

Putting a Face to an “Unknown”

By Volker Kluge

In Olympic history there is hardly left a trace, even though he was the first Chancellor of the IOC. His name was Frédéric Auckenthaler, known as Fred.¹

Even Otto Mayer, his successor from 1946 to 1964, did not know very much about him. In his memoirs he states: “From the Minutes we have been able to establish that we are talking about a Chancellor called Fred Auckenthaler (Lausanne). It is probable that he was appointed by the Executive Commission. He seems to have been nominated around 1922–3.”²

In 1922 the City of Lausanne allocated the IOC two rooms on the ground floor of the freshly restored Villa Mon-Repos for its museum and a room on the third floor, which was used as an office. At the same time Coubertin moved his residence to Lake Geneva. He probably engaged the 23 year old Fred Auckenthaler, who had just completed his pedagogical studies at the University of Lausanne, as “office manager”. The decisive factor may have been that he had known his father, Dr. Max Auckenthaler, for years.

In his memoirs Coubertin describes how in 1903 he took advantage of a favourable opportunity to study Swiss institutions and get to know the new system of military training. From there he took an interest in the Swiss Confederation, which up to then had played no part in the Olympic Movement: “I had begun with Lausanne and why, in trying in woo Lausanne, I had resorted to the stratagem of a scientific congress.”³

Among the establishments he had visited was the famous Institut Auckenthaler⁴ in Ouchy – today an area of Lausanne in which the IOC has its Headquarters. The private school known as “La Villa” had an international reputation. It was modelled on English lines in that sport played an important part in the young people’s educational programme. The conditions were favourable: there was a gym hall and a separate sports ground by Lake Geneva.

Among the sports favoured by Dr. Max Auckenthaler were football and ice hockey. The FC La Villa Ouchy, called into life by him, had in 1895 been among the founding members of the Swiss Football Federation (SFV). In 1897/98 the team played in the top category. The HC La Villa became national ice hockey champion in 1909/10 season, also thanks partly to North American and British boarders.



Coubertin was still enthusing about his impressions three years later in the *Revue Olympique*. The title of his article was: “La Suisse, reine des sports” – “Switzerland, Queen of Sports”.⁵ The Olympic Congress he mentioned, whose theme was to be sports psychology, did not finally take place until 1913 after a two year delay. Before that – in January – the President of the Organising Committee, Dr. Jean-Marc Morax, died suddenly, whereupon Auckenthaler took on his duties. There were numerous festivities in the programme, described in detail by Coubertin in his memoirs.⁶ Two years later, on 10th April 1915, Auckenthaler was witness to the solemn act in the Lausanne Council Chamber, when Coubertin sealed the IOC’s relocation with his signature.

Auckenthaler’s younger son served the IOC for three years as Chancellor; from 1923 in addition as Treasurer. That the young man fulfilled his office to the satisfaction of the mostly elderly gentlemen can be seen from the Minutes of the 1923 Session, at which the President thanked him for “son excellente collaboration”.⁷ Before and during the 1924 Olympic Games he was not only a representative of the IOC’s interests but also an active participant. At the Chamonix Winter Games he played in the Swiss ice hockey team.

Auckenthaler bid his farewell to the IOC at the 1925 Session in Prague at the same moment as his mentor. He justified his departure on the grounds of a forthcoming long absence. The journey probably took him to London, as he married a British woman there. But the marriage did not last long. Soon he returned to Switzerland, where he started a family in Nyon and worked as a language and mathematics teacher. From 1941 to 1944 he was an inspector in the German prisoner of war camps in the service of the protecting power, Switzerland; next he was the leader for six months of the St. Cergue work camp for refugees⁸. He died on 17th November 1946 in Mulhouse. ■

1 Frédéric Louis Henri Oscar Auckenthaler, born 29th September 1899 in Lausanne.

2 Otto Mayer, *A travers les anneaux olympiques*, Cailler, Geneva 1960, p. 101.

3 Pierre de Coubertin, *Memoirs*, IOC, Lausanne 1993, p. 145–146.

4 The ‘Boy’s Institute’ opened in 1840. It was bought in 1864 by Christian Auckenthaler; in 1882 his son Max (1858–1932) took over the management.

5 *Revue Olympique*, November 1906, pp. 163–165.

6 *Memoirs*, p. 151.

7 Minutes, IOC Session Rome, April 1923, p. 31.

8 Swiss Federal Archives, Berne, E4260D#1987/2#80*.

Who is who? No picture of the first IOC Chancellor Fred Auckenthaler can be found in the Olympic Studies Centre or in the museums of Lausanne, so we must be content with this photo of the Swiss ice hockey team at the first Olympic Winter Games at Chamonix in 1924. The 24 year old played in the attack, which managed only two goals in three preliminary matches. On the other hand the team conceded 53 goals – these included a 0–33 defeat at the hands of Canada, still a record margin for an Olympic ice hockey match.

Photos: Official Olympic Report Paris 1924, Volker Kluge Archive



The Swiss attaché Fred Auckenthaler (right) in August 1943 in the POW camp Dulag I in Barth, Germany, where during the Second World War British and American airmen were held prisoner. Left: Secretary Burchard.