NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

**United States Department of the Interior**
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name WPA BEACH HOUSE AT GARDNER LAKE

other names/site number 091-0000-0127

## 2. Location

street & number SE 1/4, SE 1/4, SE 1/4, NE 1/4, S. 11, T. 14S, R. 22E ☐ not for publication

city, town GARDNER ☒ vicinity

state KANSAS code KS county JOHNSON code 091 zip code 66030

## 3. Classification

| Ownership of Property | Category of Property | Number of Resources within Property | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Contributing | Noncontributing |
| ☐ private | ☒ building(s) | 1 | ____ buildings |
| ☒ public-local | ☐ district | ____ | ____ sites |
| ☐ public-State | ☐ site | ____ | ____ structures |
| ☐ public-Federal | ☐ structure | ____ | ____ objects |
| | ☐ object | 1 | ____ Total |

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

## 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Raymond Pomeroy STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER — MAY 4, 1992

Signature of certifying official — Date

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: RUSTIC STYLE

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: Limestone
walls STONE: Limestone
roof WOOD: Shingle
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The WPA Beach House is located on the SE 1/4, SE 1/4, SE 1/4, NE 1/4, S. 11, T. 14 S., R. 22 E., at Gardner Lake in Johnson County, Kansas, two miles north of Gardner. The lake itself and adjoining property lie on Sections 11, 12, and 13 of Township 14 S., Range 22 E. In the 1930s and 1940s the land around the lake was developed privately with summer cabins, but overtime the development became densely built, year round residences.

The WPA Beach House sits on the west side of the lake, at the public beach. The one story, native stone building is covered with a wooden shingled, cross gable roof. The stone walls are composed of roughly coursed, random ashlar. The stone for this building was quarried from the lake bed during the excavation of the reservoir, as was the stone for all other structures and buildings that were constructed by the transient laborers.

The building has a western facade orientation and is composed of a rectangular unit measuring 44 feet from north to south and 20 feet from east to west, this unit is enclosed. An open porch of the same construction projects off the building's rear, measuring 22 feet from north to south and 24 feet from east to west. The porch faces the lake.

Entry to the beach house is achieved through a gable roofed pavilion which projects from the center of the building's facade, and through doorways on both the north and south walls. The north and south entries are shielded by a tall wall on each side and accessed by several sets of stairs. The doors on the north and south sides appear to be original and retain their multi-paned, wooden transom windows. The building's main entry does not retain its original door. A period photograph shows a double, wooden plank door fenestrated with multi-paned windows in the main entry. Single doors of this design remain in the south and north doorways.

The building is fenestrated with multi-paned, wooden windows that are arranged variously. Transomed units grouped singularly and as pairs fenestrate the large wall spaces. These units appear to operate as casement type windows surmounted by hinged transoms.

XX See continuation sheet

Groups of three hinged transom units surmount the north and south doors.

A large stone fireplace projects from the center of the building's interior eastern wall. It is complemented by a similar stone fireplace which stands against it, projecting from the building's exterior eastern wall. Stone benches flank the exterior fireplace. A wide, stone chimey rises at the roof intersection between the main house and porch, identifying the location of the two fireplaces.

In addition to the front door alteration, the interior of the beach house has received plumbing, sinks, and a counter, and its ceiling has been covered with a white particle board. It is likely that hewn timber beams lie beneath the non-original ceiling treatment.

## 8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

| Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions) | Period of Significance | Significant Dates |
|---|---|---|
| ARCHITECTURE | 1937-1938 | 1937-1938 |
| SOCIAL HISTORY | 1937-1938 | 1937-1938 |

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

UNKNOWN

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The WPA Beach House (c. 1937-1938) at Gardner Lake is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places for its historical association with the Works Progress Administration's (WPA) reservoir and recreational project that created Gardner Lake, a project which occurred between 1935 and 1938, and for its architectural significance as a rustic style building type that was constructed at parks nationwide during the decade of the federal relief programs (1932- 1942). The Gardner Lake project represented the largest and most expensive of the twelve public works projects that the WPA funded in Johnson County, costing a total of $567,245 and employing over two hundred people.

The WPA Beach House is one of the few remaining structures from the project period. Many of the structures built for the recreational area, such as well houses, shelter houses, and latrines have been removed. Several of the original wooden tourist cabins on Lake Road 4 are extant, although they have been altered. In addition, the rustic stone caretakers home and the two brick structures built as part of the transient camp are extant and used as residences, these have also received some alterations. Most of the buildings from the transient camp have been moved or demolished. The lake itself and the dam are intact.

