

CAPTURED ON CANVAS

CARTOPHILIUM POSTCARDS AND SPINOFFS FEATURED HOCKEY HALL OF FAME MEMBERS

By Sal J. Barry | Contributing Writer

Andrew Pywowarczuk had an idea in the late 1970s. There was no comprehensive set of cards for members of the Hockey Hall of Fame, so he decided to make one.

The set was so popular that Pywowarczuk's company, Cartophilium, went back to the press two more times. Between 1983 and 1987, Cartophilium produced 240 postcards and 501 trading cards, honoring every member of the Hall of Fame. Three decades later, these cards – known for their striking portraits of hockey's greatest icons – still resonate with old school collectors.

Building the Set

"There was a lack of viable photos available to produce a set in color that had a look that connected all of the honored members," Pywowarczuk said. "The Baseball Hall of Fame had its ongoing plaque postcards, which provided a common connected look but did not do justice to the movement of baseball, nor did it capture the individuality of each subject."

To work around the lack of color photos, Pywowarczuk partnered with Donald Carleton, ("Mac") McDiarmid, a commercial artist and goal judge for the Montreal Canadiens.

"I first met Carlton McDiarmid just after supper on May 9, 1976," recalled Pywowarczuk. "I visited his apartment. Within five minutes, it was clear that he was an individual with great

talent. His real passion was art – or more specifically, hockey art."

McDiarmid, who died in 2009, painstakingly created full-color paintings of every member of the Hockey Hall of Fame. In 1979, Pywowarczuk and McDiarmid approached the Hall of Fame with their idea of a postcard set that would depict everyone, from superstar player to long-forgotten builder. The HHOF responded with open arms.

"The Hall of Fame, specifically Maurice 'Left' Reid, was very receptive and encouraging," Pywowarczuk said. "At the time, the Hall had a unique marketing and promotional situation with the NHL and honored members, so most of the normal obstacles were eliminated and by 1982 everything was in place. Mac had the artwork ready, Lefty Reid provided the write-ups, two of Cartophilium's employees did the translation into French, a printer was found and the Hockey Hall of Fame Collection was launched."

The 1983 Postcard Set

In 1983, Cartophilium released its first HHOF set, consisting of 240 4-by-6-inch postcards. Every member of the Hall – save two – was included whether they were a recently retired player, a long forgotten builder or an official.

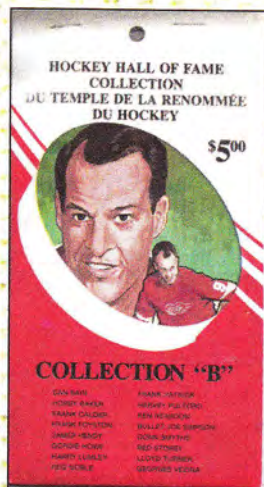
A full-color likeness of each HHOF member dominates the front of each postcard. From the trademark receding hairline of Gordie Howe to the intense stare of Maurice Richard, each por-

trait was instantly recognizable to hockey fans. A smaller illustration augmented the portrait, which showed the player in action. If the picture was of a builder, an era-specific team logo or league logo took its place.

"Mac was very detail-oriented with a willingness to go to extremes when researching a subject for the canvas," Pywowarczuk said. "Down to the last detail, he was a perfectionist. This became critical in the success of the Hall of Fame Collection."

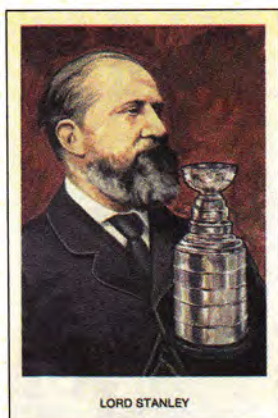
The postcards were released in 15 series labeled A through O. Cards were ordered by series then by number (A1, A2, etc. all the way to O15). It released three series each quarter, starting in the fall of 1983. Each series contained a variety of players and builders. Cartophilium sold the postcards as a subscription. For \$70, collectors would get three new postcard series every three months. Collectors who paid an extra \$19.95 received a special binder, decorated with the HHOF logo and contained special, three-pocket pages to hold the set.

