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Olimpiu G. Urcan





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A Man Chess Made

The study of American chess history has been likened to a vast archaeological dig. One determined explorer who has advanced massive excavations within the field is John S. Hilbert. His biographical works from the late 1990s and early 2000s advanced new standards within the chess history community. In 1997, Hilbert authored [*Napier: The Forgotten Chessmaster*](#) (Caissa Editions), the story of a boy who went from mesmerizing common folk on the premises of the Brooklyn Chess Club to becoming British chess champion and one of America’s finest players. In 2000, the American historian wrote the absorbing [*Shady Side: The Life and Crimes of Norman Tweed Whitaker*](#) (Caissa Editions), a book about a young chess master and lawyer who ended up a convict and an inmate in several U.S. prisons. This book won the first **ChessCafe.com** Book of the Year Award. In 2002, Hilbert followed up with a detailed chronicle of Frank J. Marshall’s early years in *Young Marshall* (Moravian Chess Publishing). In 2003, he revived the life and chess career of a Quaker lawyer in [*Walter Penn Shipley: Philadelphia’s Friend of Chess*](#) (McFarland). Shipley’s life often intersected with the most important developments in the nation’s chess life. Then, in 2005, Hilbert released one of his most fascinating books: [*The Tragic Life and Short Chess Career of James A. Leonard, 1841-1862*](#) (McFarland), the story of a young Irishman emerging as the best chess player in pre-Civil War America, but who died after a three month imprisonment in a Confederate prisoner of war camp.

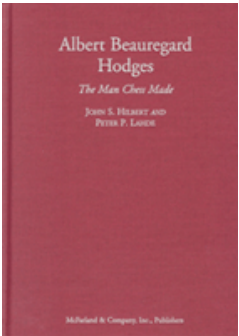
Hilbert’s most recent work is a collaborative effort with Peter P. Lahde. The two men wrote about the life of Albert Hodges (1861-1944), a former U.S. champion and one of the *genius loci* of New York’s chess scene between 1890 and the late 1920s. The final product, [*Albert Beauregard Hodges: The Man Chess Made*](#) (Jefferson, 2008), is a 542-page volume impeccably produced by McFarland. The book was well received by many critics knowledgeable in chess history. Edward Winter called it “an admirable new book” in his *Chess Notes* column [see [C.N. 5737](#)], while other specialists in the field had no lesser praise. Such scholarly production, of course, is not to everyone’s taste, as Glenn Petersen’s recent [ChessCafe.com review](#) suggests. It is our opinion, however, that Hilbert and Lahde’s work offers readers not only a vivid depiction of the life and games of an unfortunately forgotten master, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, an in-depth look at one of the most enthralling periods in American chess history: the 1880s through the 1920s.

Hodges & His Times

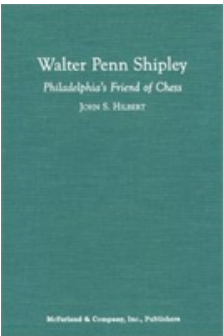
One of the trademarks of Hilbert’s writing, as is clearly seen in this collaborative volume, is the determination to build a proper context around his subject. Hilbert’s subjects are never treated with a minimum of biographical notes and a mountain of more or less carefully selected games. On the contrary, time and again Hilbert encourages his readers to delve into the context of the times and into the web of connections woven by or around his subject. The Hodges biography is no exception.

The biographical section in *Hodges* amounts to no fewer than 328 pages, divided into eleven chapters detailing Hodges’s life from his birth in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1861 up to his death in Staten Island, New York, in 1944. This is an enormous amount of material in itself (many chess biographies are far shorter, even including collected games). One may well ask whether Hodges’s life is interesting enough to warrant such treatment. Upon reading this biography my feeling is affirmative. Although Hodges’s life included no destructive turmoil as did Whitaker’s, nor did it end so sadly and prematurely, as did Leonard’s, it was a life well-lived, and one rich in chess experiences that the careful reader will find extraordinary enough. Unlike players such as Marshall and Napier, Hodges did not travel to play in international tournaments in foreign lands. Yet he played in tournaments against the likes of Showalter, Pillsbury, Judd, Capablanca and Marshall, as well as against many English amateurs through cable match play. In *Hodges*, it is the interaction between the man and the world around him that takes the central stage throughout. Hodges was, truly, as the book’s subtitle suggests, a man chess made, rather than a man who simply played chess.

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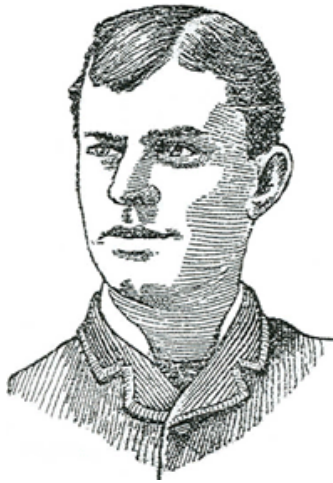
[*Albert Beauregard Hodges:
The Man Chess Made*](#)
by John S. Hilbert
& Peter P. Lahde



[*Walter Penn Shipley
Philadelphia's Friend of Chess*](#)
by John S. Hilbert



[*Shady Side
The Life and Crimes
of Norman Tweed Whitaker
Chess Master*](#)
by John S. Hilbert



*A. B. Hodges,
Nashville Daily American,
June 12, 1887, as it appears on page 25.*

Embedded in the larger context of the times, this is the story of an eighteen-year-old who chose not to follow in his father's footsteps and become a druggist in Nashville. In the early 1880s, emboldened by his passion for chess, Hodges began a remarkable journey, travelling throughout much of the American South to play chess. In this sense in particular Hilbert and Lahde's book is a valuable addition to the field, as a section of the United States is covered outside the North East, where almost all concentration has hitherto focused when studying this period. In Chapter One, the authors recount in some detail Hodges movements and encounters during this period ["The Tennessee Morphy," pp. 5- 39]. Hodges's relationship with Max Judd, the wealthy merchant and strong chess player from St. Louis, is amply discussed, as are many entertaining details of other chess characters populating the South in the mid and late 1880s. The authors establish the truth about some of the more obscure facts about Hodges's career during this period, including the matter of his unfinished match against Judd and Hodges's move to St. Louis in late 1888.



