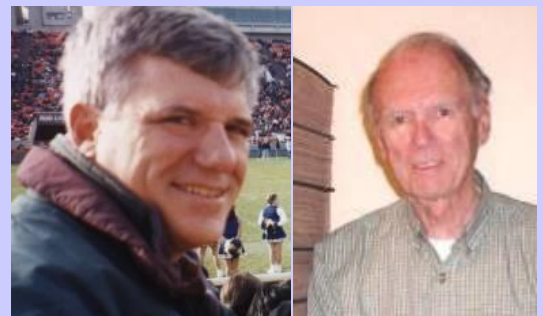


Stadium and Sports Postcard Collecting



Yankee Stadium, Ebbets, Forbes and Cleveland Municipal

By
George Vrechek with Ray Medeiros



The sports collector has many ways of collecting memorabilia. Many of us started collecting baseball cards as youngsters. If we were enthralled about the players and the game, we may have morphed into collectors of autographs, uniforms, baseballs, or equipment. If we really liked the smell of the cardboard and the neatness of players, teams, and numbers organized in a box, we may have continued with “regular” baseball cards but branched into older or newer cards as well as football, basketball, hockey, and other sports.

Distant Cousins and Jefferson Burdick

Postcards have seemed to me to be distant cousins of the gum or insert sports cards. I don’t recall seeing any postcards of players as a kid. Nothing came to mind that looked like a

baseball card with stats on the back, plus postcards wouldn't have fit neatly into the boxes containing Topps and Bowmans. I have been to a few postcard shows; they were certainly low-key events. Postcard collectors didn't look like big sports fans to me. They were patient folks though, pouring through stacks of cards ranging from the Wisconsin Dells to Niagara Falls. However the "father of card collecting," Jefferson Burdick, waxed eloquently about the beauty of the postcard even creating a few of his own featuring snowy scenes he had photographed in his home town of Syracuse. Burdick devoted eight pages of explanatory text to cover postcards versus one page for "insert" cards (all tobacco cards) in his 1960 *American Card Catalog*. Burdick's card identification system placed sports postcards starting at PC740 and going through PC798. Burdick also wrote books on just postcards. He edited the *The Handbook of Detroit Publishing Co. Postcards*, 1954 and *Pioneer Post Cards*; 1957. Not knowing much about postcards, I figured *Pioneer Post Cards* must have been about the pioneers. At any rate, if Burdick was enthused about postcards, maybe I should give them another look but limit myself to sports postcards.

Ray Medeiros, Sports Postcard Collector

Hobby pioneers Burdick, Buck Barker, and Walt Corson knew a thing or two about sports postcards, but all have been dead for at least 28 years. Fortunately one of Buck Barker's protégé's, Ray Medeiros, is very much around. I interviewed Ray (September 17, 2010 *SCD*) and covered his collection of baseball history including photographs and newspaper clippings. I also touched on his extensive collection of stadium postcards. Ray was delighted to provide more insight into sports postcard collecting. Ray has been collecting baseball stadium postcards for 62 years.

US Postal Regulations and the History of Postcards

The U.S. Postal Service has always been a rather humorless group when it comes to postal regulations. You can get yourself in a fair amount of hot water by sticking something in a resident's mailbox without sending it through the official Postal Service. Fraud through the mail seems to be more punishable than if you used a loud speaker. Writing a note over on the address side of the postcard is also verboten. It is no wonder that in the late 1800s the U.S. Postal Service was concerned about businesses advertising through the mail by sending advertising cards to residents on the cheap, the earliest form of junk mail. Consequently the U.S. Postal Service did not allow any "private" picture postcards. You could only use a government postcard which was extremely boring. The government issued card was blank on one side for your message. The address and stamp went on the other side, no fancy sizes or colors allowed either.

Cards were issued by the Postal Service starting in 1873 which started the "Pioneer" era of postcards that Jefferson Burdick covered in his book. Burdick mentions *Pioneer Post Cards* in the text of his *American Card Catalog*. He writes that the book is out of print (in 1960) but that 800 copies can be found in libraries. His book covered the "origin and early development of the picture post card," I would imagine, in succinct but vivid detail as was his style.

