

# Colonial Gardens Designation Report



**Metro Historic Landmarks and Preservation  
Districts Commission**

**August 19, 2008**

## **Colonial Gardens Local Landmark Designation Report Metro Historic Landmarks and Preservation Districts Commission**

### **Location**

The property for consideration is located at 818 West Kenwood Drive on the southeast corner of the intersection of Kenwood Drive and New Cut Road. Colonial Gardens is situated on the east side of New Cut Road opposite Iroquois Park approximately 150 yards northeast of the Iroquois Amphitheater.

### **Description**

Colonial Gardens is sited close to the corner of Kenwood Drive and New Cut Road which relates to its historic use as a roadside attraction. The building's façade is oriented to the north. Currently, parking lots are located to the east and south of the building. Situated at the south end of the property parallel to the property line is a concrete block structure that formerly housed a dry cleaning business that is considered non-contributing. A pizza restaurant is located on the adjacent property to the east of the structure.

Colonial Gardens is a two-and-a-half story, gable-roofed, frame Colonial Revival Style structure. Originally clad with wood siding, aluminum siding was later added to the building. The original building which fronts Kenwood Drive was constructed in 1902. The building's most striking features and those that articulate its early twentieth century Colonial Revival Style include the two-story wooden portico composed of a low, flat roof supported by four square piers, a primary entrance surmounted by a fanlight and flanked by sidelights, multi-pane window sash, and the corner tower, which takes advantage of the corner location and provides an eclectic note reflective of its roadside context. The portico and one-story projecting elements to the east were originally topped by a classical balustrade that has been removed.

Other alterations to the original building have occurred over its history. All but two north facing windows, including the fanlight and sidelights have been covered by aluminum siding and numerous windows on the west façade have been covered with aluminum or plywood. Though the original sash may no longer be intact, physical and documentary evidence should allow window restoration. An original chimney and two, single-story porches have been removed. A concrete block addition at the southern end of the building houses a liquor store. Despite these changes the original building's form and character defining features are intact.

### **History**

Colonial Gardens played a critical role in the development of the South End and Iroquois Park. It was built by innovative entrepreneurs' Fred and Minnie Senning in 1902. Carl Frederick Senning, from Kesse, Germany arrived in Louisville in 1868 and married Minnie Goeper in 1877. They purchased their first restaurant in downtown

Louisville at 407 West Market Street. Five years later they opened a restaurant and hotel on east 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The Sennings were known for introducing new experiences to Louisville and it is said that they introduced finger bowls in the dining room and the first bowling alley.

As the streetcar reached out to South Louisville and the Grand Boulevard stretched to Iroquois Park, the Sennings too found themselves heading south, finally settling at Kenwood Drive and New Cut Road, across the street from Iroquois Park. Here they built Senning's Park and the Senning family continued to introduce Louisville to new attractions for the next four decades. The top floor of the main building served as living quarters for the Senning family. In 1920, their son, William Senning took over the family business. He continued to operate the restaurant and beer garden and eventually opened Louisville's first zoo on the premises. The popularity of the zoo helped bolster attendance for both Iroquois Park and Senning's Park.

The histories of Iroquois Park and the Colonial Garden's structure have been intertwined since the inception of both. Senning's Park was a known hot spot for political dinners and documented history indicates that six Governors were nominated from the gazebo that once graced the beer garden. In its heyday, the popularity of Senning's Park prompted the Louisville Street Railway Company to add cars to their service to Third and New Cut Road. For the observance of Decoration Day, the park reportedly prepared for a crowd of between eight to ten thousand people.

Patrons came via the trolley, had dinner at Sennings and spent the day at the park. The Sennings and Colonial Gardens struggled through the Depression but operations continued until Fred Senning's death on December 6, 1939. Senning's Park was sold to B. A. Watson for \$15,000. He remodeled the property and named it the Colonial Bar and Grill. During the 1940s, Colonial Gardens hosted big band entertainment and dancing. Patrons came for dinner and made their way across the street for a show at the amphitheater.

In the 1950s, Colonial Gardens was purchased by Herm Schmid. Eventually, it became known as the Teen Bar, a strictly non-alcoholic venue popular with South End teens complete with its own newsletter. Teen Bar became known as the place to watch or participate in all of the popular dances. The popular Jitterbug contest, held on Wednesday evenings, was hosted by Ed Kallay. Around 1956, Colonial Gardens was acquired by Carl Coons, who changed the name to Carl's Bar. In 1959, Wilburn "Curly" Bryant leased the property and changed the name back to Colonial Gardens. Bryant operated Colonial Gardens until his death in 1983 and management was assumed by his son John. During the Bryant years, Colonial Gardens was known for its live entertainment. During the 1950s and 1960s, popular bands featured included the Sultans and Monarchs. The 1970s saw the introduction of the country and Urban Cowboy themes. Activities upstairs included pool, darts, karaoke, and a small bar, while the downstairs included the main dance floor, bands, and main bar.

