

Collecting Lincoln Cents

by Thomas Coulson



1909 - S Lincoln Cent

The debut of the Lincoln cent in 1909 marked a major departure from previous U.S. Coin issues. The new coin was designed by Victor D. Brenner to recognize the centenary of Lincoln's birth. Its appearance was starkly modern compared to the tired and relatively cumbersome Indian Cent. Sleek wire rims, thin numerals and lettering replaced the outmoded appearing thick lettering and dentilated borders. Lincoln's portrait was bold and lifelike. He was the first historic figure to appear on a regular issue U.S. Coin; another marked difference from the traditional allegorical Liberty. These changes were truly ground-breaking at the time. The recipient of a shiny, new modern-looking Lincoln Cent in 1909 must have considered themselves part of a progressive, new era.

The new Lincoln Cent was well received by the public (except for the controversy of the designer's initials on the reverse of the coin). Part of this success was undoubtedly due to the freshness and simplistic beauty of the design.

It was President Theodore Roosevelt's personal mandate to redesign U.S. Coinage in modern fashion. He judged the coinage in circulation at the beginning of his term to be uninspired. Roosevelt was certainly aware of the appearance of several modern coinage designs around the world in the prior decade or so. It was his wish to bring this beauty and modernity to the coinage of the United States. His dream was achieved in less than a generation as all the United States coinage underwent a dramatic transformation. The Lincoln cent was instrumental in this process as one of the earliest and furthest reaching examples of the new regime.

The Lincoln cent obverse has lasted for more than a century; far longer than any other U.S. Coin design. During that time the design has undergone many modifications. Lincoln's portrait has been redesigned multiple times. The Lincoln portrait has been paired with seven different reverse types. The coin has been struck in no fewer than five different metallic compositions (French Bronze, Zinc-coated Steel, "Brass", Aluminum, and Copper coated zinc). Production has occurred at four different mints and it is the most abundantly coined issue in world history.

The combination of simple beauty, historic relevance, variety, and abundance has made the Lincoln Cent series one of the most popular among collectors. There is something about the issue that can appeal to almost everyone. Below are some collecting ideas for those interested in starting a collection of Lincoln Cents. **Liberty Coin Service** stocks a wide variety of **Lincoln Cents for sale**, including **PCGS and NGC certified Lincoln cents** and nice, hand selected uncertified specimens.

View Our Inventory of Lincoln Cents for Sale [Here](#).



1909 - S VDB Lincoln Cent

How to Collect Lincoln Cents - Eight Different Ways

As with any numismatic series, the possibilities for assembling a Lincoln cent collection are bound only by one's imagination. Below, you will find several suggestions to form a collection of Lincoln Cents.

1. The Basic Collection

There are many ways to assemble a Lincoln cent collection. The series has appeal to nearly all budgets and interests. A beginner can enjoy collecting later dates straight from circulation. The advanced collector will find assembling a high grade collection, or a specialized subset of the collection, a formidable but rewarding task. Because Lincoln Cents have been produced for more than a century it is difficult to collect the series as one cohesive group. Splitting the collection into smaller groups by era makes completion of the sets a more attainable goal. This could be done as follows:

- **The Early Dates (1909-1940), or (1909-1933).** Many issues in this era are quite scarce and expensive in uncirculated grades. Building a nice, uncirculated set of well struck specimens will take a long time and require vast pecuniary resources. Fully red uncirculated early date cents can be hard to locate and vary in appearance from year to year and mint to mint. In contrast, some collectors prefer nice, glossy brown mint state specimens; as they are more affordable and a lesser risk for change of color. A pleasing evenly matched brown extremely fine to about uncirculated set is a more reasonable goal for most collectors. Even in this grade range, there is a thrill to the hunt for attractive, matching chocolate brown specimens; albeit at a far more affordable price. Some of the key dates of the early run are the 1909-S VDB Cent, 1909-S Cent, 1914-D Cent, 1922-D Cent, 1924-D Cent, and 1931-S Cent.



1914 - D cent

- **The Middle Dates (1941-1958), or (1934-1958).** These coins are abundant in all grades. A red uncirculated set is readily obtainable and not so expensive. Given the price, such a set is very impressive looking housed together in an album. It is a great value for one's collecting dollar. For a challenge, finding high-end certified pieces may add to the difficulty and cost factor. A circulated set can be collected for maybe \$10 or \$20 at most, making it ideal for beginners. Including the 1955 Double die obverse in this set will add substantially to the cost and difficulty of completion.



