

1952 Topps – The Red Stripes

By Patrick Prickett

Although opinions differ, my definition of an “error card” is one that had some defect that the manufacturer intentionally corrected at some point, and that was printed multiple times by the manufacturer before being corrected. I usually use a minimum of 10 cards as a standard so as to eliminate proof cards and other strange one-of-a-kind cards from this definition. Using this definition, the 1952 Topps set has over 700 cards. For those good at math, even after adding all the black backs, the grey backs and known error cards you will quickly conclude that this means there are numerous unknown “error cards” in the master set – and as per my definition you would be right – there are. One of my favorite unknown “error cards” is shown below. Can you spot the difference between the two cards?



The answer is seen on Ed Fitzgerald’s right shoulder by the Pirates’ logo. On the normal version he has a plain white shirt, and on the error version the purple background appears to bleed into his shirt. I say appears – because this is not in fact what happened. This Fitzgerald card is a recurring defect that I call the red stripe errors.

Unlike the Page/Sain error cards in the 1952 Topps set in which the manufacturer intentionally changed the text on the back of the card, this error is a print error – an error that occurred because of a glitch in the printing process. In this case, during the four color printing process on front, the roller for the red printing plate got messed up, and accidentally left a heavy red stripe on the left side of the card. How do we know that this is a printing error and not a different type of mistake?

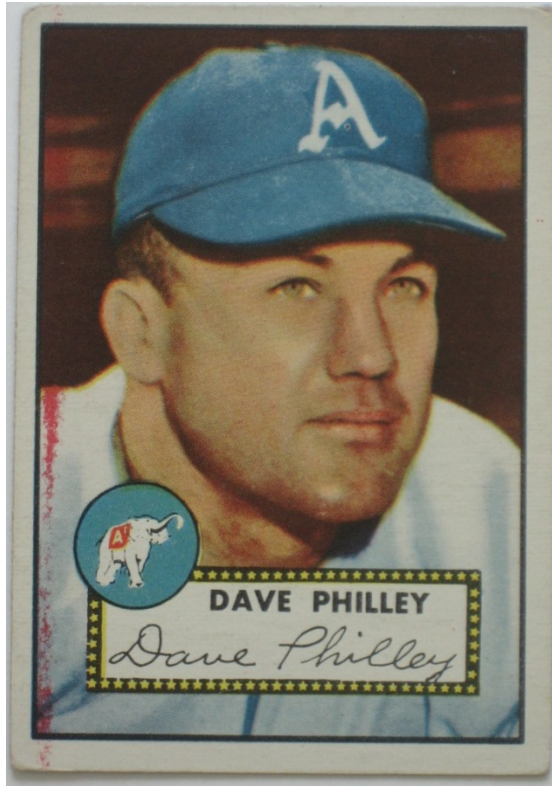
To start, a little background on the 4th Series 1952 Topps uncut sheet is needed. While no complete uncut sheet exists, and therefore the layout of the cards cannot be determined with absolute certainty, based on the known partial sheets and miscut cards, it can be shown that the 4th series 1952 Topps cards appeared on a sheet that was 10 rows tall and 20 cards wide.¹ The cards appear in these rows in number order - to at least some degree. More accurately, they are in number order in groups of 10. Since there are 60 cards in the 4th series, this means that some cards were quadruple printed on the sheet (cards #191-230) while other cards were only triple printed (cards #231-250). While not proven with 100% certainty, based on my research the layout below is most likely the correct for the 4th series cards:²

191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200
201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210
211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220	211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220
221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230	221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230
231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240
241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250	241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250
191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200
201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210
211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220	221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230
241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240

