

# A MEMORABLE LIFE:

*A Glimpse into the Complex Mind of*

# BOBBY FISCHER

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# A MEMORABLE LIFE: A GLIMPSE INTO THE COMPLEX MIND OF BOBBY FISCHER

You do not need to be a chess player to understand the impact that Bobby Fischer had on the game of chess. Born Robert James Fischer on March 9, 1943, he received a \$1.00 chess set from his sister Joan when he was six, and his love of the game quickly blossomed. Already showing a proclivity for puzzles and advanced analytical thinking, a young Bobby began what his mother Regina referred to as an obsession for the game. Little did she know that this passion would eventually lead to her son becoming the World Chess Champion, ending 24 years of Soviet domination of the game in 1972 and changing the way the entire world would view chess.

*A Memorable Life: A Glimpse into the Complex Mind of Bobby Fischer* presents a few key moments in the storied life of a man who was both a source of intense admiration and controversy. Beginning with his rise to fame as a young boy, this exhibition includes material related to his early training with

teachers Carmine Nigro and Jack Collins, many of the major tournaments in which he participated, as well as his historic World Chess Championship victory, and his later retirement from tournament play. Through artifacts generously loaned from the Fischer Library of Dr. Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield, we are given unprecedented access to Fischer's preparatory material for the 1972 world championship run, as well as the initial versions of his classic text *My 60 Memorable Games*. Never before exhibited, these materials supplement highlights from the collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, donated by the family of Jacqueline Piatigorsky, which include photographs, correspondence, and other artifacts related to his 1961 match against Samuel Reshevsky. These remarkable artifacts illuminate Fischer's brilliance, showing how he revolutionized American chess.

—Shannon Bailey and Emily Allred

## INSIDE AN ENIGMA:

*The Fischer Library of Dr. Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield*

More literature is devoted to chess than all other games combined, but today it is not uncommon to find world class players who seldom open a book. Long-running publications like *Chess Informant* continue to be published, but young stars of 2014 do almost all their study with a computer, be it by accessing databases with millions of games and analyzing them with powerful engines, or by playing online against opponents around the globe. This certainly was not the case when Bobby Fischer began his brilliant career. Bobby learned to play in March of 1949 and soon was reading his first chess book, quite possibly Siegbert

Tarrasch's *The Game of Chess*. This was the start of a life-long love of chess literature that was to serve him well.

Fischer's first source for chess books was the Brooklyn Public Library, whose collection he quickly exhausted. Fortunately by this time he had befriended Jack Collins, the founder of the legendary Hawthorne Chess Club, which would become Bobby's second home. Collins had an extensive library and introduced Bobby to great players of the past including Wilhelm Steinitz and Adolf Anderssen. The two spent many an hour going through Steinitz's *The International Chess Magazine* and Hermann von Gottschall's work on Adolf Anderssen. Their influence on Fischer can be seen in his habit of transforming "museum piece" openings into dangerous weapons with Steinitz's



**TOP:**  
Chess board signed by Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky, 1972.  
Chess Pieces from Game 3 of the 1972 World Chess Championship, 1972.



**BOTTOM:**  
Young Bobby Fischer and Jack Collins playing chess in his home, date unknown.  
Photographer unknown

9. Nh3 in the Two Knights one of the best known examples. This line, violating the well-known maxim “a knight on the rim is dim,” had scarcely been played since the 1890s when Fischer resurrected it in 1963.

Collins wrote of Bobby and his reading habits:

*Bobby has probably read—more than ‘read’, rather, chewed and digested—more chess books and magazines than anybody else. This was no task; it was a pleasure, and it has made him the most knowledgeable player in history. Five to ten hours a day of reading and studying have been the rule, not the exception. And language has been no barrier!*

Bobby began building his library early in his career and by the late 1950s he owned close to one hundred books and several hundred magazines. His collection continued to grow until a 1968 move to Los Angeles forced him to sell much of his library. Once settled in his new home, Fischer started acquiring chess literature in earnest. Ron Gross, who had become friends with Fischer at the 1955 U.S. Junior Open Chess Championship and would remain close with him for almost thirty years, recalls visiting his apartment in 1970 and finding piles of books and magazines strewn everywhere, with only a narrow path allowing passage through the living room.

