



CARD WORLD

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Hobby history from over here... and over there

Number 26: Highlights of Card Collecting in the US

Part 1, The Burdick Years (1935-1963)

by **George Vrechek**

Tim Thornham asked me to continue the series of articles on hobby history by reporting on what was happening in the United States as a result of the considerable efforts of collectors like **Jefferson Burdick** (1900-1963).

Carter connects us to Burdick

In 2001, I began researching the accomplishments of Burdick. I was surprised that I could find only three people still around who had met him, although many collectors certainly knew of his writings and initiatives.

Fortunately, **G. Lionel Carter** (1918-2008) of Evanston, Illinois, had met Burdick and lived 12 miles from me. Carter wrote the tribute to Burdick quoted in **Hobby History #9**. Carter shared his experiences meeting and corresponding with Burdick between 1938 and 1963. Carter was among the earliest of the sports card collectors who were delighted to find Burdick trying to connect with like-minded collectors, even though 90% of Burdick's own collection consisted of non-sport cards.

Like Burdick, Carter was on a quest to collect all the cards he could within the range of his interests. Carter's interests were baseball cards in the finest condition he could find, which was rather unusual for the time, in that most collectors were just looking to find what they needed in "decent" shape. They were not as fussy as Carter as to centering, edges, corners, creases and gloss. Carter had an easier time getting cards in great shape since he started collecting in 1933 at age 15 and would acquire cards, like DeLongs and Goudeys, shortly after they were issued. He didn't start collecting tobacco and strip cards until later. He never ventured much into other sports or non-sports and only collected U.S. issues.

Burdick never married. He dealt with health problems related to rheumatoid arthritis which increasingly crippled him for the last 30 years of his life. Carter married and worked at a bank. Both could be described as particular, meticulous, focused, honest, thrifty, well-organized, quiet but opinionated. Both were good writers.

Burdick's CCB

From 1937 to around 1950, about the only publication geared to U.S. card collectors was Jefferson Burdick's **Card Collector's Bulletin** (CCB). Most of Burdick's few hundred subscribers were adults. Card collecting was not a hobby that enjoyed much publicity. If anything, it was viewed as a kids' pastime.

Between 1937 and the 1950s there was a gradual transition from Burdick writing and producing everything on the hobby to others getting involved by contributing articles, researching sets and buying and selling through the CCB or other publications like *The Sporting News* and *Baseball Digest*.

Given the range of his collecting interests, Burdick was happy to receive help reporting catalogue additions from those he called the "baseball boys" - Carter, John D. Wagner and Buck Barker. Burdick



Lionel Carter in 2007

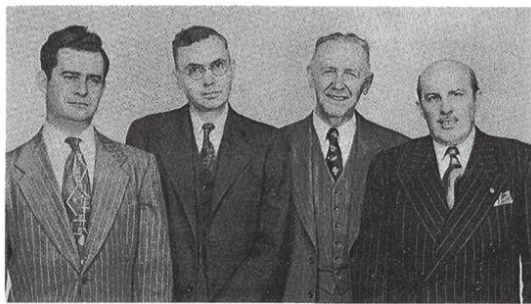
liked to keep things in order and cataloguing card sets and eventually postcards was just the ticket for him to continue to dive into details.

CCB Subscribers get involved

Subscribers would go through the arduous mailing process of contacting each other with want lists to see if they could trade cards. Phone calls and in-person meetings were rare. There wasn't a lot of money passing between collectors, since they preferred trades at reasonable prices on both sides. A few dealers would advertise their willingness to purchase or sell in the CCB or in Burdick's American Card Catalog.

Early subscribers were not typically sports specialists but collected a range of ephemera including postcards, non-sport cards, greeting cards and "British cards."

