

The Washington Post

[Back to previous page](#)

Kiplinger, an old Washington company, makes a gift of old images

By [John Kelly](#), Published: January 16

Not long after **W.M. “Kip” Kiplinger** set up his new magazine in Washington in 1920, a man in a black suit started visiting him. The man was a troller of estate sales and flea markets, a picker who specialized in prints, lithographs and woodcuts.

Kip had blank office walls to decorate. The man in the black suit had art. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Kip would buy pretty much anything that featured Washington, be it print, photograph, map or old newspaper.

In turn, so did his son, **Austin**, and grandson, **Knight**. Over nearly 90 years, they accumulated a stellar collection of Washingtoniana, which became the design motif of their H Street NW headquarters. They had so much that they started employing curators to help them sort it all.

“When you went to work at Kiplinger, you’d go down to the archives with the curator,” Knight Kiplinger told me Monday at the Historical Society of Washington. “They’d ask what you wanted for your office. The Washington Monument? The U.S. Capitol? Mount Vernon?”

In the fall, the [Kiplinger operation](#) — now a mini empire of personal finance and business forecast publications — moved to a new location near McPherson Square. The old building at 1729 H St. NW — which had two bowling lanes in the basement for the amusement of the staff — is being turned into a hotel. And all those Washington images have been given to the [Historical Society of Washington](#).

“I never saw this all in one place,” marveled Austin on Monday as he surveyed the 38 big, carefully packed boxes in an upstairs gallery. There were also eight filing cabinets containing the catalogue for the 4,000-piece collection.

Austin, 93, remembered when his dad’s office was on 15th Street NW, in a building that also housed the RKO theater. His dad leased space on the second floor behind the theater’s marquee — because the windows were obstructed, rent was cheaper — and when he was a boy Austin climbed out to sit atop the marquee and watch Calvin Coolidge’s inaugural parade.

“We are Washington history junkies,” said his son, Knight.

The highlights of the collection include a watercolor of the U.S. Capitol painted soon after it was burned by the British. The roof is missing; the windows are sooty. It’s attributed to **George Munger**. Experts think it’s by him

because they know his daughter was a painter of flowers and on the back of the painting is a spiky botanical.

There are **Mathew Brady** portraits and large paintings of White House interiors, painted by D.C. artist **Lily Spandorf** not long after **Jackie Kennedy** had the executive mansion remodeled.

There is also the less famous. In the 1950s, Kip sent one of his employees, an amateur photographer named **William Barrett**, out to take pictures of every block in downtown Washington and into Foggy Bottom. His 931 photos show a now largely vanished city, before rowhouses and low-rise storefronts were replaced by what Washington architects seem to specialize in: the boring 11-story building.

The [donation of the Kiplinger collection](#) is a nice shot in the arm to the historical society, which is pulling itself back together after financial woes. The board hopes to announce soon that the society's Mount Vernon Square library — [closed for months](#) — will be reopening for a few days each week.

As the two Kiplingers looked at all the boxes — unpacking will start soon — they remembered one of the earliest prints Kip bought. It wasn't of Washington but of the Pantheon in Rome.

“We still have that one,” Austin said.

Suburban sprawl

Interested in what Montgomery County used to be like back in the day? Then you'll want to head out Saturday to the sixth annual Montgomery County History Conference, or, as I like to call it, the MoCoHiCo (rhymes with “mojito”).

Sessions will explore the C&O Canal, the histories of Sugarland and Montgomery Village, recent archaeological discoveries related to the War of 1812 in Maryland and more. Experts will also offer advice on how to write and publish your community's history.

The MoCoHiCo is from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Agricultural History Farm Park, 18400 Muncaster Rd. in Derwood. The cost, including all sessions, continental breakfast and catered box lunch, is \$50 for county residents, \$55 for others and \$20 for students with ID.

For more information, or to register, visit www.montgomeryhistory.org or call 301-340-2825.

For [previous columns by John Kelly](#), go to postlocal.com.

© The Washington Post Company