

Hobbies Magazines from the 1930s have Burdick, Joe E. Brown, Cooperstown and more



by George
G. Vrechek



Hobbies magazine was published beginning in 1931 with articles of interest to an assortment of collectors. Its publisher, O.C. Lightner of Chicago, started by purchasing a stamp magazine and then “rolling up” more

than 20 additional publications which were usually in financial difficulty as the Great Depression lingered. The monthly issue might have 130 pages, mostly text, a smattering of photos and small ads by collectors. It featured as many hobbies as possible. I got interested in *Hobbies* because I found that Jefferson Burdick, the father of card collecting, had written some of the first card collecting articles in the 1930s for *Hobbies*. Burdick wrote a few short articles beginning in 1935 and then spent over 25 years writing for his own hobby creation: *Card Collector's Bulletin* and editing the various issues of the *American Card Catalog* – the first card price guide and catalog. Burdick donated his own 300,000-card collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York where it resides today.

In earlier *SCD* issues I covered the chronology of published articles on sports card collecting. Those articles were:

- Arthur H. Folwell, *The New Yorker*, May 4, 1929
- J.R. Burdick, *Hobbies*, December 1935, January 1936, March 1936, May 1937, August 1937, September 1937, June 1938
- Lionel Carter, *Kaw Chief Stamp Journal*, December 1936, February 1937
- J.R. Burdick *Card Collector's Bulletin*, January through April 1937, March 1938, June 1938, September 1938, November 1938, August 1939 and bi-monthly thereafter
- J.R. Burdick, *United States Card Collector's Bulletin* 1939

Based on what Burdick had mentioned about his early writing efforts, I recently purchased what I thought were all of the *Hobbies* magazines with Burdick's articles. Since I had to buy *Hobbies* in lots I wound up with a few boxes of extras, mostly from the 1930s. In thumbing through the "non-Burdick" issues I was impressed with the depth of collectors' interests in other fields featured each month such as stamps, coins, prints, postcards, books, autographs, firearms, gems, furniture, glass, tin, Indian relics, "Lincolniana", curios, dolls, records, mustache cups, fossils, model ships...just about everything but lint that you could collect. However I've refrained from getting hooked on anything but sports card collecting so I took great pains not to read too much about the other hobbies. Notice that in the above litany there is no mention of sports collecting. You'll find pages and pages on stamps, coins, maps, paintings, photography, etc but nothing was popping up on sports. The closest seemed to be a few articles on autograph collecting.

Burdick's Lost Article

However, I kept turning yellowed pages and finally found some great stuff. I thought I had read everything Burdick had published because in his *Card Collector's Bulletin* he listed the articles he had written for *Hobbies*. However Burdick forgot to list a nice baseball related piece from the July 1937 issue. Burdick is so efficient in his writing and the *Hobbies* editor so parsimonious on space allotted that I can provide the entire article: Card Collecting By J.R. Burdick.



Burdick writes: "The 1937 baseball season is now in full swing and the nation's fans are daily cheering their favorite diamond stars. Baseball's heroes come and go, but few people have a better record of the game's great ones than the card collector. Baseball's Hall of Fame to date contains eight names: Babe Ruth, Tris Speaker, Ty Cobb, Walter Johnson, Cy Young, Christy Mathewson, Napoleon Lajoie, and Honus Wagner. Except Ruth, all were of "the good old days" of Tinker to Evers to Chance and so are shown on many of the baseball cards of the period. For Ruth and Gehrig and other present day celebrities we must turn to the various candy and gum cards issued during the past few years. While intended primarily for the younger fans they are of equal interest to all who love our national game."

If you were a Hall of Fame autograph collector then it would have been much easier to get the autographs of eight guys, all were elected in 1936 or 1937 and all but Mathewson were around. Burdick mentions the cards issued in the past few years directed at "younger fans" which would have been the Goudeys, Diamond Stars, DeLongs, etc.

Burdick continues: "Going back to 1889 we find that big time baseball consisted of the National League: (Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Pittsburg and Washington); the American Association: (Athletics, Brooklyn, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Columbus, Kansas City, Des Moines, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Omaha, St. Paul, St. Joe and Sioux City). The teams have shifted about a bit since then and the players themselves have changed some too. The early cards of 1887 show them with their moustaches and striped caps all posed up in front of appropriate screens." It is interesting that as the franchises have continued to evolve the majority of those mentioned by Burdick are in the majors. (St. Joe was St. Joseph, Missouri.)

