



Dolly Fine, close-up of a "Vice Queen," *San Francisco Examiner*, 1937.

A biography by Jean Bartlett, January, 2021
(A Pacifica Historical Society Project)

Dolly Fine is a puzzle within a mystery and she did not leave a trail to follow.

The first time I heard about Dolly Fine was from one of June Morrall's readers in January of 2007. The late Morrall was a longtime El Granada resident and an extraordinary writer who served up Coastside history with a pen and a set of researched facts that pulled you in at the start. Her reader asked, "Do you know anything about the history of the house at 2 Carmel Avenue in Pacifica?" The reader had heard it was owned by a madam who may have assisted the non-law-abiding residents of Pacifica's castle with rum-running during Prohibition. Morrall put the word out. Could anyone point her towards some information? June Morrall, never short of a long list of possible writing projects, including Dolly's story, died the first week of January, 2010.

The second time I heard about Dolly Fine was in June of 2015. Hank Chapot, historian and author of the 2011-published "[Bordello Politique: The Story of Dolly Fine, San Francisco's Most Notorious Madam](#)," was a featured speaker at the Pacifica Historical Society's quarterly meeting. I wrote a story on that upcoming event for the *Pacifica Tribune*: "[1930s graft and prostitution fuels local history talk](#)." The Chapot talk was filmed for the Pacifica Historical Society's award-winning *Footprints of Pacifica* community television series, Episode 154. (Visit: PHS [Footprints of Pacifica](#). Read about Hank Chapot and purchase his book through [Smashwords](#).)

The third time I heard about Dolly Fine was quite recently when a friend of mine decided to follow the Pacifica Historical Society's recommended historical walking tour of Sharp Park. (Sharp Park, now a Pacifica neighborhood, was one of nine small coastal communities which joined together to incorporate as the City of Pacifica in November of 1957.) The number 10 stop on the tour reads as follows: *Walk west on Paloma to the waterfront and then south on Beach Boulevard along the promenade. The building at 2 Carmel Avenue (on the south corner) originally belonged to San Francisco Madam Dolly Fine who used it as a rest haven for her girls. She was arrested and forced out of business in 1938 having attracted too much attention when she claimed police bribes as business expenses.* (Link to the PHS walking tour information [here](#).)

Third time's a charm; time to investigate this many-storied woman. A great deal of my research came from media, library and online sources outside of San Francisco, including the *California Digital*

Newspaper Collection. As to the question posed by Ms. Morrall's reader regarding "possible madam" Dolly Fine and her assistance to 1920 rum runners out of Pacifica's castle, there's only rumor to her involvement – though admittedly that rumor is found in several citations. But first, some facts.

A former Montana miner, M.L. Hewitt ran Chateau LaFayette. It was located in what is known today as Pacifica's Sam Mazza Castle. Operating during Prohibition, Chateau LaFayette offered weekend parties, dinner parties, dancing and banquets. For those in the know, it also offered Canadian whiskey and "ladies-of-the-night." The rumors suggest that Dolly Fine, a neighboring weekend resident, offered assistance to the Chateau when needed. However, given that Miss Fine, as you will read further on, was arrested as a teen in 1925, and given that M.L. Hewitt died in 1924, along with his business, my guess, to throw in with the rumors, is that Miss Fine, who did become a neighboring weekend resident, offered whatever paid assistance she could to the Coastside's prolific rum-running and speakeasy days, though perhaps not specifically to Chateau LaFayette. (Chateau LaFayette was one of seven Pacifica-located speakeasies.) In addition, as you will read, Pacifica resident Miss Fine was indeed a madam – and a very famous one.

* * *

On Wednesday, March 31, 1937, the *San Bernardino Daily Sun* plastered news out of San Francisco on their front page. While the "Lady in Red," as the papers would later dub Miss Fine, is not mentioned, she knows all the players and her time in the shadow is ticking.

BRADY REINSTATED AS GRAFT PROSECUTOR, BAY CITY – Jurors Voice Endorsement for Attorney — Head of Bail Bond Company to Appear Before Inquisitors And Recite His Version — (By United Press) SAN FRANCISCO — March 30.

With District Attorney Matthew Brady again in charge of prosecution, the county grand jury today mapped a thorough investigation of San Francisco's vice pay-off system with Peter McDonough, alleged "vice lord" as the principal witness. The jury will meet tomorrow night to question graft investigator Edwin N. Atherton, whose report of vice conditions in San Francisco stirred a municipal scandal which threatened to reach high into the city's officialdom. McDonough, whose bail bond firm has been termed the "fountainhead of corruption," was scheduled to appear before the jury next Monday night. McDonough, Saturday said he was willing to "tell all" he knew about the pay-off system in San Francisco, which Atherton charged in his report gleaned approximately \$1,000,000 annually in protection money from brothels and gambling establishments.

