

## Agricultural History in the Hayward area:

### General Agricultural History:

The history of agriculture in the Hayward area follows a general pattern. In the 1850s and 1860s many grew grain crops such as wheat and barley. Some farmers were trying to grow wheat, which was growing very well east in the drier tri-valley area of today's Dublin, Livermore and Pleasanton. Small scale farmers in Mt. Eden had some success with grain crops through the 19<sup>th</sup> century along the Hayward shoreline.

Bigger operations with large land holdings took the form of experienced orchardists who raised large scale fruit crops for canning purposes. Orchardists were also experimenting with a wide variety of crops. William Meek for example, the largest landowner in the area, tried citrus and tobacco, the Lewelling family tried avocados (known early on as alligator pears). While orchard fruits were the primary moneymaker, experimentation was common for those who owned large tracts of land. Smaller scale farmers did not experiment as much with different types of crops. Instead they stuck with reliable crops with stable yields.



***A View of Meek Family Orchards, Mission Blvd. in the foreground taken from Prospect Hill  
(HAHS Collection)***

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century row crops took on a new importance. Peas, strawberries, rhubarb, potatoes, and sugar beets were all grown on large farms (like the Meek Estate), but also on

smaller farms. After harvest, row crops were usually processed in the greater Hayward area. Crops might be sent to the local canneries like Hunt's or California Conserving Company. Crops like asparagus might be sent south to Niles or Alvarado for trimming, packing, and shipping.



***Raymond Burr with Sugar Beets: a view of Burr's Sugar Beet field grown in the Hayward Area  
(Both Images HAHS Collection)***

Geographically, the agriculture of the area followed a north to south pattern. Generally speaking, further north for example, cherry orchards were vast. Moving south, cherries gave way to almonds and apricots, as well as cucumber fields. Toward the San Lorenzo area, row crops like rhubarb, peas, tomatoes, and asparagus were grown. Moving southwest in the Mt. Eden area, crops like corn and wheat were raised (as well as peas and fava beans). Southeast, along Mission Boulevard was a mix of cucumbers, some cotton, and sugar beets that extended into the Fremont and Union City areas south and southwestward.

Between 1940 and 1960, the Hayward area began to transition from a predominantly agricultural area to a suburban community. The subdivision of the vast Meek Estate property and large Castro Valley farms and orchards began in the 1920s through the 1940s. The World

War II period attracted more residents and facilitated the development of agricultural lands for building homes and stores. This trend continued well into the 1960s.



***Suburban development meets agricultural land after World War II in San Lorenzo (above) and Castro Valley (below) (Both Images HAHS Collection)***



Although some agriculture remained after World War II, it was no longer the primary occupation of people living in the area by the 1960s. By the 1970s large scale agriculture was collapsing. Population growth mirrored the decline of commercial farming. Vast orchards and row crops demanded many acres of land. As the value of property rose, farmers and developers began competing for land tracts. Many farmers relocated to the central valley, where land remained affordable. As local farms disappeared so too did the farm supply businesses as well as seasonal laborers, packers and processors. By the mid-1980s the Hunt's Cannery left the Hayward area, following farmers to the Central Valley.

In summary, agriculture in the Hayward area started with farmers who experimented with familiar grain crops. This then gave way to large vast fruit orchards and row crop cultivation, reaching its peak at the turn of the 20th century. From about 1920-1940 the number of farms and orchards began to slowly erode as the population boomed and former farms were subdivided for housing tracts. In the 1940s-1960s the decline accelerated dramatically. By the 1970s and into the 1980s there were just a few farms holding out.

