

Hayward, the Lovely Resort Town

Admit it - traveling is one of those things that we all wish we could do more of. It is on people's minds all the time, how to spend our sacred two weeks vacation. The Hayward that we know today has nearly every modern convenience of travel with several freeways and bridges, BART, and at least three major airports close by. But imagine a time when travel was more of a luxury and then think of Hayward as a destination. It is nearly impossible to imagine now, but Hayward was once a very popular resort town. Families and tourists once flocked here, seeking refuge from the crowded and noisy cities of San Francisco and Oakland.

Starting in the late 1870s, Hayward was a local destination synonymous with "resort." People passing through or those escaping normal life would stay in Hayward for entertainment, relaxation, and hospitality. Hayward was the rural countryside that provided an opportunity to



The Haywards Hotel was located at Main and A Streets. It was a local landmark and was once the pinnacle of the budding town.

commune with nature. Anyone could forget the hustle and bustle of the crowded city streets

and appreciate the slower life in Hayward, while the mild Mediterranean climate was perfect for health. As the cities grew, so did travel through Hayward, especially as railroads joined it with Oakland.

Early on, Hayward became known for good accommodations and good hospitality. The first hotel was built in 1852 by William Hayward, a New Englander who came West during the Gold Rush. Lacking luck in mining for gold, William settled in the Bay Area where he squatted on Don Guillermo Castro's land. William set up a small store to serve other miners passing through the area. From the store proceeds, he saved up enough money to buy a parcel of land on the corner of Main and A Streets, upon which he built his famous Hayward's Hotel. Originally a modest establishment, it was a place for travelers to rest for a night before continuing on their way.

Business grew and so did the hotel, growing to 72 rooms and then finally 100 rooms. The impressive three-story structure became the landmark of the Hayward area with tourists from all over the region coming to stay. In the summer months, cottages were installed in nearby Memorial Park to allow vacationers to temporarily live in the woods and commune with nature. The hotel was wildly famous for its food and hospitality, thanks in large part to William's wife, Rachel.

In 1878, the Hayward's Hotel grew to include an annex located across the street. It provided an additional 20 rooms and housed a billiards hall and bowling alley on the first floor. For over 70 years, the Haywards Hotel stood to welcome guests. Unfortunately, the main building of the hotel fell victim to a fire in 1923. The annex building was demolished in 1952 to make way for the widening of A Street.

Of course, the Hayward's Hotel was not the only choice for accommodations in the fair resort town. A competitor, the Oakes Hotel, was built in 1863. Located on Mission Boulevard between A and B Streets, it was originally known as the Lee and Ryland Hotel. When Anthony "Tony" Oakes took over following the 1868 earthquake, it was



The Haywards Hotel Annex stood across the street from the original building and provided additional rooms and entertainment space for guests.

renamed after its new owner. Another unlucky forty-niner, Oakes got his start by entertaining people with his silvery tenor voice and Mexican guitar at a Sonoma hotel-saloon. He eventually moved to San Francisco and around the Peninsula before settling in Hayward, learning the hotel service trade along the way. The Oakes Hotel had twenty rooms and one suite. It also featured private dining rooms, with chicken and game dinners being a house specialty. The Western Union Telegraph Company also had an office in the hotel to serve guests. The Oakes Hotel was known throughout Northern California for its food, liquor, and entertainment.

However, perhaps the biggest draw for guests and locals alike was the adjoining Oakes Hall. Oakes himself wrote about the hall, stating “this hall was erected by the proprietor for the use of parties, balls, and theatrical performances, with stage and scenery attached.” Because of Oakes’ previous acquaintance with San Francisco actors, opera stars, and circus performers, the Oakes Hotel became Hayward’s center of culture. Oakes himself entertained his guests in the tavern and dining room. Starting in 1870, the Oakes Hotel also became a winter home to



The Oakes Hotel not only accommodated travelers, but also served as winter home for traveling circuses.

various traveling circuses, including Montgomery Queen’s Circus and Menagerie. Pens and sawdust rings were built out back to house the animals, and tourists might encounter any number of training sessions by the performers.

By 1878, the hotel was so popular that Oakes published the *Tony Oakes Songster*, a song book containing popular music distributed in the dining room after dinner. After participating in a group sing-a-long, the room grew lively with dance. Oakes also encouraged his circus guests to perform. After a 30-year run, Oakes retired from the hotel business around 1890. The Oakes Hotel soon became the Villa Hotel and continued on as a Hayward treasure for another 60 years before its demolition in 1952.

Looking at Hayward now, it is amazing that our busy city at the heart of the bay used to be a rural travel destination known for its restorative qualities and cultural happenings. From tourists and circus animals in a resort town to a suburban commuter city, Hayward has grown tremendously to encompass new and different aspects of life. It might be something to consider the next time you head out of town to a modern travel hot-spot—how being a tourist destination now might have an effect on their future development.