

## Chapter 3

### Carl and Grace (Cook) Rhodin

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#### Introduction

Grace Margaret Cook's life rivals fiction. The granddaughter of Edward and Margaretha Koch (Chapter 1), she was raised in luxury by her aunt Clementina Bruntsch. Highly talented, she was well known in amateur theatrics and as a clubwoman. At age 36, she married Carl Rhodin, a prominent Civil Engineer and avid yachtsman, whose shocking death occurred at age 54.

Grace's sister Clara was raised by different relatives and had a life that was totally opposite to Grace's.



**Grace Rhodin, on her engagement**  
*San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec 25, 1907



**Carl Rhodin, in yachting attire**  
*San Francisco Chronicle*, May 4, 1932

**Note:** The above portraits were of necessity reproduced from microfilmed newspapers, in which the photo reproduction was extremely poor. The writer digitally removed the larger of the many spurious spots and lines, and blurred the rest, as well as the coarse halftone screen.

#### Youth

Grace's father was Alexander Cook, a son of Edward and Margaretha Cook, and a sibling of Edward, Edmund, and Ferdinand Cook, Clementina Bruntsch, and Phillippena Scheu.

In 1870 Alexander married Margaret T. Sweeney, one of the daughters of Edward Sweeney of San Francisco. Grace was their first child, born June 2 or 3, 1871. Their second child, Clara, was born May 29, 1874. Margaret died October 9, 1875, when Grace was 4 years old, and her sister Clara was about 1. Alex was unable to care for the children. Grace was sent to live with her uncle

Ferdinand and his wife Mary, while Clara was sent to live with his wife's sister Mary (Sweeney) Hayes. Both families lived in San Francisco. We suspect that after that time there was little or no contact between Grace and Clara and their father, for when he died in a county hospital in 1912, neither child came forward to claim the body. He was buried by the county.

Sometime prior to 1887 Grace moved to the home of her Aunt Clementina (Cook) Bruntsch in San Francisco, California. Clementina was married to San Francisco customs broker Carl Bruntsch. They had 6 children of their own. The family was affluent, talented and socially prominent. Grace fitted in perfectly with this environment. It provided opportunities that she would never otherwise have had. The full story of the Bruntsch family is given in chapter 2, "Carl and Clementina (Koch) Bruntsch".

Grace lived with Clementina until she was 36.

### **Clubwoman and actress**

In 1907, Grace was described by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "one of the best known girls in the Encinal City [Alameda], having been prominent in club work and amateur dramatic circles." Grace founded the Shakespeare Club of Alameda and acted as its president for a number of years. The 1907 *Chronicle* article called it "one of the most important literary clubs of Alameda" and stated that "under her leadership this club has advanced from the usual light reading club to the ranks of a power for culture." Years later the *San Francisco Examiner* noted that "Twenty-six years ago Mrs. Rhodin [Grace Cook] founded the Shakespeare Club of Alameda which is as popular today as in the beginning."

Grace was a very talented and dedicated amateur actress and director. In 1923, the *Examiner* wrote: "She is director of drama of the Sorosin Club and has been a student of Shakespeare, the Celtic dramas, Ibsen, Strindberg, Russian, Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese dramas. She has never ventured beyond the amateur field, although possessed of a talent which would warrant professional work." One of her most notable roles was in the play "The Stronger" by August Strindberg, performed in 1923 at an American Woman's Overseas League benefit at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. It features a prolonged confrontation between two women, in which one of the women, played by Grace, does not say a word. The drama critic of the *Examiner* was so impressed with Grace's silent acting that an interview with Grace was published in the paper. The critic wrote that Grace "sustained an absolutely silent part so effectively that few persons who saw her could really believe that she had not spoken a single word during the unfoldment of the drama."

## **Marriage**

Grace's social prominence led to her meeting Carl Jonas Rhodin, a well-known civil engineer who practiced in the Bay Area. Her engagement to Carl was announced on December 24, 1907 on the society page of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The article was illustrated by a portrait of Grace taken by Arnold Genthe, a photographer noted for his portraits of society women, artists, dancers and theater personalities. Carl and Grace were married April 22, 1908.

Grace was 36 at the time of her marriage, and her husband was 30. On March 1, 1916, at the age of 44, she gave birth to their only child, Carl William Rhodin.

## **Carl Jonas Rhodin**

Carl Jonas Rhodin was born May 11, 1877 at Kongelf, Sweden. He was the son of Carl Joseph Theodor and Caroline Gustava Nathalia (Trahn) Rhodin. He attended schools in England and at Gothenburg, Sweden. He studied civil and electrical engineering at the Royal Technical University in Stockholm, and graduated in 1900. He came to the United States in 1902, and during the next two years was employed as construction engineer on the Thebes bridge across the Mississippi River. Thereafter he practiced almost continuously as a construction engineer, principally in California and other Pacific coast states. Among the more important of his works, which he either planned, constructed or supervised, were the extensions and additions to the de Sabla hydraulic power system for the California Gas and Electric Company (1906), hydraulic improvements in Sacramento (1907-08), and the design and construction of several of the largest buildings in San Francisco. After 1908 he specialized in hydroelectric power developments, land reclamation, valuation rate fixing, and projected railway extensions. Among the corporations retaining his services were the Southern Pacific Railroad Co., Great Western Power Co., Pacific Gas and Electric Co., and others in Japan and China.

