

# Isaac B. Parsons: The Man Behind the Name

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You've probably driven down Parsons Avenue in Castro Valley at some point, but have you ever wondered who Parsons was? Isaac B. Parsons was born in New York in 1860. As a young man, Parsons attended the U.S. Naval Academy, graduating with the class of 1881. After serving in the Navy, Parsons came to the Hayward area in 1887. He initially purchased 40 acres at the intersection of Redwood Road and Castro Valley Boulevard. Within a few years however, he was operating a much larger ranch along Seven Hills Road. The operation included a large fruit drying operation, processing an estimated 200 tons of fruit a year! His ranch also had 120 dairy cows, shipping their milk to Oakland for bottling. A 1903 *Hayward Review* article marveled at the efficiency of his large ranch, calling it "one of the model properties" in the area.



***Parsons' Castro Valley Ranch, c. 1920***

As synonymous as Parsons is with Castro Valley, he played a large role in the development of Hayward as well. He worked for the Bank of Haywards (yes, there was an "s" in the bank's name at the time) starting in 1892 until 1948, working away in his office on the second floor of the B Street building in downtown Hayward. He served as the bank's president for most of that period. Parsons and others were able to keep the local bank in good shape not only through the Great Depression but through World War II as well.

Perhaps Parsons' largest contribution to the Hayward area was his role in the local high schools. He was instrumental in the construction of Hayward Union High School #3 in 1892, and its replacement, Hayward Union High on Foothill Boulevard in 1911. These schools served not just Hayward's youth, but

those living in Castro Valley and other surrounding communities. All told, he spent more than 50 years on the Hayward Union High school board.

His time on the school board was not without controversy, however. At a 1937 school board meeting, Parsons was called a “dictator” by his fellow board members for refusing to vote to allocate funds for a school bus. Parents argued the bus was necessary to bring students from Castro Valley and other outlying areas to the Foothill Boulevard campus. Parsons’ reported angry reply; “I got along without a bus when I went to school...They’re raising a bunch of sissies today.” Despite this conflict, Parsons remained a highly regarded member of the board.



***The Hayward Union High School Board, 1936. Left to right are N.P Nielson, Isaac B. Parsons, W.R. Jacobson, B.H. Manter, and Alden Oliver.***

Isaac B. Parsons never retired. He continued working and kept active in the Hayward and Castro Valley community up until his death on September 29, 1948. He died unexpectedly from a heart attack at his Castro Valley home while preparing for a business trip. Parsons' remains were sent to Arlington National Cemetery for interment.