Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

Guide to Using Real Estate & Fire Insurance Atlases

Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Maps of Washington, D.C.

To learn more, email Library@DCHistory.org

DCHistory.org
What are these atlases?
These are building / structure-level surveys of the District of Columbia. They are arranged in four geographic volumes with multiple editions per volume. They show the footprint of each building in the District of Columbia during each year the survey was conducted.

How can they be used?
Reviewing real estate atlases chronologically can help determine approximate date of building construction and track neighborhood development through time as well as identifying street address, square and lot number/s, and subdivision name at a given point in time. Basic information about lot and building shape is given; you can look at multiple editions to determine if changes were made to the shape of the lot or structure.

Are there more like these?
Holdings of these atlases and others like them at the Historical Society include Boschke maps, 1857, 1861; Faehitz & Pratt atlas, 1873-1874; Hopkins atlas, 1878; Hopkins real estate atlases, 1887-1896; Baist real estate atlases, 1903-1968; and Sanborn insurance maps, 1888-present.
# Historical Society Resources

**Baist Atlases** – Published in 4 geographic volumes with multiple editions, available in Reading Room

**Hopkins Atlases** – Washington City, Georgetown, and some suburbs; available in Reading Room

**Sanborn Atlases** – Single volumes updated continuously through 1990s, available in Reading Room

**Faehitz & Pratt Atlases** – Show lots, but not buildings, available by request

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Volume or Area</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baist</td>
<td>Washington City, Georgetown, Anacostia, and some suburbs north of Florida Avenue (Ledroit Park, Mount Pleasant, etc.).</td>
<td>1887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopkins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopkins</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopkins</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopkins</td>
<td>3 supplement (some NW and NE suburbs bounded by Rock Creek Park, Florida Avenue, 4th St NE, and the District line).</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faehitz &amp; Pratt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faehitz &amp; Pratt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faehitz &amp; Pratt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanborn</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanborn</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1927</td>
</tr>
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<td>Sanborn</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanborn</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Atlas Arrangements

Baist Volumes

Sanborn Volumes
How to Start

1. Find the volume that covers the area you are interested in studying
2. Open to the Index Page which provides a labeled overview of that volume’s area
3. Note that the index page is color coded to refer to the street pavement type
4. Find the area you are interested in and note which red-numbered section it is in
5. Now, turn to the page with the same number as the section you identified to begin a more detailed examination of the area
Layers of Information

Now that you have found the correct page, use cross streets to narrow in on a specific area. Use the following tips to study the area more closely.

- Square Number (black bold numbers in center of block)
- Lot Number (smaller black numbers on each lot of land)
- Street Address (italicized numbers between lots and street)
- Large buildings, institutions, and commercial structures are often identified (black text over structure and / or land)
- Color codes and symbols (see legend on each page)
Cite your source!

Be sure to record

- Volume Number (Title page)
- Year (Title page)
- Plate Number (Top right of each page)
Go Digital

Select volumes of these atlases are available online in high resolution

**Library of Congress**

*Baist Atlases*
- 1913 (Vol 1, Vol 4) [bit.ly/Baist1913](bit.ly/Baist1913)

*Sanborn Atlases*
- 1903 (Vol 1) [bit.ly/Sanborn1903](bit.ly/Sanborn1903)
- 1904 (Vol 2) [bit.ly/Sanborn1904](bit.ly/Sanborn1904)

**DC Public Library’s DIGDC**

Hopkins from 1874-1896