

Fred Douglass Elementary School

James D. Barnes

12th March 2026 – last revised 16th March 2026

Today it is unknown when and where the first black neighborhood appeared in West Dallas. In their 1990 history *African American Families and Settlements of Dallas*, Chloe Baker and W.B. Anderson cite the railroads, then later industries such as the cement factories, as having brought negroes seeking jobs into the area.¹ But I am inclined to point to a single event – the 1887 attempt to create *National Christian College* for colored people – as establishing the *College Park* addition as the first negro neighborhood in West Dallas. At the time it was platted, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that the new subdivision "was looked upon unfavorably by some, considering it a scheme to colonize the negroes in West Dallas"²-- implying that no earlier black enclave had existed in the area.

Within the next seven years a public school for colored students opened in the nearby *West End Addition*. Z.E. Coombes had platted this subdivision in July 1888³ and despite lack of an explicit statement from that time, it appears that from its inception *West End Addition* had been a neighborhood for African Americans. The State of Texas had enacted racial segregation laws long before the U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 ruling of *Plessy versus Ferguson* officially ratified a "separate but equal" doctrine. Sadie Shields, a pioneer member of the Mt. Gilead Baptist Church, located in the *West End Addition* on today's *Winnetka Avenue* just north of the Texas & Pacific Railroad track, opened the first school for black children in West Dallas. Its classes originally met inside her church, but a separate school building was soon established nearby, first taught by a Ms. Davis in 1894.⁴



1922: Sanborn Insurance Map; Dallas, Texas, Volume 5, Sheet 580 (fragment from)

Mt. Gilead Baptist Church (incorrectly labeled "Mt. Gilliam") was where Sadie Shields started the negro school (at today's 2402 N. Winnetka: ~32.7743°N, 96.8401°W). Even in 1922, the subdivision was still sparsely filled-in. The school moved to a separate building about three blocks north, here labeled **West Dallas Public Schol (colored)** (at 32.7767°N, 96.8401°, just west of today's Frederick Douglass Avenue). A school continued to hold classes for black students there until 1980. Street names have all changed: Pine (College) to Winnetka; Poe to Muncie; Williams to Bayonne; Lindsey to Duluth; Cedar to Conklin; Maple to Crossman.



1930: Fairchild Aerial photo survey of Dallas County, Texas (detail from)
 A: Mt. Gilead Baptist Church building is gone by 1930.. B: Fred Douglass School
 Foscue Map Collection, SMU Libraries, from internet webpage (2026)

NAME and ADMINISTRATION:

In 1990 Baker and Anderson call Sadie Shields' school for negroes *Cedar Valley Colored*⁵; but no other use of that name was found elsewhere (although admittedly research has not been completely exhaustive). A 1905 report in *The Dallas Morning News* cites the enrollment in the Cedar Valley school district as "184 white and 0 colored".⁶ Baker and Anderson recount how Mrs. Shields "went to the County requesting a school for black children in the community"⁷ and it seems more likely that Mrs. Shields' negro school was considered a separate "common district" under the County's school jurisdiction. The 1905 newspaper report also cites: "West Dallas, 184 white and 13 colored".⁸ It is perhaps possible that Mrs. Shields enrollment was being included with that West Dallas Independent School District's count, although the West Dallas Independent School District, which had been incorporated in 1893, did not officially include the territory of Mrs. Shields' school in 1905. That area wasn't incorporated into the West Dallas Independent School District until 1916.⁹ Perhaps the 13 students included in the West Dallas school count of 1905 were from a cluster of African American families living immediately north of Kidd Springs lake. Or its possible that *The News* has simply printed an error. None of this is very well documented. We lack the comfortable certainty of corroborated evidence.

