

## A LINK TO OUR PAST: CSS in the 1960s

I have been reading over the carefully recorded minutes from the Commodore Sloat Mothers Club meetings which I found in several bound volumes that were lovingly preserved by previous CSS mothers. The meeting minutes date from the Mothers Club inception in 1918 through 1970. 2008 is the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of a parent organization at Commodore Sloat School, and it's interesting to look back at our predecessors and the history of our school.

**1960**--The beloved 2<sup>nd</sup> principal of Commodore Sloat School, Edith Cochran, was retiring after 20 years at her post, from 1940-1960. The new principal, Miss Rose Marraccini, took over.

A tribute was presented to Edith Cochran, a portfolio of pictures and letters from her grateful students, a charm, and the establishment of the Edith Cochran Fund, for "creative and cultural arts", to be part of the Mothers Club annual budget. Mrs. Cochran was lauded as "An educator without peer, whose qualities of leadership, devotion and service have enriched the lives of nearly a generation of children..."

**1961**—There was a discussion of the question of annual promotion of students vs. twice yearly, which was the current method. For instance, children younger than 5 years old would enter kindergarten in the 2<sup>nd</sup> spring semester, instead of the fall, and be promoted to the next grade accordingly.

Traffic problems around the school were nothing new: "Great traffic congestion around the school, and especially on Darien Way", were discussed at a meeting.

There were 28 Executive Board members in the Mothers Club! We currently have 12. A teacher, Miss Dorothy Duff, retired after teaching at CSS for 40 years.

**1962**—The Mother's Club wrote a letter to the San Francisco Board of Education protesting a resolution that had passed curtailing how funds raised could be spent. "In the world of today the supplemental education that can be given by the interested parent groups should be encouraged and not discouraged."

Schools could rent a painting from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art for between \$6-15, and the Mothers Club provided the money for this.

Forced, court-ordered busing of school children to schools outside their own neighborhoods was a real possibility as the school districts were compelled to desegregate their schools. The landmark Brown vs the Board of Education Supreme Court decision of 1954 striking down institutional racial segregation, combined with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, were driving desegregation efforts around the country, including San Francisco.

A mother reported on a Board of Education meeting "regarding de-facto segregation and its many ramifications." A letter was to be sent to the Board of Education "stating that the CS Mothers Club endorses the existing neighborhood policy for districting of schools, and is opposed to the bussing of children from one neighborhood to another. We believe that integration of our schools is the ideal situation and this can best be achieved by natural integration. Forced or artificial integration leads to further segregation and eventual disintegration." The Mothers Club was "opposed to having school authorities

consider race as a basis for giving or denying a child admittance to any San Francisco public school.” “The Board of Education is continuing to study the ‘segregation problem’ even as they are being sued.”

The first mention of “state wide tests”, with a discussion of standardized tests is noted.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 was a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union over missiles placed in Cuba during the Cold War. Tensions were very high with fears that the confrontation would escalate into nuclear war.

Mothers Club minutes from October read, “After the Cuban Crisis...the Civil Defense and Public Health and Safety Chairman...responded quickly and expeditiously to a hurry-up call for distribution of the new civil defense program.”

**1963**—Some mothers agreed with a Department of Education proposal to form an advisory commission to deal with discrimination and ethnic distribution of pupils in local school districts. “We believe that the intent of the regulations is to recognize the problems of a changing society by taking into consideration the factor of a growing minority population.”

In June, the children of CSS presented retired principal Edith Cochran with the large mosaic “Pretty City”, that still hangs in the school lobby today. The students studied mosaics and contributed ideas, and a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Edith Biondi, who was skilled in art created the design. The Mothers Club bought the tiles and cracked them into small pieces. Every one of the 750 children at CSS placed at least one tile on the mosaic, and it took over a year to complete. It was dedicated to Mrs. Cochran in honor of her 20 years as principal, presented “with the blessings and love of the children, parents, and faculty of Commodore Sloat School.” The theme of the mosaic was “The children of San Francisco.” There was a dedication party, where the children surprised Mrs. Cochran with the mosaic, as well as speeches, music, a film and slide narrative of the project, and tea, with approximately 300 people attending to honor her. Take a good look at this wonderful mosaic next time you are in the lobby.

**1964**—The March of Dimes philanthropy donations from the Mothers Club changed their focus: “Money previously used for polio is now used for children with birth defects.” This reflected the fact that polio, once occurring in epidemic numbers, had been nearly eradicated in the U.S. after successful immunization programs undertaken in the mid-50s.

**1965**—The teaching staff felt that reading should not be taught in kindergarten, only readiness for the first grade.

**1967**—Mrs. Bertram (Diane) Feinstein, who was a former member of the Women’s Parole Board, spoke on “Women’s Offenses and Rehabilitation” at a Mothers Club meeting. Diane Feinstein became mayor of San Francisco in 1978, then U.S. senator from California in 1992, and remains of one of our senators today.

**1968**—Two of the mothers whose names appear in the minutes are Mrs. Arlo Smith and Mrs. Ellis Brooks. Arlo Smith became the San Francisco District Attorney in 1980, and Ellis Brooks Auto Center is still on Van Ness Avenue.

The Mothers Club was asked by the Principal to “initiate an intense letter-writing campaign to let Sacramento know our feelings concerning the deficit in San Francisco school funds.” We are certainly having similar funding problems today!

After much discussion with the Mothers Club and the Board of Education, the decision was made for annual promotion for students.

A slight hint of feminism was revealed: a few mothers were starting to be referred to in the minutes by their first names instead of their husband’s.

**1969**—“There was a discussion about the dress code for girls at Commodore Sloat. The mothers present expressed their opinions against girls wearing pants to school.”

Recreational drug use was becoming more prevalent in late 1960s society, and the minutes reflect parents’ concerns.

The Principal, Miss Marraccini, spoke about drugs in schools. “Parents must warn children about the perils of drugs and teach them and warn them not to take anything to eat or drink from others.”

The Principal stated that CSS had “successful integration”, ...”but that some militant literature have been given to the children in the past year. There have been groups trying to disrupt our schools (at all levels) but if we all work hard integration can work.”

Apparently fashions were becoming a little too wild for the school’s liking: “The dressing of children lies with the parents and the children must come to school neat and clean and their clothes must not disrupt the learning process.”

There were 2 fires at CSS over the summer, fortunately not serious, and “the boys responsible” were caught.

Enrollment was 804 students.

Big changes were coming to the school building: “Commodore Sloat School can be fixed up to comply with the new earthquake code. All work must be done by 1975.”

Sue Pierce