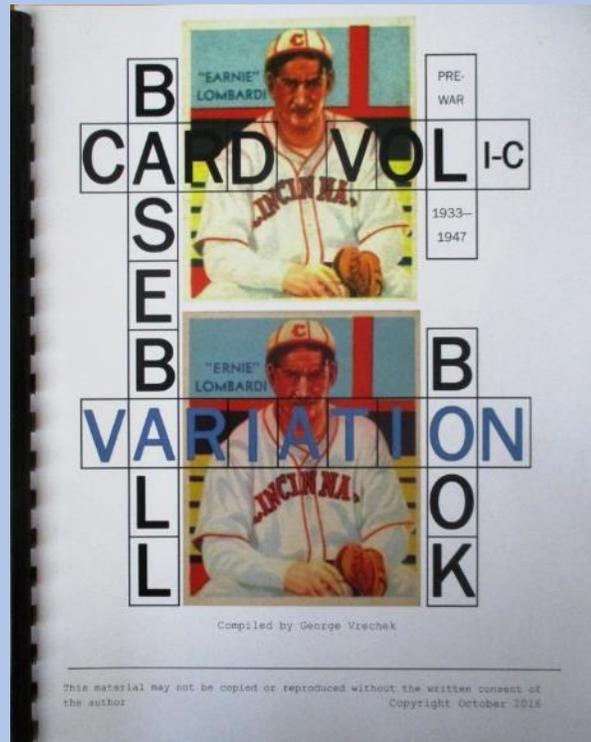
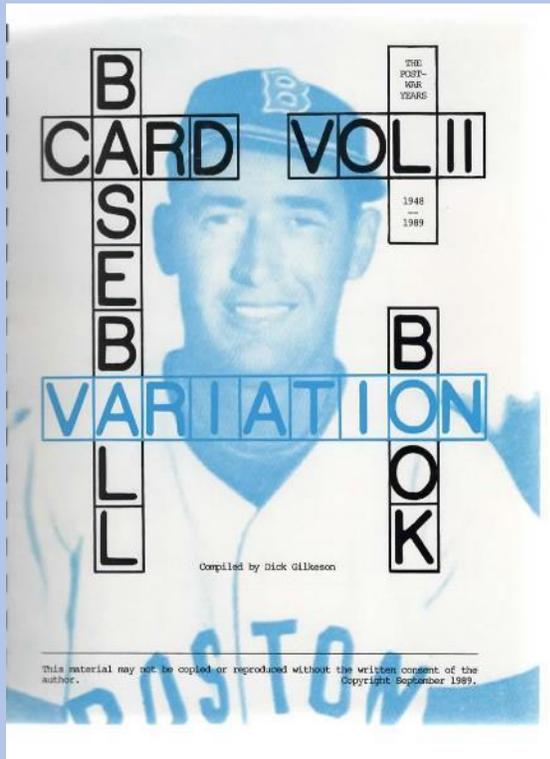




# Updating catalogs for variation discoveries, a challenge

by George Vrechek



*Gilkeson's variation book covering 1948 to 1999 and Vrechek's book covering 1933 to 1947*

Terms such as variations, errors and printing differences are found frequently in articles about the card collecting hobby. Most sane people wouldn't get too excited about blobs, lines, colors and errors on trading cards. However, card collectors are extraordinary people, and many of us keep working on master sets of cards long after it would make sense to outsiders. The good news is that variations keep coming to light, even on very old sets. Keeping track of them has been a challenge.

## **Classic 1950s variations**

Some of us were around when a few variations were quickly noticed in the 1950s. The 1955 Bowman variations were obvious with the Johnson and Bolling boys being confused. For those who looked a little deeper, there were plenty of 1954 Bowmans with statistical corrections as well as the Piersall/Williams switcheroo. The first series red and black backs of the 1952 Topps set were also obvious.

## **More variations and printing differences**

According to former Topps employee Len Brown, Woody Gelman of Topps liked to see cards printed on white stock which produced clearer images than the cheaper gray stock favored by his buddy Ben Solomon, who was always trying to save the company a buck or two. Sometimes they printed the same cards on both kinds of stock (1952, 1956, 1959, 1960).

The 1961 through 1973 sets had variations in format or information just about any time a checklist was printed. There were also 1956 team cards, 1958 and 1969 white and yellow lettering changes, the 1962 green tints, the 1974 Washington “Nationals” and a few other glitches.