1955 Double Die Cent Date



1955 Double Die Cent Motto

Click [Here](#) for a free Collector's Checklist to Help You Get Started!

➤ **The Memorial and 2009 to date Cents.** This is the entry level collection for a child or adult who wants an inexpensive introduction to numismatics. It is also a wonderful way to engage in a family activity with your children. Completing the collection out of circulation in a nice evenly matched extremely fine condition will be surprisingly challenging. The 1968 to 1974 San Francisco mint coins are seldom encountered in change. The 1960 small date and 1970 small date varieties are almost never seen in circulated grades. For those wishing to purchase the coins, all dates and mints are available in red uncirculated condition. Few of these are expensive. Often, the proof-only issues commencing in 1975 are considered part of the collection; though it



1960 Small Date
Lincoln Cent



1960 Large Date
Lincoln Cent



1972 Double Die
Lincoln Cent



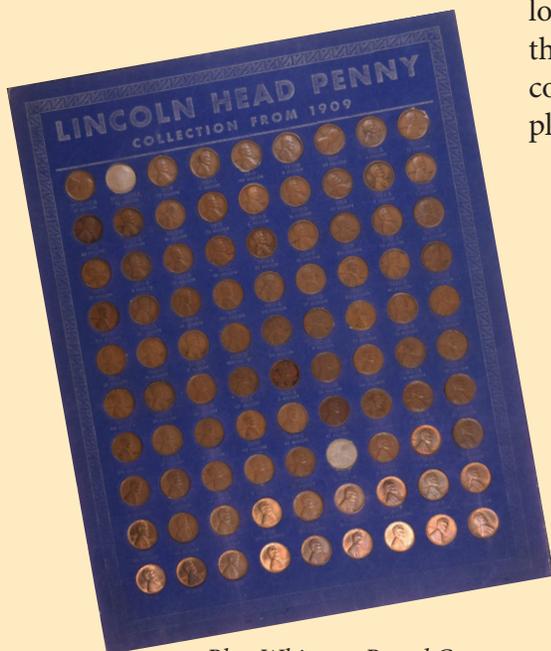
1995 Double Die Lin-
coln Cent - Liberty

is not compulsory to collect them. (I would recommend keeping different collections of business strikes and proofs; as I do not feel they belong together in a collection.) As with the middle dates, including the 1972 (and 1983, 1984, and 1995) double die varieties will add substantially to the cost.

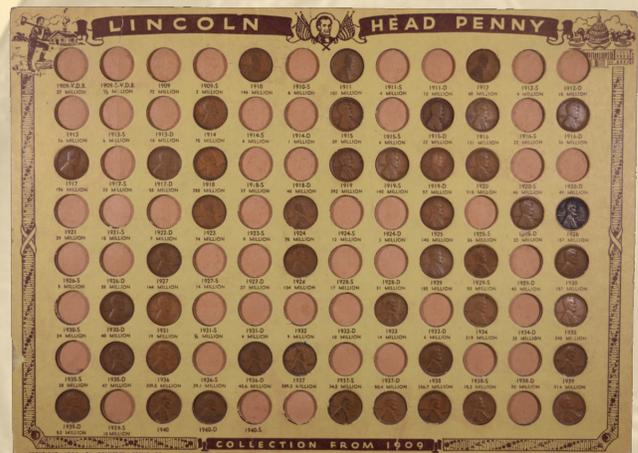
Click [Here](#) for a free Collector's Checklist to Help You Get Started!

2. Doing it Old School -Collecting History in an Historic Setting

The Whitman Company responsible for the popular tri-fold blue coin albums produced a coin board in the 1930's for various types of coins, including Lincoln Cents. These 11 by 14 inch boards can still be found on occasion; often with some of the original coins in the spaces. Buy the board and attempt to assemble a group of cents that look like they would have been taken from pocket change in the late 1930's. The earliest coins might grade very good to very fine. The 1920's dates might also be graded in that range. The 1930's coins might be graded extremely fine to uncirculated. (Try to refrain from following the advice on the back of the board which often states that you should clean your coins with an eraser.) Once the collection is complete frame it and mount on your wall for a pleasing vintage effect.



