

COLLECTION HISTORY

Josef Pasqual Ferro (1753–1809), the public health officer – the prime “Stadtphysikus” – initially had the idea for a collection of specimens, but “... there was no man who had the knowledge for that”. In 1796, the medical doctor Johann Peter Frank (1745–1821), director of the general hospital, founded the Museum of Anatomical Pathology within the newly established Institute of Pathology. He appointed Aloys Rudolph Vetter (1765–1806) as an unpaid prosector and conservator of the pathological collection. After Frank and Vetter left Vienna in 1804, it was uncertain to which medical department the museum should belong.

From 1812 onwards, the personal physician of the emperor, Josef Andreas von Stifft (1760–1836), was in charge of all aspects of health and education for the entire monarchy. This led to a system of total regulation and control. Even the handling of dead bodies at the Vienna general hospital was strictly regulated, as well as the acquisition of specimens.

In 1812, Laurenz Biermayer (1778–1843) became the pathology prosector. He conducted the autopsies and managed the museum. In 1813, he started the museum’s catalog, which continues to the present day.

It was decided that “... people with a remarkable illness who died in the hospital, including the maternity clinic and the lunatic asylum, must be dissected by the prosector of pathology in the presence of the doctors. The results must be recorded, the specimens must be collected for the pathology museum and the illness must be documented.”

In 1817, Biermayer began to systematically document the autopsy protocols, a practice which continues to this day, and expanded the collection to nearly 4,000 specimens. He was dismissed in 1829 due to negligence. His assistant, Johann Wagner (1800–1832), succeeded him as the new head of the museum and the Department of Pathology. He occupied this position until his early death from tuberculosis.

From 1827 onwards, Carl von Rokitansky (1804–1878) worked at the Museum of Anatomical Pathology, beginning as an unpaid trainee. When Rokitansky became the curator of the collection, he reduced the number of specimens to 1,375, as improper preservation in alcohol had left many of the specimens in poor condition. On that occasion he also started a new catalog. Rokitansky, head of the department and full professor, increased the collection to 4,833 objects. This was essential for education and research. Many of the specimens used in his scientific studies are still well preserved today. Under his direction, the new institute building was opened in 1862, with large and bright halls for the museum.

Rokitansky’s disciple Richard Heschl (1824–1881) became his successor in 1875. He extended the museum’s collection, adding many bone specimens – mainly skulls. Another disciple of Rokitansky, Johann Kundrat (1845–1893), became chair of pathology in 1883, contributing specimens from the collection in Graz. His main interest were brain malformations, demonstrated by his first description of porencephaly and arhinocephaly from 1882.

Anton Weichselbaum’s (1845–1920) focus of interest was pathologic histology and bacteriology. He discovered micro-organisms, such as *Diplococcus Weichselbaum* causing meningitis. In 1924, Maresch (1868–1936) became head of department. He modernized the museum and opened it to medically interested visitors. In 1929, the catalog was updated. Histological sections were obtained from many specimens in order to clarify diagnosis. The collection was reorganized according to the new standards of general and special pathology. Beginning in 1936, the chair of pathology, Hermann Chiari (1897–1969), extended the museum collection to 14,000 objects. The curator Karl Portele (1912–1993) began cataloging non-inventorized objects and investigated new preparation techniques. Due to lack of space, the museum had to be cleared within one week in 1971, and the collection was moved to 14 rooms of the Lunatic Tower, resulting in separation from the general hospital. Portele became the first director of the new Federal Museum of Pathologic Anatomy in 1974. As a federal museum, it was easy to incorporate other collections from Viennese hospitals, and national and international collections. The inventory grew to almost 50,000 objects – including historical instruments. Since 2012 the collection is part of the Natural History Museum Vienna.