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Cataloging a Coin Collection — Apps vs. a Spreadsheet

Apps versus a simple spreadsheet — which suits your collection and your comfort

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1 The 60-Second Version

The whole idea in a minute.

To catalog coins you have two sensible paths. A dedicated coin app can often identify a coin from a photo, fill in its details automatically, and estimate a value — saving typing, at the cost of relying on someone else's app and sometimes a subscription. A plain spreadsheet gives you complete control, no ongoing cost, and a file that will open forever — but you type everything in yourself. Either way, record the key facts and a photo of each coin, and keep a backup your family can find.

- An app is faster and smarter about identifying and valuing coins.
- A spreadsheet is simpler, free, and entirely under your control.
- Whatever you pick, back it up and make sure family knows where it is.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> There is no wrong choice here. A tech-comfortable collector with many coins may love an app; someone who wants a plain, permanent record they fully own is well served by a spreadsheet. Both beat a shoebox and memory.

WHY CATALOG

2 Why Catalog at All

Three good reasons.

Cataloging is not busywork — it serves three real purposes that grow more important as a collection does. For yourself, it lets you see what you have at a glance, spot the gaps you want to fill, and avoid buying a duplicate of something already in a drawer. For insurance, a documented list with photos and values is exactly what an insurer needs if coins are ever lost or stolen. And for your family, a clear catalog is a final kindness.

That last reason is the one collectors most often overlook and most come to appreciate. A coin collection that means a great deal to you can mean very little to

heirs who do not know a common coin from a rare one. Without a catalog, a lifetime's careful collecting can be scooped into a bag and sold for its face value or melt weight by people who simply do not know what they are holding.

A catalog tells them what each piece is and what it may be worth, so your collection is honored rather than squandered.

The catalog is a gift to your future self and to your family. The coins tell a story; the catalog is what keeps that story from being lost.

THE APP WAY

3 The App Approach

Smart help, with trade-offs.

Several apps are built specifically for coin collectors. Their great advantage is doing the hard work for you — identifying a coin and filling in its facts so you are not typing everything by hand. Point your phone's camera at a coin, or search a vast built-in database, and the app supplies the country, year, denomination, and often an estimated value and a picture.

Numista is one of the best-known, a large catalog where you build your collection coin by coin, backed by a huge community-maintained database. Colnect is another community-built database that helps match and identify coins, including by image. Camera-based identifiers such as CoinSnap try to name a coin from a photo, which is handy for a jar of mixed foreign coins. Dedicated programs like Collectorz CoinManage offer detailed record-keeping, and the PCGS app is aimed at professionally graded, sealed coins.

WATCH OUT

Treat an app's identification and especially its value estimates as a helpful starting point, not gospel. Automatic values can be off, and a truly valuable coin deserves a look from a reputable dealer or grader.

THE SPREADSHEET WAY

4 The Spreadsheet Approach

Simple, free, and yours forever.

A plain spreadsheet — in a free program like Google Sheets, or in Excel — is a perfectly serious way to catalog coins, and many collectors prefer it. You make a row for each coin and columns for the facts you care about. It costs nothing, depends on no company staying in business, and the file will open decades from now on almost any computer.

The appeal of the spreadsheet is control and permanence. Nothing is locked inside an app that might change its terms, start charging, or disappear; the file is yours, plainly readable, and easy to back up, print, or hand to a family member. The cost is that you do the typing and the identifying yourself — there is no camera that names a coin for you.

For a collector who values owning their own record outright, and who does not mind a little data entry, that is a trade well worth making.

> **TIP**
>
> Set up your columns once at the top, then just add a row per coin. If this part feels fiddly, it is a one-time setup that a family member or a quick visit can help you build — after that, adding a coin takes seconds.

CHOOSING

5 Which One Suits You

Matching the method to the collector.

The choice is less about which is ‘better’ and more about which fits you, your collection, and how you like to work. A few honest questions make it clear.

- Comfortable with apps and want help identifying coins? An app will save you real effort.
- Want a record you fully own that will open forever? A spreadsheet is the safer long-term home.
- Have a large, varied collection? An app's database and photos may be worth the convenience.
- Prefer no subscriptions and no reliance on a company? Lean to the spreadsheet.

