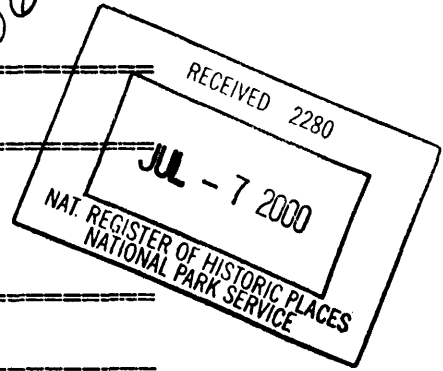


NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

869



1. Name of Property

**WIRTH, LANG & COMPANY/THE LOUISVILLE LEATHER  
COMPANY TANNERY BUILDING**

Other Name/Site Number: **(JFEP13) Louisville Stoneware**

2. Location

Street & Number: **711-715 Brent Street**

Not for publication: **N/A**

City or town: **Louisville** Vicinity: **N/A** Zip code: **40204**

State: **Kentucky** Code: **KY** County: **Jefferson** Code: **111**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally.

*David L. Morgan*

*6-5-2000*

Signature of certifying official Date  
David L. Morgan, SPO and Executive Director, KHC  
State Historic Preservation Office/Kentucky Heritage Council

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Entered in the National Register

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):

*Edson W. Beall 8/2/00*

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action



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## 8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria: **A**  
Criteria Considerations: **N/A**  
Areas of Significance: **INDUSTRY**  
Period of Significance: **1875 - 1920**  
Significant Date(s): **1875 1877 1919**  
Significant Person : **N/A**  
Cultural Affiliation : **N/A**  
Architect/Builder: **UNKNOWN**

Narrative Statement of Significance: **SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS**

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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**SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS**

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

**N/A** preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

**N/A** previously listed in the National Register

**N/A** previously determined eligible by the National Register

**N/A** designated a National Historic Landmark

**N/A** recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**N/A** recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data: **UNKNOWN**

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property **Approximately .75 acres**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal Boundary Description:

**Lots number 65, 66, 67, and 68 of the T.Y. Brent Eastern Addition to the City of Louisville, as recorded in Deed Book 90, Page 547 in Jefferson County. See accompanying plat.**

Boundary Justification :

**The property proposed for nomination is the acreage which has historically been associated with the significant resources. This acreage maintains an integrity of setting and location and is appropriate for nomination.**

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/title: **DONNA M. NEARY**  
Organization: **N/A**  
Date: **April 1, 2000**  
Street & number: **1435 Willow Avenue**  
Telephone: **(502) 456-2239**  
City or town: **Louisville**  
State: **KY**  
Zip code: **40204**

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Property Owner

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(Name: **KENTUCKY CERAMICS, LLC**  
Street & number: **741 Brent Street**  
Telephone: **(502) 582 -1900**  
City or town: **Louisville**  
State: **KY**  
Zip code: **40204**

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Physical Description

The Wirth Lang & Company/Louisville Leather Company Building was once part of a multi-acre complex of buildings which included a railroad spur. Now it remains as the only extant reminder of the thriving tannery business once located there. The building is located at 711-715 Brent Street, Louisville, Kentucky. The main block of the building is a four-and-one-half-story industrial structure built circa 1875 - 1884. A two-story brick rear addition was in place by 1905.

The Wirth Lang & Company/Louisville Leather Company building is on the northeast corner of the 700 block of Brent Street, east of downtown Louisville. This is one of several industrial properties along the rail line in the area. The Hope Worsted Mills is located less than a quarter-mile west of the property. To the south and west of the property is an urban residential and commercial mix. Known as Paristown, the neighborhood relies on the South Fork of the Beargrass Creek to form the northwesternmost boundary of the triangular-shaped neighborhood. Paristown is part of the T.Y. Brent Eastern Subdivision of the city, platted in 1854.

The four-and-one-half-story brick building is approximately 90 feet wide and runs 140 feet long. Star-shaped tie-rods are in evidence on all facades of the main block. The building is set on a stone and brick foundation. When the building was operating as a tannery, the first story of the building housed the roller and the leach house. The second story housed the dynamo and motor, and shipping. The finishing room was on the third story, and the drying room was housed on the fourth floor.

The building exhibits details of Italianate styling. The rectangular main or west facade, is symmetrically divided into eight bays. The second bay south of the alley on the main facade is punctuated by a bracketed, and pedimented entrance to the building. The small overhang is one of only several stylistic nods on this otherwise austere industrial structure. The final or eighth bay on the first floor of the main facade is larger than the others, and provided access to an elevator. By 1905, changes were made to the building to accommodate a larger elevator. It appears that the bay was enlarged and a sliding, metal door installed. The second, third and fourth stories of the main facade are divided into eight symmetrical bays of one-over-one double-hung sash windows. All windows on the first story exhibit stone sills. The windows of the upper stories are framed by brick segmental arches. Several of the voids are currently covered by plywood. Removable security bars are currently in place on several windows.

The south facade of the main block is divided into six symmetrical bays on the first through fourth floors, of double-hung sash windows. Window sizes vary. Two windows on the south facade have been fitted with multi-pane factory windows, similar to those found on the addition. The side-gabled building is accented by four Italianate-styled, full-arched, double-hung sash windows in the upper half story. These windows are located above the second through fourth bays of the fourth story. A brick bulls-eye accents the gable peak.