This new library became an important tool for Bobby in his march to the World Chess Championship in the early 1970s, and many of the items in the Fischer Library of Dr. Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield from this time show heavy usage, particularly several issues of *Chess Informant* and study notebooks that Robert Wade prepared for Fischer’s Candidates matches against Mark Taimanov and Tigran Petrosian and for the World Championship challenging Boris Spassky. Wade compiled these notebooks by poring through chess periodicals and books, collecting hundreds of games by each of Fischer’s opponents. Today, with thousands of games by potential opponents available with one keystroke, it is easy to forget how much work it took Wade to create these files.

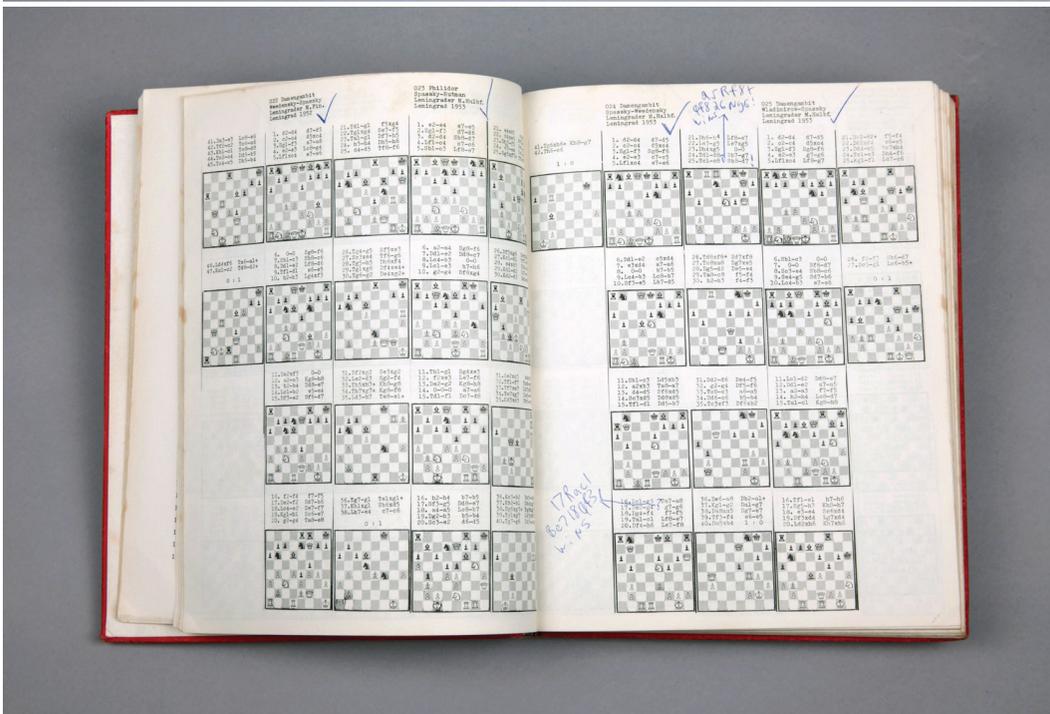
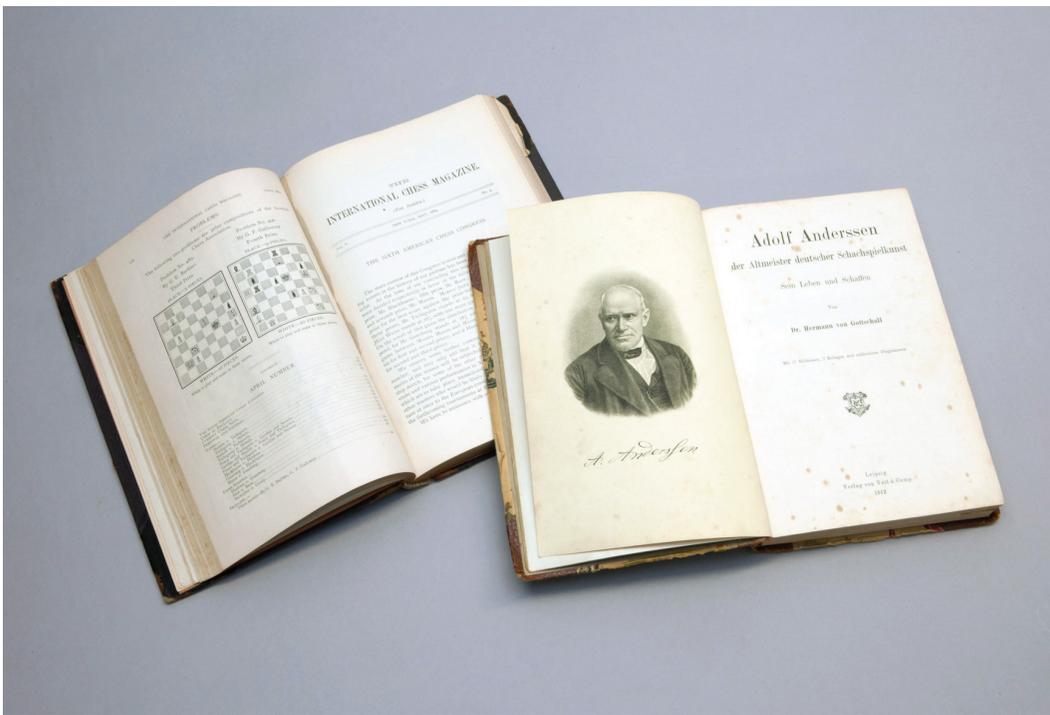
Bobby may have stopped playing after winning the World Championship, but he continued to keep abreast of new developments in chess. His mother Regina bought him subscriptions to magazines from around the world, particularly Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The collection grew so large that by 1986 Bobby ran out of room at his apartment and had to rent space at a Bekins storage facility in Pasadena, California. When Fischer left the United States in the summer of 1992 to play the rematch of the 1972 World Chess Championship with Boris Spassky in Yugoslavia, he entrusted his friend Bob Ellsworth with making sure the payments on the storage space were kept up to date. The two, who had first met in the early 1970s through their mutual involvement in the Worldwide Church of God, were close even though Ellsworth was not a chess player. This relationship changed dramatically in late 1998, when Bobby suffered a tragedy brought on by a change in ownership of the storage facility.

