



A wealth of information on the early hobby was included in 122 letters.

Barker and Medeiros letters shed light on hobby history

“There are now accumulators, investors, publicists, guys bent on making a killing in their collection.” (1971)

By George Vrechek

Recently, I was contacted by collector and writer Jim McConnell who had been given a box of hobby papers by Jim Schneider. Schneider was a friend of long-time collector Ray Medeiros (1934-2021), and the box contained some of Medeiros’ files. McConnell has led me to many early hobby stories and thought I would be interested in having the box and reporting what was in it. Was !!

Buck Barker (1911-1982) was one of the “baseball boys” as Jefferson Burdick used to call the trio of John D. Wagner, Lionel Carter and Buck Barker. Burdick was called the “Father of Card Collecting” and credited Barker for identifying most sports cards added to Burdick’s 1960 American Card Catalog. Barker’s baseball card collection was described as one of the most extensive ever assembled.



I never had the opportunity to meet Barker, yet I felt a connection with him because of his enthusiasm for collecting all players. I interviewed people who knew Barker and wrote about him (SCD 9/14/07). One of those people was Ray Medeiros, who I first met in 1982. Medeiros traded with Barker between 1950 and 1982.

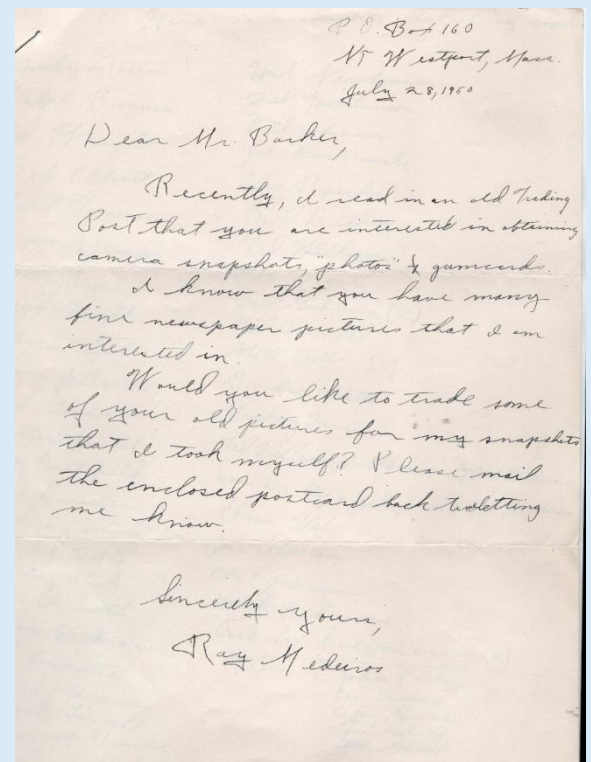
Medeiros' box contained research and newsletters on ballpark postcards. Medeiros had tried to lure me into ballpark collecting over a span of 39 years with modest success. However, one item quickly caught my eye - a one-inch-wide folder neatly labelled "Barker." The file contained 122 letters of which 62 were original letters from Barker and 60 were carbon copies of Medeiros' letters to Barker.

Twenty years ago, I went through Lionel Carter's correspondence which included great letters from Burdick and Barker, but few copies of letters sent by Carter to them. Medeiros' folder on Barker helps better understand their back-and-forth correspondence. Medeiros' handwriting was sometimes a challenge to decipher; thankfully, he typed some letters. Both men dated their letters and included their addresses, which was unnecessary for Barker (who seldom moved) but essential for Medeiros (who moved frequently).

Medeiros called Barker his mentor. In 1950, 16-year-old Medeiros responded to a *Trading Post* ad about Barker's interest in baseball "photos and gumcards." It took a few tries to get a response from Barker, but when he did it resulted in 32 years of exchanging cards, postcards, clippings, addresses, photos, guides and, occasionally, a few dollars.

Character and honesty were important to both. Both were thrifty. Both had significant collections but were the antithesis of high rollers. Much of their collections had been acquired as cards were issued or when values were modest. If something had originally cost them 5 cents, they didn't fret much over any value received in a trade. They wanted the other person to feel that, if anything, they got the better of any exchange. They were delighted when they picked up something they knew the other fellow would like. Sending cash was a last resort.