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The north facade of the main block is divided into six symmetrical bays. The first bays from Brent Street on all stories have no voids because that space accommodates the elevator shaft. The second bays from Brent Street on the first and second stories have been brick-filled to house the enlarged elevator shaft. The first floor of the north facade includes a frame platform and large sliding doors with a shed-roofed metal overhang. This provided ease of shipping and receiving for the manufacturer. Two double-hung sash windows are asymmetrical placed on the second story. The third and fourth floors of the north facade show evenly spaced double-hung sash windows in the fourth through sixth bays. The side gable is accented by two full-arched, double-hung sash windows placed over the second and fourth bays of the fourth story. A brick bulls-eye accents the gable peak.

The east, or rear facade of the main block connects the main block to an addition. Eight symmetrical bays of windows are in view for the third and fourth stories of the main block. The voids on the east facade are currently covered by plywood. A large brick square smokestack with corbeled cap is situated at the north corner of the facade.

By 1905, The Louisville Leather Company plant and offices had grown to cover about four acres. 711-715 Brent Street is the only remaining vestige of the historic leather manufacturing center. A 20-foot square frame building for storing hides was located near the bark sheds. A one-story frame building identified as the Tanner's Offal Company was located west of the bark sheds, and had a stone foundation platform built on the north side of the building facing the railroad spur.<sup>1</sup>

Adjacent to the tannery was a two-story frame building that housed two vat rooms, leach tanks, and a bark mill on the first story and the cut sole department on the second story. On the first floor of the building, "green" hides were placed into vats and covered with water and oak bark as a part of the tanning process for making oak sole leather.<sup>2</sup> A bark shed was located on the west side of Brent, at 718-720, and two more were located on a lot fronting on Vine

The company also owned 1004 and 1006 Broadway. These had been left as vacant lots, not built on by the leather company. They appear to have been used as an access point from Broadway to the buildings on Brent and Vine Streets. 1004 -1006 Broadway was also listed in the city directories as the address for the Louisville Leather Company. The lots are currently vacant. The Vine Street lot is now vacant, perhaps the buildings being demolished in the 1930s during the construction of the elevated tracks for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad completed in 1936.

A railroad spur to the Louisville Cincinnati and Lexington Railroad company, later the Louisville and Nashville, connected the manufacturer to markets around the country, and the world. In 1884, the spur stopped on the west side of Brent Street on the Louisville Leather Company's bark shed lot. By 1937 the spur was on the former site of the frame building which housed vat rooms and leach tanks. The spur, still evident, allowed the loading of goods directly from the tannery building onto railcars.<sup>3</sup>

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Several facades of the building shows fading remnants of a former tenant who painted signs on the brick walls. A Louisville Stoneware sign is in evidence on the rear facade. Two interior end chimneys pierce the metal roof on the north and south sides of the main block. A wood cornice terminates in returned ends. A frame, windowless dormer is situated on the rear slope of the roof on the main block.

The two story, brick, post and beam construction addition is attached to the east facade of the main block. The south, north and east facades of the addition are each accented by five bays, fitted with multi-paned industrial windows on the first and second stories. Many of the bays have been infilled with concrete block. When the building functioned as a tannery, the beam house was situated on the first floor of the building and the handling room was located on the second floor. The north facade of the addition is fitted with a raised platform covered by a shed-roofed metal overhang. A round, metal pipe protrudes through the overhang and meets the roof line. Large sliding wood doors pierce the facade. The addition is fitted with a very low pitched roof, falling in a slight front gable.

The interior of the building is utilitarian. The first story of the main block is divided into several work rooms or offices. These rooms have plastered walls. The upper stories of the building are not divided into rooms, but open expanses. In the addition, the exposed floor joists are supported by post and beam construction. The interior walls are exposed brick. The floors are poured concrete.

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<sup>1</sup>Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Louisville. KY, 1905

<sup>2</sup>Courier-Journal. July 20, 1930

<sup>3</sup>Historic photographs, UofL Archives; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Louisville. KY, 1905

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Statement of Significance

The historic Wirth, Lang & Company/Louisville Leather Company Tannery Building at 711-715 Brent Street in Louisville, Kentucky was built circa 1875-1884. The building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significant association with the tanning and leather industry in Louisville, Kentucky. This property is being evaluated as significant within the historic context "Tanning and Leather Industry in Louisville, 1840 -1930".

This property appears to be one of the few remaining buildings associated with the tanning and leather industry in the city of Louisville from 1840-1920. Site visits to tannery and leather manufacturing companies listed in the city directories from the mid-nineteenth century through 1920, and consultation with the 1884 *Hopkins Atlas of the City of Louisville and Its Environs*, yielded no extant buildings recognizable from the period. The tanneries considered for this nomination were the Morocco Manufactory and David Frantz Tannery on Buchanan Street, The George and Andrew Schweiss Tannery on Webster Street, the F. Monk Tannery and the J.N. Schumann Tannery on Wayne Street. The National Leather Tannery was located on Washington Street, the Falls City Tannery, owned by Conrad, Faber and Mooney was a large complex near Kentucky Street. The Excelsior Oak Tanning Company was a large complex on 7th Street Road, and two smaller tanneries were located on Ormsby and Dumesnil. West of downtown were the Wedekind, C. Hallenbourg and D. Hallenbourg Tannery on 18th Street. Two smaller tanneries were located in western Louisville, one on 15th Street near Arbegust Street, and the other on Stokes, near West Market. All of these tanneries were located on or near the Louisville Cincinnati and Lexington railroad line and were located near the banks of the Beargrass Creek. The exception on both counts was the small tannery on Stokes Street.<sup>34</sup>

"Tanning and Leather Industry in Louisville, 1840 -1930"

The context, "Tanning and Leather Industry in Louisville, 1840 -1930" is being developed for this nomination. Primary and secondary sources were consulted in the preparation of this context. These include city directories dating from 1840; Sanborn fire insurance maps, tax maps, plats and other historic city maps; United States census returns providing information relating to manufacturing in Louisville, Kentucky and the country; local newspaper articles; and period publications.

