



By Shannon Bailey

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Saint Louis*

# FISCHER REVEALED!

**THE WORLD CHESS  
HALL OF FAME EXPLORES HOW  
FISCHER WAS TRULY AN ENIGMA  
AND A GENIUS AND HOW  
QUICKLY HE ROSE NOT ONLY  
THROUGH THE CHESS WORLD  
BUT ALSO TO PROMINENCE IN  
POPULAR CULTURE**

Our mission at the World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF) is to educate visitors by interpreting the game of chess and its continuing cultural and artistic significance. But the main goal is to make chess fun and accessible. We realized that the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bobby Fischer's monumental win in the 1972 World Championship was approaching, and so we put *1972 Fischer/Spassky: The Match, Its Origin, and Influence* on the calendar. Our initial hope was to have the show open earlier in the summer so we could publicly mark the anniversaries of the individual games of the match, but the calendar was slightly changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so we ended up opening the show on August 18, 2022, a few weeks before the anniversary date of his victory. The exhibition is the largest history show we have ever staged – it takes place in all three of the WCHOF's galleries – and it will be on view through April 28, 2023. Due to the size of the show, I co-curated the exhibition with Emily Allred, our curator.



◀ A detail from the WCHOF exhibition

▼ A re-created environment from the Match of the Century including one of the three replica chess tables, chairs, plants, curtains and the logo banner



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**1972 Fischer/Spassky: The Match, Its Origin, and Influence** explores how Fischer was truly an enigma and a genius and how quickly he rose not only through the chess world but also to prominence in popular culture.”

We have already had several exhibitions centered around Fischer, so we wanted to tell a different story this time. I absolutely love history, so I often approach the game of chess from the angle of a historian. I also look for unique ways to represent chess because I would like people who may not be seasoned chess players to become interested in the game or the topic of an exhibition. I was born in 1976, so I missed the initial hype of Fischer's 1972 World Chess Championship win,

but I always somehow knew who he was. My earliest memories are from the 1970s, and I wanted people to walk into the exhibition and be taken back in time to that era. I researched car colors of the era to get a color scheme for the show, and we also wanted to include shades of orange and green that were popular at that time. We added purple to the mix and the logo, which was created by our graphic designer Farris Knudsen, and it grew from there.

I didn't just want to focus on the 1972 World Chess Championship. I also wanted to point out why Fischer's win was even more remarkable than is often recognized. I wanted to elevate Fischer even higher. It is so important to show where he came from, how hard his early life was, that he taught himself how to play and that he lost himself in the game with little outside support at first. I love New York City, and I love the role that New York had in his success. If he grew up somewhere else, he might not have become the world champion – New York was a teacher to him as much as Jack Collins or Carmine Nigro. I want to show that the Russians trained their players as young children and how they constantly financially supported their players at a time when American players had nothing.



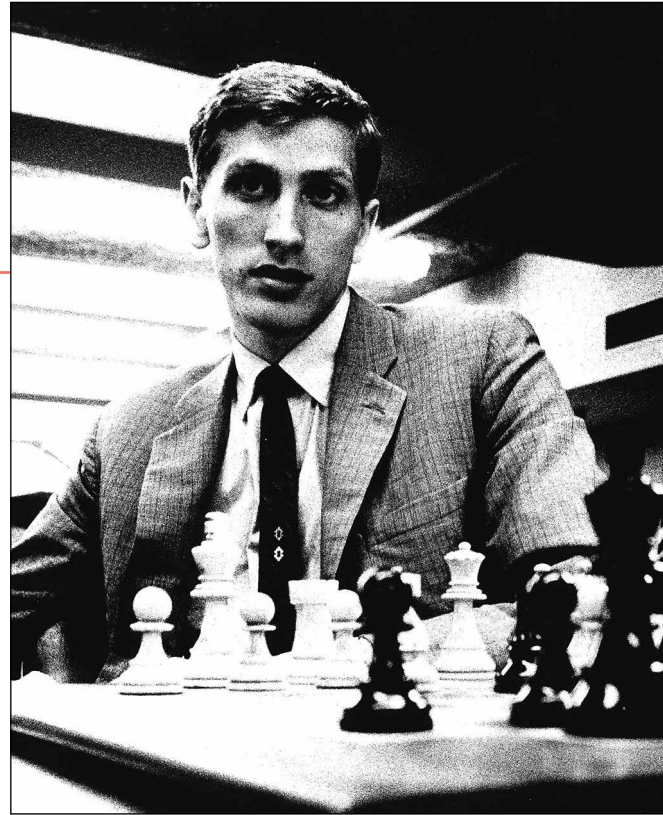
*1972 Fischer/Spassky: The Match, Its Origin, and Influence* explores how Fischer was truly an enigma and a genius and how quickly he rose not only through the chess world but also to prominence in popular culture. I loved watching every old video clip, looking at hundreds of black and white photos – eyeing every detail down to his sweaters and the ashtrays and the people in the backgrounds. I wanted to point out that even though he was thought of as being a sometimes difficult person, especially in terms of holding out for more money, he was trying to elevate the game and the players in America and put them on an even playing field with other players in other countries. I wanted to show that without Fischer, there may not be a “Saint Louis Chess Scene.” So many grandmasters started playing because of him, and Saint Louis Chess Campus co-founder Rex Sinquefeld was so inspired by Fischer. The success of chess in Saint Louis all started in 1972.

