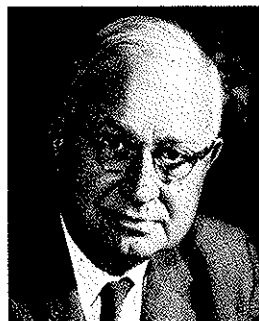


# Let's Write our Local History NOW



By W. M. KIPLINGER

A great contemporary journalist, whose eye is often on the future, shows that the old days of "our town" are full of interest and value for us.



**YOUR TOWN** is an old community. The start of it may go back 150 years, which is old by the time standards of most states. Your town has a past and a history that is fascinating, marvelous, romantic and thrilling, if you have eyes to see and a mind that is receptive to the things that are close-by, if you can understand that distant fields are NOT the greenest.

Furthermore, history is being made by our times—today and yesterday, as distinguished from years ago—history that will appear exciting in retrospect some years in the future. Trouble is, the facts that go to make up history sometimes get scattered or evaporated before they get written down into permanent form and when they are reassembled later on they may have gaps in them. The remedy is to get them now, assemble them now, and that's the point of this discussion.

Imagine a few examples: The story of the oldest store in your town is full of interest, for it shows what people bought and how they lived, and if you wish to

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call this social history, well and good. Your reform mayor. The time the city council overturned, and made a new order. The floods. The paving program. The occasion when an outside factory came to town, and why. The prices of things that people bought. The passing of the front porch. The garage on the site of the early livery stable. The library when it came, and what it has done.

## The Old Settlers

The old settlers, whose stories can be had from their grandchildren now, but not later, for even grandchildren get old and pass on. That crime wave and how it scared the community, and how it came about. The PTA and what it accomplished. The new school and the changes which it brought. The local men who made good and got famous, and how come. The tracks in the streets that used to have the "traction" that bounced along to the next town. The old railroad station, and the times it has seen.

All these topics are fairly earthy and are meant to be so, just to drive home the realization that history is not necessarily of Presidents, Parties, Congress and Wars, but that it is also of grass roots, the home town, the individuals of interest, even though they were not giants or geniuses.

If you have children you know all

about how they think the world began when they were born, and how unaware they are of the past. They even think it mildly preposterous that you were ever as young as they are now. They can't imagine what life was like before the days of television, or the family car, or the bathroom, or the school bus, or the movie, or the electric stove. You know how you want to tell them of the past, and how bored they are. But the time will come when they **WON'T** be bored, when they will go seeking those stories of the past as their own background, their own heritage, and they will regard it as a part of themselves. The question is, Are you doing now the job of assembling what they will want, of having it ready?

#### What To Do About It

What can you do? Well, you can join the local historical group. You can go to the library and see what's available. You can pore over old local newspaper files. You can look at the old news and also the old ads. You can round up some old folks with good memories, and listen and take them down. You can raise a little fund, not much, and pay someone to make a job of all this, or at least to take the lead, with a number of other folks as backers-uppers.

You can assemble stories of the recent past which the local newspapers probably would like to have for publication from week to week. Publication of fragmentary stories about this & that will stir up others and they will come across with stories and recollections of their own. It will become a game, a sport, a hobby.

Perhaps the school authorities will get interested and the high school kids will

help gather and write. Perhaps the Junior Chamber of Commerce will take it on as a project. Perhaps one of the service clubs will give it a bow. Such interest begets interest, just as three logs burn when they are nestled up together.

#### You Can Contribute

I know many towns to which all this applies. Some are big, most are small. I don't mean to rule out the big cities, but most of them have historical projects already under way, well advanced. Still, they may need your help, and you **CAN** contribute if you have lived there over a number of years.

My professional field is the national scene and the international scene, but the more I try to get my arms around them and their complexities, the more I realize that the reasons for a lot of political and economic trends lie smack in the local community. The origins of ideas are there. The motive power is there, and don't go kidding yourself into thinking it isn't true just because the far-away national or international stuff gets the publicity play. Don't under-play your own home hown, and do get busy and collect a bit of its uncollected history.

Also you'll get a sense of how the pioneers are not all dead and buried, how there are pioneers today in all sorts of fields. You may be one of them. Is this exaggerated romanticizing? Not a bit of it, if you will only see yourself and the doings of today in the perspective of history. Play at it a bit—for fun.