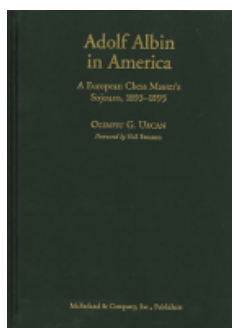




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Fewer Hats, More Quills

Quarterly for Chess History 15/2007

Chess Agency Caissa-90, 468 pp.

Edited by Vlastimil Fiala

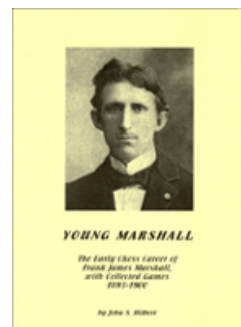
The newest volume of *Quarterly for Chess History* (released sometime in May 2010) is one of the books dealing with chess history resting on our shelf for a good number of months now. We planned to review it in our column as soon we got a copy but once we looked at it from this particular angle we found the task more difficult than anticipated. The main reason being that, like with many content-rich books out there, there are many good things to say about it and quite a number of critical points that need to be honestly addressed. Whenever that happens, summarizing the things in a balanced way requires an equidistant mindset.

Quarterly for Chess History (QCH) series is part of a large industrious publishing effort. It was founded, edited, and published (through Chess Agency Caissa-90) by Dr. Vlastimil Fiala, a teaching staff of the Political Science Department of the Faculty of Arts, University of Hradec Králové, located about 100 miles from Prague (Czech Republic). Fiala's name is well-known in the field of chess history publishing as he is the founder of Moravian Chess Publishing House, a company that specializes in reprints of old chess publications. He is also the author of several chess biographies, game collections, and historical tournament books. Being a sedulous and exceedingly industrious publisher, author, collector, and researcher, Fiala earned the respect of many chess historians who often crossed paths with him when dealing with various matters of their trade. Especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the digitization of a large body of historical sources world wide was in its infancy, Fiala was the man who commercialized reprints of old journals, pamphlets, collection of chess columns, and other such items, which otherwise would have been difficult to find.

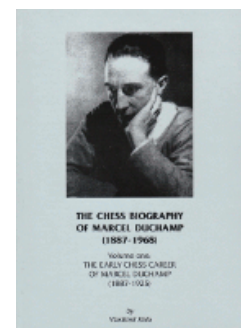
Some authors and researchers, especially those located outside the easy-to-reach area of the world's best chess libraries, often found it helpful to purchase Fiala's reprints rather than making research trips. Readers with a general interest in chess history, definitely not the types to waste evenings living among dusty newspaper columns and old books in some overseas library, gained access to several such publications. Regarding this commercial arm of Fiala's Moravian Chess venture, the advent of digitization work (either through Google Books or other vehicles) may have delivered quite a blow to the money-making enterprise. Why would someone pay a hefty sum for a 1860s publication that is now freely available online. Since the majority of Fiala's reprints do not come with some sort of introductory essay rich in historical insights about the respective publication, the only difference between what digital libraries offer (often free or for a reasonable subscription fee) and Moravian Chess' reprints are the stodgy hard cover bindings. There was a time when we owned and kept in our library copies of the Moravian Chess-produced *American Chess Bulletin*. It was costly and inconvenient as we traveled a lot. Nowadays, we own the whole series digitally stored on iPad or iBooks: more than forty volumes in digital format, economically collected, and much easier to work with for various research matters.

While such technical developments threaten the budget of those agencies that attempted to simply repackage and sell without adding significant value to the product itself, men like Fiala should have little worries for maintaining a reputation (and perhaps making some profit) in the field. That is because the other arm of Moravian Chess deals with publishing original works. Besides Fiala's own works, dealing with R ti, Alekhine, Capablanca, Duchamp, and many others, Moravian Chess publishes some of the works of leading chess

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by Vlastimil Fiala

historians such as Jan Kalendovský, John S. Hilbert, Anthony J. Gillam, John Donaldson, and others. The value of this particular output far exceeds that of the reprint department.

