

Author

Message

Batgirl



Joined: 06 Dec 2003

Posts: 165

Location: North Carolina

■ Posted: Wed Feb 04, 2004 5:47 am Post subject: the Café de la Regence



The 18th century was self-styled as the *The Age of Enlightenment*.

Although this movement encompassed Art, Music and Literature, it was more evident in the philosophers, scientists and social engineers of the time.

For our purposes in discussing chess, the important factors are that the European intellectual center was now France and that chess, once simply considered a complex game, was embraced by the intellectuals who brought some of their powers for abstract thought to bear on chess. Chess was still considered a game, for sure, and as a game, only deserved a certain amount of one's time and energy, but, even so, they helped raise chess to a higher level, and essentially helped keep chess alive. In the previous half century, the popularity of chess had been waning and little was published and few new ideas had been advanced. Greco book was the chess bible and people memorized his games without understanding them. The understanding of chess started to become more significant as people more capable, and with more leisure time, took up the game.

Much of the philosophic discussions and discourses took place in coffeehouses. In Paris, the most famous coffeehouse was the Café de la Regence.



the Café de la

Regence

The Café de la Regence attracted the greatest minds and personages of the era: Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau, Ben Franklin, Robespierre, a young Napoleon.

They gathered to discuss ideas and to play chess. The greatest of the chess players was **de Kermur, Sire de Légal** who was soon to be supplanted by an even greater player: **Francois-Andre Danican Philidor**.

The Café de la Regence, located near the Louvre on la Place du Palais-Royal, first opened its doors in 1670. It was owned by an American. Around 1740, it inherited the chess clientele from the Café Procope and for the next century and a half, it became the chess mecca.

In 1840, George Walker described the Café:

Quote:

"On Sunday all keep their hats on, to save space, and an empty chair is worth a ransom. The din of voices shakes the roof as we enter, like a beast-show at feeding time! Can this be chess, the recreation of solitude? We sigh for cotton to stuff our ears. Mocha is brought. We sip. Manners are to be noted and chessmen are to be sketched. The English are the best lookers-on in the world, the French the very worst. They do not hesitate to whisper their opinions freely, to point with their hands over the board, to foretell the probable future, to vituperate the past. I have all but vowed that when next I play chess in Paris, it shall be in a barricaded room."

Around 1760, Diderot remarked: *"Paris is the place in the world, and the Café de la Regence the place in Paris where this game is played best."*

There is an impressive list of professional house players who worked *La Regence* and players who visited there:

- Ignazio Calvi - an Italian player was the house professional there for 4 years. He was able to stash away 40,000 francs.
- de Kermur, Sire de Légal

- Philidor
- Voltaire played a correspondence game, via courier, with Fredrick the Great at La Regence.
- Ben Franklin - according to "Simpsons Contemporary Quotations", compiled by James B. Simpson. 1988

Quote:

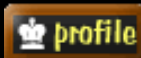
"Dr. Franklin was U.S. Ambassador to France, and the center of the chess world was located at the Café de la Regence. None other than reputed world champion Francois Andre Philidor was a regular at the Café, and Franklin visited the Café in 1781 with the intention of having Philidor autograph his copy of one of Philidor's books on chess. Of course many visitors to the Cafe were making the same request to which Café proprietor Jacques Labar had a prepared denial to keep Philidor from constant interruptions. However upon recognizing the distinguished Franklin Labar promptly presented him to Philidor, who graciously autographed Franklin's book. Once gone, Labar turned to Philidor saying, 'Francois, you just autographed your book for the American Ambassador!' Philidor looked up from his game for the first time and said, 'That's funny, I never knew that he was a chess player'."

- Deschapples
- LaBourdonnais
- Jacque-Francois Mouret, known for his drinking as well as his chess, was both the most renowned operator of the Turk and a house professional at La Regence.
- William Schlumberger, America's best player between 1826-1837, earned 4 francs/day giving lessons there. He taught Saint-Amant the game. (Schlumberger was also the Turk's last operator)
- Pierre Saint-Amant
- Lionel Kieseritzky
- Daniel Harrwitz, whom Lasker called, "a great player".
- Paul Morphy - who played and won his match with Harrwitz there, as well as his famous 10 hour blindfold demonstration against 8 strong players (winning 6, drawing 2). But contrary to Bird's description of the Cafe de la Regence as "Morphy's old haunting grounds," Morphy, in a letter to Daniel Fiske in 1863 stated, "I have, for my own part, resolved not to be moved from my purpose of not engaging in chess hereafter. The few games that I have played here have been altogether private and *sans facon*. I never patronize the Cafe de la Regence; it is a low, and, to borrow a Gallicism, *ill frequented* establishment."

In 1855 the Café de la Regence moved to a different location, but chess continued to be played there until 1916 when the chess room was closed down.