Following research and consideration of these sources, conclusions were drawn about the tanning and leather making industry in Louisville.:

- Tanning and leather manufacturing were among the earliest industries in Louisville.
- The beginning of the time period for the context corresponds to the first mention of tanneries in the city directory for the city of Louisville in 1840.
- The ending date for the context, 1930, is noted by period sources as the virtual end of leather manufacture in the city.
- The historic success of the tanning and leather manufacture in Louisville was due to ready access of raw materials, proximity to local and other markets for products, and excellent transportation options for shipping goods to markets.
- Most Tanneries were located on Beargrass Creek, or one of its tributaries.
- Tanners and owners of leather manufacturing interests in Louisville were predominately German-Americans and German immigrants.



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Ante-bellum Tanning and Leather Manufacture in Louisville

The population for the city of Louisville in 1840 was 21,210. From 1780 to 1840, most Louisville business enterprises were occupied with selling and distributing goods. By 1840, several factories or manufacturers were listed in the city directory. Those listed included flour mills, breweries, glass cutting works, a pottery, and rope walks. Fifteen newspapers (distributed daily, weekly or semi-weekly), two binderies and one periodical were being produced. In addition, two tanneries were listed in operation. One historian sees the period beginning in 1840 as the movement toward manufacturing as Louisville took on a pronounced role in supplying goods to the south and southwest by steamboat. Louisville's advantageous position at the falls and its active port created new markets, easily accessible by river. <sup>1</sup> Louisville was expanding from a point of distribution to a manufacturing center. Its reputation for quality products gave it an edge over other cities' manufacturers who could produce larger quantities. According to one account, "Louisville has been overshadowed by rival cities in this, that on the other line of goods as far as volume of manufactured output is concerned, yet this city maintains to an unusual degree the reputation established by its earlier factories, namely, of producing wares of the better grades and higher qualities whether it be in lard or flour, horse collars or sole leather, architectural iron or agricultural implements"<sup>2</sup>.

Marked increase in manufacturing citywide occurred from 1840 to 1845, and the population of the city doubled in that period. Six tanneries are included among an explosion of manufacturing interests listed in the 1844 city directory. Louisville in a matter of five years had become a bustling manufacturing and distribution center. Industry included twelve foundries, one rolling mill, two bagging factories, six cordage and rope factories, four flour mills, four lard oil factories, two potteries, three piano factories, eight brick yards and three ship yards. Twenty-eight steamboats were built at Louisville in 1843. <sup>3</sup>

The population of Louisville in 1850 was approximately 43,200. <sup>4</sup> Although Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Missouri were growing in population and industry, Louisville businessmen did not target those growing states for new markets, but concentrated their business in the existing markets of the south.<sup>5</sup>

There continued to be goods imported into Louisville for trade. In 1855, 2539 rolls of leather valued at approximately \$30,500 were received at Louisville, imported from east of the Cape of Good Hope in a variety of forms. <sup>6</sup> The number of hides and other articles recorded in the table is viewed as inaccurate by the author because local merchants did not record quantities of goods received by wagon with any consistency. <sup>7</sup> Only those goods arriving at the wharf by water are believed to have been correctly enumerated.

By 1857 the number of people living in Louisville had risen to 64,665 which also enumerated free blacks and enslaved African Americans. Statistics from 1857 record eight leather manufacturers operating in the city and employing 66 people. In comparison to other industries for the same year, 19 clothing manufacturing concerns and 17 carriage and wagon manufacturers were represented. <sup>8</sup> Goldbach, Krieger, Ryan and Stokes consistently appeared as owners of leather tanning businesses during the time of study for this context. Most were located on West Main and West Market in the downtown core between First and Seventh Streets. <sup>9</sup> Census records from 1860 list 436 manufacturing plants or factories operating in Louisville.

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Changing Market for the Industry

The Civil War from 1861 to 1865 almost halted completely the southern trade from Louisville. The industries and manufacturing concerns were individually affected, depending on the goods being produced. Those producing clothing, machinery, steamboat and other transportation supplies and food provisions were kept in production to supply federal demands for goods. Others factory buildings were called into service as barracks and hospitals for the Union Army. Following the end of the Civil War, Louisville resumed trade with the southern states through overland transportation mode.<sup>10</sup> After the War, the railroad took predominance over the steamboat in shipping goods and services from Louisville, and opened new markets for goods produced. The Louisville and Nashville Railroad put Louisville in contact with every major city within a 300 mile radius.

