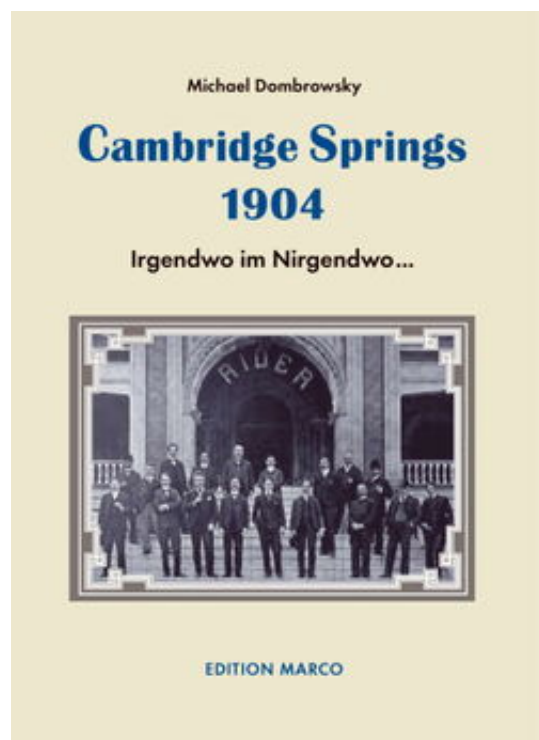


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A fresh look on a historical tournament



From our chairman:

On our request Johannes Fischer, a long-time friend of the Chess History and Literature Society, wrote a review of Michael Dombrowsky's Cambridge Springs 1904, the tournament book to which the chess world has looked forward for more than a century. The name of Cambridge Springs is better known as a defensive variation of the Queen's Gambit than as the spa where the first 'top tournament' on American soil was organised. The reviewer is a productive contributor to the German language magazine [Karl, das kulturelle Schachmagazin](#), as far as I know, from its start (2000-2001) in the current format until today, and is collaborator of ChessBase.

A fresh look on a historical tournament: Michael Dombrowsky's Cambridge Springs 1904: Irgendwo im Nirgendwo

by Johannes Fischer

Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania, is a small town in the north of the USA with not even 3,000 inhabitants. But at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century it was a famous and luxurious health resort that attracted guests from all over who stayed in luxury hotels such as the *Riverside Inn* or the *Rider* to relax and to enjoy the town's famous mineral-rich waters. And the hotels were very luxurious indeed:

"[The Rider] had 500 rooms with 1000 beds, and in the lobby there was room for 1000 visitors. From there you could reach your room with an elevator. The rooms were spacious, each one had a bathroom and a telephone. ... The hotel ... offered all kinds of relaxation: fitness rooms, a solarium and an indoor pool. A sauna area with Turkish, Russian, Finnish and Roman baths was available for use by guests. On the upper floor an outside veranda offered a wide panoramic view. ... About 13,000 light bulbs ensured that there was no darkness in the hotel. In order to operate all this reliably, the hotel had its own power station." (Michael Dombrowsky, Cambridge Springs 1904: Irgendwo im Nirgendwo, Edition Marco 2019, p. 17-18)

But both hotels, the *Riverside Inn* and the *Rider*, no longer exist: the *Rider* burned down in 1931, a fate the *Riverside Inn* suffered in 2017, and today Cambridge Springs is remembered less as a spa but more because of the famous tournament of 1904 that was played in the ballroom of the *Rider Hotel*. Eight players from the USA met with eight of the best European players, who were also among the best players in the world.

The venue and the field of participants show that the organizers spared no expense and effort to set up this top-class tournament. It is still considered one of the most important tournaments in chess history, not least because it was the first major test of strength between American masters and the European chess elite.

