

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Mathews, Courtney, House

other names/site number Christian, John T., House / FA-NE 153

## 2. Location

street & number 547 Breckenridge St.

N/A

not for publication

city or town Lexington

N/A

vicinity

state Kentucky code KY county Fayette code 067 zip code 40508

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

national       statewide       local

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

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

Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register       determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register       removed from the National Register

other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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

## 5. Classification

Courtney Mathews House  
Name of Property

Fayette County, Kentucky  
County and State

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
1		objects
2		<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC / single dwelling

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC / multiple dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modest version of Victorian-era design

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Stone / sandstone

walls: Stone / sandstone

roof: Asphalt

other: Stone / sandstone

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Name of Property

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## **Narrative Description**

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### **Summary Paragraph**

The Courtney Mathews house (FA-NE 153), built circa 1905, is a 1 ½ story building with foundation and walls made from large rough-cut sandstone blocks. Originally a single dwelling building, the hipped roof was finished in banded slate. The house plan is basically rectangular, the style showing influences of a transitional period between the irregular massing of the Victorian era and the blockiness of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century arts and crafts foursquare. The property also has a prominent stone fence and stone walkway. The house was built close to the Kentucky Association racetrack on Breckenridge Street as part of the Loudon Park Association residential area. Located in Lexington, Kentucky, the house is being identified and interpreted for its association with Lexington horseman, Courtney Mathews, a major contributor to African American history in relation to Lexington's horse racing history.

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## **Narrative Description**

### **Development and Character of the Site**

Breckenridge Street, on which this property is located, is notably wide and once served electric cars. The house was originally built near the Kentucky Association racetrack, which was located one street over and parallel to the south side of Breckenridge Street (see attached Map 1). The track remained at this location until it closed in 1933. The house, with its stone exterior, remains architecturally conspicuous among its neighboring houses, covered historically in clapboards. A main entrance to the track faced the south side of Breckenridge Street, near the nominated property. The track remained at this location until it closed in 1933. That area has not been redeveloped for housing, and streets running through it bear names alluding to the earlier use: Mustang Crossing, Murphy's Run, Triple Crown Circle, Thoroughbred Way, and Race Street. Today, Breckenridge Street generally consists of low-income homes and public housing.

The nominated property was built on a lot parceled for residential development by the Loudon Park Building Association. That lot was purchased by D. F. and Tucie Frazee and Joseph M. Scott from the Building Association in 1900 (Deed Book 120, page 136, 6/25/1900).

The property's early physical history is clouded, perhaps by an early disaster. The property's Kentucky Historical Resource Survey form suggests there may have been a house on the site earlier than 1905, and further states the house "was probably built for John T. Christian," who was president of the J. T. Christian Company, a poultry, produce, and eggs company. Christian held that post from 1902-1918 and managed the Lexington Cold Storage Company from 1910-1914.

The first Sanborn Insurance map to show the house was published in 1907, but Lexington's 1906-1907 directory has no entry for 547 Breckenridge Street. Newspaper articles indicate the house of John T. Christian burned in a 1906 fire that spread from the nearby racetrack ("Fire at Track" 1906). In 1908, Christian was living nearby—maybe while the house was under reconstruction—at 531 Breckenridge. Finally, the 1910-11 city directory lists Christian at 547 Breckinridge. The Sanborn maps indicate the house as being stone with slate roof, so it appears Christian's house is the same house that stands today.

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One contributing object on the property is the low stone fence. A walk made of four large stone slabs also fronts the property.

### **Exterior Description**

The roof consists of grooved stone-cut gutters that extend the length of the roofline. The main slope of the roof descends over the southeast corner of the porch. There are seven hipped dormers for seven windows, two looking southwest, three northeast, one northwest, and one southeast. The three original chimneys (still standing) are also made of sandstone.

The sandstone foundation and walls consist of rough-cut sandstone blocks that measure approximately 3 feet long, 1 foot tall, and 10 inches thick. The stone provides a sense of blocky massing.

The exterior shows modest influence of Victoria-era style, with some Princess Anne elements (I am using the Princess Anne term as a convenience, aware that it has not been given official status of style by the community of Architectural Historians).

### **Interior Description**

The sandstone foundation continues through the basement, with sandstone columns and wood timbers (one original timber remains). The floor joists and underdecking are made of oak, and the original maple floors of the interior are still intact and in good condition. Evidence of a fire shows in some visible charring on timbers in the basement. It is not clear whether this was the result of the 1906 fire or if it was unrelated.