However, Topps wasn't into correcting errors on many of the player cards, and they didn't look at variations as adding anything appreciable to the bottom line. Other smaller issuers like Royal Desserts, Post Cereal and Kellogg's printed variations galore.

*The Trader Speaks*, *The Sport Hobbyist* and *SCD* would have columns dealing with errors and variations. Buck Barker, Irv Lerner and Bob Solon wrote articles.

### **Floodgates open in the 1980s**

The 1980s brought many collectors into the hobby and produced an explosion of sets. The 1981 and 1982 Fleer and Donruss sets were loaded with variations – correcting a slew of mistakes. Collectors were enthused by the new sets and the variations were an added attraction. Card companies soon figured out that variations didn't hurt business either (think 1989 Fleer Billy Ripken).

### **Variation publications**

As early as 1976, collector Ralph Nozaki published a book he called *Errors and Variations Checklist*. I contacted Nozaki who recalled, “That edition was about half the length of what came out five years later. I was 17 at the time of the first edition; I completed the second one during my senior year at the University of Illinois,” which he titled, *The Mistake Manual*. Nozaki continued updating his book and writing for *Baseball Hobby News* through the 1980s.

In 1989, variation collector Dick Gilkeson self-published a book titled “*Baseball Card Variation Book, Volume II.*” Gilkeson credited work by others including Nozaki, Lee Champion, Dan Albaugh, Lew Lipset, Dwight Chapin, Bill Mitchell, Jim Nowell, John Spaulding, Al Weber and Lynda Weber. I purchased Gilkeson's book and the subsequent updates and was immediately enthused by the depth and accuracy of his compilation. If you were interested in 1952 Topps or in Fleer stickers variations, they were all there. Gilkeson's 8-1/2” by 11” book grew to over 140 pages that you could bind yourself with a plastic spiral binder, adding updates also sold by Gilkeson. There was no attempt to include values, only to indicate which version was thought to be harder.

Despite the baseball title, Gilkeson included football, basketball and hockey (plus a smattering of soccer, racing, and non-sport) sets since 1948 in his book, calling it *Volume II* with the hope that someone else would tackle a *Volume I*, covering everything prior to 1948.

### **SCD Catalog**

Late *SCD* editor Bob Lemke (1951-2017) kept in touch with others interested in obscure sets and variations. He also edited *SCD's* annual baseball card catalog (except for a three-year break) and told me he included variations which were significant or deserved different pricing. Lemke wrote in 2009, “It is my fervent wish that all readers...become participants in this dialogue, whether by submitting new information or asking questions that will spark discussions....” We miss Lemke and his card news.

Lemke edited a 2011 *Standard Catalog of Baseball Cards, 20<sup>th</sup> Edition* by Krause Publications which included then recent issues and variations. Also, in 2011 he edited the first catalog for pre-1981 cards, the *Standard Catalog of Vintage Baseball Cards*. There have been six vintage catalogs issued, the last in 2016.

### **Variations avalanche**

By the 1990s, collectors got more new sets and variations than they could handle. Even Nozaki and Gilkeson couldn't deal with the avalanche. Gilkeson updated his work through 1997 and then left it at that. He acknowledges today that some of the variations he listed were minor printing differences which

didn't deserve much attention. Nozaki commented to me that he saw the tenor evolve. Collectors were upset that every little printing difference they may have found wasn't being reported. Nozaki's insights deserve a future article.

EBay sellers continue to tout variations when they are often just among the plethora of printing differences found in most of the Topps sets from the 1960s and 1970s. Badly mis-cut and out of register cards are described as variations when a more accurate description would be scrap cardboard. However, occasionally, new significant variations have been reported in *SCD* which somehow escaped public notice for many years.

### Grading

Collectors have told me that grading companies will notate a card as being a variation, if the card is listed in a published catalog. Values may increase once a card is separated from the common cards by being a harder variation. Lemke's approach at omitting some variations from the catalog, if there were no price differences between the versions, must be periodically re-evaluated. PSA online population listings will have some, but not all, of the known variations. The financial importance of a card being listed in a catalog has grown.

### Updating Gilkeson's catalog

Gilkeson always wanted to integrate his updates into one final book covering everything he had worked on through 1997, including any subsequent finds which surfaced. The task proved difficult in that the software used for the original book was obsolete.

