

History

In the footsteps of Troitzky and of the Kubbel brothers (part 1)

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Edward Winter's website⁽¹⁾ is an invaluable source of information for every chess passionate or searcher. Some time ago, Winter had the idea to compile information about the places where chess personalities, mainly players from the past had lived⁽²⁾.

The idea of this article comes from Winter's idea. Fortunately, in August, I had the opportunity to visit Saint-Petersburg⁽³⁾ for my work. Before my trip I consulted this list. Among the collected addresses, I found two as especially interesting for the endgame study amateur, concerning Alexey Alexeyevich Troitzky and Leonid Ivanovich (or, in German style, Karl Artur Leonid) Kubbel. At the time, I had not consulted another great website which would have delighted me: www.e3e5.com. I recommend it to any chess fan who wishes to visit Petersburg. The second part of this article will exploit it.

When you visit Petersburg, you may have the impression that, very often, you are accompanied by Troitzky himself (in Russian Cyrillic: Троицкий): you cross the *Troitzky most* (Troitzky bridge), you see the *Troitzky sobor* (Troitzky cathedral), you follow the *Troitzky prospekt* (Troitzky avenue), or you do some shopping at the *Troitzky rynok* (Troitzky market). Even a *Troitzky dom* does exist: it is an estate agency! The explanation is quite simple: Troitzky is a common name in Russian, meaning Trinity. Of course, this is not specific to Petersburg, but this creates a

strange impression for the non Russian-speaking chess amateur visitor.

Many Russian people, also, are called Troitzky (and not only in Petersburg, of course). Even outside Russia: the Serbian tennis player, Victor Troicki, has paternal grandparents who emigrated from Russia: it is the same name, spelled differently with Latin letters (in Serbian Cyrillic: Троицки).

Alexey Alexeyevich Troitzky was born in Petersburg (1866) and he died there, after the city had been renamed Leningrad (1942), but he spent most of his professional life outside the former capital of the Russian Empire, even if he came back home more or less regularly. The second part of this article will deal with Troitzky's last years, when he settled in Sankt-Petersburg after retiring and with the Kubbel brothers who on the contrary never left the city, with the exception of a short stay in Riga during their childhood. I don't know if someone has already reconstructed Troitzky's full route from 1897 till 1933: it has not been an easy task but from endgame studies columns and from awards one can trace a large part of his travels to the remote Russian provinces.

A.A. Troitzky, during his years of formation, spent some time in Riga since he says himself that he attended the *Riga Realschule*, i.e. secondary school. I don't know exactly when Troitzky was in Riga, as he doesn't give any precise fact in the preface to his 1934 col-

(1) www.chesshistory.com.

(2) The list, with a lot of precise addresses, can be found here: <http://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/addresses.html>.

(3) Sankt-Peterburg in Russian or Peterburg, or even, in common parlance, Peter, pronounced as Piter.

lection of studies⁽¹⁾. The *Realschule* (today the Riga 1st State Grammar School) was the school where the Latvian writer Rainis, who was born under the name of Jānis Pliekšāns in 1865 one year before Troitzky, graduated in 1884.

A.A. Troitzky settled in Petersburg in autumn 1890, and he was near 30 when he completed his formation: the Wikipedia Russian article gives 1894 as the year he got his leaving certificate from the technico-forest state academy in Saint-Petersburg, with the status of ‘лесовод 2-го разряда’⁽²⁾. But in “Not an autobiography”, Troitzky curiously writes (I underline): ‘during 1895 and 1896, *the two years that I was in Petersburg*, I composed up to 50 studies’. He also adds: ‘My enthusiasm for chess began when I went to Petersburg as a student at the Forest Institute and started going to the café Dominique’⁽³⁾. From this, we understand that Troitzky had not been in Petersburg before 1895 ...

At least, one thing is certain: 1895 is indeed the year Troitzky published his first studies. It was in *Novoye Vremya*, a daily Peterburgian newspaper with a weekly illustrated supplement. It seems that his first study [+ 3005.10 d7c5] was published on 23rd January 1895, with the solution given on 13rd March, as shown by Ken Whyld, who was able to refer to the *Novoye Vremya* microfilms. Troitzky indicates in “Not an autobiography” that another study [+0005.10 h8h4] was the very first but he says that both were composed ‘more or less at the same time’. This supposes that Troitzky was in Petersburg *before* 1895, because, as he explains, he was encouraged to compose by some friends of note⁽⁴⁾. Troitzky had indeed made the acquaintance of the two best players in the city: Mikhail Chigorin (1850-1908), the ‘father of Russian chess’ and Emanuel

Schiffers (1850-1904), the second best player in Russia after Chigorin. They ‘became my good friends’ (preface to the English edition of ‘360’, Troitzky’s last collection of studies). They met in the Café Dominique, one of the first cafés in Russia. Chigorin was in charge of a column in *Novoye Vremya* (New Time) from 1890 till 1907 and he asked Troitzky to contribute some original compositions. Schiffers was the editor of *Shakhmatny Zhurnal* from 1894 to 1898, the other main publication that hosted Troitzky’s first compositions.

