

Historic Hotels of The Past in Fairmont- Part 1

After a long day of traveling, we no doubt have all experienced the longing to find a good hotel to get rested up for the following day's journey. In years past, Fairmont was the home numerous hotels that no longer exist today. The Fairmont of today has many fine hotels primarily in the vicinity of I-90, which would be the logical location for today's travelers. However, from the late 1800's up through the early to mid-1900's most of the city's hotels were located in the vicinity of downtown Fairmont, as that was the location best suited for travelers of that time period.

A *Sentinel* article from March 14, 1950, entitled "Local Hotels, City's 3rd Industry, Serve 52,000 Guests A Year." The article went on to state that the city's five hotels of that time offered 225 rooms and more than 1,000 persons stay at various times during the week. The five hotels listed included the Gilbert, the Augusta, the Fairmont, the Edgewater, and the Potter. Today, Fairmont offers approximately 295 hotel rooms.

The "Lakehouse" was Fairmont's first hotel. It was built in 1861 by J. M. Goodrich, the first lawyer in Martin County, and was located in what is now Ward's Park. It also housed the first U. S. Post Office, the county auditor's office, the clerk of court's office, and the treasurer's office. It was later acquired by Ezra Hyatt and the name was changed to the "Hyatt House."

The Occidental Hotel, built in 1879, was located in the "Flatiron Block" across the street from Profinium Financial's current location on Lake Avenue. The builders were Fairmont businessman P. H. Munger and two somewhat colorful members of the illustrious English Colony, Gideon Smales and Arthur W. Lyon. The building also housed the Bank of Fairmont, which eventually failed after less than one year in existence, as well as district court since the first courthouse within old Fort Fairmount had been outgrown. Ironically, the failure of the Bank of Fairmont appeared to be a result of its last venture, financing the construction of the Occidental Hotel in which it was housed. A brewery owned by Gideon Smales that was located near the Webster Street boat landing, now Ward's Park, also closed as a result of the bank failure. The bank was eventually taken over by the Martin County National Bank and Al Ward.

The Older House was a hotel that was located between Second and Third Streets in Fairmont at the present site of the Salvation Army store. It was established by J. H. Older, a Martin County farmer, and was in business in the late 1860's and 1870's. J. H. Older moved to Martin County from New York in 1864 and was considered a highly respected citizen of this area.

The Foster House was built by Hale Foster in the late 1800's and was originally located in the vicinity of Bank Midwest on Downtown Plaza. However, it was eventually moved by Foster to its final location, 101 E. Blue Earth Ave., on the corner of Blue Earth Avenue and Downtown Plaza across the street to the west from the Fairmont Opera House. Once considered one of the top three hotels in Fairmont, it ultimately declined and became what was described as a boarding house for tilers, day laborers, and transients. An interesting aspect of this hotel was that at one time, there was a suite of rooms on the third floor that served as the meeting place for Fairmont gamblers. Interestingly enough, the gamblers did not come from the ranks of the so called transients living in the hotel, but rather involved prominent Fairmont business and professional

men of the day. When their game was in session, they even had a hired lookout on watch in the event of a possible raid. The lookout resided in a small house at the rear of the hotel, next to his chicken house that supplied the hotel with chickens and eggs. The Foster House was torn down in 1935 with future plans that included a used car lot and possibly a restaurant on its location.

The Hazelmere, that was located just south of Alton Street and west of Albion Avenue on Hall Lake in Fairmont, was originally the home of Joseph Ramsdale in 1875. The Hazelmere in time became well known as one of the finest resorts in southern Minnesota and the entire Midwest. Families would come to spend their vacations here enjoying Fairmont's lakes and especially the authentic "home cooking," for which it became famous. Other nearby attractions included tennis courts, swimming, and a nearby golf course. The Hazelmere was demolished in 1939-1940 and is now a residential area.

The Bullard House Hotel was also considered one of Fairmont's finest hotels and was located at 200 South Main Street. It opened in 1895 and included an elaborate menu for their dining room. It was named after Charles H. Bullard who was a native of Massachusetts. He came to Minnesota in the 1860's, enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War, was elected sheriff of Martin County in 1867 eventually serving four terms. He also served as Justice of The Peace and, with Frank Day, founded the Martin County Sentinel. Mr. & Mrs. E. A. Luedtke of Amboy, Minnesota, acquired the hotel in 1912 and changed its name to the Edgewater Hotel. The Edgewater was for many years considered one of the finest hotels in southern Minnesota. It was demolished in 1960 in order to build a new hotel.