REPORT ILL-FEELING It was reported ill-feeling had developed between Brady and Presiding Superior Judge George Steiger over Brady's "ouster" as prosecutor, and his subsequent reinstatement. Last Saturday an "official" statement was issued from the grand jury chambers saying that the jury had voted to disqualify Brady from the prosecution because of reports McDonough held his note for \$1,100. Brady's disqualification, the statement said, was voted at Brady's request. Last night, however, the grand jury denied that it had asked disqualification of Brady, and announced it had taken a unanimous vote of confidence on the district attorney's fitness to be a prosecutor in police graft cases. State Attorney General U.S. Webb, according to the "statement," had been asked by Judge Steiger to appoint a substitute prosecutor to replace Brady. When Webb was informed that the grand jury had voted confidence in Brady, he said there was "nothing for me to do about the situation." Following the grand jury session last night, Judge Steiger and District Attorney Brady met outside the jury chambers.

ACCUSES JURIST "You issued an untruthful statement when you made an announcement at Saturday's session of the grand jury, declaring the attorney general would be asked to supersede me. You caused me to be put in the headlines. You were not telling the truth. You know the jury gave me a vote of confidence."

"I am only the presiding judge," Judge Steiger replied. "I am not the foreman of the grand jury. The statement to which you objected was dictated in my office by the foreman, James Gartland." The "mistake" statement situation had not been clarified today, but Brady apparently was fully restored to his position as chief graft prosecutor. The grand jurors voted Judge Steiger confidence. It was learned that police have obtained Atherton's list of 135 "old, established houses of prostitution," and are proceeding to raid them, methodically, one by one. Atherton submitted the list to the grand jury. Three asserted brothels were raided last night and a total of five girls and three visitors were arrested."

At the time this story ran, Dolly was in the headlights of Edwin Atherton's person-of-interest list – and all these vice secrets, blazing the headlines of so many papers, would mark the beginning of the end of her San Francisco reign.



Private Investigator Edwin N. Atherton, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1937.

A former G-man, Atherton was hired by District Attorney Brady to look into the growing rumors regarding San Francisco police graft and corruption. The investigation was triggered by a 1935 talk given by Internal Revenue Agent John V. Lewis to the San Rafael Rotary Club. In that chat, Lewis casually dropped the bomb that a number of San Francisco police officers had hundreds of thousands of dollars in unclaimed funds, and that they were living like kings through payoffs and bribery. Mr. Lewis also intimated that an unnamed San Francisco madam, for whom history strongly points a finger at Dolly, had been writing off the assistance of police officers on her taxes. (Dolly would additionally sign up her girls for the 1935-enacted Social Security Act. She also provided homes for the women who worked for her in two San Francisco apartment buildings.)

San Franciscans were generally a fairly relaxed bunch when it came to the business of prostitution, but police corruption was an entirely different story and they were outraged that another city's newspaper was calling out their town. District Attorney Matthew Brady and San Francisco Mayor Angelo Rossi were pinned down by public pressure to dig in their heels and unearth the truth – and so PI Atherton and his entire investigating firm were hired to blow the murk out of the water.

At his 2015 Pacifica Historical Society speaking event, historian and author Chapot referenced the \$1,100 Brady note mentioned in the 1937 *San Bernardino Daily Sun* front-pager.

"There's a great story," Chapot said. "An auto salesman from Van Ness Auto Row in San Francisco said a good looking blonde in a convertible, drove into the lot and gave him a bag of gold coins – \$1,100 worth. Brady came in the next day and drove a car off the lot. I don't know if it was Dolly, but the story said, 'Good looking blonde,' and Dolly (a blonde) was often described as 'a very attractive woman.' Brady denied everything."

Pete McDonough, also named in that 1937 article, started the first U.S. bail bond business with his brother Tom. He and Tom took over their father's bar, a popular watering hole which remained standing even after the 1906 earthquake, and that was just around the corner from San Francisco's City Hall. It came to Pete's attention that lawyers were taking a percentage of the money they loaned out for bail. The highly respected businessman, known for his dedication to community and those in public office, wanted in.

The bar owners began posting bail bonds as a favor to favorite patrons in exchange for a percentage of the amount posted. As time went on, Pete, and his nephew Harry Rice, became the masterminds behind the organization, McDonough Brothers. (Tom McDonough, as named in The Atherton Report, was not a part of their criminal investigation).

