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Winding through the Past

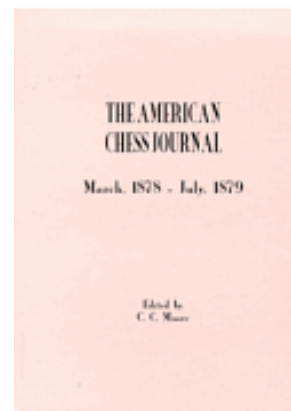
John S. Hilbert

“Believing that a first-class Chess Publication could be sustained if issued at New York, we have brought the *American Chess Journal* to the metropolis, and propose to give the chess public as good a Chess Magazine as is possible.”
—*The American Chess Journal*,
March 1878, p.1

“It is about time that personalities and jealous criticisms were expunged from our chess departments. We advocated this principle over a year ago and have been abused ever since for it.” —*The American Chess Journal*,
September 1878, p.147

The American Chess Journal, March, 1878 – July 1879, 2002 Publishing House Moravian Chess, English Descriptive Notation, Hardcover, 400pp., \$35.00

The history of few chess magazines in the United States are quite as winding as that of the *American Chess Journal*. Although the facts are not all clear, it appears the magazine first is-sued out of Hannibal, Missouri, in June 1876, and for a year saw publication as a monthly endeavor. William S. Hallock is listed as first editor of the publication. From July 1877 through the end of that year, the publication became a bimonthly. In January 1878 the magazine re-turned to its monthly format, moved its headquarters to New York City, and by March or April of that year could boast as editor Samuel Loyd. Loyd’s tenure as editor and the magazine’s home in New York lasted only through June or July 1879, a period of little more than a year. Although the magazine seems to have submerged at that point, it resurfaced that fall, in October 1879, as a quarterly publication, edited by a gentleman by the name of E. Barbe out of Chi-cago.



If this isn’t confusing enough, consider this: *The American Chess Journal*, when it first ap-peared in June 1876, began its first issue representing itself as issue number 74—thus con-tinu-ing the numbering of its parent publication, *The Chess Journal*, also known as *The Du-buque Chess Journal* and *Brownson’s Chess Journal*, which under one or another title had seen birth in August 1870. Continuing the issue numbers with 74



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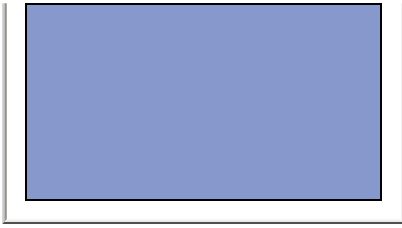
wouldn't have been so confusing if in February 1877, eight months after *The American Chess Journal* began publication, *The Chess Journal* hadn't resumed publication. And you guessed it. With its first number as issue 74. A. Brownson published *The Chess Journal* out of Dubuque, Iowa, for over twenty years, between 1870 and 1892. More or less, interruptions and spin-offs aside.

Thus, the object of our present concern, *The American Chess Journal* can be seen in retro-spect as both a continuation journal and an offshoot journal of the same publication. If any doubt remains as to just how confusing all this seems, I suggest the reader check the online catalog for the Cleveland Public Library and study the entry for "American Chess Journal, Hannibal, Mo. : [s.n.], 1876-[1881]." I'm sure the cataloger who put that entry together retired young. And just for good measure, don't forget that echoes of the magazine names given here reverberate to the present. Since April 1977 the Chess Journalists of America (known as the Association of Chess Journalists, in the early years) have been producing their own publication, *The Chess Journalist*. And in the early 1990s we had once more a short-lived *American Chess Journal*, this time out of Massachusetts.