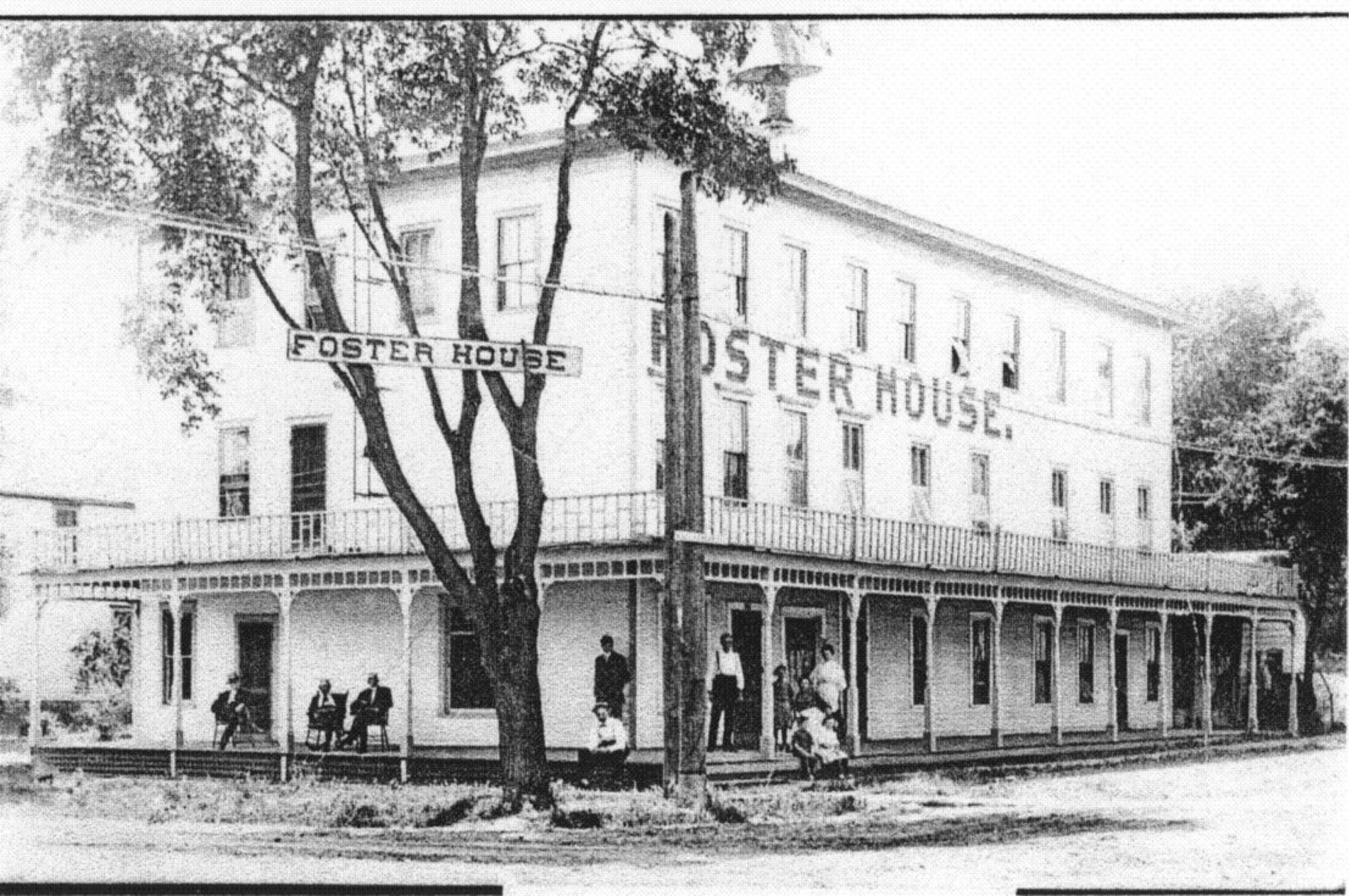
The Harlow House was built in 1890 and was located on North North Avenue, now Downtown Plaza, adjacent to the railroad tracks. It was a popular place for train passengers as they could easily tour Fairmont by taking a ride on the Concord at nearby Lake Sisseton, pay for a horse pulled taxi ride, or rent a horse-and-buggy from a nearby stable. Prior to 1930 it was not uncommon for at least twenty passenger and freight trains to pass through Fairmont on a daily basis. The Harlow House building in time evolved into the Fairmont Packing Company and later became Building 40 of Fairmont Railway Motors, Inc.