Then a twenty-year long period began during which Troitzky lived in the large region called in Russian *Severo Zapadny Kraï*, the Northwestern Territory, that was composed of six *guberniyas* or governorates, themselves subdivided in *yyezds* or districts (today *rayon’s*). He writes:

‘In 1897 I moved from Petersburg into the backwoods of Smolensk province in the capacity of assistant of the Chief Forester’ (“Not an Autobiography”, *EG119*, p. 745). Smolensk, a large town 360 km west-southwest of Moscow, is located near the boundary with present Belarus. From Petersburg, as the crow flies, the distance is approximately 600 km. Troitzky is not very accurate, probably because none of the remote places where he was in office was known by his readers. For the 1898-99 years, two places can be identified from the endings columns of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung* and the *Wiener Schachzeitung*: Gorodok and Dorsky. A quick search on Google shows that there are no less than 13 villages named Gorodok in the current *Smolensk Oblast*, that is more or less similar, in surface, with the former Smolensk Governorate (i.e. around 50,000 km²). One of these is located near Gagarin City, then called Gzhatsk, in the Gagarinski rayon, a place clos-

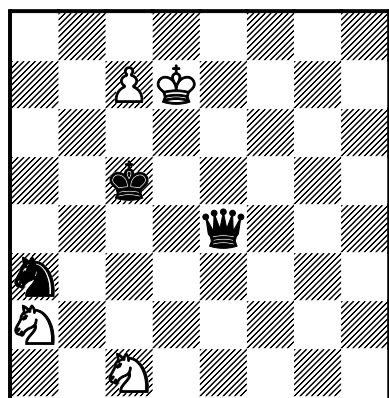
(1) This text “Not an autobiography”, has been translated in *EG119*.

(2) *Lesovod* is translated in English by nurseryman, arboriculturist or forester.

(3) A famous place for chess players in Petersburg, located on the principal street in the city, the prestigious Nevsky Prospekt, at number 24.

(4) It has to be mentioned that Troitzky had already published a three-mover in 1893 in the Peterburgian *Shakhmatny Zhurnal*.

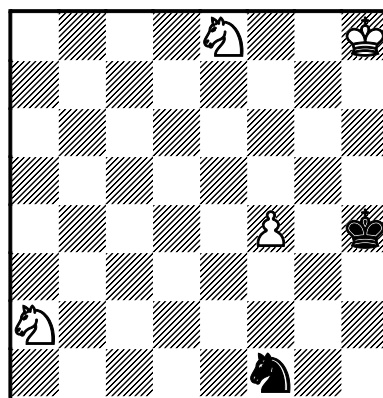
P.1. A.A Troitzky
Novoie Vremya 23i1895



d7c5 3005.10 4/3 win

1.Sb3+ Kb6 2.c8S+! Kb5 3.Sd6+ wins.

P.2. A.A. Troitzky
Shakhmatny Zhurnal 1895



h8h4 0005.10 4/2 win

1.f5 Kg5 2.f6 Kg6 3.Kg8 Ne3 4.f7 Sg4
5.f8S+ wins.

er to Moscow than to Smolensk. The same search for Dorsky doesn't give any result but a village called Dor does exist, in the same *ray-on*. Today Gorodok has ... 3 inhabitants, and Dor has ... 7!

Troitzky has reported that, in his forest, he lost his interest in chess, until one day in 1905 when the son of a ranger paid him a visit and brought him fresh works published by new composers (Rinck and the Platov brothers) and Johann Sehwers. 'My earlier interest in composing was reawakened and I felt the urge to return to it', writes Troitzky.

It is not known exactly when the composer was posted to the Kovno Governorate (Kovenskaya guberniya). Kovno (today Kaunas, Lithuania), west of Vilnius, was the capital of independent Lithuania from 1920 to 1940, as Vilnius was then a part of Poland, but we know that in 1907 Troitzky was living in Kedainiai (Kiejdany in Polish, Kedahnen in German), a village located in central Lithuania (51 km north of Kaunas). Several studies published in *Bohemia*, *Deutsches Wochenschach*, *Deutsche Schachzeitung* mention this place. Is it in this place that the unfortunate composer lost, for the first time, his chess material after a fire? In his preface to '500', his collection published in Germany and in German, Troitzky only mentions for this disaster the year it occurred: 1908. In 1909, after a short stay in

Wilna (today Vilnius, Lithuania), Troitzky went north, to a new place: Jewe (today Jõhvi in Estonia), in the Governorate of Estonia, 40 km kilometres west of Narva, in the far east of present Republic of Estonia (Ida-Viru county), close to the Russian frontier. Next year, he was in Oleshnitsa as indicated in *Niva*, September 1910. Oleshnitsa (until 1923 the Russian name of a village now called Alajoe, in Estonia) is on the shores of Lake Peipus. Alajoe today has around 150 inhabitants. As Jõhvi is the capital of the Ida-Viru county in which Alajoe is located, maybe it was only one place and not two. For Troitzky, the advantage of this location was its relative closeness to Petersburg (less than 200 km).