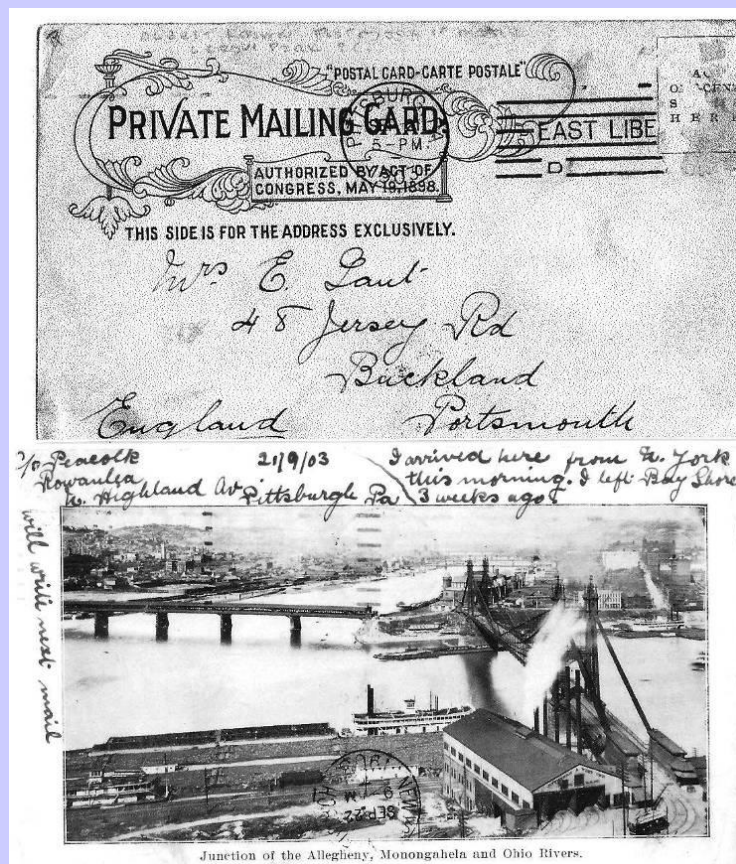
The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition was an occasion for the Postal Service to lighten up and allow picture postcards produced by others to be sent from the exposition grounds. The idea was such a hit that the Postal Service went back to prohibiting picture postcards again

right after the event. Europeans had no such problem with picture postcards and the Postal Service realized that they could actually make more money, if they allowed the use of cards. In 1898 the Postal Service allowed “private mailing cards.” In 1902 they allowed picture “post cards” but you could only write the address on the blank side; any message had to be on the front of the card with the picture. Many people just wrote over or around the picture to tell the folks at home that they were, in fact, at Niagara Falls as pictured. Even with the restrictions, picture postcards were a big hit. (As “post cards” became more popular, they became “postcards,” a typical language evolution.)

Divided Backs, What a Concept!

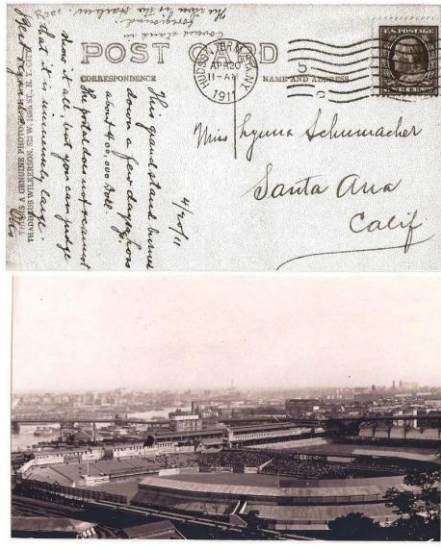
By 1907, the Postal Service decided that the world would not end, if they allowed postcard producers to divide the blank back of the postcard in two so that an address could be placed on the right side and a message on the left. The public thought this was a great idea and started sending, saving, and collecting picture postcards by the bushel. Burdick wrote that the entire world was in a postcard collecting frenzy (“the most raging hobby of all time”) from about 1904 to 1914. Many of the collections assembled in that era are still working their way to other collectors.

Earliest postmarked card showing (barely) a major league stadium in the background – Exposition Park, Pittsburg, 1903. Note the single sided back as required by regulations at the time and writing on the front



Player Postcards from the Pre-Linen Era

When I thumb through the *SCD Standard Catalog of Baseball Cards* to look for postcards with baseball players, I find prices that exceed the cost of my first car. Set names include 1905 N.Y. Giants Scorecard Postcards, 1905 Souvenir Post Card Shop of Cleveland, 1905 Rotograph Postcards, and 1906 Ullman Postcards. Nearly all of these were issues involving one or two teams. Players continued to appear on postcard issues associated with teams – 1907-9 Dietsche Chicago Cubs and Detroit Tigers, 1907 Grignon Chicago Cubs, Boston Daily American 1912, Max Stein /United States Publishing House 1909-1916, and Sporting News 1915. The Rose Company issue of 1908-9 featured over 200 players and was the closest in postcards to the T206 set of the same era.



