MRS. JOSEPH (ELIZABETH) MORCOMBE
SAN FRANCISCO, SECOND DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA
CONGRESS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS
(PTA) RECORDS,
[1914]-1937

Collection number: SFH 14

San Francisco History Center
San Francisco Public Library

2008

INTRODUCTION

Provenance

Olin Sohm, nephew of Elizabeth Morcombe, donated the materials to the San Francisco Public Library in 2002.

Access

This collection is open for research and available in the San Francisco History Center in the Main Library. The hours are: Tuesday to Thursday, 10 am to 6 pm; Friday, 12 noon to 6 pm; Saturday, 10 am to 6 pm; and Sunday, 12 noon to 5 pm. A minimum of 2 working days' advance notice is required.

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Collection Number

SFH 14

Size

2.3 cubic feet (in 3 boxes)

Processed by

Mattie Taormina in 2004
(San Jose State University Intern)

Finding Aid Edited by

Tami J. Suzuki

Date Completed

November 2007

Date Revised

April 2008

Languages Represented

Collection materials are in English.

Physical Location

The collection is housed in remote storage and requires a minimum of 2 working days' advance notice for use.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Mrs. Joseph (Elizabeth) Morcombe San Francisco, Second District, California Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA) Records, (SFH 12), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Related Materials

Deffterios, Margaret N. *History of the California Congress of Parents and Teachers.* Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 1958.

National Congress of Parents and Teachers. *History of the California Congress of Mothers: From Date of Organization, May 8, 1900, to June 30, 1913.* Complied by Mrs. M. C. Kennedy. Los Angeles: State Congress of Mothers, 1913.

National PTA. *The PTA Story: A Century of Commitment to Children.* Chicago, IL: National PTA, 1997.

Twining, Harry LaVerne. *History of the California Congress of Mothers and Parent-teacher Associations.* Los Angeles: California Congress of Mothers, 1908.

Related Collections

Researchers are encouraged to see also the Second District of the California PTA (San Francisco PTA) Records (SFH 21), and Series 9 of the San Francisco Unified School District Papers (SFH 3), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library. See also John W. Geary School PTA Records, 1930-1974, (MS 3595), California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA.

Conservation Note

During processing, some of the publicity scrapbooks were dismantled and put into file folders. Damaged covers were removed.

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

America's kindergarten movement gained momentum in the first three decades of the twentieth century when public school systems gradually began to adopt kindergarten education. As the movement swept through America, groups of local women formed private, independent Mothers Clubs to meet and discuss how they could collectively address the problems their school children faced in the home and in society. These clubs were the genesis of today's Parent Teachers Association or PTA as it is commonly known.

Spawned by the kindergarten movement, the National Congress of Mothers gained national prominence when political powerhouse Phoebe Apperson Hearst (wife of George Hearst) and Alice McLellan Birney convened the first National Congress of Mothers on February 17-19, 1897 in Washington, D.C. and elected Mrs. Adlai E. Stevenson (wife of the then-U.S. vice-president) a vice president. When the successful conference concluded, Mrs. Grover Cleveland hosted a reception at the White House for the group. The organization's formal charter was drawn up in 1900 with Theodore Roosevelt serving as chairman of the Advisory Council (he served in this capacity until 1919).

In San Francisco, the Mothers Club of the San Francisco Boys Club was organized in 1894. The group's name was changed to First Mothers Club in 1923. A Mothers Club was formed at Occidental Free Kindergarten in 1895. Within two years, the California Home and School Child Study Association was formed in San Francisco, with school principals in charge**.** The San Francisco Congress of Mothers was organized in 1908 by the merger of the Mothers Clubs and the California Home and School Association. Meanwhile, the Federation of Mothers Clubs was formed in Los Angeles. This organization became the California Congress of Mothers and Child Study Circles and joined the national organization in 1902. In 1911, the California organization became the California Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, later the California Congress of Parents and Teachers, and in the 1970s, the California State PTA.

Mothers Clubs formed alliances or federations based on regional and geographical lines. In 1910, the Northern California Congress of Mothers was formed with membership from the bay counties. This group was likely also known as the Bay Federation of Mothers Clubs. In 1912, the Bay Federation of Mothers Clubs, reorganized as the Second District of the California Congress representing nine counties, with Los Angeles already designated as the First District. In 1927, the state organization reorganized the growing Second District to include only San Francisco. The earlier Second District was then referred to as the Old Second District.

The Second District's activities mirrored the ideals and initiatives set forth by the national PTA. Strongly believing that child-rearing skills must be developed through training (an ideal stemming from the kindergarten movement), PTA mothers banded together to educate fellow mothers in home-making skills, cooking and nutrition, sewing,

hygiene, road safety and tax awareness. Even before they could vote, these women used what limited influence and resources they had to improve the relationship between home, school and community for San Francisco's youth. At its fundamental core, Progressive Era welfare groups like the PTA hoped their efforts would be a means of bringing about better societal and familial conditions so that the younger generation would have the greatest possible advantages.

The Mothers Clubs, precursors to the California State PTA, rarely saw male involvement in their activities owning in part to society's belief that child-rearing fell under the purview of the mother. The members of the PTA did their best to encourage men to become active participants in the programs, but as one newspaper reporter observed in 1937, "…the hardest job in the P.-T. A. women have is to drag their menfolks out to organization affairs. For the American father, as we well know, although he is supposed to be an important member of this group, likes to take his children's education for granted by leaving it up to the teacher or his wife." Eventually, men did become active in the Second District and formed the first State Organization of Fathers Councils in the nation in 1931.

