

Letters from Jefferson Burdick

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Lionel -

Sept 24.
Here are 32 cards that may help with the listing. Have stamped a B on backs so that if mixed with others they can be sorted out easily.

On the numbered plain backs - how would it be to add the number after the X or just the number alone where that only is known. I'd do this only if I had sufficient data on the ~~B~~ numbered type.

Like this

ty	Cros					X50
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 would mean
known in ordinary plain (by the X) and numbered plain (by the 50, which is the number of the card) If known only 1 way - use just the X or the 50 as needed.



By George Vrechek from correspondence of Lionel Carter

Hobby pioneer Lionel Carter was nice enough to loan me two boxes of material: one contained old hobby publications, the other contained correspondence to Carter from other collectors from 1940 to the 1980s. The hobby publications were certainly interesting. However I enjoyed going through the stack of correspondence. The comments are more direct, you see the process for acquiring cards, and get a better sense of what it was like to be a collector then.

Lionel Carter's Correspondence

Who else but Lionel Carter would have saved seemingly every shred of hobby correspondence for 50 years - neatly laying them flat in a stack? Carter started collecting in 1933 and gradually learned of other serious collectors. He always focused on baseball cards in the best condition. In his effort to complete sets, Carter ran ads and wrote letters - lots of letters in that the internet wasn't quite ready yet and long distance phone calls were a major event. Letters to Carter and his wife Irma came from just about any long-time collector that you can imagine: Jefferson Burdick, Preston Orem, Charles Bray, Bob Jasperson, Woody Gelman, Frank Nagy, Buck Barker, Bob Solon, Frank Barning, Dan Even, Gavin Riley, E.C. Wharton-Tigar, Elwood Scharf, Bill White, George Husby, Larry Fritsch, Bill Mastro, Don Steinbach, Harry Kenworthy, Dan Jaskula, Bert

Sugar, Steve Vanco, Lew Lipset, Jack Smalling, Howard Leheup, John Rumierz, Jim Nowell, Irv Lerner, Vic Witte, John Stirling, Wirt Gammon, Charles Brooks.....and I'm just getting warmed up.



(George) Lionel Carter with George Vrechek in 2003

General Observations

The card prices then were certainly hard to imagine today and there were no premiums for star players, but there were incredible similarities to today's hobby. People were upset with increasing prices; sets were too long, poorly designed or too numerous. Collectors were looking for a fair trade, a good deal and were aware of market values. Even Jefferson Burdick complained about having to pay "book" value for a card; and he wrote the book!

There were at least 500 letters to Carter from 1940 through the early 1980s.

Letters to Carter from Burdick

Buried in the middle of the 7 inch pile of correspondence I came across several letters and postcards. The handwriting was a little difficult to read and the lines sometimes slanted upward

to the right. But the words were clear and of great interest to me since I had spent such effort in researching the writer: Jefferson Burdick, the "father of card collecting." Burdick visited the Carters in Chicago and they visited him in Syracuse. They kept in touch until shortly before his death. Carter was a collaborator, assisting in the American Card Catalog listings and descriptions. Unfortunately Burdick didn't always date his correspondence so I have guessed on some of these:

July 29 (1949?) Crouse Ave, Syracuse

This letter is written on the back of a Gray Electric Sales Sheet dated 8/12/48 Regarding different E121s "Saw 44 of them and kept 5 for myself....Ty Cobb Mgr, Det Am. Batting (view to hips), Lou de Vormer - C, NYA portrait. This is almost the same as one I had, must have been taken a few seconds between. Practically only difference is in one mouth is closed and in other is slightly open..."

J. P. BURDICK
420 SO. CROUSE AVE.
SYRACUSE 10, N. Y.

July 29.

Limel -

Have seen more of the E121 cards I mentioned in last. Saw 44 of them and kept 5 for myself. They are same as E121, maybe slightly thinner and not quite as clearly printed. Blank back. Front at top left is 6-4-22 and at right a number. One I saw had a high number of 117 with a few not numbered. I'd guess the 4-22 is April 1922 date.