Blue Whitman Brand Cent
Board from the Late 1930's



Lincoln Cent Board by the Gramercy Stamp Company, 1940

3. Wood Grain Lincolns (1909-1940)



1921 S Lincoln Cent -
Wood Grain

From the time of the first bronze cents until the early 1940's, the mint had some difficulties mixing the alloy of the cent planchets. Frequently, one will see these coins with streaky surfaces that resemble a wood grain finish. This appearance is very common in many dates yet very elusive in other dates. It will be a challenge to complete this collection in a nice matched grade. For the ultimate task...look to get all the coins with the striations or 'grain' oriented in the same direction!

4. Just the Proofs

A run of proof Lincoln cents would be beautiful and impressive indeed. Many of the coins are very reasonably priced given their mintage figures. Like the circulating issues, this collection would be best assembled in three sections as follows:

- **The Early dates (1909 to 1916).** These nine coins, while expensive, could represent great value for the price. Certified populations are small. Coins are not common at shows and do not auction all that frequently. Specimens often exhibit pleasing toning; although especially attractive coins will command significant premiums. Aside from the 1909 VDB, which is very expensive, most of these can be found in brown or red and brown grades by the patient collector in the several hundred to few thousand dollar price range. And again, while most would consider these expensive, they are relative bargains for the true rarity. Many surviving coins have been cleaned at some point in the past century; making pristine examples even more elusive. Because of the scarcity of nice specimens and the great difference in price from one grade to the next, it is recommended that these coins be collected in certified (i.e. PCGS or NGC) holders.

- **The Middle dates (1936 to 1942).** This series of proofs is more available than the former group. While they can be more readily found; and at lower prices, the mintage figures for these coins are still quite low. Except for the first run of 1936 coins, these coins have a brilliant, mirrorlike finish in contrast to the satin finish of the early dates. Choice red proofs in this series are impressive when assembled as a group. Again, for the price, the middle dates represent nice value given their low mintages.



1941 Proof
Lincoln Cent

- **The Modern era (1950 to date).** Except for the first few years, mintages of these proof cents are much higher. All these coins are readily available in choice red states. Some collectors look for cameo frosting on the earlier coins; which are much more elusive than the normal proof coins. An entire collection of the later date coins can be assembled for a very modest amount of money and with little difficulty. The only expensive coin in the series is the 1990 'no S' cent; which is quite optional in completing the series.



Modern Proof
Lincoln Cent

5. Roll Out the Pennies, We'll Have a Roll Full of Fun...

I am familiar with several collectors attempting to assemble a roll set of each date and mintmark of Lincoln cent. Usually these collections are rolls of nice very good to very fine grade cents for the 1909 to 1933 era and Uncirculated rolls commencing in 1934. When working on a set like this, aim for consistency. Avoid discolored or corroded coins. If you want to collect rolls, be sure to devote plenty of space for storage.



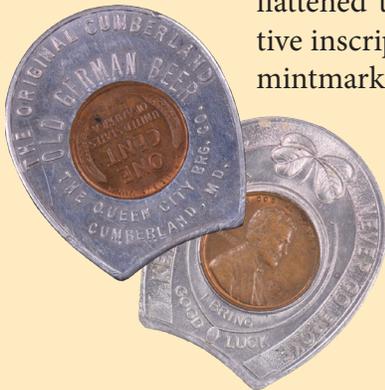
Bu Rolls of Wheat Cents

6. Encasements and Elongated cents

Lincoln cents are frequently kept as souvenirs in the form of encasements. These are usually aluminum advertising cards merchants handed to customers or they are mementos of various fairs or expositions. Similarly, many cents are flattened through a rolling machine with a commemorative inscription pressed into one side. A complete date and mintmark set of encasements or elongates would be very impressive. Lincoln cents encasements or elongates may not exist in all dates and mintmarks. This could be lots of fun to work on. In addition to collecting the cents, you can enjoy a potentially wide variety of merchant types and interesting occasions.



1937 Osterman & Levey Encased Cent - Obverse



1953 D Old German Beer Encasement The Queen City Brg. Co. Cumberland, Maryland



1965 Central Michigan Coin and Stamp Club Encased Cent



Inverness Museum and Art Gallery Scotland Elongated 1 Pence



1946 Pontiac Michigan Willard Motor Company Unlisted Encased Cent



1939 New York World's Fair Stork Club Encased Cent



Impressions 5 Lansing Michigan Elongated Cent

You can also create your own elongated cents, too. There are many places around the country with machines that will roll out a design on your cent for the price of 50 cents. This is great fun for children. My two kids had a wonderful time looking for different rolling machines and adding new elongates to their collection during the course of a recent vacation. Some of the machines are manually powered and your children can enjoy 'cranking' out the cents themselves. You can purchase albums to house these elongates at many of the places that feature the machines. For a detailed list of locations with rolling machines, visit www.pennycollector.com.



