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Historical Archives
Olympic Studies Centre

Demetrius Vikelas

Fonds list

Overview of the content of the archives concerning his biography, mandates and activities from 1894 to 1994

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Reference: CH CIO-AH A-P01

Dates: 1894-1994

Level of description: Fonds

Extent and medium: 0.11 l.m. Text documents

Name of creator

International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Administrative / Biographical history

Demetrius Vikelas was born on 15 February 1835 at Ermoupolis on the island of Syros in Greece. Born into a family of traders, he was initiated into the world of commerce early on. By the age of 13, he was working in the family firm in Odessa. A great lover of literature, he continued to study at the same time, but without obtaining a degree. Throughout his life, Vikelas remained a self-taught man, despite at various times following courses in a variety of subjects, including botany, architecture and languages.

In 1851, after the family firm went bankrupt, Vikelas left his native Greece. After visiting several European cities, he settled in London, where two of his uncles employed him in their company, Melas Bros, specialising in trading cereals. Employed first as a bookkeeper, he expanded his knowledge of business and subsequently became a partner of what was then a flourishing company. During his 25 years within the company, Vikelas accumulated a large amount of capital. In 1866, his marriage to a rich Greek heiress, Kalliopis Jeralopoulou, only added to this capital. As a result, when Melas Bros went bankrupt in 1876, his fortune was sufficient to enable him to retire in comfort from the business world. He then devoted himself full-time to his literary activities. As well as translating classical works into modern Greek, he wrote essays on education and history, some novels and various press articles. In addition, after moving to Paris in 1878, he worked actively to promote Greece in Europe, and frequented intellectual circles.

In 1894, at the request of Loannis Fokianos – an athletics instructor heavily involved in Greek sport – Vikelas agreed to represent the Pan-Hellenic Gymnastics Club at the International Athletic Congress in Paris. Before this experience, Vikelas had no particular link to the world of sport. He nonetheless joined the second commission responsible for re-establishing the Olympic Games (OG). To his great surprise, he was appointed as the first President of what would become the International Olympic Committee (IOC). With Baron Pierre de Coubertin, he was one of the main figures behind the organisation of the first modern OG in Athens, in 1896. Once this project had been completed, he handed over the presidency to the Baron, but remained an IOC member until 1899. He re-entered the Olympic world when he was appointed as Greece's delegate at the 1905 Olympic Congress in Brussels.

All his life, Vikelas maintained a deep enthusiasm for the country of his birth, and was involved in numerous education initiatives. Through his efforts, Greece acquired an education museum, a school for the blind, a school shooting range and an apprenticeship school for workers. Awarded various distinctions, including an honorary doctorate from St Andrews University in Scotland (1893), he was also made a Commander of the National Order of Denmark and an Officer of the French Legion of Honour before his death in Athens on 20 July 1908.

Immediate source of acquisition or transfer

The fonds was received by the IOC Historical Archives in 1993, following the construction of the new Olympic Museum in Ouchy.

Scope and content

The fonds covers chiefly the professional activities of Demetrius Vikelas, especially those linked to his term as the first President of the IOC from 1894 to 1896. It gives details of the organisation of the first modern OG in Athens in 1896 and the important role Vikelas played in this ambitious project. Letters to Baron Pierre de Coubertin between 1894 and 1900 show Vikelas's confidence in and friendship for the Baron, as well as the obstacles encountered in the preparations for these Games, especially linked to Greek politics.

Last update: mars 11



The fonds contains correspondence, chiefly letters from Demetrius Vikelas to Baron Pierre de Coubertin. It also includes publications and various biographical articles on Vikelas. Lastly, the fonds contains some press articles on the Paris Congress in 1894 and the restoration of the OG, as well as a transcript of the minutes of the meetings of the OG Commission between 19 and 21 June 1894.

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. Some documents are in Greek and English.

Related units of description

A bigger fonds on Demetrius Vikelas can be found in the archives of the Hellenic Olympic Committee.

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

June 2006