

# Collecting through the ages, a chronology of hobby pioneers

## Part One



*Woody Gelman, Jefferson Burdick, Charles Bray and Gene De Nardo posed in their “business casuals” for this 1952 photo, which appeared in the Card Collector’s Bulletin. All were editors for the 1953 American Card Catalog. This was likely only the second photo which had ever appeared in CCB. Photos of Burdick are rare. The surrounding cards and publications are from Lionel Carter’s collection, photos 2003 G. Vrecek.*



**By George Vrecek**

SCD articles on the history of the sports card hobby have mentioned hundreds of people. Over the past twenty years, I have been fortunate to be able to connect with several of those people and have heard or read about pioneers who preceded them.

### **ORGANIZING THE PIONEERS**

Like organizing a set of cards, it might help to organize some of the names which pop up in the history of the hobby. In Part One, I will start by organizing the people I have been able to write about who were born before my arbitrary cutoff date of 1920. Part Two of this article will pick up with those born in 1920 or later.

Obviously, there is much more that could be mentioned than a few sentences for those listed. If you have been a SCD subscriber, you may recall articles on many of the pioneers. While my listing is intentionally irrefutable (since it only includes people I have written about), there were undoubtedly

others who contributed significantly to the hobby. Readers are encouraged to report any such candidates for an “update set.”

Thanks go to hobby history buffs like Richard Rubin, Tim Thornham, David Kathman, Dave Hornish and Leon Luckey who have posted some of the old hobby literature on Net54 and elsewhere.

### **AGES AND STAGES**

When the hobby got organized in the late 1930s, collectors who found each other varied considerably in age. Lionel Carter mentioned that when he wrote to others, he didn’t know if that person was 30, 60 or 15.

Carter seemed to hit it off with people who were interested in the same sets as he was, and often those sets were whatever came out during their initial childhood collecting years. A poll I recently conducted of 50 active vintage card collectors found that the average childhood card collecting phase for them was between 7 and 15 years of age. Their favorite sets came out during their first few years of collecting or well before they were born. The average age that adults returned to card collecting was 32, although 13% of the respondents never stopped.

Thus, it makes sense to me to list pioneers by their birth years. In some cases, years are best estimates.

### **1878-1962 ARTHUR H. FOLWELL**

Folwell was a writer and editor for the *New York Herald Tribune*. In his spare time, he wrote gags for a syndicated comic strip titled “Mr. and Mrs.”

He also wrote for *The New Yorker*. One such article appeared in 1929, “A New York Childhood, Cigarette Pictures.” Folwell accumulated cards from the first tobacco card heyday in the 1880s and wrote about his experiences. His childhood cards were in a box next to him when he wrote the article.



Folwell lived until 1962, but I didn’t find evidence that he connected with other collectors. Any collectors who got back into cards from their 1880s childhood likely assumed that there were few others like themselves. There seemed to be no articles, ads, clubs or manufacturers promoting the hobby.

We will let Arthur Folwell represent all the collectors who scooped up the first tobacco inserts of the 1880s but didn’t have the good sense to have them graded, slabbed, insured and stashed away for their great, great grandchildren.

*Arthur H. Folwell, circa 1950, posted by Allan Holtz on the Stripper’s Guide Blog from an article by Jane McMaster, E&P, 7/29/50*

### **1891-1971 PRESTON OREM**

Orem was the oldest of Jefferson Burdick’s 1960 American Card Catalog editors. However, he didn’t get serious about collecting until 1956, when he was 62, an advanced age for a collector to get immersed - which goofs up my theory of when people collect.

He was a California attorney and a high roller compared to the rest of the boys. Orem liked baseball and self-published some very dry books on historical baseball statistics. Perhaps because he was late to the collecting game, some of the other guys scratched their heads as to what he was up to, throwing money around when pennies or stamps had often been the currency of exchanges. Orem was appalled that Burdick's cards were being pasted into scrapbooks at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (The Met). Frank Nagy bought Orem's T206 Wagner.

*Preston Orem, circa 1956, from a photo in Sport Hobbyist, provided by David Kathman.*



### 1896-1968 FRANK JOCK

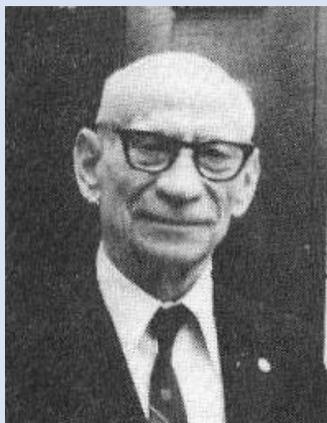
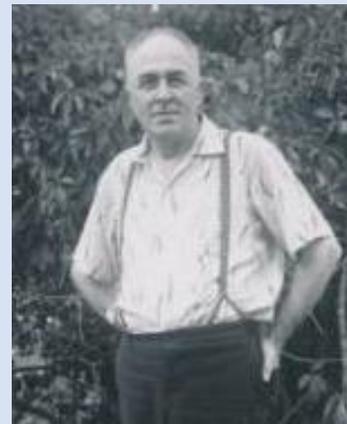
Jock was an avid collector since his boyhood. He stored 1,500 pounds of sports memorabilia in a cottage behind his house. He was an admired collector, and Bob Jaspersen started an award which was given annually after Jock's death to collectors who had improved the hobby.

*Frank Jock and his cottage, 1956, photos by Bob Jaspersen, provided by Mike Jaspersen.*



### 1899-1988 JOHN D. WAGNER

Wagner was one of the initial 15 subscribers in 1937 to Burdick's *Card Collector's Bulletin (CCB)*. (It took Burdick a few years to decide that he needed an apostrophe someplace in the title of his publication.) Wagner started collecting in 1909. His education was one year of high school. He served in WWII and was a master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force in Korea. Wagner was a generous baseball card collector. By 1936, Burdick and Wagner had started exchanging tobacco card albums with an assigned value of \$1 to each album full of cards.



In 1943 Burdick traded one of his two T206 Planks to Wagner. Around 1950, Wagner gave Burdick one of his extra Honus Wagner T206s. Burdick insisted on paying him \$25 and then donated the card to The Met. Burdick said that Wagner was better at finding cards he needed than he was. Wagner sent fellow veteran Lionel Carter a shoebox full of tobacco cards in 1946, which Carter promptly returned but ultimately traded Wagner back for some of the same cards.

*John D. Wagner, circa 1980, from the 1983 Sport Americana Price Guide, article by Chris Benjamin*

### **1899-1987 CHARLES BRAY**

Bray started running auctions in *CCB* in the early 1940s, took over from Burdick as *CCB* editor in 1949 and kept publishing *CCB* into the 1980s. He sold his 200,000-card collection to E.C. Wharton-Tigar in 1965. Burdick often visited Bray in Pennsylvania and was happy that Bray took over the considerable work of running *CCB*. In exchange Bray ran *CCB* consignment auctions which netted him a commission.

*Charles Bray, 1953 photo by E.C. Wharton-Tigar which appeared in Cartophilic World, Nov/Dec 1953 (Vol 10, No 108), published by CSGB, provided by Tim Thornham*



### **1900-1966 WALT CORSON**

Like Burdick, Corson collected over 300,000 cards, containing 616 complete sets. He briefly operated Collector's Haven, selling cards in Philadelphia in 1947 and 1948. In 1957 he had cancer surgery and wrote in *Sport Hobbyist* about selling his collection, for which he had spent over \$40,000. He had the T206 set complete except for Wagner, and he had 600+ duplicate sets.