Census data from 1870 records nearly 100 percent increase from 1860 in number of factories in the city.<sup>11</sup> The 1870s through the 1880s saw another great increase of manufacturers in Louisville. The number of factories recorded in the 1870 census was 800, and by 1880, 1200 manufacturers were listed. Statistics list fourteen tanneries operating in Louisville in 1870 and 17 by 1880. Leather manufacturers in 1870 were numbered at ten and had gone down to nine concerns by 1880. In contrast, saddle and harness makers numbered 22 in 1870 and had soared to 87 businesses by 1880.<sup>12</sup>

By 1880 Louisville was noted as the second largest leather manufacturing city in the United States<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, only eight businesses appear in the city directory listing for Leather and Findings businesses. Herman Wirth, a tanner operating on Brent Street as Wirth Lang & Company, is included in the alphabetical listing, but not in the cross listing. It seems likely that other tanners did not choose to pay for advertisements in the cross listing, where most of the entries with bolded typeface are located in the downtown core.

The period from the 1880s to the 1890s show Louisville business interests developing new markets for manufactured goods, and a movement away from almost complete dependence on the markets of the south. The north and west became points of destination for products made in Louisville, and new foreign markets were developed. Leather was a product that was in great demand in the developing states being settled throughout the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Manufacturing in general and the leather industry in Louisville specifically was impacted by the voluntarily immigration of foreigners during the nineteenth century. Among them were the English, Scotch, Germans, French and Irish. These new residents to Louisville assimilated into the community and began businesses, including manufacturing concerns. The development and operation of the leather industry was influenced by German immigrants. "Many important lines of manufacturing in Louisville are largely, and some almost entirely, controlled by Germans and their descendants, notably tanning...horse collars, saddlery trunks". Names such as Goldbach, Krieger, Wirth, Stoess and Wedekind are found in the city directories throughout the time period for this context. Tanners also known as Ryan and Stokes were doing business in Louisville.<sup>15</sup>

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In 1896, 1700 factories were operating in Louisville. A period publication states that, "The tanning business is one of the most notable industries in Louisville, and is represented by nearly a score of tanneries conducted by skilled and enterprising proprietors who take just pride in the excellence of their product. They have earned for Louisville the honor of being foremost in the tanning of fine oak sole, belting and oak harness leathers. In saddlery, harness and horse collars nearly a dozen factories employ several hundreds of men, and despite the wonderful bicycle and electrical

development of this decade, maintain one of the prominent lines of the city's industries. This is also one of the leading points for making trunks and valises. Shoe manufacturing has had an exciting history here. The making of shoes on a large scale by steam power began forty years ago, and, after various ups and downs, became one of the most prominent and prosperous trades, reaching its highest point about 1886. Since that time it has gradually declined, until it is now quite a minor interest. Lack of capital and munitions sufficient to cope with centers where the business is strongly capitalized and well backed is the cause of the decline". <sup>16</sup>Louisville's population in 1900 increased to 204,731. The local leather industry shipped in excess of ten million pounds of leather in 1900 and 1901. <sup>17</sup> Nearly fifty shops making harnesses, bridles and saddlery were doing business in the city in 1900. <sup>18</sup>By 1903, Louisville had gained prominence as the largest market in the world for fine oak tanned leather. <sup>19</sup>The city's population in 1903 was 221,908 and by 1904 had risen to 228, 550. Leather was included as one of the fifteen top manufacturing businesses in the city, along with furniture, agricultural implements, flour and manufactured tobacco. <sup>20</sup>

New Markets for Leather

The population of the city in 1910 was 223, 928. Louisville manufacturers shipped eighteen million pounds of leather in 1914 and 23 million pounds of leather in 1915. <sup>21</sup> Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Massachusetts were centers for leather manufacturing in 1915. Pennsylvania produced nearly one-fourth of all the leather goods in the country. Wisconsin produced 14 percent of all goods and Massachusetts 12 percent. Kentucky was in fourteenth place in the country, with 75 percent of all leather manufacturing for the state happening in Louisville. <sup>22</sup>

New Markets were also opening up for leather which had been captured locally. Harbison and Gathright, founded in 1865 at Seventh and Main Streets, added a department for manufacturing "motor car accessories on an extensive scale" in 1914. <sup>23</sup> The Ford Motor Company opened an assembly plant in Louisville at Third and Eastern Parkway in 1916. The automobile seats were covered with leather, creating a local market for leather goods designed for the automobile industry.

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World War One strongly impacted Louisville industries calling on them to help support the war effort. Camp Zachary Taylor hosted 28,000 Army recruits during the War, including a calvary unit.<sup>24</sup> Louisville tanneries were producing quantities of leather throughout the War years, 1917-19. Nine tanneries were operating in the city in 1918 employing 600 people. They were producing "oak sole leather, harness leather, collar leather, shirting and welt leather, chrome sole leather, scoured sole leather and Texas oak leather". Many of those had been in business for many years.<sup>25</sup> Two important factors for any manufacturing concern were met in Louisville for the leather goods industry; close proximity to raw materials and ease of distribution to markets. The Ohio River, by mid-century the railroad and later, improved roads, gave access to international markets for leather and leather goods. Local tanneries were shipping finished leather to Canada, Germany (after the War), France, Belgium, England, South America, Asia, Africa, Australia and New

Zealand. These countries would produce boots, shoes, gloves, mittens, belting, trunks, valises and bookbindings. In some cases, the finished goods would be imported back to these shores for sale.<sup>26</sup>