I was so excited to create the feel of the match and I was able to secure the loan of one of the three replica chess tables (the other two remain in Iceland) from the match.

We displayed a re-created environment including plants, curtains, the logo banner, and chairs to set the literal stage where they played. That was my “masterpiece” of the show.

With over 500 artifacts chosen for 1972 Fischer/Spassky, Emily and I categorized the historical objects for each floor of the exhibition in chronological order. The first-floor gallery focuses on Fischer’s early years – his childhood, chess training, and first achievements and accolades, including his U.S. Championship victories, his participation in Olympiads, and the Interzonals and Candidates Tournaments and Matches. It also features a glimpse into Boris Spassky’s career leading up to the 1972 World Championship. The second-floor gallery, which is dedicated to the 1972 match, includes photographs by Harry Benson CBE of Fischer, from his training at Grossinger’s Catskill Resort Motel to him celebrating his victory; information about the special arrangements and conditions required for the match; a replica of the stage where it was played; match souvenirs; and an array of recently-donated artwork depicting the match from the LeRoy Nieman and Janet Byrne Neiman Foundation. The third-floor gallery celebrates Fischer’s long-lasting legacy and impact on American chess while exploring the arrangements for the never-realized 1975 match, the “Fischer Boom,” the creation of Fischer Random chess, and how his achievements inspired Rex and Dr. Jeanne Cairns Sinquefeld to establish the Saint Louis Chess Campus, while also taking a look at his later relationship with Spassky and his chess career.

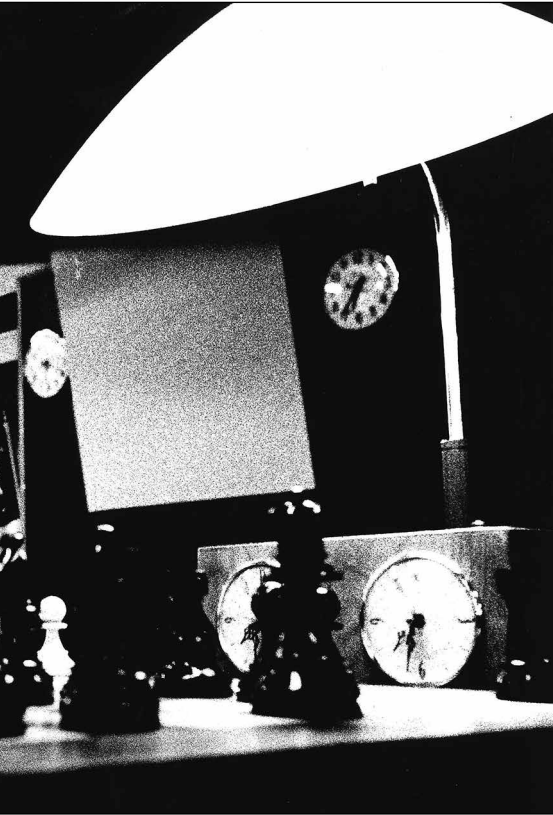
“Fischer’s victory in the 1972 World Chess Championship inspired Saint Louis Chess Campus co-founder Rex Sinquefeld’s love of chess. Rex and Jeanne founded the Saint Louis Chess Club in 2008.”