*A version of Ajeeb,
The Washington Post, March 29, 1908*

The period Hodges worked as the chess mind within Ajeeb, the Eden Musée automaton, from January through April 1889 receives excellent treatment in Chapter Two ["Ajeeb and the 'Snugs,'" pp. 39-74]. This perhaps makes for the most exciting part of Hodges's life. The research work done to clarify some of the details regarding the young American's move to New York and his work as the player hidden inside the automaton is evident. When Hodges was offered a non-chess job at Sailors' Snug Harbor (Staten Island) by a Wall Street millionaire who visited Ajeeb's exhibitions regularly, Hodges happily achieved a degree of financial stability. His success in the larger world of work, however, effectively ended the strongest period of his career as a chess player, even though he continued to play excellent chess for many years thereafter. Hodges's time within Ajeeb had acquainted him early on with the hardships facing even the most successful chess masters, and no doubt eased his decision to make the transition from earning a living through chess to earning a living through work at the nation's largest retirement home for aging sailors.

Hodges's chess activity in New York between 1890 and 1892 is covered in Chapter Three ["New York, 1890-1892," pp. 74-118]. A skillful brush paints the background: the history of the New York State Chess Association (NYSCA) and of the Manhattan Chess Club, the complicated matter of the U.S. "national title" and the disputes around it between Lipschütz, Showalter and Hodges, and the like. Hodge's participation and excellent play at the mid-summer meeting of the NYSCA in late August 1890, is covered, as is Hodges's play in the Staten Island and Brooklyn Chess Club's championships. Covered, too, are his match encounters with Hanham, Delmar and Lasker. Chapter Four ["1893: A Year of Achievements," pp. 118-143] features Hodges's successful appearances in several New York events: he won the Manhattan Chess Club's

championship, tied a match with visiting master Adolf Albin [+4 –4], and finished second in the strong New York Impromptu Tournament behind Pillsbury, but ahead of Showalter, Albin, Hanham and Delmar.



Staats-Zeitung Cup drawing with the note:
“Won by A. B. Hodges for Staten Island Chess Club (1893)”
San Francisco Chronicle, August 11, 1894.

One of my favorite sections is Chapter Five [“1894: A Year of Champions,” pp. 143-169]. In 1894 Hodges won the NYSCA championship and contested two matches with Jackson W. Showalter. After losing the first [+6 –7 =4], Hodges won the second [+5 –3 =1] to be crowned United States chess champion. Lipschutz, however, disagreed, claiming the title himself. The authors analyze in great detail the matter of rightful ownership of the nation’s title, a puzzle that has intrigued American chess historians for many years, including whether the United States Chess Association (USCA) title Showalter held at that time was truly a national title [pp. 146-147]. The authors’ consideration of who was actually the national champion in 1892 is without question the most detailed discussion of the issue to date [pp. 155-165], with documented letters from Lipschütz, and public statements and counterstatements detailed between Showalter, Hodges, Helms and other influential chroniclers. The dispute is summarized by the authors with a drop of acid. No doubt readers can determine for themselves if there are recent parallels in international chess politics: “And in truth, given the confusing and contradictory status of the nation’s title, it is not surprising to learn that just who was considered United States champion depended in large part on who was friends with whom.” [p. 164]

Hodges’s shift of focus from individual match play to team match events is covered in Chapter Six [“1895: A Year of Team Play,” pp. 169-192] in which the authors gather the details of the short-lived Metropolitan Chess League, the matches between the Manhattan and the Brooklyn Chess Clubs, as well as with the long-running series between Philadelphia’s Franklin club and the Manhattan. Besides details of Hodges’s play in these team events, the reader gets a first-hand account of the relationship between various United States chess clubs in the late 1890s.



The front page of *The Chicago Sunday Tribune* [April 21, 1901]
that offered extensive coverage of the cable match.
[Click here to enlarge.](#)

This, in fact, builds the platform for Chapter Seven [“The Anglo-American Cable Matches,” pp. 192-250], the most important chapter of the book. It deals with Hodges’s contribution to all thirteen Anglo-American cable matches between 1896 and 1911. This general topic has been treated before (for instance, in A. J. Gillam’s *Great Britain versus America: Cable Matches 1895-1901 and 1902-1911*, both volumes published in 1997 and based on Leopold Hoffer’s accounts from *The Field*), but these fifty-eight pages represent the most ever written on the subject from an American point of view. The authors summarized Hodge’s role in these matches as follows:

His steadfast role in the historic series between the United States and Great Britain, played out over 16 years, added luster to his chess reputation, and involved him, as no other player in United States chess history, in one of the most intriguing spectacles of international chess play prior to the modern day Olympiads. To truly understand Hodges’ contribution to United States chess requires a detailed treatment of the grand series of cable matches,

the story of which, from the American side, has long been waiting to take its rightful place in chess history. [page 193]

And, by all means, detailed treatment it receives. Hodges established two records in this series: he was the only man, American or British, who played in all thirteen matches, and he was the only player who remained undefeated [+5 =8]. Hodges's earliest contributions to these matches are framed in the larger context of the rivalry between the Brooklyn Chess Club and the rest of the chess clubs in the country. As the Americans lost ground in the contest by the close of the century, the authors map the ways in which a fostered spirit of national solidarity replaced this initial rivalry. Hilbert and Lahde present these matches with extraordinary details culled from the contemporary press reports. I am quite confident that readers will enjoy such passages as the one we offer below. It refers to a scene from the first cable match against the Britons:

In the first half hour of play, five or six moves were made at each board. A hitch developed in Barry's game with Tinsley, which cost half an hour, but play was then resumed. Before noon, when play became much more interesting, Pillsbury and Showalter left the stage between moves "to have a chat and smoke with their friends on the floor. The other board players appeared to be a trifle more concerned about the issue and clung closely to their boards." When refreshments were brought to the players at noon, Pillsbury began to study his board more carefully. "He dug his teeth into a huge cigar, puffed away at it furiously for a few moments, then he laid it down on the board beside him, held his head in his hands and swept the squares with his keen eyes for a full five minutes" before moving. "Then he tilted back in his chair with an air of satisfaction," having made his 13th move. [page 202]

This chapter is beautifully composed and it constitutes the climax of the extensive biographical essay. The four chapters after it deal with Hodges's play in a series of international events in the United States between 1904 and 1923 ["Domesticated Play"; "Tournaments – Too Late"; "Toward an Ending"; "The Final Years"; pp. 250-328]. These include his participation at Cambridge Springs in 1904, a series of New York tournaments between 1911 and 1921, and Hodges's play at Lake Hopatcong in 1923. In addition to the emergence of a new generation of active players in America, with leaders such as Marshall and Capablanca, the authors ascribe the decrease in Hodges's strength to his advancing age. Hodges's retirement from Sailors' Snug Harbor in 1913 was followed by his increased presence in New York's chess clubs, but time was taking its toll.

Although there is relatively little excitement in these last chapters, they do reveal a multitude of connections and details about American chess in the 1920s. One fact that will certainly interest readers is the connection between Hodges and motion pictures, a matter about which Edward Winter enquired in C.N. 3806 and 3813. The authors offer some detailed information on Hodges's various roles in movies like *War Brides* (1917), *The Auction Block* (1917), *Empty Pockets* (1918) and *False Faces* (1919). Yet, the circumstances of Hodges's involvement with the movie business remain vague. One wonders if in this Internet age clips of these movies could be found in some database. The book ends with a bibliography that lists sixteen periodicals and sixty-one historical newspapers, two appendices, a general index and five supplementary indexes.

The extensive footnotes throughout the first part of the book are rather entertaining and educative. They not only offer useful biographical information on various men Hodges interacted with on and off the chessboard, but also additional, little-known games and corrections of various errors found in previous sources. Some may believe that lengthy footnotes disrupt the flow of the main text, and thus advocate using endnotes instead. I strongly disagree. The inquisitive reader would have had quite a hard time shifting back and forth to consult endnotes. The footnotes, as formatted, complement exceedingly well the information given in the main text. I believe it easier for the reader to have them on the same page as the topic being discussed in the main text. It is also my belief that readers interested in such historical works welcome the added information that substantive footnotes provide. And readers who cannot get enough chess history will indeed welcome this book. There is more American chess history in Hilbert and Lahde's footnotes than in most other books on American chess history, period.



Sir George Newnes (1851-1910)
The Washington Post, December 7, 1895

The illustrations

The first part of the book offers seventy-three line drawings and photographs, seven of which feature Hodges. The illustrations of Hodges’s opponents or other men he knew during his lengthy career add to the book’s value. These line drawings, taken mainly from newspapers dated between 1885 and 1910, offer the reader a good impression of the times. They give a sense of the period, and provide a service for chess historians in general. A great majority of these visages would otherwise be entirely forgotten nowadays.



The Newnes Trophy
San Francisco Chronicle, March 21, 1896

However, I am puzzled by a few choices and this may actually have something to do with the editorial staff and not solely with the authors. For instance, I find it odd that no sketch or line drawing of Adolf Albin (1848-1920), who played a match against Hodges in New York in August 1893, was given. The authors summarize the circumstances of this match very well on pages 131-133, but the bottom of page 132 offers instead another line drawing of Emanuel Lasker. And in Chapter Two [pp. 39-74], although the story of Ajeeb is discussed at great length, there is no illustration of the curious chess playing automaton. Similarly, the chapter that deals with Hodges’s play in the Anglo-American cable matches offers no illustration of the Newnes Trophy or of Sir George Newnes (both of which are shown above). Of course, a work covering as much ground as Hilbert and Lahde’s is bound to raise a few questions regarding what might have been included.

The Games

In the second part of the book [pp. 331-505], the authors offer an unprecedented collection of 351 games played by Hodges. The majority of which are accompanied by extensive annotations from the chess journals of the time, some written by famous masters such as Steinitz, Pillsbury, and Lasker. Hodges played many fine games, especially in the first half of his career (the early 1880s through the early 1900s). We present below two games. The first is a victory against the well-known New York master Eugene Delmar. It appears on pages 377-378 of the book:

Hodges – Eugene Delmar [D12]
Match Game 4
Skaneateles, New York, August 2, 1892

[A rare game annotated by Steinitz, Lasker and Pillsbury in different sources. – authors] A cleverly played game from the late match between Messrs. Hodges and Delmar at Skaneateles. – NYT

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.d4 d5 3.c4 c6

Likely to cause the loss of a move since the advance of this pawn one step further is mostly desirable at a later stage in this opening. – NYT; 3...e6 at once, leaving open to play ...c5 shortly later on, is almost obviously the natural way of development. – LCF

4.e3

But here 4.Nc3 is much stronger, as 4...dxc4 5.a4 a6 6.a5 e6 7.Qa4 leaves White with by far the better position. – LCF

4...Bf5

We would prefer 4...e6. – ACM; In close games of this description the Queen's bishop is generally retained by each party on the queenside, but after Black's previous move the development on the kingside presents the most reasonable outlet for this piece. – NYT; Weak again; the bishop is essential, for defense and attack as well on the queenside. – LCF

5.Nc3

5.Qb3 might lead to the continuation 5...Qb6 6.c5 Qxb3 7.axb3 Bxb1 8.Rxb1 b5 and White's double pawn will be a drawback for the ending. – NYT