By 1918, eight companies were creating leather products, employing three hundred people. These products included buggy, wagon and truck harnesses and riding saddles and bridles. There was a noted change in the industry in that "There is also an extensive line of automobile leather goods manufactured here. Automobile leather goods form a large part of the Louisville harness and saddlery industry and is growing very rapidly becoming a recognized distribution center of automobile accessories and automobile parts, in which leather accessories occupy an important position"<sup>27</sup>. The movement of the leather industry into the production of automobile parts by 1920, signals a changing market for leather and leather goods in Louisville. The local dependence moved away from horse and wagon, which lessened the demand for the leather goods associated with that mode of transportation. The ready availability of the automobile put many harness and saddlery craftsmen out of business. The need for such items shrank as residents of Louisville became dependent upon the automobile. Leather accessories for automobiles were produced by fewer businesses. One of the largest tanning and leather manufacturers in the city, The Louisville Leather Company, closed its doors 1919-1920 following the death in 1919 of President Frederick Wirth.

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The Louisville Board of Trade published a booklet called Louisville Kentucky Fifty Years Ago in 1923. The publication designated businesses who had been in business for 50 years or more as "half-century firms". The featured companies did not include any clearly identifiable leather companies or tanneries. However, an entry for "Wedekind and C., H." may be Wedekind, Hallenberg Tanning Company, which operated in west Louisville at 18th Street. <sup>28</sup>

The Louisville Industrial Foundation Directory of Manufacturers and Products listed seven manufacturers of leather products and two tanning companies in 1923. The list included Wedekind, Hallenberg Tanning Company on 18th Street and Globe Tanning Company in west Louisville at 9th and Dumesnil Ave. The list from 1928 recorded five leather manufacturers and one tannery in operation. <sup>29</sup>The National Leather and Shoe Finders Association met at the Brown Hotel on May 22, 1927 for their twenty-third annual convention. Four hundred attendees represented 48 states and Canada. The featured events of the three day conference were tours of plants in Louisville, tours of My Old Kentucky Home for the wives in attendance, and a day at Churchill Downs for the National Leather Men's Handicap Race. <sup>30</sup>

Louisville saw 192 new industries start up between 1920 and 1923. By 1927, 119 more were opened in the community. With these new arrivals the city "could boast that among its plants seven were the largest of their kind in the world, six were the largest in the nation, and 18 the largest in the South. Louisville rose to become the 22nd city in the United States in value of manufactured products, and to 24th place in population with 234,891 residents." <sup>31</sup> However, none of these top industries included the making of leather, as it had in the first decade of the twentieth century.

The change in the leather industry over the decade between 1920 and 1930 was noted in a Courier-Journal article. Leather goods were still being produced in Louisville in 1930 but in much smaller amounts and by fewer people. <sup>32</sup> And later in the decade a writer lamented, "that wonderful old trade of leather worker ... (was) that vanishing industry. Those men of the half-moon knife, the awl and the wax-end are slowly disappearing from the list of homely industries. ...A vanishing trade." <sup>33</sup>

Herman Wirth Tannery

Herman Wirth began a business in 1855 as a tanner on Newburgh Road (now Barret Avenue) near Broadway, working and living at the same address by 1858. <sup>35</sup> He worked by himself until 1864 when he took Lang for a partner. <sup>36</sup> Wirth purchased lot number 62 in the T.Y. Brent Eastern Subdivision in 1858, fronting on Brent Street. Herman Wirth's tanyard was listed at the rear of his Barret Avenue property in the 1867-68 Edwards Directory of the City of Louisville. Herman Wirth accumulated other lots in the subdivision.

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Wirth, Lang & Company

Herman Wirth and Henry Lang, both born in Germany, formed a partnership as Wirth & Lang Company in 1864 working at the tanyard on Barret Avenue at Broadway. Wirth & Lang list the business address as Brent Street near Broadway by 1875.<sup>37</sup>

Wirth, Lang & Company purchased lot number 68 on Brent Street at a Marshal's Sale on December 17, 1877. The land was offered for sale when its owner, Thomas Y. Brent died intestate. Lot number 68 had been platted as part of the T.Y. Brent Eastern Subdivision filed in 1854. Thomas Y. Brent of Louisville had sold lot number 68 and others to his nephew, Thomas Y. Brent of Bourbon County, and later Fayette County, Kentucky in 1860. Thomas Y. Brent's widow, Mary M. Brent of Fayette County, petitioned the Chancery Court of Jefferson County for sale of this and other lots in the T.Y. Brent Eastern Subdivision in 1877. The Chancery Court required handbills be printed and one posted on the door of the Jefferson County Court House on Jefferson Street to advertise the sale of land. In addition, an order required at least three days posting in each the Courier-Journal and the Louisville Anzeiger, the German language newspaper, prior to the Marshal's Sale.

Wirth, Lang & Company paid \$530.00 cash in hand for the lot, as the terms of the sale required. The deed to the property was recorded in Sale Book Number 4, Page 345. The lot was unimproved when purchased in 1877. Mrs. Brent reported that she had been moved to sell the property for financial reasons, having recently been assessed for street improvements and stating that property tax on her late husbands holdings had steadily increased.<sup>38</sup> Wirth, Lang & Company gained ownership of lots 64-68 of the subdivision circa 1875-84 to construct the tannery building.