Barker was used to collectors coming his way, while Medeiros would try to visit collectors on any of his frequent travels. He considered meeting collectors a real bonus.



Medeiros' first letter in 1950 started 32 years of trading.

Letters sent with cards

The format for their exchanges was to include a letter with cards and clippings. The letters quickly commented on jobs, family and the weather. They responded to points made in their last exchanges and then got onto cards and what was going on in the hobby.

Barker apologized for tardiness and disorganization. Barker was a chemical engineer in St. Louis with National Lead Co. He rode his bike to the plant every day, loved dogs and cats, harbored lost animals, cared for pigeons and opposed hunting and even fishing. If Barker went anywhere, it was likely Mexico. He liked the weather, prices, language, postcards and soccer. He and his wife Alice had a daughter Patricia.



Left: Alice Barker, grandson Mike Eberhardt, daughter Patricia Eberhardt and Buck Barker, early 1950s



Right: Jeanne and Ray Medeiros, 2018

Medeiros grew up in Fall River, Massachusetts. Following high school, he served 13 years in the Air Force, some overseas, and then 15 years in Air Force civil service working in finance and budgets. Medeiros progressed up his career ladder, resulting in frequent moves and proximity to new ballparks and collectible opportunities. Medeiros' wife was Jeanne; they had a daughter Anne and two sons, Robert and Mathew. Robert, died in 1966.

Medeiros was organized from the get-go, assembling a detailed scrapbook in his childhood on Ted Williams. However, his Barker correspondence between 1951 and 1965 did not survive 12 moves with the Air Force. Except for two items from 1950, the correspondence file picks up in 1967.

It seemed strange to read their letters about quests for then-current cards. Both had killed off the bulk of their needs in Topps, Bowman and affordable pre-war sets. The infrequent issues by others provided a welcome challenge – Hostess, Post Cereal, Fleer, team issues,

ballpark postcards, Jack in the Box and even collectors' issues and police sets. Tougher regionals like Kahn's and Burger Beer really got them excited.

Medeiros' daughter Anne Marshall reminisced, "I well remember chasing after 7-11 and Jack in the Box issues with Dad. More than once, Dad talked a store out of their life-sized cardboard cutout of a player being used for their promos. When a new, uncusomary box of cereal showed up in the kitchen, I knew I was in for a lot of bowls of cereal!"

Barker and Medeiros seldom phoned since both viewed long distance calls as wildly extravagant. They met in person just a few times. The mail was so affordable that they would send each other cards to pick from and return the rest. Both enjoyed the hobby as a break from work.



Medeiros kept his correspondence in excellent order, not surprising given his positions in the military and civil service in keeping track of documents.

Let's read a sample of what they wrote. (Italics represent quotations from the letters.)