Corson also collected postcards (pre-1914 only), guides and books. He said that he played minor league baseball. He was a *CCB* writer and co-editor of the *ACC*. He finally sold his collection to Frank Nagy, who mentioned Corson's zeal for collecting contributed to financial and other difficulties.

### **1900-1963 JEFFERSON R. BURDICK**

Burdick was called the "Father of Card Collecting." His life revolved around cards, and he reached out to find other collectors, first through O.C. Lightner's *Hobbies* magazine in 1935. Burdick was interested in all cards, regardless of the subjects. Ninety percent of Burdick's collection was non-sport cards. He started the *CCB* and published the every-seven-year American Card Catalogs, despite limitations due to crippling arthritis which took his life in 1963. He donated his 306,000-card collection to The Met where it resides today. Burdick wrote about his fond memories of the tobacco cards which came out around 1909, when he was a boy in Central Square, New York.

Burdick's eventual card-collecting buddies included Pennsylvanians Wagner, Bray and Corson, who were all born within a year of one another and likely collected the same sets around 1909. They returned to collecting while in their 30s, which surprisingly matches my current survey findings. Since collectors in the early days of the organized hobby were relatively young, many were still alive when the hobby became more visible in the 1970s and 1980s.

*Jefferson Burdick, 1953 photo by E.C. Wharton-Tigar which appeared in Cartophilic World, Nov/Dec 1953 (Vol 10, No 108), published by CSGB, provided by Tim Thornham*



### **1902-1971 (est.) EDWARD GOLDEN**

Golden was an early *CCB* subscriber and contacted Lionel Carter in 1938 to trade Batter-Ups and to let Carter know about Burdick's work. Unlike many of Burdick's early contacts, Golden, Carter and Wagner were strictly interested in sports cards.

### **1903-1980 HARRY KENWORTHY**

Kenworthy taught high school in California and spent summers roaming the country buying sports cards wherever he could find them. He tossed them in barrels in the back of his old station wagon, according to Carter. His collection sold for \$60,000 in 1980.

### **1905-1982 (est.) FRED BAUM**

Baum was one of the earliest *CCB* subscribers and was with Burdick in his final years in New York City, helping him paste cards into scrapbooks at The Met. He raised money to honor Burdick with a plaque at The Met.

### **1905-1985 WIRT GAMMON, SR.**



Gammon was a sports columnist for the *Chattanooga Times*, who wrote for hobby periodicals and advertised frequently to buy cards. At one point he made a deal to obtain three Wagners and three Planks.

*Wirt Gammon, Sr., from the January 31, 1976, SCD*

*Gene De Nardo, CCB 1952*



### **1910-1990 (est.) GENE DE NARDO**

De Nardo was the last surviving ACC editor. He met Burdick in Syracuse in 1947 and got involved writing articles for *CCB* and editing the 1953 ACC and the 1956 update for “recent” cards.

Lew Lipset interviewed De Nardo for a 1986 article in his *Old Judge* publication. De Nardo wrote that Burdick was highly intelligent, “He was never interested in selling his cards but preferred to trade for what he needed.”

Note that pioneer collectors liked the idea of trading. If you valued a 1909 tobacco album full of cards at \$1 and traded it for another \$1 album, both collectors were even. However, if the \$1 value really should have been \$100, and you sold the album for Burdick’s \$1 “book value,” you might soon regret it.

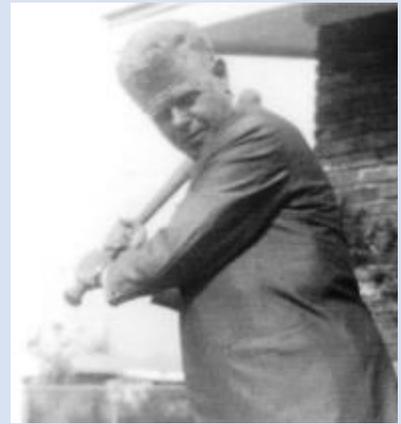
De Nardo was in touch with Burdick while he worked on mounting his collection at The Met and commented, “He told me that when he finished that job, he felt his life’s work was over, and his words were strangely prophetic.”

### **1911-1982 CHARLES “BUCK” BARKER**

Barker connected with Burdick and became a frequent hobby writer by the 1950s. His writing style was energetic, if not entirely logical or organized. He contributed many checklists for sets and was the ACC editor focused on baseball issues. One of his goals was to collect a card or photo of every player who had ever appeared in the majors, which got him into obscure and foreign sets.

He was in the St Louis Collectors Club and was generous in trading or selling his cards. Like Burdick, he would often write or stamp his name in ink on the backs of cards he sent around. Roger Neufeldt remembered that Barker would walk into a show, and club members would line up to buy cards from him.

*Buck Barker at bat 1966, photo from Buck Barker provided by Ray Medeiros*



### **1913-1995 E.C. WHARTON-TIGAR**

Wharton-Tigar was the chairman of the Cartophilic Society of Great Britain, a WWII spy, a mining company executive and wealthy enough to afford card collecting trips from England to North America. He took Bray and Burdick to a baseball game in New York. He bought Bray's collection in 1965 and accumulated two million trading cards, which he donated to the British Museum. He was likely the highest roller among the early collectors.

*E.C. Wharton-Tigar from his autobiography, Burning Bright, 1987*



### **1914-2012 GOODIE GOLDFADEN**



Goldfaden was a sports book dealer and handled cards as well. In 1925 Goodie and his brother, Jack, sold programs and pennants outside Cleveland's League Park. He decided to specialize in selling sports publications and moved to Los Angeles in 1947 where he opened Adco Sports Book Exchange. He kept selling until his death in 2012. Numerous collectors, coaches and athletes became customers, and all must have stories to tell about him. He was described as a dynamo, a bulldog, and incredibly sharp with a great memory. I bought his remaining inventory of sports hobby publications, but you could never be sure with Goodie. He told me had sold out everything he had, more times than he could remember, but that stuff had a way of finding its way to him again.

*Goodwin Goldwin advertised in many hobby publications and retained copies, 2010, photo G. Vrecek.*

### **1915-1978 WOODY GELMAN**

You might describe Woody Gelman as an artist dealing with "pulp fiction." Gelman and his business partner, Ben Solomon, were hired by Topps to develop the concepts and art for new products, especially non-sport sets. He sat with then 28-year-old Sy Berger at Berger's kitchen table developing the 1952 Topps card design. He listened to (and hired) kids like Len Brown to find out what interested his target market, much like listening to Tom Hanks in the movie "Big." Topps artists under Gelman were known for their creativity and humor which appealed to the kids. Years later, Topps employee Mike Jaspersen described them as "just nuts" – as a compliment.



*Woody Gelman, courtesy of Richard Gelman*

Starting in the 1950s, Gelman and his father-in-law, Sam Rosen, operated The Card Collectors Company dealing with Topps products. He was a big admirer of Burdick and was one of the editors for the 1953 and 1960 ACCs. He reprinted the ACC in 1967. After Gelman's death, his son Richard took over the operation.

### **1918-2008 (GEORGE) LIONEL CARTER**



*Irma and Lionel Carter at the 1977 Midwest Convention, SCNews, and at home in Evanston, Ill., photo 2003 G. Vrechek.*

Carter discovered DeLong cards in a store in his hometown of Colfax, Illinois, in 1933 and began a life-long pursuit of baseball cards. Connecting with Burdick by mail in 1938 was another milestone. Carter was a talented writer, organized and fastidious. He was an early advocate of quality, but he got along well with Buck Barker who really didn't fuss about card condition.

During WWII he had *CCB* sent to his mother and a second copy sent to him wherever the Army took him. He wound up behind enemy lines at one time in New Guinea. He kept his *CCBs* in a plastic bag and out of the mud.

