

Thomas Frere and the Brotherhood of Chess
A History of 19th Century Chess in New York City
by Martin Frère Hillyer, 223pp. (McFarland, 2007)

About the Book

The 19th century in America saw the evolution of a leisure society. Enjoying numerous technological advances, people had free time to indulge in a variety of pursuits. An assortment of board games flooded American homes. By the middle of the century, chess had surpassed all other games with its popularity. The author of three important chess texts, Thomas Frere was instrumental in the growth of chess as a significant American pastime.

This work provides an historical and chronological look at the 19th century development of chess through the writings of Thomas Frere. His books, letters, chess columns and scrapbooks chronicles the ways chess evolved over the greater part of the 1800s, and illuminates important players of the time and their games. The main text is divided into four sections covering 1827-1900. The first section looks at the early years as chess moved from private to public venues, discussing the establishment of formal chess clubs such as Frere's 1856 Brooklyn Chess Club. The second section deals with the First American Chess Congress and the advent of Paul Morphy to the world of chess. The third section focuses on Frere's part in the first formal world chess championship, a role thoroughly documented in Frere's letters. The fourth section examines the last decade of the 1800s and the steps that led chess into the 20th century.

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