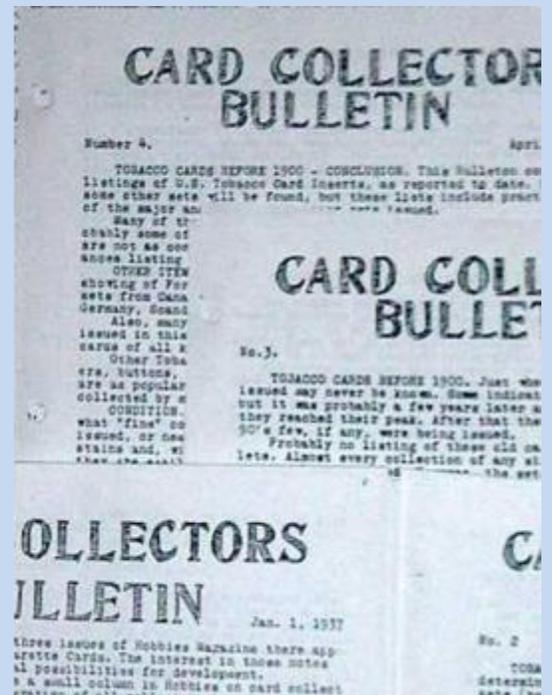
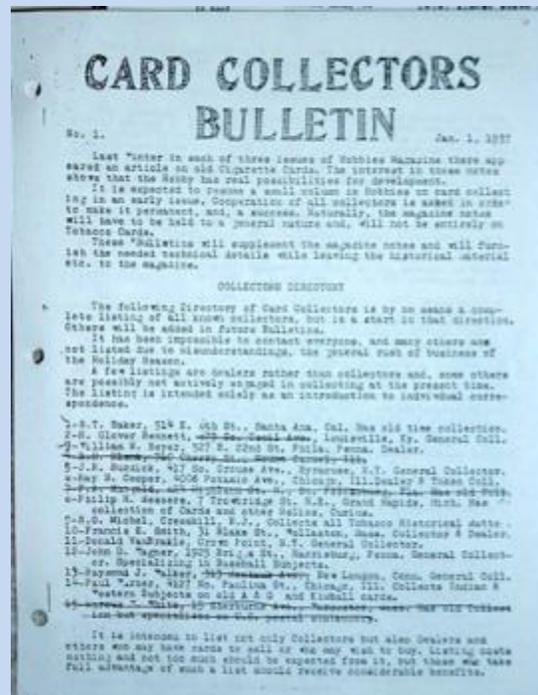


# Jefferson Burdick's Burst of Energy in Early 1937

by George Vrechek



Card Collectors Bulletin #1 left and a glimpse of #2, 3 and 4

Jefferson Burdick (1900-1963) has been known as the “Father of Card Collecting” for good reason. He was a one-man whirl of hobby activity starting in the 1930s when he began looking for ways to disseminate what he knew about card collecting in order to attract others into the hobby. The months of January through April 1937 were particularly fruitful for Burdick and the card collecting hobby.

Jefferson Burdick left with his father circa 1920, in 1952 and 1955

## Burdick's passion for card collecting

In 1910 Burdick collected tobacco insert cards which flooded the market much like they had 15 years

earlier during their first 1880s hey-days. Burdick later attended Syracuse University and then worked at a factory job that didn't fulfill his passion for researching, organizing, writing and collecting. He lived by himself and started experiencing physical limitations due to rheumatoid arthritis. He looked forward to collecting cards which both reminded him of his youth and

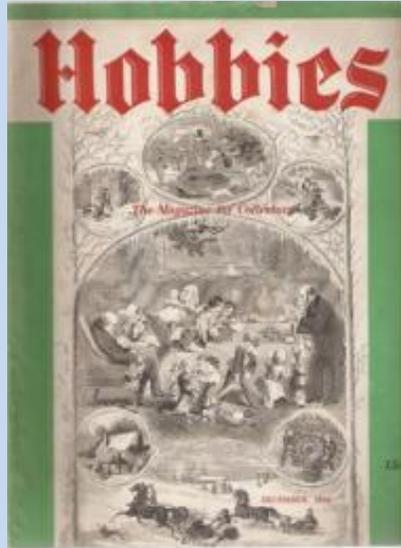


reflected the development of printing and American culture. Although he didn't drive, he traveled extensively in pursuit of cards. He became an avid collector of American ephemera and was desperate to contact others who might share his passion. Burdick eventually amassed a 306,000-card collection which he donated to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art beginning in 1947.