Scope of their collecting

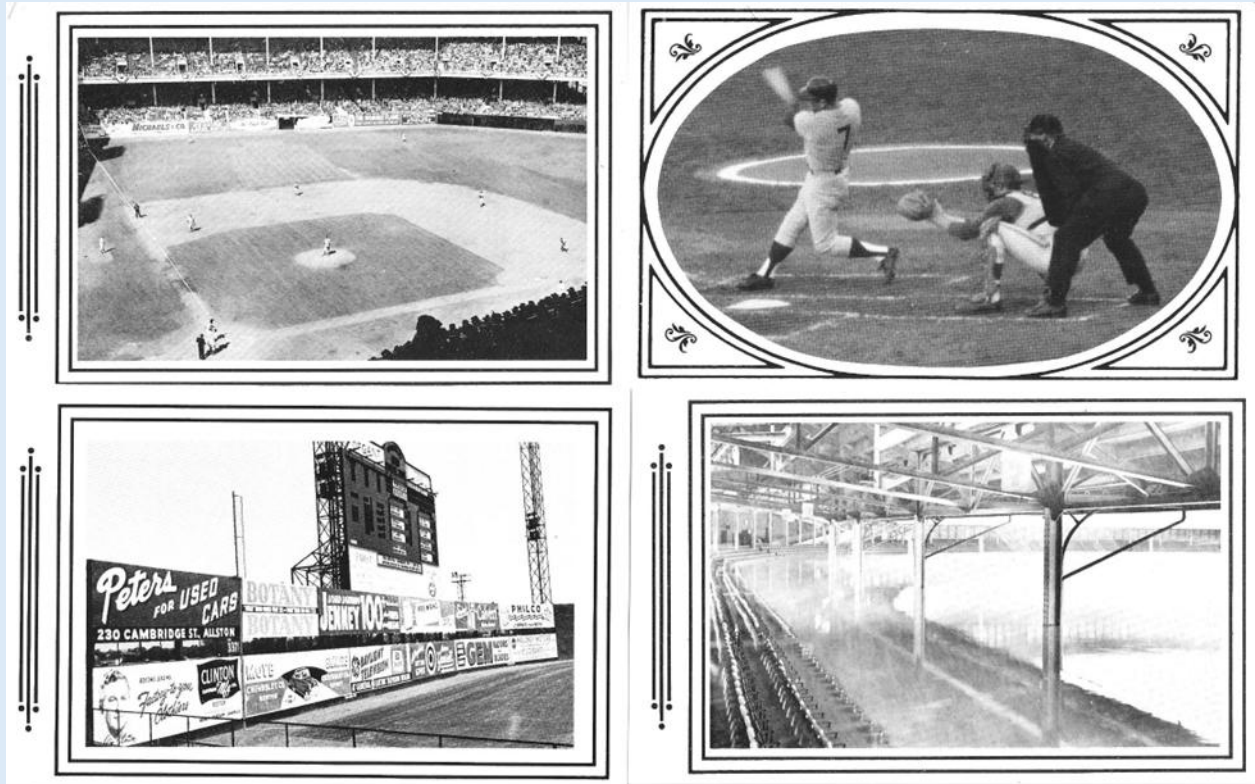
Barker

- Glad to hear from you. My big trouble is that I have lots more correspondence than I can ever answer, so at any excuse – or none – I just let the letters lie. Frankly, I would find it impossible to forget you. I generally have, during the past 5 years or more, marked the backs of all cards with the name of the one I get them from. That way, whenever I look at them closely, I usually remember the circumstances. Your name is on the back of a big bunch of Spanish postcards, many the only ones I have from a particular place.*
(1967)



Barker would stamp a card with his name on the back and write the name of the source - Burdick

- I'm really overhobbied, what with baseball cards, Latinamerican postcards & Spanish & Portugese, and also playing cards – but I can't seem to let go of anything.*
- From now on I'm after in baseball cards 1. One of each player, at least every major leaguer. 2. One of each set 3. All cards of Latinamerican players, no matter how many, I think. 4. Certain favorite sets such as E120 & Zeenuts & R318 5. Anything I especially want or like* (1971)
- I like cards of "unknowns," why collect 50 cards of Aaron?*
- Priorities - One card of each player MLB, Mexican or Latin, PCL Zeenuts 1906-15, Small #172 Old Judge, picture of one-armed Hugh Daly, BB Park postcards* (1982)



Both Barker and Medeiros collected ballpark postcards and Medeiros even created his own versions with a “Way Back When” series.

Medeiros

- *I haven't heard from many collectors lately and the Ball Card Collector (magazine) doesn't say what's new yet so don't know what to go after.*
- *Like you, I thought it best to quit collecting everything and so I am cutting further down to just postcards of baseball and soccer and books. Jeanne is expecting sometime in Nov. Ole!*
- Collecting old Reach and Spaulding Guides and 1949 Bowman variations.

