In the early morning of April 22, 1904, in the small northwestern Pennsylvania town of Cambridge Springs, a delegation of town officials, a brass band of local school children especially recessed for the occasion, and a large crowd of the town’s citizens met train No. 5 at the station on Venango Avenue. Those who disembarked were placed in fine carriages and driven across French Creek, around the Riverside Hotel, and up Main Street to the Hotel Rider, the 500-room queen of resort hotels which would be their headquarters during their month-long stay.

The Cambridge Springs newspaper, The Semi-Weekly Enterprise, wrote of this event, “One pleasant feature of the reception was the presence of 350 scholars of our public schools lined up on Venango Avenue while the procession passed, each scholar waving Old Glory. The visitors were pleased with the beautiful sight. The town was decorated profusely with flags and bunting for the occasion.”

These guests had recently come from official tours of New York City and from the sights of Washington, D.C., where they had been received by President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House. They were not government officials, returning war heroes, or even foreign dignitaries. They ranged in age from 23 to 54, in occupation from unemployed student to respected lawyer and doctor, and in background from American melting pot to Russian prince. These men really had but one thing in common: all were masters of the ancient game of chess, and they had come for the Cambridge Springs International Chess Congress.

In those glory days of chess there was no formal international chess association. A great tournament, or “congress” as such events were called, was the result of a resort town or hotel owner wishing to publicize its accommodations, and offering large prizes to attract the most exciting competitors. The brainchild for this chess congress was W.D. Rider, who was the guiding force behind the construction (1895-1897) and management of the Hotel Rider. Because Cambridge Springs was located exactly midway on the railroad lines between New York City and Chicago, it was the perfect place for a grand hotel providing luxurious lodgings for a night’s layover between America’s two great cities. Cambridge Springs boasted of curative mineral waters and a bucolic setting in the French Creek Valley. “The Rider” was the premier among some dozen fine hotels in the town including the Bartlett, the Riverside, and the Kelly.

A state-of-the-art luxury hotel, the Rider, according to its brochure, had “telephones to all rooms, electric lights, a hydraulic elevator, an artificial refrigerating plant, steam laundry, a handsome theatre with seats for five hundred guests, a beautiful ballroom with balcony, a sanitary bathing department, ...an electro therapeutic department, ...billiard rooms, bowling alley, gymnasiums, and solarium.” A single room rented for $2.50 to $5.50 per day. Weekly rates for two ranged from $30 to $52.50.

W.D. Rider had arranged for the managing directors of the tournament to be received by President Theodore Roosevelt at Oyster Bay in the fall of 1903. The president said he would be delighted to plan for a special reception at the White House in honor of the distinguished foreign and American chess masters. Once having secured the patronage of the president, the directors had an easy task in enlisting the...
support of chess clubs and associations around the country. This came as subscriptions to the *Daily Bulletin* of the International Chess Congress. Most financial support for the venture, however, was provided by Rider and the directors of the Erie Railroad Co. All of the leading masters and champions readily accepted their invitations.

On the evening of their arrival, a formal reception was held at the Hotel Rider Theater. While the crowd gathered, a band stationed on the roof garden of the hotel played popular tunes. Over 200 reporters were present from around the world, and according to the *New York Times*, the featured speaker of the evening was Col. Ned Arden Flood of Meadville, Pa. He greeted the 16 members of the chess congress who were the centerpieces of the evening, and described chess as a masculine game that had survived fashionable dictum from remotest antiquity. He contrasted it with bridge, “which challenges the feminine intellect, attracts wives and mothers from their own firesides, and serves as a stepping stone to divorce without alimony.” The *Times* reported that the oration was frequently applauded.

