

2025-07-01

Esteban Canal - Birth pains



Esteban Canal, ca. 1970

by Alan McGowan

The mystery surrounding Esteban Canal's date and place of birth has already been described on this website by CH & LS member Luca D'Ambrosio; before offering an addition to the story, it is worthwhile reviewing the different versions that have been offered.

Neue Wiener Schachzeitung 1923, page 286

Canal is 26, born Peru 1897. When he was 13, he went to Spain as a student,

Sahovski Glasnik 1926, page 203

Canal was born on April 19, 1897, on a ship in the Ocean on its way to Peru, where his parents had emigrated from Spain. He spent his childhood in Chiclayo, and in 1909, his restlessness compelled him to secretly leave his parental home and go to Europe.

Esteban Canal rodio se 19. IV. 1897. na jednom brodu na Tihom Oceanu na putu za Peru, kamo su se iz Španije iselili njegovi roditelji. U Chiclayu je proveo djetinjstvo, a 1909. nagnala ga je nemirna krv, da napusti krišom roditeljski dom i da podje u Evropu. Prošao je Španiju, Njemačku, Švicarsku, Englesku i Italiju, da se na koncu, kako sâm veli, razočara nad »ispraznošću evropske kulture«. Bavi se novinarstvom i literarnim poslom, a momentano boravi u Pešti. Šah je naučio 1913. u Leip-

Het Volk, 18 January 1934, page 3 (article by Hans Kmoch)

Esteban Canal was born in Peru in 1897 and he is half Spanish, half Italian. At a young age he came to Germany to study medicine. His dream for the future did not come true, because he came into conflict with his rich father, had to give up his studies and look for a job.

This explains how he got into journalism and soon became a sought-after contributor to various Spanish and Spanish-American magazines.



1935 Marriage Certificate (Budapest)

Born 19 April 1897, Chiclayo, Peru. His parents are shown as Canal Juan and Sterlin Daria (family names given first in Hungary).

Incidentally, the birthdate for Anna Klupacs is given as 24 October 1902 (1904 on the gravestone).

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:6XSF-TTVX?lang=en>

L'Italia Scacchistica 1981, pages 107-107 (quoted on page 147 of Zichichi's book about Canal).

He was born on April 19, 1896 in Spain, in Santander, to a Spanish mother and a Peruvian father, who, after recognizing him as his son, took him with him, for some years, to Peru. He studied in Germany, in Leipzig; later he returned to Peru where he obtained Peruvian citizenship.

1981 Death Certificate (provided by Luca D'Ambrosio to Chess Notes 6248)

Born 19 April 1897, Chielago [sic], Peru.

His father is shown as Giovanni [Juan] and his mother as Sterlin Daria.

https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/winter61.html#CN_6248

Gravestone ([photo courtesy of CH&LS member Luca D'Ambrosio](#))

Born 1893.



Chess Personalia, by Jeremy Gaige (1987)

Born 19 April 1896 Chiclayo, Peru.

Esteban Canal, by Alvis Zichichi, (Brescia, 1991), page 2.

Besides the comments by Giancarlo dal Verme above, Zichichi also says that ‘in private he sometimes let it be understood that he was born on an earlier date, and not in Peru but in Spain.’

The purpose of this article is to provide an additional piece of relevant information, but also to look at the broader picture of Canal and his family. Although it adds to the story regarding his birth year, it does not fully solve the problem. However, perhaps it will encourage further research.

Juan Canal - father

Online searches show Juan Canal’s association with Chiclayo, in the Lambayeque region of Peru, including mention of ‘Sociedad Mercantil J. Canal Ltda.’

One reference makes things quite clear:

Libro de oro de Lambayeque - Volume 1 - Page 71

1980 · Snippet view

FOUND INSIDE – PAGE 71

DON JUAN CANAL Atraído por las perspectivas que ofrecía **Chiclayo** , llegó a radicarse , formando la sociedad comercial ... Este caballero italiano fue padre del Campeón Mundial de Ajedrez **Esteban Canal** . nales caballitos de totora ...

