

1951

## Tallman Homestead, Janesville, Wisconsin.

Rock County Historical Society.

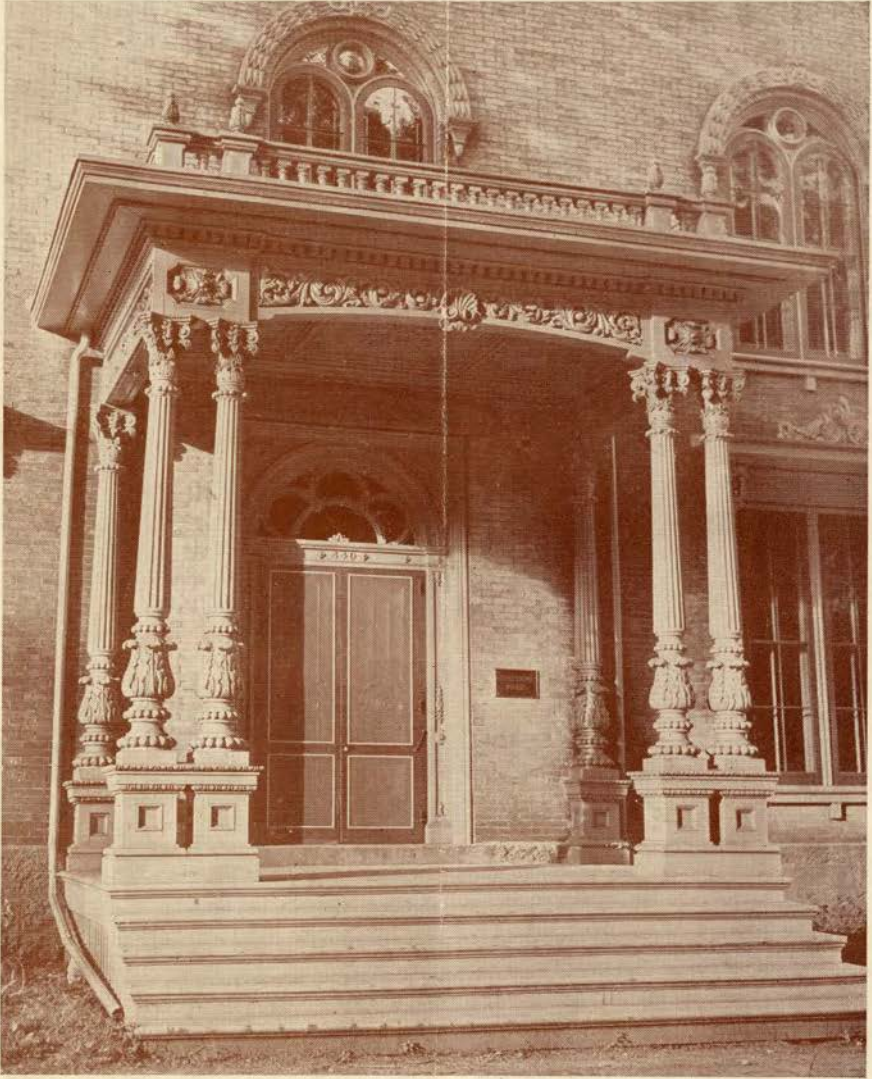
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TALLMAN HOMESTEAD  
JANESVILLE, WISCONSIN

The historic Tallman Homestead in which Abraham Lincoln was a guest and which once served as a station in the "underground railroad" activities of pre-Civil War days was opened to the public on June 23, 1951. The spacious mansion has been the home of three generations of the Tallman family.

**William Morrison Tallman**, grandfather of the donor of the homestead, practiced law for eighteen years in Rome, New York before he came to Wisconsin in 1850. Removing to Janesville, then a frontier village of 1,812 inhabitants, he continued his legal practice until July, 1854, when he began to devote his full attention to the management of his extensive land holdings.

In both New York and Wisconsin Mr. Tallman took an active interest in the political affairs of his day. As an ardent abolitionist, he acted in turn with the anti-slavery faction of the Whig party, the Liberal party, the Free-Soil party, and finally the Republican party. Among his friends were Cassius M. Clay and William H. Seward.

One of his sons, **William Henry Tallman**, became a member of a Janesville firm, Tallman and Collins, which was organized to manufacture perfume, flavoring extracts, etc., and which soon became the largest plant of its kind in the United States. At the Paris Exposition of 1876 the Tallman firm was the only American manufacturer to be awarded a prize for perfume in competition with the French.

William Henry's second son, **George Kemp Tallman**, was born in Janesville on November 29, 1874. Educated at the University of Wisconsin in engineering and law, he preferred to follow the example of his grandfather and bought timber and cut-over timber land in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Canada and other parts of the country. In addition to his timber interests he helped finance a number of irrigation and water power projects throughout the country. He never lost interest in his home city and helped in its development in many ways, as shown by his investments in business property here and in donating the Tallman homestead for the perpetuation of Rock County history.

On August 28, 1929, George K. Tallman was married to Miss Alice Jessie MacGregor of Janesville. In June, 1950, a month before his death, Mr. and Mrs. George K. Tallman gave the historic Homestead to the City of Janesville for the establishment of the Lincoln-Tallman Museum. They have contributed generously to the restoration of the home. A collection of antique firearms, Mr. Tallman's hobby for 60 years, is regarded by experts as unexcelled in the country. This collection, along with many furnishings from the Tallman home, have been used in the restoration of the Homestead.

