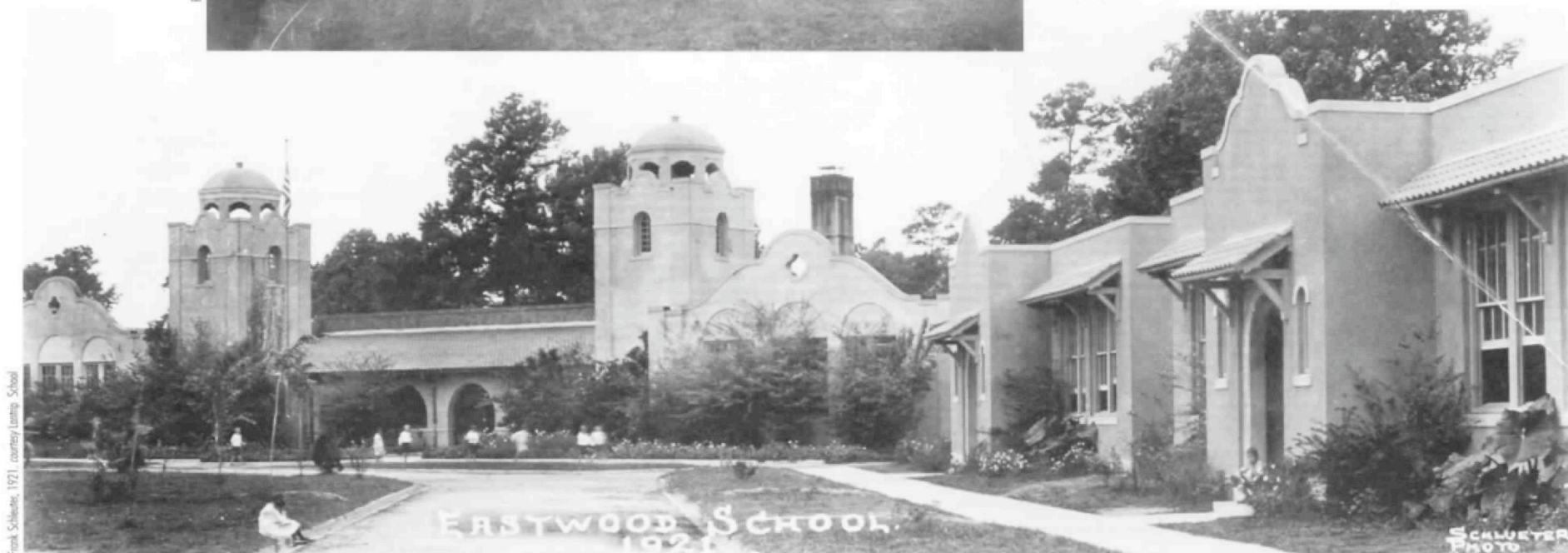




Frank Schieler, 1926, courtesy Lantrip School



Frank Schieler, 1921, courtesy Lantrip School

Eastwood (now Dora B. Lantrip) Elementary School, Maurice Sullivan, architect, 1916.

EASTWOOD ELEMENTARY

Elisa Hernandez Skaggs

The elementary school of my youth consisted of several small two-room units arranged orthogonally at one corner of a barren but spacious schoolyard. The school, Southeast Elementary in Lubbock, Texas, has since been torn down, and the grounds are now a parking lot for school buses. Although amenities were meager, the modest arrangement provided students with a friendly, productive environment. The schoolhouses were small and humble. Like our low-income houses, they were basic wood-frame, gable-roofed buildings clad in white shingles — comfortable, familiar, and unthreatening. Sidewalks linking the various units were not only little avenues where one encountered friends, but also paths to higher education — the next grade up. We didn't simply finish first grade and walk across a hallway to second, we were given a whole new building. That was

always something to look forward to at the beginning of the school year. After Southeast Elementary, I did not encounter another school planned as separate buildings until, as an adult, I found Lantrip Elementary on Houston's East Side.