Cards and gatherings

Barker

- 1964 Topps coin variations - *Those are hard to handle – a bunch just slipped out of my hand.*
- Looking for 1918-1920 Spalding and Reach Guides, German and British cards and pre-1906 baseball
- Notices the 1968 Fleer team emblem set is missing Houston.
- *Not really sure on '51 Topps Red Backs...I think the whitest backs are original issues and the darker ones REPRINTS.*
- *In 1963 I was satisfied with a complete set of Post-Jello combined.*

Medeiros

- Complains about San Diego Rockets basketball and Jack in the Box withholding one card from a team set
- *Visited Frank Jock's widow...big boards with 1920-era exhibits and 1930 Rs pasted on them, was given away to the American Legion. (1968)*
- Two-day "Convention" at Nowell's house in 1969 included how we collect, getting publicity from *Sporting News*, showing stuff, auction, then trading under the streetlamp. *It went very nicely, with everyone getting something.*
- Writing to issuers and teams
- 400 people at LA convention, enjoyed collectors at his house (1975)
- Barker mentioned he might sell cards. Medeiros couldn't afford the older stuff but would like a crack at Barker's exhibits.
- Hosted Bob Jaspersen
- Exhibits received, not sure if that was it. Sent Barker \$15 for four tough exhibits. (1981)

Prices

Barker

- *Prices sky high on old stuff anyway (1969)*

- Guess you know that Haber paid \$500 for Gammon's T206 Wagner, told me so himself...It's his calm assumption that he'll make the deal – that everyone has his price.
- While Barker and Medeiros agreed that exchanging cards for cash was a last resort, Barker relented (*I have too much stuff*) and the first exchange for \$16 appeared in 1970. Medeiros usually had to suggest the values or just send money. I counted \$76 changing hands over 32 years.

Typical letters ran several pages; one-pagers like this in 1970 were rare. Barker agreed that 65 cents for 1888 Hess cards (N321) was a good price.

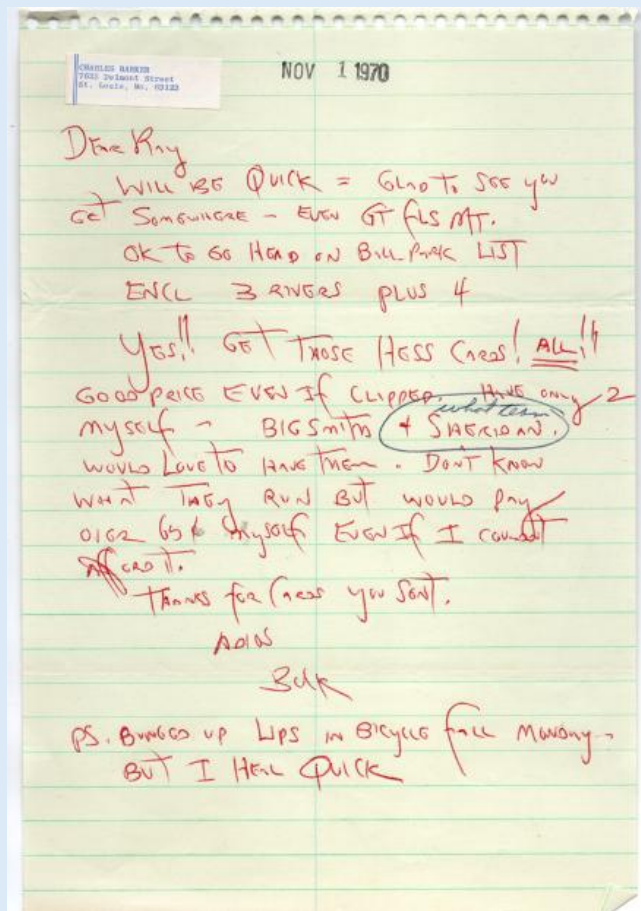
Medeiros

- I'm quite fed up with pricing these days. For example, a few months ago I sold a few 1956-9 Kahn's baseball to a young kid in the New York area who wrote me saying he was new in the hobby and heard I might be able to help him get into a few old, local issues for his collection. I figured I would help him by selling him some Kahn's for 35 cents each. Now mind you, I felt guilty charging him 35 cents but figured it must be close to the fair market price. Close, hell, this guy just advertised to buy more Kahn's in 1956-9 for \$20.00 each.
- I really fear for the hobby Buck. Remember how you often told me why you've shunned stamp collecting and its big time operators. Look around and you can see it coast to coast in our hobby. There are now accumulators, investors, publicists, guys bent on making a killing in their collection. (1971)
- Worried in that no letters from Barker in over a year. (1975)

Phone calls

Barker

Have two batches of baseball postcards for both you and Nowell – will mail some time. He called me on the phone last week. Where do these guys get all the money from? Inflated prices are just about backing me off the boards.



