What is this fascination that Yankee fans have with Mickey Mantle? Even in death, Mickey is as popular as ever in the sports memorabilia world. Why has this All-American boy from Commerce, Okla., captured our hearts and made us want to have every item ever issued with his likeness?

The answer may not be that difficult to explain. Mickey was as popular as the President of the United States. He played on the great Yankee teams that won one world championship after another. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, it was common to see him on NBC with Bob Hope and even on Sunday night with Ed Sullivan. Mothers, who didn’t know the first thing about baseball, knew who he was. He even appeared in two motion pictures with Cary Grant and Doris Day, in a “Touch of Mink,” and “Safe at Home” with Kurt Russell and William Frawley.

Television producers were constantly trying to get him on their TV shows, like the “Match Game,” “What’s My Line,” “Toast of the Town” or “The Perry Como Show” to boost their ratings.

His likeness even adorned milk cartons, book covers, and men’s clothing. Did you know that Mickey had his own brand of blue jeans and under-

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Mickey was so popular that he even had a chain of Country Cookin’ restaurants, his own bowling alley in Dallas and his very own motel called Mickey Mantle’s Holiday Inn in Joplin, Mo. To this day, his Holiday Inn was the only hotel in the entire chain to actually use an individual’s name on the marquee.

He was a player who had superhuman ability. He was a champion for the most storied franchise in all of sports, the New York Yankees. His statistics are legendary. His Triple Crown season of 1956 and three MVP awards were equal to Babe Ruth in effort and memory. He was a superstar before the word was ever used in baseball.

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When asked if he thought MLB was in violation of antitrust laws toward expansion, he quickly retorted, “My views are just about the same as Casey’s.”

We all wanted to be like Mickey Mantle. We mimicked his swing and collected all of his baseball cards. Little did we know that these baseball relics would someday end up being worth thousands of dollars and even paying for college for our children.

As we grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, we never collected cards for money. Heck, this is where we would memorize our favorite player’s statistics and tape their cards to our bedroom walls so that it would be the last thing we saw as we fell asleep. We’d even put them in our bicycle’s spokes to make our bikes sound loud like a motorcycle. We also would “flip” them, as we tried to win as many cards as possible to complete our checklists.

My first Yankee game was in 1965. It was Bat Day. With temperatures in the 90s and Yankee Stadium filled to capacity, all the kids had the same idea: We all wanted the coveted bat with his name on it.

Sadly, there were other names on the Hillerich & Bradsby label that would also be given away that day, as well.

As I entered the turnstile for the first time in my life, I remember being given a 31-inch Tom Tresh model. Dejected, but not looking a gift horse in the mouth, I immediately set out to find someone who was willing to trade. It took me a few innings, but I was successful. Mickey’s Signature Model bat was now in my possession. Little did I know that this would be the start of my Mickey Mantle memorabilia-collecting career.

In 1952, Topps issued its first full set of 407 cards. This set contained the previously mentioned Mantle card, which was a high number. This meant that his card and all other cards numbered 311-407 were released in limited quantities at the end of the baseball season, with football season just around the corner. Needless to say, these cards are very valuable.

The following year, Topps issued one of its most popular sets of all time, with all of the cards being hand-painted original artwork rather than colorized photography. Mantle’s card was No. 82.

During the next two years, 1954 and 1955, the absence of Mantle was very noticeable. The only Mantle cards being made were from Topps’ chief competitor, Bowman. In fact, Bowman shared its rights with Topps to issue Mantle’s cards from 1951-53 and then secured the exclusive rights for the 1954 and 1955 seasons. With Bowman going out of business after the 1955 season, Mantle was back in the Topps lineup for 1956. His card was No. 135.

Kelly R. Eisenhauer of Leighton, Pa., has been a fan and collector of Mickey Mantle memorabilia for more than 40 years. He supplied photography for the HBO documentary “Mantle, The Definitive Story” and is featured in Richard Wolfe’s current book, For Yankee Fans Only – Volume 2. Eisenhauer owns and operates his own Mickey Mantle webpage at www.hofmemories.com. Anyone with questions or comments can reach him at mrike@ptd.net.

Many of the photographs from this multi-part series, including a remarkable number of one-of-a-kind pieces, came from the Mickey Mantle Collection of B.S. Alpert.
In this first installment of an ongoing series that will appear in SCD roughly once per month, I will be highlighting the Topps test, secondary issues and inserts involving Mickey Mantle from 1952-69.