# Cattle, Poultry, and Sheep in the Hayward Area:

## Cattle in the Hayward Area:

Cattle played a small but important role in the history of the Hayward area. Cattle raising in the region had its beginnings at Mission San Jose. Prior to Mexican Independence from Spain, it is estimated that Mission San Jose claimed up to 24,000 cattle.<sup>1</sup>

Don Guillermo Castro, owner of Rancho San Lorenzo, was likely the first to keep and raise cattle in the area for commercial purposes. Castro would have raised these animals for the hide and tallow trade which was the backbone of the California economy from the 1820s into the 1840s. The rancheros, like Castro, ran large herds on their vast acreages. The cattle were slaughtered for the hides, which were cleaned, dried and folded for transport, and the fat reduced into tallow for use in candles. The hides and tallow were then traded with New England merchant ships who came to ports along the California coast. The hides were called California bank notes because they were essentially money. The Californio (Spanish residents of California) got to “buy” other merchandise with their “bank notes”. The trade ships were loaded with manufactured goods such as fabric, china, perfume, and sugar not readily available in Alta California at that point.

Later, the establishment of the Brighton Cattle Market in 1866 was Hayward’s first big step toward establishing a cattle industry after the earlier operations of Mission San Jose and Guillermo Castro. Initially the Brighton Market was successful and served as a marketplace where buyers and sellers could go to barter and trade. A May 1866 article reported that “The position of Hayward is favorable for business, and it has become a place of note, having now the largest cattle market and some of the largest warehouses in the state.” Other articles note Hayward as a successful center for grain and cattle because of its proximity to the San Francisco Bay and railroad lines. That being said, the Hayward area’s position as a leader in the cattle industry never fully materialized. As early as 1876, farmers began to see cattle as secondary in Hayward’s agricultural fortunes. Instead the community saw the emergence of fruit orchards and vegetable row crops. Alameda County Historian William Halley noted, “While a good deal of [animal] stock is raised in Eden, it is not a specialty, although in past years a strong effort was made to make it so.”

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<sup>1</sup> Harwood Hall, pg. 2—information based on a U.S. agricultural census about 1850, according to Hall. Hall makes the argument that the secularization of the Missions by the Mexican Government had disastrous effects on California’s cattle population, but this is questionable and needs more research.

Despite never being a primary industry, cattle raising in the Hayward area continued on as did the Brighton Market. The market appears to have slowly evolved more into a butcher shop and retail operation and less a clearinghouse for buyers and sellers.

Another factor troubling cattlemen was weather and disease. In 1878 there were passing references to “sickness among cattle in the foothills northeast of Haywards [Castro Valley]...” Just four years earlier in 1874 a cold snap was reported to have killed “large numbers” of cattle in Alameda County. The misfortune appears to have continued for cattle ranchers. A *Pacific Rural Press* article describes “Cattlemen of Haywards fear disaster. Grass, owing to lack of rains and frost, is scarcely and inch high.” These incidents may even call into the question the sustainability of large scale cattle raising in the Hayward area.



***c. 1900 Brighton Market Wagon (HAHS Collection)***

In addition to beef cattle, dairy cattle were also raised in the area. While there were several dairies before World War II, the largest emerged after the war. The Russell City Dairy was the center of the local dairy industry with some 83 milk cows, but prior to World War II, Castro Valley had arguably the *largest* dairy operation, owned and operated by I.B. Parsons.

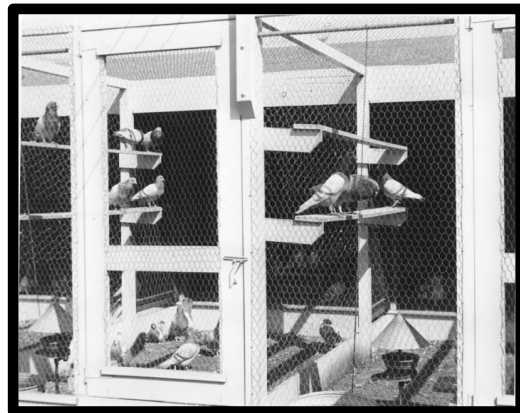
In short, the cattle industry in the Hayward area appears to have seen its high point during the time of the mission and Don Guillerimo Castro. With the start of the Brighton Cattle Market, the industry saw some growth but never became predominant. With the suburbanization of the

area after World War II, what remains of cattle ranching survives in the canyons around Castro Valley, where Don Castro had grazed his own herd. Ultimately, the cattle products produced in the Hayward area seem to have been produced for local consumption.