The front porch originally had two entrances that both entered into a large front room. This room had two interior double-sided fireplaces. The downstairs consisted of four rooms, which functioned as a dining area, a parlor, a kitchen, and a hall. The second floor contained five rooms, one with a single fireplace. Two original chimney moldings still exist and are in good condition, as is the original maple flooring. Two fireplace mantels, including floor brickwork, are in good condition. The mantelpieces have wooden Corinthian columns in Greek revival style.

### **Change to Property over Time**

The slate roof was replaced by asphalt shingles between 1980 and 1990 due to water damage. The stone gutters are intact. Aluminum awnings were added to the first floor windows. A rear enclosed porch addition, built of redwood walls and limestone foundation, was added circa 1920. The downstairs interior of the house has two added walls, cutting the house into a duplex, so that the two front entrances no longer enter into one large room. One upstairs room has been converted to a bathroom, and part of one downstairs room was enclosed to include a bathroom. The outside integrity of the house remains intact, and most of the inside features maintain integrity, such as the original maple floors and the presence of two of the original fireplaces with moldings, as well as the general layout of the original floor plan.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT / RECREATION

ETHNIC / Black

**Period of Significance**

1928 – 1940

**Significant Dates**

1928

1940

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Mathews, Courtney Lee

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The dates chosen correspond to the period during which Courtney Mathews lived at 547 Breckenridge, indicated by the date of deed conveyance to Mathews (1928) until the year of his death in 1940. These are the major dates which indicate the building's significance within its historic context.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

N/A

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### **Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Courtney Mathews House (FA-NE-153), at 547 Breckenridge (historically spelled "Breckinridge") Street in Lexington, Kentucky, meets National Register Criterion B. Mathews was a well-respected African American horseman who trained at least one Kentucky Derby winner and acted as overseer of Ashland Stud for nearly 40 years. The property is significant within the context of "African American Contributions to Horse Racing in Lexington, Kentucky, 1875-1940." The building served as Mathews's home from 1928-1940, when he was active and successful in his career, and so becomes the listing's Period of Significance. Mathews demonstrated the vital influence of African American horsemen in the horse racing industry of this era. The house's prominent architectural features indicate how one African American horseman was valued in the horse racing industry in Lexington, and rewarded to a degree that enabled him to acquire this level of material comfort.

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### **Narrative Statement of Significance**

#### **Historic Context: African American Contributions to Horse Racing in Lexington, Kentucky**

During an era when few African Americans held professional or other high-status jobs in American society, many blacks made a mark on the horse racing industry within Kentucky. Their success began as early as the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Certainly during the antebellum era, many African Americans were part of the owned assets of those Kentucky farms that produced, trained, and raced thoroughbreds. Although the end of the Civil War and passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865 nominally freed African Americans to participate fully in American society, local systems of racial segregation and inferior treatment soon arose, the so called "Jim Crow laws." With emancipation, blacks continued to play vital roles within Kentucky's horse racing industry which not only enriched the horse owners, but also provided a higher income to them than did many other forms of work available. Horse farms around Lexington and Louisville offered numerous employment opportunities for workers skilled in grooming these animals for competitive racing success.

As horse racing progressed throughout the early- and mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, fewer African American jockeys were accepted into racing. The number of black jockeys dropped dramatically in Lexington between 1880 and 1940, especially in the Kentucky Derby races. Rather than being listed as *jockeys* in the city directories and in the United States census, many African Americans were listed as *trainer jockeys, grooms, or horsemen*.

#### **Courtney Mathews' Life Story**

Born in Jessamine County in 1868, Courtney Mathews probably began his career as a jockey on small circuits. Like many African Americans in the horse racing industry at this time in Lexington, Mathews was often listed in city directories as employed in many types of horse-related occupations, including horse trainer, horseman, hostler, foreman, and overseer. During his residence at the house on Breckenridge, he was listed as foreman and horse trainer.

Not only was Mathews an African American horseman, he was also the overseer of one of the most important horse breeding farms in Lexington's horse racing industry. Henry Clay's estate at Ashland was one of the first places to incorporate purebred breeding of horse stocks in Lexington. Clay was one of the founders of the Kentucky Association for the Improvement of the Breeds of the Stock (or, merely, the Kentucky Association) to whom the track near Breckenridge Street belonged. Clay's

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grandson, Thomas C. McDowell, inherited Ashland Stud after the passing of his father. McDowell, a prominent horse owner and breeder, hired Mathews as a trainer and hostler in 1897.