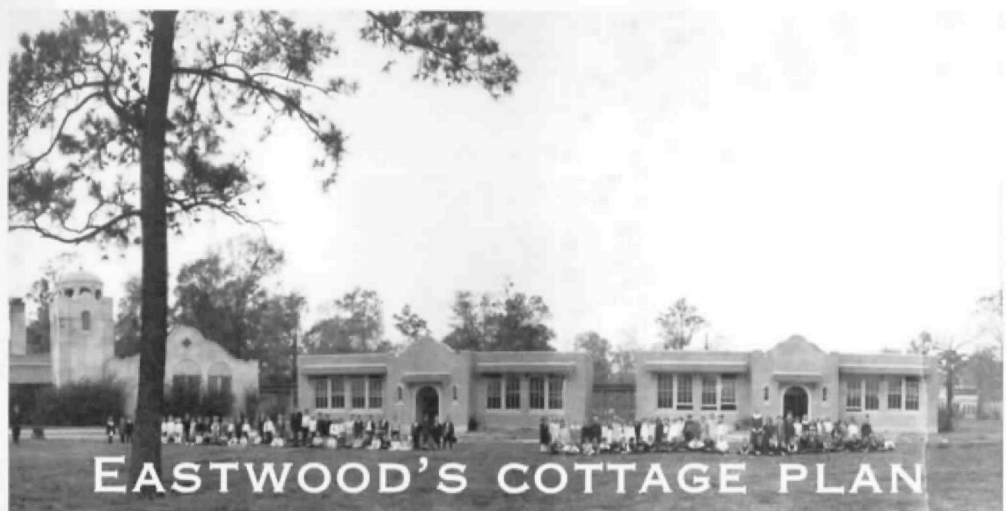
Dora B. Lantrip Elementary School, formerly Eastwood Elementary School, opened in 1916 in Eastwood, a developing neighborhood two miles east of downtown.¹ The original buildings were designed by Maurice J. Sullivan, then staff architect of the City of Houston, in a Spanish mission style. Cottage schools, in which classrooms are built as discrete pavilions, had been built in Colorado and southern California.² Eastwood Elementary, however, was the first such school in Houston.³ As early as 1913, the school board had considered a departure from the traditional one-building school in the form of a cottage plan project for

Eastwood prepared by the architects Teich & Gideon.⁴ Although Sullivan's design superceded that of Teich & Gideon, the cottage plan was retained. Fire safety, easy maintenance, and flexibility in future planning were cited as the principle advantages of such a scheme,⁵ though there are social, educational, and cultural benefits of this approach that can also be observed at Lantrip.

The original five stuccoed hollow-tile buildings were arranged with an administration unit flanked by two classroom pavilions. The administration building is bilaterally symmetrical and divided into three parts — a rectangular block and two side wings. An entrance porch with five arches across the front prefaces the library, formally framing what once were domestic science and manual training classrooms. Two stout towers, reminiscent of mission bell towers, rise at the corners of the central library block and



Eastwood Elementary School, addition, Harry D. Payne and James Ruskin Bailey, architects, 1927; side entrance, southeast corner.



courtesy Lantrip Elementary School

REFLECTS THE PHILOSOPHY
THAT A SCHOOL SHOULD NOT
BE AN IMPOSING INSTITUTION
BUT A HOUSE FOR CHILDREN.

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SCHOOL

separate it from the side wings, which contain school offices on one side and a music room on the other. The two-story towers at one time had open-air cupolas, which have since been removed. The cupolas acted as modest landmarks, rising above short trees to identify the complex from the street. The side wings, projecting forward from the towers at a splayed angle, have curvilinear gables that set the tone for treatment of the classroom buildings on either side. Repetition of the curvilinear gables architecturally helps the original buildings form a unified complex. Modest gables at the center roofline of the classroom pavilions mark entrances and divide each pavilion into two classrooms.

