



#50: Charles Bender High School

One of the greatest old buildings to visit in Humble is the Charles Bender Performing Arts Center, originally called Charles Bender High School. It is located at 611 Higgins Street, next to the Humble Museum, and is the oldest school building still standing in Humble.

In 1929 students had been attending either the Humble Grammar School or Humble High School. Unfortunately, the grammar school burnt down in a pre-dawn fire in January 1929. The district had to double-up students in the high school building, with half of the students going to school in the morning, and the other half going to school in the afternoon. In the meantime, the school board put out bids for a new school building. The plan was to build a new high school building on the location of the old grammar school, and then convert the old high school building into a grammar school.

They chose architect Harry D. Payne to design the new building. They requested he build a slightly smaller version of his design for the recently opened Robert E. Lee High School in Baytown. A new schoolhouse bond was passed by the citizens, and Harry D. Payne got to work. To make the students feel at home, he incorporated some "themes" from the Humble High School building into his new design. This included the mottos he put over the back doors: "Ever Onward" and "Impossible is Un-American."

The building cost \$125,000 to construct. Harry D Payne designed a two-story brick building with a library, an auditorium (that doubles as a gymnasium), classrooms, offices, and a teacher's lounge. When it opened in February 1930, it was one of the most advanced school buildings in Harris County because it had a built-in cafeteria (at a time when many students simply walked home to eat lunch). Former Texas Governor Pat M. Neff was the main speaker at the dedication ceremony on February 22, 1930.

It was Humble's only high school from 1930 through 1965, replacing the old Humble High School building (1918-1930) on Higgins Street. Charles Bender High School was commonly referred to as Humble High School since it was the only high school in the district. Even the later yearbooks for Charles Bender High School say Humble High School on them. The school went through a renovation in 1955, which added a Band Hall, a bigger Cafeteria, and a Gymnasium. Ten years later, in 1965, the students moved to a new Humble High School building on Wilson Road (still in use today).

Over the years, the building has had many uses: (1) Charles Bender High School 1930-1965, (2) Charles Bender Intermediate School 1965-1972, (3) Humble ISD Administration building 1974-1992, and (4) Humble ISD Curriculum & Staff Development building 1992-2003. It was abandoned in 2003 after the opening of the Instructional Support Center (ISC) at the back of Kingwood. In 2011, Gaby Diaz, a teacher at Atascocita High School (and an Humble High School alumni) and her students used "Impossible Is Un-American" as a rallying cry to convince Humble residents to save the building from demolition.

In 2011, Humble ISD gave the building to the City of Humble. The City of Humble, under Mayor Donnie McMannes, renovated the building and turned it into a Performing Arts Center. Architect and Humble Alumni Scott Brady was brought in to design the renovation. Through Brady's design, the outside of the building was restored to its original

splendor, and the inside was remodeled to accommodate performing groups, with beautiful woodwork throughout. The new Charles Bender Performing Arts Center officially opened on April 10, 2015.

The City of Humble did a tremendous job in saving this old building, and something everyone needs to tour! It is definitely one of my favorite buildings in Humble, and I recommend you attend a performance there this year.

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