Cambridge Springs had been preparing for this event for months. On March 8, the town paper told its readers that the tournament’s participants were of a greater strength than at any recent tournament. By March 18, the Cambridge Springs Improvement Society had sprung into action. The society maintained that the town should give the champion players a grand reception to indicate civic appreciation for their visit. Prizes were to be given to encourage beautification, and Miss Martha Root, a hometown girl then working for the *Pittsburgh Gazette* (and who later became an influential world traveller and important emissary of the Bahai religion), was invited to give a lecture on “Town Improvement.”

On April 1, the town’s health officer, Chris Wheeler, was distributing notices from the Health Board to residents of the town. The new ordinances required:

1. All rubbish of any and every kind must be removed from your premises... within 10 days....
2. No slops, partly decayed vegetables or any other decaying matter, will be allowed to be thrown out in back yards....
3. All earth closets [outhouses] must be cleaned within 19 days....
4. All keepers of hotels, livery and public barns will be required to remove all animal droppings and manures from their premises as often as every 7 days....

By April 12, the town council had decided on the welcoming parade route and had asked the citizens to decorate their places of business and private residences on welcoming day. They elected H.W. (Wayne) Canfield to be chief marshal, and the newspaper advised that “if anything goes wrong Wayne will, of course, be blamed, so let everybody try and make this affair a success.”

The men who readied themselves for the first day of play were the who’s who of world chess. The favorites were the French champion David Janowski, world champion Dr. Emanuel Lasker of Berlin, or even Philadelphiaan Harry Pillsbury, the premier U.S. player. Other luminaries, noted the *Daily Bulletin* of the tournament, included Russian champ M.J. Tchigorin of St. Petersburg, and the Austrian kingpin C. Schlechter of Vienna.

Near the bottom of the list, along with several lesser lights, was “Frank J. Marshall, Brooklyn, N.Y., Youthful American.” His previous record did not put him among the favorites, but he had made a strong debut as a master at Paris in 1900 when he came in third behind Lasker and Pillsbury, and he even defeated both in their individual encounters. But in weaker tournaments in Monte Carlo in 1901, '02, '03, '04, and at Hanover in 1902, he placed tenth, ninth, ninth, third, and ninth, respectively.

Although U.S. champ Harry Pillsbury was ill, in questionble condition for a strenuous tournament, the crowd looked forward to the battle between him and the world champion, Lasker. In 1896, Lasker had beaten Pillsbury in St. Petersburg in a game felt to be the best he ever played. Their 1899 meeting in London resulted in a draw after an exciting attack by Pillsbury. Dr. Lasker, barely able to save himself, had resorted to a maneuver called “perpetual check.” This tactic is used to avoid a loss — a player gets a draw by repeatedly putting his opponent’s king in check. Though he can’t checkmate his opponent, it prevents his opponent from checkmating him.

Pillsbury, however, had not for-
Janowski, who begins to wear a conqueror's air, was unmerciful in his treatment of Delmar and was the first to finish, increasing his already remarkable total of 6 and 1/2 points. But for Marshall, who clings doggedly to the leader, the field would seem to be hopelessly left behind.

Janowski’s “conqueror’s” air was a bit premature. The Daily Bulletin for the eighth round exclaims: “Keener and more exciting grows the race as each day passes and the close of the eighth round finds Janowski overhauled and Marshall bracketed with him for first place!”

During particularly arduous tournaments, chess players in the highest level of competition often agree to a quick draw after 10 or 15 moves. Called a grandmaster draw, it does not significantly hurt their chances and permits them to rest up for the next round. At Cambridge Springs, in the eighth round, the spectators were presented with one of those oddities which occur periodically in tournament chess. Pillsbury and Schlechter, the Austrian champion, agreed on a draw, but one could hardly call this draw a grandmaster, for 146 moves were made before a draw was called. Pillsbury was, in jest, christened with the title “The Master of Brevity” after the performance. This game remains one of the two or three longest games in the history of grandmaster tournament play.

