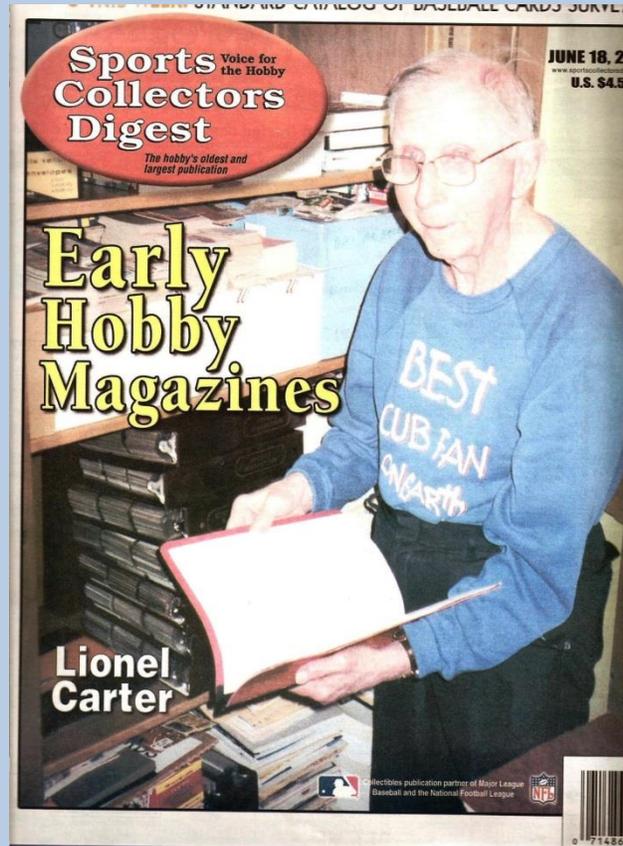
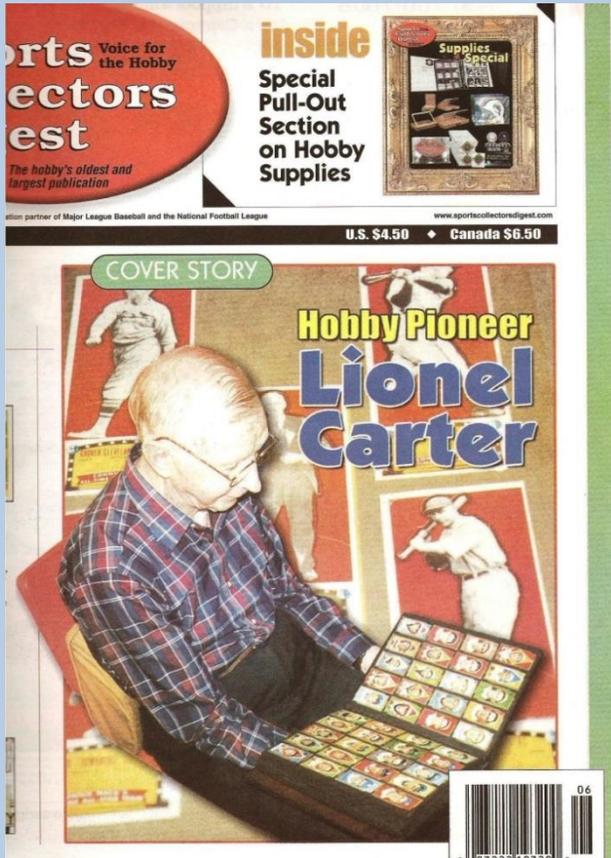


Meet Lionel Carter



By George Vrechek

Articles on Lionel Carter originally appeared in Sport Collectors Digest 2002-2007, Carter died in 2008



Imagine if you had bought baseball cards directly from the drug stores starting in 1933 and you kept buying cards every year thereafter. What if you always had an interest in nice looking cards, well centered with clear printing? You put your best singles aside never selling them. What if you also collected every major set that was issued? You

might be Lionel Carter. In fact I am positive that you are Lionel Carter in that I don't think there is another person in the world who meets this description.

