

Distillery Women: Sarah Bright Worts (1817 – 1876)



**Sarah Bright Worts, 1860s, mistress of *Lindenuold*
Photographed in Toronto**

Gooderham & Worts was a strikingly male workplace for most of its history. But women – family members, visitors, and occasionally workers – did find their way to the distillery by Lake Ontario. Among these was Sarah Bright Worts, who grew up near the distillery, married [James G. Worts](#), gave birth to nine children and was mistress of the Worts' family estate, [Lindenuold](#), until her death in 1876.

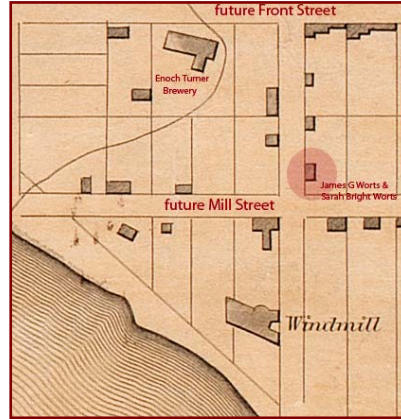
Sarah Bright was born in 1817, the fourth daughter of Thomas Bright and his (so far unnamed) wife. Compared to the pioneering Bright family, the Gooderhams and Worts were newcomers to York / Toronto. The first Brights arrived in 1799 from England via Trois-Rivières, Quebec. The patriarch, Louis Bright, had served seven years in the British army during the American Revolutionary War. In Little York, he established his family in a small, “slab shanty” on King Street West (between York and Bay Streets), apparently rented to him by a “coloured man by the name of Franklin.” Eventually, Louis became a butcher and lived for many years just east of the Don River on Kingston Road (later Queen Street). Various descendants fought in the War of 1812 (son John was with Brock at Queenston Heights) and settled in the eastern part of York/Toronto.

Among these was Sarah's father, butcher Thomas Bright. Little is known about him. But his name does appear on a June 1830 map as the owner of two, half-acre plots of land just east of [Taddle Creek](#) and north of where

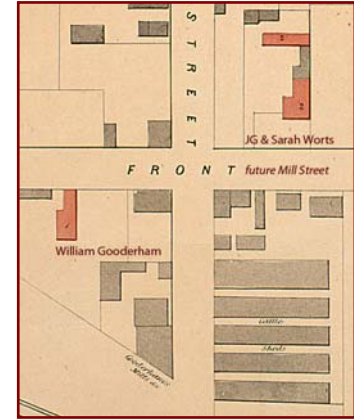
Gooderham & Worts' windmill would rise in 1831-32. This suggests an interest in land speculation or development – a common pastime in early York.



Thomas Bright's lots, 1830 MNR



JG & Sarah Worts, 1842 CTA



Worts' estate, 1858 TPL

Sarah Bright, her siblings and cousins grew up in the general area surrounding what would become the Distillery District. In the spring of 1832, James Worts bought a house on King Street East near the Don River, very close to where at least some Brights resided. Perhaps young James Gooderham Worts met young Sarah Bright at this time, when they were both in their early teens. No doubt she watched Worts Senior's windmill tower rise to scrape the sky of Little York during the fall of 1831. Perhaps she comforted JG in February 1834 when he lost both his mother (who died in childbirth) and his father (who committed suicide after the death of his wife). Undoubtedly, as the thirties progressed, she heard more and more about the business of milling ... and her favourite miller.

On October 1, 1840, Sarah Bright and James Gooderham Worts were married and settled into a small house near the corner of Mill and Trinity Streets, likely the dwelling highlighted on a detail from the 1842 Cane map. While JG tended to business – becoming a full partner in 1845 with good Uncle William (Gooderham) who had raised him – Sarah undoubtedly tended to family matters. Giving birth (ultimately to three sons and six daughters, of whom two sons and five daughters survived). Raising children. Overseeing a large household. Organizing social life. Actively participating in the life of Little Trinity Church just up the street.

By the 1850s, the Worts' estate of *Lindenwold* was taking root at the northeast corner of Mill (then called Front) and Trinity Streets. Ironically – given JG's later reprimands of daughter Clara for extravagant spending – JG's estate was already considerably larger than his uncle's on the south side of Mill (then Front) Street). (See 1858 map.) It continued to grow throughout the 1860s until it reached the size and substance displayed by the single surviving photograph. According to *The Globe* of December 1, 1868, Mr. J. G. Worts had made a substantial addition to his residence that “consists of a wing, and enlarges the house considerably.” The photograph of the house was probably taken in the late 1860s or early 1870s. Although the image is too blurry to be certain, Sarah may be standing on the verandah with a group of four daughters to her left (our right).