The history of *The American Chess Journal* is a confusing tale, and one that continues now in relation to the reprint volume considered here. More questions are raised than answered when one considers the particulars. The cover of this reprint indicates the volume was edited by C.C. Moore. As noted above, however, the editor listed at Cleveland for this period of the magazine's life is noted New York problemist and gamesman Samuel Loyd. Although the volume's cover indicates the contents covered run from March 1878 through July 1879, the last issue is in fact June 1879. Curious too is the "temporary production" of the design the new publisher offered readers for the magazine's cover, which appears as the first page in the re-print, and which no doubt stands as one of the most hideous efforts ever to bedevil a chess magazine. I'm surprised it didn't single-handedly cause the magazine's downfall. That effort is dated April 1878, while the first issue in the reprint is dated March 1878.

The only advantage the temporary design gives readers of the reprint is the knowledge that C.C. Moore was the publisher of the New York venture who was "assisted by" three names well-known to chess readers of the times: Samuel Loyd, G.H. Mackenzie, and James Mason. One suspects that the truth of the matter as to who was actually editor of *The American Chess Journal* between March 1878 and the end of June 1879 is more a question of who was responsible for publishing and general editorial tasks (Moore) and who was responsible for the actual chess content (likely Loyd, with Mackenzie and Mason really doing the "assisting").

The magazine's introductory remarks for this New York incarnation are revealing in other ways as well. According to Moore, the publication was not commenced "for the purpose of speculation or personal gain, [but rather] the entire profits and proceeds shall be devoted to the



ad-vancement and improvement of the Magazine.” Worthy as such a goal might be, it also hints at why the magazine managed little more than a year in its present form. Moore also intended the magazine to reach a larger segment of the chess public than otherwise expected, for the intention was “to produce a pleasant and agreeable home companion that shall possess interest for the great mass of amateurs who practice the game by the quiet of their own hearth-stones, and have no opportunity—even if they had the desire—to avail themselves of the practice of the chess club.”

Moore made good his threat—though admittedly he no doubt considered it in other terms—to attempt an “agreeable home companion” on the very next page when he began the serialization of a Victorian monstrosity entitled “The Diamond Castle,” which took up nearly eight precious pages, in very small print, of the volume’s first issue. Fortunately the story ends after the first three issues, but the reader will find similar items in most issues.

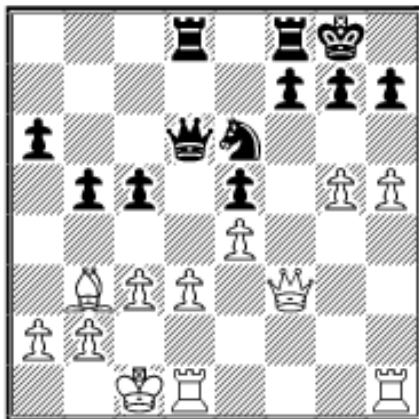
Thankfully the remainder of the March 1878 issue is largely devoted to chess in more accustomed form. With Loyd as a major figure in the magazine’s production, no one should be surprised at the extensive number of chess problems that appear in its pages. The first issue alone offers twenty-three problems (number twenty-two is a Loyd problem, while twenty-three is by the nation’s other great composer of the period, W.A. Shinkman). Many are reprinted from sources such as the *New Orleans Globe-Democrat, Turf, Field, and Farm*, the *Hartford Times*, and so on. All told readers can expect to find 345 chess problems in this work.

The first issue’s game section, quite possibly with annotations by Mackenzie and Mason, though neither are identified by name, contains nine annotated games. And it is here, in the game section, that the true value of this volume appears, at least for this reviewer. Readers will find here a wealth of local New York games unlikely to be found elsewhere, at least in readily available form. A series of five New York consultation games appears in the first issue, with players changing sides from game to game, but including players of the caliber of Mackenzie, Mason, Delmar and Frank Teed. The second game not only received some significant commentary, but also included a letter from I. Edward Orchard discussing the niceties of alternative play at White’s twenty-second move. The game is given here, though not Orchard’s entire letter, which does appear in the magazine. It is unclear whether the game was actually played in late 1877 or early 1878.