5 I kept are as follows. I think most or all are listed on your list.

- 1- Eddie Mulligan - 3B - Chi. Nat. - batting
- 2- Ty Cobb, Mgr. Det Am. - batting (view to hips)
- 3- Elwood Martin, P. Chi. Nat. - pitching
- 4- E. S. Rice - OF Wash (batting) - a same as the E. C. Rice & (portrait)
- 5- Lou de Vormer - C, NYA. This is almost same as one I had, must have been taken a few seconds between. Practically only difference is in one mouth is close and in other is slightly open so teeth can be seen a little.

So there are at least 117 of the plain backs and nobody knows how many more.

I imagine Bray could use the list in the October Bulletin - or at least a page or two of it - if you could get that much ready.

Sincerely
Jeff

Postcard Sep 4 1950

“Lionel, On the E121 list – I don’t see how you can ignore the numbered cards entirely as, after all, they are the same series...I doubt Bray gave you enough data to do an accurate listing job due to diff. positions of same player that wouldn’t show up in the name alone...Forget the E220. Not enough known about them but try to weed any of them out of the 121 list. I suspect a few of them got in it. Condense all lists as tightly as possible, the 121 is a pretty long one anyway. Sincerely, Jeff.”

Sept 24 (1950s?)

“Here are 32 cards that may help with the listing. Have stamped a B on the backs so that if mixed with others they can be sorted out easily.” This note is written on the back of a printed page that precedes the catalog of 1939. (Burdick wasn’t big on wasting paper) The page written by Burdick includes: “Old cards are bits of history, and share in the love which all Americans hold for reminiscences of years gone by....Do not stick cards to the pages. Cards which are tightly stuck down in albums should be discounted when buying because of the labor of removing cards and the probable damage to them. Warm water and careful drying and pressing is the usual process, but some damage is unavoidable All advance subscribers to this catalog will receive the first issue of the new volume free...Full details of dates and subscriptions will be in the first issue which is scheduled for August 1, 1939...The Bulletin is issued to help collectors and dealers. It is THEIR magazine, and all contributions and suggestions will be highly appreciated and will receive utmost consideration. It is issued on a non-profit basis, and the only motive is to promote the hobby of card collecting.”

March 30 (later 1950s?), now on Wolf Street, Syracuse

This is a great letter that is hard to excerpt but it responds to Carter’s complaint to Burdick about a collector who shall remain nameless who Burdick suggested visit the Carters. Apparently he did, wasn’t that interested in the cards, over-stayed his welcome and had too much to drink. One Burdick sentence will have to suffice: “Collectors, in general, are a pretty good lot but in the final analysis are no different than any other cross section of the population.”

Carter has a page out of a letter from Burdick to Buck Barker that Barker forwarded. “Why not let Carter (King of the Mounties) do an article on mounting. It’s a problem. I’m struggling with it at the museum and haven’t yet solved it. Of course, much of my stuff will be pasted down – all the plain back and printed general backs are being pasted. But can’t do that with descriptive backs and there are many long sets of those that will be tough to handle.”



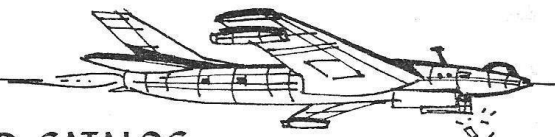
Four hobby pioneers left to right: Woody Gelman, Jefferson Burdick, Charles Bray and Gene DeNardo. From a 1952 Card Collectors Bulletin

September 21 (1959?) from St Petersburg, FL

Burdick describes his arduous journey by bus from NYC to Florida and the retirement communities he finds there. He met with a collector in Petersburg, Virginia, but only found one in St. Petersburg, Florida. "Tuesday I'm going to Lakeland to buy an album from a school teacher ... a lot of T206 and over 100 Contentneas (T209s book for \$75 to \$150 in mint these days - Vrechek) and I'll have to pay about catalog (hey, you wrote the catalog - Vrechek)Friday I'll go over to Augustine to see their antique show and hope to find some cards, but probably not. The South isn't good 'card country' although I once did get a big cigar box full of dandy old cards from South Carolina. You never can tell when they'll turn up." More trips are planned involving visits with collectors

