

New finds about the puzzling old Exhibits

Year by year checklists compiled for 1939-1966



Uncut sheets were vital in compiling annual listings. This 1947 panel had five Salutation cards retaining their reformatted 9/16" print notations and three new cards with 1/2" notations. (Photo, Fred McKie)



By George Vrechek

All some people need to hear is that it can't be done, and they are on the case to see if they can do it anyway. Even if they don't succeed, at a minimum, more is learned about a difficult subject. Dating Exhibit cards and finding variations provide such a challenge for many collectors.

Exhibit Supply Company of Chicago (ESCO) produced cards, "Exhibits," for arcade vending machines between 1901 and 1980. In 1919 under the ownership of J. Frank Meyer, ESCO expanded their operations into manufacturing arcade machines, including pinball machines and card dispensers. ESCO cranked out baseball arcade cards starting in 1921 through 1966 - when concerns about licensing and the waning arcade business finally ended the run.

Beckett Vintage Collector covered ESCO's legacy in the August/September 2020 issue with my article "Exhibiting History." I mentioned that collector Elwood Scharf (1919-2012) was particularly enthused about cataloging Exhibits and continued the work of Jefferson Burdick (1900-63).

Scharf's research

Scharf presented year by year listings of newly created Exhibits from 1946 to 1966 using his knowledge of when print notations were placed on new cards. His work appeared in a series of articles in *The Trader Speaks* in the early 1980s. However, sometimes he didn't have information on which cards were repeated from prior years. He viewed such an investigation as impractical since there was nothing new about repeated cards.

For Salutation Exhibits issued between 1939 and 1945, he lumped them all together in a July 1980 *TTS* article, which included this comment:

"Most cards have the largest mark seen on Exhibits, measuring three-fourths inch. Some of them, including McQuinn, Pollet, Reiser, Boudreau, Heath and Williams, are seen with a much smaller mark that is only one-half inch in length. These marks were printed in either the left or right corner and it appears certain that they were mixed in the same printings. Attempts to use the size or location of the mark to pin down the first year of issue of a specific card are guesswork. I have tried, as have many others, to name the cards printed and distributed in each of these years, but this is only more guesswork and, from a practical standpoint, we would accomplish little even if we could.... Some may dispute this grouping together of all fifty-one cards, but in view of the factors cited above, I can see no practical alternatives."

Well, Scharf's comments from 43 years ago became the challenge to see if a few of us Exhibit enthusiasts could date not only the Salutations but all Exhibits produced between 1939 and 1966. We felt more information might emerge on the relative scarcities of cards, and perhaps some new variations might be uncovered.

McKie met Gore and Scharf

Fred McKie has been working the Exhibit card puzzle since visiting the ESCO print shop in 1966 and meeting Chet Gore. Gore started at ESCO as plant manager in 1937 and bought the company in the 1950s. McKie came away from his visit with several ESCO catalogs touting the new issues each year and some uncut sheets.

McKie grew up in New Jersey near Philadelphia. He recalled, "My father and grandfather worked for DuPont and every year, on the weekend after Labor Day, DuPont would rent out Clementon Amusement Park, and all the employees and families had the run of the park! No entrance fee, no tickets for rides etc. This was my introduction to Exhibit cards in about 1959.

"Somehow in the early 1960s, most likely through a hobby publication, I got in touch with a guy named Jack Thompson who was a collector from Chicago. In 1966 my family and I visited Chicago and contacted Jack again. He was the one along with my father who took me to see Gore at ESCO where I got my uncut sheets. While there I also visited and met for the first time Don Steinbach who lived with his parents."

McKie met Scharf and his wife Ann at one of the early conventions and later visited him at his home and mentioned, "I now own all Scharf's Exhibit records with notations showing the work which led up to his series of articles." Scharf's notes were available for our research.

McKie has continued the hunt and one of his recent finds of 22 Exhibit cards with advertising on the backs reignited the idea that annual listings could be created for the Salutation years.



David Kiehle did a remarkable job of organizing an array of Exhibits

.David Kiehle rolls up his sleeves

My earlier articles on Exhibits eventually attracted the attention of David Kiehle of Albany, New York. Kiehle collected as a kid in the 1950s. College and teaching interrupted his collecting, but his mom never threw out his cards, and he resumed collecting as an adult.