### **Poultry in the Hayward area:**

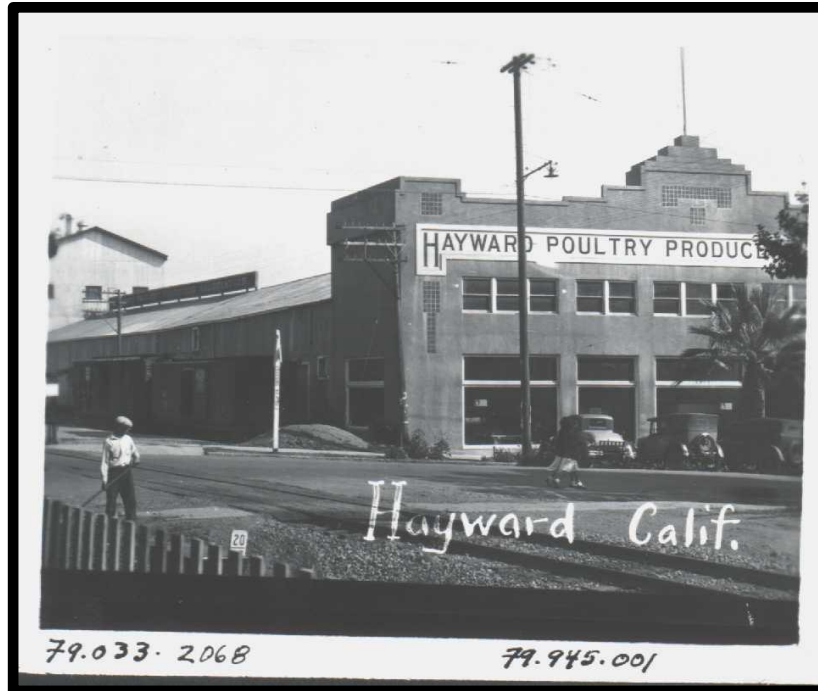
The ascent of poultry in the Hayward area was rapid. Large scale poultry raising appears to take off in the 1920s, and by no coincidence, this is about the same time Castro Valley's population began to climb.

Countywide, it was estimated that 1,200,000 birds were being raised by 1925. Between 1919 and 1925 the population of poultry was up by an estimated 175,000 year over year. Among these birds were not only chickens, but pigeons, quail, turkeys and others. The "Hayward Pheasantry" for example was raising over 1000 quail as well as specialty birds like peacocks. Between 1912 and 1925, C.R. King's "Pigeon Loft" bred four types of pigeons with an estimated 15,000 birds. The quick proliferation of poultry ranching led to more formal organizations to supply the growing industry.



***Pigeons were just one of many types of birds raised in the Hayward area  
(Both Images HAHS Collection)***

The Hayward Poultry Producers Association made the growth of the poultry industry possible. The association was a cooperative, located on lower B Street, claiming about 775 members by 1925. The cooperative served as a distribution point for new types of feed, and promoted new technologies and techniques ranging from electric incubation to egg transport. The association even served a social role, holding picnics and events for members to get together and discuss their trade. The organization of the cooperative no doubt helped many poultry ranchers survive the more difficult periods of the depression.



***The Poultry Producers building on lower B Street (HAHS Collection)***

World War II brought challenges for the area's poultry ranchers. A lumber shortage, for example, prevented the construction of new hen houses. However a 1951 report indicates that the poultry industry recovered quickly. That same year, poultry was the second largest agricultural industry in Alameda County, and in terms of individuals making a living, it was number one. This doesn't mean there were no challenges. The same report notes that fly control was the top priority for poultry ranchers. This brief note also held a clue to how the expansion of suburbs, especially in Castro Valley, would adversely impact poultry ranchers.





