

The Filson Historical Society

Speed, John S., 1927-2016
Collection on Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. and Farmington Historic Plantation, 1810-2000 (bulk: 1950-2000)

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Size of Collection:

1 cubic foot

Locator Number:

Mss. A S742j

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Biographical and Historical Notes

John S. Speed:

John Sackett Speed served as a founding officer of the Louisville, Kentucky, Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. and Board of Regents of Farmington Historic Home from 1958 to 1964. He was also involved with 1980s Farmington fundraising efforts and served as Regent of Farmington in the early 1990s.

John Sackett Speed was born on August 29, 1927, in Dubuque, Iowa. His parents were Marion Whitbread Speed Crutcher (1903-1980) and Lloyd Jeter Speed, Jr. (1899-1942), a descendant of the Speeds who built Farmington in Louisville. John S. Speed and his family lived in Louisville, Kentucky by the 1940 U.S. Census. He married Anne Carter Stewart Speed (1930-2003) on April 28, 1951, in Louisville. The couple lived in Granville, Ohio, after their wedding. By 1952, they moved to Baltimore, Maryland. By 1955, the Speeds lived in Louisville. Speed worked for the Commonwealth Life Insurance and Capital Holding Corporation.

Speed served as the first Secretary and at times Acting Treasurer of the Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. He served as Vice-Regent of the newly formed Board of Regents of Farmington Historic Home from 1962 to 1964. He was involved with Farmington restoration fundraising efforts in the 1980s and served as Regent of the Board of Regents of Farmington Historic Home from 1992 to 1993.

He died in Louisville on April 23, 2016.

Sources:

“Foundation Reelects Bingham.” *The Courier-Journal* (April 27, 1962): Section 1, page 15. In finding aid folder.

Shafer, Sheldon. “Work begins this week on new Farmington visitor center.” *The Courier-Journal* (January 6, 1993): B3. In finding aid folder.

“Speed, John Sackett.” *The Courier-Journal* (April 25, 2016): 12A. In finding aid folder.

“Stewart-Speed Vows are Solemnized.” *The Courier-Journal* (April 29, 1951): Society and Women’s News, Section 4, page 2. In finding aid folder.

United States Bureau of the Census. *Sixteenth Census of the United States*. 1940. Jefferson County, Kentucky, Roll m-t0627-01366, Sheet Number 62B, Enumeration District 121-49. Accessed through Ancestry.com.

Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. and Farmington Historic Plantation:

Farmington Historic Plantation is a non-profit, historic site in Louisville, Kentucky, that was the center of a 552-acre hemp farm owned by the couple John Speed (1762-1840) and Lucy Gilmer Fry Speed (1788-1874). The Speeds had a Federal-style, brick home constructed from 1815 to 1816. The Speeds and their allied families enslaved Black people at Farmington and at other family homes in Virginia and Kentucky. People enslaved by the Speeds included Fortune Smith, Cinderella Greathouse Smith (d. 1885), Morocco, Martha Haynes, Martha Spencer (b. 1840), David Spencer (b. 1820), Diana Thompson (1818-1895), Dinnie Thompson (1857-1939), Spencer Thompson, and Phyllis Thurston.

By 1865, Peachy Speed Peay sold off the last parcels of Speed-owned Farmington land. Other white families that lived on the property after the Speeds included the Dreschers, Bischoffs, Smiths, and Thompsons. Porter Smith and Violet F. Smith purchased the mansion in 1949. By the early 1950s, the Smiths opened their home to private tours. Barbara Anderson's play, *The Tall Kentuckian*, written and produced to commemorate Abraham Lincoln for the 175th anniversary of Kentucky's statehood in 1953, contributed to the increased public interest in Farmington as a historic site.

Around 1955-1956, Louisville landscape architect Anne Bruce Haldeman reached out to the Smiths to gauge their interest in selling their property to become a museum. The Smiths agreed and Haldeman worked to form the Historic Homes Foundation, Incorporated, to raise funding for the purchase. The Foundation was formally incorporated in January 1957. The Articles of Incorporation state that the "object and purpose of this corporation shall be the advancement of education, culture, and the arts in the State of Kentucky, by all methods calculated to achieve such end, and particularly. . . through the acquisition, restoration, and maintenance of historic sites, and the charging of an admission fee for the privilege of entering and viewing said historic sites. . . ."