5...e6 6.Be2

White does not take the proper advantage of Black's weak opening moves. He ought to proceed at once with 6.Qb3, as after 6...Qb6 7.c5 Qxb3 8.axb3 the advance of the b-pawn would prove to be almost decisive. – LCF

6...Nbd7 7.a3

Objectionable on principle, though it serves sometimes as a preparation for the advance of the c-pawn up to c5, when the opponent has already pushed ...c5. In that case the continuation dxc5 followed by b4 and c5 might establish White's superiority on the queenside. But there could not be such an object here as Black was not likely to answer ...c5 before exchanging the other pawn. – NYT; Quite in harmony with the slow and safe development White chooses. Perhaps he is afraid of castling so early on account of the possible reply 7...Rg8 and ...g5. – LCF

7...dxc4 8.Bxc4 Nb6

Hasty play. The White bishop at c4 does no harm, whilst the Queen's knight can be made use of on the kingside. 8...Bd6 9.Qe2 Ne4 was the proper course to be taken. – LCF

9.Bd3 Bxd3 10.Qxd3 Bd6 11.0–0 0–0 12.e4 Be7



13.e5

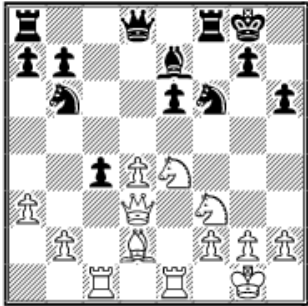
The strength of his center is much reduced by this. He should have parried the threatened ...c5 by removing Qe2. – NYT; [*Lasker quotes Steinitz's comment here, and then writes:*] He is certainly right in this, but assuming that Mr. Hodges was well aware of this fact as the excellent style of his play suggests, he must have resolved to push the pawn further on only after long considerations, and in the belief that this time the rule has its exception. And so it has; there is no inconvenience whatever following through this advance in any stage of the game later on. Whereas it is the indirect preparation of the superb finish. – LCF

13...Nfd5 14.Ne4 h6 15.Bd2 f5

Faulty to a high degree for it gives White an opening on the e-file for his rook after weakening his own e-pawn. He could have prepared a strong attack on the queenside instead by ...Rc8 or ...Nd7. – NYT; [*Lasker again quotes Steinitz's comment, and adds that:*] Taking due notice of his opinion, we may add that after 15...Nd7 16.Rac1 Rc8 17.Rc2 followed by Rfc1 and eventually b4, White seems to be in a more favorable position than Black. – LCF

16.exf6 Nxf6 17.Rfe1 c5 18.Rac1 c4

After 18...cxd4 19.Qxd4 Qxd4 20.Nxd4 Rfd8 21.Bc3 e5 22.Nf5 White has a clear advantage. – LCF



19.Nxf6+

The beginning of a subtle but nevertheless forcing combination. – LCF

19...Rxf6 20.Qe4 Qd7

If 20...Qd5 21.Qxd5 winning at least a pawn. – NYT

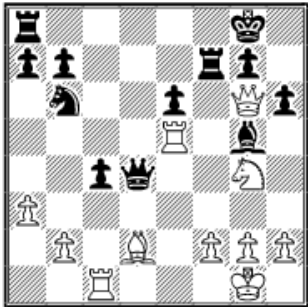
21.Ne5 Qd5 22.Ng4

Black evidently overlooked this move of the knight which yields White an irresistible attack. – ACM; A very clever stroke to which there is no satisfactory repartee. He evidently threatens Nxf6+ and this is only the prelude to a succession of vigorous attacking moves. – NYT

22...Rf7

Of course if 22...Qxe4 23.Nxf6+ winning the exchange. – LCF

23.Qg6 Bg5 24.Re5 Qxd4



25.Rxg5

White's play is exceedingly fine and interesting. He wins a piece and he has clearly aimed at this result during the last series of moves. If Black takes the rook the deadly answer Nh6+ follows. – NYT; We subscribe to Steinitz's opinion fully. – LCF

25...Rxf2 26.Qxg7+ Qxg7 27.Rxg7+ Kxg7 28.Bxh6+ Kg6 29.Kxf2 Rc8 30.Be3 Na4 31.Ne5+ Kf5 32.Nxc4 Rc6 33.g4+ Kf6 34.g5+ Kf5 35.g6 Kxg6

Resistance was hopeless long ago, but if he intended to fight on ...Kf6 was his only move. – NYT

36.Ne5+ Kf5 37.Nxc6 1–0 [0:31–0:53]

[*American Chess Monthly*, August 1892, pp.145–146. = ACM (annotations by J.F. Barry and H.N. Pillsbury); *New York Tribune*, August 14, 1892 = NYT (annotations by Steinitz); *London Chess Fortnightly*, September 15, 1892, pp.21–22 = LCF]



Emanuel Lasker as immortalized in the

The second game presented here is Hodges’s famous victory over Emanuel Lasker in October 1892, when the German master visited New York. The game appears on pages 379-381.

**Emanuel Lasker - Hodges [C62]
First Exhibition Match Game
Manhattan Chess Club
October 14, 1892**

Twenty moves in 60 minutes. This game, the first lost by Mr. Lasker [*in the United States*], was played against the New York State Champion, Mr. A.B. Hodges, at the Manhattan Chess Club on Nov. [*sic*] 14 – ACM; It was a scene of wild excitement when Lasker, the great German expert, quietly resigned his game to A.B. Hodges, the champion of the State of New York, on Friday night. Hodges deserves much praise for the splendid way he did the job. There was no funk on his part; he espied the weakness of his adversary’s position, set full sail with all his pieces for Lasker’s citadel, and beat him. *New York Sun*, October 16, 1892; The magnificent game, by which A.B. Hodges achieved the rare triumph of defeating Herr E. Lasker, who is at present reckoned as one of the best three players of the world, was the all-engrossing topic of conversation in New York chess circles during the day. Hodges has succeeded at the first attempt in doing what Blackburne failed to accomplish in twelve parties. *New York Tribune*, Oct. 16, 1892 [*comment by Steinitz*].