Experts in protection and support, McDonough Bros. provided a variety of services. This included wireless communications with numerous San Francisco police stations, so that within minutes of an arrest, involved individuals could do what was needed to rake in the dough. McDonough Bros. could additionally provide the necessary means to stop witnesses—short of bodily harm—from testifying against people who could afford to pay for not being testified against. This included police officers, owners of gambling houses, owners of businesses of ill repute. It also meant that various illegal activities, known by both the police and the perpetrators, could be organized, by McDonough Bros., for mutual financial benefit to all parties.

For instance, Dolly Fine ran a "resort," as such houses were called in those days, out of 1275 Bush Street. Per the findings of The Atherton Report, that cost her \$750 in police bribes to open her business and about \$200 a month thereafter in monthly payoffs – naturally with Pete McDonough there to work all the angles.

The "Pete McDonough Bail Bond Scandal," as various newspapers called it, had at its foundation, evidence Atherton derived from "tapped wires." That evidence might, for instance, include records of overheard telephone conversations which took place between Pete McDonough and a police official. In that conversation, McDonough might be told of an upcoming police raid on a gambling house. Should such a conversation take place, McDonough might then tip off the gambling house. Following such alleged action, fees were billed and paid.



Pete McDonough, bail bondsman, San Francisco Examiner, 1937.



News of the "alleged" \$1,000,000 a year police graft ring writes the front page. San Francisco Examiner, March 17, 1937.

The Atherton Report, which was submitted to the grand jury on March 17, 1937, was the result of an active investigation into charges of graft in the San Francisco Police from November 21, 1935 through December 1, 1936. And it was through the wiretapping of Pete McDonough's phones, that Dolly came to the attention of Atherton.

In the normal course of her business, Dolly and Pete, as well as Dolly and Harry Rice, talked on the phone relatively frequently. They might discuss information on upcoming raids and how many girls should be arrested, or perhaps new clients or employees. In the spring of 1937, Dolly was summoned to appear as a witness in the grand jury investigation of the, alleged, \$1,000,000 a year police graft ring. The *Oakland Tribune* provided a more colorful take on those events in their June 2, 1937 edition:

Miss Fine was brought before the jury on a subpoena served by the combined efforts of Atherton, four police, a pair of pliers and a hacksaw. She wouldn't let Atherton into her place to accept the subpoena until he called the officers and they started to attack a door chain with the hacksaw.

Dolly Fine, comely blonde, identified by the investigator as keeper of a Bush Street brothel, did not deny any of the purported conversations with Rice and other persons at McDonough Brothers, but said she 'couldn't remember' any of them. She became tearful when asked if she operated a house of prostitution and refused to answer on the grounds her reply might incriminate and degrade her.

On June 17, 1937, while witnesses were still testifying before the grand jury by day, Dolly Fine was one of 75 persons arrested in raids that night on houses of prostitution and bookmaking shops. Identified as a known brothel keeper in the headlines, Dolly was promptly bailed out by McDonough Bros.

On June 18, Theodore J. Roche, president of the three-member police commission, testified before the grand jury. Roche promised that as soon as the grand jury concluded its investigation, that every officer connected with the graft ring would be dismissed summarily. (Note, with a lot of outraged sputtering in the direction of investigator Atherton, Roche resigned from the police commission on July 16, 1937, which followed the resignations of the other two police commission members Frank Foran and Dr. Thomas F. Shumate. As to the police officers pulled before the grand jury, most took the fifth, and in the end, more than a dozen officers were fired or resigned, and hundreds of officers were reassigned.)

As to Pete McDonough's promise to "tell all" he knew about the pay-off system in San Francisco, he was jailed for contempt by the grand jury because he refused to talk and he refused to take the fifth.

"But he was only in jail for two or three days and they worked out a deal where he just came in and answered three questions and they let him go," historian Chapot said. "The newspapers called him, 'The Big Boss of Kearny Street.'"

While Dolly Fine was already on the radar of local law enforcement before the 1937 scandal, her more than 20-minutes of fame in newspapers all over the San Francisco Bay Area made her a household name. That fame would eventually cause her doors to close for good. By the end of 1938, she was off everyone's radar – other than her own trustworthy inner circle and none of them ever talked.

Who was Dolly Fine?

* * *



Dolly Fine, 1938. (San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.)

First off, her name was not Dolly Fine. Sure, that's what it said on her business card where it also noted that she hired out house maids but they didn't do windows. But it turns out she had a whole slew of names and was affiliated with more than one San Francisco residence. (Her soon-to-be-discovered home in Sharp Park was her get-away-from-it-all home. Her girls vacationed there as well.) It was her house at 1275 Bush Street, and her new-found, unwanted fame from the McDonough Bros. takedown, that finally led to an inkling of Dolly's true tale.

