



#3: Charles Bender's Sawmill

The name Charles Bender has become synonymous with Humble's history. While many Humble residents will recognize the Bender name today, few know the full story of the man that was so instrumental to Humble's development in the early years.

Bender was a native of Germany, and was originally apprenticed to become a banker. At the age of 15, he sailed to America to make his fortune. He worked at the banker's trade for two and half years in New York City, and then moved to New Orleans where he took a contract to furnish wood for two steamboats that ran on Lake Pontchartrain. He married Miss Lena Lochar, a native of Switzerland, in 1849. They ended up having five children.

Bender moved to Fort Smith, Arkansas in 1850 to open a bakery, and then to Warsaw, Missouri in 1852 to operate a bakery and a confectionary. He had been doing well in business, but lost everything during the Civil War. He joined the confederacy while in Missouri, but when the war ended he purchased a farm in New Braunfels, Texas and opened a packing establishment for the shipping of beef and hides. His neighbors in New Braunfels called him "Colonel Charlie." Unfortunately, he lost \$18,000 worth of property and 3,000 head of cattle in a destructive flood.

In 1872, he disposed of his farm and purchased a sawmill in Spring, Texas. As his sawmill become more profitable, he and his partner, J. C. Matthews, purchased another sawmill in the Humble area through a bankruptcy sale. The sale included the mill, thousands of acres of timberland, as well as a sawmill train. Matthews sold out to Bender in 1892. C. Bender and Sons became a highly successful lumber company, with wood shipped all over the world. In addition to the sawmills in Spring and Humble, Bender also owned sawmills in Corrigan and Moscow, Texas.

To improve productivity, Bender built a narrow-gauge train through the wooded area around Humble to haul logs to the mill. During the oil boom, he allowed oil field workers to pay for a ride from the Humble train station to the oilfields at Moonshine Hill on his lumber train. The Humble sawmill was greatly expanded over the years, but it also suffered damage from several fires, including ones in 1899 and 1909.

A generous benefactor, Charles Bender built housing for his employees, and, over the years, allowed them to purchase the houses from the company. He filed an official street plan for downtown Humble in 1904, which is still in use today. After his death in 1906, the business was continued by his sons Eugene L. and Frank Bender, and operated under the name of Bender Bros. By 1912, the Bender operation had a daily capacity of 75,000 feet of long and short leaf yellow pine lumber. Lumber was shipped to all parts of the country, including destinations in Canada. A new mill was built in 1915 that could produce up to 100,000 feet per day.

The Bender sawmill closed in 1925. Fortunately, by that time, Humble's economy was diverse enough to survive the closing of the mill. The Humble Music Center and adjacent shopping center covers the old mill pond, while the Deerbrook Crossing shopping center now stands where the sawmill was located. The Bender name still lives on in Aldine-Bender Road, Bender Avenue, and Charles Bender High School.