

## Small Historic Towns across America

As presented by Mr. Stadt's on-line Freedom Project Education U.S. History classes in the fall and winter of 2014. You can learn more about our classes by visiting us at: [www.fpeusa.org](http://www.fpeusa.org)

### Brief History of Mason City, Iowa

In 1853 two men named John Long and John Bilford traveled from Illinois to land up by the Winnebago River. John Long named a thickly wooded area Masonic Grove in honor of the "Order of the Free Masons." Then in that same year, John Long returned with two men named Joseph Hewitt and George Brentner. These three men laid out a town on the same location and renamed it Shibboleth. On his way from Illinois with his family to Shibboleth, John Long's son, Mason, died. When John Long reached Shibboleth, the town was renamed Masonville to honor the memory of his son. With there already being two towns in Iowa named Masonville, Masonville eventually became, as it is known today, Mason City. Mason City was established in 1858 as the Cerro Gordo county seat. In 1870, with an area of only one square mile, Mason City, Iowa had it's first mayor elected, Darius B. Mason.



In the year of 1866, the Mason City and Fort Dodge railroad line was established. With the coming of the railroad, Mason City had the opportunity to grow quickly and became known as an important retail and manufacturing center in the Midwest.

## Location and Driving Directions from closest major U.S. Airport

The Minneapolis airport is about 2 hours or 134 mi from Mason City, Iowa. For directions from the airport to Mason City, leave the airport exiting west on I-494. From I-494, exit on MN 77 south, Ceder Avenue. From MN77, exit on I 35E South to Albert Lea, MN. 35E will become I -35. Exit at Clear Lake, IA and turn left onto HWY 18. Drive east for 7 mi arriving in Mason City, IA.

Who was President when this town was founded? And, what was the political environment in America at that time



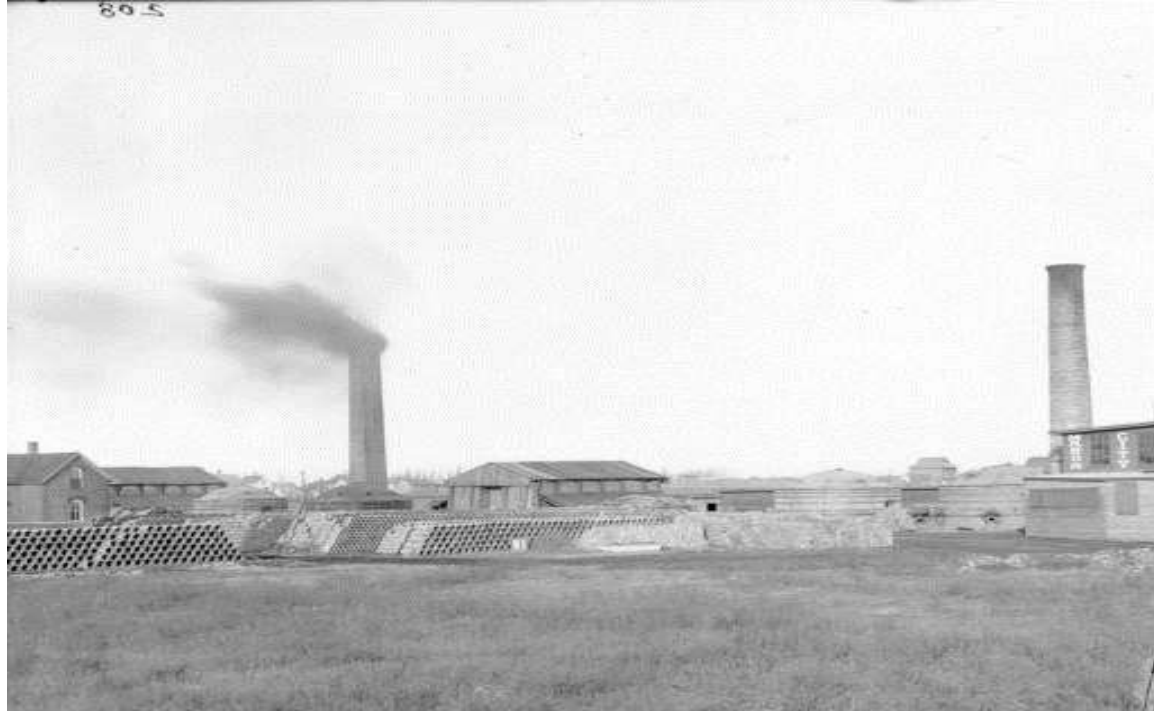
In the year that Mason City, Iowa was founded Franklin Pierce, the 14<sup>th</sup> president, was in office. President Franklin Pierce was a Democrat. He was in office at a time when the most prominent political issues were slavery and potential southern succession. His popularity in the north declined dramatically after his support of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which annulled the Missouri Compromise. He then enforced the Fugitive Slave Act, so with his support of the sensitive racial Issues, he set the stage for the southern succession.

