

George Husby has seen it all, but keeps looking anyway

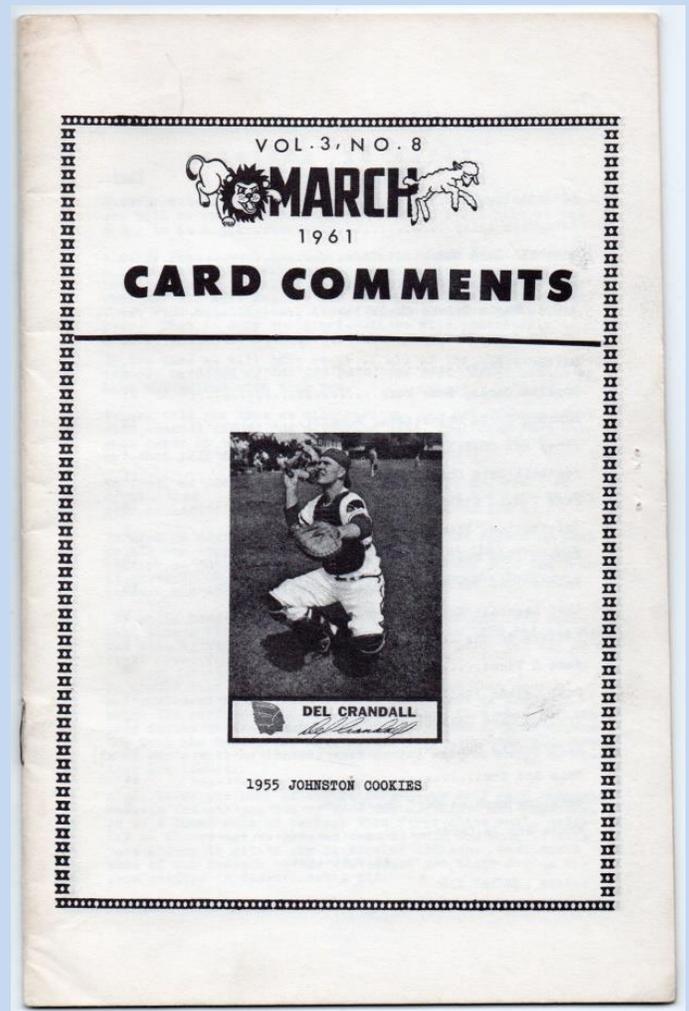


By George Vrechek

George Husby is a name that I remember seeing for the first time in 1959 in *Card Comments* magazine published by Gordon B. Taylor of New York City.

George and I had the same first name and were the same age - 14. He was in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, and I was in Chicago. Taylor's little publication reached many young card collectors during its brief existence between 1958 and 1961. Each month Taylor would have an eight-question quiz. Subscribers would respond. Husby would usually get 6, 7 or 8 answers right each month.

Husby has no clue today as to what the quiz prize, if any, may have been. However, he did retain an uninterrupted interest in collecting, and consequently he experienced many of the fledgling hobby activities of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.



The Card Comments March 1961 issue had Johnston Braves on the front and Husby's bio in their Who's Who section.

Husby sold his collection in 2005, but has remained active in the hobby by keeping an eye out for collections and unusual cards and selling a little sports memorabilia at a local antique mall. He contacted me recently about some cards he had uncovered. Of course, this first conversation about collecting led to another. I thought his experiences as a collector would interest others as well. (I also realized I have written about long-time collectors for so long, that the collectors I am now writing about are my age. How did that happen?)

W H O ' S W H O I N C A R D S

JACK URBAN - 1001 Division St.,
Algoma, Wisconsin.

Jack is 19 years old and attends Kewaunee Teachers College where he is a sophomore. He started collecting in 1950 and is in a partnership with another collector--Ed Toppe. Between them the collection amounts to 30,000 cards, with the favorite sets being non-sport sets, and they have many for trading. Jack is an avid sports fan and during the summer he plays baseball for a fast-moving college-loaded team. Jack would like to hear from other collectors so get out your pens and pencils and drop him a line.



Husby's long-time friend, Jack Urban, was also featured in Card Comments.