Sadie Shields divorced in 1914¹⁰ then apparently remarried. In 1924 Sadie Shields-Henderson is the only teacher serving at *West Dallas Colored School*.¹¹ Baker and Anderson reported that Sadie Shields had gone around the community soliciting money for the purchase of land for her school.¹² But the precious money Shields raised must have been spent on building her schoolhouse and buying its furniture, books, and equipment. The site where the school stood was always owned by white landlords, until it was sold to the West Dallas Independent School District in 1926.¹³ The next year Dallas Independent School District (DISD) annexed it.¹⁴

Dallas had built a large brick and concrete *Fred Douglass School* for colored students along Mill Creek, southeast of downtown, which opened in early 1914.¹⁵ Its site is now part of the giant highway interchange of Interstates 30 + 45. Shortly after its beloved principal died in 1923, that *Fred Douglass School* was renamed in his honor: *J.P. Starks Elementary School*.¹⁶ After the West Dallas Independent School district was annexed, the Board of the Dallas Independent School District agreed to petitions in April 1928 wanting to name the Cedar Valley colored school *Paul Lawrence (sic) Dunbar School*, in honor of the negro poet;¹⁷ but five months later DISD instead revived the *Fred Douglass Elementary School* name and bestowed it upon the West Dallas colored school.¹⁸

It is interesting to note that today three new and different school facilities of the Dallas Independent School System continue to bear the names: **Frederick Douglass, J.P. Starks, and Paul L. Dunbar.**



Relative locations of five schools, shown on a 2026 map from Dallas Central Appraisal District

1936: RED: three segregated schools exist near to each other

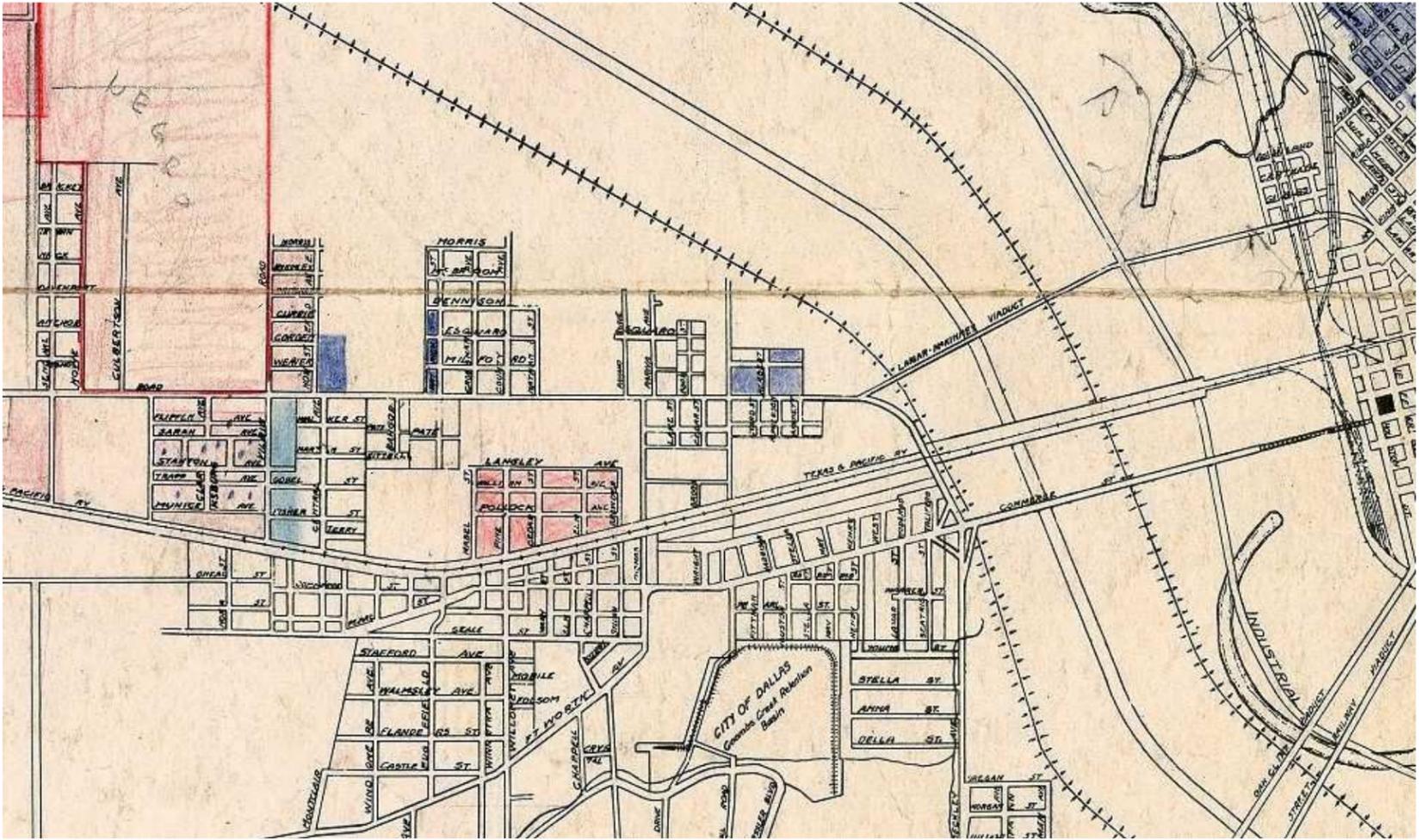
Mexican: Benito Juarez School

White: Cedar Valley School

Black: Fred Douglass School

1944: BLUE: Roman Catholic St. Mary of Carmel School opens

