

# Gillis Grafström – the Artist among the Figure Skaters

By Volker Kluge

Gillis Grafström, the most successful Olympic figure skater in the world with three gold medals and one silver

Photo: Vera Schickel Collection



Figure skating encompasses six basic jumps, with approximately 100 more derived from these six. Four jumps bear the names of their inventors.

The Norwegian Axel Paulsen performed the "Axel" for the first time in 1882 at the Ice Festival of the Viennese Skating Club (WEV). It is considered the most difficult and is known as the "king's jump" because it is the only one in which one takes off skating forward.

It was followed in 1909 by the "Salchow", created by the Swede, Ulrich Salchow. In his long career Salchow, born in Denmark, became the first Olympic champion in figure skating in 1908, and no fewer than ten times world and nine times European champion.

In 1909 the German Werner Rittberger appeared in the Berlin Ice Palace, where he skated to melodies of the "King of the Operetta" Walter Kollo. Suddenly, the drummer struck his instrument so powerfully that the 18 year old jumped backwards in shock and also landed.

The "Rittberger" was born, which the Americans call the "Loop".

Four years later came the "Lutz", for which a young Viennese named Alois Lutz is responsible. He was left no time to present the jump internationally. At the age of only 19, he succumbed in 1918 to a lung inflammation.<sup>1</sup>

## The "figure skating artist" Jackson Haines became Grafström's model

Gillis Emanuel Grafström, who was born in Stockholm 125 years ago – on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1893 –, did not invent a jump. Yet the Swede possessed another unique characteristic. He is the only figure skater who was three times Olympic champion and, in addition, won an Olympic silver medal. This hat trick was achieved among the ladies only by the Norwegian Sonja Henie and the Russian, Irina Rodnina.

Grafström's father came from a peasant family, which originally bore the everyday name of Larsson.<sup>2</sup> In Stockholm, Claes August Grafström became a wealthy property owner. He lived in the quarter of Östermalm at Styrmansgatan 47. In winter it was traditional to spray the parental yard with water so that the sons – Börje, Gillis, Lars and Nils – could skate on the ice.

When Gillis was 13 years old, he joined in 1907 the upmarket Stockholm Allmänna Skridskoklubb (SASK) of which celebrities like Salchow were members. He achieved his first successes in 1909 as winner of the junior class of the Swedish school championships.

After his Abitur, which Grafström sat in 1912 at the venerable Östra Real Gymnasium, he began to study at the am Royal Institute of Technology (KTH). The same year his name appeared for the first time at the European Championship in Stockholm, which his club fellow member, Gösta Sandahl, won from the Russian, Ivan Malinin, and the Norwegian, Martin Stixrud. On the programme was also a "senior" figure skating competition in which Grafström took part and in which he attracted attention by "superlative skill".<sup>3</sup>

Grafström's model was the "figure skating artist" Jackson Haines, whom he knew only by word of mouth. The American came to Europe for the first time in 1865. On the 24<sup>th</sup> January he appeared in Berlin in the Greater Tiergarten, which attracted 10,000 visitors, including Prussia's King Wilhelm I. After that he travelled to St. Petersburg, where he skated for the Tsar. For his big number, "Le Novice", in which he played a clumsy beginner, he received stormy applause.<sup>4</sup>

The next winter Haines stopped in Stockholm. The stands at Nybroviken were occupied to the last seat. King Karl XV, who was among the spectators, was so enthusiastic that he resolved to found a royal skating club.<sup>5</sup>

Among Haines's secrets was that he used skates of steel, screwed on to the sole of his shoes. In contrast, they skated on wooden runners in Europe, to which they fitted iron runners fastened with leather or strings. But even when he was not on the ice, Haines was very busy. The theatre managers had discovered the "original genius" for the stage, on which he appeared with roller skates. For weeks he was a guest in autumn 1867 in Vienna's Carl Theatre.

Haines gave the impetus for the foundation of the Viennese Skating Club, to which on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1867, the concession was given to erect an ice rink at the market hall. To help it financially, he declared himself prepared to give five performances, which were attended by several thousand spectators.<sup>6</sup> He sent the club on its way by saying that the ice rink was "no playground for gawkers, but a school for decency and grace."<sup>7</sup>



The American Jackson Haines on the Nybroviken in Stockholm, where thousands watched him from the bank in 1866.

Photo: Volker Kluge Archive

## Vienna versus Stockholm – the struggle for "world supremacy"

Haines's appearance became a turning point. With him as a leading figure there arose the "Viennese School". As a basis for the development of competitive sport was the "Viennese Programme" of 1882. Only then did the systematic building-up of what was later described as "Schulfiguren" occur.<sup>8</sup> Vienna became the veritable centre of power, which saw itself in sharp competition with Stockholm, where the unchallenged winner Salchow represented quite different concepts.

