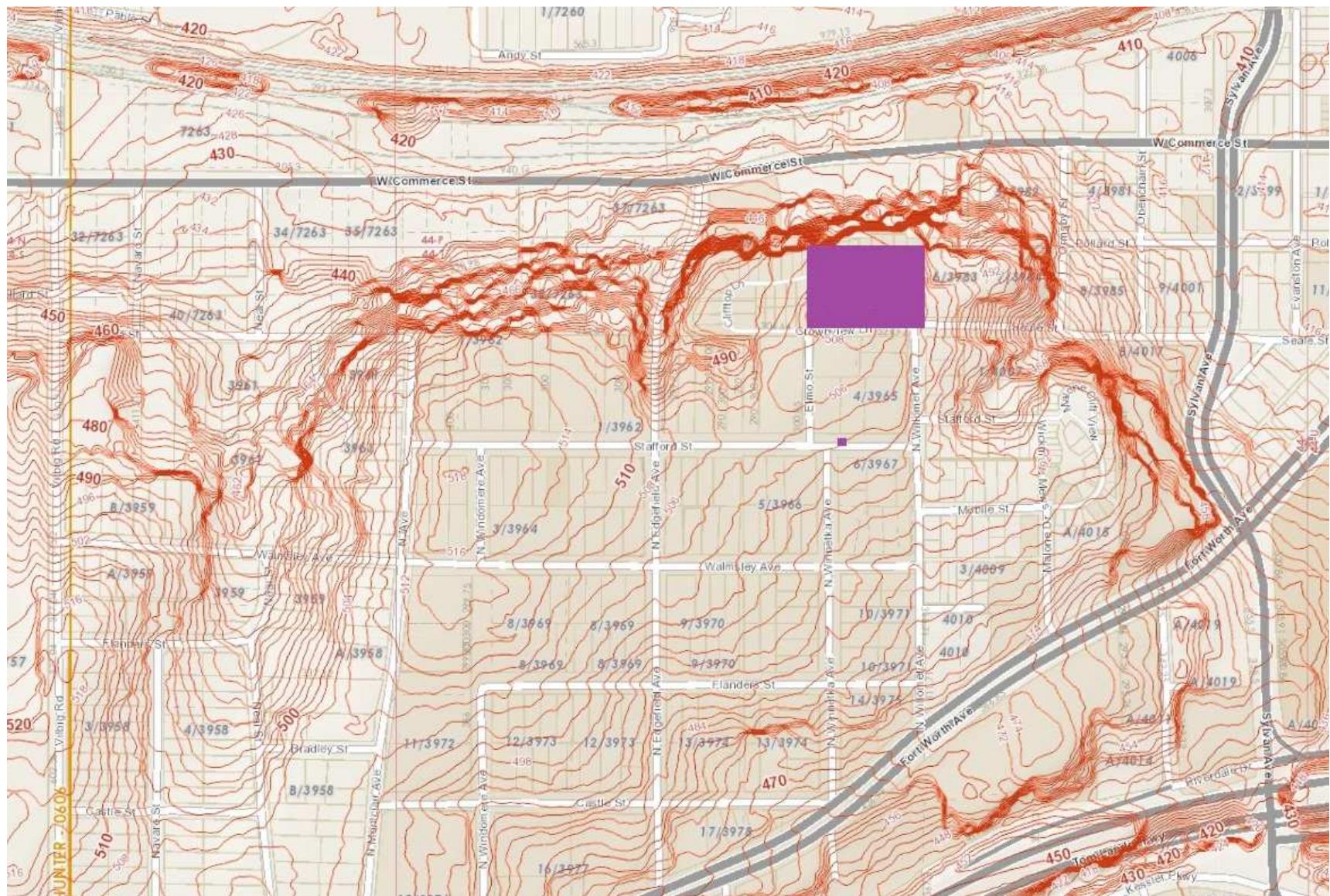


"NAZARETH UNIVERSITY": a college at the top of the hill

James D. Barnes, 30th December 2025 – last revised 14th January 2026



The purple block here covers the three acre site C.M. Wilmeth purchased in 1887 for Nazareth University

