

SORTING OUT THE VARIOUS SPARKS FAMILIES OF EARLY BYTOWN

by Doris Grierson Hope

Nicholas Sparks of Sparks Street (c1791-1862), (a son of George Sparks of Ballylusk, Co. Wexford, Ireland,ⁱ) was the first of many members of a Sparks family from Wexford County, Ireland, to emigrate to Bytown and its environs in the early 1800s. His cousin, George Sparks (c1801-1867), a son of Abraham Sparks of the Townland of Dranaghⁱⁱ, Co. Wexford, Ireland, followed him circa 1824, and settled on Lot 8, Junction Gore, township of Gloucester. Because the Christian names of Nicholas, George, Abraham, Frederick have been used commonly in the family from early times, it is now difficult to know to which George or Abraham or Nicholas one refers when tracing this family tree. Hopefully some of that confusion may be overcome by the information in this article.

The Sparks family came to Canada with a long history of service to their King. About 1720 Nicholas Sparks, an Army officer, was granted by the Duke of Marlborough the leasehold in perpetuity of lands in the townland of Darragh (Dranagh) in the County of Wexford. One of his descendants, an Abraham Sparks (1776-1856) also served as a Captain in the Yeomanry in the Irish Insurrection of 1798. Three Sparks families were compensated for losses sustained in that Rebellion. Two of these recipients were Abraham Sparks of Dranagh who received £40 in compensation; and George Sparks of Lusk (Ballylusk) who received £25.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Sparkses of Dranagh and Ballylusk, which are but 12 miles apart, are closely related. Land records indicate that two brothers, Abraham and George Sparks, sold land in Dranagh to Richard Lett in 1790. George Sparks of Dranagh in 1787 also leased 22 acres in Ballylusk to George Sparks, his nephew.^{iv} Other members of both families emigrated to the Bytown area after 1824. Who were the siblings, as well as the children, of both the Nicholas and the George who settled in Bytown?

Nicholas Sparks of Sparks Street, Ottawa, emigrated about 1816, came to Hull, Quebec where he worked for Philemon Wright for several years. In 1821 he purchased 200 acres of farm land, Lot C, Concession C, Ottawa Front, Nepean from John Burrows (Honey) for £85. In 1826 he married Sarah Olmstead Wright, the widow of Philemon Wright, Jr. They had three children; Mary (c1829-1904) who married Alonzo P. Wright, M.P., Esther (c1832-1894) who married James D. Slater, and Nicholas (1833-1872) who married Caroline Blaisdell. On Wellington Street, facing the Ottawa River, Nicholas built a large 2-storey stone house for his family, a house which has been razed and replaced by government buildings. Nicholas was not only a farmer, but also a lumberer, the owner of saw mills and pineries, a real estate vendor, a Councillor for the later City of Ottawa, but most of all, a benevolent "squire", working always for the development of a future capital city. He signed many petitions for community improvement, one in 1821 for a Volunteer troop of Cavalry to be designated the Bytown Volunteers, and one in 1836 for the establishment of a Rifle Corps distinct from the militia. He gave, gratis, prime real estate land for the building of the Rideau Canal, to widen Wellington Street, to both the Methodist and the Anglican churches, for the Court House and jail on Nicholas Street, and for fair and market grounds on both Lyon and Elgin Streets. He and his wife are

buried in St. James Cemetery, Hull. His obituary ends with "a procession of more than a mile in length followed his remains to his last resting place in the Hull burial ground".^v

His brother, George (c1803-1857) of Bells Corners emigrated circa 1824, and married Letitia Caldwell from Templeton Township, Quebec, the same year. George bought from Philemon Wright in 1826 his farm in the 5th Concession of Nepean for £137, paying more for it than Nicholas did for his farm in Upper Bytown. In 1833 both George and Nicholas signed a petition requesting additional Magistrates for the area. George and Letitia had four sons and one daughter: George (1829-1917) who married Anna Maria Riddle of South March); Hugh (1831-1904) who married Margaret Johnson of Huntley; Edward (1832-1867) who married Sarah Riddle of South March); Nicholas (1835-c1895) who married Agnes Hill of Richmond and Samantha Wagar in North Dakota; John (1839-1924) who married Jane Bradley of Nepean), James (1841-1920) who married Ellen Boyd of Huntley, and one daughter Elizabeth (c1847-). Son John served in the Fenian Raids of 1866 with No. 1 Company, Bells Corners. This John and two of his brothers, Nicholas and James, moved to North Dakota circa 1890; but only Nicholas remained and died there. Two of the family, Hugh and an infant son Nicholas, as well as their parents, are buried in Christ Church cemetery, Bells Corners.^{vi}

Roger (c1801-1874), another brother of Nicholas of Sparks Street, emigrated circa 1824, settling first in Bytown. In 1836, he and his brothers, Nicholas and Frederick, were among the first signers of that petition for the establishment of the Rifle Corps. Before 1855 Roger was farming in South Hull and had married Maria. None of their four children, Roger (c1850-1924); George (1852-1920); Fanny (1855-1908); and Jane F. (1858-1919), ever married. The whole family is buried in St. James Cemetery, Hull.^{vii}