The ninth round found Janowski and Marshall still tied with 8 points, and Lasker with 6. All looked forward to the crucial eleventh round, where Janowski and Marshall would meet for what everyone knew would be the tournament championship. But those who looked for a decisive outcome were to be disappointed. The suspense was heightened as the long game was adjourned without a result, to be finished later. The tournament news ran as follows:

A nerve racking contest of 65 moves between the two leaders was the main feature of the eleventh round of the international tournament. After seven long hours of severe mental exertion Marshall and Janowski ceased their strife and retired under the white flag for rest and repairs. Under heavy pressure Marshall kept his head well and presented a stonewall front to the enemy. The position arrived at near adjournment, with the white king being in hostile territory, was a strong reminder of the seemingly impossible problems our forefathers were wont to produce.

It wasn’t until after the thirteenth round that the adjourned game was finally completed, at 76 moves with Janowski resigning. With this win, Marshall’s stock jumped up and the young master became the first favorite of the Cambridge Springs tournament.

After the fifteenth and final round, the Daily Bulletin observed:

Frank James Marshall, of Brooklyn, N. Y., ...(born in New York City, August 21, 1877), accomplished the unprecedented feat of winning the first prize of $1000 and the championship of Cambridge Springs without the loss of a single game!... Thus again, af-
ter many trials and vicissitudes during which the flash of genius frequently shone forth with dazzling brightness, his Yankee pluck and determination to succeed achieved merited reward.

It indeed only here be added that Americans owe a deep debt of gratitude to the youthful master, whose indomitable courage has brought the Stars and Stripes once more to the front.

Marshall's second round game with Pillsbury demonstrated the clarity of his thought. He seduced his opponent's king toward the center of the board and mated him on the very square which had been contested the entire game. Calling Cambridge Springs his "greatest triumph," Marshall went on in that same year to meet and marry Carrie Krauss of Brooklyn, N.Y. (his companion for 37 years), win a battle royal in Paris against his life-long friend and antagonist Janowski, and take first prize at the famous tournament at the Dutch resort at Scheveningen. In his autobiography, he refers to the period as "the year of years."

Victory at Cambridge Springs made Marshall world famous. He was the U.S. chess champion for 30 years (1906-1936), and the spiritual father of American chess. In those years, every promising player in the United States was helped one way or another by Frank Marshall. He promoted matches, published articles and books, and taught chess from his famous Marshall chess club in Greenwich Village, where he also resided. Every player was made to feel at home there. No matter what the hour, he would sit down with a duffer as willingly as a champion to find something of rare interest in every position.

The Cambridge Springs tournament also produced an important theoretical addition to the strategy of the game. This is called the Cambridge Springs Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined. This variation was introduced and played several times in the tournament with great success. The maneuver was designed to isolate one of white's bishops away from the scene of battle. It is so well regarded that it is often avoided by an exchange of pawns early in the game, the only reason that it is rarely seen in tournament play.

The Cambridge Springs Congress was hailed as "the best arranged ever" by The Semi-Weekly Enterprise. "The great many visitors, who came to this town to witness the games, were struck with the wonderful management, the excellence of all opponents, the clever forethought in arranging even little matters and there was only one voice in the matter, namely: 'better than ever before.'" Talk of another tournament dissolved, however, when the Hotel Rider fell into legal and financial difficulties with the death of W. D. Rider in 1905. It was sold to the Polish National Alliance in 1911 and converted to Alliance College with a dedication by President Howard Taft in 1912. The building burned to the ground in the winter of 1931.

Ad hoc tournaments for publicity at grand hotels and spas have since become a thing of the past. World championships prior to the twentieth century were awarded, more or less, by informal acclamation, with the champion accepting selected challenges. Now the championship procedure is a worldwide process, including candidate tournaments in geographical zones, all under the jurisdiction of an international chess federation.

Chess, of course, continues to flourish. It remains popular as a challenging game and it is at once an art, a science, and a skill. It has a lively history as illustrated by the Cambridge Springs International Chess Congress, a history to which players continually turn for inspiration and amusement.