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Past Pieces

Olimpiu G. Urcan



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Olimpiu G. Urcan is the author of Surviving Changi: E. E. Colman – A Chess Biography, (Singapore, 2007) and Adolf Albin in America: A European Chess Master’s Sojourn, 1893-1895, (Jefferson, 2008). In addition, his biographies of Julius Finn and Arthur Kaufmann are scheduled to be released this year. The 32-year-old Romanian-born writer works as an education consultant in Singapore.

Urcan’s new Past Pieces column at [ChessCafe.com](#) will offer essays and articles on the history of late 19th and early 20th century chess. It will bring to light forgotten players, matches, games, problems, photographs and miscellaneous information that will interest all chess history enthusiasts. It will also highlight the many valuable works of present-day chess historians, authors, and researchers in the form of book reviews and interviews, as well as provide dialogues on broader topics involving historical research.

A Peaceful Victory: Manhattan Chess Club
vs. Berlin Chess Society, Cable Match, 1905

More than a hundred years ago, a chess match between two cities separated by 4,000 miles of land and water was anything but a simple affair. No satellites, no Internet, no live-broadcasting, and no instant messaging. But, thanks to the enthusiasm of several men, such a match was still conducted by transatlantic telegraph cable. For two days, twelve strong chess players in New York and Berlin crossed swords in a war of wits that was even followed by Theodore Roosevelt and Kaiser William II.

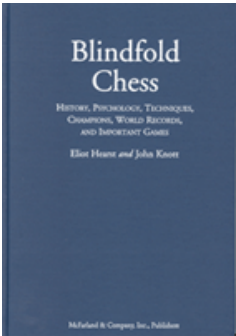
In the fall of 1905, the Manhattan Chess Club sent a challenge to the Berlin Chess Society, one of the strongest chess clubs in Europe, for a match by cable at six boards to be held at the end of November of that year. One of the essential conditions for the match posed by the Manhattan Chess Club was that players who had taken part in international tournaments be excluded from the roster of each team. Although the Berlin Chess Society accepted the challenge on October 11, it rejected such a condition from the very start: “it is pointed out that the Berlin Club could not very well accede to the wish of the Manhattan Chess Club that it play only men who have never before taken part in an international tournament,” the *New York Times* of the October 12 announced. R. W. Ferguson, chairman of the match and tournament committee of the Manhattan Chess Club, declared that the New York club would accept the team put forward by the Berlin Chess Society: Emil Schallopp, Berthold Lasker, Horatio Caro, Dr. Moritz Lewitt, Ehrhardt Post, and Heinrich Ranneforth.



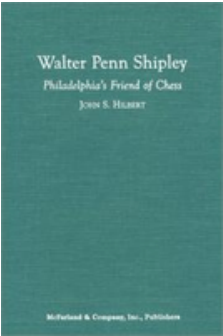
*The German team at the Agricultural Society in Berlin.
Source: ACB, November 1905, Vol. 2, No. 11, page 334.*

On October 24, the Manhattan Chess Club cabled an urgent request for setting the dates of the match. Both clubs agreed on November 11 and 12 as the playing days. Enthusiastic about the proposed contest, the Germans planned to approach Emperor William II with a request for an international trophy to mark the debut of such a match. Though a trophy could not ultimately be obtained, a letter by Baron von den Bussche-Haddenhauser sent to the Manhattan Chess Club on October 28 from the German Embassy in Washington, and published by the *New York Times* on October 29, advised that “he had communicated with the Government of Berlin requesting that Emperor William be asked for his portrait and autograph as a trophy to go to the winner of the match.” A similar gesture was undertaken by the American players, who secured a portrait of

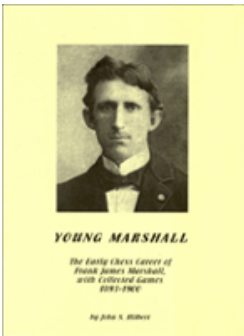
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President Roosevelt and an autograph for the winners.



The New York team in MCC library.
Source: ACB, November 1905, Vol. 2, No. 11, page 330.

On the same day, the Manhattan Chess Club announced that it had selected its six players: Gustav H. Koehler, Julius Finn, Harold M. Philips, Edward Hymes, Gustave Simonson, and Harry Davidson. Emanuel Lasker, the reigning world champion, was designated as the referee. Shortly before the match commenced, the young Hymes declared that he was out of practice and could not do justice to himself. Therefore, he was replaced by Otto Roething.

On Saturday, November 11, the match was scheduled to begin in the Manhattan Chess Club's library, Carnegie Hall. At 10 o'clock in the morning, Baron von den Bussche-Haddenhausen, representing the Imperial German Embassy, was present at the Manhattan Chess Club and took part in the exchange of greetings between New York and Berlin. The playing tables for the Manhattan players were located in the spacious library of the club, while the playing hall was reserved for spectators who could view the games on large demonstration boards. Among those in attendance was Walter Penn Shipley, Hermann Voigt, and various German consular officials.

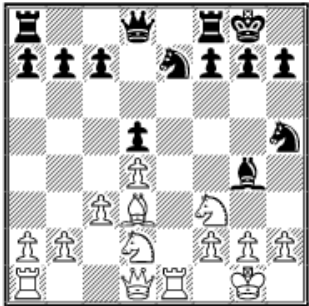
After a couple of hours of play, it was evident that Philips was losing to Berthold Lasker on second board, but it was also evident that Koehler had a significant advantage on the fourth board against Lewitt. In addition, Roething was clearly winning against Post. By evening, these predictions came to pass. Philips lost to Lasker because of a gross error in the opening, allowing the German to win several pawns based on a well-known combination:

Berthold Lasker – Harold M. Philips
Manhattan C. C. – Berlin C. C. Cable Match
Board 2, November 11-12, 1905
Petroff Defense [C42]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 d6 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.d4 d5 6.Bd3 Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8. Re1 Nf6 9.Bg5 Nc6 10.c3 Bg4 11.Nbd2 Nh5?!

11...h6 was better.

12.Bxe7 Nxe7



13.Bxh7+! Kh8

The best way given the circumstances. After 13...Kxh7 14.Ng5+ Kg6 15. Qxg4 Nf6 16.Qf4, White will get a very convincing advantage.

14.Bd3 Nf4 15.Bf1 f6 16.g3 Nh5

16...Nh3+ was preferable.

17.h3 Bxf3 18.Nxf3 g6 19.Nh4 Kg7? 20.Qg4! Kg8 21.Rxe7! Qxe7 22. Qxg6+

Here the game was adjourned.

22...Ng7 23.Bd3 f5 24.Nxf5 Rxf5 25.Bxf5 Qf7 26.Qh7+ Kf8 27.Bg6 Qg8 28.Qxg8+ Kxg8 29.Re1 Kf8 30.h4 1-0

[*American Chess Bulletin*, Vol. 2, November 1905, p.337; *Lasker's Chess*

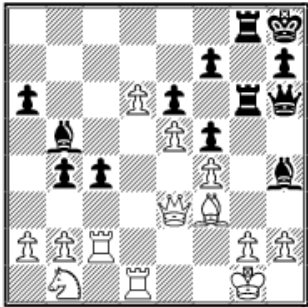
On fifth board, Roething secured a preferable position, but it was Post who showed the imagination of a genuine attacking genius, although, as shown below, perhaps too much of it. When Emanuel Lasker asked Roething his opinion about the game, the following was reported in the November 1905 issue of *Lasker's Chess Magazine*: “Mr. Roething on being asked about his opinion said that his game required very little if any explanation. The drama was told by the moves. First came the establishment of the passed pawn on d6, which black seemed willing to allow for the prospects of a violent attack against the King. Then there was a period of attack by black, of patient defense by white. Of combinations they are many, but the white king stood always ready to fly via f1, e2, etc., in an emergency. None of the aggressive combinations was quite strong enough, and that tells all the story.” The score of the game, however, reveals that some of Post’s alternatives after his brilliant play were quite positive, and Roething was fortunate that his underestimation of Black’s resources went unpunished:

Otto Roething – Ehrhardt Post
Manhattan C. C. – Berlin C. C. Cable Match
Board 5, November 11-12, 1905
Queen’s Gambit Declined [D60]

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 Be7 5.Nf3 Nbd7 6.e3 0–0 7.Bd3 c5 8.0–0 dxc4 9.Bxc4 a6 10.Ne5 Qc7 11.Nxd7 Bxd7 12.Bxf6 gxf6 13.d5 Qe5 14.Qe2 f5 15.Rad1 Rfd8 16.f4 Qf6 17.e4 b5 18.e5 Qh6 19.d6 Bh4 20.Bb3 Bc6 21.Rd2 Kh8 22.Qe3 Rg8 23.Bd1 b4

Adjourned.