He was always looking to upgrade, although he never had a card graded prior to the sale of his collection in 2006. He and his wife, Irma, met Burdick for the first time in Chicago in 1952 and drove to Syracuse to see Burdick in 1955. Carter generously shared his hobby knowledge with those of us who expressed interest and an appreciation of the hobby. My many meetings with Lionel Carter got me interested in writing more about the history of the hobby.

*Carter pointed to himself in this 1936 Colfax High School basketball team photo. In 1936, he was also looking for other collectors like Golden and Burdick, a reminder of how young some of the early collectors were and of their interest in sports. Photo 2003 G. Vrechek*



## 1919-2012 WOODY SCHARF

If you were interested in the details of exhibit cards, Elwood “Woody” Scharf was the man to check with. His series of articles about exhibits, written 40 years ago for *The Trader Speaks* magazine, showed his organization and understanding of the complicated approach of the Exhibit Supply Company. He also wrote about the timing of the 1933 Goudeys as he bought them at stores through October 1933.

*Elwood Scharf in 1973, Sport Fan*



## AND THERE WERE MORE

Some of the other names which appeared in the earliest days of the hobby include Larry Kurzrok, Ed Lancaster, Howard Leheup, Stan McClure, Howard M. Myers, A.O. Philipp, Harold Ross, Samuel Tanenbaum, Fanny Troyer, Donald Van Brakle, Steve Vanco and Jake Wise.

## THEIR COLLECTIVE COLLECTIONS

Eighteen pioneer collectors have been listed with only a few sentences about each without even getting to their families or careers. Few of them were wealthy, and they spent modest amounts on their collections. They met one another, perhaps, only a few times.

However, among just these 18 people, they likely had more vintage cards than we can even imagine – Burdick (300,000), Corson (300,000), Bray (200,000), E.C. Wharton-Tigar (2,000,000), Carter (50,000), Orem (50,000) plus likely hundreds of thousands more among the other 12 collectors. They had T206 complete sets, nineteenth century tobacco cards, Goudeys, Topps and rare cards now housed in museums. The 18 probably owned nearly every known sports card issued before 1960. To duplicate their collections today would be even more expensive than getting a decent left-handed starting pitcher under an extended-term major league contract.

In Part Two, we will cover collectors born between 1920 and 1939.

# Collecting though the ages, a chronology of hobby pioneers,

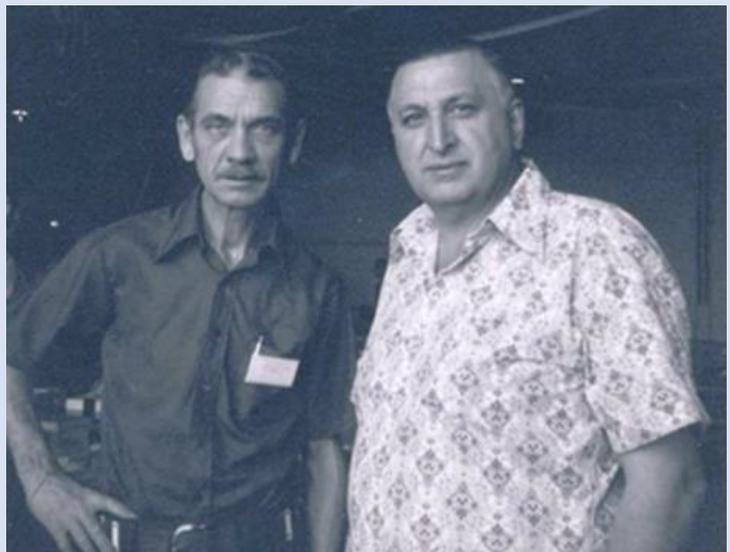
## Part Two

By George Vrechek

*Bob Jaspersen and Frank Nagy at the 1975 Detroit Convention, Photo Mike Jaspersen*

In Part One of this article, I started to organize the pioneer sport card collectors I have written about in *SCD*. I started with brief bios for collectors born before 1920. Part Two covers collectors born between 1920 and 1939. Since I have only listed collectors I have

written about previously, readers are encouraged to report other candidates (born before 1940) who contributed significantly to the hobby for an “update set.”



## 1920-1982 BOB JASPERSEN



*As a reminder of how young and sports-oriented many of the early collectors were, Bob Jaspersen on the far left captained his high school hockey team in Wisconsin in 1939. Equipment and substitutes were scarce. Photo – Mike Jaspersen*

Jaspersen was a four-sport high school athlete in Wisconsin who became a sportswriter in Minneapolis/St. Paul and Philadelphia. Jaspersen contracted tuberculosis in 1939 and spent the next two years in hospitals or sanitariums. While in isolation, he wrote about sports cards and guides and tried to find other collectors with a one-page newsletter called “Bill and Bob’s.”

In 1951, he started *Sport Fan*, one of the first publications directed at the sport card collector and published *Sport Fan Who’s Who* directories in the 1950s. He wrote with enthusiasm and humor. He attended and reported on the first gatherings of collectors in the late 1960s and early 1970s and kept *Sport Fan* going, with some interruptions, until 1977. His son Mike Jaspersen and grandson Nick have continued in the business of sports cards.

## 1920-2013 RAY HESS

Hess attended Babe Ruth’s last game played as a Boston Brave against the Philadelphia Phillies in 1935, a year in which the Phillies drew all of 205,470 fans to the Baker Bowl. Hess and his buddies could find

plenty of good open seats and watched Ruth hit three long ones over the 60-foot-high right field wall – in batting practice.

Hess moved to California in 1941. In 1958, he was presented with a big box of Bell Brand Dodgers by a grocery store supplier which helped him corner that market. He attended the first shows at Jim Nowell's house in Brea, California, in 1969 and 1970 and became friends with stadium postcard collector Ray Medeiros. Hess once bought a T206 Wagner for \$150, which Lionel Carter had taken a pass on as being too pricey. He sold much of his extensive collection to long-time friend Don Ortolani (born 1939).

*Ray Hess at the Babe Ruth Museum, photo Ray Medeiros*



### **1922-1994 FRANK NAGY**

Frank Nagy loved to collect cards in quantity such as Walt Corson's collection, which had grown to 400,000 cards by the time Nagy purchased it in 1966 for \$4,000. The Corson purchase stretched his finances and the shocks on his Oldsmobile. He was involved in the earliest Detroit area shows and joined Charles Brooks publishing *Sport Hobbyist* magazine. From 1963 to 1967 *Sport Hobbyist* produced clearly marked reprints of famous cards from Nagy's own collection. He auctioned his duplicates and stored everything in his basement. He didn't mind spending money on cards, or that prices were increasing. He wanted to obtain at least one card from every known set. Nagy was known as a shrewd trader – and a nice guy and valued mentor.

### **1921-2010 HAROLD ESCH**

Esch started collecting in 1933 and was a Wagner and Plank short of completing the T206s. He was a hobby writer starting with a column in the *Trading Post* in 1946. He was quite the lawn bowler as well.

*Harold Esch, pictured in the 1967 ALBA Bowls magazine, with his lawn bowling award.*



### **1922-2007 HARRY LILIEN**

Harry was just a kid when he and his brother Sid started trading cards with Jefferson Burdick and Carter. In 1938, he became the 47<sup>th</sup> subscriber to Burdick's *Card Collector's Bulletin*. By 1940 he was researching and reporting on tobacco issues in *CCB*. He went off to war and collecting went on hold, but (like Carter) he still got his *CCBs*. In 1948 he was back at it, helping form the Cigarette Card Collectors Society with Lawrence Kurzrok in New York City. He then dropped out of collecting until returning in the 1970s.