Mason, Benzinger, De Vaux - Mackenzie, Delmar, Teed [C30] Cafe International, New York, 1877 (or possibly early 1878)

1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Bc5 3.f4 3.Nf3 is a safer and perhaps a stronger move; but as, in all probability, it would have brought about a slow and stereotyped sort of game, the more venturesome 3.f4 was preferred. **3...d6 4.Nf3 Nf6 5.Bc4 Nc6 6.d3 a6** To preserve the King’s bishop, which White threatened to get rid of by Na4, etc. 6...Ng4 would not advance their prospects, as

White could reply with 7.Qe2, followed by Kd1 in case the bishop checked. **7.Qe2 Bg4 8.Be3 Nd4** We should have hesitated between this and 8...exf4--indeed, the latter looks far the more trouble-some of the two. **9.Bxd4 Bxd4 10.h3 Bxf3 11.Qxf3 c6 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.Ne2** Black cannot take the exposed pawn without rendering more than an equivalent. **13...b5 14.Nxd4 Qxd4 15.c3 Qd6 16.Bb3 Rd8 17.0-0-0 c5 18.g4 0-0** At this stage the contest appears to be slightly in favor of White. **19.g5 Ne8 20.h4 Nc7 21.h5 Ne6**



22.Rhg1 Nearly half an hour was spent in discussing the situation here. Mr. Mason suggested h6 as promising, but it was at once tabooed on the ground that Black might capture both pawns and still establish a successful defense. He then proposed g6 (feeling sure that the pushing of either pawn was essential to the maintenance of the attack) but Mr. De Vaux, after a careful examination, pronounced against it, Mr. Benzinger was neutral, and the discussion went on. Finally, admonished by the lapse of time that something had to be done, Rhg1 was indicated, underwent a close scrutiny of full thirty seconds duration, was thought "safe," approved and made. The result shows it did not sustain the expectations formed of it. The subjoined analysis for which we are indebted to Mr. I.E. Orchard, proves that one of the moves above referred to, viz. 22.h6, should have been adopted instead [*readers will find that letter and accompanying analysis at p.21--JSH*]; and the following likely continuation shows the other, g6, to be not inferior: 22.g6 fxg6 23.Qh3 Rf6 24.hxg6 hxg6 25.Bd5 and though Black have a pawn plus their position is not enviable. **22...Kh8 23.Bc2** On a par with its predecessor. The bishop should have been left at b3. **23...b4 24.h6 Nf4** The game is now decidedly in favor of Black and it remains so to the end. **25.hxg7+ Kxg7 26.cxb4 cxb4 27.d4** Precipitating the catastrophe; but if they had acted wholly on the defensive they would have sacrificed whatever chance of escape such a move affords. It is better to die in the field than starve in a fortress. **27...exd4 28.Rdf1 d3 29.Qxf4** The final mistake! Even now 29.Bd1 might have led to a draw. **29...Qxf4+ 30.Rxf4 Rc8 31.Rg2 Rfe8 32.Rd2 Rxc2+ 33.Rxc2 dxc2 34.Kxc2 Re5 35.Kb3 a5 36.a3 bxa3 37.bxa3 Rxc2 38.Kc4 h5 39.Kd4 Kg6 40.a4 f6 41.Rf3 h4 42.Ke3 Rg4 43.Rf1 h3 44.Kf3 Kg5 45.Rh1 Kh4 46.Rh2 Rg3+ 0-1**

The American Chess Journal, March 1878, pp.20-21

Another nice feature of this reprint, unlike many others, is that a number of the illustrations are of acceptable quality to be scanned and used for other purposes. This is because the publisher and editorial workers of *The American Chess Journal* relied on engravings rather than photographs. Even so, some of the illustrations are reprinted too dark, and the printing

process used to create this reprint could not adequately give the detail a number of the illustrations required. Some, however, work nicely, such as the following engraving of George Mackenzie, titled for readers simply as “The Captain,” and appearing between the November and December 1878 numbers (it is unclear whether these engravings appear at the start of a number or at the end of the previous one, although the former appears most likely).

