

## The chess swallow

The Swiss postal stationery shown here from 1936 is not a philatelic specialty, but the note “Für die Schwalbe” (For the Swallow) in the address is striking. The addressee is Dr. Ed[uard] Birgfeld in Meissen, the sender André Chéron in Leysin (Switzerland). And that makes this postal stationery a top-class chess-historical delicacy.

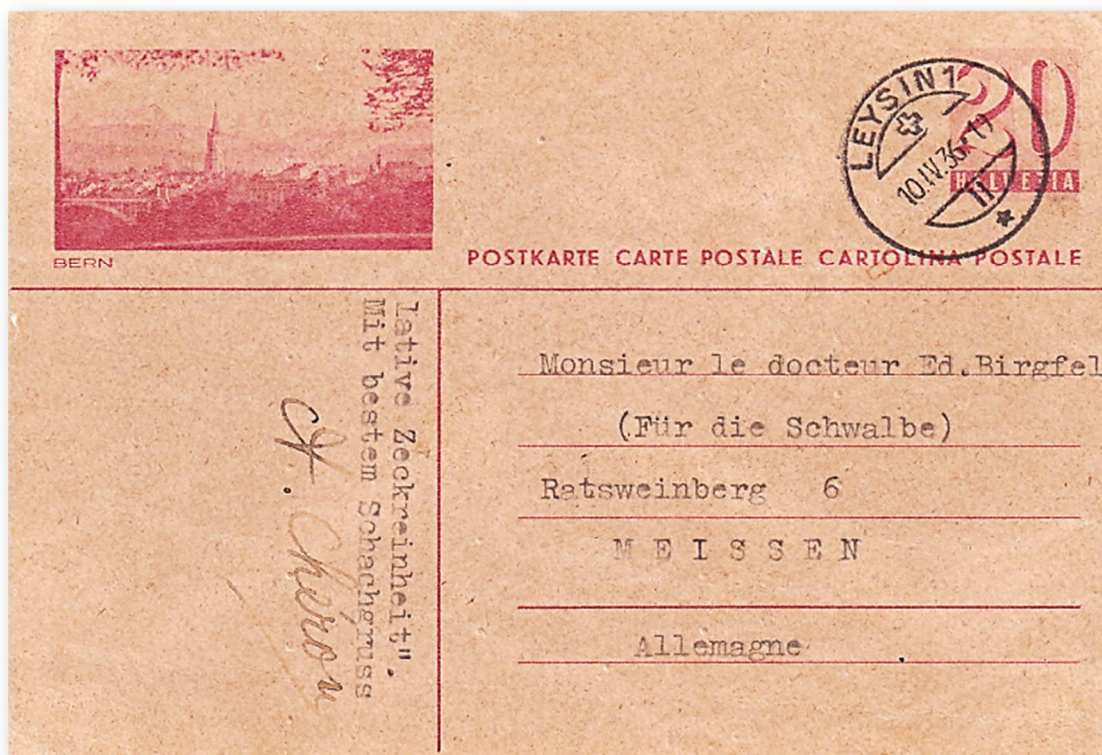


Figure 1

It begins in February 1924: fifteen problem chess friends meet in Essen and decide to found an “Association of Chess Problem Friends”<sup>1</sup>. The name of the association was to be “Schwalbe” (Swallow), in memory of the two important problem chess composers Johannes Kohtz and Karl Kockelkorn, who had published a famous four-move move (mate in 4 moves) in 1911 under the motto “Eine Schwalbe” (A Swallow). And they decide to publish their own magazine devoted exclusively to chess problem. The first issue of this new magazine, called “Die Schwalbe”, appeared in August 1924. Initial difficulties were overcome, and in 1928 Dr. Eduard Birgfeld (1887-1939), the recipient of the postal stationery shown here, took over as chairman of the association.

Eduard Birgfeld is a physician. After the First World War, he worked as a senior physician in Chemnitz, and from the end of 1928 he headed the city hospital in Meissen. He enjoys an excellent reputation in problem chess; from 1924 he heads the chess corner of the “Chemnitzer Tageblatt”.

André Chéron (1895-1980), the sender of the postal stationery, was French and won the French chess championship several times in the 1920s. And he wrote the multi-volume “Lehr- und Handbuch der Endspiele”, for many years the “endgame bible” of chess players. Chéron suffers from lung disease and

<sup>1</sup> Chess problem, also known as chess composition, is concerned with constructing and solving chess problems. In contrast to a game of chess, which extends from the opening of the game to the win or draw, the chess problem consists of a chess position devised by the problem composer with a demand, e.g. mate in 4 moves. The observer is asked to find the solution devised by the author of the chess problem, taking into account the rules of chess and against all possible resistance from the black party. In addition to orthodox problem chess (chess problems with the requirement “mate in n moves”) as well as winning and draw studies, heterodox chess problem deals with other conditions (e.g. self and auxiliary mate problems), other pieces or other board shapes (e.g. cylinder chess). Another branch of chess problem are retro-analytical problems and chess mathematical problems.

lives for decades in a sanatorium in Leysin/Switzerland, where this card was stamped. He also published many of his chess compositions in the Schwalbe.

