

*Hobby History*

# Burdick's First Catalog of Cards



*Jefferson Burdick, the Father of Card Collecting  
(note the 1946 ACC on his desk)*

By  
George Vrechek

## The first catalog arrived 73 years ago and still looks good

*The 1946, 1953 and 1960 catalogs.*

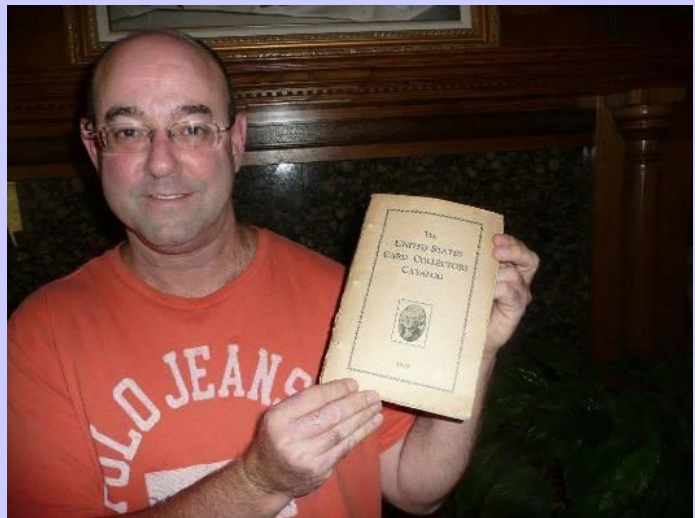
Jefferson Burdick (1900-1963) started the first newsletter for card collectors, originated the classification system for cards, and donated his 306,353-card collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Not surprisingly, his first attempt at publishing a catalog for collectable cards was superb. Many readers are familiar with Burdick's 1960 *The*



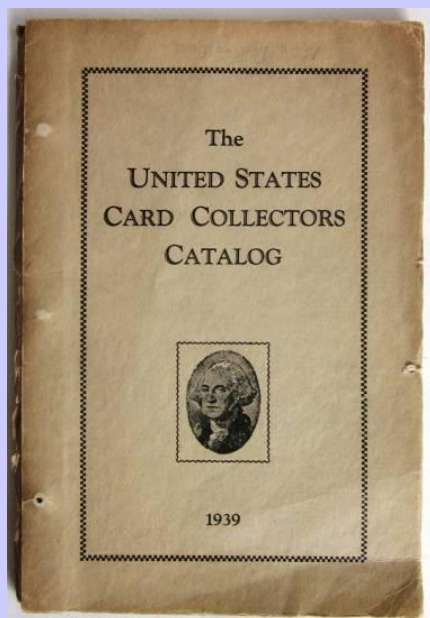
*American Card Catalog*. Burdick was what you would call a regular guy. He published a catalog every seven years and a newsletter every other month without fail. In their uncontrollable urge to collect and organize, modern collectors have made Burdick's catalogs collectables themselves.

### Every seven years

Burdick published catalogs in 1939, 1946, 1953 (with an updated re-printing in 1956), and 1960. The 1939 catalog was called *The United States Card Collectors Catalog*; all subsequent catalogs were called *The American Card Catalog*, Burdick feeling that Canada, Central, and South America should be included in the fold (and potential subscribers). Following Burdick's death, Woody Gelman continued the catalog one more time with a 1967 effort. Thereafter, catalogs morphed into Bert Sugar's *The Sports Collectors Bible*, Beckett & Eckes's *The Sport Americana Baseball Card Price Guide*, SCD's *Standard Catalog of Baseball Cards*, as well as other publications over the years. Burdick's catalogs were more plentiful with each successive edition. I've picked up the 1946, 1953, 1956, and 1960 versions, but had never come across the 1939 issue. Only 500 catalogs were printed in 1939, versus 1,250 in 1946, 1,400 in 1953, and 3,000 in 1960. The late Lionel Carter had a 1939 catalog around the house someplace but could never find it for me. Finally, avid collector Leon Luckey surfaced with a 1939 catalog. Leon moderates the Net54baseball.com forums and generously let me borrow the catalog for a few weeks to study Burdick's first effort.