During the evaluation of the compulsory figures – at that time the first and more highly esteemed part of every competition – more or less objective criteria existed, even if opinions about the free skating, the composition of which was left to each competitor, were often divergent. Salchow, who was a proponent of a technically perfect but unornamented-powerful style, rejected any type of "cheap showmanship". His view: "Art has nothing to do with these false, often sentimental poses. These serve often rather to conceal a lack of skill. The skater should in his bearing be simple, modest."<sup>9</sup>

Salchow spoke from the heart to those experts who demanded an exact figure from a skater. The pragmatist, who after a one year pause in 1913 had once again taken part in a European Championship (and won), became a wholesaler and professional official, who in his own factory produced skates to which he lent his name. As for other models, Jackson Haines acted as godfather. But Salchow brought a small saw on bow of the skate, which permitted the athlete a better jump and secure pirouettes.

Grafström, on the other hand, thought himself an artist and aesthete. He refused a strict corset. It was his dream to bring figure skating out of the narrowness of the study rooms. However, the great practical tests still awaited him. At his first World Championship, which took place in 1914 in an icy wind on the frozen harbour of Helsinki, he fell and hit the back of his head. Although he had only come seventh of 14 participants, his lecture was popular, and it read:

*Grafström has very good school and is certainly with the correct training a very likely competitor for the championship in the coming years. Now he is still somewhat unprepared.<sup>10</sup>*

Five months later the First World War began, to which the Games of the VI Olympiad, which the IOC had awarded to Berlin, fell victim. Against the resistance of the Scandinavians, who feared for the significance of their Nordic Games, an Olympic "Winter Sports Week" was for the first time to be part of the programme.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the war Grafström, who could have won an Olympic medal in 1916, found himself in a comfortable situation. As a "neutral" he was allowed to take up the study of architecture at the Royal Technical School (TH) in Charlottenburg, which he concluded in the last year of the war. He could even continue to practise figure skating. To be sure, the splendid Berlin Ice Palace from 1915 was used as a cool room for pork, yet in the Admiral's Palace in Friedrichstreet the sport went on, so that Grafström could bring himself into form in good time for the Nordic Games of 1917. The victory in the Stockholm Olympic Stadium was not to be taken from him.

### Salchow labelled Grafström's picture as an egocentric misfit

With the exception of Scandinavia and North America, international competition was in a bad place. In Austria even the national championships had to be cancelled for lack of ice and electricity. Thus it was a great performance when Belgium, badly affected by the war, declared itself prepared to carry out the 1920 Olympics, including figure skating and ice hockey, in Antwerp. That, however, under the condition that the losers in the war – the "Central Powers" – would not take part, which was sanctioned by the IOC.

Without the competition from Austria, Germany, Hungary and Soviet Russia (involved in a war with Poland), Antwerp for Grafström represented no great challenge. With over 200 points ahead of the Norwegian Andreas Krogh, and a rating of 8, he achieved his first Olympic gold.<sup>12</sup> Bronze went to the 44 year old Martin Stixrud, also from Norway.

Only eighteen months younger than Stixrud, Salchow – since 1919 President of the Swedish Skating Federation – tried to make a comeback, which for him ended joylessly with a fourth placing. He did master the compulsory figures perfectly, but his free skating looked heavy. The changing of the guard was long completed.

Among the curiosities was that the International Skating Union (ISU), founded in 1892, was wrapped in silence. Its last congress had taken place one year before the outbreak of war, when the ISU still had twelve national federations and ten clubs as members.



When the Netherlands in 1919 pushed for the Union to reorganise, the Swedish General Viktor Balck, who since 1895 had held the presidency, reacted with hesitation.

Only when the representatives of six countries met in May 1921 for a "Congress of Neutrals" did he accede.<sup>13</sup> At the invitation of the Dutch federation the national organisations including Germany and Austria met in October for the first time with the exception of Russia. It was agreed to continue the title contests after a gap of eight years. The World Championships of 1922 were awarded to Stockholm, where they took place during the sixth Nordic Games. The European Championship of the gentlemen was transferred to Davos.<sup>14</sup>

Grafström did not go to the European Championship, which thus became a sure thing for the Viennese. For two decades they had access to the Engelmann ice rink and the new site of the Viennese Skating Club in the Haymarket; thus, there were two performance centres with artificial ice and a reservoir of class skaters. The new star was the Klagenfurter Willy Böckl, who in Davos was able to put the last title holder of 1914, Fritz Kachler, into second place.

