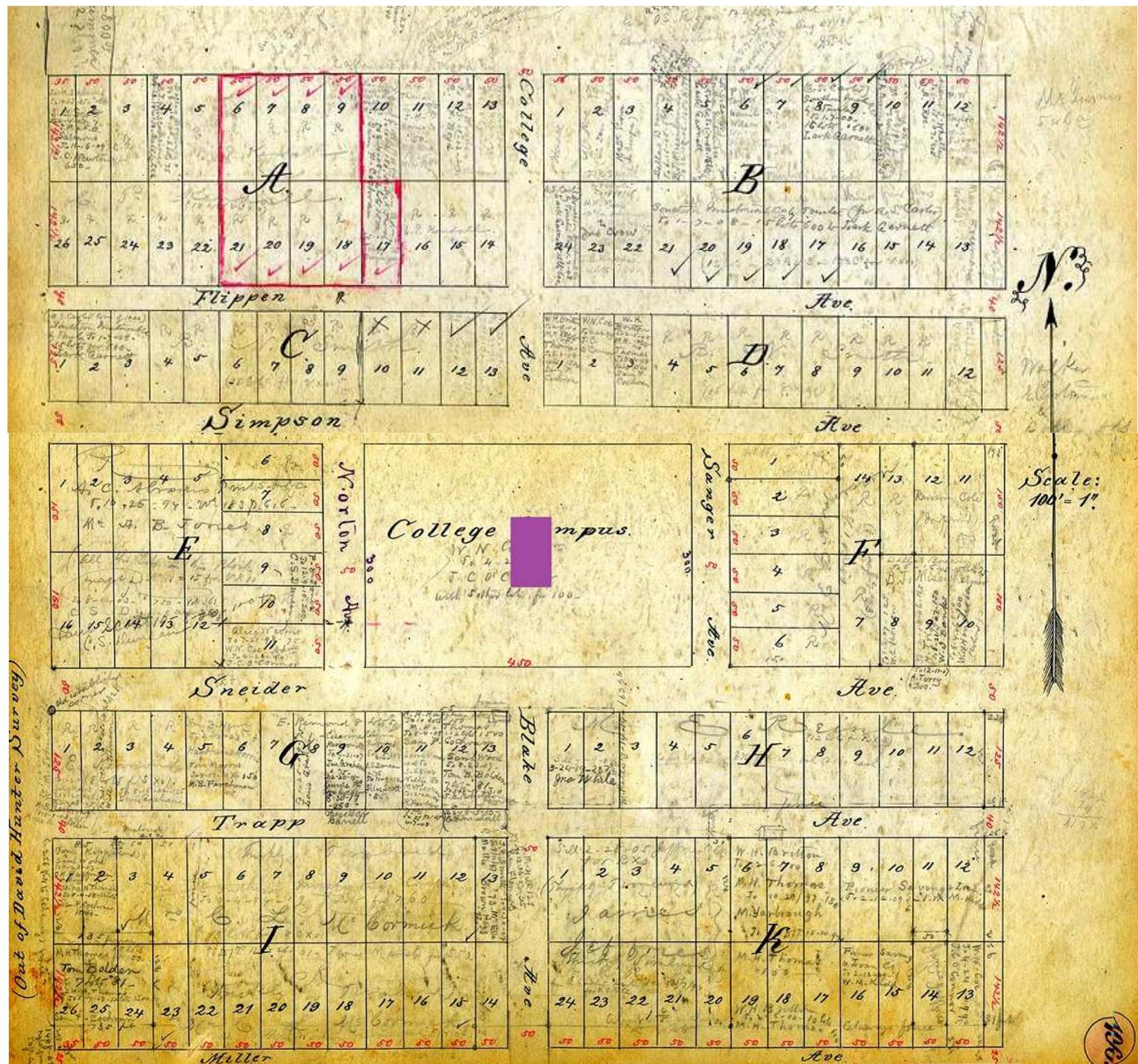


The first black college in Dallas: "National Christian College"

James D. Barnes, 25th December 2025 – latest revision: 27th December 2025



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In the early months of 1887 a young Reverend H.S. Howell, minister in the Colored Christian Church, decided that Dallas would be the best spot to locate his new negro college.¹ In March a site along Eagle Ford Road in West Dallas was selected.² "Dallas will be an Athens", the *Dallas Morning News* crowed.³ Reverend Howell solicited donations from across the nation to establish this first college in Dallas for African-Americans. Abraham's Lincoln son, Robert, sent \$25 from Chicago for the new school.

