

Historic City Hall

As you travel along Mission Boulevard through downtown Hayward, it is hard to miss the beautiful Art Deco building across from the Plaza. Referred to as Historic City Hall, people not from the area are always surprised to learn that city offices are actually housed a couple blocks away in a newer state-of-the-art building. People are further surprised to learn that the impressive, multi-story building with its elaborate facade is empty and yet, the building remains an interesting part of Hayward's history.

The city of Hayward incorporated in 1876. For 54 years, the city conducted its business from a variety of buildings in the downtown area but none were a dedicated city hall. Starting around 1920, the mayor and city council began earnestly working toward building a permanent city hall. It took ten years to get everything in place and finally in 1930, construction of the city's first permanent city hall began.

Groundbreaking ceremonies occurred on March 25, 1930 with much pomp and circumstance. Almost half of the city's 5,530 residents attended the ceremony. Parade marshal Frank Pereria kicked off the parade thru downtown to the building site. Participants in the parade included the police department led by Police Chief Louis Silva, the fire department led by Fire Chief Manual Riggs, marching bands from the American Legion, Hayward Union High School, and grammar schools, plus a contingent of 500 schoolchildren carrying American flags. At the city hall site, speakers included Mayor John Lee Wilbur and other community leaders.



Mayor Rolph of San Francisco on the left and Mayor Wilbur of Hayward on the right at the groundbreaking ceremony.

The most prominent speaker was San Francisco Mayor, and future California Governor, James Rolph. According to a report in the *Hayward Journal*, Rolph praised the city of Hayward "for its determination and progressiveness in procuring a city hall after many years of effort." He went on to say, "A city

hall is more than a building. It is a substantial expression of civic pride and confidence. Any progressive city must have such a hall. I have no doubt but that Hayward's structure will be representative of a successful, progressive community.” One report at the time claimed that during the ceremony, Rolph uncovered a horseshoe that he took as a sign of good luck. He later claimed the good luck charm was a deciding factor in his decision to run for governor of California. He was elected later that year and became the state's 27th governor.

The building's architect, E.P. Whitman (who also designed the award winning Hayward Union High School on Foothill Boulevard), oversaw the construction and work of the builders Westlund & Barry of Oakland. Initial plans called for a two-phased construction of the building. The first phase was for completion of the building's exterior and finish work for the interior first and second floors. Westlund & Barry won the bid to do the work with an estimate of \$65,840. The city council thought that during a second construction phase, when space was needed, the third floor would be completed.

The day after the groundbreaking ceremony, tractors began excavating the site and construction officially began. Construction moved along swiftly and by May 17, another ceremony was held to lay the cornerstone. Another parade, organized by a local fraternal organization, with bands and schoolchildren marched to the construction site where local dignitaries and the mayor placed a copper box containing documents, newspapers, and civic

mementos into the corner stone. Several thousand residents again flooded the streets to witness the event.

By mid-June 1930, the city council determined that it would save money to have the third floor completed while workers were on site rather than waiting a few years and paying more for a new construction team to come in and finish the work.

Westlund & Barry bid an additional \$13,475 to finish off the third floor which city council voted to approve in September.



City Hall under construction, summer 1930.

On December 7, 1930, the building was complete and a final dedication ceremony was held. This time the local chapter of the Native Sons of the Golden West sponsored the event and more city officials spoke at a very “dignified ceremony” befitting the stature of the building. The importance of the building shows in the attendance again of several thousand residents. On January 8, 1931, city council members filed out of their chambers at the firehouse (which had housed some of the city offices for many years) just up the street on Mission Boulevard. Accompanied by the American Legion band and the National Guard in full uniform, the members marched down Mission to the new city hall and officially moved into their new quarters. This would be their home for the next 38 years.

City officials had chosen an important spot for their first real home. The new city hall was built on the exact spot of Don Guillermo Castro’s home. Castro was the owner of Rancho San Lorenzo, which covered the majority of Hayward, Castro Valley, and parts of San Lorenzo. He operated his vast ranch operation from his adobe home located along a wagon route to Mission San Jose (now Mission Boulevard). After Castro left the area in the early 1860s, early Hayward settler Charles Ward moved into his adobe. The house collapsed during the great 1868 earthquake on the Hayward fault. Supposedly, remains of the adobe were found during construction of city hall.

City offices occupied the building until 1969. The original building had become cramped. The City had grown resulting in a higher demand for services and therefore, staff. A new, larger, state of the art city hall was built on Foothill Boulevard. The Hayward Police Department, which had also been located there, continued to occupy the building until 1975 when their new quarters were completed on Winton Avenue. By the mid-1980s, the building was largely abandoned.

The old city hall sits directly on top of the ever-creeping Hayward fault causing the building considerable damage over the years. Jagged cracks appeared in the walls, mortar popped from between bricks, windows were out of alignment, and even the staircases began separating from their anchors. Various engineering studies over the years determined the cost of retrofitting and repairing the building in the millions of dollars and still, the creeping fault would continue to twist the building. By the mid-1990s, the city decided the building was too dangerous and should be torn down. A group of concerned citizens stepped forward and pushed to save the building from demolition. The City Council finally agreed in 1996 to leave the building standing and give it official historic status.

Historic City Hall remains today as sort of a huge municipal sculpture. It can never be occupied but it cannot be torn down and it just might fall down in the next big earthquake. While it remains, it is a beautiful iconic building that represents a time when Hayward stepped into the modern age and began the tremendous growth that led to the community as it is today.



City Hall c. 1945