

# Jonesport Historical Society Newsletter

“Preserving Our Heritage”

Autumn 2022

## Message from the President

I am pleased to announce the elections of Aaron R. Dennis and Prof. Gregory A. Campbell, PhD, to the JHS Board of Directors.

Aaron R. Dennis was born in Trenton, NJ, and resided in nearby Ewingville until the age of 28. In 1969 Aaron enlisted in the US Army and was assigned to the Landsouth East NATO Headquarters in Izmir, Turkey. Upon returning to Ewingville, he attended the College of New Jersey, graduating *summa cum laude* with a bachelor's degree in Electronics Engineering Technology. Aaron left NJ to take an engineering position with General Electric in Somersworth, NH, then moved to Fort Wayne, IN, still employed by GE. Returning East he joined Hamilton Standard in Windsor Locks, CT, and ended his career retiring from the Bose Corporation in Framingham, MA. While living in Grafton, MA, Aaron lost his wife Linda in 2009 after 37 years of marriage. Aaron and Linda raised two boys, who still live in MA. Aaron subsequently married Holly Tomkinson of Holden, MA, who has three daughters; two in MA and one in VT. Aaron and Holly moved to China, ME, in 2012 and to Jonesport in 2016.

Greg Campbell started out as a “poor naïve clam digger” raised in Sedgwick on the Down East coast of Maine and graduated from George Stevens Academy in Blue Hill in 1960. Then he attended the University of Maine at Orono completing the work for his BS, MS, and PhD in Chemical Engineering. His 50-year technical career included employment at General Motors, Mobil Chemical, Clarkson University, and now as a consultant. He has been active as an administrator serving the Clarkson community as Chemical Engineering Department Chair, University Chief Information Officer, and Dean of Engineering, retiring in 2008. He also served on the Executive Committee and as Treasurer of International Polymer Processing Society, and the Executive Committee and Treasurer of the International Society of Plastics Engineers. He has been active in community service, serving as President of both the Potsdam, NY, and Machias, ME, Rotary Clubs, District Governor Rotary International District 7040, and Board Member of Down East Community Hospital. He has taught several courses for Sunrise Senior College. Also, about 12 years ago, he chaired the Jonesport Comprehensive Planning Committee developing a plan that cleared the way for the state to finance the new fire house. He has served as moderator for several Jonesport Town Meetings.

*Bill Plaskon, President*

## 2022 Board of Directors

### Officers:

*William Plaskon, President  
Jean Guptill, Vice President  
Charles Alley, V.P. Emeritus  
Nancy Sawyer, Treasurer  
Ashley Faulkingham, Secretary  
Eric Kelley Jr., Historian*

### Directors:

*Gregory Campbell  
Aaron Dennis  
Leland Faulkingham Jr.  
Andrew Hutnik  
Betty Kelley*

## An Old Tool with Many Connections

by Bill Plaskon

Art and Debby Scipione are Jonesport Historical Society Members. Art is a collector of old tools and has identified many of the tools on display in the JHS Museum. Art's friend Robert Groves is a tool collector from the nearby town of Addison. Robert had a tool called an adze that Art was interested in buying when Robert told him it had some connection with the Addison people who sailed on the *Nellie Chapin* from Jonesport in 1866 to establish a colony in Jaffa, Palestine, hoping to speed up the second coming of Christ. Robert had purchased the adze from the nephew of Leander Bradford Wass from Addison after Leander died in 2011 at the age of 85. Leander was a direct descendant of William Bradford who came over on the *Mayflower* in 1620. After some discussion, Robert and Art decided that the tool belonged in the JHS Museum, which maintains an extensive history of that Jaffa colony. So on June 14, 2022, Robert and Carol Groves, along with Art and Debby Scipione, donated a piece of history to the Jonesport Historical Society.

An adze is a hand tool for shaping and dressing wood, often used in the building of ships. It has a long slender curved iron blade set at right angle to the long handle. The wooden handle of this adze has the name "E.K. Emerson" burned into it. That gave me a great start in tracking the original owner of the tool.

Edward Knowles Emerson was born in Addison in 1838. He was married to Rosanna Kelley Donovan, the great-great-granddaughter of William Hix (also spelled Hicks). William Hix is the earliest known European to live in Jonesport. In 1772 he was living on the point at Sawyer Cove, which property he sold in the 1780s to John Sawyer, the grandfather of D.J. and E.M. Sawyer, owners of the general store that is now the home of Jonesport Historical Society. Incidentally, JHS member and professional genealogist Linda Harvey is the sixth great-granddaughter of William Hix.