*Leon Luckey, proud owner of Burdick's first catalog*



*The loose-leaf catalog was bound with fasteners inserted in holes punched by Burdick*

## First impressions

I had imagined the 1939 catalog as an extended version of Burdick's newsletters, *Card Collectors Bulletin*, with home-made mimeographed printing and binding. Burdick used the *CCB* to update readers with additions and changes to card sets and first announced the catalog idea to his subscribers in September 1938. The Burdick catalogs did not include checklists of cards within sets. Cards were cheap no matter who was on the card. If one particular card was unusually rare, Burdick would mention it separately, but such occasions were rarer than the cards. Thus all baseball gum card sets could be listed on a page or two and then proceed to postcards, silks, buttons, and everything else under the sport and non-sport suns.

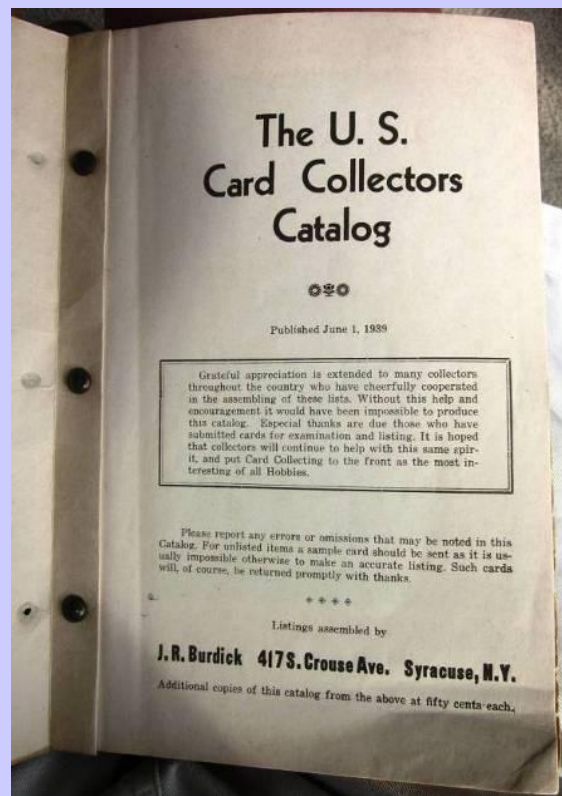
The 1939 catalog was much more of a professional and thorough effort than I had imagined based on reading Burdick's apologies about catalog oversights and errors in subsequent *CCBs*. The catalog was 6 by 9 inches, typeset, and bound with three small fasteners inserted through punched holes. Burdick reported in 1946 that the 1939 catalog had been a custom job that couldn't be easily duplicated, "We were unable to find anyone who could punch those binding holes and we personally had to carry all of those catalogs 3 ½ miles where we could drill the holes on a drill press using a special jig which we made, and then inserted them in the binders ourselves" ("ourselves" likely being Burdick and himself). The catalog was a top-notch assemblage of as much information as possible about card sets. You could see the enthusiastic effort in Burdick's work. His significant contributions were in organizing it all, taking the initiative in sharing information, and reporting prices.

