



**GOVERNOR JOHN SPARKS**

*Born in Mississippi, on August 30, 1843*

*Governor of Nevada 1902-1908*

*Died on May 22, 1908, at Home on  
Alamo Farm, near Reno*





# EULOGY



---

---

## Delivered at Bier of Governor John Sparks

---

---

### Obituary Address of Hon. Frank H. Norcross, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Delivered at Reno, May 25, Being a Part of the Last Sad Rites in Honor of Nevada's Departed Executive

---

---

For the third time in the history of our state, the people of Nevada are mourning at the bier of a chief executive who has answered the summons of the death messenger while in the active discharge of his official duties. Throughout the state for the past four days our country's flag has been flying at the half mast, signifying that respect which the people are wont to pay to a distinguished official whose earthly labors have been prematurely cut off by the Great Reaper. In the present instance, however, the occasion which caused our nation's emblem to be lowered from its proud position, brought to the hearts and minds of the great majority of the people of this state something more than the mere idea of respect due because of the official position which the person, for the time being, held. It brought feelings of sadness and of personal loss that were manifested in the look and in the voice and in the word of the thousands in this state who knew John Sparks personally and well.

There is mourning in Nevada today, not so much because the governor is dead, as that the kindly, genial honest face of John Sparks will be seen no more in this life by his

friends who were counted a legion. Had our honored dead never have held official position, there would have been the same evidences of popular grief that are manifested here and throughout this commonwealth today.

That which drew to John Sparks the love and admiration of his fellow men was his strong and sterling character, his generous nature, his kindly disposition, his openhearted hospitality. He was built upon broad lines that were characteristic of the highest type of that great body of men who were pioneers of the west. He was a state builder. In one of the great industries of the intermountain region he held a pre-eminent position. As a stockman, his name became widely known not only for the magnitude of the business he conducted, but because he was one of the foremost breeders of fine-blooded stock in this country. A lover of fine animals, he delighted to have about him many varieties. His years of life upon the plains and in the mountains, made him an admirer of the elk and the buffalo, and these majestic animals were always counted a necessary part of his surroundings.



Some of you have seen the governor as I have, alight from the train at the Alamo farm, after a period of absence from home, attending upon his official duties, and have seen a dozen or more pet dogs rush to meet him with a joy too vociferously manifested to fail to betoken a devotion to their master that showed, more clearly than words could describe, that the heart of the man was big enough to hold a bond of sympathy with the brute creation. It has been said that "He who lives nearest to nature lives nearest to God." If this be true, few lived in a more harmonious relationship with their Maker than did Governor Sparks. A lover of nature he could not help but be a lover of his fellow man.

Born in the state of Mississippi, grown to manhood in the state of Texas, he was a type of the true southern gentleman of the old school, holding high above everything else his personal honor. He was proud of his ancestors, of his family, of the state of his birth, of that of his younger manhood and lastly of the state of his final adoption, whose governor a few days ago he was.

He was but a boy when the civil war broke out, but a man in thought and action, and he offered his life as a sacrifice, if need be, for the south he loved and the cause he believed to be right. But with him the war ended all differences and no more valiant lover of the flag, symbol of an indissoluble union, could be found in all this broad land than our beloved governor, whose mortal remains now lay in honored rest beneath the folds of Old Glory. I remember an incident that happened not long ago which exhibited better than words can describe how completely has been the restoration of affection and regard between those who wore the blue and those who once wore the gray. It was at a session of the board of pardons. A man was appealing for clemency. It was stated that he was a son of a certain distinguished Union general,

who fell at the battle of Atlanta, in 1864. When the board had gone into executive session, the governor said, "I was shooting lead into that general's army in 1864, and if the applicant is a son of that gallant officer I am going to vote to give him another chance." In that little instance was evidenced something of the character of the man who had so fully won the respect and love of the people with whom he came in contact.

Like Lincoln and Jackson, he was a man who had very largely acquired his education and knowledge of the world in the great school of life. That school which confers no degrees, but which is most exacting in its requirements and which commands the highest order of character and intelligence for ultimate success.

Many years of an active business life of very large proportions, were conducted with such high regard for the rights of his fellow man that he had justly earned the sobriquet of "Honest John Sparks," long before he or his friends ever thought of his entering political life. His life had been so full of adventure, or of active business pursuits, that political ambition or preferment had never entered his mind. He had always done his duty as a plain citizen and with this he was fully satisfied. But it is difficult for a man having the characteristics of John Sparks, his great personal popularity, his reputation for honorable and honest dealing, his commanding dignity and presence, to fail to be sought out by some political party which would realize that in him was a tower of strength and that in the candidacy of such a man, the ties of party would become but as spiders' webs, and that a nomination for office by whatever party, was the equivalent of a popular choice at the polls. So John Sparks could not fail in time to be asked to become a candidate for the most exalted office within the gift of the people. Not a seeker of political honors, unfamiliar with the duties of public office, he did not at first

take kindly to a proposition which for him meant a radical change in his life. Here was again exhibited something of the character of this strong sturdy man. Doubtless most of you read as I did a few days ago of that touching incident when, after friends and politicians had failed to secure his promise to permit his name to be used as a candidate, the request of his young son and the statement that he would like to have him run for governor accomplished what all the persuasions of friends and politicians had failed to secure. That little conversation with his son may and probably did have the effect of changing the course of life of a man and of influencing the destiny of a state.

