

## “The Brief and Hectic Career of Chief Harry Raymond”

In the early 1900s, few jobs were more tenuous than Chief of the San Diego Police Department. The pressures of city politics kept careers short, averaging eleven months between 1927 and 1934. The tenure of Chief Harry J. Raymond was briefer than most, and maybe the strangest.

Raymond became chief on June 5, 1933. With more than twenty years of police experience, largely as an investigator for the Los Angeles district attorney’s office, he brought to the job a “reputation for efficiency in force management,” according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

But his appointment to the \$300 per month job by City Manager Fred Lockwood was instantly questioned. San Diegans were unhappy that Lockwood had bypassed department candidates to hire a detective from Los Angeles. The manager cited the need to reorganize the police: “It is my understanding that there are three or four cliques in the department and an outside man could break them up better than a man in the department.”

There were also sensational rumors from Los Angeles of unsavory links between Raymond and the underworld. Two local attorneys claimed Raymond had taken calls from grifters and “bunco artists” asking him to come to San Diego. But defenders of the new chief believed he would clean out much of the “petty racketeering” thought to be growing in the city.



Chief Harry Raymond *San Diego Police Museum*

Within a month of his hiring, Raymond announced sweeping changes in his department. To “distribute efficiency” and place men in “more active positions” he ordered the transfers of more than 100 police officers. The biggest staff shakeup in department history sent several veteran officers—including two former chiefs—from headquarters to substations at Ocean Beach, La Jolla, and East San Diego.

In the opinion of Abe Sauer, the crusading editor of the weekly *Herald*, Raymond’s changes “turned the department upside down and left it with its head in the dust and its legs kicking idly in the air.” Sauer protested that “competent officers were switched from section to section until they don’t know where to report for work. Everyone who was presumed to know anything was put where he couldn’t be heard.”

Throughout the summer of 1933, there was a drumbeat of criticism from the *San Diego Union*. The newspaper complained that police work was being politicized by Chief Raymond. An editorial cited a spiteful raid on a nightclub and the arrests of several out-of-town entertainers. It was “apparent that the raid was not a police matter but a political matter.”

A “loud-mouthed squabble over a midnight glass of beer” proved to be the turning point in Chief Raymond’s unpopular San Diego career. As reported by the *Union*, Raymond was a customer at the popular Hof-Brau nightclub at State and C Streets, where he ordered a beer, late on Saturday night, August 26. The beer was “served tardily” and the chief complained to the management he was not given proper attention.

Raymond then made a phone call from the nightclub to George Sears, head of the police vice squad. A short time later the chief met the vice squad at police headquarters, where the Sears was ordered to proceed to the Hof-Brau and to “stop dancing at 12 p.m., confiscate gambling paraphernalia, make arrests of all drunken persons and anyone causing a disturbance.”

Sears dutifully led his squad to the Hof-Brau at midnight. The music and dancing was stopped, slot machines were dragged outside, and the nightclub was closed. James Crofton, the part-owner of the club, protested to Sears, demanding to know why he was being singled out. When Sears called Raymond and relayed the complaint, the chief ordered police radio patrols to close all beer halls on their beats and to make appropriate arrests.

More raids quickly came and the police arrested nearly thirty people suspected of public drunkenness. As the police closed the Momart Cafe on Atlantic Street (now Pacific Highway), the owner protested. “There was a city councilman here only a few minutes ago. He told me this was a good place!”

By Monday morning, a public uproar over the police raids was front page news. Those arrested over the weekend—including a handful of agitated attorneys and politicians—were quickly released by a justice court judge. The *Union* accused Raymond of humiliating “ordinary San Diegans” to gratify a petty grudge, and demanded his resignation.

The besieged chief denied personal malice and insisted his orders were only intended to enforce a local ordinance that prohibited dancing after midnight. But Raymond’s defense was challenged by City Attorney Clinton Byers, who said there was no closing hour specified for the dance halls and nightclubs.

“I am not going to hand in my resignation to anybody at any time,” Raymond announced, after a week of rumors. But City Manager Fred Lockwood had seen enough and asked for Raymond’s resignation. When the chief ignored the request, Lockwood politely waited one day and then informed Raymond by letter that his services as chief of police were no longer required.

“Raymond is not the man for the police job,” Lockwood said. “He has shown no executive ability. He is temperamentally unfit for the post.” The ex-chief threatened action against the city council to reclaim his job but then quietly left town for Los Angeles, where he resumed an eventful career as a private investigator.

Lockwood replaced Raymond with Lieutenant John T. Peterson, a likeable former chief who had been exiled to the East San Diego substation by Chief Raymond. “Pete” Peterson would serve for one year, only to be replaced by George Sears, who would retain the post for nearly five years.

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