



Attention to Detail: The Architecture of Lucian T. Hood, Jr. *By Stephen James*

Philip G. Willard and Lucian T. Hood, Jr., 4511 North Roseneath, Houston (1953). Hood is credited with designing this modernist house in the Riverside Terrace neighborhood while he was an associate in Philip Willard's office. The current owners have installed privacy screening that hides the spiral staircase in the glassed area to the left of the entry.

Photo courtesy of the author.

The University of Houston architecture program was in its infancy in 1952 when it graduated only a handful of students.¹ Yet two of them—Kenneth E. Bentsen, FAIA (1926 – 2013) and Lucian T. Hood, Jr. (1916 – 2001)—went on to have extremely successful careers. Bentsen worked exclusively for commercial and institutional clients and produced award-winning buildings for banks, hospitals, and universities. His best-known project was the Summit (1975), a professional basketball arena for the city of Houston.²

Hood, however, focused mainly on residential architecture. At his peak in the 1980s, he had one of the most successful residential design practices of any Houston architect. Although he did most of his work in Houston, clients came from other cities in Texas and neighboring states. After he retired, others continued his work, offering Lucian Hood designs to those who associated his name with fine design and high quality.

His career spanned the modernism of the 1950s to the conservatism of the 1980s. His modernist buildings showed his intuitive command of both composition and principles of line, texture, and contrast, but the high quality of his work was most apparent in his traditional-style architecture, which he brought to life through rigorous attention to detail. He never developed a signature “Lucian Hood style,” nor would his clients have wanted it. His houses were always tasteful, always restrained, and always distinctive.

Hood was born in 1916 in the small town of Talpa, Texas, but grew up in Fort Worth. His father worked in sales for

Armour & Co. and was able to provide a comfortable life for his family.³ Young Lucian showed artistic talent very early and his parents saw that he took art lessons as a child. His interest in art and architecture continued in high school and influenced his decision to pursue a professional career.⁴ He attended the University of Texas from 1935 to 1937 but left without obtaining a degree. He returned to Fort Worth where he worked as a draftsman with architect Robert P. Woltz, Jr. from 1937 to 1942.⁵ When the United States entered World War II, Hood joined the U.S. Army Air Corps, was commissioned a lieutenant, and served as an instructor on B-25 bombers at Brooks Field in San Antonio. At the end of the war he married Mary Edna Allen; son Lucian III joined them the following year.⁶ Hood returned to Woltz's office briefly from 1945 to 1946 but late in 1946 moved to Houston where he enrolled in the architecture program at the University of Houston.⁷

Hood went to work immediately with architect Philip G. Willard, who had recently opened an office in Houston after practicing in Fort Worth.⁸ While in that city, Willard had associated with Robert Woltz on a number of architectural projects in the late 1930s at the same time that Hood worked as a draftsman in Woltz's office.⁹ Therefore, it is likely that Hood and Willard knew each other from their days in Fort Worth, and it would explain why Hood began working for Willard so quickly after he arrived in Houston.

Willard had a busy practice and did architectural design and real estate development while promoting an innova-

tive all-masonry construction system for small houses.¹⁰ He hired some of the best students from the UH program to help him, including Lucian Hood and Lars Bang (1921—2008). They assumed considerable responsibility and handled much of the design duties while Willard devoted time to his other business activities. Hood worked as a designer and associate architect with Willard until 1953.¹¹ Willard's office was prolific but is best remembered for a number of distinctive modernist houses in the Riverside Terrace neighborhood, many of which Hood and Bang designed.¹² Among Hood's best from this early period is the house at 4511 North Roseneath, whose rustic stone exterior belies its extremely modern styling. Its massing is asymmetrical but well-balanced and grounded by its strong horizontal lines. The focal point is the two-story glass wall near the front entry, which reveals a spiral staircase visible from the street.