On April 25, 1938, the *San Mateo Times* picked up this United Press story.

S.F. Boys Found in Disorderly House — (UP) SAN FRANCISCO — April 25.

Six women were in police custody today following a raid on a disorderly house in which eight high school boys, ranging in age from 15 to 17, were given lectures by police captains and sent home.

The raid followed a "tip" from parents of the youths, who requested police follow the boys and send them home. Police said the boys were members of "well known" families.

Captains Frank Lucey and William Merrick trailed the boys from a dance attended by a large number of boys and girls of high school age – to the disorderly house. Lucey and Merrick arrested Dolly Fine, asserted keeper of the house, and five inmates.

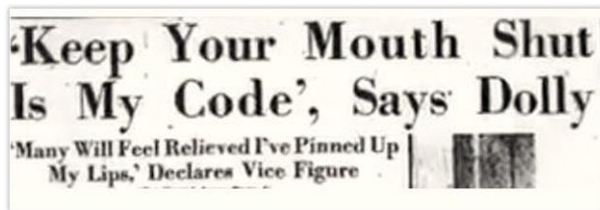
The story behind that story is there were eight young men from San Francisco Pacific Heights' families who were attending a cotillion. They had all heard about Dolly. She was famous. They figured after the dance, Dolly's house would be the next stop. One of the moms overheard her son talking about that very

plan on the phone. Fraught with worry, she phoned the police. Could they look into it? The San Francisco Police were on it.

The police waited ten minutes after the maid, at 1275 Bush Street, opened the door to let the eight young men in. A busy night, the teens were ushered to the back parlor to wait their turn. Nobody got a turn. The police raid and subsequent "talking-to" stopped that. But the damage was done to Dolly. She was to face eight charges of contributing to the delinquency of minors. A relatively new law, Dolly was the first woman to face it. If convicted, the charges carried heavy fines and jail time – two years for every count. Her bail was set at \$1,000. Pete McDonough announced he would furnish no more bail for prostitutes or those arrested in connection with vice cases.

Through her attorney Byron Parker, Dolly met bail. Dolly had been scheduled to appear on April 29 before Municipal Judge Theresa Meikle on a charge of "keeping a house of ill fame." Later she was to face eight charges of contributing to the delinquency of minors. Dolly was a no-show. She was reported to have skipped town.

Apparently before she left, she shared some of her thoughts, confidentially, to a San Francisco newspaper reporter, paraphrased here. She told him she had lived most of her life by the code of the underworld and, essentially, she wasn't going to change her stripes now. She was no squealer. She wouldn't rat out any of the known names, specifically local officials, who had abandoned her in her time of need.



With that off the table, she noted her options were pretty straight forward: plead her innocence, commit suicide or flee. But one thing was sure, she was used to living a life of luxury and plummeting into the life of the dispossessed – which would certainly be her fate if she endured 16 years of jail time – was not in her cards. As soon as she went

missing, any confidentially-sourced comments from Dolly were now newsprint fodder, and the fact that she had a home in Sharp Park became everyone's front page story.



But there was a contradiction to that April 29 suspected run – and by a Sharp Park barkeeper by the name of Dick Plate. He said Dolly and her husband were sitting in his bar on Saturday, April 30. Yet how could that be? Dolly was reported to have landed in Chicago on April 29. Here's a report to explain it all, or maybe some portion of it, from the *San Mateo Times*, early May, 1938. (There are a number of things in the following story that just don't square, but I've left it as reported. For additional clarity, the "French caretaker" referred to in this particular story was Dolly Fine's employee at her Sharp Park home. He apparently opened the home to a *San Francisco Call* reporter on April 29.)

DOLLY FINE S.M. RESIDENT — At Sharp Park During Hunt, Latest Story — SM Times — May 4.

Dolly Fine, notorious San Francisco brothel keeper, literally "pulled the wool over official eyes" and, while a nation-wide hunt was being carried on for her, she sat calmly sipping drinks in a Sharp Park bar, only a block from her elaborate house.

This and other revelations in the most recent of San Francisco scandals came yesterday as Dick Plate, proprietor of the Sharp Park bar, was quoted as saying Dolly, and George Tosla, referred to as a big-time Reno gambler and reputed husband of the brothel mistress, often drank at his bar.

The two were last seen in the Plate Cafe, Saturday, Plate was quoted. The same day the woman was reported to have landed in Chicago aboard a United Airliner.

At the same time, Attorney Byron Parker, erstwhile counsel for the blonde woman, advanced the belief that she will appear to keep her belated date with the San Francisco law. He said it is likely she is still in California, or probably just across the line of some nearby state.