▲ Bobby Fischer during round one of the 1956 Rosenwald Tournament



▶ Bobby Fischer and Jack Collins playing chess in his home



◀ Bobby Fischer waits for the start of his game at the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup

▲ Bobby Fischer visiting Mikhail Tal in hospital during the Candidates tournament in Curacao 1962



## The Match of the Century changes American chess

Fischer's story is key to the history of American chess, which we often celebrate in our exhibitions. With the American Fischer challenging the respectable Russian Boris Spassky in Reykjavík, Iceland, that summer of 1972, this event became a Cold War battle over a chessboard. Never before had a chess tournament been broadcast nightly on network news stations or reported on national newspapers on the front page above the fold, but never had an American had a chance to challenge a Russian on this particular stage. The 29-year-old Fischer won the match becoming the 11<sup>th</sup> World Chess Champion and the first American-born player to do so – ending 24 years of Soviet domination of the World Chess Championship. Fischer was welcomed back home in New York City as an American hero.

Though Fischer's later years were marred by controversy, his win in 1972 caused what is known as the "Fischer Boom" – an absolute explosion of chess enthusiasm in America. Membership in US Chess nearly doubled, rising to more than 59,000 members and many of these new chess players would go on to become future U.S. champions, authors, inductees into the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame, and major supporters of the game. Films such as *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, *Bobby Fischer Against the World*, *Pawn Sacrifice*, and the Broadway Play *Chess the Musical* would continue to bring Bobby and his accomplishments into the mainstream even after his death in 2008.

Fischer's victory in the 1972 World Chess Championship inspired Saint Louis Chess Campus co-founder Rex Sinquefield's love of chess. Rex and Jeanne founded the Saint Louis Chess Club in 2008. Additionally, Jeanne launched the Scouts BSA chess merit badge in 2011, which has now been awarded to over 250,000 Scouts. Their prestigious named international tournaments the Sinquefield Cup and the Cairns Cup have brought numerous top international players to Saint Louis and their efforts have made the United States a global chess capital, attracting more grandmasters to relocate to America and encouraging many people to take up the game in what is now known as the "Sinquefield Effect."



# CURATING CHESS HISTORY



By Emily Allred

Curator, *World Chess Hall of Fame, Saint Louis*



▲ Furniture, chess set, and chess clock from the Hawthorne Chess Club, the home of Jack and Ethel Collins

After we decide on a concept for an exhibition, our curatorial team begins looking through our own collection, which contains tens of thousands of artifacts, to see what material is related to the topic. We create a checklist of all possible artifacts to include – in the case of the Fischer show, it contained over 1,000 items connected to the careers of Fischer and Spassky, important tournaments in which they played, and their 1972 World Championship match. As this list was being created, Shannon and I did research into Fischer, Spassky, and the 1972 match so that we could start to think about the topics we might want to cover in the show. Making the initial checklist helps us to learn what stories we can tell well through the artifacts that we have on hand, and it also allows us to see where there may be holes. In those cases, we might seek out artifacts from a lender or another institution, license images or videos, or search for other ways to represent a subject.

For the 1972 World Chess Championship show, we had some really spectacular artifacts in the collection that pertained to Fischer and Spassky's careers. One highlight is the furniture, chess set, and chess clock from the Hawthorne Chess Club, the home of Jack and Ethel Collins. The Hawthorne Chess Club proved important to Fischer's development as a chess player. Collins, who was once one of the top 20 players in the United States, founded the Hawthorne after he learned to play chess in his teens. Fischer started visiting in June 1956. Collins and Fischer would analyze positions and games together. Collins also purchased a chess clock from Germany with a ten-second timer, which encouraged Fischer to think and play more rapidly. Though it may look humble, the furniture witnessed hundreds of games between Fischer and his mentor Jack as Bobby rose to the top of the chess world. These have been part of the WCHOF's collection since the museum was located in Miami, Florida.