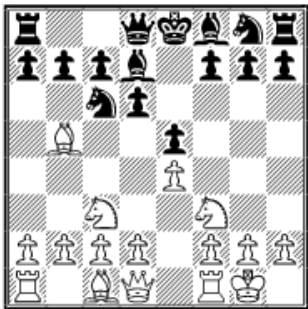
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 d6

Steinitz’s defense. – ACM; Mr. Hodges shows considerable courage in adopting this defense, as Dr. Lasker had apparently knocked the bottom out of it in his match with Steinitz for the world’s championship. – Marshall [*Writing years after the fact, Marshall apparently forgot the first Steinitz – Lasker match was played in 1894, two years after this game. – authors*]

4.Nc3 Bd7

Blackburne’s continuation. – ACM

5.0–0



9...Kh8 with the object of advancing ...f5 was stronger. This bishop was too valuable to be exchanged for the adverse knight, and the text move could have hardly any other object. – Steinitz; 9...exd4 10.Nxd4 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Be6 12.Nd5 menacing, speedily, 13.f4! would have resulted in White’s favor, as Black cannot play 13...Bxd5. But 9...Kh8 seems better than the text-play, as tending to free his game more quickly. – NOTD

10.d5

Although this move blocks his game, it is difficult to find a better move for White. – Marshall; We confess we do not like this advance, which both creates a couple of badly blocked diagonals for White and besides facilitates the adversary’s attack. 10.Nd5 seems in order here. – NOTD

10...Nb8 11.h3 Bxf3 12.Qxf3 f5

A determined effort to free his pieces, made most opportunely. – Marshall

13.exf5 Nh4 14.Qg4

I think 14.Qe4 would have been better. – Marshall

14...Nxf5 15.Bd2

This seems too slow. 15.Rae1 would have assisted his development. – Marshall

15...Nd7 16.Bd3 g6 17.Ne4

Again loss of time. 17.Rae1 at once, would have saved two moves. – ACM

17...Rf7 18.Rae1

If 18.Ng5 Bxg5 19.Bxg5 Qf8 and Black is at no disadvantage. – Hodges

18...Qf8 19.Nc3

Apparently played to develop a weakness on Black’s queenside, and to avoid exchanges, otherwise Ng3. – Marshall

19...a6

Dubious, and certainly not called for at this juncture. – Steinitz

20.Nd1 Qg7 21.Bc3 Raf8 22.b4 Bd8

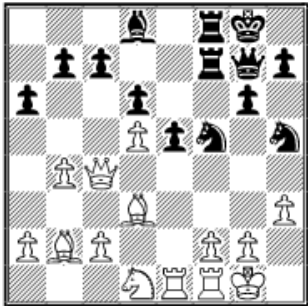
White’s last few moves indicated that his strategy was to attack the weakness on the queenside. I purposely lured him to adopt this course so that my counter-attack would be effective. – Hodges; An excellent move, preparing for the queenside attack that White’s last move portends. – NOTD

23.Bb2

To draw his opponent on for an apparently promising attack, which, however, seems foiled by a deep combination. – Steinitz

23...Nf6 24.Qc4 Nh5

The game on both sides is now extremely critical. – Steinitz.



25.f4

A trap. Of course, White dare not win the knight by g4, under penalty of mate. – ACM; A deeply woven plot unfolds itself. Of course, if he had played 25.g4 he would have fallen into the trap of 25...Nf4 and if 26.gxf5 gxf5+ and wins. – Steinitz; Of course not 25.g4 for then 25...Nf4! when after 26.gxf5 gxf5+ King moves and Queen mates. – NOTD

25...b5

25...b6 would have been more cautious. It was bad judgment on the part

of White to change the center of activity at a time when his clock was fast approaching the second hour. From a theoretical point of view White should have emerged with the better game. – ACM; 25...Nxf4 was out of the question on account of the rejoinder, 26.Rxf4; Again, 25...Nhg3 which was no doubt contemplated, was unavailable on account of 26.fxe5 Nxf1 27.e6 with a winning game. – Steinitz

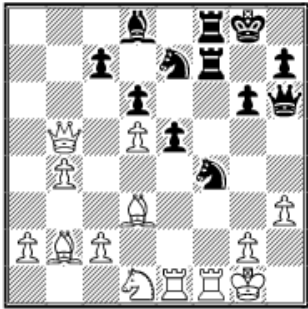
26.Qc6

White accepts the challenge, feeling that he has sufficient forces to withstand Black’s attack on his King. It is now a battle royal to the finish. – Hodges

26...Ne7 27.Qxa6 Nxf4 28.Qxb5

It is somewhat surprising that a player of Dr. Lasker’s caliber, should take his Queen so out of play for the sake of a pawn. – Marshall

28...Qh6



29.Nf2

Lasker, in the *New York Sun*, claims that this move was made hastily under time pressure and that after 29.Kh2 instead, White should have won with his passed a-pawn, but after 29.Kh2, suppose 29...Nxb3 30.gxh3 Rf3! 31.Rxf3 Rxf3 32.Bf1 Qf4+ 33.Kh1 Nf5 and wins, as after 34.Qe8+ Kg7 35.Qxd8 follows 35...Rxf1+ 36.Rxf1 Qxf1+ 37.Kh2 Qe2+ 38.Kg1 Qxd1+ etc. – NOTD

29...Qg5 30.Be4

Made under the pressure of time. It loses the exchange. 30.Kh2 was the best reply, whereupon White should win with his passed a-pawn. After the weak move Black finishes off with a few powerful strokes. – ACM

30...Nf5

Threatening ...Ng3. – Steinitz; Mr. Hodges plays all of this with great force and precision. – NOTD

31.Qc4 Ng3 32.Bf3 Nxf1 33.Rxf1 Qh4

Menacing the win of the adverse Queen, of course, by 34...Nxb3+, and at the same time initiating an irresistible onslaught. – NOTD

34.Qe4

Black threatened to win the Queen by ...Nxb3+, and a little better might have been 34.Qc3, to which Black would probably reply ...Bf6 which also renders White’s game untenable. – Steinitz



34...Nxb3+

The finish is of surprising beauty. The text move wins clearly, for obviously White has only one more answer beside the one actually adopted, i.e., gxh3, in which case Black simply wins by ...Rxf3. – Steinitz

35.Nxb3 Qxe4 36.Bxe4 Rxf1+ 37.Kh2 Re1 38.Bd3 e4 39.Bc4 Bf6 40.Bxf6 Rxf6 41.Ng5 e3 42.Kg3 Rf2 43.Bd3 Rg1

As Mr. Steinitz remarks, the finish is of surprising beauty, and shows a depth of insight and a degree of analytical ability which are possessed by

[*American Chess Monthly*, November 1892, p.239 = ACM (annotations by Lasker); *Chess Masterpieces*, by Marshall, pp.108–114 (annotations identified “Marshall,” and “Hodges”); *New York Tribune*, October 15 and 16, 1892 = Steinitz; *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, October 23, 1892 = NOTD].

Besides Hodges’s games, the authors also offer 147 various games (most of them long forgotten) played by Hodges’s opponents or other players he met in his career. These additional games are offered in the footnotes of the biographical text and some of them contain entertaining annotations.

Conclusion

Besides being an exceptional piece of chess scholarship, this biography represents a telling example of how to research and recollect an individual’s life in intimate connection with the chess developments around it. Hodges’s early life was decisively influenced by the game of chess. Although he eventually found himself sheltered from the financial insecurities professional chess players experienced in the era, chess remained important for Hodges for the rest of his life. His presence in the clubrooms on the East Coast as player, referee, lecturer, or official enriched the chess of this nation.

Simultaneously, through its welcome inclusion of extensive contextual detail, *Hodges* provides one of the most detailed accounts ever written of American chess bridging the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. I am quite confident that fans of chess history and chess culture in general will be overjoyed to add this title to their library.

Interview with John S. Hilbert

I thought this would be an excellent occasion to have John S. Hilbert discuss the Hodges book as well as other matters. He graciously agreed to answer several of my questions. Below we offer the transcript of an email interview with the American chess historian:

Olimpiu G. Urcan: Welcome back to [ChessCafe.com](#), John. Why Hodges and why now (2005-2008)?

John S. Hilbert: Hi, Olimpiu. Thanks for asking. Peter Lahde and I found Hodges intriguing for several reasons. Peter lives in Nashville, the city of Hodges’s birth. So for Peter, he was a natural. Hodges was one of the strongest American masters playing during the decade between 1885 and 1895, a period often overlooked in American chess history. Like Showalter, Hodges grew up and developed his chess outside the major power centers of New York and Philadelphia, and so as a kind of chessic outsider he had appeal as well. And of course Hodges was the only United States player to play in all thirteen Anglo-American Cable Matches between 1896 and 1911. In fact, he was the only player on either side of the Atlantic to play in every match and go undefeated (+5 =8). No one had ever done a book on him, so it was a welcome challenge.

OGU: Did publication of the book unearth new material about Hodges?

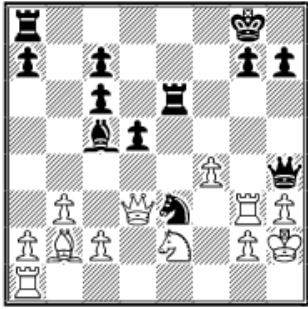
JSH: Actually, just recently a bit of new material came to light. One of the nicest things about writing works on chess history is that others with an interest often take the time to do a bit of research too, and to share it with you. [ChessCafe.com](#) columnist Jerry Spinrad, for instance, a couple weeks ago gave me two leads, one of which led to the recovery of a hitherto forgotten Hodges game, a win over Delmar. The game is hardly a great one, but it is an interesting display of offhand chess at the local club level. It’s also interesting because the game appeared in the paper outside the confines of a regular, weekly chess column. It wasn’t until October 1893 that Hermann Helms began his famous, long-running *Brooklyn Eagle* column. Delmar had not long before, in either late 1891 or early 1892, become a Brooklyn Club member, and so probably was interested in getting in some work at the club. Very weak moves by Delmar, particularly **22...Qh4** and even more so, **23...g6??**, gave Hodges a fairly easy win. But, for the record:

Albert B. Hodges – Eugene Delmar
Offhand Game
Brooklyn Chess Club
February 6, 1892

“At the first February reception of the Brooklyn Chess Club on February 6, among the games played the most noteworthy was that between the Staten Island champion, A.B. Hodges, and Eugene Delmar of the Manhattan club, both also members of the Brooklyn club. It was an offhand game only, but it was characterized by very skillful play, especially on the part of the victor, Mr. Hodges. Here is the score of the

contest in full:”

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 d6 4.Nc3 Nf6 5.0–0 Be7 6.d4 exd4 7.Nxd4
Bd7 8.Nxc6 bxc6 9.Bd3 0–0 10.f4 Ne8 11.e5 f5 12.exf6 Nxf6 13.b3 d5
14.h3 Bc5+ 15.Kh2 Ng4+ 16.Kg3 Nh6 17.Ne2 Bf5 18.Bb2 Re8 19.Rf3
Re6 20.Bxf5 Nxf5+ 21.Kh2 Ne3 22.Qd3 Qh4 23.Rg3



23...g6 24.Qc3 Nf5 25.Rg4 Qh6 26.Qxc5 Rxe2 27.Qxc6 Rae8 28.Qxd5
+ Kf8 29.Qc5+ Nd6 30.Qxc7 Nf7 31.Rd1 Qh5 32.Rd7 Qf5 33.Rg3 h5
34.Qc6 Qxf4 35.Ba3+ R2e7 36.Qxg6 1–0 [Source: *Brooklyn Daily
Eagle*, February 19, 1892]

By publishing our book on Hodges, Peter and I in effect provided others, like Jerry, with a checklist to see if games they have found have before now gone unnoticed. And now we have another Hodges game to add to his canon. Historical knowledge is built up by such slow accruals. I could probably publish a lengthy article just on the additional material that has come to light on the players I’ve written biographies and game collections about over the past dozen years.