"I started to fill in the sets that were not finished earlier and decided to obtain an active playing card for all Hall of Famers. I also try to obtain a card of every player that I can. This led me to search for 1947 to 1966 Exhibit cards. Where else can you get a card of Guy Curtright?"

"I had a few Exhibits that I had gotten from an amusement park myself as a kid. So, then I decided to work on the whole set, as well as the 1939 to 1946 Salutations. All these cards have wonderful pictures of the players and were relatively inexpensive at the time. I bought many lots and singles and started to discover that several cards had variations that were not listed in any checklist book or in any online checklist. I think the first one I discovered was Don Blasingame with 'USA' in his Cardinals logo (1959) as opposed to the one with only 'SA' in the logo (1958). I know this is trivial to many, but it led me to investigate and discover many other subtle and not so subtle variations."

With Kiehle's attention to detail, we worked on listing the Exhibits printed each year and noting the differences among cards. Here is what we had to work with when it came to organizing the Salutation Exhibits.

Issues prior to 1939

In 1936 ESCO put four players from the same team on each of 16 cards and introduced a print notation at the bottom "PTD IN U.S.A." Gore joined ESCO in 1937 and used the same 1936 format in 1937.

In 1938 ESCO again used four players on 16 cards but with a new notation "MADE IN U.S.A." Something was cooking here with Gore running the show since the notations used in later years clearly were there to help (just) ESCO identify when they last changed a card. Putting a date on a card would have spilled the beans to customers that many of these images remained unchanged for 5, 10 or even 14 years.

Cards produced between 1939 and 1945

In 1939 ESCO returned to a format used between 1921 and 1929 of one player per card but with the player's "autograph" and a salutation. Scharf noted that 24 of the Salutation cards had MADE IN U.S.A. in 3/4" type length located in the right corner of the card with 11 American Leaguers and 13 National Leaguers. The same print notation was made on 21 different cards (10 from the A.L. and 11 from the N.L.) but placed in the left corner.

Six additional cards were printed during this period but with 1/2" MADE IN U.S.A. type length. The notations are on the left corner for four American Leaguers and on the right for two National Leaguers.

Scharf reported 16 cards were likely printed each year between 1939 and 1941 and then 32 cards were printed annually from 1942 to 1945.

The scarcest cards, per Scharf, were Averill, Gomez and Hartnett followed by Kreevich, Lombardi (cordially), Mulcahy, Newson, Rizzo and Russell. Some veteran Exhibit collectors have responded that Gehrig and #9 Williams should also be considered among the toughest, but not Russell.

Player information to use in solving the puzzle

Gehrig played briefly in 1939 and died in 1941.

Averill was released by Detroit in February 1941 and by the Boston Braves in April 1941.

Glenn Russel (sic) (Glen "Rip" Russell) did not get into the major leagues until 1939, spent most of 1941 in the minors and then returned to the Cubs in 1942 before heading back to the minors with Los Angeles. Merrill "Pinky" May finally made it to the majors in 1939 with the Phillies and stayed until going into the Navy in 1943.

Ted Williams played full-time from 1939 to 1942 for the Red Sox. He was in the military from 1943 to 1946, although in July 1943 he was still stateside and played in an Armed Forces All-Star game along with Joe DiMaggio and Babe Ruth.

The first of 17 players to go into the military were Mulcahy (1941-4), Feller (1942-4), Greenberg (1942-4) and Travis (1942-4).

Players who retired during this era were Dean, Grove and Hartnett in 1941; Gehringer, Gomez, Hassett, and Rizzo in 1942; and Hubbell and Johnson in 1943. Klein and Foxx played sparingly.

Fred McKie (right) with John Rumierz at Ramierz' 43rd straight National



Playland ads on the backs of 21 Exhibits of McKie's helped date the cards.

Amusement park cards

McKie's recent purchase of 21 Salutation Exhibits had been stamped on the back with "Playland, Flint's newest amusement center, entertainment for the whole family, 203 South Saginaw Street."

The Playland cards had MADE IN USA 3/4" both left and right depicting Appling, Camilli, Clift, Cuccinello, Dean, Derringer, Gehringer, Gomez, Johnson, Keller, Keltner, Kreevich, McCormick, Mulcahy, Russell, Travis, Vander Meer, Vaughn, Walters, Warneke and York. Mize was also in the auction. Notice that none of the six players with MADE IN U.S.A. 1/2" notations (#9 Williams, Heath, Boudreau, McQuinn, Pollet or Reiser) were in this find.

