



## **The Sixth Ward's Dow Elementary School and Park**

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The Sixth Ward was founded in 1874, split from the original Fourth Ward on land purchased by the Allen Brothers in 1836 during the founding of the City of Houston. The Sixth Ward is located on the western edge of present-day downtown Houston and its boundaries include Memorial Drive, Glenwood Cemetery, Washington Avenue, and Houston Avenue to the south, west, north, and east, respectively. From 1837-1860, this area saw an influx of free blacks and other North Americans as well as immigrants from France, England, Germany, and Spain. The late 1800s saw an increase of industrial activity, including development of the Wiggins & Simpson iron foundry (1866), renamed the Phoenix Iron Works ten years later; the Houston Water Works (established in 1876 for fire-fighting); and the Houston Soap Works (1874).

Houston's Sixth Ward boasts a large collection of Victorian homes, second only to Galveston in the region and the largest in Harris County. The area containing these homes is known as "Old Sixth Ward" and is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city. The Old Sixth Ward was the first neighborhood in Harris County to be listed as part of the National Register of Historic Places and was designated as Houston's first Protected Historic District in 2007. Portions of the Sixth Ward (as well as the First) are also included in Arts District Houston, a state designated cultural district.

The Old Sixth Ward is home to one of the oldest Houston Independent School District buildings still standing, the Dow School. The Dow Elementary School building at 1900 Kane Street was built in 1912 as a 16-room structure and enlarged in 1928 to serve the entire Sixth Ward neighborhood. The building was named after Justin E. Dow, superintendent of Houston Public Schools from 1885-1887. Later, it became one of Houston's 10 unofficially segregated schools for Mexican-American children living inside and well beyond the Sixth Ward until the district slowly desegregated in the 1960s. The elementary school closed in 1993 and its students were moved to Crockett Elementary in the First Ward.

The Dow School is now home to Multicultural Education and Counseling Through the Arts (MECA), an institution that has served the surrounding neighborhood and the larger Houston Latinx community since it began in 1977 at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in the Old Sixth Ward. MECA hosts nationally recognized visual and performing arts education programs, internationally touring performances, and annual celebrations such as the Fiesta Guadalupana and Dia de los Muertos Festival.

Their campus includes several public art installations in the form of mosaics, murals, and a life-size Virgen de Guadalupe sculpture made of soda and beer cans by local artist Paul Kittleson.

In 2020, the Houston Parks Department and the Old Sixth Ward Redevelopment Authority opened a newly renovated park and playground at the Dow School, designed by the firms Asakura Robinson and MetaLab. The almost quarter-acre park's interactive Longhouse Pavilion was designed to reflect the architectural style of the surrounding homes and has an internal structure made from locally-sourced reclaimed wood. Community members were an integral part of the planning process and their handprints adorn stepping stones placed throughout the park.

Sources:

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