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1 1972 World  
Championship chess  
table, 1 of 3 replicas

2 Miguel Najdorf  
and Bobby Fischer  
in play at the 1966  
Piatigorsky Cup

3 Bobby Fischer  
analyzes with Tigran  
Petrosian at the 1962  
Curacao Candidates  
while Arthur Bisguier  
looks on

We had artifacts related to Collins, Fischer's early mentor, but we realized we did not have anything in the collection related to the only person he called his teacher – Carmine Nigro. I reached out to his son, Bill, to see if he had anything on hand that we could include in the show. We scheduled a call, and he mentioned that he had books that his father used to teach Fischer, but Carmine had continued to use them to teach many other students over the years. They were well worn, with tape holding them together. In other shows, like those that include artistic chess sets from our collection, we might choose to have an artifact conserved if it is damaged. However, in this case, this was part of the story of the artifacts: a chess lover who shared his enthusiasm for the game with numerous students. When I give tours of the exhibition, I always make sure to point out how loved the books were over the years.

We received another important set of loans related to Fischer's early career from US Chess. The organization has an archive related to Jerry Spann, who served as president of US Chess from 1957 to 1960. We had first reviewed the collection for an exhibition celebrating US Chess's history, and we took note of the Fischer items in the archive since we knew we would be doing a future show about the 1972 World Chess Championship and Bobby's career. The Spann Collection contains many letters he received related to some of Bobby's early achievements, as well as a charming holiday card featuring a picture of Bobby that Regina Fischer sent to him. Some of these discuss Fischer's participation in important international competitions, like Interzonals and Candidates Tournaments. We have some of these on view in the gallery, while others are available for viewers to review on interactive stations in the gallery.

While there are many artifacts in the collection related to Fischer, our holdings about Spassky were more sparse, though we had some photography of him as well as some interesting letters between him and Nathan Divinsky. However, we did have one showstopping artifact in the collection related to one of his notable tournament victories – the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup. Produced by Tiffany & Co., the trophy was part of a huge donation from the family of Jacqueline Piatigorsky, a chess player and patron. It was the first significant archival donation to our collection after the WCHOF moved to Saint Louis. The trophy is impressive not just because of its maker, but also because it represents one of the few times that Fischer and Spassky had played against each other before their fight for the World



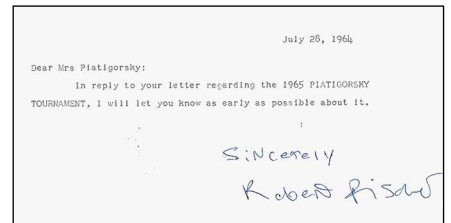
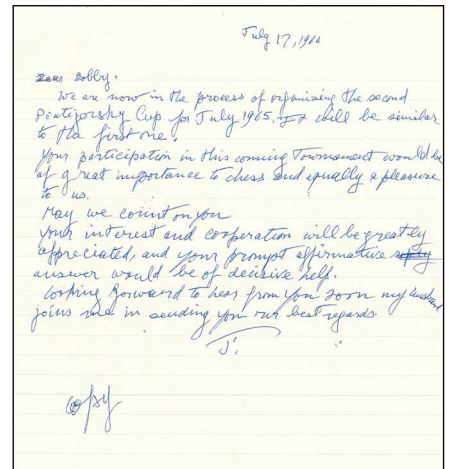
Championship. Piatigorsky kept countless artifacts related to her chess sponsorship, and many of them made their way into this exhibition, including Bobby Fischer's contributions to the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup tournament book, a letter related to PBS's broadcast of the 1972 World Championship, name placards from the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup, and photography from the match between Fischer and Samuel Reshevsky. The Piatigorsky Cup material is complemented by loans we received of artifacts related to Spassky's notable career.

### Artwork by LeRoy Neiman

As we prepared for the exhibition, we not only sought historical artifacts related to Fischer's playing career, but we also looked for art, photography, souvenirs, and other materials related to the match that could convey its immense cultural impact. In the past, the WCHOF has exhibited phenomenal photography by Harry Benson CBE, who got close to Fischer while covering him on assignment with LIFE Magazine. These intimate photographs show a private side of Fischer as well as the two chess titans facing off in Reykjavik. They were reproduced widely, becoming the best-known images of the legendary world championship match. We knew from the time we started planning the exhibition that we would include a selection of them in the show. However, we also wanted to offer our visitors something new – artifacts that we had never exhibited before in Saint Louis.

