

# Sparks, Herbert James (1891–1937)

---

GODFREY K. SANG

Godfrey K. Sang is a historical researcher and writer with an interest in Adventist history. He holds a B.A. in History from the University of Eastern Africa Baraton and a number of qualifications from other universities. He is a published author. He is the co-author of the book *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya*.

---

Herbert James Sparks was a pioneer Adventist worker in Kenya.

Herbert James Sparks was born in Durban, South Africa, on November 8, 1891.<sup>1</sup> At the age of 20, in 1911, he moved to British East Africa (Kenya) where he established a hides and skins business. When he heard that there was a Seventh-day Adventist mission in Gendia near Kendu-bay, he made his way there and connected with Arthur A. Carscallen, becoming close friends. Sparks scouted for a place where he could find big game, particularly buffalo. Moving further south he settled at a place named Kanyadoto, where a large pond attracted hundreds of big game. The pond was named *Dak Tenge* in the Luo language<sup>2</sup> (wild beasts' pond). He camped under a large tree and began to take down the larger animals, sharing the meat with the Luo people. This attracted many people to the area, and seeing the opportunity, he began to teach them on Sabbath –the day when he did not carry out his business. He constructed several sheds there to dry out his hides and skins and also constructed the first church building. When the Luo people entered the church, they were shocked to see people kneeling in prayer and even turning their backside on others, which was considered a serious taboo.<sup>3</sup> He brought to the faith a number of people including his assistant Mariko Otieno.

Due to the nature of his business, Sparks moved out of the Kanyadoto area around the year 1912. By this time there was a vibrant congregation meeting in the church he had constructed. The following year (1913) Carscallen sent over a missionary, Alfred Matter, a German. This was the official establishment of the Kanyadoto Mission. Matter continued where Sparks had left, but then the First World War broke out, and Matter had to be interned in Kaimosi, nearly one hundred miles north. The work at Kanyadoto suffered largely on account of this. Sparks meanwhile was drafted to fight in the war and was discharged around 1916 when he met and married Alice Ellen Baron.

Alice was born in England in 1894 and came to British East Africa where she met Herbert. Although she was an Anglican, Sparks brought her to the Adventist faith. Alice and Herbert had a daughter named Dora Ellen born in November 1917. Alice came down with severe fever, and Herbert decided to take her to his native Durban to recuperate. Four days on arrival, she fell severely ill and died. They had been married less than two years. He returned to Kenya with the baby to Kanyadoto Mission in the south Kavirondo area (now part of Homa Bay County). It bears witness to the outreach of Herbert James Sparks, who preached to the local Luo people from

1911.

---

## SOURCES

"Sparks, Herbert James." *Europeans in East Africa*. Accessed March 31, 2021.

[http://www.europeansineastafrica.co.uk/\\_site/custom/database/default.asp?a=viewIndividual&pid=2&person=10711](http://www.europeansineastafrica.co.uk/_site/custom/database/default.asp?a=viewIndividual&pid=2&person=10711)

.

---

## NOTES

1. Unless stated otherwise, this article is based on "Sparks, Herbert James," *Europeans in East Africa*, accessed March 31, 2021, [http://www.europeansineastafrica.co.uk/\\_site/custom/database/default.asp?a=viewIndividual&pid=2&person=10711](http://www.europeansineastafrica.co.uk/_site/custom/database/default.asp?a=viewIndividual&pid=2&person=10711).
2. Isaiah Oyoo of Rapedhi (formerly Kanyadoto), interview by the author, March 31, 2021.
3. It was believed to be an act of witchcraft if one turned their back on you.

---

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000