Back to Burdick: “One feature of the game has, apparently, not developed. We refer to the women’s baseball teams. Two or three card sets show these fair players in action, but if such teams exist today they have not come to my attention. Maybe some of them married and are now the grandmothers of Schoolboy Rowe, Dizzy Dean, and other youngsters who have made good.” Having been around in the ‘50s, I remembered Schoolboy Rowe looking like an old guy on a 1954 Topps card showing him as a coach. Dizzy Dean I thought of as equally ancient. Burdick’s story reminded me that we were all “youngsters” at one time.

Very seldom have I found Burdick writing only about baseball cards. It is thought that Burdick never attended a major league game, however he certainly sounds enthusiastic in this article. He gave some background as to how he had been influenced by fellow collectors. Burdick explains his newfound appreciation of baseball card collecting: “In a recent listing of card sets I was inclined to minimize the value of some of these sports cards. The error was quickly made plain to me by fellow collectors. Never before did I realize the tremendous appeal which baseball has on the vast sports loving American public. Among card collectors at least the game’s heroes of the past will not be forgotten. Where else, I wonder, can these stars of the past be brought to life as vividly as on these cards? In addition to the Big Leagues there are cards and sets showing leading players of the International and other minor circuits, the Blue Grass league, various Southern and Texas leagues, and the Pacific Coast League. The whole nation is covered.”

Joe E. Brown’s Collection


Burdick’s “lost” article was great to find so it encouraged me to keep turning the yellowed pages of *Hobbies*. I found the July 1936 *Hobbies* had two great articles. The first covered the collection of Joe E. Brown and was titled “BASEBALLiana” by Joe O’Neill with one nice photo.

I knew that Joe E. Brown had been an early memorabilia collector (the Barry Halper of his day) and remembered him as an older comedian, not that funny to “with-it youngsters” of the 1950s. From O’Neill’s article I learned that Joe E. Brown:

- played in a baseball movie “Alibi Ike”
- had a tryout with Yankees
- held an interest in the Kansas City minor league team
- was referred to as “America’s Baseball Fan No. 1”

Apparently the players of the day were glad to give Brown “valuable objects.” What did Brown pick up that was so valuable? Try a bat that Babe Ruth used when he hit three homers in a World Series game (which must have been the

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Joe E. Brown, movie star, has an outstanding collection of baseballiana from which this illustration is reproduced.

BASEBALLiana

By JOE O'NEILL

WHAT is perhaps the world's greatest collection of "baseballiana" is the property of Joe E. Brown, the wide-mouthed comedian of the Warner Bros. studios in Hollywood, who was seen on the screen a few months ago in the famous Ring Lardner diamond classic, "Alibi Ike," and more recently in a laugh-story of the theater called "Bright Lights." It's no secret that Joe—despite all his fame and fortune in the movies—would much rather have been a star ball-player in one of the big leagues. Failing that (though he did have a trial one with the New York Yankees) he has backed several ball clubs, has held an interest in the Kansas City team, and is still considering the idea of buying a big league team.

Objects that have figured in important games are to Joe the most interesting and valuable objects in the world. Since he's America's Baseball Fan No. 1, he has no difficulty in acquiring his trophies. The players are glad to give them to him—and he's a friend of every big-leaguer and hundreds of minor-leaguers.

There was a World Series game a few years back wherein Babe Ruth, the great Yankee, hit three home runs on the same afternoon. The big heavy ash bat the Babe wielded—autographed by Ruth and all his teammates—has one of the star positions in Joe E. Brown's collection.

There was another World Series game in which, in the ninth inning, the tying and winning runs were on base when the ancient Grover Cleveland Alexander was called upon by the defending team to go into the box and preserve the one-run lead. He did it by striking out the batter on three blinding fast balls across the plate. Brown has the ball used in that heroic stand.

Whenever Joe Brown is in the East during the baseball season, he sits in the dugout with the players and manager. Whenever touring players, on exhibition trip and the like, reach Hollywood in the Winter, they automatically become guests at the Joe E. Brown home.

He always brings back souvenirs with him when he goes to a ball game. He has no end of bats, balls, mitts, fielders' gloves and what-not. He even has several complete uniforms, the latest being one worn by the eminent "Dizzy" Dean.