For Governor Sparks, official life as chief executive of this state, was one of mingled pleasure and sadness. He took keen satisfaction and pride in the growing prosperity of Nevada during his administrations. He rejoiced in the fact that during his incumbency in office the world was becoming aware of the great undeveloped resources of this state, whose domain was so vast that it was almost an empire in itself. It was a pleasure to him to promote the welfare of this state in its struggle for the recognition of its true worth, the same as in the past it had been his pleasure to successfully direct vast business enterprises. But Governor Sparks had never before been in political life, and it was difficult, yea, almost impossible for him to pass with scant consideration criticism of his official acts. It was a revelation to him to find that there was a difference in private and political life in regard to the appreciation with which one's acts were sometimes received. A man of the highest honor and integrity, sensitive as he was proud, he was hurt by the things which those who were older in political experience would have regarded but as the concomitant of public office and would have passed unnoticed or with but slight consideration.

Governor Sparks' administration of

the affairs of state, while marked with success and the accomplishment of many objects of general public benefit, will always find greatest interest centered in the events of the last few months preceding his death. At a time when he was suffering from a bodily ailment which made life almost unbearable he was confronted with a question which called for the exercise of wise and considerate statesmanship. Few state executives have ever been called upon to make a more momentous decision than was Governor Sparks in November of last year. Well might any man in a similar position have said, "I am sick—too sick to consider a situation of such great importance. I will leave the matter to others, and will seek relief from the incessant pain which makes sleepless nights and life a burden." But John Sparks was made of a different kind of clay. A great problem was presented for him to decide. He was chief executive and the responsibility rested with him. He had never before in his life failed to do his duty, as God had given him the light to see his duty. He was not going to falter now let the consequence to himself be what it may. Never, I believe, did a man act with a more conscientious desire to do the right than did Governor Sparks during those trying times. He believed this state was on the verge of domestic trouble, which to avoid if possible, he felt was a duty that his oath of office imperatively imposed upon him, and him alone. He knew what had been the cost in lives and property in other states when that stage had been reached when cool and dispassionate judgment was dethroned and right became lost sight of, in a struggle between contending forces of might. To save the fair name of Nevada from such a struggle, to guarantee the supremacy of law and order, to do that which he believed was for the best interests of both contending forces and that of the great masses of the people of his state, was the sole impelling motive behind the



acts of the man whose memory we honor today. He believed as every intelligent man must sooner or later believe, that in the differences that from time to time arise between capital upon the one hand and labor upon the other, neither side can ever win a victory worth the having by violence or other perversion of the law, and that it makes no difference which side be the violator.

Governor Sparks had won the love of the toilers of Nevada. His sympathies were with them in every righteous struggle for the betterment of their conditions. I have heard him say, as many of you have heard him say, "that which I have done, I did as much in the interest of the miner as the mine owner." Those who knew John Sparks, knew that he meant what he said. Furthermore, what he did, was done at a time when he felt that the shadow of the hand of death was over him. Before this he had remarked to close friends that he would never live his term of office through. The malady from which he finally succumbed had already fastened its relentless clutches upon him. This is not the time nor the place to speak of the wisdom of those acts, fraught with so much effect upon the future of this state. At a time like this, when all that there is that really counts is a man's character, what he did amounts to very little in comparison with the motives that prompted his acts. The governor has gone before the Great White Throne, where alone is administered equal and exact justice and where the secrets of all hearts are known. There his loved ones and his friends who knew him best know that the unsullied purity with which his acts were done is indelibly recorded in the great book of life.

Whatever of mistakes, if any, John Sparks made, they were of the head

and not of the heart. Whether what he did was at the time necessary or wise or not, time alone can solve to the satisfaction of all, but be that as it may, the people of Nevada can today in the presence of this distinguished dead, thank Almighty God that throughout the state of Nevada peace, prosperity and law and order prevail.

As the south, and the north as well, finally grew to realize that the great heart of Abraham Lincoln was big enough to care for the interests and welfare of the south as well as the north, and that he, after all, was the best friend the south had, so the time will come when those who have felt that the governor had ceased to be their friend will realize that in him they had a truer friend than they ever knew. I predict that the time will come in Nevada when all the people of this state of whatever occupation or position, without a dissenting voice, will join in saying that no marble can be found too white to erect a monument that will symbolize and commemorate the civic virtues of Governor John Sparks.

His work on earth is ended. He has gone to his reward. A kind and devoted husband and father; a true and steadfast friend; a noble citizen; a faithful, honest and conscientious public official, a real gentleman, comprise in brief, the sum and substance of the life of John Sparks.

"Earth, let thy softest mantle rest  
On this worn child to thee returning  
Whose youth was nurtured at thy  
breast,  
Who loved thee with such tender  
yearning.  
He knew thy fields and woodland ways  
And counted every man a brother;  
Asleep, beyond our blame or praise,  
We yield him back, O gentle  
Mother!"