

Baseball in Hayward

It is believed that baseball found its way to the San Francisco Bay Area shortly after California became a state in 1850. By 1867, Pacific Coast teams had organized a league and adopted formal rules. After the Cincinnati Red Stockings, the very first professional baseball club in the US, paid a visit to San Francisco in 1869, more teams sprung up in California.

It took Haywards a little while longer to get in the game. It was not until 1878, two years after the town incorporated, that a local team was formed. The *Hayward Journal* reported, "On August 7 men of Haywards and vicinity met and voted to establish the Haywards Base Ball Club, with Horry Meek president. Its purpose is to promote the immediate physical benefit that may be derived from the exercise, and for the pleasure that is attached to the playing."

Horry Meek, son of William Meek of Cherryland, had played baseball at the University of California. His father owned the field on A Street where the team practiced and played. They played in an open field with their supporters standing around the edge, or sitting on the ground. The *Journal* reported, "Fans attended in large numbers." At first there were no gloves or catcher's masks used and few player substitutions were allowed. Home plate was only 45 feet away from the pitcher, compared to the 60 feet 6 inch distance that is used today.

The team played their first game on September 15, 1878 against the Westerners of San Francisco and then the Oakland Mystics, Alameda County Champions. The team did not have matching uniforms and held a special dance at the Odd Fellows Hall on B Street to raise money for uniforms so that at their next game against the Oakland Caledonians they were well outfitted.

The sport continued to grow in Haywards and in the 1880s the Town Plaza, where the new heritage plaza is under construction, was the location where most

games were played. From the various reports of the *Hayward Journal*, it sounds as if these became quite the community events. “The teams had colorful names, like the Fats and the Leans, and in the off-season they kept a goat tethered to the field to keep the grass down.” The *Hayward Journal* newspaper itself even fielded a team, the “Journals” with editor George Oakes serving as manager. Eventually, playing fields sprang up on E Street near where Bret Harte School is today and down B Street where Burbank School is located.



The Hayward Journals Baseball team, 1887. The team is posing at the Hayward Plaza. (HAHS Collection)



*An 1889 Illustration of the baseball field in the Hayward Plaza.
(HAHS Collection)*



*Looking toward E Street, c.1906. Notice the baseball field in the foreground.
The Oakland Oaks practiced on this field. (HAHS Collection)*

By the turn of the century, Hayward was known for its competitive teams. The season started in April and continued until late October. Every Sunday (much to

the chagrin of the local clergy) there was a game as well as on all special holidays. For those special days teams would come from San Francisco and Oakland. In 1901, the *Journal* reported on the Palmtag and Heyer's Brewery team playing the Howard Tailoring Co. team of Livermore. The P & H team, which consisted of men like a local dentist, the Fire Chief, a lawyer, and city employees, won the game 5 – 2.

In the spring of 1910, the Oakland Oaks of the Pacific Coast League (PCL) trained here in Hayward. The Oaks were one of six original franchises in the Pacific Coast League. PCL teams were one of the popular west coast leagues that brought professional baseball to the bay area in 1903. The 1910 Oaks team was quartered at the Hayward Hotel and used the practice diamond in front of the present Bret Harte School. Many of the local teams had the thrill of playing against them in scrimmages and occasionally beat them.

The Golden Era in Hayward baseball was the 1910-20 decade. In 1910 Archie McGregor became the manager of a town team called the Hayward Merchants. It flourished and won all kinds of area championships until the First World War came around. Most of the men went off to fight. After the war, to help the community heal, an organization known as the Hayward Boosters was created with the sole aim of supporting and promoting local baseball. They raised several thousand dollars which were used to upgrade the ball fields to include dressing rooms, showers and a grandstand.



The Hayward Merchants Baseball team, 1929. (HAHS Collection)

Baseball has never lost its interest for Bay Area audiences. Boys and girls are still playing locally in a variety of leagues at all skill levels. Our colleges and universities still have teams that hone those skills and send the best to semi-professional and professional careers. We are also fortunate to have two Major League Baseball teams to follow and root on in the Bay Area. The San Francisco Giants have been playing in the area since 1958, while the Oakland Athletics arrived ten years later in 1968. But the roots of the game in the area go back to the 1860s, and the future is found in the faces of all the young players playing today.



Treeview Little League players and coaches, 1981. (HAHS Collection)