## Burdick's introduction

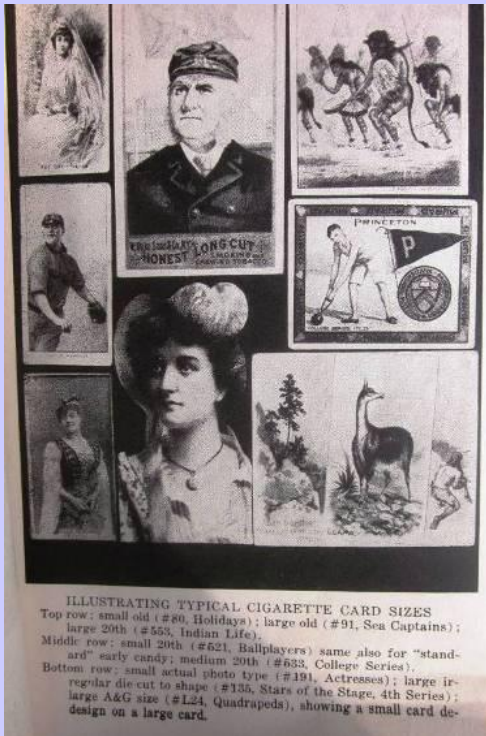
Burdick was an efficient writer, covering most of what he wanted to say in just the first six pages. Burdick begins with the catalog's only one-page illustration of several cigarette cards and provides an index for the 90 plus pages of content: advertising cards, blankets, bread cards, cigar bands, cigarette cards, candy and gum cards, flannels, foreign cards, greeting cards, photographs, post cards, silks, tickets, trade cards, and more.

Burdick starts with some background: "The collecting of cards began soon after the end of the Civil War when manufacturers and tradesmen, as a means of advertising, had cards printed calling attention to their wares and services....During the eighties card collecting received a real impetus when manufacturers began inserting a small souvenir picture card in each package of cigarettes." Burdick refers back to the good old days, in this case Burdick's good old days were prior to 1915 when tobacco manufacturers flooded the market with insert cards that were all but forgotten by 1939, except by "only a few collectors who kept (collecting) alive, as best they could, in the ensuing years."

*The cover page lets readers know they can get additional copies for 50 cents.*



The only illustration in the 1939 catalog was this one page showing a variety of tobacco cards.



### Hobbies and CCB

Burdick thanks O.C. Lightner's *Hobbies Magazine* for allowing him to publish several articles on cigarette cards starting in December 1935. Burdick's *Hobbies* articles generated sufficient interest for him to begin publishing *Card Collectors Bulletin*. He explained that "the big need seemed to be for some tabulation and description of these many sets and for the establishment of prices and values. This problem was attacked by issuing a series of eight *Card Collectors Bulletins* at various intervals in 1937 and 1938." The catalog was an extension of what Burdick started in the *CCBs*. Burdick wrote, "It is intended to cover the entire card field as completely as possible. No listing of the old cards will be entirely complete and accurate."

*Burdick's index covered everything under the sports and non-sports sun.*

### Prices

One of the big reasons for buying the catalog would be to get an idea of prices. Burdick wrote, "The fixing of card values is a difficult matter. The present prices are based on... supply and demand as they have been noted in many transactions, and after consultation with many collectors and dealers. It is impossible, of course, to satisfy every one in the matter of prices. Some seem to think they should start at 5 cents and with the sky the limit. Others favor 1 cent for everything. Both, obviously, are not correct." Obviously! He laments that silly prices, like \$1, have been paid for cards that should be really only worth pennies. He also describes how lots of cards should be discounted from the per card prices.

<b>General Index</b>			
Old Cigarette Cards—see special Index on Page 16			
Actual photos .....	10	Foreign cards .....	7, 42
Advertisements .....	81	Game cards .....	73
Advertising cards—		Greeting cards .....	75
Historical .....	4, 10	Ice Cream Cards .....	66
Listings .....	68	Inserts, miscellaneous .....	67
Albums .....	11, 13, 52	Leathers .....	50
Bible cards .....	76	Menus .....	77
Blankets .....	47	Milk bottle caps .....	77
Book marks .....	78	Name cards .....	76
Book matches .....	78	Photographs .....	78
Book Plates .....	78	Pins .....	51, 65
Bread cards .....	55	Playing Cards .....	72
Bulletin, last page and .....	9	Post Cards .....	74
Business cards .....	76	Poster banners .....	11
Calling cards .....	76	Poster cards, large .....	78
Candy and Gum cards—		Poster stamps .....	41, 68
Early issues .....	56	Prices, general .....	6
Recent issues .....	60	Prints and paintings .....	78
Celluloid Buttons .....	51, 53, 65	Programs .....	77
Cigar bands .....	41, 79	Rewards of Merit .....	77
Cigar box labels .....	79	Rugs .....	47
Cigarette cards—		Silks .....	43
Historical .....	4, 10, 34	Soda cards .....	54
Index, old issues .....	16	Stereoptican cards .....	75
20th Century issues .....	34	Sunday School cards .....	76
Coffee cards .....	52	Tags .....	77
Condition, general .....	7	Tickets .....	77
Cut outs .....	11	Tin Tobacco Tags .....	79
Flannels .....	47	Trade cards .....	4, 10, 68