Medeiros

Speaking of telephone calls, I made my first ever (paid type) last night to George Martin of BCC (Ball Card Collector) and my last for this decade as I don't go for this at all simply because I'd be full of bull if I said I could afford it. He turned out to be delightful to talk to.

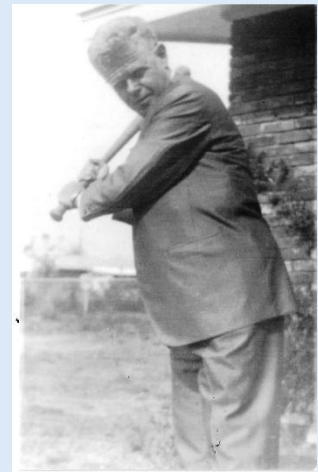
Collectors

Collectors, publishers and dealers are mentioned in most letters including Jaspersen, Carter, Bray, Thing, White, Dobbins, Leheup, Solon, Nowell, Mitchell, McWilliams, McLean, Goldfaden, Dischley, McPherson, Hess, Bailey, Jock, Martin, Vanco, Haber, Aronstein, Weiss, Horne, McClure, Wilson, Thom, Lerner, Tinker, Keetz, Menchine, Ortolani, Nagy, Broder, Quinn, Murry, Witte, Scharf, Gammon and McConnell.

Opinions

Barker

- Mentions 3-D Topps and suggests type collecting
- *Bondarenko and Jaspersen put out real (hobby) papers. Stommen's paper (SCD) is getting better.*
- Barker not pleased with the St. Louis convention planning. (1981)



Buck Barker, 1966

Medeiros

- Expansion to Montreal - a bad idea due to ownership
- Pushy collectors or dealers ranked.
- *Soccer is dying in the U.S.*
- *Vietnam is now cooling off...just in time for the hotfire in Israel!* (1973)
- Advises Barker on his first St. Louis convention – *leave your cards home. Go out and meet old friends.* Barker later responded – *did very well on trades and sales. Met lots of good fellows.*
- The closest to a complaint to Barker showing exasperation trying to keep their exchanges organized - *If I've said anything that disturbs you, Buck, I'm sorry but I'm not going to kid myself or my friends. I'm telling it like it is.* (1976)



Grandson Adam and Ray Medeiros, 1996

Activities and jobs

Barker

- Played baseball and soccer at 11, pool and handball.
- Gets 1967 World Series tickets and sends Medeiros a stub
- *Just finished "How to Retire in Mexico on \$2.47 per Day."*
- *Enjoyed your visit very much. (1972)*
- Bought a new 3-speed Triumph bicycle

Medeiros

- High school baseball pitcher, tried out for Boston Braves, then joined the Air Force
- Moved from Wyoming to California to Montana, quickly returning to California working on space budget for Air Force.
- *I should move to St. Louis and just walk over to your place to talk over all the things we've got going.*
- *The world of business is just a living, dull by comparison (to collecting).*
- Medeiros, Barker and spouses met in St. Louis in 1980.
- Discloses he is retired and Jeanne opening an antique shop "Way Back When" - also used as name for his self-published ballpark postcards and Ballparks Bulletin. (1981)

Barker's last letter to Medeiros - 4/25/82

- *Cards – want them? I'll send them and send anything you wish for them. (1982)*
- Mentions Don McPherson and Lew Lipset might be interested in Medeiros' Hess tobacco cards, which are too expensive for Buck.
- *Well retirement ain't the end. Just think positively like prosperity is just around the corner.*
- *Our daughter wants us to move to Virginia Beach. Not a bad idea for various reasons, but Alice doesn't want to.*

Final chapters

In November 1982 Barker went into the hospital for gall bladder surgery. Alice Barker wrote: "One day he is doing fine, and the next morning at 4:30 they called and said he died.... We all loved Buck so much. He was good to everyone and everything."