24.Nb1 Bb5 25.Be2 c4 26.Rc2 Rg6 27.Rd1 Rag8 28.Bf3



28.Bf3

Post could have posed some serious problems to the New Yorker by playing 28...f6!?!; for instance, 29.d7 would have been met by 29...fxe5 30.Qxe5+ Bf6, and then the apparently spectacular 31.d8N wouldn’t have worked because of 31...Qg7 32.Qd6 Ba4.

28...Rg3!?

This staggering move must have surprised the tellers, recorders, and operators and perhaps some of his team mates too. Roething did not dare to take the rook probably based on 29.hxg3 Bxg3 30.Rd4 c3 31.Be2 Bc6 and Post’s attack would have looked very dangerous.

29.Nd2

The New Yorker played this safe move just to meet another resourceful reply.

29...Rh3

This boldly threatens the h2-pawn.

30.Nf1

Post could have had equal chances with 30...b3 31.axb3 cxb3 32.Rc3 Bxf1 33.Kxf1 Rxb3 etc.

30...Bc6 31.g3

Roething was one happy man now that Post’s attack has vanished, and in some peculiar desperation Post went down in flames.

31...Bxg3 32.Nxg3 Rgxg3+ 33.hxg3 Rh1+ 34.Bxh1 Qxh1+ 35.Kf2 Qxd1 36.Rxc4 Qh1 37.Rxb4 Qg2+ 38.Ke1 Qh1+ 39.Kd2 Qd5+ 40.Qd3 Qg2+ 41.Kc3 Bd7 42.Rc4 1-0



*Large Demo-boards in the playing hall of Manhattan Chess Club.
Source: ACB, November 1905, Vol. 2, No. 11, page 332.*

On fourth board, Koehler disposed of Lewitt in an easy manner after the latter proved too brittle when confronted with the New Yorker's kingside attack in the Four Knights' Defense. Lasker wrote of Black's play as "logical and energetic. Nor does it lack the spice of combination. As an instance note the 23rd move which leads up to the block of the White King which enables Black the threat of the sacrifice of the Queen later on. This is almost a problem idea."

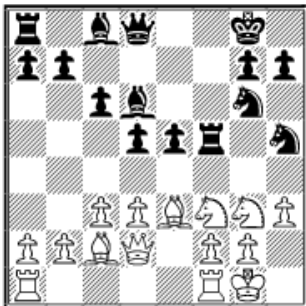
Moritz Lewitt – Gustav H. Koehler

Manhattan C. C. – Berlin C. C. Cable Match

Board 4, November 11-12, 1905

Four Knights [C49]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bb5 Bb4 5.0–0 0–0 6.d3 d6 7.Ne2 Ne7 8.h3 Ng6 9.Be3 c6 10.Ba4 d5 11.c3 Bd6 12.Bc2 Nh5 13.Qd2 f5 14.exf5 Rxf5 15.Ng3



15...Rxf3! 16.Nxh5

16.gxf3 would have failed to 16...Qd7!! (17.Nxh5 Nh4 and White cannot avoid the mate.) 17.Bg5 Nh4 and Black wins.

16...Rf8 17.Ng3 Nf4 18.Ne2 Qg5 19.Ng3 h5 20.Bd1?

This gives the game away. 20.Bb3 was needed.

20...h4 21.Bxf4 exf4 22.Nh1 Bxh3 23.Bf3

The position was adjourned here.

23...Qg6 24.Kh2 Bxg2 25.Rg1 h3 26.Rae1 Rf6 27.d4 Qg5 28.Re5 Bxe5 29.dxe5 Qxe5 30.Re1 Qf5 31.Qe2 Bxf3 32.Qxf3 Rg6 33.Rg1 Rxd1 34.Kxg1 Re8 0-1

[*American Chess Bulletin*, Vol. 2, November 1905, p.338; *Lasker's Chess Magazine*, Vol. III, November 1905, pp. 22-23].

Thus, by the end of the first day of play, the New Yorkers secured a 2-1 lead against the Germans. It was on the second day of play, as the November 1905 issue of the *American Chess Bulletin* remarked, that "the surprise came at the sixth board, where the play, at the crucial point, was of a decisively sensational character." There, Simonson was facing Heinrich Ranneforth, the editor of the *Deutsches Wochenschach*:

Heinrich Ranneforth – Gustave Simonson

Manhattan C. C. – Berlin C. C. Cable Match

Board 6, November 11-12, 1905

Four Knights [C49]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bb5 Bb4 5.0–0 0–0 6.d3 d6 7.Ne2 Ne7 8.c3 Ba5 9.Ng3 Ng6 10.d4 c6 11.Bd3 Bc7 12.Be3 Kh8 13.Qd2 Qe7 14.Rae1 Be6 15.Ng5 Qd7 16.f4 exf4 17.Bxf4 Rae8 18.Be3 Ng4 19.Nf5 h6 20.Nh3 Nxe3 21.Rxe3 Bd8 22.Rg3 Kh7

Adjourned.

23.d5 cxd5 24.exd5 Bxd5 25.Nf4 Be4 26.Bxe4 Rxe4 27.Nh5!

27.Nxd6? fails to 27...Bb6+ 28.Kh1 Rxf4! 29.Rxf4 Nxf4 30.Qxf4 Re8!.

27...Qb5 28.Qc1 Rfe8 29.h3 Bb6+ 30.Kh2



30...Qxf1??

Simonson goes oddly astray; better was 30...Qxf5! 31.Rxf5 Re1 32.Qxe1 Rxe1 33.h4 Kg8 and Black’s active rook would have given good hopes for a balanced game. The German player reacted well initially.

31.Nf6+! Kh8 32.Qxf1 Re1 33.Nxe8?

This error is soon followed by another one. Instead, 33.Nxd6!! threatening mate would have won the game for the Berlin team and equalize in the match.

33...Rxf1 34.Rf3 Re1 35.Nfxd6?! Ne5 36.Rf4?

Better, but still insufficient was 36.Rf5 Bg1+ 37.Kg3 f6 38.Rh5 Re3+ 39.Kf4 Nd3+ 40.Kg4 Bh2.

36...Bg1+ 37.Kg3 Re3+ 38.Rf3 Nxf3 39.gxf3 Re7 40.Nxg7 Kxg7 41.Nf5 + Kf8 42.Nxe7 Kxe7 43.a4 Be3 0-1

[*American Chess Bulletin*, Vol. 2, November 1905, pp. 338-339; *Lasker’s Chess Magazine*, Vol. III, November 1905, pp. 24-25].

This dramatic encounter essentially secured the fate of the match as the Americans were now leading 3-1. By comparison Davidson’s game against Caro on the top board proved to be an eventless draw. The only really exciting incident was that Caro’s first move was initially transmitted incorrectly as 1...c5 and Davidson was under the impression that he was facing a Sicilian Defense. However, the error was soon corrected and the American player realized he was up against Caro’s pet opening:

Harry Davidson – Horatio Caro
Manhattan C. C. – Berlin C. C. Cable Match
Board 1, November 11-12, 1905
Caro-Kann Defense [B13]

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.c3 Nf6 6.f3 e6 7.Ne2 Bd6 8.Bf4 Bxf4 9.Nxf4 Qb6 10.Qb3 Qc7 11.Ne2 0-0 12.Na3 a6 13.Rd1 Na5 14.Qc2 Bd7 15.Qd2 b5 16.Nc2 Rfc8 17.0-0 Rab8 18.Ng3 Nc4

Adjourned.

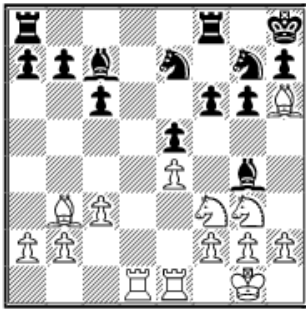
19.Qc1 a5 20.f4 a4 21.a3 Qd6 22.Rf3 Bc6 23.Re1 Re8 24.Nb4 Bb7 25.Qc2 h6 26.Qc1 Qb6 27.Kh1 Rbc8 28.Qc2 Nd6 29.Qe2 Nfe4 30.Rff1 f5 31.Qh5 Qd8 32.Re2 Qf6 33.Bb1 Kh7 ½-½

[*American Chess Bulletin*, Vol. 2, November 1905, p. 337; *Lasker’s Chess Magazine*, Vol. III, November 1905, p. 24].