The message on this 1911 split-backed card is that the Polo Grounds as pictured had burned down a few days earlier.

This golden age of early postcards was known as the pre-linen era in that the fuzzier linen cards didn't appear until about 1930. In general, collectors identify sports postcards by the terms: pre-linen, linen, and chrome. Images could be colored photographs, renderings, or what were known as "real photos" created by developing the photos directly onto postcards. The only "problem" with the baseball player cards like those created by The Rose Company is that commons are listed in the SCD Catalog at \$2,400 in near mint. Wagner and Cobb are \$24,000 each, which

exceeds the cost of my current car. Nonetheless there are serious collectors of such early postcard issues, spending some serious money. Former SCD contributing writer and collector Dan Even is one of the advanced player postcard collectors as is Bob Thing.

Old Ballparks

However, if your interest is in the old ballparks rather than the old players, you can collect quite a bit before having to sell your old car. Ray Medeiros has been one of those collectors. Ray contacted Buck Barker in 1948 as a result of Barker's article in *The Sports Exchange Trading Post*. Buck sent Ray a response using an old postcard of Sportsman's Park in St. Louis. Ray was quickly hooked on starting a collection, and has picked up 10,233 more stadium postcards since. While Ray doesn't have all the baseball stadium postcards in captivity, he probably has 90% of them. My math computes that there have been, on average, 100 postcards issued per year over the 100 plus years that postcards have existed. That comes to only 6 cards per team prior to expansion. For some reason some of the old ballparks proved to be more photogenic than others. For example, Griffith Stadium in Washington D.C. was rarely featured on a postcard. If you went to Washington, you were probably writing home about seeing something other than the Senators play. Fenway Park and Wrigley Field, on the other hand, were popular years ago and have remained popular subjects for postcards sent from Boston and Chicago.



Chicago Parks – Westside Grounds, Weeghman (later Wrigley) Field in the Federal League, Wrigley Field, and Comiskey Park



Fenway, Briggs, Shibe, and the Palace of the Fans in Cincinnati

Linen Card and Chrome Eras
 Around 1930 a new printing process enabled postcard producers to use high rag content paper (resembling “linen” cloth) and vivid, if not always accurate, colors. Baseball stadiums began appearing in the linen card format. A few teams also issued player postcards but not

necessarily on linen, e.g., the Cardinals and the Indians. The linens lasted until after World War II when the “photochrome” era began with most cards printed on glossy card stock. According to Ray, “They got their name “chrome” because in the late 1930s Kodak began making Kodachrome film available to the general public and it became a hit with all photographers.” Player postcards continued to be issued for teams like the Cardinals, Indians, LA Dodgers, and Milwaukee Braves (Bill and Bob Photo, Spic and Span Dry Cleaners.) The players themselves were customers for postcards produced by photographer George Brace in the 1950s through the 1970s. Brace would sell the photos to the teams or players who would use them to respond to fan mail. J.D. McCarthy was a Detroit-based photographer in this same era. The Exhibit Supply Company even got into the player postcard game by issuing some of their regular annual cards with postcard backs..

Collecting Sports Postcards

Who collects sports postcards? Is it the postcard collector who happens to have an interest in sports, or is it the sports collector who has branched into postcard collecting? Ray Medeiros felt that it is usually the sports collector going after postcards. Although in the case of Jefferson Burdick, he was enthused about any type of card – sports postcards, non-sports postcards, and any other postcard ever issued. According to Ray, the sports postcard collector has been a relatively small segment of the sports collecting market, and there are probably less than 100 serious postcard sports collectors who deal with the early era of postcards.

Around 1972, postcard dealers became aware of the interest of sports fans in their cards and began charging a premium for sport-related cards, even if no premium was really warranted, according to Ray. Better deals can often be found at card shows buying from baseball card dealers who have picked up a few oddball postcards. They usually don’t carry much of an inventory and will price the postcards reasonably without fully investigating their scarcity. There are no monthly postcard price guides covering stadium postcards, and to Ray’s knowledge no one has sent a stadium postcard to PSA or other graders to have it entombed, a refreshing situation in Ray’s opinion. Market values for even 100 year-old stadium postcards can be relatively modest (\$10 to \$25). More recent cards are found in the \$1 to \$10 range. However, there are significant exceptions to these ranges for scarce cards particularly some of

the one-of-a-kind “real photos.” It hasn’t made sense for the bad guys to try to counterfeit any old cards – yet.