One can also assume that Troitzky had kept a pied-à-terre in the capital of the Russian Empire. From time to time, the original studies published in chess magazines mention Petersburg: for instance, in November 1909 (*Deutsche Schachzeitung*), in January 1910 (*Niva*), or in 1912, (*Bohemia* and *Deutsche Schachzeitung*). Petersburg, at the beginning of 1st World War, had to be renamed in Petrograd, because of the German origin of its name that was now inappropriate in a country fighting against German Empire. But it is in a German source, the *Ranneforth's Chess-Kalender*, that we find the first precise address of Alexei Troitzky in his native town.

Heinrich Ranneforth (1864-1945) was a German chesswriter, one of the editors, with M. Karstedt, of the *Deutsches Wochenschach*. Later, Ranneforth became one of the editors of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung* during the dark times of Nazism. Ranneforth published, from 1907 till 1938, his well informed yearly *Schach-Kalender*. In the 1915 issue, p.78, he gives the following full address :

‘Troitzky, A.: Roschdestwenskaja 44, Qu 22, St Petersburg/Petrograd 8, Russia’. This address, with its German spelling is also in Lamare’s papers with a small alteration (Roschdestwensaya). It corresponds to the current 8th *Sovietskaya ulitsa*, apartment 22 (German Qu is for Russian Kv, apartment), in the *Smolny* area. The name of the Rojdestwenskaja street was changed, as many other streets, during the Soviet era.

In the following years, things are far from clear: it seems that in 1916 he was still posted in Jewe (source: *Tidskrift för Schack*), even if the *Chess Amateur* award, the same year, places him in Petrograd. In 1917, he was probably in Hmara, a small village in the Smolensk oblast, south-east of the regional capital (source, again: *Tidskrift för Schack*). Later the same year, the same source gives Minsk (Byelorussia). 1917 is also the year Troitzky lost for the second time his chess material.

Troitzky’s second period of professional activity took place in another part of Russia, this time east of Moscow, in the Penza region, near the Volga. He was no longer an assistant forester, he was an instructor in the Provincial Executive Committee (*Gubispolkom* in Russian), working for the new regime. Penza is located 625 km south-east of Moscow (i.e. 1,200 km south-east of Petersburg). Life in Penza and around was particularly troubled during the Bolshevik revolution: there was insurrection in the ‘kulak districts’ and it is from Penza that the Czechoslovak Legions

launched an anti-Bolshevik uprising in April and May 1918, severely quelled by the Red Army.

These difficult years⁽¹⁾ coincides with Troitzky’s ‘second break in [his] composing activity’ (1917-1923), that was the cause of strong anxiety about his fate. In his column devoted to endgames, on page 168 of the July 1945 *BCM*, T.R. Dawson reported that more than 25 years before, he had announced Troitzky’s death: ‘In 1919, he was reported dead, but in 1920 in a letter from his own hand I had the joy of turning “dead” into “missing and found again”.’ Marcel Lamare, in his review for *La Stratégie* of the Troitzky 1934 collection also mentions the rumour (‘There was a rumour going that he had been slaughtered; in point of fact, he had been the victim of several plunderings or fires that had destroyed his documentation’ – *La Stratégie*, August 1935). Even in Russia, nobody could certify that he was still alive. Later, in 1922, the chess journal *Shakhmaty* published a kind of missing person notice, asking Troitzky to give his address⁽²⁾.

Next year, Troitzky came back to composition and to competition. ‘My reappearance came as a surprise there where an unconfirmed rumour had spread that I had perished in the Revolution.’ (‘Not an Autobiography’, *EG119*, p.746)’. Sources⁽³⁾ indicate that Troitzky worked in the forest areas of Dolgorukovo, Golovinscino and Černoserje. The latter is confirmed by several chess sources: Černoserje is in the Mokshansky raion, south-west of Penza. Troitzky’s foreword for his 1924 collection of studied was signed off: ‘Tschernoserje, 1 January 1924’. The award of the *Česke Slovo* 1924 tourney gives the same place (see *Casopis československých sachistu* vii-viii1924, p. 99 and *Shakhmaty*, August 1924).

(1) Civil war, with intense fighting in 1918-1920, disorganized the whole country.

(2) This is quoted on p. 26 of the introduction written by V.A. Korolkov [*A.A. Troitzky, Life and Work*] for the 1959 collection of Troitzky studies.

(3) E.g. the Russian academic dictionary: <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/418098>.