Al Rosen (Mr. Mint) bought Harry and Sid's collection and called it one of the finest conditioned collections he had ever purchased. Rosen's humorous account of the purchase described how the Liliens didn't just lay all their cards on the kitchen table but would emerge with cards in spurts out of a mysterious back room. It took Rosen eight or nine visits to buy what he could. Rosen said that he offered the Liliens \$200 just to look into the back room.

*Harry Lilien during WWII, photo Lilien family*

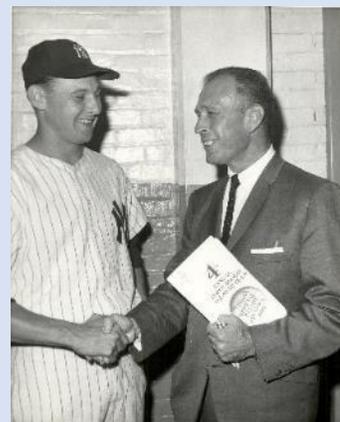


### 1923-2014 SY BERGER

Sy Berger told me, "I was never a collector. I was a gatherer." Nonetheless no hobby history can neglect to mention Sy Berger. Following WWII, Berger returned to Bucknell to finish his last year of college. He became friends with Joel Shorin, son of Phil Shorin with Topps. Joel Shorin persuaded Berger to join him in the family business at Topps. Berger quickly got things done, signing players to appear on Topps cards and making friends with players, owners, league presidents and clubhouse people. He worked with Gelman to produce the first of many successful Topps products, the 1952 baseball set.

Berger was a great interviewee with a non-stop stream of interesting stories. With the help of his family, I wrote about his life which appeared in the September 19, 2014, *SCD*. He died December 14, 2014.

*Tom Tresh of the Yankees and Sy Berger, 1962 photo Sy Berger*



### 1923-2009 BOB SOLON

Solon's childhood memories of collecting Goudeys were rekindled in the 1950s when, as a teacher, one of his high school students showed him some cards. Solon got back into collecting quickly. He visited Carter when Buck Barker and Charles Bray came to Chicago in 1958. They sat around Carter's kitchen table talking and trading cards. Solon visited Chicago-area card manufacturers like Exhibit Supply Company. When the well ran dry on new sets, he and a few friends created their own with some 1969 and 1970 non-licensed issues with made-up names like LaPizza Royale and Fud's Photography. Despite selling the bulk of his collection in 1979, he retained his enthusiasm for baseball, putting together new sets and talking and writing about collecting and baseball.

*Bob Solon in his basement of cards in 2003, photo G. Vrechek*



### 1926-2010 RAY BILLBROUGH

Billbrough of Flushing, Michigan, had a bio in Lerner's Who's Who. Like many collectors, he was in his early 30s before he resumed collecting in 1958. He had accumulated 25,000 cards by 1970.

Around 1953, he worked in a sporting goods store which sold baseball gloves. Inserted with the gloves were five or six baseball cards. Billbrough wound up with 2,750 of the cards. He carefully selected a run of 97 cards and destroyed the rest. He mentions that they were burned, which is the way our family handled "recycling" paper products at the time. We had a wire basket near the alley to use for such torching.

Sy Berger handled dumping cases of unsold 1952 Topps high numbers in the ocean. The 2,653 cards leftover which Billbrough burned were also 1952 Topps high numbers. I'll guess there were about 54 mint double-printed Mantles in the fire. Oh, well.

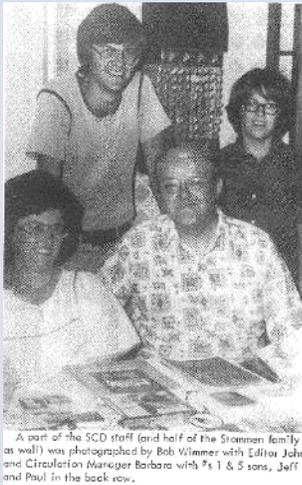
## 1928 FRANK KEETZ



Keetz of Schenectady, New York, started collecting in the late 1930s and dealt with most of the hobby pioneers. He discovered the hobby again and attended a 1970 show run by Gelman. "One thing led to another," Keetz confessed as he went antiquing.

Keetz gravitated into a niche of sport cards, the comic postcards and tobacco inserts. His initial attraction was their affordability and history. Keetz taught high school history and social studies. He has written the book, so to speak, having put together five guides on these postcards. He still had a table at his local show until the pandemic hit.

*Frank Keetz still taking a table, 2012 photo Keetz*



A part of the SCD staff (and half of the Stommen family as well) was photographed by Bob Wimmer with Editor John and Circulation Manager Barbara with the 1 & 3 sons, Jeff and Paul in the back row.

## 1931-2001 JOHN STOMMEN

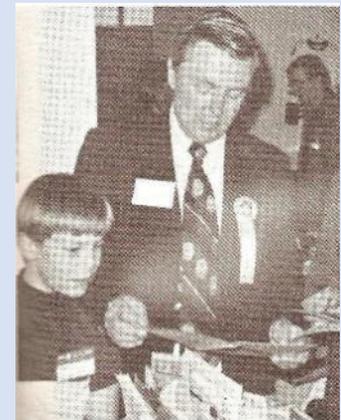
Stommen of Milan, Michigan, started *Sports Collectors Digest* in 1973. Several new hobby publications emerged in the 1970s and Stommen was likely the oldest of the publishers at age 43. His sons were collectors and helped produce *SCD*, initially from the family's kitchen table. The Stommens also ran the local newspaper and an agricultural radio network. He sold *SCD* to Chet Krause in 1981. *The Trader Speaks* was sold to *SCD* in 1983.

*The Stommens made putting out SCD a family affair. photo SCD*

## 1931-2021 BILL LOUGHMAN

Loughman of Elmhurst, Illinois, collected cards, but also had a penchant for finding old sports sections and photos. During his airline piloting days, he would look for opportunities to pick up unwanted accumulations from media companies looking to purge their archives. He also visited Goldfaden, Barker, Gelman and other hobby pioneers. He still had a few piles of pulp when I last talked to him in early 2021.

*Bill Loughman at a show with his son Mike, Chicagoland Sports Expo program 1973*



## 1934-2021 RAY MEDEIROS

Ray Medeiros was responsible for putting me in touch with several veteran collectors. Medeiros always connected with people in the hobby as a collector, store operator, publisher, show organizer, collector of Ted Williams articles and expert on stadium postcards and photographs.

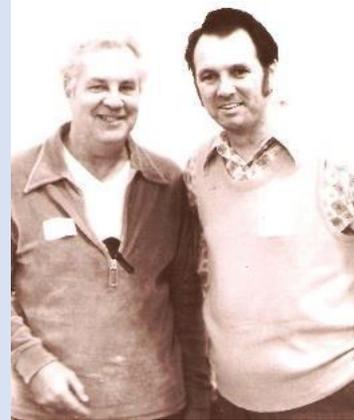
Medeiros started collecting Playballs in 1941. He discovered newspapers from 1891 to 1943 in an abandoned home in Fall River, Mass., and organized and preserved the sport sections. Medeiros spent 13 years in the Air Force in such far-off posts as Greenland and Morocco, yet managed to connect with

Frank Jock, Goodie Goldfaden, Howard Leheup and Buck Barker during that era. Collector Mel Bailey (born 1933) was a fellow soldier who became a friend. Hess, Jaspersen and Medeiros became friends as well, and all attended Jim Nowell's 1970 hobby gathering.

Medeiros helped organize several "Stadiapex" meetings where stadium postcard collectors could buy, sell, trade and chat. He created a set of postcards called Way Back When, featuring old ball parks. He wrote me, "Careful, collecting stadium postcards is like eating peanuts – once you start, it's hard to stop."