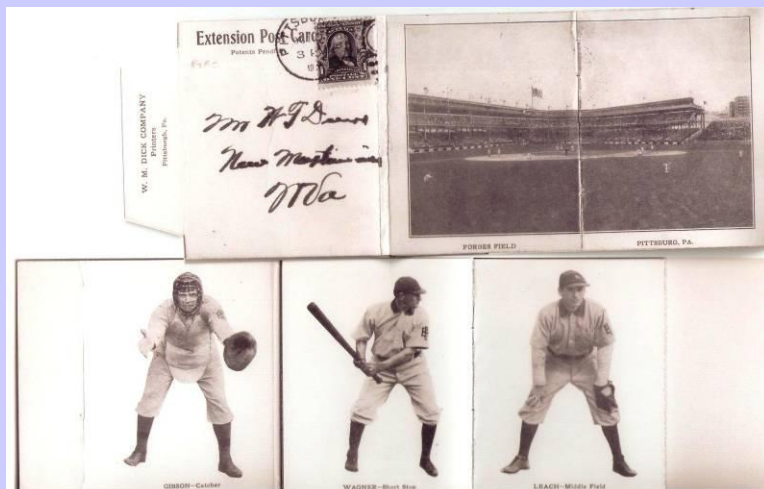
The Stadium Postcard Catalog

Ray started to accumulate significant quantities of stadium postcards and was responsible for the first catalog on stadium postcards issued in 1971 as a separate 30-page issue of the hobby publication, *The Ballcard Collector* published by Frank Martin and attributed to Ray and Buck Barker. Three hundred copies of the catalog were issued; the catalogs are probably rarer than the postcards. Ray intentionally made no mention of values in his catalog. At the time, most sports postcards could be purchased for 10 cents each just like the other postcards. However, postcard dealers responded to the catalog by raising prices on sports postcards. The escalation in prices has really not continued, according to Ray. Some postcards have even gone down in value as more copies of old cards emerged from dusty trunks.

In order to obtain information about sports postcards, Ray would send his findings first to Buck Barker in St. Louis. After Buck added what he knew to be missing, the list would go to other hobbyists like Elwood Scharf, Ray Hess, and John Thom. Other collectors started contacting Ray including Ron Menchine, George Tinker, and Mel Bailey. Ray Medeiros probably remains at the top of the collector list as to the number of stadium postcards collected but collectors like Jim Schneider of Fullerton, California, Elias Dudash of Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania, the late Ron Menchine of Baldwin, Maryland, plus a number of others have built sizeable collections as well. Ray contributed to two subsequent catalogs with prices published by Tom Crabtree; the last one was issued in 1997 and called *Baseball Stadium Postcards, Checklist and Price Guide*.

Size and Condition

Collectors like decent conditioned cards, but there is no particular premium for cards that have never been used. A message, stamp, and cancellation date on the card can add to its authenticity and desirability, for example, if someone attended a game and noted when some memorable event took place. Postcards were initially only printed in the 3.5 by 5.5 inch format allowed by the post office. By the 1960s, cards at 4 by 6 inches were allowed and called “Continental” because the size had first been used in Europe (the European Continent.) Postcards have since grown to 5 by 7 inches and beyond.



Rare fold-out of the Pirates including Wagner



Shibe Park, the first Base Ball Club, American League, 21st Street and Lehigh Avenue, Philadelphia. The Largest and Best Appointed Base Ball Park in the World.



Pitchers Practice at Cincinnati Ball Park.



POLO GROUNDS, 157th STREET AND EIGHTH AVENUE
Can be reached by Sixth and Ninth Avenue Elevated direct to the grounds, and Broadway Subway, stopping at 155th St., and a short walk to the grounds. Seating capacity estimated at 40,000. Reserved Seats as well as Box Seats on sale by A. G. Spalding & Bros., No. 130 Nassau St. and No. 29 W. 42nd St.



GRIFFITH STADIUM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Shibe Park, Wagner with the bulls-eye at Palace of the Fans, Polo Grounds, and an extremely scarce Griffith Stadium aerial



The above is a view of the stadium
 which was opened in 1903. It was
 built on a site which was formerly
 a public square. The stadium is
 one of the largest and best
 equipped in the world.
 It is a fine example of modern
 stadium architecture.
 A. G. Spalding & Bros.

