STONEFIELD AFTER DEWEY

Chicago politician Walter Cass Newberry bought Stonefield in 1887. Newberry operated the farm, selling crops and animals to the Chicago market. By 1895, Newberry incorporated the fire damaged ruins into a summer residence. The new house was simplified and scaled down from Dewey’s original. Newberry sold the property in 1896. Tenant farm families lived in the house for the next 40 years. In 1936, 744 acres of Dewey’s estate became Nelson Dewey State Park. Around 1948 the home opened for tours. Stonefield Historic Site opened in 1953.
Nelson Dewey, son of a New York State lawyer arrived in Cassville in 1836. He clerked for Daniels, Denniston & Company, land speculators vying to make Cassville the territorial capitol. By 1837, He was elected Register of Deeds. Fair and objective, Dewey was soon elected to the Territorial Legislature. Practicing law in Lancaster, Dewey amassed a fortune in real estate and mining.

At 35, Dewey was elected the State's first governor. He established the State seal and State motto “Forward”. His two terms guided formation of State government. After leaving office, Dewey returned to practicing law.

In 1849, Dewey married Catherine Dunn, daughter of Territorial Chief Justice Charles Dunn. She was socially ambitious and 14 years his junior. The couple lived in Lancaster and had three children, Charlie, Katherine “Katie”, and Nelson “Nettie”. Charlie died of cholera at age 7.

By 1859, Dewey commenced Stonefield a 2,000 acre gentleman’s farming estate. Completed in 1868, the gothic revival home included many modern conveniences. A contemporary described Stonefield as a “marvel of beauty and attractiveness where, from wide open balconies, one could look upon the green lawns, the waving meadowlands, and the green sloped Iowa hills in the distance.”

On January, 2, 1873 a fire gutted the Stonefield home. Luckily, Cassville citizens were able to rescue some belongings. Dewey suffered financially from the Panic of 1873 and resulting economic depression. Money issues strained Nelson and Catherine’s marriage and the couple separated. Catherine followed her daughter to St. Louis while Nettie briefly lived with his father in Stonefield’s Ice House. By 1879, Dewey lost Stonefield to foreclosure; he lived the rest of his life in the nearby Denniston Hotel.

In 1889, Dewey suffered a stroke while arguing a case and died five months later. He is buried in Lancaster beside his son, Charlie.