

Mount Airy Academy

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20th April 2026 – last revised 21st April 2026



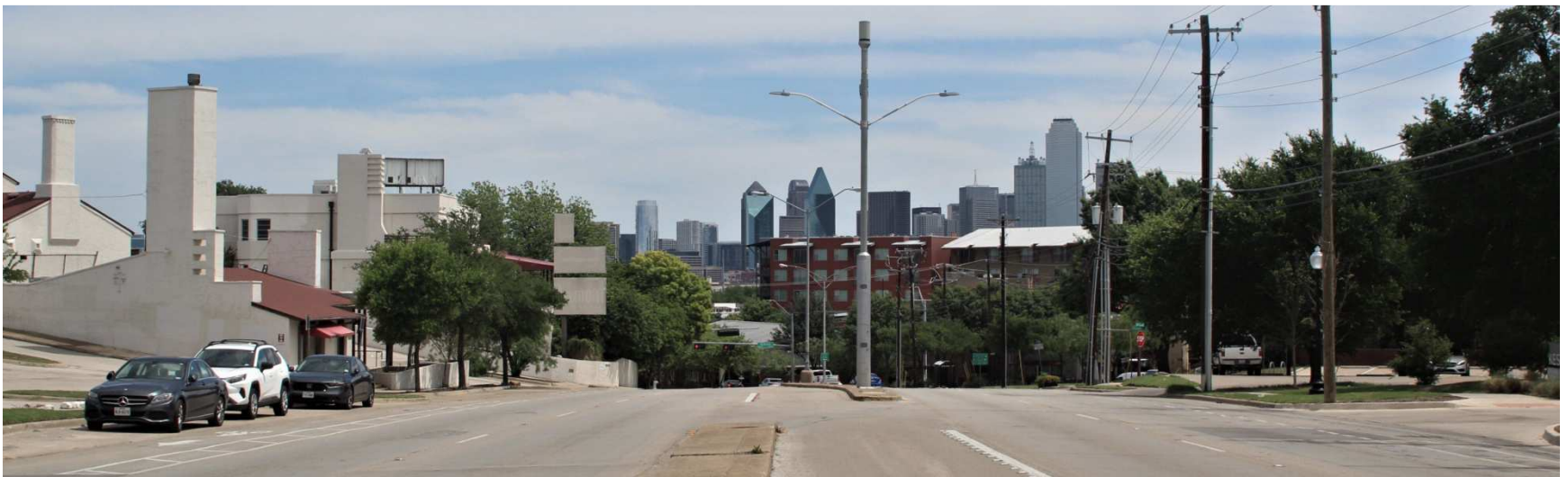
MT. AIRY ACADEMY -- 32.7684°N, 96.838°W-- shown on 2026 map from DCAD
This is generally the right area, though the precise location of the schoolhouse is unknown.

Mount Airy Academy was a public school located on the hilltop along the south side of the Fort Worth wagon road (today's Fort Worth Avenue). For a couple of decades it was the school for all the children of the West Dallas neighborhood. Like many such early "one room schools", this wood building was also used as a public meeting hall, voting poll, and church. By the end of the 19th century *Mount Airy* became a nickname denoting the entire hilltop area.

The *West Dallas Church of Christ* (later called *Western Heights Church of Christ*) used *Mt. Airy School* for its early gatherings. During founding of the church, revival preacher General Richard N. Gano led worshipers down to the freezing waters of Coombes Creek where 50 were baptized.¹ For years after the school had closed and their new 1890 church building was occupied on what-is-now North Winnetka Avenue, this congregation was still being called *Mt. Airy Church of Christ*.² In 1891 ladies of the St. Paul's Methodist-Episcopal church, located about 100 yards east, gave a "necktie party" fundraiser inside the *Mt. Airy* schoolhouse.³

Mt. Airy Academy was started by Willie Blanche Robinson (1856-1909), a daughter of Benjamin Franklin Robinson (1807-1884). Their family moved from what-is-now Kansas City to Dallas in 1872. Willie Robinson never married, never had children of her own, but spent her life teaching the children of others. She initially held school classes inside the Robinson family home on the north side of the Fort Worth wagon road. Robinson records say, "the next year a lot was donated without deed, then the community erected a small frame school house and painted it brown, where Willie Blance taught". Like her father, Willie B. Robinson knew Latin and Greek, and was an authority on literature and history. She wrote poetry for recreation, published under the penname "*Persia*". Willie B. Robinson became one of the Examiners granting certification to new Dallas school teachers. After starting the *Mt. Airy Academy* Willie Blanche Robinson taught school in the communities of Wheatland and Jimtown, then ended her teaching career with years of teaching third graders at Cumberland Hill School across the Trinity River in Dallas.