QCH is part of this second dimension of Fiala's production with Moravian Chess. The first issue appeared in 1999 and it was meant to appear four times a year. The latest issue, here under review, is numbered "Summer 15/2007." There is definitely some anomalous chronology with this that seems to be caused by the editor's inability to produce and release four issues each year. From the latest issues of the *QCH*, it appears that the number of contributors dwindled and Fiala's own writings and research pieces fill the gap at an unprecedented ratio. Though it still makes for interesting material; in the majority of cases – through his private archives and collections of neglected chess columns – he is able to offer little known material. However, Fiala's disproportionately large body of work featured in *QCHs* indicates that the journal, at least occasionally, fails to appeal to a steady group of leading contributors. Instead, like much of the Volume 15 reveals, Fiala ("the editor") is somewhat forced to put on the writer's and researcher's hat too and write pretty extensively not only about chess matters from his native country but also on those related to Russia, England, Holland, Mexico, and even Australia. The desire to present varied material (geographically and chronologically) is all too apparent. The problem is that it comes from the same pen instead from a large group of diverse contributors and instead of being truly representative of the current standard of chess history research and writing in various parts of the world, it mostly represents the standards of Fiala's research or, at best, those of Central European chess history research.

Glancing at the contents list for this particular issue, we notice Fiala himself writes about the following: Salo Flohr's chess activities in 1930 [pp. 3-184], a first installment on a Chigorin biography project [pp. 185-223], a series of little known games by Van Lennep [pp. 234-257], a report on Mexico City 1932 tournament [pp. 258-292], an essay on the Wallace vs. Hodgson 1896 match in Australia [pp. 293-308], compiles much of the "Great Chess Players" section dealing with miscellaneous obscure items related to leading players [pp.309-366], an essay on the second correspondence match between Bohemia and England, 1907-8 [pp.367-375], some varied notes on women's chess [pp. 386-405], an essay on chess research [pp.406-416], "Chess Miscellany" section [pp. 417-456], and – finally – the two book reviews [pp. 456-467]. Thus, the editor authored nearly 430 pages of the total 468. Somewhere within these pages there is an essay on the Norwegian Olaf Barda contributed by Øystein Brekke [pp. 224-233], and a ten-page essay on Elaine Pritchard (nee Saunders) by Tony Gillam [pp. 376-386] inspired by Elaine's daughter who provided the British researcher with some unedited cuttings.

The heavy-hitting pieces were meant to open the volume. In the first essay, Fiala uses Czech and other sources to chronicle Flohr's chess activities in 1930. This is, in fact, a second installment following on the heels of a first published in *QCH* 14. It surveys Flohr's play the Hamburg Olympiad (1930) and his play in a series of tournaments held in the space of the former Czechoslovak state. Fiala argues that this particular year is critical for understanding Flohr's rise as one of the leading players of the 1930s. The style of presentation includes a blow-by-blow account, with fifty-six games from tournaments and various exhibitions, and with a multitude of reconstructed crosstables. While we have certainly seen better prose in previous *QCHs*, the games are quite entertaining. Take the sample below, which was given on page 181 with some basic annotations (not entirely accurate by all means):

Salo Flohr – Ott

Liberec, December 1930

Forty-one board Simultaneous Exhibition

Duch Defense [A82]

1.d4 f5 2.e4 fxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.g4 d5 5.g5 Ng8 6.f3 Bf5 7.fxe4 dxe4 8.Nge2 Nc6 9.Be3 e6 10.Ng3 Be7 11.Bc4 h6 12.Nxf5 exf5 13.Qh5+ Kd7 14.Qf7 Qf8 15.Qe6+ Kd8 16.0–0–0 hxg5 17.d5 Nb8



[FEN "r1k1qnr/ppp1b1p1/4Q3/3P1pp1/2B1p3/2N1B3/PPP4P/2KR3R w - - 0 18"]