Ray passed away on October 5, 2021, in Colorado Springs. His daughter, Anne Marshall, wrote me about a tour of Fenway Park with her dad, "I remember being in awe of my dad...as I observed the ease with which he interacted with strangers and friends, sharing his data bank of knowledge, jumping from subject-to-subject: ballparks, ball players, ball trivia, time and again. He was truly happy, being with others who loved the sport and its history as much as he did."

*Ray Hess and Ray Medeiros in 1973, photo Medeiros*



### **1935 BILL WHITE**

Bill White wrote me that he keeps a low profile, but White's name pops up frequently in the history of the hobby. He started collecting in the late 1940s.

Bob Thing, Dan Even and White maintained a master checklist of the Philadelphia Phillies. White wrote me last year about his late friend Irv Lerner, "I lived in the Philadelphia suburbs and Irv came out to the house early in his collecting days, and I kind of flabbergasted him with the collection I'd made by that time. We became pretty good friends, went out to dinner at many of the shows we attended, and he and his family came down to our place in Ocean City, New Jersey, for the couple of years that Bob Schmierer had a show on the Music Pier there."

### **1936-2007 LARRY FRITSCH**

Fritsch went from an avid, young collector to one of the earliest full-time dealers - Larry Fritsch Cards. Fritsch bought collections, bid in auctions and bought cases directly from manufacturers. Thousands of Topps high-numbered 1972 football cards came his way via a purchase late in the season. He advertised extensively and published a catalog which distinguished prices for different card conditions and for stars when such distinctions were not common. His prices could be robust; he had his own feeling for values and contributed his knowledge to the SCD price guides. He also produced collector issues with reprints of old sets or new concepts like the "One Year Wonders."

On my way through Wisconsin in 1982, I stopped into his store, located behind his house outside Stevens Point. His "store" was a warehouse for his millions of cards, and he wasn't really set up to deal with a few obscure cards at a time from a collector's wantlist. I must have looked disappointed as I returned to my car empty handed. Fritsch came hustling after me and gave me a handful of cards that he thought I might like. It was a nice gesture.



*Larry Fritsch and Kit Young met in Stevens Point, SCD*

## 1936-2020 IRV LERNER



Irv Lerner, Goody Goldfaden and Lloyd Toerpe looking over a scrapbook of Irv's treasures.



*Irv Lerner, Goodie Goldfaden and Lloyd Toerpe photographed at an early show, Sports Fan (left)*

*Long-time table holder Irv Lerner at the 2008 National Convention, photo G. Vrechek (right)*

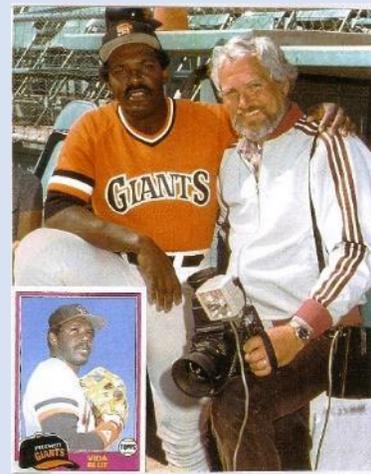
As a kid in Philadelphia, Lerner had a good source for mint cards. His dad ran a cigar store which sold cards. By the time baseball cards appeared after WWII, Lerner was old enough to keep them in good shape. He reentered the hobby in 1959 and met nearby collector Bill White. He bought cards from Goldfaden, Gelman, Fritsch and Bruce Yeko. He collected and reported on variations, and he thought about ways to connect with collectors. His solution was to publish "Who's Who in Card Collecting" in 1970 and 1971 which remains a great source for information on many early collectors. Lerner took a table at each National Convention to sell his accumulation of cards in great condition.

## 1937 DOUG McWILLIAMS

I have written about Doug McWilliams' experience in photographing athletes, but he has also been a significant collector. Along with neighbor Dick Dobbins (born 1934), he had a particular interest in cards from teams in the San Francisco Bay Area. His efforts to photograph players from the stands led him from the Oakland Oaks to the Oakland A's and producing postcards for sensational rookie Vida Blue. McWilliams' work caught the eye of Topps, and he was hired to photograph players in the 1970s and 1980s in Arizona spring training. He produced postcards for primarily Oakland players to use for fan correspondence in the 1970s and 1980s.

SABR selected McWilliams as the winner of the 2021 Jefferson Burdick Award, commenting on "his willingness to pull back the curtain and show us the process of how photographs end up on cards."

*Doug McWilliams with one of his first sports customers, Vida Blue. McWilliams took the photo used for Blue's 1981 Topps card, photo D. McWilliams*



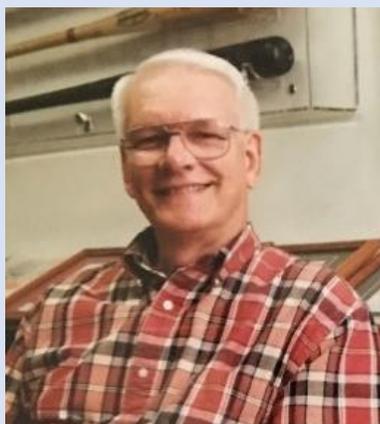
## 1938-2020 LLOYD TOERPE



As he reported in *Ballcard Collector* published by George Martin (born 1939), Toerpe was among the organizers of a gathering of 10 collectors in October 1969. Like a progressive dinner, the group moved on from Toerpe's home in Flint, Michigan, to the home of two other collectors. The group morphed into the early Detroit-area shows which drew nearly 500 people by 1971.

Toerpe was interested in cards, photos and publications. He quickly got back to the tobacco inserts, regionals as well as current sets. He collected guides and NFL Record Manuals.

*Carol and Lloyd Toerpe hosted the 1973 Detroit convention, Sports Fan*



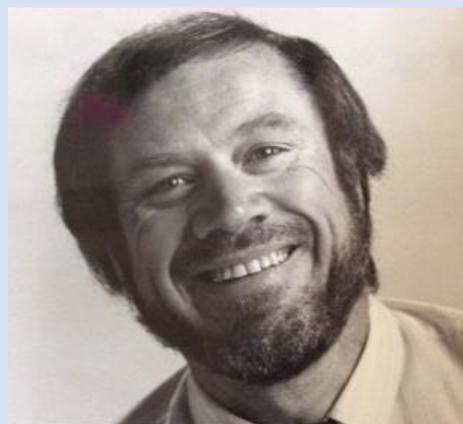
## 1939 GAR MILLER

*Gar Miller in 2002, photo David Hunsinger*

Miller started collecting 1949 Bowmans while living across the river from Philadelphia in New Jersey. In 1953 he inherited his father's tobacco card collection. Unfortunately, he sold several cards for 20 cents each including a Ty Cobb. However, he kept collecting through high school and buying cards advertised in *Grandstand Manager* and the *Sport Hobbyist*.

He played baseball and basketball in college. In the Army he was stationed in New York City and assigned to write publicity. He got to meet Jackie Robinson.

Just about the time he thought he might sell his collection, he met Lerner and jumped back in. He got to the early 1970s shows, went on buying trips and wrote a 1973 book "Baseball Cards." Miller said that he collected what came his way. He continues to stay involved, still running ads in *SCD* selling vintage baseball and football cards.



## 1939 DWIGHT CHAPIN

*Dwight Chapin in the 1980s, photo Dwight Chapin*

Chapin started collecting in 1948 in Lewiston, Idaho. He retained his interest in cards, autographs, sports and writing about sports. His Ty Cobb autograph came directly from Cobb. The widows of Babe Ruth and Christy Mathewson sent him canceled checks signed by their husbands.

