

The Origins of the San Bernardino Police Department
May 15, 1905

By 1850, California had won independence from Mexico in the Mexican-American War and had been admitted into the union as a state. In 1851, a group of 500 Mormon men, women, and children in 150 wagons arrived in the San Bernardino valley. In February of 1852, the Mormon pioneers purchased the 40,000-acre San Bernardino Rancho from the Lugo family for \$77,000. The Mormons built a stockade on the property to protect themselves from raiding desert Indians and named it Fort San Bernardino.

As the population increased, up to 1,200 people, so did the need for law enforcement. In 1853, Brigham Young, President of the Mormon Church, appointed Bud Rollins the first law officer in the San Bernardino settlement. By 1854, San Bernardino was thriving and the City of San Bernardino was officially incorporated. With the vast majority of San Bernardino residents being Mormon, San Bernardino was a temperance town. No drinking or gambling was allowed.

San Bernardino remained a Mormon settlement for only five years. In 1857, Brigham Young recalled the colonists to Utah and many returned. Opportunists of all kinds soon filled the vacuum that was created by so many people leaving so quickly. San Bernardino soon earned a reputation as a tough town.

In 1868, the elected office of Town Marshal was established. The Office of Town Marshal would remain the law enforcement agency in San Bernardino until the town was re-incorporated under newly established rules of city incorporation in 1905.

From 1853 to 1905, 15 men served as town marshals of San Bernardino:

Bud Rollins
Stewart Wall
George Mattheson
Frank Kerfoot
Charles Landers
Mark Thomas
John C. Ralphs
L. Van Dorm
Joseph Bright
Hughes Thomas
David Wixom
William Reeves
John Henderson
Ben Souther
Walter A. Shay

After the City of San Bernardino was incorporated under the new rules of incorporation, a Mayor and a Common City Council were elected to office. H.M. Barton was elected the first mayor of San Bernardino. He and the new council took office on May 8, 1905. One of the first orders of business for the new mayor and common council was to appoint a new police force to take office at 12 noon on May 15, 1905. Mayor Barton read a proclamation naming eight officers to the new police department:

John Bell Ketring
Robert O'Rourke
John A. Henderson
William H. Hurley
Edward Poppett
Benjamin Emerson
Richard Curtis
Robert Nish



Left to Right
Top Row **Bob O'Rourke** **Jack Kettering** **Ben Emerson** **John Henderson** **Bob Nish**
Bottom Row **H. Hurley** **Chief W.A. Shay** **Richard Curtis** **Ed Poppett** **~1905~**



Walter A. Shay Jr. (Born: 06-29-1866 - Died: 08-02-1931)
Chief of Police

At the time that Mayor Barton and the councilmen were appointing the city's new police force, Walter A. Shay, their choice for Chief of Police, still had approximately two years left in his elected position as San Bernardino Town Marshal. The mayor and council would have to wait until Shay's term expired in 1907 before they could appoint him as the city's first full-time Chief of Police.

Walter Shay was born on June 29, 1866 in San Bernardino. In 1892, he married Matilda "Tillie" McCoy and they lived at 495 N. "C" Street (now Mayfield Avenue). After trying his hand at farming, Mr. Shay began his law enforcement career as a San Bernardino County deputy sheriff in 1899. In 1903, he was elected to a term as Town Marshall for the City of San Bernardino. He held this position until being named Chief of Police.

W.A. Shay went on to be appointed as Chief of Police by three different San Bernardino mayors between 1905 and 1917. In 1918, Shay ran for and was elected as the Sheriff of San Bernardino County. He served as Sheriff until 1931 when he was succeeded by his nephew, Ernest Shay. Ernest Shay was in turn succeeded by Walter Shay's son, Emmett Shay, in 1934.

Chief Shay died on August 2, 1931. He is buried at San Bernardino's Pioneer Cemetery next to his wife.

