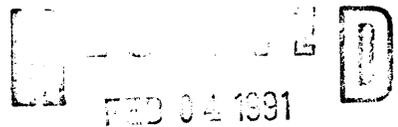


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Rankin House  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number 61467 Jacques Lemieux Boulevard  N/A not for publication  
city, town Mandeville  vicinity  
state Louisiana code LA county St. Tammany code 103 zip code 70445

### 3. Classification

<b>Ownership of Property</b>	<b>Category of Property</b>	<b>Number of Resources within Property</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<b>Contributing</b>	<b>Noncontributing</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Leslie P. Tassin January 31, 1991  
Signature of certifying official Leslie P. Tassin, LA SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism Date  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. Patricia Andrus 3/19/91  
 See continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_  
 determined not eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
 removed from the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
 other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

---

**6. Function or Use**

---

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

---

---

---

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

---

---

---

---

**7. Description**

---

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Moderne

---

---

---

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

---

walls brick

---

roof tar

---

other 

---

---

---

**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Rankin House (1939) is a ten room, two story, Modernistic villa constructed of hollow tile with decorative brick facing. The house enjoys a very attractive setting near Mandeville on scenic Cane Bayou amid numerous mature trees. The villa fell victim to the scandals of 1939 (see Part 8), and work was never finished. Unaltered since the day construction stopped, the Rankin House has stood as a shell for over 50 years.

The house has two major elevations--one facing the bayou, the other facing the forest. The latter is the villa's principal facade and contains the main entrance. The plan, though irregular and non-axial, maintains an overall cruciform shape. There is virtually no attempt to create interior vistas; rooms are designed to look outward into the natural setting. The house is anchored by a two story great hall which culminates in a massive curving bay with an inset fireplace and chimney. With its two story windows, this striking bay dominates the principal facade. The rear wall of the great hall has a generous staircase which ascends to an open second floor landing from which it is possible to view the two story space. Behind the hall is a corridor and a rear living room with a single story round bay overlooking the bayou.

Because the house was never finished, it is difficult to tell what the intended use was for the various spaces. The block at the north end contains a three car garage, and it was probably also intended to contain a kitchen. At the south end of the house is a two room wine cellar. The second story is recessed back in two places, penthouse fashion, to create balconies overlooking the landscape. There is also a balcony over the previously mentioned rear living room bay. The plan makes extensive use of curved corners and corner windows. The latter is a touch of the International Style.

Many of the windows are set within horizontal bands formed by varying the brickwork. Bands are also used to accent the projecting bays. In addition, some of the openings are capped by decorative panels in which the bricks are laid vertically with the corners facing outward.

When construction stopped, the house was completed up to the top of the parapet wall with the flat roof in place. Windows and doors were never installed, and the interior walls remain unfinished. In addition, no hardware or fixtures were ever installed.

See continuation sheet

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Politics/government  
architecture

Period of Significance  
1939  
1939

Significant Dates  
1939  
1939

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Rankin House is of statewide significance in the area of politics/government because it represents a significant chapter in Louisiana political history -- the Scandals of 1939. This house and a few others are exemplary of the "high roller" lifestyles of various politicians and LSU officials who were essentially "robbing the state blind" during the 1935-39 period. These individuals were known at the time for building "mansions," but many soon had to trade their status as landed gentry for a convict's uniform. The house is also of statewide significance in the area of architecture as a rare and exceptional example of the Modernistic style.

State Significance: Politics/Government

The period from 1935 to 1939 was probably the most scandal ridden era in Louisiana history, which is quite a distinction in a state where corruption has been the fashion for much of its history. (The chief competitor and perhaps equal for this dubious honor is the Reconstruction era.) The politicians in question were the heirs of Huey P. Long, who had been assassinated in 1935. Paraphrasing historian Allan Sandler, "all the king's men scrambled for the crown" and then proceeded to "share the people's wealth." In contrast to the Kingfish, his successors, wrote Sandler, pursued power "as a means to the accumulation of money." The ultimate political significance of the resulting scandals was that they led to the election of reform governor Sam Jones in 1940. Although Huey's brother Earl K. Long was later able to rebuild enough of the Long machine to recapture the governorship, the Longites never again enjoyed the monopoly on power they had in the 1930s.

