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THE FORT ATKINSON CLUB IN FORT ATKINSON LISTED IN NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Fort Atkinson, Wis. – The Wisconsin Historical Society has announced the listing of the Fort Atkinson Club in the city of Fort Atkinson, Jefferson 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 Fort Atkinson Club is a preservation success story. Left vacant since the 1990s, the building was acquired by a local philanthropist and is owned and operated by a private foundation. When the building was acquired, it was covered with aluminum siding and many windows were enclosed or covered. The interior was only in fair condition and many historic details had been covered up with modern materials. An historic renovation of the building in 2014 uncovered and restored almost all of the historic details of the building both inside and outside. Using sympathetic methods, the building was made handicapped accessible and is now in use for activities benefiting the entire community.

Built in 1912, this fine Craftsman style building was used for social and recreational activities throughout much of the 20th century. It was built as a private clubhouse for use by primarily professional men in Fort Atkinson, an unusual facility in a small town. It was built with social rooms, a card room, billiard room, dining room, dance floor, gym, and bowling alley. It was suggested in the press that the club would be a wholesome alternative to the saloon for the hard working young men of Fort Atkinson.

In 1930, the Billings Masonic Lodge of Fort Atkinson acquired the building and continued its use as a social center for masonic activities. The Fort Atkinson Masonic Lodge was a large and active organization with a women's auxiliary and youth groups meeting there. The old Fort Atkinson Club remained the home of the Masonic Temple until the 1990s and was the longest location of this fraternal group in Fort Atkinson.

The original building was designed in the Craftsman style and was meant to resemble the Wisconsin State Building of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. The Milwaukee architect, Charles Fitzgerald, created a building that had similarities to the Wisconsin Building, but was a fine Craftsman design in its own right.

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.

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