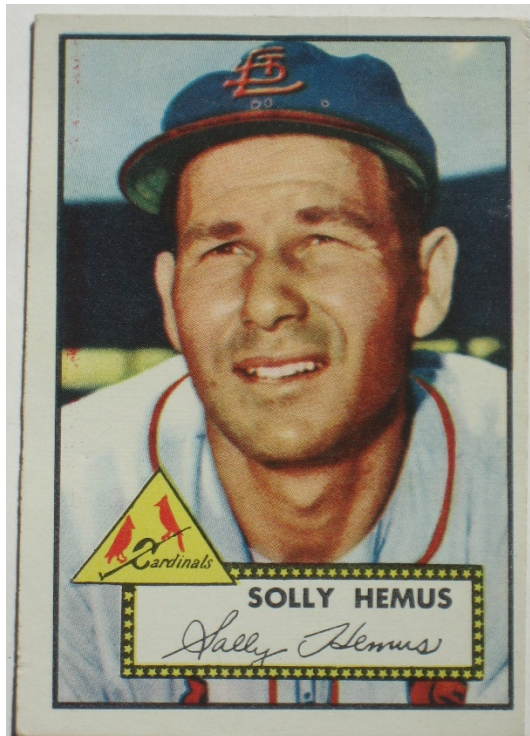
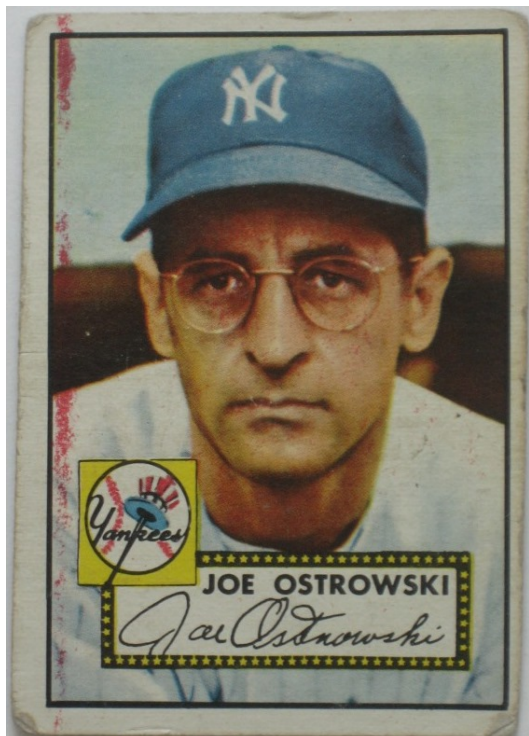
As is shown in this layout, card #236 (Ed Fitzgerald) always appeared in the row directly below card #226 (Dave Philley) and in most cases directly above card #246 (George Kell) except in one case when card #236 was in the last row on the sheet. So if there was a printing error, you would expect to find evidence of this red stripe on cards #226 and #246, and lo and behold, there are cards with that print error:

¹ A complete sheet has 200 cards on it, not 100 like commonly thought. The reason that 100 is the more common thought is that the Lord Baltimore printing press that was used was fitted with a splitter, a cutting tool, that automatically cut the sheets into 2 smaller sheets of 100 cards (sometimes referred to as the A and B sheet).

² To the extent that there are any errors in this layout – they should be limited just to the last two rows in the table. Also, note that this grid does not show a large gap between the first 10 cards and the second 10 cards on the sheet because unlike the 2nd series cards which are known to have this gap – the 4th series cards did NOT have a gap. It is unknown if there was a gap between rows 5 and 6 – like appeared on the 2nd series cards.



A key point to observe is that the #226 Philley and #246 Kell cards have the red stripe in the left side border – just like the #236 Fitzgerald card – confirming that this is a printing glitch. This same red stripe print error also appears on #206 Joe Ostrowski card and #196 Solly Hemus card:

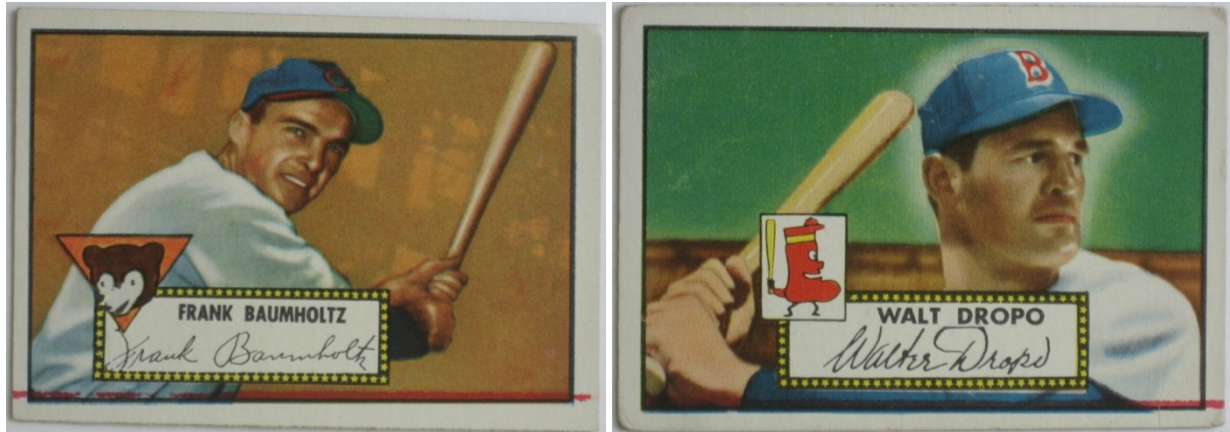


Despite looking for years, I have never seen a #216 Richie Ashburn card with a red stripe in the left border, but in theory it should exist. All of these cards end in the number "6" (so I'll refer to these as the "6" column cards) and putting them in order from top to bottom, the uncut sheet with the red stripe would have looked a bit like this (with a blank spot for the Solly Hemus card as that was a recent find):



