

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Indiana
COUNTY: Spencer
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:
Brown-Kercheval Home

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
315 South Second Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Rockport

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:
Eighth

STATE:
Indiana

CODE:
18

COUNTY:
Spencer

CODE:
147

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious		
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Louis L. and Eleanor B. (Mrs. Louis L.) Ray

STREET AND NUMBER:
315 South Second Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Rockport

STATE:
Indiana

CODE:
18

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Spencer County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Rockport

STATE:
Indiana

CODE:
18

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
None known

DATE OF SURVEY:
 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:

CODE:

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The frame, 14-room, Brown-Kercheval Home was originally built in 1853-54 as a 6-room, story and a half, gabled "Gothic Cottage." Construction is balloon type of yellow poplar with oak beams. A central hall with open vestibules at either end and two rooms on either side constituted the first floor. The house, when bought on June 24, 1954, by Samuel Gibson Brown, was still unfinished, so the new owner immediately added a one-room kitchen wing with gabled roof. Woodwork shows some Greek Revival and earlier influences; all is hand-planed. Nails are handmade and the original window sashes contain wavy handblown glass, now darkening in color. Window cornices on the front and sides are Gothic "Gingerbread;" the unadorned windows on the back are definitely Greek Revival in feeling. A cistern under the back vestibule furnished filtered water for domestic use. Each room had a chimney for stoves or the two fireplaces, one in the living room and one in the back parlor. Ceilings on the first floor are 12-foot, except for the kitchen which is 10-foot. There is almost no ornamentation. Panels are present beneath each window in all rooms of the first floor, except for the kitchen. Window sashes are 6-paned; some have been placed on weights, others are held open by sticks.

In 1880 the house was "raised" to make four bedrooms and a hall room on the second floor and two bedrooms on the added third floor. The third floor is a copy of the original second floor with a central hall, a bedroom on either side and four unfinished corner storage rooms. All exterior trim, such as window cornices and sashes, were faithfully copied so that few realize that the original house was not three stories. At this same time a tin roof replaced the original cedar shingles and a marblized, cast-iron mantle and grate was placed in the southwest bedroom. Other rooms had flue holes in the chimneys, whose elaborate brickwork caps are important period pieces.

In 1908 the gabled roof and cubby-hole attic above the kitchen was replaced by two rooms, one a bathroom, for running water and electricity had been installed. At the same time the "Colonial-type" front porch with its eight columns and elaborate railing was added. Doors on the second floor indicate the three periods of the house: the earliest are two-panelled, Greek Revival in type. The 1880's are represented by 4-panelled doors; the 1908 doors have 5 panels.

Since 1908 the only changes made have been the excavation of a furnace room and the installation of a hot-air furnace in 1927.

Furnishings of the house are all family pieces, accumulated since 1854, except for a few earlier pioneer pieces moved into the house in 1854. Furniture ranges from pioneer cherry through Late Empire mahogany veneer, to heavy black walnut, mostly made locally or in Evansville, a center for black walnut furniture manufacturing. The double parlors have unusually fine original graining, outlined in white, on the doors, under-window panels, and baseboards. The Brussels carpet with geometric marblized pattern, was laid in 1866. Both parlors have square pianos. The back parlor has its original mahogany veneer furniture with fittings of the period; the front parlor is furnished with black walnut and horsehair of 1869. The well-known Poindexter portraits (see Wilbur D.

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Peat for descriptions)* of pioneer Samuel Gibson Brown (1805-1873) and his wife, Maria Louisa Reeder Brown (1821-1906) have hung in the back parlor since 1855.

Furnishings in the bedrooms range from a pioneer cherry bedroom set of the 1830's to heavy black walnut and marble sets of the late 1870's. Fittings contemporary with each period have been preserved and are used in these rooms.

According to tradition, the brick outbuilding was built by Samuel G. Brown soon after he had become established in his new house on the bluff over the Ohio River. It consists of a 10x20-foot woodshed above a 10x20-foot brick-floored cold cellar, a 10x10-foot washroom, and two privies. One privy for two is for the servants and opens off of the washroom; the other for two is entered from the brick walk outside. Both privies and washroom are plastered and finished. The vault of the privies, 18 feet deep, bottoms on porous sandstone which provides excellent drainage. These functional "necessary houses" are in their original condition and are seemingly unique.

* Peat, W. D., 1954, Pioneer Painters of Indiana: Art Assoc. of Indianapolis, Ind., 254 p.

6. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) Built 1853-1854; enlarged 1880 and 1908

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Phi- | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | losophy | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Human- | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | itarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The architecturally interesting Brown-Kercheval Home is significant because of its scenic and historic site, the personages who have lived in and visited there, and the well preserved condition of the house and its furnishings as one of the last examples of the home and environment of a prosperous 19th century, small, mid-west river-town family of pioneer origin. There are no known homes similarly preserved by a single family along the Ohio River in southwest Indiana.

The site, on a bluff some 80 feet above the Ohio River and only a few hundred feet above the historic "Lincoln Flatboat Landing" and below the "Lower Landing," provides an unobstructed view of a 6.5-mile stretch of river. During steamboat days the yard was commonly used as an observation point for those awaiting arrival of the packets. The busy ferryboat, plying between Indiana and Kentucky, also used the Lower Landing until the early 1940's. Neighbors still gather, however, on the bluff to watch steamboats go by and in the recent past gathered to watch the showboats and listen to the calliope. The numerous Indian artifacts found on the site incline one to the belief that it was also a favorite Indian campsite because of the commanding river view and the view over the lowlands of Kentucky.