A week later at the World Championship the order changed. Kachler lost to the Swede, although the latter had fallen in the compulsory section, which had six figures for the first time after the new competition order had been introduced. After that, Grafström offered such a brilliant free skating programme, where he not only



made up the ten points needed, but also pulled out a lead of 2.45. „He showed in his pirouettes an acrobatic and a skill, which aroused astonishment“, enthused the Viennese *Sport-Tagblatt*.<sup>15</sup>

From 1919 Grafström had ignored the Swedish championships and left the field to his seven years younger brother Lars, who took the title in 1922.<sup>16</sup> The following year, Lars was second in Djursholm behind ex-world champion Gösta Sandahl, surprisingly putting his brother into third. Sandahl was then sent alone to the World Championship in Vienna, where he landed in fourth place behind three Austrians – Kachler, Böckl und Dr. Ernst Oppacher.

What was wrong with the titleholder? Grafström stayed again in Berlin, where he educated himself further. The training had to take a back seat, as the only available artificial rink in the Admiral's Palace had to close for economic reasons in March 1922. Only with the start of the next winter did Grafström travel to Davos, where in January 1924 the European Championship took place, for which he cherished no ambitions. He explained his non-participation as caused by a weak heart which prevented him from going more frequently to compete. A hint of his early death, which was to hasten for him 14 years later?

He did, however, not want to miss the Olympic "Winter Sports Week", which began a few days later in Chamonix, and it saw him in dazzling form. Five of the seven judges – not a Swede among them – placed him in the compulsory figures in place number one. Two – both Austrians – saw him in place two. Only Czechoslovakian Hynek Kott fell out of the role, when he rated the free skating of his compatriot Josef Slíva 20 points higher than those of Grafström. Even with a "second best" free skating, he was ahead of Böckl.<sup>17</sup>

The World Championships of 1925 ended with a scandalous pairs skating victory of the Austrians, Herma Jarosz-Szabo and Ludwig Wrede, over the French pair of Andrée Joly and Pierre Brunet. For some time there had been talk of a dictatorship of the hosts, the Viennese Skating Club, which caused many foreigners to avoid events on the Danube, because they feared being given poor marks.

The ISU could no longer avoid involving itself with the so-called judging question. At its next congress the Judges Committee was dissolved and re-constituted. The chairman was Salchow, who also replaced the 81 year old Viktor Balck as president.

Salchow and Grafström were never friends, but after Chamonix their relationship deteriorated further. The soloist Grafström had travelled to the World Championship in February 1925 in Manchester only at the last minute and took part prior to the competition in a skating exhibition. He was used to having his own way. Salchow contributed considerably to the negative



Seventy years after Grafström's third Olympic victory, the Swedish Post Office honoured him with a special stamp. He had to share the honour with swimmer Arne Borg (1500 m freestyle champion in 1928).

picture, especially what the Swedish press wrote of Grafström. For them he was considered an egocentric misfit.

Alone against everyone! After the championships in which he had easily asserted himself against Böckl, Grafström was suddenly without money. In vain he asked the Swedish federation for help, but was refused. Completely without means, he had to make his way to Great Britain. Fortunately, he found a position as an architect in London. He received a contract for a theatre building, so that he could support himself with this fee.<sup>18</sup> He informed his club that in future he would no longer represent Sweden, but only perform as an individual, which was permitted by the international competition rules.

### **Fabulously built and handsome: the man who "skates music"**

With the new winter season Grafström moved to Switzerland, where he found ideal training conditions in Davos and St. Moritz. He showed no interest in the next European Championship in Berlin – the first international championship that was given to Germany since 1914.<sup>19</sup> He thought the continental title contests were superfluous, which is why he never took part in them.

Even with the expectations of the ambitious Viennese, he burned for an "Olympic revenge" and remained unfulfilled. Grafström left Böckl his title as world champion without a fight. In the lion's cage, his non-appearance was explained by saying that Grafström was probably afraid to place himself before the Viennese jury. That could not be dismissed as this was composed of three Austrians and two Hungarians.

Grafström, who at the same time competed in an international event against weak British rivals, had another strong motive. In St. Moritz he had met Cécilie, the great-granddaughter of the famous German composer, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.<sup>20</sup> The 27 year old was married to the jurist, Benoit Oppenheim, who came from the extremely rich family of the Jewish banker and art collector of the same name.<sup>21</sup>

Wonderfull summer in Sweden: Cécilie von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Gillis Grafström, who had met in 1925. Adjacent: Training on the Baltic Sea.