Those historic hotels that made their presence known in the area after the turn of the 20th century will be highlighted in a later article.

For more information on this topic, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.

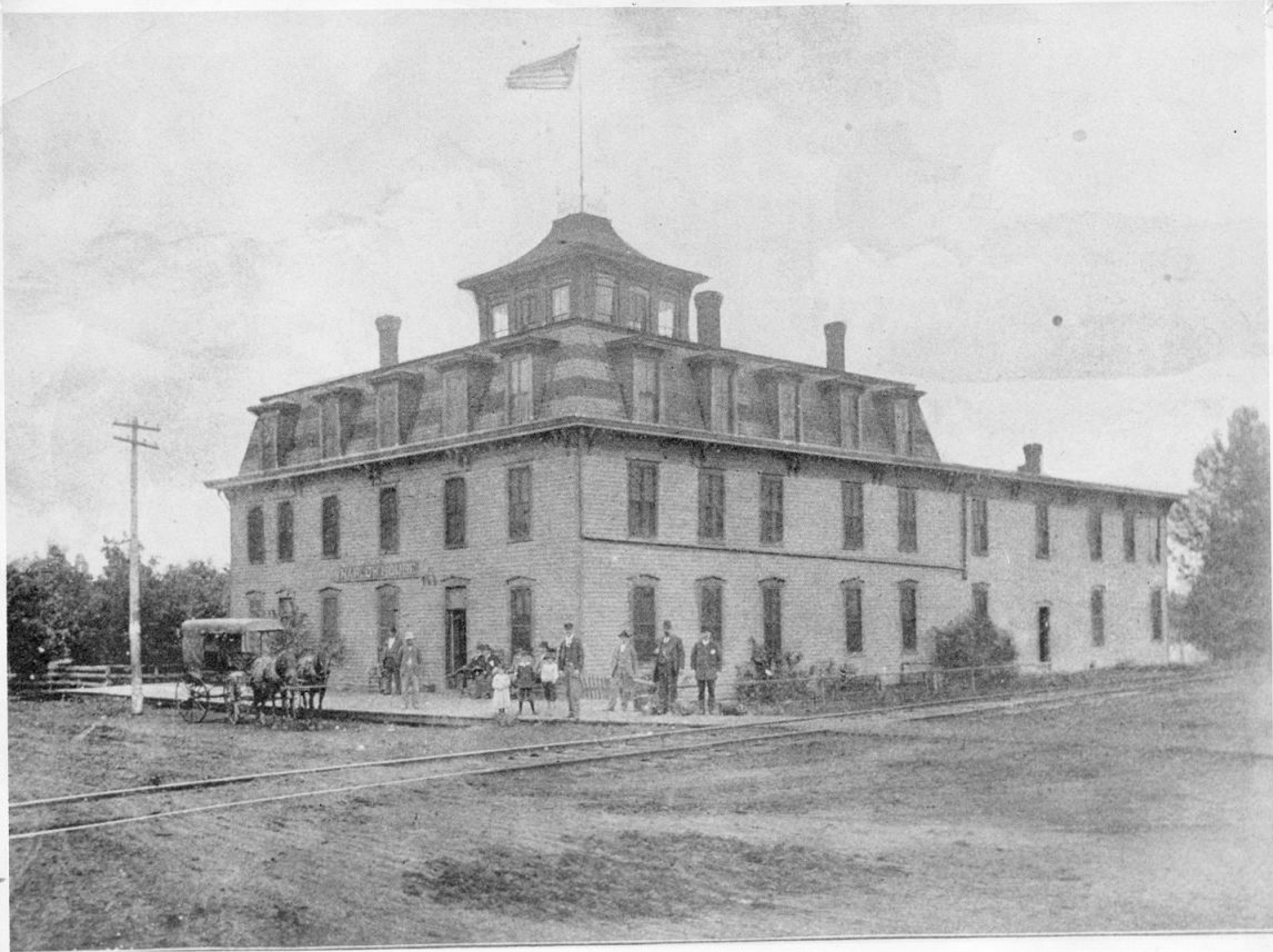


BULLARD HOTEL, FAIRMONT, MINN.



FOSTER HOUSE

FOSTER HOUSE



Harlow House 1890



Hazelmere Hotel, Fairmont, Minn.