The site, on land first patented in 1812, was auctioned in 1833 as a city lot to Amanda Pitcher, wife of John Pitcher, first lawyer and Judge of Spencer County, Indiana, and later a Civil War General. He is reputed to have lent books from his extensive library to his young friend, Abraham Lincoln. The house built on the site by the Pitchers was occupied by Mrs. Pitcher's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Cissna. Dr. Cissna was the first doctor of Spencer County. On his death the property was sold, the old house razed, and in 1853-54 a new one was erected by a local entrepreneur, Morris Sharp.

On June 24, 1854, the unfinished house was bought by Samuel Gibson Brown. Born in 1805 in the upper Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, young Samuel was brought to Indiana by his parents in 1812. Without the advantage of schooling, he grew into an astute land speculator, shopkeeper, flat-boatman, and silent partner in many projects. When, in 1852, he decided to retire from active business, he moved from Dubois County, Indiana, to Rockport, where he soon purchased his home on the bluff. Backer of many businesses and civic enterprises, important landowner, and man of wealth, he was a prominent force in the community. In 1869, he founded, with R. T. Kercheval, the Rockport Banking Company, a

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successful private bank with a 10-year charter. On his death in 1873, his son-in-law, Samuel E. Kercheval, and daughter came to Rockport to make their home with his widow on the bluff. Although Kercheval and his wife, Cornelia Brown Kercheval, were frequently away from Rockport for long periods, they maintained their permanent residence here. Samuel E. Kercheval was a typical product of his age, being bold and excelling in a variety of ventures - business, legal, farming, and politics. As the owner and editor of the Rockport Republican Journal, he was a well known politician and friend of O. P. Morton, Benjamin Harrison, Frederick Douglass, Lew Wallace, and others. The fact that his Father was also active in Republican politics and a member of the Indiana State Legislature, helped make S. E. Kercheval a state leader when comparatively young. Before he was 20 he had held a number of offices in the Spencer County Courthouse. Under Benj. Harrison he was U.S. Marshall for the Territories of Arizona and New Mexico, and under McKinley he was Marshall for the State of Indiana. Like his Father he was a member of the Indiana State Legislature. At the time of his death in 1910 he was the first elected Mayor of the City of Rockport. Kercheval had been a delegate to so many Republican National Conventions during his career that he was nicknamed "The Argus of Conventions." He was Sergeant-at-arms of the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia in 1900.

After the death of Kercheval, the house passed to his daughter, Blanche, whose husband, the late Edward Crittenden Simpson, a Democrat, was also a lawyer and a member of the Indiana State Legislature from the Spencer County district.

The house is now owned by a nephew of Mrs. Simpson, the 4th generation. His children and grandchildren comprise the 5th and 6th generations of the family to have been sheltered by the house in its 119 years.

As a result of political, literary, and scientific activities of the owners, the Brown-Kercheval Home has entertained and sheltered many prominent guests, well known locally, nationally, and internationally: Benj. Harrison, Frederick Douglass, the black abolitionist, and such later figures as Paul V. McNutt, numerous Congressmen, Senators, and scientists from many parts of the world. Meredith Nicholson, when visiting, named the house - "The House of a Thousand Biscuits."

Today's visitors are charmed by the peaceful setting, the sweeping river views, and are increasingly fascinated, with the passage of years, by the house and its furnishings. For this reason an attempt is being made to preserve the house and its contents intact so that future generations may be able to visualize the ways of life in a small river-town during the 19th century. A large part of the interest lies in the fact that the Brown-Kercheval Home is not a "restoration" and has not been "refurnished" with so-called period pieces, but is a house of accumulations that has grown through continuous occupancy by a single family for almost a century and a quarter.

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Continuation of item 9 - Major bibliographical references.

1899 History of the Republican Party of Indiana, R. M. Seeds, ed.: The Indiana History Co., Indianapolis, Ind.

Biography of Samuel Edward Kercheval, v. 1, p. 211-212.

1938 Encyclopaedia of American Biography: The American Historical Society, Inc., New York, N. Y.

Biography of Edward Crittenden Simpson, p. 378-379.

1938 Evansville (Ind.) Courier for Saturday, June 25.

"Residence furnished before Civil War changed but little through the years" - illustrated article.

1961 American Men of Science, The physical and biological sciences, 10th ed.; Cattell Press.

Biography of Louis L. Ray, p. 3307

1965 Yearbook, Indiana Society of Pioneers.

"Flatboat letters from Samuel Gibson Brown, " p. 17-25 (illustrated).

1969 Who's Who in the South and Southwest; Marquis, Inc., 11th ed.

Biography of Louis L. Ray, p. 829.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1880 A biographical history of eminent and self-made men of the State of Indiana: Western Biographical Publishing Co., Cinn. Ohio.
 Biography of Robert True Kercheval, v. 1, 1st dist., p. 28-29.
 Biography of Samuel Edward Kercheval, v. 1, 2nd dist., p. 20-21.

1885 History of Warrick, Spencer, and Perry Counties, Indiana: Goodspeed Bros. and Co., Chicago, Ill.
 Biography of Hon. Robert True Kercheval, p. 467-468. Various refs. to Rockport Banking Co., Rockport Republican Journal, etc...

(see continuation sheet)

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	0 ' "	0 ' "		37° 52' 48"	87° 2' 42"	
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **Between one and two acres**

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: **Louis L. Ray (Dr.)**

ORGANIZATION: **U.S. Geological Survey, Dept. of Interior** DATE: **May 18, 1973**

STREET AND NUMBER: **315 South Second Street**

CITY OR TOWN: **Rockport** STATE: **Indiana** CODE: **18**

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name _____

Title **Indiana State Liaison Officer**

Date **August 13, 1973**

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

 Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

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