

Webbly, more commonly known today as the O. Max Gardner House, was the home of one of North Carolina's most prominent 20th-century public leaders. A key figure of the State's famous "Shelby Dynasty," Oliver Max Gardner enjoyed a distinguished career that included service as State senator, lieutenant governor and governor from 1929 to 1933. The two-story house facing south Washington Street--the original core of the current house--was built sometime between 1852 and 1855 by attorney Augustus W. Burton. Shortly thereafter, the house was sold and for the next 48 years, changed hands rather rapidly, with one exception. On April 1, 1869, Mrs. Adelaide W. McAfee purchased the property at a sheriff's sale and lived there for nearly 20 years. In 1905, J.A. Anthony, a prominent Shelby attorney bought the home and, by that point, a much reduced lot. Anthony and his wife, Ollie Gardner Anthony, initiated a Colonial Revival renovation in 1907 which totally changed the appearance of the house.



The core of the house was built in the 1850s; there was a substantial renovation in 1907
 Photo courtesy of Uptown Shelby Association

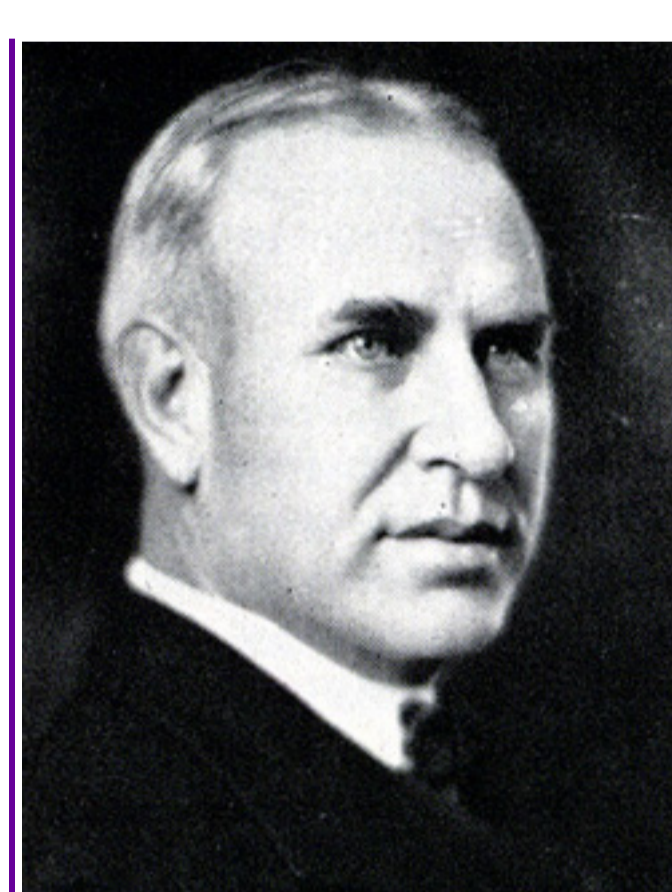


O. Max Gardner was governor, and served under Presidents Roosevelt and Truman
 Photo courtesy of Uptown Shelby Association

Anthony's brother-in-law and law partner was Oliver Maxwell Gardner. Gardner married Faye Webb, a member of the politically influential Webb family. In 1911, Judge James L. Webb, Faye's father, bought the enlarged house from J.A. Anthony. The Webbs and the

Gardners (including two of Max and Faye's three children) moved into the home which quickly acquired the name Webbly. Gardner had spent much of his life on a farm and took pride in that lifestyle. He kept several cows at Webbly to instill the same work ethic in his sons, Ralph and James. While the boys herded the cows to pasture on the other side of town and brought them back at night for milking daily, they were embarrassed by this type of labor and were known to take the cattle through alleyways to prevent discovery of their work. O. Max Gardner's first step in his climb to political fame came in 1910 when he was elected to the State Senate. After holding many other offices, he was elected Democratic governor of North Carolina in 1928. In light of the spectacular defeat of the national Democratic ticket that year, Gardner's victory was a testament to his superb political organization and personal popularity. As the state's chief executive during the first years of the Depression, he was credited with initiating programs that helped many small farmers weather the difficult times. He later served under President Franklin Roosevelt as chairman of the Advisory Board of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, and under President Harry Truman as Undersecretary of the Treasury. He was appointed ambassador to the Court of St. James, but did not live to fulfill that appointment. Much of the last 25 years of his life were spent in Washington, D.C., but Gardner always considered Webbly his home. After Gardner's death, Faye returned to Webbly to live with her sister, Madge Webb Riley. The two inherited the house as the only surviving children of Judge James L. Webb. Madge died in the early 1950s leaving Faye as sole owner of the estate. She lived at Webbly until her death in January 1969. Of her three sons, only Ralph survived and lived in the house.

Webbly is not only reflective of United States politics, but of the entertainment culture as well. Webbly was the base for Thomas Dixon's 1905 novel *The Clansman*, and according to Ralph Gardner, also the setting for a segment in D.W. Griffith's 1915 cinema classic *The Birth of a Nation*, based on this novel. In May of 1993, O. Max Gardner III and his wife, Victoria Harwell Gardner, turned the home into a bed and breakfast with a political theme. The Inn at Webbly was one of the nation's finest inns, but closed in 1998 due to an illness in the family which made operation of the inn difficult.



Oliver Max Gardner
 Photo courtesy of North Carolina Dept. of Public Instruction

Webbly is located at 403 S. Washington St. in the [Central Shelby Historic District](#). Although the Gardner family continues to live in the house today, it is open to the public Monday-Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm. Call 704-487-0616 for further information.

