

FH 019 310 DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED JUN 4 1975  
DATE ENTERED AUG 6 1975

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME** Ellsworth - Potter House \* use this  
HISTORIC Porter House Museum  
AND/OR COMMON Ellsworth, Dighton B., House

**2 LOCATION**  
STREET & NUMBER 401 West Broadway  
CITY, TOWN Decorah VICINITY OF Second  
STATE Iowa COUNTY Winneshiek CODE 14 CODE 191

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>OWNERSHIP</b>	<b>STATUS</b>	<b>PRESENT USE</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**  
NAME Winneshiek County Historical Society  
STREET & NUMBER 401 West Broadway  
CITY, TOWN Decorah VICINITY OF Iowa

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**  
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Winneshiek County Courthouse  
STREET & NUMBER  
CITY, TOWN Decorah STATE Iowa

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**  
TITLE Plat of Original Decorah, Iowa  
DATE 1857  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Winneshiek County Recorder -- Courthouse  
CITY, TOWN Decorah STATE Iowa

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

*10*  
*Smith*  
The Porter House Museum is a two story red brick gable roofed Italianate structure with tower. Asymmetrical in plan, the buildings' distinctive profile is enhanced by the pediment roof of its tall tower, the Queen Anne veranda with conical roofed gazebo at the front, a side bay window on the first floor and by a back porch.

Less prominent but no less distinctive decorative elements include the paired brackets under the eaves, the cream colored brick arches over the sash windows, beveled glass, stone stringcourses on the tower and the wood pediment, columns and balustrade of the veranda.

Decorative masonry appears under the eaves of the tower and the top string course of stone has dentils. The semi-circular fan-light with tracery above the main entryway is followed by a round trefoil arch window above on the second level and on the third by tall paired, round arched openings. All other openings are segmental arched.

Aside from the installation of modern utilities, the interior of the structure (although not described here) has apparently suffered little alteration through the years.

Historic photographs reveal that the exterior may have been altered by the enlarging of the front veranda and by the removal of chimneys and dormers in the tower roof.

The Porter House property is surrounded by a rock wall, a post 1867 addition of polychromatic stones joined by mortar.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES    1867

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

First owned by Dighton B. Ellsworth a merchant from Lewis County, New York, the Porter House Museum is named for its most recent owner Adelbert Field Porter, a collector and naturalist. Both prominent Decorah citizens, Ellsworth and Porter shared similar taste in the conspicuously picturesque Italian style of the latter 1/2 of the nineteenth century. Built to the specifications of H. O. Ball by contractor Wm. Alsip (from Pennsylvania) and carpenter Benjamin T. Barfoot (from Ohio), the house was begun in June of 1867 and completed around October of the same year.

Following is a statement about the architectural significance as provided by Marion Nelson, Professor of Art History at the University of Minnesota:

"From an architectural standpoint, the Porter House, on Broadway, in Decorah, Iowa, is a superb example of the Italian Villa style of architecture as presented in Andrew Jackson Downing's The Architecture of Country Houses. Though differing somewhat in detail and proportions, it follows essentially the plans of design 22, figure 119-120, in that work. Though some verandas are thought to have been added slightly after the construction of the building in 1867, it is a completely unified structure which is of the period in every exterior detail. The interior also appears to be without alterations in room arrangement or in basic decorative treatment. Some indications of a change in heating system are evident.

Exceptional features of the house are (1) the well-preserved and stylistically consistent verandas covering the entire front and surrounding the kitchen wing on three sides, (2) the rich polychrome effects created by the two colors of brick and the contrasting white trim, (3) the tastefully designed tower in the comparatively rare Italian Romanesque style with a border of blind arches in the brickwork at the top and a graceful roof rising in a concave curve to the central point, and (4) the ornate jigsaw grillwork over the interior entrance arch and the opening to the bay window (possibly slightly later than the house but typical for Decorah), and (5) the fact that the building is, in spite of its rich exterior detail, comparatively modest in size. This last characteristic gives it a fine, jewel-like quality.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Winneshiek County Republican, 1867.  
Winneshiek County History, Baily, 1913.  
Winneshiek Title and Abstract Co.--records.  
Winneshiek County Recorder.  
Winneshiek County Treasurer.  
Architectural Analysis, by Marlys Svendsen, 1974.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

NO UTM HL

A 17S 151976000 1471941600  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
C

B  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Porter House Trustees -- Winneshiek County Historical Society

ORGANIZATION

DATE

c/o Geneva Waters, Secretary

March 20, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

622 Center Street

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Decorah

Iowa

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Adrian D. Anderson

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

6/4/75

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Adrian D. Anderson

DATE

8/6/75

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

Marlys Svendsen

DATE

AUG 4 1975

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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Aside from the intrinsic qualities of the house, it is of historic importance as one of the few fine examples of its style in a rather wide area. Decorah's only other example (on Grove Street) is small in size and in a bad state of repair. The house of the Howard County Historical Society in Cresco, Iowa, is in the French Baroque style, and both Montauk, Clermont, Iowa, and the Villa Louis in Prairie du Chien, Illinois, are of the more massive "sugar cube" type Victorian buildings which lack the picturesqueness of the Italian Villa style as exemplified by the Porter House."