The scandals broke in 1939 and became front page headlines all over the country as a relentless, far-ranging federal investigation brought in indictment after indictment. Also at work were parish grand juries. The two most high-ranking individuals toppled by the scandals were LSU President James Monroe Smith and Governor Richard Leche, who both served prison terms. All in all, between July 1939 and November 1940, there were almost 50 indictments involving nearly

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Chain-of-Title. St. Tammany Parish Conveyance Records. Copy in National Register file.  
Kane, Harnett T. Louisiana Hayride: The American Rehearsal for Dictatorship, 1928-1940.  
Gretna: Pelican Publishing Co., 1971. First copyright and printing in 1941.  
Sindler, Allan P. Huey Long's Louisiana: State Politics, 1920-1952. Boston, Johns  
Hopkins Press, 1956.  
New Orleans Times-Picayune, various issues 1936-1950. Specific dates available in  
National Register file.  
Davis, Edwin A. Louisiana: A Narrative History. Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing  
Division, 1971.  
Vertical File, "Louisiana Political Cartoons, 1939," Louisiana Collection, Hill  
Memorial Library, LSU.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A  
 preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)  
has been requested  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings  
Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering  
Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:  
 State historic preservation office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Specify repository:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property @ 5 acres

UTM References

A 

1	5	7	8	8	0	8	0	3	3	5	9	5	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

  
C 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

  
D 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Please refer to enclosed map.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

Boundaries were chosen to encompass the house and its setting, particularly its relationship to Cane Bayou. To have followed property lines would have meant including what seemed like an unnecessarily large acreage (60-70 acres).

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title National Register Staff  
organization Division of Historic Preservation date November 1990  
street & number P. O. Box 44247 telephone (504) 342-8160  
city or town Baton Rouge state LA zip code 70804

Owner: Justin Wilson & Associates

P. O. Box 1546  
Lacombe, LA 70445

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Rankin House, Mandeville vicinity, St. Tammany Parish, LA

Section number 8 Page 1

150 persons and more than 40 organizations and business firms. Nearly 50 years of imprisonment and a total of over \$60,000 in fines were pronounced and imposed. Four suicides followed the exposures. The various charges included embezzlement, misuse of WPA labor and materials, "kickbacks," mail fraud, conspiracy to defraud, violation of the Connally "Hot Oil" Act, etc.

One of the indictees was William G. Rankin, who served as State Commissioner of Conservation from August 1936 until July 1939, when he resigned at the request of Governor Earl K. Long. (Long, as lieutenant governor, replaced Leche when the latter resigned.) Rankin was forced to resign because of front page charges concerning mishandling of funds in the care of the Conservation Department for the construction of the Geology Building at LSU. Rankin was again on the front pages in October 1939 when a federal grand jury indicted him in the infamous Leche gift boat case. To summarize, in 1938 Rankin had presented Governor Leche with a roughly \$11,000 40 foot yacht purchased with Department of Conservation funds. The indictment also charged that Conservation Department funds and personnel were being used to equip, maintain and staff the boat. Rankin pleaded guilty and was sentenced to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta for 1 year and 1 day. In January 1940 he was indicted by a federal grand jury for violation of the Connally "Hot Oil" Act (shipping in interstate commerce oil in excess of established limits). Again he admitted his guilt, and his sentence was suspended because he aided the probe. Finally, Rankin was indicted on two different embezzlement charges, one of which ended in a one year sentence to the state penitentiary. Another accusation made at the time concerned the way Rankin's boat firm in St. Tammany flourished because of all the Department of Conservation business it received.