With the disappearance of the two Saturday, the luxurious bomb in Sharp Park last night lost the French caretaker, who also took his departure.

AFRAID OF CAMERAS The caretaker said that his only reason for abandoning the post was that cameramen of metropolitan papers drove him out.

"What they think I am—a movie star?" he was quoted.

With the Sharp Park home now apparently deserted, it was revealed that previous reports the home was closed were false. Not only is the home still furnished, but several loads of furnishings from the Bush Street brothel have been moved in, reports yesterday disclosed.

Plate revealed yesterday that Tosla and his wife had often made his bar the rendezvous of quiet tête-à-têtes. First he believed them to be wealthy retired suburbanites, Plate told press representatives.

SAT AT BOOTH Saturday the two again visited his place together and, as usual, did not sit at the bar, but chose a secluded booth. After several drinks the two left.

Later in the evening the woman returned alone. It was this night that word of her sensational bail-jump had been broadcast across the nation and police looked up her supposed trail in Chicago. Sunday Plate recognized her picture in a newspaper.

Sunday morning the familiar big, brown LaSalle sedan was not to be found in Sharp Park. The \$1,000 was forfeit.

Attorney Parker told a San Francisco grand jury yesterday he believes she is still in California because her "children" are still in the state. The jury wanted to know names of the children and

Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

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where they are located for it was previously understood she had but one child in another state. Parker declared he does not know.

It was also learned today that Testa, husband of the "Lady in Red," had been a habitue of North Beach for four or five years.

In regards to this particular *San Mateo Times* story, Dolly's purported husband George Testa, has his last name in the same article also presented as "Tosla," twice. Research shows a fellow named George Testa, a cigar maker, had a business in San Francisco's North Beach District during the time in question, and a wife of a different name.

But what about Dolly's Sharp Park home, right at the waterfront on Carmel Avenue – still there, and still painted the same on the outside.

The *San Francisco Call* reporter, who bribed and pushed his way past the French caretaker to gain entrance to Dolly's holiday digs, had a field day writing his story. He called it "the house that sin built." He noted the "doorbell sounded like soft chimes, not some cheap ring." He wrote about its lacquered red bar with gilded dragons and a grand mirror. That room's shades were red, naturally. Adjectives covering luxury, comfort and riches purred from his pen. The story ran with photos. It was a sensation.

All that happening in Sharp Park — and then there was the telegram sent May 2, 1938 to San Francisco Chief of Police William J. Quinn from Chicago Chief of Detectives John L. Sullivan.

RETEL DOLLY FINE ALIAS DOROTHY HARDING ARRIVED AT 2:40 P.M. APRIL 29TH USING NAME MRS. L. O'BRIEN TOOK CAB TO LAWRENCE HOTEL PAID DEPOSIT ONE DOLLAR UNDER NAME MARIE SORENSEN. ALSO PAID DEPOSIT ONE DOLLAR VICEROY HOTEL SAME NAME SAME DATE HAS NOT RETURNED EITHER HOTEL? WILL ADVISE IF APPREHENDED.

CLASS OF SERVICE	WESTERN UNION	SYMBOLS
This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablogram unless, its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.	R. B. WHITE PRESIDENT NEWCOMB CARLTON CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD J. C. WILLEVER FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT	DL = Day Letter NM = Night Message NL = Night Letter LC = Deferred Cable NLT = Cable Night Letter Ship Radiogram
The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.		
FH17 50 DL COLLECT CHICAGO ILL MAY 2 2938 2000A 582 823		
WILLIAM J QUINN CHIEF OF POLICE LUCY & MERRICK		
RETEL DOLLY FINE ALIAS DOROTHY HARDING ARRIVED 2:40 P.M. APRIL		
29TH USING NAME MRS. L. O'BRIEN TOOK CAB TO LAWRENCE HOTEL PAID		
DEPOSIT ONE DOLLAR UNDER NAME MARIE SORENSEN. ALSO PAID DEPOSIT ONE DOLLAR		
VICEROY HOTEL SAME NAME SAME DATE HAS NOT RETURNED EITHER HOTEL?		
WILL ADVISE IF APPREHENDED.		
JOHN L SULLIVAN CHIEF DETECTIVES.		
COPIES MADE		

It should be noted that once Dolly Fine's Sharp Park address was revealed, thousands of weekend motorists took to driving past it.

Now before that telegram was sent, the *San Mateo Times* ran the following report on Saturday, April 30.

DOLLY FINE HOME ON COAST — Special to The Times — Sharp Park — April 30.