Despite Colonial Gardens strong association with Iroquois Park and people in the South End and the entire city of Louisville, business began to wane and its doors were closed in June of 2003. A capacity crowd of over 600 attended the farewell.

## **Significance**

Colonial Gardens represents the last of the historic road house, beer garden, and entertainment venues that once defined Louisville's South End. In addition to Colonial Gardens, the area once boasted numerous beer gardens, including Simm's Corner, Summer's Park, Iroquois Gardens, the Calico Club, and Gordon's Corner. All of these venues have been lost to new development. Colonial Gardens has been a landmark in the community for over 100 years and highlights one of the entrances to one of Frederick Law Olmsted's most prominent parks, Iroquois Park.

The area that included Kenwood Hill or "Sunshine Hill" as it was known in earlier times and later as Cox's Knob was purchased by Benoni Figg in 1864. Land was cleared for his charcoal business and later he built a small sawmill, opened a rock quarry, and constructed the L&N Railroad Company's Strawberry Station at the intersection of New Cut and Third Street Roads. In 1876, Figg's daughter, Mary, and her new husband, Charles W. Gheens, acquired half of the heavily wooded property and fourteen years later sold it to Sam Stone Bush and the Kenwood Park Residential Company.

In 1888, Louisville Mayor, Charles Jacob, bought 300 acres of the Burnt Knob for the city's largest park, known first as Jacob's Park and later Iroquois Park. By the second half of the nineteenth century, New Cut Road extended south from the Louisville and Nashville Turnpike between the Burnt Knob and Cox's Knob before continuing southward to the county line. The Fourth Street streetcar line was extended past Churchill Downs out Third Street to the entrance of the new city park. By the turn of the century, Senning's Park was an established entertainment center at the corner of Kenwood Avenue and New Cut Road. Although the opening in 1893 of the Grand Boulevard, modern-day Southern Parkway, allowed easier transportation to the area, the first suburban residents were wealthy families who built retreats in the area to escape the summer heat.

Residential development remained sparse until subdivision activity began in the 1930s and 1940s. The Iroquois Amphitheater was built by the Works Progress Administration and in 1939, Lou Tate bought property on Kenwood Hill that included three Bush family summer homes and a shed left by Benoni Figg. This property would become a gathering place for textile artists from around the world and became known as the Little Loomhouse.

As citizens moved farther from the city's core after World War II, this primarily residential area became a popular site for development, especially during the 1950s. Residential development accelerated in the 1960s when Kenwood Hill was extensively developed by T.G. Eckles and his son, William Eckles and when Robert Thieneman

developed Kenwood Terrace on the southern slopes of Iroquois Hill. By the end of the 1960s, the residential character of the Iroquois area was well established.

As area roads, like New Cut Road, were improved with modern paving to become two-lane highways, a need for roadside services emerged to aid motorists. Mom-and-pop establishments were the first types of businesses to locate along the roadside. In an era before corporate chains became the dominant commercial type, locally-owned motels, restaurants, gas stations, and general stores dotted the roadways. Typically, the proprietors lived on the premises to be able to serve customers at any hour.

Roadside restaurants and entertainment venues emerged as a twentieth century phenomenon to serve motorists and residents in the outlying areas of the city. Eating outside of the home was not an entirely new concept, since dining establishments could be found in hotels and along Main Street. Prior to the development of modern paved roadways and automobiles, taverns served travelers on horseback or stagecoaches.

The roadside restaurant distinguished itself from other eateries by being quick, convenient, and accessible. As transportation routes to major cities improved with introduction of the car, roadside services emerged to accommodate both local residents and tourists. Automobile travelers could avoid the more formal downtown restaurants, but still enjoy a reliable meal without having to pack their own food. Rural residents could enjoy a home-style meal without having to take a long trip into town.

A variety of different roadside restaurants began to address the motorist's needs. Family-style restaurants, walk-up food stands, and drive-in restaurants were developed on the outskirts of town along the highway to serve the motoring public. Family-style restaurants tried to distinguish themselves from other roadside dining establishments by offering dependable quality food at a time when other wayside restaurants could be questionable. Attracting the auto traveler's attention through the restaurant's architecture and signs became a significant way of communicating their presence in a sea of roadside dining establishments. The family-style restaurant typically relied on domestic or regional themes to draw patrons to their establishments.