Several variation collectors stayed in touch with Gilkeson to see what we could do to assist in the process. In 2016, I published a 24-page booklet titled "Baseball Variation Book, Volume I-C, 1933 to 1947" with the hope that someone else would tackle the tobacco card era as Volume I-A and the subsequent issues before 1933 as Volume I-B. I had fun trying to list all the MP&Co. and exhibit variations.

### Cady's approach

Four years ago, collector Mike Cady volunteered to take on the considerable task of updating Volume II. With Gilkeson's consent, Cady used information and formatting from Volume II, but has gone modern by converting it all into a blog which lists variations in each set and can accommodate, updates, photos and discussions. The sections can be printed and made into a booklet, like Gilkeson's original format with boxes to check as per the example below.

1955 BOWMAN				
48 Milt Bolling	<input type="checkbox"/>	Frank back	<input type="checkbox"/>	Milt back
101 Don Johnson	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ernie (Brave Uniform)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Don (Oriole Uniform)
132 Kuenn	<input type="checkbox"/>	Kueen back	<input type="checkbox"/>	Kuenn back
157 Ernie Johnson	<input type="checkbox"/>	Don (Oriole)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ernie (Brave)
195 Palica	<input type="checkbox"/>	No traded line	<input type="checkbox"/>	Traded line added
204 Frank Bolling	<input type="checkbox"/>	Milt back	<input type="checkbox"/>	Frank back

*An example of the catalog format*

Cady commented, "My goal, as per Dick's request, is to provide a site listing all of the variations, by definition as listed on the website, from all four sports and some non-sports, with as many photos as possible and to be updated when new ones are discovered. Plus, create a forum where there can be discussions by all and photo sharing of old and potentially new variations."

Cady decided to ditch all but the prominent printing differences, even if they had been listed in Gilkeson's book. The distinction has been made by collectors that a variation is only created in the pre-press stage and that printing differences comprise everything else that happens once the presses start.

Collecting printing differences can be fun, but they aren't variations. However, there is often a hazy line between variations and some printing differences. Even the printers and layout people may not have been able to tell what caused the change. A 1950 #245 Papai was reported in *SCD* in 2019 which had a fat, blue loop on the bottom left corner. Was it a printing glitch that was removed in the press room, or did it venture on and off the pre-press sheet as a variation? What about the 1958 Topps Pancho Herrera/ Herrer? When in doubt, Cady has tried to list cards in the hazy area as well.



*The left corner of 1950 Bowman Al Papai was found with a mysterious blue streak.*

He also decided to only list sets produced between 1948 and 1999, in that way including all Gilkeson's prior work, but not more modern issues.

Cady surveyed several collectors to see if we knew of variations in old sets which had been discovered since Gilkeson's work, and he incorporated everything into a variation blog. Interested collectors can contact Cady and get access to the copyrighted blog site; see [baseballcardvariationsguidebookvol2.wordpress.com](http://baseballcardvariationsguidebookvol2.wordpress.com).

### **10 recent interesting variations**

Rather than trying to cover everything, I thought we could look at just ten noticeable variations that have been discovered in older post-war baseball sets since Gilkeson's book was published. All of these have been reported in *SCD* and will be on Cady's website.

1. **1952 Topps #307 Campos** Topps 1952 set collectors seem delighted to pursue additional cards, be they variations or printing differences - and pay good money for them. About 10 years ago, the Campos card was spotted three ways: with two red stars on the bottom back, two red stars and a missing front border line, and with one black star and one red star. Frank House's Tiger logo and two versions of the entire third series graybacks (clear and muted) have also been explored in recent years.
2. **1953 Bowman #43** Hal Bevan's date of birth was originally printed in error as 1950 but corrected in lesser quantities to 1930. For most collectors, the first knowledge of this came via a *SCD* article over 10 years ago.
3. **1954 Bowman loops in the sky** In another *SCD* article over 10 years ago, we found that there were unnoticed "loops in the sky" for all these many years on two 1954 Bownmans. This is a strange variation in that #10 Erskine and #218 Roe can be found with or without the errant remnants of a player's signature from the cards above them on the printing sheet (#2 Jackie Jensen and #210 Jimmy Piersall). There are also a few partially airbrushed versions.

