

# GIDEON STÅHLBERG

AN EPOCH IN SWEDISH CHESS

VOLUME I

The Musketeer Years 1908–1939

Peter Holmgren



# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** xi

**Introduction** xiii

**Notes to the Reader** xv

**Abbreviations** xvi

## **1. Family, Childhood and the First Moves** 1

Surte and its Glassworks 2

The Ståhlberg Family 3

Sister Anita 4

Brother White 4

Brother Anton 6

Gideon Growing Up 7

1919–1922 – First Moves 8

1923 – Surte Chess Club 9

Lasker in Gothenburg 9

1924 – Meeting Knut Robertson 10

Playing Spielmann in a Simultaneous 11

1925 – The First Tournament 11

Trollhättan – 9<sup>th</sup> Swedish Congress 12

1926 – Matriculation and Master Title 13

Karlstad – 10<sup>th</sup> Swedish Congress, Qualifying for the Master Category 14

Signing up for Majornas Schacksällskap 17

Gothenburg Team Championship 18

Problem Solving 20

## **2. 1927 – Reaching the Swedish Elite** 21

Lasker Passing By 21

Gothenburg – Stockholm 23

Örebro – Sharing First Place with Stoltz 24

London – First International Experience 29

Watching Sämisch Not Seeing the Board 32

Majorna Turning 20 32

- 3. 1928 – Joining the National Team 37**  
Stockholm vs Gothenburg over the Phone 39  
Training with Stoltz 40  
Helsingborg – the 12<sup>th</sup> Swedish Congress 42  
The Hague – Representing Sweden for the First Time 45  
Oslo – Nordic Championships 55  
New Premises for the Gothenburg Chess Federation 59  
A Glimpse of Capablanca 60  
Ludvig Collijn 50 years 60  
Life in Uniform 63  
Gothenburg Team Championship 63  
Réti in Stockholm 64
- 4. 1929 – Military Service and Swedish Champion 67**  
Reviewing Nimzowitsch 68  
“Nordic Champion” as a Civilian 72  
Propaganda Campaign 76  
Club Champion of Göteborgs Schacksällskap 77  
Swedish Champion 77  
The Champ Starts Touring 80
- 5. 1930 – Apprentice in the Chess World 83**  
Match against Bogoljubow 83  
Swinemünde 88  
Hamburg – The 3<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad 93  
Nordic Championship 103  
Stoltz is the Star 108  
Match against Spielmann 111
- 6. 1931 – A Year in Gothenburg 115**  
Training Match with Arvid Flygare 115  
Manhem 25 years 116  
Gothenburg Team Championship 118  
At Last, Champion of Gothenburg 119  
15<sup>th</sup> Swedish Congress in Uddevalla 122  
Prague Olympiad – Count on Sweden! 126  
Training Match with Klas Henriksson 138  
New Premises for the Gothenburg Chess Federation 140  
Defending the Title against Stoltz 140

## **7. 1932 – Moving to Stockholm 151**

- Training Session in Örebro 151
- Champion of his New Home Town 152
- A Tour around Lake Mälaren 155
- The First Column – *Hvar 8 Dag* 156
- Training for the Unemployed 156
- Team Blitz 157
- Problem Solver? 157
- Alströmergatan 32 158
- Karlskrona – 16<sup>th</sup> Swedish Congress 159
- Membership in Sällskapet 165
- Wasa One-hour Tournament 165
- A Tour in Southern Sweden 167
- Bridge Arbiter 167
- Gothenburg Team Championship 169

## **8. 1933 – Sweden Becoming a Power Nation 173**

- Revenge on Spielmann 174
- Local Activities 179
- Bridge Olympics 180
- Training for the Olympiad 181
- Folkestone Olympiad – “Birth of a Swedish Opening Variation” 183
- Tournament Director in Lund 191
- Chess Politics 192
- A New Season 193
- Bridge Championships in all Shapes and Forms 194
- Coaching Session in Västerås 195
- Stockholm Team Championship 196
- Cabaret Artist 199
- A Bridge League 200
- Stockholms Schacksällskap 200
- Christmas in Gothenburg 202