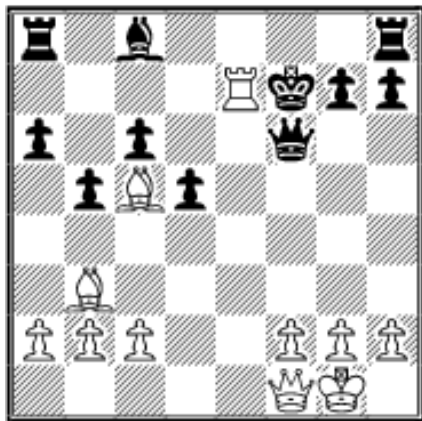
The April 1878 issue was the first to include an engraving, that one being of John Cochrane, who had died in London two months before. The engraving was taken from the *Westminster Times*. In addition, the issue reproduced a lengthy and highly entertaining letter taken from *The Hartford Times* that spoke of Cochrane and his personality. For example, the author noted that “Dull men condemn the style of Cochrane, while incapable of appreciating his *coups*. A civilization that tends towards a uniform respectable mediocrity should be thankful for marked individuality. Cochrane’s style was Cochrane himself. Bestow on Byron the calmness of Wordsworth and the piety of Herbert, erase failings, supplement with virtues—he were no longer Byron; we should lose a giant poet to gain an average parson. And so with Cochrane—a tame, caged Cochrane were no Cochrane!” One will not find such writing, or such evocative, richly cultivated prose in general, in today’s chess magazines. One will also find in the same letter, under the authority of the writer having heard the statements from Cochrane’s own lips, that privately Cochrane resented Staunton’s handling of him in *The Chess Player’s Companion*, where Cochrane was made to look like a mere pawn-and-move bumpkin to Staunton’s steady talent. Cochrane, so the writer had been informed, had won the majority of the last even games he had played against the English champion. These are the tidbits that help breathe life into the portraits of the players of the past, that return them to the flesh and blood of emotion and personal conflict, both for petty reasons and for great.

Those interested in early correspondence chess games will find examples in this volume as well. Here, for example, taken from the June 1878 issue, is a game played in the *Hartford Globe* correspondence tournament. The winner, Delmar, of course, is the noted over-the-board player, while his opponent, I.E. Orchard, is the gentleman who had provided some analysis for the game from an earlier issue, given above.

E. Delmar – I.E. Orchard Hartford Sunday Globe Correspondence Tourney, 1878

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0–0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 The defense adopted in this game by Black was first recommended by the Leipsic School. If 8.dxe5, Dr. M. Lange proposed for Black ...Be6. Anderson prefers 7...d5 8.dxe5 Ne7 9.Be3 Bb7 10.Nbd2 Nxd2 11.Qxd2 etc. **8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.dxe5 c6 10.Be3 Bc5 11.Nd2 Nxd2 11...Qe7** was the correct play here, when the game would have proceeded thus: 12.Bxc5 Qxc5 13.Nxe4 dxe4 with a good game. Black’s move was evidently made

under the impression that White could not afford to give up the exchange. **12.Bxc5** A nice piece of strategy. White's sacrifice of the exchange is perfectly sound, although somewhat impaired by his fourteenth move. **12...Nxf1 13.Qxf1 f5 14.exf6** A move we cannot quite agree with. 14.a4, although not so immediately aggressive, appears to us as more effective. Yet the move in the text makes things quite lively for Black. **14...Qxf6 15.Re1+ Kf7 16.Re7+**



16...Qxe7 Forced, for if 16...Kg6 17.Qd3+ Bf5 18.Qg3+ with a won game. As the game is very interesting hereabouts, we give a diagram of the position after White's sixteenth move. [Actually, no diagram appears in the issue, although one is given here for the sake of this re-view.—JSH] **17.Bxe7 Kxe7 18.f4 g6 19.a4 Be6 20.Qe1 Kd7 21.Qc3 Rhf8 22.Qd4 Kd6 23.c4 Rf5 24.g4 c5** White's maneuvers are above criticism, and