The WPA Beach House is located on the SE 1/4, SE 1/4, SE 1/4, NE 1/4, S. 11, T. 14 S., R. 22 E., at Gardner Lake in Johnson County, Kansas, two miles north of Gardner. The lake itself and adjoining property lie on Sections 11, 12, and 13 of Township 14 S., Range 22 E. In the 1930s and 1940s the land around the lake was developed privately with summer cabins, but overtime the development became densely built, year round residences.

Gardner Lake is outside of the City of Gardner's limits, but the city does own the WPA Beach House, the beach, some seventy acres of undeveloped land around the lake, and the lake bed.

☒ See continuation sheet

Additionally, the City of Gardner uses and sells the water in the lake, however, the water rights to the lake are still held by the State of Kansas. Application for this authority was first made by the City of Gardner to the Kansas Fish and Game Commission in June, 1934.

The federally funded drought relief programs of the 1930s made the idea of a reservoir to meet the City of Gardner's water needs an attractive and attainable possibility to the citizens of Gardner. The idea of tying into the federal drought relief programs to provide dependable and sanitary water systems for the residents of Gardner and surrounding agricultural areas was developed by E. F. Alexander, a Gardner druggist. Alexander stimulated an interest among members of the Gardner business community which resulted in the founding of the Gardner Lake Corporation, the organization that spearheaded and guided the lake project.

The corporation was chartered in May, 1935 as a for profit corporation with the expressed purpose of purchasing and acquiring land necessary for the construction of Gardner Lake, for the sale of land around the lake to private persons, and to operate recreational businesses, although the unincorporated organization had been active since 1933. The Gardner businessmen who composed the corporation were: R. J. Stockmyer, who served as its president; J. E. Johnson, who served as its secretary; and H. C. Bigelow, E. E. Armstrong, M. R. Campbell, W. D. Fleming, H.E. Payne, E. E. Shriver, R. K. Stockmyer, A. Bigelow, and Ollie Turner. These Gardner businessmen were in a position to attract the appropriate government programs to construct the lake. The corporation's charter expired in 1985.

The structure of the reservoir project changed several times during its four year history. Initially, the Kansas State Fish and Wildlife Commission had considered purchasing the acreage where the lake now lies and undertaking the lake's construction, but a 1934 Kansas Supreme Court ruling declared that the commission could not borrow government funds to finance the purchase of the property. In lieu of state purchase, members of the unincorporated Gardner Lake Corporation purchased the 359 acre tract of farmland in January, 1934. The land was selected for its inclusion of a branch of Kill Creek, this tributary was dammed to create the lake. The corporation began to sell lake front acreage as early as February, 1934 for $100 a lot, and by April, 1937 120 lots had been sold. The sale of the lots helped to finance the corporation's $18,000 purchase.

As is written in its 1935 charter, the corporation had expected to donate the lake and some land to the State of Kansas to operate as a state park, but the state was unable to accept the property. In June, 1937 the corporation quit claimed the property which had not been sold to the City of Gardner, including the WPA Beach House, the beach, some 70 acres of undeveloped land reserved for park land, and the lake bed. Government documentation and other sources refer to the project as the Gardner State Lake prior to 1937, after that time the project is referred to as the Gardner Lake.

Project plans for the Gardner State Lake project were developed by the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC) in 1934. KERC was organized in 1932 to administer the Reconstruction Finance Corporation Funds (RFCF) appropriated under the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA) of 1932. In June, 1935 the WPA began operations in Kansas and all long range projects which had been established under KERC were resubmitted for approval by the WPA.

The WPA was established in 1935 to organize "light" public works projects for the able-bodied, unemployed who were on the public relief roles. The WPA never employed more than 3.2 million people in any month and its average monthly earnings were far below prevailing or social security wages. The WPA provided work for over 5 million Americans between July, 1935 and December, 1938, after which date the agency was reorganized and renamed the Works Projects Administration.

KERC established a camp at the Gardner State Lake project site in April, 1934 known as Transient Camp #9. Fifteen functional buildings were planned for the camp, although more buildings were actually constructed. The buildings included mess halls, bath houses, barracks, a hospital, a kitchen, a waterworks, and a recreation hall. Over 200 men were expected to be employed over a two year period building the camp and then constructing the lake and dam. The 18 April 1934 Gardner Gazette notes that, ".... an immense amount of work must be done in clearing the land, riprapping the shores of the lake with rock, building ornamental entrances and wiping out all places which might possibly be breeding places for mosquitoes." The camp was located to the south of the WPA Beach House and beach, on the west side of the lake, at the base of the cove at the junction of Gardner Road with Lake Roads 4 and 5.