- **Charles Bray** (1899-1987) took over the production of CCB in 1948. He ran the CCB auctions and collected a 10% fee. His own 200,000 card collection was purchased by **Edward Wharton-Tigar** in 1965.
- **John D. Wagner** (1899-1988) had been a master sergeant in the military and began trading albums of tobacco cards with Burdick in 1936. They traded T206 Planks and Wagners to each other. John Wagner met Honus Wagner and asked him about his T206 card.
- **Buck Barker** (1911-1982) didn't find Burdick until the 1950s, although he had been a collector since 1922. He quickly got into cataloguing sport sets. He loved Latin American issues and the pursuit of hard-to-find obscure players. He would write or stamp his name on the back of cards he sent to others and didn't fuss about condition.
- **Howard Myers** checklisted the T206 (#521) baseball set in 1938. Burdick wrote, "The scarcest cards are Plank and Wagner. Amounts of 50 cents and \$1.00 are being offered for these." By 1960 Burdick's own catalog assigned Wagner a value of \$50, which Burdick thought to be a ridiculously high number.
- School teacher **Harry Kenworthy** (1903-1980) travelled the country in the summer to buy cards. His collection sold for \$60,000 in 1980.
- Sports editor **Wirt Gammon Sr.** (1905-1985) wrote, advertised and purchased expensive cards. He owned three T206 Wagners and three Planks.
- **Walt Corson** (1900-1966) ran a store, Collectors Haven, in Philadelphia in 1947 and 1948. He sold his collection to Frank Nagy of Detroit.
- **Goodie Goldfaden** (1914-2012) sold sport publications and some cards for over 85 years! He moved from Cleveland to Los Angeles in 1947.



Burdick's Card Collector's Bulletin finally included a photo of the American Card Catalog editors, May 12, 1952 – Woody Gelman, Jefferson Burdick, Charles Bray and Gene DiNardo.



Buck Barker 1955



Goodie Goldfaden with George Vrechek in 2010

- The June 1940 CCB listed new subscriber **W. M. Wright** of London, "interested in buying, selling and exchanging British and American cigarette cards." Wright was the first subscriber outside the U.S. mentioned in CCB.
- Other early subscribers included **Edward Golden**, **Harry Lilien**, **E.L. Lancaster**, **Bruce Spencer** and **Samuel Tanenbaum**.

References to Collecting in the U.K.

Burdick's ancestors came to the U.S. from England in 1651, first settling in Rhode Island and moving their large families to farms steadily westward to Central Square, New York, where Jefferson Burdick was born. Burdick was attracted to the memories of his youth in the small town with snowy winters, a New England tradition and U.S. tobacco insert cards.

In his first hobby article written for *Hobbies* magazine in 1935, Burdick mentions U.K. collectors and their efforts in organizing their hobby. Burdick liked the idea that he could focus on American issues and not those outside the U.S.

Every few issues, Burdick would report on collecting in the U.K. including activities or publications by **Eric Gurd**, **William Wright**, **Arthur Cherry** and **Charles Bagnall**. Burdick had a penchant for trying to get in the last word on a topic – like who issued the first trading card. Burdick met Edward Wharton-Tigar in the 1950s, who took Burdick to a baseball game in New York City.

Non-sport cards were the norm

Burdick donated his 306,000 card collection to the **New York Metropolitan Museum of Art**; only 10% of the cards were sport subjects. The print room there still houses the cards which Burdick pasted into 394 albums. It took me 2½ hours to get through seven of his albums during a 2004 visit to the Met. Burdick's American Card Catalog reflected this same breakdown – 90% of the listings were not about sports.

However, the popularity of baseball, football and their resulting card issues exploded after WWII. Today, PSA's reports only 4% of the cards they have graded are non-sport cards (if you exclude Pokémon and TCGs).

How about the manufacturers?

While collectors in the U.S. were busy cataloguing, putting together sets and trading cards, card manufacturers continued to do what they did best – make money by producing cards that people would buy. If customers wanted to collect them rather than letting their moms throw them out after a few years of taking up space, that was up to them.

Sy Berger (1923-2014) of **Topps Gum** once told me, "I was never a collector; I was a gatherer." Berger wanted to see the stuff sold. If product took up room and didn't make a profit, you might as well dump it in the Atlantic Ocean. The Shorin family, who owned Topps, were not in the business of losing money by holding onto cards, inspecting them for variations and keeping an archive. There is an adage in real estate sales, "Don't fall in love with the real estate." Price the stuff to sell.

