

referendum in 1868 was no more of an unambiguous triumph of principle over prejudice than Governor Stone's victory three years earlier. But to the extent that principle prevailed over expediency, the credit belongs in no small measure to Edward Russell.

STONE CITY, IOWA

By Joan Muyskens, Editor

Stone City, Iowa, located on the Wapsipinicon River about four miles west of Anamosa, has been described as "the place that refuses to die."¹ Born over a century ago, it has had three significant periods; the first, its founding and flourishing as a quarry town that, in the late 1800s, drew "more money from other states than any (other) town in Iowa;"² the second, its use as an art colony, established by Grant Wood; and, the third and present period, its return as a quarry town. This article will take a brief look at each of these periods and the people that stood behind the vitality of Stone City.



John A. Green

The first period of Stone City's history can be attributed largely to the efforts of John A. Green. Born in Ireland on Dec. 10, 1844, John A. Green came to the United States with his mother and sister in 1852. The family settled in Boston, Mass., where he attended school and, in 1860, began to learn the business of stone cutting. In 1865, he removed to Joliet, Ill., and worked for several years as a journeyman. After that, he worked for the Union Pacific Railroad, cutting stone for bridges. It was in Joliet, that he married Ellen Kane.

¹ *Des Moines Sunday Register*, magazine section, Dec. 6, 1964.

² *Annals of Iowa*, Third Series, Vol. 20, p. 305.

In March of 1868, John A. Green arrived in the area presently known as Stone City; he "found it a vast wilderness with heavy timber on all sides, but fast yielding to the woodman's ax."³

Several quarries were operating at the time John A. Green arrived in the area. About 1852, a Mr. Haggard opened a small quarry at the western end of the Stratified Stone Basin. Mr. Haggard supplied stone for the farmers in his neighborhood; he also furnished stone for Cornell College, Mount Vernon.⁴ This stone was hauled by wagon over the then uninhabited prairies. Mr. Haggard sold this quarry to Dr. S. G. Matson, who named the quarry Mount Hope. The quarry was later sold to James & Ross and, after that, to James & Ronen. The quarry was closed in the late 1800s.

The first large quarry was opened by David Graham on the center of section 5, 84 north, 4 west.⁵ It was from this quarry that in 1859, the first stone was shipped by rail outside the area, to Dubuque and Cedar Falls. This quarry was successively owned and operated by David Graham, Haines & Lewis, M. Hisey, and John Ronen.

The next quarry was opened in 1866 by Crouse, Shaw & Weaver. It was operated by them until 1872, when it was sold to the State of Iowa. It was then worked by convicts from Anamosa.⁶ The State abandoned this quarry in 1878. Other quarries opened in the area were owned by Parsons & Webb and H. Dearborn.

In 1869, John A. Green opened a quarry on the south side of the Wapsipinicon River; he named this quarry Champion Quarries No. 1. In approximately 30 years of operation, he shipped over 47,000 cars from this quarry.⁷ With an average valuation of \$20 per car, which is low,⁸ stone shipped from this quarry would total \$940,000. Green also bought the aforementioned State owned quarry which he operated on a small scale to fill the deficiency of Champion

³ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

⁴ *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, Oct. 19, 1904.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Annals of Iowa*, Third Series, Vol. 20, p. 307.

⁸ *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, Oct. 19, 1904.

Quarry No. 1. In 1887, he opened a quarry on the Chicago and NorthWestern Railroad, which he named Johnellen. Within the first 10 years of operation, he shipped over 7,000 carloads from this quarry — an average of \$14,000 worth of stone shipped per year.

In 1883, Dawson & Hess opened a quarry known as Gold Hill which they operated for four years. This quarry was then sold to F. S. Brown & Co. who operated it and an adjacent quarry which they named Mammoth Quarry. From 1887 to 1896, approximately 12,000 carloads of stone were shipped from these two quarries.