One sister, Elizabeth (c1794-1862), who also emigrated circa 1824, married Edmund Hurd of the township of Templeton, Quebec at St. James Church, Hull in 1828. They had three children: Nicholas (c1830-1907) who married Jane Rider Kelly and then Jane Payne; Edmund (c1832-) who married Jane Scharf; and one daughter, Mary Ann (1834-) who married Benjamin Bickford of Fitzroy Harbor in 1850. Edmund and his brother-in-law Nicholas Sparks "partnered" as lumberers before 1829. Edmund and Elizabeth are buried in St. James Cemetery, Hull.^{viii}

Another brother, Frederick (c1791-1856), (wife Eliza Burrowes), emigrated circa 1828 and was employed by his brother Nicholas from at least 1836 to 1853. He served as Surveyor of Roads for Upper Bytown in 1842, and Pathmaster in 1845. He was involved with the establishment of a Mutual Fire Insurance Company for Dalhousie District in 1845. Frederick and Eliza had a family of six children: sons Robert and Frederick who died young; Mary Ann (1841-) who married Alfred Traylor; Ellen (c1843-1925) who married Archibald Graham; Alice (1846-1931) who married Samuel Fee; and Jane (1850-). Frederick was first buried in the old Sandy Hill Cemetery; but after the death of his wife in 1888, his body was moved to Beechwood Cemetery where several of the family are interred. After Frederick's death, his widow lived at 418 Sparks Street, in a 1½ storey stone house next to Christ Church Cathedral.^{ix}

Nicholas's oldest brother, Abraham (c1783-1863), did not emigrate till 1853. He lived in

the townland of Coolookbeg, County Wexford, a property next to the family home of Ballylusk. His marriage to Frances Dixon in 1832 as well as the births of four children are registered with the Church of Ireland parish of Ardamine in Courtown. In Bytown, Abraham, a carpenter and a contractor, who lived at and worked out of 388 Albert Street, constructed Lauder Hall of Christ Church Cathedral, as well as a wing of the old Russell Hotel. Their children were: Mary (1833-) and George (1836-), neither of whom married; Margaret (1840-) who married William Boucher of South March; and Abraham (1852-1933) who married Mary Jane Patterson of Perth. Dr. Harry Dixon Sparks (1886-1948) who served as a food inspector for the City of Ottawa for many years was their son. The family is buried in St. James Cemetery, Hull. The obituary of Abraham, Jr., tells that he is "the last surviving nephew of the pioneer Nicholas Sparks".^x

Four of Nicholas's cousins from the townland of Dranagh also emigrated after 1824. George Sparks, previously mentioned as living on Lot 8, Junction Gore, Gloucester, married Sarah Welsh in Ireland in 1823. They had a large family of seven sons and four daughters, all of whom, like their father, were very successful in their many endeavours. Their eldest son, Abraham, born in Ireland (1824-1903) married three times: (1) Ann Purdy of Richmond; (2) Sara Ann McCullough of Gloucester, and (3) Elizabeth Purdy of Gloucester. Three sons, Jonathan (c1831-1897), Nicholas (1844-1909) and Frederick (c1846-1882) never married. His third son, George (1832-1922) married Lydia Matilda Garland of (Ashton) Richmond and settled in Vars. His fourth son Robert (c1839-1882) (wife Wilhemina Stewart) was the land surveyor who in 1873 walked the 42 miles from Arnprior to Ottawa in 8 hours and 17 minutes. Robert and Frederick were the two sons who died with the sinking of the ship *Asia* in Lake Superior. The youngest son, Samuel James (1847-1923) married Maud Gilbert. George's oldest daughter Sarah Ann (c1829-1862) married Henry Joel Burrows, son of John Burrows (Honey). His second daughter, Jane (c1830 -) married John Colborne of Cumberland. His youngest daughter Mary Ann (c1840-1905) married William Ogilvie of Glen Ogilvie. His third daughter, Esther (1835-1923) who married Charles Wolff, remained in possession of the double stone family residence on Russell Road which the family had built about 1851. Sarah Sparks, George's widow, and many of the family are buried in Beechwood Cemetery.^{xi}

Two other brothers of George of Gloucester emigrated after 1830, but they settled outside the Ottawa area. Frederick (c1812-c1871) who married Sarah Thackaberry settled in Wolford Township. She is buried in North Augusta Cemetery. They had a family of 9 children, seven daughters and two sons, Abraham and Samuel. Another brother Robert (c1803-) emigrated and settled in the North Gower-Marlborough area. He married Betsy Edwards and had by her two daughters and five sons, Frederick, Abraham, Robert, Joseph and Isaiah.