We matched the players against years played in the majors and found that 1942 was the most likely year that ESCO would have printed the cards stamped by their Playland customer. The Flint Public Library confirmed that there was an amusement park at that address along the Flint River in 1942, but the site was vacant in 1941. By 1945 the city directory listing had changed to Playland Jewelry and Novelty.

The theory and playing the cards

Armed with the above information, I prepared a spreadsheet to sort players by various criteria. A critical decision was to assume that the notations were all in the same place in 1939 and one of the 16 players featured had to be Gehrig. The notation on Gehrig's card was MADE IN U.S.A. 3/4" on the lower left side. Since there were 24 such cards, and the theory was that notations were to indicate the year first produced, it made sense that eight players were repeated from 1939 and re-used in 1940 along with eight new players – all with notations on the lower left. Hence 24 cards with MADE IN U.S.A. left had to be played in the first two print runs of 16 cards each.

Once these cards had been played in 1939 and 1940, ESCO started using 21 MADE IN U.S.A right corner cards with 16 such cards printed in 1941. ESCO tried to spread the players among the 16 teams, but it was not always possible.



You might say that it was silly for ESCO to repeat eight cards from 1939 in the 1940 printings when there were so many stars who had not appeared yet. However, that would mean that



ESCO mixed the left and right print notations on new cards in the same year, which seems less likely. ESCO's Four-on-One 1938 Exhibits repeated 49 of their 64 player photos from 1937. In 1937 they repeated 47 of the images from 1936. I think they stuck with their overall economical formula of reusing cards and just adding new touches each year. Arcade "players" might be induced to throw more pennies into a machine if they didn't always get a brand-new card of the latest player.

In 1942 ESCO went with print runs of 32 cards, allowing them to add five new players with MADE IN U.S.A. lower right and chose among the cards previously appearing in 1939, 1940 and 1941 to fill out the 32-card run. McKie's 22 players all fit the criteria for being in the grouping of 32 cards printed in 1942.

This ad panel from an ESCO arcade machine includes six baseball players likely produced in 1942. Four were also among the "Playland" back cards. Prizefighters include Max Schmeling, which Exhibit collector Adam Warshaw pointed out, is a puzzle as to why ESCO would have included him during WWII. (Photo, Fred McKie)

When new players were added after 1942, ESCO likely used 1/2" MADE IN U.S.A. left notations for four American League players in 1943 and 1/2" MADE IN U.S.A. right notations for two National League players in 1944. It is possible that we have the years switched for the players, but there were enough players retired or in the service by 1943 that replacing four players in 1943 made more sense than just two. The 1945 printing was likely the same as in 1944, according to Scharf. The smaller print font size is quite noticeable for these six players, another indication that ESCO was using a system to keep track of changes to prior printings.

The resulting matrix of when players appeared was tested against their major league appearances, trades, retirements, service duty and the known scarcities of cards. In a few instances, a case had to be made for why certain players were included. For players in the military, it appeared that ESCO started dropping them from their 16-card runs early in the war, but by 1943 they were left in the print runs and ESCO even added Ted Williams #9 who was in the military when he first appeared on an Exhibit. (ESCO didn't have time to fiddle with a lot of new photos. Their arcade machine experience had led to producing switches used on bombers and submarines during the war.)