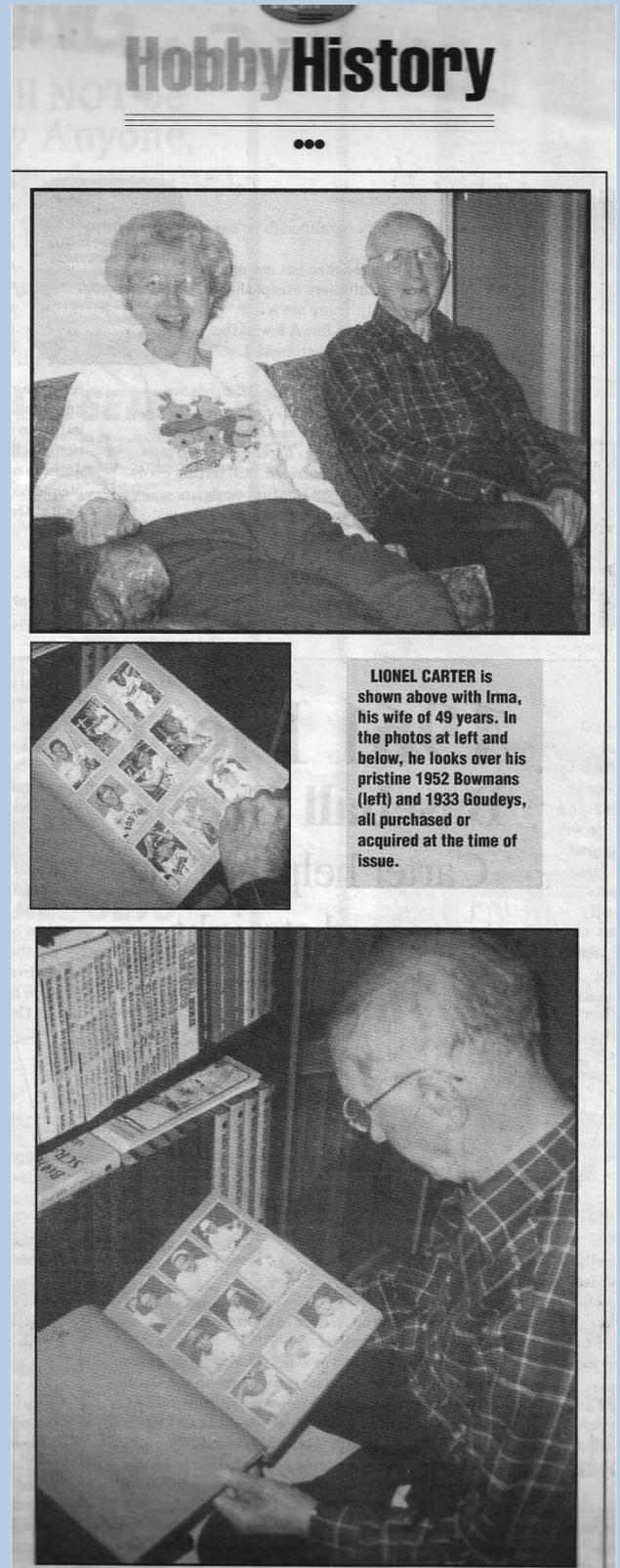
I had the good fortune to talk on the phone to veteran hobbyist Lionel Carter in researching a recent *SCD* article on Jefferson Burdick, the father of card collecting.

Lionel and his wife Irma were the only people I found who had met Burdick. After completing the Burdick article, I arranged to meet Carter. I had been disappointed in visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to see Burdick's collection. Meeting Carter was an entirely different experience. Carter has not only been a collector, he has also been a writer for hobby publications and a promoter of collecting. I borrow from Carter's own writings to describe how he got hooked on collecting.

Colfax and Cards

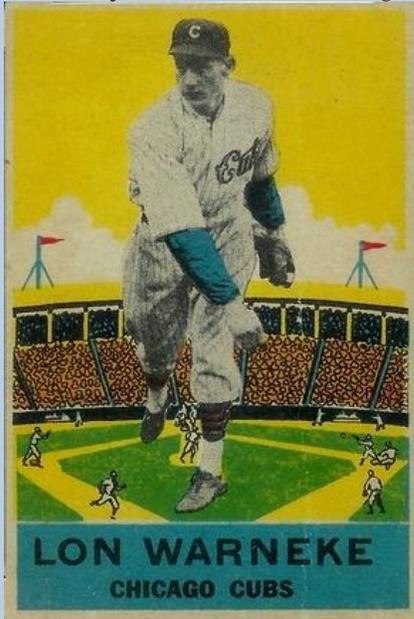
(George) Lionel Carter was born in 1918 and raised in Colfax (population 892) in north central Illinois. In the summer before high school, he played baseball in the morning and went swimming in the afternoon. He listened to the Cubs on the radio. Carter collected stamps and had an early predisposition to keeping things nice and organized. There were no baseball cards in Colfax or anywhere else in the world that young Lionel knew... at least not until one summer day in 1933 when he stopped in the drug store. He normally bought a five-cent candy bar at the nearby confectionery store. Instead he saw 1 cent packages that contained one baseball card and a piece of gum. He quickly decided to skip the candy bar and buy 5 of the 1-cent packages. He was not disappointed, except in the taste of the gum. The cards Carter happened upon were the 1933 DeLongs: 2 inches by 3 inches with a look that they should be used to play a baseball game with large players standing in small stadiums.

