November 22, 1963 is one of the handful of days in United States History that will always be remembered clearly by those who lived it. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas was devastating to the United States populace. Before his funeral was over, there was already discussion of a lasting tribute for such a beloved president. In only thirty eight days, the Kennedy Half Dollar was designed and approved into law. Production began in January, 1964 and coins reached commerce in late March, 1964. It was a remarkably fast time for a coin to go from concept to circulation.

Because of President Kennedy’s tragic death and great popularity, the coins were aggressively hoarded by the public. Some wanted a memento of the slain president. Others saw opportunity in future demand for the coin. Many went to Europe, particularly Germany, where Kennedy’s visit a year earlier made him very popular. Further exacerbating the supply of new halves was the rising price of silver, which drew virtually all 90% silver coins out of circulation quickly. Few Kennedy Halves made it into circulation for long. When one was seen in circulation, it was considered an oddity to be saved; so even more were withdrawn in this manner. As few kennedy half dollars were seen, the denomination faded from public consciousness and mintages gradually declined from year to year. By 2001, there was ostensibly no demand for Half Dollars in commerce. The Kennedy Half Dollar has been minted every year since 2002, but only for collectors and not for circulation.

The Kennedy Half Dollar has existed for over fifty years now and has become one of the larger U.S. Coin series full of interesting variety. The Kennedy Half Dollar has been struck in four different compositions: 90% Silver, 40% Silver Clad, Copper-Nickel, Clad, and Gold. It has been issued in seven different finishes: Uncirculated, Satin finish Uncirculated, Special Mint Set, Proof, Matte Specimen, Reverse Proof and Enhanced Uncirculated. There are the mint set only issues of 1970-D and 1987 P and D Kennedy Halves. More recently, the scarce 1998-S matte proof Kennedy Half was sold in commemorative sets with the Robert F. Kennedy Silver Dollar. For the series fiftieth anniversary, a gold version if the coin and a handsome four coin commemorative set were issued. There are many other varieties that are often collected with the series such as the 1964 Proof Accented Hair Kennedy Half, the ‘No Initials’ coins of 1982, the Type I and Type II S mintmarks on the 1979-S and 1981-S Proof Kennedy Halves, and a few dates with doubled die obverses.

The series also features very rare Kennedy Half Dollars. One enigmatic issue is the 1964 Special Mint Set Kennedy Half. Proof Kennedy halves were issued in 1964, while Special Mint Sets that were not quite the quality of proofs were issued from 1965 through 1967. For some reason, perhaps as a test run, as many a fifty or so of the SMS coin sets were made with a 1964 date. Other rarities include a series of wrong metal strikings. Examples of these are a 1964 Kennedy Half Dollar struck on a 40% Silver Planchet, a 1965 Kennedy Half struck on a 90% Silver planchet and a 1977-D Kennedy Half struck on a 40% silver planchet.
How to Collect Kennedy Half Dollars – Four Different Ways

1. The Basic Collection

Most Kennedy Half Dollars are inexpensive. Because of this, the optimal grade to collect is choice uncirculated or choice proof grade. There are many coins to collect, so it might make sense to split the collection into groups. There are a couple of ways to do this:

- Buy the uncirculated coins first. Pick them up by decade. Or, buy as many nice matching coins as you can find in one trip. Coins with attractive toning can add to the challenge of the set. You may find that the business strike run of coins is sufficient for your interests.

- If you wish to keep going after acquiring the business strikes, buy the proof coins next. These could be split up into groups of the early silver coins, the copper nickel coins and the later silver coins.

- Buy a partially complete set as a base. Then complete it as needed. Upgrade existing coins if necessary to make a nice, matching set. This way you can often get a nice album out of the deal for free.

- Add the coins that are not usually included in the album. These might include things like the 1982-P No Initials, Half Dollar, the 1998-S Matte Proof Kennedy Half, and the 2014 special issues.
2. Just the Proofs (and SMSs)

If you want an attractive set of coins, work on the proof run of Kennedy Half Dollars. Start with the middle and late dates first (1973 to date). These will be the easiest to find in nice grades. For coins that haven't been around very long, many Proof Kennedy Halves have minor impairments. Be sure to examine coins to find the nicest ones available. You may wish to buy certified coins as they will be better protected inside their holders. Once you have purchased the later dates, start working on the earlier dates. Heavily frosted proof Kennedy Halves from 1964 to 1972 will be tougher to find than the later issued. Some of these are very expensive in high end deep cameo grades. For the casual collector, nice attractive non cameo specimens of these dates should suffice.

If you want the highest quality set of proof Kennedy halves, search for the Deep Cameo versions of the coins. In the high proof grades these coins can be elusive and very expensive. The 1964 Accented Hair Half and the 1971-S Kennedy Half are especially scarce. The 1965 through 1967 Special Mint Set coins also exist in deep cameo finishes and are also very rare and expensive. For an added challenge, acquire the 1964 Special Mint Set Kennedy Half.

Buy the set complete. Complete Kennedy Half Dollar sets are frequently offered. With all the special issues, they are becoming more expensive. This may not be so fun as working on the set part by part though.
3. **A Fantastic Finish**

No other United States coin has been produced in seven different finishes. It would be fun to collect a representative of each type of Kennedy Half Dollar finish. These include:

- Proof, (1964, 1968-Present)
- Special Mint Set (1964-1967)
- Matte Specimen, (1998)
- Satin Finish (2005-2010)
- Enhanced Finish (2014)
- Reverse Proof Finish (2014)

4. **Kennedy Half Type Set**

Over the past fifty years, there have been several different types of Kennedy Half. For those not wishing to complete the entire set, a group of all the different types might be of interest. The different types of Kennedy Half are:

**Uncirculated**
- 90% Silver Composition, 1964
- 40% Silver Composition, 1965-1970
- 40% Silver Composition, Special Mint Set, 1964-1967 (1964 is 90% Silver)
- Copper Nickel, Comp. Bicentennial Reverse, 1976
- 40% Silver Composition, Bicentennial Reverse, 1976
- 90% Silver Composition, Specimen, 1998
- Copper Nickel Composition, Satin, 2005-2010
- Copper Nickel Composition, Enhanced, 2014
Read more about Kennedy Half Dollars