YEAR BY YEAR EXHIBIT CHECKLIST 1939-1944							
	font	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
Appling (batting)	L 3/4	1939			1942	1943	1944
Camilli	L 3/4	1939	1940		1942	1943	1944
Clift	L 3/4		1940		1942	1943	1944
Cuccinello	L 3/4	1939			1942	1943	1944
Dickey	L 3/4	1939	1940			1943	1944
Feller (portrait)	L 3/4	1939	1940				
Foxx	L 3/4	1939	1940		1942		
Gehrig	L 3/4	1939					
Gehring	L 3/4	1939	1940		1942		
Hassett	L 3/4		1940			1943	1944
Hubbell	L 3/4		1940		1942	1943	1944
Keller	L 3/4		1940		1942	1943	1944
Keltner	L 3/4		1940		1942	1943	1944
Lee	L 3/4	1939	1940			1943	1944
Lombardi, Cordially	L 3/4	1939					
McCormick	L 3/4		1940		1942	1943	1944
Medwick	L 3/4		1940			1943	1944
Mize	L 3/4	1939			1942	1943	
Mulcahy	L 3/4	1939			1942		
Newson (Not Newsom)	L 3/4	1939					
Ott	L 3/4	1939			1942	1943	1944
Rizzo	L 3/4		1940				
Travis	L 3/4	1939	1940		1942		
Vaughn	L 3/4	1939	1940		1942	1943	
Averill	R 3/4			1941			
Dean	R 3/4			1941	1942		
Derringer	R 3/4			1941	1942	1943	1944
Di Maggio, Joe	R 3/4			1941	1942	1943	1944
Gomez	R 3/4			1941	1942		
Greenberg, Very truly yours	R 3/4			1941	1942		
Grove	R 3/4			1941	1942		
Hartnett	R 3/4			1941			
Higbe	R 3/4			1941	1942	1943	1944
Johnson, Bob	R 3/4			1941	1942	1943	1944
Klein	R 3/4			1941			
Kreevich	R 3/4				1942	1943	1944
Kuhel	R 3/4			1941	1942	1943	1944
Lombardi, Cordially yours	R 3/4			1941		1943	1944
May	R 3/4			1941	1942	1943	1944
Newsom (new pose)	R 3/4			1941	1942	1943	1944
Russell	R 3/4				1942		
Vander Meer	R 3/4				1942	1943	1944
Walters	R 3/4				1942	1943	1944
Warneke	R 3/4			1941	1942	1943	1944
York	R 3/4				1942	1943	1944
Boudreau	R 1/2					1943	1944
Heath	R 1/2					1943	1944
McQuinn	R 1/2					1943	1944
Williams 9 SHOWING	R 1/2					1943	1944
Pollett	L 1/2						1944
Reiser	L 1/2						1944

The left or right placement of print notations and the size of the fonts were clues to the years players likely appeared.

I had erroneously assumed that Williams #9 was scarce because he appeared early in the run of Salutations like Gehrig. But the smaller print notation for Williams indicated that he came along after the print runs were expanded to 32 cards in 1942, and the larger fonts were discontinued for new cards.

Difficult cards all fit into the matrix - Gehrig, Lombardi (Cordially), Newson, Rizzo, Averill, Hartnett and Klein. We speculated that Averill may have been pulled from the 1941 printing early in the year, since he was released in April. Such mid-year changes were rare.

1946 font size uniformity

In 1946 all the mystery is gone from Salutations since Scharf was around to report that 32 cards were produced, all with new 9/16" notations, and we know who the players were.



This 1948 panel kept the four Salutation cards the same but added new Verban, Furillo, Lowrey and Kell cards with 5/8" notations. (Photo, Fred McKie)

Salutation style stays in fashion

In 1947 ESCO went to 64-card sheets reusing 29 Salutations from 1946 and adding 35 cards with 1/2" MADE IN U.S.A. notations but without salutations. Each year the number of cards with the salutation design would diminish, although new print notations might be added. In 1949 there were 13 players with salutations. In 1952 there were seven: Boudreau, DiMaggio, Elliott, Feller, Holmes, Pafko and Williams. By the end of the 1950s, ESCO was still using Feller, Pafko and Williams. Therefore "Salutations" should translate to a card style and not the years produced.

Scharf, uncut sheets and the work of Kiehle

While Scharf had information as to the players appearing for the first time in years after 1947, he didn't know exactly which players were repeated. With subsequent finds of images of uncut

sheets, panels and ad cards (supplied by McKie), David Kiehle undertook the challenging work of organizing the Exhibits. The players printed each year were identified with just a few gaps. We added the most likely players reused to fill in the gaps for seven cards in 1948, 31 in 1949, 28 in 1953, four in 1954 and two in 1957. That meant only 72 cards involved some guesswork out of 1,248 cards produced from 1946 to 1966, 5.8% of the total.

Even more variations, ask Paul

When ESCO sent brochures to their arcade customers, they highlighted new or revised sets. To keep the cards affordable and to avoid licensing questions, it made sense for them to tickle their sets rather than make major revisions.

