



VARIATIONS AND ODDITIES FROM THE 1950s STILL TURNING UP

by [George Vrechek](#)

What do you collect when you think you have every card in a set and your enthusiasm for collecting additional sets has not yet kicked in? One approach is to upgrade your cards, which can become an endless pursuit of perfection. Another approach is to collect the variations and other items related to the set such as inserts and unnumbered checklists. An attractive challenge in collecting variations is that they are harder to find but not necessarily prohibitively expensive. Variations are a way of staying involved in collecting a set you like. Surprisingly new variation discoveries pop up even after people have scrutinized the cards for 40 or 50 years.

RECENT FINDS



Like 87 other cards in the 1959 Topps set, card #240 of Hank Bauer comes with a gray or white back. But a card has been found that also comes with his name in yellow letters on the front rather than the common white lettering. All other aspects of the cards look identical.

Although the white and yellow don't show up on the copies, I have included them to show that the yellow letter card is otherwise the same. I have examined the card closely and can find no evidence of alterations. It has a gray back.. The series that includes Bauer has 88 cards. Some of the other series have 110 cards. If 110 cards were printed at a time, there must have been 22 double prints if there were only 88 player cards. Bauer could be a double print - but why aren't the yellow letter Bauers (if there is more than one) in equal quantity as the white letters? Are there others from this series with different color lettering? We now have a 1959 yellow letter variation.



The 1955 Topps set was thought to have no variations but wait...! Card #106 of Frank Sullivan is found commonly with the "i" in his signature dotted. Not so common are variations with the dot on the "i" missing or partially obliterated. On the partially obliterated version the remnant of the "i" is further to the right on the card than any of the ink in the "dotted i" version.

Perhaps the variations are due to a proof reader who mistakenly thought the dot was a glob on the plates and removed it - or mostly removed it? It didn't take me too long to spot the Sullivan versions shown here so they must be out there in reasonable quantities - or I was lucky.

THE "REGULAR" VARIATIONS

Krause Publications and others producing checklists or guides generally have a policy of only listing variations if they are valued at a premium over the "regularly" issued card. Uncorrected errors are sometimes also identified. Such inclusion is usually to be informative as to oddities and to confirm that value should not be effected by corrected versions of the card since none exist. e.g. 1957 reversed negative Aaron, or wrong faces with names - too numerous to mention. I will describe some of the other "unlisted" variations found but first I think it is helpful to review the "listed" or "regular" variations described in the guides. I'm going to limit my scope to just the 1950s for this article. The "regular variations" from the 1950s listed in the guides include:

1950 Bowmans: #181 to 252 come with or without the copyright on the backs.

1954 Bowmans: Williams/Piersall plus 37 cards with statistical errors on the backs that were subsequently corrected. In this case the prices of both statistical varieties are the same but both cards are listed anyway in the guides. Saul Rogovin, Carl Scheib, and Dave Philley have the distinction of coming in three different back variations each. The 2 strikeout back Rogovin is a relatively recent listing.

1955 Bowmans: The Johnson and Bolling boys got the Bowman layout people really confused. This set has eight Johnson/Bolling variations. The other variations are Harvey Kueen or Kuenn - take your pick and Erv Palica traded and no mention of trade.

1951 Topps Redbacks: Holmes and Zernial variations

1951 Topps Teams: dated and undated

1952 Topps: First series black or red backs, Page and Sain variations. Mantle - will discuss later.

1953 Topps: Black or white printing of personal data on second print run of 80 cards printed

1956 Topps: #1 to 180 with white or gray backs, six team cards with 3 front variations (and 2 more back variations due to the gray/white backs)

1958 Topps: Fourteen yellow team name variations and nineteen yellow player name variations - distinctions lost on about 1/3rd of the people mis-advertising these cards on ebay. Be careful in purchasing cards advertised as "yellow letters." The white letter player name Hoefft card has either a red or orange triangle by his foot. There are four team checklists with variations. Also Herrera/Herrer and perhaps some-in-between Herrera variations - or is this a printing goof that has been elevated to variation status?

1959 Topps: #199-286 with gray or white backs, five players with or without traded or optioned lines, and Warren Spahn with 3 versions of his birth date.