**The Construction.** In 1855 William Morrison Tallman began the construction of a family homestead, and the buildings were completed under his personal supervision in 1857, at a cost exceeding \$42,000, paid in actual gold. Designed in the style of an Italian Villa, the mansion has three floors with twenty rooms above the basement and a cupola on top. It is 51 feet 6 inches wide by 100 feet in depth and rises to an elevation of 60 feet.

Built of Milwaukee pressed brick the walls are all one foot in thickness and stand on a foundation of cut sandstone rising from a natural strata of solid limestone.

The house has two fronts with a handsome portico on each and double mullioned window frames and sashes on each front. The sashes are all mahogonized, and each window has an inside slat blind which slides into the wall on metal rails and sheaves. These are painted ivory and have silver plated knobs and fastenings. All outside doors are of black walnut with elegantly carved panels and moldings.

**The Interior.** On the first floor there are five large rooms besides the hall, vestibule, and pantries. In keeping with the elegance of an Italian Villa the rooms have marble mantels with iron grates and paneled ceilings with rich ornamental cornices. Two walnut carved doors from the drawing rooms open into an observatory fitted with windows topped by crescents of colored glass. Between the dining room and the kitchen are the butler's pantry and the dumb waiter, for all cooking was done in the basement kitchen. At the end of the main hall on the first floor is a solid mahogany semi-circular stairway with niches in the wall for statuary. An elliptical opening in the center of the halls between the first and second floor is surrounded by a solid mahogany rail and fancy balusters.

Originally the homestead was heated by fireplaces and by a furnace installed in the basement. Hot air flues were built into the brick walls, and each of the first and second floor rooms and halls have enameled registers. Drainage from the roof collecting in copper reservoir tanks on the third floor provided running water in the four main bedrooms on the second floor. Each bedroom has a walnut wash stand with marble top and bowl. In addition the Lincoln room, in the northwest corner, has a marble fireplace.

**The Signal Window.** Of great beauty and interest on the second floor is the East hall window, with brightly colored imported panes of glass that served as a signal window by which fugitive slaves were guided to the house from the Rock River. A closet in a small back bedroom has a concealed flight of steps to the attic. Slaves hiding in the house stayed in the basement, except when there was danger of a search, at which time they could go up a back stairs to the secret ascent into the attic and there lie flat under the roof until the all clear signal was given. The room in the basement where the slaves were harbored is still intact. The basement also has a kitchen with an upright range, a laundry, vegetable rooms, coal room and store rooms. The third floor, with six bedrooms, served as spacious quarters for the servants. The Cupola, the crowning note of grandeur and taste in the 1850's, has long graceful windows with curved tops. From here there was an excellent view of the Rock River, the city and surrounding countryside.

**Lincoln's Visit.** Though extremely interesting and beautiful in construction the Tallman Homestead is important because it has shared in making the history of Janesville and the Old Northwest. It is famous as the only home in Wisconsin in which Abraham Lincoln stayed as a guest. The future president had come to Janesville from Beloit at the personal invitation of Mr. Tallman and Mr. A. A. Jackson, an attorney and later Mayor of

Janesville, to deliver an address on the slavery issue. He was entertained by the Tallman family from Saturday afternoon until Monday morning, October 1-3, 1859. He attended the Congregational Church with the Tallmans on Sunday and left the next morning for his home in Springfield, Illinois. He was never again in Wisconsin. Stephan A. Douglas and William H. Seward were also guests in this home. The house became the focal point for leaders of the anti-slavery movement in Southern Wisconsin in addition to serving as a station in the "underground railroad."

**The Carriage House.** The carriage house is 34 feet square and similar in style and construction to the dwelling. It has two floors above the basement and is surrounded by a cupola and ventilator with projecting cornice and brackets. It has been remodeled for use as a Rock County Historical Museum.

There were originally 1300 feet of gravel walks and carriage ways on the grounds. Most of these have been restored. A carved fence surrounded the property on three sides and an elaborate entrance with white columns topped with frieze ornamentation formed the carriage entrance. The grassy expanse north of the house was an orchard and south of the house were vegetable and flower gardens.

**The Restoration.** The house was occupied by members of the Tallman family until 1915. Since that time it has stood idle, but its recent owners, Mr. and Mrs. George K. Tallman, have kept the property in a remarkable state of preservation during the intervening thirty-six years. Mr. and Mrs. Tallman have generously donated sufficient funds to the Rock County Historical Society, which has a lease on the property, to completely restore the exterior of the mansion and the carriage house. The society, through the financial support of its members and interested citizens, has restored the interior of the house to present the appearance of a Civil War home. Some of the original furnishings have been donated by Mrs. Tallman and by other persons who have acquired them through acquaintance with the family.

**Rock County Historical Society.** Organized in 1948 with over 500 charter members, the Rock County Historical Society grew in its first year to over 800 members, making it the largest local society in the state. In August, 1950, an Award of Merit was given by the American Association for State and Local History for "the most significant and ambitious record of accomplishment of any county society in the states of the Old Northwest." It is the purpose of the society to make the museum a shrine to famous Rock County people. Rock County has been the birthplace and home of such famous people as Frances Willard, founder of the W.C.T.U.; Carrie Jacobs Bond, composer of the immortal "I Love You Truly" and many other songs; Ella Wheeler Wilcox, popular poetess of the 1880's and 1890's; Brother Dutton, soldier and missionary to the lepers; and many other persons of the past and contemporary scene.

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The museum will be open during the summer months, May to November, six days a week from 9:30 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. and on Sunday and holidays from 1:30 to 6:30 P.M. Robert H. Jacobi is the curator.