Being a Mickey Mantle collector hasn’t been easy. For those of us who wanted to have one of everything, Topps has kept us very busy during the past 57 years. Starting with their first release of Mickey’s first Topps card, the famous No. 311 from the coveted 1952 set, the company has issued hundreds, or should I say thousands, of cards and items with his likeness since 1952. Even today, Topps is releasing more Mickey Mantle baseball cards each year than the complete total of when he was patrolling center field for the New York Yankees.

When we were kids, it was a common goal for any Yankees fan to pull a fresh Mantle card from an unopened pack. We didn’t collect his cards for the money; there was no money in baseball cards during those days. We collected Mickey’s cards because he was our hero. Very few of us had the foresight to handle these precious artifacts with kid gloves and preserve them for eternity. In fact, most of us probably wrapped our cards with rubber bands, put them in a Phillies cigar box, and then one day would discover that Mom “gave them away” to the garbage man. It was a part of growing up. May our cards rest in peace.

PART I
Topps Test, Secondary Issues and Inserts 1952-69

(Mickey Mantle artwork (from top) by Dick Perez, Ron Stark (2), Arthur K. Miller (far right) and two Ozzie Sweet Mantle photo cards. Mantle photo collage on the previous page by David Spindel.)
From proofs to goofs and everything in between

The 1956 Topps Button Box that never was
In 1956, Topps issued a set of pins or buttons that featured 60 of the game's biggest stars. To a lot of people's shock, Mickey Mantle did not appear in this set. He was, however, strongly considered and was going to be used for the display box. (See picture No. 1) This artwork was the first extra issue of Mickey that never materialized. Topps opted instead for a display box with Ted Williams' picture. The artwork of Mantle is a one-of-a-kind item that originated from the Topps art department.

Bazookas – 1959-69
In 1959 (Photo No. 2), using the trade name Bazooka, Topps issued 23 different, small boxes filled with individually wrapped pieces of 1-cent bubble gum. Each box, filled with 25 pieces of Bazooka Joe Chewing Gum, cost 20 cents. Printed on the back of these boxes were blank-backed, full-color cards that measured 23/4-by-5 inches when properly cut along the dotted lines. Unnumbered, these cards were commonly cut from the box. Very few intact boxes remain today. The Mantle card is a very much sought-after item that is valued around $2,000. Complete 1959 boxes with Mantle have been valued in excess of $4,000 depending on condition.

Bazooka issued a total of 10 different Mantle cards from 1959-68 (Photos Nos. 3-10). Most of these issues appeared as three-card panels on the back of Bazooka Joe boxes. The three-card panels measured 2¾-by-5½ inches (Photo No. 7), although card sizes did change over this 10-year span. In 1968, a totally different design was created, where four cards appeared on each box. Complete Bazooka three-card panels with Mantle are priced in the $300-$500 range.

1959-64 Topps Salesman Panels Beginning in 1959, Topps salesmen would sometimes give out three-card panels to their distributors in order to promote the upcoming year's card set. Mickey Mantle appeared on a 1959 Topps panel along with Bob Cerv and Jim Bolger. In 1962, Mantle's AL Home Run Leaders card No. 53 appeared with Barney Schultz (who, ironically, would intersect with The Mick in the 1964 World Series by serving up a famous home run) and Carl Sawatski.

In 1964, two different Mantle panels were distributed. He appeared with Jim Davenport and Grover Powell on the first release. The second panel featured Carl Willey of the Mets, Bruce Howard and Frank Kretzzer of the White Sox, and Bob Friend of the Pirates (Photo No. 12). The reverse side of the panel showed Mantle's back side of card No. 50 (Photo No. 11) and promoted the 1964 Topps cards. These panels are very rare and were very limited in number.
MICKEY MANTLE From previous page

1960 Topps Tattoos

In 1960, Topps produced a total of 96 different tattoos. The tattoo was actually an outside wrapper for a 1-cent piece of chewing gum. The wrapper was 13/16-by-3½ inches and green in color. There were two Mantle tattoos in this set. The first featured a simple facial drawing of Mickey with his name in block letters (Photo No. 13). Being very difficult to obtain, the 1960 Mantle tattoo remains the most expensive item in the set. It is valued at around $300. Mint condition examples are twice as valuable, since most were usually cut to fully view the entire tattoo.

The second Mantle tattoo featured his facsimile signature over a baseball (Photo No. 14) and had his name misspelled as “Micky.” It is valued between $75-$100.