Sheriff James J. McGrath today kept a close watch on the luxurious Sharp Park home of Dolly Fine, San Francisco brothel keeper, now a fugitive from justice, as a nation-wide search was inaugurated for her.

HOME SEARCHED Sheriff McGrath, with Undersheriff Lawrence Nieri and Deputy Sheriff George Krehl, yesterday made a thorough search of her home. San Francisco police, in an earlier search, reported finding a list of select telephone numbers, evidently left by the blonde in her sudden departure.

The woman was last seen in the Bay region, Thursday night, when she came to her Sharp Park home. A number of trunks were delivered earlier and she followed in her big tan sedan.

Neighbors said she remained at the property but a few moments, then drove back toward San Francisco.

Going under the name of "Mrs. O'Brien," she was thought to be in Chicago now, having flown there aboard a United Airlines plane from Reno.

GRAND JURY ACTS Grand jury indictment charging her with contributing to the delinquency of minors, was believed by police to have hastened her departure.

A bizarre story of her life told to acquaintances before she left revealed that she planned to keep the rule of the underworld by "keeping my mouth shut."

She also said she had a child she was afraid would learn her true identity.

*"If I could only have stayed open until the fair here in 1939 (The Golden Gate International Exposition), I would have been able to retire on an income of \$200 a month," she said.**

Her description has been broadcast to all police headquarters in the country.

**The savvy business woman was known for her wise investments as well as profit sharing for her girls. Fellow madam, future restaurateur and future mayor of Sausalito Sally Stanford called her friend Dolly, "the smartest madam in the racket."*

Along with Chicago, Sharp Park and Reno, Paris and San Diego were also named as possible sightings.

On Monday May 2, 1938, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported that "pals" of Dolly Fine said that the San Francisco madam might return and tell all. They hinted she might "fight fire with fire by telling of vice in relation to police." Those same sources disclosed that Dolly, "far from being en route to France, merely put a state border between her and police." Dolly told pals that she was "rushed into her disappearance act by advisors." Who those advisors were and what their motives were was not known. The sources said Dolly had not originally intended to run away but there was a certain criminal attorney she needed to confer with but he was out of the city at the time.

Meanwhile, also on May 2, the *Nevada State Journal* reported that the "finery and elaborate furnishings" of Dolly's Sharp Park beach home were removed by van drivers who refused to discuss their orders or the destination of their delivery. (Almost 30 years later, the same paper would report that most of Dolly's time in hiding was spent at one of the larger hotels in Reno.)

On Thursday, May 5, the *San Mateo Times*, among many other papers, rolled out Dolly Fine's "real" name – though that name may be as full of holes as any of the other Dolly Fine aliases.

DOLLY FINE IN '25 GANG, CLAIM — May 5.

Sharp Park's most publicized resident today has been revealed as a member of a 1925 bandit gang, and, as a result, San Francisco police were searching for three members of the gang in an attempt to bring the bail-jumping Dolly Fine before the courts.

Information from San Francisco today said Dolly Fine, whose alleged Bush Street brothel cracked open a new vice investigation recently, was the Julia White, alias Julia Black, of the 1925 gang.

One member of the gang, known through underworld circles as Al Brady and whose real name, according to police is Lawrence Bryan, is said to be the brother of Dolly Fine.

Brady, or Bryan was "graduated" from Folsom prison while two other members of the gang, Fred "Dutch" Fritch and Irby Hunt, also served prison terms. The three were arrested in 1925 for holding up "Dr." Gabor Koenigstein and robbing him of \$5,000 in rubies and diamonds.

Brady, supposed brother of Dolly Fine, stood trial and was acquitted on this count. Fritch and Hunt escaped trial.

Today, however, police were searching the three for a possible clue as to the whereabouts of the missing woman and her supposed husband, both last seen by a Sharp Park barkeeper last Saturday. Dolly Fine was indicted by a San Francisco grand jury after she jumped \$1,000 bail on eight charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

There are definitely morsels of truth in the story that references the 1925 bandit gang. Definitely the "Julia White" in the story, who had her "headshot" taken by the San Francisco police, would later be known as Dolly Fine. What is not mentioned is that Julia White, alias Julia Black, was not charged. She apparently was the lookout. What is also not mentioned in that story is that the person robbed, Dr. Gabor Koenigstein, a chiropodist, also known as Kingston, was one of San Francisco's foremost fight referees, and there was something suspect in that business of his having \$5,000 in rubies and diamonds in his possession. Meanwhile, while Dolly's mentioned brother – Al Brady, or Lawrence Bryan, or Larry Brady as he became known when he was pulled before the grand jury regarding his involvement in the "Pete McDonough Bail Bond Scandal" – has a different last name than his "sister." Was Julia married to a guy with the last name of White or Black? Was her actual last name, Brady or Bryan like her supposed brother? Admittedly in a 1937 *San Francisco Examiner* photo of Larry Brady on the stand, there is a resemblance between Larry and Dolly. But who can make sense of this Grade-A baloney?



