



Historic Fowler Mansion

Solomon Fowler built the home for his family across the road from his mills.

Early Bristol businessman, Solomon Fowler, built the Italianate style home for his family in 1868. Following Fowler, a number of different families lived in the home, including the Sudboroughs, followed by the the Stewart Gardner family in the 1950's, by the Bogers and Dibley families from the 1960's until the Mansion was bought by Lynette and Dave Johnson in 2002 from Robert Boger's daughter, Susie Dibley. Fowler was one of the original entrepreneurs of Bristol, Indiana.. He built a number of saw mills, flour mills and even a 5-story furniture store.



No trace of any of these structures remains today, but parts of the old dam can still be seen in the St. Joe River behind the Water Treatment Plant, across the street from the mansion that Solomon Fowler built for his family. In the end, the mill structures were all burned, likely in an arson, caused by a disagreement with one of the competing mill operations (Boyer's) in the area. Fowler died in 1877; wife Martha, 1904.

Matha was related to Cordelia Wheeler, whose tombstone was made into part of a bench in the front yard. It is probably the original stone from the old Illinois Street Town Burial Grounds, since a later one was found in the Oak Ridge cemetery. Martha's daughter Cordelia Clark from a previous marriage, married Fred Sudborough, and they lived in the home. Next, the home was owned by Stewart Gardner who installed the reflecting pond and lap pool. He was an early entrepreneur, inventor of the first Class A motor home. In the early 60's, he actually built his trailers on Vlstula Street, Bristol's main street. In 1962 the Bogers bought the home. Their daughter, Susie Dibley, took over the home when her father moved away in 1972. She in turn sold it to the Johnsons in 2002. The historic home is located in Bristol, Indiana.



1868 Italianate Style Home



In 2002, Lynette & Dave Johnson bought and begin restoration of the 4,000 square foot home that sits on a hill and 5 acres at the western edge in Bristol, Indiana



Dave and Lynette Johnson did the extensive research leading to the Home being listed in 2003 in the National Register of Historical Places, one of the few places in the Bristol Indiana area so designated.



Lynette enjoys sharing the home with friends and with community groups and has opened the home several times for town house tours as well as for non-profit organizations like the Tri Kappa Mental Health Coffee held in the fall of 2008.

National Register of Historic Places:
The Johnsons' dedicated research allowed the home to qualify for listing on this important register.

The home is her canvas:
An art teacher, passionate about history, Lynette convinced her husband Dave, a home remodeler and carpenter by trade, that buying the historic red brick mansion at the west edge of Bristol Indiana was a good idea.

“This house is my canvas,” she says, “but we really didn’t know what we were getting into by attempting to restore the home to its former glory.”

Chimneys first, Cupola followed:
To support the nine internal fireplaces, the house had four external rooftop brick chimneys, which had been plastered over with cement at sometime in its history, probably to prevent leaks. They have been restored by the Johnsons, one at a time, due to the high cost.

By 2012, all four chimneys had been completed. The Johnsons' plan to rebuild the removed cupola that once crowned the home as shown in early photographs followed and was completed at last. Lynette decorated it with a cloud-painted ceiling and invites others to enjoy the stunning view.

A Curiosity in the front yard...



Visitors examine a tombstone of Cordelia Wheeler, relative of an early resident, that was used as part of a yard bench. In the early 1900's, a number of graves were moved from the Illinois St. Cemetery to Oak Ridge, and many of the original stones were replaced by family members with new ones and old ones repurposed.



The Fowler Mansion was featured in house tours in 2005 and 2008 to raise funds for community activities by a local Town group.



Visitors were escorted through the home by guides who told them the history of the house.



Shown in 2008, The home has been lovingly renovated, but is still considered by the Johnsons to be a work in progress. The home has nine fireplaces.



The dining room too, has a fire place and is big enough to seat a large family. The Johnsons have filled the home with period furniture and accessories.



The kitchen has been extensively remodeled and members of the Tri Kappa group guided visitors on a tour during their 2008 event.



Upstairs rooms also had fireplaces, very tall windows and high ceilings. Antique furniture and accessories add to the back-then feeling of the historic home.



The many different types of fireplace mantels used in the home individualize each room. Unique style beds are placed in the many bedrooms.