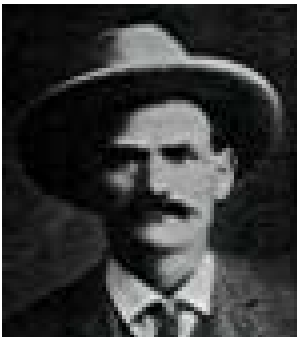


RICHARD HOLMAN CURTIS (Born: 1843 - Died: 1924)
Assistant Chief of Police

Richard Holman Curtis was born in 1843 in Kentucky. He was only seven years old when, in 1851, his parents brought their family to San Bernardino by oxen team.

Assistant Chief Curtis was one of the original members of the current San Bernardino Police Department. After being with the department for several years, Assistant Chief Curtis retired. He then worked as a schoolteacher and truant officer for the local school district and liked to spend his summers in the Lytle Creek Recreation Area as a fire warden.

Assistant Chief Curtis was 81 years old when he died in 1924. He is buried next to Mrs. Curtis in San Bernardino's Pioneer Cemetery



JOHN BELL KETRING (Born: 1860 - Died: 04-02-1947)
Police Officer

John Ketring was born in Linden Tennessee in 1860 and came to San Bernardino, via Tombstone, Arizona in 1882. In 1886, Officer Ketring married Clara Campbell. They made their home at 1142 W. 7th Street in San Bernardino where they raised two children. On February 3, 1905 Clara died and Mr. Ketring went on to marry his second wife, Mina Gunn, with whom he had a daughter.

Prior to becoming one of the original members of the San Bernardino Police Department, Officer Ketring operated a grocery store at 555 W. 3rd Street with fellow San Bernardino policeman and future mayor John Henderson. In 1905, Officer Ketring became a member of the San Bernardino Police Department where he remained as an officer for several years.

Lewis Ketring Jr., great-grandson of Officer Ketring, has some interesting thoughts about his great-grandfather. Lewis remembers that Officer Ketring was "mysterious and evasive" about the life he led before he came to San Bernardino. When asked about his early years he would become very defensive, say that that was another life and another place, and then immediately change the subject.

Lewis believes that Officer Ketring arrived in San Bernardino some time in early 1882. He has researched information that places Officer Ketring in Arizona prior to his arrival in San Bernardino and found that when he arrived in San Bernardino he lived in a boarding house owned by Nicholas and Virginia Earp.

Lewis suspects that Officer Ketring may have known the Earp brothers in Tombstone, Arizona and that when Morgan Earp was killed, Officer Ketring assisted Virgil and James Earp in transporting Morgan's body to California for burial in Colton. That would explain his acceptance into the Earps' boarding house and possibly an introduction to Walter Shay by the Earps and his subsequent employment as a San Bernardino policeman.

Officer Ketring died on April 2, 1947. He is buried at San Bernardino's Pioneer Cemetery.

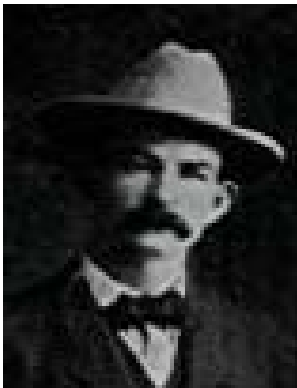


ROBERT GLEN NISH (Born: 01-30-1862 - Died: 07-07-1936)
Police Officer

Robert Nish was born in San Bernardino on January 30, 1862. On June 4, 1890, Officer Nish married Isabella Shellcy. They lived at 1268 W. 7th Street where they raised two children. Officer Nish began his law enforcement career as one of the original members of the San Bernardino Police Department in 1905. In 1910, Officer Nish left the San Bernardino Police Department and went to work as a deputy sheriff for the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.

He left the sheriff's department in 1920 and became a railroad car repairman with the Santa Fe Railroad.

Officer Nish's family became distant to the San Bernardino valley area and his only known relative is his granddaughter, Mrs. Shirley Smith of Buena Vista, Colorado. Officer Nish died on July 7, 1936 at Loma Linda Hospital at the age of 74 after a long illness and is buried at Mountain View Cemetery.