Carter quickly got hooked on baseball cards. Since there were only 24 cards in the DeLong set, he was able to put a set together rather quickly. He and six friends soon developed a baseball game with the cards using playing cards. The player's card "ran the bases" which consisted of Bull Durham pouches filled with sand. Home-made playing cards were used to determine if the player hit the ball.



Additional decks were consulted depending on whether a ball went to the outfield or the infield. Pitchers were as likely as Babe Ruth to hit homers. Complete statistics were kept. Carter did not put his best singles in the games, thinking it foolish to ding them up. Carter's collection benefited from being started by a 15 year old rather than the typical 6 or 7 year old who might naturally be much rougher on the cardboard.

Lionel's favorite – the DeLongs



Surprisingly the very limited distribution DeLongs of 1933 were about the only cards in town. The DeLongs did not even make an appearance in some of the cities. Lionel's older sister in Bloomington, Illinois picked up cards available there: the 1933 Goudeys. To this day Carter calls them "Big League Cards" which is what they say on most fronts. It is also the name I called them as a kid. The Big League cards added quite a bit to the rosters of the various card game teams in Colfax. Carter was a little upset with Goudey for overdoing it with the 2 identical Gehrigs and 4 Ruth cards. One of each would do. Again, Carter kept the best cards as singles and away from the card game handlers.

Early Hobby Writer

Carter continued with baseball in high school, leading off and playing left field, and kept up his interest in cards. He found the Goudeys and Diamond Stars. Batter Ups were of particular interest. The 1935 Goudeys and wide and fine pen premiums were greeted with less enthusiasm. Carter subscribed to the stamp collector's publication Kaw Chief Stamp Journal of Lawrence, Kansas. In 1935 he was asked to write a column about baseball card collecting for the publication. In 1937 Carter wrote an article on baseball cards for Hobbies Magazine. Despite this visibility he was initially unable to find other baseball card collectors. Eventually he found Edward Golden of Norton Heights, Connecticut. Golden and Carter traded for missing series of Batter Ups that were not available in their respective areas. Again Carter made sure he got cards in the best condition, no standing up those die-cut batter-ups to play the card games.

Finally, Connections to Other Hobbyists

Through Golden, Carter learned of Jefferson Burdick which seemed at the time to be another great thrill like the drug store DeLongs. Burdick had published 5 issues of his "Card Collectors Bulletin." Carter quickly subscribed in 1938, got copies of the issues he had missed, and began a nearly uninterrupted string of 50 years subscribing to and contributing to various hobby publications. The first issue of Card Collectors Bulletin consisted of two mimeographed pages and listed the 14 other known card collectors to whom Burdick sent the publication. Buck Barker and John Wagner were names familiar

to me. Burdick lived at 417 S. Crouse Ave, Syracuse, New York. (Someone should check the floorboards.) The early issues contained Burdick's first efforts to create what became the American Card Catalog. Carter has meticulously preserved these publications. Burdick's Card Collectors Bulletins (30 cents per year for a subscription) provide a wealth of information in a few pages. It is clear that Burdick was not a baseball card collector at the time. His interests and other collectors seemed to be spread among the host of subjects appearing on insert and advertising cards in the U.S. and Britain. Gum baseball cards were a little too recent at the time. On the other hand, Carter had still never seen a tobacco insert card.

Carter has preserved the first issue of Burdick's Card Collectors Bulletin from 1937 and most other pre-1980 hobby publications.

CARD COLLECTORS BULLETIN

No. 1.

Jan. 1, 1937

Last winter in each of three issues of Hobbies Magazine there appeared an article on old Cigarette Cards. The interest in those notes shows that the Hobby has real possibilities for development.

It is expected to resume a small column in Hobbies on card collecting in an early issue. Cooperation of all collectors is asked in order to make it permanent, and, a success. Naturally, the magazine notes will have to be held to a general nature and, will not be entirely on Tobacco Cards.