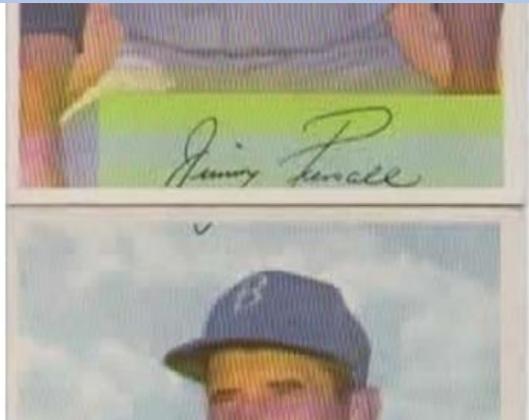
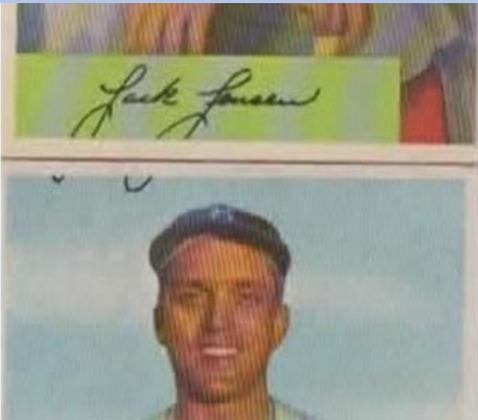
nk proved he was ready for the majors wh  
Senators at the end of the '51 season. He  
Charlotte, where he led the Tri-State Leagu  
He hit .322 for Charlotte in 1950 and in '49  
.338 mark. A former Havana College stu  
o pro ball with Portsmouth in 1944 and th  
He was out of organized ball in 1946-47.

**MINOR LEAGUE BATTING RECORDS**      **FIELDING**

At Bat	Runs	Hits	Home Runs	RBI	Batting Average	Put-outs	Ass
26	4	11	0	3	.423	6	
2852	421	820	10	309	.321	1250	78

rd with Washington Senators      \*\*Minor League Li

☆ **TOPPS BASEBALL** ☆



The 1952 Campos with one red star and one black star and two 1954 Bowmans with "loops in the sky"

4. **1955 Topps Sullivan** Variations seem to pop up when an avid employee thinks they have spotted a stray glob on a card and removes it from the press sheet for subsequent printings. Unfortunately, some of these stray blobs needed to stay put in that they were dots over the letter "i" in a player's signature. Poor Frank Sullivan's dotted "i" got removed, partially removed, put back and darkened in about six different versions of his card. Other autographs have also been spotted with dots or no dots –1955 Topps #29 Wehmeier and 1967 Topps #223 Mike Ryan.

Frank Sullivan's signature has a dot over the "i" which took on six different looks.

5. **1955 Topps Jackie Robinson** In the September 28, 2018 SCD, Bert Lehman reported that the Robinson card can be found with the Dodger logo slightly cut off on the left side which appeared to be caused by a pre-press change in the card layout. The same truncated logo was noticed on the 1955 Topps Wehmeier variation by Tom Billing.
6. **1956 Flat hats** Several eBay sellers pointed out very slight cropping differences on some 1956 Topps. A headshot is superimposed over an action background. Images shift slightly within the frame of many cards but are not mis-cuts. In extreme cases it appears that hats had been cut off or flattened, or that feet have moved in relation to the card border. In 2013 a few of us variation-chasers noted several 1956 cards with the altered cropping and found that the flat hats were about as common as the regular hats.

