

The Telegraph and Chess

Before there was the telephone and the Internet, there was the electrical telegraph. Unlike the telephone the telegraph was used much more for commercial than social purposes. The telegraph companies advertised chess matches to show the practical applications of the telegraph in its speed and accuracy and long distance. To call attention to its interactive potential, early demonstrations of the telegraph included long-distance chess games.

In 1832, Baron Paul L. Schilling von Canstatt (1786-1837) in Russia created the first electromagnetic telegraph. He had a transmitting device which consisted of a keyboard with 16 keys. These served for switching the electric current. He was one of the first to put in practice the idea of binary (on-off or dot-dash) system of signal transmission. An English student, William Fothergill Cooke (1806-1879), took the model of the telegraph to England, declared that this model was constructed by him and got a patent for it. The telegraph was soon after used by the English railway.

By 1835, a telegraph line was installed along the first German railroad and a telegraph network was built in Munich, Germany.

In 1836, Dr. David Alter (1807-1881) invented the first known American electric telegraph in Elderton, Pennsylvania. He rigged the telegraph between his house and his barn.

Also in 1836, Samuel Morse (1791-1872), an art and portrait painter, independently developed an electrical telegraph and replaced the letters by points and lines (...---...). His assistant, Alfred Vail (1807-1859), developed the Morse code signaling alphabet with Morse. Morse code was designed so that the most frequently used letters required the least effort. Morse was also a chess player who followed the career of Paul Morphy (1837-1884). There is even an 1848 daguerreotype of his wife and daughter playing chess.

In 1837, and Charles Wheatstone (1802-1875) and William Cooke developed the first commercial electro-magnetic telegraph. It displayed 20 letters, but need five wires to connect the sending and receiving stations. It was soon replaced by the Morse Telegraph when it was found that telegraph messages could be received by sound alone, and only needed one or two wires.

In January 1838, Morse first successfully tested his telegraph in New Jersey. Without a repeater, the range of his telegraph was limited to 2 miles.

In July 1839, the telegraph entered commercial use over the 13 miles of the Great Western Railway, from Paddington station to West Drayton.

Samuel Morse wrote a letter to Louis McLane (1786-1857), an American lawyer and politician, claiming that a game of chess was played by telegraph on April 9 and 10, 1844.

On May 1, 1844, a 38-mile telegraph line was completed between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland. On May 22, 1844, Morse made the first public demonstration of his telegraph by sending a message from Washington, D.C. to the Baltimore railroad depot, where Alfred Vail was the Baltimore operator.

On November 16, 1844, the first game of checkers (draughts) was played by telegraph between a player in Baltimore and the assistant telegraph superintendent in Washington, D.C.

On November 23-25, 1844, a telegraph match was played between the chess clubs of Baltimore and Washington, DC. The two cities were the first to be linked by an American telegraph. Seven games were played by telegraph. The games were played to test the accuracy of the telegraph as well as for the players own amusement. A numerical notation was used (the White pieces were on numbers 57 through 64). The 686 moves which made up the match were transmitted without a single mistake or interruption. The first chess game was played by Mr. Greene in Baltimore against Dr. Jones in Washington. Mr. Greene won.

In 1845, the first commercial telegraph line in the United States ran along the railroad tracks between Lancaster, Pennsylvania and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

In early 1845, Howard Staunton (1810-1874) was proposing playing chess by telegraph and brought up the idea to Professor Wheatstone. He suggested that a game should be played by telegraph between two persons only, one stationed at each end of the telegraphic line.

On April 9, 1845, Howard Staunton and Captain Hugh A. Kennedy (1809-1878) traveled to Gosport, on the west side of Portsmouth Harbor, southwest of London to play a team of players in London (Vauxhall terminus) by telegraph. The two teams of players were 100 miles apart. The telegraph ran along the tracks of the South Western Railway. Staunton and Kennedy lost their first game to the team of Henry Thomas Buckle, Captain William Evans, George Perigal, William Tuckett, and George Walker (Staunton only says the first game was unfinished). According to Staunton, the first game was to test the powers of the telegraph with the signals that would be used in the next day's game. Staunton wrote, "the first day's play is a sort of rehearsal merely to familiarize the men to our chess notation." Getting the moves back and forth involved a ten minute delay. The game lasted 8 hours and was transmitted in Gosport by Mr. Hoffmeister. For Staunton and Kennedy, the moves were made in their hotel, and a messenger took it to the telegraph offices a few blocks away. During the first game, several mistakes occurred in transmission of the moves. One case had a bishop on the wrong square for several moves in the game.

On April 10, 1845, a second game was played between Staunton and Kennedy at Gosport vs the team in London. The draw in the second game was agreed after 43 moves so that Staunton and Kennedy could catch the last (half past 5 o'clock) train of the day back to London.

On April 17, 1845, *der Humorist* reported a telegraph game between Howard Staunton of London and Matthew B. Wood of Southampton.

In 1846, William Cooke, Charles Wheatstone, and John Ricardo founded the Electric Telegraph Company, the world's first public telegraph company. When operators were bored, they played chess by telegraph.

