

## Herman B. Foster House (1893) 204 West Main Street – Gardner *National Register of Historic Places*



The Foster home, once a part of a 160 acre farm, now sits on the northwest corner of Oak and Main, two blocks from downtown Gardner. *Johnson County Museum Collection.*

Located at 204 W Main Street in Gardner, the Herman B. Foster home was nominated for its architectural significance to the National Register of Historic Places in 2007. Built in 1893, this National Folk style home with Victorian accents is classified under the style of Folk Victorian. The wood framed home is typical of late 19<sup>th</sup> century homes, national folk style homes that added a localized interpretation of popular emerging architectural trends such as Victorian or Italianate. Local

builders began adding intricate wood trim and accent pieces to traditional style homes as these pieces became affordable, mass produced and easily available with the expansion of the railroads. The two-story Foster home retains much of its original architectural integrity with a commonly built gable front and wing form with clapboard siding on the first level and Victorian inspired wood shingle detailing and scalloped edging on the second. A small roofed porch is often placed in the L made by the two wings and this type of porch is evident in the Foster home.



The Fosters operated a mercantile business in partnership with Arthur Bigelow starting in 1881. The mercantile operated in downtown Gardner for over 30 years. *Johnson County Museum Collection.*

In addition to its architectural significance, the history of the home also reflects the City of Gardner's growth and transition from a small rural farming community. The home was originally built on 160 acres in the western part of Gardner for businessman Herman B. Foster, who in partnership with Arthur Bigelow, operated a successful

mercantile business under the name of Bigelow & Foster. The Foster's lived in the home for just under a decade until they sold the home to Clarence Sheddon in 1902 for \$2,000.00. Through the early part of the twentieth century, four generations of the Sheddon family lived and farmed the property.

Throughout the years the large acreage was sold and parceled into new streets and city lots for homes as the town of Gardner expanded. In the process, many of the agricultural outbuildings were removed, though one remaining outbuilding, a chicken house, remains to the north of the home. The chicken house was used well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Dottie Sutton Secrist, who with her first husband Bill, bought the home from the Sheddon family in 1943. She was a local business woman who operated the Gardner Café, a liquor store and a local bus stop, but also continued to raise chicken and sold eggs to supplement her income. Today, the home continues to transition with Gardner's growth. In 2002, Gardner Historical Museum, Inc. formed and bought the residence. It is now a community museum dedicated to the history of the Gardner area.

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