The flexibility of a cottage-plan school was conducive to the future additions and modifications inevitably required in a growing school district. In a 1948 article entitled "What We Like About One-Story

Schools," Wilfred F. Clapp wrote: "We want buildings adaptable to change. If there is any one thing we know about the educational program, it is that changes are going forward always. Buildings must not prevent them."⁶ As has been the case with Lantrip, cottage schools lend themselves to piecemeal construction, planned and phased as need arises and funds become available.

Lantrip has received several such additions to its campus, which are generally sympathetic to the style of the original buildings. In 1927, an addition connected to the older buildings by open arcaded walkways was designed by Harry D. Payne and James Ruskin Bailey. Built behind the original Sullivan buildings, the Payne-Bailey building created a well-scaled courtyard. A wide open-air loggia with large arched apertures and doorways extends from the beige stucco façade of the newer building into connecting walkways. Although this addition was designed in a Spanish colonial revival style, the architects departed from

the original cottage plan. The Payne-Bailey building has a central cafeteria block with two arms of classrooms radiating from it at the same angle as the original classroom cottages radiate from the library and administration block. Despite the deviation from the cottage plan, the 1927 building works well with the original buildings because of its design and scale. Decorative allusions are found in chimneylike vents protruding from the gabled roof and in the entry tower at the southwest corner of the building. An arched doorway facing Dallas at the base of the tower has a decorative plaster surround, painted dark brown to match the other exterior wood trim in the complex. "Eastwood Elementary School" is carved above the door.

In 1935 a PWA-funded addition by Robert Maddrey expanded the Payne-Bailey building. Those new classrooms were added seamlessly and symmetrically to either end of the wings, so that one has to look very closely to tell that any addition was made at all.

In 1949 three separate cottage pavil-

ions were added on the eastern side of the campus by Wirtz, Calhoun & Tungate in a remarkably sensible and sympathetic manner. These cottages are compatible with the original group in size and material. Like the 1916 Sullivan buildings, they are faced with beige stucco and contain two classrooms each with a core of bathrooms and wood lockers. The primary departure is the lack of curvilinear gables and a simpler, crisper, more modern look. What is most interesting, however, is that the architects chose to return to the cottage scheme in the first place. The east-most of these pavilions is aligned with Sullivan's originals and actually occupies the site where Sullivan had proposed to build a third flanking pavilion.

The most recent addition was completed in 1981 by the architecture firm Cate/Castillon Associates, Inc. This beige stucco building, built on the southeast side of the school grounds, has the most modern treatment of the additions. Like the Payne-Bailey building, the Cate/Castillon building departs from the cottage plan. Also connected by covered



Eva Hernandez Skaggs

Eastwood cottage additions, Wirtz, Calhoun & Tungate, 1949.



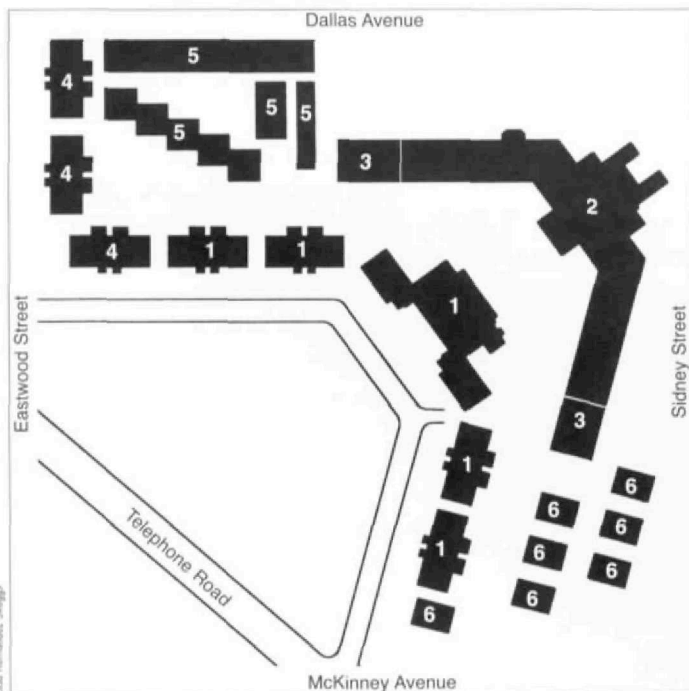
Utilitarian covered walkways to temporary buildings.