Cécilie fell in love with the artistic Swede, who in the Netherlands had begun to collect drawings of ice skating history. On his travels he searched in antique shops and in flea markets, and he was emotional when he could find a new rarity. He acquired paintings, drawings, lithographs and woodcuts, porcelain figures, silver miniatures, plates and wall tiles, books and postcards, sheet music. Nor could he go past wooden skates, which were worn in Holland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup>

In his homeland Grafström met with lack of understanding. What did this Bohemian live on? Where did he get the money if not from dubious sources? Grafström refused to compete in the Nordic Games, which took place for the last time in 1926, but he demanded a certificate as an amateur sportsman in order to be able to send in his entry for the next World Championship in Berlin.

The officials were furious. At the last minute they sent him the wished-for document, but as the executive committee had agreed only by 3–2 votes, Grafström decided not to compete. Much to the regret of Böckl, who had announced a "struggle for life or death".<sup>23</sup> Salchow, who in Berlin was acting as referee, saw himself embarrassed, which is why he threatened Grafström with a ban: "... and not just for competitions but also for exhibition skating".<sup>24</sup>

For the public, Grafström remained a sphinx. But those who knew him better thought he was a friendly and cheerful person, of whom the German skater Arthur Vieregg sang genuine songs of praise:

*It was once said of Gillis Grafström by an authoritative source: we are all only figure skater, Grafström is the artist. And in fact one who has seen Grafström in his compulsory routines and free skating will have to come to the same result. With Grafström every movement looks aesthetic, elegant and beautiful; it is a delight to observe him with the set figures and especially with the free skating. He skates to a certain extent music, and it is as if he could draw on the ice the piece of music by which he skates. As in addition he is a fabulously grown, handsome man, there is a big plus on his side.*<sup>25</sup>

Grafström's free programme was not as difficult as some of his competitors, but the simply skated curve often looked stronger than the hardest jump of others – art in the truest sense of the word.

### **A skater is sought to become Olympic champion for the third time**

Grafström's one year ban had run out on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1927. It took until summer for the Swedish NOC to start selecting a team for the Olympic Winter Games of 1928 before he was remembered. The skating federation resolved to be represented in St. Moritz by Grafström.

No one knew to which address an enquiry should be sent. It was assumed that he was permanently occupied in Berlin, but exact information could not even be supplied by his Swedish relatives. "Grafström is sought!" ran the headline of a newspaper which quoted Salchow:





Knickerbockers were *en vogue*: Gillis Grafström 1928 in St. Moritz. Adjacent: Grafström with Cécilie's daughters Luise and Vera on the Bornstedt pond in Potsdam.

Photos: Vera Schickel Collection, Volker Kluge Archives

*We are ready to do everything for Grafström's preparations for the Olympic Games, if he just reports to us. He can easily be back in the special class if he does some training. Grafström is only 35 years old, the best age for a figure skater., and he has no rival in technique, approach and experience.*<sup>26</sup>

How the times had changed! Especially when a federation had no more medal candidates available. On the other hand, Salchow underestimated his arch-enemy, who despite the ban had continued to work hard. In the Berlin Sports Palace, still the regular training site of the Berliner Schlittschuh-Club (BSC), he knew almost every metre. In winter he also trained on the frozen Havel lakes in Potsdam, where he had found a new home with Cécilie and her two daughters.<sup>27</sup>

After the Swedish federation had fully rehabilitated Grafström and taken back the accusations that he had broken the amateur rules, he declared himself ready to attack his third Olympic Games. Traditionally, he went in early January to St. Moritz. Suspiciously observed by the competition, who met at the same time in Troppau at the European Championship, they did not trust the news that Grafström had allegedly injured his knee. Now it could be speculated: a trick? Or did the "injured knee" mean that he was not fit?

All the rumours ceased when the Winter Games began. Grafström wore a knee protector and a rubber bandage, and he ended the compulsory figures on the ice rink of the Kulm Hotel just behind Böckl. Four of the seven

judges, who for the first time, had come from a different country, placed him first. Two of them placed him third. The Austrian – Eduard Engelmann, Jr. – wanted to see his compatriot win. The Belgian judge speculated on a bronze medal for Robert van Zeebroeck, which in the end he won.