On its own, this "6" column print error would be an odd little occurrence, but interestingly this red stripe phenomenon occurred more than once in the 4th series (and only in the 4th series). The "5" column also

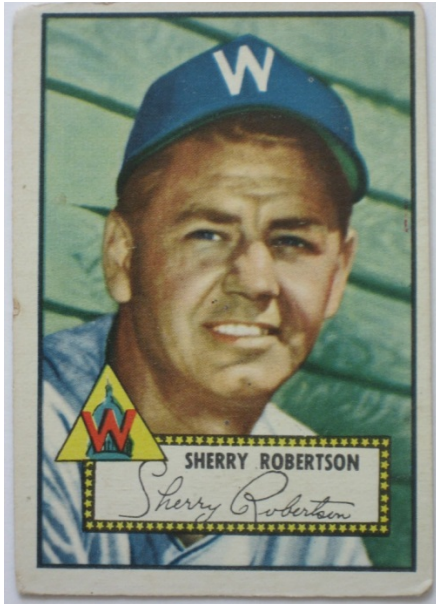
had red stripes on the cards, and the two most commonly seen red stripes from that column are #225 Frank Baumholtz and #235 Walt Dropo:



While #225 Baumholtz and #235 Dropo cards very clearly show a red stripe, cards #205 Clyde King and #215 Hank Bauer also show the same red stripe – but their stripes are much harder to see due to the photographs used to make the original card. On these cards, the red stripe is usually only clearly seen in the white borders:



If this red stripe print error ran from the top to bottom of the sheet like we saw for the column 6 cards, there should also be a red stripe version of #195 Minnie Minoso and #245 Sherry Robertson. No Minoso card has ever been identified to date with a red stripe. Similarly, no full red stripe card for Sherry Robertson card has ever been found, but there are cards that hint that it existed. The photo below shows #245 Sherry Robertson with two, small red dots in the border across from his left ear.

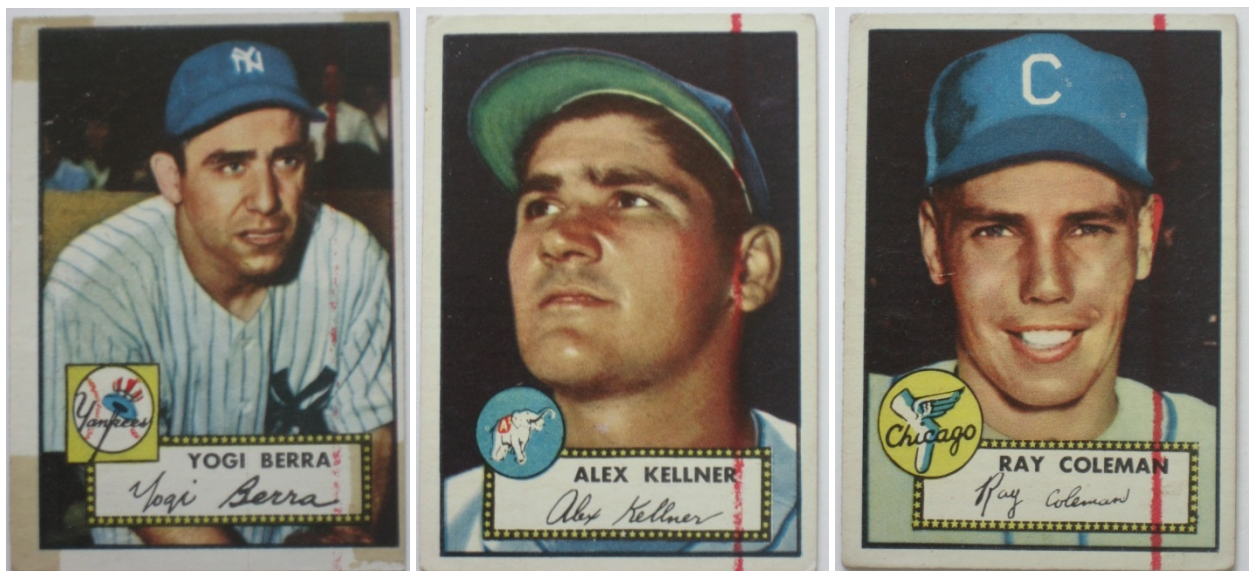


Unlike the "6" column cards, the "5" column cards have their red stripe in the right border, and here is what the red stripe uncut sheet might have looked like:





The red stripe print error also appears in the "1" column, specifically on cards of #191 Yogi Berra, #201 Alex Kellner, #211 Ray Coleman, #221 Granny Hamner, #231 Sam Zoldak and #241 Tommy Byrne:



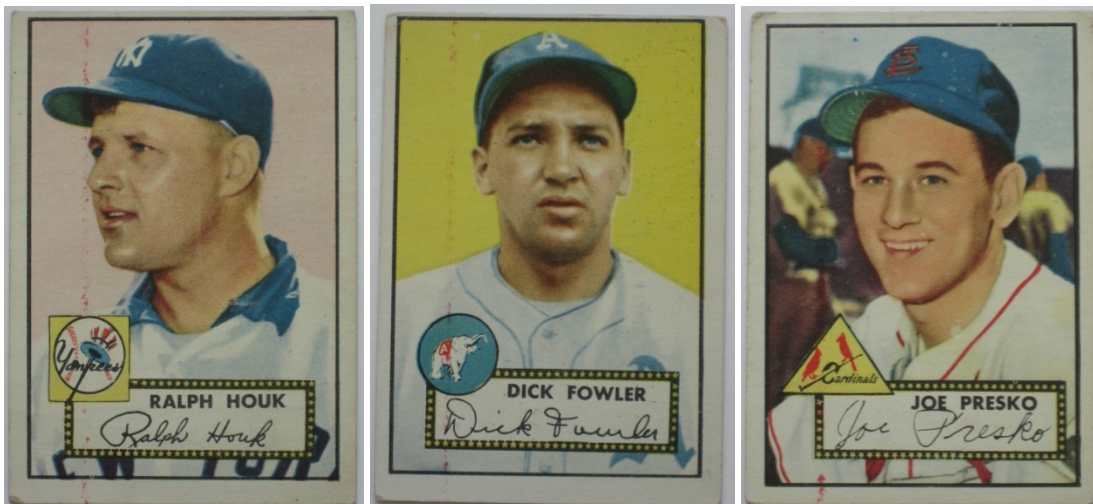


In this case we can see that the red print stripe occurs on the right hand side of the card, but not in the border like in the "1" column:





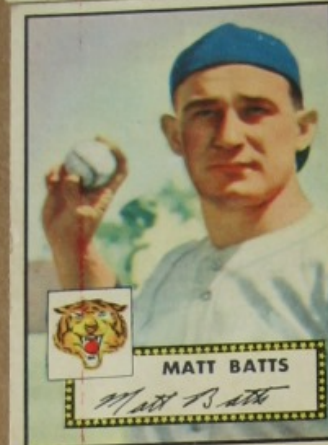
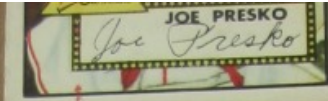
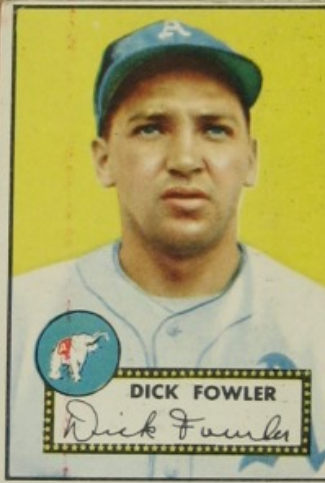
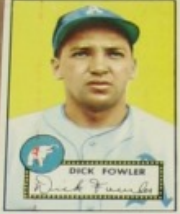
Finally, a red stripe print error also appears in the "0" column on cards of #200 Ralph Houk, #210 Dick Fowler, #220 Joe Presko, #230 Matt Batts, #240 Jack Philips and #250 Carl Erskine:





It should be noted that the red stripe in this column appears to be fainter than the other columns as no truly heavy versions have ever been identified. Top to bottom this column might have looked like this:





Reasonable people may disagree on whether these red stripe cards should be considered true error cards and included in the 1952 Topps master set or not. On one hand there are 10+ copies of many of these cards – which is similar to the quantities for some of the 1952 Topps 3rd series grey backs which are usually included. But on the other hand, this is obviously a printing defect that was corrected, rather than an intentional change to the paper stock or information on back. Regardless, these red stripe cards are commonly seen in several columns on the 4th series 1952 Topps sheet, and at the very least prove the general layout of the cards on the sheet given that the stripes match up top to bottom in the columns.

As noted above, there are two cards that should exist (#195 Minie Minoso and #216 Richie Ashburn) that have never been seen. If you ever sees a #195 Minie Minoso or #216 Richie Ashburn card with a red stripe, please send me a photo (or even the card!) so I can update the article.