Hood earned his architecture degree in 1952 but probably learned more from his on-the-job training with Willard. His many years of experience in the Woltz and Willard offices set him apart from other recent graduates, and in the 1953-1954 school year Hood returned to his alma mater to serve as a visiting critic and design instructor.¹³

By 1953 Hood left Willard to start his own practice but within a year joined with Lars Bang to work on two office buildings, the Times Building at 2444 Times Blvd. (1955) and the Century Building at 2120 Travis (1956).¹⁴ Although Hood and Bang often receive joint credit for both buildings, it appears that Hood was primarily responsible for the Century Building.¹⁵ The partnership did not last beyond these projects, and by 1955 Hood had returned to working

on his own.¹⁶ Press reports of the time show that he had a varied practice, designing apartment projects large and small, single-family residences, and small professional offices.¹⁷

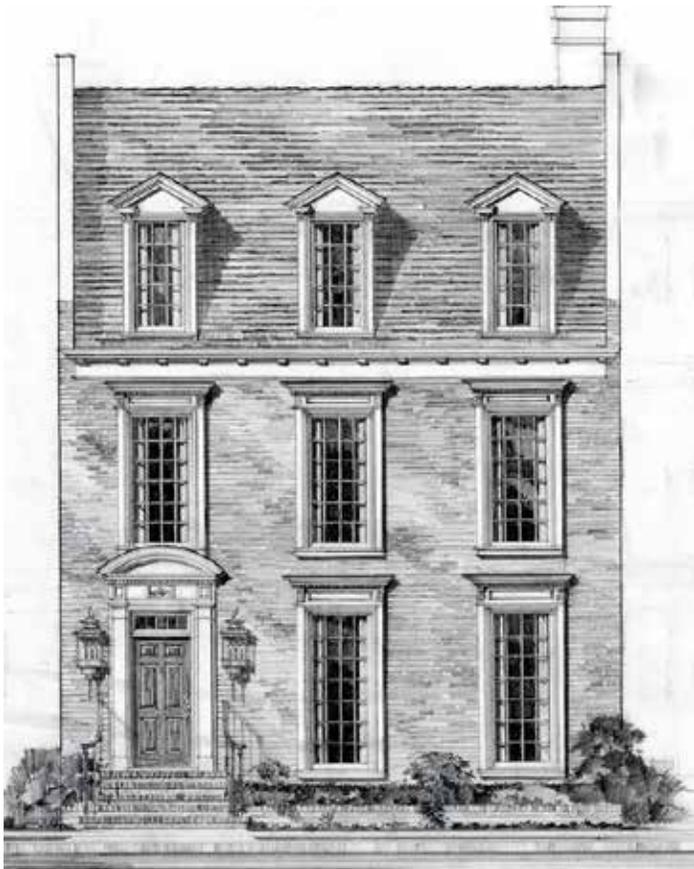
In the 1960s Hood, assisted by a few draftsmen, ran a small architecture practice that designed houses for individuals and homebuilders, as well as apartment projects for investment builders. A highlight of this period was the Memorial Creole Apartments (1968) at 10220 Memorial Drive, which featured Louisiana French Creole architecture. An outstanding design, it showed the hallmarks that would define Hood's later career: traditional-style architecture with authentic, often historically accurate, exterior elevations and great attention to detail. A half century later, the Memorial Creole is still well maintained by the Finger Companies, the original owner, which markets it to those seeking luxury apartments in the wooded Memorial neighborhood. If its amenities and picturesque setting were not persuasive enough, its website announces that it was designed "by renowned architect, Lucian Hood."¹⁸

In the 1970s Hood continued to design small office and retail projects for commercial clients, but residences—single-family detached, townhouses, and apartments—dominated his practice. The volume of work was high for a small architectural office, apparently a result of his growing reputation.¹⁹ He had designed large, expensive houses since the beginning of his career, but during the 1970s these became a much larger part of his practice. He was a favorite architect for several home builders who produced small numbers of high-end custom homes in the city's most



Lucian T. Hood, Jr., *Memorial Creole Apartments*, 10220 Memorial Drive, Houston (1968).

