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Jennings County Historical Society

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## The Jennings County Historical Society in action!

The Jennings County Historical Society, Our Heritage Inc. has acquired a threatened landmark to serve as the next community asset.



**1860 #73 Lodge, Odd Fellows**
**Photo courtesy of Indiana Landmarks**



**Vision for the future**

Today the Jennings County Historical Society officially announces acquisition of another Jennings County landmark, Lodge #73 Odd Fellows building in historic Vernon, Indiana. “The historical society now occupies two landmarks in Vernon, the North American House Museum on the corner of Pike and Brown Streets and the Lodge on the corner HWY 3 and 7 and Pike Street. Both landmarks are included in the Vernon Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places,” states Brad Bender, society President and Mayor of Vernon. The three-story Lodge carries significant history as it was the first structure to be built as part of Vernon’s commercial district. A devastating fire burned the entire block along Pike Street in 1859. The Lodge was subsequently built in 1860 by Samuel Read, who also built the Jennings County Courthouse.

In 2023 the Lodge was listed among Indiana's 10 Most Endangered Landmarks and at risk of demolition. Indiana Landmarks purchased and stabilized the building over a two-year period, making improvements including masonry repointing, new roofing and guttering, rebuilt and painted side cornice with custom fabricated corbels, new wooden window sashes at the 3rd floor level, rebuilt 1st floor wooden floor system on south side, and poured concrete foundation with perimeter drain and sump pump pit in the basement.

Earlier this year the historical society reached out to Greg Sekula, Director of Southern Region Indiana Landmarks and Ron Stiller, architect to collaborate on how the building could be used as a community asset. Indiana Landmarks granted the society $2,000 for a feasibility study on the Lodge. "The feasibility study was invaluable to the decision process for purchasing the landmark. We did our due diligence," comments Chris Asher, Curator of the North American House Museum and 42-year volunteer. "Purchasing the Lodge is a milestone moment for our organization and our entire community. Our goal is to honor its history while opening doors for new community experiences. While it is a long-term renovation project and many hours of fundraising and grant writing this clearly moves the society forward in preserving history and serving the community!"

Sekula adds his enthusiasm to the historical society's, "Indiana Landmarks is delighted to be working with the Jennings County Historical Society on the transformation of this landmark building on the square in Vernon. As a beloved local institution, the historical society is best poised to lead this effort and has a vision for the property that will have a lasting legacy on Jennings County."

The purchase was made possible through Indiana Landmarks and a generous challenge donation from Tony Jordan, a Jennings County native. Having a passion for saving lodges, Tony gifted the society a $75,000 challenge donation toward the $150,000 purchase price of the Lodge. "It's important to do what we can to save old lodge buildings. They built downtowns. The historical society needs the room to expand displays", says Jordan. In the photo below Jordan hands over the check to Chris Asher, who accepted the donation on behalf of the historical society.



Tony Jordan hands over a check to Chris Asher as a challenge gift for the Jennings County Historical Society's next community asset – #73 Lodge Odd Fellows Building.

Photo courtesy of Jennings County Historical Society

The purchase also ensures that the landmark will be protected, renovated and utilized. Plans call for additional museum capacity, a gathering place for collaboration and community programs, dedicated railroad museum galleries, educational opportunities in the old-time arts, income generating galleries (perhaps a coffee shop) and capacity for exhibitions and traveling displays.

The historical society is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit mission-driven organization dedicated to preserving, presenting, documenting and maintaining the rich history of Jennings County by encouraging preservation of landmarks, sites, records, artifacts, traditional arts and promoting civic pride. The historical society has served the community for 65 years with volunteers and one part-time staff.

Join the society's restoration efforts and invest in the community. "We have Jordan's $75,000 challenge gift to match in the next 12 months, pay off the $125,000 mortgage and complete phase 1 of a multiple year renovation plan that includes exterior work. We're launching a Capital Campaign. Make a double impact with your donation during this dollar-for-dollar matching campaign! All donations are tax deductible. Donations may be made online by clicking on the following link or checks may be mailed to the Jennings County Historical Society, PO 335, Vernon, IN 47282. You may also donate through monthly or quarterly increments as listed on the link below. For more information contact the museum at 812/346-8989 or email jenninghistoricalsociety@gmail.com . "Be a part of this community project and get your name on the wall! Honor a loved one with a memorial. Make a contribution that will move the society into the future and preserve our county's rich heritage for generations to come," says Asher.

Go To: https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/donation-form/lodge-capital-campaign to make a donation.