In the fall of 1886 the Reverend C.M. Wilmeth, minister and publisher for his Christian Church denomination, decided that the "hilltop" corner of the escarpment, overlooking the wide floodplain of the Trinity River, with a view to the city of Dallas about two miles to the east, would be the best spot to locate his new college, *Nazareth University*.¹ The following February, and again in April, Wilmeth secured real estate deeds from William R. Fisher – three acres of land at the north end of what is now Willmett Avenue, at the summit of what is now Seale street.²

Wilmeth's family had been White Settler pioneers who had arrived in Dallas in 1845 and staked a frontier land claim in what-is-now Grand Prairie. They probably knew William Coombes, and like William Coombes the Wilmeths had trouble with Comanche raiders stealing their horses. Menaced by the Indian threat, they retreated northeast to Collin County,³ where a new son was born on the 2nd of January 1848. He was named Collin McKinney Wilmeth and later went by the nickname "Mac".⁴ Likely, as a boy Mac had been introduced to his namesake, early Texas pioneer Collin McKinney (1766-1861), for whom the county and its principal city were named.

C.M. Wilmeth attended *Kentucky University*, enrolled in their *College of the Bible*⁵ -- today known as the *Lexington Theological Seminary*. This was a department in Kentucky's oldest university, a private school then located in Lexington, where it remains today as *Transylvania University*. Like his father, and his older brother James, C.M. Wilmeth became a minister in the Christian Church. Returning to Texas he, along with his brother James, briefly taught at the *Add-Ran College* in Thorpe Springs, Texas – now known as *Texas Christian University (TCU)* in Fort Worth. After various missionary services, in 1875 C.M. Wilmeth and his brother James started publishing a church newspaper, which in 1877 they moved to Dallas and distributed as the *Christian Preacher*.

" … a number of churches introduced the use of instrumental music in services. These actions produced a schism within the denomination and became a matter of public debate … . Although Wilmeth published church news and a calendar of coming events, most of the *Christian Preacher* was devoted to commentaries that attacked the "progressive" tenets of the other faction of the church. The editorials, demonstrative and flamboyant, often were a response to remarks published in … a rival religious paper … . These two publications acted as a public forum for members of the Disciples of Christ." ⁶

"Mac" Wilmeth decided in 1886 that he was going to start a new Christian Church college on the hilltop across the Trinity River opposite Dallas. He was going to move to the William Coombes Survey. He was thirty-eight years old. C.M. Wilmeth had married Mary Griffith Rutherford in 1873, and they already had five children, a son and four daughters, with another son born in October of that year.⁷ Wilmeth often preached to the local West Dallas Church of Christ congregation who were meeting inside the *Mount Airy Academy* school building in West Dallas. In 1881, the congregation had bought land for a cemetery and church building site, but had not yet built any permanent sanctuary structure.

Nazareth University seems to have been modeled after the departmental organization of *Kentucky University* where Wilmethe had attended college, with Music, Bible, and Industrial Departments.

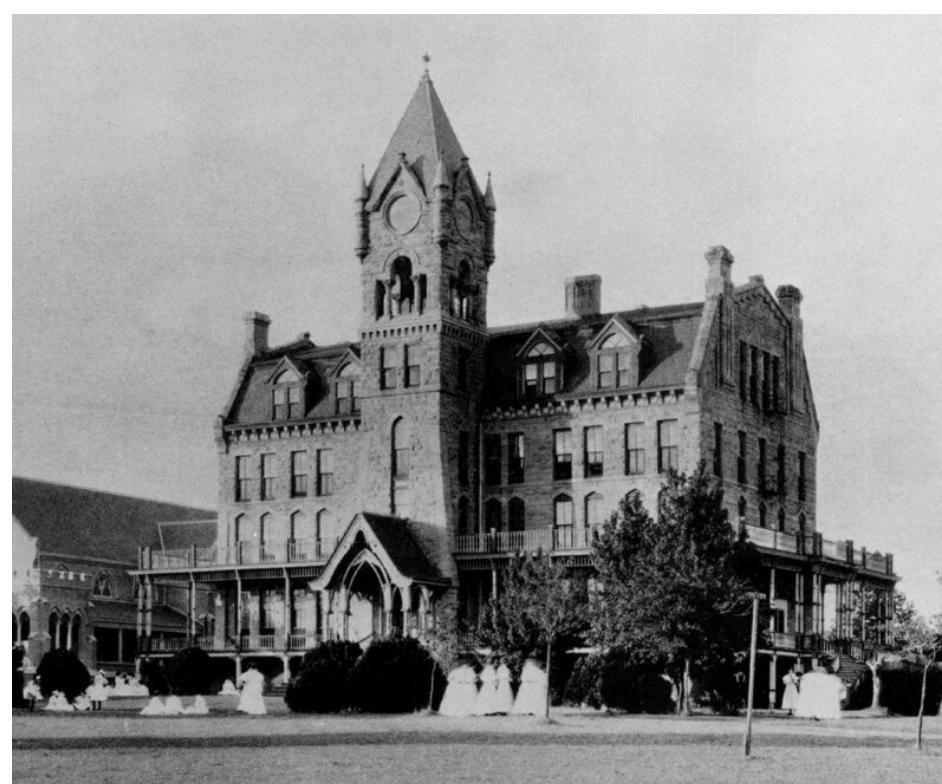
The oldest mention of C.M. Wilmeth in the *Dallas Morning News* appears on October 8th of 1886, when the new *Nazareth University* is also first mentioned. Two days later *The News* described plans for Wilmeth's university building:

"Yesterday the architect exhibited to *The News* representative the partly perfected plans for the main building of Nazareth University which is to be erected on Flanders' Heights. It is to be three story, of stone, with about 150 feet front in full, facing east, the pike forming an airline avenue to the city. The front consists, on the main floor, of two wings for reception and office rooms. Immediately in the rear of these another pair of wings extending north and south about twenty feet behind the former. Then centrally in the rear is the chapel, which will seat on the floor 500 or more, and with the galleries and rooms added by means of sliding partitions, an extended auditorium is afforded that will accommodate 2000 or 2500 hearers."⁸

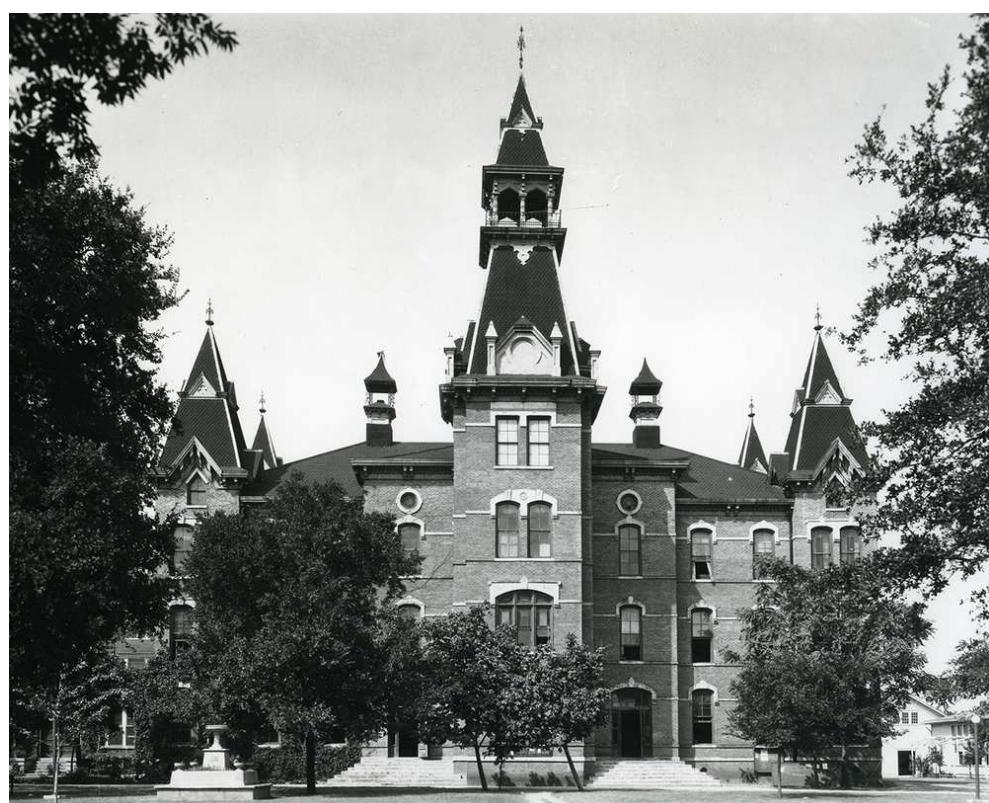
No illustration of the 1886 architectural design for Reverend Wilmeth's *Nazareth University* can be found today. This new West Dallas college would have enclosed about twice the volume of Reverend H. S. Howell's West Dallas college for the Colored Christian Church – *National Christian College*. The name of the architect for *Nazareth University* is unknown, but it's reasonable to wonder if Wilmeth had employed West Dallas resident James E. Flanders, the architect of the Dallas County Courthouse. Though the description of the plan included no mention of any tower, other college buildings of similar size in that era of north Texas often had big square central towers. I like the idea of a tall square tower appearing on the horizon for travelers headed both directions along straight-line West Commerce Street – the square tower of the Dallas County Courthouse seen just off to the left of West Commerce Street when traveling east, and a similar square tower for the university seen on the hilltop, just off the left of West Commerce Street when traveling west. But no cornerstone was ever laid. Such grandeur would never be.



