

The Greatest Collection that you will never see

The Jefferson Burdick Collection at the Met

This was the first of many articles written by George Vrechek about Jefferson Burdick and his collection. This article appeared in Sports Collectors Digest on October 4, 2002, and is reprinted here with their consent. Additional articles by Vrechek on Burdick inspired by this first visit can be found on the oldbaseball.com library page.



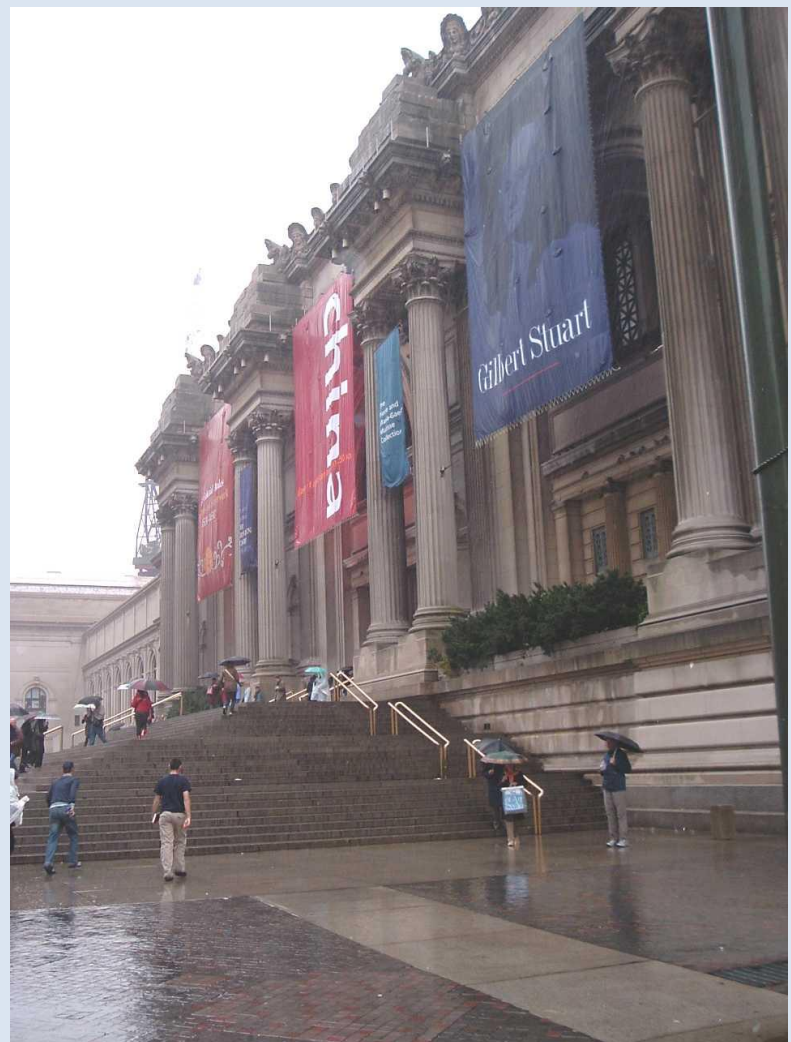
by George Vrechek

The Metropolitan Museum of Art at the edge of Central Park, New York City, photos by Mary Shoval

Who was Jefferson R. Burdick? a) the President of the Confederacy, b) a heavy weight fighter, or c) the father of card collectors. If you answered (c) you are a true hobbyist. Long before grading companies, \$5 per pack cards, and monthly price guides, there were avid collectors like Jefferson R. Burdick of Syracuse, New York. Burdick had such a passion for collecting and organizing that he spent years obtaining cards and then developing the system of card classification that is used today. His *American Card Catalog* first published in 1939 was the first reference and pricing source on baseball cards.

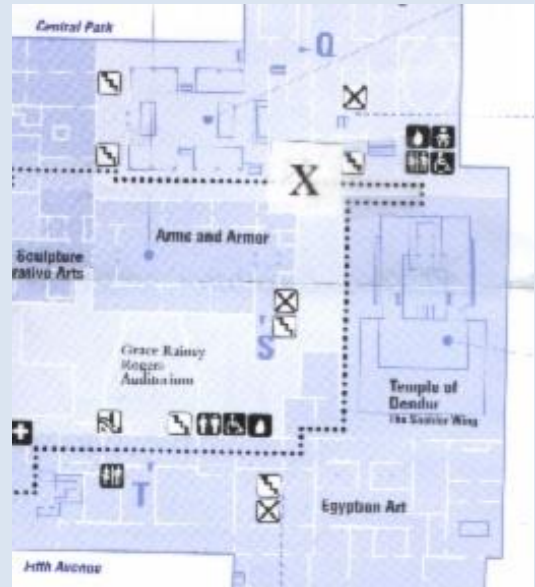
The Jefferson R. Burdick Collection

Burdick attempted to collect virtually every baseball card issued from 1880 to 1960. He donated his entire collection of 30,000 baseball cards and some 300,000 other card types to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1947. The collection is still there today. You may have heard that it is possible to arrange to see the collection at the museum or that a good portion of the collection is on display on a rotating basis. Don't believe it!





The steps of the museum are a great gathering spot



Floor Plan of the Met: X marks the spot of the Burdick Collection

Arranging for the Pilgrimage

Believing that I would never be considered a serious collector until making the pilgrimage to the Metropolitan Museum, I contacted the museum to give them the good news that I would be coming. I soon realized that the people working at the museum are interested in art, art history and the artistic products of various cultures. They are not particularly interested in baseball cards. While they are not unlike the rest of the real world, they do happen to own the “Greatest Collection of Baseball Cards that You Will Never See.” More on that later. After calling and finding someone who represented that they were familiar with the collection, I asked if I could arrange to see it. I was told that “one-third of the collection” was on display. The rest of the collection is rotated such that after a number of visits “you could see the whole thing.” Don’t believe it!

The Pilgrimage

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is located at Fifth Avenue and 87th Street on the east, central edge of Central Park. It is in a bustling area full of visitors, families, vendors, joggers, walkers and art enthusiasts. Two of the more popular exhibits at the museum during my February visit were the “Earthly Bodies: Irving Penn’s Nudes 1949-1950” and “Extreme Beauty the Body Transformed” a display of extremes in women’s fashions. Not wanting to be considered a nerdy baseball card-only collector, I took in these two exhibits as well. The nudes needed some clothing. You didn’t really want to check them out. The fashions were informative from Madonna’s brassieres to tiny shoes for bound feet. However I was there to see the cards so enough of this “art,” let’s see some real cardboard!

I was directed to the American Wing where the rotating portion of the collection available to the public is housed. I dodged my way around the Egyptian Art, through the Temple of Dendur and then I found it: The Burdick Collection. Immediately I saw six glass-enclosed cases, three mounted on each wall of a small hallway.