THE FANEUIL STADIUM, BOSTON
This stadium was built in 1903 and is one of the largest and best equipped in the world. It is a fine example of modern stadium architecture.

Columbia Park, Yankee Stadium, Sportsman's Park, and Crosley Field

Polo Grounds fold-out mailed by a St. Louis Cardinal player in 1909



The Polo Grounds stadium, New York City, witnessed by 80,000 people.

Rare Cards

There is no T206 Wagner among sports postcards but there are some very rare cards as a result of the “real photo” process. Photographs could be developed directly onto postcards to produce a dozen or so postcards. These cards were usually created by non-professionals. Ray has discovered unique cards of Columbia Park in Philadelphia from 1908 and Exposition Park in Pittsburg from 1903. A real “find” will be running across a card that the avid collectors have never seen such as the one-of-a-kind “real photo” cards. In Ray’s case, he enjoyed finding a rare card of Busch Stadium under construction in the background of a 1965 card issued for a Mississippi River ferry boat and buried among the 25 cent cards at a show. Postcards will have error and corrected versions just like regularly issued baseball cards. Ray has a Briggs Stadium

postcard that missed some of the colors until the error was found and corrected. A view of packed bleachers at Shibe Park was borrowed by another issuer and labeled as being from the Polo Grounds.

Correct and error postcards: the bleachers were at Shibe Park and not the Polo Grounds as stated on the second card. Briggs Stadium, Detroit, is missing some of its color in the lower card which was withdrawn shortly after issue.

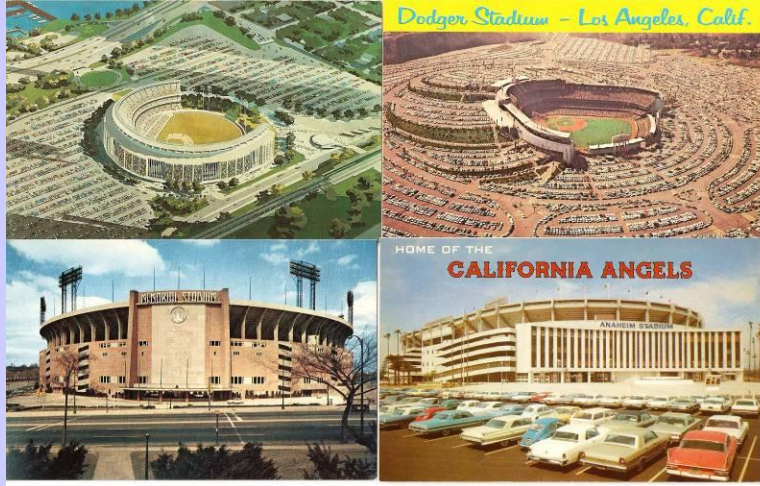


Way Back When Cards

In 1982 Ray introduced the Way Back When postcards using images from photographs in his collection to create 140 postcards of old ballparks. Ray recalls the event as follows: “I ran a full page ad for the cards in the first edition of *Green Cathedrals* and it opened the floodgates when writers at various newspapers picked up on it, particularly the *Chicago Tribune*. Subscriptions to the Way Back When Postcard series and our newsletter, *The Ballparks Bulletin*, increased dramatically. I then began hearing from authors of books (I worked extensively with the late, and truly great, Lawrence S. Ritter on *Lost Ballparks*) and a number of artists who needed to see a particular image of a ballpark as it might have appeared in a particular era. Most of those individuals would contact the Hall of Fame library and wind up referred to me because of my extensive files of stadium postcards (10,234) and photographs (5,485). I have many other images of varying sizes and types which bring the grand total to 17,423 images. In addition, I maintain a clip file containing still more photos taken from newspapers and magazines going all the way back to the turn of the century. That file is six feet thick and grows a little every few weeks as the stuff continues to come in from all points on the compass.”