1980: PURPLE: Lorenzo De Zavala Elementary School opens



Attributed to year **1945**: Detail from a city map showing segregated Dallas housing areas.

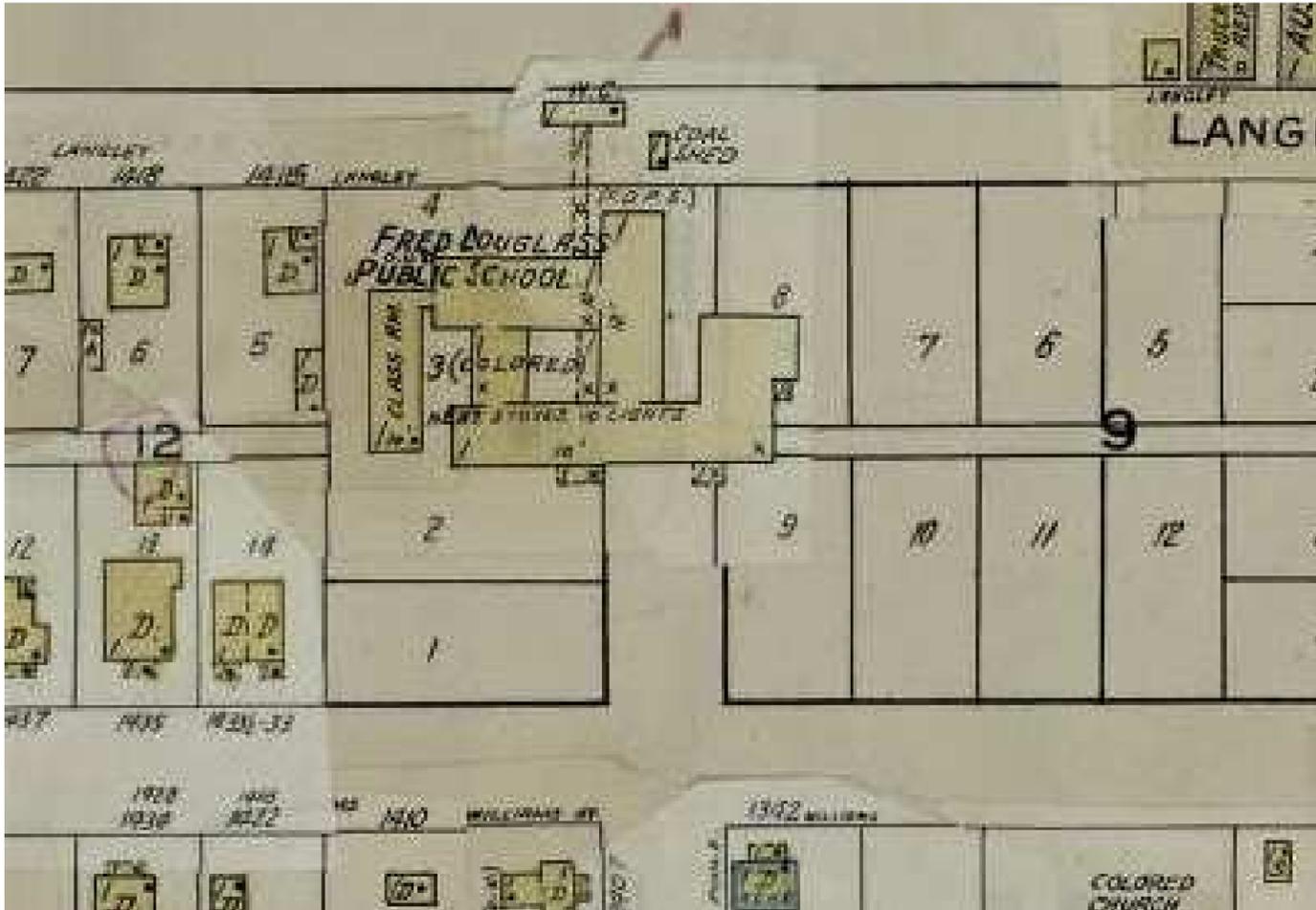
Unknown source (picked up circulating on Facebook circa 2000)