Church and home were twin pillars of Sarah Worts' life. From the time Little Trinity Church opened in 1844, the family-supported local church became the focus of religious life, so much so that after their deaths, JG's and Sarah's children placed plaques honouring their parents in the church. JG had served as Vestry Clerk for over 30 years and the family had given liberally to support the church and congregation.

It was here, too, that religious and social occasions mixed when Worts' children were married. In April 1870, for example, Little Trinity was filled to capacity with Worts, Gooderhams and many other prominent Torontonians to witness the wedding of Clara to bank manager A. M. Cosby. An unidentified newspaper reporter noted, "The rustle of costly silks and the hum of whispered conversations, alone broke the solemn silence within the sacred edifice, when, shortly before the appointed hour, the organ pealed forth the strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March."

After the ceremony, all repaired to nearby *Lindenwold* where Sarah Bright Worts presided over a splendid wedding "déjeuner."



Invitation to Clara's wedding at Little Trinity & déjeuner at Lindenwold, April 27, 1870

Signs of social and financial success surrounded Sarah and her brood. Not only did the family enjoy considerable luxury at home, it also ventured forth into the wider world, including visiting Montreal in 1864. While there, several members had their portraits taken by Canada's foremost photographer, William Notman. JG posed first, standing and appearing ready to take on the business elite in Canada's largest city. Then four Worts women posed, one after the other. Sarah sat first, holding a book and resting an arm on a music box or instrument – all telling comments about her accomplishments or aspirations. Then three daughters posed, standing up, dressed in nearly identical dresses and severe hairstyles – eminently proper Victorians, one and all.



Sarah Worts, 1864
McCord Notman I-12089.1



Charlotte Worts, 1864
McCord Notman I-12090.1



Clara Worts, 1864
McCord Notman I-12092.1



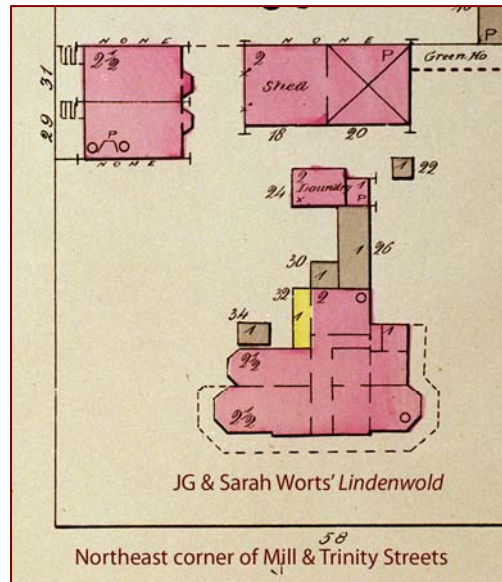
Emily Worts, 1864
McCord Notman I-12091.1

Sarah Bright Worts, 58, died at home in *Lindenwold* on June 30, 1876. She was survived by a grieving husband and seven of her children. After a funeral,

likely at Little Trinity Church, she was laid to rest in St. James Cemetery where other family members would join her in due course. In an era when few women merited public mention either in life or death, a rare obituary by an anonymous but long-time friend appeared in (an unidentified) newspaper. Naturally it sang the praises of this kindly lady by the lake.

OBITUARY.—The Late Mrs. Worts
 Died on the 30th of June, of a very painful illness, which she bore with great patience and resignation, Mrs Sarah Worts, wife of Mr James G Worts, and fourth daughter of the late Mr Thomas Bright, so well and favourably known by the old settlers and "pioneers" of little York. The writer has been intimately acquainted with the deceased lady for more than forty years, and can bear testimony to her "goodness and loving kindness through all the relations of life, as girl, wife and mother, sister and friend; and through all those years from girlhood to the last hour of her life, he never knew her to do an unkind or inconsiderate act. To her relatives and friends, she was ever ready to extend a helping hand, and in the true sense that the right hand knew not what the left hand did; and no person appealed to her in vain for assistance. Even to the last hour of her life, when she was racked with pain, she did not forget her usual kindness, and completely forgot herself in thinking of the welfare and convenience of others. Though she did not parade her religion before the world, she was a true Christian in the broadest sense of the term, her piety being eminently practical and useful to all in her day and generation, never missing an opportunity to do good or exercise her bounty. In fact, her character may be summed up in the few and expressive words, "that a better woman never lived."
 (COMMUNICATED)

Sarah Bright Worts, July 1876



Lindenwold, 1880

Thanks to Douglas Worts, Deboarah Brooker-McKinley and "Clara's Girls - Edna, Jane & Deborah" for sharing photographs and information about Sarah Bright Worts and her daughters.

Information about the Brights is scattered, some appearing in John Ross Robertson's *Landmarks of Toronto*, volume 2, pages 678-680, and some in the 1885 *History of Toronto and County of York, Ontario*. Almost nothing deals directly with Sarah, except the obituaries and ephemera shared by her descendants.

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