*The December 1935 Hobbies magazine cover and a portion of Burdick's article*

### **Hobbies Magazine, Burdick's first outlet**

In 1935 Burdick contacted *Hobbies* magazine, published in Chicago by O.C. Lightner (1887-1950), to persuade them to give him a little space in their large monthly magazine. *Hobbies* was a beacon for about every imaginable collectibles hobby: stamps, coins, relics, gems, firearms, etc. However coverage of sports collectibles and trading cards was non-existent. Lightner had purchased a stamp magazine in 1931 and then took over publications for several other hobby groups as their own publications suffered during the Depression. Burdick must have pitched that his new column would deal with the very specific category of tobacco insert cards and would differ from any other hobby they already featured. Lightner gave him two pages in the December 1935 issue.



Writing about T206 tobacco cards in 1935 would be like featuring 1990 Topps cards today, not exactly ancient history. Burdick seldom mentioned sports cards per se. He considered himself a general collector and pursued every conceivable type of card from actresses to Yacht Colors of the World. Burdick wrote three articles in 1935 and 1936 for *Hobbies*.

### **Card Collectors Bulletin**

However Burdick felt that he was not getting enough space in *Hobbies* to write as much as he wanted to about card collecting. From his prior contacts with a few card collectors and dealers and from readers who responded to his *Hobbies* articles, Burdick developed a mailing list of 55 people he thought would be interested in his findings. Between January and April 1937 Burdick published 15 pages of information in his *Card Collectors Bulletin*. (After 1938, Burdick properly added an apostrophe to the *Card Collector's Bulletin*.)

In January 1937 he mailed the first CCB to the 55 people and printed a few more to send out to future contacts. The first issue was free and only two pages, but in that issue he promised much more information to come and asked for 25 cents from each collector to help defray his

printing and mailing costs for the next three issues. Not all 55 apparently bit on this scheme, and Burdick's second *CCB* went to only 25 subscribers. However I compute that Burdick had amassed \$6.25 from his subscribers and was on a roll. What did Burdick have to say, keeping in mind that duplication and mailing costs could wipe out his \$6.25 nest egg, and that he had to keep the information succinct.

### **Bulletin No. 1, January 1937**

Burdick told the story of his *Hobbies* magazine efforts and listed 14 collectors who agreed to have their names and addresses published. The initial 14 were B.T. Baker, H. Glover Bennett, William Beyer, B.H. Blank, Ray Cooper, F.A. Mangold, Philip Messers, R.G. Michel, Francis Smith, Donald VanBrakle, John D. Wagner, Raymond Walker, Paul Warner and Marcus White. Only Baker lived any further west than Chicago. Blank, Mangold and White disappeared from future directories very quickly. I only recognized Messers, VanBrackle and Wagner as names appearing again in the early days of sports card collecting. Wagner was a long-time sports card enthusiast who later gave Burdick one of his extra T206 Honus Wagner cards. Burdick traveled to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1935 to meet Wagner at his home.

It is interesting that Burdick immediately addressed the question of value in this first issue. He summarized his view in less than a page. His words of wisdom were that he had heard about cards changing hands for 50 cents to \$1 each, but stated, "I doubt the justification for such prices and I think it is ridiculous to expect the hobby to thrive with such ideas in effect."

Burdick's view was that tobacco cards should go for 2 cents each in "fine undamaged condition." Beat up cards weren't worth 2 cents to Burdick. Dealers, or those buying in lots, should expect to "buy at much lower rates than above." (How much lower can you go?) Burdick though would pop for 4 to 5 cents, or conceivably 10 cents, each for pre-1900 large cards like cabinets. Burdick added, "On the other hand, the small baseball player cards issued since 1900 (this would include T206s) may be priced at 1 cent each." At this point, all cards in a set were considered as being at the same price. Stars, commons, rookies were all valued at pennies. As a true collector Burdick hoped that prices he would have to pay to round up even more cardboard wouldn't get silly.

If, in fact, some T206s of Wagner, Cobb, Plank and the boys were available for 1 cent each, I know I would have written to Burdick and asked him to pick out some of the nicer ones and express mail a few to me. I'd even throw in an extra 25 cents for future *CCB* issues. However, I didn't have the foresight to be around in 1937. In all fairness, 1 cent in 1937 is the equivalent of a whopping 17 cents today.

### **Bulletin No. 2, February 1937**

This time Burdick doubled the *CCB* to 4 pages in order to list all tobacco sets issued since 1900. He explained why space didn't permit him to list each of the cards in the sets, but offered to loan anyone his checklists by mail. Readers generally approved of his two cents about prices in the inaugural *CCBs*, although some thought completed sets should be worth a premium.

Burdick agreed in theory but then rationalized that the collector had probably included some lesser conditioned cards in the set that still weren't worth 2 cents to big-spender Burdick and to heck with any premiums for sets. He recognized six more subscribers: R.S. Clover, M.O. Hallock, E. Beique, Stanley Barvitsky, Elena Wheeler and Noyes Huston.