The 1860 census of Jonesport shows that E.K. Emerson was a sea captain, then a house and ship carpenter at the Indian River section of town. In August 1866 he and his wife Rosanna, along with their 5-year-old son, Elmer, sailed on the *Nellie Chapin* to Jaffa with about 150 other followers of Rev. G.J. Adams. Here is where the connection of the tool's owners starts to grow. The shipbuilder of the *Nellie Chapin* was Leander A. Knowles, the first cousin three times removed of Leander Bradford Wass, from whose nephew Robert Groves purchased the adze. Also, the captain of the *Nellie Chapin* to Jaffa was Warren Wass, the second cousin three times removed of Leander Bradford Wass. Furthermore, E.K. Emerson was the first cousin twice removed of Leander Bradford Wass.

As described in the book *The ForeRunners* by Reed and Jean Holmes, E.K. Emerson played the fiddle in March 1867 at a grand reception of dignitaries from seven countries at G.J. Adams's house in Jaffa. But two months later Rosanna and her son returned to the U.S. to escape the hardships of life at Jaffa. By October, Edward could no longer take the abuses of Adams and tried to return to the U.S. with 38 other desperate colonists.

(Connections continued, page 3)



The E. K. Emerson adze donated to JHS by Robert and Carol Groves and Art and Debby Scipione.



Art Scipione with the donated adze.

(Connections continued)

Mark Twain, who was touring the Holy Land at that time on the vessel *Quaker City*, heard about the misfortune of the group and was instrumental in getting a wealthy passenger to pay the passage in gold for Emerson and 24 others. Twain later wrote about his encounter with these colonists in his book *Innocents Abroad*.

Like many of the disappointed colonists, the Emersons did not want to return to live among their former neighbors, so they settled in Massachusetts where Edward worked as a house carpenter. After Rosanna died in 1881 he married Mary Asenath (Libby) Black in 1882. He retired in 1904 and returned to Addison. He died in 1912 at a veterans' hospital in Maine.

This story was made possible thanks to professional Downeast genealogists Leonard F. Tibbetts, Darryl Lamson, and Linda Harvey; and to JHS genealogists Charlie Alley, Cathy Perry, and Donnie Woodward, all of whose research is saved on the JHS Genealogy, Cemeteries and Archives databases.

## A Poor Little Rich Girl from Jonesport

by Darryl B. Lamson

*In American social history, there have been a number of heiresses to fortunes whose lives and tribulations have been covered in popular news as a “poor little rich girl”—such as Barbara Hutton, Gloria Vanderbilt, and Doris Duke. While Jonesport families have had much smaller fortunes and less publicity for an heiress, there is at least one case where financial security did not ensure happiness.*

Helena Irene “Lena” Nelson was born at Jonesport, Maine, 14 August 1887<sup>(1)</sup>, the only child of William B. and his second wife Iretta Nancy “Etta” (Donovan) Nelson. Lena’s father was a prosperous sea captain and part-owner of more than a half dozen sailing vessels. The family lived at Jonesport in summers<sup>(2)</sup> and at Linden (part of Malden), Massachusetts, in winters. Lena was probably pampered, and as a teenager was sent to the Moses Brown School for Young Ladies in Providence, Rhode Island, a finishing school.

Lena married at Linden 19 June 1911 Franklin Forrest Sparks<sup>(3)(4)</sup>, who was born at Advance, Indiana, in 1882, son of Charles M. and Elsie Mae (Fishback) Sparks. He had a B. A. degree from Wabash College in 1907 and an advanced degree from Harvard University in 1911. He taught as a high-school principal at Augusta, Georgia, 1911—14; at Mountain Home, Idaho, 1914—17; then was superintendent of schools at Townsend and at Augusta, Montana. He retired in the 1930s to Vashon, Washington, on an island across Puget Sound from Seattle. He is remembered as a driven and controlling person<sup>(5)</sup>.

For the births of her first four children, Lena returned to her parents’ home at Linden. By the time her father died at Jonesport in January 1922 aged 67, Lena and her family were living in Montana, where her four younger children were born. Her widowed mother reluctantly went to live with her brother Charles and his wife Alice Donovan, but didn’t like living with them, was depressed, and hanged herself in their barn in August 1923 aged 61<sup>(6)</sup>. Lena’s parents left her a trust fund which was still disbursing money that was reported periodically in the *Machias Valley News Observer* until the late 1970s<sup>(7)</sup>.

(Poor Little Rich Girl continued, page 4)



Lena Nelson



Etta (Donovan) Nelson

(**Poor Little Rich Girl** continued)