Photo courtesy of the Finger Companies, Memorial Creole Apartments.



Lucian T. Hood, Jr., 7632 Del Monte, Houston (1973). This Neo-Classical townhouse was one of many that Hood designed for the area south of Woodway Drive near Tanglewood. It is difficult to reproduce the fine detail, but the superb architectural rendering showcases his talents as an artist.

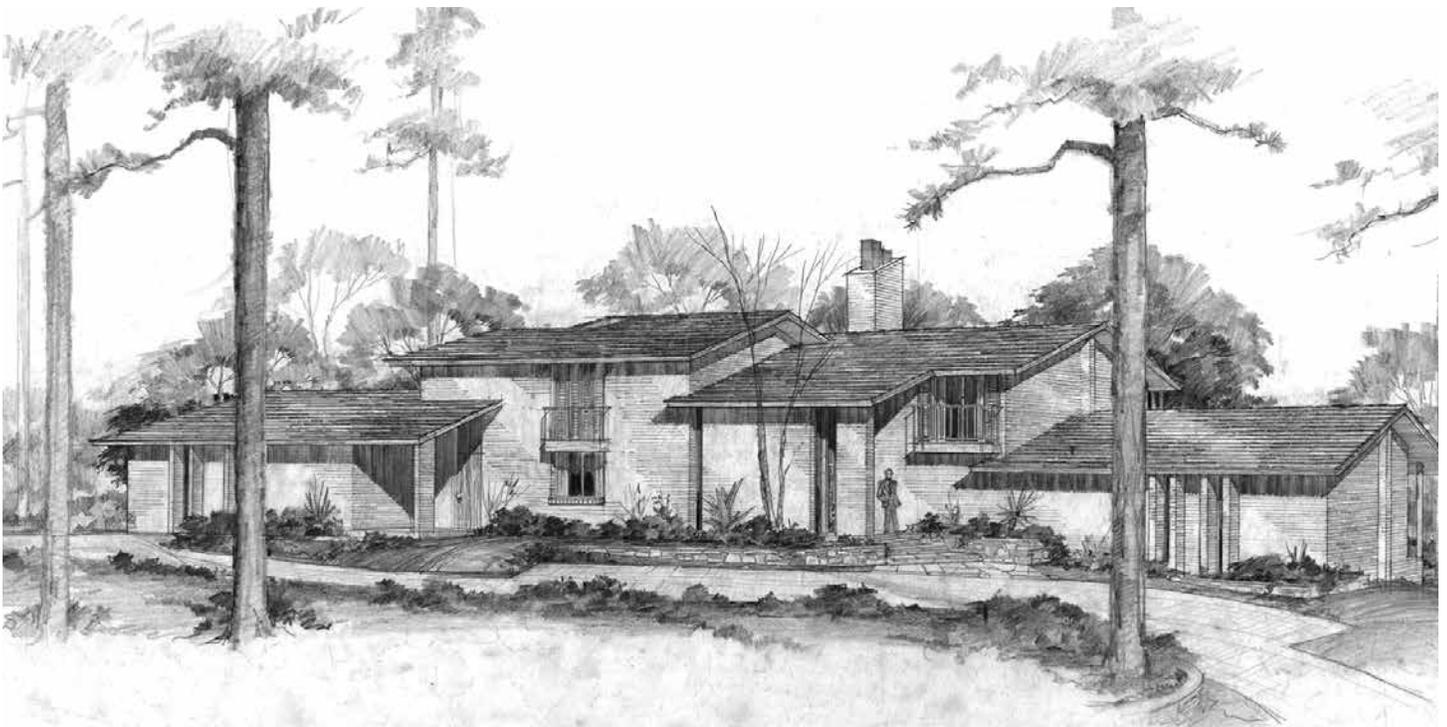
All architectural drawings courtesy of the Lucian T. Hood Architectural Papers, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

exclusive neighborhoods.²⁰ His designs fill the blocks of the desirable northern edge of Tanglewood, between Woodway Drive and Buffalo Bayou. Others are found in River Oaks and the Memorial Villages where he created opulent mansions for Houston's rich and famous.