## Oldest businesses/largest businesses today

Mercy Medical Center-North Iowa is the area's largest employer currently in Mason City, Iowa, supplying people locally with jobs and reliable medical care.



One of the oldest businesses and the first major industry in Mason City was The Brick and Tile Company. It got its start in 1886 using the natural resources abundant in the area such as clay and was very successful. By the year 1912 Mason City was among largest producers of these products in the nation.



## City government

Mason City has a form of government typical in fairly small towns. In this form of government the mayor is elected for a term of two years and at large which means from among the entire population in the city.



There are six council members, two selected at large and the other four are elected and represent each of the four wards in the city. There is also City Administrator appointed by the Mayor and City Council.

## Historic attractions in the area. Festivals and Events

A historic figure that lived and worked in the area of Mason City was Frank Lloyd



Wright, the famous architect, interior designer, writer and educator. He built many buildings in the area such as the Stockman House and Interpretive center which can be visited and toured for any interested. There are many other buildings of historic value that can be visited, that is why Mason City is named among the 14 best cities for architecture lovers.

There is also the Kinney Pioneer Museum which is excellent for young children and adults. It gives a realistic feel of the old Pioneer days, featuring a one-room schoolhouse, log cabin, blacksmith shop and old jail, and so much more.



Another historic figure from the Mason City area is Meredith Wilson, who had a successful career in the music and entertainment industry.

He is well known for his Broadway play that became a movie, titled Music Man. The Music Man is based on several historic places in Mason City as well as people from the area. So if one finds the work of



Meredith Wilson intriguing, visit Music Man Square which shows the 1912 landscape of the film The Music Man in all of the original set designs. There is also an interactive museum emphasizing Meredith Wilson's memorabilia and music-related exhibits.

The North Iowa Band Festival is marking 77 years the event has been held. It offers free music, entertainment, a carnival and many different types of events and food. It is being held Friday, May 22, 2015-Sunday, May 24, 2015 in East Park.



Meredith Willson led a 75 Trombone Band at the North Iowa Band Festival in 1962.

## Where can we stay if we visit Mason City?

A wonderful place to stay for a great experience is the Historic Park Inn Hotel. The Historic Park Inn Hotel is the last remaining hotel designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. This incredible example of Prairie School architecture has been completely restored to its original appearance and serves as a wonderful hotel.



## Why would I want to visit this historic small town?

Mason City is a town full of character and history with homes and buildings that have beautiful architecture. For me, it was the town I had my first trip to the library when I was little, the town where I had my first piano lesson and recital, the place where I would go Christmas shopping and where when I was little would always want to go to the park that had the coolest play place ever! Mason City will always have sentimental qualities for me because every time I go there I will remember all the great times that I had in this incredible, historic and amazing small town.

## Links you may wish to visit.

<http://www.mcpl.org/historyandgenealogy/archives/historyofmasoncity>

<http://www.masoncity.net>

<http://www.visitmasoncityiowa.com/mason-city-history>