1961 Topps Dice Card

Without a doubt, this elusive Topps test issue is at the top of all advanced Mantle collectors’ want-lists. Produced in very limited numbers, this black-and-white game card (shown with both front and back sides) is easily the most difficult Mantle card to obtain. Its scarcity and value have made it almost impossible to afford, even if one became available.

Measuring 2½-by-3½ inches, the card featured a full-body pose of Mickey batting left-handed on the front (Photo No. 15) and had various outcomes, when certain dice combinations were rolled, on the reverse side (Photo No. 16).

Thought to be patterned after the very popular APBA Baseball board game, the game card would give youngsters yet another reason to collect this issue. Eighteen cards were produced in this Holy Grail of sets.

It is thought that Woody Gelman, who headed Topps’ Product Development Department from 1953 to the late 1970s, was responsible for this release. Experts conclude that there may be no more than 10 in existence. In the past few years, a Mantle Dice Card was sold at auction for $24,000. I wouldn’t be surprised to see a $50,000 price tag if another one ever becomes available. Never really released officially by Topps, it is thought that the dice card sets might have been given to Topps executives or made their way out the back door during the midnight hours.

1961 Topps Stamps

As an added insert in 1961, Topps included a two-player stamp panel to its wax packs. Measuring 13/8-by-13/36 inches, several variations of these panels can be found. There were two different Mantle issues. The first panel has Mickey and Bill Bruton of the Milwaukee Braves together, while the second panel shows Mickey with Jackie Jensen of the Boston Red Sox (Photo No. 17). Both panels are worth around $200, with singles of Mantle selling in the $40-$50 range.

1962 Topps Stamps

Once again in 1962, Topps added a two-player stamp panel to its regular baseball cards wax packs. Using a totally different design, players’ photographs appeared with a red or yellow background. Issued with two players and a promotion tab for a 10-cent stamp album, Mantle appeared on three different panels, matched with either Hank Aaron (Photo No. 18), Felipe Alou or Dick Stuart. The complete three-piece panels are worth about $100-$125 each.

1962 Baseball Bucks

The 1962 Baseball Bucks were made to resemble American currency in $5 and $10 denominations. Printed on green paper, the Mantle “Buck” was made to resemble a small $10 bill. Issued in their own package, the Baseball Bucks were 41/8-by-1¼ inches in size (Photo No. 19). Near-Mint examples that are well centered are valued in the $350 range.

1962-63 Topps Mock-up Cards

Every year before a card is issued, the Topps artists would design different formats that would be considered for a final product. Two such Mantle “mock” cards made their way into the hobby. Although these designs were never selected, it is interesting to see the different designs and ideas that surfaced as potential ideas.

The first mock-up looks very much like a wood-grained design similar to the 1962 release (Photo No. 20). In the second example (Photo No. 21), Mantle’s name and “pitching record” are present with the idea of a ruboff “coin quiz” being presented.

1963 Topps Artwork for the Back of Mantle Card No. 200

In 1989 at the famous Guernsey’s auction in New York City, Topps started to clear out the vault and make some of its prized possessions available to the public. Test issues, proof cards, uncut sheets, original artwork and countless other items were sold. Pictured is the original artwork that was used for the back of Mantle’s 1963 Topps card (Photo No. 22). The comic highlighted Mickey’s 14th World Series home run. It is a one-of-a-kind item from the Topps art department.

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1963 Topps Mantle Plaque
Issued in 1963, this Topps issue was actually a mail-in offer that came on high-number wax packs. Approximately 6-by-8 inches in size, the “mask” was made of embossed plastic and came with a wood-grained frame that was actually a part of this issue (Photo No. 23). Very much sought after by advanced collectors, this premium is very valuable, with Near-Mint, uncracked examples bringing in excess of $2,000. Mantle was the only player issued in this format.

1963 Topps Peel-Offs
Included inside 1963 Baseball packs, this 1¼-by-2½-inch insert sticker featured colored head shots of 46 different players (Photo No. 24). The Mantle is the most valuable in the set at around $75.

1964 Topps Coins
Topps issued 164 different metal coins and inserted them inside the 1964 Baseball wax packs. There were three different Mantle coins. A gold-trimmed coin was numbered 120 and is valued at $60 (Photo No. 25). Two different All-Star blue-metal coins exist, with one showing Mantle batting right-handed (Photo No. 26) and the other showing him batting left-handed. Both of these All-Star coins, numbered 131, are valued at about $50 each. Topps would later bring back the coins in 1971 and then again in 1987. An uncut metal sheet of the 1964 Topps coins has also made its way into the hobby (Photo No. 27).

1964 Topps Giants
This postcard-sized issue, 3½-by-5¼ inches, never really caught on with collectors or simply were produced in quantities that kept prices relatively low. Today, the Mickey Mantle card can be purchased for $25 in Excellent condition (Photo No. 28). Mantle is card No. 25.

1964 Topps Photo Tatoo
Despite a spelling variation for the word, “tattoo,” Topps went back to its 1960 design for this 1964 issue. Using different artwork and a yellow wrapper instead of the green, Topps issued two different Mickey Mantle tattoos. The first featured a close-up facial drawing of Mantle with a red triangle in the background (Photo No. 29). The second variation featured the same Mantle artwork, but replaced the red triangle with a diagonal yellow stripe (Photo No. 30). Both issues featured the type “M. Mantle, Yankees” below his picture. Values of each tattoo are $200-$300, depending on condition.

1964 Topps Stand-Ups
Using color photographs of 77 different play-
1966 Topps Rub-Offs

Patterned after the 1961 Magic Rub-Offs, this issue was inserted into 1966 Topps Baseball wax packs. The Rub-Offs featured a colorful, close-up portrait with the player’s name, team and position printed below inside a yellowish scroll. It is very common to find badly centered examples of these issues. The Mantle Rub-Off is fairly common, but is the most valuable player in the set (Photo No. 37). In the past few years, uncut rolls of 20 or more players have been selling for around $100.

1966 Topps Unpublished Black-and-White Display Box Photograph

The Topps Vault recently sold a black-and-white 5-by-7 photograph of Mickey Mantle on eBay. This image of Mantle was intended to be used for the display box of the 1967 Topps Discs, but never was (Photo No. 38). A colored version of the same photo was used, however, for the actual 1967 Topps Test Disc and 1968 Topps Proof Disc.

1967 and 1968 Topps Discs

Issued to be the insert for a button that never was made, these scarce Topps test discs are very difficult to find. In 1967, using silver-foil square paper, Topps issued a total of 24 different players. Mantle is shown with a red background (Photo No. 39). His name is printed in black below his picture and his team, the New York Yankees, is wrapped around the top of his head. Mantle’s position is listed as “OF” for outfield. In the 1968 issue, the proof was made and printed on cardboard and never released as a finished product (Photo No. 40). The major difference in this proof was a large printer’s “X” appeared on the disc for printing and centering purposes. Mantle’s position was also changed from outfield to first base.

1967 Topps Pin-Ups

A 5-by-7 insert in the 1967 Topps Baseball wax packs, these colorful full-body pictures were numbered with the player’s name, team and position inside a circle at the bottom of the issue. Mantle was No. 11 in the set and is valued at around $15 in Excellent condition (No. 41).

1967 Topps Punch-Outs

Similar, but very different from the earlier described 1966 Topps Punch-Outs, this test issue featured only one player, a team captain, in the upper-left corner of the card (Photo No. 42). Eight other players, without pictures, completed the batting lineup. Different variations of lineups exist, but the card is basically the same. Small squares on the front of the card were opened or punched to play the baseball game.

1968 Topps Action All-Star Stickers

Issued in long strips of three panels, the 1968 Action All-Star Stickers featured one large photo of a player in the middle panel and smaller-sized pictures of other players in the top and bottom panels. Mantle appeared twice in this test set. Mantle appears on sticker No. 7, where he is pictured by himself in the middle of a field with the words “Mickey Mantle” printed below his picture and his team, the New York Yankees, is wrapped around the top of his head. The back of the card had directions on how to play.

The Mantle card has his picture in the upper-left corner as team captain. He is batting third, with Mel Stottlemyre pitching. Examples are valued at around $2,000 in Ex-Mt condition. Mantle’s name does appear in the batting lineup of other Punch-Out cards where he is not the team captain. Some of these cards can be bought in the $100-plus range, depending on the captain pictured on the card. There are plenty of variations.

1967 Topps Who Am I?

Part of a non-sport set, the Who Am I? card featured a well-known personality, who was disguised by a gray scratch-off coating. To find out the true identity on the card, the coating would need to be scratched off. There were four baseball players in the set. They were Babe Ruth, Willie Mays, Sandy Koufax and Mantle. The Mantle card, which was No. 22, could be identified by a caption which read, “I Have Many Baseball Awards on my Mantle-Piece. Who Am I?” There was a football helmet design that was used to hide the identity of Mantle (Photo No. 45). Unscratched cards are valued in the $200-$250 range. Several uncut sheets of the Who Am I? set have made their way into the hobby.