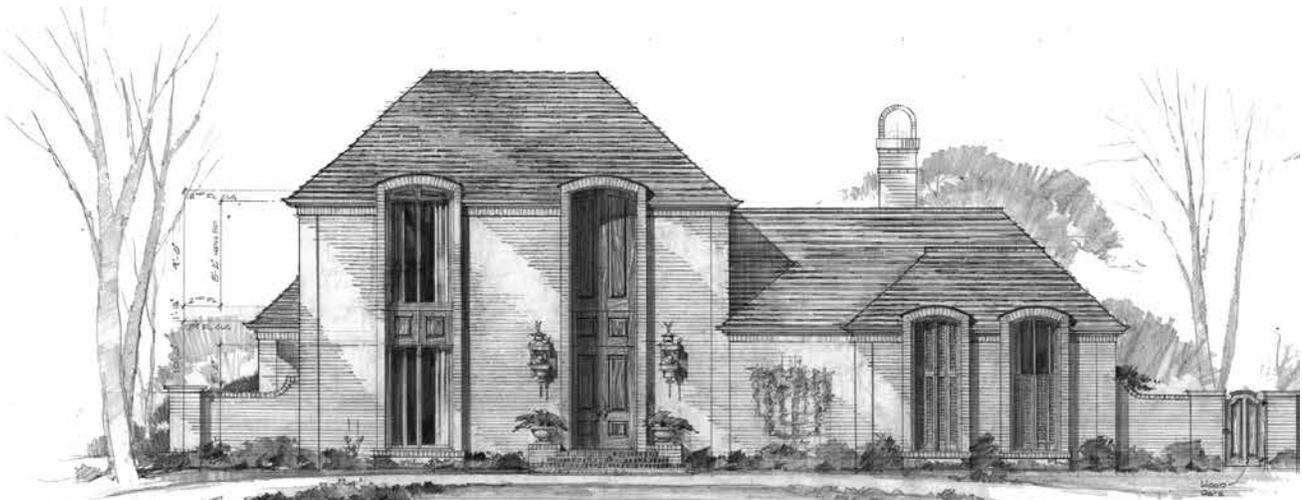
In the 1980s, a time of economic recession in Texas, Hood began to design smaller houses for mass-market builders. These houses were more modest than his usual products, but they incorporated the same tall rooflines and period detailing used on his larger houses. He instilled a sense of elegance and dignity not often found in houses for the middle class. By the end of the decade, as the economy improved, he returned to more expensive houses, but large home building companies remained important clients.

Hood seemed equally comfortable designing in both modern and traditional styles. With the current interest in mid-century modern architecture, he is often celebrated for his modernist buildings of the 1950s. Yet, even in that decade—the peak of popularity for modernist residential architecture—he designed many houses in traditional styles.²¹ In the 1970s his “Transitional” designs blended the two aesthetics. They were formally abstract but elegant, with pronounced, hooded door and window openings crowned by shallow segmental arches. His traditional-style residences ranged from eclectic to historically accurate. For the former, he showed creativity and skill in assembling the elements of a traditional style in a way that was new but consistent with convention. When the Reagan era of the 1980s ushered in a vogue for red-brick Georgian Revival style houses, Hood distinguished his designs by stressing authenticity in their detailing.

The attention to detail required by traditional architecture came easily to Hood, probably because of his talent as an artist. Many years of sketching had taught him to look



Lucian T. Hood, Jr., 302 Fall River Court, Houston (1976). This sprawling ranch-style house in the Memorial neighborhood for Marvy Finger was an increasingly rare contemporary design in a decade when Hood's clients were beginning to demand more traditional styles.



Lucian T. Hood, Jr., 713 Tanglewood Blvd., Houston (1976). Hood's French-influenced "Transitional" style houses blended modern and traditional aesthetics. They were formally abstract but elegant with their pronounced, hooded door and window openings crowned by shallow segmental arches. The over-scaled lanterns were a Hood trademark.

closely at the details in a scene, and it probably gave him an appreciation for the picturesque qualities inherent in traditional architecture. We see this in his working drawings prepared for construction. They are remarkable not only for their meticulous drafting but also for the fine architectural renderings that became Hood's trademark. In most of them, he took the time to render the standard front elevation view of the building in pencil with shade and shadow. The best are works of art; he gave each a three-dimensional quality with his deft use of the pencil lead to approximate the texture of brick walls and wood shingles, the grain in a piece of wood, and the highlights in a pane of glass.

By the time Hood retired in 1992, he was so well known that builder William Carl bought Hood's practice and for a decade and a half offered variations of Hood's many designs under the name Lucian Hood, Inc. In 2007 Carl closed the office and donated all of the drawings and records to the University of Houston Libraries.²² With over 900 projects,

Hood's is the largest of the library's architectural collections. It also has proved to be the most popular, receiving frequent reproduction requests from patrons who own a house designed by Lucian Hood. As large as it is, the collection is not complete, missing many projects from the early years that apparently were lost or destroyed.²³ Drawings for some of Hood's projects have been scanned for the Digital Library (<http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/hood>), which makes important holdings of the UH libraries accessible online. In 2013, the library also acquired the drawings and papers of Hood's classmate, Kenneth Bentsen, as a way to preserve the legacy of the small but talented class of 1952.

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Lucian T. Hood, Jr., 4307 Churchill Downs Drive, Austin (1983). Hood interpreted Texas regionalist precedents for this Hill-Country commission but executed the house in a buff-colored brick rather than native limestone. The design was specific to its site and departed from the Georgian Revival and French Country styles that characterized most of Hood's houses in the Houston area during the 1980s.

ENDNOTES – Attention to Detail: The Architecture of Lucian T. Hood, Jr.

1. Vernita Bridges Hoyt, ed., *Flashbacks: Images from the First Fifty Years of the College of Architecture, University of Houston, 1945–1995* (Houston: The Atrium Press, 1995), 11.
2. Stephen Fox, “Kenneth E. Bentsen, FAIA (1926–2013),” *Texas Architect* 64, no. 1 (1/2 2014): 19. “Kenneth Edward Bentsen, FAIA,” in *50 from 50: Fifty Outstanding Alumni of the College of Architecture University of Houston, 1945–1995*, Robert Timme and Karen Skaer Soh, eds. (Houston: The Atrium Press, 1995), 15. Kenneth Bentsen Associates were lead designers of the Summit, in association with the architectural firm of Lloyd, Jones, Brewer & Associates. The Houston Rockets played there for decades, but since 2005 it has been the home of Lakewood Church.
3. *American Architects Directory*, 1st ed., “Lucian T. Hood, Jr.” (New York: Bowker, 1956), 255; *American Architects Directory*, 2d ed., “Lucian T. Hood, Jr.” (New York: Bowker, 1962), 323 (Birth date and place) (hereafter, *Architects Directories*, Hood). 1930 United States Census, roll 2398, Sheet 2A, enumeration district 0101, Precinct 1, Tarrant County, Texas, s.v. “Lucian T. Hood, Sr.” *Ancestry.com*; and 1940 United States Census, roll T627_4141, Sheet 7A, enumeration district 220-5, Precinct 1, Tarrant County, Texas, s.v. “Lucian T. Hood, Sr.” *Ancestry.com* (Father’s address and occupation).
4. Lucian Hood III, email messages to the author, July 8, 2017, August 25, 2017.
5. *Architects Directories*, Hood. Woltz was a native of Fort Worth who returned in 1937 to open his own office after working with George Dahl, Donald Barthelme, and other architects to design the Texas Centennial Exposition in Fair Park, Dallas. Judith Singer Cohen, *Cowtown Moderne* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1988), 24-25; Carol E. Roark and Byrd Williams, *Fort Worth’s Legendary Landmarks* (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 1995), 208.
6. Lucian Hood III, email messages to the author, July 8, 2017, August 23, 2017.
7. *Architects Directories*, Hood.
8. In his directory entries, Hood listed his first year of employment with Willard as 1946. *Architects Directories*, Hood. During World War II Willard worked on buildings in Houston for John A. Roebling’s Sons’ Company and American Chain & Cable Company. National Park Service, National Register Nomination Form, Fort Worth Warehouse & Transfer Company Building (2013), 15 <https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/13000126.pdf> (hereafter, National Register Form, 15). These large projects in Houston probably led to Willard’s decision to relocate his practice there after the war.
9. Regarding Willard and Woltz in Fort Worth, see Judith Singer Cohen, *Cowtown Moderne* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1988), 25, 99; and National Register Form, 15.
10. This system was the basis for the house at 6315 Brookside Drive, Houston and others. “This All Ceramic Home,” *Houston Chronicle*, August 20, 1950, sec. C, p. 9. Willard’s real estate development activities are described on the same page of the newspaper. See also “All-Ceramic Home,” *Houston Chronicle*, May 18, 1952, sec. C, p. 12. Willard built houses with this masonry construction system under the business name “Ceramic Construction Company.” Ben Koush, Protected Landmark Designation Report, 6328 Brookside Drive, Archaeological & Historical Commission, City of Houston Planning and Development Department (2006), 9 https://www.houstontx.gov/planning/HistoricPres/landmarks/06PL20_Minella_House_6328_Brookside_Dr.pdf; Ben Koush, “East End Modern,” *Cite* 69 (2006): 28-29. During the 1940s Willard had worked with architect Robert P. Woltz, Jr. and engineer Charles M. Davis to design and construct several reinforced concrete buildings in Fort Worth and Houston as part of the national defense effort. National Register Form, 15. Willard’s wartime experience with concrete construction may have informed his experiments with his novel “ceramic” construction system.
11. *Architects Directories*, Hood. Information about their responsibilities in the office comes from Russell Howard, who interviewed Bang in the early 2000’s. Howard is a former president of the Houston Mod organization, which promotes preservation of Houston’s mid-century modern architecture (<http://houstonmod.net/>). Bang also said that Willard had made Hood and Bang partners in the firm. The account can be found in the HAIF online forum, “Some Riverside Terrace Mods,” post by member “Space Age” (Howard) dated May 30, 2007 <http://www.houstonarchitecture.com/haif/topic/11348-some-riverside-terrace-mods/>. Nevertheless, in his directory entries in 1956 and 1962, Hood claimed only to be an associate, not a partner. *Architects Directories*, Hood.
12. Important Riverside Terrace houses are discussed in Stephen Fox, “Riverside Terrace and Environs: An Architectural Tour,” *Cite* 19 (1987), 21-22. Willard and Hood’s Riverside houses include 4511 North Roseneath Drive (1952) and 3403 North Parkwood Drive (1953). Stephen Fox, *Houston Architectural Guide* (Houston: American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter and Herring Press, 1990), 157. 3403 North Parkwood, for client Sammy Finger, was one of Willard’s “ceramic homes” and in contemporary reports was credited to Philip G. Willard and Lucian T. Hood. “In MacGregor Area,” *Houston Chronicle*, August 10, 1952, sec. F, p. 4. The Parkwood house is published in Alan Hess, *Ranch House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 124-127, where it is also credited to Hood. Nevertheless, according to Russell Howard, Lars Bang said that the house was his design, not Hood’s. HAIF online forum, “3912 Roseneath in Riverside Terrace” post by member “Space Age” (Howard) dated March 21, 2007 <http://www.houstonarchitecture.com/haif/topic/10281-3912-roseneath-in-riverside-terrace/?tab=comments#comment-155542>. The Hess book also features a later Hood design at 5330 Mandell Street (1959). Hess, *Ranch House*, 208-211.
13. *Architects Directories*, Hood.

14. By March 1955, the Times Building was almost complete and had already been occupied by tenants, including “Lucian T. Hood, Jr., architect and co-designer of the building.” “Three-Story Times Bldg. Nears Finish,” *Houston Chronicle*, March 27, 1955, Sec. C, p. 6. A month earlier, newspaper reports had announced that construction was about to begin on the Century Building, with Lucian T. Hood as architect. “New Office Building for Travis,” *Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 13, 1955, Sec. E, p. 9. Hood was responsible for the first phase of the Century Building, a 7-story office building just south of Houston’s downtown business district. It was an early project of Kenneth Schnitzer, whose Century Development Corporation later created the large Greenway Plaza development along the Southwest Freeway. By 1964 Schnitzer’s company had enlarged the Century Building to 12 stories and added an adjoining 14-story building. The Century Building complex was later renamed Central Square and for many years was home to the Central National Bank. In 2014-2016 new owners renovated and remodeled the building. <http://arch-ive.org/archive/central-square/>; <http://www.houstonarchitecture.com/haif/topic/90-old-central-bank-building/>; Lucian Hood III, email message to the author, July 8, 2017. The Times Building also still exists but has been remodeled. HAIF online forum, “Times Building” post by member “Space Age” (Howard) dated June 12, 2008 <http://www.houstonarchitecture.com/haif/topic/16295-times-building/>.
15. Hood’s son believes that the partnership with Bang had ended by the time work began on the Century Building, or shortly thereafter. Lucian Hood III, email message to the author, July 8, 2017. This is supported by contemporary accounts, such as an advertisement by Binswanger Glass Company, which lists Hood as the architect for the Century Building. <http://arch-ive.org/archive/central-square/>. See also “New Office Building for Travis,” *Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 13, 1955, Sec. E, p. 9.
16. *Architects Directories*, Hood. City directories show that Hood had a listing for his own office by 1953 and in only one year (1955) was there a listing for the firm of Hood & Bang Architects. By 1956 both Hood and Bang had offices in the building they had designed at 2444 Times Blvd. but were not practicing together. Newspaper reports from 1955 and later do not show Bang as a partner on any building that was credited to Hood.
17. The apartment projects ranged from the large 160-unit Canfield Plaza (in association with Robert Hussman) to the small 12-unit Bellefontaine Garden Apartments. “Canfield Plaza to Have 18 Buildings, 160 Units,” *Houston Chronicle*, Nov. 13, 1955, Sec. F, p. 4; “\$100,000 Spent on Apartments,” *Houston Chronicle*, Sept. 23, 1955, Sec. F, p. 4 (Bellefontaine).
18. Memorial Creole Apartments, <http://www.memorialcreole.com/>.
19. By the 1970s Hood’s office was handling at least sixty projects per year and continued to do so through the 1980s. However, in any given year many of the projects were never completed, often because the client chose not to proceed. It is difficult to determine the total number of projects from earlier decades because many of the records from those years have not survived.
20. Hood did more work for the Barnett brothers than any other high-end builder, and their work is plentiful in the Tanglewood neighborhood. Bob Hancock, Norwood Homes, and William Carl were also frequent clients. Hood also designed several apartment projects for the Finger companies and homes for members of the Finger family. Lucian Hood III, email message to the author, July 10, 2017.
21. Among these was a “Southern Colonial Mansion ‘in Tanglewood,’” complete with servant’s quarters. “Southern Colonial Mansion ‘in Tanglewood,’” *Houston Chronicle*, Sept. 25, 1955, Sec. D, p. 7.
22. Members of the Houston Mod organization were instrumental in arranging this effort to save the records of Hood’s practice.
23. Lucian Hood III recalls that in the mid-1960s, while his father was moving his office, he stored many of his architectural drawings in the garage of his house. Flooding caused by heavy rains entered the garage and damaged the drawings. Hood chose to throw them out. Lucian Hood III, email messages to the author, February 9, 2017, July 8, 2017.