Julia White, alias Julia Black, also known as Dolly Fine, was a teen in this 1925 mugshot, obtained by the *San Francisco Examiner*.



Larry Brady, 1937, *San Francisco Examiner*.

On May 4, 1938, the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* presented an Op-Ed opinion piece that excoriated the SFPD's cries of alarm over the missing madam.

DOLLY FINE "AT LARGE"

We try not to appear too cynical, but for some reason we just can't work ourselves into the proper frenzy over the "disappearance" of Dolly Fine, long established San Francisco brothel "madame," and the hectic search supposedly under way for her in this country and on the high seas.

In spite of the high-sounding pronouncements issued daily to the press by Chief of Police William Quinn, no one can tell us that the San Francisco police department does not hope—way down in its heart—that the missing vice queen is never found.

This, of course, goes principally for the cops on Dolly's Bush Street beat and the boys in the home precinct station house. Dolly, according to her story poured out in confidence to a metropolitan newspaper reporter and two days later spilled all over the front page by the same scribe "in the public interest," paid her boys in blue handsomely for protection.

Dolly, even in spite of her underworld code that demands sealed lips come what may, might nevertheless be tempted to deviate ever so slightly from the party line in event one or more of the boys pulled the old double cross, or as the San Francisco natives quaintly put it, "turn on too much heat."

Yes, the more we think of it, the more we feel that if the San Francisco police department never sees Dolly Fine again it will still be too soon. Not that we would infer that any of its members could have had anything to do with her "disappearance"—no, no, not that!

On May 19, 1938, the *San Mateo Times* reported that Dolly was in San Diego. It came right off of the UP Newswire.

Dolly Fine, wanted by San Francisco police since April 29 as a fugitive, obtained the aid of a San Diego notary public Monday to cancel a lease on a San Francisco residence which figured in the charges against her, it was learned today.

Miss Fine, often referred to as the "Lady in Red," appeared suddenly at the desk of Edith G. Benjamin, notary public in a downtown hotel, Monday and had the cancellation of a lease on a house at 1275 Bush Street, San Francisco, notarized.

Miss Benjamin said the woman signed the paper as "Dorothy Fine." She was accompanied by a man who was not identified.

As soon as the paper was notarized Miss Fine and her companion departed.

In San Francisco it was learned police have started abatement actions against the house Miss Fine formerly leased. The woman is wanted for allegedly contributing to the delinquency of minors in connection with operation of the residence.

At some point, if not all along, Dolly decided she would return to San Francisco and face the charges. By then she had hired San Francisco criminal lawyer Jake Ehrlich. She needed the best. Ehrlich's nickname was "The Master."

Born in 1900, in Rockville, Maryland, Ehrlich began his legal studies at Georgetown Law School, and then nearly penniless, came out to San Francisco and finished his legal education at San Francisco Law School, the oldest evening law school in the States. While he studied, he boxed professionally to pay the bills. He became famous in 1931 when he, and attorney Jerry Geisler of Hollywood, successfully reversed the 1929-statutory rape conviction of their client, theater magnate Alexander Pantages. Pantages at one point operated 84 theaters across the U.S. and Canada. In 1929, he was convicted of raping a 17-year-old dancer.

An impeccable dresser, Ehrlich became a member of the California Bar in 1922 and practiced until his death, December 24, 1971. Throughout his career he would handle or partner on 105 murder cases. None of his clients received the death penalty and 41 would be acquitted on all counts. Along with Dolly Fine, his caseload over the years would cover a lineup of famous defendants, including: drummer Gene Krupa for marijuana, Errol Flynn for divorce, Gertrude Morris for murdering her husband and Howard Hughes for movie censorship on his film, "The Outlaw." Ehrlich won them all.

On Wednesday, July 27, 1938, the six-foot tall madam returned to San Francisco to face charges. Her 89-day disappearance squeaked in just under the 90-day bail expiration. The *Nevada State Journal Reno* was one among many newspapers to run this UP Newswire.

Dolly Fine, a blonde brothel queen who has been playing hide-and-seek with San Francisco's police for three months, surrendered late Wednesday to answer the charges that arose when raiders found eight school boys of prominent families in her place.

She appeared with her attorney, J. W. Ehrlich, in the court of Superior Judge I.M. Golden.