Other mail-order companies sold the postcards, as did card shops, the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto and the Montreal Canadiens at home games at the Montreal Forum. Each series sold for \$5 and came in a cardboard envelope. A "puck-shaped" window in the envelope allowed the top postcard to be visible, as if the honoree was peering out at the potential buyer.



Ten promo cards were produced with the back of the cards highlighting the size and price of the set.

The issued binders featured a logo of the Hockey Hall of Fame.



LORD STANLEY



HOBEY BAKER

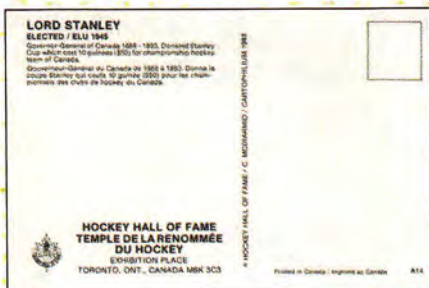


ROY WORTERS



BILL CHADWICK

The Hockey Hall of Fame inducted Lord Stanley in 1945 as an honored builder.



Dale Weselowski, owner of Ab D. Cards in Winnipeg, remembers his store sold the postcards in 1983. Today, he still sells singles and complete sets through his store's website.

"The first few series were the most popular with Bobby Orr, Gordie Howe and Jean Beliveau," Weselowski said. "Needless to say, the builders weren't that popular or the guys who played in the 1920s or 1930s. Postcards of the guys who just retired in the past 10 or 15 years were the most popular because people could still relate to them."

The back of each postcard has the player's name, year of induction and a two-sentence synopsis of their achievements. There is ample room on the back to write an address and a short message, as well as a "box" to affix a stamp. But mailing these out was the last thing on people's minds.

"I don't think anyone used them as postcards," Weselowski said. "These were hockey collectibles."

Despite being similar to trading cards, the postcards do not have any player statistics. This was a conscious decision by Pywowarczuk.

"Each member was to be viewed as equal," he explained. "No qualifying attributes were added or implied. That is why the postcards did not have stats of any kind."

Also contributing to the lack of statistics was, coincidentally, a lack of statistics. Records for the NHL and its precursor, the National Hockey Association, were readily available, but statistics for the Pacific Coast Hockey Association were not. Several HHOF members starred in the PCHA, including Lester Patrick, Frank Nighbor and Cyclone Taylor. Offering incomplete stats for some players and none for others would have stratified the members.

Cartophilium omitted two recent HHOF inductees. While 1983 inductees Ken Dryden and Stan Mikita were included, Bobby Hull and Harry Sinden were not.

The 15 series of postcards were printed in sheets of 16, which totaled 240 cards. But there were 242 total members of the Hall of Fame at the time, so two were kept out. Since Dryden and Mikita were the first two from the 1983 class who agreed to participate in the set, Hull and Sinden were not included with the intention of being included in a future release — just not the next one.

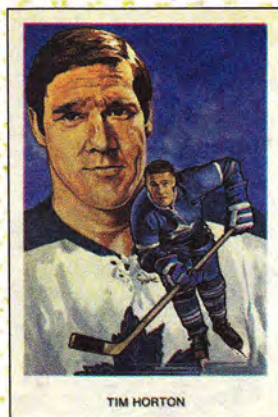
1985: The Incredible Shrinking Set

"Once series A through C were issued successfully, collectors started asking for a standard-size, 2 1/2-by 3 1/2-inch issue," Pywowarczuk said.

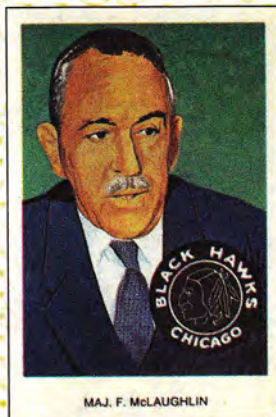
Collectors loved the postcards, but wanted something more affordable. Sears Canada also wanted to sell the set in its Christmas catalog, but at the gift-friendly price of \$19.95. Thus, Cartophilium scaled down the postcard set and produced a set of 240 standard cards. Sears Canada, mail order card dealers and card shops sold the set, which came in a plain white cardboard box. A binder with the Hall of Fame logo and card pages was again available for purchase for an extra \$15.