In terms of cultural resources to represent the Scandals of 1939, it is clear that the so-called mansions built by people like Leche, Rankin and various others best symbolize the phenomenon. The conspicuous consumption lifestyle of the individuals indicted was a major topic of commentary at the time. Examples (besides the mansions) include Governor Leche's habit of pulling big bills out of his pocket (often \$1,000 ones), using state planes to attend LSU football games and staying at the finest hotels, expensive boats, building a golf course for Leche and his friends at state expense, etc. Besides the golf course, which is now practically a ruin, the most tangible displays of conspicuous consumption were the mansions or estates built during the period. They were a particularly favorite charge at the time. For example, a cartoon showing a home tour was headed "Now Show Us the Supermansions the Political Racketeers Built." Dick Leche purchased a two hundred acre tract, also in St. Tammany Parish, and had a hunting lodge-like main building constructed. There was also a boat landing and kennels, pens and exercise yards for the various animals the Governor raised. Some commented that the brick used on the estate looked remarkably like that of the recently demolished state-owned Charity Hospital. Another well-known house was that of George Caldwell, superintendent of construction at LSU, who was

CONTINUED

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Rankin House, Mandeville vicinity, St. Tammany Parish, LA

Section number 8 Page 2

---

indicted for receiving an unauthorized "commission" on all construction work under his charge. Apparently Caldwell's mansion was a topic of great interest in Baton Rouge because of its lobby-like bathroom with gold fixtures and accessories. (Both Leche and Caldwell were charged with using WPA labor and materials on their estates.) Another extant example is that of Long machine political boss Abe Shushan, who built a quite large "Colonial" pile in St. Tammany Parish.

All of these houses, including Rankin's, are featured in Harnett Kane's 1941 account of the era, Louisiana Hayride. A photo shows the house under construction, with a caption noting that "the sheriff got ahead of the contractor." Rankin bought the property in two transactions, 33.96 acres for \$312.50 on February 14, 1938 and the remaining 31 acres for \$186 on December 8, 1939. Kane's description of Rankin's house bears quoting: "He (Rankin) had planned an establishment that would outshine Abe's, Dick's or Caldwell's, had chosen a vista on the banks of a stream which, coincidentally, the Conservation Commission was deepening and improving. It was to be a castlelike all-brick-and-glass mansion, planned for a large-scaled way of life; two story gaming hall, partly roofed sun porch which gave commanding views of the countryside, wide passageways, new glass materials which had never before been used in the Deep South, specially colored semi-transparent walls. . . . The walls had been finished, the interior construction begun, when Rogge and his jurors became interested in the master." (Rogge was in charge of the federal investigation.)

The unfinished house was seized by the Internal Revenue Service in November 1940 and sold at public auction in March 1941 to the Southern Sanitarium and Medical Missionary Corporation of New Orleans. The firm indicated that it planned to complete the house and use it as a sanitarium, but nothing ever happened. Today the house looks just as it did when "the sheriff got ahead of the contractor." It stands with the three other "mansions" mentioned above to symbolize the "orgy of graft and corruption" (Allan Sindler) known as the Louisiana Scandals of 1939.

The house has recently been purchased by Justin Wilson and Associates, Inc. and will be finished (using the Tax Act) to serve as Mr. Wilson's headquarters and the location for his cooking series.

Note Regarding Architect:

It has been said that the architect for the Rankin House was either the firm of Weiss, Dreyfous and Seiferth or Solis Seiferth acting alone. While this is quite believable, attempts to document an architect for the house have been unsuccessful.

CONTINUED

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Rankin House, Mandeville vicinity, St. Tammany Parish, LA