It was the 14<sup>th</sup> February 1928 when the foehn broke over St. Moritz. Its consequence was a temperature rise from three degrees in the morning to 25 degrees in the hours around noon, which made the timetable collapse. As the ice surfaces were under water, the free skating, planned for the next day in the Olympic Stadium, had to be postponed. When it could take place 72 hours later, the ice was still soft, which was no advantage for the sturdy Böckl. However, he was overwhelmed with congratulations. All the greater was the consternation when the jury, after lengthy discussion, declared Grafström to be the winner.<sup>28</sup>

In the self-image of the Viennese they had again lost the battle against Stockholm. The defeat was even more painful because Grafström remained in sunny St. Moritz instead of travelling to the World Championship in Berlin. He needed to recover, he told the public.

Without his rival, Böckl's joy at his fourth title was only half so great. And not only that: the Austrian lost his desire to skate and announced his resignation. He went to America, where he was employed as manager of the New York Skating Club.

Had Böckl suspected that Grafström did not intend to retire, he would perhaps have changed his mind.

In 1931 Grafström granted the wish of King Gustav V and appeared once more in Sweden. At the opening of the Stockholm Ice Hall he wore Swedish national costume.

Far right: The Olympic medallists of Lake Placid in 1932 (from left): Karl Schäfer (Austria/gold), Montgomery Wilson (Canada/bronze), Gillis Grafström (Sweden/silver).

Photos: Vera Schickel Collection; Berättelse över Olympiska Spelen 1932



Cracking the hard nut was left to the young Karl Schäfer, who seemed to have the necessary self-confidence. Grafström was training that very week in Davos, when Schäfer won his first European title there. Schäfer admired the posture of the Doyen, but his free programme had, he thought, no content, he announced cheekily: "Every Austrian senior would be better in that respect than the Olympic champion."<sup>29</sup>

Five weeks later that sounded quite different, when Grafström in London (in addition to his Olympic victory) also won the third gold medal of a world champion. In their decision the judges were largely united: Grafström received rating 6, Schäfer the ten. "This time Grafström still remained the winner!" prophesied the Viennese *Freiheit*, which allowed Schäfer a period of rest. Grafström, it was said, still had an important argument on his side, his famous name.<sup>30</sup>

For the media mob, who wanted to see Grafström in a "permanent loop", in constant competition with the new "miracle skater", he remained a puzzle. They did not know that he was engaged in a large project of the Berlin Underground stations nor that one of his colleagues was called Ernst Baier, and that the latter had recognised in him his shining model. Ten years after their first meeting – in 1936 – Baier became Olympic champion in the pairs with Maxi Herber.<sup>31</sup>

Only a few suspected with what seriousness Grafström thought about skating, which he wanted to point in a new direction. Not everyone could grasp his ideas. When in February 1931 in Berlin in skating exhibitions, he danced to the Swedish folk dance,

Hambo (related to the Polka-Mazurka), individual whistles were heard, but by the next performance, the public gave vent to their enthusiasm.

Still, Grafström for now did not plan to compete. He rejected the incoming tendency to acrobatic skating, but he had a high opinion of Schäfer, whom he thought had a natural talent. His only criticism: he missed in Schäfer still "the cultivated, artistic".<sup>32</sup>

Many, who presumed it was generational conflict, could not believe their eyes, when the two of them trained peaceably together for over an hour in St. Moritz. The windows and balconies of the surrounding hotels were full when the pair danced over the ice, with Schäfer in the lead. When "naughty Karli"<sup>33</sup> – as a Viennese newspaper wrote – with his bubbling over-strength added a double Rittberger, Grafström left the ice, to come back half an hour later to practise his tango.

### The Olympic silver medal of 1932 was his "most beautiful victory"

At the end of 1929 Grafström was awarded the *Svenska Dagbladets* guldmedalj.<sup>34</sup> In addition King Gustav V expressed the wish to see him skating one day in Sweden.<sup>35</sup>

It looked as if his homeland had made peace with him. But a new conflict broke out when the young Vivi-Anne Hultén, on whom great hopes were placed, was only fourth in the 1931 European Championship in St. Moritz, whereupon her mother during the awards ceremony, furiously pulled her out of the ballroom. After that,



Salchow accused her in a letter that he would favour the Norwegian Sonja Henie. Never again, said Mrs. Hultén, would her daughter compete for Sweden as long as Salchow was in charge.<sup>36</sup>

It was a perfect scandal. To calm the waves Salchow had no choice but to resign. With that the barrier disappeared which had held Grafström back – he stood shoulder to shoulder with Hultén, from challenging for his fourth Olympic Games. He used a short trip to Stockholm in order to announce his participation “at any price”, which was printed by *Dagens Nyheter* under the headline, “Message of joy”.<sup>37</sup>

Grafström had not promised too much. After two exhibitions at the Christmas holidays in the Berlin Sports Palace, the nearly 39 year old travelled to America, where the duel of two generations was sold as a big hit. The Viennese newspapers continued to doubt that Grafström would compete, and when it was announced that he had injured his knee in the Olympic Arena, that was treated as a “bluff” and “manoeuvre” to upset Schäfer.<sup>38</sup>

The opposite was the case. The chronic damage to the knee, from which Grafström had suffered for a long time, compelled him to narrow his programme. In the compulsory figures, training for which he had neglected in the last few years, he showed himself unsure. He fell during one figure which meant a preliminary decision. All seven judges placed Schäfer in first place.

