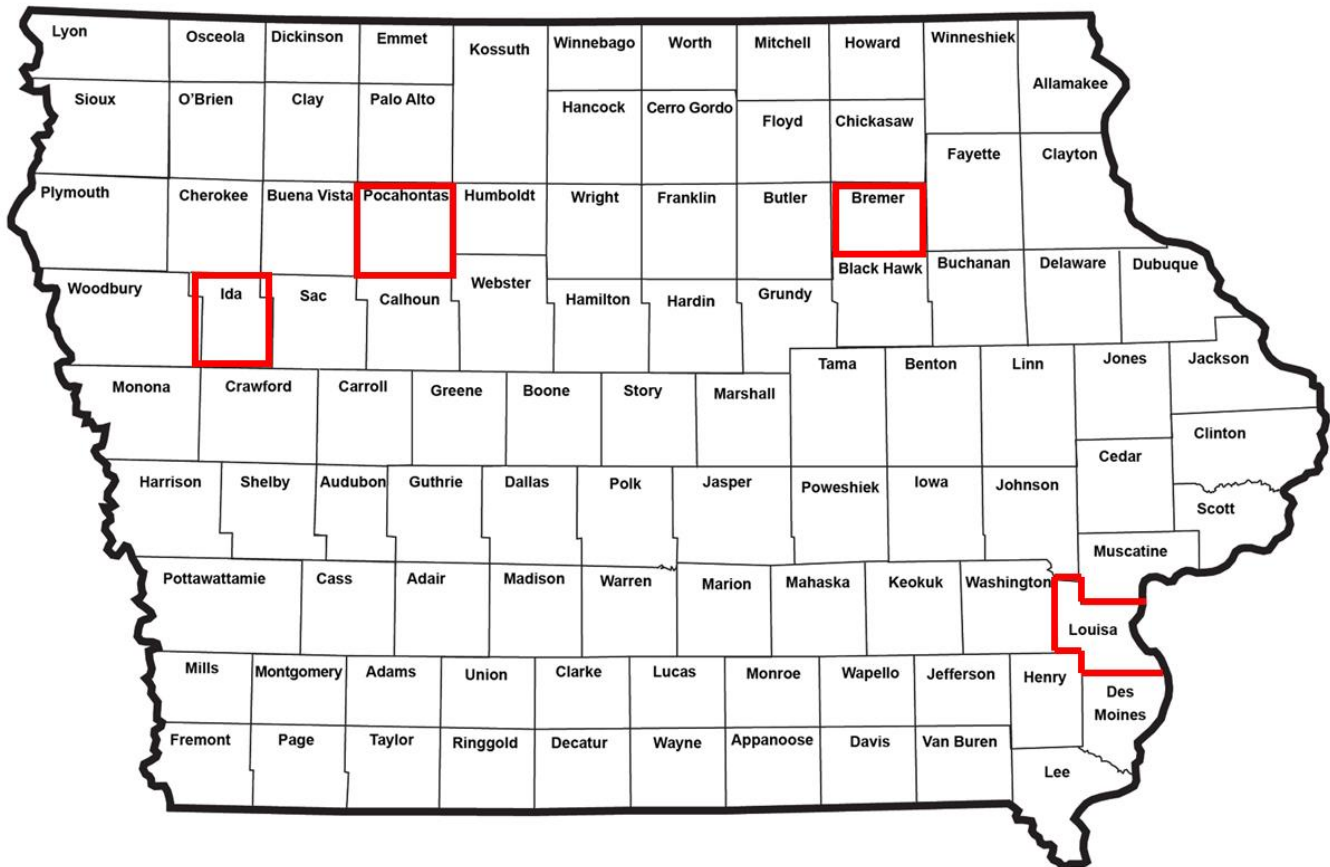


*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides monthly, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

## Counties Named for Women

When Iowa joined the Union in 1846, there were 44 counties within the state. In 1851, the Iowa General Assembly created 49 new counties, filling out most of the state map we know today. Many of Iowa's 99 counties are named after someone. Early lawmakers chose county names to honor the usual who's who of presidents, military leaders, and Native Americans. But there are also a total of four counties in Iowa that are named after women.



## Louisa County – 1837

Louisa County is in southeastern Iowa along the Mississippi River.

There is quite a story to explain how Louisa County came to be named for Louisa Massey. Mrs. Reuben Noble of McGregor, who as a child lived on the farm adjoining that of a man named Woodbury Massey in Otter Creek Jersey County, Ill., told the tragic story:

“Mr. Massey, with his wife, two children and a younger brother, left a farm in Illinois in 1833 and came to Iowa to prospect in the mining region about Dubuque. No sooner had the two brothers staked out a claim than their right to it was disputed by a man by the name of Smith and his son. The case was carried into court and decided in favor of the Masseys.

“When they returned to take possession, the elder Smith appeared and shot Woodbury Massey, killing him instantly. A few days after the tragedy, Louisa Massey, the 16-year-old sister of Woodbury, came to Dubuque. On finding one brother dead, and hearing that the son of Mr. Smith had threatened to kill the other brother on sight, she secured a pistol and went in search of the young man. She found him in a grocery store, stepped up in front of him, and with the words, ‘If you are Smith, defend yourself,’ fired. The ball struck against a bundle of papers in his pocket and his life was temporarily saved. He died as the result of the wound two years later.