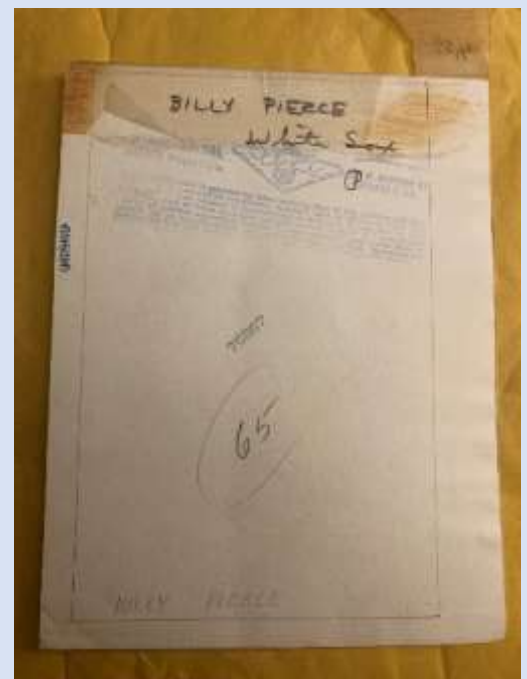
Catalog publishers have classified as variations cards with significant differences in notations: placement (left or right corner), language (Made in U.S.A. /MADE IN U.S.A./Printed in U.S.A) and the inclusion of an additional notation "An Exhibit Card." However, changes in the size of the fonts used, the exact placement of the notations and a few other oddities have not always been listed as additional variations.

Paul Marchant bought most of the assets of ESCO in 1979 including 8,000 to 10,000 photo files. I contacted him recently about print notations and image size changes. Paul responded, "I have never seen anything in the records to indicate why these changes were made. The photographs are virtually all 8"x10". On the backs there are rectangles drawn to show what portion of the picture is to be used. Most of these rectangles are not the size of the finished cards so at some point they had to be expanded or reduced to the correct size. I have been through all the photos several times and have never seen any with notations on front."

The fine print on the photos used from International News Photos provided that they couldn't be reproduced for "advertising or trade purposes without the written consent of...all persons appearing herein." ESCO held the photo service harmless for claims if they (likely) didn't get such consent. At least airbrushing backgrounds kept anyone else in the original photo out of any reproduction.

Marchant's comments meant to me that photos were re-shot with artwork to the right size, and then print notations were manually added to create plates. Otherwise, the size of the notations would have shrunk along with the artwork. Often the same plates in strips of eight were reused for the letterpress printing the next year. However, sometimes they must have gone back to the artwork and reapplied the notations, which could wind up in a slightly different spot on a new plate.

ESCO photo files show that this airbrushed Billy Pierce was reduced to 65%, crop lines and a "signature" were added, but no print notation appeared at this stage. The photos were arranged in four strips of eight halftones "as usual." (Photo, Fred McKie)



Kiehle compiled two lists of variations for the periods of 1939 to 1946 and 1947 to 1966. Variations on cards with salutations printed after 1947 were included with the 1947 to 1966 listings to be consistent with the annual listings. The result was a listing with about 50 more variations than are commonly identified in catalogs and by grading services. Kiehle avoided listing cards that are considered printing differences that occurred after the pre-press setups. Most of the variations fit into the following categories.



To keep track of cards like Ted Williams variations, Kiehle lined them up by year from 1946 to 1961 and labeled the differences. Note the slightly smaller image used in 1946-7.



Variations from standardizing the 1946 printing

In 1946 all cards had 9/16" print notations. For cards repeated from prior to 1946, if there were no major differences, catalogers didn't list them as variations. Boudreau, Joe DiMaggio and Walters fell into this category.

Dark borders

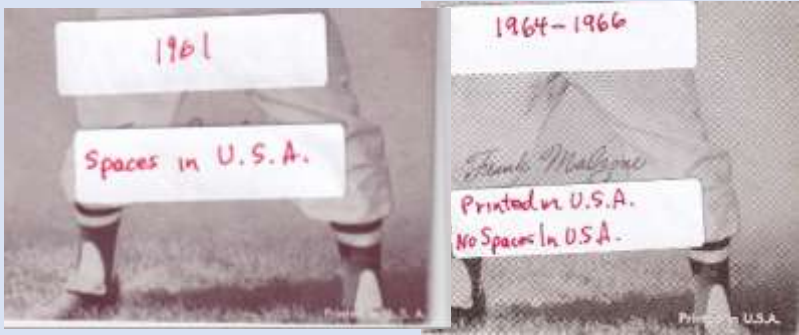
Sixteen cards (which might have been two strips of eight) first appeared with darkened bottom borders in 1951. At first glance, you could regard these as differences which occurred during the printing process, which are appropriately (and somewhat derisively) called "printing differences" as opposed to variations. Some cards of the same player are found with varying degrees of darkening – which probably are printing differences. However, an uncut sheet from 1958 showed these darkened cards again next to cards with no such darkening. Why ESCO would do this is hard to explain. Perhaps they were just trying to make them look different, or maybe these started out as goofs when creating plates in 1951 and just continued until new plates were made. The players involved are Ashburn, Campanella, Carrasquel, Dropo, Easter, Ennis, Kell, Kellner, Lemon, Majeski, Musial, Pafko, Raschi, Sauer, Torgeson and Wertz.