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Courtyard addition, Cate/Castillon Architects, Inc., 1981.



Eva Hernandez Skaggs

Dora B. Lantrip Elementary School, site plan.

- 1 Sullivan Buildings (1916)
- 2 Payne-Bailey Addition (1927)
- 3 Maddrey Additions (1935)
- 4 Wirtz, Calhoun & Tungate Pavilions (1949)
- 5 Cate/Castillon Addition (1981)
- 6 Temporary Buildings (>1985)

walkways to the rest of the complex, it has an open triangular footprint with a small courtyard in the middle. Unfortunately, the building separates itself from the rest of the complex because of its internal organization. From across the main courtyard, the stepped classrooms seem unfriendly, their narrow, horizontal strip windows too dark and placed too high. The only engaging view of the building is from inside the new courtyard,

where an arched, open-air loggia connects the classrooms with an outside hallway like those used throughout the complex. However, this more private courtyard is separated from the rest of the campus.

COURTYARDS ARE NOT ONLY A DELIGHT TO THE EYE BUT CAN ALSO BECOME STIMULATING OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS.

Another noteworthy addition appears at the southeast corner of the school grounds in a group of temporary buildings, popularly referred to as T-buildings. These buildings, found on public school campuses throughout Houston, have been brought in as a quick, cheap solution for overcrowding. At most schools such buildings seem isolated and out of place, but at Lantrip they make sense. In fact, the T-buildings are more sympathetic to the original cottage plan than the Cate/Castillon addition. They are painted beige with dark brown trim to match the rest of the campus, and their scale fits nicely in the decentralized scheme. Close to both the Sullivan buildings and the Payne-Bailey annex, the T-buildings are physically connected to the rest of the complex by covered walkways and are aligned with the Sullivan pavilions. Rather than treating these new buildings

as different, the campus has accepted their presence and even embraced them through modest but efficacious landscaping. One of the most important aspects of a cottage-plan school is its scale. The one-story, closely sited buildings provide a comfortable atmosphere for young children. Small courtyards also help to bring down the scale of the school. The school does not dwarf its low-rise neighborhood but blends with it. Most of the houses in Eastwood are modest one-story bungalows whose low eaves nearly match those of the school in height. Even Lantrip's towers are not overbearing but anchor the design, which reflects the philosophy that a school should not be an imposing institution but a house for children. This atmosphere, initiated by Sullivan's pavilions, has been maintained.

The informality at Lantrip is largely a result of its architecture: the low, connected buildings and the Spanish mission-style design. Unintimidating entrances provide a friendly welcome to visitors, which is especially meaningful when the school is used as a community center or a place for informal neighborhood gatherings.

Perhaps because of this informality, the local community seems to have taken ownership of the school. Mothers show up early to pick up their children and sit and chat on the front steps of the classrooms or at the picnic tables in the courtyard. The porch in front of the library is an inviting space where children gather and either play or sit in the shade of the arched cloister, waiting for their rides home. Even the curving driveway adds to this informality. In the afternoon, cars line up in front of the pavilions as if the children were being picked up from their own homes.

The arrival of families from Mexico and Central America in Eastwood has brought Lantrip into an even more meaningful context. The Spanish mission style is appropriate for a community whose ancestors built the original missions, and the cottage plan suits a community that is

comfortable with outdoor living.

Upkeep of older buildings continues to be a challenge for a school system that has perpetual funding problems. At Lantrip Elementary the original red roof tiles have been replaced by less expensive composition shingles. Heating and cooling an older, decentralized complex bring frequent problems. Wiring runs through metal conduits, over roofs, and across walkways. At the rear of the Payne-Bailey annex, facing Dallas, unsightly mechanical equipment is nestled between the building and a vegetable garden. These pragmatic accommodations are eyesores. However, considering the informality of the architecture, the numerous additions, and the decentralized organization, they are less bothersome than they might be around a typical schoolhouse.