But in the free skating, held in front of a sell-out house, Grafström showed himself to be just as good as ever. Certainly, he did not have the difficulties in his repertoire of his 15 years younger rival, yet what he presented in terpsichorean harmony was so impressive that neither the public nor the media at the end of evening knew who had won.

Artur Steiner, the only Austrian journalist to accompany Schäfer to Lake Placid, felt as if he was at a “trial” with an uncertain outcome. He wrote:

*The hours stretched out endlessly. Midnight was long past, it moved to quarter past, to half past. Messengers were sent out to spy out whether inside in the consultation room had finally come to a result. Nothing!*

*Our gaze hung expectantly at the door, but nothing moved. But suddenly some twenty journalists up to their room, in which they had some Morse machines with which they telegraphed all over the world. We want to stop them, but they have no time. Every second is valuable. Only as they run past do they shout to us: “Schäfer first, Grafström second!”<sup>39</sup>*

The article does not merely offer an interesting glimpse into the restricted possibilities of reporting, but also the method, unimaginable today, of decision-making by the jury which required several hours to announce the result. Definitively, it could only be found in the *Official*



Munich 1937:  
Grafström as ice skating instructor. Left the Austrian Felix Kaspar, Olympic bronze medallist in 1936, right: the Olympic pairs champions Maxi Herber and Ernst Baier of Germany

*Report* which appeared long after, from which it emerged that five judges had put Schäfer first and two Grafström.<sup>40</sup>

Schäfer celebrated the triumph over the “seemingly unbeatable” Grafström years later as his greatest success.<sup>41</sup> Others saw in the silver medal which the Swede won his “most beautiful victory”.

Among the few who thought they should have to criticize him again was Salchow, who characterised his compatriot as a moody prima donna and a spoiled star. For him the “case” was closed with Lake Placid.<sup>42</sup> He just could not change. For a long time there had been dissatisfaction about his presidency, but he stayed on for a further five years as ISU President, until he was voted out in 1937.<sup>43</sup>

Beyond his active time, Grafström remained a phantom. Several times it was said that he was hoping to make a comeback. But that was just as untrue as the rumour that he would train with Vivi-Anne Hultén for the pairs. In fact he prepared her with his brother Lars for the Winter Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in which Hultén won individual bronze.

In the late summer of 1936 Grafström opened, in Munich's Prinzregenten Stadium,<sup>44</sup> his own skating school. He moved in late 1937 to Berlin, where the intention was to install him as Reichstrainer, a foreigner to be treated at a distance. The intention remained.

Grafström was taken to hospital in Potsdam in January 1938 with reported flu, where he caught up what he had missed. He married Cécilie on 8<sup>th</sup> February, whom he soon made a widow. He died on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1938 of a heart muscle inflammation.





**Student Janosch Klein had cleaned up the site of the grave before the 2018 memorial event.**

Photo: Peter Frenkel

The German poet Friedrich Schiller wrote 220 years ago: *Posterity weaves no garlands for the Mime. And so he must be chary with the present, Must fill the moment that is his entirely, Assure himself of his contemporaries' favor, And in the feelings of the Best and Worthiest ... Erect a living monument to himself. Thus he anticipates his name's eternity, For one who's done enough to satisfy The Best of his own time has lived for all time.*<sup>45</sup>

The prologue to *Wallenstein's Camp* ends with the sentence: „Our lives are earnest and our art serene.”<sup>46</sup> ■

