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Joined: 06 Dec 2003
Posts: 165
Location: North Carolina

■ Posted: Sun Apr 11, 2004 11:20 am Post subject: Saint Amant



Pierre Charles Fournier de Saint Amant -



After the death of Bourdonnais, the mantle of leading chess player of France fell upon the shoulders of **Pierre Charles Fournier de Saint Amant**. Saint Amant was born in Château Latour in the Bordeaux region of France on September 9, 1802.

During his life he was a wine merchant, a clerk, an actor, an explorer, a diplomat and the French (and possibly the world) chess champion. He learned chess from his mentor **Wilhelm (William) Schlumberger**.

Not a whole lot is known of Schlumberger. He was born in Mulhouse in Alsace region of France where the Schlumberger family operated a large winery that is in operation today. They also were industrialists who operated fabric mills in the area. Schlumberger was a leading French player (his German name comes from the fact that Alsace lies next to Germany and has often changed alliances throughout history between France and Germany. During Schlumberger's life, Alsace was French.). He's best known for his chess in America where he arrived in October 1, 1826 under a contract to operate Maelzel's automaton, the Turk. He was the Turk's last operator (previous operators during its European tour had been Allgaier in Germany, Alexandre and Mouret in France, Williams and Lewis in England). Surprisingly, he was to replace a young French woman who, for lack of chessplayers in America, was the operator when the Turk

premiered on April 13, 1826 at the National Hotel, 112 Broadway, NY. She was only capable of playing pre-established endgames. Schlumberger had his own peculiar experiences. He almost gave away the secret of the Turk when some school boys reportedly saw him exiting the cabinet after an exhibition. Then on January 30 and 31, 1827, the Turk placed a game against a certain Mrs. Fischer. Mrs. Fischer won the game. After the game Maelzel explained that the Turk had only ever lost three games; once in Paris, once in Boston and by Mrs. Fischer in Philadelphia. The game, published in the newspapers, was possibly the first published game by an American woman chess player.

Edgar Allen Poe wrote in his famous exposé of the Turk:

"There is a man, Schlumberger, who attends him wherever he goes, but who has no ostensible occupation other than that of assisting in the packing and unpacking of the automaton. This man is about the medium size, and has a remarkable stoop in the shoulders. Whether he professes to play chess or not, we are not informed. It is quite certain, however, that he is never to be seen during the exhibition of the Chess-Player, although frequently visible just before and just after the exhibition. Moreover, some years ago Maelzel visited Richmond with his automata, and exhibited them, we believe, in the house now occupied by M. Bossieux as a Dancing Academy. Schlumberger was suddenly taken ill, and during his illness there was no exhibition of the Chess VOL. 11-42 Player. These facts are well known to many of our citizens. The reason assigned for the suspension of the Chess-Player's performances, was not the illness of Schlumberger. The inferences from all this we leave, without farther comment, to the reader."

On November 9, 1837, Schlumberger, who sometimes used the alias Mulhouse, sailed to Havana, Cuba, along with Maelzel and the Turk. There, he contracted Yellow Fever and died in February of 1838.

Saint Amant became a regular at the Café de la Régence. He was known to play there day and night when he wasn't working. It was a standing joke that he was henpecked and when his wife would come by and tap on the window with her umbrella, signaling St. Amant that his chess time was up he would stand up abruptly and leave.

In 1834, Saint Amant was selected to captain the team from Paris in a two game correspondence match against the English Westminster Chess Club at Huttman's (founded by George Walker). The Paris team won the match which lasted two years. In their game as white, Westminster played 1.e4. Saint Amant advocated the fashionable *King's Pawn One Defense*, 1...e6. After this match it was forever to be referred to as the French Defense.

In 1836, Saint Amant went to England, where he often traveled as a wine merchant, and beat George Walker soundly in a match (+5-3=1). He also beat Fraser and others. Saint Amant was a notoriously slow player, but ironically, he was the first player to ever suggest a time limit.

