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May 22, 2013

THIS WEEK: Fort Madison Penitentiary

BACKGROUND:

From *A glimpse of Iowa in 1846; or the Emigrant's Guide, and State Directory*

By John B. Newhall

Published 1846

Fort Madison Penitentiary

Fort Madison

Is the seat of justice of Lee County and is beautifully situated on a curve of the west bank of the Mississippi, twenty miles below Burlington, and about twelve miles above the head of the Des Moines rapids. Its situation and appearance indicate a natural site for a city. In commercial importance, Fort Madison may be regarded as the fourth important point in the Territory. It contains a population of about 1,600 inhabitants, and is under the municipal regulations of a city charter, which authorizes the election of a Mayor and Board of Aldermen.

Fort Madison contains the Territorial Penitentiary, likewise a handsome brick Court House, constructed at a cost of about \$13,000, several neat churches, a number of good hotels and extensive brick warehouses, together with numerous trades and mechanical establishments.

History

As early as 1805, Gen. Pike selected this point as a military station, and it was occupied for that object in 1808. In 1813, old Fort Madison was evacuated by troops, and destroyed by fire.

In 1832, Fort Madison was again settled by Z. Hawkins, Benj. Jennings, Aaron White, Augustine Horton, Daniel Thompson and Peter Williams. In 1833 their claims were purchased by the late Gen. John H. and Col. Nathaniel Knapp. In the summer of 1836 lots were first offered for sale. From that time on to the present period, the town has had a steady and vigorous growth.

The Territorial Penitentiary was established by the authority of the Iowa Territorial Legislature in 1839.

The design for a single cell house two hundred feet by forty-four feet was completed in 1841 at a cost of \$55,933.30.



Fort Madison Penitentiary 1919