

Joshua Speed

Born: November 14, 1814

Birthplace: Louisville, Kentucky

Joshua Speed was raised on a 550 acre plantation that depended on slave labor for profitable operations. The main cash crop was hemp which is labor-intensive, thus the need for slave labor. The farm also produced corn, hay, apples, pork, vegetables, wheat, tobacco and dairy products. The tasks of planting, harvesting and shipping products to market were performed primarily by enslaved African Americans who worked in the fields, labored at the ropewalk, and drove the wagons.

Slave life at Farmington was representative of slave life at other large Kentucky plantations. Between 45 and 64 enslaved African Americans worked on the plantation. The average Kentucky slaveholder owned fewer than 5 slaves, but Farmington, with its large slave population, resembled the large plantations of the state's Bluegrass Region.

Although the family was strongly pro-Union, slavery for most Speed family members was an accepted way of life. Slave labor was essential to the profitable operation of the plantation, and the profits derived from the labor of enslaved African Americans at Farmington, as well as income received from hiring out slaves, helped to pay for luxury goods and education for the Speed children in addition to family necessities.

Joshua Speed met Abraham Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois and became a lifelong friend and trusted confidant. Abraham visited Joshua Speed at the Farmington Plantation in August 1841, and for the first time in his life, he lived in luxury, a luxury made possible, in part, by slavery.

In a letter to Joshua Speed, Abraham Lincoln wrote: "Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "*all men are created equal.*" We now practically read it "all men are created equal, *except negroes.*" When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal except negroes, *and foreigners, and Catholics.*" When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty – to Russia,

for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy [*sic*]... And yet, let me say I am,

Your friend forever A. Lincoln.

Sources:

Kentucky Government

Farmington Historic Site