

## Cataloging Your Collection by Joe Mulvey

It has been said by somebody that unless you catalog your collection, all you really have is a box of rocks! While all of us probably place a high value on our mineral collections, this value is always underestimated by the geologically challenged.

There are many reasons to catalog your mineral collection:

1. To keep track of what you have
2. To record when and where you obtained specific specimens
3. To help recall where you have stored those priceless mounts
4. To note whether each specimen was a gift, collected, obtained at the give away table or purchased
5. As we get older we forget more and more, having your collection documented means anybody can understand your collection even if you can't remember whether that eosphorite you collected 25 years ago came from Palermo #1 or #2!
6. If anything ever happens to you, a documented collection will have value to your descendants. An undocumented collection wouldn't make sense to many.

I am very happy to say that over the past two years I have cataloged about half of my collection. I chose to use Microsoft Excel to document my collection. While some would have chosen to use Microsoft Access, I felt that I would be preoccupied with the program instead of being able to focus on the collection. I do feel I know Excel extremely well, and I also know that once the data is in Excel, it can easily be exported in the future into any other database, even a web based interface. As a matter of fact, I have exported my collection into web pages from Excel successfully by just using the Save As web page command.

Each column is specific to one type of info about the specimen. Each row is dedicated to one specimen. The fields I chose to track for each specimen are as follows:

**Catalog Number** I chose to start with 1001, thinking that 4 digits would allow me 9,999 minerals before having to go to a 5 digit system. Using a laser printer, I printed size 5 Arial font numbers on a large sheet of labels. I got about 1000 numbers on one page and used scissors to cut out each one and either affix it to the box or to the backside of the specimen. Especially with the micros I used tweezers to affix the label. I then coated the label with clear nail polish. Typically, I would pull out one drawer at a time and label all of the contents, which would take one or two evenings. After labeling, I brought the drawer over to my PC and entered the specimens into the database. Some people choose to use the Dana numbering system followed by a hyphen and then an incremental number starting at 1 for each example of a species. For my collection, I felt that this was overkill.

A very interesting suggestion from President Cristofono is to use the Mindat specimen ID number followed by a hyphen and then sequential numbers for each version of like specimens.

Historically, others did the same thing using the Dana numbering system.

**Specimen Name** Self explanatory, I refer to Pough's Rocks & Minerals as well as Mindat to verify correct spelling.

**Specimen Size** Use the standard size declarations: MM for micromount, TN for thumbnail, SC for small cabinet, etc.

**Mine** Collection locality, again like the specimen name, I try to verify correct spelling to maintain consistency as much as possible. Especially when copying locality information from labels it is easy to carry on misspellings; this is the time to correct the spelling of Huanzala once and for all!

**City** Self explanatory

**County** Self explanatory

**State** Self explanatory

**Country** Self explanatory

**How Obtained** I enter info such as self-collected, gift of, MMNE giveaway, Purchased at 2007 Tuscon Show, etc.

**Year Obtained** Self explanatory

**Cost, if purchased** Self explanatory

**Estimated Value** I try to give a value to everything to understand my investment as well as to make the worth of the collection known because eventually, my daughter will inherit my collection.

**Specimen Storage Location** Most of my collection is thumbnails and micromounts. I have a wooden cabinet 30" x 20 x 20 with 10 drawers. I call it Cab1 and each drawer is labeled from 1 – 10. So a specimen in drawer 3 would be located in Cab1 Drawer 3.

**Specimen Notes** I left a field to make notes such as associated minerals, what to look for that makes it special, things to remember.

**External Mineral Information** I put a URL link to the PDF file for the mineral on the RRUF website or a link to the Mindat specific mineral home page.

**External Magazine Articles** Articles I have scanned that were significant to my collection and interests relating either to a specimen or locality.

For your collection you may choose additional fields or deem some of my choices as either extravagant or foolish. It's your collection and your call. Set it up as you wish!

Some database notes about using Excel as your collection management system.

1. Sorting: select all, use the sort option and sort by whichever column strikes your fancy. For instance, say I am labeling yet another micro from Palermo and I start wondering just how many Palermo specimens I have cataloged so far. Using the sort option to use the Location field as the primary key, and the mineral name as the secondary, I will see the sheet sorted by location, then by mineral name, thus revealing that I have an extraordinary amount of Palermo specimens. I can sort by any field based on what strikes my fancy at the time. When I am done, I re-sort based on the catalog ID number.
2. ID Cards: Using Microsoft word and the mail merge function, I created a template for my specimens that takes name, ID number, locality info and formats it into a card that has a nice header that says "From the Collection of Joseph Mulvey" with the details of the mineral below.
3. Printing: I can print the collection info and bring it with me to events whether they are meetings, mineral shows, dealers' houses, etc. I no longer have to rely on memory to see if I have any (or how many!) mimetites from the Tiger Mine.
4. I can also save this to a laptop to bring with me to a meeting and even synchronize it to my Palm Pilot.
5. Sorting options have taught me a lot about what my collecting interests really are! If you had asked me prior to cataloging what my collection of minerals entailed I would have said New Hampshire minerals focusing on the White Mountains. In retrospect you will find that I enjoy the colorful minerals of the southwestern United States, Palermo and Mt Saint Hilaire.

6. I use the auto complete option in tools so that I always spell things consistently; this enhances the sorting.
7. If I give a specimen away or it disintegrates I use the strikethrough option under format to show that the mineral once existed in my collection but was donated to another or that a pet ate it. I choose not to remove the entry from the database.
8. You can backup and archive your collection information. You will always have copies. While index cards are visually appealing and very impressive, they are manually challenging. Once enough specimens have been cataloged, a paper-based system will become unwieldy and you won't have the sorting options that allow you to summarize and report your information for a greater understanding of what you have.
9. I also have the option of emailing my collection database to others who may be interested in what I have.
10. The final piece that I expect to accomplish will be a specimen photo of each item with a link in a new column. This will be an external photo as opposed to embedding the picture into the spreadsheet.