

## Park/e/s Research B.P.S (*Before* The Parke Society)

By Ken Parks PS#1406

I'm assuming most of you, as members, know that the Parke Society came into being in 1963 as a family association for descendants of Robert Parke (1580 – 1665), who arrived in America aboard the Winthrop Fleet. In a few short years the Parke Society expanded its scope, becoming a surname society encompassing all Park, Parke, Parks, or Parkes lineages in North America. In the six decades of its existence, the Society has amassed an impressive database of Park/e/s-named individuals, drawing mainly from the lineage information submitted by its members.

What research did the Parke Society and its members have at their disposal back in 1963? Obviously, the age of online genealogical research was decades in the future, so I thought it would be interesting to take a look at what research was done prior to the Society's founding, how it was done back then, and some of the researchers who published their findings about our Park/e/s forebears.

Frank Sylvester Parks

Probably the first name that comes to mind is that of Frank Sylvester Parks (1861-1937) who grew up in Palmer, Massachusetts and Washington, D. C. In 1894 he went to Boston as an accountant and actuary. He published his first book, "Genealogy of the Parke Families of Connecticut" in 1906, and describes its origin thus:

"This book is the result of a casual visit to the Boston Public Library in September 1899. The compiler, then residing in Boston, noticed upon a shelf in that library a history of his native town, Palmer, Mass., and on looking over its pages, came across his own name, together with that of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Up to that time he had not known his great-grandfather's name and had never had any curiosity to know it...From that point he started in systematically to discover the name of his great-great-grandfather, and for three months spent all his evenings poring over genealogies and local town histories, in the Boston Public Library, looking for all items about the family name and taking notes of them.

Having obtained considerable information through this source, it was decided to send out circulars to other members of the family, and, if results would warrant it, publish in book form all the facts that were secured. At that time, however, it was not realized what a stupendous undertaking it would be."

Over the years, Frank Sylvester Parks published several other books on Park/e/s genealogy, and his books are available online at the following site:

[www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/frank-sylvester-parks.shtml](http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/frank-sylvester-parks.shtml)

In his first book, Frank Sylvester Parks mentions a number of earlier Park/e/s histories published prior to his first book:

“As far as known this book is the first successful attempt to publish a list of the Parke and Parks families of Connecticut. It is said that Paul Park wrote a genealogy of Robert Parke's descendants in 1763. Hezekiah Ripley Parke is supposed to have compiled and written out his branch of the family about 1847. Hudson Hovey Parke attempted a genealogy of Robert Parke's family about 1887, but did not live to publish it. Mr. Edwin H. Park published a very good genealogy of his branch of the Robert Parke family in 1902\*.

The "History of Windham County, N. H.,"\* contains a very complete account of the descendants of Alexander Park, who is supposed to have come from Ireland in 1728, and landed in Boston; finally settling in Windham. Bond's "History of Watertown," Mass., contains several generations of the descendants of Richard Parke, of Cambridge, Mass., who came from London, in the ship "Defence," in 1636. In 1888, Mr. Levi Wesson Park, of Chicago, published a small book: "Family Record of Levi Park, of Bernardston, Mass." Levi was a descendant of Richard. Rev. C. C. Park published a record of the Peter Park family in 1876\*; and W. J. Park, of Covington, Ky., published in 1880, "The Park Family of Washington Co., Pa."\*

Dr. C. R. Parke, of Bloomington, Ills., compiled in Ms. a list of the descendants of Arthur Parke, of Pennsylvania, who came from Ireland before 1744. The "History of Rye, N. Y.," contains a record of some descendants of Roger Park, who is supposed to have come from France before 1699.”

\* These books are in the Parke Society Library

Charles Wellman Parks

Rear Admiral Charles Wellman Parks (1863-1930) was another researcher who, like Frank Sylvester Parks, worked in Washington, D. C. for a time, and the two may have met there. He had a distinguished career quite apart from his contributions to his Parks family research.

Even though these two gentlemen worked in Washington, D. C. for a number of years, it's doubtful they had access to census records for their research. The U.S. Census Bureau was established as a permanent agency within the Department of the Interior in 1902. Prior to that, the work was performed by a temporary office overseen by other agencies, including the Department of State and Department of Interior. The first censuses were conducted by U.S. Marshals and their assistants, and replaced by specially-appointed and trained census takers in 1880. An online search failed to turn up the date when census data was first made available to the public, but it was most likely well after the two Parks researchers mentioned above published their findings. Most likely, they relied on local town records, published histories, as well as the aforementioned circular letters sent out to acquire names and dates of various branches of the Park/e/s lineages they researched.

Likewise, other Park/e/s books found in the Parke Society Library published prior to the Society's founding in 1963 were likely compiled using similar sources and methods. Among these are the works of Nell Park Gum, Zella Armstrong and Janie Preston Collup French, Robert L. Park, Owen Biddle, Nathan Grier Parke II, John P. Wallace, Henry William Clark, Edward A. Parks, Leonard A. Morrison, Helen Kuhn Jackson Black, Rev. C. C. Park, and Edwin H. Park.

### The More Recent Past

Those Park/s/s genealogists who began researching in the 1970s would have had access to microfilmed census records, but because of the 72 year restriction on availability to the public, the most recent census available in the 1970s would have been the 1900 census, which was made public in 1972. By the time I began making trips to the National Archives branch in New York City in the early 2000s, the 1930 census, which became available in 2002, began to make information available for my parents' and grandparents' generations.

The amount of information available online began to grow in the early 2000s, with many county message boards, and some dedicated exclusively to a surname, making it possible to connect with others researching their Park/e/s ancestors. Ancestry publishing, founded in 1983, launched Ancestry.com in 1996, paving the way for online family history. They launched the first online census images in 2000, and completed the 1930 census in 2003. In addition to a host of other databases, they became a major force in changing the way genealogical records became available to the wider public.

The LDS church has a long history of microfilming records of genealogical interest, and for many years those records could only be accessed by visiting a Family History Center, or obtaining microfilmed records on loan, usually to a local library or historical society. More recently, FamilySearch.org, the online face of the church's family history organization, has made a concerted effort to digitize its collections, making more and more of its holdings available, free of charge, on its website. More online genealogical companies have come into being, but these two are arguably the two main players in the field of online genealogical research at present.

While there is definitely still a need for onsite visits to local courthouses and other repositories, the world of online genealogy has transformed the way we now conduct family research. Where once the only people able to actively research their roots by traveling, spending time and money on trips to various locations, were those who either had that freedom later in life when they were retired, or when their family and work obligations permitted travel and time spent in onsite research. Now anyone with a computer can access information anytime of the day or night without leaving home. Adding the relatively new tool of DNA testing in the early 2000s, we can now learn things about our ancestors that those early Park/e/s researchers could hardly imagine! Will our descendants in a generation or two look back and likewise find our research methods rather limited and quaint? To coin a phrase, "only time will tell."