“The young girl had no sooner thus avenged one brother’s death and protected the life of the other than the upper river county went wild with her praise. No war hero was ever welcomed with greater enthusiasm than she was when she returned by boat to the old home at the mouth of the Illinois. Cheering throngs greeted her at every stop on the river, and nearly sunk the boat at the final landing near Otter Creek in their eagerness to greet her. Some years afterward, a new county was organized in Southeastern Iowa and named Louisa in her honor.”

Excerpt from the Globe-Gazette; January 26, 1963

Louisa decided her brothers were no match for Smith so it was up to her to save them. She dug out a large sunbonnet that covered her fair hair and shadowed her features and slipped a gun away from her brother while he was sleeping. Since she did not know Smith by sight, Louisa got a young boy to accompany her and point him out. Then the innocent looking pair, a young girl in a sunbonnet and a little boy, started down the dusty street.

They found Smith standing with some men in front of the general store. "There he is," the boy whispered. Louisa's heart skipped as she saw Smith's six-shooter at his side. But the girl did not hesitate. She knew what must be done.

Deliberately she stalked up to Smith and in a voice trembling with anger said, "If you are Smith defend yourself!"

The man made a motion toward his gun but he was too late. Holding her pistol firmly with both hands, Louisa squeezed the trigger and sent a blast straight at the man's heart. With a cry, Smith reeled back and fell to the street. Because a wallet carried in his breast pocket deflected the bullet, Smith was not killed but was seriously wounded.



## Bremer County – 1853

Just north of Black Hawk County in northeastern Iowa, Bremer County was named after Fredrika Bremer. Bremer County was named by [Governor Hempstead](#), who was an admirer of the Swedish authoress. During his tenure as governor, he incorporated 52 new counties in the state, including Bremer. Bremer County is thought to be the only Iowa county named after a person in literature.

Fredrika Bremer was a Finnish-born writer and feminist reformer. Bremer became known for women's emancipation in Sweden. She wanted women to be allowed to study in both elementary schools and universities and to become professors, judges, and physicians. She argued that women were owed the same rights as men. She died in Sweden on New Year's Eve in 1865. The town of Frederika in Bremer County, although spelled differently, is also named after her.



Copy of a portrait of Fredrika Bremer  
by Johan Gustaf Sandberg

## Ida County – 1858

Ida County is located in western Iowa along Highway 20. The county's name is usually credited to Iowa state Representative [Eliphalet Price](#). Price was on the State Commission in 1851 to name Iowa's newly formed counties.



Ida was named after Ida Smith. Ida Smith was the first child of European immigrants to be born in the region. The first authentic account of the early settlement of Ida County states that in 1854, Robert Townsley and Edward Smith built a cabin and raised a small crop of corn. The first pioneer child born in the county was a girl to Edward and Margaret Smith and was named Ida. (Some say she was named for the county; others say the county was named after her.)

Ida County Pioneer Record; August 14, 1952

## Descendant of First White Child Born in County Visits Here

A descendant of the first white child born in Ida county was a visitor in Ida Grove the past week.

He is E. M. Foster, who was born in Smithland, but now resides in Amarillo, Tex.

Foster stated he is the grandson of Mrs. H. J. Adams, whose uncle Ed Smith was the father of the first white Ida Smith child born in Ida county.

Foster produced a clipping from a paper stating that the town of Ida Grove and the county was named after Ida Smith.

It was the first time he had visited this community.

## Pocahontas County – 1859

Located in the northwest part of the state, the county is named after the Native American woman who belonged to the Powhatan people. Pocahontas, who became famous for her heroic intercession to save the life of Captain John Smith during the early history of Virginia, later married colonist John Rolfe in 1613 or 1614.

The name of Pocahontas was suggested by Iowa state Senator [John Howell](#) of Jefferson County to Phineas M. Casady of Des Moines, who was a member of the Iowa Senate and was on the Senate Committee on New Counties.



Pocahontas depicted in a 1616 portrait engraving by Simon de Passe

### Iowa Legislative website

#### John Howell

Jefferson County

Born March 21, 1798, in Montgomery County, Virginia. He died February 26, 1856, in Round Prairie Township, Jefferson County, Iowa. Mr. Howell married Violet Harter on January 23, 1822, in Montgomery County, Virginia. He came to Van Buren County in 1846 from Virginia. Mr. Howell was a farmer by trade having purchased 450 acres in Round Prairie Township. He was a Senator in the Second and Third Iowa General Assemblies, 1848 and 1850. He was also elected to the Virginia State Legislature. He was the patriarch of the two houses and in his earlier days had been a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses. Naming an Iowa county Pocahontas was Howell's suggestion. He was accorded the privilege of naming one of the counties and suggested this name. Of all the states carved out of the Northwest territory ceded to the national government by Virginia, not one had named a county for the heroine and he asked that this tardy honor be paid to her memory. There were some of the legislators who demurred when this name was proposed but upon being informed that Howell was the sponsor, they withdrew all objections, saying that the old gentleman could have anything he asked for.