The displays included over one hundred vintage cards: 1941 Goudeys with color variations, 1941 Playballs – all of the four cards I needed – the DiMaggios and Bobby Doerr. And there were Mantle and Mays in the 1959 Bazookas, Colgan Chips, Triple Folders, Batter Ups, a 1949 Bowman uncut sheet. Oh, this was great stuff. I can't wait until I get into the area where the rest of the display is kept. Well wait a minute. This next room has cuckoo clocks in it, old furniture...where are the cards? What happened to them? I must have made a wrong turn. Surely this museum guard must know. She did. She said "that is it, you've seen it all." She must not be very informed. She must have misunderstood me. The museum has "The Greatest Collection of Baseball Cards.....that You Will Never See." She was right. That was all there was. Believe it! I had been led to the oasis and only been given a sip.



You can see it all right here – the left wall and the right wall. That's it!

I stopped in the gift shop. Not surprisingly they had "nothing on the Burdick collection," not a postcard, baseball card or expensive coffee table book. A store employee acknowledged he had "heard it before" when I said that it seemed as if the museum was embarrassed about the collection.

The Museum's Viewpoint?

I was back on the street disappointed in not seeing much but now interested in how Burdick's collection had wound up as such a missed opportunity. I tried to see it from the museum's viewpoint. They had probably not asked for this gift, didn't fully understand what they had, but had grown to fully understand how collectors can be persistent and not entirely trustworthy. Hadn't Larry Fritsch and Barry Halper also run into difficulties in trying to find a vehicle for displaying their collections? Displaying more of the Burdick collection would take up valuable museum display space that could be used to attract true art aficionados. Perhaps they have done what Burdick wanted them to do: hang onto this stuff and don't let some fast-talking collector/dealer talk you out of my cards. I was now interested in learning more about the museum's handling of the collection and Jefferson R. Burdick.

The week following my visit, I called back to the museum, asked to talk to someone involved with the Burdick collection, and eventually got in touch with Connie McPhee of the Prints and Drawings Department. I learned that the collection could only be viewed if arrangements were made through the Chairman of the Department, George Goldner. Such approval was generally

only given if someone were with another museum or doing serious research (sort of mutually exclusive card collecting and seriousness). Hobbyists were no longer able to arrange to just see the collection. Ms. McPhee said that one of the problems in displaying the collection was light exposure. They were properly concerned that sunlight would fade the cards. I did note during my visit that the museum had an inordinate amount of natural light for an art museum. I also noted however that Madonna's brassieres had been safely tucked away in a nice cool, no-sunlight basement display area.

I was also told that the collection was difficult to display in that Burdick had mounted (glued!) the cards into albums and that it would be hard to display the albums as-is. McPhee said that the cards in the display cases were rotated every six months. With the baseball card collection alone exceeding 30,000 cards, I soon computed that if 150 cards were displayed every six months and every card rotated, I could get to see the entire collection in just 100 years. If the entire 300,000-card collection were exhibited in such a manner, you would need another millennium or two to see it all.

I learned that through the Toledo Mud Hens the Toledo Museum of Art was going to be loaned 145 cards from the Burdick collection to display until July 7th. I asked if loaning to other institutions was common. It is not. McPhee believed this loan to be the first. I later found that insuring the cards in transit and while on loan is a significant cost.

I e-mailed the Met's Communications Department for the press - no response. I wrote Ms. McPhee per her request with a list of additional questions – no response. I called again and was able to talk to George Goldner, the department head. Goldner was helpful. He was disappointed that the communications department had not responded and that the initial information I received about the exhibited collection was wrong. Goldner has been at the museum since 1993. He had respect for the collection, Burdick and Burdick's books, calling him, "brilliant."

Goldner explained the difficulty in trying to provide balance among the 1.5 million items in the Prints and Drawing Department. The baseball card portion of Burdick's collection had become a popular destination. With only a dozen or so seats in the archive room available to visitors, a need to provide security while albums were used, and concern about handling the collection; it became increasingly difficult to allow any significant number of visitors to just view the collection.

Veteran collectors I talked to later confirmed that they had heard "through the grapevine" that collectors removed some of the valuable cards from the collection. In 1993, the idea developed of displaying a number of interesting, popular cards and restricting access to the balance of the collection. In general Goldner felt that the approach was successful in that most people were happy to see the cards displayed, valuable museum display space was preserved and the collection remained secure. Goldner said that he had collected cards as a kid. He didn't know of anyone at the museum who had met Burdick and didn't believe that the museum had any pictures of Burdick or further information of a biographical nature. I then tried a different approach.

The New Yorker Article

I have the advantage of being married to a top-notch librarian who helped me investigate Jefferson R. Burdick and his collection. What had been written about the museum's involvement in the collection? A scholarly 1998 article by Kathleen Rauch led me to a 1990 article in *The New Yorker Magazine*. Tom Rassieur was the curatorial assistant in the Department of Prints and

Photographs at the time. The article explained that he “prefers Rembrandt and Dürer.” (1990, p. 26) He “thought baseball cards were put in bike spokes, not museums.” (p.26) (Correct on that one.) At the time visitors dropped by the print room, knocked on the door and asked to see the collection. Little kids thumbed through pages with Wagners on them. The curators seemed annoyed that visitors had not much interest in the fine art in the rest of the museum that particularly inspired them as curators.

Descriptions of Burdick

The article states that “In 1947...when (Burdick) showed up at the Met offering to donate his collection, the curator of the print room, A. Hyatt Mayor, had no idea that Burdick had accumulated three hundred thousand baseball cards, postcards, and playing cards. Mayor accepted the offer, but when the first shipment, of several thousand items came in, that December, he observed with some surprise that ‘this honor brought responsibility’ (Later, he wrote of Burdick, ‘The energy that he might have put into making a home and bringing up a family, he poured instead into studying insert cards.’) Though Burdick was crippled by arthritis, he readily took on the arduous task of mounting his hundreds of thousands of cards.” (1990, p.27) Burdick donated his collection in 1947 and then spent the next 16 years visiting the museum and working on placing the cards in some 394 albums. The vast majority of Burdick’s collection was not baseball cards but postcards, trading cards and playing cards – any paper product – “American-printed-ephemera” as the curators like to say. Burdick was an ephemerist. “The day Burdick mounted his last card, he said as he left the print room, ‘I shan’t be back.’ He entered the hospital the next day, and died two months later” in 1963. (p.27)

Hobby Articles

Robert Obojski wrote an article for *Baseball Hobby News* in February, 1982. He stated that Burdick originally mailed the albums to the museum commencing in December 1947. The albums are about 12.5” by 15” and weigh 12 to 14 lbs. each. Burdick had a small desk in the Met’s print department and “an array of enthusiasts came to help him, the chief support given by Fred Baum (a Brooklyn collector/dealer)...The last card went in the last album at 5 o’clock on January 10, 1963, he entered University Hospital the next day.” (1982,p.5)

Another source, *The American Premium Guide to Baseball Cards*, 1982, by Ron Erbe, states that “Burdick was roaming the country and, when not working, was accumulating a huge collection of trade and hobby cards...Developing a terminal illness, he willed his collection to the” museum. (1982, p.5) From various sources I’ve read that Burdick worked for an electronics firm, really got into trying to collect everything produced since 1880, and spent his time organizing his collection and categorizing the cards.

