

## A Link to our Past – Commodore Sloat School in the 1940s

I have been reading through the minutes of the Commodore Sloat Mother's Club meetings dating back to 1920, and found the 1940s very interesting. This is "everyday history", recording the activities of ordinary people living through extraordinary times. It is also history as seen through women's eyes.

1940—Mrs. Edith Cochran was the new principal. Shortly after her appointment, the school mourned the passing of Miss Elvina Berard, the first principal of CSS. A memorial service was held for her in the auditorium.

Darien Way, the street at the front entrance to the school, became a one-way street for traffic safety at drop-off time.

The Mother's Club was proactive; "We are attempting to safeguard the morals, as well as the safety of the children, even outside of the school, as is shown in our protesting a liquor license in the neighborhood of the school. The license was not granted."

The Principal, Edith Cochran, said it was "harmful to the child to allow them to read these cheap 10 cent comic magazines, that the paper and printing is all inferior and harmful to the eyes and that the comics in these books are not accepted by the papers. All mothers should watch this carefully and guard against it."

1941—The Principal stated, "how lax we have been in regard to the superior or gifted child. What can we do for the enrichment of the superior child?"

The United States was hoping to avoid being pulled into the war in Europe and Asia. "It was agreed we cooperate with the PTA-2<sup>nd</sup> district in their plan to register all women for a National Defense plan."

The Principal stated that a book, "Step by Step in Sex Education", was missing from the library.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Imperial Navy and Air Force attacked U.S. Naval forces at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii. War was declared the next day by President Roosevelt and the United States entered into World War II.

A Mother's Club meeting was held on December 8. It was noted that "Step by Step in Sex Education" was still missing from the library. Due to a paper shortage, no more school newsletters, "The Log", would be distributed, but 1 copy would be posted on the bulletin board. The Mother's Club President, "informed us that it was unwise to give a note of worry to our meetings in this time of War, but to remain calm and follow in our same routine, hoping for happier days. She promised attention to any matters conducive to the safety and welfare of our children."

On December 10, there was an Executive Board Special Meeting. "In the circumstances of the War Emergency, the meeting was called to appoint a Disaster Chairman and Committee to make plans for any action the War Emergency may demand of us." The Mothers were instructed to "Remove all articles from the bulletin board which are not vital to Defense Work." "Room Mothers were divided into groups to obtain emergency registration for volunteer efforts. Nurses, doctors, and first aiders were listed, location of fire boxes and equipment in the school were studied. A survey of buildings near school that could be used as shelters were made. The first aid room was equipped" with fundraising by the Mother's Club. "Emergency food shelves were supplied with emergency rations."

“A program was planned to educate every individual in home defense methods.” The San Francisco Fire Department demonstrated bomb control.

1942—“The Red Cross has sent out an appeal for magazines and toys...to be used for the Evacuees”, a probable reference to people evacuated from Hawaii. The book “Step by Step in Sex Education” was returned to the library. San Francisco Junior College, Aptos Junior High, and West Portal School were designated Disaster Centers. First Aid kits were assembled and placed at strategic sites around the school. An appeal from the Red Cross was made “for hospital sweaters for the Boys brought from the islands.”

“The importance was stressed of someone being home at all times to receive the child in case of emergency, unless other arrangements had been made.” A speaker at a meeting, an attorney and civic leader, stated, “We should preserve our form of government by telling our children that OUR form of government is the best.”

The Christian Scientist Church across the street from CSS stated that “the children could use the church in case of disaster and a key to the building was received”. First aid and “Air-Raid Precaution” classes were held at the school. A Women’s Air Raid Warden Service was formed.

Speakers from the Red Cross Blood Procurement Center spoke to the Mothers about the need for blood donations. “Dr. Pinkerton in Honolulu, at the time of Pearl Harbor, had 700 units of plasma available and this amount was consumed in 6 hours.”

Gas and sugar rationing was ongoing. Bingo games at Letterman Army Hospital in San Francisco were enjoyed by the soldiers, with prizes provided by CSS. 150 Christmas stockings were provided “for the boys in the closed mental wards”, with”cigarettes, peanuts, candy, and a tangerine.” CSS paid for 15 soldiers to go to the symphony, “with a box provided for the boys who may be somewhat incapacitated.”

