

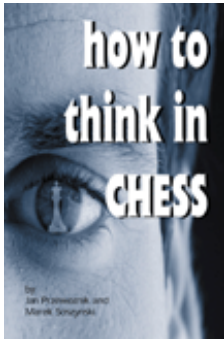


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## A Tale of One City

John S. Hilbert

“We propose to touch on all events of any importance, so far as we have been able to ascertain, that have occurred in this city, or that have taken place elsewhere with Philadelphia players taking part.” *Chess in Philadelphia*, p.5

*Chess in Philadelphia*, by Gustavus C. Reichhelm, with the assistance of Walter Penn Shipley (original publication, Philadelphia 1898); 2001 Moravian Chess, Hardcover, English Descriptive Notation, \_\_\_pp., \$35.00

Collecting rare chess books has long been a passion of the well-to-do chess lover. Doing so is but another manifestation of the many-sided pleasures associated with the game, a field perfect for the book lover and reader of glories of the past. Until recently, however, unless you were willing to spend a hefty sum and considerable time combing used book lists and auction catalogs, obtaining many of the gems of the past simply wasn't realistic.

Thanks to Dr. Vlastimil Fiala and his Publishing House Moravian Chess, working out of the Czech Republic, those interested in the history of the game now have a much more reasonably priced way to gain access to some delightful and enlightening volumes hitherto neglected. One such volume, the first of what will probably be several reviewed here, is entitled *Chess in Philadelphia*.

When originally published in 1898, *Chess in Philadelphia* was released in a limited print run of only 500 copies. Of those, over half were subscribed for prior to the publication date. The November 1898 issue of *American Chess Magazine* recommended contacting Shipley to purchase a copy, as “every volume will be an ornament to the center table and be as fine as type and paper can make it.” The price was \$2.50. Today, with the passing of time and time's inevitable wrath, not to mention inflation, copies of *Chess in Philadelphia* are not all that easy to find. And when one is found, in relatively good condition, the volume can readily sell for \$250 to \$300 dollars. Autographed copies, either by Reichhelm or Shipley, can bring even higher prices. My own copy, the one truly “original” volume in my library, was signed by Emil Kemeny, chess editor of the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* during the 1890s, and for many years a good friend of the authors. In order to preserve my copy, specialized book restoration was required, including treatment of each page to prevent further disintegration. Restoration added another \$100 to the cost. As House Moravian's reprint of *Chess in Philadelphia* retails for less than \$30, clearly obtaining such a reprinted volume represents a substantial savings for those interested in the book's contents.

Gustavus Charles Reichhelm (1839-1905), though born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, long made his home in Philadelphia, a city whose chess strength throughout the nineteenth century was second in the United States only to New York City. A chess obituary on Reichhelm appears in the *American Chess Bulletin* for November 1905, at pp.355-56. Not surprisingly, the piece was written by Walter Penn Shipley, Reichhelm's coauthor and confidant for many years. Reichhelm was known as an excellent player, and for many years was considered the unofficial champion of Philadelphia. He scored well against master strength players who visited the city, such as George H. Mackenzie, then recognized as United States champion, and James Mason, then living in the United States. Reichhelm's formal match play, however, was handicapped by what he himself referred to as a “nervous excitement”



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in crucial games.

Reichhelm's contribution to chess hardly stopped with his own play. He was a noted problemist and chess editor. In November 1859, Paul Morphy made his only visit to Philadelphia, but it was enough to set off excitement over the game in the city. Following Morphy's departure, the first Philadelphia Chess Club was formed. According to Reichhelm himself (for in truth much of this information can be found in *Chess in Philadelphia* itself), there were 87 chess columns in the United States in 1860, no less than seven of them in Philadelphia alone. On March 17, 1860, for example, the *Philadelphia Evening Journal* began its chess column, edited by W. Lehman Walker and Reichhelm. However, the experiment was short-lived, and the column ended October 13, 1860.