DON JUAN CANAL, attracted by the prospects offered by Chiclayo, settled down, forming a commercial company... This Italian gentleman was the father of the World Chess Champion [sic] Esteban Canal...

Libro de oro de Lambayeque, Volume 1, 1980, page 71.

Which fits with the chess master being half Italian, according to the Hans Kmoch article above.

Genealogical websites provided further details about Canal's family. The following details are taken from the pages of a ship's manifest. The S.S. Ebro had travelled from West Coast Ports – the website records that the port of departure was Callao [Peru] – though that is not shown on the manifest, arriving in New York on 12 July 1920. The family's last address was Jauja, Peru.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:J6D8-ZPR?lang=en>

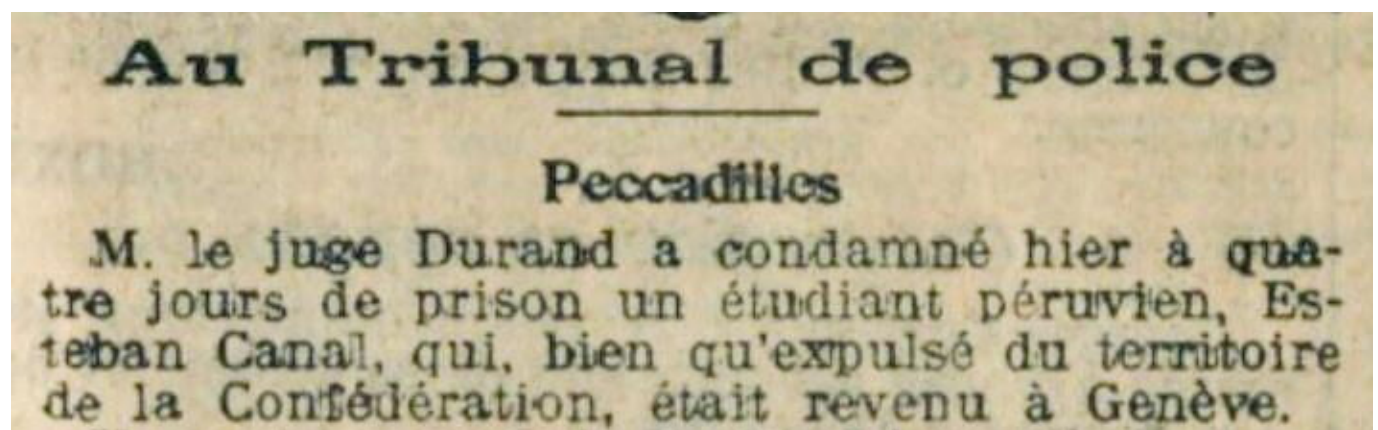
Juan Canal is shown as having been born in Piedmont, Italy (Piemonte), which further supports the earlier reference to the chess master being half-Italian. His wife Daria, who described herself as French, was born in La Paz, Bolivia. This has some relevance later.

Name	Age	Occupation	Nationality	Race/People	Birthplace
Juan Canal	53	Merchant	Peruvian	Italian	Italy-Piedmont

Name	Age	Occupation	Nationality	Race/People	Birthplace
Daria Canal	44	Wife	Peruvian	French	Bolivia-La Paz
Teresa Canal	19	Student	Peruvian	Italian	Peru-Chiclayo
Manuela Canal	17	Student	Peruvian	Italian	Peru-Chiclayo
Cristobal Canal	11	Student	Peruvian	Italian	Peru-Chiclayo
Lucrecia Canal	10	Student	Peruvian	Italian	Peru-Chiclayo

The manifest indicates that the family was ‘In Transit’, their eventual destination being Switzerland. Considering that Esteban Canal had been sent to Europe study purposes, it is possible that his siblings were going abroad for the same reason

Meanwhile, our subject, who was in Switzerland at this time, got himself into trouble with the authorities, as reported in the Swiss press.