Section number 8 Page 3

---

**Rankin Postscript:**

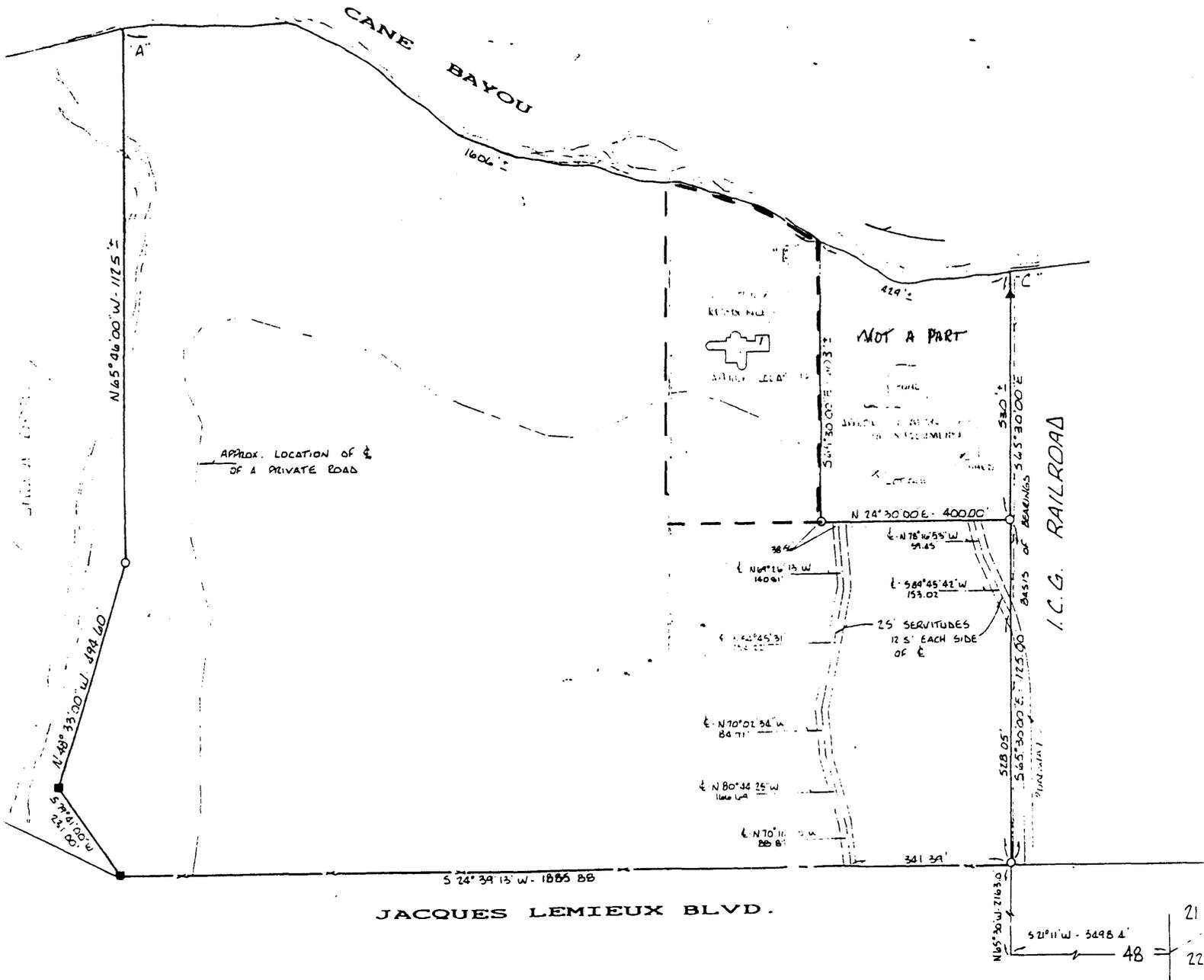
Rankin was granted a full pardon by Governor Earl Long in January 1949 and died in his native New Orleans in 1950.

**State Significance: Architecture**

The Rankin House is of architectural significance on the state level as a rare residential example of the Modernistic style. Modernistic architecture made a respectable showing in Louisiana during the 1930s, as can be seen in about fifty to one hundred schools, courthouses, city halls, hospitals, etc. Only a handful of residences partake of the style, and those that do generally take the form of a few details applied to a boxy form. By contrast, the Rankin House is a large, distinctively massed and articulated villa with a wide variety of decorative brickwork patterns. The State Historic Preservation Office knows of no other Modernistic residence in Louisiana which equals the Rankin House.

Despite the fact that the house was never completed, it still stands as a worthy architectural statement in the Modernistic style. It features exceptional asymmetrical massing, a distinctive fenestration pattern, and copious decorative brickwork panels. Essentially all it lacks are window and door details and interior finishes. This does not significantly compromise its importance as an overall work of architecture.

Rankin House  
 Mandeville vicinity  
 St. Tammany Parish, LA



LEGEND  
 O - 1/2" IRON ROD SET  
 ■ - 1 1/2" IRON ROD FOUND  
 ▲ - 1" IRON ROD FOUND

1" = 320'

N  
 --- BOUNDARY

21  
 22