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panel (Photo No. 46). Other players who also appear on the No. 7 panel are Rod Carew, Tony Gonzalez, Steve Hargan, Willie McCovey, Rick Monday and Billy Williams. Mantle also appears in a smaller picture on panel No. 10, where Hank Aaron is in the middle panel by himself. Other players that appear on the Aaron strip are Bob Gibson, Bud Harrelson, Catfish Hunter, Gary Peters and Vada Pinson (Photo No. 47). Mantle also appeared on the Topps Action Stars display box (Photo No. 48). The large Mantle panel is valued at $500 and the small Mantle (Aaron) strip is valued at $375. An uncut sheet of the large and small action stickers is known to exist.

1968 Topps Game
Reminiscent of the 1951 Red and Blue Backs, this 1968 issue featured 33 of the games biggest stars. Issued as an insert in 1968 Topps wax packs, Mantle was No. 2 of the set. His card was designated as a “single” in the game itself (Photo No. 49). The insert card is very reasonable in price, with Ex-Mt examples worth about $20-$25.

1968 Topps Plaks and Checklist
The 1968 Topps Plaks were one of the scarcest of all test issues. Being copper in color and made from molded plastic, the Plaks were issued in groups of three players, which featured close-up busts of 24 different superstars. The Mantle Plak featured Richie Allen of the Philadelphia Phillies and Jim Fregosi of the California Angels (Photo No. 50). The complete Mantle Plak in unsnapped condition is worth close to $2,000 or more in Near-Mint condition.

Two different checklists appeared with the plastic busts. Checklist No. 1 showed 12 stars of the American League with Mantle, while checklist No. 2 featured 12 stars from the National League. The checklists are more readily available than the actual plastic busts themselves. The Mantle checklist card, which features Harmon Killebrew, Frank Robinson, Carl Yastrzemski and others, is valued at around $600-$700 (Photo No. 51).

1968 Topps Posters
After inserting 5-by-7 posters in their 1967 wax packs, Topps evidently liked the idea enough and decided to market their 1968 posters in their own packs. Costing just a dime, Topps increased the size of this year’s poster to 9½-by-18½ inches. Mantle is No. 18 of 24 and is valued around $100 in Excellent to Mint condition. Mantle appears on the Topps display box in cut-out form (Photo No. 52).

1969 Topps Decals
Identical to the 1969 Topps regular-issue card in design, Topps produced a special set of 48 decals and inserted them into their 1969 Baseball wax packs. Mounted to a white paper backing, the decals measured 1¾-by-2½ inches. Mantle is valued in the $40-$50 range. Large rolls of these decals have made their way into the collecting hobby, thus lowering the values of this 1969 issue.

1969 Topps Stamps
Issued in sheets of 12, Topps returned to producing stamps for the first time since 1962. With each stamp being perforated and measuring 1-by-1½ inches, the Mantle sheet is valued between $50-$75 (Photo No. 53). Mantle singles can be bought in the $10 range. Topps also produced a New York Yankees stamp album in which stamps could be pasted. The albums are valued at around $5 without the stamps.

1969 Topps Super
Using the same photo from the 1965 Mantle Bazooka, Topps produced a round corner, high-gloss card that measured 2¾-by-3¼ inches. Using a close-up photo of Mickey from the waist on up, the card also featured a facsimile signature. Mantle’s name, team, position and card No. 24 appear on the reverse. The 1969 Super is very popular with collectors and is valued around $1,200 in Near-Mint condition (Photo No. 54). Uncut sheets of this 1969 issue are known to exist and are very valuable (Photo No. 55).

1969 Topps Team Posters
Continuing to make posters as they did in 1967 and 1968, Topps produced 24 different team issues. Being larger in size, (12-by-20 inches) and more colorful in appearance, Topps used a total of 10 different New York Yankees for this issue. On this Yankees team poster were photos and facsimile signatures of Stan Bahnsen, Horace Clarke, Bobby Cox, Jake Gibbs, Joe Pepitone, Fritz Peterson, Bill Robinson, Tom Tresh, Roy White and Mantle (Photo No. 56).

On March 1, 1969, Mickey Mantle announced his retirement from baseball. Topps wouldn’t issue another Mickey Mantle release until 1981, when Thirst Break Comics would be marketed inside Thirst Break Gum (Photo No. 57). ♦ In the second installment in the series in the March 6 issue of SCD, we’ll feature Mantle collectibles from Japan and from his link with the Yoo-Hoo Beverage Co. Anyone with unknown, oddball Mickey Mantle items can reach the author at mrike@ptd.net.