

For Immediate Release

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Wisconsin Historical Society Placed the Nels and Nellie Johnson House on the State Register of Historic Places

Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. - The Wisconsin Historical Society placed the Nels and Nellie Johnson House (Wisconsin Rapids, Wood County) on the State Register of Historic Places in May.

The Johnson House, constructed in 1892, was designed by architect William H. Parker in the Queen Anne style. The house is significant for its association with Nels Johnson (1847-1902), a prominent nineteenth-century merchant, industrialist, and political leader in Wisconsin Rapids. Johnson was at the height of his career and influence during the decade that he lived in this house, which is the only extant building associated with him in the city. Nels was the co-founder of the Johnson, Hills & Company department store, which in December 1891 was considered "the largest and most prosperous firm in Wood County," according to the local newspaper.

Johnson was elected mayor in 1894 and in this capacity he spearheaded important municipal improvements, such as the construction of a waterworks and a bid to secure cheaper telephone service from the Wisconsin Telephone Company. In 1895 Johnson became first president of the Consolidated Water Power Company, which subsequently furnished building sites to manufacturing plants along the Wisconsin River and supplied them with electric power at a moderate price, thus playing a major role in attracting industry to Wisconsin Rapids in the early twentieth century. Johnson was also president of the Grand Rapids Pulp & Paper Company, and in 1895 he supervised the building of a dam and paper mill upstream at Biron, which linked the interests of that community with those of nearby Centralia and Grand Rapids.

Upon his unexpected death in 1902, one writer for *The Marshfield News and Wisconsin Hub* noted that Johnson was "a leading factor in the upbuilding of Grand Rapids, and associated with many of her leading industries."

The State Register is Wisconsin's official list of state properties determined to be significant to Wisconsin's heritage. The State Historic Preservation Office at the Wisconsin Historical Society administers both the State Register and National Register in Wisconsin.

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

About Wisconsin Historical Society

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people connect to the past by collecting, preserving and sharing stories. The Wisconsin Historical Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs and services. For more information, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.

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