

People in the hobby



Lerner, Nagurski, Nowell and Brown

By George Vrechek

News and my contacts with other collectors continue during these difficult times. Here are some of the names which have surfaced recently.

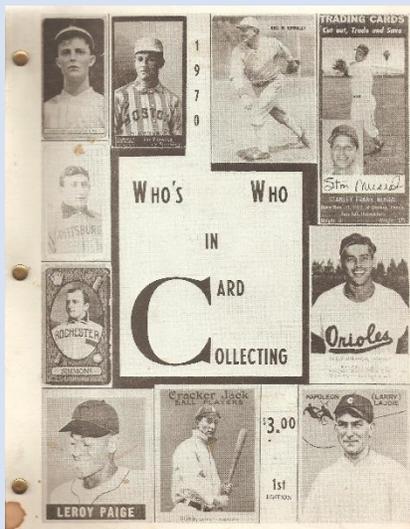
IRV LERNER (1936-2020)

Irving W. Lerner passed away on January 30, 2020.

I first interviewed Irv in 2002 when he provided background information on Jefferson Burdick's work and the early days of the hobby. His dad ran a cigar store in Philadelphia and sold cards which Irv collected starting in 1948. He kept his cards in nice condition and was able to fill his wantlists through what came into the store.

He returned to collecting in 1959 and connected with collector Bill White of nearby Norwood, Pennsylvania, and Woody Gelman and Bill Haber of Topps. He visited Zabel Brothers in Philadelphia, who printed Topps cards. Irv authored a comprehensive hobby directory, "Who's Who in Card Collecting, 1970" which he updated in 1971.

Irv was a C.P.A. and part-time dealer - supporting his collecting habit. He worked shows with his wife, Eleanor. I assisted them at the 2008 Chicago National and wrote *SCD* articles about Irv's book and hobby career. He was also known as The Ring Man for his collecting and selling of commemorative rings.



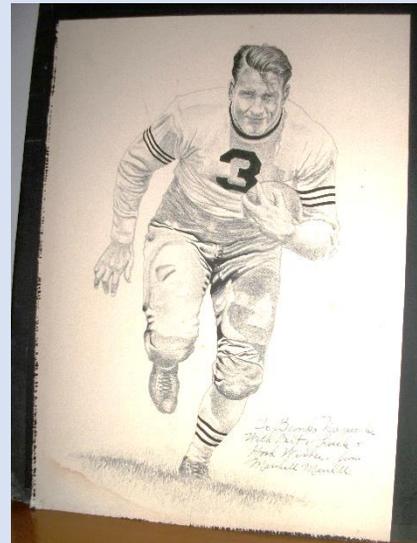
Lerner's Who's Who book and Eleanor and Irv Lerner at the 2008 National, photos G Vrechek

Eleanor said that they stopped doing shows after 2012, due to mobility issues, and that Irv had sold all the cards in his collection over the past few years. She said Irv had been doing well until suffering a stroke and dying suddenly following a trip to Florida.

Donations in Irv's memory were directed to the Jefferson Stroke Center of Philadelphia.

NAGURSKI PRINT

I have been a fan of Milwaukee Braves prints by Marshall Merrell since buying a few at Milwaukee County Stadium in 1953. The black and white drawings printed on white glossy paper cost 25 cents a pop at the time. While I have written about the prints, I have never found much information on the artist. Nonetheless Tony Nagurski, the son of Bronko Nagurski, tracked me down to see if I knew anything about a drawing by Merrell of his dad. I told him all I knew, which wasn't much. But I got to see a, perhaps one of a kind, 8 by 10-inch charcoal drawing by Merrell with the inscription "To Bronko Nagurski, With Best of Luck and Good Wishes from Marshall Merrell."



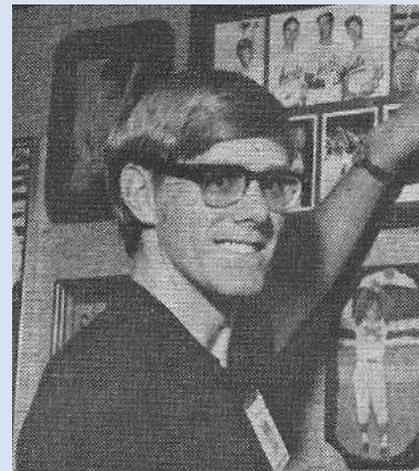
Marshall Merrell prints, which survived being taped to George Vrechek's bulletin board in 1953, and Merrell's drawing of Nagurski

JIM NOWELL

A name sprinkled throughout my SCD hobby history articles is that of Jim Nowell. Nowell started collecting in 1952, was very active in the hobby in the 1960s and early 1970s. I hadn't had any contact with him until recently.