Shortly thereafter, in 1861, Reichhelm took over the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* chess column, a column that had originally been started in 1858 by Francis Wells and Dr. Samuel Lewis. By the time the *Evening Bulletin* column ceased publication on December 30, 1870, Reichhelm had run an astonishing 775 chess problems and 2,640 games. He would offer multiple games each column, and would divide them by geographic location, assigning such subheadings as Chess in New York, Chess in New Orleans, and, of course, Chess in Philadelphia. Though Reichhelm never mentioned it, it appears more than probable that he took the title of his book from the subheadings in his *Evening Bulletin* column of many years before.

In 1873 Reichhelm edited the *Chess Record*, a separate publication devoted to chess, but one that very quickly merged that same year with the *Philadelphia Intelligencer*, and thereafter ran at less frequent intervals. As a columnist, however, Reichhelm is better remembered for his *Philadelphia Times* chess column, which began January 18, 1880, and ran until that paper ceased publication in August 1902, when Reichhelm took over Emil Kemeny's duties at the *Philadelphia North American*, where he ran his column until his death on Thanksgiving afternoon, November 30, 1905. His very last column appeared a few days later, in December 1905, and subsequent research has revealed that it was his good friend, Shipley, who had ghost written the final column, and who had helped his dying friend at the end. Shipley himself was a five-time champion of the prestigious Franklin Chess Club in Philadelphia, as well as three-time Pennsylvania State champion. He had his own column, inherited from Pillsbury, in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* from 1906 until his death in 1942, at which time no less a personage than Hermann Helms wrote of Shipley as being "the Dean of American Chess."

I have gone to the trouble of giving the background above for the very good reason that little, if anything, is remembered today about Reichhelm or Shipley. Republication of *Chess in Philadelphia*, in an accessible and reasonably priced edition, however, should go a long way to rescue these figures from the oblivion to which they have hitherto been assigned. As we have Reichhelm and Shipley to thank for their painstaking efforts in crafting the story of chess in Philadelphia through the nineteenth century, we have House Moravian to thank for resurrecting the book for readers to enjoy in the twenty-first.

*Chess in Philadelphia* runs 158 pages. Its Table of Contents shows the volume is divided into thirteen chapters, as follows:

- Chapter 1, Historical Survey (pp.5-22)
- Chapter 2, Biographical Sketches (pp.23-30)
- Chapter 3, Leading Philadelphia Tournaments (pp.31-39)
- Chapter 4, Pennsylvania State Tournaments (pp.40-41)
- Chapter 5, New York State Tournaments (pp.42-44)
- Chapter 6, Principal and Minor Team Matches (pp.45-47)
- Chapter 7, Knockout and Rapid Transit Tournaments of the Franklin Chess

Club (pp.48-51)

- Chapter 8, Simultaneous and Blindfold Exhibitions given at Philadelphia by Celebrated Chess Masters (p.52)
- Chapter 9, Tournaments and Team Matches of Junior Chess Club (pp.53-54)
- Chapter 10, Mercantile Library Tournaments (p.55)
- Chapter 11, Correspondence Tournaments Participated in by Philadelphia Players (pp.56-59)
- Chapter 12, Games (pp.60-119)
- Chapter 13, Solving Tournaments and Problems (pp.120-126)

In addition the book includes an Appendix (pp.127-149) comprised of numerous Paul Morphy games collected by Reichhelm in the 1860s (and which I am sure have been incorporated into standard Morphy collections today), a listing of the top fifty tournaments worldwide from London 1851 through Cologne 1898, and various listings of matches between cities, clubs, and individuals, followed by Reichhelm's own system for chess move notation designed, according to the author, for cable chess. Indexes according to openings, players, individuals mentioned, and miscellaneous matters appear at pp.150-158.

I have included above the page numbers for each chapter so readers interested in the book can get a sense of the extent of the content. For instance, obviously almost half the text proper (59 pages out of 126) are given over to games. Of the 154 games in the text, 125 are games played by Philadelphia players between 1847 and 1898. Similarly, one can also guess, given the single page devoted to chapter 8, that the "chapter" is in fact merely a list of either simultaneous or blindfold performances given by masters visiting the city.