Collector’s Guide to Baseball Cards by Troy Kirk in 1990 has the most complete description of Burdick and his work that I found. I believe this book is one of the best sources of accurate information on the baseball card hobby. Among the additional bits of information were: “In a 1955 article in the Syracuse Herald Journal, Burdick recalled collecting cigarette cards as a child. ‘Practically every small boy saved these kind of cards. We made our dads use certain brands whether they liked them or not.’” (1990, p.71) Kirk also wrote: “Burdick had completed 34 albums when he began to work full time on the project. (1959) He moved to New York....and he completed another 360 albums over the next few years.” (1990, p.73) Burdick placed the cards in the albums in the same sequence that he listed the sets in the *American Card Catalog*.

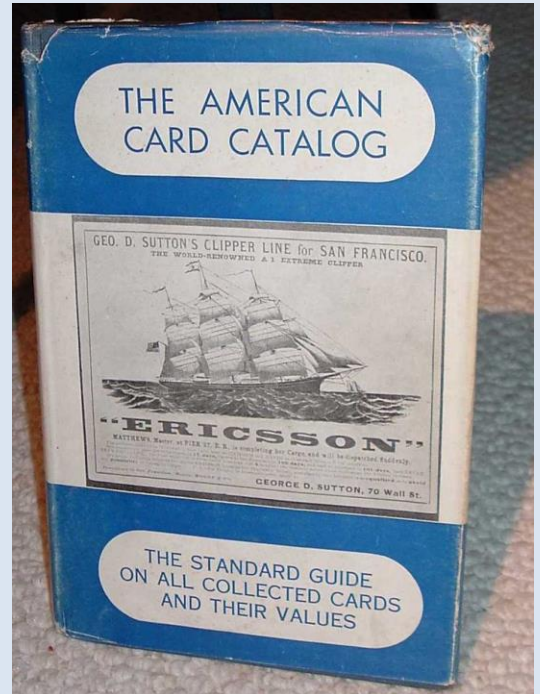
Articles in 1993

1993 seemed to be the time to get some ink on the collection. A 1993 *US News and World Report* article (in the “Culture” section) states the museum was putting the cards on exhibit for the very first time (what proved to be the “100 year rotation” system.) “Now the Met will be one of the few places such rarities can be seen so extensively.” (1993, p.11) Had they exhibited any significant quantity, I would agree. But what the Met displays looks paltry compared to a table manned by, say, Levi Bleam at any card show. The article mentions that the collection was over 300,000 items including “cigar bands, soup can labels, and, of course, 30,000 baseball cards.” (p.11)

The *New York Times* in 1993 mentions that Burdick started collecting as a 10 year old in 1910. (Although it wasn’t until 1933 that he really started to be carried away by it all.) Like many of the articles it dwells on the valuable Wagner card in Burdick’s collection and finds it newsworthy that baseball cards are of such widespread interest. Assistant curator, Elliott Bostwick Davis, explained why this cardboard was really art: “We see from these cards how popular culture can influence what is familiarly known as ‘Pop Art’...For instance in the 1948 set Phil Rizzuto is represented. I think it is strikingly similar to many of the silk-screen portraits with bold, flat areas of color that Andy Warhol was producing more recently, during the 1970s and 1980s. The cards also reflect how popular art responded to changes in graphic design. Different palates, different type styles, different ways of presenting the portraits of these players changed dramatically over the years.” (1993, p.C5) I agree.

The *Times* article has one of the few descriptions I found of Burdick. “He suffered from arthritis so painful that he could hardly lift his arms off a table....This racked, frail man with black-lashed eyes of a haunting gray-violet. Even though Burdick amassed this phenomenal collection, it is believed he never attended a professional baseball game.” (1993, p.C5) Later in my quest I came across only one picture of Burdick which appeared in Kirk’s book.

Although I had certainly heard about *The American Card Catalog*, I had never seen one. My wife checked with our local library and found there were only 48 libraries in the U.S. and Canada with copies of *The American Card Catalog*. There were three in Illinois. She requested a copy from the Illinois State Library in Springfield. I thought the *Catalog* would tell me more about Burdick. Did it ever.



After visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and then reading everything I could find on Jefferson Burdick, I was still very interested in learning more about Burdick – the Father of Card Collectors. I thought that his book, *The American Card Catalog (ACC)*, would tell me more about the man. I obtained a copy of the *ACC* through the State of Illinois Library system and began reading. The book barely mentions Burdick, yet it told me a great deal about him. *The American Card Catalog* is an incredible body of work.