He was a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, Society of Swedish Engineers and Engineer's Club of San Francisco, and the Commercial Club. He also belonged to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, and for many years was chairman of the section on city planning.

Recreation was not neglected. He was a member of the Mt. Diablo Country Club, and the San Francisco Yacht Club. He was an ardent yachtsman and wrote a number of articles for magazines devoted to the sport. He was noted for the development of scientific standards of performance and methods for handicap yacht racing. He was one of the judges of the international yacht races during the Panama Pacific Exposition in 1915.

## **Last Years**

On May 3, 1932, Grace opened the door of a tool house at the rear of their home, and found Carl dead on the floor, shot through the head with a 32 caliber pistol which lay beside him. Carl and Grace had left home the previous morning, headed for separate destinations. Carl did not return home that night, but Grace did not worry because Carl often stayed overnight when working late in San Francisco.

The police concluded that instead of going to San Francisco, Carl returned home and committed suicide. Grace believed that his suicide was due to worry over financial reverses (it was the middle of the depression) and over the impending termination of his contract with Pacific Gas and Electric.

Carl's funeral was held May 5 at the Cathedral Chapel of the Grant D. Miller Mortuary in Oakland. The body was cremated. Carl and Grace's son was only 16 years old at the time of his father's death, a student at Oakland High School.

In 1935, Carl was selected for inclusion in the prestigious *National Cyclopædia of American Biography*. His technical papers are preserved at the California Water Resources Center at the University of California, Berkeley.

Grace lived for 24 more years, dying at the age of 95 on August 1, 1956. Her obituary stated that she was "long active in amateur theatrics in the Bay Area." This suggests that whatever her financial circumstances after her husband's death, it did not halt her involvement in the theater.

Carl and Grace's son Carl W. obtained a degree in engineering, probably at the University of California at Berkeley, and pursued a 47-year career as a mechanical engineer. He married **Inez B. Anderson** on May 26, 1951, in Alameda County, California. Inez was born May 30, 1920 in Alameda Co, CA, They had three children:

**Carl A. J. Rhodin**, born June 21, 1958

**Christian P. Rhodin**, born April 4, 1960

**Jon H. Rhodin**, born April 30, 1962

Carl W. Rhodin died at age 84 on May 16, 2000, in Oakland, California. He resided at 1107 El Centro Ave. He was survived by his wife Inez, who died May 15, 2008, last residence Fremont, Alameda Co, CA.

## **Grace's sister Clara**

Clara Alide Cook was born May 29, 1874. After the death of her mother in 1875, Clara was sent to live with her Mother's sister, Margaret (Seeney) Hayes and her husband Edward. Clara never married. She died at age 84 in Alameda County California on June 22, 1958.

Clara's niece Dona Bretherick recalled that:

. . . I remember fondly my Aunt Clara Cook (Koch) daughter of Alexander Koch. Clara was a frequent visitor as she lived in Oakland . . .

Aunt Clara clearly had no money. In later life, she lived in a small studio room apartment in Oakland and made hats to support herself. She had only a few stray cats for companionship. She never dressed well as I recall, and mother often invited her for dinner during the holidays which might support information about her financial and family situation.

In retrospect, I find it strange that she seemed to "fade away" without a trace, and that no other Cooks appeared at our house during my lifetime.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the following persons, without whose help I could not have compiled this biography. Jessie and Bob Bruntsch of San Diego and Barbara Barnett of Yuba City, California, shared information in their collections. Dona Bretherick of Berkeley, California, shared her personal recollections of Clara Cook. Margaret Posehn copied sources for me at the California State Library. Nancy Waterhouse found and copied census and other records for me at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City.

## Related chapters at this site

- 1 Edward and Margaretha (Jung) Koch
2. Carl and Clementina Koch Bruntsch
3. Carl and Grace (Cook) Rhodin
4. The Koch Brothers
5. Leonhard and Phillippena (Koch) Scheu
6. Children of Leonhard and Phillippena (Koch) Scheu

*Contact the writer if more information needed*

## Sources

(Symbols refer to items in the Bibliography)

### Grace

**Parents:** Name of father from the biography of Carl Rhodin, Bio1. Mother's maiden name from Social Security records, D2. Marriage date and mother's full name from N1.

**Birth of Grace:** D2, D3; consistent with age reported in 1880 census Ce2. No record from the time of birth found.

**Death of mother:** N2.

**Sent to live with relatives:** Census 1880, Ce2, Ce3, Ce4.

**No contact with father:** The informant for the death certificate of Alexander Cook,

(D7,9) was the county hospital, not a relative.