May 12, 1960 Written on 1960 ACC Stationery

About the just published ACC "I guess there are a few errors scattered about but what the heck – who is 100% perfect?...The printer who set the type was only a little one horse outfit but he did pretty good. For the actual printing and the binding he turned it over to a real high class place...But even so, out of about 300 I checked there were 3 defects...(Buck Barker) did a lot of work and I thought it all pretty good although I'm not a real judge of the technique of baseball writing.... But I began work on that book last Thanksgiving... It's not just writing it. You have to dig up the data to write and that means hundreds of letters to people all over the country. Then their mass of replies has to be sifted out and arranged in some order – and try not use anything that isn't absolutely correct. Anyway, Lionel, by next Catalog time someone else will have to carry the ball. 4 of 6 on this job are past 60 and that will make us too old for another one, if indeed, we are here at all."



THE 1960 AMERICAN CARD CATALOG

The Standard Guide on all Collected Cards and their Value.

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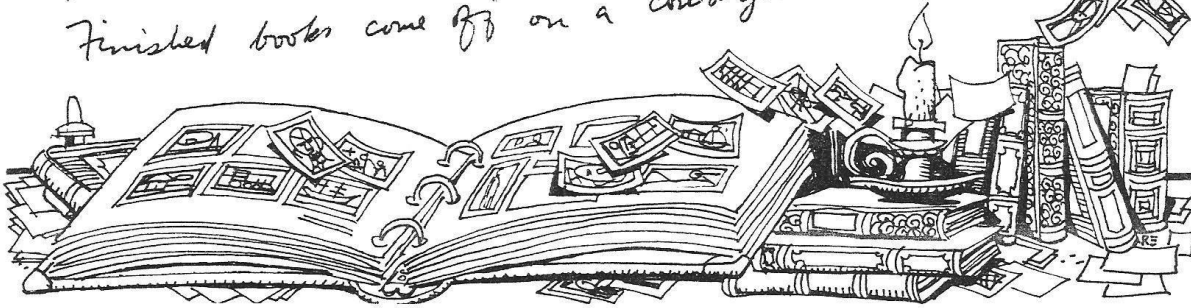
Lionel -

May 12, 1960

Got the card and glad to know we passed the test by you. But that isn't what we're worrying about. What we want to know is: what does Luma say? If she approves - we're made. Otherwise we might better not started.

I guess there are a few errors scattered about but what the heck - who is 100% perfect? Not me, or anything I'm likely to make - even if I have a bunch of fiscal geeks helping on the job.

The printer who set the type was only a little one horse outfit but he did pretty good. For the actual printing and the binding he turned it over to a real high class place. Somebody said it was the third largest in the world. I don't know. Only I could see they do plenty work and the best. Finished books come off on a conveyor belt faster



November 28, 1960, Madison Ave, NYC

Four page letter to Carter complimenting him on his writing abilities, the difficulty in getting published despite such abilities and the economic realities of having a book printed yourself. "A book is just a pound of waste paper unless you can sell it... Orem and Payne are listed as co-publishers of the Catalog but actually they have no financial interest in it at all...only the 4 of us are in it financially...No, I don't have all the sets complete. A lot of people think I have everything, but I don't. Lack a lot of R300, Batter Up, lack 2 of the 34 Big Leagues and 2 of the Diamond Stars (batting average backs)...I know of only 6 Wagners here at the Museum and Public Library, Bray, Wagner, Gammon and 1 that turned up last winter. A kid here in the Bronx had it...I didn't know Orem had one and I never heard of Colzietti either. There probably several more about. All so far have originated in the NYC area."