- 1 Among the jumps forgotten today are the “Euler” (also called “Thorén”). Its inventors were the Viennese brothers Carl und Gustav Euler, 1900 European champions in gentlemen's pairs. The same is true of the “Walley”, first shown in 1934/1935 Open Professional Championships by the American Nathaniel “Nate” Walley. Cf. James R. Hines, *Figure Skating in the Formative Years. Singles, Pairs, and the Expanding Role of Women*, University of Illinois Press, 2015
- 2 The Larssons were a family of farmers who owned a farm in Grafhult in Westgotland. When one of the four sons, Gustav Adolf, was staying in Göteborg for his education, the director of the local seminar made him the proposal to name himself after the paternal property. Thereupon he chose the name “Grafström”, which his brothers Johan, Viktor and Claes (the father of Gillis) adopted. In 1962 the Grafströms founded a family federation that meets even now in Grafhult. [www.http://goto.glocalnet.net/grafstromska/](http://goto.glocalnet.net/grafstromska/)
- 3 *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 12<sup>th</sup> February 1912
- 4 *Illustrierte Zeitung*, Leipzig, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1865, p. 100. The appearance in St. Petersburg took place on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1865 in the Tauride Garden.
- 5 Sweden was the country that Haines loved the most. When, aged 35, he died in June 1875 in Gamla Karleby (since 1977 Kokkola or Karleby) in Finland of tuberculosis, he wished to be buried in Stockholm.
- 6 As a fee Haines received 2435 Gulden, of which he donated 1405 for the Viennese “Poor funds”.

- 7 *Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1868
- 8 Cf. Demeter Diamantidi/Carl von Corper/Max Wirth, *Spuren auf dem Eise. Die Entwicklung des Eislaufes auf der Bahn des Wiener-Eislauf-Vereines*, Alfred Hölder, Vienna 1881
- 9 Ulrich Salchow, *Das Kunstlaufen auf dem Eise*, Grethlein, Leipzig, o.J. (ca. 1914), pp. 43–45. The Swedish edition *Handbok i konstskridning på skridskor* appeared in 1906.
- 10 *Illustriertes Sportblatt*, Vienna, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1914
- 11 The Berlin Ice Palace was the intended venue, where the competitions were to take place from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> February 1916.
- 12 Of the seven judges Grafström was placed second in the compulsory figures only by the Norwegian Knut Ørn Meinich. He marked his compatriot Krogh higher. In the free skating the Frenchman Louis Magnus saw the Norwegian Martin Stixrud in front.
- 13 Benjamin T. Wright, *Skating around the World. The One Hundredth Anniversary History of the International Skating Union*, Davos 1992, pp. 38–40. The six “neutral” national federations were Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.
- 14 The European Championships of the women and the pairs were not introduced until 1930. In Davos in the pairs an “international championship” was carried out, won by the Austrians Helene Engelmänn and Alfred Berger.
- 15 *Sport-Tagblatt*, Vienna, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1922. More important than the points total was the decisive rating 7, while Kachler received 8. Of the five judges three placed Grafström first, while two had him second. Behind Kachler Böckl with rating 15 was third.
- 16 Lars Grafström (1900–?) was as early as 1917 third in the Swedish championships as well as runner-up in 1920. Later he appeared in stage shows, in which he showed remarkable acrobatic performances on extremely narrow stages.
- 17 Grafström was first with rating 10 and 2575.25 scores from Böckl (13/2518.75) and the young Swiss Georges Gautschi (23/2233.50). Slíva, who had been third in the free skating could not do better than fourth.
- 18 Unfortunately, the name of the theatre could not be found. Allegedly, it was the Devonshire Theatre, built in 1884 in Victorian style, though it was not in London but in Eastbourne.
- 19 As Berlin at that time had no artificial ice rink and the winter had turned out very mild, the European Championship was held after several postponements in Triberg in the Black Forest.
- 20 Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809–1847) was one of the most significant German musicians of the romantic period. He was the grandson of the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), who in Berlin played an important role in the epoch of the “Enlightenment”.
- 21 Benoit Oppenheim (1876–1934) had married Cécilie von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1898–1995) in 1920. Her father, Otto von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1868–1949), who in 1907 was ennobled at his own request, was the main shareholder of the chemical enterprise Agfa, founded by his father. The company, known for its photographic products, joined I.G. Farben A.G. in 1925. Oppenheim's father (1842–1931), named “the elder” owned the Bankhaus R. Oppenheim & Sohn, founded by his father and later taken over by the Deutsche Bank. The family is remembered inter alia by the “Villa Oppenheim”, built in neo-classical style on the Baltic island of Usedom.
- 22 *Der Eislauf in Kunst und Kulturgeschichte. Aus der Sammlung Gillis Grafström*, Stockholm, Altonaer Museum, Hamburg, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1965–30<sup>th</sup> January 1966. The collection was shown in 1963 also in the Nordic Museum in Stockholm and (inter alia) during the 1976 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck. After the move of the widow of Västerås to Hamburg she left the collection to the World Figure Skating Museum in Colorado Springs.
- 23 *Die Bühne*, Vienna, No. 61, 1926, p. 18
- 24 *Dagens Nyheter*, March (no date available) 1926
- 25 *BZ am Mittag*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1926. Arthur Vieregg (1884–1946) took part in the World Championships of 1923 and in the European Championships of 1922, 1924 and 1926. The later judge and lecturer at the Deutsche Hochschule für Leibesübungen was the author of the book *Der Eislauf*, August Reher, Berlin 1921.
- 26 *Sport-Tagblatt*, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1927
- 27 Cécilie Oppenheim, who divorced in 1928, lived in Potsdam, Bertiniestraße 1 (“Casa Bartholdy”), built between 1906–1908 (today “Villa Mendelssohn-Bartholdy”). After her father had been classified as a Jew by the Nazi race laws, the villa was taken over and rented to the Reichskommissar für die Seeschiff-Fahrt.