**Made home with Margaretha Bruntsch family:** N3

**Raised by Bruntsch family:** See Chapter 2 on Carl and Margaretha (Koch) Bruntsch.

**1907 Chronicle quotation:** N3

**Examiner quotation:** N6

**Grace's acting career:** N3, N6

**Marriage:** Engagement N3. Wedding date in Bio1

### Carl J. Rhodin:

**Carl J. Rhodin biography:** Bio1, N7

**Death of Carl J. Rhodin:** N7, N8

**Carl J. Rhodin papers:** D4  
**Death of Grace:** D3, D2, and obituary N9, D10  
**Child of Carl J. Rhodin:** N7  
**Carl W. Rhodin:** N9, D8  
**Marriage of Carl W. Rhodin:** D9, D10.  
**Dates of Inez Anderson Rhodin:** Social Security Death Index.  
**Son Carl W. Rhodin:** Ce7, Ce8, N7, N9, D9,  
**Residence of Carl W. Rhodin:** D10, M1  
**Clara Cook**  
**Birth and death dates:** CA Death Index D6.  
Not found in Social Security Death Index.

## Bibliography

### Biographies

**Bio1** Biography of Carl Rhodin, *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Vol. 24, pp. 336-337.

### Census

**Ce1** 1870 census, San Francisco, 2nd precinct, 7th ward, p 242, enumerated Jun 15, 1870, family of Edward Sweeny (age 50, b Ireland), including daughter Margaret Sweeney. Living with them is Alexander Cook.

**Ce2** 1880 census, San Francisco, p 123D, enumerated Jun 5, 1880, family of Ferdinand Cook. Living with them is Grace Cook, age 9

**Ce3** 1880 census, Fremont, Santa Clara Co, CA, Alexander Cook, widowed, living alone.

**Ce4** 1880 census, San Francisco, p 284D, family of William Hayes, wife Mary, Clara Cook age 7 living with them.

**Ce5** 1900 census: Grace not found.

**Ce6** 1910 Census, Alameda City and Co, ED 12, sheet 11A, enumerated Apr 21, 821 Pardu St, family of Carl Rhodin.

**Ce7** 1920 Census, Alameda City and Co, ED 13, sheet 15, enumerated Jan 12-13, 1727 Encinal Ave, family of Carl Rhodin

**Ce8** 1930 Census, Oakland, Alameda Co, CA, ED 1-49, sheet 6A, family of Carl Rhodin, 6468 Benvenue Ave, enumerated Apr 5.

### Documents

**D1** Application for Social Security number: Grace Rhodin by Carl Rhodin, conservator, Apr 14, 1963, SSN 551-70-9455.

**Raised by mother's sister:** She first appears in the 1800 census in in the family of William and Margaret Hayes (Ce4).  
**Margaret's maiden name:** Sweeney is from the surname of her brother James who is living in the same family. We know that this is the right Clara because in 1970 both Alexander and his soon-to-be wife Mary were living in the household of William Hayes (Ce1).

**D2** Social Security Death Index: Grace Rhodin, SSN 551-70-9455.

**D3** California Death Index: Grace Rhodin, mother's maiden name Sweeney.

**D4** Carl J. Rhodin Papers: The Water Resources Center Archives at the University of California, Berkeley.

**D5** California Death Index Carl W. Rhodin, son of Grace and Carl. No obituary found.

**D6** CA Death Index, Clara Cook, SSN 552-07-4401. Not found in Social Security Death Index.

**D7** Death certificate of Alex A. Cook, State index no. 629, Santa Clara Co., CA.

**D8** CA Birth Index, 1906-1995

**D9** CA Marriage Index

**D10** Death certificate of Carl William Rhodin, Alameda Co., CA.

### Family sources

**F1** E-mails from Dona Bretherick to me, Sep 30, 2004 and Oct 25, 2004.

### Newspaper articles

**N1** Marriage of Grace's parents: *San Francisco Morning Call*, Aug 19, 1870, p. 3, col. 3

**N2** Death of Grace's mother: *San Francisco Morning Call*, Oct 11, 1875. p 4, col. 2

**N3** Grace's engagement: *San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec 25, 1907

**N4** Annual play of Shakespeare Club: *San Francisco Call*, Dec 25, 1907.

**N5** American Federation of Woman's Clubs district meeting: *San Francisco Call*, Feb 18, 1910, p 8.

**N6** Newspaper interview on silent acting: *San Francisco Examiner*, Apr 24, 1923, p 11.

**N7** Obituary of Carl Rhodin: *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 4, 1932, p 11

**N8** Death notice for Carl Rhodin: *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 4, 1932, p 11.

Same notice in *Oakland Tribune*, May 4, 1932

**N9** Obituary and death notice for Grace Rhodin, *Oakland Tribune*, Aug 4, 1966, p 37.

**Miscellaneous**

**M1** 2000 Telephone book: Carl Rhodin, Oakland, CA, online, Ancestry.com.