His career as a West Coast sportswriter spanned from 1956 to 2005. He met other California hobby people including Goldfaden, Medeiros, Nowell, Mike Berkus and Steve Brunner.

His 1974 article about sports cards, while he was with the *Los Angeles Times*, made national news and did much to boost the visibility of the hobby. He sold his cards through Lew Lipset 25 years ago. He lives in Mill Valley, California.

## OTHERS

The listing only includes collectors I have previously mentioned in articles. Many others also appear frequently in hobby literature such as: Bob Rolfe (born 1921), Charles Blazina (1923), Vic Witte (1931), Tom Collier (1932), Roland Villard (1934), Ron Menchine (1934), Lee Temanson (1938), Tom Reid (1938), John Fawcett, Owen Ricker and Barry Halper (all 1939).

In addition to collectors mentioned in hobby publications, many others were less visible. Maybe they just liked to read about the hobby. Maybe their mothers never tossed out their cards, and they didn't have to recapture their childhood collections by advertising or trading. Maybe they didn't know there was anyone else interested in old cardboard. You can't assume that there weren't others with significant collections. People don't like to advertise that they have Honus Wagner cards in their dens.

## YOUNGSTERS

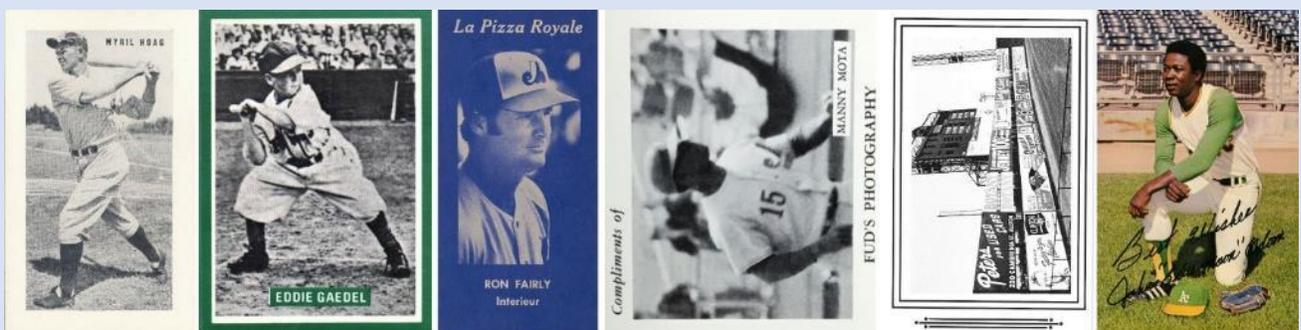
Names come to mind of others who were in the hobby for what seems like forever. However, many were born too recently to be included in Part Two.

Those born in the 1940s (to the best of my information) include Bruce Yeko, Pat Quinn, Charles Brooks, John Thom, Bob Schmierer, Jim Beckett, Rich Egan, Steve Mitchell, Ted Taylor, Mike Aronstein, Jack Smalling, John England, Len Brown, Bob Thing, Eric Lange, Dan Even, Fred McKie, Jack Urban, Roger Neufeldt, Lew Lipset, Bill Haber, Bob Schulhof, Jim Nowell, Jim Zak, Gavin Riley, Gary Cyprus, Charles Brooks, George Husby, John Rumierz, Jay Barry, Dan Dischley, Al Rosen, Paul Marchant, B.A. Murry, Roger Marth, Don Steinbach, Barry Newman, Dick Reuss, Jim McConnell and all those who I haven't had a chance to write about - yet.

I guarantee, I have missed naming some other collectors born before 1950 who have been prominent in the hobby. I apologize in advance for the omissions.

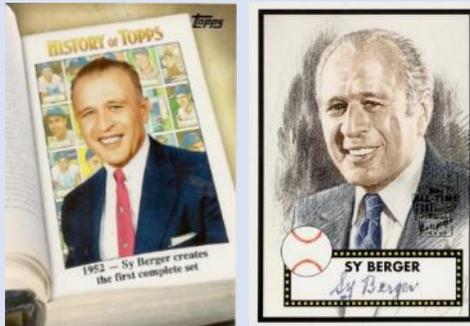
## WITNESSING DRAMATIC GROWTH

I don't believe any of the individuals featured in Part Two had ever met Jefferson Burdick. However, many had contact with other early pioneers like Corson, Carter, Barker, Goldfaden and Gammon. Several were sportswriters, and most of them wrote for hobby publications. They lived from coast to coast (plus Greenland and Morocco). They collected the "recent" gum cards as kids and as young adults witnessed the growth of the hobby and the emergence of shows and publications. During the span of their collecting years, prices increased dramatically, card condition and third-party grading became factors and the internet emerged. They kept collecting through it all and have had interesting stories to tell.



Many of the boys had an urge to create their own card sets –left to right - Nagy’s own Famous Cards, Fritsch’s One Year Wonders and Solon’s LaPizza Royale and Fud Photography, Medeiros’ Way Back When postcards and McWilliams A’s postcards.

Sy Berger didn’t need to produce collector sets. Topps produced the cards for him, including a few of Berger himself.



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This article appeared in the January 1, 2022, and February 1, 2022, SCDs; a big OBC thank you to Sports Collectors Digest (SCD) for allowing us to reprint George's article here on the OBC site.

## Pioneer fan mail

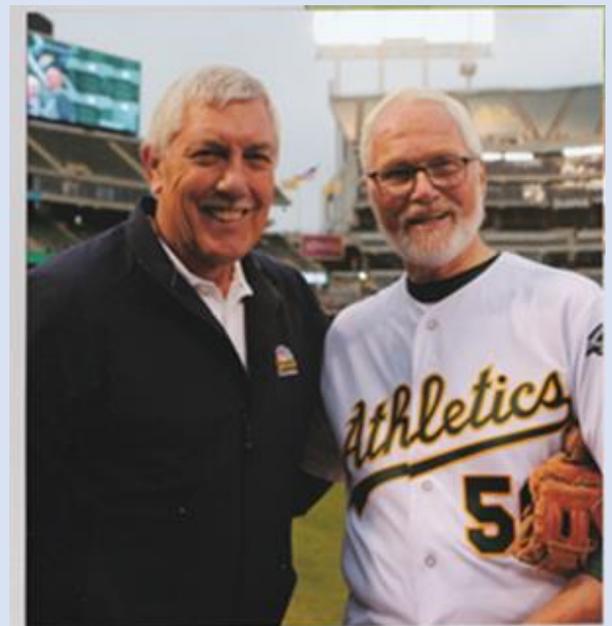
### Part Three



By George Vrechek

The hobby pioneers articles in the January 1 and February 1, 2022, SCDs generated several nice responses from readers about long-time collectors.

The late Ray Fosse (left) with pioneer collector Doug McWilliams. Photo by Christine Kroeckel/Oakland Athletics



When collectors look at cards they collected as kids, it brings back memories of the enjoyable, relatively brief days of one’s youth when we were opening packs, trading and trying to find cards of our favorites on a meager budget. Likewise, when the names and faces of long-time collectors are published, it apparently brings back memories of the early days of collecting as an adult when we discovered there was a hobby with other collectors, dealers and eventually shows and the internet. We might even think nostalgically about the prices from the early days of the hobby and whatever budget we may have had.

I invited readers to let me know about their experiences with long-time hobbyists. Here are some of their comments.