Football is Joe's second-best love, and his pet team is the University of California at Los Angeles. His boy Don is a student there and plays on the freshman team. Joe made a prototype out of a great backfield player at U.C.L.A., named Mike Frasher-itch, and after the boy graduated, got him a job as catcher on the Mission ball-club of the Pacific Coast League.

In a game two years ago, Frank-stein threw a 50-yard pass from behind his own goal-line toward the end of the game, and the receiver, Chuck Cheshire, carried it for a winning touchdown. You can bet that Joe E. Brown cherished that ball, carrying the signatures of both lads. He has several other footballs that figured in memorable games. He is one of the very few non-collegiate individuals who's always welcome on the player's bench.

Joe likes to look at boxing matches, but has no special interest in any fighter. Nevertheless, he has several pairs of boxing-gloves that were worn in championship bouts, particularly in the lighter-weight classes.

Every Winter Brown gets together, equips and backs a team of basketball players, who wear on their uniforms the legend, "Joe E. Brown All Stars." He pays their coach and trainer, pays their traveling expenses, and travels with them whenever he can. Of course, it's easy to say "that's a lot of swell personal publicity for Joe." But he really doesn't do it for that reason. He likes the game—likes any competitive game, and is a genuinely grand sportsman.

Perhaps, in the next few years we will see greater general interest in collecting baseballiana. Certainly the sport has sufficient devotees to warrant saving and collecting items connected with the big league teams and particularly the outstanding players. Too, there is being developed at Cooperstown, N. Y., a baseball museum which will call attention to the relics connected with this grand American sport.

fourth game of the 1926 Series against St. Louis, although he also hit 3 out in the fourth game of the 1928 Series). On top of that, Ruth and all his teammates autographed it for Brown's collection. The next little item mentioned is from Grover Cleveland Alexander's relief appearance to save game seven in the 1926 World Series. Alexander struck out Tony Lazzari on three pitches with the bases loaded – Brown had the ball “Old Pete” used. (It was convenient for Pete that Babe Ruth decided to try to steal second and was thrown out to end the game. I like to think it must have been a botched hit and run.)

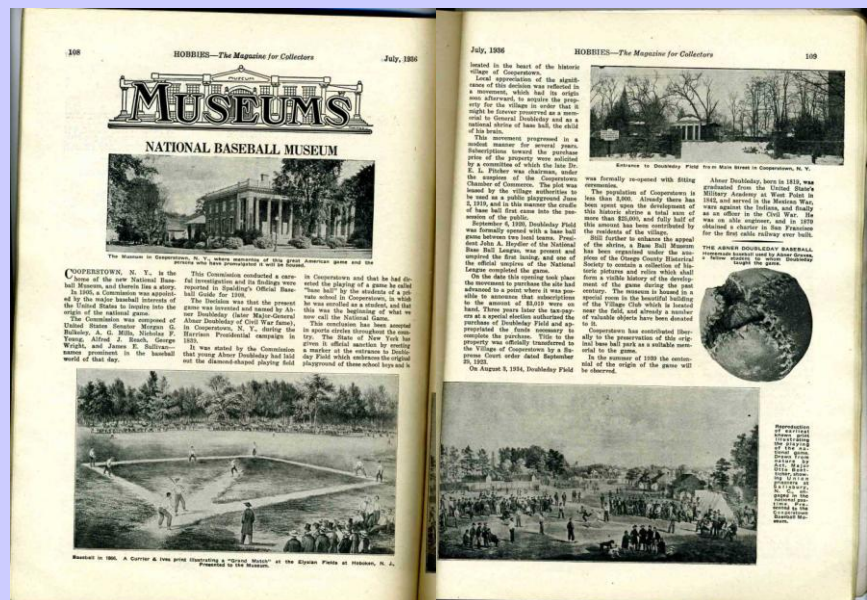
Did Brown pick up this stuff on ebay? at hobby shows? through SCD advertisers and auctions? Of course not. He usually picked it up by sitting on the bench with players at games. What a deal! O'Neill wrote: “Whenever in the East during the season he sits in the dugout with the players and manager... When players tour the west coast after the season they'll stay with Brown. He has no end of bats, balls, mitts, uniforms.”

Brown somehow got to sit on the bench not only at baseball games but football games such as those at UCLA where his son played. He naturally collected balls from important college games. Brown also collected boxing gloves from big fights. He sponsored a basketball team each winter, the “Joe E. Brown All Stars” paying all expenses and traveling with the team.

