

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0175997

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED JUL 17 1975  
DATE ENTERED AUG 11 1975

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

The Ronald-Brennan House

AND/OR COMMON

The Brennan House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

631 South Fifth Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Louisville

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Third

STATE

Kentucky

CODE

021

COUNTY

Jefferson

CODE

III

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

The Filson Club

STREET & NUMBER

118 West Breckenridge Street

CITY, TOWN

Louisville

VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Jefferson County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

531 West Jefferson Street

CITY, TOWN

Louisville

STATE

Kentucky

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1974

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington, D. C.

STATE

(continued)

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Brennan House is a three-story brick Italianate townhouse with both stone and cast-iron trim. The house has traditionally been painted a chocolate brown which makes it reminiscent of the more gradiose brownstones in New York City. The main portion of the front facade is three bays wide with an ornate hooded doorway at the north end. The double wooden door is panelled with an original curve at the top. The double-hung, two-pane-over-two-pane windows of frosted glass are topped by stone window caps in a segmental arch. The first and second stories are separated by a brick course. The second-story window caps have a round arch. The third story is also separated by a brick course and the smaller attic windows are topped by segmental arch caps connected by a brick course. A deeply projecting cornice below a hip roof surrounds the house and is underscored by dentils and double brackets between the bays. Alternating long and short quoins emphasize the corners. Set back to the north are two additional front bays with a cast-iron veranda in front and a cast-iron balustrade. The south facade has a one-story semi-octagonal bay window topped with iron cresting. The rear facade has a one-story piazza of light iron construction with a shed roof and thin, undecorated columns resting on the brick pavement--a characteristic Louisville feature.

In 1912 an addition was made on the north side of the house for a doctor's office. It projects beyond the cast-iron veranda of the front and was built of brick and in a Renaissance Revival style compatible with that of the original structure. The single bay consists of a large arched doorway inset with a smaller arched door inset and separated by sidelights.

The floor plan of the first story consists of small vestibule, hallway, parlor with two marble fireplaces and an ornately framed bay window, dining room, library (formerly the music room), pantry, bathrooms, kitchen. The office wing, has a waiting room and examining room. The second floor plan is similar to the first with the exception that the office wing has no second floor. There are eight rooms on the second floor including a billiard room. The third floor which is over the front portion of the house has a hallway and five unfinished storage rooms.

The interior contains a variety of furniture and objects collected by the Brennan family for a century. Fittings such as mantels, window and mirror frames, chandeliers, sconces, medallions, and cornices remain from the late nineteenth century. A magnificent dining-room suite and master bedroom set which were manufactured in Louisville and displayed at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 remain within the house, as well as nearly all the furnishings and accessories necessary for the maintenance of an upper middle-class establishment a century ago. These have been and will continue to be preserved and exhibited as an integral part of the house.

Louisvillians have in general avoided connected rowhouses; only one example of Federal townhouses and several clusters from the 1890s are known from the last century. Instead, closely-spaced townhouses have been preferred, sometimes with stone fronts superimposed on brick construction. Even the largest downtown mansions have tended to conform to this type, and of course those few with originally extensive grounds were usually built up around in later years.

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# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1868; 1912

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As George Yater put it, the Ronald-Brennan House is "a visible reminder of the wave of prosperity and the accompanying building boom that swept over Louisville during the first decade following the Civil War, and the only completely intact, completely furnished vestige of the days when most of Louisville's wealthy lived only a stone's throw from the city's commercial heart while lesser folk scattered farther away. . . . It is a well-ordered Victorian oasis in the midst of 20th century visual pollution." It is significant because it is one of very few intact residences north of Broadway in downtown Louisville. Its further significance lies in the fact that it is of a type of residence introduced to Louisville before the Civil War by Henry Whitestone, a prominent Louisville architect (1819-1893), although it is unlikely actually to have been designed by him. The structure exhibits characteristics of a perhaps coarser hand imitating Whitestone's motifs.