First Surprise

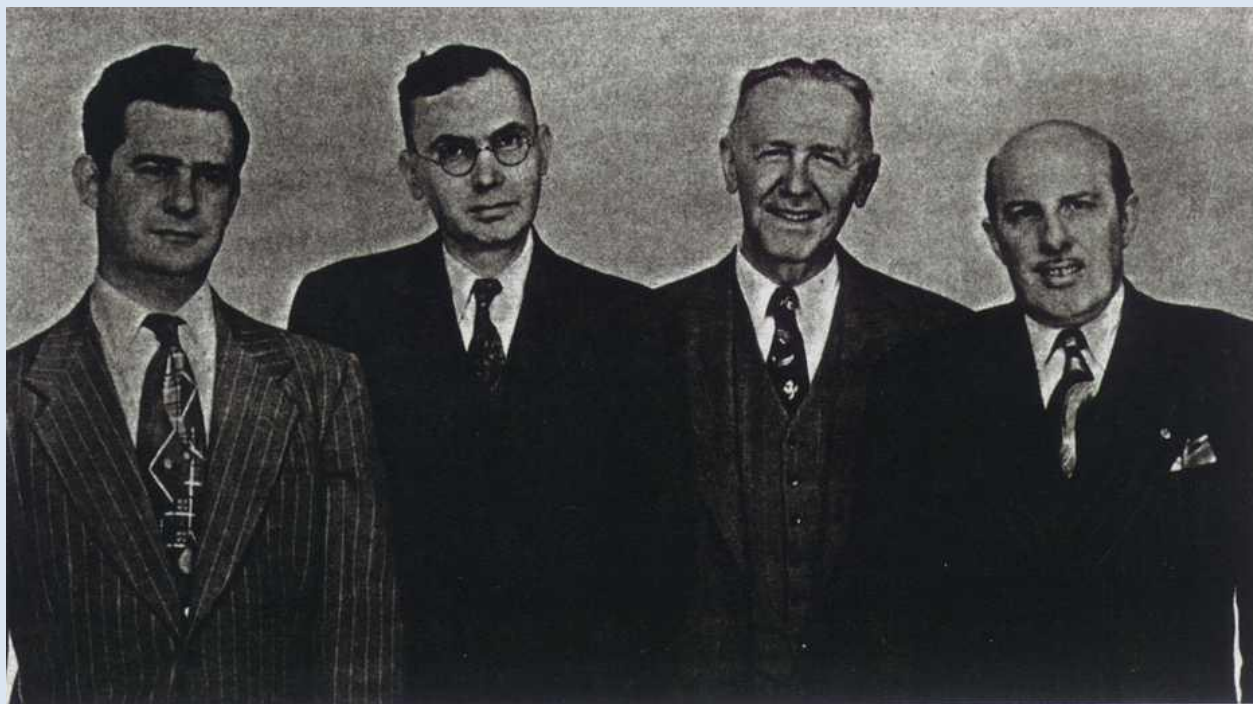
Krause Publication's *Standard Catalog of Baseball Cards* devotes about 25 pages to pre-1961 Topps and Bowmans. How many pages do you think *The American Card Catalog* devoted to these sets? 30 pages? 10 pages? 1 page? Krause's Catalog of just baseball cards runs over 1,600 pages. The pages are 8.5 inches by 11 inches. How many pages are in *The American Card Catalog* which covers not only baseball, but also every other sport and non-sport issue?

The answers are that the ACC has less than one page devoted to pre-1961 Topps and Bowmans. The ACC is all of 240 pages that measure 8.5 inches by 5.5 inches. The ACC is therefore about 7% as big as the Krause Catalog. Thirty of the 240 pages in the ACC are ads. There must have been more space dedicated to 1930 through 1943 baseball issues? Nope! Try just one page in the ACC. How about baseball cards inserted in Tobacco products like T-205, T-206 etc? The ACC covers them all in less than one page.

How can this be such a significant and detailed work by the "Father of Collectors"? The answer to that one tells us more about early collecting and Burdick, but first, a word about the *Catalog* and its editors.

5—Bowman Gum Co., Baseball Issues, all numbered.	
1—1948. BGW (48) 2 1/8 x 2 1/2, album	.20
2—1949. Colors (240) 2 1/8 x 2 1/2, several print. var. for some	.20
Over No. 200, 25c.	
3—1949. Pacific Coast League (PCL No. 1-36) 2 1/8 x 2 1/2	.50
4—1950. Picture Card Collectors Series (252) 2 1/8 x 2 1/2	.10
5—1951. Baseball Picture Cards (324) 2 1/8 x 3 1/8	.10
6—1952. Baseball Picture Cards (252) 2 1/8 x 3 1/8	.10
Stan Musial 25c.	
7—1953. Baseball Collector Series, Colors (160) 2 1/2 x 3 3/4	.10
Stan Musial 25c.	
8—1953. Baseball Collector Series, BGW (64) 2 1/2 x 3 3/4	.15
9—1954. (Name on Bat) 224, 2 1/2 x 3 3/4	.05
No. 66 Williams or Piersall—50c. Error No. 159 is Baker.	
10—1955. Color TV Set (320) 2 1/2 x 3 3/4 (251-310, 5c)	.03
Error and Corr. cards No. 48-101-157-204.	.15.
7—Bowman Football Issues, all numbered.	
1—1948 BGW (108) 2 1/8 x 2 1/2 professionals	.20
2—1950. Picture Card Collectors Series (144) 2 1/8 x 2 1/2	.12
3—1951. Football Picture Cards (144) 2 1/8 x 3 1/8	.10
4—1952. Pro Football Picture Cards (144)	.10
1. 2 1/8 x 3 1/8. 2. 2 1/2 x 3 3/4 issued with 5c packs.	
5—1953. (Name in Football on Front) 96, 2 1/2 x 3 3/4	.10
6—1954. (Name in Pennant on Front) 128, 2 1/2 x 3 3/4	.05
7—1955. (Name in Black Block on Front) 160, 2 1/2 x 3 3/4	.03
0—Pro Basketball 1957-8 (80) 2 1/2 x 3 1/2, Topps Chewing Gum (T.C.G.)	
numbered	.04
Display card.	
1—Ringside (96) Boxers, about 2 x 3, numb., Topps (No. 48, 25c)	.05
2—Topps Hockey 1954-5 (60) 2 5/8 x 3 3/4, 4 U.S. teams only, numb.	.05
Also see V310 for Topps Canadian hockey.	
4—Topps Chewing Gum (T.C.G.) Baseball Issues, first 4 listed unnumb.	
For BB and FB in Hocus Focus and Magic Photos see R714-26 and 27.	
1—Bazooka Baseball Cartoons by Mullin 1949, 2 x 2 7/8, wrappers	.10
2—Connie Mack's All-Time All-Star Team (11) diecut, An., 2 x 5 1/4	.25
3—1950 All-Stars (11) diecut, An. 2 x 5 1/4	.25
4—1950 Team Pictures (9) diecut, An. 2 x 5 1/4	.25
Reprints dated 1950, original insert issue not dated.	
5—1951. "Official" cards. 2 x 2 5/8, Anon.	.10
a) 52 red backs. b) 52 blue backs (diff.) 2 teams for Holmes (Boston or Hartford) and Zernial (Chi. or Phila.).	
6—1952. Topps Baseball (407) 2 5/8 x 3 3/4 (Nos. 1-80 red or blk back)	.10
Errors No. 48-49-391, Nos. 311 to 407, 30c.	
7—1953. Dugout Quiz on back (280) 2 5/8x3 3/4, display card. Feller	.10
Nos. 253-261-267-268-271-275 not issued.	
8—1954. (Red No. on Green Stitch Ball) 250, 2 5/8 x 3 3/4	.08
Display card of Ted Williams.	
9—1955. (Black No. on Red Stitch Ball) 210, 2 5/8 x 3 3/4	.07
Nos. 175-186-203-209 not issued (Topps in Green).	
10—1955. Baseball Doubleheader (66 cards, 2 Nos. on each)	.07
Style of T201, 2 1/8 x 4 7/8 when flat.	
11—1956. (Black No. on Red Stitch Ball, Topps in Black) 340	.06
2 5/8 x 3 3/4, also checklist, display cards.	
12—1957. (Red No. on Blue Stitch Ball, Topps in Blue) 407, 2 1/2 x 3 1/2	.05
Also checklist, contest, display cards. Team pictures showing date, 15c.	
13—1958. (Red No. on Ball with Cap) 495, 2 1/2 x 3 1/2, No. 145 not issued	.04
Nos. 475-495 Sport Mag. All-Stars. Contest, premium, display cards. Nos. 443-446-450-462, 15c.	
14—1959. (White No. on Green or Black Square) 572, 2 1/2 x 3 1/2	.03
Nos. 116-146 Sporting News Rookie Stars, Nos. 461-470. Baseball Thrills, Nos. 551-572 Sporting News All-Stars.	
15—1959. Blank Backs (23 seen) 2 7/8 x 5, unnumb, Anon carton designs	.15
5—Topps Football Issues, all numbered except first issue.	
1—1950. College Players (23) 7/8 x 1 1/2 Anon. unnumb.	
Varsity Gum	.10
Felt college pennant on backs,	