## **9. 1934 – Life on the Road 205**

- Match against Aron Nimzowitsch 205
- Bridge 216
- Újpest Chess Club 25 Years 216
- Bad Niendorf – Grandmaster Old Definition 223
- Zürich – Acquaintance with Lasker 230

Copenhagen – Enjoying Good Neighbours 244  
Match for the Nordic Championship 250  
A Quick Stop in Scania before Going Home 256  
Stockholm Team Championship 256  
Too Much Bridge 257

## **10. 1935 – The Best Year Ever for Sweden 259**

Training for Moscow 260  
Moscow 1935 – Missed Opportunity to Beat Capablanca 261  
The World Champion Alekhine in Örebro 287  
Stockholm North vs South 293  
Touring Finland 294  
The First *Finlands Schacks* Tournament 294  
Loviisa – 3<sup>rd</sup> Bath Tournament 299  
Match against Birger Rasmusson 302  
Match against Ilmari Solin 304  
Match against Eero Böök 306  
The Journey to Warsaw 307  
Warsaw – Olympic Success 307  
Germany – Sweden in Sopot 319  
The Second *Finlands Schacks* International Tournament 325  
One Week in Turku 329  
A Celebration Tour through Sweden 332  
Sweden 333  
A Nasty Letter from Gothenburg 336

## **11. 1936 – Five International Tournaments and One “Olympiad” 339**

Visiting Norway 339  
Bridge and Some Chess in Stockholm 340  
Margate 341  
Ostend 345  
Bad Nauheim 353  
Dresden 360  
Table Tennis Champion in Poděbrady 366  
Munich – The “Jester Olympiad” 376  
Column in Dagens Nyheter 389  
Gothenburg Team Championship for Manhem 389  
Stockholm Team Championship 390

## **12. 1937 – Lots of Chess and a Lot of Bridge 393**

- Reuben Fine in Town 393
- Chess and Chessmasters 403
- Bridge Championships 404
- Team Blitz 407
- Jurata – 4<sup>th</sup> Polish Championship 407
- Ķemeri – Missed Opportunity to Defeat Alekhine 413
- Pärnu – Success for the “Second Paul” 430
- The Stockholm Olympiad – a National Disappointment 435
- The FIDE Congress 448
- Sopot 449
- A Small Tournament in Warsaw 452
- A Month in Finland 453
- Stockholm Team Championship 1937/38 455
- A little Tour in Southern Sweden 455

## **13. 1938 – Nordic Champion 457**

- Łódź 458
- Taking Good Care of Keres 465
- Bremen – Grossdeutschland vs Scandinavia 474
- Kalmar – 22<sup>nd</sup> Swedish Congress 477
- Örebro – Nordic Champion 480
- A Tough Tour through Denmark 485
- Match against Bjørn Nielsen 490
- Slowing Down for Christmas 496
- Stockholm Team Championship 497
- A few more Simuls 497
- Hur man spelar schack 498
- Training Match with Henrik Carlsson 499

## **14. 1939 – Farewell Sweden 501**

- Collijncupen 501
- Ķemeri–Riga 502
- Ordinary Life in Stockholm 509
- 7<sup>th</sup> World Bridge Olympic 509
- Stockholm Blitz Championship 510
- Stockholm – Swedish Championship Tournament 510
- Bad Harzburg 515

The Nordic Championships in Oslo – Collijn’s Farewell	522
Team Selection for Buenos Aires	525
Olympiad at Risk	526
Atlantic Crossing	526
Argentina during Ståhlberg’s Stay	529
Buenos Aires – The 8 <sup>th</sup> Olympiad	530
FIDE Moves to Buenos Aires!?	548
Historical Rating/Ranking	549
Alekhine–Capablanca?	549
Going Home?	550
To be continued ...	551

**Appendix I – Tournament Record 1925–1939 553**

**Appendix II – Match Record 1929–1939 555**

**Notes 556**

**Bibliography 563**

**Index of Openings (ECO Codes) 568**

**Index of Annotators 570**

**General Index 572**

# Introduction

The title of this book is *Gideon Ståhlberg, An Epoch in Swedish Chess*. So, what other epochs constitute Swedish chess history?