City maps from 1884 and 1905 show a one-story, linear-plan house and a building on the rear of the property at 714 Barret Avenue belonging to the company. This appears to be where the business was begun by Mr. Wirth. No remnants of the earlier buildings remain.<sup>39</sup>

The city directory entry for 1877 lists Brent Street as the address. The company also changed names circa 1876-77 and added partners. Wirth, Lang & Company was formed and new partners C.H. Mantle and A. Cowan joined the company. The two had formerly partnered as Mantle and Cowan. Their advertisement in the 1876 city directory lists their business as leather, hides, oil, belting and hose wholesale. Mantle and Cowan had been located at 155 Main Street near Fifth Street.<sup>40</sup>

Herman Wirth moved his residence from the Barret Avenue tanyard site to 420 Broadway in 1878. The same year, his son Frederick Wirth was recorded in the city directory as the bookkeeper for the company. Frederick Wirth resided with his father on Broadway near Campbell. By 1879 Mantle and Cowan were no longer listed as partners. Frederick Wirth had been added as a partner in the business.<sup>41</sup>

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COMPANY TANNERY BUILDING

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The Louisville Leather Company

The Louisville Leather Company was incorporated in 1880, formed from Wirth, Lang & Company. The same year, the property was transferred to Frederick Wirth. Herman Wirth remained as president of the company, and by 1883 Frederick Wirth had been appointed secretary and treasurer for the manufacturing company. The Wirths had also moved their residence to 906 East Broadway. By 1899 their residence was recorded as 524 East Broadway.<sup>42</sup>

Between the land purchases in the 1870s and 1884, with Herman Wirth at the helm, the operation grew significantly as The Louisville Leather Company. The original tanners shop site on Barret Avenue was maintained and additional lots purchased to create a multiple acre manufacturing interest with several buildings and a rail spur.<sup>43</sup>

Herman Wirth died in 1902, and Frederick Wirth was named as president. John Hepp was named secretary and treasurer of the Louisville Leather Company circa 1902-03. Frederick Wirth and wife Emma Lang Wirth, daughter to partner Henry Lang, moved to 1057 Cherokee Road with their daughter following the death of his father.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike the majority of leather manufacturers advertising in the city directories, Herman Wirth and Henry Lang (who never advertised in the city directories) located their tannery east of the downtown core, off Broadway. The obvious benefits of their choice were vacant lots for sale close to town, ready access to water and sewers, and road and rail options for transporting goods and receiving supplies and materials for manufacturing. The Bourbon Stock Yards, a source of hides, was also less than one-half mile from the tannery. Sewers and water pipes had been installed on Brent Street by the 1880s. The south fork of Beargrass Creek is located approximately fifty yards southwest of the tannery. The roads leading to the plant, Broadway, Barret, Brent, Vine and Breckenridge Streets, were macadamized or blacktop by 1884. The railroad tracks followed the line of the South Fork of Beargrass Creek and provided ready access to domestic and foreign markets.

The local leather industry shipped in excess of ten million pounds of leather in 1900 and 1901.<sup>45</sup> By 1903, Louisville had gained prominence as the largest market in the world for fine oak tanned leather.<sup>46</sup> At the beginning of the century, leather was included as one of the fifteen top manufacturing businesses in the city, along with furniture, agricultural implements, flour and manufactured tobacco.<sup>47</sup>

The Louisville Leather Company was lauded in 1908 as "one of the oldest and most surely established industries of the city and under the present management is making a record that promises to place it far in advance of all competitors".<sup>48</sup> That year, forty employees were turning out 1000 "finished sides of sole leather" per week.

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Large demand for the sole leather manufactured by the Louisville Leather Company came from the South and Southwest and the North and Northwest. <sup>1</sup> Before and after the Civil War the South was a key market for goods produced in Louisville. The zenith of The Louisville Leather Company from the 1880s to its closing in 1920 may be Louisville. <sup>1</sup>

The Louisville Leather Company vacated the building at 711-715 Brent Street between 1919 and 1920. Frederick Wirth died February 27, 1919, and the business appears to have been closed shortly after his death. A story in the Courier-Journal says of Frederick Wirth, "He was one of the leading leather men of the United States". <sup>1</sup>

The new occupant at 711-715 Brent Street was R. Mansfeld & Son Inc. owned by Henry Wedekind. The shift in occupants represents a regional movement into furniture manufacturing in Louisville in the 1920s, as documented by Carolyn Brooks in the National Register context "Furniture Manufacturing in Louisville, Kentucky 1832-1941". Mansfeld manufactured department store cases, drug store equipment, show cases and bank fixtures. Interestingly, Wedekind, Hallenberg Tanning Company had been a large concern in the leather business. It is unknown if there is any connection.

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pg. 276.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, pg. 276.

<sup>6</sup> Directory of the City of Louisville 1864

<sup>7</sup> Directory and Business Directory for the City of Louisville, 1855-56

<sup>8</sup> Hurd and Burrows City Directory 1858-59

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, pg. 276.