In 1846, only 146 miles of telegraph lines existed. By 1850, there were 10,000 miles of telegraph lines.

In 1851, during the London International Tournament, a telegraph match was planned between London and Paris. Due to disagreements with the French government, the telegraph match did not take place. Thus, the organizing committee of the London tournament arranged a telegraphic match between the St. James Hall Chess Club and the London Chess Club.

Staunton discussed his early telegraph games in the *Illustrated London News* on April 4, 1856. He also reported on a telegraph contest between the Liverpool Chess Club and the Manchester Chess Club, 30 miles apart. The game lasted eight hours.

In 1858, Staunton offered to play Paul Morphy by the new transatlantic cable, with the moves transmitted by telegraph. However, the underwater transatlantic cable failed and was not replaced until 1866.

In December 1858, the New York Chess Club played a telegraph match against the Athenaeum players of Philadelphia. Two games were played over the wires of the American Telegraph Company. The first game was drawn and the second game was won by Philadelphia.

In 1859, Samuel Morse was in Europe and watched Paul Morphy play chess. When Paul Morphy returned to New York, the New York Chess Club had a testimonial dinner for Paul Morphy on his return. Samuel Morse was invited to sit at the head table with Morphy, but Morse wrote back to the Testimonial Committee, regretting he had a previous engagement, but wished Morphy well.

In 1861, a cable match with moves transmitted by telegraph was played between Dublin and Liverpool.

In 1861, the first transcontinental telegraph system was established from the eastern United States to California.

In 1862, the first international telegraph chess game was played between Hugh Kennedy in England and Serafino Dubois in Italy.

In 1863, a telegraph match was played between the chess clubs of Hamilton, Canada and St. Catherine's in Western Canada.

In 1866, the first successful transatlantic telegraph cable was completed.

In 1866, the Christchurch Chess Club in New Zealand was formed for a telegraph match against the Nelson Chess Club.

In 1869, a telegraph match was played between the Westminster Chess Club and the Bristol Chess Club. Eight games were played. The Westminster Club won four, drew one, with 3 unfinished games to win the match.

In 1870, a telegraph match was played between Victoria and New South Wales. Victoria won with 3 wins, 1 loss, 2 draws, and one unfinished game.

In 1871, a seven board chess match was played between teams in Sydney, Australia and Melbourne, Australia. Sydney won with 5 wins, 1 draw, and one loss.

In 1872, Lowenthal proposed that a telegraph match of two games be played between the City of London Chess Club and the Vienna Chess Club (Schachgesellschaft), the two strongest chess clubs in Europe. A time limit of 4 days would be granted to each party for deliberation. Six players were to be elected on each side. The first moves were dispatched by telegraph and correspondence on June 1, 1872.

In 1874, the City of London Chess Club defeated the Vienna Chess Club in a telegraph match. The consultation match played by telegraph was the first of its kind in Europe.

In 1878, the first telephone chess match was played.

In 1880, the Liverpool Chess Club played the Calcutta Chess Club via telegraph. It was the first intercontinental telegraph match. The match lasted four months and was won by Liverpool.

In 1882, the Toronto Chess Club played the Detroit Chess Club by telegraph. This may be the first telegraph match between the USA and Canada.

In 1886, the St. Petersburg chess club defeated the London chess club in a telegraph match. The St. Petersburg Chess Club also defeated a chess club in Siberia by telegraph.

In 1891, Mikhail Chigorin defeated William Steinitz with two wins in a telegraph match.

In March 1892, a telegraph match was played between the Manhattan Chess Club and the New Orleans Chess, Checker, and Whist Club.

On March 9, 1895, the Manhattan Chess Club (New York) played the British Chess Club (London) by cable, transmitting the moves by telegraph. Only about 22 moves were played in each of the 10 games. One game was agreed drawn. All the other games were adjudicated as drawn by Emanuel Lasker.

In May 1895, a two game telegraph match was started between Victoria, Canada and San Francisco.

In 1895, the Manhattan Chess Club played the Franklin Chess Club in Philadelphia in a telegraph match. The two teams were 100 miles apart. The rooms of both chess clubs were directly connected by wire. Philadelphia won 7.5 to 6.5.

The first cable chess match using the telegraph between Great Britain and the United States began on March 13, 1896. USA won 4.5 to 3.5. The Anglo-American cable matches lasted from 1895 through 1911.

The second cable match began on February 12, 1897. UK won 5.5 to 4.5.

In March 1897, a telegraph match was played between the Manhattan Chess Club and the New Orleans Chess Club. Manhattan CC won 6.5 to 3.5.

On May 31, 1897, a telegraph match was played between the Manhattan Chess Club and the Franklin Chess Club in Philadelphia. The Franklin Chess Club won 8-6.

In May-June, 1897, a cable match played by telegraph (a Wheatstone Duplex machine) was arranged between five members of the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, DC, and five members of the British House of Commons in London (8,360 miles apart). The match lasted seven days and ended in a draw, 2.5 to 2.5. This match was arranged by Richmond Pearson, ambassador to England. In this match, a record of time in cable matches was established. Twenty moves were cabled in 21.5 minutes, one move going to and from Washington in 31 seconds.