One page does it for Topps and Bowman in the 1950s



ACC editors (left to right) Woody Gelman, Jefferson Burdick, and Charles Bray as well as Gene DeNardo 1952 Card Collectors Bulletin

The ACC and its Editors

The 1960 ACC indicates that the publishing of the ACC followed a 1936 (*Hobbies Magazine*) article by Burdick on the subject and a 36 page mimeographed catalog in 1937-8. The first typeset ACC appeared in 1939 (called *The United States Card Collector's Catalog*). The ACC was then updated/renamed in 1946, 1953, 1960, and in 1967 after Burdick's death. The 1960 edition was reprinted in 1988. Other hobbyists participated in the ACC, as associate editors to "J. R. Burdick, Managing Editor." The associates to the 1960 edition were: Charles Bray, Woody Gelman, Buck Barker, Preston Orem and Edwin Payne. Credit was given to various "collaborators" including Lionel Carter, A.G. Lyon, Jr., legendary British collector E.C. Wharton-Tigar and 61 others. In a letter from Charles "Buck" Barker published in the May 20, 1981 *SCD*, Barker stated that none of the other editors had anything to do with the "R" and "W" sections of the *Catalog*. "They were compiled by Barker, corrected by Burdick, with both doing the proofreading. Jeff was the man behind every line of the *Catalog*; he had to because it was his name that sold the publication to collectors, antique dealers, and other purchasers. Remember, he was the original insert card researcher, the publisher of three previous *Catalogs*, and the card expert." (1981, p.5) The photo of editors Gelman, Burdick and Bray as well as collector Gene DeNardo appeared in the *Card Collectors Bulletin* in 1952.



Each of the associate editors ran an ad at the back of the *Catalog* giving us an idea of their interests:

- Charles Bray, East Bangor, Pa.: All collectors should subscribe to The Card Collectors Bulletin, \$1 per year, checklists, technical articles etc. Mail auction sales every 2 months, 10% sales commission
- Woody Gelman, Franklin Square, New York: Printed material of the 19th century (no specific mention of sports cards)
- Charles “Buck” Barker, St Louis: Collector of baseball cards of all kinds, always ready for a trade or purchase, Card Collectors Bulletin
- Preston Orem, Altadena, California: Collector of all insert cards, silks, baseball blankets, exhibit cards and periodical cards, wants since 1943 are very limited
- Edwin Payne, Salem Oregon: Specializing in pre-1917 U.S. Exposition Post Cards. Shoebox mixture of old view cards ...\$1.00 per pound postpaid.



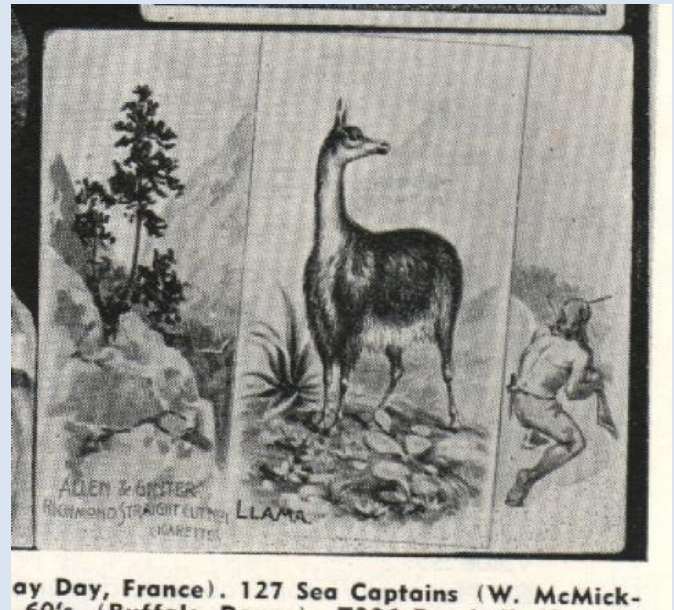
Burdick's Writings

Burdick himself has no ad. It is the *Catalog* that he is selling and he gets to editorialize throughout the book as he writes the preamble and as he introduces each section. Here is a sample of what Burdick (1960) had to say: “A Card Collection is a magic carpet that takes you away from work-a-day cares to havens of relaxing quietude where you can relive the pleasures and adventures of a past day – brought to life in vivid pictures and prose...Here is an ever changing mural of life, peoples, and events as they have moved across the pages of time. Splendorous pageantry of the rise and triumphs of empires, alternating with the quaint life of a small boy, the fragrance of garden flowers, and the tender love of a mother and child” (1960, p.6) Was Burdick an early 60s flower child? Was he serious? Actually, as we learn, Burdick is all about how cards and their collecting help enhance our lives and expand our interests. He is really not a baseball card enthusiast. He is enthused about everything.

More Burdick: “Cards depict the devastation of nature’s fury, the crashing armies of conquering nations, and the increasingly mad whirl of modern existence. They also show the serenity of a quiet country life, the gracious humility of those called great, the joyous romp of children on Christmas morn, and a thousand other homey things we love to remember. Every set of cards is a glorious picture window of the past.” (1960, p.6) Excerpts from Burdick’s preamble: “weave the golden fabric...little things in life...cards depict everything that man knows or dreams about...a wider horizon, and the satisfaction that comes from achievement.” (1960, p.6) Is Burdick a poet inside an accountant?

Burdick is so efficient in how he uses the technical pages of the *Catalog*. He is equally efficient in depicting his enthusiasm in less than a page, in giving us the history of printed material and pictures with another page, and summarizing all types of card collecting in one page. Prices are important to this *Catalog*. Burdick spends one of his efficient pages discussing value and condition and comments on factors that affect price throughout the *Catalog*.

Burdick tells us that a short 150 years before, there was little in the way of printed material and pictures available for the average person. All available books were read and re-read and loaned to others. People hungered for pictures. When pictures became available to many in the late 1800s, people bought them and saved them to look at them again and again. Households had albums and boxes of pictures. He describes woodcuts used for reproducing designs and pictures and mentions old Albrecht Dürer, who enthused the Metropolitan Museum curator, for his contributions to the art. Reproduction of pictures progressed steadily such that by the late 1800s business people began to see the possibilities of pictures as a means of promoting their products.