## Condition

Burdick was a bit more persnickety than I had imagined describing the importance of condition as follows: "Condition must be considered in pricing cards. Many are found with creases, stains, tears, tack holes, and other defacings (he must have peeked at my collection) to such an extent that they are almost valueless. The prices in this catalog are for specimens in good to perfect condition. As in all collecting, this is often a matter of personal opinion." Burdick's descriptions of "good" and "perfect" may not be that far from today's standards. He basically thought cards in decent shape should all run about the same price.

## Finding cards

Based on his own experience, Burdick advises readers "Very few of the cards listed in this catalog can be obtained by writing to the firms which issued or printed them...such writing is an absolute waste of time....As far as known, there are no exclusive card dealers, but all dealers in antiques, old books, curios, and Americana should be considered card dealers." Burdick encourages the reader to chase the cards wherever they can be found, "Old cards are bits of history, and share in the love which all Americans hold for reminiscences of years gone by."

## Card classification

Burdick started his system of classifying cards by grouping like card issues with certain series of numbers, listing the known sets alphabetically, and then assigning the sets numbers. This system proved difficult to maintain in later catalogs. To Burdick's surprise, old card sets kept coming out of attics and floorboards and more room and information was needed to list additional sets.

It didn't take Burdick long though to list sets. Page 40 lists all 19<sup>th</sup> Century tobacco sports issues very efficiently, for instance:

- 515 Baseball Teams (16) Fatima 10 cents
- 516 Baseball Folders (50) Mecca 3 cents
- 517 Baseball Folders Hassan triple folders 3 cents
- 520 Baseball Series gold bordered (400) 2 cents
- 521 Baseball Series white borders 2 cents
- 525 BB Players Old Mill 3 cents
- 574 Champion Athletes and Prizefighters (50) Mecca 3 cents