The third cable match began on March 18, 1898. UK won 5.5 to 4.5.

The fourth cable match began on March 10, 1899. USA won 6 to 4.

Cambridge and Oxford defeated the American universities (Harvard, Columbia, Yale, and Princeton) by one point in a cable match (3.5 to 2.5). The winning team took possession of the Rice Trophy, donated by Isaac Rice of New York.

In 1899, a team match by telegraph on 12 boards was played between Boston and Chicago. Chicago won the match 6.5 to 5.5.

In 1899, a match by telegraph between St. Petersburg and Vienna was played and won by Vienna. The stakes were 1,000 francs a side.

The fifth cable match began on March 23, 1900. USA won 6 to 4.

In April, 1900, a cable match took place between the British universities and the American universities. The British players were Tattersall, Softlaw, and Wiles from Cambridge, and A. George, G. Ellis, and Soddy from Oxford. The American players were C. Rice and F. Hopkins from Harvard; A. Cook and Austell from Yale; Sewall from Columbia; and J. Hunt from Princeton. The British team won 4.5 to 1.5.

In November 1900, the first telegraph match between Victoria and West Australia (2,300 miles) was played, 10 players a side. West Australia won with 6 wins, 3 losses, and one unfinished game.

The 6th cable match began on April 19, 1901. UK and USA tied 5-5.

On March 15, 1902, USA won the 7th cable match with a 5.5 to 4.5 score. The Americans played at the Brooklyn Chess Club and the English team played at the International Hall, Cafe Monaco in London. The telegraphic communications was provided by the Commercial Cable Company.

On March 27-28, 1903, the British universities defeated the American universities in their 5th annual cable match by the score of 3.5 to 2.5.

In April, 1903, USA won the 8th cable match with a 5.5 to 4.5 score. The USA was represented by Pillsbury, Barry, Hodges, Marshall, Hymes, Voigt, Newman, Delmar, Howell, and Hellms. The UK was represented by Lawrence, Blackburne, Mills, Atkins, Bellingham, Trenchard, Michell, Jacobs, Gunston, and Hooke.

In 1904, the annual interstate telegraph match between the Melbourne Chess Club in Australia and the New South Wales Chess Association was cancelled because the Australian postmaster general claimed he could not spare the time since the telegraph lines were jammed from increased activity due to rates being recently reduced. In the early days of cable matches, the telegraph companies were very glad to allow chess matches as good advertising.

From 1904 to 1906, cable matches were halted due to the Russo-Japanese war, which made arrangements for the cabling too difficult. The cables were filled with battle reports and diplomatic necessities, with not time to allow chess cable matches.

In 1905, a telegraph match was played between the Manhattan Chess Club and the Chicago Chess and Checker Club. Emanuel Lasker was the referee and adjudicated the unfinished games. The Manhattan Chess Club won 9 to 7.

In 1906, there was no chess cable match between the USA and the UK because the cable companies refused to handle them, giving a reason that their service for the cable match was at a loss.

In 1907, UK won the 9th cable match with a 5.5 to 4.5 score.

In 1908, USA won the 10th cable match with a 6.5 to 3.5 score.

In 1909, UK won the 11th cable match with a 6 to 4 score.

In 1910, UK won the 12th cable match with a 6.5 to 3.5 score.

In 1911, UK won the 13th cable match with a 6 to 4 score. Britain, having won three matches in succession, took permanent possession of the silver Newnes Cup, offered in competition by Sir George Newnes (1851-1910) several years earlier.

Of the 13 US-UK cable matches, Blackburne played in 11 matches, winning 2, losing 4, and drawing 5. Pillsbury played in 8 matches, winning 1, losing 2, and drawing 5. Albert Hodges played in all 13 cable matches without losing a game.

In 13 matches, the USA won 6, UK won 6, and one draw. The total points were 64 to 64. Each country won 39 games, lost 39 games, and drew 50 games. UK won the Newnes trophy for winning in 3 times in a row.

From 1899 to 1903, there were Anglo-American University cable matches between Oxford and Cambridge and Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia University. A second series of University matches was held from 1906 to 1910. The last in a series of cable matches between the universities occurred in 1924. In 11 matches, the British universities won 4, the American universities won 4, and they drew 3 times. In 1907, Capablanca played for Columbia University and drew his game on board 1 against H. Rose of Oxford.

In March, 1924, the Western Union Telegraph Company opened the first direct cable between London and Chicago. On November 6, 1926, a cable chess match between London and Chicago was held.

Between 1926 and 1931, London played 5 cable matches against 4 US cities. This series of cable matches using the telegraph was known as the Insull Trophy series.

In 1926, London beat Chicago by 4-2.

In 1927, London beat New York by 4-2.

In 1928, London was leading Washington, DC by 3-2, but there was a dispute about the bottom board. The matter was referred to FIDE and the match was annulled.

In 1930, London drew with Washington DC, with the score of 3-3.

In 1931, London beat Philadelphia by 3.5 to 2.5.

In 2006, Western Union discontinued all telegram and commercial messaging services, thus ending the telegraph era.

The June 2008 issue of Chess Life described the New York vs. Philadelphia 1858 telegraph match.