Nowell wrote, "Even though I haven't collected in 50 years, I still read SCD and must say, I have enjoyed your articles on the 'Old Days of Collecting.' I used to trade with 'Buck' Barker, Rich Egan and purchased cards from Charles Bray/Preston Orem."

Yes, he did. Nowell organized what was likely the first West Coast gathering of collectors in 1969. In 1970, he attracted a wider audience for what could be referred to as the first national gathering at his home in Brea, California. Attendees in 1969 and/or 1970 included hobby publisher Bob Jaspersen and his son Mike, Ed Broder, John England, John Ortolani, Dennis Graye, Lionel Carter, Irv Lerner, Ray Hess, Jim McConnell, Goodie Goldfaden and Ray Medeiros among others. Some of the attendees had traded with one another for years but had never met. Many were in Lerner's *Whose Who* book and have been the subjects of hobby history articles. Eleanor Lerner told me she was disappointed not being able to join husband Irv on the California trip.



Nowell in 1974, SCD

Nowell is proud of the plaque he received from Mike Berkus at the 1977 West Coast Convention recognizing his contributions to the hobby. He said he stepped away from the hobby to spend quality time with his two children and coach Little League for 20 years. He later got into world traveling and bird photography.

Nowell's collection has been stored for 50 years, and he has just begun selling his publications, card magazines, all sports related material, etc. For his lists, he can be contacted at: jnknow@gmail.com. *Nowell in 1974, SCD*



Attendees (below) at the first California "convention" in August 1969 Left-right, standing: Bill Johnson, John Smith, John Thom, Don Ortolani, Dennis Graye, John England, Jim McConnell, Jim Nowell. Kneeling: Dale Britton, Mr. Hernandez, Bill Klink, Ray Medeiros, Ed Broder, Photo Mike Jaspersen

The second gathering in 1970 was reported by Bob Jaspersen in his Sport Fan publication.

SPORT FAN
EMONT, PA. FOUNDED IN 1951

SPORT FAN ATTENDS COAST CONVENTION
By Bob Jaspersen
SPORT FAN Publisher

The second annual West Coast Sports Collectors convention, held at the home of Jim Nowell in Brea, Calif. on Aug. 22-23, gave evidence that these get-togethers are growing in popularity and will undoubtedly spread to all corners of the nation within a few years.

SPORT FAN publisher Bob Jaspersen and son Mike, who attended two earlier conventions this year, and Irv Lerner of Phila., publisher of Who's Who in Card Collecting, flew to California for their first meeting with collectors in that section of the country. Also attending from the Phila. area was Jay Ludwig, of Oreland, Pa., who made the
(Continued inside)

Front row, left to right, Jay Ludwig, Allan Kaye, Rusty Moshier, Jeff Johnson, Ken Baker, Steve Black, Paul Wright, Steve Brazell. 2d row, Pat Connealy, Harry Hoffman, Keith Jackson, Steve Marshall, Lionel Carter, Joe Deiprie. 3d row, Mike Jaspersen, Jim McConnell, Bob Jaspersen, David Weiners, Irv Lerner, John Thom, Ray Hess, Dale Britton, Ray Medeiros,

LEN BROWN

Len Brown started at Topps as a boy wonder teenager in 1959 (at \$70 per week) and stayed with them for 41 years. I wrote about his career in a January 23, 2015, *SCD* article.

I have touched based with Brown a few times about Topps card questions. He has been especially helpful to the non-sports card hobby writers in that he worked closely with Woody Gelman of Topps on many such issues starting in the 1960s. Brown wrote me recently and reminisced: "I used to write the backs of the sports cards...the short bios and the little cartoon facts about the athletes.

Len Brown, Soupy Sales and Woody Gelman 1965, photo from Len Brown



“My big involvement beginning in the 1960s was more with the non-sports cards. I co-created Mars Attacks, a series that was sold to Hollywood that Tim Burton directed. I wrote Civil War cards and worked with some great artists who painted the series, and I wrote the stories about the cards on the backs. We weren't accurate and the accounts were fictionalized to make it more interesting to kids.

“I wrote and cocreated Garbage Pail Kids, Wacky Packages - came up with the gags on Funny Monsters...wrote the backs of the Beatles cards...worked with designers on the packaging of many of the Topps products. You name it, our small creative department did a lot of work...met George Lucas and Mark Hamill when I went to Hollywood to secure photos for Star Wars.

“I could go on and on about all the products that Topps issued. It was a great job...the only job I had in my life. On Sunday, I would look forward to going in to work on Monday morning. I was a lucky man. The best job that anyone could ever have had.”

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

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