Not all cards made their way to Sturgeon Bay

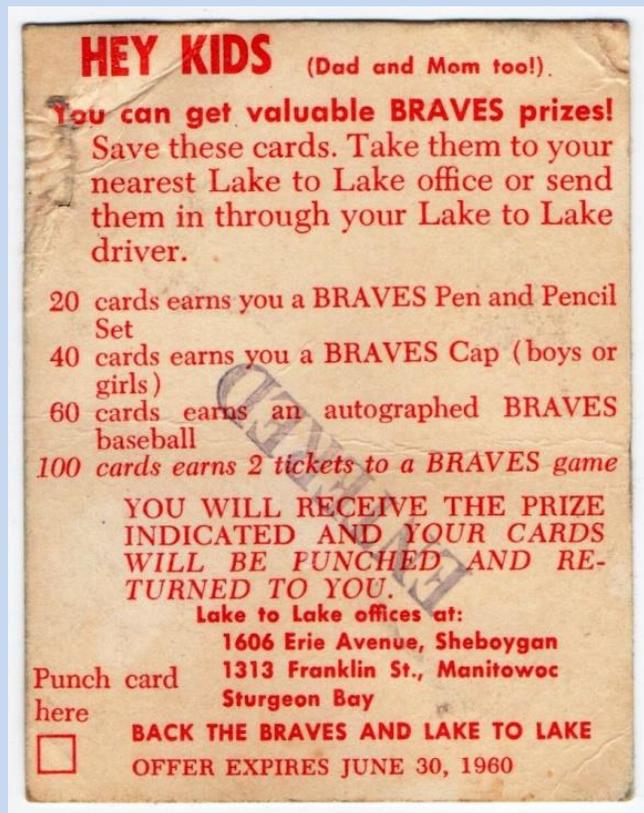
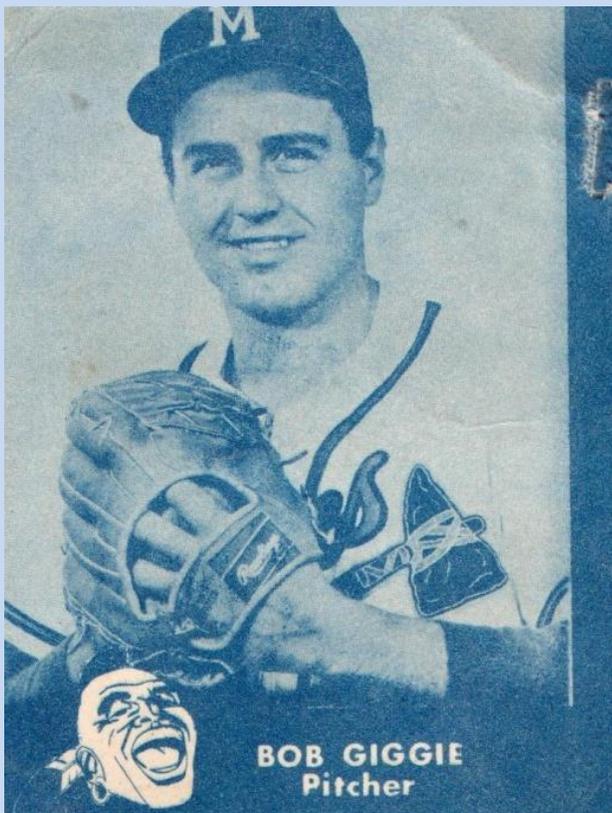
Some card issues and series never made their way up to Sturgeon Bay when Husby was a kid. He recalls, for example, that the 1956 Topps he bought stopped at number 180. It took him awhile to learn that there were numbers up to 340. Of course, 1952 Topps high numbers never made it to his neighborhood, nor did basketball, hockey or other high-numbered baseball series. To buy some of this stuff then would cost you plenty. A 1960 *Card Comments* ad by Gordon B. Taylor himself offered a 1952 Topps baseball set in excellent condition for \$65. (That price was like 16 cents a card! Maybe Mickey and Willie might be worth that, but what about all those other cards of guys named Cookie, Hoot or Ebba. I'm sure glad I didn't fall for that type of high-priced sales pitch.)