By January, 1935 construction of the camp was almost complete and there were 99 transient laborers living at the camp. The laborers

came from all over the country and earned between $1 and $3 per week. The laborers were provided with food, shelter, clothing, and medical care. The camp made an effort to reach out to Gardner and Gardner made an effort to include the camp in its community. The camp held a housewarming party in October, 1934 that 2,000 people attended. The Gardner Gazette had a weekly section called "State Lake Camp News" where it reported the progress of the project and miscellaneous news about various camp laborers and administrators. Under Superintendent Jack Chesbro's supervision, Transient Camp #9 became known as a model community.

Excavations for the reservoir began in March, 1935. The heavy machinery delivered to construct the dam included a heavy elevating grader, a blade grader, three big caterpillar tractors, fifteen Ford dump trucks, and a steam shovel.

In November, 1935, John Stutz, KERC's Executive Director, approved his agency's project proposal to the WPA for ".... the building of a State Park in Johnson County to provide recreation and fishing facilities for the surrounding communities; and also the improvement to serve as Water Conservation, including the construction of a dam impounding 2,351 acre feet of water, employing transient labor known as Transient Camp #9, State of Kansas ...." In doing so, Stutz effectively transferred the jurisdiction of the Gardner State Lake project from KERC to WPA. Under the WPA, the scope of the project changed very little, and included the construction of an earth fill dam and appurtenances impounding 2351 acre feet of water, the maintenance and operation of a camp for unattached workers employed on the project, landscaping the grounds, and the construction of recreational facilities including shelter houses, toilets, a bath house, a beach, a boat house and dock, outdoor ovens, picnic tables, and an athletic field.

By May, 1936 225 men, working three daily shifts, were employed at the camp to build the dam. The 27 May 1936 Gardner Gazette reminded its readers that the project plans included ornamental archways, a keeper's lodge, a bathing beach, and a wide highway across the dam, enforcing the image that the final result would be attractive and an asset to Gardner, even if the present scene was very muddy.

In September, 1936 heirs of the Cristler estate filed an injunction against the WPA and the Gardner Lake Corporation, alleging that their land was being destroyed for the reservoir without any

authority. Much of the property that the Gardner Lake Corporation had purchased for the reservoir project in 1934 had been owned by the Cristler family. This filing held the project up temporarily, but by April, 1937 the dam had been completed with the exception of the spillway and water was being impounded.

The 7 April 1937 and 21 April 1937 issues of the Gardner Gazette noted the project's progress by reporting that Kansas City Power and Light Company had built an electric line around the east side of the lake and that thirty-six picnic ovens were being constructed. The bathing beach, bath house, boat dock, roads, and other structures connected with the project were to be started soon.

Plans published in the 26 April 1937 Gardner Gazette show a different location for the beach and boat dock than was actually chosen; the location shown in the newspaper is the location of the Transient Camp #9. The existing beach is north of the camp site. The site for the boat dock is just south of the beach. Period photographs show the relationship between the beach and its beach house and the boat dock and its boat house. It is likely that the water level was not deep enough at the camp site to accommodate a boat dock, and since the plan called for the boat dock and beach to be in close proximity to one another, the beach was moved to its present location when the boat dock was moved.

While there are no exact entries for the dates of construction for the beach house, it is likely that its construction occurred simultaneously with the beach, placing its construction between April, 1937 and May or June, 1938. The 2 February 1938 Gardner Gazette noted that the "bathing beach is graded and ready for its surfacing of sand." Interestingly, the beach house was never specifically identified in the project plans, and one can assume that it was classified as a shelter house at the time of its construction. However, since the beach opened for its first season in 1938, the building as always been known as the beach house.

The WPA Beach House sits on the west side of the lake, at the public beach. The one story, native stone building is covered with a wooden shingled, cross gable roof. The stone walls are composed of roughly coursed, random ashlar. The stone for this building was quarried from the lake bed during the excavation of the reservoir, as was the stone for all other structures and buildings that were constructed by the transient laborers.

The WPA Beach House derives its architectural significance as a rustic style building type that was constructed at parks nationwide during the decade of the federal relief programs (1932- 1942). The structures built by relief workers reflected the principles of rustic architecture upheld by the National Park Service from its establishment in 1916 through the early 1940s. Arthur Good set forth the basic style and ideals of rustic architecture in his influential 1935 publication entitled Park Structures and Facilities.

Rustic style park structures were designed to blend in with and not intrude upon the environment. Colors such as warm browns were used to subordinate the structures to their settings as would horizontal lines and silhouettes. Building materials were to have the qualities of ruggedness, durability, practicality, and nativeness in order to create the impression of the building as a natural outgrowth of the park itself.

