

The Hall Legacy

40 years of serving the hobby: Hall's Nostalgia has ridden the Hobby's roller coaster, becoming a fixture on the East Coast

By Chris Tripler and Margaret Banker

The Early Years

If you are or were a collector of baseball cards or baseball memorabilia in New England within the past 45 years, you probably heard about or maybe even bought from the Hall Nostalgia family of memorabilia businesses.

For readers of *SCD*, Hall's relationship dates back to the late 1970s when the back covers would be adorned with their offerings and card services as a catalog business. Hall's has been an institutional part of collecting for many years across the country, but especially in New England. David Hall and his brother, Joel, with help from their accountant father, Walter, opened Hall's Nostalgia on March 15, 1976, in Arlington, Mass. The store was the brainchild of Joel and a family endeavor for the decades to come. David was 18 years old, and his brother Joel, 16, felt that they were at the time opening the first, free-standing baseball card and sports memorabilia store in the U.S. They named the store Hall's Nostalgia, which was inspired by a *Life* magazine cover playing on the idea of a different era of pleasant memories.

David started collecting cards when he was 10 in 1967 because of his love of the Red Sox and the "Impossible Dream" season. Like many in that era and before him, David spent time with the cards, from flipping to putting them into bicycle spokes; the icon of card collecting that continues to have its own nostalgic run. He recalls a time when he travelled with his brother and father to the New York City card show in 1973, in which Joel purchased a T206 Ty Cobb for \$2 and a Goudey Ruth for \$11.

David continued to collect through his high school years, and as he began at Bentley College, he opted to use his collecting expertise to start the business. David primarily sold cards and memorabilia



Walter Hall, pictured at right with Roy Sievers, and his sons David and Joel began operations in 1976 and continue to run an eBay business in 2016.

to kids and, with no surprise, to older men who had left the hobby in the 1950s and 1960s. As a stand-alone store, many had questioned how well they might do, though a market was clearly developing. David saw this firsthand at the 1979 Philly show in which cards were bought on one side of the show and flipped for nearly twice as much on the other. That year was also remarkable for obtaining the gift of a complete Ted Williams uniform from the son of Williams' dentist.

A time of expansion: the 1980s

In 1979, the first price guides started hitting the book stores across America, making the business that the Halls were working in more respectable. To meet the coming demand for cards, the Halls opened their second store in Lynn, Mass., in 1980. David recalls that the advent of "value" to cards helped motivate buyers and sellers, which was great for business, though in those early years it had been a boom-or-bust cycle. Most collectors were still in the mindset that trading was a purer form of collecting the cards, instead

of buying cards directly. But, by the mid-1980s, Beckett started to come out with its monthly price guides, throwing the card business into the same conversation as stocks and bonds, and suddenly cards had investment potential. Hall's Nostalgia was now ensconced in a legitimate business venture, and things really started to take off.

In the mid-'80s, the Halls were approached with an opportunity to purchase a complete, Mint 1915 Cracker Jack set, which they promptly did. At the time, the prices were just beginning to settle in, and at book value, they were able to buy the Cracker Jack set for just under \$1,000. Since Hall's Nostalgia was still establishing itself as a business, and because it was not heavily capitalized and in need of a new business vehicle, many painful choices were made to make the business successful. In retrospect, the selling of the 1915 Cracker Jack "Shoeless" Joe Jackson for \$200 was purely a business decision that David wishes he hadn't had to make. David imagines the possibilities even today.

By the mid-to-late-'80s the card boom was in full swing, and card stores were in nearly every town in New England. Along this time, Walter and Joel helped put together the well-known Greater Boston Collector's Club show held at the Shriner's Auditorium, in Wilmington, Mass.

To create another revenue stream, as well as provide another experience for buyers of higher-end memorabilia, the Halls decided to conduct auctions. On Feb. 2, 1985, Hall's Nostalgia ran its first auction sale at the Knights of Columbus in Arlington. The auction proved to be highly successful, bringing in new business to the store and reaching out to an ever-widening pool of clientele. Business was so intense that there were times when the family would travel to card shows and close the stores, only to find notes taped to the store demanding to know where they had gone! As the 1980s progressed, competition was fierce, and the Halls decided that the business needed another element to reach the market of buyers in a more engaged way. In 1988, the Halls had their first card show at the Wakefield Colonial Hilton, bringing together dealers from the area. The local card show was still a relatively novel and successful idea, which the Halls promoted and ran with great acclaim for years. In 1990, the card show was moved to the Peabody Holiday Inn and became known as the Boston-Peabody Classic, drawing national dealers and card collectors until the last show in December 2000.

The auction years: the 1990s

The Halls rode the strong wave of hobby interest into the beginning of the 1990s. David tells of how during this time the market for newer cards was stronger than vintage simply because of the sheer number of younger collectors following baseball and the home run chases. As

the overproduction caught up with the beginning portion of the decade, and the younger collector's attentions shifted to computers and video games, there was a noticeable decline in the value and interest in the newer cards.

At the same time auction houses both locally and nationally began to take interest in selling rare and valued memorabilia pieces, as had happened in 1992 when Christie's sold the Gretzky T206 Honus Wagner and later sold again by Robert Edward Auctions in 2000 for more than



ASCD file photo of David Hall. David said one of his biggest hobby regrets was not offering enough for an uncut sheet of 1933 George C. Millers.

\$1 million. In 1996, Josh Evans of Leland's held the celebrated Boston Garden Auction, in which Walter Hall helped as the certified auctioneer in house and sat in the front row, while Joel and David manned the cage, sending merchandise out with runners to the audience to look at items.

For the Halls, these years presented both challenge and opportunity, as competition for items became more diffuse, but it also brought more items out of attics and basements for sale. They decided to open a second Arlington store

at this time, suspecting that the boom would continue for some time. Being in the Boston area, and with an established reputation, Hall's Nostalgia was able to diversify and survive the crash of cards mid-decade. In later years, the hobby had to contend with a global-wide counterfeit ring of cards and autographs. The presence of fake Jordan, Gretzky and Griffey rookie cards and autographs sent a real chill down the spine of the memorabilia world. Still, the Halls managed to maintain the integrity of their business, and because they were diversified in their business dealing, they survived the late 1990s.

Into the new century: Challenges and adapting to a new hobby world

From the advent of the large-scale number of fakes and illegitimate autographs on memorabilia, the new century brought about a number of challenges to the hobby, and through it all the Halls maintained a strong presence. By 2000, they had decided to end the shows that had run since 1988, as well as close the stores in Arlington and Lynn in part because of the advent of grading.

During this time, graded cards, as part of a response to the counterfeiting of the 1990s, became an integral part of the business. David remembers, humorously, when the other David Hall, founder of Collector's Universe, began hitting the market with graded cards and customers would ask the Hall's Nostalgia David, "So, now you're into grading cards?" The Halls would buy and sell a few of these items, but they did not become a large portion of their business. When David needed signatures confirmed, he would turn to JSA for items to be put into their auctions. Again, it wasn't like other

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