Very few cards were illustrated in the Catalog

Advertising or Trade Cards

Burdick leads us into the background for “advertising cards.” Such cards were given away to promote products, early cards appear as fancy versions of today’s business cards. Advertising cards take up about 15% of the ACC pages. They include Clipper Ships, Currier & Ives prints, banners, labels, Prang cards, and very little in the way of baseball cards. Here we start to see Burdick’s extreme sense of organization. Each group of cards is associated with a product, given an abbreviation, arranged alphabetically, and given a number. Few numbers are skipped. Everything is in order. The Clipper Ship Cards were probably the most expensive cards in the *Catalog* with HK1 at \$20 to \$30 each and others (HK3) going up to \$100 each. (The equivalent of 2 Honus Wagners as we will see.) The baseball cards in the “H” classification for trade cards include such issues as Smith’s Men’s Store, Boston Store, and Packard-Bell TV.

Souvenir Cards/Postcards

Souvenir cards including postcards take up another 30% of the ACC. We learn that picture postcards couldn’t be used very readily until the U.S. Postal service permitted them in 1898. There are zillions of categories for postcards and Burdick tackles them all.

Again the sports related products are a limited portion of the total collectable category. Arcade exhibit cards fit here in the “W” section along with “trading” or strip cards. Even here we see that exhibits and strips include a host of subjects: actors, actresses, cowgirls, Western stars, magic tricks, palm reading, planes and sports cars.

Burdick writes regarding the difficulty in identifying issuer and subjects in strip cards: “An example of the confusion in these sets is shown on one single sheet of 25 cards...of 7 baseball players, 4 boxers, 2 tennis girls, 2 golfers (apparently not ‘boys’), 1 football player, 1 jockey, 1 marathoner, 1 bicyclist, 1 auto racer, 2 Presidents’ wives, 1 actress, 1 singer, and finally Betsy Ross!” (1960, p.186)

Buck Barker wrote in an open letter to *SCD* in 1981 that “Jeff was not apparently vitally concerned with Post WWI issues.” (1981, p.5) Also “Jeff didn’t really get worked up about the

strip card section in that it didn't seem very important to him." (p.5) As to the difficulty of identifying various sets with no known publisher, Barker stated that R317 and W575 were meant to cover a variety of sets of unknown origin

Insert Cards

About 55% of the ACC deals with "insert" cards defined as cards inserted with products. Burdick writes: "After advertising cards became popular, it was inevitable that the idea of distributing the cards by packing one with a manufacturer's product would be developed" (1960, p.42)...from tobacco it spread to other commodities including gum. "T" was used for 20th century tobacco insert cards (plus 1898 and 1899.) "R" stood for "recent" cards. Recent meant from the 1930s! Like many of us, Burdick seemed to have a fondness for cards from his own youth which covered the boom years of tobacco card inserts of 1909 to 1915.

Burdick describes the tobacco wars, the introduction of Turkish tobaccos, local distributions, monopolies, cigarette roller girls, the World Tobacco Index, and the myriad of subjects that found themselves stuffed into packages. Again baseball is a drop in the bucket among the subjects inserted. The following is a list of some of my favorite set titles drawn from hundreds listed in the ACC: actors and actresses, aviators, bicycle and trick riders, butterflies and bugs, dancing girls of the world, fancy bathers, fancy dress ball costumes, fish and bait, girls, savage and semi-barbarous chiefs and rulers, sea captains, smokers of the world, and yacht club colors.

If you collected these cards, there wasn't much difference whether you had a trout or a perch on your card. None of them were worth much. But it was challenging to put together sets and to trade large quantities of cards. Burdick was interested in "all collected cards." The collection he gave to the Met tried to include them all. Baseball and sports were just a portion of Burdick's interests, only about 10% of the total collection. No wonder he didn't have any time to go to baseball games.

Prices

If your perch card was about as valuable as someone else's trout card, there wasn't much point in cataloging each individual card. It was sufficient for the collector to know that fish cards should run you about 5 cents each. There were no "rookie" fish. Therefore the ACC gave one-line descriptions of sets, indicating the subject, size, number of cards and price per card. Issues were known by some key description (if any) on the card such as "Isolation Booth." The 1953 Topps displayed in a frame at the Met have a printed description of "Dugout Quiz on back cards" just as they are described in the ACC. One line in the ACC described:

- R186 Famous Aircraft (50) Wings wrap, Am. Chiclé 2 ¼ x 4 ½..... 3 cents ea.

Just one line described the 1933 Goudeys:

- R319 Big League 1933 (240) Goudey (No. 106 \$1.00).....20 cents ea.

Well, I guess they did make some distinctions. The #106 Napoleon Lajoie card was certainly worth 5 times as much as let's say a Babe Ruth card in the set. The prices here were real though. 1952 Topps are listed at 10 cents each, with high numbers at 30 cents. Gordon B. Taylor, who advertised in the ACC with over 1 million cards for sale, sent me his price list in November, 1960 along with *his Card Comments Magazine*. The 1952 Topps were 10 cents each, high numbers were 50 cents each. Imagine his nerve trying to sell high numbers at 20 cents over "book" and charging as much for Faye Throneberry as Mickey Mantle! I was too smart to buy at those prices. Then again the 1952 Topps were 8 year-old cards selling for 10 times their original price. Do you think you could sell 1994 Topps at 10 times original cost?

You can see why one page could cover all Bowman baseball, all pre-61 Topps, and still have room to list Bowman football, Topps Basketball, Ringside, Topps Hockey and Topps football. The only gum cards listed at a premium I found were that pricey Lajoie and the 1952 Topps Page/Sain (30 cents). Tobacco cards over \$1 were limited to \$10 for Plank and \$50 for THE Wagner. Frankly I think our founding card fathers mislead their readers at the time into thinking that Mantle, Mays, and Zverink were like so many trout, perch and whales.

Despite the insignificance of the values in the ACC, pricing was a key reason for buying such a catalog; as it is today. The relative costs of cards seemed to reflect the scarcity and popularity of the issues. Some of the pricing related directly to Burdick's own experiences. According to a *Collector's Guide to Baseball Cards*, "Burdick received a small quantity of the Lajoie card directly from Goudey in 1934 and gave them to fellow collectors." (1990, p.37). Burdick prices the Lajoie at \$1.00. Also "Burdick had a lot of trouble locating (the Wagner) and may have started it on its way to fame by publicizing its scarceness. Burdick finally did obtain a copy of this card as a gift from a collector friend." (1990, p.36).

