

Wisconsin Historical Society: Downsville Lodge No. 196 I.O.O.F. in Dunn County listed in National Register of Historic Places

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Downsville, Wis. – The Wisconsin Historical Society has announced the listing of the Downsville Lodge No. 196 I.O.O.F. in Downsville, Dunn County, in the National Register of Historic Places. National Register designation provides access to certain benefits, including qualification for grants and for rehabilitation income tax credits, while it does not restrict private property owners in the use of their property. The Downsville Lodge was built in 1908 in the Romanesque Revival style. The building's walls of locally quarried rough-faced sandstone blocks and the large Romanesque arch, centered on its main façade contribute to the building's commanding presence in the small community. Its design reflected sturdiness, permanence, and stability, qualities that complimented the benevolent purpose of the fraternal lodge.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows is a benevolent fraternal society that rose in popularity in America during the 1820s. Fraternal organizations were social as well as practical as they provided financial assistance to its members and families in times of need. The occupations of the men of the Downsville, Wisconsin area were often dangerous. Many worked for logging companies, some worked in the sandstone quarries, while others cleared and farmed the land. One accident could doom a family to a life of poverty. The Odd Fellows assisted its members in times of sickness or distress to get back on their feet. In the case of death, widows and

orphans were taken care of. These practices provided a valuable service during a time before the existence of public welfare or medical disability. Organizations such as the Odd Fellows were the precursor to health and life insurance companies and played a vital role in the social welfare network in the community.

The register is the official national list of historic properties in America deemed worthy of preservation and is maintained by the National Park Service in the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Wisconsin Historical Society administers the program within Wisconsin. It includes sites, buildings, structures, objects and districts that are significant in national, state or local history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture.

To learn more about the State and National Register programs in Wisconsin, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.