

County Courthouse Turns 100!



Photo of the Courthouse in 1909



Photo of the Courthouse Today

The first decade of the early 1900s was an interesting time period in American history. In those first ten years teachers were paid \$325 a year, 15 states adopted speed limits of 20 miles per hour, teddy bears became a national fad, transportation changed the way people lived, sheet music sold in the millions of copies, radios began to bring music to the entire nation, and in Fort Bend County, Texas a new courthouse was built during 1908-09.

January 19 is the official 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Fort Bend County Courthouse located at 401 Jackson Street in Richmond, Texas. Built for \$75,000 (\$1.7 Million in 2007 Dollars), the courthouse, now popularly known as the Old Courthouse, was actually the fifth courthouse built in Fort Bend County, and it is the only one of those five courthouses still standing.

Now designated a National Historical Landmark, the original building with its distinctive three story rotunda was designed by C. H. Page and Brothers and features a mix of brick and stone, with turrets and a copper dome, mosaic-tile flooring and green glazed-tile wainscoting. Two additions were made to the original structure—one in 1935 and the other in 1957. Over the past 100 years, the courthouse has been the scene of many high-profile civil and criminal cases, and it has been used as a setting for several documentaries and movies.

While the courthouse was built in 1909 to serve a county with a population of 18,168, it now serves 529,000 people. In 2008, Fort Bend County residents voted to construct a new Fort Bend County Judicial Complex to meet the judicial needs of the county's growing population. The new complex will consolidate all courts and judicial support functions at one location. It will also house the offices of the District and County Courts of Fort Bend County, the District Attorney, the District Clerk and the County Clerk's judicial support staff. Room to add additional courts that will be created by the state legislature as the county continues to grow has been included in the design of the new complex. And for the first time in many years, adequate parking space will be available. When the new complex opens in late 2010 or early 2011, the Old Courthouse will be carefully restored and preserved for future generations to enjoy as part of Fort Bend's rich history.