~Batgirl

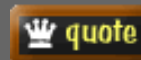
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bluebikerider



Joined: 26 Dec 2003
Posts: 70



Posted: Wed Feb 04, 2004 12:32 pm Post subject:

This drawing gives an idea of how it looked inside, I guess at the 2nd location since Tchigorin was pictured. The caption read , " Café de la Regence during a telegraphic match between Paris and Vienna. Tchigorin watches move by M. Rosenthal (at table, r)

But this is how I would imagine such a place to look.

An account of a visit by George Walker (who as you know, recorded the 85 games of the Laboudonnais-MacDonnell match), describes the mayhem and emotion that chess brings to some of us .

=====

" Carried away by my zeal, I rushed toward him, but catching my coat-skirts unhappily in a neighboring chess table, down goes the whole concern, the men flying over the floor. This awakens the wrath of a brace of fresh enemies and the confusion becomes confounded.

" 'Sir' cries one of them, 'are you mad? * Do you ever look before you?' The other screams, ' Sir, you have cost me the game!' 'You had already lost it.' Observed his antagonist. 'I had won it , sir- I would have played that game against Verdoni, or Philador himself.'

" 'Well, but gentlemen,' observed poor I, 'do not all talk together. I am ready to pay the stake if the fault were mine.'

" ' Pay! Pay! You were not rich enough, were you to coin your brains and bones.' 'For how much, then, were you playing?' ' For honor, sir. I have come 700 miles, post, to accept the challenge of Monsieur here, who fancied himself invulnerable; and but for you, I should have given him a lesson- I should have taken his pride!'

" ' A lesson! What do you mean You ought to thank the young man for coming to your assistance as he did. I had your queen won by force in 18 moves.'

" ' Absurd! Ridiculous! I should have mated you in 11. I had looked through it."

" ' Mated me? Can you dare say so? You it is, Sir. I am to thank for this gross insult.

Learn, young man, that people don't run in the Café de la Regence.'

" 'Up jumps another player. ' And learn you yourself, sir, that people don't shout in the café de la Regence, and that they have no right to even speak here.'

The hubbub rises, but one resource remains. I rush forth from the café and take refuge in the Palais Royal."

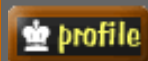
** no offense intended to garykevinware*

cafereg.JPG

Description:	inside the cafe de la regence
Filesize:	34.9 KB
Viewed:	95 Time(s)



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Batgirl

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

■ Posted: Wed Feb 04, 2004 8:24 pm Post subject:



Thanks for the wonderful description of the Café de la Regence as well as the great picture.

To round things off, here's some information on George Walker:

George Walker was an interesting person. He was born in 1803. He wasn't all that great of a chess player, but he loved chess. Although in the 1830's he was possible the strongest player in London, that didn't say a whole lot since he played McDonnell at pawn and move odds. But that didn't stop Walker from making major contributions to chess. He founded 2 chess clubs and edited the first chess magazine in England - *the Philidorian*.

He was a printer who specialized in sheet music, but he managed to print chess books that he sold very cheaply - just to promote chess. Walker also created the custom of recording games and even wrote a book called *Chess Studies* that contained 1,020 games played between 1780 and 1844. He was a friend of both McDonnell and la Bourdonnais as well as Capt. Evans (of the Evan's Gambit fame) -in fact, he seemed to be on good terms with just about everyone. He helped players like la Bourdonnais and Evan by raising funds for them in their old age and, after they died, for their widows. He himself died in 1879. He was well loved and admired by many.

But, unfortunately, he isn't the Walker who recorded the McDonnell-la Bourdonnais match. That was William Norwood Walker. The two men are often confused because they are both associated with la Bourdonnais and McDonnell. W.N.Walker died shortly after the match.

Here's yet a third view of the Café de la Regence.

This sketch depicts Morphy giving his blindfold demonstration.



~Batgirl



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bluebikerider



Joined: 26 Dec 2003
Posts: 70

Posted: Wed Feb 04, 2004 9:14 pm Post subject:



Quote:

But, unfortunately, he isn't the Walker who recorded the McDonnell-la Bourdonnais match. That was William Norwood Walker. The two men are often confused because they are both associated with la Bourdonnais and McDonnell. W. N. Walker died shortly after the match.

oh..well , I'm confused. and George was given credit for writing down the moves in "The World of Chess" by Anthony Saily.

Just goes to show you that you check your facts better than that guy (and better than me , too)

Quote:

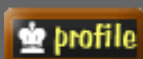
In June 1834 he played Alexander McDonnell (1798-1835), England's best player, at the Westminster Chess Club. From June to October 6 matches were played. They played 85 games and Bourdonnais won 45 games, drew 13, and lost 27. (Other sources say he won 44 games, drew 14, and lost 30). Over 3,500 moves were made.

George Walker organized the event and William Greenwood Walker, the aged Secretary of the Westminster Chess Club, wrote down all the moves.

from Bill Wall's page on La Bourdonnais - <http://www.geocities.com/siliconvalley/lab/7378/bourd.htm>

now ..who is William Greenwood Walker? just kidding

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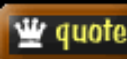


Batgirl



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

Posted: Wed Feb 04, 2004 9:45 pm Post subject:



Quote:

oh..well , I'm confused. and George was given credit for writing down the moves in "The World of Chess" by Anthony Saily.

Just goes to show you that you check your facts better than that guy (and better than me , too

No, as I said, they're easily confused and the fact that Saily confused them is proof. Bill Wall's page is correct.

As it said, William Greenwood Walker was the Secretary of the Westminster Chess Club.

I had mentioned that George Walker founded 2 chess clubs. One was St. George's and the other was the Westminster. Whether the two Walkers were related, I have no idea.

I am aware that William Greenwood Walker wrote a book named *A Selection of Games At Chess*, published by Thomas Hurst in London, 1836. That would be close to the time of his death, maybe even posthumously.

That's the sum total of what I know about him.

~Batgirl

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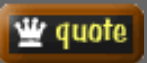
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Batgirl



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

Posted: Wed Feb 04, 2004 10:02 pm Post subject:



Quote:

now ..who is **William Greenwood Walker?**

That's the man's correct name.

My first mention of him, as *William Norwood Walker*, was a freudian slip, if you believe in Freud.

~Batgirl

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bluebikerider



Joined: 26 Dec 2003
Posts: 70

Posted: Thu Feb 05, 2004 5:51 pm Post subject:



Poets do not go mad; but chess players do.

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

A letter from Diderot to Philidor on the perils of blindfold chess....

" I should more readily excuse you these dangerous experiments if you had wagered enough to win 5 or 6 hundred guineas. But to risk your talent and your reason for nothing is simply inconceivable. Besides, I have talked about this to M. Legal, and his answer: 'When I was young, I decided to play a single game of chess without seeing the board, and at the end of the game I found myself so fatigued mentally that it was the first and last time of my life. It is foolish to run the risk of going mad for vanity's sake.' Now, when you shall have lost your ability, will the English come forward to rescue your family? Do not believe, sir, that what has not yet happened to you will not happen. Take my advice, write more fine music for us, write it for many years, and do not expose yourself further to the possibility of being an object of scorn, a state in which so many are born. At most they will say of you, ' There is that Philidor creature, he is nothing any more, he lost all sense he had by pushing little pieces of wood across a chessboard.'

Footnote - Diderot's named his daughter after his sister who went mad and died at the age of twenty-eight.

It is not known how often she played blindfold chess.

acafe.jpg	
Description:	a bunch of mad men at the cafe de la regence
Filesize:	43.31 KB
Viewed:	51 Time(s)



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Batgirl



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

[Posted: Thu Feb 05, 2004 8:53 pm](#) [Post subject: Philidor - blindfolded](#)

[quote](#)

Philidor tried his hand at blindfold chess when he was 18 and still a student of **Legal de Kemeur**. **Legal** had tried a blindfold game but found it too taxing. **Philidor** often played through games in his head at night in bed and felt he could play a game without a board. He tried a game and was, in fact, successful. In 1744 he played and won 2 simultaneous games blindfolded. Then in 1750 while in Berlin, he played 3 such games, winning them all. He gave blindfold demonstrations throughout his life, but 1782, he gave some in London for the first time and though the result was poor - 1 loss and 1 draw - the response was that of amazement because Londoners had never seen anything like it before. In 1783 he gave another display, this time winning 2 and drawing 1. He gave at least 8 more demonstrations during the next two years. If there had been any doubt in any Londoner's mind who the greatest chess players might be, these blindfold games convinced them it was **Philidor**. Although he was a Frenchman, **Philidor** was greatly honored and admired in England.

~**Batgirl**

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bluebikerider



Joined: 26 Dec 2003
Posts: 70



Posted: Fri Feb 06, 2004 2:44 pm Post subject:

A blindfolded Philidor at Parsloe's, a London chess club c.1794...

blindfoldphil.jpg

Description:	blindfold
Filesize:	38.25 KB
Viewed:	14 Time(s)



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Batgirl



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

Posted: Fri Feb 06, 2004 9:02 pm Post subject: sketch



Quote:

A blindfolded Philidor at Parsloe's, a London chess club c.1794...

Very nice sketch! I don't think I've seen that particular one before.

The way to a girl's heart is through her chess picture collection...

Thank you!

~Batgirl

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