The Foundation purchased Farmington for preservation in January 1958. The initial purchase consisted of the mansion, a barn, garage, ice house, and over 3 acres of land. The Foundation's intent was to furnish the house with early 1800s furniture and décor and use the house and grounds as a gathering place for local clubs and community events. The Foundation formally opened and dedicated Farmington Historic Home in April 1959. The Foundation's early interpretation of the property focused on the architecture, that the mansion plans were based on Thomas Jefferson's architectural designs, and the relationship between the Speed family and Abraham Lincoln, including that Lincoln stayed in the home in 1841.

In 1961, Jefferson County and the Commonwealth of Kentucky purchased Locust Grove and agreed to grant the Historic Homes Foundation rights to preserve and operate Locust Grove. By 1962, the Foundation approved the creation of two separate Boards of Regents for Farmington and Locust Grove, which operated as divisions under the Foundation. Over time, the Foundation managed the marketing, finance, and development for the properties while the separate boards and museum staff managed the day-to-day operations of each site.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Farmington staff and board members advocated for new archaeological studies, construction of a visitors and education center, development of new elementary through

high school interpretative programs, and restoration and renovation projects. Linda Rogers served as Director of Farmington in the early 1990s and pushed for greater efficiency in Farmington's operations. John Speed served as Regent of the Farmington Board of Regents by 1992 and was succeeded by Beverley Ballantine in 1994. Deborah Spearing began her position as Executive Director of Farmington Historic Home in September 1994. She pushed for the reinterpretation of the property to include acknowledgement and stories of the people who the Speeds enslaved and the Speed women. The board fired Spearing in September 1999 in response to public criticism of a new exhibit's nostalgic interpretation of slavery. Carolyn Brooks succeeded Spearing as interim Executive Director and remained in the position until her resignation in 2007.

By 2007, the historic site changed its name to Farmington Historic Plantation. As of 2022, Farmington continues to operate under the umbrella of the Historic Homes Foundation.

Sources:

Ayers, Nina. "Continuing exodus." *The Courier-Journal* (February 20, 1999): The Forum section, page A8. In Mss. A B188, finding aid folder, Filson Historical Society.

Elson, Martha. "Farmington widens focus: Home highlighting African Americans." *The Courier-Journal* (March 22, 1995): Neighborhoods/East County section, page 1. In Mss. A B188, finding aid folder, Filson Historical Society.

Elson, Martha. "Farmington pushes to highlight African Americans' contributions." *The Courier-Journal* (March 22, 1995): Neighborhoods/Mid-County section, page 2. In Mss. A B188, finding aid folder, Filson Historical Society.

"Foundation Reelects Bingham." *The Courier-Journal* (April 27, 1962): Section 1, page 15. In finding aid folder.

Green, Nathaniel E. "Leadership change." *The Courier-Journal* (February 20, 1999): The Forum section, page A8. In Mss. A B188, finding aid folder, Filson Historical Society.

Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. Articles of Incorporation. December 28, 1956. In folder 5.

Bylaws. 1987. In folder 17.

"History of Farmington's Ownership." September 1996. In Mss. A B188, folder 65, Filson Historical Society.

Jennings, Michael. "Turmoil erupts after firing, slavery exhibit." *The Courier-Journal* (December 28, 1998): page 1, A7. (See Mss. A B188 finding aid folder)

Kincaid, Robert L. "Farmington to Become a Historic Shrine." *Lincoln Herald* (Winter 1957-58): page 12-17. In Mss. A B188, folder 120, Filson Historical Society.

"The Latchstring's Out." *The Courier-Journal* (April 26, 1953): Travel Section: Kentucky Your Vacation Land, page 31. In Mss. A B188, finding aid folder, Filson Historical Society.

Lincoln National Foundation. "The Tall Kentuckian." *Lincoln Lore* no. 1261 (June 8, 1953).