The Lake to Lake bonanza

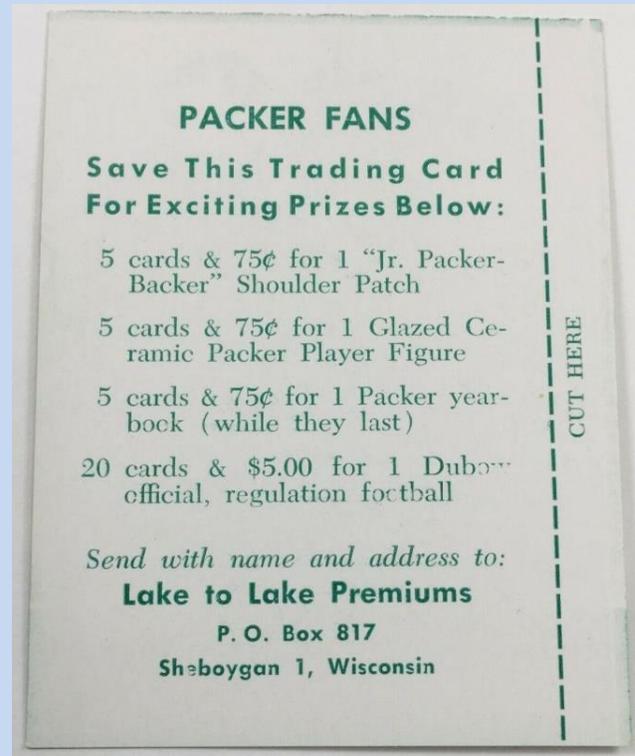
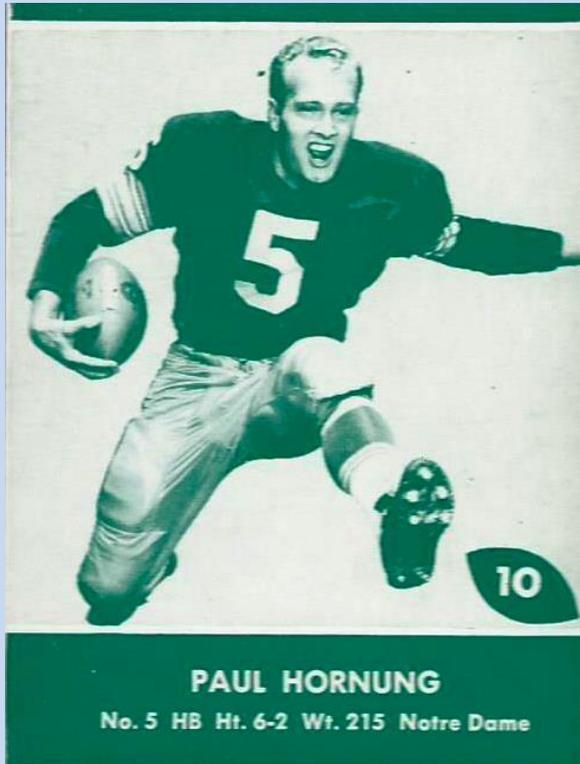
One issue that could be found in Sturgeon Bay was the 28-card Lake to Lake Dairy baseball set issued in 1960 by a cooperative of approximately 2,000 farmers utilizing three plants in northeastern Wisconsin. The Lake to Lake cooperative represented dairy farms between Lake Michigan and Lake Winnebago. Cards of Milwaukee Braves were unstapled from milk cartons by customers and mailed to the plant offices for prizes. Sturgeon Bay was one of the three locations where cards were sent. The promotion

ended June 30, 1960. The idea was that the cards would be further mangled (canceled) with a hole punch and sent back to the customers along with the prizes.

Husby, then 15, decided to walk over to the dairy and ask if he could have any cards. He told them he was willing to buy them. "They laughed at me," Husby recalls. The dairy people were happy to just hand him the cards which had come in and, for whatever reason, were still around. He walked home with a box which he estimated contained 10,000 Lake to Lake Dairy cards. The cards were typically stamped on the back with the word "entered" rather than having a hole punched in them, but some of the cards had avoided the stapling, stamping and punching altogether. The scarce cards of Ray Boone (withdrawn after a May trade) and Bill Bruton (even harder to find for some unknown reason) were among the cards, but in lesser quantities. Aaron's card was found in about the same quantity as others.