“15-18 tons of scrap metal has been collected by the school.” A War Service Program was ongoing: a 10 foot Christmas tree and 3 smaller trees were sent to the Red Cross Recreation Center at Letterman Hospital. “700 gifts were presented to the soldiers from the children.”

1943—A Blood Drive was held. “Classes in the planting and cultivation of Victory Gardens are to be given in the auditorium.” Victory Gardens were home gardens planted to supplement scarce food due to rationing. An air raid shelter was completed at Commodore Sloat. The Principal spoke of a course at San Francisco Junior College on Child Recreation Care. “With the opening of child care centers due to the numbers of mothers now employed, there is a great need for trained people to take over this work.” A Mother’s Club member would check on a new laundry service, as the former laundry had “gone to war.”

A speaker for the Red Cross spoke on the Cookie Brigade. The Red Cross Canteen Service in New Delhi, India was being developed “in this desolate area of the Far East,” taking place at “outposts wherever our boys are stationed and is patterned after the canteen set up in San Francisco.” They requested “cakes, sandwiches, and cookies as there is a great need for this type of refreshment for the boys.” The Cookie Brigade also operated locally, with Red Cross “girls” delivering cookies to servicemen.

A speaker at another meeting stated, “Inasmuch as women were in the majority, the givers and preservers of life, they should have a great more to do with the management of affairs of the world-particularly the post-war world and the peace aims. Women in

service to their country (war workers) should receive treatment such as that provided for the men in service.’

A home canning course was held at St Francis Community Church. A speaker regarding food rationing urged, “We must meet the challenge this war presents.” Victory sewing classes were planned. War stamp and bond sales at CSS as of May 1943 equaled \$37,248. War bonds were government issued bonds sold to finance the war effort. War stamps sold for lesser amounts and could be saved towards the purchase of war bonds.

“Letterman Hospital asked for 100 nail files and 50 pairs of scissors, on behalf of the boys who are without relatives or friends to bring them small comforts.”

1944-- The children of CSS collected 11.4 tons of paper for the paper drive. It was not possible to have work done on the school building due to “material shortage and labor conditions.” “Air raid procedure has been changed by the Board of Education and all alerts will be considered imminent. No children will be dismissed.”

“Letterman Hospital has requested that our Christmas philanthropy...be devoted to the patients in the mental wards. We have been asked to supply small gifts that the boys may wrap and send to their families.” D-Day, June 6, 1944 was the invasion of France by Allied Forces, beginning the liberation of occupied countries and the end of the War in Europe. The Japanese had yet to be defeated.

1945—4<sup>th</sup> Graders read letters received from servicemen thanking them for the Christmas packages the children had sent on the “Christmas Ship.” “The children illustrated how much geography they had learned from tracing those letters on the globe to their destination or point of origin.”

The West of Twin Peaks 7<sup>th</sup> War Loan (bond) Drive was ongoing, the goal was the purchase of a B-29 plane, at a cost of \$75,000! B-29s were long range bombers primarily used in the Pacific theater of the war.

6<sup>th</sup> grade children at a meeting “sang an original and appealing war loan song urging us all to buy more bonds.” A conference associated with the San Francisco Charter of the United Nations, which was signed in San Francisco on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1945, was attended by a mother, as a “good will ambassador.” She shared her impressions: “Mr. Molotov to her, was the most expert in avoiding controversial issues and his intriguing press conferences were over-capacity attended.” She was referring to Vyacheslav Molotov, the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, for whom the “Molotov Cocktail” is named. An inquiry was made “as to whether our children should be shown the gruesome atrocity pictures of helpless political prisoners during Germany’s tyrannical reign. Many mothers thought the pictures should be shown so our children will not readily accept Germany re-armament propaganda.” This must have been a reference to Nazi concentration camps.

It was “agreed that now more than ever the boys (at Letterman Hospital) would need these small but important reminders that the end of the war will not mean that they are forgotten in our anxiety to resume normal peacetime living.”