Locust Grove Board of Regents and Farmington Board of Regents, "The Case for Locust Grove and Farmington." 1989. In folder 19.

“Past Regents of Farmington and Locust Grove.” 1976. In Mss. A H159c Haldeman, Anne Bruce, 1903-1993. Papers, ca. 1928-1993, Folder 329, Filson Historical Society.

Ries, Linda C., and Violet F. Smith. *Farmington, The Fulfillment of a Dream*. 1959. (See Pamphlet 976.9911 R559 or Mss. A B188, folder 20 for partial copy)

Shafer, Sheldon. “Work begins this week on new Farmington visitor center.” *The Courier-Journal* (January 6, 1993): B3.

Walker, Janet Lowell. “Talk delivered on May 4, 1959 at Filson Club.” In Mss. A B188, folder 14, Filson Historical Society.

Whitman, Alexandra H. *Farmington Docents' Manual*. 1991. In folder 30.

Speed, John S., 1927-2016
Collection on Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. and Farmington Historic Plantation, 1810-2000 (bulk: 1950-2000)

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of original records and materials collected by John S. Speed while a founding member of the Board of Trustees for Historic Homes Foundation and the Board of Regents of Farmington Historic Home in Louisville, Kentucky. The collection documents the founding and administration of the Foundation and Farmington from the 1950s to the late 1990s. Materials include correspondence, articles of incorporation, bylaws, reports, minutes, publications, and photographs. The collection is useful for researching changes in historical and archaeological interpretation of a nineteenth century Kentucky hemp farm and house over time, the administration of historic house museums in the twentieth century, and the genealogy of the Speed and related families of Kentucky.

John S. Speed's family gifted the collection to the Filson in labeled, expanding file wallets with folders and loose materials inside. Speed grouped the materials by topic: the Historic Homes Foundation and Farmington from 1956-1958, miscellaneous Farmington materials and photographs, the Speed family and descendants, and numbered topical sections for "The Story of Farmington," a booklet on the history of the property, Speed family, and people who the Speeds enslaved. The processing archivist maintained the core of these groupings and original folder titles, and inter-filed the unfolded and unlabeled materials.

The Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. grouping (folders 1-19) documents the founding and administration of the Foundation through records that date from 1956-1988 and earlier contextual clippings and a report that date from 1935-1953. The folders are arranged by the creation dates of the contents, then alphabetically by title. Founding-era records include correspondence and legal documents related to the purchase of Farmington from the Smiths (folders 5, 7); correspondence about the need for preservation of Farmington, recruiting trustees, donations and pledges, acquiring public funding, expenditures, and qualifying for non-profit tax-exempt status (folders 3-4, 7-9); undated officers and membership lists (folder 6); and receipts, invoices, and notes on expenditures (folders 3, 12). James C. Courtenay's files (folder 3) include draft articles of incorporation for the Foundation; an invitation for the opening ceremonies of Farmington on April 18, 1959; and the 1950 articles of incorporation for the Louisville Council for Historic Sites and Buildings, Incorporated. An October 1958 report of the Research Committee (folder 11) and circa 1960s hostess information packet (folder 13) provide insight into the early interpretative narratives and programming for Farmington, and the role of women in its preservation, furnishing, and interpretation. Other early items of note include an unpublished manuscript on Farmington written by Mary Stuart Anderson while she was a student at Smith College in the late 1940s (folder 2). The report includes original photographs and drawings of the mansion.

Later materials (circa 1970s-1989) in the Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. grouping document the Foundation after it expanded to also preserve Locust Grove in the 1960s. Materials include a circa 1970s-1980s brochure for Farmington and Locust Grove, an annual report and accountant's report of examination for the Foundation in 1985, Foundation bylaws as revised in 1987, a 1988 booklet by the Locust Grove Historic Home Publication Committee on the Croghan family of Kentucky, and 1989 preservation and construction proposals for Farmington and Locust Grove.

