**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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**SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS**

**TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**

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1. **NAME**
   - HISTORIC: The Ronald-Brennan House
   - AND/OR COMMON: The Brennan House

2. **LOCATION**
   - STREET & NUMBER: 631 South Fifth Street
   - CITY, TOWN: Louisville
   - VICINITY OF: _NOT FOR PUBLICATION_
   - CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Third
   - STATE: Kentucky
   - CODE: 021
   - COUNTY: Jefferson
   - CODE: 111

3. **CLASSIFICATION**
   - CATEGORY: X BUILDING(S)
   - OWNERSHIP: X PRIVATE
   - STATUS: X OCCUPIED
   - ACCESSIBLE: X YES: RESTRICTED
   - PRESENT USE: X MUSEUM
   - DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress
   - CITY, TOWN: Washington, D. C.
   - STATE: ___

4. **OWNER OF PROPERTY**
   - NAME: The Filson Club
   - STREET & NUMBER: 118 West Breckenridge Street
   - CITY, TOWN: Louisville
   - 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
   - DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress
   - CITY, TOWN: Washington, D. C.
   - STATE: ___

(continued)
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.
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 wholesale 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 Ochterlon 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.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/4 acre

UTM REFERENCES
A (1,6) 6|0|8|5,5|0 4|2|3,3|8,3|0
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
B C

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

FORM PREPARED BY
NAME / TITLE
Elizabeth F. Jones, Jefferson County Representative (WEL)
ORGANIZATION
Kentucky Heritage Commission
STREET & NUMBER
4012 Massie Avenue
CITY OR TOWN
Louisville
STATE
Kentucky

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

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 4/17/76
DATE AUG 7 1975
The Ronald-Brennan House

CONTINUATION SHEET

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

(continued)
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.