

# One Corner: Main and C Streets

Fire Station #1 on the corner of C Street and Main in downtown Hayward is always a hub of activity. If they are not going out on calls, which is constantly, the firefighters are checking the fire trucks, testing equipment, changing the tires on the fire truck, and giving tours to school children. The station used to be across the street for the Historical Society's Museum, so we were all supremely aware of their activity. Noisy neighbors they may have been, but they definitely kept things hopping in downtown! Interestingly enough, that corner has always been a busy place and an important part of the community.

The corner of C Street and Main was originally the "backyard" of Don Guillermo Castro. His home was approximately located on the site of Historic City Hall on Mission Boulevard. Castro's backyard became an urban corner when the grid pattern of downtown Hayward was laid out in the early 1850s, and the site of a house for many years. In 1888 the Eden Chapter of the Native Sons of the Golden West (NSGW) purchased the property for \$3,500. The NSGW was a fraternal and charitable organization devoted to preserving California history. Eligibility for membership depended on having been born in the state of California. Many of the movers and shakers in Hayward at the time were key members of the local chapter, including George Oakes, who was the editor of the local newspaper, and William Hayward himself.

The group bought the property on the corner of C Street to build a place to hold their meetings. The NSGW raised \$25,000 to fund the building project, but it was built for less than that. The resulting structure, the Native Sons of the Golden West Hall, was much more than just a lodge hall; it became the social center of the community and the town's largest building at the time. It housed a ballroom, a billiard hall, a gymnasium, a kitchen, a stage for theatrical productions, and meeting rooms. The building was dedicated July 4, 1890 with great pomp and circumstance—speeches, parades, and much gaiety, caused by the consumption of vast quantities of liquor (according to some reports).



*NSGW Hall just after completion in 1890.*

The NSGW Hall was a fixture in Hayward until the late 1930s when many of the social functions held there moved over to the newly constructed Veterans Memorial Hall across the street. During its lifetime, though, the NSGW hall would be the venue for not only NSGW meetings but also many balls and stage performances, including an appearance by famed stage actress Lillian Russell. It hosted school graduations and political conventions. Hiram Johnson, candidate for governor of California in 1910, spoke there during his successful campaign. After 1909 it served as the armory for the local National Guard unit. The hall also hosted plenty of sporting events, including prize fights. Toward the end of its life, it was used as a roller skating rink.



*The Native Daughters of the Golden West stand in the doorway of the NSGW Hall, c. 1895.*

The NSGW Hall was torn down just before World War II. Not long after, a new building appeared on the corner. Purity Food Store Company bought the property and built one of their trademark Quonset-hut shaped stores on the site. Purity was a Bay Area based grocery store chain that concentrated on operating stores in smaller towns like Hayward. Once again, that corner of downtown was a busy place.

The Purity Store served the community until 1961 when the store closed and the company sold the property to the City of Hayward for \$110,600. The City planned on using the store building as the new home for Fire Station #1 which was in desperate need of a new home. While the City worked out all the details to fund the renovation of the store, they leased the store for a couple years as a public skating

rink—the Hayward Ice Rink. This gave Hayward residents a new reason to come down to that corner of town.



*The C Street side of the Purity Store, c. 1948.*

Finally, in 1965 the City had funds to begin the redesign and renovation of the building. They hired the architecture firm of Wahamaki & Corey to make the old store into a functional fire station. Zaballos Construction Company won the contract to do the work. The new fire station was dedicated on February 13, 1966. Fire Chief Matt Jimenez proclaimed after the building's completion, "It is the most beautiful I've seen in the nation - an architectural marvel." The innovative design, inspired by the original dome shape of the grocery store building, went on to win several architectural design awards. Fire Station #1 finally had a new home in a central location of the city from which they could easily reach a broad area.



*Hayward Fire Station #1, 1966.*

Over the years the station was altered to accommodate larger, more modern equipment. Unfortunately, some of these alterations affected the structural integrity of the building. Following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, the City realized the fire station might not withstand the next large earthquake. Fire Station #1 was too important to the community's safety to risk the building compromising the firefighters' ability to respond to a call. The City came up with the money for a new building. In 1996, the dome-shaped Fire Station #1 was demolished and a new building designed to modern seismic standards was built in its place. The beautiful station now located on the corner was dedicated with just as much pomp and circumstance as the NSGW Hall more than a hundred years prior, only without the overindulgence of alcohol, on January 11, 1997.



*Fire Station #1, 1997.*

That corner of Hayward has seen a lot of action over the city's history. It appears that it will continue to be a "hot spot" for many years to come in our little "corner" of the world!