

The Foster House, A Fairmont Landmark

Travelers to Fairmont and Martin County today can stay at the Holiday Inn, the Comfort Inn, the Highland Court Motel, the Budget Inn, as well as many other motels in the area. Where could the travelers of the past stay for the night? There were a number of interesting places of lodging in the area at one time that no longer are in existence today.

The Foster House, the Harlow House, the Hazelmere Hotel, the Bullard Hotel, the Hotel Heidel, the Fairmont Hotel, the Augusta Hotel, the East Chain Hotel, and the Hodgman House in Granada were some of the area hotels from the past that no longer exist.

One of these, the Foster House, was one of Fairmont's leading hotels in its day. It was located on the corner across the street to the west from the Fairmont Opera House. Built about 1876 by an Englishman named Cole, the Foster House was at one time one of Fairmont's prominent landmarks. Frank Day once lived there, and some of his children were born there. Other early tenants were C. N. Peterson and Billie Hay.

In its first 20 years of its existence, the Foster House was a flourishing hotel and it was considered a real moneymaker. It was popular for the traveler both in terms of its price as well as its location near the downtown area of Fairmont. In its better days, it offered 40 rooms to guests. Originally located in the middle of the block near the present Bank Midwest site on Downtown Plaza, it was moved by Hale Foster to its final location directly across the street to the west from the Fairmont Opera House. As time passed, however, the public taste in hotels gradually changed. The Foster House no longer seemed to meet the needs and wants of the traveler of that time, and it soon began to fall on hard times. Although considered a fire hazard in later years, no fire had ever occurred there. The hotel was eventually sold to Rudy Gimm in 1935.

At the time of its sale, the Foster House was managed by Jess Law. He found moving from the hotel to be very difficult, as he had been the hotel's proprietor for approximately 21 years. Mr. Law felt moving from the Foster House to be comparable to losing an old friend. In the July 29, 1935 Sentinel he states, "I don't know what to do. I'd like to keep running a

rooming house, but I can't find a thing except on the edge of town, and you can't expect people to stay out that far. I'm forced out of business I know, and about all I can do is to go out and find a workingman's job." It's interesting how times have changed for the lodging business in that now sites at the edge of town, obviously near interstate highways, seem to be prime locations for motels.

Mr. Law, being quite unwilling to give up the Foster House, continued to make his home in the hotel even while the building was being torn down. He had nowhere to move to once the hotel was torn down, so it was agreed that he could sleep on the first floor until the building was virtually pulled down over his head. He planned to "stay with the ship," even though an inch and one-half of rain fell over the building with no roof one night and proved quite difficult for him to find anywhere dry to sleep. He was also attempting to keep anyone from stealing any of the building materials, although, one night someone got in and stole some of the metal parts of the bathtubs.

The removal of the Foster House was completed in August of 1935 by the Hanson Brothers of Albert Lea. Among the last to finish the job was Jesse Law, former manager of the hotel, who then began looking for a job. The plans for the site of the former hotel included a used car lot and a possible lunchroom on the corner. What eventually became of Mr. Law is unclear, however, progress of that era appears to have taken a community landmark of its time and permanently changed the landscape of the city of Fairmont.