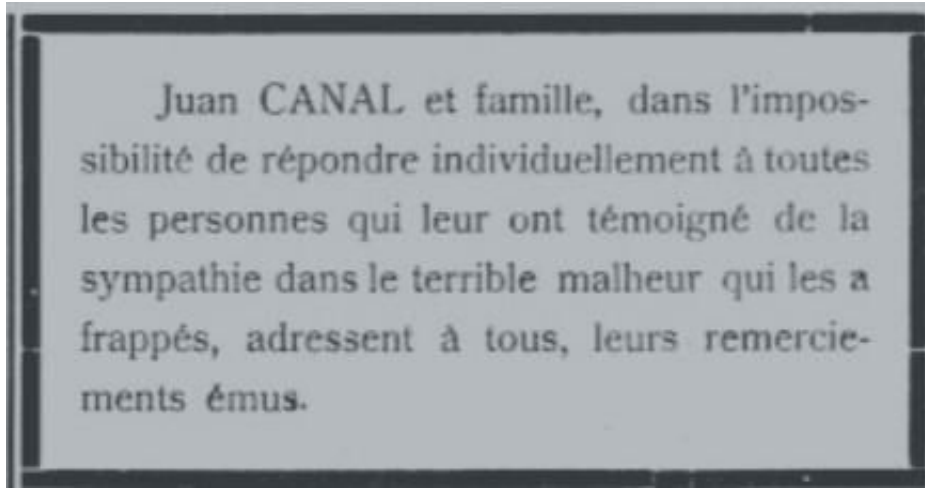


Judge Durand yesterday sentenced a Peruvian student, Esteban Canal, to four days in prison, who, although expelled from the territory of the Confederation, had returned to Geneva.

La Suisse, 23 July 1920, page 5.

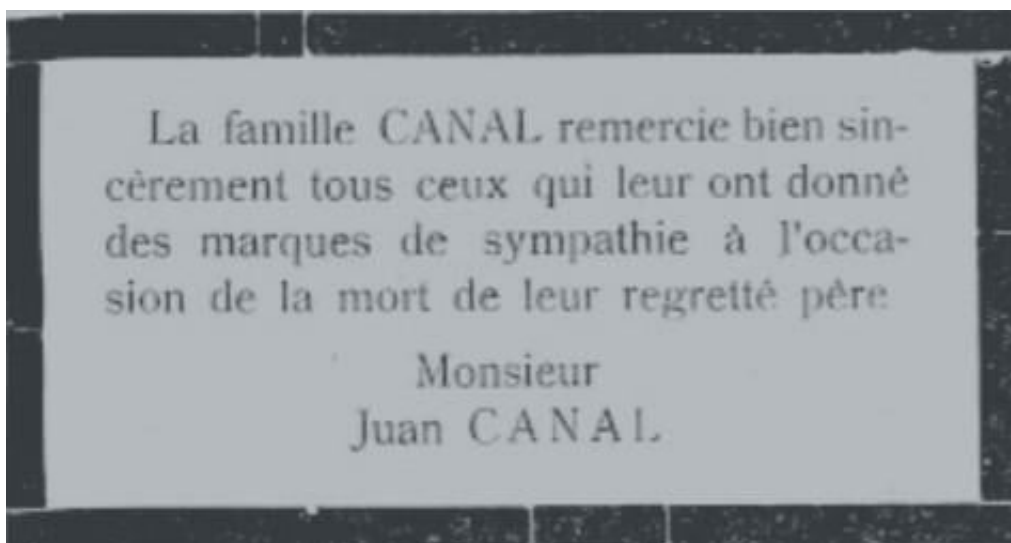
A similar report in La Tribune de Genève, 23 July 1920, page 4, said that Canal was 23.

Canal's family, still in Switzerland in 1921, was struck by a mysterious tragedy.



Juan Canal and family, unable to respond individually to all the people who have shown them sympathy in the terrible misfortune that has struck them, address to all their heartfelt thanks.

Feuille commerciale de Sierre et du district, 11 February 1921, page 4



The Canal family sincerely thanks all those who have given them marks

of sympathy on the occasion of the death of their late father Mr. Juan Canal.

Feuille commerciale de Sierre et du district, 11 March 1921, page 3.

