

ONCE UPON A TIME IN NORTH PARK

Walter Weymouth, the Policeman Who Lived

By Katherine Hon

History has a funny way of changing just when you think you have the facts straight. Walter Weymouth, a North Park/University Heights resident in the early 1900's, was a patrolman with the San Diego Police Department. He worked alongside Walter Bellon, a public health officer who helped clean up the Gaslamp when it was the Stingaree. In those early days, saloons, gambling halls, and brothels thrived along the waterfront. Health officer Bellon wrote, "Many strange things happened during our campaign for better health conditions about town. Some complaints related to police measures, others pointed to unsanitary conditions, at times both went together." He goes on to tell the story of how Weymouth went with him to confront an elderly man causing "considerable annoyance, and unrest for his neighbors, by his suspicious actions." This man greeted the health inspector on his porch with a double bladed axe over his shoulder. "Walter Weymouth well equipped for this type of work, took possession of the axe. The battle was over." The police intervention had a happy outcome, as Bellon related he learned later that the man's "entire attitude changed for the better and he became a friendly neighbor."

Sadly, police lore had it that Weymouth was shot sometime in 1916, perhaps ambushed for stepping on too many toes, and died soon afterward. Indeed, the San Diego Union reports on March 16, 1916 under the headline **POLICEMAN SHOT; EXPECTED TO DIE**, that Patrolman W. A. Weymouth was shot, probably fatally, at about 2:30 that morning. The shooting took place at 8th and K Street. The next day the paper runs a photo of Weymouth, under the caption, "Recent Portrait of Patrolman Walter A. Weymouth, Shot and Probably Fatally Wounded." This article states, "Patrolman Weymouth, suffering agony, but making a brave fight for life, was said last night at the Agnew hospital to have about 'one chance in a hundred.' Shot through the abdomen, only his superb physical constitution can pull him through, said physicians as they shook their heads doubtfully." In near-obituary style, the article says Weymouth "recently worked for the police department with sanitary inspectors of the health department, but was transferred to an early morning berth. He was a member of the police department baseball team, which played the firemen some months ago. He had been on the department about a year, and because of his good nature and close attention to duty was well liked." The following day an article about the manhunt notes, "Weymouth is at the Agnew hospital in critical condition." But then other news dominates the headlines.

Did Weymouth die? Historical records continue his story. The San Diego Jail Register and Record of Arrests shows Weymouth back to work in August 1916. His work continues into 1917, making arrests for vagrancy, violating probation, and drunkenness. In the November 1917 arrest records, Weymouth is listed as a U.S. Agent. His change of employer is verified by the San Diego City Directory, which lists his occupation as Special Employee, U.S. Department of Justice. Walter A. Weymouth, age 36, is in the

1920 Census living in San Diego at 3947 Utah Street with his wife and 6-year-old daughter. His occupation is Special Agent, U.S. Investigation Bureau. The 1919 and 1920 City Directory similarly lists his occupation as special agent, U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Investigation. Weymouth apparently stayed in enforcement work although he left San Diego by 1921. He is in the 1930 Census with his wife and 16-year-old daughter in Pasadena, California, and working as a Detective with the "Agency." He was a long-time survivor of his wounds, still collecting a police pension in 1945-46.

Did the newspaper get it wrong? No. A small article on March 21, 1916 set among headlines about the war in Germany, anarchistic speeches from Industrial Workers of the World, and the search for Poncho Villa reads, "Wounded Patrolman Expected to Recover." The article states, "Walter A. Weymouth, patrolman, shot by a thug recently, is thought by his physicians to have a good chance of recovery. At the Agnew hospital he continues to improve and City Surgeon Crabtree is inclined to believe that the danger is over." Accounts of his death were understandable, but exaggerated. That's history for you!