Burdick listed all post-1900 tobacco cards alphabetically by subject starting with #501 Actors and continuing to #591 World War Scenes. Cards of athletes other than baseball were listed under a sports subcategory. Since the manufacturers were generally all controlled by the American Tobacco Company, Burdick lumped them all together. He had a few other numbers for sets without the names of the issuer, foreign cards and recent issues that weren't tobacco cards. Most of the listings were for non-sports cards.

*Burdick numbered post-1900 tobacco cards after arranging them alphabetically by subject, the 1937 set numbers 515 through 526 were changed in the 1940s to T200 to T211, but kept in the same order. T200 through T211 are shown below.*



**Bulletin No. 3, March 1937**

In the third bulletin Burdick started listing pre-1900 tobacco cards and completed the listing with the fourth bulletin. This time he acknowledged that, "The prices do not accurately reflect the extreme scarcity of some of these cards. Only those with favorable connections were able to form large collections and, with the passing of fifty years, may be destroyed and lost. Cigarette smoking was not as common in those days as today." Burdick welcomed four more subscribers: Harold Ross, Paul Tapley, Edward Golden (a baseball card collector who stayed active for many years) and J.C. Page. Because pre-1900 tobacco cards were produced by (somewhat) independent manufacturers, Burdick grouped cards by subject alphabetically under each manufacturer starting with Allen & Ginter.

#### **Bulletin No. 4, April 1937**

In the final issue promised to subscribers, Burdick wrote: "No plans for additional bulletins have been made. It is quite probable that later on sufficient material will be garnered for other issues....The card column in *Hobbies* is yet to begin, but it is hoped that room for it may be found soon." O.C. Lightner of *Hobbies* never made enough room, and Burdick went on to be involved in putting out his own bi-monthly *CCB* for card collectors for the next 26 years.

Burdick acknowledged that, "Probably no listing of these old cards will be entirely complete." He added, "Many card collectors will want the highly interesting cards issued with coffee, soda, candy, gum and the old trade cards of all kinds which are beyond description," although Burdick went on in a few years to describe them anyway. He left holes in his numbering system to start plugging in more sets. You can tell he was interested in rounding up fellow collectors and finding new sets through the *CCB* rather than making any money in the process.

Burdick couldn't resist throwing in advice in this concluding effort. His comments are accurate today: "Beginning collectors soon find that collecting these cards is quite different from some hobbies. It is real collecting. There are no dealers with huge stocks ready to supply complete sets of anything desired. Usually such sets are built up a bit at a time and require considerable search and expense. These cards are a type of Americana which is fast becoming scarce. Old collections, during the past years, have been thrown out by efficient housewives and so, are mostly lost....No one can expect to make a complete collection. It is a difficult task to complete even a dozen or two sets. It is a case of getting whatever is available, but every collector may take some satisfaction in the fact that he probably has at least a few items that other collectors do not have."

Bulletin No. 4 also began what would become a standard feature: listing errors, corrections, and amplifications to previous set listings in the *CCB*. Burdick was anxious to get it right and to share the information.

#### **How did Burdick do?**

Did Burdick wind up listing "practically all of the major (tobacco) sets issued" as he described in the *CCB*? It looks like he came very close. Burdick hit the major sets, although he had some trouble figuring out the number of cards in some sets. The obscure Baseball Comics set #518 later is catalogued by Burdick as T203 and keeps its same place in the order with the more popular T201, T202, T205 and T206 sets. It all looked like baseball to Burdick.

The table lists the per card prices included in Burdick's 1937 CCBs for sports sets. He covered pre-1900 tobacco sets (#32 to #366) and post-1900 tobacco sets (#514 to #578). He later revised the set names for his 1946 American Card Catalog (ACC).

