

The 1913 Hayward Blossom Festival

By Diane Curry, Curator

In March 1913, the citizens of Hayward staged an elaborate event called the Blossom Festival. Organizers proclaimed it “the greatest attraction ever held in Hayward.” The festival was intended to showcase the agricultural wonders of the area in preparation for the coming of the world’s fair, the Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) which was to open in San Francisco in 1915. The exposition was to celebrate the completion of the Panama Canal and show the world that San Francisco and the entire Bay Area region had recovered fully from the devastation of the 1906 earthquake.

Everyone in the Bay Area supported the idea of an exposition anticipating an influx of money into their communities from visitors coming to the exposition. When San Francisco won the exposition in 1911 (beating out several other cities around the country), all of the communities of the Bay Area, including Hayward, responded gleefully (well, newspaper editors did at any rate). Between 1911 and the opening of the exposition in 1915 the organizers of PPIE held one celebration after another: groundbreaking for various buildings, tours of the different phases of construction, and encouraged local community celebrations like the Blossom Festival, all as a way to build and maintain interest in the exposition.



Local girls advertising the coming Blossom Festival. They are posing on the grounds of the old Hayward High School on A Street.

In addition to showing Hayward's support of the exposition, Blossom Festival organizers wanted to highlight the beauty and vitality of Hayward. According to an article in the March 18, 1913 issue of the *Hayward Journal*, "Ten millions of dollars are represented in the fruit industry in this part of the county. Nearly 5,000 acres of orchard land in the vicinity of Hayward, all in full bloom, will be visible to the visitors that come to the fiesta. The pink of the cherry tree will be shaded by the white of the pear tree and the pure petals of the apple and prune tree." The committee, chaired by local farmer and businessman Isaac B. Parsons, raised money to underwrite the cost of the festival from large landowners and corporations including many in Oakland. The entire festival cost \$2000 and was fully funded by donations.

The Festival committee planned to decorate downtown Hayward and even brought in a professional decorator from San Francisco. An article in the newspaper said: "E. M. Eisfelder, the official decorator for the Blossom Festival, has arrived with a crew of experienced decorators and as soon as the weather permits will commence decorating the streets, storefronts, buildings and automobiles for Hayward's first grand Blossom Celebration.

The streets will be decorated with pink and green flags, hanging baskets of blossoms and

greens and the poles with greens and palm leaves representing trees. The store fronts and buildings will be draped with large American flags, pink and green cloth and blossoms." For weeks prior to the festival, a decoration committee headed by Mrs. Mastick and other prominent local women searched through the hills and valleys of Hayward, gathering greenery and flowers to use in the decorations. The entire town was encouraged to decorate their home or business to participate.

The festival kicked off with an auto parade on March 22 with activities throughout the week, culminating in a big day on March 29. This first event was a parade of some 35 gaily decorated automobiles traveling from Hayward, through Oakland and on to San Francisco to widely advertise the Blossom Festival to the surrounding communities. After some bad weather early that morning, the parade finally arrived in Oakland around 11:30 that morning. The group



A decorated car in front of businesses on Mission Boulevard and A Street.

traveled up Mission Boulevard/East 14th Street to Oakland where they were greeted by a police escort and the Oakland Chamber of Commerce. The contingent of cars meandered through downtown Oakland and ended up at the ferry terminal where they caught a boat to San Francisco (remember the Bay Bridge was not built for another 23 years).

Upon arriving in San Francisco, the parade was officially received by PPIE officials “with heralds and escorted throughout the City and entertained.” Cash prizes for the best auto decorations were awarded by judges stationed between the San Francisco Ferry Building and the Exposition grounds in the Marina district.

Throughout the week were smaller activities: practice for an auto race, sightseeing tours through the orchards around Hayward, but the big event was on March 29th. First thing in the morning was a baseball game at the Hayward Athletic Park (near Bret Harte Middle School) between Boone’s Academy and Hayward High School. Unfortunately, Hayward High lost the game 8 to 4. There was also a motorcycle race from Hayward to San Leandro where 70 participants started the race and only 50 completed it. The winner making the run in 37 minutes!



A horse drawn entry in the Floral Parade from the Hogrefe family.

Later in the morning was a “Grand Floral Parade” of decorated cars, floats, and other vehicles. People from all over the area, including Mission San Jose and even some from Oakland

participated. The parade route meandered through the streets of downtown out to First Street (now Foothill Boulevard) and then down First Street to the new Hayward Union High School (what is now the Safeway Shopping Center on Foothill). At the high school, the march turned around and returned to Hayward Grammar School on the corner of B and First Street.

Prizes were awarded for the best decorations on an auto, for best decorated car driven by a lady, and the best decorated float drawn by horses, among other awards. At the grammar school were remarks by all the festival dignitaries including Isaac Parsons, Hayward Mayor Charles Heyer, Oakland Chamber of Commerce president A.A. Dennison, mayors from other surrounding communities, and officials from the PPIE.

Later that afternoon was a Baby Show and Parade that gathered at the Carnegie Library (at the corner of B and First Streets) and marched around downtown ending at the Native Sons of the Golden West Hall (at C and Main Streets). The babies (and presumably their parents) won prizes for everything from best decorated baby carriage to cutest and plumpest babies to the finest set of twins, thirteen different categories in all.



The Klee Twins won 2nd place in the best looking twins contest and 1st place in the best decorated carriage.



One of the awards from the Baby Show!

Following the baby contest was a Centipede Race between squads of the National Guard (Hayward had a large National Guard company based out of the Native Sons building). This sounds like some sort of a three-legged or relay race, though no description was included in the Festival program or the newspaper.

Probably the most unusual sporting event was the auto polo contest at Hayward Athletic Park. Festival organizers described it as: "... the new fangled and very exciting auto polo game, played by two men, each in a speedy automobile, who play some kind of golf." Newspaper descriptions of the event proclaim it to be the new sport never before seen on the West Coast (probably because it was a little dangerous!) Essentially, auto polo was like regular polo but with cars; one man driving a left-drive car (not standard at the time) while another, the Mallet Man, rides the running board on the right side of the car attempting to whack a medicine ball through a goal post with a large mallet before the other team. There was a Red Team and a Blue Team. The Blue Team had some ignition troubles and both cars "turtled" a few times (meaning they flipped over from making too sharp a turn) but nonetheless, it was quite an exciting spectacle!

The day wrapped up with a large ball at the Native Sons of the Golden West building. The Fifth Regiment Band, of the National Guard, provided the entertainment. Throughout the day the streets were clogged with visitors from near and far. Hayward's Company H of the National Guard spent a lot of time that day trying to keep the streets clear for autos and parades. Several different autos and a 30-seater touring car took visitors on a lazy tour through the blooming orchards to show off Hayward's bounty.

In the end, as many as 50,000 thousand (organizer's estimates) attended the event. And apparently it went off without a hitch!

While the Blossom Festival was promoted as a “first annual” event, there does not appear to have been another. Maybe the success of the first one was just too much to try to top. Also, it took a lot of work and maybe there was just a lack of will to do it again! Even so, the Blossom Festival shows Hayward’s growing connection to the broader metropolitan Bay Area at the turn of the twentieth century.