

Justice Keith F. Sparks

Placer Superior Court 1977-1981

Third District Court of Appeal 1981-1997

Justice Keith F. Sparks was born on March 19, 1933 in Sacramento, California. Following graduation from Placer High School he received his Bachelor of Arts and Juris Doctorate degrees from University of California, Berkley. He served briefly in the U.S. Navy before beginning his practice of law in Placer County. His father, Lowell L. Sparks, served as the Placer County District Attorney, before serving as a Placer Couty Superior Court Judge, devoting nearly 34 years in public service. Justice Sparks served as the Roseville City Attorney and Chief District Attorney before his appointment to the Placer County Superior Court Bench in 1977. After serving four years on the Superior Court, he was appointed to serve on the Third District Court of Appeal in 1981.

Justice Sparks is remembered as a highly respected jurist. He is also known for his kindness, compassion and decency. Justice Sparks is described by his friend and colleague Justice George Nicholson as follows: “Justice Sparks was a careful and conscientious jurist. His opinions were meticulously researched and eloquently written. He was humble, polite, and gentle, while wise, courageous and strong. He bent when he should and stood tall when he should. He was a wonderful friend and a joy as a colleague, on and off the bench.”

Justice Sparks authored many definitive appellate decisions, including the *Horn* case, analyzing the historical underpinnings of the insanity defense. During a special session honoring him in 2024, Third District Court of Appeal Presiding Justice Laurie Earl stated: “During his tenure at the Third District Court of Appeal, Justice Sparks wrote the majority published opinion in 237 cases, as well as 9 published concurrences and 7 published dissents. He was also a force behind the creation of the court’s internal opinion repository, which led to countless efficiencies in the days before online research services began collecting nonpublished and partially published opinions.”

In his retirement, Justice Sparks continued his service to the community and was instrumental in the creation of the Sparks Law Library in Auburn, which currently serves lawyers, law students and self-represented litigants, providing practical materials and legal resources.

Justice Sparks married his high school sweetheart, Mary Hughes, in 1954 and they were married for 66 years; they had four children, Kathryn, Thomas, Theodore and Christian. He passed away at his home surrounded by his family.