Mathews trained Alan-a-Dale, one of McDowell's most successful horses, who won the Kentucky Derby, with African American jockey Jimmy Winkfield riding in 1902. Mathews also broke and trained the third-place winner of that same Derby, called The Rival. Mathews remained on at Ashland for thirty-eight years, retiring in 1935, four months after the death of McDowell. He then went on to work at Spendthrift Farm where he remained until his death at his Breckenridge home in 1940. For thirteen important years of his career, Mathews lived in the house on Breckenridge near the Kentucky Association racetrack (see Map 1).

During his residence at the Breckenridge house, Mathews broke, trained, groomed, bred, and/or exercised horses such as Admiration, Batten, Rush, Tom Bowling, Bracegirdle, Kanawaha, The Manager, King's Daughter, Ellen-a-Dale, America, Star Jasmine, Manager Wait, Lady Madcap, Woodlake, Lady Madcap, The Minute Man, Waterblossom, and Distinction. Many of the horses, like Tom Bowling, were so distinguished that they remained in stud for years. Waterblossom was considered "the best mare the Major [McDowell] ever owned."

In a 1928 article, Brownie Leach also credits Mathews for training noted jockey Lucien Lyne, with whom he maintained a close friendship throughout his life (Leach 1928). Mathews also may have taught other horsemen how to train horses, particularly George Denney. Denney worked with Mathews at Ashland and became a successful trainer for McDowell and other horse owners. Leach accredits Denney's success at least in part to Mathews. Thus, Mathews helped shape the career not only of horses but also of African Americans aspiring to belong in the horse racing industry as jockeys, groomsmen, or even trainers.

### **Evaluation of Significance of Courtney Mathews House within the Historic Context**

The residence on the nominated property stands out among its neighbors, signaling that its owner had attained a certain level of wealth and social prestige. Built circa 1905 by John T. Christian, the house incorporates architectural elements that give indications of relative affluence. Its sandstone block walls, foundation, slate roof, and cut-stone gutters were not repeated in the neighborhood of clapboard covered houses. The property's prominent stone fence and slab walk also contribute to the appearance of the owner's economic success. Standing a half-story higher than the surrounding 1-story frame houses, the residence had dominated the immediate landscape by the time that Mathews purchased it in 1928.

When Mathews and his wife Louisa purchased the house, they were only one of two African American families living on Breckenridge. Additionally, they were listed in the census as owning a radio, when only two other neighbors had one. Though Mathews worked most of his life as a horseman, he spent the years 1916-1928 living in a modest house at 530 Ohio Street in Lexington. His 13 years at the Breckenridge Street house represents an important time during his career as overseer of Ashland Stud and at Spendthrift. Whether or not Mathews himself viewed the Breckenridge house as a status symbol, its architectural prominence cannot be overlooked.

Mathews and his fellow African American horsemen lived before the Civil Rights Movement, when the newspapers featured daily evidence of the social ranking of African Americans, both in what was

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reported and sometimes in the absence of coverage. For instance, blacks had only one column dedicated to them, called “Colored Notes”, which typically did not present feature articles, and which would be a contemporary journalistic form to recognize the efforts of black trainers in horse racing. In the absence of printed evidence, the house on Breckenridge Street becomes a more primary document with which to understand Mathews’ significance.

Two factors—the relatively low wages for African Americans in the horse industry, as well as the general removal of those laborers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—make the quality of Mathews’ residence a stronger indicator of his relative stature in the industry. Mathews’ ownership of the house was afforded by his overseer role at Ashland Stud; his training of champion horses also confirms the assessment of his significance. The only other dwelling in the neighborhood that approaches the quality of design and materials of the Mathews House is standing at the entrance to the old African American cemetery on Loudon.

### **Evaluation of Integrity**

A property associated with the African Americans who populated the Lexington area Horse Industry must have integrity of location and sufficient integrity of materials and design to convey their identity to the Period of Significance. If a house has integrity of location, materials, and design, then it will be said to have integrity of association, which is the foundation quality that supports the claim of Criterion A or Criterion B (association with important events or important persons), and thus, its eligibility. While some changes have been made to the Courtney Mathews House since 1940, the integrity of the property remains, its historic qualities of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling and association exist to help us learn about an important figure in this very important Kentucky activity pattern.

The house has complete integrity of **location**. It stands about 1 city block away from the former site of the Kentucky Association racetrack. This proximity illustrates the importance of the house’s location to Mathews’ livelihood. Working for T.C. McDowell, Mathews would have exercised, groomed, and trained horses at McDowell’s farm at Ashland as well as at the Kentucky Association track during spring and fall meets. The house’s proximity to track and stables shows not only in maps but also in evidence of charred timbers in the house’s basement, the remnants of a fire that likely spread from the stables at the racetrack in 1906. Nicknamed “Chittlin’ Switch” –a somewhat pejorative term used to highlight the predominance of African American jockeys and trainers—the Kentucky Association track operated from 1827 until 1933. Mathews would have had very close access to the stables and track through an entrance on the south front of Breckenridge Street.

The house maintains integrity of **setting** on three levels: within the Mathews house site, the immediate street setting of the residential neighborhood, and the slightly larger setting which once included the race track. These three levels reinforce the house’s identity and help us connect Mathews with his work. Though the Kentucky Association track is no longer present, the place is still an open landscape after 80 years. The current equine street names in the neighborhood point to the historic use of the land. Both the landscape and the street names testify to the importance of that resource in defining this part of Lexington. The extra-site residential neighborhood is not being proposed for listing, but is still a vital part of this house’s story.

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The house maintains integrity of **materials** and **design**. The historic exterior materials of sandstone block remain intact. Although the slate roof has been replaced, the alteration allowed for preservation of the interior, so that water damage would not destroy the property. The interior has had slight alterations, but the maple floors, plaster walls, and two fireplace moldings remain intact. Additionally, the design of the house closely resembles its original plan. Materials and design convey Mathews's importance, in that the house incorporates many distinct architectural elements that set it apart within the neighborhood and enable it to serve as a symbol of wealth. Its walls and foundation of large sandstone blocks illustrate the attention to wealth and detail used in the building. Builders in the Bluegrass region of Kentucky generally used limestone rock in construction. The stone-cut gutters display intensive labor, another indication of wealth. The property's prominent stone features—the fence and slab walk—show a relative wealth and prestige for its owner. The slate roof and height make a non-ostentatious show wealth, something a bit more than the other houses in the immediate area. Having been built in the midst of two vacant lots and among 1-story frame houses, the Courtney Mathews House would have been very prominent on the street and in the neighborhood.

The house retains integrity of **feeling** of the era in which Mathews achieved his significance, particularly in its integrity of setting, materials, and design. The house gives some of the same impressions that one might have had while viewing it during the Period of Significance, knowing the identity and occupation of its owner.

Finally, the factors identified above all provide an integrity of **association**, between Mathews, the property, and the industry in which he achieved his success. Mathews moved to the house in 1928 and it was his final residence until his death in 1940. The house is a well preserved element of an important local industry, which remains an iconic institution within Lexington and the central part of the Commonwealth. Given these considerations, the conclusion is the house is eligible for National Register listing.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

### Bibliography

- "African Americans at Ashland." Ashland, The Henry Clay Estate. Web. November 2010.  
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 "McDowell's String." *Lexington Leader* 4 Jun. 1905: sec. 2, p. 3, col. 3.  
 "A New Stud Formed." *Lexington Leader* 30 Mar. 1890: p. 7, col. 2.  
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 Smyth, Philip. Interview with owner by Sarah McCartt. October 2010.  
 "Spring Meeting." *Lexington Leader* 19 Feb. 1905: sec. 2, p. 3, col. 2.  
 "Turf News." *Lexington Leader* 6 Jun. 1905: pg. 7, col. 3.  
 "World of Sports." *Lexington Leader* 19 Oct. 1905: pg. 7, col. 3.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): FA-NE-153

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** Less than one

**UTM References**

**Coordinate Values Expressed according to 1983 NAD  
Calculated by GIS (KYGEONET)**

1	<u>16</u> Zone	<u>721 390</u> Easting	<u>4214 160</u> Northing	3	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing
2	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing	4	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing

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### Verbal Boundary Description

Lot Number 19 on Block Number 16 as shown on plat of Loudon Park, recorded in Plat Book 1, page 30, fronting on the north side of Breckenridge Street 50 feet, and running back at right angles and of equal width 150 feet.

### Boundary Justification

The boundaries reflect the historic boundaries and original property lines as recorded on Plat maps and in deed books when the land was parceled into lots by the Lexington Land and Building Company.

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### 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Sarah McCartt, Graduate Student  
organization Western Kentucky University, Department of Folk  
Studies and Anthropology date December 7, 2010  
street & number 1906 College Heights Blvd. telephone 270-745-6549  
city or town Bowling Green state KY zip code 42101  
e-mail sarahmmccartt@gmail.com

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### Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** 3 USGS maps indicating the property's location.
- **Continuation Sheets:** Pages 1-9
- **Additional items:** Map 1: Sanborn Insurance Map, 1907, showing location of house in relation to Kentucky Association Race Track

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### Photographs:

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Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Courtney Mathews House  
City or Vicinity: Lexington  
County: Fayette State: Kentucky  
Photographer: Sarah McCartt  
Date Photographed: October 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 3: Photograph 1: Exterior of front of house, facing Breckenridge Street.
- 2 of 3: Photograph 2: View of stone fence, front of house.
- 3 of 3: Photograph 3: Exterior rear of house, showing rear shed addition.

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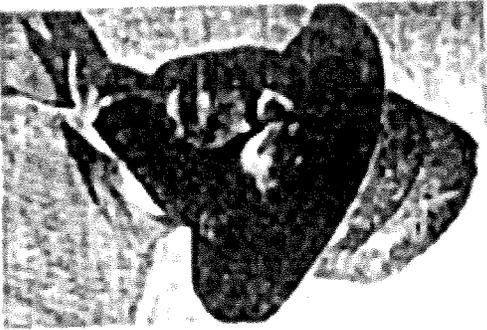
**Property Owner:**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

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name Philip Smyth  
street & number 547 Breckenridge St. telephone 859-225-9334  
city or town Lexington state KY zip code 40508

Courtney Mathews



COURTNEY MATHIEWS

b. 8/5/1868

d. 5/29/1940

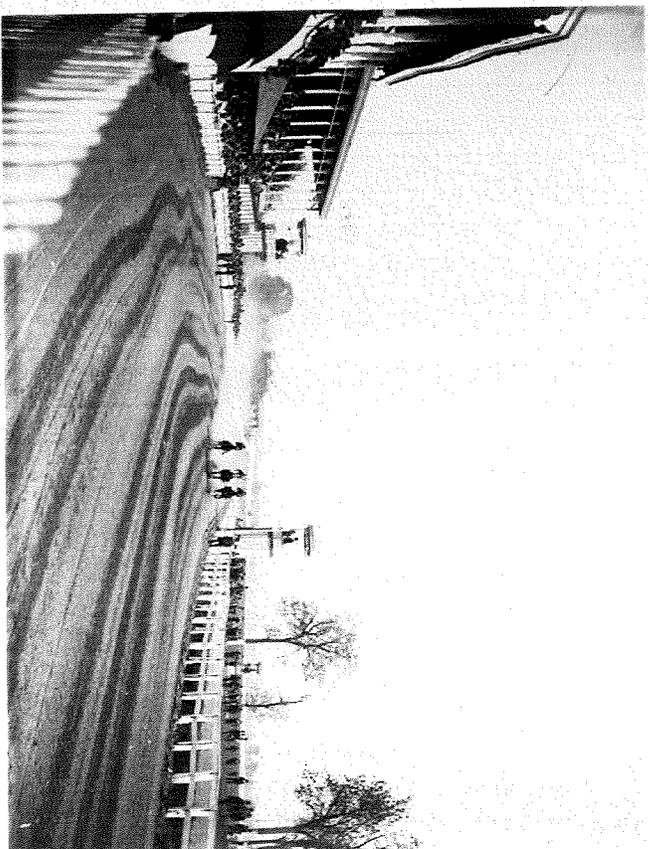
Photo: Blood-Horse magazine

Alan-a-Dale



Photo: Kentuckiana Digital Library

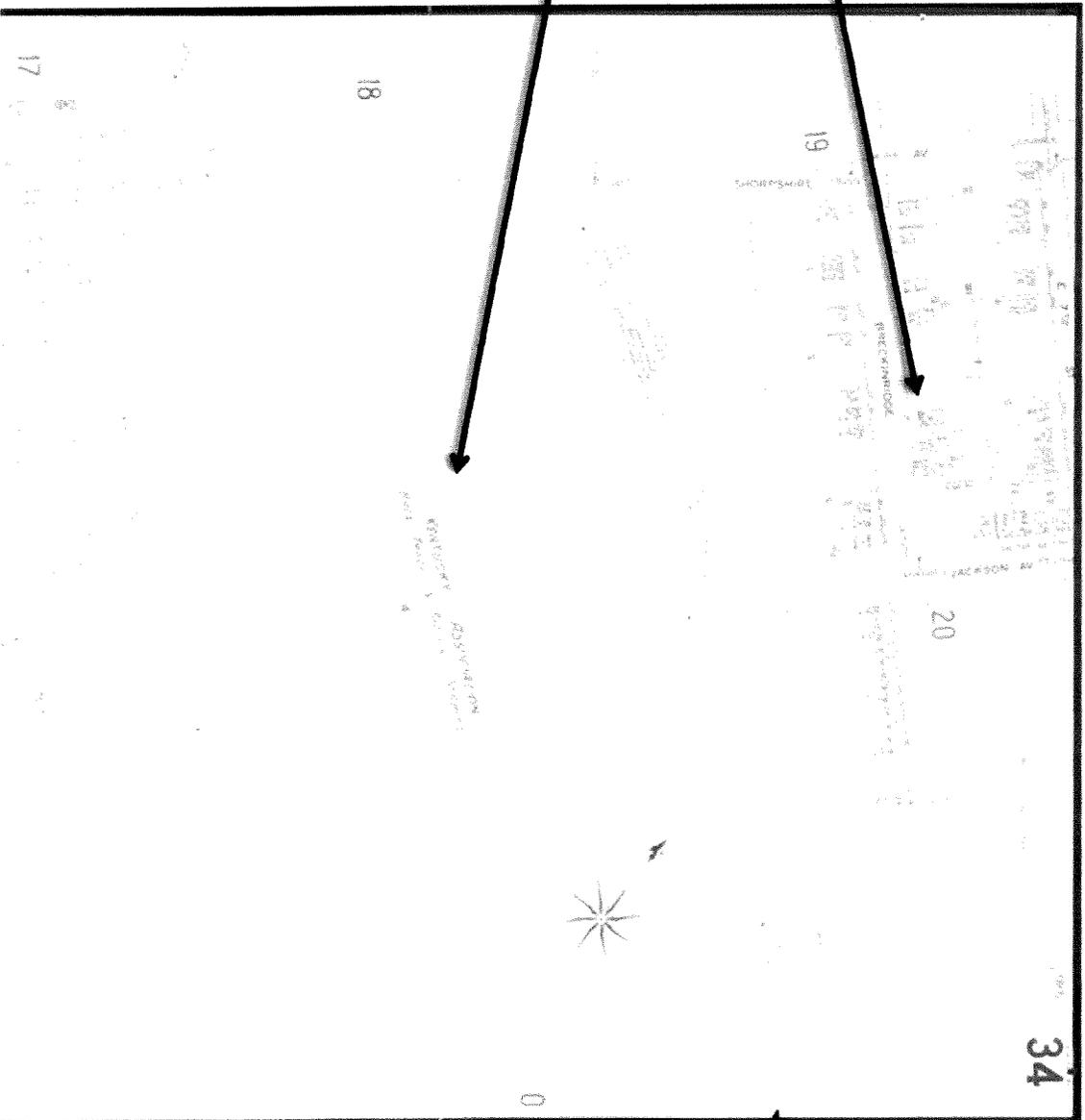
# Kentucky Association Race Track



Photos: Kentuckiana Digital Library



# Property in relation to Kentucky Association Race Track, 1907



Sanborn Insurance Map, Lexington, KY, 1907

Courtney  
Mathews House

Fayette Co., KY

Zone 16

Easting 721390

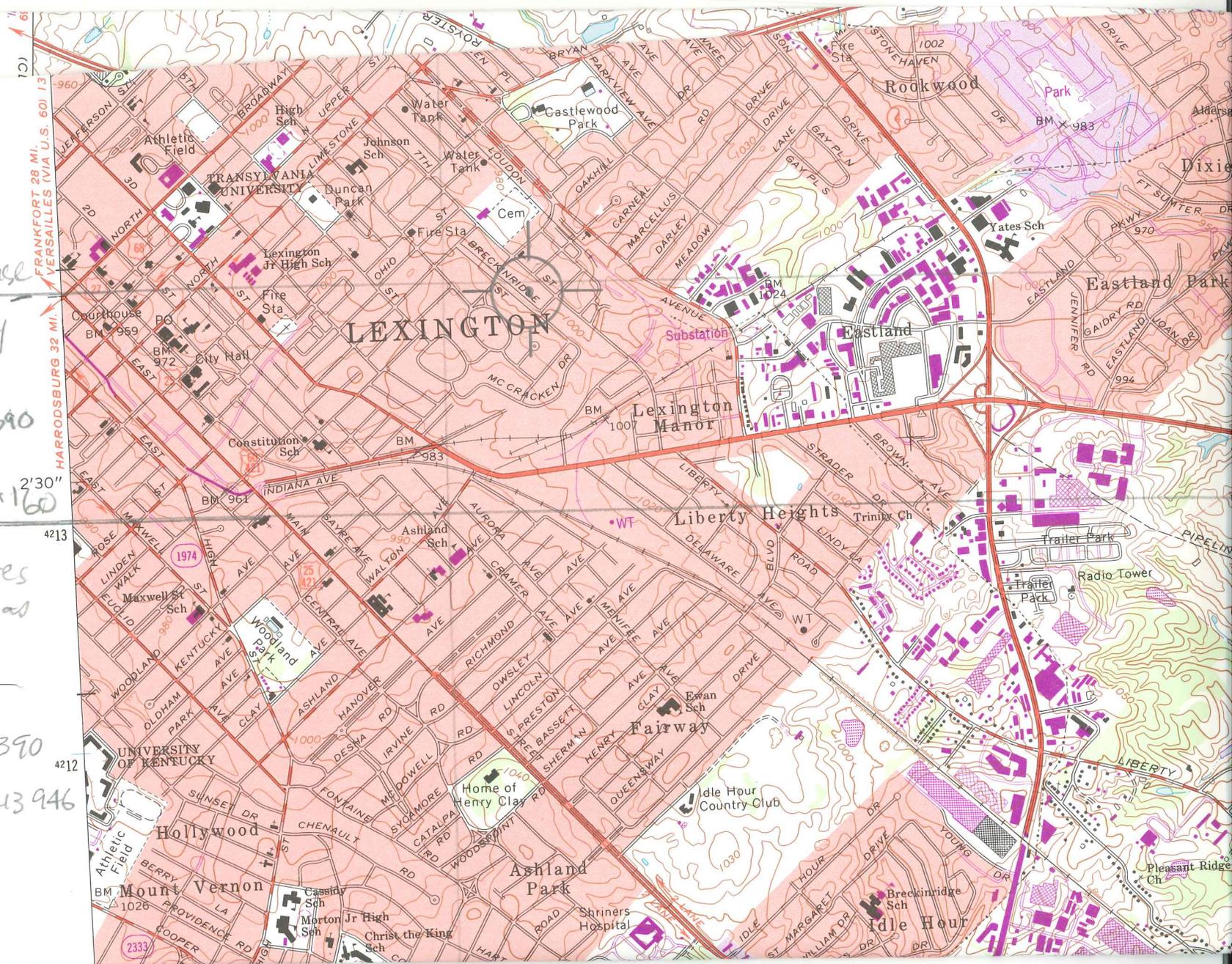
Northing 4214160

coordinates  
expressed as  
NAB 83

NAD 27

Easting 721390

Northing 4213946



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County and State



Name of Property:

Courtney Mathews House

City or Vicinity:

Lexington

County:

Fayette County, Kentucky

Photographer:

Sarah McCart

Date Photographed:

October 2010

Photograph 1 of 3:

Exterior of front of house, facing Breckenridge Street.

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Name of Property

Fayette County, Kentucky

County and State



Name of Property:

Courtney Mathews House

City or Vicinity:

Lexington

County:

Fayette County, Kentucky

Photographer:

Sarah McCartt

Date Photographed:

October 2010

Photograph 2 of 3:

View of stone fence, front of house.

