

A LINK TO OUR PAST—CSS IN THE 1950'S

I happened upon 5 volumes of minutes from the Commodore Sloat School Mothers Club meetings, dating from the Mothers Club's inception in 1918 through 1970. After reviewing this interesting glimpse into the history of our school, I have been writing a series of articles detailing CSS history as seen through the eyes of the Mothers Club.

WWII ended in 1945, with many men returning home to their families after serving in the military overseas. As you can imagine, there were many children born the following year, the start of the "Baby Boom". My own mother, a retired elementary teacher, was issued an emergency teaching credential in 1950, as there were so many 5-yr-olds entering kindergarten there were not enough teachers! San Francisco and Commodore Sloat School were no exception, and there were between 670 and 811 students in the K-6 school in the 1950s, with the peak of 811 in 1951.

The families at CSS in the 1950s seemed to have traditional stay-at-home mothers, who had a lot of time to devote to the school. The Cold War was on, with the nation experiencing great anxiety over antagonistic relations between the 2 great post war powers of the world, the United States and the Communist government of the Soviet Union. Communism was spreading through Eastern Europe. The McCarthy era had begun, with the House Un-American Activities Committee convening in Washington, D.C., attempting to uncover people suspected of unpatriotic activities. Anti-Communist hysteria gripped the nation and Americans sought ways to assure that people were "loyal" to the constitution and the American government. Much concern and attention was paid to "Civilian Defense" in the activities of the Mothers Club.

1950—The Korean War started, with the Army of the Communist North invading the South. UN forces, including the United States military, intervened, supporting South Korea, with China and Russia supporting the North.

1951—The minutes spoke of the "unsettled time of world unrest". The Mothers Club secured air-raid shelters for the children of CSS in the surrounding neighborhoods.

A report on Board of Education decisions included, "All teachers were required to take a loyalty oath under the Levering Act. Those failing to do so have been dismissed." The Levering Act, passed by the California state legislature in 1950, required all state employees to take an oath supporting the Constitution, stating that they were not members of the Communist Party, and pledging that they would not support any organization that advocated overthrowing the United States Government. Teachers who refused to sign were indeed terminated.

At a general assembly meeting an "atomic bomb movie" was shown.

Polio was still a threat; a Mother's March on Polio enlisted CSS mothers to collect donations for that cause. The minutes mention a "Bundles for Korea drive". There was a need to provide the school with first aid kits, "in line with the Civil Defense Program." The December general assembly meeting was in the form of an "outdoor Christmas carol gathering around the decorated tree on Darien Way and climaxed with the arrival of Santa Claus on a fire engine".

1952—The topic for a speaker for a general meeting was "Does War in Korea Mean World Peace?"

There was a concern about parents parking or stopping on Darien Way, blocking traffic. This has been a concern at CSS for many years!

A new invention arrived: ballpoint pens were demonstrated to the Mothers Club, and were to be tried for the 4th grade and up.

The mothers' names listed were always their husband's, ie, Mrs. Ted Brown.

At the end of the minutes, it usually said, "there being no further business, tea was served in the library".

1953—The Korean War ended this year.

The Principal spoke about a new book, "Television and our Children". There were now televisions in millions of homes.

The "Honorable Teresa Meikle, Superior Court Judge, spoke on 'What every woman should know about the law'."

1954—The U.S. Collector of Customs gave a talk on "narcotics".

1955—The Mothers Club sent a letter to the Board of Education protesting an increase in class size.

A letter was received from the Balboa, Lakeside, and Ingleside Homeowner's Associations asking that "our building which has not been painted since 1921 receive attention at this time". Renovations and improvements on school buildings moved slowly even then!

Some positive publicity was noted: a recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle commented on the high standards in the San Francisco schools.

The Mothers Club received a "letter from the UN which suggested that on Hallowe'en the children collect money for sick and needy children instead of soliciting sweets for themselves". This was the now familiar UNICEF Halloween collection.

1956—The Governor's report on Juvenile Delinquency was discussed by the Principal at a meeting. A speech at A.P. Gianinni high school was titled, "Why They Behave That Way".

90-100% of mothers at CSS were members of the Mothers Club and had paid their dues; \$1/year.

KQED Education channel 9 invited the Mothers Club to support the station.

A member was asked to write to the Chief of Police requesting 2 hour parking zones in the blocks surrounding CSS.

A special Education Board meeting was "...called because of the urgency of acquainting ourselves and all families with the Civilian Defense Disaster Evacuation Plans." An evacuation was to be made in teachers' and parents' cars to head south "to our destination in Sunnyvale."

1957—For a \$10 introductory fee, pictures could be rented from "the San Francisco Museum of Art for the enjoyment of the children at CSS".

The Principal "announced that the report of a tiger loose from the zoo today proved false."

At a general assembly meeting the speaker was a home economist, "...Mrs. Filsinger, from the P.G.& E. She showed beautiful color slides of holiday tables and outdoor lighting, and gave some recipes from her department at the P.G & E."

"Mrs. Cochran asked the Safety Chairman to put a reminder in the bulletin telling mothers not to park in the crosswalk at Darien Way." Our parking issues are not new!

The Philanthropy Chairman "...suggested that we take over a needy family in our school instead of elsewhere since there is a needy family here."

23 Christmas trees, one for each classroom, were decorated and then sent to Children's Hospital before the school break.

1958—The 40th anniversary of the CSS Mothers Club was celebrated.

A "Civil Defense for Householders" course was offered at CSS.

1959—The Principal spoke on homework or homestudy and its contributions to the child. The Mothers Club considered forming "...a committee to bring some pressure to bear on the Neighborhood Youth Council to work toward the elimination of Juvenile Delinquency."

Apparently there were new fire safety standards: "Fire Department restrictions made it impossible to have classroom (Christmas) trees this year."

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