



Hobby Royalty Revisited

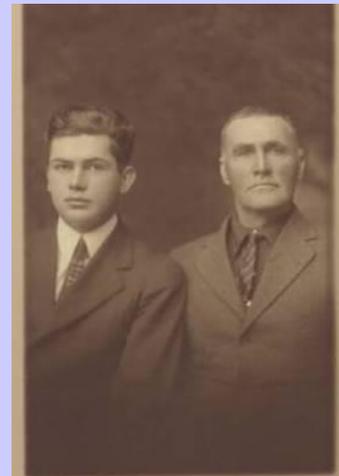
An Update on Burdick, Carter, Goldfaden, and Solon

By George Vrechek

Over the past eighteen years that I have written for SCD, I have had the opportunity to talk to many people about the early days of the hobby. I started by contacting hobbyists who knew of Jefferson Burdick, the “father of card collecting.” From there the subjects expanded naturally to include pioneer collectors (Buck Barker, Lionel Carter, and Harry Lilien) and elder statesmen still involved in the hobby (Goodwin Goldfaden, Irv Lerner, and Bob Solon.) I thought it would be interesting to see what has happened in the years since my articles relevant to some of these people or their collections.

Burdick’s Collection

I first visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in 2002 to view Jefferson Burdick’s collection of 306,000 cards he had donated to the museum prior to his death in 1963. Burdick was driven by an interest in American ephemera of any kind and an urge to organize and collect all that he could. My first “view” of his collection could be called an obstructed view at best in that I managed to see about 100 cards on public display. I persisted though and contacted the museum to arrange to see a small percentage of the archived collection over the next few years. My articles acknowledged the museum’s challenges in providing access to the collection while guarding their gift to see that it didn’t walk off – card by card. George Goldner was the Director of the Drawings and Prints Department; Connie McPhee was his associate responsible for the print study room. Goldner authorized my visit to the archives and McPhee provided me with what I asked to see in the time available. I wrote stories about each of my three visits.



Jefferson Burdick (left) and his father – perhaps 1920

Burdick’s Grave

Several readers have contacted me to learn more about Burdick. There was a rumor that his grave was unmarked. A reader sent me the photo of his headstone in Hillside Cemetery, Central Square, Hastings, New York, to refute that idea. The inscription includes “One of the Greatest Card Collectors of All Times.” Being a stickler for the language, Burdick would have likely

insisted that the last “s” be dropped from “Times” but the idea is clear. I learned from a 2009 article by Sean Krist of the *Syracuse Post-Standard* that the grave had been unmarked until 1997 when “John DeFlores - an old friend who sat on the same bench while they worked at Crouse-Hinds - bought Burdick a tombstone in 1997.” Burdick’s great niece, Betty Clark, contacted me in 2005 following one of my articles and provided the photo of Burdick as a young man with his father. I helped arrange for her to view the collection when she traveled to New York City, but I have lost contact with her.



Access at the Museum

I called the museum recently and talked to Kit Basquin in the Drawings and Prints Department. While McPhee is still with the museum, Freyda Spira is now the person responsible for visits to the print study room where the Burdick collection is housed. As in the past Goldner has to approve any visits related to baseball cards. Most of Burdick’s collection is non-sports related and isn’t as much of a problem to access. If you are just interested in Burdick’s collection of Valentines, for example, it is easier to get in the door. The collection is still kept in the binders that Burdick put them in some 50 years ago. The paste is not any moister and problems continue with fragile cards and fragile album pages, but the collection is still available for limited viewing. Any visit has to fit into a window of 2 ½ hours on either Tuesday morning or afternoon. The staff continues to rotate a few hundred cards into the public display on the first floor of the museum.