The Robinson's family history notes locate this school building: "at present 900 block Ft. Worth Avenue".⁴ Land donated for a school site there was owned by Reverend Samuel Armstrong (1809-1890) and Dr. John Stevens (1824-1881), who lived about a mile west-southwest at today's *Middlebrook Place*. It seems consistent with Reverend Samuel Armstrong's past service as founding trustee of the Tuskegee Female College, in Alabama, to become a patron of education again at his new home in Texas.⁵



Standing in Fort Worth Avenue in front of the conjectured site of *Mt. Airy Academy* schoolhouse (April 2026- author)
Today this view is cluttered, but it still hints of the sweeping vista across the floodplain from *Mt. Airy Academy* in the 1880s.

Mount Airy Academy, in its day, was cited often as a venue for teaching, preaching, and politicking; yet now information about the building and its site is scarce and meager. My research has found no picture of it. First mention of *Mount Airy Academy* is printed in the *Dallas Morning News* in 1886.⁶ On the 2nd of June 1888, Samuel Armstrong and his daughter, widow Mary (Armstrong) Stevens, for \$1,700 sell 6.38 acres of land extending from the Fort Worth Road south to the Coombes Creek, to school teachers P.A. Sidell and V.W. Teagarden.^{7, 8} On the 4th of November 1889, the *Dallas Morning News* reports that: "*Prof. P.A. Sidell conducts a flourishing academy school of 100 pupils at West Dallas. The school property is valued at \$1,000*".⁹ Teagarden soon is teaching school in Cedar Hill.¹⁰ In 1890 Sidell and Teagarden sell off large chunks of this 6.38 acre site and a few weeks later Teagarden sells his half interest in Sidell's personal lot to Sidell alone. A couple of years later Sidell sells Teagarden his half-interest in their remaining shared holdings. Teagarden sells off his remaining acreage in 1894¹¹ – after a bond election had overwhelmingly endorsed funding a new brick *West Dallas Public School*¹², but long before that new building opened in the fall of 1895.¹³ This leaves P.A. Sidell with a narrow strip fronting about 65 feet of width onto Fort Worth Avenue. This is the site of P.A. Sidell's personal residence until his death at age 75 in 1930.¹⁴ I find no explicit evidence citing an exact location of the *Mount Airy Academy*, but my guess places it on this site which was also -- or becomes -- Sidell's private home.

Unfortunately the 1922 Sanborn Insurance map of this area has incorrectly drawn property boundary lines.¹² It is uncertain if any of the wood buildings shown on that map of this area might have ever been a school. My best guess points out that school buildings typical receive rough use, tend to wear out relatively quickly, and that the *Mt. Airy School* was likely demolished (or perhaps remodeled into Sidell's residence) shortly after the new *West Dallas Public School* building opened. I find no exact records with precise dates, and it looks like the lifetime of the *Mount Airy Academy* might span – as outer limits – from 1874 to 1895.

(End)

FOOTNOTES:

1. 1933-November-14th; "**Congregational Expansion**", an article about the history of *Western Heights Church of Christ* written by Maybelle Ewing Robinson (1893-1975), originally published in **Firm Foundation** (using this date).
A scanned copy of this article presently appears online at: "<http://www.7Ladders.com/Coombes/1933-MR.jpeg>".
2. As one example: 1908-July-24th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 4; *Dallas Social Affairs*.
3. 1891-June-2nd; *Dallas Morning News*; page 2; *Local Notes*.
4. Harriett Sue (Churchill) Krayner has been a primary source of information about this Robinson family. Sue happens to be a childhood neighbor and Rosemont Elementary School classmate of mine. She is a great-great-granddaughter of Benjamin and Helen Robinson.
Firstly, Sue Krayner provided me with a copy of four typewritten pages of *Notes about West Dallas* – undated, unsigned. These notes appear to be someone's initial "rough draft", containing blanks and "guesses". I interpret that this was intended for revision, never completed.
Sue Krayner further provided me with a copy of "**Robinson Family History: Descendants of Gerrard Robinson**", by Robert W. Robinson, dated 1980, 25 pages – a genealogical and biographical history of the Robinson family in America.
This genealogy also refers to a family history titled "**Our Ancestors**", written by Maybelle Ewing Robinson, a written Robinson account of unspecified date and unknown length which I have not seen.
There is a tendency for modern historical accounts to date the founding of *Mt. Airy Academy* and the neighborhood *Church of Christ* to year 1872. But the first land purchase by Major Benjamin Franklin Robinson is a transaction dated 21st of December 1872. (Vol. S, page 38). With builders to hire, materials to deliver, and time spend on construct, it doesn't seem likely that the Robinson family could have left their wagon and tents to move into their new house any sooner than the spring of 1873. The *Mt. Airy school* would likely not have started inside that new Robinson house any sooner than the fall of 1873; and "*the next year*" would then date the new construction and first use of the school building across the Fort Worth road at no sooner than late 1874.