Jerry also sent me a reference to Hodges that helps confirm some information we obtained from census records, although as so often happens there are some contradictions. Hodges’s early life is obscure, living as he did in post-Civil War Nashville. Information known about him suggested the most likely candidate for his father, found in the 1880 census records, was a “Dr.” Samuel Hodges, a druggist in Nashville who also prepared and sold patent medicines, such as his “Compound Sarsaparilla and Iodide Potash.” Albert Hodges in the same census records was listed as a “drug clerk.” Thanks to Jerry, we now learn from an Alabama paper many years later, the *Birmingham State Herald* for March 19, 1896, to be precise, that one local Nashville citizen recalled that he remembered Hodges “ten years ago, when he was a prescriptionist in Nashville. His father was a doctor, and his only brother, Charles Hodges, is now managing editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*.” Terms such as “doctor” were rather loosely used back in the Nineteenth Century, but in general the published statement supports the main conclusions we reached in the book. We had no knowledge of Hodges’s brother’s profession, and it would have been a nice detail to add. My point is that it took publication of the book to begin the process of further study of Hodges. You see, scholarly books are beginnings, and not just ends. I’m glad to learn more about Hodges, as is Peter. I should mention, though, that census records show the family had a third brother, Samuel Jr., born between Charles and Albert, who the source in the Birmingham paper didn’t know about. Yet it’s nice to have some of this information confirmed by another source. Hodges never talked in public, as far as we could tell, about his early years working for his father, or about his family, at all.

OGU: The role of context in your works is obvious. How do you envision the relationship between the subject whose biography you’re writing and the medium around him? Isn’t it a thin line between too much context and too little background?

JSH: You are certainly correct to suggest that creating a balance between context and background on the one hand, and hard, concrete details regarding only the player’s personal life on the other is a difficult feat. Much depends on what information survives. In the case of the notorious Norman Whitaker, for instance, I had thousands of personal documents to pick from, while with a figure like William Ewart Napier, relatively speaking next to nothing. The personal documents surviving about Napier wouldn’t fill one page of the documentation in the Whitaker book. Of course, the focus of a work is important, too. Peter and I thought it fairly obvious, for instance, that a work about Hodges with the subtitle *The Man Chess Made*, would focus on the impact chess and the chess community had on his life. I mean, we could have subtitled it *The Chess the Man Made*, silly as that sounds, if we had meant it the other way around. Of course no subtitle would have been necessary for such a book, as it would have been little more than a game collection, of which there are many. What the book actually attempts, as clearly laid out in its introduction, is something much more sophisticated than a simple recounting of Hodges’s life and the bald scores of his games. We wanted to immerse the reader in the chess of the times. And that meant detailed accounts of local coverage, the role of the individual chess columnist, the role of chess clubs in the United States, and, in Hodges’s case in particular, the

importance of the cable matches for a generation of American players. For Hodges, more than many, chess provided an opportunity to develop connections that led to a better life. Not in chess, but through chess. Hence, the subtitle, *The Man Chess Made*. Just how chess and more specifically, chess connections, offered Hodges opportunities for advancement in life was one of the book's essential themes.

OGU: Regarding Hodges: there is very little known about his private life. I assume he had no children. With the exception of the cable matches up to 1911, his chess wasn't as good starting with the first years of the 1900s. He was definitely still a dangerous opponent, but his results can't be compared with those from 1885-1895/7. How much did his finding a job outside the chess world at Sailor's Snug Harbor contribute to giving Hodges a different perspective on earthly matters (compared to Pillsbury, let's say)? Could it also be blamed for taking the edge off Hodges's play? (I am thinking that for a man for whom chess ceased to be a life and death matter, his ambition and fighting spirit drops considerably, compared with men whose lives and finances depend upon winning).

JSH: No, Hodges had no children. And clearly he was stronger, because younger and more active in chess, during the earlier period of his chess career. For Hodges, as for most of us, chess was a hobby, not a profession. That doesn't mean he didn't take it seriously. No one beats a Lasker in an individual game, even in 1892, who can't play some pretty good chess. But Hodges quickly learned, no doubt from his time in Ajeeb, the chess playing "machine" at the Eden Musée, that the life of a chess professional in the 1890s was not an enviable one. Poor playing conditions, small prizes, constant travel from club to club for exhibitions and at best small royalties for writing were about the most a professional chess player could expect. No one like Hodges who looked closely at the life of a Steinitz, a Mackenzie or a Pillsbury back then would have envied them. Hodges wanted more options for his life. And as a chess amateur, a very strong player who could help any club he supported, he made use of the connections he made in the game.

You see, if you look at the lists of club officers in Nineteenth Century American chess, you won't typically find the strongest players holding office. The club president was usually a well-to-do man, a professional, either independently wealthy or well-connected in society, or both – and a relatively weak player. The same was often true for the other club officers. Hodges made the most of chess, but he did so to enhance, not restrict, his life. But for his strong chess ability, Hodges would not have met the accomplished and connected men he did, and likely would not have found such a position as Secretary of Sailor's Snug Harbor, as described in detail in the book. It was in this sense that he was *The Man Chess Made*. I would agree, too, that after he married and began his non-chess line of work, he played chess less and, not surprisingly, found himself making more slips that detracted from his game. He was frequently out of form. Not an unusual situation for most of us today, in a way, who follow the game only casually.



*Reshevsky at the Marshall Chess Club
Europe's prodigy, facing the U.S. Champion, poses for the camera,
with A. B. Hodges looking on. Source: American Chess Bulletin, Vol. 17, No. 8,
November 1920, page 167.*

OGU: The lives of Walter Penn Shipley and A.B. Hodges were both deeply marked by chess and they remained loyal to the game for the rest of their lives. What are the major differences in their contributions to chess in the United States?