***Poultry Raising by Veterans at Hayward Union High School c. 1948 (HAHS Collection)***

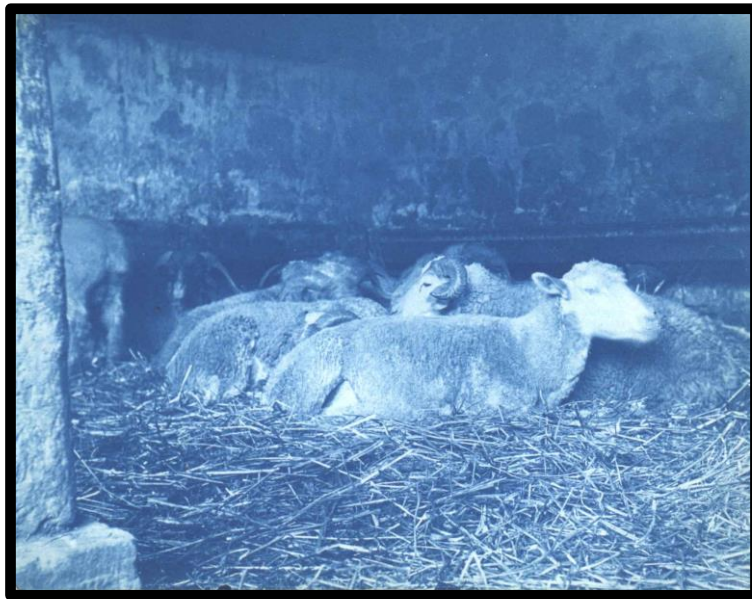
Suburban expansion ultimately brought an end to the poultry industry in Castro Valley and arguably in the entire Hayward area. According to local historian Harwood Hall, the large swarms of flies that hovered over poultry operations in Castro Valley caused tension between remaining ranchers and the new suburban homeowners. The development of housing in Castro Valley also drove up land value and made selling off chicken ranch property tempting for ranchers already seeing declining profits.

Hall also notes that the various components of chicken ranching were becoming more centralized. This meant that incubators, egg collection, and the production of chicken feed were now being done in large facilities in other parts of the state, mostly in the Central Valley. This process began to undermine the importance of groups like the Hayward Poultry Producers Association. Smaller operations in places like Castro Valley were unable to compete. The decline was fairly swift.

Climaxing after World War II, the one-two punch of suburban expansion and the consolidation of the industry ended large scale chicken ranching in the area. However, it is important to note that poultry by far outlasted cattle and sheep ranching, in part because ranchers needed less land and organizations like the Poultry Producers Association helped disseminate knowledge, lowering the cost of entry into commercial chicken ranching.

### **Sheep in the Hayward area:**

As early as 1860 there were a large number of sheep in the Hayward area. That same year saw the creation of the California Wool Growers Association, as well as the arrival of Basque immigrants specializing in sheep into other parts of California.<sup>2</sup> An 1860 agricultural census reveals that Don Guillermo Castro, owner of Rancho San Lorenzo, had at least 400 sheep. Early resident William Knox, who would have arrived in the area just a few years earlier, claimed 800 sheep on the same census.<sup>3</sup>



***Cyanotype image of a sheep, Otto Emerson? (HAHS Collection)***

The number of sheep raised in the area seems to have been on an upward trend. Eden Township's 1870 agricultural census reveals more large landowners were taking on larger numbers of sheep. William Meek, less than a decade after his arrival to the area, owned 1100 sheep. By 1876 it is estimated that Meek may have had upwards of 1,600 sheep.

Sheep raising then slowly declined in the area. By the turn-of-the-century there is very little mention of commercial flocks of sheep in "Alameda County Farm Reports". One exception

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.woolgrowers.org/about/history.html> also see [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5310348.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5310348.pdf) for a brief timeline of Basque sheep herding in California and Nevada.