The Ballparks Bulletin and Stadiapex

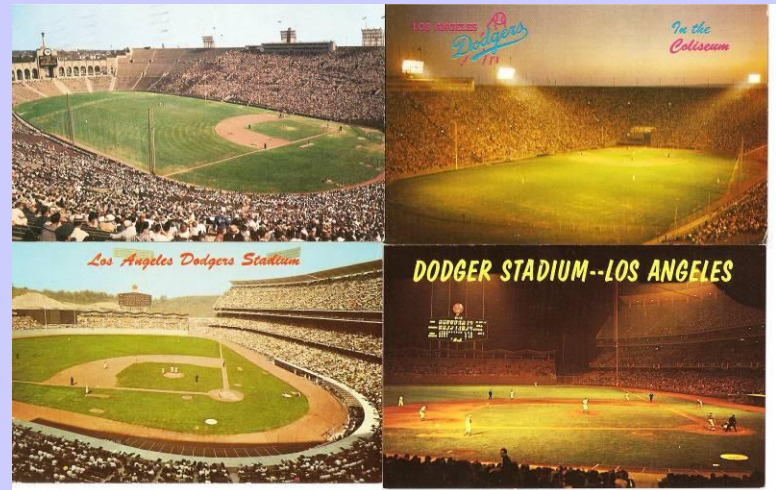
From 1986 to 1988, Ray published a monthly newsletter for stadium postcard collectors called *The Ballparks Bulletin*. A typical issue was sent to over 800 subscribers and might include 38 pages with two pages of collector advertising and dozens of articles and images from individual collectors. You could tell that the collectors were into the nostalgia associated with the old parks. Ray’s earliest subscriber was Howard Haimann who I talked to recently. Howard recalled that “We thought old ballparks like Ebbets Field were like a palace. In reality they were often broken down parks falling apart.” Even images of more modern (uglier) parks have taken on a hue of nostalgia as you see old cars, faded colors, and seas of parking lots.



“Modern” stadium cards that are starting to look rather nostalgically ugly – Shea, Dodger Stadium, Memorial Stadium Baltimore, and Anaheim

The Coliseum and Dodger Stadium – day and night

Another activity among the stadium postcard collectors has been the periodic Stadiapex shows which Ray describes as follows: “In 1987 Mike Walsh and his friends back in Pennsylvania suggested having a get together of stadium postcard collectors in conjunction with the Morlaton Pennsylvania Postcard Club Show. I gave it my full support and devoted space in *The Ballparks Bulletin*, naming it Stadiapex, and it was a great success. Since then, there's been a meeting almost every year in whatever city a National was being held. Some gatherings have been small while some have been especially well attended like the Chicago shows and the jackpot Stadiapex of them all, the one in Fenway Park in 1999, attended by some 100 collectors.”



Internet Sites

There is no current price guide or newsletter on stadium postcards. There are a few websites devoted to postcards with sections on sports or stadiums. Dealer and collector Scott Ward has a site at stadiumpostcards.com featuring cards for sale. Another interesting site is vintageball.com and features cards, photos, and postcards owned by various collectors. In addition to eBay, another site to find baseball stadium postcards for sale is the European version of eBay called delcampe.com.

Observations

Among the nice aspects of sports postcard collecting is that it is relatively affordable. Undiscovered old issues keep turning up providing continued interest for even the advanced collector. You can find cards at postcard shows, flea markets, and antique shops. Ray Medeiros provides a final thought on the subject, “My experience in postcards goes well beyond stadium and player postcards. My wife Jeanne and I have collected postcards of many types and have studied a good many of the subjects that have appeared on them. We have been members of postcard clubs all over the country, have devoured every word in numerous publications, and to this day keep up with market trends in Europe as well as here. We've frequented shows and

auction houses over there and have become quite comfortable with what collectors like and to some extent (because like any hobby, collecting fads are in a constant state of flux along with what sells and what doesn't) have a feel for the general state of the hobby. Postcards are a great window into history here and abroad and a peek beyond the sports category in a dealer's boxes, especially a European's, can be a fascinating introduction to the world of printing, design, layout, photographic skill and subject matter. In short, there's more to the world of postcards than stadiums....but stadiums are a delightful way to immerse one's self!"

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Some of Ray's Thoughts on Ballparks

I sure would like to see Wrigley again...both inside and around the park, truly the best in the National League in my view with Fenway the class of the junior circuit. New ballparks are nice buildings to look at but take a look at the upper deck in every one of them and ask yourself how that location compares to the top deck of any of the second generation ballparks like Shibe, Forbes, original Yankee Stadium, Ebbets, Polo Grounds and so on. What fascinates me is how fans, who are also taxpayers, pay for construction of the new stadiums and arenas, then get lousy seats if they are not affluent or know someone at a company or corporation who locked up the best seats and gives them away to "clients." Those fans also now must pay much higher prices for them than they did for better seats in the ballparks they saw torn down in order that "the local team be competitive." The problem with that statement by the owners is that just about every team now has a new taxpayer-funded ballpark but some of them are still in last place! – *Ray Medeiros*

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