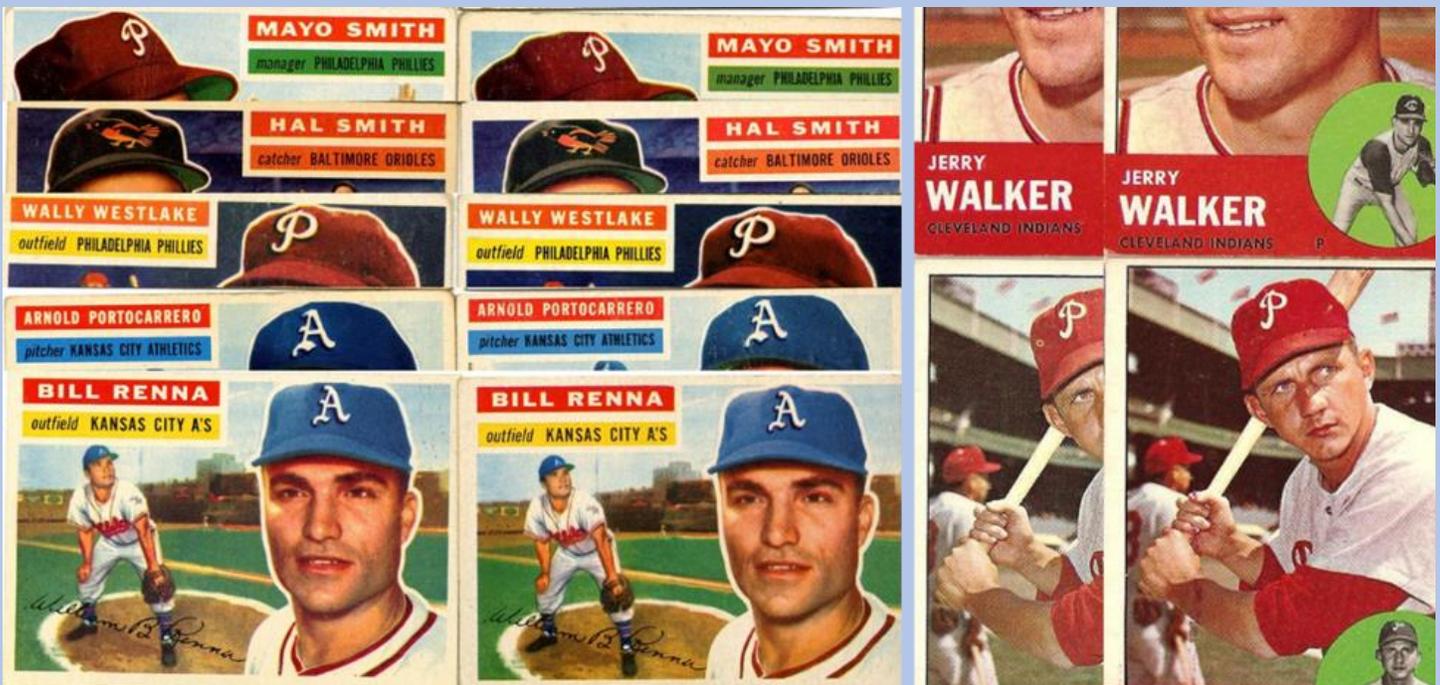


7. **Exhibit cards** Lemke's listing of baseball exhibit card variations in the annual catalog was acknowledged to be only some of the variations found on exhibit cards. Gilkeson skipped the exhibits entirely.

As I have reported, the Exhibit Supply Company would re-use the same images for many years. However, they might change the notations at the bottom of the cards. Cards were printed in black and white, sepia and other colors. Autographs were changed and images were cropped differently. The catalog listed some variations that don't appear to exist (Appling, Bearden, Branca, Dillinger and Keller without "An Exhibit Card") and missed dozens of other variations. I prepared a baseball exhibit card variation spreadsheet for post-1938 releases which will be incorporated in Cady's online resource. With assistance from Fred McKie, I am still working on sorting out all the cards which can be found in both black and white and sepia.

8. **1963 Topps – 11 cropping differences** Again, eBay sellers pointed out slight cropping differences on a few 1963 Topps cards in the same print run. It occurred to me that there must be a logical explanation for the variations. With the help of Dennis Elkin in 2010, we found an entire 11-card row of cards repeated on a B sheet where the player images and their inset photos shifted slightly within the card frame. The card numbers are 372, 376, 386, 387, 388, 404, 409, 413, 438, 439 and 445.