The stone from the Stone City quarries was shipped to an area including eight states — Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri. According to a letter written by John A. Green to Dr. S. G. Matson, Jan. 13, 1896:

It is in the finest buildings and bridges in those states namely; The Boston Block, a seven-story building 56 x 120 feet, all stone; Washburn Building; Sidel Building; Congregational Church; and the Great Arch Double Track Viaduct across the Mississippi River below the Falls of St. Anthony, all the above in Minneapolis. Besides these there are in Iowa two of the large shops at Rock Island Arsenal, the Guard House and Barracks, also six officers' quarters; the Blind Asylum at Vinton; the Sabula, Keethsburg and Fort Madison railroad bridges, and the Lyons, Clinton and Muscatine highway bridges. There is also the Insane Asylum at Norfolk, Nebraska. In Wisconsin, Minnesota and Illinois the C. B. & N. Ry. and the C. & G. W. bridges on their entire lines; and those of the Illinois Central in Iowa and Illinois. The entire system of the C. M. & St. P., the B. C. R. & N., the C. & N. W. as well as the C. R. I. & P., virtually, all the roads in the Northwest have used it to their entire satisfaction. The Iowa Hospital for Insane at Independence is built of this stone, also the columns under the Rotunda in the State Capitol where strength is required.

There are very few towns or cities but have used it wherever stone was required. It can safely be said that no more durable stone, except granite, exists.

Stone City Named

The town of Stone City was named by John A. Green after the establishment of a post office there in September, 1873. At that time, there were approximately 600 people

living in the town. Stone City was not incorporated and records say that there was never any crime in the town and that a town marshal was never needed.⁹ The *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, wrote:

The place is orderly as the best community in the state. It has none of the features of a mining or of the average quarry town except the line of work. Drunkenness may be said to be unknown. Harmony between the men and their employers is perpetual. They are all personal friends. They are neighbors and when opportunity affords, they are companions.¹⁰

In 1883, John A. Green built a mansion at Stone City with stone from the Champion quarries. It was located on a hill overlooking the town. The mansion had seven marble fireplaces and was decorated by Clark Cox, a New Orleans artist.

In the 1890s, when Stone City's population had reached 1000, John A. Green built a combination hotel-opera house and mercantile block for Stone City, the cost of which was estimated at over \$40,000. The building was four stories high with ground dimensions of 160 by 40 feet and an annex 60 by 20 feet. It was one of the largest buildings in Jones County, and, the most costly. The hotel consisted of 50 rooms; the sales room, which had a french glass front, was 40 by 60 feet. The opera house, called the *Columbian*, was 40 feet square and would seat between 400 and 500 people. The opera house stage was 20 by 40 feet, with a height of 24 feet. The entire building was lit by gas. Green employed scenic artists, the Clark brothers of New Orleans, to paint the scenery for the opera house, including a street scene, wood scene, garden scene, a landscape, etc. One of the drop-curtains of the opera house stage, painted by Clark Cox, showed a view of Stone City with the Wapsipinicon River in the foreground.

At the formal opening of the hotel and opera house, a New York musical troupe was engaged and the playhouse was thrown open to the public.¹¹

The building of this block for the people of Stone City was considered Green's "crowning act of generosity to the

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Cedar Rapids Republican Magazine*, Nov. 18, 1923.



John A. Green Mansion, Built 1883

The basket of fruit and basket of flowers, on small pillars in front of the mansion, were carved from huge blocks of stone from the Champion quarries. They were a part of the Stone City exhibit at the Columbia Exposition.

The mansion was destroyed by fire in 1953. It had, for some previous years, been used as a summer home by Prof. Paul Engle, University of Iowa, well known Iowa poet.

people of the town in which he lives."¹² Other philanthropic acts of John A. Green included the building of the Stone City railroad station; he gave the stone and laid the foundation for the Home for Friendless Children in Cedar Rapids; and he contributed to the building of the hospital at Anamosa, under the direction of the Sisters of Mercy.

Besides being successful in business, he owned 1000 acres in Linn and Jones counties and was principal owner of the Wasioja Stone Co., Dodge Center, Minn., John A. Green was successful politically. In 1891, he was elected senator from the Cedar-Jones district — he served in the 24th and 25th General Assemblies. However, in 1904, he was unsuccessful in his candidacy for Congress in the fifth district.

Death of a Man and an Era

The introduction and wide-spread use of Portland Cement in the early 1900s replaced the use of limestone and the profits of the quarry business dwindled. By the 1920s, Stone City was almost deserted, only about 50 persons remaining within the city limits.¹³ John A. Green had moved his family to Cedar Rapids in September, 1919. His death in his home on Feb. 25, 1920, marked the finality of an era. He was buried in Holy Cross Cemetery, Anamosa. His wife, two sons and three daughters survived him.

In 1920, Frank C. Nisson bought 200 acres of the former Green estate, including the Green mansion. A company leased the property which was formerly Champion Quarry No. 1 and a little quarrying was continued, but the hopes and dreams of the quarry men had ended.