The last brother of George of Gloucester to emigrate was Abraham (c1809-1871) who married Mary Ann Butler in 1837 in Banogue, Ireland. By 1843 they had emigrated to Bytown, and by 1847 they had moved to Nepean township. Their second son George (1844-1909) married twice: Catherine Owens of Fitzroy Township, and Elizabeth Moody of Bells Corners. Sons George and Robert (1840-1904) in 1869 bought Lot 25, Concession II, Ottawa Front, Nepean, near Skead's Mills. There many saw and grist mills flourished on the waterfront. As well, Abraham and Mary Ann Butler had four daughters: Elizabeth (1838-1919) who married John Farmer; Ann (1846-1925) who married William John Geddes, Alice (1847-1897) who married William Foster,

and Maria (1855-1906) who married John Nesbitt. Their eldest son Robert, their second daughter Jane (1843-1903), and their youngest son William (c1850-1886) never married, and are buried with their parents in Christ Church Cemetery, Bells Corners.^{xii}

Today there is no living male descendant of Nicholas Sparks of Sparks Street, Ottawa, but male descendants of this patriotic Irish farming family who still carry those Christian names of Nicholas, George, Robert and Frederick are scattered throughout the country.

i. OBN, Vol. 17, #2, 1984, article "Sparks Family Letter", by Naomi Slater Haydon. Also Naomi Slater Heydon, *Looking Back*, Nemo Publications, Ottawa. Naomi Haydon, a direct descendant of Nicholas Sparks did extensive work (both published and unpublished) on the various Sparks' families of Bytown, and is to be given full credit for much of the information contained in this article.

ii. Bruce S. Elliott, "The McCabe List: Early Irish in the Ottawa Valley" in *Families*, Vol. 28, Vol. 29, No. 3, 1990 and Vol. 30, No. 3, 1991. George of Gloucester had 1 son and 2 daughters at the time Colonel By penned this list.

iii. *Armories and Lineages of Canada*, by Herbert George Todd, Editor, Yonkers, N., Y., 1917, pp. 89-90. Also National Library of Ireland, Dublin, "List of Persons Who Suffered Losses in the 1798 Rebellion, JLB 94107.

iv. Registry of Deeds, Dublin, Ireland, Instrument # 226475, Book 338, Page 128, August 6, 1789; Instrument #265915, Book 405, Page 259, Dec. 20, 1787, Instrument #277819, Book 426, Page 276, Sept. 27, 1790, Abraham and George to Lett. Also National Archives, Dublin, Tab 31/25, Tithe Applotment Books, Kilcormick, Wexford, 1825, shows landowner as Abraham Sparks with 63 acres.

v. op. cit., *Looking Back*. Also Michael, Newton, *Lower Bytown*. Vols I and II, National Capital Commission, Ottawa, 1979. Also LAC, RG9 Vol 14, 1823-28, and LAC, Upper Canada Sundries 1836, pp 5823-27, I-66-70. Also *Ottawa Citizen*, Mar. 1, 1862.

vi. LAC, Census 1851, Nepean Township, George is shown as born about 1791, but Militia records of 1828 (RG9 1B Vol. 29) tell that he was age 23 at that time; i.e. born in 1805. Also RG 5 A 1, Vol. 125, pp 68813-69327.

vii. LAC, Upper Canada Sundries 1836, pp 5823-27, I-66-70. Also records of St. James church and cemetery, Hull.

viii. St. James Church, Hull, and Christ Church, Ottawa for Marriage to Bickford. Partnership of Sparks and Hurd from Perth Examiner, 1829.

ix. Records of Christ Church Cathedral, Ottawa, show marriage of Eliza Burrows to Frederick Sparks, Register 175, p. 109, Book 29. However, a clearly written "William Burrowes" acted as

witness to this wedding. The same William Burrowes witnessed the baptism of their son Robert in 1840, and their daughter, Ellen in 1843. See also 16 Victoria, Appendix SSSS1853. See also *Bytown Gazette*, Aug. 11, 1842, Feb 1845, and April 25, 1856, p. 3, col. 4,

x. National Archives, Dublin; Tab 31/29, Tithe Applotment books, Killenagh, (Diocese of Leighlin) Wexford, 1832, shows for Coolookbeg, occupier is Abraham Sparks, with 14 acres, 3 roods. Also Ardamine Rectory, Courtown, Ireland, Record for Parishes of Donoghmore, Ardamine and Killena; marriage of Abraham Sparks to Frances Dixon, and baptisms of children. Also *Ottawa Citizen*, article "Further Information about the Sparks family", Centennial Edition, 1967.

xi. Harry J. Walker, *100 Years Ottawa and the Valley*, reprinted from *Ottawa Journal*, 1967. pp 48-50; Also Robert Serre, *Pioneer Families of Glen Ogilvie*, Gloucester Historical Society, pp. 17-20. Also *Ottawa Journal*, Feb. 17, 1923. Also Gladys Blair, "Sparks-Wolff House, in *Ottawa Journal*, Feb. 28, 1970.

12. Bruce S. Elliott, *The City Beyond*, Corp. of City of Nepean, 1991, p. 108; Also Marriage License Bonds, Dublin 613-617, Ardamine Parish Register, Ossory, Ferns & Leighlin, marriage of Abraham Sparks to Mary Ann Butler. See also Mormon records.