The Farmington Historic Plantation grouping (folders 20-33) documents the administration of Farmington Historic Plantation after the Foundation approved the creation of the Board of Regents for the museum in 1962. The folders are arranged by the creation dates of the contents, then alphabetically by title. Materials date from 1968 to 1999 and include correspondence about school fieldtrips (1968), photographs of the property (circa 1960s, circa 1990s), planning and fundraising records for a restoration project (1981, 1986, undated), long range plan records (1985, 1988, undated), board meeting records (1991, 1992, 1995), a docents' manual (1991-1992), interpretative publications (1981, 1991), and archaeological and architectural reports with handwritten notes by John S. Speed (1974-1998). Other items of note are January 1999 correspondence and a report by Dr. J. Blaine Hudson on "the African American section of the Farmington Visitor's Center exhibit" commissioned by the Historic Homes Foundation, Inc. (folder 30).

The Story of Farmington grouping (folders 34-40) consists of correspondence, drafts, a bibliography, notes, photographs, and reference materials for a booklet by John S. Speed. He intended for the publication to cover the history of the property, Speed family, and people who the Speeds enslaved. Speed worked on the booklet in the late 1990s and the materials that he gathered for reference date from 1886 to 1985. Drafts, notes, correspondence, and a bibliography are in the folder named "General." The remainder of the folder titles follow Speed's original labeling of a section number and topic name. These folders contain hand-written notes on suggested images for each topic and reference materials. Photographs were separated and cataloged as 022PC28 The Story of Farmington Photographs.

The Speed family grouping (folders 41-47) contains original and copies of materials on the Speed family of Kentucky, dating from 1811 to 2000. The grouping documents Speed family genealogy, property ownership, portraits by William Merritt Chase, and the relationship between Abraham Lincoln and the Speed family. Original materials include a 1869 notebook on Speed genealogy; February 24, 1868 courtship correspondence from Ella Keats Speed (1850-1878) to Thomas B. Crutcher (1846-1891); a "Mental Photographs" questionnaire album of Speed family members with some portraits (1871); a September 1, 1876 letter addressed from Booneville, Missouri to "My Very Dear Friend" about the death of a cousin, Gus Stephen, from typhoid fever; a nineteenth century eulogy by a husband for his wife; and a 1811 receipt for payment of estate settlement fees to Achilles Sneed, Jefferson County Court Clerk, by heirs of Cuthbert Bullitt. A September 6, 1981 letter from Percy Hays Speed to John S. Speed discusses Percy's attendance at the 1981 Speed family reunion, trip to see Thomas Speed's home in Jeffersontown, Kentucky, and copies of legal documents enclosed with the letter (folder 46). The enclosed documents are a copy of an 1816 deed from Henry Speed, Elizabeth Speed, and Mary Speed to Samuel Light, and James Speed's will dated 1810 as recorded in Mercer County, Kentucky, in October 1811.

Related Collections:

022PC28 The Story of Farmington Photographs

HM/F-2-23 Farmington subject photographs, 1959-1975

Mss. A B188 Ballantine, Beverley, 1937-. Research Collection on Farmington, 1757-2006.

Mss. A B613a 100 Bingham, George Barry, 1906-1988. Papers, 1861-1989

Mss. A H159c Haldeman, Anne Bruce, 1903-1993. Papers, ca. 1928-1993

Mss. A P826 Pope, William, 1775-1844. Papers, 1783-1864

Mss. A S742c Speed family. Papers-Farmington Collection. 1816-1961

Mss. A S742e Speed family. Papers - Farmington Collection. 1816-1961

Mss. A S742f Speed family. Papers, 1813-1981

Mss. AR H159 Haldeman, Anne Bruce, 1903-1993. Landscape design records, 1929-1986

Mss. AR T Tyler, C. Jr. Farmington blueprints, 1946

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Folder List

Box 1

Historic Homes Foundation, Inc.