Stone City Art Colony

In 1932, Grant Wood, internationally known Iowa painter, and Adrian J. Dornbush, formerly a director of the Flint Institute of Art, Flint, Mich., and a guest instructor of painting in The Little Gallery, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the winter of 1931-1932, established an art colony at Stone City.

¹² *Anamosa Journal*, May 31, 1894.

¹³ *Cedar Rapids Republican Magazine*, Nov. 18, 1923.

The aim of the colony, as expressed by Grant Wood, was as follows:¹⁴

It seems to me that we need, this year, especially, a combination camp and summer art school within this section of the Middle West. The mountain and sea-side colonies are too expensive, and too far away for the year 1932.

This Middle-West section is not as obvious as Taos, Brown County, or the coast of Maine, but neither is it covered with the palette scrapings of previous painters. To those willing to observe and think for themselves, instead of merely repeating what has already been said, this territory offers new and very usable material.

My faith in middle-western material is not based alone upon its being fresh and unused, and does not proceed from any "booster spirit" for any particular locality, but is founded upon the conviction that a true art expression must grow up from the soil itself.

In referring to middle-western material, I do not at all mean an endless succession of red barns, silos, and corn shocks; but rather a subtle quality that extends over a large but quite homogenous area, and that manifests itself in a thousand elusive but significant ways. This country has real character that has sometimes been expressed by our writers, but has not, as yet, been caught by our painters.

I have been wondering, for some time, how a serious effort toward a genuine, comprehensive interpretation on canvas of our part of the country could be made. Surely, one or two painters working alone cannot do much more than catch a few aspects of the whole. But a group of people painting harmoniously together, each contributing his own images to the forming of an accumulated vision, may accomplish a great deal.

Through talks with other painters of this section, the Stone City summer school has developed. The coming of Adrian Dornbush to teach in The Little Gallery project in Cedar Rapids last winter has provided the necessary leadership. We have been greatly impressed by his clear, definite emphasis on essentials, and his open-mindedness in regard to the individual methods of expression.

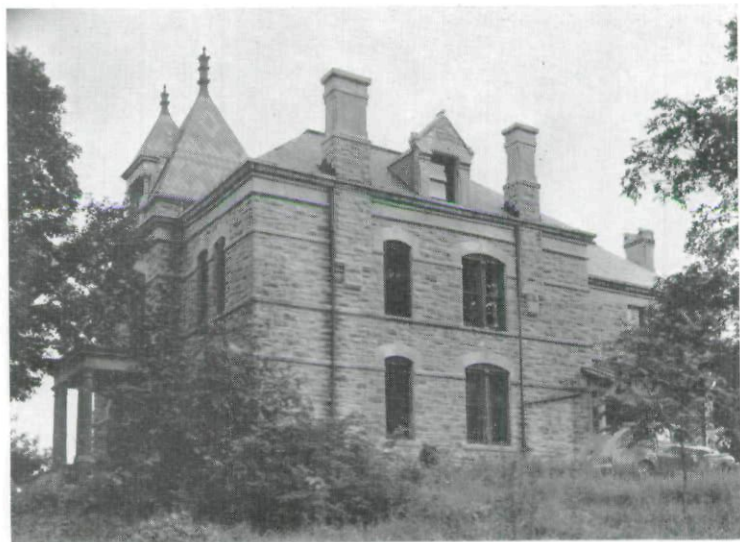
We plan to conduct the summer school in this same manner. At the end of the session we hope that each member of our group will find that he has discovered something definite to say in his painting and that the manner of his saying it is his own individual manner.

It should be clearly understood that we are not trying to promote our own particular methods of painting. Nor are we interested in methods except as a means of most forcefully expressing what one wishes to convey. Our theory being that when a painter has a definite message, he will, by experiment, find the most adequate means of expressing it, let the result be as conservative, as eclectic or as radical as it may.

¹⁴ *Catalogue, Stone City Colony and Art School, Summer, 1932.*

Grant Wood and Adrian Dornbush started the art colony with a capital of \$100¹⁵ and great visions of the development of a truly Mid-Western art. They leased a 10-acre tract which had been a part of the Green estate and included the Green mansion, ice house and water tower. They made arrangements with a Cedar Rapids business man to print a catalogue "with the understanding that if the colony prospered financially he would present a reasonable bill for the work, but if it didn't they could 'just forget it.'"¹⁶ On the same basis, they obtained other supplies needed for the colony.

The upper floors of the Green mansion were converted into a dormitory; the first floor served as the business office, dining room and kitchen, a recreation room and a studio for sculpture classes. The basement included lithography equipment, a workshop for picture framing and showers for the men.



