



JACQUELINE PIATIGORSKY:
PATRON, PLAYER, PIONEER

OCTOBER 25, 2013 – APRIL 18, 2014



Jacqueline Piatigorsky and Herman Steiner during a 1953 Television Appearance.
Photo Jack Case

“...with a chess set, it is impossible to be bored.”



Gregor Piatigorsky and Jacqueline Piatigorsky Pose before the Wall Board during the 1963 Piatigorsky Cup. Photographer Unknown

JACQUELINE PIATIGORSKY: PATRON, PLAYER, PIONEER

Through her sponsorship of the legendary Piatigorsky Cup tournaments, creation of the Piatigorsky Foundation, and her representation of the United States in the first Women’s Chess Olympiad in 1957, Jacqueline Piatigorsky had a profound influence on twentieth-century American chess. Jacqueline’s legacy impacted chess on the local, national, and international levels. Many ideas that are taken for granted today, such as student chess organizations, were innovations in her time and passions of hers. Her activities also helped establish the West Coast as a thriving center of chess culture rivaling that of New York.

Jacqueline was born in Paris, France, to the famed Rothschild banking family. A nurse taught her to play chess at an early age, when Jacqueline was recovering from a childhood illness. In her 1988 memoir, *Jump in the Waves*, she wrote that her nurse, Miss Coque, told Jacqueline that “...with a chess set, it is impossible to be bored.” More than a salvation from dullness, the game soon became both a passion and a refuge to Jacqueline. Though she wrote of feeling neglected by her parents and oppressed by a nanny during her childhood, chess offered her an opportunity to forge her own identity independent of her famous family name.

In 1937 Jacqueline married Gregor Piatigorsky, a world-renowned cellist. The two immigrated to the United States with their daughter Jephtha at the outset of World War II, first settling in Elizabethtown, New York, where their son Joram was later born. Though she had not received any formal chess training, her desire to compete led her to participate in correspondence chess tournaments sponsored by *Chess Review*. Of this period in her life, Jacqueline said:

“But my real love was chess. Chess was part of my blood. Of course, in the winter there was no one to play with in Elizabethtown, so through a chess magazine I started to play by correspondence, entering tournaments in which one played six games at the same time. That was perfect for me. I had a small pocket set which I always carried with me and I studied each position in great depth. Before mailing out a move I was so anxious not to make an error that even alone in the woods my heart was beating hard. I went over each variation again and again. I had to win.”

After another series of moves, Jacqueline and her family settled in Los Angeles, California. There, Gregor joined the faculty of the music department at UCLA, while Jacqueline became further immersed in the world of chess. At an auction, she met International Master (IM) Herman Steiner,¹ who after learning of her skill, encouraged her to compete in tournaments over the board. He was instrumental in the flourishing of her playing career on the national level, recommending that she be invited to the 1951 U.S. Women’s Chess Championship. After his death in 1955, Jacqueline took over the management of his chess club, the Hollywood Chess Group, and renamed it the Herman Steiner Chess Club in his honor.

Jacqueline soon rose to the top of the field of women’s chess and participated in the U.S. Women’s Championships six times in the 1950s and 1960s. Her best result occurred in 1965, when she won second place behind Gisela Gresser.² She also defeated her rival, Woman International Master Mona May Karff³ in such a captivating manner that the *New York Times* printed their game.

¹ U.S. Chess Hall of Fame, 2010.

² U.S. Chess Hall of Fame, 1992.

³ U.S. Chess Hall of Fame, 2013.



Participants in the 1957 Women's Chess Olympiad.
Photographer Unknown



Jacqueline, Tigran Petrosian, and Miguel Najdorf Watch Samuel Reshevsky Analyze a Game in the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup. Photo Phil Bath

Jacqueline took part in another historic first for women's chess in 1957, representing the United States in the inaugural Women's Chess Olympiad in Emmen, the Netherlands, with teammate Gisela Gresser. Jacqueline played on second board, and the team won a bronze medal in the historic competition. Later that same year, she took her first step in the arena of chess promotion, serving as the chairperson for the U.S. Women's Chess Championship, which was held in Los Angeles and sponsored by the Herman Steiner Chess Club.