RED: Negro neighborhoods

BLUE: Mexican neighborhoods

The area was filling with new residents rapidly, especially after the Trinity River levees were built around 1930, protecting West Dallas from flood. In 1931, *Fred Douglass School* had a staff of two teachers.¹⁹ By 1949 it had a principal and sixteen teachers.²⁰ The *Fred Douglas School* was being expanded by adding wooden "temporary buildings" onto its enlarged campus site. In 1934 a fire broke out in a faulty heating flue in one of the "temporary" buildings and students were evacuated while the fire was put out.²¹

The *Fred Douglass School* facility was racially separate but far from equal. While classrooms in the white *Rosemont Elementary School* about a mile and half to the south were being decorated with framed color prints of classic Fine Art masterpieces procured for its classrooms by its *Dad's Club*, the *Fred Douglass School* didn't even have a running water supply until 1938 – before then water was being hauled to the school building.²² In 1937, DISD decided it was going to move the fast growing population of Mexican students at *Benito Juarez Elementary School* into the *Cedar Valley School* building along the south side of Eagle Ford Road, transferring its white students elsewhere.²³ The laws of segregation were rigid; combining negro students with Mexican or White children was not a possibility.



1950: Sanborn Insurance Map; Dallas, Texas, Volume 5, Sheet 580 (detail from)