Side View of Green Mansion

¹⁵ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sunday magazine section, Aug. 13, 1933.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The basement of the ice house was converted into a sort of rathskeller, named "The Sickle and Sheaf." The water tower was also put to use, the upper part having been turned into an apartment which, in 1932, was used by Adrian Dornbush — and became known as "Abrian's Tomb."¹⁷



The Sickle & Sheaf; Dennis Burlingame, bartender

¹⁷ *Artist in Iowa—A Life of Grant Wood*, Darrell Garwood; W. W. Norton & Company Inc., New York, 1944, p. 148.



Front View of Ice House
Containing The Sickle & Sheaf



"Old Water Tower," Stone City

Adrian Dornbush accepted the responsibility of being the director of the colony; Grant Wood took the official title of Faculty Director; and Miss Grace Boston was named Business Manager. The faculty for the 1932 colony included Marvin D. Cone, art instructor, Coe College; David McCosh, a graduate of the Chicago Art Institute; Edward B. Rowan, director of The Little Gallery, Cedar Rapids; Arnold Pyle, gallery assistant of The Little Gallery; Adrian Dornbush and Grant Wood. None of the faculty were paid; they received only free board and room. The courses were accredited through Coe College.

On June 26, 1932, the first term of the Stone City Art Colony was opened. Tuition for the full six-week term was \$40, or \$7.50 per week. Board and room were extra.

The success of the colony was greater than expected and soon the dormitory was filled. With the suggestion of James Kelley, a Davenport artist, it was decided to secure ice wagons to house the overflow of students.¹⁸ The ice wagons were obtained from a Cedar Rapids firm and, hitched in a line behind a truck, were hauled to the colony at night, permission for the caravan having been granted by the State Highway Department. The wagons were fitted with bunks and converted into lodging houses. Their weathered exteriors were soon painted and they gave a gay, carnival appearance to the colony.

There was no special daily routine at the art colony; attendance was required at few of the classes and the students were more or less free to work when and as they pleased. The dress was casual, Grant Wood worked in overalls, and the atmosphere informal. On Sundays, the colony was opened to visitors. Ten cents admission was charged and sandwiches and soft drinks sold; the proceedings went toward the expenses of the colony. The students exhibited their work, encouraged to sell as much of it as possible, and musicians from the vicinity, often the band from the reformatory at Anamosa, furnished music. Interest in the colony was great and the Sunday crowds were large, at times numbering over 1000. This not only enhanced the friendly relations between

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

the artists and the people of the surrounding area, but also added to the good reputation of the colony.

The 1933 term was similar to that of 1932, although extended from six, to eight weeks. A few people were added to the faculty, Francis Chapin, an instructor from the Art Institute of Chicago, and Florence Sprague, an instructor from Drake University, Des Moines; and Mrs. Melvin W. Ellis served as hostess. The financial details were, however, handled more carefully, as the colony founders had lost money on the 1932 term. (Although the colony was not established to make money, it was hoped it would be self-sustaining.) Thus, Jefferson R. Smith, a former St. Louis newspaper man, was named executive secretary and it became his duty to handle all business arrangements.

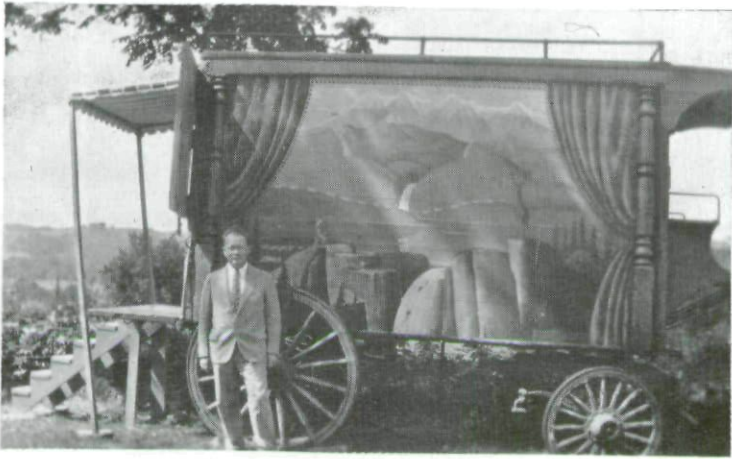
The 1933 term of the Stone City colony also met with great success and it inspired hopes of a great future for the area. As expressed by Keith Kerman in the Aug. 13, 1933, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "It looks as if Stone City might amount to something again, and in a way which some people consider more important than its old industrial prosperity. It may some day be revered as the cradle of a truly American art . . . There is a good chance that this summer gathering of artists and art students, known already over a wide territory, is going to be internationally famous." John Steuary Curry, an established Kansas artist, visited the colony and expressed hopes of working with Grant Wood during the next summer session.¹⁹ The Carnegie Corporation contributed \$1000 to further the project.²⁰ And Grant Wood made plans for the 1934 session.

However, the art colony was never financially successful; a number of the students had been allowed to work for, rather than pay, their tuition, and Grant Wood was pressed for both time and money. Thus, plans for the 1934 term were dropped and the Carnegie Corporation grant was applied to past debts.²¹ Grant Wood joined the faculty of the State University of Iowa, Iowa City; he was also assigned the direction of the Public Works of Art Project in Iowa.

¹⁹ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sunday magazine section, Aug. 13, 1933.

²⁰ *Artist in Iowa—A Life of Grant Wood*, p. 161.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.



Grant Wood and His Ice Wagon

Grant Wood was born Feb. 13, 1891, on a farm four miles east of Anamosa. He attended Antioch School, east of Anamosa, from 1897 to 1901; he later attended a handcraft school in Minneapolis, and night classes at the Art Institute in Chicago. He served in the Army during WWI and, after the war taught school in Cedar Rapids. He spent several summers studying art in Europe and, by 1930, was a well known painter.

Grant Wood died Feb. 12, 1942, from Cancer. He is buried at Riverside Cemetery, Anamosa, Iowa.

A Grant Wood Memorial has now been established at the Antioch School building by the Anamosa Paint 'n' Palette Club.

Although the town itself would always live in Grant Wood's 1930 painting *Stone City*, the hopes for its second period of vitality died with the end of the art colony. The Green mansion was emptied and the ice wagons removed from the hill. It was, once again, an almost deserted town.

Weber's Quarries Afford New Hope

In the early 1940s, Clarence DeWees of Marion, purchased two quarries at Stone City — the former Dearborn Quarry and the former John A. Green Champion Quarry No. 1. He moved crushing equipment into these quarries and made crushed material for road use, and fluxstone, which he sold to small firms that had blast furnaces for the smelting of iron ore.²² In 1952, William C. Weber of Anamosa, began

²² Letter, Gene Lawrence (Office Manager, Wm. C. Weber Stone Company) to Joan Muyskens, March 12, 1968; located in Correspondence file, Annals Office, Historical Building, Des Moines, Iowa. Hereafter, referred to as Letter, G.L. to J.M.

buying into the DeWees Quarries and, by 1959, became sole owner.²³ In 1959, William C. Weber also bought the Ronen Quarry from the Ronen Estate and, in 1962, he bought another of the former Green Quarries from Dale Barnes, who had operated the quarry on a small scale for a few years previous.²⁴

Today, the Weber Quarries have 15 permanent employees; an additional 10 men are hired in the summer as part time help. Weber has supplied stone for numerous jobs, including the Herbert Hoover Memorial Library, West Branch; the Citizens Saving Bank, Anamosa; the Anamosa Senior High School; the Anamosa Community Hospital; All Saints Church, Cedar Rapids; the Dubuque Parking Ramp; stone for exterior facing of the Wayne Zion Lutheran Church, Scotch Grove, and St. Francis Church, Fayette; and stone was shipped to Chicago for an apartment building. He is in the process of opening an underground mine in the Ronen Quarry and expects to have it ready for production by the spring of 1969.²⁵ And, the future looks good. There is no threat of lack of stone and, according to Gene Lawrence, Office Manager of the Wm. C. Weber Stone Company, "we certainly expect to keep quarrying as long as there is a call for a good building product such as Stone City Stone."²⁶

Although the population of Stone City still remains about 100, it is an active community. The local store, built by the Dearborns in 1894 (see *Annals* cover sketch by Wm. J. "Bill" Wagner), is still in operation; street lights were installed and paid for by the Wm. C. Weber Stone Company; and, an active community club has been formed. Many tourists visit Stone City each summer and fall and it is hoped that a recreation area or park will be developed at Stone City.

Thus, Stone City, one of the most fascinating areas in Iowa, remains "the place that refuses to die."

²³ *Des Moines Sunday Register*, magazine section, Dec. 6, 1964.

²⁴ *Letter*, G. L. to J. M.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.