

## American Gothic House History



The property was plotted by W.H. Jaques in 1881. The first recorded owners were Charles and Catherine Dibble in 1887. They lost the house due to overdue taxes and E.P. Forest Howard purchased the home in 1897 and operated a candy and novelty store which later failed. Gideon and Mary Hart Jones purchased the house in 1917 and were living there when Grant Wood painted *American Gothic*. Seldon and Myra Smith bought the house in 1942 and their son, Carl inherited it in 1960. He maintained it until he gave it to the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1991. The visitor center, built by the city of Eldon and Wapello County, opened in 2008.

Wood's most famous painting is titled *American Gothic*. This painting was created in 1930 and depicts a farmer and his daughter in front of a small farmhouse. The models for the painting were Wood's sister and Wood's dentist. The bullet-shaped window in the background is where the name of the painting came from. The window looks like windows on the large churches in Germany built in the Gothic tradition of architecture.

*American Gothic* was the first painting by Wood to receive attention outside of Iowa. Up to 1930, Wood's work was well-known within the Cedar Rapids community and had received awards at the Iowa State Fair, but few people outside of Iowa knew of his art. This all changed when *American Gothic* was shown at a Chicago art exhibition in 1930. The painting won an award and was purchased by the Art Institute of Chicago, where it is today.

The house used as the backdrop for the painting is located in Eldon, Iowa. The house was found by Wood when he was scouting for things (landscapes, towns, people) to paint. The house today appears the same as it did when Wood originally sketched it for his painting.

*American Gothic* has become a well-known image of Americans and Midwesterners, especially Iowans. The picture has been used in many different places: on magnets, ties, t-shirts and in political cartoons. The image of a couple in front of a house has been used to sell a wide range of products. Many people (and animals) have replaced the original pair: presidents and their wives, Native Americans, Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy, pigs, cats, cows and movie stars, to name a few. The original pair has been placed in many different settings: under water (when Iowa was flooded), on the beach, at a party with figures from other well-known paintings (*Mona Lisa*, *Whistler's Mother*, *The Scream*), in a car and in France.