



Lincoln and the Speeds:

The Untold Story of a Devoted and Enduring Friendship

Abstract

On April 15, 1837, a tall angular young man with lean, wrinkled cheeks and sad gray eyes, walked into the general store in Springfield, Illinois and laid on the counter a pair of saddle bags which he carried in his long arm. He asked the young owner of the store the price of a mattress, blankets, sheets, coverlid, and a pillow for a single bed. The store owner calculated the items at seventeen dollars. The young man replied: "It is perhaps cheap enough, but small as it is, I am unable to pay it. If you will credit me until Christmas, I will pay you then, if I do well; but if I do not, I may never be able to pay you." The store owner looked up into the face of his customer and said: "You seem to be so much pained at contracting so small a debt, I think I can suggest a plan by which you can avoid the debt and at the same time attain your end. I have a large room with a double bed which you are welcome to share with me." The customer replied: "Where is your room?" The owner replied: "Upstairs," pointing to a pair of winding stairs which led from the store to the room. The young man picked up his saddle bags, went upstairs, set them down on the floor, returned below and explained: "Well, Speed, I'm moved!" The customer was Abraham Lincoln and the owner of the store was Joshua Speed. The friendship that developed between Joshua Speed and Abraham Lincoln lasted until Lincoln's death in 1865.

Joshua Speed became Abraham Lincoln's closest and intimate friend. The friendship spread to his brother James Speed, who later became Lincoln's Attorney General in 1864. Joshua and James Speed became Lincoln's informal informants on the military and civilian activities during the Civil War in Kentucky. With Lincoln's help, Joshua and James Speed helped save Kentucky for Unionists early in 1861. The purpose of this book is a dual biography of Joshua and James Speed that will reveal how closely the friendship between Joshua Speed and Abraham Lincoln continued to affect not only Joshua Speed's life, but also his brother James Speed. Both Joshua and James Speed were dedicated to the Union, even though each brother followed different paths. James Speed was a Unionist, emancipationist, abolitionist, and Radical Republican. James Speed entered politics, becoming a state representative and later Attorney General under Abraham Lincoln and later Andrew Johnson. Joshua Speed lived his life as a businessman. Joshua Speed differed from his brother and Lincoln and did not agree with emancipation, but felt that the issue of emancipation should not hinder his support of the Union. In April of 1861 after the attack on Fort Sumter, Kentucky debated the issue of whether to join the Union or Confederacy. With Joshua and James Speed's loyalty to the Union, Lincoln depended on Joshua and James Speed to help secure Kentucky for the Union. With Joshua and James Speed's help, Lincoln managed to transport thousands of weapons into Kentucky for distribution among the loyal Union Home Guard.

During the war, Lincoln needed trustworthy friends to help him deal with the delicate situation in Kentucky. Both James and Joshua Speed kept Lincoln informed on not only the political affairs in Kentucky, but also the civilian affairs. After Lincoln's death James and Joshua Speed helped to preserve Lincoln's legacy in their own way. James Speed became a Radical Republican and fought to gain equality under the law for blacks, even though most of

Kentucky did not want to follow the Radical Republican stance on reconstruction. Joshua Speed helped to maintain Lincoln's legacy by contributing to Lincoln's memorial and speaking and writing about Lincoln.

The purpose of the book is to fill a long overdue void, to tell a story of Kentucky's history that has escaped the literature in recent times. With Lincoln's 200th anniversary of his birth, the story of Joshua and James Speed can give the reader another window into Lincoln's friendships. The story of Joshua and James Speed can also reveal the story of Kentucky politics during the Civil War; the struggle between Union loyalists and Confederate sympathizers; the struggle for emancipation, abolition, and those who opposed equal rights for blacks in Kentucky.

Chapter One: Life on the plantation for Joshua and James Speed. During the early 1800's John and Lucy Speed moved to Louisville, Kentucky, building Farmington in 1814. Farmington became a very successful hemp plantation, located on Bardstown Road. In order to run the large plantation, John Speed employed sixty slaves and both Joshua and James Speed grew up among slavery.

Chapter Two: In 1837, Joshua Speed decided to break out on his own and moved to Springfield, Illinois. He set up a very successful merchant store. While running the store, a young Abraham Lincoln asked if he could board in Joshua Speed's establishment. From that point on, Joshua and Lincoln became the best of friends. While boarding with Joshua Speed, Lincoln experiences his first heartbreak over his separation from Mary Todd. Joshua Speed also loses his father at Farmington and decides to return home.

Chapter Three: In order to get away from his deep depression over his separation from Mary Todd, Abraham Lincoln decides to visit Farmington. Lincoln becomes friends

with all the Speed family members, including James Speed. James Speed becomes a very successful lawyer and emancipationist.

Chapter Four: Joshua and James Speed enter into Kentucky politics and are elected to office. Joshua Speed also tries his luck at being a plantation owner, but becomes a more successful businessman and later quits politics.

Chapter Five: Slavery becomes an issue in the nation. Joshua and Lincoln differ in their view on slavery. James Speed continues his law practice and experiences the Bloody Monday riots in Louisville. James Speed also becomes a professor at the University of Louisville.

Chapter Six: 1860 election. The country splits over Lincoln's election. Joshua and James Speed support Lincoln. Lincoln needed James and Joshua Speed to help him preserve the Union in Kentucky.

Chapter Seven: War! James Speed becomes a state senator and helps form the Union Central Committee. William "Bull" Nelson calls on Joshua Speed for help to distribute weapons to loyal Union men of Kentucky. Joshua and James Speed help distribute the weapons and meet with Kentucky's most prominent Union men. During the Civil War Joshua and James Speed become Lincoln's unofficial informants on Kentucky.

Chapter Eight: 1862 Confederate invasion of Kentucky. James Speed as senator implements radical laws to punish disloyal citizens and keep Kentucky in the Union. Lincoln differs with Joshua and James Speed over the Emancipation Proclamation. After the murder of Union General William "Bull" Nelson at the hands of Union General Jefferson Davis at the Galt House in Louisville, James Speed becomes Union General Davis' attorney.

Chapter Nine: Emancipation Proclamation becomes the law of the land. James Speed still thinks slavery should be a state issue, not a federal issue. Joshua Speed continues to believe in states' rights.

Chapter Ten: James Speed helps form the Unconditional Unionist Party, which supports black Union soldiers, emancipation, and the crushing of the rebellion. The Unconditional Union Party becomes a radical party in the state. James Speed changes his mind over the Emancipation Proclamation and supports Federal emancipation. Joshua Speed also changes to support the Unconditional Union party. Kentucky turns away from Lincoln. Joshua and James Speed become involved in General Stephen Gano Burbridge's reign of terror in Kentucky.

Chapter Eleven: James Speed becomes Lincoln's Attorney General

Chapter Twelve: The death of Lincoln. James Speed has to deal with the Lincoln conspirators and the trial of the Lincoln assassins. Scandal erupts over his decision to execute Mary Surratt.

Chapter Thirteen: The trial of Confederate President Jefferson Davis and the Fenian Case. President Andrew Johnson and James Speed have a falling out over black suffrage and equality. James Speed becomes a radical.

Chapter Fourteen: James Speed returns to Kentucky after resigning from being Attorney General and tries to form the Republican Party in Kentucky. He runs for several offices but loses. Joshua Speed turns to the Republican Party and becomes a wealthy man. James Speed becomes a professor at the University of Louisville. Joshua Speed died on May 29, 1882, James Speed on June 25, 1887. ■

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