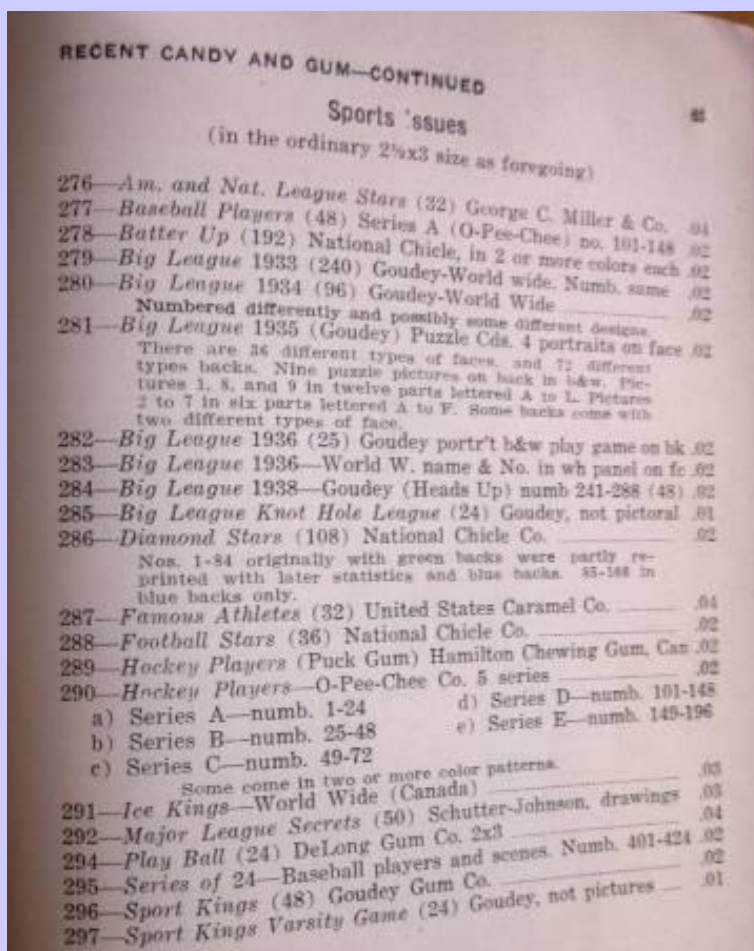
20th CENTURY TOBACCO—CONTINUED		40
Sports Issues		
515—Baseball Teams (16) Fatima, 2½x4¼, actual photos		.10
516—Baseball Folder Series (50) Mecca, folders open to 2½x4¼		.03
517—Baseball Folders—Hassan, triple folders, opens to 2½x5¼		.03
75 diff. center panels known. Probably 150 diff. end panels but used in many mixed combinations		
518—Baseball Comics up to date (25) Mayo, Med.		.03
519—Baseball Players—Ramly, TTT, b&w photos, gold fr., Lg.		.03
520—Baseball Series (players) gold bordered cards (400) Sm.		.02
Sweet Cap, Hassan, Polar Bear, Honest L.C., Piedmont, Cycle, American Beauty, etc. Only slightly more than 200 known.		
521—Baseball Series—white borders, Sm.		.02
Sweet Cap, Sovereign, Piedmont, Cycle, El Principe de guita, Tolstoi, Lenox, Polar Bear, Hindu, Old Mill, Hustler, Drums, American Beauty, Broadleaf. Various inscribed as Series of 150, 350, 450, or assorted. (521 known).		
522—BB Play.—Recruit, Broadleaf, Cycle, Napoleon, Sm.		.02
Often called the "brown background" set.		
523—BB Play. (18) Fireside (& other prod.) Champs 1910, Sm.		.02
524—BB Play.—Contentnea, Virginia & Southern leagues, Sm.		.03
a) First series (colors)		
b) Photo series—b&w		
525—BB Players—Old Mill, photos, red bordered, Sm.		.03
Seven series numbered 1 to 7.		
526—BB Players—Red Sun, Southern Assc. Green borders, Sm.		.03
525—BB Players—Obak, Pacific coast leagues, Sm.		.03
Two series—red or blue backs.		
571—Champions, Series of (25) 2½x3¾		.05
Honest Long Cut, Miner's Extra.		
572—Champion Athletes and Prizefighters or Series of Champion Athletes, Hassan, Mecca, Tolstoi, Lg.		.02
Hassan cards have no series name. Various divided into Series 1-50, 51-100, etc. 153 designs known as follows:		
a) Athletes (track and field) 62		d) Champion Golfers 6
b) Aviators 4		e) Pool & Billiards 16
c) Champion Bowlers 4		f) Prizefighters 62
573—Champion Pugilists (50) Honest L. C., Miner's Extra, Lg.		.02
Same design as fifty of 572 but slightly smaller card.		
574—Champion Athletes and Prizefighters (50) Mecca, Tolstoi, Lg.		.03
Mostly full length portraits of fighters only. (7 ring scenes). Slightly larger than 573. Come with both white and silver borders.		
580—Champion Women Swimmers (100) Pan Handle, num., Lg.		.02
592—Famous Baseball Players, Champion Athletes and Photo Play Stars (100) Fatima, 2½x4¼, actual photos		.10
575—Prizefighters of the Past and Present—Dixie Queen, Lg.		.03
601—Prizefighters—Pet Cigarettes, Sm.		.03
577—Prize Fight Series, 101 and 102 (25 each) Sm.		.02
Oxford, Duke of York, Intermession, Arabs, Turkish Whites		
578—Pugilistic Subjects—Red Sun, green borders, Sm.		.03
579—World's Champion Athletes (50) Pan Handle, Lg.		.02
Note—see also Extra Large Cards, and Miscellaneous inserts.		