These "Bulletins will supplement the magazine notes and will furnish the needed technical details while leaving the historical material etc. to the magazine.

COLLECTORS DIRECTORY

The following Directory of Card Collectors is by no means a complete listing of all known collectors, but is a start in that direction. Others will be added in future Bulletins.

It has been impossible to contact everyone, and many others are not listed due to misunderstandings, the general rush of business of the Holiday Season.

A few listings are dealers rather than collectors and, some others are possibly not actively engaged in collecting at the present time. The listing is intended solely as an introduction to individual correspondence.

- 1-B.T. Baker, 514 E. 6th St., Santa Ana, Cal. Has old time collection.
- 2-H. Glover Bennett, 679 So. Cecil Ave., Louisville, Ky. General Coll.
- 3-William N. Beyer, 527 N. 22nd St. Phila. Penna. Dealer.
- 4-B.H. Blank, 710 Cherry St., Mount Carmel, Ill.
- 5-J.R. Burdick, 417 So. Crouse Ave., Syracuse, N.Y. General Collector.
- 6-Ray B. Cooper, 4006 Potamic Ave., Chicago, Ill. Dealer & Token Coll.
- 7-F.A. Mangold, 624 Highland St. N., St. Petersburg, Fla. Has old Coll.
- 8-Philip H. Messers, 7 Trowbridge St. N.E., Grand Rapids, Mich. Has collection of Cards and other Relics, Curios.
- 9-R.G. Michel, Cresskill, N.J., Collects all Tobacco Historical matter.
- 10-Francis E. Smith, 31 Blake St., Wollaston, Mass. Collector & Dealer.
- 11-Donald VanBrakle, Crown Point, N.Y. General Collector.
- 12-John D. Wagner, 1925 Briggs St., Harrisburg, Penna. General Collector. Specializing in Baseball Subjects.
- 13-Raymond J. Walker, 317 Westauk Ave., New London, Conn. General Coll.
- 14-Paul Warner, 4127 No. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill. Collects Indian & Western Subjects on old A & G and Kimball cards.
- 15-Marcus White, 15 Sherburne Ave., Worcester, Mass. Has old Collection but specializes on U.S. postal stationery.

It is intended to list not only Collectors but also Dealers and others who may have cards to sell or who may wish to buy. Listing costs nothing and not too much should be expected from it, but those who take full advantage of such a list should receive considerable benefits.

COLLECTORS BULLETIN

J. R. BURDICK
417 SO. CROUSE AVE.
SYRACUSE, N. Y.

June 1, 1937

originally planned for this date but publication at this time and so seems advisable. First, the listing of Elan... by collectors. Together with Leathers, these com... tobacco inserts. It is again requested that all... of these "other inserts" write me. Several have

on at this time allows me to notify collectors that... at my original address of 417 South Crouse Avenue... change, although present conditions do not seem to... 417 South Crouse Avenue is the address printed on

names at this time:
Colfax, Illinois Baseball card specialist
Brooklyn, N.Y. Collector and dealer
New York, N.Y.

Aside from the various classifications covered in... no other card listings are contemplated except those... ing those of ice cream, cracker jack, etc. Bulletin... in these listings and No. 8 (later in the season) will... of these issues are now current.

with No. 7 it is planned to distribute free of charge... tors receiving this Bulletin. Several have mentioned... be fully prepared and forwarded to me by September 10... for complete coverage. They should be on one sheet of... sides if desired. Prices should not be mentioned and... out previous inquiry. Items listed should be confined... lletins. Want lists are temporary affairs and it would... to me until about September 1st so that they will be as... le.

to all subscribers without charge. A very few copies... left and may be had at .25.

CHECKLIST OF LEATHERS

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- orders, etc. " "
- children's story designs " "
- ed " "
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The 112th

World War II interrupted card collecting but not Carter's continued interest. Hobby publications were sent to his mother's house in Colfax while Carter traveled throughout the Pacific with the 112th U.S. Cavalry Regiment, the horse soldiers. Not surprisingly, Carter became the historian/organizer of the 112th Cavalry's subsequent reunions. The 1,500-man regiment suffered heavy casualties during the war. He has documented their efforts with photos and clippings and continues working on a book about the unit. Carter's "draft" looks and reads like it could be photographed as-is and issued tomorrow.

