

## United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



613

## 1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Cranfill Apartments

Other name/site number: Cranfill-Beacham Apartments, Cliff Street Condominiums Building B

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

## 2. Location

Street &amp; number: 1909 Cliff Street, Building B

City or town: Austin

State: Texas

County: Travis

Not for publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐

## 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 levels of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ localApplicable National Register Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Wolfe".

State Historic Preservation Officer

A handwritten date "6/24/13" in blue ink.

Signature of certifying official / Title

Date

Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ver Edson H. Beall".

A handwritten date "8.20.13" in blue ink.

Date of Action

A large, light blue, diagonal stamp that says "SCANNED".

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## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

### Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

### Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions:** DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling = apartment building

**Current Functions:** DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling = condominium building

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification:** MODERN MOVEMENT/International Style

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Concrete, Wood, Glass

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7-7 through 7-10)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	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.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: N/A

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Period of Significance: 1960

Significant Dates: 1960

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked):

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked):

Architect/Builder: Harwell Hamilton Harris, Architect / Don Legge, Supervising Architect / A.W. Bryant Construction Co., General Contractor

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8-11 through 8-14)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 9-15)

### 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 #

### Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office (Texas Historical Commission, Austin)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☒ University (University of Texas at Austin, Alexander Architectural Archive)
- ☐ Other - Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** Less than one acre

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

Latitude: 30.285141 Longitude: -97.751304

**Verbal Boundary Description:** Roughly the rear (east) half of the following legally described property: Lot 14 and the south twenty-five feet of Lot 15, Block 3 of Carrington Subdivision, a subdivision of Outlots 26, 27 and 28, Division D, a subdivision in Travis County, Texas according to the map or plat of record in Volume 1, Page 49B of the Plat Records of Travis County, Texas. See scaled boundary map on page 17.

**Boundary Justification:** The Cliff Street Condominiums property contains two separate buildings. Only the nominated building (Building B) has historic and architectural significance.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Emily Ardoin, graduate student, Masters of Science in Historic Preservation  
Organization: The University of Texas at Austin  
Street & number: 3101 Tom Green Street  
City or Town: Austin State: Texas Zip Code: 78705  
Email: emilyardoin@utexas.edu  
Telephone: (337) 962-2103  
Date: December 14, 2012

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheet Map-16 through Map-18)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets Figure-19 through Figure-25)

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## Photographs

Name of Property: Cranfill Apartments  
City or Vicinity: Austin  
County, State: Travis County, Texas  
Photographer: Emily Ardoin  
Date Photographed: October 6, 2012  
Number of Photos: 15

### Photo 1 of 15

Exterior entry, covered trellis and surrounding buildings  
Camera facing southeast

### Photo 2 of 15

Exterior entry, covered trellis  
Camera facing east

### Photo 3 of 15

Exterior entry, covered trellis  
Camera facing southeast

### Photo 4 of 15

Courtyard  
Camera facing northeast

### Photo 5 of 15

Courtyard  
Camera facing east-southeast

### Photo 6 of 15

Courtyard exterior, west facade  
Camera facing east-northeast

### Photo 7 of 15

East facade  
Camera facing north

### Photo 8 of 15

Unit 3 entry  
Camera facing east-southeast

### Photo 9 of 15

Unit 2 living area  
Camera facing east-northeast

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Photo 10 of 15  
Unit 2 dining and living area  
Camera facing north

Photo 11 of 15  
Unit 3 dining and living area  
Camera facing southwest

Photo 12 of 15  
Unit 2 loft  
Camera facing west

Photo 13 of 15  
Unit 3 loft bedroom  
Camera facing northeast

Photo 14 of 15  
Unit 3 loft bedroom, dresser, and balcony  
Camera facing north-northwest

Photo 15 of 15  
Unit 3 entry CMU detail  
Camera facing southeast

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## Narrative Description

The Cranfill apartment building is a two-story building composed of concrete masonry units (CMU) and board-and-batten redwood siding. Design work began in 1958 and the building was completed in 1960. Designed on a 4x8 grid with minor adjustments during construction, the apartment building is comprised of three residential units in a linear arrangement. Two single-story arms extend west from the apartment building and create a "U" shape, surrounding a central courtyard with a large oak tree. The primary façade, including the apartment entrances, faces west into the courtyard. The three apartment units are identical in layout with the exception of an additional wing in Unit 3. The building has seen little change since its construction beyond interior finishes and a condominium conversion, which involved the separation of once-shared utilities and new HVAC equipment. The apartments were designed by Harwell Hamilton Harris for Thomas Cranfill, an English professor at The University of Texas at Austin. Cranfill commissioned the building as a residence for his partner Hans Beacham, a professional photographer. Beacham occupied Unit 3 until his death in 2004, after which the apartment units were sold individually as condominiums by the Cranfill family.

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## Setting

The three-unit apartment building is located on a short, residential street in the West University neighborhood of Austin, Texas. It sits directly behind a modest 1930s bungalow that has been subdivided into two units. Collectively, the two buildings are now known as the Cliff Street Condominiums. The two-unit bungalow is designated Building A, while the three-unit Cranfill apartment building is designated Building B. This nomination is limited to Building B and its immediate surroundings only; Building A falls outside of the nomination boundaries.<sup>1</sup> A driveway for parking access runs along the north edge of the property. A narrow two-story duplex of new construction sits in close proximity to the drive. A portion of this home occupies the second level only, leaving the ground level below open for parking. The east side of the lot is covered with vegetation and bordered by a dry creek connected to Shoal Creek. The dry creek and surrounding area on the east side of the building have always been natural and untended, and bamboo planted by a neighbor across the creek spread to the house by the 1970s. The bamboo is now the most prominent vegetation on this side of the house, enhancing privacy and filtering sunlight. The Cranfill Apartments sit one lot away from a single-family dwelling also designed by Harwell Hamilton Harris and commissioned by Thomas Cranfill as his own home.<sup>2</sup>

## General Characteristics

The apartment building is constructed mainly with structural CMU on a pier-and-beam foundation, accommodating the sloped grade of the site and allowing HVAC ducting to run under the floors. One portion of the building, the extension wing of Unit 3, sits on a concrete slab foundation. Redwood board-and-batten siding covers portions of the building, mainly the second-floor portion of the west façade and the edge wall of the interior lofts. The flat roof is trimmed with a metal cap, which replaces the original wood. The CMU is left exposed and painted on the exterior and interior of the building, leaving the individual blocks and their texture

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<sup>1</sup> See boundary justification on page 4 and the boundary map on page 17.