*Century of Progress 1933 Chicago
Elongated Cent - Made from 1920 D
Lincoln Cent*



*1987 MSNS
Spring Convention
Lansing Coin
Elongated Cent*

7. Variety - the Spice of Lincoln

Because common Lincoln cents are inexpensive, they have been extensively searched. This has yielded a multitude of different varieties. These range from minor to dramatic appearance. One might look for things like the BIE or 'cracked skull' varieties. There are several double dies; the most prominent of which are the 1955, 1972, 1983, 1984, and 1995. Mintmark varieties such as different mintmark size or orientation exist; as well as over-mintmarks and repunched mintmarks. The Lincoln Cent Resource (www.lincolncentresource.com) is a veritable goldmine of information for anyone looking to start a collection of Lincoln Cent varieties.

8. Type Set

Instead of collecting all dates and mintmarks, perhaps a set of all the different types of Lincoln cents might be sufficient. It might be fun to collect one very nice key date or semi-key date specimen of each type. The one prohibitively rare type would be the aluminum cent of 1974. Only a handful of these exist and they may not be legal to own – so a specimen would be difficult to obtain and only available at a six or seven figure price. Since it was not a circulating coin, it would not be compulsory to complete a type set; but it would certainly be a fun addition for the collector with the means to afford one.

Types of Lincoln Cents- Business Strikes

➤ Lincoln Obverse, Wheat Stalk Reverse



*V.D.B. on
Reverse*

- V.D.B. (Designer Victor David Brenner initials) on reverse -1909
- Designers initials removed (1909-1917)
- V.D.B. initials added on obverse, french bronze composition (1918-1942, 1946-1958)
- Zinc Coated Steel (1943)
- Shell Casing 'brass' composition (1944-1945)



*V.D.B. on
Shoulder*



*1943 S Steel
Cent*

- Lincoln Obverse, Lincoln Memorial Reverse
 - f. 'French Bronze' composition (1959-1961)
 - g. 'Brass' composition (1962-1982)
 - h. the Aluminum Cent pattern(1974)
 - i. Copper Plated Zinc composition (1982-2008)



*Memorial
Reverse*



*Birthplace
Reverse*



*Log Splitter
Reverse*



*Politician
Reverse*



*Capitol Dome
Reverse*



*Shield
Reverse*

- Lincoln Obverse/ Birthplace reverse (2009) Both Copper plated zinc and 'brass' specimens exist for each of the 2009 varieties.
- Lincoln Obverse/ 'Log Splitter' reverse (2009)
- Lincoln Obverse/Politician reverse (2009)
- Lincoln Obverse/Capitol Dome reverse (2009)
- Lincoln Obverse/Shield Reverse (2010-date)

Types of Lincoln Cents- Proofs

- Lincoln Obverse, Wheat Stalk Reverse
 - a. V.D.B. Initials on reverse -1909
 - b. Designer's initials removed – (1909-1916)
 - c. Designer's initials on obverse, satin finish (1936)
 - d. Same type as c., brilliant finish (1936-42; 1950-58)



*1941 Proof
Cent Reverse*

- Lincoln Obverse, Memorial reverse
 - a. 'French Bronze' composition (1959-61)
 - b. 'Brass' composition (1962-64; 1968-82)
 - c. same as b.; Special Mint Set finish (1965-67)
 - d. Copper Plated Zinc composition (1983-2008)



*1981 S Proof
Cent Reverse*

- Lincoln Obverse/Birthplace reverse (2009)
- Lincoln Obverse/'Log Splitter' reverse (2009)
- Lincoln Obverse/Politician reverse (2009)
- Lincoln Obverse/Capitol Dome reverse (2009)
- Lincoln Obverse/ Shield Reverse (2010-date)



*Proof Birth-
place Reverse*



*Proof Log
Splitter Reverse*



*Proof Poli-
tician Reverse*



*Proof Capitol
Dome Reverse*



*Proof Shield
Reverse*

Quick Diagnostic and Authentication Guide for Selected Lincoln Cents

1909 - S VDB Lincoln Cent

Note Shape of Block S mintmark. The S fits in a square area. The top serif is straight. The bottom serif is slightly angled. There is a triangular die chip in the upper half of the S to the left, just before the center of the mintmark. (This Mintmark punch was used on all Lincoln Cents and many other S-Mint coins from 1909 through 1916.)