#### 95-YEAR-OLD COLLECTOR PAUL HILL

Rob Rugel wrote:

I know it's very hard to capture all of the collectors from that time period, but one big omission is a relative of my wife Gina - Paul Hill and his wife Rose of Southampton, Pennsylvania. Paul, who is now 95 years young, had an extensive collection of game used uniforms and bats from professional MLB players. He has since sold that collection. Unfortunately, the only item I ever saw was a Cracker Jack uniform that Joe DiMaggio gave to him personally. Joe D was Paul's favorite player.

Paul was also featured with a full-page article in *SCD*; I believe in the '90s. That's when I first learned of Paul. I have been lucky enough to get to know Paul the last 25 plus years. One of the things that impressed me about Paul is that he had baseball cards on the ceiling of his basement to look at when you arrived in his man cave. He also had impeccable baseball scrap books for all teams and special players. Paul had a huge selection of autographs that we used to trade. When I visit Paul, he will always tell me stories of all the great players he met over the years including Ty Cobb, Ted Williams and even Joe Louis. He met Babe Ruth at a Philadelphia sports writers' banquet.



Paul Hill

## PHOTOS OF WALT CORSON STILL MISSING

Richard Rubin reported on also trying to find photos of pioneer collector Walt Corson (1900-1966):

My search has turned up nada, zilch. I've checked my publications from the '40s, '50s, '60s and '70s (and my collection from those years is extensive), no photos in any of them. All of the *CCBs* were an easy search - no pictures at all. Some periodicals, such as *The Sports Hobbyist*, which Charles Brooks started in 1956, offered more hope. *The Sports Hobbyist* has several photos of collectors in most issues, and I'm surprised that Corson isn't among them.

## BUYING FROM GAMMON AND BRAY

Featured pioneer Gar Miller, wrote:

Most of the (pioneers) were just before I got entrenched, but two I dealt with quite a bit. I was a buyer of Wirt Gammon's 25-cent T206 tobacco card specials as a young collector, and I was a regular participant in Charles Bray's auctions. There must have been a minimal number of subscribers because I frequently won lots that included complete sets - i.e., 1959 Topps set for \$50. You never knew quite what the condition would be, but I was just in an accumulating mode and that was perfect for me. I knew of many of these people though through a subscription to *Grandstand Manager*. There was a classified section in the back, and I used to correspond with collectors as far back as the 1950s when I was still in high school.

## STRONGSVILLE PROMOTER

Clay Pasternack wrote:

I have been a subscriber of *SCD* since 1975, and I was a dealer, collector and show promoter for over 40 years. It was very enjoyable to read the two articles on the hobby legends. Some of the first group I was fortunate enough to trade or buy from, most particularly Goodwin Goldfaden, who is a story all to himself! Many of the names of the youngsters(!) in your last article are people who I traded with, bought from or were table holders at our Strongsville, Ohio, shows during our run from 1978 - 2000. I had never had contact with Bruce Yeko until about 5 years ago, as he started and has owned a record

label of original cast Broadway and off-Broadway shows, and I contacted him regarding some music industry business.

I guess I missed the cutoff for your youngsters group, but I was born in 1950, and my two partners for our show Geoff Sindelar (born 1947 or '48), now deceased, and a former major Cleveland sports talk show host) and Mike Roether (born in 1960 and had his picture in *SCD* as one of the youngest dealers in 1974) would fall into that group as well. Our circuit of shows by the mid - late 1970s were the Troy Hilton in Detroit, one of the hotels in the suburbs of Cincinnati, Grove City, Pa., and then our show in Cleveland. As a collector, I bought cards every week from George Husby and did a lot of trading and buying with Pat Quinn and Jim Beckett.

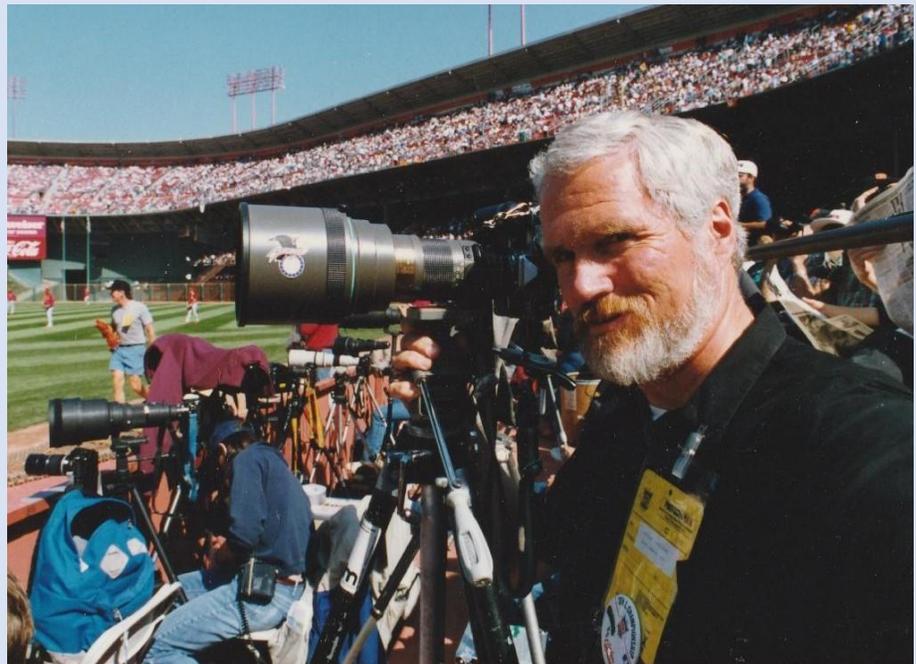
### **SURPRISED TO BE A PIONEER**

Doug McWilliams wrote, "Thank you for including me in your recent two-part article. I have enjoyed reading about all the collectors from the past. Surprised I am considered a pioneer but looking at the number '84' written down these days also surprises me."

McWilliams went from doing photos from the stands to photographing players for Topps, the Oakland A's and others. I asked McWilliams, if he had a photo or two, I could share with *SCD* readers, since, as a professional photographer, he would likely agree that a picture is worth a thousand words. He shared two photos of interest.

*Doug McWilliams at work.  
Photo from the files of DM.*

McWilliams threw out the first pitch at the A's 50th Anniversary announcement of their Coffee Table book in 2018, along with two other photographers. The late Ray Fosse (A's color commentator and 12-year MLB catcher) served as his catcher. McWilliams added, "I'd known Ray since 1972, and he caught me that evening, very special for me."



### **ATTENDED NOWELL'S EARLY SHOWS**

Ken Willey of Southern California attended the third show run by Jim Nowell in 1971 and wrote:

I doubt most collectors of today realize how difficult it was to locate the established hobby, in the decades before the 1980s. I was a typical baseball card collector as a young teen around 1969. I would walk a few blocks to a liquor store to buy some packs of cards, every now and then. I usually found some glass bottles along the way and turned them in for their deposits. That gave me money to buy even more cards. Anyway, I was getting too old to collect cards, so one day I drove my bicycle into town (Glendora, California) to visit our small city library. (It was across the street from the Frank Chance/Cub building.) I looked through *The Sporting News* and noticed some ads by baseball card companies. One of them was Larry Fritsch Cards. I purchased some old Topps through

its catalogs for a while, until my lucky break came. One of their catalogs featured an ad by the magazine, *The Ballcard Collector*. I finally found the organized hobby.

I attended the third and final convention held at the Nowells' home in Brea, California, in 1971. I was then 15 years old. I displayed several of my 1940 Play Ball cards on their kitchen table. I recall some collectors at the show telling me that they never saw them before.