Below are three more covers that fit the theme:

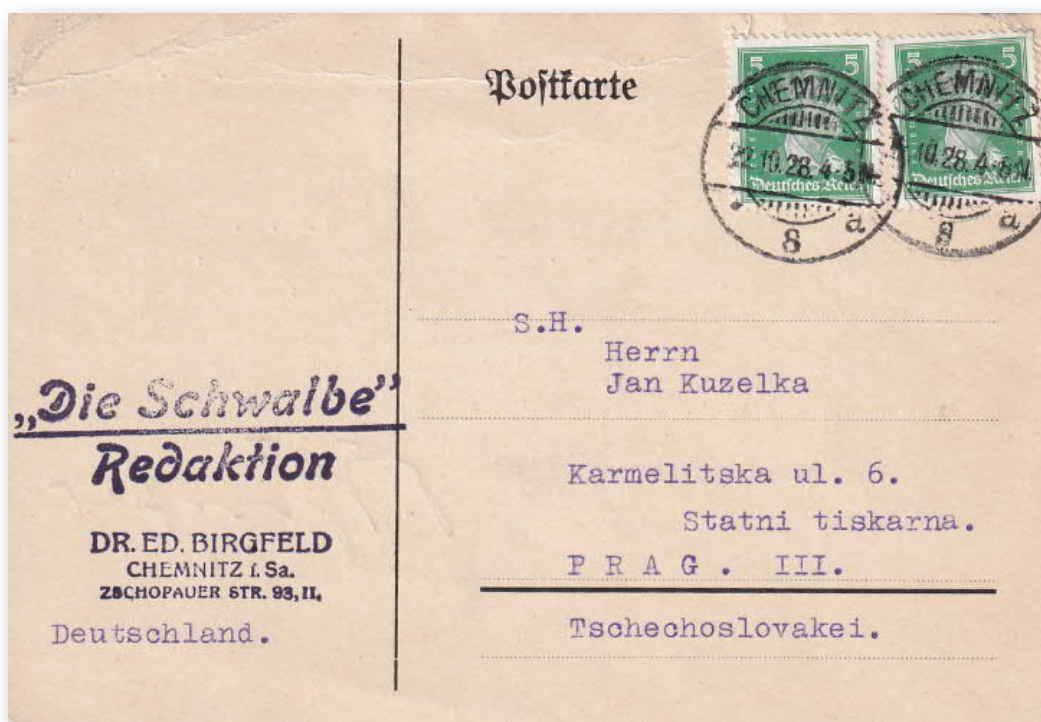


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows a card from Dr. Birgfeld to chess editor Jan Kuzelka in Prague, who runs a Czech chess column there.

Figures 3 and 4 take us into the recent past.



Figure 3





Figure 4

Figure 3 shows a Russian postal stationery with additional franking; GA and additional franking show chess motifs. The card was sent from Lviv to Einbeck/Germany in 1990, shortly before the independence of Ukraine. The illustrated envelope (Figure 4) takes us back 25 years to the time of the Yugoslav Wars. The item is being returned because the airmail service to the country of destination was “temporarily suspended” in April 1999 (see return stamp).

The Schwalbe's flight is far from over. The “Schwalbe, deutsche Vereinigung für Problemschach e.V.” is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Figure 5 shows the current front page (excerpt) of the magazine “Die Schwalbe”.

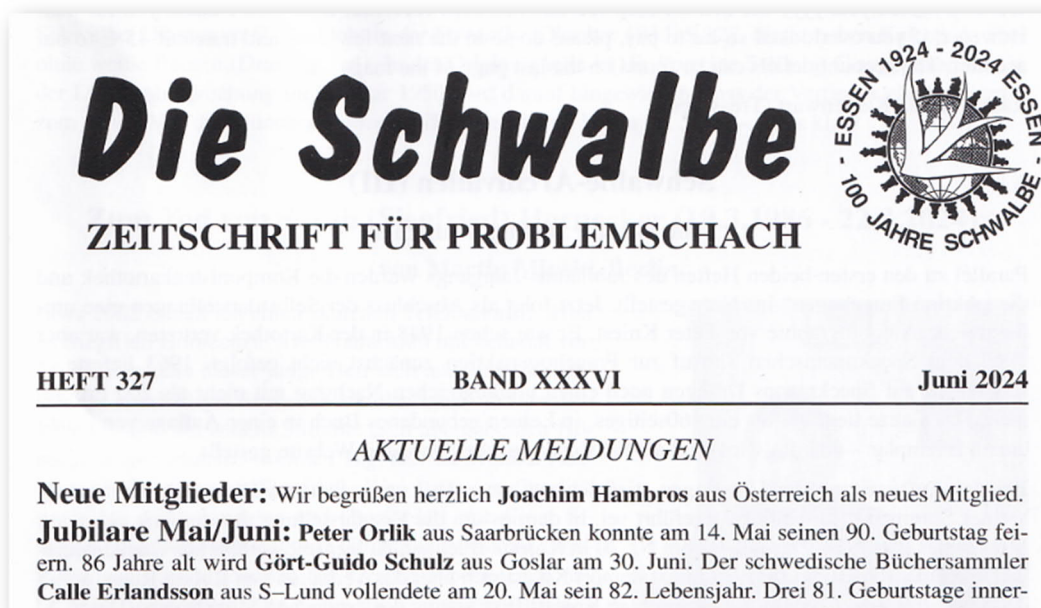


Figure 5

Quellen: Wikipedia; Die Schwalbe; <https://www.dieschwalbe.de>; Abbildungen aus eigener Sammlung.