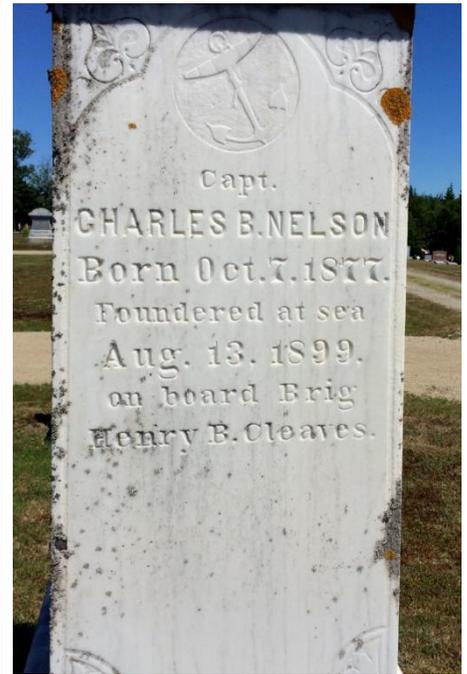
Until the mother's suicide, everything seemed to be well on the surface, but it wasn't. During most of the latter part of her life, Lena was in and out of mental institutions<sup>(8)</sup>. This may have been triggered in May 1935 when her youngest child, Ellis, drowned at Augusta, Montana, at the age of 3. There are indications that Lena's mother, Etta, and her paternal grandmother, Esther (Rogers) Donovan, had "delicate" or unstable dispositions<sup>(9)</sup>, and Lena may have inherited some of that instability, but kept it under control in her earlier years.

Lena's situation, however, may have been the result of a family tragedy when she was 12. Her parents agreed to give her a big party for her twelfth birthday. She had a 21-year-old half-brother from her father's first marriage, whom she rarely saw, and he was invited. Charles B. Nelson was serving as captain of their father's brig *Henry B. Cleaves*, and intended to sail it to Jonesport for the party, but the vessel was lost with her crew of eight in a storm on 13 August 1899<sup>(10)</sup>, the day before Lena's birthday. This was devastating mentally and financially. Over time, the sense that her brother died because of her birthday party and that it was all her fault, may have become too much to cope with, and she was institutionalized.

During this latter part of her life, Lena's remaining son, Charles, died in 1968; daughters Elsie and Emma both died in 1972; and husband Franklin died in 1974 aged 91; but the mental damage had probably long since been done. Lena herself died in Seattle, Washington, 6 April 1978<sup>(11)</sup> aged 90 years. All the education and financial security that her parents were able to give her couldn't overcome the early emotional trauma that had happened. It seemingly took years before it was too much.

### Notes and Sources:

- (1) *The Donovan Family of Jonesport, Maine*, by Darryl B. Lamson with Linda Harvey.
- (2) The Nelson house has been torn down. It was behind the house at 2 Mason Bay Rd.
- (3) Massachusetts marriage record on Ancestry.com.
- (4) Biography of Franklin F. Sparks in *Montana: Its Story and Biography*, Volume III.
- (5) Telephone conversation on 3 October 2006 with Lena's adopted granddaughter Debbie (Koyle) Helsloot of Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada. She has a "passion" for psychology and sociology.
- (6) The late Jonesport resident Lelia (Mitchell) Bagley (1891—1982) recalled in a conversation in the 1960s that her son Virgil Eugene Bagley (1912—2001) and his friend were playing around Charles Donovan's barn that day and discovered her body; they both had nightmares for many years with visions of the hanging body with bulging eyes.
- (7) Washington County [Maine] Probate File for Helena Nelson Sparks.
- (8) Conversation with Mildred (Donovan) Lamson in 1965.
- (9) Delta County [Michigan] Homestead Documents for Arthur Leighton.
- (10) Charles' death date taken from grave marker in Greenwood Cemetery at Jonesport. Lloyd's of London Casualty Returns shows the *Henry B. Cleaves* left Gonaives, Hayti, 27 July 1899 for Stamford, Connecticut, and was not heard from again.
- (11) Lena was buried in Greenwood Memorial Park at Renton, Washington, with her husband (Find-A-Grave on Ancestry.com).



Grave marker of Lena's half-brother, Capt. Charles B. Nelson, Greenwood Cemetery, Jonesport

### Photos:

- Lena (Nelson) Sparks photo from Linda Harvey.
- Etta (Donovan) Nelson photo from Linda Harvey.
- Capt. Charles B. Nelson grave marker photo from Find-A-Grave website.

**Author Darryl Lamson's comment:** Lena (Nelson) Sparks was a cousin to my grandmother Mildred (Donovan) Lamson (1895—1972) and to Linda Harvey's great-grandmother Edna (Donovan) Harvey (1902—1964).

—DBL

**Membership Form (Q)  
2022**

**Please print all information clearly. Use a separate form for each person. Membership is 5.00 per year per person.**

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**E-Mail** \_\_\_\_\_ **Contact me about volunteering**

\$ 5.00 **2022 Membership**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **2023 Membership (\$5.00)**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **2024 Membership (\$5.00)**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **Tax Deductible Donation**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **Total Amount**

**Make check payable to *Jonesport Historical Society***

**Mail to: Jonesport Historical Society**

**P.O. Box 603**

**Jonesport, ME 04649**

Jonesport Historical Society

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**NOTICE:**

Until the COVID-19 restrictions are over, the Jonesport Historical Society Museum and Heritage Center will be open in 2022 only upon request May through October. Please call to make an appointment.