An uncut 1958 sheet includes Musial, Pafko, Drogo and others with darkened bottom borders mixed in with cards with clean borders. (Photo, Fred McKie)

Formatting for the stat backs

When ESCO decided to use stat backs in 1962 and 1963, they also slightly reformatted the print notations. The most obvious change eliminated the spaces found in "U. S. A." as printed in prior years. Cards brought forward from pre-1962 were used again in 1964-6 when the blank backs returned, but with the "U.S.A." tightened and usually placed in a slightly different spot. Aaron, Aparicio, Banks, Clemente, Mays and Musial are among those with these differences. On some cards you had font size, location and image all different.



Frank Malzone, and other pre-1962 cards, had Printed in U.S.A. with the U.S.A. letters spread. Thereafter, the font size changed slightly, the U.S.A. is noticeably tighter and the print moved around on his shoe.

Clemente's notation changed and moved around.

Color differences

Kiehle also dealt with print colors. He didn't get into the various shades of sepia or tan ink, but he did address cards printed in black and white. In 1952 and 1960 ESCO only printed cards in black and white. He settled on the approach of listing cards from those years, even if they were otherwise the same as the sepia cards from other years. The black and white versions are not included in the 50 cards mentioned. Cards were printed in black and white in other years as well, but just not exclusively. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish between sepia and black and white.



ESCO eliminated backgrounds on all their cards, except for some foreground grass and shadows. The 1947 Homogenized Bread card of Pafko (left) appeared after his first ESCO card in 1946. A dark bottom border surfaced in 1951; a new blank hat, blank jersey and Printed in U.S.A. arrived in 1959. He appeared for 14 years with ESCO and got to wear the same Cub outfit for 13 of those years despite being traded by the Cubs in 1951.

There weren't many printing differences or miscuts on Exhibits, but occasionally something unusual would show up like the card on the right. Roger Craig's card has a salutation as did a few other random cards produced in the 1960s.