Ellsworth, whose name was not on the lease, only learned of the change in ownership after a payment had been missed, and Fischer’s treasures scheduled for auction. He made a valiant attempt to buy everything back, spending over \$8,000 of his own money, but in the end only partially succeeded, leaving Bobby devastated. Harry Sneider, Fischer’s former physical trainer who attended the auction with Ellsworth, arranged to have his son bring the twelve boxes of Fischer’s memorabilia that had been rescued to Budapest where Fischer was then living. Later, after Bobby’s death, the noted collector David DeLucia bought much of this material from Pal Benko, who was Fischer’s close friend for 50 years.

The Sinquefield Collection comprises most of Fischer’s other Bekins possessions. Primarily books and magazines acquired by Bobby between 1970 and 1992, it includes several items used in preparing for the World Championship match. These include a well-used copy of *Chess Informant* Volume 12, containing many handwritten notes

RIGHT:  
Publications from the Fischer Library  
Collection of Dr. Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield





TOP:  
*The International Chess Magazine Vol. V, No. 1-12*, January–December 1889. William Steinitz.  
*Adolf Anderssen der Altmeister deutscher Schachspielkunst*, 1912. Hermann von Gottschall.

BOTTOM:  
*Weltgeschichte des Schachs Lieferung 27, Boris Spassky: 355 Partien*, 1972. Eduard Wildhagen.

and corrections and the aforementioned files that Robert Wade prepared on Mark Taimanov, Tigran Petrosian, and Boris Spassky. Supplementing Wade’s work was Fischer’s copy of the famous “Red Book” on Spassky. The last in the *Weltgeschichte Des Schachs* (World History of Chess) series, this hardback book with a red cover was Fischer’s inseparable companion during his preparations for the world championship match, and he is said to have played through and remembered every game in it.