Post War Collecting

After the war Carter moved to Chicago. In 1946 John D. Wagner sent Carter a significant collection of early tobacco cards after learning of Carter's interest in cards and his war record. Carter politely declined the gift and sent the cards back. But in time he was able to trade with Wagner and others so that he worked backward in completing tobacco and candy sets from the early 1900s. This time it was harder for Carter to get the mint condition cards that he preferred. He couldn't buy them as they were issued. Carter actively pursued the new issues after the war as well, Leafs and Bowmans (PCLs in gem mint), the first Topps including the Connie Mack and Major League All Stars, team cards, blue backs and red backs. Each year Carter bought plenty of cards and began picking out the best-centered and clearest cards for his set collection and then trading or selling his duplicates. In Chicago he found a few other collectors. Carter may have put together the first "show" when Carter, Buck Barker and Bob Wilson set up their cards in one room each of Carter's apartment in the early 1950s. They moved about the rooms trading, comparing and having a great time. He traveled to the first large shows in Los Angeles and Detroit in the early 1970s. Oh, by the way, Carter worked for a bank and married the wonderful, energetic Irma Carter in 1953. They have traveled extensively since Lionel's retirement.

Carter wrote for hobby publications, for the most part without compensation. The names of Frank Nagy, Buck Barker, Preston Orem, Bob Jasperson and Charles Bray appear in the publications Carter has retained. Carter's own writings flow easily, describe quickly, and contain a sense of humor and perspective. The following are excerpted from one of Carter's articles:

"A stick of gum and a baseball card for 1 cent, the clerk had said, and I had handed over my nickel for five."

"But again like today, who cared about the gum?"

"I think the first card set purchased by a collector remains one of his favorite sets..."

About flipping – "Frayed edges and trimmed cards, those boys should have been thrown in jail."

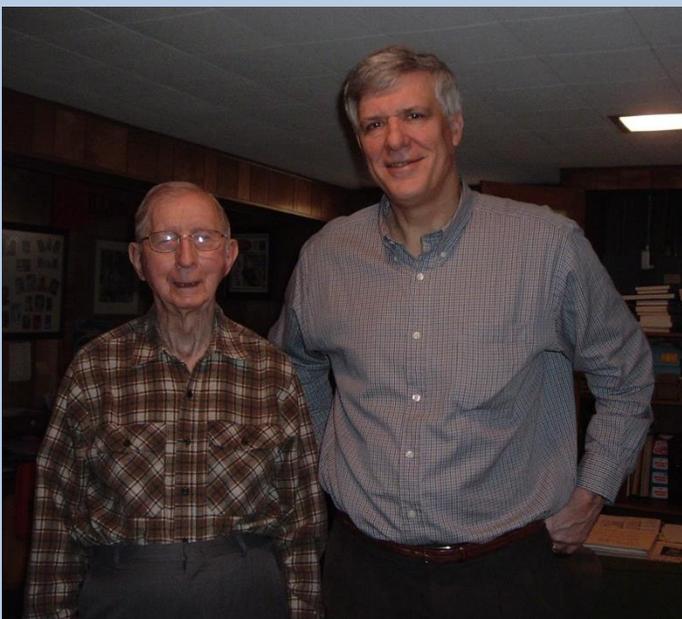
Other Early Collectors

Carter has many great stories about other collectors:

- Harry Kenworthy was born in 1902 and began collecting tobacco cards as a kid. He kept collecting until his death in 1980. Harry placed cards in cracker barrels for storage during cross-country buying trips. He would stop on the way through Chicago and spend the night with the Carters.
- Buck Barker was a generous collector with a disinterest in condition. When Barker came to a show, table holders would line up to try to buy from Barker. Barker organized much of the gum card section of the American Card Catalog and wrote extensively for the hobby publications. He was known as a true baseball fan as well as a collector.
- Walt Corson was one of the earliest collectors and amassed over 300,000 cards including 616 different complete sets. Corson worked on the American Card Catalog and checklisted many sets. In addition to the baseball card collection, Corson collected post cards and published a monthly collector newsletter.
- Frank Nagy bought Walt Corson's collection for \$3,000
- Lloyd Christiansen: Put his initials "L.C." on his cards
- Charles Bray took over *The Card Collectors Bulletin* from Burdick in 1949. He sold his extensive collection in the mid 1960s to E.C. Wharton-Tigar another legendary collector from London.
- Preston Orem offered Carter the Wagner for \$150, which Carter declined. Orem published books on early baseball history after selling his collection (pretty dry statistical accounts of early baseball.)
- Lew Lipset swapped Batter Ups with Carter
- Jefferson Burdick sent Carter one of the ten 1933(4) Lajoies that Goudey had sent to Burdick. Burdick visited Carter to see his collection of "recent" gum cards. The Carters visited Burdick in Syracuse.