A cottage school not only lends itself to extensive landscaping but requires it. Separate pavilions divide the outdoor space, creating roomlike areas, sheltered and private, that beg for decoration. Courtyards are not only a delight to the eye but can also become stimulating outdoor classrooms.

Lantrip's main courtyard at the center of the complex is one of the most pleasant places the school offers. Now lush and well maintained, it was barren and neglected before rehabilitation began in 1975. At that time, Lantrip became the ecology magnet school for elementary school children as part of a district-wide program to increase racial integration and improve educational opportunities. The courtyard, densely planted with both evergreens and flower beds, not only provides an experimental laboratory but also reinforces the idea of a Spanish mission setting. Picnic tables in front of the lunchroom and some sheltered paved areas around the courtyard serve as gathering places in kind weather. At the center of the smaller courtyard, a garden and fountain have been established for educational purposes — to attract butterflies. This smaller, shady place with the sound of water is more contemplative than the main courtyard, which is usually full of activity.

Not all of Lantrip's campus is maintained as well as the courtyards. The students and teachers take care of most of the outdoor areas. School administrators do not often enlist the help of the school district because, as the principal lamented, HISD's idea of landscaping is to mow everything down. The grounds at the back of the school, except for the vegetable garden, seem neglected, and the modest landscaping in front of the school has almost disappeared; what is left is unkempt. Between the front circular drive and Telephone Road a broad, manicured lawn used for special celebrations and community gatherings has been replaced by recreation areas. Hard-top paving allows for a basketball court; a baseball diamond and play area have obliterated

the grass; and a new Spark Park with brightly-colored playground equipment on safe bark chips hides the buildings behind it. Lantrip's front lawn was necessarily chosen for physical education areas because the available space on the pentagonal site has been filled with buildings and courtyards. Unfortunately, the haphazard appearance of the playground is far less attractive than the wide, green lawn was, and it interrupts street views of the picturesque architecture.

The cottage plan, which makes such intensive use of outdoor space, works best in mild climates. Outdoor living at Lantrip is attractive and intriguing to visitors accustomed to multistoried schools whose classrooms are connected by narrow, artificially lit interior corridors. Even so, the administration gives the scheme mixed reviews: on beautiful days the outdoor spaces are wonderful, but on cold, rainy days they are not so pleasant. Most teachers and administrators admit to having been initially attracted to the cottage plan because the separate pavilions provide personal teaching areas, privacy, and a sense of ownership for both students and teachers.

Although the arrangement has proven at Lantrip to be adaptable to change, pleasant to work in, and supportive of healthy outdoor activities, it has been neglected as a conscious model for schools in Houston.

My elementary school was not intended as a permanent school, nor was the climate as obliging as Houston's. We experienced many days of freezing weather in the winter, windy and dusty days in March, and tornadoes and hailstorms in May. Still, walking across the campus to the lunchroom or two buildings down to watch a film was eventful and refreshing. Students who have attended Lantrip Elementary School surely have memories similar to mine of walks through open-air loggias and the stimulation of outdoor living. ■

1. Stephen Fox, *Houston Architectural Guide* (Houston: The American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter and Herring Press, 1990), p. 164.

2. "School Board Contemplates Cottage Plan for Eastwood," *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1913, p. 16. The cottage plan was reported to have been originated by "Dr. H. W. Corwin of the Minnegua Hospital, Puebla [sic] Colorado." Examples noted were the Buena Vista and Lilier schools of Colorado Springs. See also *Houston Architectural Survey* (Houston: Southwest Center for Urban Research and The Rice University School of Architecture, 1981), vol. II, p. 398.

3. "Eastwood School will be the First in Houston under Cottage Plan," *Houston Daily Post*, December 12, 1915, p. 11.

4. "School Board Contemplates Cottage Plan for Eastwood," *Ibid.*

5. *Houston Architectural Survey*, p. 398.