Page 2 of the 1987 history of the Western Heights Church of Christ and Cemetery written by Sue Churchill Krayner contains the odd statement: "*The Western Heights Church of Christ building was erected in 1875 and services are still conducted there*" – a remark she buttresses with two footnotes. But this 1875 date doesn't fit with the Western Heights Cemetery deed of 1881, which stipulated that the two acre site was to be place for the congregation's new church building as well as a graveyard. And it does not match the deed records or other histories of the wooden Church of Christ sanctuary building still standing in the 1900 block of North Winnetka Avenue. The two footnotes in Sue's remark cite histories of Texas churches. I rather suspect that this 1875 date is actually the date of construction of the *Mt. Airy Academy*, a building in which the *Western Heights Church of Christ* held church services.
5. Reverend Samuel Armstrong, Dr. John H. Stevens, and Mary Catherine (Armstrong) Stevens Stephenson are interesting and important figures in the late 19th century of this district. In the past I have written often about this Armstrong/ Stevens family, especially in my "**History of the William Myers Section**", especially "**Volume 6: The Embry Abstract -- Stevens Park Addition**" (2002); and in a further section about the Stevens family in "**Volume 14: Addenda**" (2009). Copies of these history volumes were donated to the Dealey Library of the *Dallas Historical Society* with a second set also donated to the *Dallas Public Library*, downtown 7th floor *Texas & Dallas History division*, archived under their name *Jim Barnes Collection*.
There are internet versions summarizing key elements of this material at "<http://www.7Ladders.com/WmMyers/Content.htm>" – titled "History of the William Myers Section".
6. 1886-October-10th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 4; *West Dallas Items*.
7. Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 94, page 522; 1888-June-2nd; Armstrong et al to Teagarden and Sidell, 6.38 acres.
8. 1887-July-23rd; *Dallas Morning News*, page 8; *School Examiners*
– lists P.A. Sidell and W.V. Teagarden as having been issues certificates and grades by the Dallas County Board of School Examiners.
9. 1889-November-6th; *Dallas Morning News*, page 4; *Dallas Public Schools*.
10. 1891-July-22nd; *Dallas Morning News*; page 8; *Personal*.
11. Subsequent real estate transactions for the 6.38 acres sold to Teagarden and Sidell are as follows:
Dallas County Deed Records; Vol. 130; page 600; Mary Stephenson release to Teagarden and Sidell.
Dallas County Deed Records; Vol. 144, page 38; 1890-Dec-12th; Teagarden and Sidell sell two parcels to widow E.A. Hill.
Dallas County Deed Records; Vol. 131, page 155; 1890-Dec-27th; Z.E. Coombes and S.A. Rush release to Teagarden and Sidell.
Dallas County Deed Records, Vol. 137, page 213; 1890-Dec-27th; Teagarden deeds his half-interest in Sidell's lot to Sidell alone.
Dallas County Deed Records; Vol. 137, page 214; 1890-Dec-27th; Teagarden and Sidell deed a street easement to Oak Cliff.
Dallas County Deed Records; Vol. 141, page 588-591; 1892-Nov-27th; Sidell sells his remaining half interest area to Teagarden.
Dallas County Deed Records; Vol. 173, page 391; 1894-Jan-20th; Z.E. Coombes and S.A. Rush release to Teagarden and Sidell.
Dallas County Deed Records, Vol. 178; page 159; 1894-Jan-22nd; Teagarden sells 3 parcels of 6.38 acre tract to A.W. Scripture.
Dallas County Deed Records; Vol. 192, page 54; 1894-September 24th; Teagarden sells his last 70 ft strip to A.W. Scripture.
Dallas County Deed Records; Vol. 209; page 37; 1896-June-26th; Teagarden release to A.W. Scripture.
12. 1893-October-19th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 8; *Cost of War*.
13. 1895-August-18th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 16; *West Dallas School Board*.
14. 1930-September-5th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 13; *P.A. Sidell, 75, Dallas Lawyer, Dies*.
15. Sanborn Insurance maps; Dallas, Texas; 1922 edition; Volume 5; Sheet 582.

(End of Footnotes)