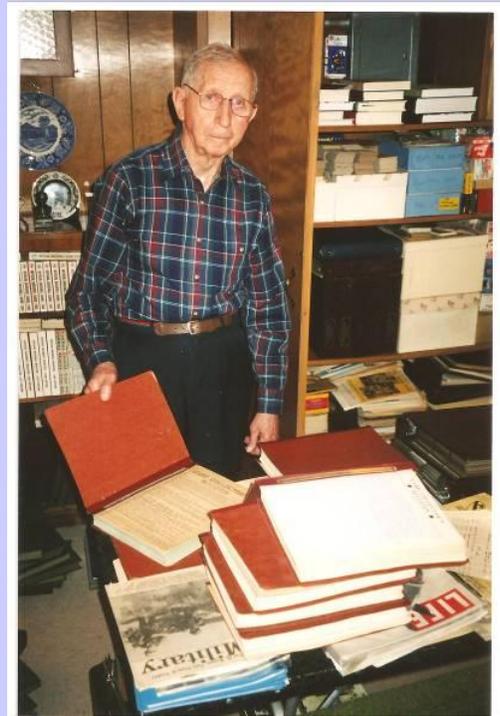
Jefferson Burdick 1953

Museum Shop Still Empty

Readers of my previous articles have contacted me to see if I knew anything about posters or cards depicting the Burdick collection that were sold in the museum store years ago. I sensed some frustration in trying to find Burdick information or products through the museum. Nothing on Burdick seems to be in stock and no one mentioned plans for printing anything more. However, Kit Basquin mentioned that the museum’s merchandise people have photographed items from the Burdick collection for possible use in museum gift shop products and that you just “need to keep checking the on-line store” for possible new products. While there haven’t been any advances in viewing or preserving the collection, it is being maintained and access is still available.

Lionel Carter

I first contacted Lionel Carter in 2002. Carter had been one of the early collectors who had contacted Burdick in the 1930s. Carter wrote for Burdick's publication, *The Card Collectors' Bulletin*, and many other hobby publications over 70 years. He sold his significant collection of high-quality baseball cards thru Mastro Auctions in 2007 and died in 2008. I wrote articles on Carter's correspondence, his cards, and a tribute following his death.



Lionel was survived only by his wife, Irma. Irma had accompanied Lionel on many of his hobby trips and understood Lionel's lifelong interest in collecting and writing. There was no obituary for Lionel Carter and no religious or memorial service. Doug Allen, then with Mastro, had said he had been working on publishing Lionel's World War II memoirs, a 60-year devotion by Carter. While Lionel had lost interest in his own wantlist, he was still very active in refining and polishing his World War II book.



Following Lionel's death, I contacted Irma. She didn't have much to say about Lionel's memoirs, his correspondence, or his remaining collection of publications. She didn't really have much interest in talking to me or any other hobbyist for that matter. Any news of the book being published seems to have vanished. The cards live on though. Carter's cards were entombed by SGC and PSA with a notation that they are from the "Lionel Carter Collection." The cards appear frequently in current ebay auctions.

George Vrechek (left) and Lionel Carter (right) July 2008

Over the years Lionel had sent me 20 packages containing copies of articles he thought to be of interest. He sent me one baseball card, which I treasure, a 1985 common. We had gone together to his last Chicago Cub game. Lionel was in and out of a nursing home and died a month after we had our picture taken together. I was hoping to see his war memoirs published and to remain in contact with Irma. Not everything works out.

Goodwin Goldfaden

Goodie Goldfaden remains the oldest dealer with the most years in business. I contacted him as a young man of 93. He will be 95 in November, a birth date identical to Joe DiMaggio's, he

reminds me. I wrote an *SCD* article about Goldfaden being the first full-time dealer in sports publications; he also dealt with sports cards. He amassed significant inventories – and sold them all off – eight different times from his store in West Hollywood, California. He sold two boxcars containing 50 tons of material to Notre Dame University in the mid 1970s. When I talked to him about the article, I mentioned my interest in old hobby publications. He said he would see what he could find.

I called Goodie again recently. He immediately remembered my interest in hobby publications. We chatted for awhile and then he asked if my daughter still lived on Hayworth Street in Los Angeles. I had even forgotten the name of the street where she previously lived, but Goodie hadn't. I'm willing to back Goodie in any memory contest among 95 year-olds. He said though that the internet had been adversely affecting his business and he was spending more time visiting with doctors. He was in the process of relinquishing his post office box of 59 years and his warehouse, maintained for over 30 years. He hadn't even advertised in several months. But he was still selling out of his shrinking inventory.

He called me back a few days later and rattled off the hobby publications he had found for me. We quickly made a deal. I got to buy something from Goodie Goldfaden! I also got a current photo of the tanned and actively fit Mr. Goldfaden shown here holding a “jfc directory of Sports Collectors, 1968 edition” which was part of the hobby publication deal. Longevity runs in the family in that Goodie was making plans to visit his 89 year-old younger brother in Texas.

