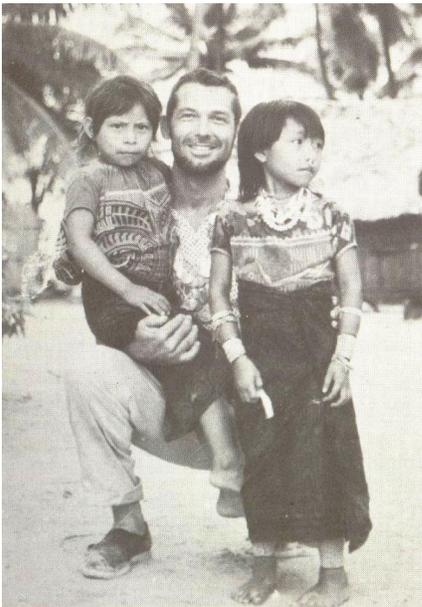


The Life and Work of Kit Kapp

by Eliane Dotson
Old World Auctions

Kit S. Kapp and his wife, Valerie A. Kapp, have been long-time friends of Old World Auctions and the map community at large. Starting their love affair with maps as collectors, they eventually became map dealers to fuel their passion for maps and traveling. Kit Kapp passed away on November 23, 2013, and is survived by his wife, four children, nine grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Kit is deeply missed by his family, friends, and colleagues and will be remembered for his kindness, his adventurous spirit, and his contributions to the map community and to field research in Central America and the Caribbean. We honor Kit by sharing the story of his life and work.



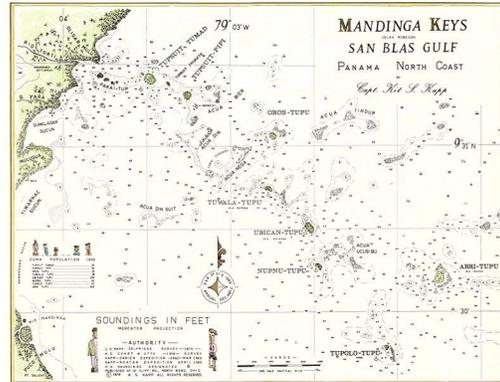
Kit Kapp was born a collector. Beginning with stamps as a young boy in Cincinnati, Ohio, Kit's collections grew in number and diversity over the years. As a teenager, he worked as a cowhand on a ranch in Nevada, and at the end of the summer spent his entire earnings on antique firearms. Drafted into the Army towards the end of WWII, he was sent to Japan shortly after the surrender. There he befriended a Japanese history professor who introduced him to Ainu culture, inspiring Kit to build a collection of old Ainu artifacts. After graduating from the University of Cincinnati in 1950, he spent time exploring the Caribbean and Central America. He became enamored with the San Blas Islands off the coast of Panama, spending time with the Kuna Indians and developing a collection of Molasses, later writing and publishing a book on the topic in 1972. His greatest and favorite collection, of course, was antique maps, which was initially sparked by his adventurous spirit.

In addition to collecting, Kit had a passion for exploration. As a student at the University of Cincinnati, he found time to go mountaineering, climbing Mount Whitney and other peaks. One year, he drove an old Model-A Ford from Cincinnati down south to Costa Rica. Claiming to be a journalism student, Kit succeeded in meeting and interviewing the presidents of both Nicaragua and Guatemala during his trip. His car survived the journey back to the US, despite suffering 18 bullet holes passing through a small revolution in Nicaragua. After graduation, instead of joining his father's successful lumber business in Cincinnati, Kit bought a 40 ft. Chesapeake "Bugeye" in Hampton, Virginia, and set sail to explore the West Indies. Despite having little sailing experience, he made his way to the Virgin Islands, finally dropping anchor at St. Thomas.

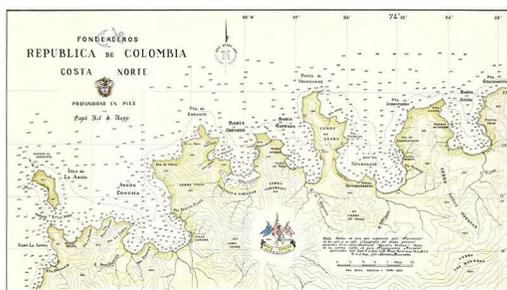
With St. Thomas as his home base, Kit spent the next 15 years sailing around and exploring the Caribbean, Central America, and northern South America. In his mid-twenties he started a yacht charter business, enabling him to make a living from sailing. He furthered his love of exploration and adventure by leading 10 official expeditions within Central and South America as a fellow of the Explorers' Club of New York. It was during this time that his love of maps flourished - charts were not just indispensable tools

to aid in navigation, but a representation of uncharted waters and new places to explore. As his wife, Valerie, explains: "Kit was a romantic at heart and should have lived in the 17th - 18th centuries when there was still a lot of exploring to be done in the Caribbean/Central America area! I think he re-lived those days vicariously through looking at old maps and charts." During Kit's years as a ship captain, he became interested in drafting his own charts. He invested in the equipment to do his own soundings, measurements, and sightings. Kit was quite a skillful mapmaker and published 8 sailing charts of the waters around Honduras, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, and the British Virgin Islands.

The first map Kit purchased was a Mercator map of the West Indies that he found in an antique shop in Cincinnati while still in college. After he moved to St. Thomas and began earning a living, he started collecting antique maps in earnest. By 1967, he had accumulated enough maps to have an exhibition at a public library in Jamaica. At the opening of the exhibition, he met his future wife, Valerie, who was living in Jamaica at the time. Shortly thereafter Kit and Valerie took a trip to Cartagena, Colombia, where they were married. The Kapps traveled extensively around the Caribbean for the next five years and then decided it was time to "swallow the hook" and settle down someplace on land.



