

Crime in west Pasadena: Attempted burglaries

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Pasadena was remarkably free of crime in the early years of its existence, but by the mid 1880s burglaries were frequently reported in the newspapers.

On September 19, 1887 the Pasadena Daily Union reported on an attempted burglary at the home of George F. Kernaghan at Olcott Place on a Saturday night.

“The family had retired for the night and all had fallen to sleep. They were suddenly awakened by the ringing of the electric burglar alarm, the indicator showing that some one was trying to force an entrance at the front of the house.

“Miss Shotwell, a sister-in-law of Mr. Kernaghan, fired a revolver out the window to frighten off any intruder, and all again went to bed. Not more than fifteen minutes had passed when the alarm had sounded again, the indicator showing this time that the attempt was being made at the rear door.”

The thieves were frightened away, however, presumably by the loud ringing of the bell,



Olcott Place was created by George F. Kernaghan and his neighbor to the north, Delos Arnold. The Kernaghan family, at their home with a carriage on Olcott Place. The property extended from Terrace Drive to South Orange Grove, and would later be sold to Hulett C. Merritt in 1903.

which could be heard all over the house.” The Union admonished that “the inmates are armed and will make it lively for anyone making another such attempt.”

Immediately north of the Kernaghans was the home of Delos Arnold, on the other side of Olcott Place. His son, Ralph Arnold, wrote about one of the attempted burglaries in 1955:

“One time the burglar came on the front porch in his stocking feet. He examined the window latches with matches and found one latch unlocked. He had raised the window about three inches when the burglar alarm went off. He ran to the north end of the porch and jumped about eight feet into a bed of violets. My father regretted the fact that he hadn’t planted cactus there. We did have a cactus patch along Olcott Place on the west side of the house.”

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A view of the Delos Arnold home from Olcott Place. Ralph Arnold wrote: “We moved into the large house as soon as it was completed late in 1886. It had all the gadgets current at the time – push button electric lighters for the gas-jets; electric burglar alarm connecting all windows and doors with an annunciator in the master bedroom ... In the ten years we lived in the house the burglar alarm went off only twice, but it undoubtedly paid for itself both times.”