Courtney Mathews House

Name of Property

Fayette County, Kentucky

County and State



Name of Property:

Courtney Mathews House

City or Vicinity:

Lexington

County:

Fayette County, Kentucky

Photographer:

Sarah McCartt

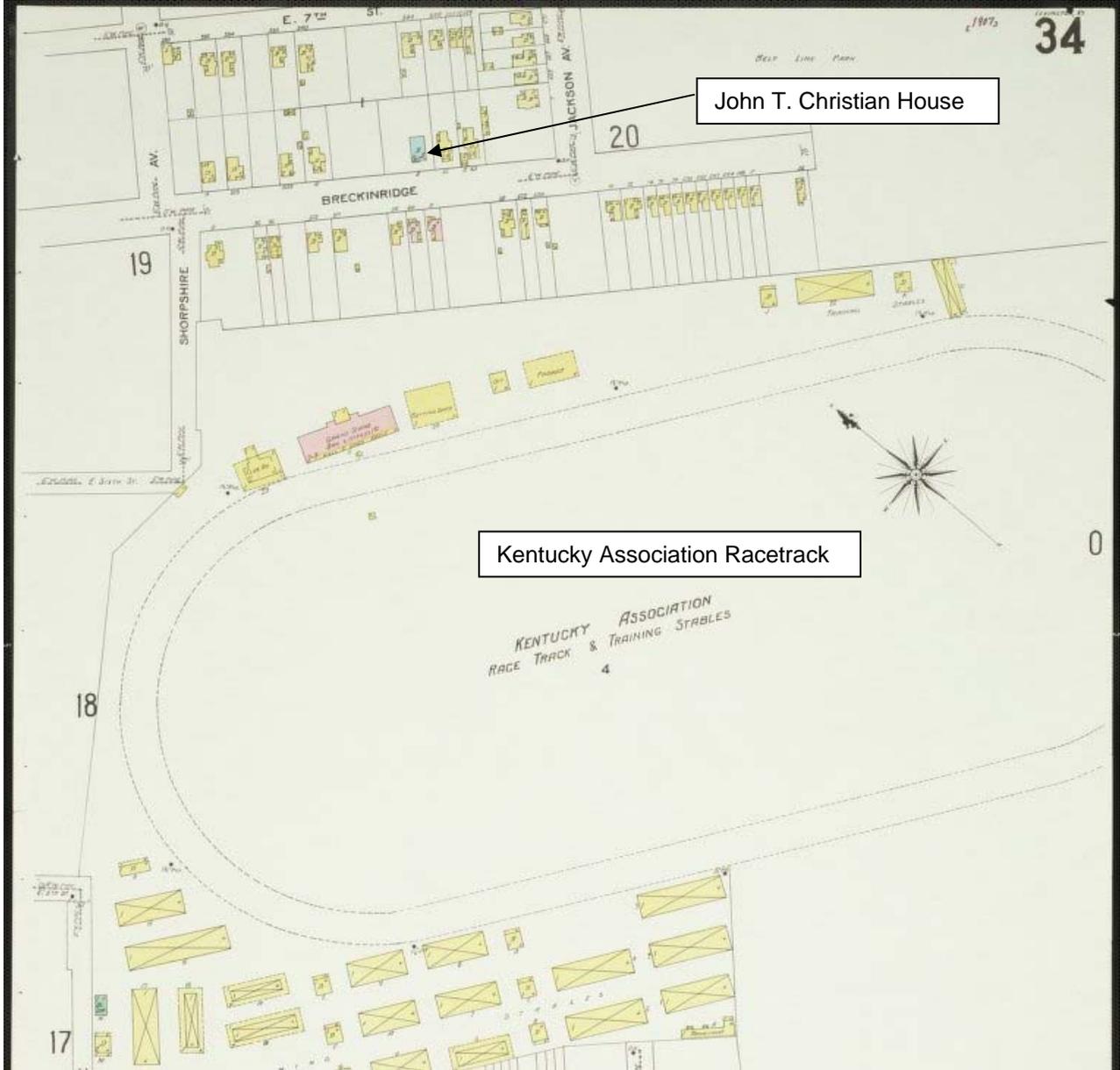
Date Photographed:

October 2010

Photograph 3 of 3:

Exterior of back of house, showing rear shed addition.

Courtney Mathews House  
Name of Property  
Fayette County, Kentucky  
County and State



Map 1  
Name of Property: Courtney Mathews House  
City or Vicinity: Lexington  
County: Fayette County, Kentucky  
Map Description: Sanborn Insurance Map, 1907 showing location of house to Kentucky Association racetrack.