1909 - S VDB Lincoln Cent Mint Mark



Close up of 1909 - S VDB Lincoln Cent Mint Mark

The mintmark frequently (but not always) sits in a slightly depressed area and there are often small striations around the mintmark. People frequently mistake these striations for tooling around the mintmark and conclude that the coin they are looking at is altered. These striations are the result of die erosion that occurs naturally during the life of a die. Coins that are well worn or dirty may be more difficult to authenticate. On these coins the triangular die chip which is a characteristic of a genuine mintmark may be difficult to see.

There are four mintmark positions for the 1909-S VDB Cent.

- The First is close to the date and almost midway between the 9 and 0 of the date. The left portion of the S is flush with the right end of the first 9.
- The Second is slightly further from the date (top of S is flush with bottom of 9's) than the first but matches almost exactly in positioning with the first between the 9 and 0. The S tilts slightly right in position 2 whereas it is straight in position 1.
- The third is the same distance from the date as the second, but is shifted further to the right. The left edge of the S is midway between the 9 and 0 of the date. The S is also tilted slightly right like the second position mintmark.
- The fourth position is low and further to the right. The S is below the bottom of both 9's and the left edge of the S is flush with the left edge of the 0.



1909 S V.D.B. with mintmark in position 3



1909 S V.D.B. with mintmark in position 4



1922 No D Lincoln Cent

There are three die varieties of the 1922 D no D Lincoln Cent. Only one of the Die pairs is considered to be a legitimate no D Cent as it is the only obverse for which no trace of the D mintmark is visible on any specimen.

- **Die Pair 1** - 1922 no D Cent has a weak obverse and reverse. The second 2 in the date is weaker than the first 2. The reverse displays a diagonal die crack through the O in ONE.
- **Die Pair 2** - The 'legitimate' 1922 no D. The obverse has a strong date in which the second 2 is more prominent than the first 2. The reverse is a new die and the details of it appear to be two grades less 'worn' than the obverse.
- **Die Pair 3** - The second 2 in the date is again weaker than the first 2. The reverse has weak details. The O in ONE does not have the diagonal die crack as in the die pair one.



1922 Plain Lincoln Cent Die Pair 3 Close up of Date



1922 Plain Lincoln Cent Die Pair 3 - Reverse Close up of 'One Cent'

1960 Small Date Lincoln Cent



1960 Small Date Lincoln Cent



1960 Large Date Lincoln Cent

The 1960 Small Date Cent has the top of the 1 is flush with the top of the 9, meanwhile in the 1960 Large Date Cent the 1 is below the top of the 9. The 0 appears to be perfectly rounded in the 1960 Large date Cent and in the small date the 0 is skinnier. On the 1960 Large Date Cent, the tail of the 6 is much longer than in the small date.

1970 - S Small Date Lincoln Cent

The 1970-S Small Date Cent has the 970 in the date all flush at the top of the date. It is also known as the High 7. The ERTY in LIBERTY is often weak on 1970-S Small Date Cents. On the 1970-S Large Date or Low 7 variety, the 7 is just a little lower than the 9 and 0 in the date.



1970 S Large Date Lincoln Cent



1970 S Small Date Lincoln Cent

1979 and 1981 - S Type I and Type II Proof Cent

The 1979 Type I and II S mintmarks are fairly easy to distinguish. The Type I S is a block with no clear separation from the top, middle and bottom of the S. The Type II mintmark is much clearer, with definite separation between the top, middle and bottom of the S.



1979 S Type 1



1979 S Type 2

The 1981 Type I and II mintmarks are a little more confusing. Both mintmarks are clear, but it is the shape of the mintmark that makes the difference. The Type I mintmark is the same as the 1979 S Type II mintmark. It is clear and the top right portion of the S folds downward towards the middle of the mintmark. The Type II 1981 S mintmark has flat, parallel top and bottom parts. The top of the mintmark does not 'fold down'. There are balls on the top and bottom serifs that are not on the Type I mintmark.



1981 S Type 1



1981 S Type 2

1982 Lincoln Cent Varieties

There are 8 Varieties of 1982 Lincoln cent. These coins were made in two different metal compositions and had different style lettering as well. The Varieties are distinguished as follows:

- **1982 Large Date Copper Cent** – Numerals are thick as they are on 1981 Cents. Coins weigh 3.11 grams.