From Burdick's first 4 CCBs				
Set #	Description	Mfr	price	current ACC designation
#32	Worlds Champions, first series	A&G	0.02	N28
#33	Worlds Champions, second series	A&G	.02-.05	N29, N43
#41	Polka Dot Nine women baseball players	Duke	0.10	H807 TYPE 2
#67	Presidential baseball club	Duke	0.10	N154
#97	Talk of the Diamond	Duke	.03-.05	N135
#120	Champions	Goodwin	0.03	N162
#127	Baseball players actual photos	Goodwin	.02-.10	N172/N173
#145	Champions of Sports and Games	Kimball	0.02	N184
#219	Prizefighters, Mechanics Delight	Lorillard	0.05	N269
#272	Baseball players small die cut game	Mayo	0.02	N301
#281	Baseball scenes women players	Venable	0.05	N360
#301	Athletes	Hall	0.03	N344
#346	Baseball players, photos, Newsboys League	Hess	0.02	N321
#347	Athletes and Prizefighters, photos	Hess	0.02	N332
#366	Leading baseball players etc.	Gold Coin	0.05	N284
#514	Baseball players, Turkey Red, Fez, Old Mill		0.01	T3
#515	Baseball teams Fatima photos		0.01	T200
#516	Baseball folder series, Mecca, double folders		0.03	T201
#517	Baseball folders, Hassan, triple folders		0.03	T202
#518	Baseball Comics, Mayo		0.03	T203
#519	Baseball players, Ramly, TTT, photos, gold frame		0.02	T204
#520	Baseball series, gold borders		0.01	T205
#521	Baseball series, white borders, several hundred		0.01	T206
#522	Baseball players, brown backgrounds		0.02	T207
#523	Baseball players, Fireside		0.02	T208
#524	Baseball players, Contentnea		0.02	T209
#525	Baseball players, Old Mill		0.02	T210
#526	Baseball players, Red Sun		0.01	T211
#527	Baseball players, Sweet Caporal, discs		0.02	P2
#548c	Sports Girls, Hamilton King		0.10	T7-6
#571	Champions, Series of 25 Honest Long		0.03	T227
#572	Champion Athletes and Prizefighters		0.02	T218
#573	Champion Pugilists, Honest Long		0.02	T227
#574	Champion Athletes and Prizefighters, Mecca, Tolstoi		0.02	T220
#575	Prizefighters of the past and present, Dixie Queen		0.02	T223
#576	Prizefighters, Turkey Red, Fez, Old Mill		0.10	T3
#577	Prizefighters Series 100 and 102 Oxford etc		0.02	T225
#578	Pugilistic subjects, Red Sun		0.02	T226
#579	Worlds Champion Athletes, Pan Handle		0.02	T230
#580	Champion Women Swimmers, Pan Handle		0.02	T221
#592	Famous baseball players, champion athletes, Fatima		0.10	T222

Burdick's catalog numbering system changed in the coming years as he added other categories of cards and began using prefixes, although he never had a prefix for the pre-1900 tobacco cards which are now referred to as "N" (19<sup>th</sup> century) cards. He touched on the huge Old Judge sets (N172 and N173) with his listing of set #127 Baseball players, actual photos...2 cents for the small cards and 10 cents for the cabinets. He didn't waste space.

The table with this article reflects Burdick's set names, numbers and prices for just the sports sets listed in the 1937 *CCBs*, as well as his subsequent *American Card Catalog* classifications for those sets. Comic sports sets and sports sets featuring women are also listed. Burdick's prices reflect a few relationships that can still be seen with prices today. His Old Judge card and cabinet prices were 2 cents and 10 cents. The *SCD* price catalog lists commons in excellent at \$325 for the cards and \$1,500 for the cabinets. Just a few zeroes have been added to the prices over the years. The T208 Cullivan's Fireside Philadelphia A's set was valued at 2 cents per card by Burdick. The Thomas Cullivan Tobacco Company was located in Syracuse where Burdick lived, and perhaps they were a dime a dozen around Syracuse. Commons in excellent condition are listed at \$9,000 in the current *SCD* catalog. The 18-card set in excellent would be \$260,000, if you could find them.

*John D. Wagner, Harry Lilien, Lionel Carter and Charles Bray all subscribed to the early CCBs*



### **Finding collectors**

With these 4 bulletins made up of 15 pages, Burdick announced to anyone who expressed the slightest interest that the hobby of card collecting could be fun and challenging. Burdick was there to add order to the process and graciously share what he had found regarding values and scarcities. His bulletins reached pioneer sports collectors John D. Wagner, Donald VanBrakle and Eddie Golden. Within a year he had also found G. Lionel Carter, Harry Lilien, Charles Bray and Howard Myers who have been mentioned in prior *SCD* articles on hobby history. Ads by collectors and dealers to buy, sell and trade ran in future *CCBs*, and collectors added their own articles to supplement Burdick's work. Bray started to run auctions in the *CCB*.

My thanks go to the late G. Lionel Carter who faithfully collected every issue of the *CCBs* and allowed me to read and copy his *CCBs* which included his notations. Carter fondly remembered his friend and mentor "Jeff."

### **Firsts by Burdick**

Burdick's burst of energy in early 1937 was truly amazing. He started the first hobby publication for card collectors. It was the only voice of the hobby for many years and continued for another 47 years. He began the exchange of information regarding pricing and started the first price guide. He developed a system for cataloging vintage cards that is still used today. He developed checklists of individual sets and made them available to collectors. He provided a publication for collector advertising and auctions. He started the first collector directory. He caused people to start looking in attics and basements for cardboard treasures. Finally, he raised \$6.25 from some thrifty collectors who didn't throw around 2 cents very readily. It was a pretty fruitful four-month effort. Thanks, Mr. Burdick.

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