Cards are priced at just one value assuming "good" condition. "Good" was defined as without creases, stains, tack holes, bad centering or similar defacements. (Somewhere between excellent and pristine, gem mint in today's lexicon.) "As a rule, it is sufficient to review values only at intervals of a few years," (1960, p.9) per Burdick. Set prices are described as being either equal to the sum of the individual card prices or at a slight premium. Burdick even addresses "junk" cards as being of too poor a condition or of limited interest. Condition was not critical, as evidenced by Burdick gluing the cards into books or using corner hinges, as well as descriptions of some of his cards as "trimmed." Plastic sheets were not around yet. The cards on display at the Met that I saw were generally in the excellent grade.

Looking for People Who Knew Burdick

It isn't easy finding people who knew Burdick. Although Burdick died just less than forty years ago, it was difficult finding people who had ever met Burdick. I tried contacting people whose names appeared in the ACC. I tried talking to or e-mailing veteran dealers and hobbyists. I talked to T.S. O'Connell and Bob Lemke of SCD. I posted messages on hobby web sites. As I mentioned before, I talked to people at the museum. I had not found anyone who had met Jefferson Burdick.

I asked a dealer at the George Johnson/*Chicago Sun-Times* show if he had been involved in the hobby for a while. He assured me that he had, some thirty years. I asked him if he knew anything about Jefferson Burdick. He said "No, I don't have any cards of Burdick." At least he was correct with the first part of the response: "No." Two veteran dealers from the New York area insisted Burdick's collection was either at the Smithsonian or the New York Public Library. I quickly found that I knew more about Burdick than 95% of the people I talked to.

The 5% that knew more than I did were well worth the effort of contacting. Dealer Roger Neufeldt, Norman, Oklahoma, had not met Burdick but had known Buck Barker. Although I didn't pick up any more about Burdick, I probably have enough for another article on Buck Barker and the early days of card shows. (Hobby pioneers Barker and Bob Jaspersen both died on November 18, 1982.) I talked to Al Rosen, Bill Henderson, Kevin Savage, and Wayne Verner who knew just about what I knew at the time about Burdick. Bob Lemke suggested I call veteran collector John Rumierz of Dearborn, Michigan. John had not met Burdick but remembered Irv

Lerner's 1969 book, *Who's Who in Baseball Card Collecting* that had a one page story on Burdick. John remembered that Burdick was reclusive, that he collected through the mails by trading, and had been in poor health.

I then talked to Bill White, Ocean City, NJ, Irv Lerner of Philadelphia and Lew Lipset, Carefree, Arizona. Lerner recalled that Burdick moved from Syracuse to New York City to continue working on the collection because he wasn't able to get around easily. White remembered trading with Burdick and many of the other early collectors like Buck Barker. White and others I talked to felt it was not uncommon that veteran collectors (Burdick, Walt Corson, Frank Nagy) were reclusive. Most dealings were through the mail and you wouldn't really know whether you were dealing with someone who was 15 years old or 60 years old. White had viewed some of the Burdick collection at the Met in the 1960s. You were able to ask for albums and they would be brought to you. Lipset confirmed that there were few people still around that had ever met Burdick.

Lionel and Irma Carter

John Rumierz had also suggested contacting Lionel Carter. I was pleased to find that Lionel Carter lives 10 miles away from me in Evanston, Illinois, at the same address that appeared in his ad in the back of the 1960 *American Card Catalog*. Lionel Carter was a name that I remembered from ads and articles, including an article I have that he wrote about the 1974 Midwest Sports Collectors Convention in Detroit. He has been collecting for most of his 84 years.

Unfortunately Lionel was in the hospital when I first called but I was able to talk to his wife, Irma. Irma became the first person I found who had ever met Jefferson Burdick. Mrs. Carter was most gracious in sharing with me her memories of "Jeff" and of early collecting. Burdick visited Lionel Carter in Evanston. The Carters had visited Burdick in Syracuse. Mrs. Carter vividly recalled Jeff as being "reclusive", a loner living by himself in a rooming house in Syracuse. He was a small man in poor health. Mrs. Carter added: "Jeff was just furious at the prices. He felt that (collecting) was a hobby and not a business. Inserts were given away and not meant to be sold....Jeff was not that interested in baseball. He collected everything." Burdick was not married. His personal life seemed to consist of strictly cards. He worked on them all the time. Burdick remained in Syracuse until 1959 and then eventually moved to New York to work full-time on organizing the collection.

Lionel and Irma Carter knew "Jeff" Burdick and the early collectors in the hobby, photo G.Vrechek



I called again when Lionel Carter returned home. Talking to Lionel was one of my best experiences in the hobby – and provided more than enough information for an even longer article than this. I will stick to Lionel Carter’s experience with Burdick. Carter told me that Burdick was the original writer/editor of *The Card Collectors Bulletin* which he started in 1937, making Burdick the first hobby publisher. Charles Bray took over when Burdick became too crippled. Burdick wrote about new issues and newly discovered old issues. His interest was in cards prior to the 1930s.

Burdick may not have gotten into collecting the “recent” gum cards until the late 1940s when he visited Carter in Evanston. Burdick took the train to Chicago to see Carter as well as a woman in Chicago who collected post cards. Burdick was interested in seeing Carter’s considerable collection of gum sports cards. According to Carter, “Jeff was badly crippled with arthritis. His neck seemed that it went sideways...it was hard for him to get around.” (Presumably Burdick was afflicted with rheumatoid arthritis.) It would have been difficult for him to drive.

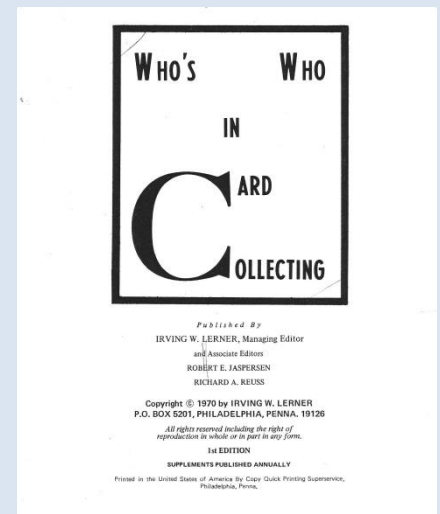
Carter didn’t recall seeing any photos of Burdick, but remembered him as maybe 5 foot 8 inches and 140 pounds. Carter visited Burdick in Syracuse in the 1950s but didn’t recall seeing any cards at all. The “last thing he wanted to do was part with his cards.” However the cards may have started migrating through the mail to the Met.