## Gentlemen's clubs or shady pubs

Until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, chess was played by upper-class men in exclusive gentlemen's clubs and by less fortunate individuals spending their time in dark and smoky bars and cafés. If there were any tournaments, their results never left the inner circles. This changed when the two brothers, Ludvig and Gustaf Collijn, entered the scene in the late 1890s. With financial support from their mother and later at their own expense, they were able to invite international top players and began to organize the chess community into clubs, districts and a national federation. Their goal was to foster players capable of competing with the world's elite, but also to spread chess to all social groups. They used their international network to help some promising players participate in European tournaments and visit grandmasters for training. One early example is Gustaf Nyholm, the first Swedish champion. His talent was undisputed, but his results suffered from a lack of stamina. The breakthrough came with Gösta Stoltz in the early 1930s, and when he was joined by Gideon Ståhlberg and Erik Lundin, Collijns' dream came true.

## Gideon Ståhlberg

No one has left his mark on Swedish chess like Gideon Ståhlberg. It is fair to say that he constitutes an epoch by himself. His competitive achievements, prolific writing, engagement in Swedish chess organization, strong personality, and witty and ironic, sometimes sarcastic, humor may have been surpassed by someone in each separate case, but never as a whole. He was twice a candidate for the World Championship, took an active part in the Swedish congress discussions, "owned the room" he entered and made many appreciated speeches and lectures. He toured Sweden and the neighboring countries, spent nine years in South America, wrote textbooks on chess, a series of tournament books and served as arbiter in six world championship matches. Ståhlberg also edited weekly columns in several newspapers throughout his entire career and often reported daily during tournament play and arbitration work. After dominating the South American chess scene together with Miguel Najdorf during the war and up to his departure in 1948, Ståhlberg remained popular in Latin America for the rest of his life. Few Western grandmasters reached the level of respect he did in the Soviet Union.

## Ulf Andersson

After Ståhlberg's death in 1967, it took only a couple of years until Ulf Andersson presented himself by winning the Swedish Championship in 1969. He quickly climbed the ladder and qualified for the grandmaster title in 1972. Throughout the 1980s, he participated in the international top tournaments with excellent results. If it hadn't been for his extreme unwillingness to lose and avoidance of risks, he could have been closer to the world championship than he actually was. His achievements and



importance, inspiring a whole generation of Swedish grandmasters, must also be considered an epoch in its own right.

If Ståhlberg ranks higher than Ulf Andersson, that will always be the question, but without a doubt, Ståhlberg's influence on Swedish chess cannot be overestimated. This work attempts to provide a factual basis for readers to form their own opinions.

Ståhlberg had, and still has, a reputation for being a “connoisseur of wine and spirits” and as a rather cursory writer about chess. There are too many testimonies about the former to be totally dismissed. However, referring to the period covered in this volume, it is simply not true. He was, in fact, a very fit person, probably exercising his athletic interests in table tennis and other sports quite frequently. It is true that Ståhlberg's annotations in the press after coming home from South America often are quite brief and fit into the same mold, but during the 1930s, his game notes were extensive, sometimes using military vocabulary, and it is evident from the games by him and his compatriots that they engaged in advanced opening preparations.

The early career of Gideon Ståhlberg, covered in this first volume subtitled “*The Musketeer Years*”, coincided with a period of Swedish chess during which several of its masters developed into world-class players. Had all of them performed at their highest level at the same time, the national team could very well have been the strongest in the world.

When Ståhlberg, 27 years old, entered the playing hall for the sixth chess Olympiad in Warsaw 1935, he was highly motivated and in top form. After a very busy year, coming directly from two months of touring in Finland and an incidental journey, he wanted to show the chess world how strong a team Sweden had become. But before going into these details, let's take it from the beginning.