Brief consideration will be given here to some of the chapter highlights. Chapter 1, Historical Survey, is really a detailed timeline, by year, of chess in Philadelphia between 1802 and 1898. The vast majority of entries involve the period 1859 forward, starting with Morphy's visit to the city. Much like the Bobby Fischer boom following his winning of the world championship in 1972, chess saw a surge of popularity around the nation in the late 1850s and early 1860s, following Morphy's national and European triumphs. The timeline is an excellent source of information on the development of chess in Philadelphia. One can only wish, as with the book as a whole, that more cities around the world could find a Reichhelm and a Shipley to chronicle the great chess events of the past.

Chapter 2, Biographical Sketches, covers seven early Philadelphia chess players, including H. Philips Montgomery, Philadelphia's sole representative at the First American Chess Congress, New York 1857. In that event Montgomery, after defeating his first round opponent, Allison, 3-1, fell to Louis Paulsen in the second round, 2-0. (Montgomery was called back to Philadelphia on business, and had to resign the match to Paulsen. A review of the two games in the tournament book indicates, too, that the second game was originally drawn at move 21, but when he did not leave New York at the hour the next morning he was expected to, Montgomery agreed to play the game out, resulting in a loss after hasty play.) Another brief sketch of some interest is the one on William C. Wilson, former Civil War major and, finally, murder victim. Wilson happened to be vice president of the Franklin Chess Club when he was bludgeoned to death at his business in August 1897.

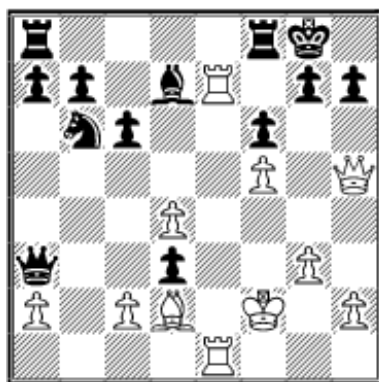
Chapter 3, Leading Philadelphia tournaments, gives crosstables for numerous events, including every championship for the Franklin Chess Club played from its inception in 1885 through the 1897-98 event. Unless one happens to have ready access to a copy of Jeremy Gaige's *Chess Tournament Crosstables*, Vol. 1 (1851-1900), *Chess in Philadelphia* is the only book offering this material. Chapter 5, Tournaments of the New York State Chess Association, owes its presence in a

book devoted to Philadelphia chess due to the curious fact that the New York State Chess Association's predecessor organization was the New York and Pennsylvania State Chess Association, and Pennsylvania members at the time the organization changed over were allowed to retain their membership. This also explains why the winners at Cooperstown 1886, Skaneateles 1892, Buffalo 1894 and Skaneateles 1895 were all Philadelphia residents. These crosstables appear in the book as well.

Chapter 11, on correspondence chess, was likely done entirely by Walter Penn Shipley. This would be understandable, since Shipley was co-winner of the *Globe* Correspondence Tourney, No. 2 (an early correspondence event sponsored by the St. John, New Brunswick newspaper, the *Globe*) as well as the main force behind the Continental Correspondence Chess Tournament of 1894-1898. Crosstables for both events appear in *Chess in Philadelphia*, and in fact do not appear in Gaige's massive, four volume work on crosstables.

Chapter 12, Games, of course, is the heart of the text, though as has been suggested above, a great deal of information is provided by the other chapters in the book. The first nine chess games are various consultation team encounters between Philadelphia and Boston (two games, in 1847, ending 1½-½ in favor of Philadelphia), and Philadelphia and New York (seven games, between 1856 and 1886, favoring Philadelphia by the lopsided score of 5-0, with 2 draws). Each of the 126 games in this section is annotated, though not always with the precision one would like to see.