Medeiros continued to stay involved in the hobby organizing mini-conventions of stadium collectors called Stadiapex. Medeiros' daughter Anne Marshall recalled, "The last Stadiapex that dad was actively involved in planning was held (in 1999) at Fenway. I went too and it was the first time I saw my dad surrounded by people who knew of him, had collected/traded with him, wanted to meet him. It was an incredible experience all the way around for (grandson) Adam and me."

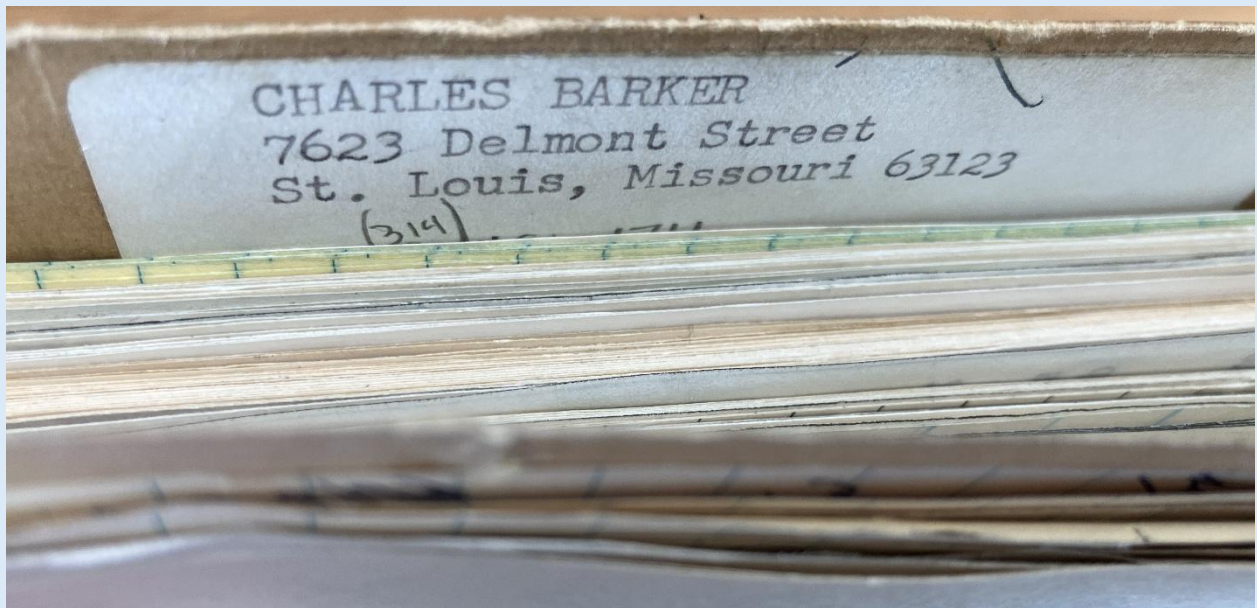
In 2021, Marshall let her dad's friends know that he had passed away on October 5th following a fall. Jim McConnell remembered him, "Ray was one of the last of the old-time collectors and his ballpark postcard collection was unsurpassed, as was his knowledge of old ballparks."

Reflections

It was humorous to read they were cutting back and then to find a year or two later, they were hunting for more cards. Both complained about prices in the 1960s. They even complained about too many hobby periodicals in the 1970s. They didn't mind that some cards stayed on their wantlists for decades. They weren't going to pay high prices for something that was a hobby, a diversion. It took Barker two years to find a container to ship uncut exhibit cards to Medeiros. You had to be patient.

It was a rare letter that mentioned anything about card condition, upgrades, stars or rookies. A card in decent shape was about it for their level of fussiness. Their interests in soccer and Latin American cards were not the norm.

They wrote for several hobby publications and described quests for cards. They were not excited when prices started climbing and "hustlers were running around" looking for stars in great shape, but they still enjoyed collecting and the friends they met.



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