

Foster House

Foster House, 100 North First Street; 1882, 1884, 1886, 1996; original architect/builder unknown; Minneapolis Energy Center/NRG Energy, Inc. (44)

Significance: Example of a surviving late nineteenth-century commercial building, constructed in the proximity of Bridge Square, and representative of twentieth-century conversions in the Warehouse District.

In 1882, Stephen E. Foster erected this three-story brick structure to house his carriage manufacturing company. Originally, Foster's building shared a party-wall with a two-story livery stable with limestone walls at 102 North First Street. The livery stable has long since disappeared, but a remnant of its stone wall can still be seen on the north facade (parking lot side) of Foster House. In 1884, Foster took out a building permit to erect an addition to the rear and convert the main building into a 35-room hotel, known as the Foster House. The carriage making factory, as well as a blacksmith, operated in the new addition. In 1886, the building was again expanded with a brick addition to the rear. The hotel operations seem to have lasted into the early twentieth century. Over the years, the building housed a variety of businesses including a baking powder manufacturer, a distributor of pneumatic tubes and conveyor belts, and a wool company.

Following World War II, many of the buildings in the warehouse district were either abandoned or under-utilized as businesses left the inner city for the suburbs. Beginning in the late 1960s, artists discovered that the warehouse district offered cheap space where they could live and practice their art, be it anything from painting to loud rock-and-roll music, without disturbing the surrounding neighborhood. From 1985 to 1995, Foster House was called the Skunk House and served as home to

the No Name Gallery. In 1994, the Federal Reserve Bank acquired the building as part of their new facility planned for 90 Hennepin Avenue. The bank leased Foster House to the Minneapolis Energy Center/NRG Energy, Inc. With approval of the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission, NRG removed the 1886 addition to the building, as well significant portions of the interior floors and walls to accommodate the backup cooling plant for the bank. The front portion of the building was remodeled into office space.

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