I researched other depictions of the 1972 match, and one set of images that stood out to me were the drawings that artist LeRoy Neiman created while covering the match for ABC's *Wide World of Sports*. Throughout his career, Neiman had captured important moments and figures in sports history: the Olympics, boxing legend Muhammad Ali, and much more. He also gained fame for his illustrations in *Playboy* magazine. The 1972 World Championship introduced Americans to the world of competitive chess. As a result, for many Americans, Benson's photography and Neiman's illustrations may have been some of the first images they had seen of two top chess players going to battle. Images like these also speak to the World Chess Hall of Fame's mission, which is to explore how chess intersects with art, history, and popular culture. I also liked that Neiman had a background depicting sports stars – it complemented Fischer's belief that as a top chess player he deserved to be afforded the respect accorded to top athletes in other sports.

I reached out to the LeRoy Neiman and Janet Byrne Neiman Foundation, hopeful that they would have some of his illustrations of the match. Their director



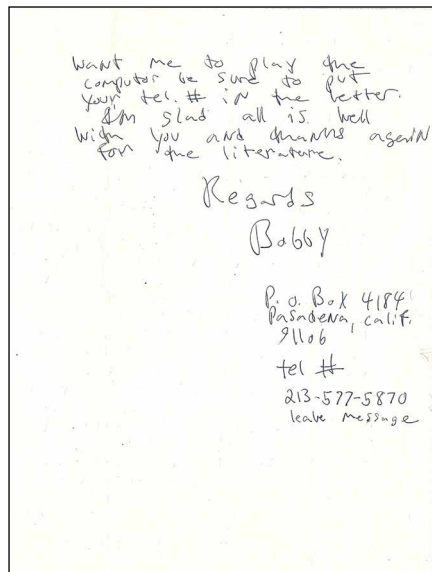
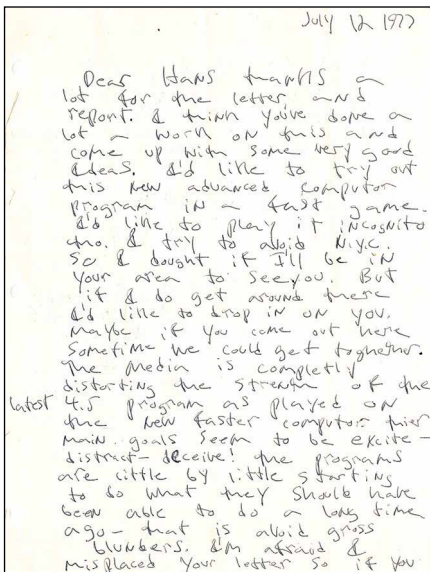
▲ Copy of a Letter from Jacqueline Piatigorsky to Bobby Fischer regarding the Second Piatigorsky Cup

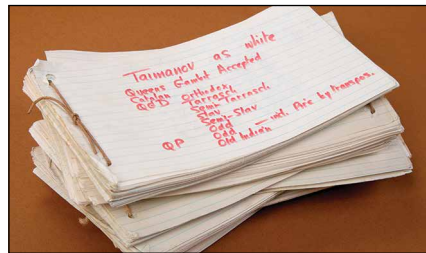
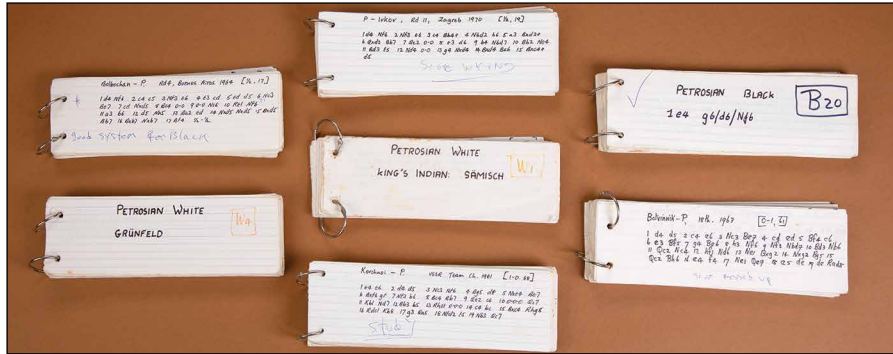
▲ Bobby Fischer's reply to Jacqueline Piatigorsky

returned my email quickly, and to my delight, responded that they had many images of the match in their holdings. They were also excited that we would be showcasing this part of Neiman's body of work. Before this, I had contacted figures related to the match (or their families), and due to the passage of time and other events, some did not have materials to lend. Through this experience and research for other shows, I had learned to not get too excited about a potential loan until we had it onsite. The generosity of the Foundation now caused a new conundrum – which of the drawings should we include in the show?