This excellent example of an Italianate townhouse was built about 1868 for a Main Street whole-sale tobacco merchant named Francis Ronald. In 1885 the house was purchased by Thomas Brennan, an industrialist and inventor whose patents are said to have been awarded two first prizes at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. One of his eight children, Dr. John Arvid Octerlon Brennan, a prominent local physician, lived in it until his death in 1963. He had added an office wing to the house in 1912. Dr. Brennan left the house and its furnishings to the Filson Club which has recently opened the house as a museum with guided tours. The interior furnishings date back into the nineteenth century and are all objects belonging to the Brennan family and accumulated through the years. In essence, the entire structure evokes the sophisticated, materially comfortable life of the late nineteenth-century affluent town-dweller.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Island of Elegance," by Helen Leopold, The Courier-Journal (Louisville) (October 9, 1960).  
 Jean Howerton, "Well, Those Brennan Boys Are Back," The Courier-Journal (October 7, 1962).  
 Nelson L. Dawson, "The Brennan Family Home: A Preliminary Report," The Filson Club Quarterly, XLVIII, 2. (April, 1974).

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/4 acre UTM OK HL

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,6	6,0,8,5,5,0	4,2,3,3,8,3,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Elizabeth F. Jones, Jefferson County Representative

(WEL)

ORGANIZATION

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

December 19, 1974

STREET & NUMBER

4012 Massie Avenue

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Louisville

STATE

Kentucky

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Eldred W. Milton

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

7-14-75

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

A. B. Howerton

DATE

8/14/75

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

W. M. [Signature]

DATE

AUG 7 1975

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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The Ronald-Brennan House

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Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky  
1971 - State  
Kentucky Heritage Commission  
401 Wapping Street  
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

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The Brennan House, one of very few 19th-century townhouses surviving within the commercial downtown area north of Broadway, reflects in its relatively tall, narrow facade and particularly in its interior layout, its somewhat cramped urban site. The front faces a busy north-south street; to the south there has long been a lower brick commercial building project out to the street; to the north and rear are parking lots. Nevertheless, with its front and rear lawns and a few fine trees, it remains an oasis of nature and grandeur in its urban surroundings.

The grounds of the Ronald-Brennan House are separated from the street by a handsome iron fence set on stone coping with limestone piers at the entrance; these have egg-and-dart molding under lavish but deteriorating crests. The limestone path, also with stone coping, proceeds directly from the gates up three steps to the entrance.

The shallow vestibule is reached from five limestone steps flanked by curved pedestals. The outer opening has a segmental arch echoing those of the adjacent parlor windows. At the level of the stringcourse is a double-corniced hood apparently supported by richly carved or molded brackets that emerge from paneled pilasters. A row of dentils under the hood echoes those of the main cornice. A carved feature comparable in scale to the brackets is centered over the entrance. The inner door is round-arched.

Set back to the north of the main facade is a wing two bays wide repeating the treatment of the front at somewhat diminished scale. The extremely delicate but well-organized cast-iron filigree of the first-story porch with balcony above contrasts to the almost overbearing quality of the main entrance.

The south facade of the main block has a large one-story semi-octagonal bay window topped with iron cresting. On either side, flanking the chimneys of the double-parlor's mantels are long sealed-up window openings. The rear wing is set back and contains a large recessed double gallery with wooden ornamental columns and brackets opening to the south, where there may at one time have been a garden, although late 19th-century city atlases show other residences on adjoining lots.

The floor plan of the first floor, which has 14-foot ceilings, consists of a long narrow straight-run stair hall extending back from the entrance to the dining room which fills the width of the rear wing. To the right of the hall is a long narrow parlor (once perhaps double) with two round-arched white marble mantels flanking an ornately-framed bay

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window. There are particularly fine gilt-framed mirrors over the mantels and matching pier-glasses between the two bay windows at both front and back. A library (formerly the music room) opens to the left off the rear of the front hall. What was once its north bay window now gives onto Dr. Brennan's office and examining room in the 1912 wing.

The dining-room door and window frames have the same flamboyant curves as those of the rest of the house (perhaps developed from Greek Revival "eared" frames). The composition stone mantel, however, with its heraldic cupids, seems to date from the turn of the century, when perhaps golden oak parquet was laid over most of the original flooring (except in the parlor, which seems always to have been fully carpeted) and a number of tinted glass panels were placed in windows, some including the Brennan family coat-of-arms. The location of several of the mantels seem to have been switched at this time, leaving some of the original, more ornate carved soapstone mantels in the rear upstairs bedrooms, one of which was used by the Brennans as a billiard room

To the rear of the dining room the kitchen, pantries, silver closet, backstairs, lavatory, and servants' dining room remain essentially intact. There is only one, rather splendid bathroom on the second floor.

Although structurally sound (the Brennan family maintained the house meticulously during the 80-odd years they lived there), the house needs some stabilization of the basic fabric and cosmetic attention to preserve the former standard of maintenance.