By the end of the second day of play, the only unfinished game was Finn’s and Schallop’s at third board. Faced with his knowledgeable opponent, Finn played well and met the German expert on equal terms.

Julius Finn – Emil Schallop
New York – Berlin Cable Match
Board 3, November 11-12, 1905
Four Knights [C49]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bb5 Bb4 5.0-0 0-0 6.d3 d6 7.Ne2 Ne7 8.c3 Ba5 9.Ng3 c6 10.Ba4 Bc7 11.Bg5 Ne8 12.Nh4 f6 13.Bd2 g6 14.Bb3+ d5 15.Bh6 Ng7 16.Nf3 Kh8 17.Re1 dxe4 18.dxe4 Qxd1 19.Raxd1 Bg4



20.h3 Bc8 21.Rd3 Rd8 22.Red1

Adjourned.

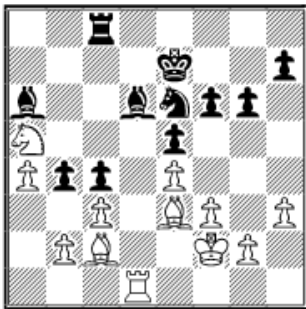
22...Rxd3 23.Rxd3 Ne6 24.Rd1 Kg8 25.Nf1 Kf7 26.Be3 Ke8 27.N1d2 Bd7 28.Nc4 Nc8 29.Ne1 Ke7 30.Nd3 b6 31.f3 Nd6 32.a3 Rd8 33.Nxd6 Bxd6 34.Kf2 Bc8 35.Nb4 Bb7 36.Ba4 Rc8 37.Bc2 a5 38.Nd3 c5 39.Nc1 b5 40.a4 b4 ½-½

[*American Chess Bulletin*, Vol. 2, November 1905, p. 328; *Lasker's Chess Magazine*, Vol. III, November 1905, p. 25; *New York Times*, November 13, 1905].

Emanuel Lasker adjudicated the final position of the game as a draw and he quoted Finn's own comments on the game in the November 1905 issue of *Lasker's Chess Magazine* (Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 25-26):

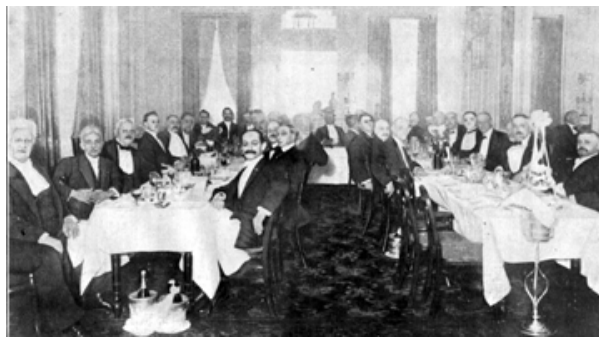
"I should have avoided the exchange of the Queens by **17.Qe2** and then I should have had a vastly superior position. After this omission I doubt whether, in spite of the strong activity of my pieces and of the difficulties which black experienced on the queen's side, I could have achieved a better result by force. Schallop [*sic*] saw through a neat trap that I had laid for him, just in time to save himself. He played **19...Bg4** in order to pin my Knight; but when I advanced with **20.h3** intending to reply to **20...Bxf3** with **21.Rd7** he retreated to Bishop's square. After this, not seeing a chance to force the issue and being told by the captain to hold the draw in hand, I contended myself with waiting tactics, thus allowing my opponent time to advance his pawns on the queen's side. I offered a draw when we needed it for winning the match. On Mr. Schallop's [*sic*] non-acceptance I made a counter-stroke on the queen's side by **40.a4** intending to continue by **41.Nb3** and if **41...c4**, by **42.Nxa5** forcing Ba6 and allowing Rxd6 and cxb4 etc. In my judgment this would have given a good chance for a win, but the adjournment intervened and I am perfectly satisfied that the decision of the referee, as the game stood, was justified."