Next came the task of finding remunerative work ashore. With encouragement from Valerie, Kit agreed to turn his antique map collection into a business. Becoming map dealers was a natural step for the Kapps, as it allowed them to continue their passion for travel, acquiring maps wherever they went. They spent the winter of 1972 in England on the Isle of Wight, where Valerie had been born, and began to produce their first map catalog. After spending many years basking in the warmth of the Caribbean, they decided to move to sunny Florida to set up shop.



Kit had always loved to research maps, study them, and note differences among them. As he and Valerie traveled around the world buying maps, they began to befriend many dealers who were kind enough to share their knowledge of maps and guide the Kapps through the process of becoming dealers. R.V. (Mick) Tooley, based in London, became a mentor to Kit, who spent a week at Tooley's

shop every spring. Kit and Mick Tooley became great friends, and Mick encouraged Kit to write carto-bibliographies for the Map Collectors' Circle. Over the years Kit wrote carto-bibliographies on the maps of Jamaica, Colombia, Panama, and Central America. Steve Luck, Tooley's protégé and successor to his business, has many fond recollections of Kit's visits: "He came every year and spent up to a week going through every piece of paper we had. He literally was part of the furniture the week he was here. We would go to lunch together and to tea. We shared an interest in sailing, and we used to talk about his exploits in the Caribbean. As a person he was younger than his years."

On the Kapps' annual trips to the UK, Kit regularly visited many map dealers, always looking to buy maps and share stories. Philip Burden described the annual visits Kit made to see his father, Clive Burden: "For as far back as I can remember Kit used to visit us. He would spend the whole day through 6.00 pm working his way through EVERY draw of stock. This exercise took him on average 5 consecutive days. He would not stop for lunch, would not sit down but would always end the day with a beer before heading back to town! They were the good old days which I remember with great fondness." Simon Hunter also became good friends with Kit and recalls, "On his regular trips to England he would often take a trip down to my house in Hove on the south coast. I would collect him from the railway station and he would spend hours looking through my stock of maps. Kit was a very astute buyer but he was also a most entertaining character whose good humour and traveller's tales made it impossible to resent the large discounts he invariably managed to obtain on his many purchases. I always had the greatest admiration for his wife Valerie who somehow managed to keep him on the straight and narrow where business was concerned, and who sometimes had to take a firm hand with him when clearly his heart had overruled his head when making some of his acquisitions." Jonathan Potter also remembers Kit admiringly: "His visits to JP Ltd were always lengthy as he seemed to have something to say about most of the maps he examined as he had been there, sailed up the river, or had a brush with the natives he disturbed. He was amusing, a fund of stories from far-flung parts, and obviously with a very interesting background."

Once firmly established as a map dealer, Kit began sharing his knowledge and passion for maps with others. Jackie Grace, owner of an art gallery in Maine, became a map dealer herself because of Kit. After seeing the Kapps' ad for antiquarian maps in a publication, Jackie called Kit to find out more about his "original antique maps." Kit offered to send a package of maps to Jackie upon approval for her to sell at her art gallery. All of the maps sold within two weeks, and Jackie began to request regular packages of maps from Kit. Jackie explains, "I give thanks to Kit for starting me in a very lucrative business. He was an intellectual, a thinker, interested in so many things and he could talk about anything. He was a very interesting man and a lot of fun." Kit also served as a mentor to Gerald Rizzo, who described him as "the perfect mix: He displayed both an adventurous spirit, and a historian's perspective; He possessed an impulsive yearn, as well as a bibliographer's discipline; [...]He could reflect in solitude, but engaged best at the center of an audience. Indeed, Kit S. Kapp could completely fill a space, just as certainly as the very maps he carried so proudly." Under Kit's mentorship, Gerald built a collection of maps of Africa, now part of the Afriterrra Foundation, designed to preserve the cartographic history of Africa. Kit served as the inspiration for the collection, and Gerald is paying tribute to him by inscribing Kit's name over the reading room at the Afriterrra Free Library in Boston.

After being map dealers and publishing catalogues for over 25 years, the Kapps wanted to focus more of their time on traveling and less on the business. They decided to shift their business and sell primarily through auction houses. They began a business relationship with Marti and Curt Griggs, of Old World Auctions, which soon blossomed into a friendship. Over the years, the Kapps auctioned thousands of maps with OWA. "Unwrapping the Kapp consignment was always cause for excitement in the office," recalls Marti, "we never knew what to expect but were confident that we'd find several treasures in the package. Many of the sea charts he consigned with us had not been seen on the market for decades. After about ten years of cataloging their consignments, I asked Valerie if they were running out of maps. To which she replied, 'oh no, we just

opened a couple more crates of beautiful maps the other day." The most expensive map they ever sold was through OWA - a 1790 William Faden chart of the Tortugas and Florida Keys - which sold for \$34,500. Valerie Kapp continues to work with OWA to sell their inventory. Although there are a few maps with personal meaning that she intends to keep - including ones of the Isle of Wight, Jamaica and Cartagena - Valerie's goal is to sell the remainder of the collection.

Kit S. Kapp wore many hats - husband, father, collector, explorer, captain, cartographer, researcher, mentor. He was always willing to share his knowledge and experiences with others - to recount his run-ins with pirates in the Caribbean or to encourage a novice map enthusiast on building a collection. His legacy within the map community is well preserved, and he will be remembered fondly by all who had the privilege to know him.