<sup>2</sup> The Cranfill House (1955) was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.

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visible. Other notable features include the linear, box-like quality characteristic of mid-century design and the double-height interior living areas, faced almost entirely with glass and looking out to the private east side of the lot.

**Courtyard**

The north side of the courtyard is enclosed by a CMU wall dividing two walkways. One of these walkways, on the north (exterior) side of the courtyard, is fully covered and provides a path to the courtyard entry in the northeast corner. Originally cantilevered and serving as a porte cochère for car access, the closed wood trellis gained 4x4 posts at a later date after it began to sag. The south (interior) walkway is covered by an open wood trellis with concealed lighting supported with 4x4 posts. A metal-frame corrugated plastic screen encloses the west end of the courtyard. The screen is not original to the building but was designed to match the proportions of the wood-framed fiberglass screen it replaces. The south end of the courtyard is enclosed by the one-story additional wing of Unit 3, faced with CMU. The east side of the courtyard is enclosed by the west façade of the apartment building and includes a walkway covered by a second-level balcony. The east covered walkway is also supported by 4x4 wood posts. The northeast corner of the courtyard includes a small common storage room enclosed in CMU.

**West (Primary) Façade**

The west façade is windowless CMU on the ground level with apartment entry doors off of a walkway covered by a balcony above. The second-level balcony and a boxed roof overhang above run the entire length of the building and are faced with board-and-batten siding. The balconies are separated between apartments by the apartments' restrooms, which protrude from the interior of the building. The west and north elevations of the restrooms are faced with siding to match the face of the balcony. Full-height wood-framed glass and jalousie glass doors separate the balcony from the apartment interiors.

**North Façade**

The north façade is a flat, windowless CMU wall with utility meters and water heaters (none original) visible at the ground level. The west half of the façade is one story high and includes a covered wood pergola providing entry into the courtyard.

**East Façade**

The east façade is divided into three identical portions framed by a flat roof overhang and extended CMU walls on the north and south ends. The three portions are divided by CMU columns. Each portion is divided into three sections of full-height glass extending from the ground plane to the roof with wood frame and mullions, flanked by two symmetrical bays of wood-framed jalousie glass doors with glass above. A rectangular, box-like wood awning shades each door. Each awning is covered with a parabolic lens on the underside and also serves as a light fixture.

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### South Façade

The south façade is a flat CMU wall with one wood-framed fixed-pane window with obscure glass, original to the building, and two metal-framed casement windows which were added later. The west half of the façade, which encloses the Unit 3 extension wing with the courtyard beyond, is one story high. The east half of the façade is two stories high.

### Interior

All three units are identical in layout with some exception in Unit 3, which has a north-facing entrance and an additional wing which includes an open nursery and second bathroom (originally a dark room that served the unit and mechanical room that served all three units). The typical unit consists of an open studio layout with a kitchen and double-height living space on the first floor and a loft bedroom and bathroom above the kitchen.

The narrow entry hall includes a small closet with washer and dryer and two partitions separating the hall from the kitchen and stair. The remainder of the first level is open and free of interior partitions. The partially enclosed kitchen includes painted wood upper and lower cabinets on the north, west, and south walls and lower cabinets with transom ledge on the east side, leaving the upper portion open to the dining and living area beyond. Gas-powered cook top and double oven are included on the east side, and a sink is included on the north side. All countertops are black plastic laminate. An open dining area beyond the kitchen also exists below the loft. Beyond the edge of the loft is the double-height living area, where the two-story glass wall on the east side provides a private view of the vegetation and creek beyond.

A narrow stair on the south side of the entry hall leads to the open second-level loft. A low ledge surrounds the loft on the east and south sides, bordering the living area and the stair. The ledge is lined with painted wood cabinets and open bookshelves facing the loft and board-and-batten siding facing the living area. The northwest corner of the loft includes an enclosed walk-in closet and bathroom separated by a short hallway with a built-in painted wood dresser.

Lighting consideration throughout the typical apartment unit is notable. The hallways at the apartment entry and loft bathroom are lit by large recessed rectangular fixtures covered with parabolic lenses that fall flush with the gypsum board ceiling. This lighting condition is echoed across the west wall of the kitchen and at the north wall of the dining area from the outer edge of the upper cabinets to the edge of the loft. Matching pendant fixtures with simple translucent glass globe shades are present above both glass doors to the backyard, at the southeast corner of the loft, and outside on the south side of each balcony. Exterior awnings covering both jalousie glass doors at the east wall of each unit contain built-in lighting fixtures concealed by obscure glass on the bottom of the awning, and the courtyard trellis is lit by concealed fixtures tucked into the trellis frame.

### Integrity

The Cranfill apartment building retains most of its original features and character and integrity is high. Stabilization work has occurred at the northwest corner of the building where a large crack had formed in the CMU wall. The apartments have been converted to condominiums, which necessitated new utility meters. The mechanical systems have also been updated, moving partially above the ceilings in some units with a

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supplemental air-conditioning unit installed in the south wall of the Unit 3 loft. Some new equipment, meters, and water heaters have been installed on the north and south exterior facades. Early brick paving in the courtyard has been replaced with mulch, likely to protect the root system of the live oak tree. The wing at the south end of the courtyard, part of Unit 3, has seen more renovation than the remainder of the building. This wing originally included a darkroom for Hans Beacham and a mechanical room that served all three units. The darkroom has been converted to a restroom and a bedroom, and the mechanical room has been converted into another bedroom. Windows along the south façade and a skylight have been added for natural light. An exterior door at the west side of the mechanical room has been removed. The roof of this wing has been raised to meet the top of the balcony ledge, and new metal scuppers have been added for drainage. All new infill material is CMU to match the existing material. The roof has been covered with a new PVC membrane.

All three apartment units retain some of the original interior finishes, with several visible changes throughout. A small coat closet originally installed in the entry hall below the stairs has been expanded to house a washer and dryer in all three units. Units 1 and 3 retain the original bathroom layout but include all new finishes and fixtures. Unit 2 retains the original bathroom, including some original finishes and fixtures. White oak flooring has replaced the original carpet on the ground level in Units 1 and 3. This flooring material matches what was specified in the original drawings but was substituted with carpet during construction. Unit 2 has updated cork flooring. All units have original double oven, cook top, and kitchen finishes with the exception of a new quartzite countertop in Unit 3 and repainted cabinets. Paint colors vary throughout the units.

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### Statement of Significance

The Cranfill Apartments are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, as they display distinctive characteristics of mid-twentieth-century modern design on a residential scale. Additionally, the building is an elegant and exemplary example of the work of Harwell Hamilton Harris, widely regarded as a master of this era of design. Harris designed the apartments in 1958 for a professor at The University of Texas at Austin, where he had served as Dean of the School of Architecture before moving to Dallas around the time he designed the building. The building is one of few examples of Harris's work in Austin and is associated with the Thomas Cranfill House, designed by Harris in 1952 and located just one lot south. The period of significance for the nominated property is 1960, the year in which construction on the building was complete.

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### The Architect

Harwell Hamilton Harris was born in Redlands, California, on July 2, 1903. Though his father, Frederick Thomas Harris, was a locally known architect, Harris did not pursue architecture at the beginning of his studies. Originally studying sculpture at Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, Harris developed an interest in the field of architecture after visiting Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House. His interest in Wright's organic style of architecture, his early life in southern California, and his early educational and professional influences all informed the distinct architectural style he ultimately developed. He did not ultimately pursue formal architecture training, instead beginning his career by working under Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler while completing night classes in engineering. The characteristic style he developed in his own practice combined aspects of Neutra's functionalist style with the material warmth and organic nature of Frank Lloyd Wright's work. Harris also gave some of his career to education, serving as the Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin and teaching at Columbia University. He also designed several commercial structures, including the Dallas Trade Mart and First Unitarian Church in Dallas and the Greenwood Mausoleum in Fort Worth. He was, however, primarily known for the residences he designed. Harris became one of the most prominent proponents of regionalism in modern architecture, helping to develop the heralded California Modern style.<sup>3</sup>

### Harris's Work in Texas

Harris moved to Texas in 1951 to serve as the Dean of the School of Architecture at The University of Texas at Austin. During his four years at the school, he overhauled the curriculum, emphasizing spatial awareness, critique of existing architecture, and regionalism. He hired several new faculty members who shared his views on architectural education and would later come to be known as the "Texas Rangers." One of the most notable projects during this time was the Pace Setter House in Dallas, Texas, in which Harris involved six University of Texas students for the entire scope of the project. *House Beautiful* commissioned the house in 1954 to be built

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<sup>3</sup> "Biographical Sketch of Harwell Hamilton Harris", *Harwell Hamilton Harris*, Alexander Architectural Archive; Germany, Harwell Hamilton Harris

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at the Dallas State Fair with funding from the Dallas Power and Light Company, who wished to promote electrical equipment in residences.<sup>4</sup>

Harris's typical Texas residences, though they display elements similar to his California buildings, are distinct in a few ways. Due to the hot Texas climate, they are relatively closed when compared to his open, "spider-web" designs more prevalent in California. They also employ some materials local to the region, such as cypress wood. Although Texas holds a relatively large number of Harris's works, second only to California, only four of his works exist in Austin. After leaving his position at The University of Texas at Austin in 1955, Harris moved to Dallas and continued to complete projects primarily in Texas and California. These included notable non-residential projects in Dallas including the Dallas Trade Mart, Greenwood Mausoleum, and First Unitarian Church.<sup>5</sup> When he received the commission for the Cranfill Apartments in 1958, Harris asked Don Legge, one of The University of Texas students involved in the Pace Setter House project, to serve as the supervising architect in Austin. Harris employed another University of Texas student, Egan Ray Gleason, to work exclusively on the apartment project as a draftsman.<sup>6</sup>

### The Cranfill Apartments

The Cranfill Apartments elegantly embody many of Harwell Hamilton Harris's architectural ideals, including honesty of materials, efficiency and economy, and connection to the site. Lisa Germany describes the building in her biography of Harwell Hamilton Harris:

"Hidden behind a conventional house on a remote street, the concrete block apartments held out Harris's favorite surprise: a rich and private exposure to nature. Quiet and elegantly functional, they are among his best work."<sup>7</sup>

The modesty and simplicity of the forms in the building allows the rest of the character-defining features to become especially apparent. Harris's much-heralded Havens House,<sup>8</sup> constructed in Berkeley, California, in 1940, made use of its hillside site to accomplish a dramatic progression from a closed, compressed street entry to an expansive view of San Francisco Bay on the private side of the house. The Cranfill apartments employ a similar progression, both in the initial entrance from the public street into the communal courtyard and again in the entry to each individual apartment. Though the Cranfill apartments are much smaller than the Havens House and on a relatively level plane, this progression effectively creates buffers between public and private space at two levels and highlights the connection to the site's natural features, including the existing large oak tree in the courtyard and the wooded area east of the building. Germany also notes that the loft layout and double-height window wall resemble the house Harris later designed for himself in Raleigh, North Carolina.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Germany, *Harwell Hamilton Harris*, 139-151

<sup>5</sup> Germany, *Harwell Hamilton Harris*, 157-187

<sup>6</sup> Letters from Harwell Hamilton Harris, Alexander Architectural Archive

<sup>7</sup> Germany, *Harwell Hamilton Harris*, 175

<sup>8</sup> The Weston Havens House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Germany, *Harwell Hamilton Harris*, 197. The Harwell Hamilton and Jean Bangs Harris House and Office was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2010.

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The simple and rational floor plan, designed on Harris's typical three-foot grid and almost completely devoid of walls, exemplifies his ideal for clarity and efficiency in plan. The few interior walls that do exist within each unit, with the exception of the wall enclosing the stair, always serve to provide or support storage millwork. Likewise, almost all storage provided in the apartments functions doubly to divide space. The ceilings are flat and uninterrupted, using only recessed and pendant lighting and a small recessed utility fan over the stove to maintain a single plane across each apartment.

Harris often used radiant heating in his California homes, including the Havens and Harold English residences. By the time Harris designed the Cranfill apartments, however, he had begun to use conventional air conditioning more frequently in his work. This was likely influenced by the Texas climate, and Harris went as far as developing plans for an air-conditioned courtyard in a Texas residence just before he designed the Cranfill apartments.<sup>10</sup> The Cranfill courtyard is not air conditioned; however, the enclosed courtyard, jalousie glass and placement of openings to promote cross breezes contribute to the building's favorable adaptability to hot weather. Paul Lamb, who lived in Unit 2 in the 1970s as an architecture student at The University of Texas at Austin, has noted that he often kept the jalousie windows open and did not need to use air conditioning.<sup>11</sup> The air conditioning system, completely concealed below the floor and above the second-floor ceiling, takes care of additional necessary relief from the Austin summer heat. The Cranfill apartments also demonstrate the transition to Harris's more frequent use of heavier exterior building materials, including concrete block and brick, that developed as he designed more Texas residences.<sup>12</sup>

Harris's original attempt to use locally cut cypress wood also speaks to his regional style. Project files reveal that Latane Temple, the Diboll, Texas, supplier who had previously provided long-leaf pine for the Pace Setter House, had no cypress available due to flooded swamp land.<sup>13</sup> Only then was the siding material changed to redwood, which Harris used in many of his California homes.

The spare and exposed use of materials in the Cranfill Apartments exemplifies Harris's ideal of honesty in materials. This is best demonstrated by the redwood board-and-batten siding—which received a clear finish outside and was left unfinished inside—and the concrete block, which was painted but otherwise unfinished to expose its texture. The mostly exposed materials lend a warmth to the building that even further emphasizes its connection to nature. Materials are treated systematically: Concrete block is only punctured completely from floor to ceiling, and natural wood is used only in narrow horizontal runs.

The Cranfill Apartments display several hallmarks of mid-twentieth-century modern home design both in form and materials. The overall building and the individual apartments are linear, box-like, and understated. The flat roof and lack of ornament add to the sleek quality typical of modern buildings of this era. Further adding to this quality are large expanses of glass with minimal mullions and architectural lighting designed to maintain a continuous ceiling plane.

<sup>10</sup> Germany, *Harwell Hamilton Harris*, 170-173

<sup>11</sup> Telephone interview with Paul Lamb, December 13, 2012

<sup>12</sup> Germany, *Harwell Hamilton Harris* (exhibition), 62

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Latane Temple to Harwell Hamilton Harris, Alexander Architectural Archive

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According to Paul Lamb, a resident of Unit 2 in the 1970s and 1980s, the apartment building was originally conceived as a private studio to be built onto the back of the nearby Cranfill House.<sup>14</sup> This is supported by an early letter from Harwell Hamilton Harris to Don Legge, which describes the project as an addition.<sup>15</sup> Lamb also notes that the decision to build a multi-unit residential building detached from the house was due to the opportunity to gain additional income and a more discrete location for Beacham, who was Cranfill's partner. Cranfill and Beacham frequently traveled to Mexico together, and Beacham's photography book *Architecture of Mexico: Yesterday and Today* was published while Beacham lived in the Cranfill Apartments. After Cranfill died in 1995, his estate retained ownership of the building until after Beacham's death in 2004.

Until their condominium conversion in 2007, the apartments were occupied mainly by long-term tenants who were professors or students at The University of Texas. Original tenants in Units 1 and 2 included a single woman who worked in advertising and two graduate law students, both of whom Thomas Cranfill had taught previously. In a letter to Harwell Hamilton Harris dated January 21, 1960, Thomas Cranfill noted, "I hated to surrender my resolve not to rent to students, but grew nervous after two weeks of advertising by a real estate agent, who showed them to twenty prospects, then tried to persuade me to lower the rent. One lady complained that her hair would never go with the color of the walls."<sup>16</sup>

### **The Cranfill Apartments and the Cranfill House**

Harris designed the Cranfill House (NR, 2004) as a residence for Thomas Cranfill in 1952, during his position at The University of Texas at Austin. The house was built in 1955, three years before the apartment building was designed. The Cranfill House sits on a nearby lot at 1901 Cliff Street, hidden from view by vegetation. The two buildings are faced with matching, natural finish, board-and-batten siding, though the siding on the Cranfill house was executed in local cypress wood while the availability of cypress at the time of the apartment project prevented its use there.<sup>17</sup> Other similar aesthetic traits include wood trellises and concrete aggregate exterior walkways. One distinct difference between the two is the material used for the main construction: The Cranfill House is a wood frame building on a concrete slab foundation, reflective of Harris's residences and his earlier work in California. The Cranfill Apartments are constructed of concrete block, similar to non-residential work such as St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Big Spring, Texas, which was built in 1960.<sup>18</sup> Both the Cranfill House and the Cranfill Apartments exhibit a hallmark of Harris's work with similar-feeling closed and private front entrances that give way to open and expansive views at the rear, maximizing exposure to the natural resources of the area.

<sup>14</sup> Telephone conversation between Paul Lamb and the author.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Harwell Hamilton Harris, Alexander Architectural Archive

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Thomas Cranfill to Harwell Hamilton Harris, Alexander Architectural Archive

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Latane Temple to Harwell Hamilton Harris, Alexander Architectural Archive

<sup>18</sup> Germany, *Harwell Hamilton Harris*, 170-171



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Paul Lamb, Interview with author, December 13, 2012.

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## **Cranfill-Beacham Apartments (1958)**

1911 Cliff Street, Units 1-3, Austin TX 78705

Prepared for Ernesto Cragnolino, president, Cliff Street Condominium Owners Association

By Phoebe Allen (phoebezink@gmail.com)

Legal description: Lots 14 & 15 + S. 25ft. of Lot 16, Block 3

### **SUMMARY**

The Cranfill-Beacham Apartments, located eight blocks from the University of Texas, were designed in 1958 by architect **Harwell Hamilton Harris**, one of the leading designers of the Mid-Century Modern style, to house Thomas Cranfill's partner, **Hans Beacham**, a highly respected photographer, on property one lot away from Cranfill's home, also designed by Harris. According to Harris' biographer, Lisa Germany, "the double height, rectangular box quality of the Charles Eames house in Los Angeles with its open-mezzanine second floor may have worked subtly on Harris as he designed three apartments<sup>1</sup> in Austin for Tom Cranfill. ... Hidden behind a conventional house on a remote street, the concrete block apartments held out Harris's favorite surprise: a rich and private exposure to nature. Quiet and elegantly functional, they are among his best work."<sup>2</sup>

Cranfill's home and the Cranfill-Beacham Apartments both reflect the adaptation of Harris' California style to the climate, environment, and materials available in Austin, and mark a further transition between his work in California and that in North Carolina.

### **GEOGRAPHIC SETTING & HISTORY OF PROPERTY**

The apartments are located on a quiet street in the West University neighborhood area known as the **Carrington Subdivision**. The triplex is situated behind a modest, early 1930s bungalow.<sup>3</sup> The 1935 Sanborn map indicates a prior one-story rear apartment whose footprint was considerably smaller than the triplex. Full glass windows and louvered glass doors on the rear façade of the Cranfill-Beacham Apartments overlook gardens and vegetation in a drainage creek that feeds Shoal Creek. Significant vegetation screens the rear garden area from adjacent neighbors to the rear.

**Leonidas Davis Carrington** (1816-1897) purchased for \$3,200 the property between Palmetto/22<sup>nd</sup> and Magnolia/19<sup>th</sup>, Shoal Creek and San Gabriel in 1854 as a family farm. The land was originally owned by **Hannah** and **David Gouverneur Burnet** (1788-1870) (President of the Republic of Texas for seven months in 1836 and Vice President under Mirabeau Lamar), to whom it had been given by the Republic of Texas.<sup>4</sup>

Carrington, a merchant and land speculator who would serve as Captain and Assistant Quartermaster in the Civil War, arrived in Austin from Mississippi in 1852. The family lived in

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<sup>1</sup> Harris lists 1958 as the date for the Cranfill apartments in *The Organic View of Design*, an interview by Judy Stonefield, under the auspices of the Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Germany, Lisa. *Harwell Hamilton Harris*. University of California Press in association with the University of Texas Center for the Study of American Architecture. 2000 edition; first published by the University of Texas Press, 1991. pg. 175.

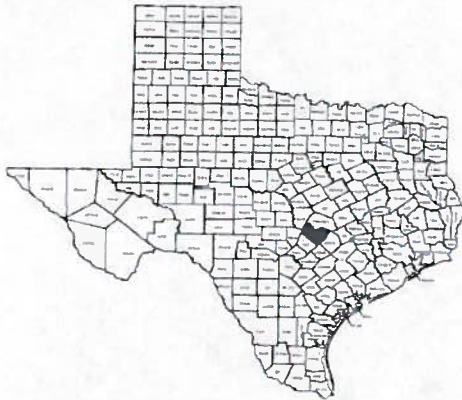
<sup>3</sup> The house, believed to have been used as a dormitory, was converted into a duplex after a fire. It was recently renovated with removal of vinyl siding to expose the original wood boards.

<sup>4</sup> *Austin Daily Statesman*, Feb. 13, 1897, pg. 3.

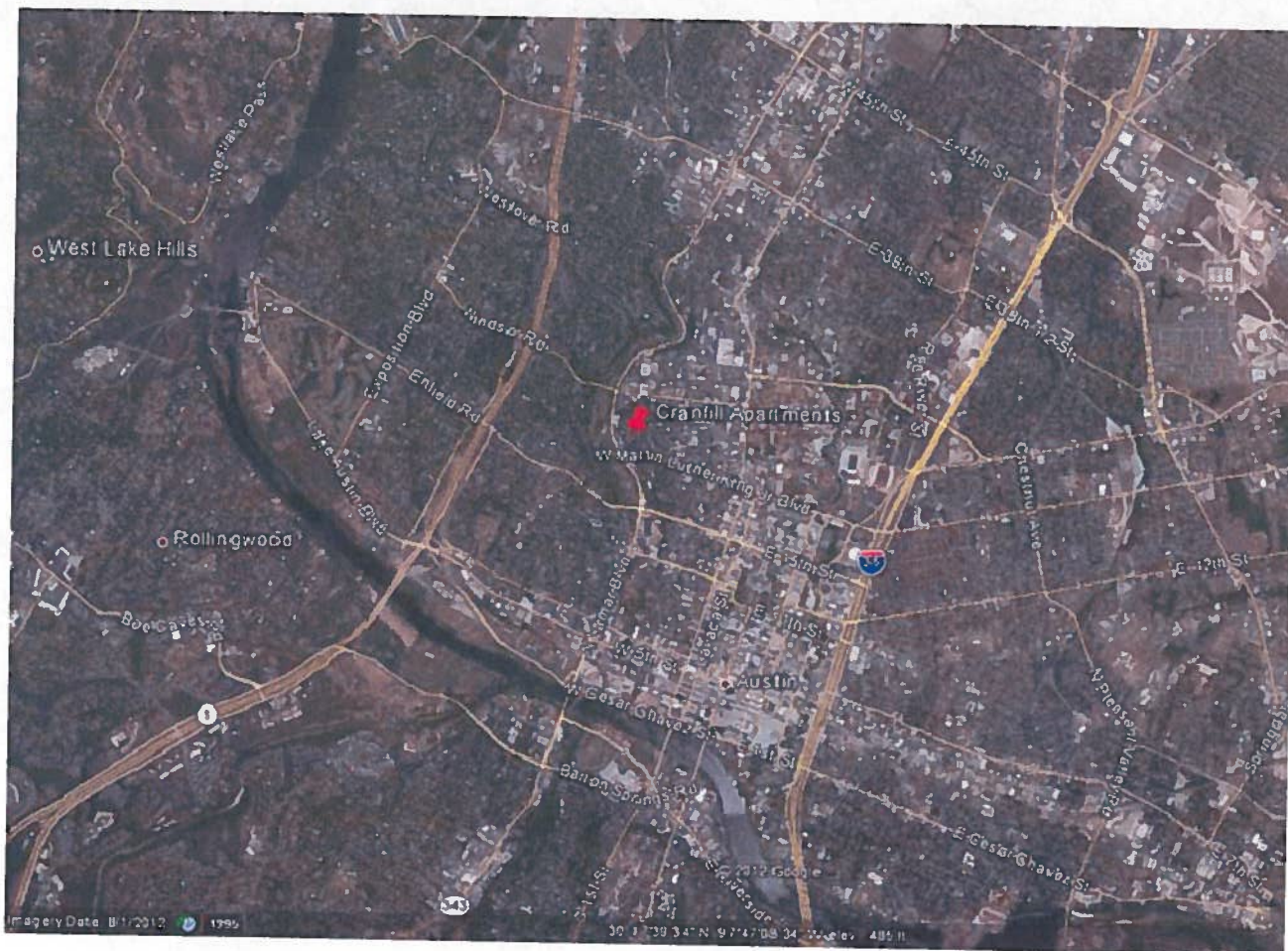
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Cranfill Apartments, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Map 1: Travis County (shaded) is located in central Texas.



Map 2: Cranfill Apartments is located in west central Austin. Map obtained from Google Earth.

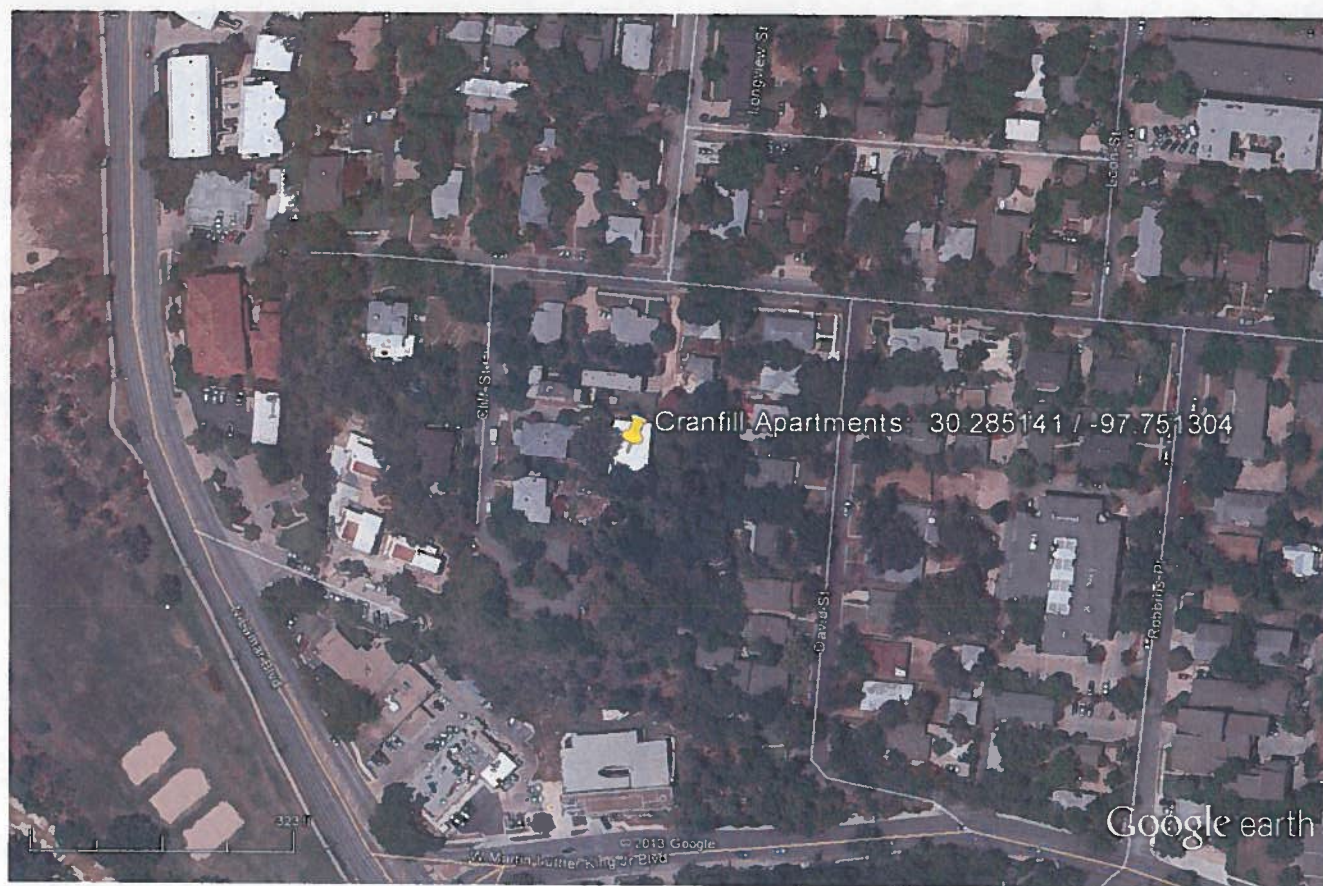


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Cranfill Apartments, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Map 3: Scaled Google Earth map with locational data for Cranfill Apartments.



Google earth

feet  
meters 200 800

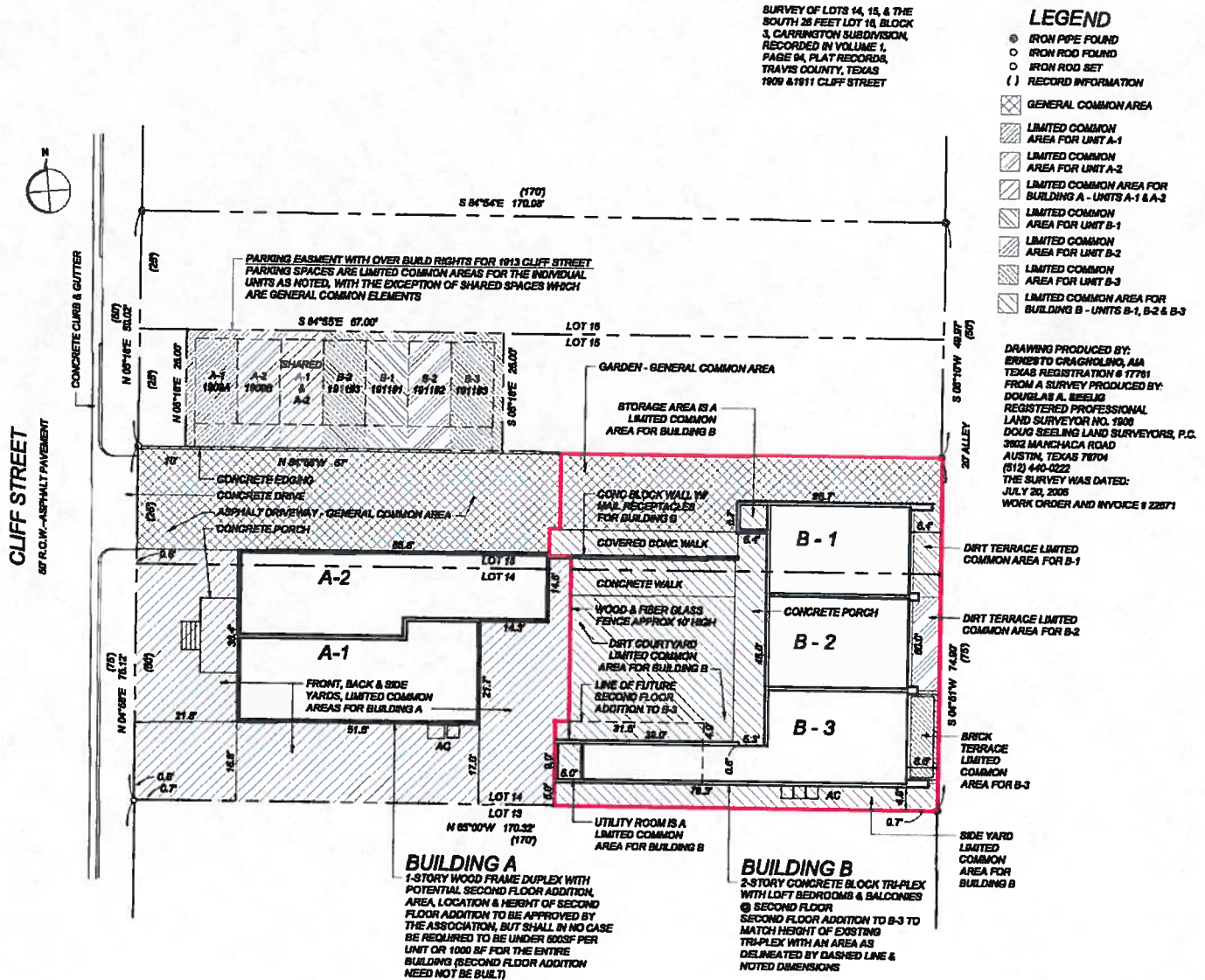


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Cranfill Apartments, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Map 4: Boundary for the nominated property is shown in red. Original map by Ernesto Cragnolino, AIA, with modifications by Texas Historical Commission staff.

Scale: 1 inch = 32 feet



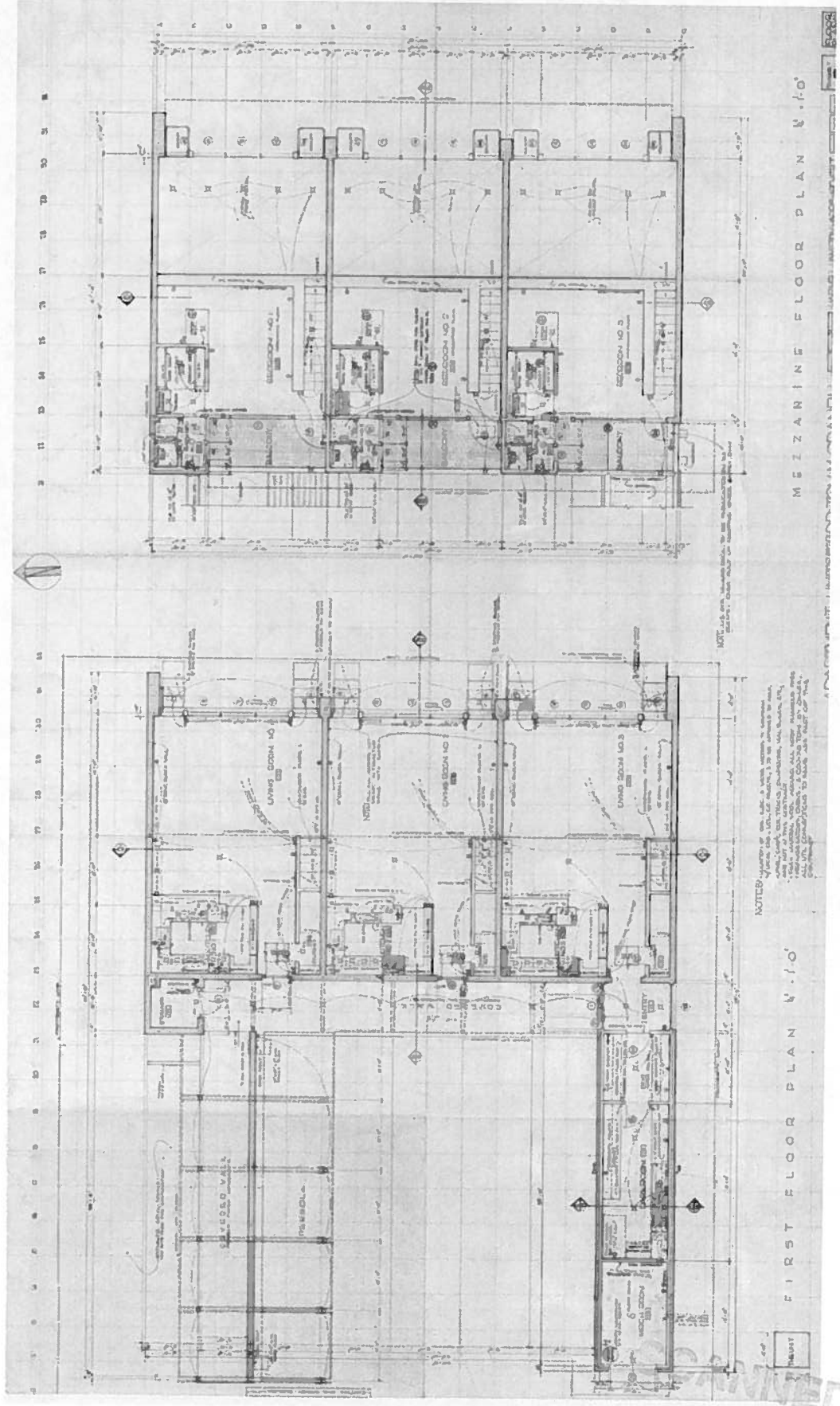
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Figure 2: Interior floor plans from original architectural drawings in the Alexander Architectural Archive at The University of Texas at Austin.



Cranfill Apartments, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Figure 3: Exterior elevations from original architectural drawings in the Alexander Architectural Archive at The University of Texas at Austin.

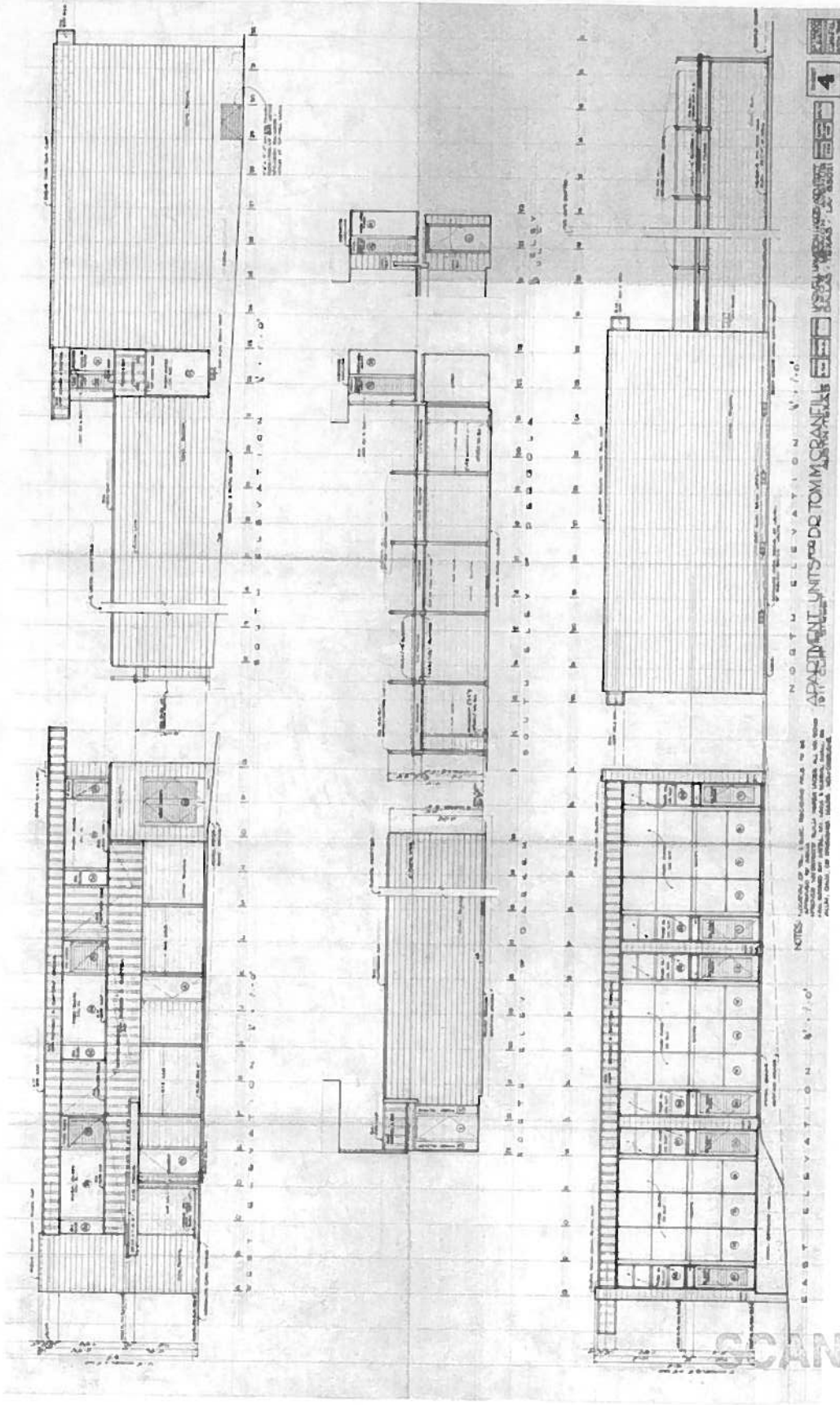


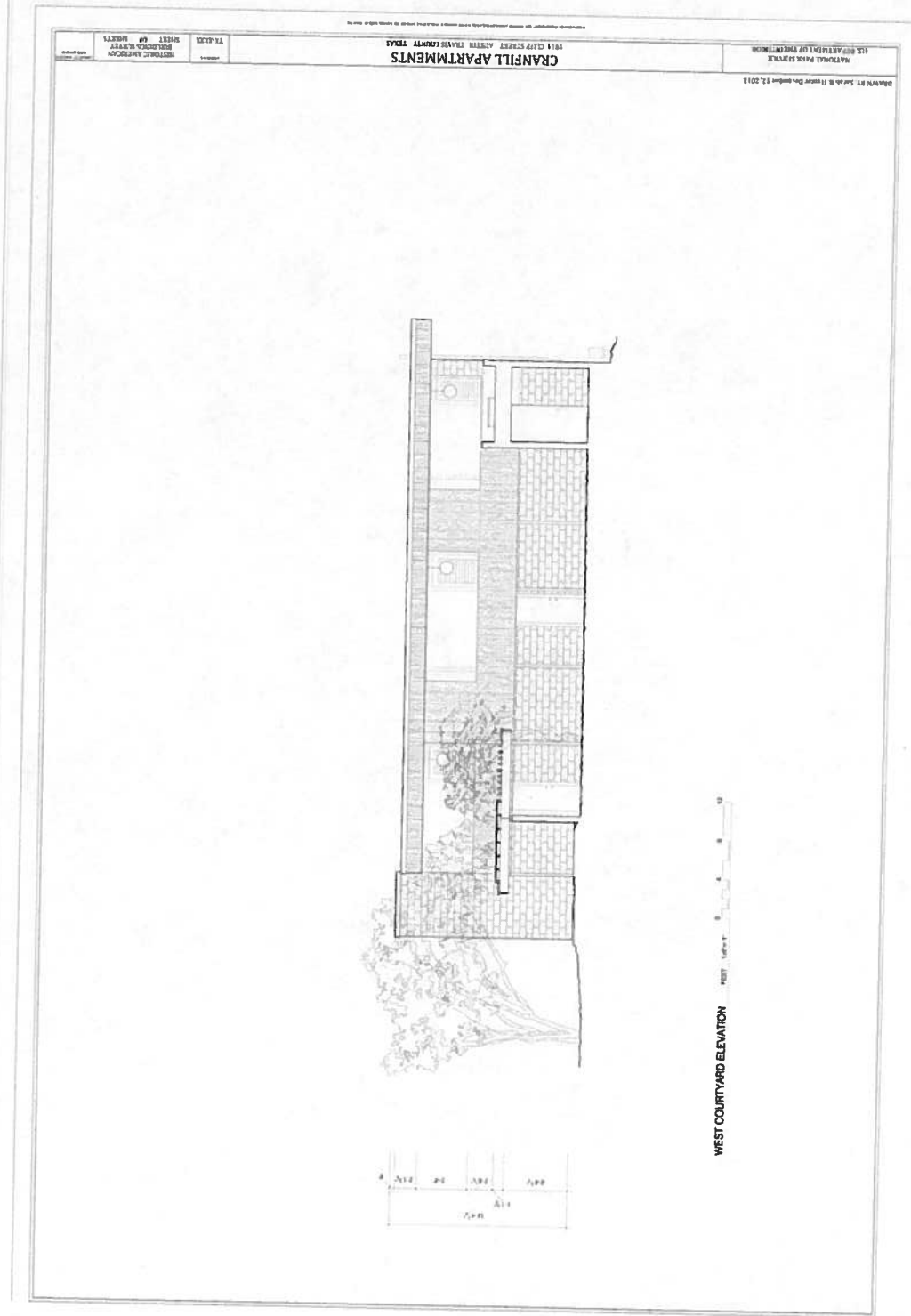
Figure 4: Building section through Unit 3 drawn by Emily Ardoin for HABS from field measurements.



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Cranfill Apartments, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Figure 5: West exterior elevation drawn by Sarah Hunter for HABS from field measurements.



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Figure 6: East exterior elevation and building section drawn by Maggie Hereford for HABS from field measurements.