Dallas County courthouse of 1881, designed by architect James E. Flanders. Burned in 1890.



Similar in size to the building described for Nazareth University is this St. Mary's College in East Dallas. Started in 1886; razed around 1948.

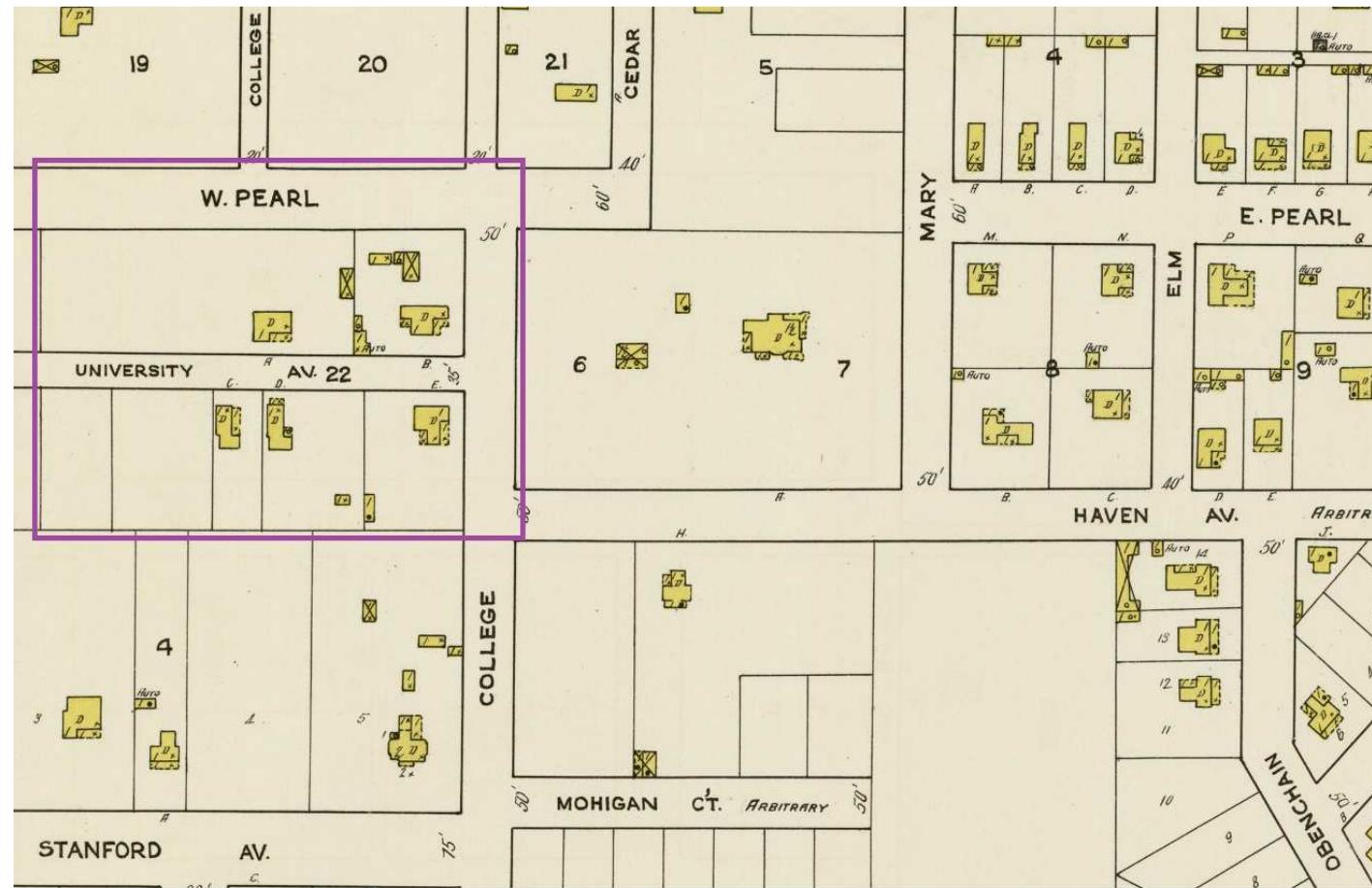


"Old Main" at Baylor University, Waco, Texas. Construction started in 1887. Still standing.



James E. Flanders drew this courthouse design for Shackelford county in 1883. Still standing.

University president Wilmeth was prudent and practical. Instead of the large stone building designed for *Nazareth University*, he started by building frame houses for himself and the other faculty. Though it had never mentioned previous classes held for *Nazareth University*, *The News* reported that classes "opened again" on the 2nd of January 1887, with the Bible department.⁸ In April the university is credited with having seven faculty members, meeting in the community school building.⁹ What was planned was construction of half a dozen wood frame houses for faculty. Classes were then held inside the homes of the professors, much like Thomas Jefferson had planned for the *University of Virginia*. By February of 1888, *Nazareth University* had not only a Bible College to train ministers for the Christian Church, it also had an Industrial College.¹⁰ A Music Department opened in Wilmeth's new residence and "the sound of the piano (as well as the hammer) is constantly heard".¹¹



Detail from Sheet 582; Volume 5; 1922 edition of the Sanborn Insurance maps, Dallas, Texas -- with the site of Nazareth University added as an outline in purple. The lower "College" street is now "Willmet Avenue" and "Haven Av." is now "Seale Street".

Wilmeth depended heavily on the neighborhood Christian Church, imploring them to postpone building themselves a building for at least five years while his university could get started. Wilmeth had been an influential evangelist and leader of the Christian Church in Texas; but by March of 1888 a divisive dispute had erupted within the West Dallas congregation. The Christian Church group split, with a minor faction following preacher "Weeping Joe" Harding east, down onto the floodplain to open a new separate church. Harding resigned from the West Dallas church. Angry calls were made for Wilmeth similarly to hand over his resignation.¹²

In the late spring of 1888, at the end of the academic term:

"The college and President Wilmeth's residence were thrown open and the campus was arranged with seats and croquet sets for all who wished to enjoy sports, promenades and conversation under the moonlight. The moon rode high in the heavens and poured a flood of light over oak and cedar and shrub, until it was difficult to decide which was the more lovely, Mount Airy by moonlight or the city over opposite with its long lines of gas lights and here and there its sentinels of electric light."¹³

Nazareth University continued to hold classes for another academic year, and commencement exercises in June of 1889 closed the school term -- the *Pierian Society and Nazareth Lyceum* "will adjourn till fall" it was reported.¹⁴ But there would be no fall semester classes at *Nazareth University*. Partially in exchange for cancellation of the mortgage debt still due, President Wilmeth transferred land ownership for his university site back to William R. Fisher on the 28th of October 1889.¹⁵ Wilmeth then moved with his *Nazareth University* to Corinth, Howard County, Arkansas, where the college struggled until its final closure in 1897. Wilmeth led a group "Exodus to Mexico", where he was initially successful in establishing a new colony at Tampico. He contracted malaria and died there on the 12th of October 1898, age 54.¹⁶



Collin McKinney "Mac" Wilmeth, portraits¹⁷

At this point we know of no documents or official records from this *Nazareth University*, nor any photograph of its buildings or students. We have no statement left explaining the reasons *Nazareth University* had been moved away from West Dallas.

Methodist-Episcopal minister Samuel Armstrong (1813-1890), himself a former managing Trustee for a college, proposed in April 1889 the creation of another university in West Dallas¹⁸; but, so far, no other college has ever opened in the William Coombes Survey.

FOOTNOTES:

1. 1886-October-8th; *Dallas Morning News*, page 8: *West Dallas Items*
2. Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 95, page 497; 1887-February-26th; warranty deed to C.M. Wilmeth from W.R. Fisher and: Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 90, page 525; 1887-April-27th; warranty deed to C.M. Wilmeth from W.R. Fisher
3. Though barely mentioning C.M. Wilmeth, there is a long account of his ancestry and his parents' settlement in north Texas, in: 1929-July-28th; *Dallas Morning News*, pages 3 and 8; *She Owned Grayson County's First Stove*, by Clemintine W. Briley.
4. *FindAGrave.com* (January 2026); Collin McKinney "Mac" Wilmeth: 1848-1898 (burial site unknown).
5. R. L. Roberts, "Wilmeth, Collin McKinney", *Handbook of Texas Online*, (accessed December 26, 2025), <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/wilmeth-collin-mckinney>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
6. David Minor, "Christian Preacher", *Handbook of Texas Online*, (accessed December 30, 2025), <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/christian-preacher>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
7. *Family Search.com* (December 2025); family tree for Collin McKinney Wilmeth (1848-1898).
8. 1887-January-2nd; *Dallas Morning News*; page 16; *West Dallas*.
9. 1887-April-17th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 9; *Answers to Correspondents*.
10. 1888-February-7th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 5: *West Dallas*.
11. 1888-February-13th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 4; *West Dallas*.
12. 1888-March 25th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 4; *Church Differences in West Dallas*.
13. 1888-June 24th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 13; *The News in the Suburbs*.
14. 1889-June-2nd; *Dallas Morning News*; page 23: West Dallas, announces the adjournment of the Pierian Society and Lyceum; 1889-June-25th; *Dallas Morning News*; page 6; *Nazareth College*, describes the final commencement held in West Dallas.
15. Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 109, pages 584; 1889-October-28th; C.M. Wilmeth to W.R. Fisher.
It is here noted that C.M. Wilmeth had three other West Dallas real estate deed transactions filed in county records:
Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 98, pages 65; 1888-October-4th; C.M. Wilmeth to J.A. Crawford, and.
Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 109, pages 583; 1889-October-4th; J.A. Crawford back to C.M. Wilmeth.
There is also the following deed, whereby C.M. Wilmeth sold Lots 6 & 7 of Fisher's Addition to W.R. Fisher, though there is no record of Wilmeth having ever purchasing this parcel – a mystery. Perhaps there had a deed which was never filed.
Dallas County Deed Records; Volume 95, pages 498; 1887-April-28th; C.M. Wilmeth to W.R. Fisher; filed 1888-Oct.-5th.
The proximity in dates between this deed where Wilmeth sells Lots 6 & 7 with Wilmeth's purchase of land on the west end of his university site, makes it appear as if he had first bought the area along the slope to the east -- the northeast corner of today's Willmet and Seale – then decided that its terrain was too difficult for building his college and traded it for flatter land back to the west. The land Wilmeth had presumably originally purchased – "Lots 6&7" – was then sold by W.R. Fisher to L.F. Powell. It appears that Powell then constructed a one and half story house east on the precipice of the escarpment – there's a construction notice in the *Dallas Morning News* dated September 1888 for a Frank Powell adding to his West Dallas residence. That small terrace for Powell's house was about 12 feet lower than Wilmeth's hilltop university site, but Powell's roof and upper story probably started to block Wilmeth's site's view of distant Dallas – which might have been irksome to Wilmeth. Fisher often waits years before filing deeds, and it seems that since it got traded back, that he never bothered to file this one with Wilmeth. Wilmeth filed the deed for his side of the trade as he was leaving Texas. This is based on fragmentary documentation – is conjectural and speculative – therefore, at least in this point in time, I will not deem it as "reliable history".
16. Same as Note 5 above.
17. Same as Note 4 above.
18. 1898-April-2nd; *Dallas Morning News*; page 8; *West Dallas*.

(End of Footnotes)