Black's play is equally fine, but "fortune favors the strongest battalions." **25.Qe3 d4 26.Qe4 Rff8 27.Qe5+ Kd7 28.Qxc5 Rxf4 29.cxb5** Well played. Black's position is now deplorable. **29...Rxc4+ 30.Kf2 Rf4+ 31.Ke1 Raf8 32.Qc6+ Kd8** Black has no resource. **33.Bxe6 Rf1+ 34.Ke2** This game is one of the most interesting of the tournament. **1-0**

The American Chess Journal, June 1878, p.81

The *Journal* at least made reference to the *Hartford Globe* for the game and quite possibly the annotations, too. For those interested in such matters, the score and annotations published here were used without any attribution in the Providence, Rhode Island, *Sunday Journal*, for November 24, 1889, over eleven years after they appeared in *The American Chess Journal*.

Some suggestion of difficulties to come might have been gleaned from reading the following brief comment on the end of one of the journal's most valued contemporaries: "We regret to announce the sudden demise of the *Westminster Papers*. Like all chess monthlies it didn't pay. None of our exchanges will be more missed." One suspects that *The American Chess Journal*, despite the denial given in its inaugural New York issue that speculation or personal gain were not the purpose of the effort, would soon find itself foundering on just such shoals, before resurfacing in Chicago late in the summer of 1879.

In all, purchasers of this reprint will find something on the order of over 110 annotated games among the pages devoted to agreeable home companion materials (fortunately fewer as time went by) as well as some very interesting and revealing squabbles of the times. Not surprisingly, two of the more interesting matters involved Samuel Loyd, who appears to

have been something of a magnet for dissension and irritable commentary. We learn, for instance, that the journal, published by Dr. C.C. Moore and edited in part by Loyd himself, had the pleasure of announcing the prize winning chess problem sets in the first problem tournament of the fledgling American Chess and Problem Association. First prize was given to Loyd, second to W.A. Shinkman, and third to C.C. Moore. In reporting on the problem tournament Loyd took the opportunity to attack, without naming them, a number of his detractors. He pulled no punches, however, in telling the chess public his thoughts about such gentlemen: “Grumblers were not found wanting to belittle and bemire the honors we received, as well as the awards we were called upon to make. In every case these petty critics belonged to the lowest grade of problem-ists who were unable to treat such subjects intelligibly, or to compete successfully themselves. A fifth or sixth rate problemist who flatters himself that he has become a public instructor, is as supremely ridiculous as a queen or rook player who writes as analysis of an opening or anno-tates a game by Steinitz.”

Loyd’s irritation had been increased earlier by suggestions that multiple problem set entries from one competitor had been accepted in the competition, which was denied. (In a much later issue the attentive reader will learn it was Loyd himself who had been accused.) Another critic, indeed another “brother editor,” who said the problem competition was a failure, was exposed as a problem composer himself who had recently been humiliated by having one of his problems cooked, and thus his entries dismissed from another competition. Loyd let loose with an additional and prolonged salvo in the September 1878 issue, and several more appear in later pages of the journal. If nothing else Loyd’s venom and caustic pen still make for interesting reading, and certainly any future biographer of the great problemist and gamester would be remiss not to carefully study Loyd’s words here.

Loyd’s diatribes aside, there is much else here that will interest chess historians. Much like the materials mentioned above that appeared following the death of Cochrane, the death of George Allen, author of *The Life of Philidor, Musician and Chess-player*, and other works, is covered in some detail, with information appearing about his life and work that may well not be available elsewhere. And of course, much more chess appears, including the eight game match between Delmar and Loyd, won by Delmar 5-1, with 2 draws. The preliminaries for that match as well as something of its cause are covered as well, as readers will discover.

All in all, I suspect this volume is one very much for the specialist, the chess historian or someone interested in learning a good deal about a slice of New York chess life at the end of the 1870s. General readers interested in learning something of American chess history would do much better starting with a series such as Steinitz’s marvelous *International Chess Magazine*, as well as the few volumes of the *American Chess Magazine* that came out in the late 1890s, before considering picking up such a work as this.

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