January 23, 1961 Madison Ave, NYC

"The doctors gave me a 'totally disabled' rating"...Burdick regrets not being able to travel with the Carters. "I'll just get out one of them 'trip around the world' card sets and I'll be there – a magic carpet without leaving my easy chair... I guess I told you that costs for our Catalog are now around \$6,000 and the figure will be more, of course, before all are sold. You will probably figure that 3,000 copies at \$4 is 12,000 and so there is plenty of margin yet. But a lot of copies are sold to bookstores at less than \$3 a copy and we don't know how long the 3,000 copies will last. Maybe 10 years, with a lot of advertising spread along every year. Maybe a lot will never sell..." Regarding being at the Museum: "I usually go up on Tuesday and Friday...In a few years a lot of us old timers will be gone and you will be senior collector and top authority. Speaking of us going – Glidden Osborne of London just died. Probably had the biggest collection of cigarette cards in the world. I wonder how he left his collection – maybe to a museum or to the Cartophilic Society of which he was so long president."

May 29, 1961 Madison Ave, NYC

Burdick suggests that Orem may be selling his collection to pay for his baseball book publishing. "My health is definitely on the down trend. A few years ago a doctor examined me and pronounced me a "Medical Museum." Today I have at least 2 or 3 additional ailments – rather bad ones... I hope to hold together long enough to complete the card mounting job here, but there's no guarantee...I'm getting pretty badly bent and twisted out of shape and my clothes, for example, just don't drape around me gracefully any more. Some might say I looked like something the cat dragged in...Old Fred Baum was just here for a couple of hours... Comes up to the Museum most every time I'm there. He collects all tobacco and coffee and is wilder at it than even you baseball boys are about the National game...I agree with you that there are too many BB cards being issued...In the early days it was bad enough when they put out a 250 card set. Now its four times that, or almost, and between the gums, cookies, meats, and a few other things – well – I gave up...I guess somebody else will have to round out the collection with such things.

August 22, 1961, Madison Ave, NYC

Another great letter about cards, variations, checklists, increasing prices and the catalog. "I haven't tried to collect all the new cards of past ten years but get a few that especially interest me. Have few of the long baseball sets but I agree with you in that it is being overdone. Its too

much for some of the younger collectors who don't have that kind of money to spend on cards...Once an idea clicks, everybody gets in the game and tries to cash in on it."

November 24, 1961 Madison Ave. NYC

"Lionel- For nigh onto 2 months now the world has been waiting for a report of the latest Carter safari. The tension has been mounting terrifically and has reached the breaking point in this area. Naturally I feel a strong interest in the journey (having strongly considered being a member of the troop) and I know others must be concerned....We want to know how you found old man Orem and how is the book going? I have bought quite a lot from his collection this summer. His prices were a little uppity on some things (low on others) but I paid them gladly as I feel I'd never get another chance in my lifetime at most of that stuff. He had a remarkable collection considering he had been at it only 5 years....I feel the book business will be a disappointment (to him). It's a tough racket for anyone. A lot more money is lost on books than is made. Only the retail book dealers can save him and they are a hard boiled lot....Orem sold his Hans Wagner for \$150. Nagy in Detroit got it. Some kid collector asked me what it was worth in my opinion. All I can do is stick to the Catalog and I recall you saying you wouldn't pay even \$50 for one. There may be a small demand at over \$50 but I don't believe its very large. Charley Bray decided to stick with the \$50 rate in the Catalog. Johnny Wagner writes that Gammon is now asking 30 cents for ordinary T206 and T205 which is too high. And a lot of the BB gums since 1948 are selling too high. There's a lot of that stuff around and it shouldn't sell at over catalog for selected items – with lots at a lower figure. Dealer Taylor has skipped the coop, so it seems, and looks like he forgot to settle some outstanding obligations. Nobody knows his present address."