A search of an online Swiss newspapers archive did not find any information relating to the tragedy, and our efforts to obtain more information about the death from official Swiss sources failed.

Returning home

Family members, excluding Esteban Canal and his mother Daria, made the journey home to South America. Teresa, Manuela, Cristobal and Lucrecia – accompanied by an older brother Auguste [sic-Augusto] (22) – sailed on the S.S. Orbita from Cherbourg on 14 June 1921.

The ship's manifest indicates that their local contact in Switzerland had been Dr Werra, Surre [sic?-Sierre?]. Their final destination was Chiclayo, Peru, and a contact there was Mr Ramon Velez, at Casa Canal, Chiclayo. The ship arrived in New York on 24 June 1921.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:J6KF-LZV?lang=en>

Nothing is known about what happened to Daria Sterlin Canal. And for information purposes only, here are brief details of Esteban Canal's siblings:-

Augusto 1898-1950

Teresa 1901-1932

Manuela 1902-1983

Cristobal c1908-?

Lucrecia 1909-2003

Carmen 1916-1916

All were born in Chiclayo, except Carmen, who was born and died in Jauja.

Review

Canal must have been interviewed many times when participating in chess tournaments. In the examples shown above, including his 1935 marriage, he remained firm in his contention that 1897 was his year of birth, sometimes providing 19 April.

But how does one explain the change from 'born Peru 1897' (1923) to the much more detailed 'born on April 19, 1897, on a ship in the Ocean on its way to Peru' (1926)? Canal must surely have been given this information by a family member.

So why does the 1934 article by Hans Kmoch return to 'born in Peru in 1897'? Was it simply because it was an easier reply to a question about his background?

The birth date of 19 April 1896 appears in L'Italia Scacchistica 1981, the same article introducing the notion that Canal was born in Spain. In view of the fact that Canal had so often provided 1897 as his year of birth, is it possible that this new date was a result of a slip of memory by Canal, or a slip of the writer's pen?

That 1896 date was later used by Jeremy Gaige in Chess Personalia (1987), but without reference to any supporting documentation (Gaige only noted the 1923 Neue Wiener Schachzeitung article).

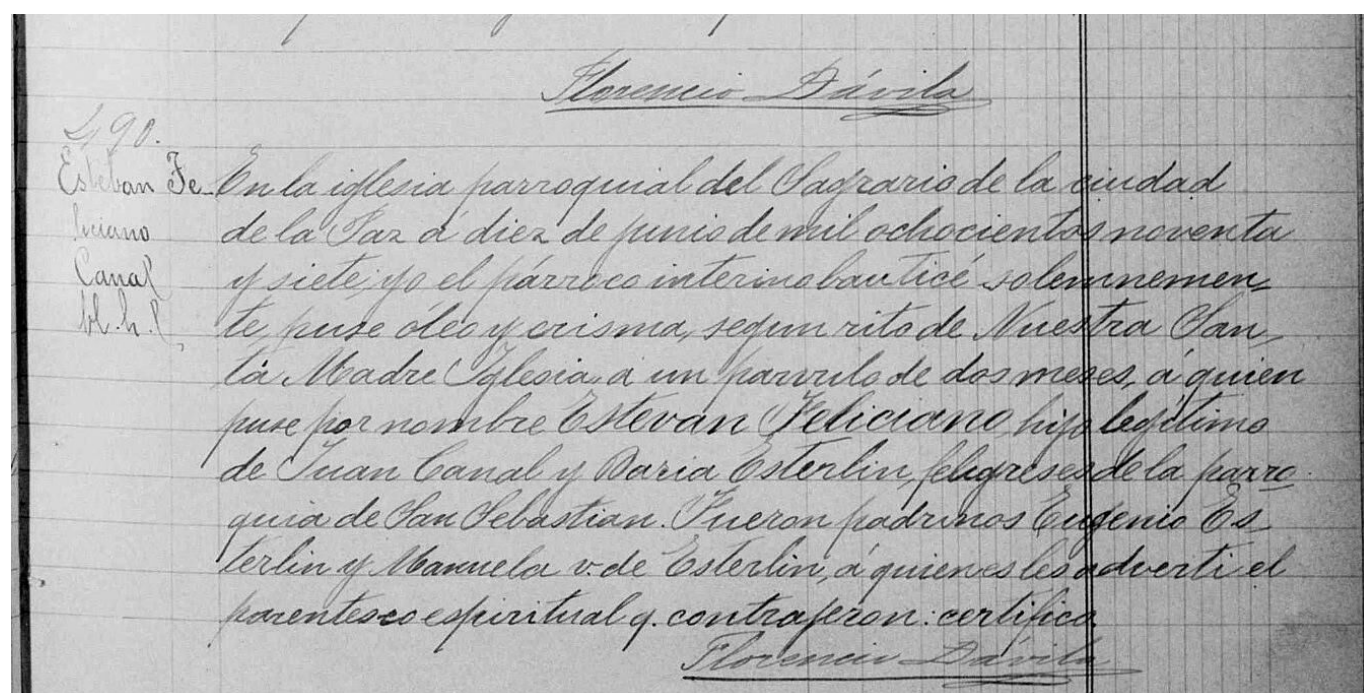
If Canal had been born in Chiclayo, Peru, as shown on his 1935 marriage certificate, surely the event would have had to be registered there. And if he had been born in Spain, then the same statement applies. But what if the most likely scenario is the very detailed one reported in the 1926 Sahovski Glasnik; that Canal was indeed born on a ship on its way to Peru? Could that explain why no documentation has surfaced relating to his birth in Peru or Spain?