Discussions topics proposed for the year included: Post War Planning, the San Francisco Charter, (of the United Nations), and Intercultural Relations. “The possibility of San Francisco being the City of Peace presents a challenge for the future we must face.” Until 1949, the United Nations was based in San Francisco. Enrollment at CSS was at 865 students, with 27 teachers, and the average class was 33 children.

There was a nurse at CSS 2 mornings a week. “As soon as women are available for such positions, “it was hoped that there could be a full time nurse. Nurses and other

women had gone to work to support the war effort. The St. Francis Garden Club held an Autumn Festival to raise funds for a Christmas project for returning veterans. In December the mothers gave a party for the men in the closed mental wards, "to give these boys who have given so much, some small chance to join in the spirit of Christmas giving." The war ended with the Japanese surrender on August 14, 1945.

1946—A Victory Clothing drive was held to collect warm clothing for overseas. There was a shortage of teachers necessitating double sessions for Kindergarten. The Treasury Department of the U.S. Government awarded a citation to CSS for meritorious service in the sale of war stamps and bonds. There was a controversy over which was better: Junior High schools (which were started in 1923) or K-8 schools. It was decided that the Post War Service Chairman would continue bingo and entertainment for convalescent veterans at Letterman Hospital. A Father's Night program featured a speaker, "Education for the Atomic Age". Even with new salary increases, 50% of teachers on leave had not returned. There was a proposal to pay teachers a minimum of \$200/month. SFUSD was short 40 nurses.

1947—Some mothers advocated that a part of post war service funds be allocated for the benefit of CSS children. Another mother disagreed, "The closed mental wards at Letterman are very much in need of morale building, attention and entertainment, and they do not get too much of it from other sources. The Letterman patients are still war casualties and it is for their benefit." It was decided to continue the bingo games. At the end of one meeting, a floral designer "gave an elaborate and most attractive demonstration of flower arranging." Then, as was the case with most of the meetings of the Mother's Club, tea was served.

The Chief Probation officer of the San Francisco Juvenile Courts spoke at a meeting. "Juveniles especially are faced with complex problems which are mostly the result of our war years creating emotional instability. Parents are not totally to blame as delinquency is a deeper emotional conflict than parents can create." Parents must have been relieved!

In September, Mrs. Cochran, the Principal, discussed a summer program she had attended. "Arithmetic and reading methods were discussed and the concluding thought was that education today is a science on which there is wide research and investigation."

The Superintendent of San Francisco Schools spoke, and said that in his opinion, "Children's health comes first and no homework should be given in the elementary grades." Certainly not the case today! The Mother's Club advocated retaining San Francisco's cable cars. They worked on getting a traffic signal installed at Junipero Serra and Ocean Ave where the school is located.

Other topics were discussed: "the singing of Christmas carols in schools has been again questioned by...the Civil Liberties Union." "The United States Supreme Court has ruled children in our schools do not need to salute our flag." A Red Cross worker congratulated the Mother's Club on their continued philanthropy at Letterman Hospital. "Letterman Hospital is the largest Army General Hospital in the Western United States. It has a capacity for 2000 patients."

1948—the Mother's Club again declined to join the PTA, citing their wish to remain an independent organization. "We have more advantages and freedom of activity for our various projects."

There was a proposal to write a letter to the San Francisco Motion Picture Council, "asking if the picture entitled 'The Outlaw' could be kept out of our district theaters on

Saturdays in lieu of the fact that so many of our children attend the show on that day.” It was not considered a “desirable movie for school children.” “The Outlaw” was a notorious film directed by Howard Hughes, starring Jane Russell in a racy performance.

There was a polio epidemic in San Francisco. An event at school with 150 children expected was cancelled, since “the gathering of that many children together is being discouraged at this time.”

From a San Francisco School Building Survey: the “Playground is one of the largest in the city for elementary schools”. There were an inadequate number of benches for eating lunch. There was no running water or sinks in classrooms.

1949-- A dentist spoke at a meeting on “new fluoride treatment for children’s teeth.” The Letterman fund was to continue only for Christmas gifts.

And so, a bit of history of our school and of San Francisco during the WWII years.

Respectfully,  
Sue Pierce