

Gardner Lake Beach House (1937-38)

West Side of Gardner Lake - Gardner

National Register of Historic Places

Located on the west side of Gardner Lake is a small, unassuming stone structure. The one-story building, constructed of Kansas limestone in the rustic style, is one of the few remaining buildings from the construction of the Gardner Lake project, 1935-1938. The building may not initially appear to be a historically significant structure—especially when considering many of the other resources in the county. However, this building is an icon from a very intense period of American history and is one of the only remaining structures in Johnson County resulting from Depression era relief projects.



The Gardner Lake Beach House, constructed by the WPA in 1938 as a part of the creation of Gardner Lake, was designed in a rustic style so it could "blend in with, and not intrude upon the environment."
Johnson County Museum Collection.

The Gardner Lake Beach House was constructed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1938, as a smaller part of the creation of the Gardner Lake. The WPA was created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935 as a response to the massive unemployment caused by the stock market crash in 1929. The WPA was established to provide basic work for the high number of unemployed. In 1938, the WPA was reorganized and renamed the Works Projects Administration. More than five million Americans found work between July 1935 and December 1938 as a result of these projects.

The overall Gardner Lake project cost \$567,245, which included not only the construction of the lake and lake house, but the creation of an earthen dam, beach,

shelter houses, toilets, outdoor ovens, picnic tables, athletic fields and a boat dock. It was the largest of twelve WPA projects commissioned in Johnson County during the 1930's.

The rustic style of most WPA structures is consistent throughout the United States. The design of WPA buildings was based upon principles established by the National Park Service (NPS in 1916). In the beach house national register nomination history, rustic park structures were found to "blend in with, and not intrude upon the environment." Building materials were described as "rugged, durable, practical, and built with native materials, in order to imply the building as a natural outgrowth of the park itself." NPS structures built between 1935-1942 thus shared many remarkable traits. The beach house was in use from 1938 until 1989 and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. The beach house is one of the sites included in the "Beyond this Exhibit" booklet which compliments the *Seeking the Good Life* exhibit.



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