# 1930 – Apprentice in the Chess World

Instead of competing for the Gothenburg City Championship, Ståhlberg characterized the participants in some detail in *Ny Tid* of January 12. He assigned the best chances to Eric Jonsson but noted that the experienced Ernst Lundin, the eventual winner, often finished among the prize winners. Jonsson took second place and debuting Gunnar Skarp, who received a special heads up from Ståhlberg, finished third.<sup>1</sup> For his club *Majorna*, Ståhlberg gave lessons in chess theory, the first one on February 24.<sup>2</sup>

What must have been Ståhlberg's first simultaneous tour was arranged in February. He made seven displays in the vicinity of Gothenburg, starting in Lysekil and ending up in Falkenberg.

## Match against Bogoljubow

**April 4 – April 8**

When a match with Efim Bogoljubow looked like a reality, Ståhlberg prepared himself by theoretical studies and a couple of training sessions. Three players of master or first category strength from *Majorna* lined up

as sparring partners by playing standard time games, with predetermined openings, simultaneously against Ståhlberg in the club room in Allécaféet. It is not known who played or what openings were used, but the first occasion on March 24 was won 3–0 by Ståhlberg after three hours. How the second meeting on March 31 ended was never reported in the press.<sup>3</sup>

Bogoljubow came from Triberg to Gothenburg on February 28. There he gave two simultaneous displays before he embarked on his second major tour through Sweden, including visits to Kiruna in the very north, Visby on the Baltic island of Gotland and Karlskrona in south east. Bogoljubow turned out to be far from unwilling when a match with Ståhlberg was suggested during his days in Gothenburg. A generous attitude considering he had nothing to gain by defeating Ståhlberg. When passing Stockholm, a preliminary agreement was reached, provided that the financing of SEK 300 could be guaranteed. Approaching the end of his exhausting journey around Sweden, the match with Ståhlberg was secured, thanks to a cunning move by Knut Robertson. When this opportunity to see Ståhlberg testing his strength against top notch opposition was turned down both by the Swedish and the

Simultaneous displays in February/March 1930								
Date	Place	Premises	Notes	#	+	=	-	%
9.2.1930	Lysekil			19	12	4	3	74%
13.2.1930	Borås	Café Orion	7:30 pm, 5h	21	18	2	1	90%
14.2.1930	Tråvad			25	15	9	1	78%
	Tollered			?				
	Munkedal			?				
	Varberg			?				
2.3.1930	Falkenberg	Stadshotellet	11:30 am, 5h	35	23	6	6	74%
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>100</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>79%</b>

Gothenburg chess federations, *Majorna* promised to handle the organization provided that Ståhlberg annotated the games, now reduced from six to four, without compensation. With this in hand, Robertson sold the publication rights “exclusively” to *Ny Tid*, *Stockholms-Tidningen* and *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* for SEK 100 each! Entrance fees of SEK 1 per game or SEK 2 for all four games contributed with another SEK 100, giving Ståhlberg coverage for coffee and bus tickets roundtrip Surte–Gothenburg. As a souvenir, Restaurant AB Vara donated a silver cup to each player.

With no words from Bogoljubow during the first days of April, the match organizers feared that he had left Sweden without keeping his commitment. This turned out to be incorrect and he showed up at the train station the night before the match, simply having been too busy to even keep a record of his own results.

Play began in Allécaféet at 5.30 pm on April 4. While the audience sat down in the actual café, following the games on a demonstration board, the players had a quiet place in *Majorna*’s room. The match unmercifully revealed that Ståhlberg wasn’t yet ready for the international arena. His opening repertoire didn’t meet the modern requirements and gave Bogoljubow two easy victories to begin with. Ståhlberg learned



The match opponents, ready for the first game.

a lesson and in the third game his Queen’s Gambit resulted in a tough fight. In the last game Bogoljubow had to fight for a draw, a pawn down in the endgame. It should be remembered that Bogoljubow at this point was close to his peak as a player. After his major successes in Moscow 1925 and in Bad Kissingen 1928 he had challenged Alekhine for the World Championship in 1929 and was still considered a title contender.