JSH: Interesting you should mention Shipley. After all, given what I've already said about the role of the club president in Nineteenth Century chess, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Shipley eventually found himself president of the Franklin Chess Club, Philadelphia's strongest club, for the last twenty-five years of his life. Shipley, a Quaker, became a well-respected and influential lawyer in Philadelphia, and in his private capacity helped many players financially, most notably Pillsbury. Shipley played for his club, and was a strong amateur, but his main contribution to chess came through his organizational skills, his boosterism for chess in general, and the influence of his personal connections. In addition, he edited a respected chess column in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He took the

column over from Pillsbury, who had not run it long, and continued it for over thirty-five years. He was also known in his day as the Dean of American Chess, much like Hermann Helms. It is a shame Shipley is not in the American Chess Hall of Fame for all his contributions to the game. He certainly deserves to be.

Hodges, on the other hand, while keeping his hand in a little at club organization and the like in his later years, for the most part gave himself over to play. He was a club man in that he could be relied on to fill a high board in team matches, including the Anglo-American Cable Matches, as well as to give a simultaneous exhibition when asked – which was quite often, for decades. He was popular at chess dinners, and often was asked to speak. But his main contribution to chess was in his play, while Shipley’s was more divided between play and local, regional and eventually national organization and promotion.

OGU: How do you respond to the criticism about the footnotes disrupting the flow of the text or providing unnecessary detail (both in Hodges as well as in *Young Marshall*)?

JSH: Well, certainly everyone is entitled to their opinion. The value of a reviewer’s opinion, of course, depends on the knowledge of the subject matter brought to the review of a work, and I’m afraid there are few reviewers around who have exceptional credentials for writing about chess history. This isn’t surprising. Most reviewers are accustomed to writing reviews of self-help books on chess, to use the broadest term, books on the openings, or at most on a first cousin of chess biographies, the game collection. Few are prepared to write seriously about scholarly works on chess history.

But to return to the issue of notes, I would suggest a preference for endnotes over footnotes, in effect whether a verbal aside is placed on the same page as the text or at the end of a book, really is a matter of taste. The question isn’t worth wasting a great deal of time or space on, as it so closely parallels an argument over the best flavor of ice cream: vanilla or chocolate. Or another. It’s subjective, a personal preference, and the use of either footnotes or endnotes are acceptable in most scholarly works. As for reviews of chess history books in general, I do miss Taylor Kingston’s pieces here at ChessCafe.com. They were well-developed, included a thoughtful summary of what a book held, and showed authors the courtesy of taking seriously what often costs them years of work. Whether he ultimately liked a book or not, Taylor put in the time and effort a good reviewer must in order to do his job properly – which is more than simply giving a subjective feeling for a book, but rather laying out for the potential reader the work’s strengths as well as weaknesses, giving examples of games, style, evaluation of research and the like. Anyone who checks out some of Taylor’s pieces in the ChessCafe.com [Archives](#) will know what I mean about his reviews. They were entertaining and informative – miniature works of art in themselves.

OGU: What biographies will you be working on next?

JSH: Peter Lahde is working on a Kashdan biography and game collection, which I’m excited about. As for me, my next book (a much shorter one than *Hodges*) is on Philip Richardson, a Brooklyn-based player active between the late 1850s and 1900. As a player Richardson was very highly regarded by both Steinitz and Mackenzie, two of the strongest masters in the United States during those years. Mackenzie called Richardson “the stormy petrel of chess,” because he usually showed up at the clubs when the weather was bad. He was a photographer at a time when the profession required strong natural light. Hence, his chess appearances were usually during stormy weather or at night. Or both. Richardson also was something of a problemist, and so I included over twenty of his compositions to go along with over 190 of his games. By the way, only about a dozen of Richardson’s games have made their way to the more popular, mega-million databases. (Fewer than a third of Hodges’s games are there.) The Richardson book is in production now, and should be available later this year. I’m also finishing up a second collection of chess essays, and then will turn my attention to some other chess figures, including Max Judd. I’ve finished research on a book about him, as well as a game collection.

OGU: How difficult is to research a “minor chess figure”?

JSH: How difficult? As difficult as you care to make it. Some writing about chess history give little effort to checking or supporting their statements. But anecdotes aren’t history, and can actually be pernicious when accepted without support from a web of contemporary sources. The less well known the chess figure, the harder it usually is to learn details about his life. However, some of the problem rests in how one defines “life.” I tend to define it broadly, to include the chess events they enter and the opponents they faced, not just the moves of the games they played. The Nineteenth Century chess community in the greater New York area was a small one, and players got to know one another and their records quite well. Some books that claim to be chess “biographies” are

really little more than game collections with a few pages of text thrown in. Personally, for their money, I'd rather give readers much more than they can easily find in a database.

OGU: Do you see yourself working on subjects other than American players in the future?

JSH: It is possible, but unlikely. I've done work on Löwenthal, for instance, as well as some minor figures like the Reverends William Wayte and John de Soyres. The problem for an American writer is that so many of the more obscure sources are only available, quite understandably, far away. The further the distance, the greater the costs of doing research, even in the Internet Age. While I'm certainly willing – one has to be, in writing chess history – to write without expectation of significant profit, the cost of doing the research right is probably prohibitive.

OGU: Is it tough to combine your regular job with the duties of chess writing?

JSH: It is difficult, at times. Certainly, for a period of about ten years, I was doing extensive research and collecting many items – mostly reprints and xeroxed pages from libraries. I'm not a well-to-do collector, and in any event I'm more interested in the content of valuable historical documents than I am in owning them. During that time I devoted almost all my energies, outside of work and family, to chess history research. Now I am more diversified.

OGU: Thanks, John. We wish you the best with your future writing.

JSH: My pleasure and warm greetings to **ChessCafe.com** readers.

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