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<sup>11</sup> Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1880

<sup>12</sup> Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1880

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, pg. 277

<sup>15</sup> Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1770s, 1880; Johnson, pg. 282

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, pg. 280

<sup>17</sup> Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1902

<sup>18</sup> Garnett V. Keller "And Another Thing --" Louisville Times, April 6, 1937

<sup>19</sup> Visit To The Southern Cities: Louisville Board of Trade Souvenir, November 16 - 21, 1903

<sup>20</sup> Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1904

<sup>21</sup> Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1920

<sup>22</sup> Courier-Journal. "Leather and Leather Goods (Not Including Shoes) : Louisville Is In Center of Hide Producing Country and Is a Factor In the Manufactured Product, But the Industry Could Be Extended To Make This City One of the Great Fabricating Markets of the World" November 14, 1915

<sup>23</sup> Louisville Herald. "Has Made Saddles Fifty-Nine Years." March 9, 1923; Louisville Post. "Founder One Of 'Morgan's Men': J.B. Gathright Gained Basis of Successful Business While in the Confederate Army. March 9, 1923)

<sup>24</sup> George H. Yater. Two Hundred Years at the Falls of the Ohio: A History of Louisville and Jefferson County. The Filson Club: Louisville, 1987

<sup>25</sup> Courier-Journal. "Nine Tanneries Form Industry Useful to City" March 12, 1918. pg. 11, Section 2

<sup>26</sup> Courier-Journal "Leather and Leather Goods (Not Including Shoes) : Louisville Is In Center of Hide Producing Country and Is a Factor In the Manufactured Product, But the Industry Could Be Extended To Make This City One of the Great Fabricating Markets of the World" November 14, 1915

<sup>27</sup> Courier-Journal. "8 Plants Create Leather Goods In Numerous Line" March 12, 1918, page. 11, Section 2

<sup>28</sup> Louisville, Kentucky Fifty Years Ago. Louisville, 1923

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- <sup>29</sup>Louisville Industrial Foundation. *Louisville at the Falls of the Ohio: Directory of Manufacturers and Products*, Louisville, 1923, 1928
- <sup>30</sup>Courier-Journal. Leather Men Gather Here. May 22, 1927
- <sup>31</sup>Louisville Gas and Electric Company Advertising Section, the Courier-Journal, Sunday, February 17, 1963, pg. 21
- <sup>32</sup>Courier-Journal. July 20, 1930
- <sup>33</sup>Garnett V. Keller "And Another Thing --" *Louisville Times*. April 6, 1937
- <sup>34</sup>G.M Hopkins Atlas of the City of Louisville, and It's Environs. 1884
- <sup>35</sup>Hurd and Burrows City Directory 1858-59
- <sup>36</sup>Louisville Anzeiger - Jubileums Beilage. 1909:Caron's Directory 1875, 1876
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup>Mary M. Brent, Plaintiff vs. Mary C. Brent, and co. defendants, Case 31664, Louisville Chancery Court
- <sup>39</sup>Greater Louisville Illustrated: The South's Most Progressive Twentieth Century Metropolis, pg. 176, Louisville, 1908
- <sup>40</sup>Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1877
- <sup>41</sup>Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1879
- <sup>42</sup>Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1883, 1899
- <sup>43</sup>G.M Hopkins Atlas of the City of Louisville, and It's Environs. 1884; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Louisville. KY, 1905
- <sup>44</sup>Jefferson County deeds; Greater Louisville Illustrated: The South's Most Progressive Twentieth Century Metropolis, pg. 176, Louisville, 1908
- <sup>45</sup>Caron's Annual Directory for the City of Louisville, 1902
- <sup>46</sup>Visit To The Southern Cities: Louisville Board of Trade Souvenir. November 16 - 21. 1903
- <sup>47</sup>Visit To The Southern Cities: Louisville Board of Trade Souvenir. November 16 - 21. 1903
- <sup>48</sup>Greater Louisville Illustrated: The South's Most Progressive Twentieth Century Metropolis, pg. 176, Louisville, 1908

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Filson Club: Louisville, 1987

