



INTERNATIONAL
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Historical Archives
Olympic Studies Centre

J. Sigfrid Edström

Fonds list

Overview of the content of the archives concerning his biography, mandates and activities from 1908 to 1964

14 April 2011



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Reference: CH CIO-AH A-P04

Dates: 1908-1964

Level of description: Fonds

Extent and medium: 0.42 l.m. Text documents.

Name of creator

International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Administrative / Biographical history

J. Sigfrid Edström was born on 21 November 1870 in Morlanda, a village in western Sweden. After engineering studies at the *Chalmer Technical University* in Gothenburg (Sweden), he moved to Switzerland to continue his training at the *Zurich Polytechnicum*. At this time, he became interested in sport. Throughout his studies, he practised athletics and rowing. In 1891, he even beat the Swedish 150 metres record, with a time of 16.4 seconds.

After obtaining his engineering degree, Edström left Europe for the USA, where he was employed by the *Westinghouse Electrical Manufacturing Co.* in Pittsburgh. Here, too, he continued his sports activities, joining the *Pittsburgh Athletic Club*. In 1896, he left the Pittsburgh Company to go and work for the *General Electric Co.* of New York. After that, he returned to Switzerland, where the city of Zurich employed him to work on building trams.

In 1899, he married Ruth Miriam Randall (1867-1944), an American from Chicago. They had four children: Miriam, Björn, Janesie and Lenore. A year after his wedding, Edström became Director of the Gothenburg Municipal Tramways, a post he held until 1903 when he was appointed Director of ASEA, a large Swedish electrotechnical company. He held this post until 1933, when he became Chairman of the Board.

Parallel to his work in industry, Edström was actively involved in the Swedish sports movement, but also internationally, becoming one of the most influential sportsmen of his time. Among other things, he became Chairman of the *Swedish Amateur Athletic Association* in 1901, and also chaired the Swedish Sport and Gymnastics Association until 1940. He was also the co-founder of the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) in 1913, as served as its President until 1946.

Edström contributed to the Olympic Movement in 1908, when he was named Chef de mission of the Swedish team at the Olympic Games in London. He held this position again at the Games in 1920, 1924, 1928, 1932 and 1936, as well as playing a major role in the organisation of the Games in Stockholm (1912). In 1920, Edström was co-opted as a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Sweden, after a postal vote. The following year, he was elected on to the IOC Executive Committee, and was elected Vice-President a decade later, in 1931. He held this position until being officially named IOC President in September 1946. His predecessor, Henri de Baillet-Latour, died in 1942, and Edström had served as acting President during the final years of the Second World War. Even if the IOC's activities were disrupted by the conflict – the Games in 1944 were cancelled, for example - Edström performed this difficult task with considerable aplomb. Taking advantage of his native country's neutrality during the War, he succeeded among other things in maintaining contact between the various IOC members. Then, after the conflict, he quickly convened the Executive Board, which awarded the first post-war OG to London, in 1948.

After officially becoming IOC President at the 1946 Session in Lausanne, Edström continued throughout his term of office to show the leadership and efficiency which had characterised his acting presidency. His diplomacy was, moreover, required on several occasions for managing the IOC's activities in the delicate post-war context and then during the Cold War. Among other things, he had to take the sensitive decision to exclude Japan and Germany from the Games in 1948 and work to strengthen the ties of Olympism with the USSR.

At the age of 82, Edström retired as IOC President in 1952. The same year, he was appointed IOC Honorary President by acclamation. He died in Stockholm on 18 March 1964.

**Immediate source of acquisition or transfer**

The date on which the fonds was transferred to the Archives by the IOC Document Management section is not known.

Scope and content

The fonds covers the work of J. Sigfrid Edström within the Olympic Movement as an IOC member (elected in 1920), Vice-President (1931-1946) President (1946-1952) and Honorary President (1952-1964). It also covers the relations between Edström and the IOC from 1908 onwards, before he officially became part of the Committee, mainly in his function as President of the International Amateur Athletics Federation (1913-1946). In this respect, the fonds testifies to Edström's role in the relations between the IFs and the IOC, particularly regarding the creation of the IFs' Permanent Office. From his time as an IOC member, his correspondence tells us about Edström's links with the other IOC members, and the members of the US Olympic Committee. Part of the fonds covers his interim presidency during the Second World War. In this connection, the correspondence – particularly that with the IOC Secretary General, Mrs L. Zanchi – reveals all the efforts made by Edström to maintain the IOC's activities during the conflict: correspondence with the various IOC members, organising celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the revival of the OG in 1944, managing membership subscriptions, etc. The fonds also reveals the work of Edström as President, through varied correspondence. Lastly, the fonds contains information on the creation of a commemorative medal bearing the likeness of Edström, made for his 80th birthday, and his donation of books, letters, photographs and other objects to the Olympic Movement at Mon Repos between 1953 and 1961. The fonds mainly consists of letters written or received by President Edström. It also contains circulars and some of his speeches.

Accruals

No

System of arrangement

The files are classified by subject, by document type or by activities in alphabetical order. The documents in the files are classified chronologically, from latest to earliest.

Conditions governing access

The documents are freely accessible, subject to the provisions established by the IOC to this effect.

Language / scripts of material

The documents are mainly in French and English. Some documents are in German, Italian or Spanish.

Related units of description

A J. Sigfrid Edström fonds is held by the *Swedish State Archives*.

Notes

The content of this fonds, including the Olympic identifications, are the property of the IOC.

Rules or Conventions

Description complies with ISAD(G).

Date(s) of descriptions

August 2006