During the mid-to-late 1960s, Jacqueline participated in tournaments less frequently. However, over the course of the same decade, she dedicated herself more fully to chess promotion, first co-sponsoring a match between former child prodigy Grandmaster (GM) Samuel Reshevsky⁴ and rising star GM Bobby Fischer.⁵ Also supported by the American Chess Foundation, the match was held in both New York and Los Angeles. The match ended prematurely over a disagreement over the start time for one of the games—Jacqueline had wanted a Sunday game to begin earlier both so that she could attend one of Gregor's concerts and accommodate the travel needs of out-of-town audience members. Fischer declined

to play at the earlier time, and the game was declared a forfeit. Fischer refused to play the remainder of the match, which was a disappointment to Jacqueline and the other tournament organizers. In the wake of this event, she formed a close friendship with Samuel Reshevsky, who became her coach.

Despite her early setback, Jacqueline's interest in chess promotion was not dampened, and she established the Piatigorsky Foundation, which had as its goal to boost chess culture in the United States. At the time, the idea of a philanthropic chess organization was so novel that the Internal Revenue Service denied the group's first application for not-for-profit status. However, she persevered and the Piatigorsky Foundation became renowned for its support of American chess both on elite and local levels.

The Foundation's first and most famous venture was the organization of the 1963 Piatigorsky Cup tournament. This competition attracted the best American and international players. Jacqueline organized it at the urging of Gregor, who said that in the United States there was, "too much emphasis on physical sports and not enough on the intellectual...A country

like ours has an obligation not to be second to anyone." However, it was Jacqueline's attention to detail and persistence that made the event legendary. The competition was held again in 1966, and its success prompted the *Los Angeles Times* to name Jacqueline its "Woman of the Year."

During the 1960s and 1970s, the patronage of the Piatigorsky Foundation was especially prolific. In addition to the aforementioned competitions, the organization sponsored chess programs directed toward women, senior citizens, public school students, and veterans. It also promoted chess to children in juvenile detention facilities, underserved communities, and in schools for children with physical disabilities, impaired vision, and deafness. These activities on the local level were complemented by the Foundation's efforts on the national level: organizing the 1968 Interzonal Playoff at the Steiner Chess Club and providing financial support for Bobby Fischer's World Chess Championship run, the U.S. Chess Championship, and the U.S. Women's Chess Championship.

Jacqueline took a special interest in promoting chess among the young. After learning that "due to lack of organization,

lack of financial support, and lack of qualified representatives, the United States had no entrant in the 1965 World Junior Championship," she established the United States Junior Invitational Championship, now known as the U.S. Junior Closed Championship. The Foundation also directed the California Junior Championship and provided money to students who wanted to participate in the National High School Championship. On the local level, the Foundation ran the Tournament of Champions, as well as the Christmas Tournament, designed to promote chess in public schools.

After this burst of activity in the 1960s and 1970s, Jacqueline began to focus more energy on her newfound passions, sculpture and tennis. The Piatigorsky Foundation was dissolved in 1985; however, its visionary influence is still felt today. Jacqueline passed away in 2012 at the age of 100 after a long life full of great achievements. The World Chess Hall of Fame is proud to celebrate her legacy in this exhibition made possible by generous loans and donations from the Piatigorsky family.

— *Emily Allred, Assistant Curator
World Chess Hall of Fame*



Jacqueline Piatigorsky with her Artwork.
Photographer Unknown, 1966

⁴ U.S. Chess Hall of Fame, 1986

⁵ U.S. Chess Hall of Fame, 1986; World Chess Hall of Fame, 2001.

JACQUELINE PIATIGORSKY (1911-2012)

NOVEMBER 6, 1911

Jacqueline de Rothschild is born to Baron Edouard de Rothschild and Germaine Alice Halphen, in Paris, France.

c 1917

At age six, Jacqueline becomes ill. An English nurse named Miss Coque brings her a surprise during her recovery, a pocket chess set. After Jacqueline returns to health, Miss Coque lets her keep the treasured set.

JANUARY 26, 1937

Jacqueline marries world-renowned cellist Gregor Piatigorsky while accompanying him on his concert tour in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Their first daughter, Jephtha, is born in Paris in October.

1939

The Piatigorskys purchase a property in Elizabethtown, New York, following an American concert tour. They return to France for the summer, but finally flee on September 3, only hours before France officially enters World War II.

1940

Jacqueline's second child, Joram, is born in Elizabethtown. There Jacqueline also begins to play correspondence chess games and studies opening strategies.

1949

The Piatigorsky family moves to Los Angeles after living in Philadelphia for several years.

1951



1951 Hollywood Chess Group "B" Championship Brilliancy Prize.

Jacqueline begins using the weekly chess problems in the *Los Angeles Times* as practice. Later this year, she meets the chess editor and her future coach Herman Steiner, who encourages her to play at his Hollywood Chess Group. She plays in the Chess Group "B" Competition, and despite a middling performance, wins the brilliancy prize for a beautiful combination.