Smartly clad and flippant, she said she had fled "because of those nasty headlines about me."



Dolly Fine returns to face the music. San Francisco Examiner photo, 1938.

Reported at various times in San Diego, Chicago and Reno during the three-month chase, Miss Fine said she had been in San Diego but denied having been east.

The raid and her flight last spring touched off one of the city's choicest scandals.

On July 28, the Santa Cruz Sentinel picked up the AP (Associated Press) story, out of San Francisco.

Dolly Fine, also known as Dorothy Harding, ended an 89-day game of hide-and-seek with the police when she returned Wednesday to face trial on charges of running a disorderly house and contributing to the delinquency of eight high school boys.

The boys were seized last April in a raid on a San Francisco brothel that police claim Miss Fine operated.

Dolly, a slender blonde, appeared first today at the offices of Jake Ehrlich, her lawyer. Police Inspectors Frank Lucey and William Merrick, to whom Ehrlich had telephoned, were in Ehrlich's office when she arrived.

"Hello, Dolly, how are you?" they said.

"Hello, boys," said Dolly. "Everything happens to me, don't it?"

There was a conference and from there Dolly was squired to the Hall of Justice. A fair-sized procession of policemen and other characters marched behind her into the court room of Superior Judge I.M. Golden.

While her lawyer arranged for her release on \$2,000 bail, Dolly twisted a handkerchief and denied to newsmen she was guilty of the charges against her.

"I am innocent," said she. "Give me a break."

"When I saw the headlines after my arrest, I couldn't stand it, so I left. I was nervous and ill, so I went to a sanitarium. It was out of the state, but never in Reno or Chicago or Paris, as reported."

Dolly said she had been in San Diego for a time while she was away. William Quinn, San Francisco chief of police, said 30 arrests had been made since 1930 in resorts operated by Dolly.

Let's talk Attorney Ehrlich. His services did not come cheap. It was reported that during his career one defendant paid him \$15,000 for a 15-minute court appearance, and did so without complaint. Ehrlich subpoenaed all eight parents the morning of the first trial. He knew they wouldn't show. They didn't want the scandal. They didn't want their "good" family names raked across the headlines. And Ehrlich was right. They were all no-shows. Then Ehrlich asked District Attorney Brady — hadn't several of the dads already mentioned that they had introduced their sons to prostitution? Where was the evidence to support that Dolly contributed to their delinquency, if the delinquency had already been established by the boys' own fathers. The judge went along with Ehrlich. There would be no forcing the parents to come in and

testify. Sixty days and a \$500 fine for disturbing the peace; justice was served. Matthew Brady, who served as San Francisco's District Attorney from 1919 through 1943, undoubtedly had his opinion of that ruling, but the sensation was over. Later, when recalling his client, Ehrlich would say, "Dolly Fine was beautiful, intelligent, articulate and smart. She was a good looking young woman who dressed smartly, bought good books, read them and discussed them."



Dolly Fine, *San Francisco Examiner*, 1938. Dolly came to court either wearing face-covering veils or sheilding, wide-brimmed hats.

After all, it's just conjecture. What is known is that Dolly — or Mrs. George Testa or Tosla, or the sister to Al Brady aka Lawrence Bryan aka Larry Brady, or Dorothy Harding, or Mrs. L. O'Brien, or Marie Sorensen, or Julia White alias Julia Black, or Dorothy Fine, or possibly the wife of Patrick Fine – a woman named Dollie – who can be found in the 1933 San Francisco City Directory residing with her husband at 2050 Bush Street, and finally, regardless of her name, most certainly the mother of one or two — sent Ehrlich a plaque on which she had inscribed: "*To the Master, a great attorney, in appreciation from Dolly Fine, 1938.*"

Dolly spent her 60 days in the San Francisco County Jail, located in San Bruno, not too far above Dolly's old "summer home" in Sharp Park. Opened in 1934, the jail was dubbed "The Sunshine Jail Farm." The seven-story jail featured: large outside windows at the back of each cell to provide fresh air and sunshine (and accidentally a security issue), along with outside grounds which offered prisoners gardening programs, a bake shop and livestock maintenance. The jail was for a "milder criminal demographic."

Dolly was released right before Thanksgiving of 1938, five days shy of her 60-day sentence. She closed her properties and disappeared.

Chapot said the rumor is that Dolly married into a wealthy family and became a Pacific Heights matron. I found, what looks to be possibly, her brother's WWII Draft Registration card. That card lists Brady's only relative as a married woman living in Tennessee. That "Mrs." has a name not mentioned in this story.



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is also a former Hallmark Card writer, a produced playwright and a published author.