Some collectors sensibly use both: an app to identify and enjoy browsing the collection day to day, and a periodic export to a spreadsheet as the permanent, independent record. That belt-and-suspenders approach captures the app's convenience while keeping a copy that does not depend on the app surviving. However you decide, the important thing is simply to start — even a basic record beats memory and a shoebox by a wide margin.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

WHAT TO RECORD

6 What to Record for Each Coin

The facts that matter.

Whichever method you choose, the same core information is worth capturing for each coin. You do not need all of it for every coin, but the more complete the record, the more useful it is for you, your insurer, and your family.

Field	Why it matters
Country & year	Identifies the coin at a glance
Denomination & mint mark	Distinguishes similar coins and rarer versions

Condition / grade	The biggest factor in a coin's value
Acquired & price paid	Your cost basis and the coin's story
Estimated value	For insurance and for your family
Photo	Proof of what you have and its condition

Condition deserves particular attention, because it often matters more to a coin's value than the coin itself. The same date and denomination can be worth pocket change if worn and a great deal if pristine, so even a rough note of condition — worn, average, uncirculated — adds real meaning to your record. And a photograph of both sides is worth far more than a description when it comes to insurance or helping a family member understand what they are looking at.

PHOTOGRAPHING

7 Photographing Your Coins

Clear pictures, little effort.

Good photographs make a catalog far more valuable, and they do not require special equipment — a phone camera and a little care are plenty. Clear pictures prove what you own and its condition, which is exactly what an insurer or an heir needs.

1. Lay the coin on a plain, dark background in good, even light — near a window works well.
2. Avoid harsh glare; soft, indirect light shows the detail best.
3. Photograph both the front and back of each notable coin.
4. Get close enough that the coin fills the frame and the detail is sharp.
5. Keep the photos with your catalog, or linked to the right entry.

You do not need to photograph every common coin, but any piece of real value or sentiment deserves a clear front-and-back picture. On a phone, you can often attach the photo directly in a coin app, or keep a folder of images named to match your spreadsheet rows. Either way, the pictures turn a list of words into genuine proof of what sat in the drawer.

VALUES

8 A Word About Values

Estimates, not appraisals.

It is tempting to trust the value an app shows, or a number from an online price list, but these are estimates and starting points, not firm appraisals. A coin's real worth depends on its exact condition, its rarity, and what a buyer will actually pay on the day — none of which a quick automatic estimate can fully judge.

- Use app or price-guide values as a rough guide for insurance and organization.
- Remember condition can swing a value enormously, and a photo cannot grade a coin precisely.
- For any coin you believe is genuinely valuable, get an opinion from a reputable dealer or a professional grading service.
- Be wary of a shop's offer to buy as a measure of true value — a buyer's offer is naturally low.

The sensible approach is to record a reasonable estimate for everyday organization and insurance, while treating your genuinely valuable pieces differently: those deserve a professional look before you rely on a number. Keeping that distinction clear in your own mind prevents both the disappointment of an inflated estimate and the mistake of selling something precious for far less than it is worth.

KEEP IT SAFE

9 Keeping the Catalog Safe

A record no one can find helps no one.

A catalog only does its job if it survives and can be found. A little care here protects all the work you put in, and it is the step collectors most often neglect.

1. Keep a backup copy, not just the original — a spreadsheet saved in the cloud, or an export of your app's data.
2. Keep the photos backed up alongside the catalog.

3. Store a copy separately from the coins themselves, so one loss does not take both.
4. Tell a trusted family member that the catalog exists and where to find it.
5. Update it when you buy or sell, so it stays accurate over the years.

Think through what would happen to your catalog if your computer failed or your home suffered a fire or theft. A single copy on one device, or trapped in an app only you can open, is fragile. A backup in the cloud or on a second drive, plus a note to a family member about where everything is and how to reach it, is what turns your careful cataloging into lasting protection for the collection and the people who will one day inherit it.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> For insurance or estate purposes, a catalog kept only in an app on your phone can be hard for family to reach. A backup they can actually open — a spreadsheet or a printed copy in your records — is worth keeping too.

GETTING STARTED

10 Just Getting Started

The hardest part is the first row.

