

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

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Mencken, H. L., House

and or common Mencken, H. L., House

**2. Location**

street & number 1524 Hollins Street N/A not for publication

city, town Baltimore N/A vicinity of Cong. Dist.: Seventh

state Maryland code \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ independent city \_\_\_\_\_ code 510

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name University of Maryland, Dr. John S. Toll, President

street & number Elkins Building, Room 2C

city, town College Park N/A vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state Maryland 20742

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Baltimore City Courthouse

street & number North Calvert Street

city, town Baltimore state Maryland 21201

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Maryland Historical Trust  
Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1975  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle

city, town Annapolis state Maryland 21401

# 7. Description

B-926

## Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

## Check one

unaltered  
 altered

## Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

The H. L. Mencken House is a typical middle-class Baltimore row house of the late nineteenth century. Built in the early 1880s, the house is characteristically of brick construction with Italianate decorative detailing. The facade or south elevation is three stories high, three bays wide, crowned by a bracketed cornice, and rests on a marble foundation. A garden enclosed by a brick wall and wooden fencing and featuring a pergola and sculpture extends from the back of the house to Booth Street. Although some changes were made to the property in recent years, the house and garden remain intact for the period of Mencken's occupancy, 1883-1956.

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The H. L. Mencken House stands on the north side of Hollins Street in the western half of the block formed by Stricker and Gilmore Streets in the Union Square neighborhood of west Baltimore. The house fronts on Union Square and is one of a row of almost identical brick houses that borders the north edge of the park. The park was recently restored by the City of Baltimore to its turn-of-the-century appearance. The structure consists of a rectangularly shaped three-story main block with telescoping wing that projects from the rear or north elevation. The one-story extremity of the wing was built about 1923. The three-bay facade or south elevation has stretcher bonding, a decorated and bracketed wood cornice, rectangular shaped double-hung windows with one-over-one lights, a double-doored entranceway with a round arch transom and boldly molded surround, and marble foundation wall and entrance steps. The principal interior woodwork consists of architrave molding.

The house is entered through a small vestibule with paneled walls and marble flooring. Entrance into the main or stair hall is through a set of glazed double doors, one of which bears a brass plaque inscribed with Mencken's father's name. The stairhall is narrow and runs the length of the front parlor with a door at the end leading into the back parlor. The staircase has turned balusters and newels and decorated stepends and rises to the third floor. The front parlor is to the west through an arched doorway which has flush doors but apparently was doorless originally when it was built probably about 1923.

The front and back parlors are rectangularly shaped rooms set perpendicularly to each other. The front parlor has a chimney breast minus the mantel and fireplace opening that it is believed to have had originally. A gilded mirror with a low pier table at the bottom and a hood at the top stands between the two windows on the front or south side of the house. The hood motif is repeated in gilded valances above the windows. The ceiling in the front parlor is divided into panels by plaster strips and has a cornice and central molded medallion above a chandelier. The front and back parlors are connected by a rectangular doorway with paneled pocket doors.

# 8. Significance

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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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	

Specific dates 1883-1956 Builder/Architect unknown

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

### SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

For nearly seventy years, this modest three-story brick row house on Union Square in west Baltimore was the residence of H. L. Mencken (1880-1956), a journalist who became one of the most influential editors, authors, essayists, and social critics in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. The house, which remains intact, reflects the personal side of the man who as editor and co-founder of the American Mercury (1924-1933) and, earlier, editor of The Smart Set (1914-1924) enjoyed literary influence and fame and championed such new and bold American writers as Theodore Dreiser, James Branch Cabell, and Sinclair Lewis. Mencken was also the foremost authority on the American language through his multi-volumed The American Language.

