

**LINDEN PLACE FACT SHEET**

To help applicants write their Statement of Intent, we’ve provided some brief historical notes about Linden Place as well as some questions for consideration. These are only preliminary tidbits of information and they do not reflect the breadth and depth of Linden Place’s history. These particular facts and questions do not need to be part of your work but may provide an entry point for your Statement of Intent. Once the program begins writers-in-residence will be oriented with an in-depth self-guided audio tour. We understand that writers may shift and/or refine the focus of their projects after taking the tour.

**About the Land**

The 1.8-acre parcel of land that the house sits on was once part of Sowams, the ancestral homelands of the Pokanoket tribe, later renamed Wampanoag by early colonists. Historian Dr. David Weed notes on his website, “A treaty in 1621 between the Pokanoket Tribe and the Plymouth Colony set in place a fifty-year period of peaceful relations. A breakdown in those relationships, however, followed Massasoit’s death in 1661 and led to the devastating two-year King Philip War and the eventual colonial domination of the land.”

Questions for consideration:

*What might the experience of the land have been when it was in the stewardship of the Pokanokets?*

*How did the King Philip War influence what Linden Place and downtown Bristol have become today?*

**About the Property**

Linden Place’s property includes four buildings: the 1810 Federal-style mansion that is the primary focus of the museum, a carriage house (circa 1850), a ballroom, and a garage (both circa 1906). These buildings surround a designed landscape with gardens and two small gazebo-like structures.

Architect Russell Warren, who designed the home for George DeWolf in 1810, also designed the wood-frame gothic-themed, one-story, octagonal conservatory that was added around 1840. A billiard wing and caretaker’s wing extending from the rear of the house were also built in 1840.

The central four-story winding staircase is a character defining feature of the house. It travels from the central hall on the first floor to the fourth floor where it ends in a domed skylight that allows natural light into the stairway.

The back part of the home includes a passage to the caretaker’s wing which houses the (now private) servant’s kitchen, a separate serving kitchen where food was kept warm and plated, and two sets of stairs: one leading down to the basement and the other leading up to the second and third floor. These more hidden areas obscured the laborious movements of servants from the home’s occupants and guests.

Both the second and third floors have three bathrooms, each with numerous mirrors. The third floor also has a shower room.

The exterior of Linden Place was used as Gatsby’s mansion in the film THE GREAT GATSBY, most notably in a scene with Robert Redford and Mia Farrow dancing on the sidewalk out front.

Questions for consideration:

*In thinking about the different spaces within the home, who do you envision moving through and interacting with those spaces?*

*If you owned this property, what updates and changes would you make (or not make)?*

*How do the front and back stairways reflect the power dynamics of the people who lived here?*

**About the People**

Original owner of the home, George DeWolf, was born into a family that had been engaged in the Rhode Island slave trade beginning in the 18th century. His father and grandfather had both made voyages to Africa to purchase people who would become slaves. The family financed, in whole or in part, at least 88 slaving voyages between 1790 and 1808.

Census data confirms that in 1810 there were at least 34 enslaved individuals living in Bristol, owned by 20 individuals. These people were connected to the DeWolf empire in one way or another, either as family members or business partners. Two enslaved people are listed as being held here in Linden Place.

In 1855, Sarah DeWolf, George’s widowed daughter-in-law, leased the entire house to Captain William Vars, a hotelier from Newport, who turned the mansion into a boarding house and hotel.

Until very recently, it was believed that the shop of Daniel Tanner, an African American barber, was housed in Linden Place during Sarah DeWolf’s tenure. Though evidence now points to Tanner’s barbershop being across the street, we cannot discount the power of oral storytelling which placed Tanner’s shop in our glass conservatory for more than a century.

In 1865, George’s Daughter, Theodora DeWolf Colt, moved back into the home ten years after her husband’s death. She removed all hotel construction and planted the linden trees, rebranding the property as Linden Place. Theodora held theatrical performances, poetry readings, and salons that included famed writers Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, all of whom advocated for the abolishment of slavery.

Legendary actress Ethel Barrymore became part of the family in 1909 when she married George DeWolf’s great grandson Russell Colt. She loved visiting with the children in the summer, and her luggage can be seen in her bedroom on the second floor. Her enduring legacy includes the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York City and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Four Presidents have been guests at Linden Place – Andrew Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, Chester A. Arthur, and James Monroe. Though the home was built after George Washington’s death, a reverse glass portrait of him hangs in the front entryway.

Questions for consideration:

*Whose stories are centered in history and whose stories are lost?*

*If you could travel back in time and interview one person who lived here, who would it be?*

**About the Collection**

The dining room chandelier once held 60 candles. It was refitted with electric lights and an outlet that allowed Theodora’s son, Samuel P. Colt, to enjoy his morning toast prepared directly at the table. The chandelier was long rumored to have hung in Buckingham Palace, but according to a 1904 article in the Bristol Phoenix, the fixture originated from an English castle (specific whereabouts unknown).

A letter written by Thomas Jefferson in the 1820’s to one of the DeWolfs is in the museum’s collection. In it, Jefferson speaks of the importance of the separation of church and freedom of speech.

In 1872 Roycroft Press published “Stray Fancies,” Theodora’s book of poems for private circulation. The collection deals with such themes as patriotism, pride, poverty, love, and death. It includes, among other things, several odes to deceased family and friends and a poem about the emancipation of enslaved people.

There is a bust of industrialist and politician Samuel Colt in his office on the second floor. It is believed to have been sculpted by Gutzon Borglum, known for his monumental sculptures of four American Presidents at Mount Rushmore.

The billiard table in what is now the gift shop received the first medal for excellence at the Paris Exposition in 1900. While filming “The Great Gatsby” in 1974, Robert Redford played billiards at this table with his colleagues.

Questions for consideration:

*How do the objects in the collection represent the values of the people who lived here?*

*What stories are held within these objects?*