<sup>3</sup> 1860 Federal Non-Population Census—it is important to note that there were others with fairly large numbers of sheep, but Knox and Castro stood out as the largest at the time.

appears to be Charles Cook, who was raising sheep on 500 acres of land in Palomares Canyon. Known for his large flocks in other states, Cook moved to California to try to popularize sheep raising. However, after the initial 1925 announcement of his arrival to the area, there is no information regarding Cook or his flocks afterward. After the turn of the century the number of sheep raised for commercial purposes appears to decline quickly. At the same time there were likely hundreds of sheep still in the area used for personal use by farming families in the Hayward area.

## A Little Dry History: Fruit Drying in Hayward

Fully tree ripened, with every opportunity to develop true fruit lusciousness, dried fruits become a symbol of complete flavor and compact good eating qualities.—*The Story of Dried Fruits*, 1945

Beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Hayward became a leading fruit growing area in California. The good soil and mild climate made it the perfect place to grow cherries, apricots, pears, plums, and a variety of berries. Growing fruits became very profitable with the arrival and construction of railroads making it possible to ship Hayward area products to locations around the state and nation. The abundance of orchards and access to transportation routes made this an ideal place to establish businesses related to packing, canning, and drying fruit.

Hayward's farmers shipped a portion of their fruit fresh but the largest portion of the fruit crop was sent up for canning. At one time, Alameda County had five large canneries, with Hunt Brothers Cannery in Hayward being one of the largest. Canning required the fruit to be cooked and placed in sealed cans or jars. Beginning in 1895 until the cannery closed in 1981, Hunt's canned most of the local fruit.

The fruit that was not sold fresh or canned was dried at several local dryers. In 1883 the price of fruit dropped so low that many of the growers in the area decided to dry some of their crops rather than try shipping the fresh product out of the area. This was almost ten years before Hunt Brothers came to town so drying was the only other large scale option.

Drying fruit is an ancient form for food preservation where the moisture of the fruit is removed. Dried fruit kept the intense flavor of fresh fruit, but the shelf life of dried fruit was much longer than fresh fruit. This process was done by cutting the fruit in half, removing the pit, and laying it in trays in the sun. Depending on the fruit, it took several days for the moisture in the fruit to evaporate. The invention of dehydrating machines in the 1920s sped up this process to a few hours.

The orchardists found that drying was another good way to sell their product. In December 1889 the Haywards Fruit Growers Association sponsored a meeting of fruit growers from Hayward, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, Niles, Sunol, and Danville. They met in Hayward to set standards for drying and shipping methods for their fruit. From that point on, drying was a viable business in the area. In 1901, 40 carloads of dried fruit—mostly apricots, prunes, and pears—were shipped from Hayward to markets in the east. The entire shipment was valued at \$79,500. Consumers liked dried fruit because it was another way to eat fruit. It did not spoil as easily as fresh fruit but could be reconstituted by boiling in hot water to closely resemble the fresh product. Dried fruit also had a different taste than canned fruit.