December 10, 1961, Madison Ave., NYC

Burdick writes a nice letter to Carter commenting on the long vacation that Burdick would have been physically unable to make, mentions Carter's work and then adds: "I worked over 23 years at my last job and a lot of 45 to 50 hour weeks...All that time I was doing a lot of card work too and it meant a tight schedule as I couldn't work late hours at night as most do. I have to get a full 9 hours sleep. At that time I went to bed at 8 PM, read the paper for an hour and slept from 9 to 5:30 or 6 AM...You'd better think twice about selling the collection. There is quite a bit of loose card money about these days and there are probably several others like (a certain collector) who would snap up a good collection like yours for 1000 or so. I guess Orem started a craze for selling, but its different with him. He's an older man and he expects to have other interests (his books) to keep his hobby time going. All the same. I think he will regret selling the cards – not only because he liked the cards but because the books won't take their place. He can do a lot of book writing, but to print and sell them all may require a lot more money than he can take in from them. The writing may be the easy part of it. A profit is another thing, but of course, he may do it the same as collecting cards, with the pleasure being sufficient payment.... I do think that every collector should arrange for some disposition of his collection when he passes on and if he can foresee the date of passing, it might be OK to dispose of them himself shortly ahead of such date – but you aren't in that category yet. I made arrangements for my cards in 1948 when I was only 48 years old, as at the time I was getting rather poor physically and I didn't know how long. However, the miracle drugs (cortisone) came on in 1950 and allowed me to work until 1959 and in the meanwhile to sort out from 2 to 6 cartons of cards each year and ship them on.(to the Metropolitan Museum) Now I'm finishing the job here. Another full year before I can scrape

bottom. Just counted the 119th tobacco insert and it's 31,708 to date. Thanks for the news and love to Irma, Jeff"

April 28, 1962 Madison Ave, NYC a typed letter

Burdick writes about the challenge of getting to Charley Bray's in Pennsylvania without being able to drive a car – not easy. "On retiring – I still say the trick is to retire early enough. As time goes on, I see ever so many waiting until they literally have one foot in the grave before they quit. Then the retirement period is too short – as it probably will be for me. Nobody can figure accurately how many years are left for them but they should try to figure out at least ten years of happy retirement...In my case, I have the huge accumulation of cards here, which I hope to get entirely in order before I pass on. Have been at it over 2 ½ years now and it looks like another year almost before I can hope to finish it. Some would do it faster by burning the midnight oil but I have to get long and regular rest – sometimes I don't, as last night when I doubt I slept an hour...I am more concerned about the card collecting angle (than the baseball season). Looks to me like there are too many long sets being issued. Also a lot of prices being paid are too high. I may be wrong but that's the way it looks from here. I personally discontinued collecting all the sport sets about ten years ago, also the funny ? jokes and horror monster stuff. I have most of the others and even a token lot of even the sports and monsters but nowheres near completion and I'm not trying to fill them in in any way."

May 23 (most likely 1962)

Burdick's handwriting is more restricted. "The enclosed sugar bag will show you my present address.(Bellevue) Probably in for a couple of weeks for a thorough checkup and treatment. My condition was getting so unbearable that I had to do something...I hope to be out about the time the show opens at Bray's but you can see I won't be in any condition to make the trip over unless I could do it in a private car and I don't know of anyone with a car who would make the trip...I'm more sorry than I can tell you about missing the show. I had thought of it all winter with keen anticipation and I'm sure it will be good....Give my regards to Charlie and Mrs. Bray...Best, Jeff"

July 7, 1962

Handwriting is even more restricted. The Carters had hoped to see Burdick on one of their vacation trips but it hadn't worked out. "I'm planning on moving sometime late this year. Just when and where to is not yet known and I may even abandon the idea but at least I want to get somewhere else if at all possible...Will be looking forward to writeups of the (Carter) trip. Almost as good as being there. Another unique Carter service. Don't plan on me flying to Chicago. I'm still too shaky on the feet to roam very far. Have resumed work on the cards at the museum and hope to finish the job this Fall. It's an awful mess. Special regards to Irma, Jeff"

Burdick died March 13, 1963

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