circa 1970: Fred Douglass Elementary School

from *KERA News* report – 1st May 2023

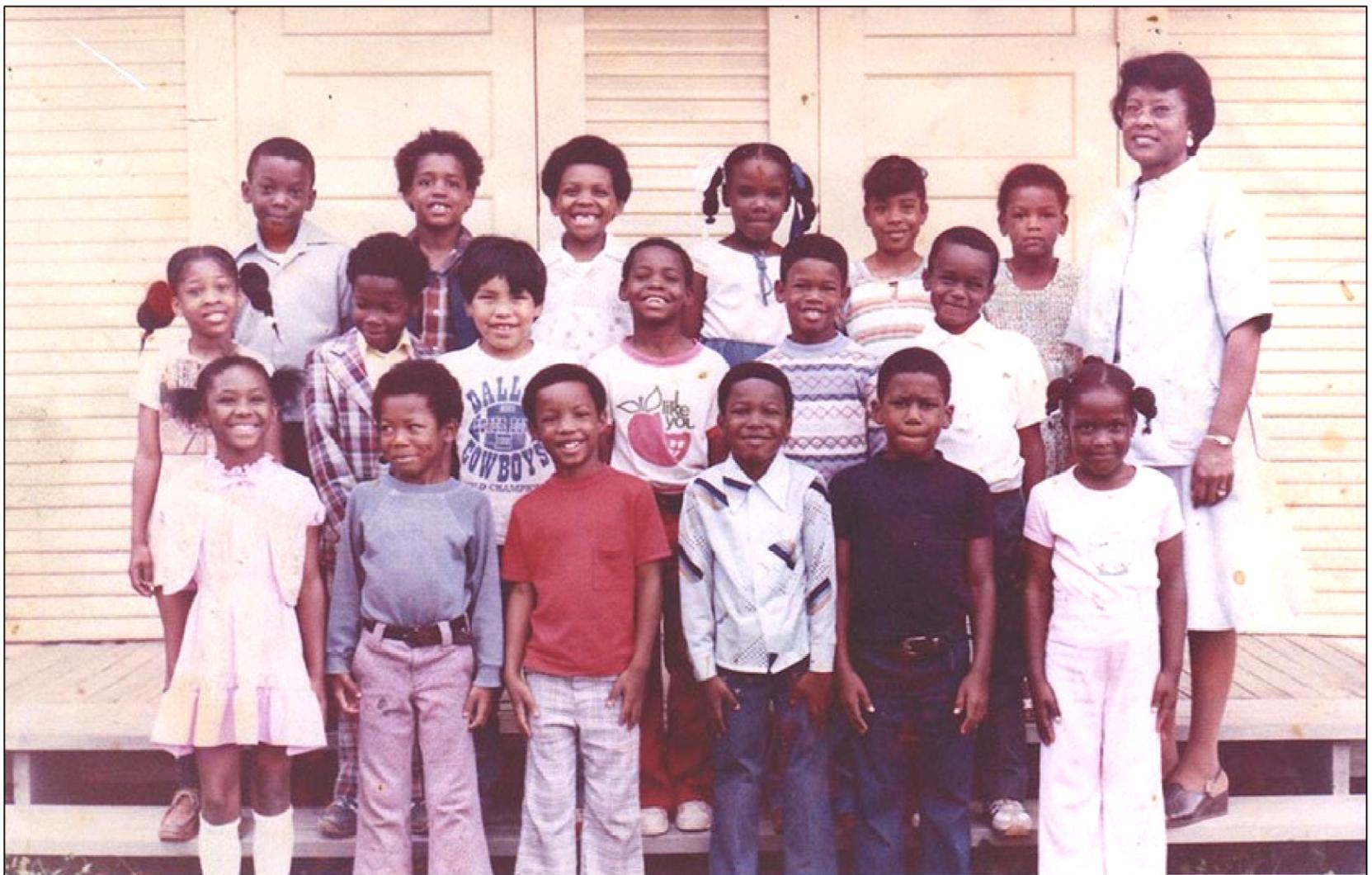
article: "Did sale of historically Black Frederick Douglass School seal the fate of Gilbert-Emory Neighborhood?"

captioned: "Courtesy of Paula Hutchison/ The Dallas Morning News"

The need for a new school building for the colored students of West Dallas was discussed for decades before plans for the new *Lorenzo De Zavala Elementary School* were finally initiated; and those plans were then attacked with allegations that the new West Dallas school was only going to perpetuate racial and ethnic school segregation in the area. In 1972, the Federal Courts accepted DISD's plan for *De Zavala Elementary*. Construction finally got started.²⁴ It opened in 1980. At that point *Fred Douglass Elementary School* in West Dallas was permanently closed. DISD solicited bids for its now unused site but no offers were received.²⁵ Finally in 2017 the old *Fred Douglass School* site was sold by the Dallas Independent School District to private developers.²⁶