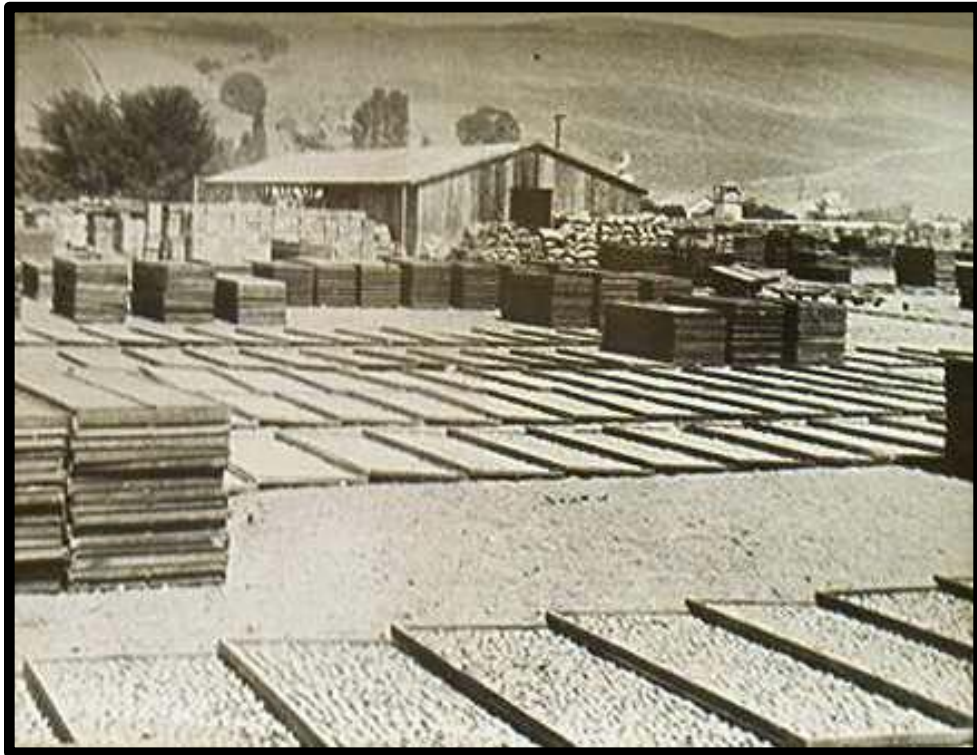
Dryers operated whenever the fruit was ripe enough to harvest (beginning around May), meaning it was not a year round operation. The cannery functioned like this as well, hiring temporary employees during tomato season or apricot season, but the cannery packed more varieties of fruits and vegetables than the dryers did. As one 1920s chamber promotional booklet proclaimed, “Hayward is the heart of one of the richest agricultural centers in the state. The soil is prolific, growing in great abundance fruits and vegetables of all kinds. Here apricots are known the world over as the finest in quality and Hayward has the distinction of being the largest apricot drying center in the world.”

Besides apricots, pears and prunes were also a local specialty for dryers. Some of the large drying operations in the area were those of Robert King (a Lewelling relation) in San Lorenzo, Frank J. Cunha in Hayward, Sorensens’ on Fairview Avenue, Joseph Correia on Mt. Eden Road, F.J. Rodgers on Foothill, Ramos Brothers on Winton Avenue, Roderick on O’Neil Avenue in Hayward, I.B. Parsons in Castro Valley, and Russell & Kimball in Hayward.

Activity at one local dryer, Russell & Kimball, was described like this in 1903, “Here, during the fruit season, deft fingers of girls and women and boys fly swiftly, and fruit in the wide shallow trays curls under the summer sun. Tons and tons of fruit, principally apricots, prunes and pears, are thus treated, making a product that is sold all over the world. Many families find here a chance to do easy, lucrative work, without being kept under a roof. From gray-haired matrons to tiny toddlers range the workers, all wielding swiftly the shining knives, cutting, pitting, and

slicing.” While I sincerely hope the author’s reference to toddlers working was an exaggeration, I think his point was that people of all ages could find work in the local dryers and that the work was not too strenuous.

Drying operations lasted in the area as long as orchards remained. After World War II, it became more profitable to build houses for the surging population than grow apricots or pears or cherries. Over the years the orchards slowly disappeared as did the dryers. Probably the last holdout was F.J. Rodgers who was still harvesting apricots from his ranch on Foothill Boulevard and drying them in the 1980s. While drying was not a huge industry in the area, nor the primary way that local produce was processed, it is still another part of the agricultural history of this area and provided employment for Hayward’s growing population.



*Tray of Apricots at Roderick’s Fruit Dryer, c. 1920 (HAHS Collection)*



*Trays of Apricots at Ramos Brother's Dryer (HAHS Collection)*



*Prepping at the Ramos Brothers Fruit Dryer, c. 1925 (HAHS Collection)*



*Preparing apricots for drying, c. 1930 (HAHS Collection)*





*Employees at Roderick's Fruit Dryer, 1919 (HAHS Collection)*