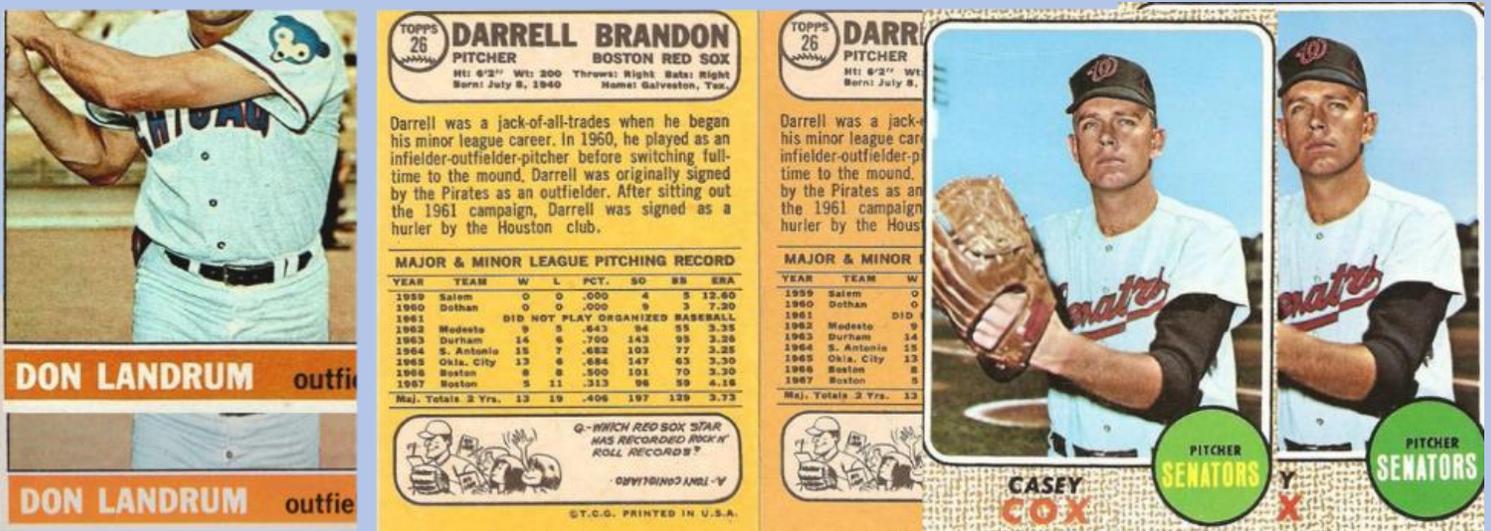
*Several 1956s and 11 1963 cards moved on press sheets producing images cropped slightly differently. Note the top of the hats on the 1956s. The 1963 Walker has one or two stripes visible on his shoulder. The player behind Oldis' bat has a uniform number more or less visible.*



9. **1966 Topps Landrum's fly** Topps airbrushing in the 1960s was generally limited to changing the hats or uniforms of traded players. However, they also could help button a player's fly as noted in an SCD article about Don Landrum's card #43. The fly on Landrum's pants was airbrushed to conceal the offending button, however a third version was also created with an only partially successful airbrushing.

10. **1968 Milton Bradley** Lemke let the world know in a 2006 *SCD* that 77 1967 Topps baseball cards, 33 1968 Topps football cards and 22 hot rod cards were printed together for a Milton Bradley game. Dr. Carlton Miller explained the details in a 2014 *SCD*. The goldenrod backs stand out from the regular issue when placed side by side; otherwise they can be hard to distinguish. Mis-cut football cards will show a touch of the burlap background used on the adjacent baseball cards.

However, the revelation that hit me when I learned about the Milton Bradleys was that the long-listed yellow-letter variations for #49 Brinkman and #66 Cox were actually their cards in the MB set. It also told me that all MBs were relatively scarce (like the Brinkman and Cox cards) compared to the regular Topps issue. The MB Nolan Ryan and Joe Namath cards have become pricey. From the Miller article, we learned that baseball checklist #107 came in two versions – just like in the regular set, with Marichal’s inset photo cropped differently. You could argue that the 132 MBs are not variations, but a completely different set – which you can chose to ignore.



*The button on Landrum’s fly was airbrushed away in 1966, and in 1968 Topps produced a set of cards for a Milton Bradley game.*

There are plenty of other variations that popped up after Gilkeson’s last update, and Cady has tried to capture them all to provide some interesting reading. It is a bit surprising that even advanced collectors interested in variations haven’t all gotten around to grabbing one of these variation catalogs to see what else is out there.

Gilkeson still has some copies of his original book and updates for sale and can be reached at [gilkeson1@msn.com](mailto:gilkeson1@msn.com). Mike Cady continues working on the updated Volume II blog. If you want to get on Cady’s list, when he is ready to publish, send him an email at [mcady68677@aol.com](mailto:mcady68677@aol.com).

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