His annotations, neatly handwritten in the margins are fascinating. Witness the following cryptic note to the game Spassky–Suetin, Soviet Union, 1967. After **1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 e6 4. d4 cxd4 5. Nxd4 Qc7 6. Be3 a6 7. Nb3 Nf6 8. f4 Bb4 9. Bd3** Fischer has written in the margin **9. ...d5!** This novel way of handling this variation where putting the Black pawn on d6 is the norm, was first employed in an analogous position by Adolf Anderssen in 1877, but seldom seen until the last game of the 1972 world championship match in Reykjavik which opened **1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 a6 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. Be3 Nf6 7. Bd3 d5**.

The single most important work in the Sinquefeld Collection is a typewritten galley of an early version of *My 60 Memorable Games* with handwritten corrections by Bobby. Fischer spent four years writing and revising his classic work and much interesting material did not survive the final cut. The following is the first of two examples of Fischer’s preliminary text:

*Game 32: Fischer-Tal*

*Tal has an annoying habit of writing down the move he intends to play before making it. As a consequence his scoresheet is an eyesore. He usually write lemons down on the first draft, reserving the move he actually selects until somewhere around the fourth chicken scratch. Unfortunately, the temptation to glance at his scoresheet is overwhelming; I got excited when I saw him write down **20. ...Ra5 21. Bh5 d5 (21. ...d6 22.Rxd6!)** **22. Rxd5 exd5 23. Re1+** wins outright.*

Only the variation survived the final cut for publication.

The next passage from Game 45: Fischer-Bisguier was completely eliminated from the final version of *My 60 Memorable Games*. However, *Chess Life*’s December 1963 issue published a similar note by Bobby:

*On the last occasion, referred to above, my opponent played **4. ...Bc5!?** alias the Wilkes Barre Variation. At that time I was quite unfamiliar with it and nearly laughed out loud at the thought of my opponent making such a blunder in a tournament of this importance! I was just about to let him just have it when I noticed that he had brought along a friend who was studying our game very intently. This aroused my suspicions: maybe this was a trap, straight out of the book. But a Rook is a Rook—so I continued with **5. Nxf7** and there followed **5. ...Bxf2+!** **6. Kxf2 Nxe4+** **7. Ke3 Qh4** and, somehow, I got out of the mess with a draw. I had no chance for first place and my trophy for the best scoring player under 13 was already assured, since I was the only one under 13!*

Fischer had begun writing *My 60 Memorable Games* in 1965, and it took four years for it to finally see publication. The conflict between Bobby’s desire to write the best book possible and his reluctance to provide information that might help his opponents undoubtedly prolonged the writing process.

These drafts, along with Fischer’s study materials in the Sinquefeld Collection, allow unprecedented insight into the mind of the chess champion, exhibiting his intense attention to detail and remarkable analytical abilities. The Sinquefeld Collection also includes Fischer’s own copies of publications about the 1972 World Championship match; chess periodicals; books inscribed to the champion by other famous players including David Bronstein, Anatoly Karpov, and Viktor Korchnoi; and other artifacts from post-1972; which together paint a complex picture of Fischer’s life in chess.

—IM John Donaldson

<sup>1</sup> John W. Collins, *My Seven Chess Prodigies* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p.53.

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Curated by Shannon Bailey and Emily Allred, World Chess Hall of Fame.

Related programming and a pdf of this brochure are available for download at [worldchesshof.org](http://worldchesshof.org).

## WORLD CHESS HALL OF FAME

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### COVER IMAGE:

Bobby Fischer seen from above, analyzes during the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup. Photographer unknown.

### BACK COVER IMAGES (TOP TO BOTTOM):

**Draft of My 60 Memorable Games**, 1966. Bobby Fischer, dates unknown; **The 1961 Sammy Reshevsky and Bobby Fischer Match Sponsored by Jacqueline Piatigorsky and the American Chess Federation**, 1961. Photographer unknown; **[Detail with Bobby Fischer's notes] Weltgeschichte des Schachs Lieferung 27, Boris Spassky: 355 Partien**, 1972. Eduard Wildhagen; **Bobby Fischer at the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup**. Photographer unknown.

COLLECTION IMAGES: © S. Carmody Photo