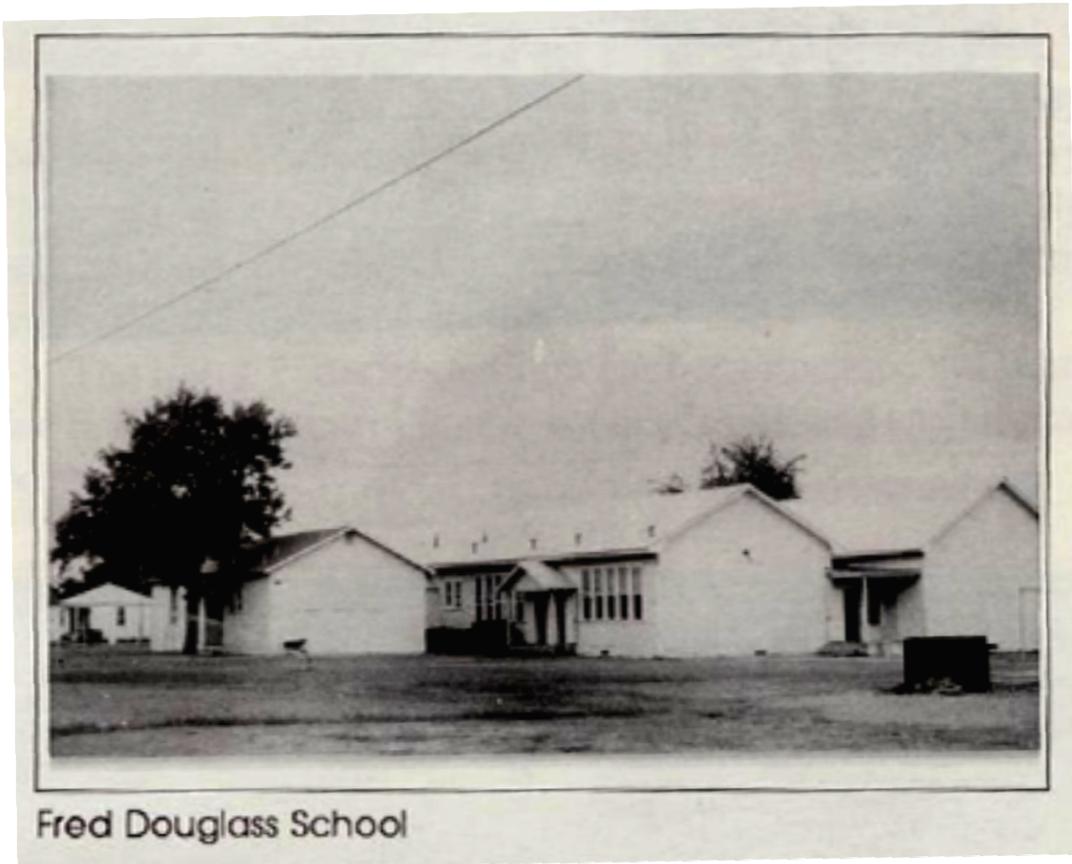


Fred Douglass Elementary School – November 1972
From the collections of the Dallas History & Archives Division, Dallas Public Library.
Copyrights are retained by the Dallas Public Library (Dallas, Texas, U.S.A.)



Fred Douglass Elementary School 1977-78 Dallas, Texas

From the collections of the Dallas History & Archives Division, Dallas Public Library.
Copyrights are retained by the Dallas Public Library (Dallas, Texas, U.S.A.)



Another view of the Elementary School on Bayonne.²⁵

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

Sealed bids for the sale of the Fred Douglass Elementary School Property will be taken by the Dallas Independent School District, and each such bid shall state the price which the bidder proposes to pay in cash, and each such bid shall be accompanied by a good-faith deposit of a cashier's check in the amount of 10% of the submitted bid, payable to the Dallas Independent School District and presented and filed with the Board of Education Secretary, 3700 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas, not later than 2:00 p.m., January 25, 1985. Bid forms may be picked up in Room 116 of the School Administration Building, 3700 Ross Avenue, between 8:00 a.m. and 5 p.m. All such sealed bids shall be opened, tabulated, and read in public on January 25, 1985 at 2:00 p.m. in the Board Room, at 3700 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas. No Bid less than \$25,000 will be considered.