Lake to Lake Braves cards were stapled to milk cartons and then returned to dairies for prizes, cancellation and return. This card was stamped "entered" on the back and likely came from Husby's haul.



The Hornung card was one of the more readily found 1961 Lake to Lake Packers. Husby purchased about 200 Hornungs from an individual in SheyboGAN.

Lake to Lake Packers

Husby had cornered the market on Lake to Lake Braves and continued to sell off that bonanza for the next 45 years. He also picked up Lake to Lake Packers cards from 1961, but those were harder to come by since they were returned only to Sheboygan, 85 miles away. In the 1980s, Husby acquired a find in Sheboygan consisting of 200 cards each of 16 players in the 36-card set. Those 16 cards are still valued as more common than the others.

The cooperative likely decided that the effort needed to print, staple, collect and return the cards dwarfed the value of the grand prizes: two tickets to a Braves game for 100 cards or a football for 20 cards plus \$5. The baseball and football cards were each one year wonders, distributed only in northeastern Wisconsin for a few months. Lake to Lake operated from 1945 to 1981 when they were absorbed into Land O'Lakes.

Sets for \$2.80

Being the young entrepreneur, Husby started putting the Lake to Lake baseball cards into sets and selling the sets for \$2.80. (The latest *SCD* catalog lists a set at \$2,250 in near-mint.) Fortunately for Husby, he didn't sell too many sets at \$2.80 and still had a good inventory around when the hobby

heated up years later. Husby wrote a few articles for hobby publications in the 1960s and 1970s, usually about the Lake to Lake set. The Lake to Lake Braves remain his favorite.

Visiting Carter

Also in 1960, Husby contacted hobby pioneer Lionel Carter of Evanston, Illinois, and arranged a visit to see Carter's extensive baseball card collection. Carter, then 42 years old, was initially skeptical that the 15-year-old Husby was a serious collector. After Husby's visit, the sometimes-crusty Carter wrote a letter to Husby's mother stating, "My wife and I enjoyed his all too brief visit with us and we were both impressed by his good manners, intelligence, and interest....He is earnest about card collecting and the type I like to encourage." Naturally, Husby retained that treasured letter and remembers, "I saw his collection and it was amazing."

Running ads and picking up collections

While still a teenager, Husby ran ads in the local paper seeking to buy cards. He was successful in picking up collections from kids and their parents. Goudeys, Play Balls and tobacco cards were added to his collection, and he was able to upgrade cards he already had. In the 1960s, Husby was still buying cards as they came out. Irv Lerner's 1970 Who's Who in Collecting booklet listed him as a collector with 50 complete sets and 10,000 cards.

Husby remained in touch with Jack Urban which led to a renewed enthusiasm for the hobby in the early 1970s. Together they ran ads and bought collections. Then, according to Husby, Urban had the idea that they should take the show on the road and try Milwaukee, the big city 150 miles south.

Buying trips and shows

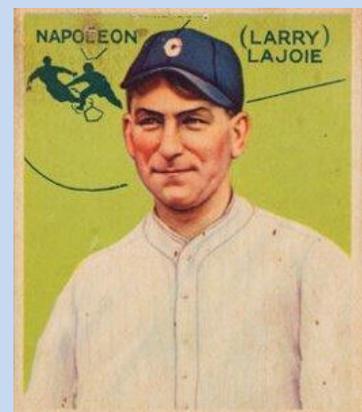
The Urban/Husby partnership made their first hotel buying trip in 1973 or 1974, according to Husby. They ran newspaper ads in advance of coming into Milwaukee and rented a hotel room. Sellers brought their cards to the hotel and Urban and Husby made the deals, splitting the cards between them or later selling complete sets and splitting the proceeds. The prices paid for cards were modest; not many people thought that the cardboard was worth much of anything, except to crazy collectors like them. Shows in the Midwest were just starting to catch on and Urban and Husby took tables at shows in Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis. They used their profits to finance more buying trips.