UNLISTED VARIATIONS OR PRINTING ODDITIES

What else is out there that hasn't been listed in the guides because: 1) of the "no premium value" theory 2) they are relatively recent or isolated discoveries or 3) they are considered printing "irregularities?" Here is what else I know in addition to the Bauer and Sullivan cards:



1952 Bowmans: The first series seems to be found with images which I would describe as either "clear" or "dull." The differences are pretty hard to tell with some cards. Others like the Ed Yost shown here seem pretty clear -



or dull as the case may be. Then there is the Werle no "W" card. The signature on card #248 of Bill Werle is missing the "W" on some cards.



1952 Topps: In a previous article I discussed the differences due to double printing on Mantle, Thompson, and Robinson; the gray/white backs found with the 3rd series, Campos with black or red stars, and color differences on the front of cards with black backs such as Kretlow and Boone. Crandall and Feller also show background differences. A new one I have for you is the Dubiel card shown here that seemed to get through the printing process without getting all of the colors on it.

1954 Topps: According to Dick Gilkeson, author of "Baseball Card Variation Book," cards 1 to 50 come with gray backs printed in Canada rather than the white backs.

1956 Topps: Also according to Gilkeson there are a number of cards with color line variations on the front. Ted Williams comes with no line over his name or a yellow, green, blue, or red line. Bessent has no line over team name or a red line. Wynn and Ford have no lines or yellow or red lines.



1957 Topps: Card #176 Baker has his name legibly on the back or what reads as "EUGENF W. BAKEP" on the back. Card #185 of Kucks has an interesting printing irregularity shown here with the red top of the "8" in card number "185" floating and a white "donut" amidst the stats on the back.

1959 Topps: I found #350 Banks with a blue background versus the more common green - due apparently to yellow ink missing from the printing. The entire series must have been printed with this same problem.

UNNUMBERED CHECKLISTS

Checklists and inserts abounded after the 1950s and are certainly of interest but will be saved for another article. There aren't too many checklists or inserts from the 1950s that aren't part of the regular numbered sets. The first checklists appeared in 1956. There are two unnumbered checklists: Series 1 and 3 on one card and Series 2 and 4 on another. 1957 gives us everything to collect: a scarce middle series, team cards, checklists and inserts. The checklists again are not part of the regular numbered set. There are four checklist cards: Series 1-2, Series 2-3, Series 3-4, and Series 4-5. Each of the cards come with either a Big Blony ad or a Bazooka ad on the back, thus giving us eight possible checklist cards. In mint condition these eight checklist cards go for about 50% as much as the entire numbered set! The 1957 set includes Mantle, Brooks Robinson, Koufax, Ted Williams, Aaron and the rest of the stars from the 1950s (except Musial.) The variation collectors probably look for some rationale for not collecting the different ad backs.

INSERTS

The 1957 set also has five insert cards: Four cards announcing contests ending on four different dates and one "lucky penny" insert card. Fortunately these cards are relatively inexpensive although they probably truly deserve the "scarce" tag. At least demand is "scarce" also. The 1958 set has two insert cards - a contest card and a emblem insert card. In 1956 Topps issued five insert cards with different contests involving guessing the score of games to win a prize - sounds like Topps pioneering effort into gambling. I don't believe these inserts are currently listed in the guides. There are a number of other non-standard issues from the 1950s which were sets themselves or test issues and not inserts per se. These issues include: 1956 Topps Hocus Focus (large and small), 1956 Topps Pins. 1955 Topps Doubleheaders, and 1955 Topps Stamps.

THE TOTALS

With all of the above variations you can keep going for quite awhile even after you have "finished" a set. Listed below are the number of cards in the regular sets and the additional variation cards that can be collected based on the above descriptions. I have excluded the printing irregularities I've described - except for the Herrera and Baker cards.

Set	# of Cards issued	# of Variations
1950 Bowman	252	72
1951 Bowman	324	0
1952 Bowman	252	73
1953 Bowmans	224	0
1954 Bowman	224	41
1955 Bowman	320	6
1951 Topps various	135	11
1952 Topps	407	150
1953 Topps	274	80
1954 Topps	250	50
1955 Topps	206	2
1956 Topps	340	206

1956 Topps CL+inserts	7	0
1957 Topps	407	1
1957 Topps CL+inserts	9	4
1958 Topps	494	40
1958 Topps inserts	2	0
1959 Topps	572	96

So here are another 850 cards you can collect in addition to the regular cards - and you thought you were almost finished. Happy collecting.

Please let me know of any other variations or printing oddities that you have found and any comments you have on this subject.

A big OBC thank you to [Sports Collectors Digest \(SCD\)](#) for allowing us to reprint George's article here on the OBC site!