By 1938, the city of Louisville boasted over 600 restaurants which included cafeterias, taverns, inns, coffee shops, luncheonettes, grills, food stands, and cafes. The majority of these establishments were located near the city center or in local neighborhoods. Some like Bauer's Restaurant were located along major roadways leading into Louisville. The Inn Logola on Bardstown Road (U.S. 31); the former Bauer's Restaurant on Brownsboro Road (US 42); Air Devils Inn on Taylorsville Road (State Hwy 155); the demolished Gordon's Corner on Old Third Street at New Cut Road (State Hwy 1020), as well as Simm's Corner, Iroquois Gardens, and the Calico Club were other local establishments that functioned as road houses, taverns or beer gardens during the period.

Roadside attractions were designed to engage the tourist or local citizen in activities that encouraged the patron to stay at a particular locale for an extended period.

Oftentimes, the entertainment venue was a part of a larger roadside complex that could include gas stations, motels, and restaurants. Predictably, this benefited the mom-and-pop proprietor because patrons would spend more money. These roadside attractions were often vernacular in character and ranged from miniature golf courses and petting zoos to dancehalls and roadhouses. Fanciful architecture underscoring the particular amusements being offered was common expression to further draw the customer to the venue.

Early roadside tourism also included visiting local sites of natural beauty. Local and State parks were developed to be destinations offering relaxation and respite from the city. With the introduction of affordable automobiles, an expanded road system, and more leisure time provided by employers, working- and middle-class people were afforded the opportunity to travel inexpensively. During the New Deal era, parks were further enhanced with amenities constructed by the CCC and WPA including amphitheaters, cabins, lodges, hiking trails. Mom-and-Pop businesses capitalized on these scenic destinations by locating their roadside businesses in nearby towns or just outside park boundaries.

Colonial Gardens' historic significance relates to its role as a roadside entertainment, eatery, and beer garden during the early-twentieth century. The property serves as an excellent example of an early roadside commercial building located at the entrance to Louisville's largest and oldest public park. The surviving structures and site of the prosperous Senning's Park and Colonial Gardens, represents the early beginnings of modern roadside services including dining. This historic property marks the cultural response to the transformation of roads and travel modes in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