### Mencken: Biographical Notes

Henry Louis Mencken was born in Baltimore on September 12, 1880, the first of four children of August and Anna Mencken. His father and his uncle Henry, after whom he was named, ran a cigar factory in west Baltimore. At sixteen he graduated with honors from the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, one of the city's leading public high schools, and reluctantly went to work in his father's factory. After the elder Mencken's death in 1899, he took a position with the Baltimore Morning Herald. In about three years, Mencken advanced from Southern Police District reporter to City Hall reporter to city editor of the paper. When the Baltimore fire of 1904 consumed the Herald building along with much of the city's center, Mencken put out the paper from three different places during the next week and contributed to what has been called the best contemporary account of the fire.

In 1906 the Herald failed, and Mencken joined the Baltimore Sun as its Sunday editor, contributing a column on the theater as well. In 1910, when the Evening Sun was launched, he went to work for its editorial page and soon began writing a daily column, "The Free Lance." The highly controversial column, primarily concerned with local issues, continued until 1917, when Mencken's pro-German sympathies - he had gone to Germany as a war correspondent and had advocated American entry on the German side - made it advisable for him to leave the paper temporarily. In 1920 he returned, and began a series of Monday editorial page articles which continued until 1938 and which dealt with every topic from national politics to local streetcars. He also continued to cover such major stories as the national political conventions and the Scopes trial in Tennessee in 1925.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

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See Continuation Sheet No. 4

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Baltimore West, Maryland

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	8	3	5	8	4	4	0	4	3	4	9	7	5	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

The property measures 18' by 150' and consists of one rectangular city lot which is indicated on the enclosed map.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ronald L. Andrews, National Register Administrator

organization Maryland Historical Trust date 12 April 1983

street & number 21 State Circle telephone (301) 269-2438

city or town Annapolis state Maryland 21401

# 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER date 12 April 1983

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (Continued)

A fireplace with a circa 1923 classical-influenced mantel and red tile is in the west wall of the back parlor. Along the north wall is a door leading into the wing and a jib-door leading into the garden. The back parlor was probably originally a dining room and has a plaster cornice. The ceiling in this room is otherwise undecorated except for a mid-twentieth century hanging light fixture.

The third room back on the first floor was last used during the Mencken occupancy as the dining room but probably was originally the kitchen. It is a small room in size and has narrow vertical board wainscoting. An enclosed staircase leading to the basement and the upper levels stands along the south wall. A double-doored closet with glazing is installed along the north wall.

The remaining space on the first floor was built in 1923 as kitchen and pantry. These rooms were renovated by the university and bear little resemblance to the Mencken period, except for window and door moldings.

On the second floor, the front room, which Mencken used during much of his life as a study, has an ell extending over the entrance hall. The woodwork is the original architrave type. This room also apparently had a mantel and fireplace opening originally. The ceiling has dropped acoustical tile, added by the university, which covers part of the window molding. The window molding, however, does not appear to have been damaged when the tile was installed. The back rooms of the second floor are devoid of decoration except for simple architrave molding. A new kitchen and bathroom were installed in this area by the university.

The front room on the third floor originally the size of the one below, is divided into two with the area above the entrance hall partitioned for use as a kitchen. The original baseboard and trim exists intact except for the kitchen area. A mantel in this room has inlaid decoration and appears not to be original but pre-1923. The back room on this floor is small in size and lined with bookcases.

The integrity of the house is high for the Mencken occupancy. Several photographs of the interior indicate that most of the changes noted above were made by the Menckens in modernizing the house. Ventilating units and associated piping added by the university are intrusions but the ventilation was installed in a manner to avoid damaging decorative plaster work.

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Mencken: Biographical Notes (Continued)

Mencken began to win national attention in 1914 when he and George Jean Nathan became coeditors of The Smart Set. In his newspaper and magazine essays, Mencken attacked virtually every aspect of American life - its culture, educational system, religious manias, politics, and the "booboisie," the word Mencken coined to describe the great American public. Mencken's first position with The Smart Set was as book editor. The magazine developed a serious reputation under Mencken. By the time Mencken and Nathan founded the American Mercury in 1924 with Alfred Knopf as publisher, Mencken was well established as a critic of national distinction and importance.<sup>1</sup> The American Mercury became the bible of college students and the American literary set of the 1920s.