Gothenburg 1930	4.4	6.4	7.4	8.4	Tot
Ståhlberg, Gideon	0	0	0	½	½
Bogoljubow, Efim	1	1	1	½	3½

Time limit: 30 moves/2h, 15 moves/h

Schedule: game 1: 5.30 pm, 2 pm next day

game 2: 12 am–4 pm, 5 pm

game 3: 4 pm–8 pm, 8.30 pm

game 4: 4 pm–8 pm, 8.30 pm

## Gideon Ståhlberg

### Efim Bogoljubow [C30]

m Gothenburg (1), April 4, 1930

Annotations by Efim Bogoljubow and Gideon Ståhlberg

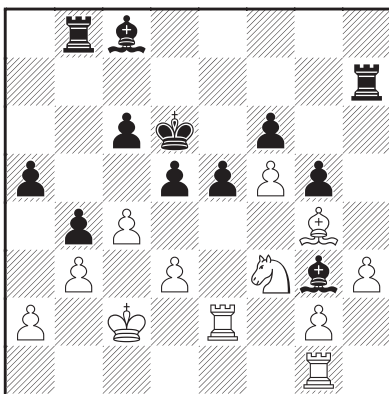
**1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nc6 3.d3 Nf6 4.Nc3 Bc5 5.f4?** With this move White transfers to a variation of the King’s Gambit Declined, something that really isn’t anything to strive for. (EB) **5...d6 6.Nf3 a6** I consider this move the strongest. After 6...Bg4 White can exchange the well placed bishop on c5 with 7.Na4. 6...Be6 is best met by 7.Bb5 with some counter chances. (EB) **7.f5** Theory recommends 7.fxe5 dxe5 8.Bg5 h6 9.Bxf6 Qxf6 10.Rf1 with equality. I consider, however, that Black still has an advantage, for example 10...Qd6 11.Qd2 Be6 12.Bxe6 fxe6! 13.0–0–0 0–0–0 etc. (EB) **7...Nd4!** (GS) **8.Bg5** The attacking attempt 8.Ng5 0–0 9.Nd5 is repulsed by 9...Nxd5 10.Bxd5 h6 followed by c6 and d5. (GS) **8...c6 9.Nxd4 Bxd4 10.Qd2 h6** Forcing the exchange of the bishop, since 11.Bh4? is met by Nxe4 etc. and if 11.Be3 then 11...d5. (EB) After 10...Bxc3 11.Qxc3 Nxe4 follows



Bogoljubow

12.Bxf7+. (GS) 11.Bxf6 Qxf6  
 12.Bb3 Bd7 13.Nd1 0-0-0  
 14.c3 Ba7 15.Ne3 After  
 15.Nf2 would have followed  
 15...g6!, e.g. 16.fxc6 Qxc6  
 17.0-0? Bh3! (GS) 15...Qg5  
 16.Nc4 Kc7 17.Qxg5 hxg5  
 18.Nd2 f6 19.Bd1 The re-  
 sulting endgame offers equal  
 chances. Black has the open  
 h-file and the bishop pair,  
 but its effectiveness is es-  
 sentially reduced. (GS) 19...  
 d5 20.Bg4 Better prospects

for the defense were offered by 20.Bf3 dxe4 21.dxe4 etc. (EB) White tries to achieve the idea of breaking on the h-file. From a practical point of view it would, however, have been better to secure the position for breaking attempts. After 20.Bf3 Rh4 21.g3 (not 21.h3 Rdh8 22.Ke2 in view of 22...g6! 23.fxc6? g4!) 21...Rh6 22.h3 Rdh8 23.Bg2 the position is just drawish. (GS) 20...g6! 21.Ke2 Rh4! 22.h3 gxf5 23.exf5 Now Black of course obtains a strong pawn center. 23.Bxf5 is, however, even less appropriate in view of 23...Bxf5 24.exf5 Rb8! (threatening g4) 25.Nf3 Rf4 26.g4 e4 etc. (EB) Consistently played but the beginning of great difficulties for White. Also after 23.Bxf5 Black obtains strong pressure on the white position. (GS) 23...Rh7 24.Rae1 b5! Of course White has no defense against this attack. 25.Kd1 a5 26.Kc2 Rb8 27.b3 Kd6 28.Nf3 Bc8 29.Rd1 The freeing attempt 29.h4 is still premature. After 29...g4 30.Nxh4 follows 30...Rg7 31.Ng6? (or 31.Bf3 Bf2) 31...Rxc6 and also after 30.Rxh4 Rg7! 31.Rf1 White is superior. (GS) 29...b4 30.c4 Bf2 31.Rdf1 Be3 32.Re1 Bf4 33.Rhg1 Bg3 34.Re2