I occasionally won high-number 1952 Topps, from Charles Bray's auctions. My interest in them was for trade purposes, as a couple big time collectors from back East, really prized them. I belonged to the Sports Card Collectors Club in Garden Grove, California, in the early 1970s. I often set up a table selling my duplicates. Goodwin Goldfaden often wheeled and dealt for my sport books. I last saw him at a library book sale in Whittier around 1996. He was there with his wife. He had a large box with him and just automatically tossed into it all the sports related books. I recall being impressed by how Goldfaden was still so actively involved in collecting or accumulating books.



*Ken Willey attended the 1971 Nowell show and is shown here at Angel Stadium of Anaheim.*

## **COLLECTING IN WISCONSIN**

Tom Biernasz of Peshtigo, Wisconsin, wrote:

I either recognize or met many of the people that were mentioned in the articles. I met Larry Fritsch at the first card show I attended in 1981. I didn't buy anything from him but did ask him what he thought about the current hot topic of PVC in plastic sheets. His response was that his cards have been in those sheets for years, and that he had no intention of removing them because the removal process would cause more damage to the cards than the sheets. (Years later, his son Jeff, gave me a tour of their card shop/warehouse facility in Stevens Point. I remember being amazed at seeing so many cases of sports cards stacked so high that a forklift was needed to reach the top shelf!) It was at this show that I/we (my brother attended with me) made our first purchase from a non-dealer. An individual was trying to sell a cigar box of cards to the dealers, but for some reason he wasn't succeeding, so we approached him and ended up buying the cards for \$125. The cards were some nice 1953 Topps and Bowman cards with plenty of stars. Both Mantles were there, and I still have the Topps one in my collection. Unfortunately, I traded the Bowman Mantle because at the time we were only interested in Topps cards.

Most of my childhood collection was accumulated by purchases from a couple of small-town stores, swapping cards with other kids and mail orders from The Trading Card Company. I would send whatever change I had for cards I needed to complete my sets and for the most part there wasn't any differentiation between commons and stars.

## **PIONEERS AND PRICES**

Matt Gardner, Columbus, Ohio wrote:

I really enjoyed your articles on collectors. I met a few of them through the years at shows and even a few at the 1980 National - Bob Jaspersen, Frank



Nagy and Lionel Carter all had written or talked to Jefferson Burdick...who would get mad at Nagy and Lionel both because they would raise the price of cards on accident. Frank was such a great guy and so was Lionel; they both would give us kids cards. I received my first T206 from Lionel. I sure do miss these guys you mention.

### **ROSE AND MANTLES FROM GELMAN**

Bruce Nason of Vero Beach, Florida, wrote:

I have been collecting Pete Rose exclusively since I was 9 in 1969. Even at that young age, I had enough foresight to backorder all of Pete Rose's cards to when he was a rookie. That's why I was surprised to see Woody Gelman of The Card Collectors Company in this article. That was the company I bought my cards from. They sent me the wrong 1963 rookie card, and my mother called them. Somebody told her they were sending the last Rose rookie card they had. Amazing what you remember, sometimes. My brother and I also ordered the 5th and 6th series from them in 1969, and we both ended up with the white letter Mickey Mantle cards which we both still own to this day!

### **WAGNER ON WAGNER**

Phil Vigs found it interesting that John D. Wagner had given a T206 Wagner to Jefferson Burdick. I shared with him an excerpt from Burdick's *Card Collector's Bulletin* about subscriber John Wagner who reported that on August 12, 1941, the Pittsburgh Pirates played a game in his hometown against the Harrisburg Pennsylvania Senators.

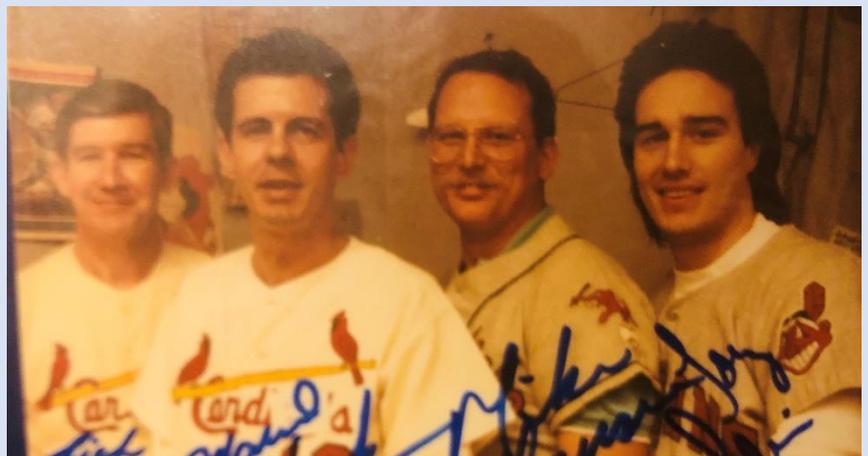
John Wagner wrote, "I had the great pleasure of talking with old Honus Wagner. The lowdown on the cigarette card is that he would not let them put his picture on such cards since he did not think an athlete should smoke. I found the old boy is still pretty active, and he gave me his autograph with fancy scrolls and letters due to our name similarity. I am sure glad to get the straight dope on this long unverified statement." However, old Honus may not have been completely honest with collector Wagner as to "free" use versus smoke-free likely being the root of his problem.

### **ST. LOUIS DEALER MARVIN HUICK**

Tony Lewis wrote:

*Left to right: Richard Leech, Marvin Huck, Mike Stewart and Tony Lewis, 1980s – photo Tony Lewis*

Wanted to share with you another hobby great, in Marvin Huck. Marvin is second from the left in the photo attached. This photo is about 40 years old, taken at the Holiday Inn show in St. Louis, Missouri.



Little background. I am the kid on the far right (I'm 60 now!). In 1982 I worked for Piedmont Airlines in Winston Salem, NC. I was 22 years old and would fly back to St. Louis a couple times a year to attend the awesome baseball card shows there on Lindbergh Ave. On one of the early trips, I entered the first ballroom and, as Marvin always had the first table on the left as you go in the door, he was one of the first people I would see. He saw that I was lugging a suitcase around, and he kindly asked if I would like to put it behind his table so I could walk the show in relative comfort. That led to a

friendship that led to me sitting with him, Rich Leech and Mike Stewart at their table for the next several years when I was in town.

Most guys in the hobby at that time were so stingy with knowledge. Marvin was the opposite. If an item came in, or we had a question about scarcity or value of a collectible, Marvin would share what he knew with not just us but anyone. I witnessed him on several occasions pay a walk-in, a fair value instead of just 'stealing' an item because the owner had no clue as to the value. We had so much fun at those shows.

Marvin was a wonderful man that loved the hobby. We used to sit at the table and laugh about how serious some dealers took themselves. I had a banner made with his tag line 'Long time hobbyist, big name dealer,' which hung at the shows for many years. Marvin has since passed on, but he left quite a legacy with those of us who knew him. He was a preeminent St. Louis Cardinals collector in the '80s and '90s. I think he sold the majority of his collection and donated the proceeds to a family favorite charity.

Anyway, read your article and it caused a flood of great memories. Keep up the great work!

## **THE QUEST**

Former Bulls and Lakers coach Phil Jackson, the "Zen Master," wrote in "Hoop Dreams" that it is all about the quest, the journey. The destination keeps moving ahead of us. Collectors, like those responding to the pioneer articles, have gathered memories of their quests. They remember the good times along the way and the people who made it an enjoyable activity.

*George Vrechek is a freelance contributor to SCD and can be contacted at [vrechek@ameritech.net](mailto:vrechek@ameritech.net).*

*This article appeared in the June 1, 2022, SCD; a big OBC thank you to Sports Collectors Digest (SCD) for allowing us to reprint George's article here on the OBC site.*