The driving forces behind the organization of the tournament were Hartwig Cassel and Hermann Helms, both passionate and strong chess players and journalists by profession. The money was provided by the businessman William D. Rider – who gave the hotel its name and had the idea for the tournament – and Isaac I. Rice, chess enthusiast, lawyer and businessman and multi-millionaire who had made his money in the railway business and with the construction of electric cars and submarines. However, Rice, who at the age of six had emigrated with his family from Germany to the USA, did not enter chess history as a sponsor of the tournament in Cambridge Springs but as a promoter of the Rice Gambit, a dubious line of the King's Gambit (1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.h4 g4 5.Ne5 Nf6 6.Bc4 d5 7.exd5 Bd6 8.0-0). Rice organized theme tournaments with this variation and with lavish starting fees and prize money he lured the best players in the world to explore the murky theoretical depths of this variation.

The tournament in Cambridge Springs began on April 24, 1904 with the opening ceremony and the drawing of lots, the first round was played on April 25. A curiosity concerned the rules:

"The organizers had only specified the venue, the playing times and the distribution of the prize fund. The participants were responsible for the rest of the rules themselves." (M. Dombrowsky, Cambridge Springs 1904, p. 36)

If one takes the historical Elo-ratings calculated by statistician Jeff Sonas as a benchmark, then Mikhail Chigorin was the highest ranked of the 16 players and the number one seed. He was followed by Harry Nelson Pillsbury, Dawid Janowski, Carl Schlechter and Richard Teichmann. World Champion Emanuel Lasker was only sixth on this virtual seeding list, as he had not played a tournament for four years and celebrated his return to the tournament arena in Cambridge Springs.

In the end the world champion scored 11 points out of 15 games, sharing second to third place with Dawid Janowski. Convincing winner of the tournament was the young American Frank Marshall who scored 13 points from 15 games and was the only player to remain unbeaten. For this victory he received the first prize of \$1,000 and established himself among the world elite.

The tournament was luxuriously organized, the field was strong, the outcome surprising, but there was no tournament book to remember the event. This was not least due to the fact that Helms and Cassell wanted to exploit the tournament journalistically and reported extensively and much about it in magazines and newspapers and were not interested in competition from a tournament book. In 1935 Fred Reinfeld published a book about the tournament, and on the occasion of the 115th anniversary of Cambridge Springs, German chess journalist and author Michael Dombrowsky again became fascinated by this historically significant chess tournament and decided to write a book that tells the story of Cambridge Springs, the story of the tournament, and stories about the tournament and its participants.

Dombrowsky searched archives and libraries in the USA and in Germany and consulted chess historians and chess collectors such as Michael Negele, Hans-Jürgen Fresen and David DeLucia to find contemporary reports and photos and turned this material into an entertaining, readable book that comes with 78 illustrations and gives an interesting insight into chess at that time.

In the first part of his book Dombrowsky delves into the history of the town Cambridge Springs and tells how the tournament was organized and realized. In the second part of his book Dombrowsky concentrates on the tournament itself, with round reports of all 15 rounds, including all 120 games of the tournament. Many of these games come with contemporary annotations by players such as Emanuel Lasker, Georg Marco, Frank Marshall, Carl Schlechter, Siegbert Tarrasch and others. Dr. Robert Hübner provided annotations from a modern perspective, impressing with his customary precision, criticism and occasional flashes of irony.

The concluding third part of the book is devoted to the time after the tournament and takes a look at "Cambridge Springs today". And while the round reports reveal how tournaments were played and organized back then, and the contemporary analyses give an insight into the chess thinking of that time, it is the narrative parts of Cambridge Springs 1904 that make this new book about a historical tournament fresh, modern and entertaining.

Michael Dombrowsky, Cambridge Springs 1904: Irgendwo im Nirgendwo,
Edition Marco: Berlin 2019,
236 pages, 78 illustrations, German.
€39,00.

See also:

- New Literature: [Cambridge Springs 1904](#)
- Publications of our Members: [Dombrowsky, Michael](#)

- Chessbase: [Zeitreise: Cambridge Springs 1904 - Das Turnierbuch](#)
- [Edition Marco](#)