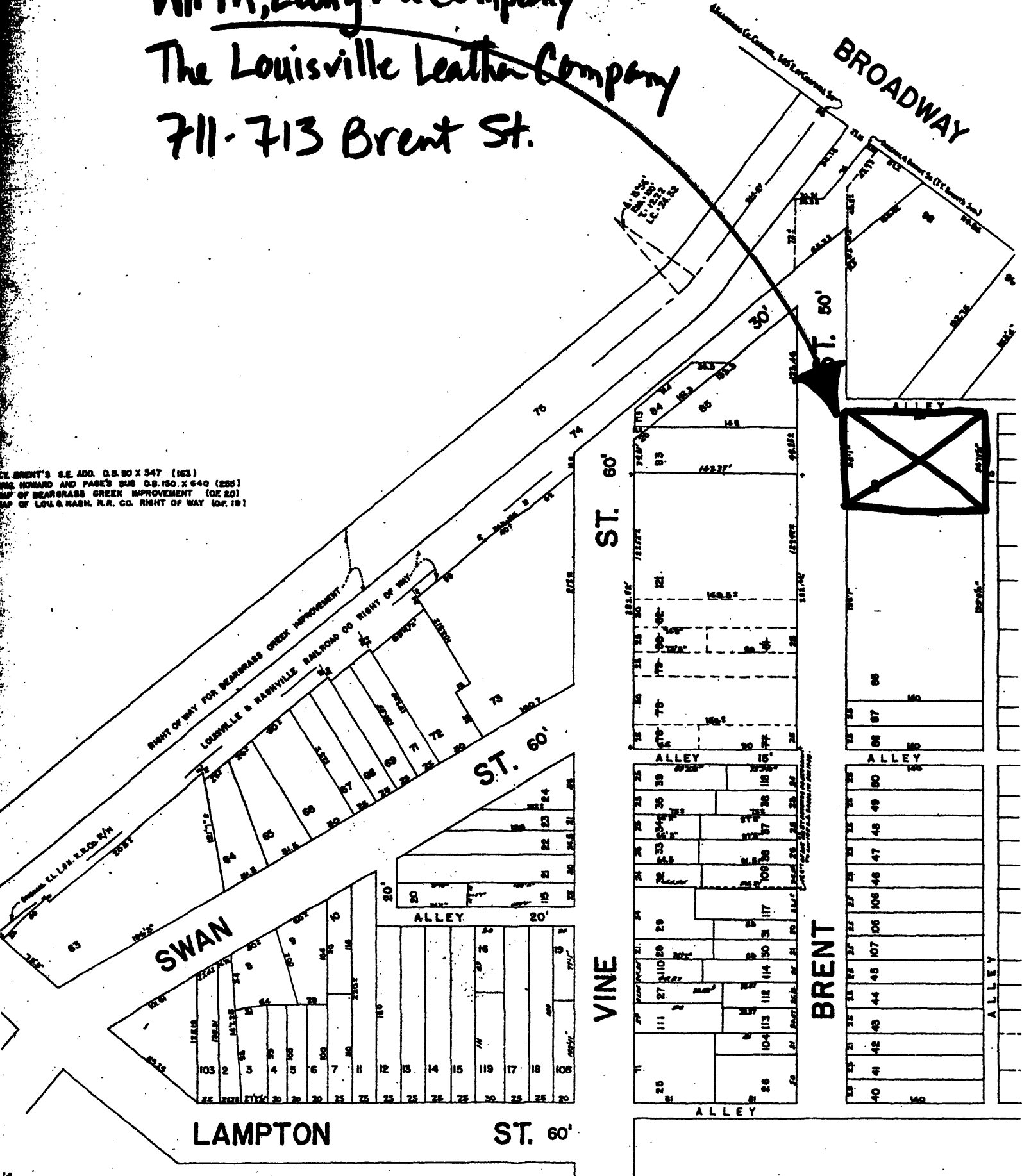


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**JFEP 13**  
**Wirth, Lang and Company**  
**The Louisville Leather Company**  
**711-713 Brent St.**

THOS. F. BURKE  
JEFFERSON COUNTY TAX COMM'R  
R. J. TAPPENHORN - CHIEF DRAFTSMAN  
DRAWN 11-27-38 R.

EX. BRENT'S S.E. ADD. D.B. 90 X 547 (163)  
GRS. HOWARD AND PAGE'S SUB D.B. 150 X 640 (255)  
MAP OF BEARGRASS CREEK IMPROVEMENT (DE 20)  
MAP OF LOU. & NASH. R.R. CO. RIGHT OF WAY (DE 19)



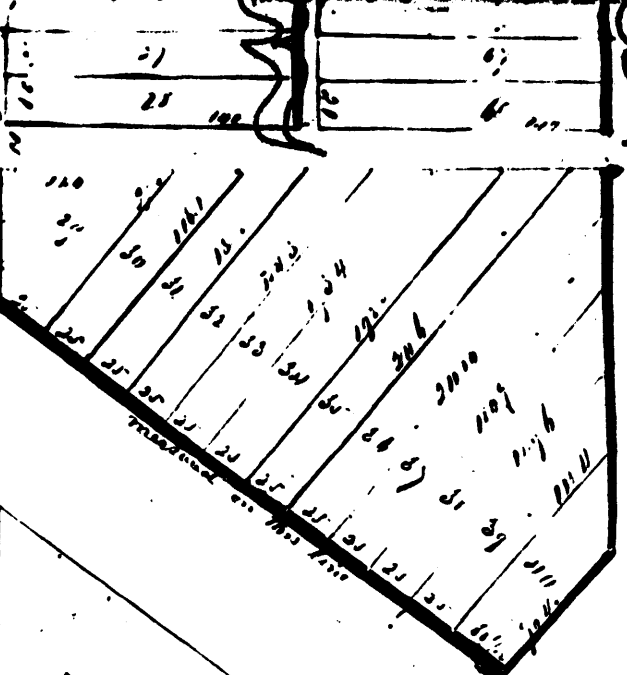
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Broadway

V.V. Brent's

South Eastern Addition  
to the City of Louisville

WIRTH LANG & COMPANY / THE LOUISVILLE LEATHER COMPANY LOTS 65, 66, 67, 68

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COMPANY TANNERY BUILDING

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Photographs

The following information pertains to all photographs:

Donna M. Neary  
March 22, 2000  
Kentucky Heritage Council

Photo 1  
West facade, entrance detail

Photo 2  
South facade

Photo 3  
South facade, detail

Photo 4  
Northwest corner of building

Photo 5  
North facade

Photo 6  
North facade

Photo 7  
Southeast corner of building

# PHOTO MAP

THOS. F. BURKE  
JEFFERSON COUNTY TAX COMM'R  
R. J. TAPPENBORN - CHIEF DRAFTSMAN  
DRAWN 11-27-38. K.

S.E. 1" = 60'

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- ③ same as ②
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WIRTH LANG & COMPANY / THE  
LOUISVILLE LEATHER COMPANY

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