Celebration on the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gillis Grafström in the Bornstedter Church in Potsdam

Photos: Walter Wawra

- 28 Comité Olympique Suisse, *Résultats des concours des II<sup>mes</sup> Jeux Olympiques d'hiver, St. Moritz 1928*, pp. 5–6. Grafström won with rating 12 and 1630.75 scores from Böckl (13/1625.50). Engelmann placed the 18 year old Austrian Karl Schäfer second. He did him no favours with that, as the Czechoslovakian judge, who wanted to bring his compatriot Sláva to the front, punished him with ninth place. In the general classification Schäfer was fourth and Sláva fifth.
- 29 *Neues Wiener Journal*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1929
- 30 *Freiheit!*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1929
- 31 Interview Volker Kluge with Ernst Baier (1905–2001), 19<sup>th</sup> October 1993. Baier had lived in Berlin since 1922 and from 1924 studied architecture. About Grafström he said: "At that time he was twenty years ahead of me."
- 32 *Sport-Tagblatt*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1930
- 33 *Ibid.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1931
- 34 The gold medal donated by the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* in 1925 is considered the highest Swedish distinction. It was awarded to Grafström together with Sven Utterström, who in the same year had won the 50 km cross-country ski race as the first Swede on the Holmenkollen.
- 35 Grafström fulfilled this wish in December 1931, when in connection with the inauguration of the Stockholm Ice Hall (a former hangar for aeroplanes) he opened the programme with an appearance.
- 36 *Dagens Nyheter*, March (no date available) 1931
- 37 In a three part series of articles, published by *Dagens Nyheter* in autumn 1931, he promised to fight for the fourth Olympic title "until the last drop of blood".
- 38 During training on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1932 Grafström stumbled over a photographer's apparatus, which had been assembled by the ice rink. Thus an old knee injury broke out again, so that he had break training for two days.
- 39 Artur Steiner, „Mit Karl Schäfer in Amerika“, in: Alexander Meisel, *Karl Schäfer, Meister der Welt*, Vienna 1932, pp. 21–25
- 40 III Olympic Winter Games Committee, *Official Report III Olympic Winter Games, Lake Placid 1932*, pp. 218–219. Three of the seven judges rated Grafström's free programme higher than that of Schäfer. The final result: 1. Schäfer 9/2602.0, 2. Grafström 13/2514.5. Only the former Norwegian pairs skater Yngvar Bryn placed Grafström in compulsory and free in third place.
- 41 For the film *Weißer Traum* Schäfer explained in 1943 in front of the camera: "I beat him because I had the better nerves, because I took the last attack with absolute calm – and from then on I was world champion in figure skating".
- 42 *Sport-Tagblatt*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1932
- 43 Salchow lost the last sympathies at the 20<sup>th</sup> ISU Congress in 1937,

when he railed repeatedly against the Viennese skating school and the Winter Olympics. In the ensuing election he received only six of 17 votes. The new president was the Dutchman Gerrit van Laer.

- 44 On the free surface, opened on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1933, Sonja Henie as well as the later pairs Olympic champions Maxi Herber and Ernst Baier prepared for the Winter Games of 1936.
- 45 Friedrich Schiller. *Wallenstein: A Dramatic Poem*. Translation and Notes to the Text by Flora Kimmich. Introduction by Roger Paulin. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0101>
- 46 Friedrich Schiller, spoken as a prologue at the reopening of the Weimar Playhouse, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1798



The double figure skating world champion and Olympic silver medallist of 1968, Gabriele Seyfert, laid flowers on Grafström's grave in Potsdam on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018 to mark the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. Left: Vera Schickel with the silver cup that her stepfather had received in 1925 from the Swedish Skating Federation. Far left: the Vice-President of the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB), Stephan Abel. On the right: the 1972 Olympic 20 km walk champion, Peter Frenkel, who had organised the ceremony.