Carter's Cards

Update: In 2007 Lionel Carter decided to sell his entire collection of cards through auctions throughout the year by Mastro Auctions. The auction house took possession of the entire collection. However, prior to 2007 I had an opportunity to visit with Lionel and view the collection before it was "entombed" by graders.



Lionel Carter and author George Vrechek

Carter organized his collection before the advent of the plastic sheet. Cards were placed in albums using album corners, originally black corners and then clear. Cards were arranged

numerically in albums with a cover sheet describing the set and an extra card or two mounted so that the backs are visible. Since the card backs were otherwise not visible, the first and last number of the cards on a page were stamped on the pages. The skip numbered Leafs all got their own number. Cards were arranged on a page symmetrically, which was hard given the horizontals mixed in with the portrait formats. The cards since 1933 looked untouched since the day they emerged from the drug store. Die-cut, stand up cards were just as they were in the pack, flat. Centering was as even as possible. Borders were white. The only alteration to original condition was that the gum dust was off the cards.

Cards are mounted with clear plastic or paper hinged corners: a time-consuming process before the advent of plastic sheets.

Tobacco cards arranged in a sea of colors.



An album might have contained all the Diamond Stars including the high numbers, Canadian Goudeys, Batter Ups, and Playballs. Another album might hold Topps. The high numbers appeared with no fanfare. There were few variations, although he had the 1954 Bowman Williams. Tobacco cards were a little rougher but not much. The major

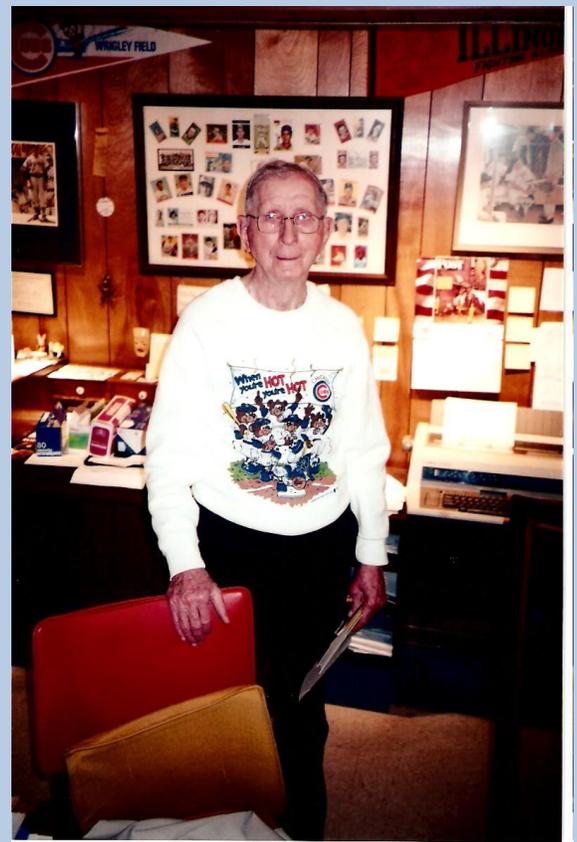
tobacco cards were all there except the Wagner mentioned previously. There were a few cards missing from sets, but very few. A few of the less attractive sets, with minimal sentimental value had been sold off over the years.

Carter stuck it out as the 1980s arrived, still buying cards and sets as they came out. 1982 Donruss cards were placed in plastic sheets. Carter couldn't remember the last time he bought a card that he needed.

Still Going

Like many veteran hobbyists, the last dozen years or so of escalating prices and card issues waned Carter's interest in collecting. Although I did notice that he picked up one of the Topps commemorative cards at a Cub's game a few years ago, just as I had. While he still had a want list someplace, he felt he had collected enough. I tried to tweak his interest by explaining some of the variations and inserts I've found in issues from the 30s through the 60s, but I don't think I distracted him a bit from his current interest which is finishing his book about the 112th Cavalry.

Lionel Carter is a delightful, modest man with remarkable consistency and organization. He has a sense of humor and is a gifted writer. You'll find him still sending off letters to editors to express views or add missing information. Each 4th of July he wears his World War II cavalry uniform and marches in the local parade. Each year he gets a plaque honoring him for "First Place Military Marching Units." Quite an understatement, just like the man.



Lionel Carter

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A big OBC thank you to [Sports Collectors Digest \(SCD\)](#) for allowing us to reprint George's articles here on the OBC site.