Saint Amant is described in this 1840 article from *Fraser's Magazine*:

The Café de la Régence

by a Chess-player

(transcribed by Mark Weeks)

At one time spoken of confidently as the successor to Deschappelles and De la Bourdonnais, St. Amant may still be styled the favourite of the Café de la Régence. Certainly, no other player in the world is more agreeable to look over. It is matter of universal regret that St. Amant has in a measure fallen away from his allegiance to the chequered flag he once followed, by night and day, through France and England, and now confines his chess to Sunday evenings.

St. Amant's game unites the dashing style of Greco, with the ingenuity and steadiness of a veteran chief. Young in years, he is aged in chess. Quick as lightning in commonplace situations, St.

Amant takes a full measure of contemplation in positions of difficulty. In play with me, I once timed him three quarters of an hour on a single move! None of the French players approach St. Amant for courteousness of demeanour and readiness to oblige. He never sneers at a bad player; never taunts the unfortunate, nor insults the conquered. St. Amant visited England upon the occasion of bearing Deschappelles' proud challenge, a few years back, and had a decided advantage in chess over our best practitioners. He has beaten, in fact, every player but Deschappelles, De la Bourdonnais, and Boncourt. Rather a stickler for reputation, St. Amant declined risking his laurels upon the occasion of Szen, the Hungarian, visiting Paris in 1835, and refused to accept the challenge. This fact excited some surprise; but the feeling is unfortunately but too common among fine players. St. Amant and Boncourt have played in all about thirty-five games; and Boncourt stands at present, I believe, with a majority of three. Signor Calvi is spoken of latterly as the equal of these two heroes, but does not play at the Régence.

In 1841 Saint Amant revived the periodical started by Bourdonnais (from 1836-1840), *Le Palamède*. It lasted until six years this time, until 1847.

Saint Amant was widely considered the best player from France. He's often considered the unofficial world champion at this point but it's hard to determine. Saint Amant refused a match with Szen, probably at least his equal. Petrov was also untried.

He a match to John Cochrane in 1842 (+4-6=1).



-Staunton vs

Saint Amant

In 1843 Howard Staunton was considered the strongest player in England. A match between Staunton and St. Amant was arranged in July in London. Saint Amant won the match (+3-2=1. His winning was 1 guinea.

A second match between them was arranged for them on November 14 at the Café de la Régence. When it concluded on December 20, Staunton had won decisively (+11-6=4) earning 100 pounds and the popular opinion of being the strongest player in the world .

Several firsts occurred during these two matches. Saint Amant played the first Benoni and introduced, ironically, the Staunton Gambit. Staunton introduced the positional English Opening.



