



**ONCE UPON A TIME IN NORTH PARK**  
**The Search for Harry J. Kelly**  
**By Katherine Hon**

When we research the past, we often focus on buildings and major events. But tales from history (and her story) are about people. In North Park, ordinary and extraordinary people walked our halls through the Roaring Twenties, the Depression, and two World Wars. They worried about work, rejoiced in family, and suffered loss. Is it fanciful to think that some of their energy remains? Is tracing the arc of a life that shared our space a worthwhile pursuit? You decide.

The first couple to own this writer's unassuming bungalow on Dwight Street was Harry J. Kelly and his wife Julia Helen. City directories first show them in the house in 1923. The early city directories indicate occupations, and Harry is listed as a Detective with the San Diego Police Department. Over the next 20 years, he advanced to Chief of Detectives, and served as Acting Chief of Police from April 28 to July 18, 1939. He disappeared from San Diego directories after 1945. I became interested in this person. Where was he before he bought my house? What did he look like? Where was he from? Did Harry and Julia have children? Could there be family still living in San Diego? What was his job like? When did he die, and where was he buried?

Finding Harry before Dwight Street was easy – just additional searching in the city directories. He's first listed in 1913, living at 1803 I Street, and working as a warehouseman for Cook-Haddock Co., a wholesale grocers. This is his occupation until 1916, when his occupation is "Police." He moves among various downtown addresses, including the Maryland Hotel on F Street, until purchasing the Dwight Street bungalow.

Finding Harry's photo was more of a challenge. The San Diego Police Museum at 205 G Street had a display board with photos of all the Chiefs of Police. Disappointedly, since Harry was only "acting" for 2 ½ months, his picture was not on the board. (Thanks to Steve Willard, Vice President of the San Diego Police Historical Association, that oversight has now been corrected.) But the Annual Police Relief Fund Souvenir albums produced in the early 1920's had photos of police force members, and under the title of Detective Sergeant was a 30-year-old Harry Kelly, chiseled, dark-haired, with an enigmatic smile.

To discover Harry's family, I turned to the federal census. On-line genealogical databases like Ancestry.com (accessible on city library computers) make searching for individuals simple, if you know the year and place of birth to sort your person of interest from others with the same name. Through the Police Museum records I learned Harry was born in 1891 in Piqua, Ohio. I found Harry and Julia in the 1920 census on I Street in San Diego, with no children. They were in the 1930 census on Dwight Street, again with no children. End of the line. But maybe he or Julia had brothers or sisters? Yes! In the 1900 census for Piqua, Ohio, Harry is listed with his father William (an Irish blacksmith born in Canada), mother Margaret, an older brother and sister, and two younger brothers. In subsequent censuses, however, his siblings stay in Ohio. No apparent California connections. What about Julia's family? Her maiden name would be on their marriage license. The 1930 census noted Harry's age at marriage was 27. From this I surmised they were married in 1918. The San Diego Historical Society Research Library in Balboa Park has log books with marriage licenses from 1871 to 1959. The information is arranged strictly chronologically – no indexing by name. If you don't know the actual date, you have to start turning pages and pray that the bride didn't want a winter wedding. After flipping many pages, there they were, uniting at Our Lady of Angels Church on June 3, 1918. The marriage license listed Julia's maiden name, and the names of both sets of parents. Hitting the city directories again, I found Julia and her older sister Augusta in San Diego from 1910; over the next several years they were joined by brothers Martin and Joseph, sister Rose, and mother Catherine. Because Julia's maiden name was unusual, the family was easy to track to the present, and I had the pleasure of speaking with the wife of a nephew (son of Julia's brother Martin), who shared a few stories that she remembered her late husband telling, including how Harry would be lying on the couch smoking a cigar and reading the Police Gazette when the relatives came over for Sunday visits.

Next issue: A policeman's job, and completing the life arc.