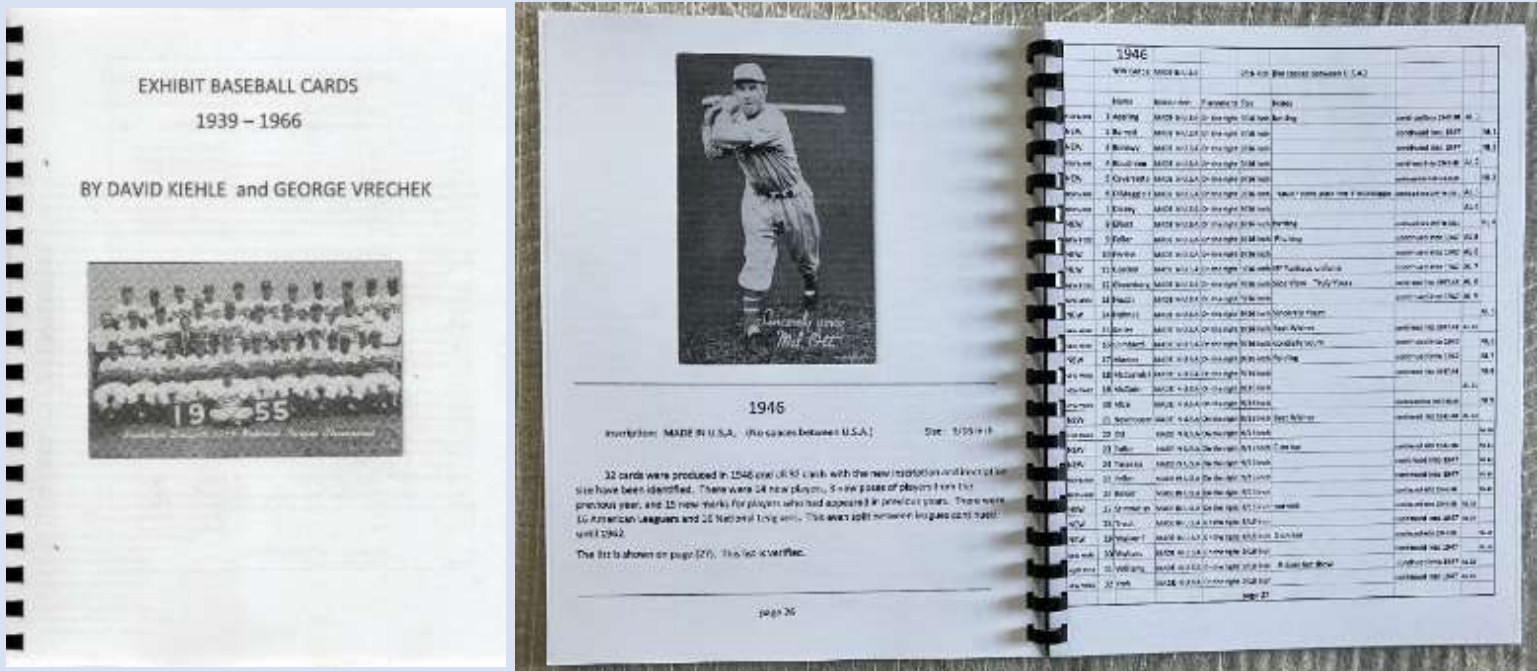
Research results

Kiehle turned the research into a 107-page digital book "Exhibit Baseball Cards 1939-1966" by David Kiehle and George Vrechek to explain what we did, to list the cards produced each year and to provide two master lists of baseball Exhibits and their variations for the 1939-1946 and 1947-1966 eras. Any assumptions about players printed are identified as "to be verified." It was not practical to include photos of variations, but they are described as much as possible. Mickey Mantle, for example, has 11 versions A through K described. The years a player was in MLB and the team he was on when pictured are included.

Paul Marchant, the last ESCO owner, looked at our results and commented, “It is amazing that after all this time you have a list of the baseball cards issued each year in the late 1930s and early 1940s.”

Mike Cady maintains the website “Baseball Card Variations Guide Book Vol 2” - an incredible resource for finding variations in vintage sports cards. Within that website, the book can be viewed at no cost. Go to

<https://baseballcardvariationsguidebookvol2.wordpress.com/2019/07/11/exhibit-cards/>. To review the book more readily myself, I had Staples print and bind the 107 pages for about \$30. The book can be updated for any added information.



The digital version of the Exhibit book can be printed and bound to more easily track the plethora of information.

ESCO’s annual card production had ups and downs; the war years and 1966 were likely the low points. However, if you look in the book at just the number of years a player appeared on Exhibits, you see dramatic differences. Plenty of stars are around. Musial, DiMaggio, Mantle, Spahn and Aaron are “common” because they appeared so frequently. Pafko appeared for 14 years, Torgeson 14, Ennis 13, Vernon 12, Doby 11, Mathews 11, Reese 11, but then – Beggs, Case, Chase, Church and many others including World Series teams were one year and done. At least ESCO packaged all cards in a printing in sequence such that if you threw in 64 pennies, you would likely get 64 different cards.

I have found that once you collect a set that you like, you are drawn into any variations in that set to keep you collecting. Grading services have encouraged collectors to keep working on sets by publicizing registries that rank the condition of a collector’s set. Exhibit card registries have included many variations, and collectors have likely gone after all of them. If you suddenly tell collectors that they should add about 50 more “required items” to hunt down to maintain their registry positions, there would be some push back that these new variations are too minor and should be ignored – and then collectors will run out and quietly try to collect them anyway.

In the case of Exhibit cards, it is arguable that they even constitute a set to start with. But, heck, collectors figured out the annual printings from 1921 to 1938, why not annual listings thereafter? Collecting Exhibits is an activity that can keep you interested about as long as ESCO cranked out penny cards (1901-1980). If you are not worried about set registries, you may enjoy taking a closer look at those Exhibits. It can be done!

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