Good wrote that: "Successfully handled it is a style which, through the use of native materials in proper scale and through the avoidance of severely straight lines and over-sophistication, gives the feeling of having been executed by pioneer craftsmen with limited hand tools. It thus achieves sympathy with natural surroundings and with the past."

The WPA Beach House is a successful example of rustic style architecture, integrating native stone construction with low, horizontal lines, appearing as a building which belongs at its site naturally. Additionally, the WPA Beach House retains a high degree of architectural and structural integrity, and this retention allows the building to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under the categories of nomination described in this text.

In Spring, 1991 the Gardner Lake Association initiated efforts to preserve the WPA Beach House. The beach house had been operated as such by the City of Gardner from the summer of its completion in 1938 until 1989, when it was closed. In Spring, 1991 the City of Gardner began considering selling some of its property at Gardner Lake, including the WPA Beach House. Implied in the sale of the property was its demolition. The Gardner Lake Association's efforts to preserve the WPA Beach House generated much local discussion and controversy. Some local residents believed that the registration of the property would make its sale impossible, but many residents could not imagine the lake without the beach house

and fought vigorously for its registration. Although the City of Gardner objected to the proposed nomination, the members of the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review voted in favor of the nomination. In addition to its listing on the Register of Historic Kansas Places Places, the WPA Beach House is now being considered for designation on the National Register of Historic Places.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

[XX] See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- [ ] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- [ ] previously listed in the National Register
- [ ] previously determined eligible by the National Register
- [ ] designated a National Historic Landmark
- [ ] recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- [ ] recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- [XX] State historic preservation office
- [ ] Other State agency
- [ ] Federal agency
- [ ] Local government
- [ ] University
- [ ] Other

Specify repository:
KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property LESS THAN ONE ACRE

UTM References

| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | 15 | 332620 | 4301540 |
| B | | | |
| C | | | |
| D | | | |

[ ] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

THE NOMINATED PROPERTY IS LOCATED ON THE SE 1/4, SE 1/4, SE 1/4, NE 1/4, S. 11, T. 14S, R. 22E near Gardner in Johnson County, Kansas. The property stands on a tract measuring 64' x 40', whose northeast corner is 14.1' directly northeast of the northeast corner of the building's foundation. Beginning at the northeast corner of the parcel the boundary proceeds 40' south, 64' west, 40' north, and 64 feet back to the point of beginning.

[ ] See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary for the nominated property contains a 64' x 40' tract which is part of a much larger acreage historically associated with the building. The boundary contains a small acreage immediately around the building.

[ ] See continuation sheet

## 11. Form Prepared By


name/title MARTHA HAGEDORN-KRASS, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN
organization KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY date APRIL 21, 1992
street & number 120 WEST TENTH telephone 913-296-5264
city or town TOPEKA state KANSAS zip code 66612

**Selected Bibliography:**

City of Gardner to Gardner Lake Corporation, Contract. 6 November 1939. Book 24 of Misc., p. 442. Johnson County, Kansas Register of Deeds.

Federal Works Projects Records for Johnson County, Kansas. National Archives, Washington, D. C.

Gardner Gazette; 21 February 1934, 7 March 1934, 14 March 1934, 23 March 1934, 28 March 1934; 18 April 1934; 8 May 1934; 16 May 1934; 23 May 1934; 30 May 1934; 6 June 1934; 27 June 1934; 15 August 1934; 3 October 1934, 10 October 1934; 17 October 1934, 7 November 1934, 21 November 1934, 28 November 1934, 19 December 1934, 2 January 1935, 16 January 1935, 6 February 1935, 13 March 1935, 20 March 1935, 27 March 1935, 10 April 1935, 29 May 1935, 31 July 1935, 28 August 1935, 15 April 1936, 27 May 1936, 10 June 1936, 23 September 1936, 7 April 1937, 21 April 1937, 26 April 1937, 12 May 1937, 9 June 1937, 11 August 1937, 1 September 1937, 2 February 1938, 16 February 1938.

Gardner Lake Corporation Charter. 24 May 1934. Book 28 of Misc., p. 48. Johnson County, Kansas Register of Deeds.

Good, Albert Houghton. Park Structures and Facilities, prepared by the U. S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service. (Rahway, N. J.: Quinn and Boden, 1935).

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Kansas Water Appropriation Act, K. S. A. 82a-701.

Schruben, Francis W. Kansas in Turmoil, 1930-1936. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969).

Topeka Daily Capital; 11 September 1936.

F KANSAS

# GARDNER QUADRANGLE
KANSAS—JOHNSON CO.
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

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WPA BEACH HOUSE
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