Take for instance, the following position:



**Kemény – Showalter, Sixth Match Game, US Championship, Philadelphia 1896**

**Position after 23...cxd3**

Here Reichhelm and Shipley give the conclusion of the game: **24.Bh6!** A beautiful stroke, and one which was earned by the previous play. **24...d2** If 24...gxh6 25.Qxh6 Rf7 26.Rxf7 Kxf7 27.Qxh7+ Kf8 28.Qh6+ Kf7 29.Qg6+ Kf8 30.Qxf6+ Kg8 31.Re4 wins. **25.Rxg7+ Kh8 26.Rxh7+ Kxh7 27.Qg6+ 1-0** *Chess in Philadelphia*, p.105.

While the game is quite interesting to play over, one should be wary of the annotations. Here, for instance, in the note following 24...d2, Reichhelm and Shipley overlook, after 24...gxh6, that White can mate in two moves with 25.Qg4+, followed by 26.Qg7.

Do such errors warrant condemning the book? Not really. First, clearly, errors or not, the work is of historical interest for anyone at all concerned with nineteenth century American chess play. Second, it is my belief that the average club player, rather than avoiding historic games and their possible errors in annotation, would do well to play over such games with some care. As is so often the case, while many games played before 1900 might lack sophistication, they correspondingly offer great opportunity for fruitful independent study. In the example above, White's twenty-fourth move brings to bear on Black's King the one piece in his forces not participating in the attack. The direct attack on the King, and how it is carried out, is a useful illustration for the vast majority of club strength players. That Reichhelm and Shipley failed to find a mate in two in their 24...gxh6 line only offers readers the chance to find it for themselves. Please do not misunderstand my point. I am not advocating shoddy analysis any more than I am advocating the careless playing through of old games. My point, rather, is that for the vast majority of players, and readers, rated, say, expert and below, the examination of such historical games as found in a work like *Chess in Philadelphia* can be both entertaining and of some pedagogical value, and should not be dismissed out of hand. And certainly not dismissed entirely in exchange for the playing through of only, say, Kasparov's

latest games, which, instructive as they may be, might well prove too complex to be of much direct value.

Regardless of such debatable matters as educational value, the games in *Chess in Philadelphia*, besides being fun, offer the reader a collection of games he or she is unlikely to run across in any other form, or by any other means. A quick check through ChessBase's million plus game base revealed only 22 games played in Philadelphia before 1899. Of those, 13 come from one Lasker simultaneous exhibition in 1892, and four more come from the series of games played between Steinitz and Martinez ten years earlier. As for volumes on individual players, a few of these games will appear in exhaustive and specialized game compilations, such as Ken Whyld's exceptional collection of Lasker's games, as well as the standard collections of Steinitz's games. But even with such volumes in your own chess library, the vast majority of games in *Chess in Philadelphia* will prove to be new. In short, all but a few of the 126 games in this volume will prove new to the average reader, and many of the games will turn out to bear replaying, selected as they have been by two of the most accomplished chess masters Philadelphia produced in the nineteenth century, and from the many thousands of games that appeared in Reichhelm's chess columns over a period of nearly forty years.

What Reichhelm and Shipley have done is provide not only a detailed record of the highlights of chess in one of the United States' strongest chess cities, but also an entertaining volume of interesting chess games, problems (there are eighteen composed by Reichhelm, B.M. Neil, Julius A. Kaiser, J. Elson, and other nineteenth century Philadelphians), and historical information likely to entertain most chess palates. What House Moravian has done is make such a volume, long available only to specialized collectors of rare chess books, accessible to today's rank and file lovers of chess.

There are of course some negative aspects of the reprint. Reichhelm's original volume was published with a page size of approximately seven inches by ten inches. The reprinted version is closer to six inches by eight. The print is thus significantly smaller in the reprint, though it is entirely legible. The same cannot be said of the photographs. Enough detail is lost in the reproductions here, when compared to the originals, that it is safe to say that if you are considering buying the reprint for the photographs, you shouldn't. In addition, some sort of short, introductory material, no more than, say, one or two pages, explaining something of the context of the book, would have been helpful for readers not intimately aware beforehand of the work's place in American chess history. These points, however, are details that can largely be ignored by those seeking simply to read and enjoy the book's content. Those who do will likely be very pleasantly surprised.

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