18.d6 cxd6 19.Rxd6+ Bxd6 20.Rd1 Nf6 21.Rxd6+ Nbd7 22.Bxg5 Qe7 23. Bxf6 gxf6 24.Rxd7+ Qxd7 25.Qxf6+ Qe7 26.Qxh8+ Kd7 27.Bb5+ Kd6 28. Qd4+ 1-0

Fiala justifies his piece on Chigorin's early years, meant to be the first part of another chain of installments, by arguing that there is still a wealth of unexplored primary material despite no shortage of Chigorin biographies or game collections:

[...] in the examination of Chigorin's chess legacy many sources remain unexplored, including such important ones as chess columns, edited by him (*Vsemirnaja Illustracija*, *Niva*, *Novoe vremja*). During his life, Chigorin visited the chess centres in most countries in Europe and America and took part in tournaments there or played matches with major world players, not to speak of playing of hundreds of simultaneous exhibitions and consultation games, many of which are preserved in journals and in chess columns. Russian historians, post-1945 authors of chess biographies (Grekov, Romanov, Panov, Yudovich) had limited access to foreign sources and mostly failed even in making full use of Russian sources, in particular the chess columns.

This sounds pretty reasonable and one hopes to see a wealth of new games recovered in addition to significant previously unknown details of Chigorin's life. The text part of the essay is a shy start, but the game section puts forward thirty-three interesting games, most of them gleaned from rare columns such as *Shakhmatnyj Listok* and *Vsemirnaja Illustracija* and played between 1874 and 1877. Check out this entertaining fragment that we extracted from an unannotated game given on pages 197-198:

V. Knorre - Mikhail Chigorin

St. Petersburg, 1874

Italian Game [C50]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.0-0 d6 5.d3 Nf6 6.Bg5 h6 7.Bh4 g5 8.Bg3 h5?!



[FEN "r1bqk2r/ppp2p2/2np1n2/2b1p1pp/2B1P3/3P1NB1/PPP2PPP/RN1Q1RK1 w kq - 0 9"]

9.Nxg5! h4 10.Nxf7 hxg3!?

This is indeed a very imaginative retort.

11.Nxd8 Bg4!?

11...Ng4 does not seem to be better: 12.hxg3! Bxf2 13.Rxf2 Rh1+ 14.Kxh1 Nxf2+ 15.Kg1 Nxd1 16.Nxc6 bxc6 17.Nc3 and White holds an indisputable advantage.

12.Qd2 Nd4! 13.Nc3??

After this blunder, White cannot prevent the mate. The only way to survive was 13.h3 Ne2+ 14.Qxe2 (Forced; since 14.Kh1 is met by 14...Rxh3+!) 14...Bxe2 15.Ne6 Bb6 16.Nc3 Bxf1 17.Kxf1 gxf2 and Black's advantage should be clear enough.

13...Nf3+!! 14.gxf3 Bxf3 0-1

Since the author seems to eventually piece together all these extensive biographical essays into a more structured biography (see for his example his work on Duras in previous *QCHs* and the forthcoming release of an independent volume by Moravian Chess titled *Oldřich Duras: Life and Works, Volume I: On the Road to the Chess Mastership, 1882-1905*) what would be the point to first publish them inside *QCH*?

While the little known games of Norman W. Van Lennep are indeed a nice addition, we do not know what to make of the essay on Mexico 1932 tournament. As Fiala himself admits in the preliminary notes, the tournament already received proper treatment in the hands of Dale Brandreth in the form of a tournament book, in addition to the fact that the *American Chess Bulletin*, a standard and easy to find source of reference, and some well-known Mexican sources provided full accounts. We failed to notice the "novelty" factor on this particular matter, which is again treated by the author in the same blow-by-blow style with no relevant game annotations whatsoever.

