
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 13-02

Editors Building

1729 H Street, NW
Square 127, Lot 854

Meeting Date: December 18, 2014
Applicant: D.C. Preservation League
Affected ANC: ANC 2B
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

After careful consideration, the Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the former office building known as the Editors Building at 1729 H Street NW (now the Hampton Inn Washington D.C./White House) to the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. It is further recommended that the landmark nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing at the local level of significance.

Background

The Editors Building is a ten-story office building constructed in downtown D.C. in 1949-1950 to house the offices of the family-owned and operated Kiplinger Washington Editors, Inc., publisher of subscription-based business and finance periodicals, namely the *Kiplinger News Letter* and the *Kiplinger's Changing Times Magazine*. Established in 1923 by Willard "Kip" Kiplinger, the Kiplinger publishing company has enjoyed more than eight decades of journalistic success. Despite hardships imposed by the digital age, Kiplinger is still actively engaged in the publication of its newsletter and magazine, in addition to its on-line publications.

Kiplinger remained the owner/occupant of the Editors Building until the Fall of 2011, when it sold its headquarters building and moved to smaller offices at 13th and L Streets, NW. In 2012, Palmetto Hospitality of Washington, D.C. renovated the building into a hotel and operates it today as the Hampton Inn Washington, D.C./White House.

In addition to serving as the headquarters of the Kiplinger Washington Editors, Inc. for 61 years, the Editors Building housed an extensive collection of print media including historic maps, prints, engravings, lithographs, watercolors, woodcuts, drawings, photographs and much more, on historic Washington, D.C. Known as the Kiplinger Collection, this collection of Washingtoniana was begun in the 1920s by Willard "Kip" Kiplinger and was carried on after his death by his descendants. The vast array of print media filled the building's corridors, offices, Board room, and lobby area exhibit space, as well as a special archives room set aside for the collection. After sale of the building, the Kiplinger family donated the vast majority of the collection to the Historical Society of Washington, while setting aside a few of the pieces for the National Portrait Gallery, Mount Vernon, and the Lincoln Cottage. Today, a permanent exhibit,

Window to Washington, showcasing a portion of the collection, is on view at the Historical Society of Washington.



History

The Kiplinger Washington Editors was established in 1923 by a former Associated Press economics reporter, Willard M. “Kip” Kiplinger (1891-1967). In that year, Mr. Kiplinger began publication of the one-page *Kiplinger Washington Letter*, a weekly business and economic forecasting periodical for people in management, and later expanded the company to include other business publications, namely *Kiplinger’s Personal Finance Magazine* (originally named *Kiplinger Magazine*), a monthly finance publication to advise American families on personal money management. Historically, neither the letter nor the magazine carried any advertising, but relied exclusively upon paid subscriptions.

Willard’s son Austin H. Kiplinger (b. 1918), still editor emeritus and non-executive board chair at the age of 96, joined his father’s firm in 1952, just as his two sons later followed him into the family business. Austin’s son, Knight A. Kiplinger (b. 1948) is currently editor-in-chief and steward of Kiplinger Washington Editors. Knight Kiplinger is also president of the Kiplinger Foundation, a family foundation created and funded by Willard M. Kiplinger in 1948 that supports a wide array of charities in the Washington area and nationwide.

During the 1950s after nearly 30 years in the business, Willard M. Kiplinger was considered a nearly infallible oracle. In addition, his no-nonsense writing style that cut away excess verbiage to reach the point was widely copied in journalism. Although Willard Kiplinger continued to

write about 80 percent of the *Letter* himself into the 1950s, he had a staff of approximately one dozen that would later grow into the hundreds. Kiplinger was an admirable boss, distributed three-quarters of the company's profits to his employees who he referred to as associates. There was also a bonus and pension system that allowed his journalists to pull in "a decent salary." Kiplinger felt that newspapermen were underpaid and stated that his reporters are "good and worth it." That progressive business model survives today, as the company continues to share business profits and offers generous retirement benefits and other perks.

Architecture

From its founding until World War II when the company began to outgrow its office space, the Kiplinger Washington Editors had its offices in the Press Building on F Street. In 1946, the company purchased three lots in the 1700 block of H Street, historically the site of three 19th-century residences, and began construction of its headquarters building. Upon completion, the Editors Building was the first large office building on the block.

The ten-story office building, often referred to in period articles as a Washington "skyscraper," was designed by local architect Leon Chatelain, Jr. and built by builder, John McShain, known for his construction of many federal buildings. Chatelain's design for the Editors Building is indicative of mid-Century Modernism in the city characterized by a transitional aesthetic. The building's overall massing, namely its three-part commercial block, is rooted in traditional classical building forms, while its smooth limestone walls, its pared down ornamentation, and its vertical emphasis is more overtly Modern. The Editors Building recalls Chatelain's earlier Washington Gas Light building at 11th and H Street, NW.

During his 25-year career as a sole-practitioner from 1930 to 1956, and later as a partner in the firm Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan, Washington-born Leon Chatelain, played an important role in the city's design world. While his early career focused on residential buildings, he designed several important commercial and institutional buildings and developed a long-standing relationship with the C&P Telephone Company, designing that company's headquarters building in 1948 and several of its telephone exchange branches. In 1956, Chatelain became president of the AIA, and established his new partnership which went on to design several major commercial office buildings, and institutional projects, particularly on the Georgetown University campus.

Evaluation

The Editors building meets D.C. Designation Criterion B (History) and National Register Criterion A (Events) for its association with the Kiplinger Washington Editors, a renowned Washington-based financial news organization, established in 1923 and still active today as a family-run news publication.

The Editors building also meets D.C. Designation Criterion (D) Architecture and Urbanism and National Register Criterion C (Architecture) for its mid-Century Modern design and as the work of noted local architect, Leon Chatelain, Jr. The mid-20th-century Editors Building provides a good example of transitional design in this city where building treatment and details reflect both traditional and Modern stylistic approaches. The Period of Significance extends from 1948-1950, the beginning and end dates of construction.