

# Follow in Honest Abe's historic (and large) footsteps

By Jason Francis  
Special to the Lakes Edition

When you step into the Lincoln-Tallman House you are following in some incredible—and, literally, quite large—footsteps.

Men's size 14 footsteps from one of the most prolific Americans in history, to be exact.

The house is the last surviving location in Wisconsin where Abraham Lincoln, our country's tallest (at 6'4") and perhaps most-beloved president, once slept.

The house and nearby Helen Jeffris Wood Museum Center represent the crown jewels of the Rock County Historical Society's campus in Janesville, offering history buffs (and anyone looking for a uniquely fun time) a chance to experience intriguing, bygone eras.

There are changing exhibits at the museum and an awe-inspiring elegance on display in the structure, decor and all-around aura of the famous Lincoln-Tallman House.

The Rock County Historical Society (RCHS) manages the 1850s Italianate Lincoln-Tallman House, which was built by 19th century lawyer, land speculator and avid abolitionist William Morrison Tallman.

A pioneer in the Republican Party, Tallman hosted Lincoln at his home for two nights in 1859 after Lincoln, who lost a U.S. Senate bid the

previous year, presented speeches in Milwaukee and Beloit. Lincoln became president in 1860 and served in the position until his assassination in April 1865.

The home and the vast array of elegant artifacts and furnishings displayed inside provide an educational avenue for RCHS to highlight the abolitionist movement and a way of life dating back 150 years. More than seventy percent of the furniture is original, making it one of the most complete historic houses in the Midwest.

Built between 1855 and 1857 at a cost of \$42,000, the six-floor mansion was constructed utilizing the state-of-the-art technologies of its time.

**Three types of tours**  
Three distinctive types of tours of the Lincoln-Tallman House are offered by RCHS.

Typically lasting between 50 minutes and an hour and encompassing the basement, first and second levels of the mansion, traditional Lincoln-Tallman House tours are offered Thursday through Sunday from June through December from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tours begin at the Helen Jeffris Wood Museum Center (426 N. Jackson St.), which was once the home of Stanley Tallman (grandson of William Morrison Tallman).

A second type of tour,

titled "Tallman Technologies," focuses on how the home's 1850s technological innovations helped revolutionize Janesville. These tours, which are by appointment only, take visitors back to 1872, when William Morrison Tallman put his residence up for sale.

Tallman Technologies tour guides take on the role of an 1872 real estate agent of sorts who conducts the tour as though they are attempting to sell the house to the tour guests.

Finally, if you are still holding that interest in servant life that was so vividly portrayed in the television series "Downton Abbey," you will enjoy the "Help Wanted" tour, which offers the chance to step into the shoes—and aprons—of those characters by joining the servant class in completing 19th century chores and activities in the Lincoln-Tallman House. These tours are offered 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays, June through September. Tours during those months on Monday through Wednesday are by appointment only.

**Showcasing history**  
The museum center, meanwhile, showcases exhibits that highlight interesting facets of Rock County's storied past, such as the exquisite "Crafting Excellence: The History of Pauline Pottery & Pickard China" exhibit. "Pauline Pottery and

Pickard China have long been recognized nationally as some of the finest pottery and china, both for its functional use and as highly sought after artwork," states the exhibits description on the historical society's website.

The latest attraction at the museum center is "History in Focus: The Exhibit," which ties into the RCHS's 2017 theme, a series of special events and a request to the community to share their stories with the society (see sidebar).

"Throughout history, images have captured stories. That's why in 2017, the Rock County Historical Society is focusing on capturing your images and stories," reads the exhibit's description on the RCHS's website. "Enter our Victorian-era photography studio and snap a picture while dressed to the nines. View historic paintings. And admire the beautiful artifacts."

The new exhibit runs through the end of 2017.

Museum center hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily June through December. Admission to the museum, which also houses a gift shop, is free.

**Historic campus**  
Besides the Lincoln-Tallman House and the Helen Jeffris Wood Museum, other historic structures on the RCHS's main campus (located on 3.5 acres in the 400 block of



A bust of Abraham Lincoln overlooks the very bed in which Lincoln slept in the Lincoln-Tallman House for two nights in 1859. As the story goes, Lincoln was apparently quite the snorer. (File photo by Jason Francis)

North Jackson Street in Janesville) include:

- The Charles Tallman House, 430 N. Jackson St. (Charles Tallman was a grandson to William Tallman). Completed in 1915, this building became the new home of the RCHS archives and research center last year. The center is open Wednesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. or by appointment by calling 608-752-5891.
- The Carriage House. Constructed behind the

Lincoln-Tallman House in 1857, it was used to house the Tallman family's carriages, tack and horses. The carriage house was designed to mimic the architectural style of the Lincoln-Tallman House.

- The Greek Revival-style Wilson King Stone House. Originally a residence built by James P. Knowlton in 1845, the home was moved to campus in 1964 and currently

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