We find the "Great Chess Players" and "Chess Miscellany" sections as the most entertaining in the whole volume. In the first, the reader will find documents dealing with Edge/Fiske matters, twelve forgotten games and press reports on Alekhine's visits in Canada in 1932 (Toronto and Winnipeg), several little known Capablanca games, fourteen Lasker games from a forgotten simultaneous exhibition in Leiden in 1898, and some more unknown Lasker games submitted by Tony Gillam from his private archives. In "Chess Miscellany," the reader may find unknown games of Charousek, Duchamp, Mieses, and apparently Kieseritsky, and quite a lot of smaller items. As expected, Tony Gillam, a close associate and research colleague of Fiala, contributed many of these items. These two sections are quite entertaining and interest both the general reader and the expert chess historians. We would prefer to see these sections heavily expanded in the detriment of the lengthier pieces that can very well develop legs of their own as individual publications.

The volume ends with two book reviews, both written by Fiala. They abound in generalities when in fact this space could be the very forum where extensive and detailed reviews of chess history works would be most welcomed especially considering the chronic lack of such specialized peer reviews on the Internet or in the standard chess magazines.

Overall, there are 294 games in this volume and we are quite sure the majority of them are worth being analyzed and indexed. However, we are also confident that readers would appreciate some general modern annotations that highlight the critical moments of a game or correct/dispute the accuracy of the historical annotations cited throughout the volume. Let's have a look at one of Lasker's games from the Leiden 1898 exhibition given at page 348. The absurdity of most of the historical annotations found and reproduced from the original manuscript (below signaled with "*QCH*") is evident:

Emanuel Lasker – C. T. Steffelaar

Leiden, 4 July 1898

Falkbeer Counter Gambit [C31]

1.e4 e5 2.f4 d5 3.exd5 Bd6? 4.fxe5 Bxe5 5.Nf3 Bg4 6.Qe2 Nd7!! 7.d4 Bxf3!

8.Qxf3 Qh4+ 9.g3 Qxd4 10.Nc3 Ngf6 11.Bd2 0-0?!

QCH: "Better is 11...0-0-0." In fact, both are very much playable.

12.0-0-0 Qb6?!

QCH: "Better is 12...a5!" This proves an interesting idea.

13.g4 Ne8 14.Bd3 h6??



[FEN "r3nrk1/pppn1pp1/1q5p/3Pb3/6P1/2NB1Q2/PPPB3P/2KR3R w - - 0 15"]

QCH: "Necessary was 14...Bxc3!" While the text move is indeed weak, the suggested improvement is not much better either: 15.Bxc3 Nc5 16.h4 Nd6 17.h5 with a powerful attack for White.

15.g5?

QCH: "Why not 15.Qf5!?" Because of 15...Nef6 perhaps and White achieved nothing. Stronger was 15.h4, of course.

15...hgx5 16.h4?

QCH: "Again 16.Qf5!" And, again, 16...Nef6 and if 17.Qxg5, then 17...Rfe8 with balanced play.

16...f6

QCH: "Better was 16...Bxc3!" No, it was not. It was as bad as the text move, which deserves two question marks. Better was 16...g4!? 17.Qxg4 Nef6 18.Qf5 Rae8 19.h5 Nc5 with enough resources for Black to defend.

17.hxg5 Kf7!



[FEN "r3nr2/pppn1kp1/1q3p2/3Pb1P1/8/2NB1Q2/PPPB4/2KR3R w - - 0 18"]

The "!" is unexplainable. Black is simply lost and Lasker wrapped things up with a neat mate trap. The last two "!!" are fully deserved.

18.d6!! Qxd6 19.Nd5!! c6 20.g6+ 1-0

The *QCH* series provides much content for the specialized historian and *QCH*

15 does not disappoint in that respect. But, if it is to be sold, we feel that much of the informative substance can and should be packaged with more care for editorial matters, quality of production, superior design, and an enlarged field of competent contributors. If Dr. Vlastimil Fiala alone is editor, writer, researcher, compiler, publisher, designer, etc., the journal may not raise its editorial standards and may appeal only to a relatively restricted group of specialized individuals. Sure, genuinely incentivizing various active chess historians for contributing genuinely relevant material and investing in a complete makeover in terms of design/layout and professional editing is a costly proposition. Our opinion is that such a step may very well be necessary if *QCH* intends to emerge as a leading research journal close to the highest academic (and commercial) standards both in terms of content and presentation.

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