

## East Falls Past—John B. Kelly

*The Fallser*, October 2012, by Ellen Sheehan

This month's East Falls Past column is a newspaper account from the 1950s of an interview about living in Falls of Schuylkill with John B. Kelly.

"Falls of Schuylkill is my home town. I am proud of it. The people of the Falls are so close-knit; we are often called clannish. We are like a big family. Sometimes we fight among ourselves, but it's strictly a family fight. No outsiders may butt in. We consider Philadelphia a suburb of "The Falls."

I was born on Clearfield Street in the "lower end" of the Falls. I was the ninth of ten children. My father, John H. Kelly, came to the U.S. from County Mayo, Ireland as a youth of 20. His first job was at Dobson Mills. Nearly everybody in town worked there. When I was five years old, my family moved to the "upper end" of town (Midvale Avenue). Soon I was involved in the athletic rivalry between the two sections. In my day, the "uppers" were better at football. The "lowers" excelled at baseball. Basketball was a standoff.

As a youngster, I watched men in single shells on the river. I decided to be a sculler. It was the most fortunate ambition I could have had. In those days, at least five of the clubs on Boathouse Row had upper river clubhouses at the Falls. The support of my fellow townsmen was always heartening to me when I raced. Through the years my victories were always celebrated by the Falls rooters giving a dinner in my honor. Later, they gave two dinners for my son, Jack. Finally, to even things a bit, the Kellys were hosts at a dinner attended by more than 350 of our loyal supporters.

The Falls is a wonderful place. We'll take on the world in anything."

