Don Lancaster

Don Lancaster’s love of baseball led him to collecting; love of a different sort led him to donate those collections to the History Center’s Library & Archives. Lancaster grew up in Belle Vernon and developed an interest in history and in baseball. When he was nine or ten, Lancaster got a clock radio for Christmas and listened to KDKA at night before falling asleep. Over the winter, he enjoyed listening to “Party Line” with Ed and Wendy King; in spring and summer he followed Pirates baseball, tuning in to broadcasters Bob Prince, Jim Woods, and Nellie King.

Baseball cards were all the rage with boys so Don started buying them with tip money from his Pittsburgh Press delivery route in 1967. He became a baseball fanatic, though he didn’t attend his first Pirates’ game until August 28, 1968, where he watched the St. Louis Cardinals defeat the Pittsburgh Pirates 8 to 0 at Forbes Field. Lancaster sat on the first base side, in the upper deck. His great-uncle, John Tomajko, bought him a game program and taught him how to keep score. Lancaster held onto that scorecard—it became the first of many in his collection.

Lancaster began collecting all programs from all professional sports, then narrowed his focus to game ephemera to just the Pirates and other Western Pennsylvania teams. In the 1980s he began adding material from high schools and colleges, as well as minor and semi-pro teams. As he grew more sophisticated, and his collection got larger, Lancaster began to chase the rare and harder-to-find materials, combing flea markets, yard sales, and the Internet for treasures such as Pittsburgh Pirates’ hockey programs from the 1920s, Pittsburgh Ironmen basketball programs from the 1940s, and high school football programs featuring players such as Mike Ditka.

In 2002, Lancaster’s then-fiancée, now wife, professor Faye L. Bradwick, Ph.D., encouraged him to think about a new home (other than hers) for his massive collection. Lancaster heard about planning for the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum and approached the History Center. Knowing that his collection would be preserved and made available to researchers, the media, and to the public through exhibits pleased Don, and he began to donate material to the archives.

To date, he has given more than 1600 sports programs and other ephemera that now have a home at the History Center. The material has been used in the Sports Museum as well as in changing exhibits such as the Steelers 75th Anniversary and the Forbes Field exhibits. It has also been used extensively by both local and national media as well as sports researchers. Lancaster continues to add to this collection, as well as others in the archives, preserving his love of sports and sharing it with a whole new audience.

For more information on the History Center’s commemorative program, please contact Erin Emily Engel at 412-454-6321 or eeengel@hswp.org.