

**Volume 17**

**Number 070**

**T206 Honus Wagner Trading Card**

**Lead: Emerging from the heady days of the alliance between tobacco and baseball, the Honus Wagner Trading Card is an extremely rare piece of memorabilia, fetching in 2007 an anonymous Ebay purchase for a whopping \$2.35 million.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Almost from inception the American tobacco industry understood the value of advertising in the rising popularity of the national pastime, baseball. Somehow it all fit together. Tobacco use on and off the field was**

**almost universal with players, managers, and the fans all chewing and puffing away at the pungent weed. One of the earliest forms of baseball advertising was the baseball card, absent the modern statistical or biographical information - just a player's picture and often in a numbered series which encouraged buyers to repeatedly purchase the company's products.**

**Enter Johannes Peter Wagner, nicknamed Hans or Honus, The Flying Dutchman, who played for 20 years, mostly with the Pittsburgh Pirates organization. He was a powerful hitter and was considered the greatest shortstop of his day. In 1910 the American Tobacco Company created**

**the Honus Wagner Trading Card as a part of its T206 series. Wagner ordered the company to stop production, allegedly because he was totally opposed to the use of tobacco products. Later evidence suggested that Wagner was a user of chewing tobacco and was probably attempting to get a larger payment from American in an era when even stars of baseball were compensated at little more than subsistence levels.**

**Because it was withdrawn, the card is today extremely rare with only a dozen or so originals known to exist. The near-mint version of the card was rediscovered in 1985 in a shoebox filled with other cards in the T206 series and from that point its value and**

**the amounts paid for it have reached into the stratosphere. Its rarity and ever-increasing value are a quaint reminder of the alliance between baseball and tobacco, the arbitrary nature of the marketplace and the capricious taste of the investor and customer.**

**From Richmond Virginia, this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

**Bloom, John.** *A House of Cards: Baseball Card Collecting and Popular Culture.* Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

**Blum, A.** "Tobacco in Sport: An Endless Addiction?" *Tobacco Control* 14 (1, February 2005): 1-2.

**Fullerton, Hugh S.** "Earnings in Baseball," *The North American Review* 229 (6, June 1930): 743-748.

**Hageman, William.** *Honus: The Life and Times of a Baseball Hero.* Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing Company, 1996.

**Riess, Steven A.** "Professional Baseball and Social Mobility," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11 (2, Autumn, 1980): 255-250.

**McGimpsey, David.** *Imagining Baseball: America's Pastime and Popular Culture.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000.

**Thompson, Michael O'Keeffe and Terri.** *The Card: Collectors, Con Men, and the True Story of History's Most Desired Baseball Card.* New York, NY: It Books, 2008.

**Voigt, David Quentin.** *America Through Baseball.* Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall Publishing, 1996.

**Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.**