After 34.Re2

34...a4! Black does not have to worry about the threat 35.Nd2 axb3+ 36.axb3 Ra7 37.Nf1 due to Bf2! (EB) A

carefully prepared advance, intending for the rooks to operate on the a-file. (GS) 35.Rb1 Ra7 36.Nd2 axb3+ 37.axb3 Ra2+ 38.Rb2 On 38.Kd1 follows 38...Rba8. (GS) 38...Ra1 39.Rb1 Rba8 40.Rxa1 Rxa1 41.Nb1 In severe time trouble White overlooks Black's neat response. Even after 41.Kb2, however, it is impossible to hold the game. (GS) 41...Bf2 42.Kc1 Bd4 43.g3 e4 44.dxe4 dxc4 45.bxc4 Ba6 46.Rh2 Here the game was adjourned. At resumption of the game, White immediately resigned. 0-1. Black forces the win by 46...Bxc4 47.Be2 Be3+ 48.Kc2 Ra2+ 49.Kd1 Bb3+ 50.Ke1 Rb2. (GS) *Tidskrift för Schack* 1930:5 pp98-99, author's translation (EB); *Ny Tid* April 6, 1930, author's translation (GS)

### Efim Bogoljubow Gideon Ståhlberg [D15]

m Gothenburg (2), April 6, 1930

Annotations by Efim Bogoljubow and Gideon Ståhlberg

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 Bf5 (?) I have refuted this move in detail in my book *1.d2-d4!*. (EB) This continuation, often used before, is now considered inferior, since White obtains pressure against Black's weakened queen's flank. (GS) 5.cxd5! Nxd5 6.Qb3 Nxc3 After 6...Qb6 comes, as is well known, 7.Nxd5 Qxb3 8.Nc7+ Kd8 9.axb3 Kxc7 10.Bf4+ etc. with advantage for White. (EB) A novelty. (GS) 7.bxc3 If now 7.Qxb7 then 7...Nd5 8.Qxa8 Qc7 followed by Nb6 or if 8.e4 then 8...Bxe4 9.Qxa8 (9.Nd2 Nb6!) 9...Qb6! (not 9...Qc7 because of 10.Ba6) (GS) 7...Qb6 8.Nd2! White obtains a strong pawn center with this move – the consequence of Black's failed treatment of the opening. (EB) An emphatic refutation of Black's play. After 8.Bf4 Nd7 9.Nd2 Nf6 10.f3 Black would have obtained fully equal play by 10...Nd5. (GS) 8...Bg6 9.e4 Nd7 10.f4! Prevents the freeing move e7-e5. (EB) 10...f6 Relatively better was 10...e6. Black gets totally confined after the text move. (EB) 10...e6 offered somewhat better chances, but White's superiority in the center is distinct also in this case. (GS) 11.f5 Bf7 12.Bc4 Qxb3 13.axb3 Nb6 14.Be6! g6 Black now gets totally locked up. There is no adequate defense against White's play on the open files and threatened break d4-d5. (GS) 15.Nc4! (GS) 15...Nxc4 16.bxc4 Bg7 17.0-0 0-0 18.Bf4 Bxe6 19.fxe6 f5 20.e5 Rfd8 21.Rfb1 b6 22.Ra6 Rdb8 23.Kf2 h6 24.h4 Kh7 25.Ke3 Rb7 26.Kd3 Rab8 27.Kc2 Rc8 28.c5 Rcb8 29.cxb6 axb6 30.Rba1! White breaks through in the fastest possible way. (GS) 30...c5 31.Ra8 cxd4 32.cxd4 Rxa8 33.Rxa8 Rc7+ After 33...b5 34.d5! g5 White wins in an elegant way by 35.d6! (GS) 34.Kd3 See Diagram. The ending needs no further comments. 1-0. *Tidskrift för Schack* 1930:5 pp99-100, author's translation (EB); *Ny Tid* April 8, 1930, author's translation (GS)