

Jay Kislak, 96, real estate mogul with passion for history, dies

Miami businessman remembered for donating historic treasures

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MIAMI - Businessman Jay I. Kislak, a philanthropist whose love of history benefited both scholars and students through millions in donations, died on Wednesday in Miami. He was 96.

Kislak, an avid collector of books and artifacts, made donations to the Library of Congress [<https://www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/kislak.html>], the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Miami and Miami Dade College Freedom Tower -- always with his wife, Jean Kislak by his side.

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Tom Bartelmo, the president of the Kislak Organization [<https://www.kislak.com/>], University of Miami President Julio Frenk and Miami-Dade College President Eduardo J. Padron were saddened by his death.

"He was a pioneer in philanthropy and community building," Padron said in a statement. "We will forever be grateful for his support of MDC and its Kislak Collection of rare Mesoamerican art and treasures [<http://www.kislak.com/kislak-collection-given-to-university-of-miami-and-miami-dade-college/>]."

Kislak turned his father's company into a real estate and financial services empire, and he spent his free time learning about the native civilizations that predated the European explorers, while amassing a collection of treasures.

His donation to the Library of Congress [<https://www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/kislak.html>] included two volumes of Lewis and Clarks Expedition, Ptolemy's Cosmographia, published in 1486; Peter Martyr, published in 1521; and The Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation, published in 1589.

Kislak was born June 6, 1922 in Hoboken, New Jersey where his Ukrainian father Julius I. Kislak founded Kislak Realty [<http://kislakrealty.com/>] in 1906. He joined the family business when he started going door to door for listings at 16 years old. He earned a business degree at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania in 1943 and he served as a U.S. Navy pilot in World War II.

Paula Kislak, his daughter and chair of the Jay I. Kislak Foundation [<https://www.kislakfoundation.org/>], told The U News [<https://news.miami.edu/stories/2018/03/passion-for-preserving-history.html>] earlier this year that while her father's real estate business ventures thrived in their home state of New Jersey, her family celebrated when they moved to Florida. They moved in 1953 when he expanded the company's mortgage services division.

In 1963, Kislak founded Kislak National Bank in Miami, and it eight branches. It was sold to Banco Popular in 2005. Over the years, Kislak managed more than 7,000 multifamily units and brokered more than 1,550 commercial real estate transactions, according to his company website.

"I have always hung around books and libraries," Kislak told a Fine Books & Collections magazine reporter in 2008 [<https://www.kislakfoundation.org/pdf/FineBooksAndCollections-JayKislak.pdf>]. "When I first moved to Florida, I had a shelf filled with the regular fodder young people collect -- fine bindings, Dickens, that sort of thing."

In 2004, Kislak donated more than 3,000 books and other objects of the Jay I. Kislak Collection to the Library of Congress [<https://www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/kislak.html>]. It is part of Exploring the Early Americas, a permanent exhibit on public display at the Thomas Jefferson Building, in Washington, D.C.

In 2013, Kislak returned to his alma mater to donate \$5.5 million to the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania.