

The Ellinwood Riviera Legacy

By Elizabeth A. Spatz, Hollywood Riviera Homeowners Association Historian

Recently I was researching the history of my home in the Torrance Riviera and learned from its original 1956 building permit, that its provenance began with an owner referred to as the “Ellinwood Corporation.” I was not familiar with the name Ellinwood, and was compelled to learn more. What I discovered—a heritage stemming from the Civil War era and California’s Rancho days, routed through some of San Francisco’s founding medical community—was not what I expected.



**CHARLES N. ELLINWOOD,
SURGEON**

Photograph of Dr. C.N. Ellinwood, ca. 1865.

Charles Norman Ellinwood, born in Vermont in 1834, became a well-respected physician in the San Francisco Bay area. Attending medical school in Chicago in 1858 and continuing his studies in Paris until 1862, he joined the 74th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment, assembled in Rockford, IL on 4 Sept. 1862, and operated as a surgeon in the U.S. Civil War for Lincoln’s army until his discharge as medical director on 10 June 1865. In 1866, Dr. C.N. Ellinwood moved to San Francisco, married Elizabeth Steele McDowell of New York, and settled into a prominent career in medicine, serving on the boards of Cooper Medical College, the Regents of the State University of California, and as president of the San Francisco Medical Society.¹

In the course of his successful medical career, C.N. Ellinwood had befriended his colleague, Dr. Levi Cooper Lane, founder of the Cooper Medical College and Lane Hospital, both institutions having been under Ellinwood’s leadership for a time. At Dr. Lane’s death in May of 1902, the task of distributing his estate was left to Ellinwood, who, following the death of Lane’s widow just six months later, chose to retain the majority of the holdings as his own property, maintaining that the estate was left to him unconditionally by Mrs. Lane.² One of the properties in Dr. Lane’s estate was a plot of

land located in Southern California,³ purchased by Lane for taxes and identified as Lot B in an 1882 partition map of the Rancho Los Palos Verdes.⁴

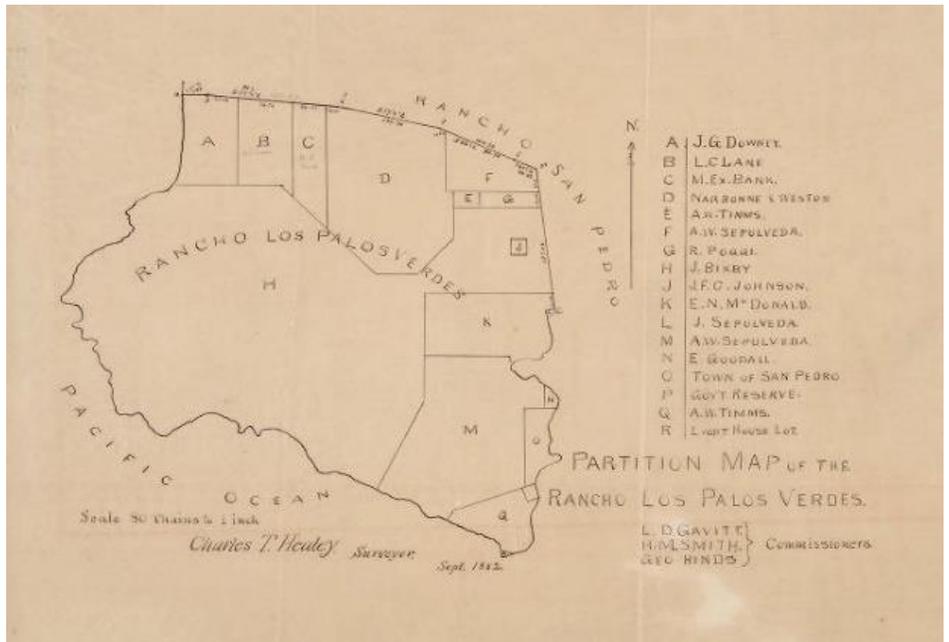
¹ Biographic information from Charles Norman Ellinwood Personal Papers (MSS 44), Lane Medical Archives, Stanford University Medical Center.

² Wilson, John L. *Stanford University School of Medicine and the Predecessor Schools: An Historical Perspective*, 1998, Part IV: Cooper Medical College 1883-1912, Chapter 29, The Ellinwood Affair 1905-1907. <available online at <https://lane.stanford.edu/med-history/wilson/aboutwilson.html>>

³ Dr. Lane owned several parcels of land in Southern California, and from 1888-1897, as noted in the *Los Angeles Times* real estate transfer postings, sold property in San Pedro to notable buyers such as George H. Peck and Arcadia B. de Gaffey (wife of John T. Gaffey).

⁴ “Partition Map of the Rancho Los Palos Verdes”, September 1882, call no. SR_Map_0090, collection of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

A sprawling 31,629-acre property previously owned by brothers Jose Loreto and Juan Capistrano Sepulveda, the Rancho Los Palos Verdes, granted to the Sepulveda family by Governor Pio Pico in 1846, encompassed the present-day Palos Verdes Peninsula as well as portions of San Pedro and Torrance. Partition B would eventually become known as the 1,000-acre Ellinwood Ranch and was bordered by Sepulveda Blvd on the north and Torrance City boundary on the south, the Torrance/Redondo city boundary line and eastern edge of the Hollywood Riviera area along Via Colusa on the west, and roughly followed Anza Avenue along its eastern edge. The Ellinwood plot of land remained undeveloped for nearly 70 years after its acquisition from the Sepulveda brothers.



Partition Map of the Rancho Los Palos Verdes, September 1882 (Collection of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.)

So how did a prominent San Francisco physician, who evidently only visited Southern California to give an occasional medical convention lecture, become involved with developing Torrance real estate?⁵ It appears that it was the County of Los Angeles who first contacted Dr. Ellinwood about his South Bay property, seeking permission in 1908 to begin road construction through the northwest corner of his Rancho Lot B partition. This request was granted, as was the County's later right of way submission for continued road work in 1934, approved by Ellinwood's surviving children, Lathrop Ellinwood and Charlotte Greer. While Lathrop was slow to embrace change – the family home in Pacific Heights was left to him and remained empty and untouched for decades after his mother's death in 1929 – Charlotte was known for her societal activities and charity work. And it was Charlotte who precipitated the development of the Ellinwood property into one of Torrance's most notable residential neighborhoods.

⁵ The claim by an *LA Times* article (published 21 June 1953) stating that C.N. Ellinwood "had lived in this area as a child" is unverified. Ellinwood was born and lived with his family in Vermont until he was orphaned at age 10 in 1844, after which he likely went to live with his maternal grandparents or possibly his older sister, Julia, who lived in Illinois, where Ellinwood later attended medical school. There is no evidence that Ellinwood ever lived in Southern California.

In December of 1945, Charlotte Ellinwood Greer⁶, daughter of Dr. C.N. Ellinwood, who died in 1917, sold her inherited portion of the family ranch for an undisclosed amount⁷ to Los Angeles attorney Roy P. Dolley⁸ for the development of an elaborate, million-dollar housing project.⁹ Mrs. Greer's land was comprised of 207 acres extending north from Pacific Coast Highway (then called Highway 101) along the Torrance-Redondo Beach line to Avenue G, and east about one-half mile. This was the first subdivision provided for development to the city of Torrance from the Ellinwood Ranch property, and in May of 1946, the Torrance Planning Commission gave approval for realtor Ben Haggott,¹⁰ who was managing the development for Dolley, to begin subdividing 69 of the 207 acres into 188 housing lots for the initial development phase of what would become Seaside Ranchos.¹¹ In March of 1947, Haggott continued with a second development phase for his Seaside Ranchos project, allocating 150 more acres of the Ellinwood tract for building 450 additional homes. The transformation of the Ellinwood tract, which had been an agricultural area until now, was well underway.¹²



City of Torrance map with Ellinwood tract highlighted (in yellow), 1939. Sepulveda Blvd forms north boundary, Torrance/Palos Verdes Estate city line is south boundary. Torrance/Redondo city line is west edge, and Anza Avenue forms east edge boundary. (Courtesy Torrance Historical Society)

⁶ Charlotte Ellinwood, wife Robert P. Greer, is also referred to as Mrs. Charlotte McGreer, a likely conflation of an abbreviation of her mother's maiden name, McDowell, appearing as a middle name, i.e., Charlotte Mc Greer.

⁷ "Attorney Buys Torrance Tract", *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Dec. 1945.

⁸ Full name Leroy Pearce Dolley (1899-1964), according to Ancestry.com.

⁹ "207 Acre Ellinwood tract Purchased for Elaborate Home Development Project", *Torrance Herald*, 20 Dec. 1945.

¹⁰ Edward Benjamin Haggott (1904-1982) was a realtor, developer, and president of the Palos Verdes Water Company. He played an instrumental role in formulating Southern California's water policies and in 1982, the Torrance City Council resolved to dedicate a water reservoir in his honor.

¹¹ Seaside Ranchos was initially referred to as "Dolley Seaside Acres." See "Torrance Beach Tract Approved" in *San Pedro News-Pilot*, 8 May 1946.

¹² At the Torrance City Council meeting of March 6, 1946, Ben Haggott requested the tract of 188 lots to be rezoned from A-1, agricultural, to R-1 residential and one lot allocated to C-1 for commercial development, ostensibly what would become the Plaza Mayor at the corner of Calle Mayor and Pacific Coast Highway. His request was approved.

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Seaside Rancho advertisement in the Redondo Reflex, 16 May 1947.

In May of 1947, barely one year after phase one development had begun, Seaside Rancho homes, designed by local architect George Morlan,¹³ were available for sale. With an average cost of \$10,500 for 1,200 square feet, the ranch style homes featured three bedrooms, real fireplaces, efficient kitchens and tiled showers, in a neighborhood “where values will maintain!”¹⁴ By August more than 30 of the 140 homes sites had been occupied, with the family of Mr. and Mrs. A. Fredericks of 5335 Sharynne Lane being identified as the first to move into the Seaside Ranchos neighborhood.¹⁵ To support the needs of the rapidly growing Seaside community, Haggott made eight acres of the Ellinwood tract available to the newly formed Torrance City School system for construction of an elementary school. Seaside Elementary School opened in February of 1950, with 440 students enrolled in the first, completely modern school constructed in Torrance since Fern Avenue School opened in 1932. Designed by architect Arthur Mann,¹⁶ Seaside Elementary featured slanted ceilings and louvered windows, embracing new indirect lighting principles that attracted educators from around the country.¹⁷

Over the next ten years, the city of Torrance negotiated acquiring the remainder of the Ellinwood Ranch from Mrs. Greer’s brother, Dr. Lathrop M. Ellinwood, who was C.N. Ellinwood’s eldest living son.¹⁸ Also a physician from the San Francisco area, Lathrop had been reluctant to release the property until he was assured it would become a “proper development as a beautiful residential section.”¹⁹ The city of Torrance was certainly in accord with providing the necessary elements for a beautiful, proper development. In 1948 discussions began over a 10-acre site to be acquired by the Torrance School District for the establishment of a new school for the upper Riviera, which would become Riviera Elementary School. The following year developer Ben Haggott presented plans to the Torrance Planning Commission for a shopping center to be located at Calle Mayor and Pacific Coast Highway, becoming the first business structures to be developed on the Ellinwood property. In 1950 Torrance successfully acquired the 10 acres needed for the Riviera’s new school from Lathrop Ellinwood, as well as the

¹³ George Smith Morlan, (1892-1951), also designed the Starr Building, completed in 1950, in Malaga Cove Plaza, as well as homes in Lunada Bay with Ivan T. Johns, realtor and developer. Morlan is occasionally misprinted as “Morian”, as in the Seaside Ranchos promotion material from 1947.

¹⁴ Seaside Rancho Homes advertisement, *Redondo Reflex*, 16 May 1947. Interestingly, Ben Haggott had requested that sidewalks be omitted from the Seaside Rancho development, to retain a more rural atmosphere, but withdrew his request to the city planning commission in February of 1947, according to “Realtor Withdraws Sidewalk Complaint” in *San Pedro News-Pilot*, 11 Feb. 1947.

¹⁵ “Seaside Ranchos 140 Homes Now Nearing Completion”, *Redondo Reflex*, 15 Aug. 1947.

¹⁶ Arthur Mann, of the architectural firm Daniel, Mann and Johnson, was also involved with the design of Riviera Elementary School, which opened in 1952.

¹⁷ “School Dedication Sunday”, *Torrance Herald*, 2 Feb. 1950.

¹⁸ Lathrop McDowell Ellinwood, M.D., (1883-1976) was the second eldest son of C.N. Ellinwood, and outlived his brothers Charles Norman Ellinwood (1881-1942) and Veranus McDowell Ellinwood (1888-1953) to manage the Ellinwood estate with his sister, Charlotte Ellinwood (1879-1954).

¹⁹ “Homes to Rise on Old Rancho”, *Los Angeles Times*, 21 June 1953.

necessary land for the future South High School, which wouldn't open until January of 1958.²⁰ The Los Angeles architectural firm of Daniel, Mann and Johnson were hired to design the 13-room elementary school, estimated to cost \$300,000.²¹ Believed to be among the first schools using tilt-up, pre-cast concrete construction, Riviera Elementary School opened on Sept. 15, 1952, with an enrollment of 503 students.²²



Harry Kissel (left) with Dr. Lathrop Ellinwood at Ellinwood tract ground-breaking ceremony, 12 June 1953. (Courtesy San Pedro News-Pilot, 15 June 1953.)

Continuing to ensure there would be an adequate number of schools ready for the quickly expanding Ellinwood community, the city of Torrance began plans for building an elementary school to serve the lower Riviera area in November of 1952. Originally named Pacific Elementary, the school opened in September of 1955 as Newton Elementary School, to avoid confusion with a Manhattan Beach school also named Pacific.²³ With schools established and shopping center plans well under way, the next notable project for the Ellinwood tract evolution followed just eight months after the opening of Riviera school. This next phase of the Ellinwood property's evolution would be the largest and most ambitious project to date.

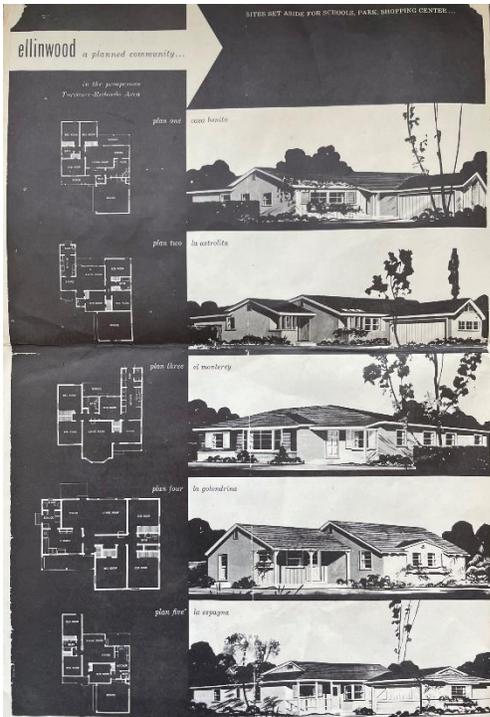
On Friday, June 12, 1953, ground was broken for an impressive \$20-million development of an additional 302 acres of Ellinwood land located south of highway 101 and west of Waleria. Attending the groundbreaking ceremonies were Dr. Lathrop M. Ellinwood, Torrance Mayor Mervin M. Schwab, County Supervisor Burton C. Chace, and Harry Kissel, president of the Ellinwood Corporation and developer of the property. Five model homes were completed first to introduce the initial phase of 190 dwellings in the new Ellinwood community, with 1,200 homes making up the project's entirety. The three-

²⁰ South High School had planned to open in the fall of 1957, but due to labor strike delays did not open until January of 1958, with several construction projects still to be completed. See "South High School's Opening Delayed Until Late Autumn", *Torrance Press*, 1 Aug. 1957.

²¹ "Riviera School Gets Nod", *Peninsula Press*, 21 Dec. 1950. Founded in 1946 by Phillip Daniel, Arthur Mann, S. Johnson, and Irvan Mendenhall, the firm of Daniel, Mann and Johnson (now known as DMJM) is credited with changing the face of corporate architecture in the late 20th century, showcasing the versatility of concrete. The Riviera Elementary school was one of their earlier projects.

²² "Record Enrollment Bulges City Schools", *Torrance Herald*, 18 Sept. 1952. Until Riviera Elementary opened, students in the area had attended Seaside Elementary School, whose previous year's enrollment dropped from 787 to 381 students. The lower enrollment at Seaside was expected to be temporary, given the many new homes nearing completion in the surrounding neighborhood.

²³ "School Name Now Newton, Not Pacific", *Torrance Herald*, 20 Jan. 1955. The name change was suggested by local residents, since the location of the Ellinwood school was on Newton Street (at Nancy Lee Lane). Newton Elementary operated as a K-8th grade school until 1972 when it was reconfigured as Richardson Middle School and, due to declining enrollment, closed in 1986. See "Torrance Unified School District Facilities & Asset Review Committee Report", June 2007, available from <https://www.tusd.org/>.



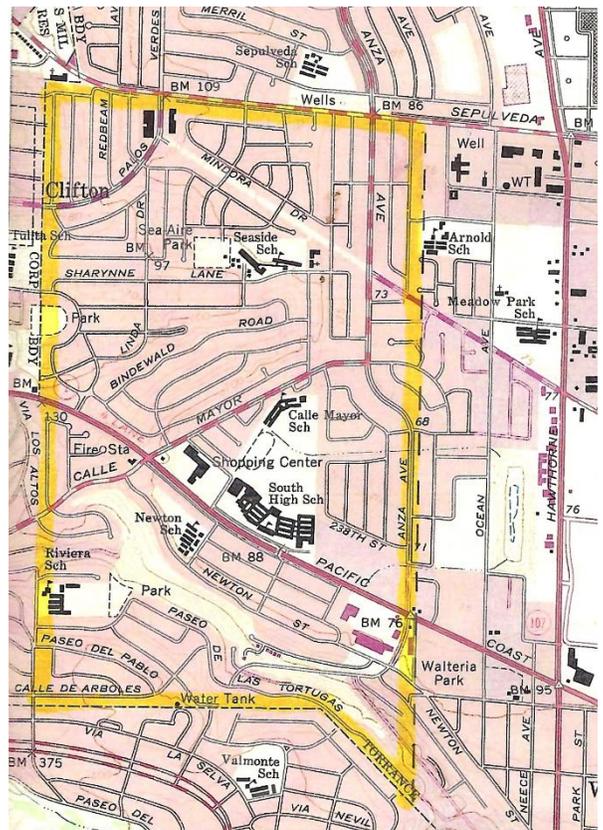
Ellinwood Homes brochure, 1953-1954.

bedroom, two-bath ranch style homes, with varying exterior features, were expected to sell for an estimated \$12,000, and were made available to veterans with no down payment, Kissel announced.²⁴ Tract plans were approved by the County of Los Angeles in 1955, and soon thereafter building permits were granted by the city of Torrance. Construction began in 1956, crowning the final phase of homes built in the Hollywood Riviera and among them, my own Ellinwood Corporation tract home.

In the course of my research, I believe I may have answered another historical question I had, that being the origins of the name of my street, Paseo de Pablo. This is likely a reference to Pablo Pryor (1839-1878), son of Nathaniel Pryor and his wife, Maria Teresa Dolores Sepulveda, sister of the Sepulveda brothers from whom Dr. Lane, and then C.N. Ellinwood, acquired the land that became the subject of this article. I also discovered other street name origins, such as NancyLee Lane, named for Harry Kissel's daughter, and Seaside Rancho's Linda Drive and Reese Road, named by Ben Haggott after a family friend

and his own son. There are likely many more discoveries to be made about our Ellinwood Rancho, which I think all would agree, is indeed the beautiful residential area that Lathrop Ellinwood had hoped it would be.

I want to give special thanks to those who assisted and inspired me in researching the Ellinwood property, being Monique Sugimoto of the Palos Verdes Library District, Kurt Weideman of the Torrance Historical Society, Rebecca Poirier of the City of Torrance, and Judy Brunetti of the Hollywood Riviera Homeowners Association. And to anyone who may have additional information or resources related to the Ellinwood property history, please contact me. There's always more to learn and share. At least I hope so!



Ellinwood tract map, 1979.

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²⁴ "Break Ground Friday for Big Housing Tract", *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, 9 June 1953.