Any rules that applied at the time regarding the registration of births at sea are unknown to me. In 1897 there was no Panama Canal, so ships destined for Peru would round Cape Horn and travel up the west coast of South America. Important ports included Valparaiso (Chile) and Callao (Peru). It is quite possible that the birth was eventually registered in some way, perhaps after the parents arrival in Peru.

1897 Baptism

The extract shown below, I believe, throws a little light on the story. It shows a baptism in La Paz, Bolivia, on 10 June 1897 of The child is two months old and is named as Estevan Feliciano, the son of Juan Canal and Daria Esterlin [Sterlin?].

For a child born in the middle of the ocean, one can imagine a family, particularly a very religious family, wishing to have their child baptised in church. The choice of La Paz may be explained by Daria Canal having been born there (as shown on the 1920 ship's manifest), and wishing to introduce the child to her family.



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In the parish church Sagrario in the city of La Paz on June 10, 1897, the interim parish priest solemnly baptized and anointed a two-month-old son with the oil of chrism according to the rite of Our Holy Mother Church, whom I named Estevan Feliciano, the legitimate son of Juan Canal and Daria Esterlin, parishioners of the parish of San Sebastian. His godparents were Eugenio Esterlin and Manuela widow of Esterlin...Certified Florencio Davila

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:685R-PZ79?lang=en>


The website indexing appears to have selected 10 April 1897 as the date of birth based on a literal interpretation of the child's age when baptised.


Also, the mother's name was wrongly transcribed as Maria, when it is clear from the extract that her name was Daria.


It is also unclear as to why the child's name is shown as Esteban Feliciano Canal Esteban, rather than Esteban Feliciano Canal Sterlin.

Esteban Feliciano Canal Esteban

Birth • Bolivia, Catholic Church Records, 1566-2020

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Name	Esteban Feliciano Canal Esteban
Sex	Masculino
Birth Date	10 de abril de 1897
Father's Name	Juan Canal
Father's Sex	Male
Mother's Name	Maria Esteban
Mother's Sex	Female
Event Type	Baptism
Event Date	10 de junio de 1897
Event Place	La Paz, Pedro Domingo Murillo, La Paz, Bolivia

Esteban Feliciano Canal Esteban's Parents and Siblings

OPEN ALL

Juan Canal	Father	M	▼
Maria Esteban	Mother	F	▼

There is a very strong possibility that this was the baptism of the chess master Esteban Canal, which means that 1896 can be removed from all references to his birth.

Alan McGowan
July 01, 2025