Mencken's influence waned during the Depression partly because his irreverence and iconoclasm were better suited to the prosperity of the 1920s, and partly because he vigorously opposed Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal. He had a dislike of government interference in the life of the citizen.

During the 1930s he worked on revisions and supplements to his monumental treatise The American Language, which had made him the foremost authority on the subject. He also contributed to The Sunpapers of Baltimore, published on the occasion of the Sun's centennial in 1937. In the early 1940s he produced three volumes of reminiscences, which Mencken lovers call "the Days books." In Happy Days, Newspaper Days, and Heathen Days, he eschewed political and social comment almost entirely and produced a superb if unconventional autobiographical work. In the fall of 1948, Mencken suffered a severe stroke, from which he appeared to recover physically, but he was left with an inability to read, write, or remember proper names. He died on January 26, 1956.

Mencken's best work includes his American Language volumes and the essays collected in the six-volume Prejudices (1919-27). He also wrote several book-length studies of subjects as varied as the playwright George Bernard Shaw (1905), the philosopher Fredrich Nietzsche (1908), women (1917), democracy (1926), and religion (1930). The first of his 30-odd books was a collection of poems called Ventures Into Verse.

Although he achieved the status of a national celebrity, Mencken never moved away from his beloved Baltimore. He had a strong appreciation of family life and took family responsibility seriously. At eighteen he assumed the official headship of the house on his father's unexpected death. At 21, he turned down the job of assistant editor of Leslie's Monthly because it meant moving from home to New York.<sup>2</sup> In later years, he customarily spent two or three days at his New York office, then returned to Hollins Street to pursue the orderly, quiet patter of his life.

The house at 1524 Hollins Street was an integral and vital part of Mencken's life. He wrote: "I have lived in one house in Baltimore for nearly forty-five years. It has changed in that time, as I have - but somehow it still remains the same. No conceivable decorator's masterpiece could give me the same ease. It is as much a part of me as my two hands. If I had to leave it I'd be as certainly crippled as if I lost a leg."<sup>3</sup> It had become so early in

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Mencken: Biographical Notes (Continued)

his life. Happy Days contains many references to life in the house and playing in the garden to which he always refers as yard.<sup>4</sup> He left the house for a period of five years, from 1930 to 1935, when he was married to Sara Haardt and they lived in an apartment at 704 Cathedral Street. Within a short time after Sara's death he moved back.

House: Historical Notes:

The house was purchased by August Mencken in 1883. It was constructed in the early 1880s as part of the development of the north side of Union Square. About 1923, a new kitchen was added and sections of the interior altered. Upon the death of August Mencken, Jr., the house was given to the University of Maryland which uses it for residences and offices. The University and the City of Baltimore are negotiating an exchange of the Mencken property for a city-owned property. The H. L. Mencken House would then be placed under the auspices of the Mencken Society, a 300-plus membership organization which honors the journalist.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Charles A. Fecher, Mencken: A Study of His Thought. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup>Carl Bode, Mencken. (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Fecher, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>H. L. Mencken, Happy Days; 1880-1892. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 7.

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Fecher, Charles A. Mencken: A Study of His Thought.  
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940.

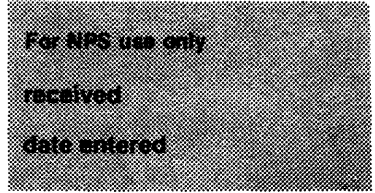
Maryland Historical Trust. State Historic Sites Inventory:  
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Mencken, H. L. Happy Days: 1880-1892.  
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Mencken, H. L., House

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8. A notation in the 28 July 1883 issue of the American Architect and Building News (p. 47) states that Jacob Saum recently built 11 three story brick dwellings on Hollins Street, including the Mencken House, costing \$3,500. The architect is identified as W. Claude Frederic.
9. A major source of information on Mencken and his influence on American life is: Dorsey, John R. On Mencken, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.

J. Rodney Little  
State Historic Preservation Officer

3-24-86

Date