The Foundation sent us numerous images to choose from. Some were straightforward depictions of Fischer and Spassky at the chessboard, as one might expect of a journalist covering the match. However, they also contained details that could not be captured in black and white photography of the match: Fischer's flashy purple suit, the colorful plants arranged on the stage, and more. The drawings also give us insight into other details about

▼ Letter from Bobby Fischer to Dr. Hans Berliner.





▲ Fischer's files on his opponent's opening repertoire

the ambiance of the match – there are images of Fischer picking up a tray of food from the cafeteria with a pocket chess set in hand – a visual illustration of the accounts of friends and the media that Fischer was constantly studying. Neiman also drew images of eager spectators following commentary about the match. In the end, I selected a mix of drawings that showed different aspects of the match, even if it meant leaving out some images of Fischer and Spassky at the chess board. We sent the list of the pieces we wanted to borrow to the Foundation, and to our surprise, they offered the pieces to us as donations to our collection instead of as loans. We of course accepted their kind offer, and we are looking forward to being able to exhibit the works in future exhibitions!

### Photography by Carl Mydans

We received a loan of a photograph from the Amon Carter Museum of American Art related to one of the first national news stories to feature Fischer. Photojournalist Carl Mydans captured an image of a young Bobby Fischer for a February 1964 LIFE Magazine story titled “One-Track Mastermind.” Mydans started his career with the Farm Security Administration, reporting on the cotton industry during the Great Depression. He later became one of the first photographers to work for LIFE Magazine. He worked in both the European and Pacific theaters during World War II, and one of his most famous photographs is General MacArthur returning to the Philippines. Mydans accompanied Bobby Fischer around New York, taking pictures of him at some of his favorite haunts – the Marshall Chess Club, the arcade, the circus, and a bookstore. While only a few of them were included in the story, they provide a look into his personality.

Fischer is said to have memorized each of the 355 games in this volume, which totaled over 14,000 moves.

### The Fischer Library of Dr. Jeanne Cairns Sinquefield and Rex Sinquefield

When planning *1972 Fischer/Spassky: The Match, Its Origin, and Influence*, we were fortunate enough to have a significant collection of Fischer artifacts in Saint Louis that we could borrow from for the show: the Fischer Library of Dr. Jeanne Cairns Sinquefield and Rex Sinquefield. The collection contains hundreds of books and periodicals that once belonged to Bobby, but the stars of the collection are materials that Fischer used in preparation for the Candidates Matches and the World Championship. These include notebooks of games by Fischer's opponents organized by opening by Robert Wade. We also are displaying the “Big Red Book,”

which Fischer can be seen consulting in news clips about his preparations for the World Championship. The last volume in a series of books produced by the German publisher Eduard Wildhagen on great players of the world, it contains unannotated games by Spassky, with a diagram illustrating the progress of the game every five moves. Bobby Fischer is said to have memorized each of the 355 games in this volume, which totaled over 14,000 moves. The Sinquefields also have the pieces from Game Three of the World Chess Championship – the first game in which Fischer ever defeated Spassky. While we have displayed these pieces in many past exhibitions, including our first traveling international show, they still take my breath away when we are installing them in cases – imagining Fischer moving the same pieces we are putting on the board for view by visitors.

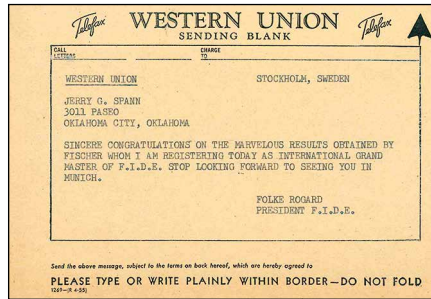
### Interactive Installations

When we plan gallery layouts for exhibitions, we try to think about what viewers will see when they first walk into the gallery. Since *1972 Fischer/Spassky: The Match, Its Origin, and Influence* fills all three of our galleries, we wanted to think of an introduction