The biggest obstacle to cataloging is not the method — it is simply beginning, especially with a collection that has grown large over the years. The trick is to start small and let it build, rather than waiting for a free weekend that never comes.

- Begin with your most valuable or most meaningful coins, so the record is useful even while incomplete.
- Do a little at a time — a handful of coins an evening — rather than trying to catalog everything at once.
- Enter new coins as you acquire them, so the collection never gets ahead of the catalog again.
- Ask a grandchild or friend to help, which can make it a pleasant shared task.

You do not have to catalog the whole collection today. Start with the coins that matter most, add a few each evening, and before long the shoebox has become a record worth keeping.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task.

I want to…	Do this…
Why catalog	For your own records, for insurance, and for your family
An app	Identifies coins, pulls in details, estimates value — less typing
A spreadsheet	Total control, no subscription, works forever — more typing
Record this	Country, year, denomination, condition, and what you paid
Photograph	A clear photo of both sides of each notable coin
Keep it safe	Back up the catalog and tell family where it is
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

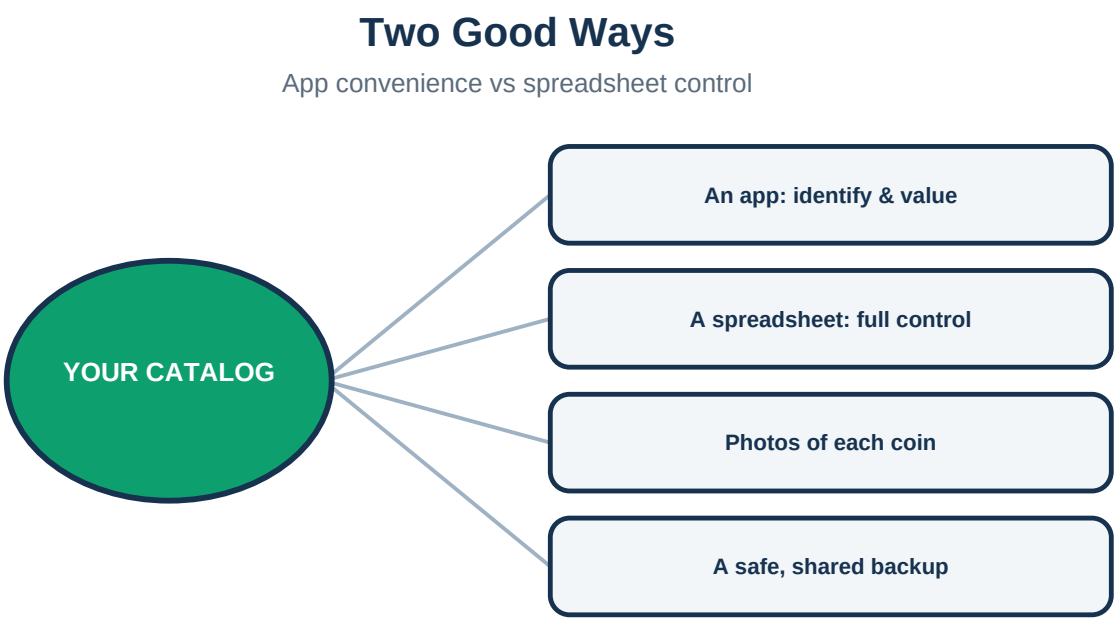


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Getting Started

From a drawer of coins to a catalog

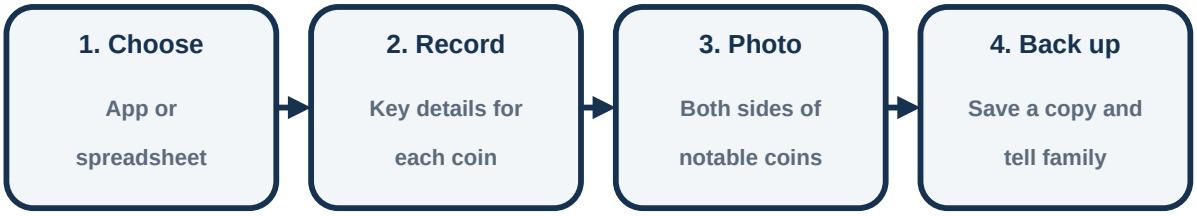


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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