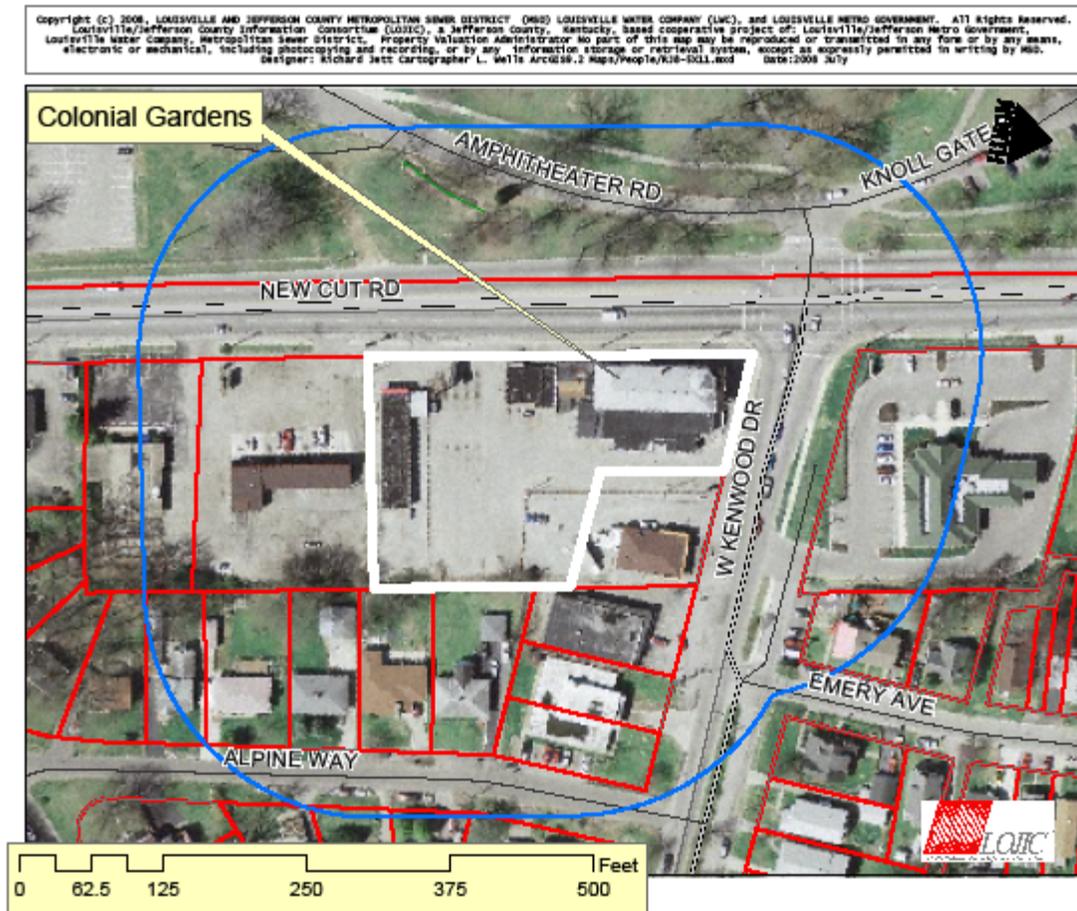
### **Integrity Assessment**

The Colonial Gardens building retains a great deal of historic integrity related to its use as a roadside entertainment venue, eatery, and beer garden. The location of the building has remained the same since it was constructed. The close orientation to the road underscores the historic use as commercial property that was built to serve the increasingly mobile public. Site integrity remains since the Colonial Gardens property is still surrounded by its expansive grounds adjacent to Iroquois Park.

Though some alterations of the original design have occurred overtime, the historic building remains essentially intact. The integrity of both feeling and association is also intact since the site is still strongly identified with South End social life and recreation, especially because of its proximity to Iroquois Park.

## Boundary Justification

The property proposed for Landmarks designation encompass approximately 1.2 acres and is listed by the Jefferson County Property Evaluation Administrator (PVA) as parcel number 062G-0068-0000. This boundary includes the remaining historic resources associated with Colonial Gardens.



## Sources of Information

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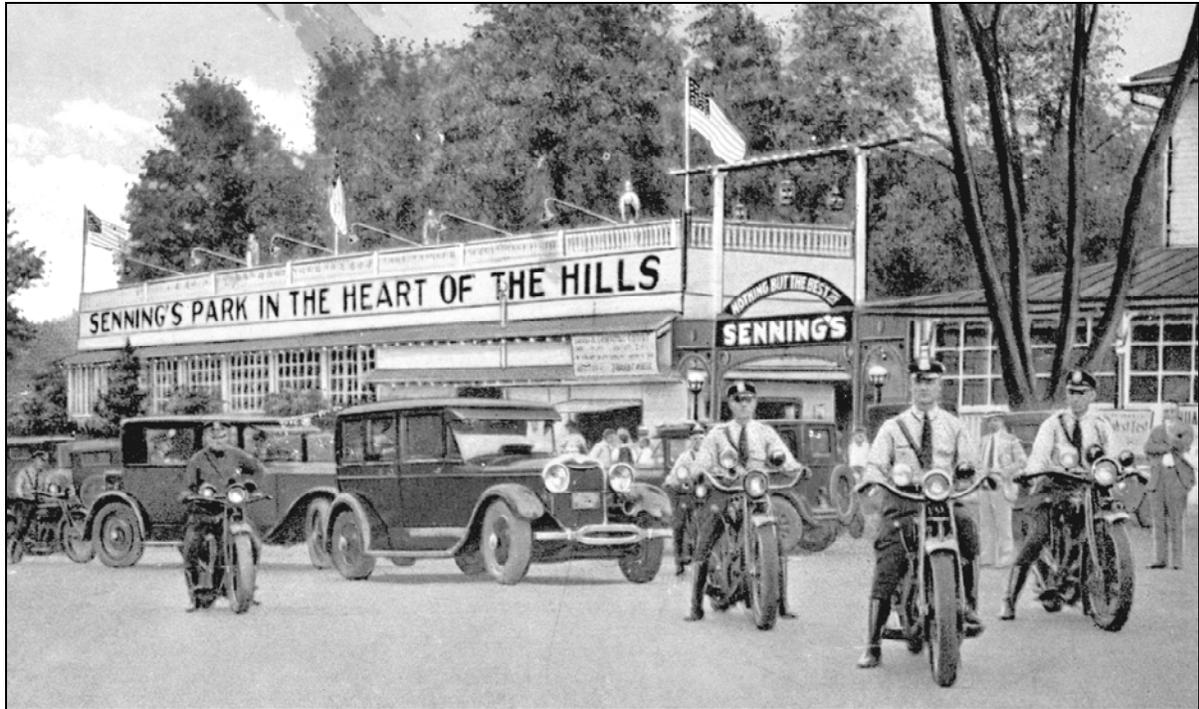
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## Designation Criteria