In researching Brown I found that he had overcome a very hard life, joined the circus at age 10 as a tumbler, got into vaudeville and finally became a big star in the movies during the 1930s. He was a natural athlete and played in two other baseball movies: Fireman, Save My Child and Elmer the Great. He had his own baseball team at Warner Studios. His son was the GM of the Pirates for over 20 years. As to Brown's collecting interests, O'Neill wrote that “perhaps in the next few years we will see a greater interest in collecting” what he called “Baseballiana.” I guess. I haven't been able to track the current whereabouts of Ruth's bat or Alexander's ball. If any reader knows, please let me know “the rest of the story.”

The New Baseball Hall of Fame

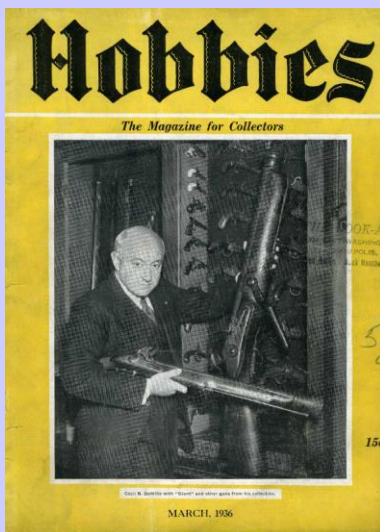
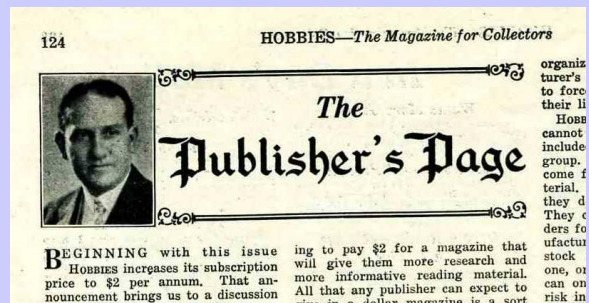
The third article I found was “The National Baseball Museum” which had several illustrations and promoted the idea of visiting Cooperstown. The article had no byline. The article explained how the new National Baseball Museum had been founded in Cooperstown. A 1905 commission concluded “the present game was invented and named by Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown, New York, during the Harrison Presidential campaign in 1839.” The story was Doubleday taught his fellow students how to play the game at a private school in town and that the first true baseball field was the schoolyard. This has all been a bit puzzling to subsequent researchers in that Doubleday graduated from West Point in 1842, so what was he doing going to school in Cooperstown in 1839?



At any rate, knowing a good opportunity for tourism when they saw it, village leaders acquired this schoolyard in 1923 and began hosting exhibition games. The little town of 3,000 raised \$25,000 to help fund a shrine to baseball. The museum in 1936 consisted of a special room at the “village club” building organized by the Ostego County Historical Society. The current Hall of Fame Museum was built after this article and opened in 1939 to commemorate 100 years of baseball, at least based on the 1905 commission’s idea of when baseball started. Not counting the multitude of Hall of Fame members themselves, Cooperstown’s current population is something like 1,936 people. Cooperstown’s museum plans were news in 1936 when this story was written. It is amazing that the building materialized during the Depression when so little was built.

O.C.

Hobbies magazine from the 1930s is interesting reading. Just watch what you read by its publisher, O.C. Lightner. “O.C.” may have been an abbreviation for “off-center.” He would use about 1/3 of his Publisher’s Page (which was usually two pages) writing about hobbies or, more frequently, the economics of his publishing a hobbies magazine; but he quickly and consistently got off on a tangent about taxation, discriminating against the rich and other horrors of the “alphabet soup programs” of F.D.R. who never got Lightner’s vote. Lightner, among many other things, advocated taking away the right to vote from people who would accept government pensions. He also liked the idea of the U.S. taking over Canada. However, the concept of social security taxes and benefits were pretty radical to the publisher. At least his writings are a testament to freedom of the press. Lightner died at age 63 in 1950 and was succeeded as editor by Pearl Ann Reeder who continued the magazine longer than even Lightner’s term.



Cecil B. DeMille shows off his big guns on the cover a typical magazine from March 1936 Hobbies

Hobbies must have had a decent circulation in that the old issues are pretty easy to find. It also helps that they were sending the publication to collectors who have a natural tendency to not throw things out.

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