It has always been so

Manufacturers of tobacco products in the 1880s looked at how they could attract customers. Embellishing insert cards used to stiffen the packaging of cigarettes proved a good idea. What did customers want to see on the cards? Pretty girls never hurt business. Baseball players might be a good bet. If you didn't like baseball, maybe you liked flags, flowers, or pretty girls holding flags and flowers. **James B. Duke's American Tobacco Company** had to figure out if they were in the cigarette business, trading card business or both. They did what they thought would be the most profitable.



Appropriately, Sy Berger got his own Topps trading card



If you went to an amusement park in the early 1900s, you might be attracted to buying pictures that you couldn't obtain elsewhere – like pretty girls, actresses or off-colour jokes. Cards were put into arcade machines so that “players” might waste an entire penny for a piece of cardboard that cost one-tenth of a cent to produce. **J. Frank Meyer's Exhibit Supply Company** (ESCo) in Chicago sold arcade machines and soon found itself in the business of producing cards to put into machines. By 1922, they figured out that boxers and baseball cards attracted customers.

In 1919 **Enos Goudey** in Boston was selling inexpensive candy and gum. By 1933 his company turned to packaging trading cards with gum and produced attractive issues like Indian Gum, Sport Kings and Big League Gum. Former Goudey employees Harold DeLong and Alvin Livingstone spun off and started their own companies, **DeLong Gum** and **National Chicde**, to compete against Goudey.

Flamboyant and prolific entrepreneur **J. Warren Bowman** (1895-1962) started Gum, Inc. in Philadelphia in 1927. In the 1930s, Gum, Inc. added trading card promotions to their gum with popular sets like Horrors of War and Play Ball. Bowman's own “collecting” seemed to consist of wives (four) and money (millions made and lost).

Customers bought what they liked, especially once the products were more about the cards than the candy. Manufacturers could influence demand by producing attractive cards, including special offers or premiums, presenting new ideas and skirting censors or licensors whenever possible. Successful companies needed marketing leadership and creative people to attract customers to their brands, particularly when some of the products (bread, milk, tobacco, gum) were hard to differentiate from those of competitors.

Woody Gelman

There were a few cases of people straddling the fence between producing cards and collecting them. Topps product development director **Woody Gelman** (1915-1978) was a one-man search engine for pop art. He collected cards, art, comics, advertising and cartoons. He joined others involved in editing and marketing Burdick's American Card Catalog as early as 1950. He collaborated with his father-in-law **Sam Rosen** to operate the **Card Collectors Company** selling Topps inventory from prior years. He joined Sy Berger at Berger's kitchen table designing the 1952 Topps baseball cards. However, he really liked opportunities when he could bring in artists to produce concepts and designs for non-sport sets like the controversial 1962 Mars Attack and Civil War News. He protected archives of their work product from being discarded.

Collectors in the business

A trickle of other collectors began going into the business side of the hobby. **Gordon B. Taylor** of New York City had a mail order card store, which he eventually sold to **Marshall Oreck**. **Bruce Yeko** had millions of cards and moved from Milwaukee to New York City and then Connecticut to sell full-time in 1963 as **Wholesale Cards**. He bought Oreck's inventory. **Larry Fritsch** in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, also became a full-time dealer.

Sportswriter **Bob Jaspersen** started his own hobby publication, **Sport Fan**, in 1951. Detroit high school student **Charles Brooks** began **The Sport Hobbyist** in 1956. While most such efforts between 1945 and 1963 didn't last very long, you could tell that younger collectors were attracted to the hobby and were not necessarily following the paths of hobby pioneers – or even knew about them.

Post Burdick – a new era

Burdick pasted the last of his 306,000 cards into albums at the Met on January 10, 1963. Two months later, he died from the effects of rheumatoid arthritis. The card-collecting world that he lived in had matured and was about to grow exponentially.

In the next instalment, we will cover some of the people who were instrumental in the U.S. hobby after Burdick's passing.