- Folder 1: Clippings, 1935, 1950, 1953, 1956-1959
- Folder 2: House for Sale by Mary Stuart Anderson, circa 1940s
- Folder 3: James C. Courtenay's files, 1950, 1956, 1959
- Folder 4: Correspondence, 1956-1957
- Folder 5: Purchase, 1956-1957
- Folder 6: General, circa 1956-1958
- Folder 7: Donors, 1956-1959
- Folder 8: Legal, 1957-1958
- Folder 9: Trustees, 1957, undated
- Folder 10: John Speed (d. 1840) estate records, January 1958
- Folder 11: Research Committee report, October 1958
- Folder 12: Bills paid, 1958-1959
- Folder 13: Hostess information packet, circa 1960s
- Folder 14: Log cabin at Farmington postcard, circa 1960s
- Folder 15: Farmington and Locust Grove brochure, circa 1970s-1980s
- Folder 16: Annual report and report of examination, 1985
- Folder 17: Bylaws, 1987
- Folder 18: The Croghans of Locust Grove, 1988
- Folder 19: The Case for Locust Grove and Farmington, 1989

Farmington Historic Plantation

- Folder 20: Children's programming, January 12, 1968
- Folder 21: Clippings, 1969, 1974, 1986-1988, 1991, 1995
- Folder 22: Architecture and conservation, 1974-1998, undated
- Folder 23: Booklet, 1981
- Folder 24: Speed Pic-nic, 1981
- Folder 25: Farmington Restoration Project, 1981, 1986, undated
- Folder 26: Long range plan, 1985, 1988, undated
- Folder 27: Trust financial records, 1988
- Folder 28: Board of Regents meeting records, January 1991, March 1992, 1995
- Folder 29: Docents' manual, June 1991, May 1992
- Folder 30: Exhibitions, 1991, January 1999

- Folder 31: Archaeology, 1992, 1997
- Folder 32: Loan of Jouett portraits to Farmington, 1996
- Folder 33: Deed search report, circa 1990s

The Story of Farmington

- Folder 34: General, 1997, undated
- Folder 35: I Thomas Jefferson and Farmington, 1968, 1997, 1998
- Folder 36: II The Speed Family, circa 1997
- Folder 37: III The Children of Farmington, 1951, circa 1997
- Folder 38: IV A Visit from Abraham Lincoln, 1948-1992, circa 1997, undated
- Folder 39: X African-Americans at Farmington, 1978, circa 1997
- Folder 40: XV Working the Land, 1985, circa 1997

Speed family

- Folder 41: Genealogy and descendants, 1869, 1979, 1984, undated
- Folder 42: George Keats portrait by Chase, 1997, undated
- Folder 43: John Gilmer Speed portrait by Chase, 1994-2000
- Folder 44: Lincoln and Speed correspondence from Joshua Wolfe Shenk, 2000
- Folder 45: Lincoln and the Speeds, 1886, 1966, 1993-1996, undated
- Folder 46: Mercer County deed and will, 1811, 1816, 1981
- Folder 47: Original documents, 1811, 1868, 1871, undated

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Subject Headings

Aggy (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1825
Annis (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1825
Architecture, Domestic - Kentucky - Louisville
Ben (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810
Bingham, Barry, 1906-1988
Black people - Kentucky - Jefferson County
Black people - Kentucky - Mercer County
Boards of directors - Kentucky - Louisville
Boswell (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1812
Courtenay, James Clark, 1897-1991
Death
Enslaved people - Kentucky
Enslavers - Kentucky
Farmington Historic Plantation (Louisville, Ky.)
Haldeman, Anne Bruce, 1903-1993
Harrod (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1812
Historic Homes Foundation (Louisville, Ky.)
Historic house museums - Interpretive programs - Kentucky - Louisville
Historic house museums - Kentucky - Louisville
Historic preservation - Kentucky - Louisville
Hudson, James Blaine, III, 1949-2013
Jesse (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1825
Jim (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1825
Locust Grove (Louisville, Ky. : Estate)
Lucy (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1812
Maria (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1825
Nancy (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1812
Nancy (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1812
Nonprofit organizations - Administration - Kentucky - Louisville
Nostalgia - Kentucky
Slavery - Kentucky
Speed family
Speed family - Homes and haunts - Kentucky
Tom (Enslaved person in Mercer County, Ky.), active 1810-1825
Upper class families - Dwellings - Kentucky - Louisville