Rare cards

Husby and Urban continued their buying trips primarily in Wisconsin until the mid-1980s, when, according to Husby, "Everyone started to jump in on it." On one memorable trip in the 1980s, they joined with Dick Millerd and went to Chicago where they were able to purchase a 1933 Goudey set which included the rare #106 Lajoie card. The Lajoie eventually wound up with Barry Halper.

Husby owned 1/3rd of a 1933-4 Goudey #106 Lajoie – for a few months.

Husby's own collection expanded into more obscure sets from the 1933 to 1970 era. He liked the Johnston Cookies cards, which were easier to find in Wisconsin, and other regionals like Stahl-Meyer Franks (New York), Spic and Span (Braves) and Hunter



Wieners (Cardinals). Tobacco cards didn't enthruse him as much. He took a pass on buying a T206 Wagner for \$1,000. He added to his football and non-sports sets: TV westerns, presidents, cars and planes, and picked up basketball and hockey cards. He advertised in *SCD* and *The Trader Speaks*. Starting in 1977, he bought cases of new cards.

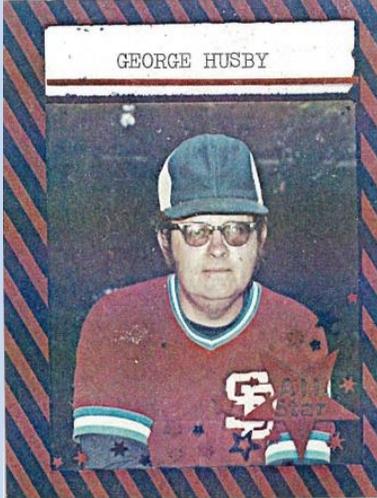
Hobby contacts and baseball

Over the years, Husby met many prominent people in the hobby, in addition to Carter, including Buck Barker, Wirt Gammon, Frank Nagy, Larry Fritsch, Bruce Yeko and John England. I found Husby's name scattered in old hobby publications and mentioned frequently by other veteran collectors I have interviewed. Husby would run into collectors and dealers at shows and on buying trips. Once he had enough cards for the sets that interested him, he would get dealers involved who were working full-time and interested in bigger buys.

Husby and Urban were elected with seven others into the first Wisconsin Sports Collectors Association hall of fame for collectors in 2011. He coached American Legion baseball for 50 years in Sturgeon Bay, his teams winning 710 games. He also did hundreds of local high school sports broadcasts. He was elected to the Wisconsin Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame and Door County Baseball Hall of Fame.



George Husby (left) with Wisconsin Baseball Coaches Association Awards Chairman Ron Kading receiving recognition for 50 years of coaching in 2014, photo provided by George Husby



A card of Husby from the 1970s by Trade-A-Card, Inc. as manager of the Sturgeon Bay Legion team

Selling out but not really leaving

In 2005, Husby decided to sell his collection and did so without looking back. Everything went including his hobby publications and the last of the Lake to Lake cards. I asked, Wasn't that tough on you to part with your collection? He responded, "I likely missed the run-up in values due to grading, but I am happy with what I did." He retired from 43 years at the local bank at age 62. Jack Urban also sold his collection a few years before Husby. Urban is still living in Wisconsin in an assisted living home.

Husby added, "I have kept involved. I thought it would make sense to contact some of the old-timers who had been in the hobby for many years. I re-read copies of my old hobby publications and found familiar names. I am not big on getting stuff done on the computer, so I wrote each person a letter and stuck it in the mail. Some came back to me, but other letters resulted in contacts. From those contacts, I have found a few leads for guys, who I thought would be interested in their collections."

From one of those contacts, Husby reached out to me to see if I had ever heard of 1953 Topps cards he found with red numbers and all-red cartoons on the back rather than black. I hadn't, nor had anyone else he talked to, but it makes for interesting conversations. Husby still subscribes to *SCD* and stays in touch with people in the hobby like Kevin Savage, Eric Lange and Jeff Morey.

Husby said, "I also have booths with sports memorabilia at four different antique shops or malls and will work a few days a month at my space."

It looks like there is life after collecting. It just involves thinking about collecting and the memories rather than hanging onto the actual cardboard.

George Husby enjoys hearing from other collectors and can be reached at george.husby@icloud.com.

*George Vrechek is a freelance contributor to *SCD* and can be reached at vrechek@ameritech.net.*

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