-an older Saint Amant

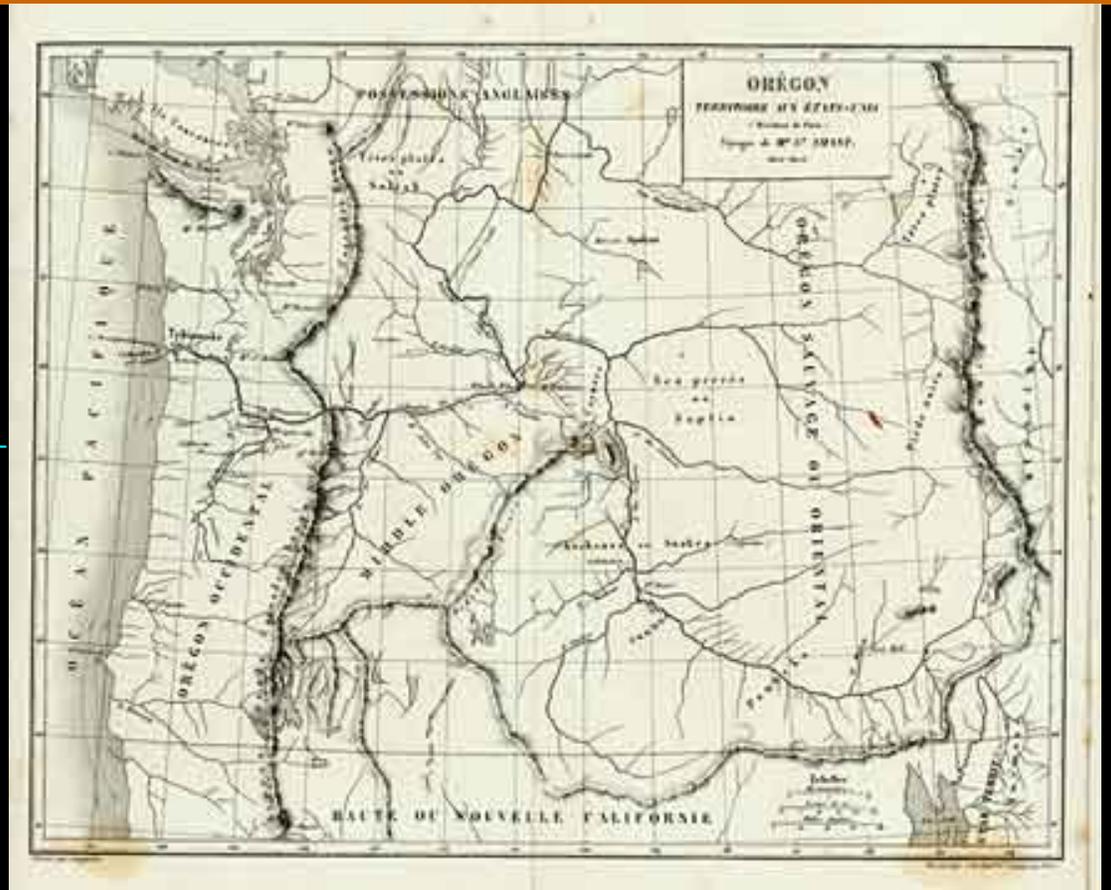
According to G. H. Diggle, writing in *The British Chess Magazine* in 1938:

"... In I.L.N., September 7, 1950, Staunton says: "It is we fear too true that M. St.-Amant is about to leave Europe for some years on an expedition to California." And in Bell's Life, April 27, 1951, we read: "St.-Amant has been appointed French Consul for California. Success to the true man!" St.-Amant, however, did not cross the Atlantic until after the great 1851 Tournament in London, at which he was present for part of the time, though only as a spectator.

St.-Amant spent over a year in California with his headquarters at San Francisco. We next hear of him arriving in New York, homeward bound in the autumn of 1852. "

While in America, Saint Amant wrote *Voyages en Californie et dans l'Oregon* which was considered the most comprehensive and important work on California published in French.

here is a map, drawn by Saint Amant, from that book



He drew a match in New York in 1852 against Charles Stanley, the US champion (+4-4=0)

St. Amant was back in Paris in 1858 when Paul Morphy made his first visit to France. He openly admitted that Morphy outclassed him as a chess player, and was present at a banquet honoring Morphy. While it's known that they played some private games, only one game, which Morphy won, has been recorded and preserved.

[Event "casual game"]

[Site "Paris"]

[Date "1858.??.?"]

[Round "-"]

[White "St Amant"]

[Black "Morphy"]

[Result "0-1"]

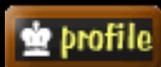
1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. c3 Nf6
5. d4 exd4 6. cxd4 Bb4+ 7. Bd2 Bxd2+

8. Nbxd2 d5 9. exd5 Nxd5 10. O-O O-O
11. h3 Nf4 12. Kh2 Nxd4 13. Nxd4 Qxd4
14. Qc2 Qd6 15. Kh1 Qh6 16. Qc3 Bf5
17. Kh2 Rad8 18. Rad1 Bxh3 19. gxh3 Rd3
20. Qxd3 Nxd3 21. Bxd3 Qd6+ 22. f4 Qxd3
{ white resigns }
0-1

In 1861 Saint Amant retired to Birmandreis, near Hydra, Algiers in Northern Africa. He died there in on October 9, 1872 after a carriage accident.

~Batgirl

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