SPEER, Mary (Taylor). March 27, 1906–November 23, 1966.
University of Pittsburgh (BA 1926, MA 1928, PhD 1935).

Mary Margaret Taylor was the only daughter and third of four children of Hallie Blanche Virginia (Criss) (1875–1959) and Albert Aaron Taylor (1872–1937), both of Washington County in the southwestern part of Pennsylvania, a few miles from Pittsburgh. Her parents were married in 1899. Taylor's mother attended common school and several terms at the state normal school and was a teacher in a one-room school and a housewife; her father attended common school and was a carpenter, mason, cabinet maker, and general contractor, having engaged in home study in addition to common school. They had four children: Joseph Stewart (b. 1901), Albert Alfred (b. 1902), Mary Margaret, and Edward A. (b. 1913), all born in Midway, Pennsylvania.

Mary Taylor grew up in Midway and attended the three-year high school there, 1918–21. The following year she took the classical course in the Carnegie High School on the outskirts of Pittsburgh and graduated in 1922. She was awarded the four-year college scholarship, given annually on the basis of a competitive examination, from Washington County. In her undergraduate years, 1922–26, at the University of Pittsburgh she carried majors in both mathematics and Latin. She was elected to Sigma Kappa Phi, a national foreign language honorary fraternity, and to QUAX, a women's science honorary society at Pittsburgh, before graduating with highest honor, the only recipient of a BA so honored in 1926. A brother recalls that she was offered graduate assistantships in both mathematics and Latin.

Taylor held a graduate teaching assistantship at Pittsburgh from 1926 to 1930. In this period she earned her master's degree in 1928, studied in the summer of 1928 at the University of Chicago, and continued work toward the PhD at Pittsburgh. From 1930 to 1934 Taylor was instructor of mathematics at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, and in the academic year 1934–35 she was back at the Pittsburgh campus as a graduate assistant to complete the work for her PhD.

In 1935 Taylor married Eugene R. Speer (1903–1978), a Pennsylvania native who also graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 1926, did graduate work there in mathematics and physics 1926–28, and graduated from the University of Pittsburgh law school. They remained in Pittsburgh, where she taught at her alma mater, and he practiced law. In 1936–37 she is listed in the university catalogue as Speer and as a graduate assistant. From 1937–38 to 1942–43 she is listed as an instructor in mathematics.

The Speers had three children: Virginia Ellen (1941–1981), Eugene R., born in 1943, and Susan Margaret, born in 1947. All three children did their undergraduate work in mathematics. The elder daughter did a year of graduate work in mathematics in England as a Fulbright scholar and became a computer software manager. The two younger children earned PhD's in mathematics and computer science, respectively. Eugene Speer is in the department of mathematics at Rutgers University; Susan Speer Owicki was a faculty member in the department of electrical engineering at Stanford University, later earned an MA in counseling psychology, and is a licensed marriage and family therapist.

In 1986 Mary Speer's son reported that she continued her position at the university until sometime after the birth of their elder daughter and before his birth, and

that his mother "recounted that she left the University of Pittsburgh, and mathematics teaching, because men junior to her were promoted to Associate Professor while she was not, and because she was told that this was because the men had families to support and needed the money" (Smithsonian questionnaire).

Mary Speer was an involved Presbyterian throughout her life and was an active member and administrator in Girl Scouts of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, from the early 1950s until her death. She died of cancer at age sixty in Pittsburgh in 1966.

Thesis and dissertation:

1928 [Taylor, M. M.] A note on the solution in series of the general homogeneous linear differential equation. MA thesis, University of Pittsburgh.

1935 [Taylor, M. M.] Reciprocals of certain curves and surfaces with respect to a space cubic curve. PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, directed by Forest Almos Foraker. Abstract: *Abstracts of theses, researches in progress, and bibliography of publications* 11:211–16. (*Univ. of Pittsburgh Bull.* 32, no. 1.)

Publication:

1929 [Taylor, M. M.] (Translator from the Latin) On the theory of combinations, by Jacques Bernoulli. In *A Source Book in Mathematics*, ed. D. E. Smith, 272–77. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. Reprint: 1959. New York: Dover Publications.

Abstracts:

1937 Reciprocals with respect to a space cubic. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 44:187 #1. Presented to the MAA, Beaver Falls, PA, 26 Oct 1935.

1939 Types of curvature of curves and surfaces. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 46:536 #4. Presented to the MAA, Greenville, PA, 13 May 1939.

Other sources: Owens questionnaire 1937; Smithsonian questionnaire prepared by son 1986; communications with University of Pittsburgh Alumni Association and University of Pittsburgh Archives; US Census 1910, 1920 PA.

Last modified: December 13, 2008.