6. Wilfred E. Clapp, "What We Like About One-Story Schools," in *School Planning, The Architectural Record of a Decade* edited by Kenneth Reid (New York: F. W. Dodge Corporation, 1951), p. 263.



Fifth graders, Eastwood Elementary School, 1926. Lester Scardino and Cecil Isbell, 7th and 8th from left, back row.

AS IT WAS

Lester Scardino remembers the discussions that took place around his family kitchen table in their crowded apartment over a grocery store at the corner of Hamilton and Polk. Not only did his parents want their own home, they were concerned about the quality of his education. After looking at several modest new subdivisions, they chose Eastwood in large part because of its impressive new elementary school. They bought a bungalow on Woodside Drive and moved in time for Lester to begin third grade at Eastwood Elementary in 1923.

Now age 81, Scardino has vivid memories of his school days at Eastwood. "We all walked to school and took our lunches in paper sacks. There was no lunchroom. The sissies went home for lunch, but most of us ate our sandwiches on the grass in front of the school. That was where we played during recess too. The boys played marbles or softball with bats and balls they brought from home. We didn't have any playground equipment or organized sports activities, but we got plenty of exercise." When asked what the girls did, he hesitated for a moment and laughed: "I'm not really sure, we weren't too interested in the girls. I guess they jumped rope and played jack stones on the porch."

When Scardino attended Eastwood, he remembers only the original five buildings. "There was no fence around the school and, with the big lawn and pretty architecture, it was an impressive neighborhood landmark. We called the area behind the school 'the fields.' The fields were overgrown and buggy; we never went back there."

Today the fields are filled with landscaped courtyards and buildings, but on a recent visit to what is now Lantrip Elementary, Scardino smiled at the children and concluded that it didn't seem that different. Inside his old fifth grade classroom, he remarked that the room looked the same, except the open face gas heater was gone, and the cloakroom was now a boys' bathroom.

"The cloakroom, my God, that's where Mrs. Meyer took me when I put a tack in her chair. We all had bets on whether she would feel it or not. She was so fat. Well, she felt it. In the cloakroom she picked me up by my ears; I struggled to get away and tried to climb out of the high cloakroom window. She pulled me back by my heels and gave me the worst

spanking. I'll never forget that." Surprised, I asked if the students got spanked very often. "If you were bad," was his answer.

The other spanking he remembers occurred after he and his cohort, Cecil Isbell (who, after playing for the Green Bay Packers, became the first coach of the Baltimore Colts), were sent out to pick some branches "... to decorate for a play or something. We spent some time catching crawfish in a nearby gully, then we cut down nearly a whole dogwood tree. It was the dogwood that upset Mrs. Anderson so much. We caught crawfish around there all the time."

Another favorite memory for Scardino is of the music contests they had on Fridays. "Life was very simple then. Nobody had an automobile except the Johnsons. We had no radios, but the school had a Victrola. Our fifth grade teacher played classical music such as Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, which we certainly didn't hear anywhere else. At the end of the week we had a contest to identify the composers. She didn't expect us to remember the names of the pieces, but she wanted us to appreciate classical music and hear the differences between composers. It was a great thing. We also had spelling bees on Friday, the girls vs. the boys. The girls always won."

When asked if he knew Dora Lantrip, the principal, he said "Oh my, yes. She was the spirit of the school. Every morning she went to each classroom; we would all stand and sing 'Good morning to you, Good morning to you. We're all in our places with shiny faces. Good morning to you.' She traveled all over every summer. The years I was there she went to Alaska and brought back all sorts of artifacts and costumes from the Alaskan Indians. We didn't have an auditorium, but some children would dress up in the costumes, and Miss Lantrip would gather us outside and tell marvelous stories. She was a big, outdoor woman. Very impressive. We all respected her." BS

Dr. Peter Lester Scardino graduated from the Rice Institute in 1937 and settled in Savannah, Georgia. He had not visited his old school in over fifty years.