

= American Gothic House =

The American Gothic House , also known as the Dibble House , is a house in Eldon , Iowa , designed in the Carpenter Gothic style with a distinctive upper window . It was the backdrop of the 1930 painting American Gothic by Grant Wood . Generally considered Wood 's most famous work and among the most recognized paintings in twentieth century American art , the painting is the model for hundreds of parodies across every creative medium . Grant Wood , who observed the house only once in his lifetime , made only an initial sketch of the house ? he completed American Gothic at his studio in Cedar Rapids .

First owned by Eldon resident Charles Dibble after its construction in 1881 and 1882 , the home was (with one 1897 exception) a private residence until the late twentieth century . After a thirty @-@ year preservation effort culminated with the donation of the house in 1991 to the State Historical Society of Iowa , the site now includes the original house in its 1930 form and a visitors center . The house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 . Since 1991 , various caretaker @-@ occupants have continued to rent the home privately .

= = Early history and architecture = =

Charles A. Dibble (born 1836 in Saratoga County , New York) , by various accounts a railroad man , livery stable owner , and Civil War veteran , lived in Eldon in the late nineteenth century . He and his wife , Catharine , began building the house in 1881 for themselves and their eight children . Its relatively simple board @-@ and @-@ batten siding , white color , and moderate size ? just 504 square feet (46 @.@ 8 m2) ? were quite common in nineteenth century Iowa architecture . A similar style can be observed in the birthplace of President Herbert Hoover in West Branch , built a decade before the American Gothic House , which features board @-@ and @-@ batten siding , a simple shingled roof , a central chimney , white color , and a moderate size as well . Unique and unusual exterior features of the house include its two Gothic windows in the gable and its steep @-@ pitched roof . Both features would later be exaggerated by Grant Wood in American Gothic . The lower floor of the house contains three rooms and a bathroom , while the upper floor has two bedrooms . The house has been called the best @-@ known example of a Carpenter Gothic cottage in the United States .

There is no conclusive evidence explaining why the Dibbles chose to place Gothic windows on the upper level . The windows are believed to have been purchased through the Sears catalog . There are two commonly accepted theories : the Dibbles may have wanted the windows to beautify their home at a time when rural life in Iowa was a struggle , or they could have been following a trend in which extravagant details were desirable in residences in the late nineteenth century , and the Dibbles chose windows whose costs would have been relatively reasonable at the time .

The Dibbles ' house was foreclosed around 1897 after they were unable to pay their taxes , and they moved to Portland , Oregon by 1900 . It exchanged hands several times until 1917 , when Gideon and Mary Hart Jones purchased it . The Jones family owned the house until 1933 (and notably added a kitchen which created the west wing of the house) ; thus , it was the Jones family who allowed Grant Wood to use their home as a backdrop for American Gothic .

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During the summer of 1930 , Edward Rowan , a young gallery director from Cedar Rapids , a large city approximately 80 miles (130 km) to the northeast of Eldon , attempted to promote fine arts in the rural town by opening a gallery and library and leading art classes in Eldon . Rowan 's attempts were met with success ? the Eldon Forum called the exhibitions " an unusual treat . " This , along with an indebtedness Wood felt toward Rowan , drew the painter (himself a native of Anamosa , Iowa) to come to Eldon .

In August , Wood was driven around the town by a young painter from Eldon , John Sharp , looking for inspiration . Sharp 's brother suggested in 1973 that it was on this drive that Wood first sketched

the house on the back of an envelope . Wood did not immediately regard the house as beautiful , but he did find it captivating . His earliest biographer , Darrell Garwood , noted that Wood " thought it a form of borrowed pretentiousness , a structural absurdity , to put a Gothic @-@ style window in such a flimsy frame house . " At the time , Wood classified it as one of the " cardboady [sic] frame houses on Iowa farms " and considered it " very paintable . " After obtaining the permission of the Jones family , Wood made a sketch the next day in oil on paperboard from the house 's front yard . This sketch displayed a steeper roof and a longer window with a more pronounced ogive than the actual house , features which eventually adorned the final work ; however , Wood did not add figures to the sketch until he returned to Cedar Rapids . He would not return to Eldon again before his death in 1942 , although he did request a photograph of the home to complete his painting .

= = Later history and current status = =

Decades after American Gothic was regarded as an American icon , the house continued to serve as a private residence , usually for rent , transferring ownership only once more from the Jones family to the Seldon Smith family at a " distress sale " in 1942 . A grassroots movement to preserve the house was started as early as 1945 by Nan Wood , Grant Wood 's sister and the female figure depicted in American Gothic . A visit in 1960 to the house (which was beginning to fall into disrepair) by Des Moines architect and historian William J. Wagner , A.I.A capped these early efforts . He was among the first to suggest preservation of the house as a historic site :

In the early 1970s , a series of letters between Eldon businessmen and Carl E. Smith , the newly @-@ inherited owner of the house , revealed differing opinions on continued use of the house : Smith wanted to renovate the house and protect it from vandalism only ; the Eldon leaders were more in favor of making the house a historic site . The house was abandoned for much of the 1970s ? a bullet was fired in an upstairs bedroom ; weather and vandalism took their toll as well . Only in the late 1980s did the owner of the property consider turning the house over to the state . Indeed , many southern Iowans were conflicted on the issue ? the owner wanted to keep the house only because he believed the current renters would have nowhere else to go if they were forced to leave .

After the home was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 (the result of an application by an Eldon farmer) , the owner refurbished the house , installing an indoor bathroom and electricity and restoring the windows and wallpaper . Local politicians believed such work coupled with a new museum and education center could provide a major boost to local tourism ? one state senator hoped for as many as 100 @,@ 000 visitors per year . After the house 's owner eventually turned over the property to the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1991 , an effort was made to move the house to Living History Farms outside Des Moines , but Eldonians fought to keep it within their city limits . The house was renovated in 1992 , with boosters hoping to see the house become a pop @-@ culture tourism attraction , much like the Field of Dreams site in similarly rural Dyersville . Today the American Gothic House Center hosts approximately 15 @,@ 000 visitors per year , which does not account for additional after @-@ hours visitors .

Visitors are encouraged to view the house from the outside and have their photo taken ? in fact , the visitors center provides many sizes of similar aprons and jackets worn by the original painting 's models . The adjacent American Gothic House Center , completed in 2007 , contains exhibits about the painting , artist Grant Wood , and the community around the house . Each June , the city of Eldon holds its Gothic Days festival , a celebration of the painting and rural life in Eldon in the 1930s . Starting in 2015 , tours began in the first floor of the home . The Gothic House is not handicap accessible .