Recent gum issues weren't much more of a problem with the following listed on page 63:

- 276 Am and Nat. League Stars (32) George Miller 4 cents
- 278 Batter Up (192) Nat Chicle 2 cents
- 279 Big League 1933 Goudey (240) 2 cents
- 280 Big League 1934 Goudey (96) 2 cents
- 294 Play Ball (24) DeLong 4 cents
- 296 Sport Kings (48) Goudey 2 cents

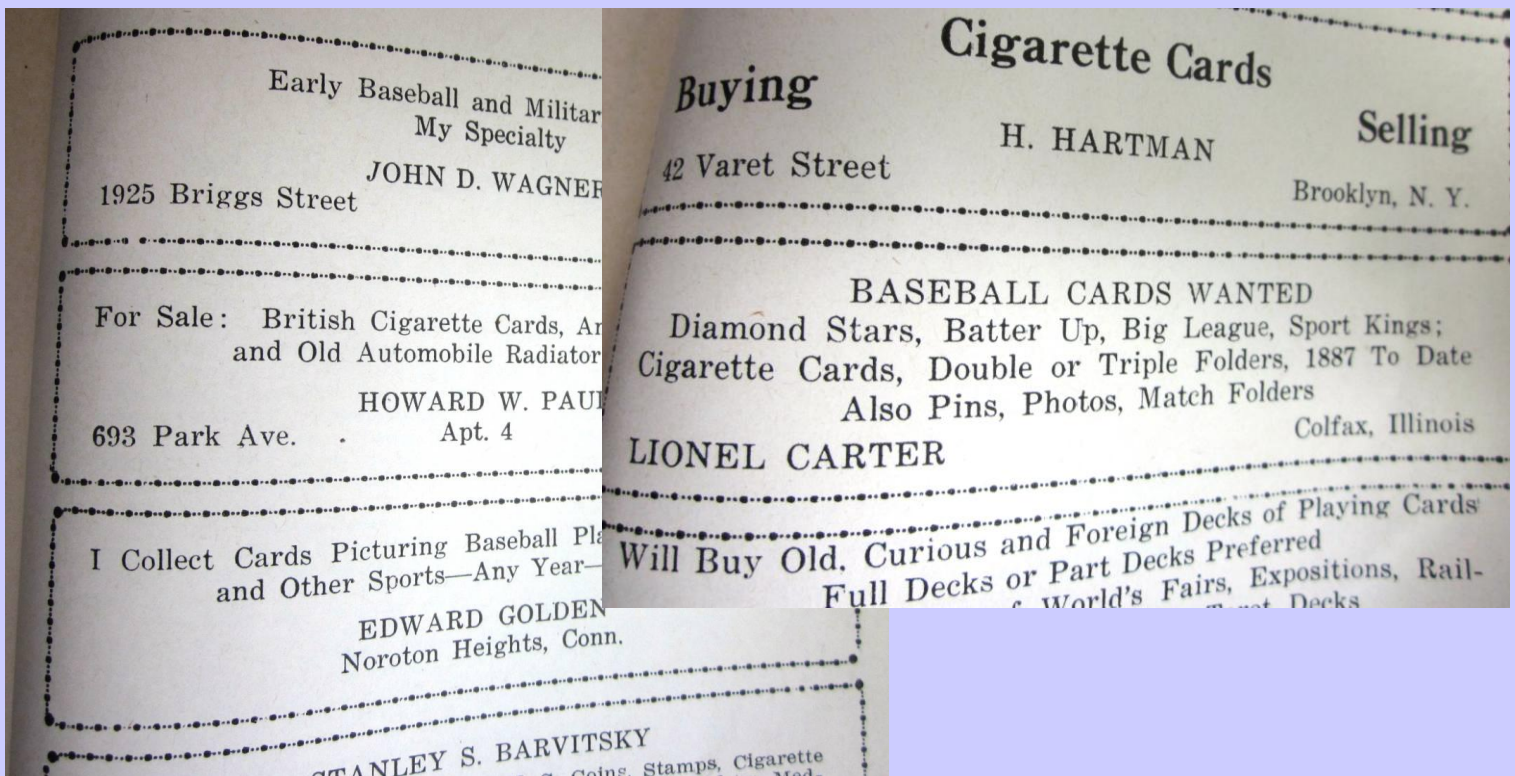
The only set that managed a little more description was #286 Diamond Stars (108) National Chicle 2 cents and the notation: "Nos 1-84 originally with green backs were partly reprinted with later statistics and blue backs. 85-108 in blue backs only." Bill Dickey and Hank Greenburg though were the same lousy 2 cents as Buddy Myer and Sparky Adams. If you wanted a checklist of the white-bordered set #521 (T206s), Burdick advised you to contact subscriber and advertiser Howard M. Myers.

