

## Stone City Art Colony

In 1932, Grant Wood and Adrian Dornbush, an art instructor at The Little Gallery in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, established an art colony in Stone City. With little more than \$100 and a number of promissory notes based on the success of the art colony they leased 10 acres of land on the Green estate. (200 acres of the estate had been purchased by Frank Nissen in 1920.) The parcel of leased land included the Green Mansion, the Ice House and Water Tower.

The upstairs portion of the house was converted into a dormitory. The rest of the house was used for business offices, kitchen, a sculpture studio and showers for the men.

The basement of the ice house was made into a bar called "The Sickie and Sheaf" where instructor/student Dennis Burlingame tended bar. The upper portion of the water tower was converted into an apartment where Adrian Dornbush lived. It was called "Adrian's Tomb."

The art colony failed. In terms of attendance and reputation the colony was a huge success. However, it was never a financial success. Many of the students had been allowed to work, rather than pay for their tuitions and the colony was pressed to pay its bills.



"Adrian's Tomb" – Water Tower

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"The Stone City  
Foundation"

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## STONE CITY, IOWA

### "THE PLACE THAT REFUSES TO DIE"<sup>1</sup>

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## *Stone City*

"The Stone City Foundation"

A non-profit 501 (c) (3)  
organization founded to preserve  
the history of Stone City and to  
promote tourism of the area.

<sup>1</sup> *Des Moines Sunday Register*, magazine section, Dec. 6,  
1964

# STONE CITY, IOWA

The community of Stone City began in 1850 with the discovery of large deposits of limestone along the banks of the Wapsipinicon River. J. A. Green saw the potential of the limestone and, at his most productive, operated three quarries in the area, using labor from the penitentiary in Anamosa. His successful business helped increase the population of Stone City from 60 to 500 by 1880. The idea of a “city made of stone” was becoming a reality. One of the first buildings was Columbia Hall, a magnificent three story hotel and opera house, completed in 1883, and made of 500,000 tons of limestone. Unfortunately, the property was purchased in the 1930s and torn down in 1938 to use the stone elsewhere.



**Columbia Hall**

Another magnificent structure, the Green Mansion built in 1883, was first damaged by fire in 1963 and torn down in the 1990s.



**Green Mansion**

Thanks to the vision of George Nissan (the developer of the modern trampoline) the original three story Barn, the Quarry Office, Water Tower and Ice House are all still standing although they have been converted into private homes. The preservation of these structures, along with the Catholic Church, Schoolhouse, General Store, Dearborn Residence, Blacksmith Shop and several other private homes has helped revitalize the town with new families without losing the charm of old Stone City.



**St Joseph's Catholic Church**

## New Era of Stone Mining

By the early 1900s, the advent of Portland cement was having an adverse effect on the economy of the Stone City quarries and one by one they began to shut down. During the next half century, nature reclaimed most of the quarries. In 1952 the quarries underwent an economic revival under a new owner. The Stone City quarries have continued to grow and have become one of the largest quarries in the Midwest. The “Stone City quarries” now ship stone all over the United States.

The stone from the banks of the Wapsipinicon can be seen in both old and new construction, not just in Iowa, but across the United States. One of the most recent uses of this limestone can be seen in the new Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. Buildings in Iowa include many of those at Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, the State Capitol in Des Moines and the state penitentiary in Anamosa.



**Blacksmith Shop**