Analysing Finn's comments cited above, should the game have continued from the final position, it would have obtained a more exciting character after **41.Nb3 c4 42.Nxa5 Ba6**:



And now **43.Rxd6! Kxd6 44.cxb4** when Black needs to play cautiously to prevent White from obtaining an advantage. For instance, the tempting 44...Nd4 fails to 45. Bb1! Rb8 46. Bd2 Nb3 47. Nxb3 cxb3 48. b5 Bc8 49. Bb4+ with excellent compensation for White. Black could probably hold the game with **44...c3 45.Bxc3 Rxc3 46.Bd1 Ra3 47.Bd2** yet there would have been plenty of good resources for White even then. An accurate evaluation by Finn.

Thus the Americans won the match 4-2 and with it the trophy, an autographed portrait of President Roosevelt. Carl Buentz, the German Consul in New York, present at the festivities, declared at the conclusion of the match that "no German would ever object to such peaceful victories of the Americans." Aristides Martinez, the President of the Manhattan Chess Club sent at least two interesting telegrams following the end of the match: one to Roosevelt noting that "the esteemed trophy remains in New York to grace our clubroom walls"; and another to the German Ambassador in Washington assuring him that the Manhattan Chess Club "bears its victory over your fellow-countrymen with becoming modesty, though with some excusable elation," as the *New York Times* of November 12 and 13 reported.



The victory dinner at Café Martin.
Source: ACB, December 1905, Vol. 2, No. 12, page 350.

According to the December 1905 issue of the *American Chess Bulletin*, the victory of the Manhattan Chess Club over Berlin Chess Society was celebrated at a special dinner at Café Martin, attended by most of the American chess personalities of the time. The six members of the team, accompanied by Aristides Martinez and Emanuel Lasker, occupied the head table. A large number of guests hosted by Professor Isaac L. Rice occupied the rest of the seats, including Marshall, who just returned from a long tour abroad, and who would soon annotate all six of the cable match games for the *American Chess Bulletin*. Rice, in his characteristic entrepreneurial style, envisioned a global chess organization, as a report on page 351 of the *Bulletin* read:

“Professor Rice, who was the German umpire during the cable match, and who spoke on behalf of the Berlin Chess Society, called attention to the need of a strong national organization to work in unison with a proposed international confederation for the purpose of promoting championship matches and tournaments and agreeing upon regulations under which these might be satisfactorily contested. The speaker stated he stood ready to support any such movement and, incidentally, expressed the hope that it might lead to an annual contest for the championship of the world.”

In his speech, Lasker supported Rice’s idea and hinted at a possible match with Harry N. Pillsbury. He also toasted Marshall, with whom he had exchanged some difficult words the year before regarding their proposed championship match. In his turn, Marshall congratulated the winning team and said “the victory was most timely, coming after his own recent fiasco at Nuremberg, and would tend to make Germans entertain greater respect for chess as played in America.” Other speeches were given by J. D. Redding and Judge McConnell, the latter reminiscing about his encounters with Paul Morphy and issuing statements on the Rice Gambit, both with pleasing effect on the audience. Among the other guests were Capablanca, Cassel, Delmar, de Visser, Fox, Halpern, Hanham, Helms, Koehler, and Philips.

Despite the diplomatic exchanges on this occasion, the history of encounters between the Manhattan Chess Club and Berlin Chess Society was not a trouble-free affair. The Clubs intended to meet again in 1908, but negotiations failed apparently because of the Manhattan Chess Club’s demand that players who participated in international tournaments be excluded. The *New York Herald Tribune* of February 22, 1908 signaled such differences in opinions when the possibility for another match was discussed:

“The cable match between New York and Berlin came up for discussion at the general meeting of the Berlin Chess Society on January 31. Surprise was expressed at the attitude of the Manhattan Chess Club in ruling out members of either club who had participated in international tournaments. An exception was made in the case of Schallopp, two years ago, when the Manhattan Chess Club won by 4 games to 2. Since then E. Post, of Berlin, who lost in the match two years ago, has become an international player, and he would be barred under the ruling the New Yorkers propose. The same would apply to E. Cohn, whom the Berlin club expected to use. The Germans will adhere to the terms of their original challenge, which calls for the best players who are members of the two clubs. If these terms are not acceptable here there will be no match.”

There was no other match by cable between the two clubs. In just a few years, the world would be shaken by the first global conflagration in which both United States and Germany played important roles. That time, the innocent war of wits on a chessboard was replaced by a merciless war with more than forty million casualties, dead or wounded. Victory was anything but peaceful.



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