The Montreal Gazette also sold the set, but in series of 20 cards each week over a 12-week period. Collectors could mail away to The Gazette for each series or purchase them at participating retail locations. The Gazette offered its own three-ring binder, which had both the HHOF and The Gazette logos printed in gold-colored ink.

Despite being produced in 1985, the HHOF trading cards have a 1983 copyright date on the back. Also, this set still excluded Hull and Sinden. "We could not get the sheets to configure for 242 cards," explained Pywowarczuk. "Plus we did not want to convey the impression that updates were forthcoming within two



TIM HORTON



MAJ. F. McLAUGHLIN



GUMP WORSLEY



STANLEY MIKITA



years."

Since the PCHA stats were still not complete, there still weren't stats on the cards.

To promote the set, Cartophilium issued ten promo cards: Gordie Howe, Terry Sawchuk, Johnny Bower, Jean Beliveau, Maurice Richard, Bobby Orr, Harry Howell, Howie Morenz, Eddie Shore and Lord Stanley. Fronts of the promos were the same as the standard cards, while the backs noted the size and price of the set.

1987: Now with Statistics

"The card sets, when they came out, were actually quite popular because they were smaller," Weselowski said.

Cartophilium went to the presses for a third time in 1987 for the 1985 set. The cards were again standard-sized, but finally included statistics.

"Since the PCHA and Western Hockey League stats were finally available, stats were added to all players when possible and applicable," Pywowarczuk said.

Twenty-one new cards make this version of the set stand out: Hull and Sinden from the 1983 inductee class, and popular stars from the 1970s such as Bobby Clarke, Phil Esposito, Dave Keon, Serge Savard, Bernie Parent, Gerry Cheevers and Jacques Lemaire.

Cartophilium, mail order retailers and hobby shops sold the 261-card set for \$19.95, or \$34.95 with a HHOF-logged binder and card pages.

"A few complained that they had to by 261 cards to get 21 new cards," Pywowarczuk said. Regardless, the set quickly sold out.

End of an Era

By the late 1980s, the direction of the hobby shifted. Card collecting splintered from set collectors to rookie card collectors, team set builders and so forth. Card dealers broke up the HHOF sets to sell the more popular players, certain teams, or the builders and officials who did not have a Rookie Card prior to their Hall of Fame cards. People requested Cartophilium to sell large quantities of single cards, but the company declined.

They considered continuing both the postcard set and the trading card set, though.

"There was residual interest [to continue] the postcard format," Pywowarczuk said. "But to justify production, 48 subjects were required. That would have put the projected issue date of around 1994 if relying on new honorees. Doing cards of players with different teams (such as Gordie Howe with the Whalers instead of the Red Wings) was considered but had the potential of creating more problems than solutions."

Unfortunately, the growth of the trading card industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s made future HHOF trading cards impossible. Licensing became more complicated as more card companies entered the marketplace.

"The small sets were well received, but with the end of the Topps/O-Pee-Chee exclusive for NHL cards after 1989-90, the honored members were no longer viewed as being under one

HHOF umbrella," Pywowarczuk said. "Once members signed exclusive deals with the new card producers, they were no longer usable and had to be excluded from our set."

Legacy

The Hockey Hall of Fame postcard set and two subsequent card sets were the only all-inclusive HHOF sets released. Though comprehensive at the time, the Hall of Fame postcard and trading card sets are dated by today's standards. Thus, it might not connect with the younger collectors.

"It's for the historical buff more than anyone else," Weselowski said. "It's for the person who is into the history of hockey. And now, when you add the extra 30 years on there, it's the older part of history. You don't have recent inductees like Mats Sundin in the set."

So, why do the HHOF postcards and trading cards endure to this day?

"Because it used paintings instead of the photos," Weselowski said. "It almost has a nostalgic feel to it. There's some pretty old time hockey in there."

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Sal J. Barry is a freelance writer from Chicago who fondly remembers buying the HHOF trading card set as a kid. He also writes for The Hockey News. Check out his hockey card blog at PuckJunk.com. Contact him at sjb@puckjunk.com or on Twitter @puckjunk.