The property which is the subject matter herein is that which is known as the Fred Douglass Elementary School Property, situated in Dallas, Dallas County, Texas, and being located at 1101 Bayonne Street, being part of City Block 9/7265.

The property being offered for sale is described as follows:

Part of City Block 9/7265; 474' x 235' x 474' x 235'; 111,390 sq. ft. more or less of land and identified locally as 1101 Bayonne Street.

Although the Board reserves unto the Dallas Independent School District the right to consider any bid which is made, regardless of the form of such bid, it recommends that all bidders use the form of bid which has been prepared and is available in Room 116, of the School Administration Building, 3700 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas, in order to alleviate any question or compliance with the requirements laid down herein. The Board of Education reserves the right to reject any or all bids. No bid will be considered which is not accompanied by the required earnest money cashier's check.

1983-February-11th

Dallas Morning News; page 84.

(End)

FOOTNOTES:

1. *African American Families and Settlements of Dallas: On the Inside Looking Out – Exhibition, Family Memoirs, Personality Profiles and Community Essays, Vol. II*; May, 1990; Black Dallas Remembered, Incorporated, Publisher; Dr. Marnie L. McKnight, Project Director; article on pages 51-53; "West Dallas Community" by Choloe Baker and W.B. Anderson; page 51.
2. 1887-April-8th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 8; *West Dallas*.
3. Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 95, pages 254-257; 1888-July-30th; signing of the plat map of "West End, An Addition to the City of Dallas by Z.E. Coombes, August 1888. Deeds immediately following sell large parts of West End to William. B. Gano (1854-1913).
Z.E. Coombes (1833-1895) was a son of William Nelson Coombes (1803-1867). He was a prominent figure in law, government, and the Masonic order. In 1866 Z.E. Coombes had been elected County Judge, head executive of Dallas County, but in November 1867 had been removed by the U.S. Army during its Reconstruction administration of Texas, one of many government officials all over the state dismissed on charges of neglecting the rights of blacks. Later Z.E. Coombes was elected as a State Representative and fate made him the head Mason presiding over laying of the cornerstone of the new Texas capitol building in 1885. This research has sadly found no evidence portraying any racial intent Z.E. Coombes might have had in establishing his West End Addition in 1888. The presence of the Mt. Gilead Baptist Church and Sadie Shields organizing the first black school in West Dallas sometime prior to 1894 gives the appearance that West End might have been a black enclave -- on "the other side of the tracks" from the W.R. Fisher Addition and Flanders Heights beyond -- from its very beginning. Alternatively, this West End Addition was platted at the height of the buying frenzy in the new Oak Cliff Addition. Oak Cliff investments were faltering by October 1891, and possibly West End Addition, facing similar investment problems, had then begun renting to blacks.
4. Same as Note 1 above.
5. Same as Note 1 above.
6. 1905-June-11th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 6; *Scholastic Census Figures*.
7. Same as Note 1 above.
8. Same as Note 6 above.
9. A separate article on this website gives the history of the West Dallas Independent School District, showing its territory expansions. Specifically, the 1916 expansion of that school district to include the future Fred Douglass school site is: Dallas County Deed records, Vol. 662, pages 684-685; (1916-January-31st).
10. 1914-December-25th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 14; *Advertisement*.
11. 1924-September-15th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 9; *West Dallas School Teachers Represent Five States*.
12. Same as Note 1 above.
13. Chain of Title for the site of West Dallas' **Fred Douglas Elementary School**:
1843: William Coombes (1803-1867) buys the original White Settler land claim of Mabel Gilbert.
1846: William Coombes sells his square mile claim to son Isaac Nelson Coombes (1825-1854). [Vol. A, p. 61.]
1854: William Coombes is granted headright deed to the chain of title. [Vol. F; p. 390; also: Vol. 155, p. 112.]
1866: North half of William Coombes Survey is divided to I.N. Coombes' 4 daughters. [Probate Case # 148 Notes, p.45.]
Z.E. Coombes (1833-1895) is the Executor of his brother Isaac's estate, and administrates the partitioning.
1865: Ivy Green Coombes (1849-1923), heir of 100 acres, marries Benjamin L. Cowand (1838-1914).
1887: Benjamin and Ivy G. Cowand sell a 32 acre tract to Z.E. Coombes. [Vol. 89, p. 188.]
The Coombes and Cowand families of the 19th century were all White.
1888: Z.E. Coombes plats the **West End Addition to the City of Dallas**. [Vol. 95, p. 254.]
Fred Douglass School originally was built on **Lot 4 of Block 12** of the West End Addition, and subsequent deeds trace only its transfer.
1889: Z.E. Coombes sells all of Block 12 of West End Addition to J.M. O'Neill [Vol. 103, p. 129.]
This is apparently James Madison O'Neill (1846-1929), inventor, one-time candidate for Dallas Mayor; listed as White in 1900 Census. whose wife is: Annie Brown (Hall) O'Neill (1851-1891); buried in the White Protestant Greenwood Cemetery (Dallas), so presumed White.
1889: J.M O'Neal and wife sell to John A. Payne [Vol. 404, page 177].
John Albert Payne (1842-1917), is listed as White in the 1910 Census.
1907: J.A Payne sells to J.R. Driver; [Vol. 397, p.57]
John R. Driver (1849-1922), wife Emma Driver (1859-1946), daughter Beulah Driver (1883-1964) -- all listed as White in the 1920 Census.
1907: The heirs of JA Payne affirm his sole title (presumably to settle his wife's estate-- she had died in 1901) [Vol. 402, p. 530.]
1916: John A. Payne repeats and corrects prior deed of sale to J.R. Driver. [Vol. 690, p. 341.]
1926: Emma Jane Driver, widow + Beulah Driver, Executrix of estate of J.R. Driver, sell Lot4/ Block 12 to H.H. Martin (\$150). [Vol. 1335, p.196.]
This H.H. Martin is thought likely to be: Howard Horace Martin (1880-1984), longtime school principal., listed as White in Census of 1950.
1926: H.H. Martin sells Lot 4/Block 12 to West Dallas Independent School District ten days later (\$185). [Vol. 1334, p. 482.]
Dallas Independent School District annexed West Dallas Independent School District in 1927, reportedly finally selling this site in 2017.
14. 1927-September-24th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 17; *Teachers to Study Work For the Fall*.
15. 1914-January-01; *Dallas Morning News*; page 14; *Growth is Marked in Public Schools*.
16. Paula Bosse: *Flashback Dallas: "Black Schools in Dallas -1930"*, (copyright 2020) internet (accessed March 2026).
17. 1928-April-18; *Dallas Morning News*; page 15; *School Board Takes Office*.
18. 1928-September-26th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 4; *Building and Addition Ordered by School Board*.
19. 1931-August-30th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 8; *Assignment of 1,300 Teachers Announced for Dallas*.
20. 1949-August-28th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 14; *Unclassified*.
21. 1934-February-28th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 1; *127 Children March out as School Burns*.
22. 1938-October-19th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 12; *School Board Votes \$1561,981 for Buildings*.
23. 1938-September-15th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 12; *Schools Enroll 40,582; Gain of 1,627 Made*.
24. 1972-February-17th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 1; *Judge OKs Construction of 7 School Projects*.
25. 1983-March-2nd; *Dallas Morning News*; page 13A; *\$12 million offered for DISD sites Bids on 3*
26. 2023-May-1st; **KERA News** report by Daine Solis; *Did sale of historically Black Frederick Douglass School seal the fate of Gilbert-Emory Neighborhood?"*
27. Same as Note 1 above.

(End of Footnotes)