

The Peter Speer House
Fairfield Road
Fairfield, Caldwell Township
Essex County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-669

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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Owner: Mrs. Elizabeth S. Keebler

Occupant: Mr. F. J. Ermileo

Date of Erection: About 1810

Builder: Peter Speer 1786-1872, owner in 1810

Architect: Unknown

Present Condition: Original, except for a large front
dormer, the hood to the front door, rear leanto

Number of Stories: One and one-half

Materials of Construction:

Foundation - brownstone masonry

Exterior walls - timber frame, clapboarded

Interior walls - lath and plaster on frame

Chimneys - brick, built into inside of gable
end walls

Roof - gable, covered with modern composition
shingles

Historical Data:

The identity of the original owner of this house is discovered by search of title in the County records, reported as follows.

At a date not here established, but certainly previous to 1796, Isaac Colyer purchased from Henry Garritse and Cornelius Hetfield a tract of some 123 acres* in the part of Acquackanonk Township which has

*Recited in deed of 9 Nov. 1796, Jos. Colyer to Thos. Speer, rec. Essex Co. Deed Bk. D-31.

since become Caldwell Township. This farm had a northeast frontage of some 1782 feet on the lane to Timothy Gould's house (now Dutch Lane) and extended thence westward some 380 feet along the northwest side of the intersecting Fairfield Road to the lot on which then stood the Dutch Reformed Church(a), beyond whose 165 foot frontage the tract extended further southeasterly about 2900 feet below that road and along the line of Henry Bush's land and over the Deepvaal Brook or "Great Ditch" to the line of Henry Garretse's farm.

This grantee, Isaac Colyer, died intestate before 28 October 1796, on which date the commissioners appointed to divide his real estate among his three sons, Joseph, Henry, and Isaac, the latter two being under 14 years of age, made their report to the Orphans Court of Essex County. By this lengthwise division, lot no. 1, containing some 60 acres along the entire northeast line of the farm was assigned to the eldest son Joseph Colyer, lot no. 2 adjacent comprising some 30 acres in a narrow strip the full length of the farm was assigned to the son Henry, and no. 3, likewise of 30 acres, forming the southwestern quarter of the farm fell to the youngest son Isaac Colyer Jr.(b). On this last tract was later erected the frame house here surveyed.

Joseph Colyer, abovesaid, sold to Thomas Speer(c) some 45 acres in the northern part of his 60 acre allotment by two deeds dated 1 November 1796, the grantee having already purchased from the estate of his deceased

(a) Rebuilt 1805 on a site further east on same road, and still standing.

(b) Orphans Court, Essex County, Bk. A, pp. 112-113.

(c) Thomas Speer d. 26 June 1829 in his 76th yr., his wife Maria d. 31 Oct. 1846 in 88th yr., per gravestone inscriptions in Fairfield R. D. Chyd.

father the house a month previous(d). Likewise, by a deed of 17 June 1797 he obtained from the heirs of Henry Bush the 54 acre farm on the northeast line of that tract and extending along the lower side of Fairfield Road some 1350 feet to a point east of Dutch Lane. Speer also acquired the 30 acre share of Henry Colyer, which lay adjacent on the southwest, by a deed of 13 March 1801.

Isaac Colyer Jr., mentioned above, by his guardian Timothy Gould, sold his 30 acre allotment of his father's farm to his elder brother Joseph Colyer by a deed of 6 July 1801, and the latter conveyed it to Peter Speer(e), both parties being described as of Caldwell* Township, for \$875, by deed dated 25 December 1810. No house or other building is mentioned therein, but we have established the fact that the house here considered stands on this division of the original Colyer farm. This Peter Speer acquired from his parents, Thomas and Mary Speer, named above, some 12 acres adjacent on his northeast line by deed of same date above, and held the farm thus assembled until his death in 1872. He bought from Thomas P. Badgeley a 40 acre addition along his southwest line and the "new road" (which cut off from Fairfield road westward to Horseneck) by deed of 1 July 1815. Being 24 years old in 1810 and probably lately married, it appears that Peter Speer bought that 30 acre tract adjacent to his father's farm then in order to build his own house, the one here surveyed.

Peter Speer of Fairfield, Caldwell Township, by his will dated 1st March 1867 and proved 20 March 1872, devised to his wife Harriet the lifetime use of his "homestead farm and premises at Fairfield which has been occupied by me during the past number of years." To his

(*) Caldwell Twp. created 1798 from parts of Acquackanonk and Newark Townships

(d) By deed of 1st Oct. 1796, the administrators of said Isaac Collyer decd. had sold the house on a 3 acre plot to Thomas Speer of acq. Tp. for 300 Pounds, and he took possession. It is still standing, a cutstone house, the place being Miller's Poultry Farm. Thomas Speer devised this homestead to his son Tunis Speer by will dated 4 Jan. 1819.

(e) Peter Speer b. 8 Oct. 1786, d. 28 Feb. 1872. Harriet, dau. of Wm. and Mary Sandford, and wife of Peter Speer, b. 21 July 1791, d. 17 June 1873.

son Marcus E. Speer and wife he devised the lifetime use of "all that part formerly my homestead farm at Fairfield whereon they now reside and which they have used and occupied for the past number of years", also the use of "my Mandavill lot" of 28 acres at Tours Point, Morris County, and, after their death, the same property he devised to their daughters, Harriet wife of Giles Van Duyne and Sarah E. wife of Alfred Stagg. Testator bequeathed his own homestead, after the death of his wife, to his four grandchildren, Harriet wife of Henry Crane, Melvina wife of Mark Ward, and the two named above. To his daughter-in-law Adaline, wife of William S. Speer he devised the lifetime use of half the house at Little Falls. In a codicil dated 1st July 1868, testator Peter Speer states that he has since exchanged with his grandson by marriage, Giles Van Duyne, the "part formerly my homestead farm at Fairfield.....whereon my son Marcus E. Speer has resided" for property in Brown Street, Newark.

By deed of 1st October 1873, Giles Van Duyne and wife Harriet, of Newark, conveyed to Harriet Crane, wife of Henry L. Crane of Little Falls, Passaic County, and Melvina A. Ward, wife of Mark A. Ward, of Orange, his one-quarter interest in "the homestead farm of Peter Speer which was occupied by him for a number of years before his death" and which "was given to his wife Harriet" during her lifetime and afterwards to his four granddaughters by his will (above cited). Likewise, by deed of 4 February 1874, Sarah E. Stagg of Newark, another of the four devisees, conveyed her fourth part, to the said two grantees, describing a tract of some 38 acres in Caldwell Township which is found to be that assembled by their grandfather, Peter Speer, by the deeds of 1810 cited above. From these two non-resident granddaughters, who thus acquired full possession of that part of the farm of Peter Speer, the property passed to Nancy S. Schmitt of Caldwell Township by their deed of 15 January 1908, from whom it passed to Mrs. Elizabeth Schmitt Keebler, the present owner. She resides in a modern house next eastward, and the old farmhouse thereon (here surveyed) is occupied by a tenant F. J. Ermileo who operates that part of the farm lying on the northwest side of Fairfield

Road as a flower nursery. Across the road, on the other part of this old farm of Peter Speer, now Mrs. Keebler's, a modern house stands with farm buildings.

Reference:

Search of title in land and probate records of Essex County by Thomas J. Riley and James Hanlon, H.A.B.S. abstractors, as reported 4 October 1940

Lewis D. Cook

Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams

SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.

District Officer

TW 12/11/40