Burdick chastised Carter for advertising in *The Card Collectors Bulletin* that he was willing to pay \$1 for each card he needed and 50 cents for any upgrade card as being too much money to keep collecting a hobby. The *Collector’s Guide to Baseball Cards* also addressed this as follows: “Burdick himself worked very hard to keep prices low, as he was afraid that card collecting would become as overly commercialized as the coin and stamp collecting hobbies. He hoped card collecting would remain an enjoyable, affordable hobby for everyone.” (1990, p.72) According to Lionel Carter: “Burdick ran auctions of cards and sold them for 7 or 8 cents each, and they were pretty good cards. Buck Barker was more of a fan, whereas Burdick was more into the cards.” Lionel Carter is very cordial and has remarkable memories of the early years of the hobby.

Burdick’s Hall of Fame Bio

After a month long search and after completing all of the above research, my wife obtained a copy of Lerner’s *Who’s Who in Card Collecting*, 1970 and 1971. This 113 page booklet listed approximately 400 collectors throughout the world who responded to Editor Irving Lerner’s questionnaire. It included a six person Card Collectors Hall of Fame headed by Jefferson Burdick. The one page tribute to Burdick included additional important biographical information:

- Burdick was born February 25, 1900 and died March 13, 1963.
- Burdick graduated from the University of Syracuse
- He was employed as an advertising salesman (doesn’t sound that reclusive to me) and later employed by Krause-Hines Co. in Syracuse
- Burdick is buried in the family plot in Syracuse
- When he felt that the challenge of card collecting diminished, he shifted his attention to postcards



Lionel Carter is quoted in the tribute as follows: “J.R. Burdick was quiet, unassuming, a man dedicated to a hobby for the sake of the hobby, not for any altruistic motive, a man whose honesty and integrity could not be questioned...The dedication of this man to a job and the determination to see it through can best be illustrated when one realizes that he lived until the last card in his collection was mounted. There will never be an equal to J.R. Burdick in our hobby as a man, as a collector, as an editor, as a writer, as a publisher, as an organizer.” (1970, p.11)

“On learning of Mr. Burdick’s death, collector Buck Barker commented: ‘He prepared the foundation for our hobby, and laid most of the bricks of the structure himself. In a field where the normal object is to accumulate as large an amount of possessions as possible, he was most unusual because he gave his cards away – either to the museum or to individuals. There is no one like Jeff, and it is not likely that he will ever be replaced – not by anyone.’” (1970, p.11)

Findings

Burdick’s 30,000 baseball cards may seem modest given today’s 990 and 792 card sets. However if you had collected every card from every major set from 1933 to 1960, you would have something like 7,000 cards. If you threw in all the T-200 series tobacco baseball cards you might get up to 10,000 cards. Burdick wanted to collect everything issued and he may have come pretty close. Baseball cards were only a tenth of Burdick’s collection. *The American Card Catalog* reflected much of what Burdick collected and donated to the Met.

The ACC covered an incredible range of collectables. This 240 page book described T-206 card backs, Valentines to 1870, paper dolls, Clipper Ship posters, corrected 1955 Bowman errors, playing cards from Germany, Bible cards, business stationery, mechanical toy bank advertising cards, menus, cigar bands, the T207 Loudermilk, Ecuadorian bull fighting, and Chilean navy cards.

Burdick also edited the *The Handbook of Detroit Publishing Co. Postcards, 1954* and *Pioneer Postcards; the story of mailing cards to 1898*, published in 1957. Both books are significant accomplishments as well, filled with details and illustrations.

The bibliography in the ACC contains the only direct reference to Burdick and a final confirmation of his intentions regarding his collection. He writes: “The Metropolitan Museum of Art is installing the entire collection of J.R. Burdick. It may be a few years before the entire collection is available for inspection. It will include a representative showing of all card types, some of them outstanding in size.” (1960, p.196)

In this writer’s opinion, the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art has a difficult responsibility. They are foremost, an art museum. They own a valuable collection that is somewhat of a stretch as to its artistic value. As the collection has gotten more valuable, it has become more of a problem balancing accessibility and preservation. If significant portions of the collection were displayed, it would probably take up space disproportionate to the interests of museum visitors. If our own collections were up on the walls in our homes, we wouldn’t need to paint many walls. Allowing people to page through the valuable collection poses problems regarding theft and preservation of the condition of the cards. The cards are glued into albums on both sides of a page. (Had Burdick spent his last 3 years sticking a card a day in the spokes of a bicycle and left the rest in shoeboxes to await the dawn of the plastic sheet age, the collection might be in better

shape today. Collectors of ephemera are inclined to paste paper into albums however. Ah, the perfect vision of hindsight!) Removing 300,000 cards from the albums without damaging them may take more than a few minutes.

However the present arrangement is not satisfactory either. True collectors are interested in much more. Burdick wanted us to see “the entire collection.” The postcards, trading cards, playing cards and myriad other collectables should be of interest as well. The cards are valuable and require protection, but so does most everything else on display in an art museum. Perhaps some type of 30,000-card trade with another institution would make sense. Another museum would need to approach the Met to arrange for a loan or sale. The Smithsonian? The Baseball Hall of Fame? A museum for paper ephemera? A new sports cards museum?

Let me know if you have a museum available or have other ideas. With the wealth of information gathered from talking to the various veteran collectors and dealers I am working on another article on the early days of the hobby. Let me know if you have something to contribute.

George Vrechek email at vrechek@ameritech.net

Acknowledgments for their assistance on this article: Susan Vrechek, John Rumierz, Lionel and Irma Carter, Irv Lerner, Bill White, Lew Lipset, Roger Neufeldt, Chris Stufflestreet and David Hornish.

References

Barker, Charles “Buck.” (1981, May 20). The 1960 American Card Catalog and nos. R329-R346-W517-W626, also plus M101-R317-V100-W575 (An open letter to Dick Reuss from Charles “Buck” Barker). Sports Collectors Digest, 8, 5.

Burdick, J.R. (Jefferson R.). (1960). The American card catalog: the standard guide on all collected cards and their values. East Stroudsburg, PA: Kistler Printing Company.

Burdick, J.R. (Jefferson R.). (1957). Pioneer post cards: the story of mailing cards to 1898 with an illustrated checklist of publishers and titles. Syracuse, NY.

Kirk, Troy. (1990) Collector’s Guide to Baseball Cards. Radnor, PA: Wallace-Homestead Book Company.

Lerner, Irving W. (1970 and 1971) Who’s Who in Card Collecting. Philadelphia, PA: Copy Quick Printing Superservice.

Berkow, Ira. (1993, August 13). Baseball cards: out of the pocket and into the Met. The New York Times. C1, C5.

Cards. (1990, August 13). The New Yorker, 66, 26-7.

Erbe, Ron. (1982). The American Premium Guide to Baseball Cards. Florence, AL: Books Americana, Inc.

Horn, Miriam. (1993, July 5). Baseball beauties. U.S. News and World Report, 115, 11.

Obojski, Robert. (February, 1982) Baseball Hobby News,