In considering the designation of any neighborhood, area, Property or Structure in the Jefferson County as a Local Landmark, or District, the Commission shall apply the following criteria with respect to such Structure, Property or District:

Local Landmark Designation Criteria	Comments	Meets	Does Not Meet
(a) Its character, interest, or value as part of the development or heritage of Louisville Metro, Jefferson County, the Commonwealth, or the United States.	Colonial Gardens served local residents and travelers along New Cut Road beginning in 1902. Originally on the outskirts of the city, the commercial site served an important function as an entertainment destination in Louisville's South End.	X	
(b) Its exemplification of the historic, aesthetic, architectural, archaeological, prehistoric or historic archaeological, educational, economic, or cultural heritage of Louisville Metro Jefferson County, the commonwealth, or the nation.	Colonial Gardens represents an important community gathering place. Colonial Gardens became a popular roadside attraction beginning in the early twentieth century. The property has the potential to yield significant archaeological resources related to the social history of the early twentieth century and particularly roadside attractions.	X	
c) Its location as a site of a significant historic event.			X
(d) Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of Louisville Metro, Jefferson County, the commonwealth, or the nation.	The Senning family operated a series of commercial enterprises beginning in 1902 on the property. The Sennings and subsequent owners, including the Schmids, served the local and traveling public in a diverse capacity over time at the site along New Cut Road opposite the entrance to Iroquois Park. Colonial Gardens represents the last of the historic road house, beer garden, and entertainment venues that once defined Louisville's South End.	X	

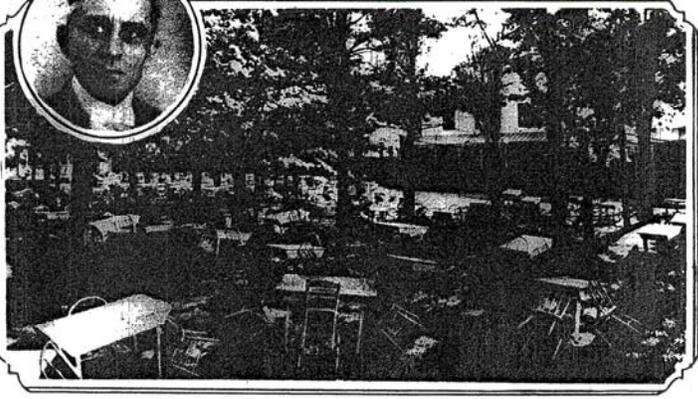
Local Landmark Designation Criteria	Comments	Meets	Does Not Meet
(e) Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen	Though missing contextual details, Colonial Gardens still evokes the Colonial Revival Style.	X	
(f) Its identification as the work of an architect, landscape architect, or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of Louisville Metro, Jefferson County, the commonwealth, or the nation.			X
(g) Its embodiment of elements or architectural design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship, which represents a significant architectural innovation.	Roadside dining in the early-twentieth century was a new phenomenon. To capture the interest of travelers, restaurants cleverly used the architecture of the building as way to attract business. Colonial Gardens used elements of the Colonial Revival Style to evoke a sense of whimsy and southern charm.	X	
(h) Its relationship to other distinctive areas, which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on an historic, cultural, or architectural motif.	Colonial Gardens became a favored South End gathering place once it opened in 1902 and has been closely associated with the history of both the National Register listed, Olmsted designed Iroquois Park and the Little Loomhouse. The nearby Beechmont Neighborhood has recently considered preservation district status to protect its historic character.	X	
(i) Its unique location or physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature or which reinforce the physical continuity of a neighborhood, area, or place within Louisville Metro.	Colonial Gardens has long been identified as a community focal point along New Cut Road at the entrance to Iroquois Park, adjacent to the WPA funded Amphitheater.	X	



*Photograph of Senning's Park courtesy of William Senning, Jr.*



WILLIAM A. SENNING



## IN THE HEART OF THE HILLS

A fragrant, beautiful eating-place. Cozily warm all winter under the palms. A well-cooked chicken, frog leg, baked duck or porterhouse steak dinner prepared by expert chefs and daintily served. A refined atmosphere that will greatly help you enjoy your meal. In the city, yet out of the noise of it. Such is the pleasure which awaits the diner at

◆ **SENNING'S PARK** ◆

*1926 Ad for Senning's Park*



*Senning's Park Bandstand*



*Colonial Gardens, c1940s, Photograph courtesy of University of Louisville Photographic Archives*



*Photograph of Colonial Gardens courtesy of the Louisville Public Library*



*Colonial Gardens photograph, c1950, courtesy of the University of Louisville Photographic Archives*