Goodie Goldfaden with George Vrechek, February 2010



Bob Solon

Bob Solon started collecting in 1931 and was still at it when I interviewed him in 2004. Bob had a knack for getting results directly from the card issuers by contacting them or dropping in on them. He wrote Bowman in 1955 that he was having trouble finishing the last series. They sent him a big box containing six complete sets of the last series. He even cranked out a few issues of his own including the “1969 Solon Kansas City Royals.” While he had sold most of his vintage material in 1979, he maintained his interest in putting together recent sets and in acquiring cards of obscure players.

I called again recently. Bob confessed to “not doing much with current cards.” He said that he sold most of his regional issues to Kevin Savage, although he still had about 1,000 sets of the Sunoco Dream Team. Bob only had two Topps sets left. Our conversation included the names: Bruce Yeko, Leaf Gum, Exhibit Supply Company, 1888 Scrapps Tobacco, 1963 Milwaukee Sausage Seattle Rainers, and Al Demaree Die-Cuts. Bob offered that “the whole idea of card collecting was an anachronism.” He thought memorabilia was still strong but that kids “hadn't

taken to the cardboard.” He also felt major league baseball had evolved into big bucks for homerun hitters.

Despite his complaints, Bob remained enthused about baseball, football, and every other sport. He was aware of the standings in each major league division and predicted winners of each division and the logical reasons why. He remembered all who had homered for New York against Boston the night before. He liked the Phillies again in the World Series. In the same breath he recalled listening to the Cubs on the radio playing in the fifth game of the 1929 World Series. They blew an 8-0 advantage to the A’s who scored 10 runs to win. He remembered the announcer saying that Ruth was pointing to something at Wrigley Field in the 1934 World Series. He remembered Castiglione of Pittsburgh blowing the opportunity to make an unassisted triple play against the Cubs in 1948. He regretted not looking up Goldfaden on his last trip to Los Angeles. I’ll put Bob Solon up against any other 85 year-old sports prognosticator.



Bob Solon 2006

It is great to see the old-timers retaining their interest in sports and the hobby. It seems to have kept all of them young at heart, if not in age.

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This article was written shortly before Bob Solon’s death in August 2009 The following notice was printed in SCD following Bob’s death.

SCD recently learned that long-time collector Bob Solon of Oak Park, Illinois, passed away on August 27, 2009. Bob wrote for many hobby publications starting in the 1950s and was just featured in a November SCD article based on an August interview. Bob started collecting in 1931, went off to World War II, and reentered the hobby in 1954. He sold most of his vintage collection in 1979, but kept active putting together modern sets and following baseball. Bob was a Chicago school teacher with an incredible recollection of facts, figures, and people.

Once Bob got back into the hobby, he did so with initiative and enthusiasm even visiting issuers and printers like the Exhibit Supply Company and Leaf Gum usually in search of the obscure set

or player. The regular Topps issues were too easy. Like pioneer collector and baseball cataloger Buck Barker, Bob wanted to collect a card or photo of anyone who had appeared in a big league game. In 1958 Bob attended a gathering at Lionel Carter's home when Buck Barker and Charles Bray, Card Collector's Bulletin editor, came to town. They exchanged Goudeys, tobacco cards, and the last series of 1958 Topps.

Starting in 1969 Bob helped create five collector sets: 1969 Fud's Photography Montreal Expos, 1969 Solon Kansas City Royals, 1970 La Pizza Royale Expos, and two other issues of Orioles and Expos. Bob was a fixture at the early Chicago card shows. Collector Brian Powell remembered Bob as kind and gracious to new collectors and encouraging experienced collectors to share their knowledge by writing for hobby publications. Bob devoted a good deal of his basement to sorting and storing cards, keeping up on new issues each year. Some inventory of Bob's collection remains.

At age 86 Bob's eyesight was failing and his remaining hair seemed to head every direction but straight, however he retained his marvelous ability to talk to people and to stay enthused about baseball. His annual beginning of the season prediction of a 2009 World Series winner was Philadelphia, which had been his pick in 2008 as well. He came within a few games of being right again. The hobby will miss Bob Solon, collector. Bob's wife, Pearl, also died this past year. The family can be reached at sarahksmom@yahoo.com Subject line: Bob Solon.

George Vrechek, *SCD* writer

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