National Christian College was to be located in a new *College Park Addition* in the West Dallas area of Dallas County. Today's Singleton Boulevard ran along the north (top) of this subdivision's map (above), and Vilbig along its east (right) side.

In March 1887 this forty acre site, just north of the Texas & Pacific railroad, was "secured as a donation". Home sites were laid out surrounding the new college to "form a settlement for the better class of colored people"⁴; though a few days later it was reported that the new subdivision "was looked upon unfavorably by some, considering it a scheme to colonize the negroes in West Dallas".⁵

The new streets of *College Park* were named in honor of Dallas donors : the Sanger Brothers, Flippen, Norton, Sneider, Simpson, Blake, Trapp, and Miller.

Construction started on the first building of *National Christian College* in June of 1887.⁶ It faced east -- 100 feet by 60 feet in plan -- a brick structure three stories tall. In the plat map shown above, a purple-colored rectangle has been scaled onto the central block labeled "College Campus" as a conjectural location of Howell's college building. The *Texas & Pacific Railroad* provided a special train for the dedication event – eight passenger cars shuttling trainloads of happy Dallas citizens out to watch the cornerstone be ceremoniously set during a *Juneteenth* celebration. It was reported that "the foundations are laid and the walls all around are five to ten feet in height".⁷ But apparently money ran out. The building was never completed. Classes were never held.

This site was totally inundated during the 1908 flood of the Trinity River. What happened to this incomplete 1887 brick college building is unknown. The streets of the College Park subdivision have been renamed but its plan remains mostly intact.



No illustration of the 1887 architectural design of Rev. H.S. Howell's *National Christian College* can be found today; but this drawing, showing a similarly sized college building in Kansas, might give us an idea of the appearance of Howell's vision. *The Dallas Morning News* reported that the building was going to cost \$20,000, would be "three stories high, of brick with ornamental stone facings and architectural hues conforming to the gothic order".⁸ Three days later *The News* published that "the style of architecture is of the renaissance in college edifices, and when finished it will be at once imposing, ornate and stylish."⁹ Architectural style designations like "gothic" and "renaissance" had little definite meaning in Texas at that time.

"The cornerstone is white marble, and it bears The Inscription on its face: 'Laid by the F.A.A. M.C.C. Dean, M & W. G. M. June 18, 1887. Trustees – G.W. Crawford, L.N. Thompson, J.R. Smith, T. Ruth, I.M. Ellison, H.S. Howells President, Mrs. Sarah A. Mendel'. On the end of the stone are the words: 'National Christian College', was published the day after the Juneteenth ceremony. Among other papers, a congratulatory letter from U.S. President Grover Cleveland was placed into the cornerstone.¹⁰

Since June 19th fell on a Sunday that year of 1887, the traditional Juneteenth festivities and the cornerstone dedication at the new college for African-Americans were held the day before – June 18th. *The News* reported the next day that 42 lots in the College Park addition had been sold – the proceeds of those sales going to the college. Cash donations so far totaled \$2,070.50.¹¹

By the end of August "sixty-four pupils have been placed on the register".¹² A report in *The News* stated that "about \$2,500 is needed to complete the college".¹³

In May of 1888 *The Dallas Morning News* published Rev. H.S. Howell saying that "work on the college will be resumed as soon as they get money enough to finish the walls and cover it in".¹⁴ Reports about this new colored college in Dallas then cease.

The business apparatus of the 1887 *National Christian College* is difficult to trace. The college, as a corporate entity, never held title to its land; nor did Rev. H.S. Howell, the new college President. The 40 acre site of the *College Park* addition was purchased by a Mr. O.S. Rigen at the end of March 1887,¹⁵ and his plat of the new subdivision was not filed until the 15th of June 1887,¹⁶ three days before the cornerstone dedication ceremony was held. Rigen still held ownership title to the three acre "College Campus" block of *College Park* addition when he died in 1891. In the probate Case Note file records of the settlement of Rigen's estate there is no mention of a college or its building.¹⁷

O.S. Rigen's death had been preceded by his wife's. They had no children. They were buried in Oakland Cemetery in Dallas and it turns out that their generosity had also provided land for the establishment of that cemetery, where ironically theirs were among the earliest burials. He had been 35 years old when he platted *College Park* addition and had provided land for Dallas' first African-American university. His wife, Lillian Huntley (Ewing) Rigen, had been 28.¹⁸

Howell's name appeared six more times in the Dallas Morning News, as spokesman for prohibition, involved in the Library Association, as Director of the Colored State Fair of 1888, then as the buyer of a lot at the entrance of *College Park* addition. Then after January 1889, H.S. Howell disappears. A tombstone for a Rev. Dr. H.S. Howell's is found in Kansas City, inscribed that he had died on the 13th of November 1898 at 48 years old. Howell had been practicing as a physician in Kansas City for years and had been an active political leader in his colored community.¹⁹ It is likely this is the same Rev. H.S. Howell who had tried to establish the **National Christian College** in Dallas when he had been about 37 years old.

In conclusion it should be remarked that I have seen no previous history citing this **National Christian College** as the first black college established in Dallas, Texas. I have given it this rank simply because I have not been found any earlier example.

Finally, it should be noted here that two other historically black colleges in Dallas have older birth dates. **Paul Quinn College** is cited as being "the oldest historically black college west of the Mississippi River" with its beginning in Austin in year 1872²⁰; but it was not moved to Dallas until 1990, when it took over the campus of the former **Bishop College** campus. **Bishop College**, in turn, had been started in year 1881 – earlier than **National Christian College** – but it did not move to Dallas until 1962. So, both **Bishop College** and **Paul Quinn College** can rightfully be said to be older historically black Dallas colleges, but neither had been located in Dallas before **National Christian College** tried to start here in 1887.



An early view of **Texas Wesleyan College** in Fort Worth, whose construction began in year 1885.²⁰

(End)

FOOTNOTES:

1. 1887-January-23rd; *Dallas Morning News*, page 4: *The Colored College*.
2. 1887-February-24th; *Dallas Morning News*, page 8; *West Dallas*.
3. 1887-March-1st; *Dallas Morning News*, page 8; *West Dallas*.
4. 1887-April-3rd; *Dallas Morning News*; page 16; *Colored College*.
5. 1887-April-8th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 8; *West Dallas*
6. 1887-June-5th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 16; *Colored College*.
7. 1887-June-19th; *Dallas Morning News*, page 13; *Laying the Corner Stone*.
8. 1887-June-16th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 8; *The Colored College*.
9. Same as Note7 cited above.
10. Same as Note7 cited above.
11. Same as Note7 cited above.
12. 1887-August-30th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 8; *The Colored College*.
13. 1887-August-27th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 5; *The Colored College*
There is quotation of Rev. Howell in: 1887-Aug-4th; *Dallas Morning News*, p.8; *The Eve Before the Battle*.
14. 1888-May-27th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 16; *West Dallas*.
15. Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 83, pages 384; 1887-March-28th; purchase of 40 acres by O.S. Rigen.
16. Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 84, pages 604-605; 1887-June-15th; plat map of the College Park Addition, O.S. Rigen.
17. Probate Case Note file No. 2050; *Dallas Genealogical Society*, from *The Portal of Texas History* (December 2025); 137 pages.
The deed whereby the estate of O.S. Rigen sold the "College Campus" block of the *College Park* addition is:
Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 235, pages 369-371; 1889-April-4th; to J.C. O'Connor.
18. *FindAGrave.com* (December 2025); burials for O.S. Rigen (1852-1891) and his wife Lillian Huntley (Woods) Rigen (1859-1890); in the Oakland Cemetery, Dallas, Texas.
19. *FindAGrave.com* (December 2025); burials for Dr. H.S. Howell (?-1898); Elmwood Cemetery; Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.
20. Wikipedia (December 2025); entries for "Paul Quinn College", and for "Bishop College".
21. Facebook, Texas Wesleyan University's Post; (24 August 2025).

(End of Footnotes)