Note that cards issued for 1 cent as recently as 1933 had rocketed up to 2 cents in the catalog. If the Buddy Myers and other commons in average condition had continued on this double-every-6-year pace, they'd go for \$82 each today, the power of compounding. I guess price escalations may have actually slowed since 1939.



### Advertisers

To help subsidize the catalog cost, Burdick solicited ads from CCB subscribers. The last few pages of the catalog contained small ads from hobby pioneers: Lionel Carter, Charles Bray, John Wagner, Edward Golden, Howard M. Myers, A.O. Philipp, Donald Van Brakle, Howard Paul, E.L. Lancaster, and H. Bruce Spencer. Burdick included his own ad seeking cards and subscribers. He even offers to pay more than the values shown in his own catalog "where my wants are few." Antique and book dealers included ads as well.



### Financial results

Burdick let his readers in on everything through the *CCB*. In an August 1939 *CCB* he reported that 100 of the 500 copies had been sold. Additional copies were available for 50 cents. Burdick reported that expected catalog proceeds were going to run only about \$300. Printing cost \$120, binders and envelopes \$35, postage \$50 and advertising \$90. It looked like Burdick might eventually have a dollar or two left over, if he was lucky. Burdick finally sold the last of the 1939 catalogs in 1945. A *CCB* editorial by Donald Van Brakle lauded Burdick for his “intellectual honesty...and single-minded devotion to this hobby to the exclusion of personal gain.” Surprisingly, Burdick also reported receiving some negative feedback from subscribers complaining about one small thing or the other.

### Future catalogs

The final catalog page stated, “This catalog is in loose leaf form so that, where desirable, sheets may be replaced or new sheets inserted. Such revision is planned for yearly, and any such sheets will be distributed as part of the *Card Collectors Bulletin*.” Burdick issued a 20-page supplement in July 1940 and smaller supplements in October 1941 and October 1942, but with the war going on, another complete catalog didn’t come out until 1946, thus starting the every seven year sequence.

I checked subsequent catalogs to see how much of the 1939 catalog had been reused. While the appearance, size, and topics remained similar in later catalogs, Burdick rewrote just about everything. The most significant change in 1946 was adding letter designations and changing the set numbers. Set #521 became T206. The 1933 Goudey set #279 became R319, etc. The 1939 and 1946 catalogs only acknowledged Burdick’s involvement. The 1953 catalog included Charles Bray, Gene DeNardo, and Woody Gelman. The 1960 catalog mentions the same gang plus Buck Barker, Preston Orem and Edwin Payne. The hobby was growing; those 2 cent cards were long gone.

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