- **1982 Small Date Copper Cent** – Numerals are thin as they are on 1983 and later Cents. Coins weigh 3.11 grams.



- **1982 Large Date Zinc Cent** – Numerals are thick as they are on 1981 Cents. Coins weigh 2.5 grams.

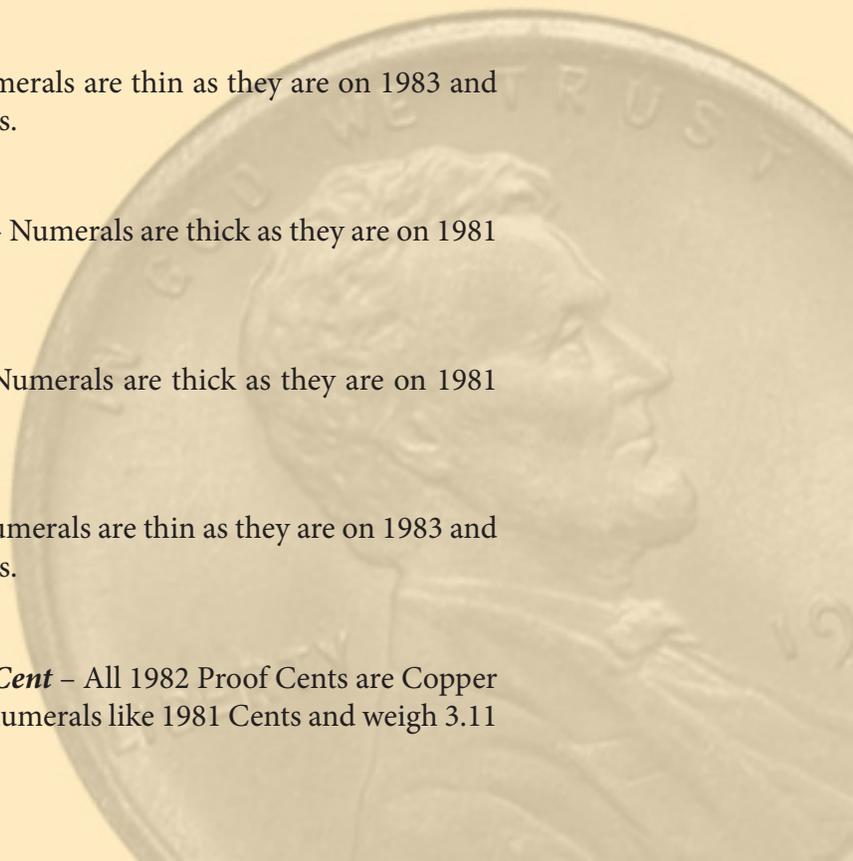
- **1982 Small Date Zinc Cent** – Numerals are thin as they are on 1983 and later Cents. Coins weigh 2.5 grams.

- **1982-D Large Date Copper Cent** – Numerals are thick as they are on 1981 Cents. Coins weigh 3.11 grams.

- **1982-D Large Date Zinc Cent** – Numerals are thick as they are on 1981 Cents. Coins weigh 2.5 grams.

- **1982-D Small date Zinc Cent** – Numerals are thin as they are on 1983 and later Cents. Coins weigh 2.5 grams.

- **1982-S Large Date Copper Proof Cent** – All 1982 Proof Cents are Copper Large Dates. They have the thick numerals like 1981 Cents and weigh 3.11 grams.



Read more about Lincoln Cents

There are many great resources available to the Lincoln Cent Collector. The following list, while not exhaustive, includes several fine references on the topic of Lincoln Cents

Podraza, Brad. The Lincoln Cent Resource. www.lincolncentresource.com
This is a fantastic online resource for Lincoln Cents!

Bowers, Q. David. A Guide Book of Lincoln Cents (Official Red Books) Whitman Publishing, 2008.

Lange, David W. The Complete Guide to Lincoln Cents. Zyrus, 2005.

Flynn, Kevin. Lincoln Cent Matte Proofs. Kyle Vick, 2009.

Wexler, John and Flynn, Kevin. The Authoritative Reference on Lincoln Cents. , 2009

Porter, James A. An Introduction to 2009 Lincoln Cent Errors. Create Space, 2013.

Anderson, Shane M. The Complete Lincoln Cent Encyclopedia. Krause Publications, 1996.

Daughtrey, Charles. Looking Through Lincoln Cents: Chronology of a Series. Zyrus, 2005.



Vintage Library of Coins Album with 1960's and Earlier Lincoln Cents