ROBERT EMMETT O'ROURKE (Born:02-19-1872 - Died: 12-06-1941)
Police Officer

Robert O'Rourke was born on February 19, 1872 in San Simeon, California. In 1900, Mr. O'Rourke and Emma McCoy (sister of Mrs. Walter Shay Jr.) were married. They made their home at 981 N. "F" Street in San Bernardino. Robert and Emma O'Rourke had no children. In 1908, Emma passed away and Officer O'Rourke left the San Bernardino Police Department and moved to Long Beach where he joined the Long Beach Police Department. He became Long Beach Police Department's first motor officer and rose to the rank of Captain of Detectives.

While living in Long Beach, Officer O'Rourke married Mary Elizabeth Settles, with whom he had a daughter. In 1914, Robert O'Rourke left the Long Beach Police Department and moved to Santa Monica, California where he served with the Santa Monica Police Department as a detective for a short time. He left the Santa Monica Police Department after being hired by the Pasadena Police Department as a detective. He was the only person to ever be hired by Pasadena P.D. at the entry-level rank of detective. Mr. O'Rourke served the Pasadena Police Department for twenty years, retiring in 1941 at the rank of Detective Lieutenant.

Robert O'Rourke died in Alhambra, California of natural causes on December 6, 1941 at the age of 68. He is buried in Mountain View Cemetery in Alta Loma.



WILLIAM HARRISON HURLEY (Born:02-19-1872 - Died:07-24-1915)
Police Officer

William "Hack" Hurley was born in Iowa on March 28, 1838. He came to San Bernardino in an oxen wagon, via Utah, in 1859. He was married to Serena Black and they lived at 310 N. "H" Street in San Bernardino.

Following his retirement from the police department, Officer Hurley became a rancher and lived in the area of Los Angeles County now known as the San Fernando Valley. He traveled throughout the state. According to his obituary, he was "one of the most fearless officers the city ever had and sustained the reputation he made in the Indian times of being afraid of

nothing." Officer Hurley died on July 14, 1915 and is buried at Pioneer Cemetery. Several of his descendants reside in Southern California.

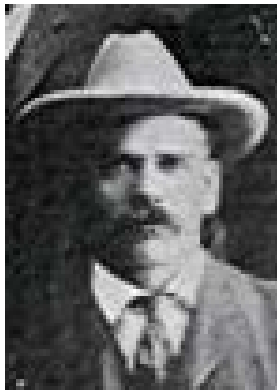


BENJAMIN EMERSON (Born: 1880 - Died: 10-14-1914)
Police Officer

Through research it was discovered that Benjamin Emerson was born in 1880 in San Bernardino and lived at 426 W. 3rd Street with his wife. Not much more is known about Officer Emerson.

In 1908 Benjamin Emerson left the Police Department to pursue a career in sports. He moved to 653 W. 3rd Street.

On October 14, 1914 Benjamin Emerson died after he became involved in a fight with a local newspaperman who pulled a handgun from his pocket and shot Mr. Emerson in the chest. Ironically Mr. Emerson died in the back of a police patrol wagon while being taken to County Hospital. Benjamin Emerson is buried in Mountain View Cemetery in San Bernardino.



EDWARD POPPETT (Born: 07-30-1869 - Died: 09-11-1961)
Police Officer

Edward Poppett was born on July 30, 1869 on his family's farm in San Bernardino, located now near the intersection of Baseline Street and "D" Street. In 1889 he married Mary Poppett and they lived at 1284 North "D" Street where they raised four daughters.

Mr. Poppett began his law enforcement career serving as a city policeman for several years in San Bernardino prior to the City's formal incorporation. In 1905 Mr. Poppett was selected to be one of San Bernardino's first full-time uniformed policemen.

He continued to serve the City of San Bernardino, becoming the department's first detective, a position he maintained until his retirement in 1952, after 47 years of service, a record that still stands to this date for a full-time officer.

Edward Poppett died on September 11, 1961, at the age of 92, and is buried next to his wife at Mountain View Cemetery. He has several descendants residing in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties.