

A LINK TO OUR PAST, CSS 1918-1929

Commodore Sloat School has a long and rich history. It is named after John Drake Sloat, an American naval officer with 55 years of service. In 1846 he commanded US Navy forces that landed at Monterey, then the capitol of California, and claimed the California territory for the United States from Mexico.

I happened across 5 bound volumes of the minutes of the Commodore Sloat Mother's Club and started reading them. Handwritten minutes from a meeting long ago stated, "On May 10, 1918, the Commodore Sloat School Mother's Club was formed". "A letter was sent to the Board of Education asking for a suitable yard for the proposed school and a committee was appointed to appear before the board." Apparently school for neighborhood children was being held in a small, crowded shack until a new school could be built.

Minutes were carefully recorded at the meetings of the nascent organization, and reveal a glimpse into Commodore Sloat's and San Francisco's history. The first gift to the school was a piano, purchased by the Mother's Club by fundraising. There were philanthropic pursuits: "Clothing for the poor was collected but on account of the epidemic not distributed", a reference to the terrible influenza pandemic of 1918 which took many lives in San Francisco and worldwide.

1919- Members checked to see if the school had secured a corner lot. The Mother's Club was meeting at a nearby clubhouse for a year. The Club worked with local realtors and community leaders to generate interest in residents in the growing neighborhoods of St Francis Wood, Westwood Park, and Ingleside Terrace to build a new school. CSS Mother's Club protested the opening of an ice cream store and dancing place at Ocean Ave and Junipero Serra to the police commissioners, and their license was denied. The name of the organization changed to CS Parents and Teachers Association.

1920- Teachers had to go to UC Berkeley for training courses, it was suggested that they be able to utilize the "State Normal" school, later San Francisco State University. "Considerable work" was done for "the teacher's salary raise" and influenced "that needed reform". The proposed Commodore Sloat School was approved by the Board of Supervisors in their budget. A playground slide was purchased by the PTA. A banner was awarded each month to the class with the most mothers attending meetings in the school colors, orange and white. An urgent request went out for each member to bring a cup and saucer and a spoon to meetings. Tea was usually served after the meetings were adjourned.

1921-Community assistance was a function of the Club: there was a report in the minutes on "the family in our care" as "slowly improving. The husband was not working and was caring for a sick wife". A donation of \$35 in "staple foods" was approved. There was a "Children's Home" adjoining the school. A boy cared for by a local family had "a scant amount paid by charity." One mother at the meeting "gave a check for \$5 at once and promised clothing for the father".

1922-the first principal, Miss Elvina Berard, was appointed. There is still a plaque honoring her under the tree to the right of the school entrance. CSS officially opened for students in April 1922 as a K-8 school. It was built for \$200,000 and featured Spanish architecture, modern conveniences, and was situated on 3 acres. It was felt that the new school would foster community spirit in the new residential district growing around it.

“Our first meeting was of course an auspicious one as we gathered for the first time in the beautiful new Commodore Sloat School building of which we are so justly proud. It is appreciated to the fullest after many years struggle by the faithful members who started this club and worried along in the old wooden structure which we dignified by the name school.” A successful card party fundraiser was held in the “school’s spacious auditorium “, giving parents the opportunity “to come together in the splendid new building .

1924-Again showing their clout, the PTA thwarted plans for a “Pool Room” on Ocean Ave. The PTA purchased a Victrola, a moving picture machine, and educational films for the school.

1925-The PTA supported the Board of Education for proper representation of the West of Twin Peaks district. Members were politically active, and attended board meetings.

1926-the PTA purchased 8 small sewing machines for the primary classes. A successful Father’s Night was held.

1927-Teachers started attending PTA board meetings. The conservation of Mt Davidson originated with a member of the CSS PTA.

1928-29-The cafeteria opened, with equipment purchased by the PTA. 200-300 children were served each day. A radio was purchased for the school by the PTA.

It’s fun and interesting to see what our predecessors in the Parent Organization contributed to Commodore Sloat and its’ children, and how the school evolved.

Sue Pierce