liberties. After having been suppressed under the Franco regime, 11 September has once again been marked, since 1976, as Catalonia's national day.

