

1929 Hayward Shootout

By John Christian, Hayward Area Historical Society

On September 16, 1929, Hayward Police Officer George Vierra responded to a domestic violence call that would change Hayward and its police department forever. The police were called because a man named Vincent Cataldo fired a gun into the air in an attempt to scare his wife during a heated argument. By most accounts Cataldo was said to be drunk which would have been illegal because of prohibition.

Officer Vierra soon arrived onto the scene at 1261 B Street, just east of downtown Hayward. When Cataldo was confronted by Vierra and two other men, he threatened to shoot them. The officers quickly retreated to their patrol car and took cover, waiting for backup to arrive. After a moment, Vierra got up and pointed a police car's spotlight at the house. Just as Vierra exposed himself, Cataldo appeared in the window and opened fire with a rifle. Vierra was hit twice, once right above the heart and the second time through the arm. Alameda County Constable A.J. La Cunha returned fire and was also shot twice, but recovered shortly after. Meanwhile, Vierra was rushed to the Hayward Central Hospital on A Street where he bled to death about an hour later. Vierra officially became the first Hayward Police officer to be killed in the line of duty. He was a three-year veteran of the department.



Officer George Vierra pictured in his Hayward Police Department uniform c. 1929.

Back at the scene, Cataldo's home was surrounded. Unbeknownst to Cataldo, there had been a law enforcement convention in Oakland about the time of the shooting. As news of the shootout traveled, officers and sheriffs from all over Alameda County responded and surrounded the building. It's hard to say exactly how many came, but reports suggest more than a dozen armed officers were on the scene. The men were armed with pistols, revolvers, shotguns and even a machine gun! Two Hayward firefighters were also on the scene using water cannons to flood out Cataldo.

At some point during the melee, Cataldo's wife escaped the house and Cataldo's son, Vincent Cataldo Jr. was arrested for interfering with the officers.

Upstairs, Cataldo held out for three hours, most of which he spent crouched in a cast iron bathtub protecting him from bullets shot through the two-story building. Finally a tear gas bomb drove Cataldo to the back porch where a Constable from Niles shot him with birdshot. Cataldo was quickly taken into custody and the siege was finally over. Any celebration was short lived however as word spread before it had even ended--George Vierra had died.



Officer Vierra was taken to Hayward Central Hospital where he died of his injuries during the shootout. The building still stands on A Street in downtown Hayward.

When the smoke cleared officials examined the building. It was estimated that 1261 B Street was shot hundreds of times. At his murder trial, Cataldo pleaded insanity due to his drunken state. A jury took only six minutes to convict Cataldo of Vierra's murder. He was given a life sentence but paroled in 1946 at the age of 70.



1261 B Street is where the shootout took place. Notice the broken windows on the second floor. The building was torn down in the 1960s.

Back in Hayward, local officials honored George Vierra with a City Council Resolution commending his bravery. It was reported that Vierra's funeral was the largest in Hayward's history at that point with over 1000 in attendance at All Saints Church. The funeral cortège was then escorted by San Leandro and Hayward Police as well as state patrolmen to Holy Sculpture Cemetery for burial. Vierra's No. 2 star police badge was retired by the police department. George Vierra left behind a wife and an 11 year-old son.