SEPTEMBER 1 - 3, 1951



1951 California Open Chess Tournament Santa Cruz, California. Photographer Unknown

Jacqueline competes in the California Open in Santa Cruz, finishing thirteenth in a field of forty-three players.

OCTOBER 20 - NOVEMBER 3, 1951



Jacqueline Piatigorsky and Willa Owens in the 1951 U.S. Women's Championship. Photo Nancy Roos

Jacqueline makes her tournament debut at the U.S. Women's Chess Championship in New York, which features a field of ten competitors. She finishes in a tie for eighth/ninth place with Willa White Owens, whom she defeats in an eleven-move miniature.

MARCH 1952

Jacqueline appears on the United States Chess Federation (U.S.C.F.) rating list for the first time at 1840.

APRIL 19 - MAY 1, 1954

Jacqueline participates in the first official California Women's Championship, which is held at the Hollywood Chess Group and organized by Herman Steiner. Jacqueline ties for second place.

SEPTEMBER 1955



1955 U.S. Women's Championship Brilliancy Prize.

Jacqueline wins fourth place in the U.S. Women's Chess Championship in New York, behind Nancy Roos and Gisela Gresser (who tie for first) and Mona May Karff. She defeats the latter in dazzling style in a game that is awarded the brilliancy prize.

NOVEMBER 1955

Herman Steiner dies and leadership of the Hollywood Chess Group is transferred to a group directed by Jacqueline. The club is renamed the Herman Steiner Chess Club in his honor.

DECEMBER 1956

The Steiner Chess Club hosts the California Women's Championship, in which Jacqueline places third.

SEPTEMBER 2 - 21, 1957

Jacqueline competes in the first Women's Chess Olympiad in Emmen, the Netherlands, representing the U.S. along with Gisela Gresser. Jacqueline wins a bronze medal for her performance on board two.

NOVEMBER 3 - 16, 1957

The U.S. Women's Chess Championship is held in Los Angeles, California. Jacqueline serves as chairperson of the event, which is sponsored by the Herman Steiner Chess Club.

c 1960 - 1961

The Piatigorskys finance a second venue for the Steiner Chess Club in Los Angeles. This new building on Cashio Street is designed by Frank Lloyd Wright Jr., to be more open and tournament-friendly than the existing club space on Beverly Boulevard, which it eventually replaces.

JULY - AUGUST, 1961



Bobby Fischer and Samuel Reshevsky compete in their 1961 match. Photographer Unknown

Jacqueline cosponsors a match between Samuel Reshevsky and Bobby Fischer, which ends when Fischer disagrees with a new starting time for the twelfth game. Reshevsky becomes Jacqueline's close friend and chess teacher.

DECEMBER 1961

Articles of Incorporation for the Piatigorsky Foundation are created.

APRIL - MAY 1962

Jacqueline competes in the U.S. Women's Chess Championship in New York.

NOVEMBER 1962

Jacqueline participates in the Utah Open Chess Tournament. She is one of only three women playing, and places ninth in a field of twenty-six players.

NOVEMBER 23, 1962

The *San Francisco Examiner* reports Jacqueline is working to promote chess with the Veterans Administration Hospital and among students with hearing impairments.

FEBRUARY 1963

Samuel Reshevsky, William Addison, and Larry Evans compete in the U.S. Championship Playoff, which is sponsored by Jacqueline. Reshevsky wins the tournament and advances to the 1964 Interzonal.

JULY 2 - 27, 1963



Tigran Petrosian and Paul Keres exchange some friendly words before beginning their first round game in the Piatigorsky Cup Tournament. Photo Otto Rothschild

Paul Keres and Tigran Petrosian share first place in the first Piatigorsky Cup, which attracts elite players from around the world. Jacqueline sponsors and organizes the event.



August 1963 Issue of Chess Review.

DECEMBER 3, 1963



1963 Ladies Nevada State Chess Championship Trophy.

Samuel Reshevsky writes to Jacqueline to congratulate her on her first-place finish in the Ladies Nevada State Chess Championship.

MAY 1965

Jacqueline wins second place at the U.S. Women's Chess Championship at age 53, her best performance in the event. She finishes half a point out of first with an excellent score of 7 1/2 - 2 1/2 and defeats her longtime rival Mona May Karff.

SEPTEMBER 1965

The Piatigorsky Foundation establishes the Student Chess Club of Los Angeles, a subgroup of the Steiner Chess Club and one of the first junior-only groups in the country. Among its early members are such famous names as future GM James Tarjan, future Senior Master Alan Pollard, and future National Master Andy Sacks.

JANUARY 1966

Jacqueline reaches her peak U.S.C.F. rating of 1996.

JUNE 1966

The Piatigorsky Foundation takes over promotion and direction of the California Junior Chess Championship. The Foundation also sponsors the U.S. Junior Closed Championship, an event the group would support until 1985.

JULY 17 - AUGUST 15, 1966



Baris Spassky, Jacqueline Piatigorsky, and Gregor Piatigorsky with the Piatigorsky Cup. Photo Phil Bath

Jacqueline sponsors the second Piatigorsky Cup. On August 14, over nine hundred spectators watch the Fischer - Spassky game. This remains the largest audience ever to witness a chess tournament in the United States. Spassky wins the event.

AUGUST 1966

Chess Life lists Jacqueline Piatigorsky as the fifth-ranked American woman chess player, with a rating of 1902.

DECEMBER 1966

The *Los Angeles Times* names Jacqueline its woman of the year for her accomplishments, which include the sponsorship of the second Piatigorsky Cup.

MAY 13, 1967

Jacqueline is inducted into the Southern California Chess Hall of Fame for her achievements as a chess player and benefactor.

SEPTEMBER 1967

The Piatigorsky Foundation opens the Women's Chess Club as a subgroup of the Steiner Chess Club.

FEBRUARY 18 - MARCH 3, 1968



Leonid Stein and Vlastimil Hort at the 1968 Interzonal Playoff. Photo Art Zeller

The Piatigorsky Foundation organizes and sponsors the three-man (Samuel Reshevsky, Vlastimil Hort, and Leonid Stein) Interzonal Playoff event at the Steiner Chess Club. Reshevsky wins the competition and advances.

MARCH 29 - APRIL 10, 1968

The Piatigorsky Foundation sponsors the American team's entry into the Chess Olympiad in Lugano, Switzerland.

OCTOBER 17 - NOVEMBER 7, 1968

The Piatigorsky Foundation helps the U.S. participate in the Chess Olympiad for the Blind.

1971 - 1972

The Piatigorsky Foundation joins the American Chess Foundation and the U.S.C.F. in sponsoring American Grandmaster Bobby Fischer's run for the World Chess Championship. In 1972, he wins the legendary match, ending years of Soviet chess domination.

AUGUST 6, 1976

Jacqueline's husband Gregor dies of lung cancer.

1984

The U.S.C.F. awards Jacqueline the title of Life Member.

1985

The Piatigorsky Foundation is dissolved.

1988

Jacqueline publishes her memoir *Jump in the Waves*, which includes a chapter on her chess activities.

JULY 15, 2012

Jacqueline passes away in Los Angeles, California, at the age of 100, leaving behind a great legacy related to American chess.



Jacqueline Piatigorsky in Action against Mona May Karff during the 1955 U.S. Women's Championship. Photographer Unknown



Jacqueline Piatigorsky and Bobby Fischer at the Herman Steiner Chess Club. Photographer Unknown, 1961



Herman Steiner watches as Jacqueline Participates in a Simul with Samuel Reshevsky. Photo Nancy Roos, early 1950s



Paul Keres, Gregor Piatigorsky, Jacqueline Piatigorsky, and Tigran Petrosian following the 1963 Piatigorsky Cup. Photo Phil Bath



Jacqueline Piatigorsky Watches as Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky Play in the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup. Photo Phil Bath



Piatigorsky Cup Trophy, 1963
Tiffany & Co.
Courtesy of Michael DeFilippo

THE PIATIGORSKY CUPS OF 1963 AND 1966

The 1963 and 1966 Piatigorsky Cup tournaments rank among the strongest chess competitions ever held on American soil. They are on a short list that includes New York 1924, New York 1927, Dallas 1957, and the 2013 Sinquefeld Cup. Organized by Jacqueline Piatigorsky and the Piatigorsky Foundation, these landmark competitions were created with the goal of promoting chess in the United States. By bringing together world-class players in elegant settings, Jacqueline hoped to prove that the United States could support chess on an elite level.

Held during the Cold War, when tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were high, the Piatigorsky Cups represented a triumph of diplomacy. Jacqueline and Gregor Piatigorsky faced a daunting task in trying to have Soviet players compete in both events, something that had happened only once before in 1954, when the Soviet Union and United States played a team match in New York. That the Piatigorskys succeeded was a testament to their hard work and persistence, and resulted in Tigran Petrosian competing in both events. This was the first time a reigning World Chess Champion had participated in an individual competition in the United States since Alexander Alekhine played in Pasadena, California, in 1932.

Both the 1963 and 1966 tournaments were double round-robin competitions in which all participants played against each other twice. Jacqueline produced an elegant trophy for the events that featured a “love cup” designed by Tiffany & Co. as its centerpiece. The cup is flanked by two *Régence*-style chess pieces, while the base

has plaques with spaces for the names of the winners. The 1963 event, held at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, California, included eight competitors from five different nations and offered a prize fund of \$10,000.¹ The two Soviet players, Tigran Petrosian and Paul Keres, triumphed over the rest of the field and shared the top prize. The exciting competition attracted a large audience.

Bobby Fischer participated in the 1966 tournament, ensuring that the top American talent of the period was represented in the competition. It also meant that the field of ten players in the 1966 event contained one World Chess Champion (Petrosian) as well as two future ones (Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky). Fischer had declined an invitation to the first Cup, still unhappy about his aborted 1961 match against Samuel Reshevsky, which Jacqueline had cosponsored. However, by 1966 the sore feelings had subsided, and his presence and play made this Cup an electrifying event. After a strong start followed by a disastrous performance mid-tournament, Fischer mounted an amazing comeback to tie with the tournament leader, Spassky, in the standings. Their game in the penultimate round attracted a record 900 spectators and served as a preview of the excitement the two would generate six years later in their epic 1972 World Chess Championship match in Reykjavik, Iceland. The two played to a hard-fought draw. Spassky then won his last game against Jan Hein Donner, who was at the bottom of the standings, while Fischer’s game against Petrosian ended in a draw. Spassky achieved a narrow victory over Fischer, winning \$5000 from the \$20,000 prize fund and a smaller version of the Piatigorsky Cup trophy.²

¹ \$10,000 in 1963 is equivalent to over \$76,000 today (Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)

² \$5,000 in 1966 is equivalent to over \$36,000 today, while \$20,000 is equivalent to over \$144,000 today (Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)



Tournament Director Isaac Kashdan Addresses the Players before the First Round of the 1963 Piatigorsky Cup. Photo Otto Rothschild



Jacqueline Piatigorsky with the Winners of the 1963 Piatigorsky Cup Tournament, Tigran Petrosian and Paul Keres. Photo Otto Rothschild



Competitors Playing in the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup. Photo Art Zeller

The Piatigorsky Cups were not only elite tournaments, but they also broke new ground in making chess competitions more spectator-friendly. The 1963 event followed traditions that had existed for decades, with wall boys moving the pieces on large demonstration boards for the audience. Periodically these same wall boys would manually adjust clocks mounted next to the demonstration boards, giving the audience a rough idea of how much time each player had used.

This formula worked reasonably well, but Jacqueline, known for her attention to detail, wanted to improve this system for the second event. She aimed to ensure that everyone that attended the tournament would be able to see the action, even if they were seated in the back of the playing hall. To this end, she developed a projector system that would make the moves of each game clearly visible. By the time of the

second tournament, held in Santa Monica, California, in 1966, she had designed and perfected the setup. This innovation, as well as her creation of electric wall-mounted clocks that kept precise measurements of each player's time, turned out to be both novel and necessary in the second competition. The second Piatigorsky Cup consistently drew crowds of 600 to 700, peaking at 900 spectators near the end of the event.

Though Jacqueline had originally intended to hold the tournaments every two to three years, the difficulties of gaining the participation of players from around the world led her to stop organizing the event after 1966. Nevertheless, she succeeded in holding two brilliant and beautiful tournaments that are still fondly remembered.

— IM John Donaldson



JACQUELINE PIATIGORSKY: *PATRON, PLAYER, PIONEER*

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The World Chess Hall of Fame acknowledges Jeanne and Rex Sinaquefield, whose generous support has made this exhibition possible.

The World Chess Hall of Fame would like to extend a very special thank you to the entire Piatigorsky family, especially Jephtha Drachman, Joram Piatigorsky, Evan Drachman, and Anton Piatigorsky. We are honored to present the life of Jacqueline Piatigorsky in this project.

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Curated by Emily Allred with the World Chess Hall of Fame. Related programming and a downloadable pdf of this brochure can be found at worldchesshof.org.

Above:

Yury Averbakh, Jacqueline Piatigorsky and Pal Benko at the 1968 Interzonal Playoff. Photo Art Zeller

Cover Image:

Jacqueline Piatigorsky.
Photographer Unknown, c 1950s

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