Visitors are charmed by the Victorian furnishings and the careful choice of styles and colors in the fabrics and wall coverings, carefully and lovingly chosen by Lynette Johnson.



Lynette finds the pond to be a soothing and inspirational place, although she admits it does require a fair amount of upkeep.



A lap pool provides the opportunity for good exercise – when she can find the time after her busy days as an art teacher for Concord Schools



Officials from the 2008 Tri Kappa group were extremely pleased at the success of their Mental Health Coffee held at the Fowler Mansion.



Of course, Lynette can't resist decorating the home each holiday season, and adding photos of "what went where" for use in the coming years of bringing a joyful look to the 150+ year old Mansion.



Susie Dibley and her six children (Katie, Andrea, Emily, David and not pictured Michael and Matthew) celebrated one of their last holiday seasons in the historic home in December, 2000.



The large dining room easily seated the whole family on those occasions when all the teenage members were at home to share a meal.



The kitchen was the place for the family to gather for quick meals, do their homework, or make meal preparation.



In the boys' room on the second floor, the high ceilings were perfect for a regulation size basketball hoop that allowed for practice any season of the year.



Young Susie Dibley, with parents Bob and Mary Boger, moved to the home in 1962. Her parents moved on in 1972, and Susie added historic touches when later she returned with her own family to live there again.



Dibley showed the hidden entrance to a basement room that was accessible from a hole cut in the kitchen floor. This entrance and the basement below have been the source of many rumors and explanations of what it was built for.



In the basement, there were remains of a brick tunnel that was said to lead from the basement under the road and across to the river. Not built until 1868, after the Civil War, the home could not have used by the Underground railroad as was previously thought.



Using the tunnel would have required someone to crawl as it was too low to allow standing up. It may even have been just a part of the heating system, as was revealed in a June 2014 interview with Lynette Johnson after an inquiry to the Elkhart Truth newspaper.



In February, 2013, Susie Boger Dibley wanted to celebrate her 50+ birthday with a special party. She invited friends & family to join her at a Painting Party held at her old Bristol home. Lynette Johnson's "Bristol Uncorked" Painting Classes are now held there.



Susie and her friends and relatives enjoyed an evening of snacks they had brought, a special birthday cake, and the chance to express their own personal creativity in a unique flower painting, directed by Lynette, as she led the group through the session.



After all the fun, there was still one more thing to do, as Lynette led the group on a tour of the renovated house as Susie told stories in each of the rooms about the family times that had been shared in the home when it had belonged to the Bogers and the Dibleys.



Susie demonstrated how she would put her head on the upstairs ceiling grate to listen to the conversations of her parents downstairs. She didn't recall hearing anything really revealing, but it was all part of the fun of living in an historic home with her family.



It was an evening that Susie and her daughters Megan Peters and Andrea Dibley will never forget. The tour brought back so many memories of days gone by, including when the boys of the family put a basketball hoop in their bedroom with a high ceiling.



Finally it was time for Lynette to lead a few guests at a time up into the finished cupola with the expansive windows on every side and the ceiling painted with blue sky and clouds. All thought it was a truly breathtaking view to top off a wonderful evening.

2014 Dibley Dewald Wedding



On Friday, July 11, 2014, Katie Dibley, the 4th child and 2nd daughter of Susie Dibley, married Vincenzo Dewald in her childhood home where she lived until December, 2000.



Vincenzo says that it was in this house that he first laid eyes on Katie. He was a friend of her older brother, Michael. They spent many happy hours here.



The couple spent the evening of their wedding at Murphy Guesthouse Bed & Breakfast in Bristol. They will return to their home in the West and honeymoon in Big Sur. They plan a trip to Italy next year.



Susie Dibley joins her daughter Katie and new son-in-law Vincenzo in the living room of the home where both women spent their childhoods.



Lynette Johnson was thrilled to host the wedding of Katie and Vincenzo in the home that meant so much to the Dibley family.



June 2014 photo of the Fowler Mansion with the cupola installed.
The renovation on the historic home continues today.

To book your own painting class, visit Bristol Uncorked Face Book page
at <https://www.facebook.com/bristoluncorked>