to the first floor that would set the scene for our exploration of Bobby Fischer's early career. Chess historian International Master John Donaldson has assisted us with research into our collection as well as many past exhibitions. Several years ago, he shared maps of Brooklyn and Manhattan that he had created in Google Maps. They featured Fischer's haunts in New York as well as important chess locations from the 1950s and 1960s. Since the city played such an important role in his development as a chess player, we decided to devote a wall in the gallery to the New York chess scene and Bobby's place in it. Sam Balmer, one of our graphic designers, created two oversized maps where we marked each of the chess locations. Our Graduate Research Assistant Ahnna Matthews and I looked up images of or related to each place, which we placed on an interactive screen that had text by Donaldson about their importance and relevance to Fischer. Other installations in the exhibition allow visitors to play through each of the games from the 1972 World Championship, watch the moves of the games, and view interviews with figures inspired by Fischer's career. We also included iPads where people could look through articles from our collection related to key moments in Fischer's career.



▲ Telegram from FIDE President Folke Rogard to Jerry Spann letting him know Fischer will now be an International Grandmaster

### Vanderbilt Television News Archive

Shannon and I wanted to include videos of news coverage of Fischer's career in the exhibition to give more insight into how the media covered the 1972 World Championship. We located some through research online, including clips from Fischer's appearances on The Dick Cavett Show, but we also wanted to include material from nightly newscasts. I traveled to Nashville to visit the Vanderbilt Television News Archive to view the over 100 clips they listed that pertained to the life of Bobby Fischer. Many were very short – just 30 seconds or less – and checked in on the score of the match as it progressed. However, others were much more fascinating, showing Fischer's preparation and reaction to winning his Candidates' Matches. I marked which ones we might want to include in the show, and our Registrar Nicole Tessmer began reaching out about copyright. In the end, we were able to include just a portion of the ones I marked: some had rights issues, while others were prohibitively expensive to include. There are still quite a few clips in 1972 Fischer/Spassky that we have never exhibited before, and visitors have spent a lot of time in the show enjoying them.

▲ Bobby Fischer and Samuel Reshevsky during Game 6 of their 1961 Match



### Shannon's Final Thoughts On This Extraordinary Exhibit

We have had wonderful feedback from our visitors. Many chess players here for the Sinquefeld Cup and the U.S. Chess Championships said this was the best show that we have ever put on. We are also planning an array of lectures with John Donaldson and Frank Brady, curator tours, movie screenings such as *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, *Bobby Fischer Against the World*, and *Pawn Sacrifice*, as well as lessons to be learned from Leroy Neiman's drawings.

In addition to the writing of his essay for our brochure, John Donaldson was hired as a consultant on the project. In the early stages, he worked with Emily and I on topics to cover and as a Fischer expert. John is fully aware of our scope of audience and our mission goals so he was a great fit for us.

[We present two brochure essays written by IM John Donaldson on Bobby Fischer, and also by GM Andy Soltis on Boris Spassky. -Ed.]

▼ Bobby Fischer's Scoresheet from Round 11 of the 1961 Fischer - Reshevsky Match

CALIFORNIA STATE CHESS FEDERATION				
White: <u>Reshevsky</u>		Black: _____		
Opening: <u>R2</u>		Date: _____		
Event: <u>USA</u>				
	WHITE	BLACK	WHITE	BLACK
1	P2P	P2P	31	P2P
2	P2P	P2P	32	P2P
3	P2P	P2P	33	P2P
4	P2P	P2P	34	P2P
5	P2P	P2P	35	P2P
6	P2P	P2P	36	P2P
7	P2P	P2P	37	P2P
8	P2P	P2P	38	P2P
9	P2P	P2P	39	P2P
10	P2P	P2P	40	P2P
11	P2P	P2P	41	P2P
12	P2P	P2P	42	P2P
13	P2P	P2P	43	P2P
14	P2P	P2P	44	P2P
15	P2P	P2P	45	P2P
16	P2P	P2P	46	P2P
17	P2P	P2P	47	P2P
18	P2P	P2P	48	P2P
19	P2P	P2P	49	P2P
20	P2P	P2P	50	P2P
21	P2P	P2P	51	P2P
22	P2P	P2P	52	P2P
23	P2P	P2P	53	P2P
24	P2P	P2P	54	P2P
25	P2P	P2P	55	P2P
26	P2P	P2P	56	P2P
27	P2P	P2P	57	P2P
28	P2P	P2P	58	P2P
29	P2P	P2P	59	P2P
30	P2P	P2P	60	P2P