A native of Iowa, Elizabeth Morcombe, became active in the Second District in 1923. Her previous newspaper experience prepared her for her first PTA position as publicity chairman for her unit, then as district publicity chair, and ultimately, publicity chair for the California Congress of Parents and Teachers.[1] She taught other units how to generate and document their unit's publicity and wrote a regular Sunday column for the club in the *San Francisco Examiner*. In 1935, her peers elected her President of the Second District. Described by columnist Ethel Bogardus as a highly organized individual, thorough and complete, her two-year administration was marked by outstanding accomplishments in child welfare. Upon her term's conclusion, the district recommended she have a place on the national board and presented her with a life membership in the National Congress.[2] Morcombe maintained the organization's publicity records.

Morcombe was married to Joseph E. Morcombe, editor of *Masonic World*, but their union produced no children. Elizabeth Morcombe died in Alameda County on May 12, 1957 at the age of 83.

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[1] Estcourt, Zilfa. *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 27, 1935.
[2] *The News*, March 31, 1937.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Mrs. Joseph (Elizabeth) Morcombe San Francisco, Second District, California Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA) Records contain documents pertaining to the activities of the San Francisco PTA in the years 1895 to 1937. The records were maintained by Elizabeth Morcombe (Mrs. Joseph E., nee Sohm) who served as publicity director and president. The collection contains publicity scrapbooks, correspondence, minutes, and official PTA history. The meticulously kept scrapbooks and histories reveal the San Francisco group's early activities and political platforms as it grew from a conglomerate of Mothers Clubs to a shareholder in the national PTA organization.

Significant items of note are Mrs. H.C. Rothwell's 40-page history of the organization and Mothers Clubs movement in San Francisco, circa 1937. This document is located in the Organizational History series. A concise review of Morcombe's two-year presidency can be found in Publicity Record Book, Vol. II, 1936-1937**,** and images of Morcombe are located in Publicity Record Book, Articles by Mrs. Morcombe, 1929-1936 and Publicity Record Book, Vol. II, 1935-1936. Also of note is a newspaper picture located in Publicity Record Book, Articles by Mrs. Morcombe, 1935-1937 and Publicity Record Book, Vol. I, 1935, featuring PTA members with these very scrapbooks receiving statewide recognition for the PTA's publicity efforts.

Researchers should be aware that the titles and dates on the publicity scrapbook covers are not always a true reflection of their contents. Check this guide for accurate dates.

ARRANGEMENT NOTE

The collection has been organized into three series: Organizational History, Publicity Record Books, and Miscellaneous Records. Within each series, the collection is arranged chronologically (based on the actual dates in each volume's contents).

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series 1: Organizational History, [1914]-1937
.25 cubic feet

The records contained in this series document the creation and early development of the Mothers' Clubs and PTA movement in San Francisco and California. The series contains correspondence (1937), histories of the different clubs and associations (1895-1927), handwritten and typed minutes of meetings (1916-1927), semi-annual and annual summaries of each local PTA associations' activities (1916-1927), and copies of the *Parent Teacher Journal* (1932-1937).

Mrs. H.C. Rothwell's 40-page history of the organization, circa 1937, is of particular interest as it records the early history and founding date of each Bay Area Mothers Club, its founders' names, and the school affiliation of each club. Additionally, it provides key information on the problems California faced joining the national PTA organization due to confusion over the creation of the California Congress. Also of note is the earliest handwritten history (May 1913), written by the first historian elected by the Congress of Mothers, Mrs. E.A. Brower.

Series 2: Publicity Record Books, 1929-1937
2 cubic feet

Mrs. Joseph (Elizabeth) Morcombe wrote a series of brief articles focusing on the philanthropic work of the San Francisco PTA for the Sunday section of the San Francisco Examiner. These short articles, and any other press the PTA received from 1929 to 1937, were compiled into scrapbooks and serve as an informal record of the group's activities and platforms. Typical news articles describe PTA members outfitting needy children with new clothes and shoes, arranging for free dentistry work for children, electing and honoring new PTA officers, and holding bake drives. Also included are listings of PTA event calendars and meetings. The clippings disclose the various political platforms of the PTA: elimination of tools of warfare as toys, establishment of a children's court, creation of more playgrounds, tax and legislation awareness and child welfare, education and development. References to founder Phoebe Apperson Hearst and the Fathers' Clubs are found throughout the clippings.

Notable articles include Morcombe's thoughts on the creation and need for the Fathers Councils (1935), the use of the PTA's growing political power (1935), and the emerging drug problem among 16-to-25-year-olds due to the introduction of marijuana into California (1936).

The scrapbooks are in good-to-fair condition. They are arranged chronologically, with the later scrapbooks featuring a table of contents, index, and separate sections for local, state, and national PTA press stories.

Series 3: Miscellaneous Records, 1936.
1 scrapbook

The articles collected in this scrapbook are authored by Dr. Nancy Bayley and Sam Goodheart for the *San Francisco Examiner*. They pertain to miscellaneous children's welfare and developmental issues.

The articles are in good condition, and arranged chronologically.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1. Organizational History, [1917]-1937

Container	Folder or Book	Folder Title	Date
Box 1	1	Correspondence	1937
		History of Mothers' Clubs and PTA Scrapbook:	
	2	Front Cover	[1937?]
	3	Early History of Mothers Clubs and PTA in San Francisco	[1914-1937?]
	4	Histories of the Second District, California Congress of PTA, 1916-1920	[1917-1920]
	5	Semi-Annual and Annual Reports, San Francisco Congress of Mothers and PTA	[1917]-1927
	6	*Parent Teacher Journal*	1932-1937
		See Appendix B for Index	

Series 2. Publicity Record Books, 1929-1937

Container	Folder or Book	Folder Title	Date
Box 1	7	Newspaper Articles by Mrs. Morcombe	1929-1931
	8-11	Newspaper Articles by Mrs. Morcombe	1930-1936
	12	Newspaper Articles by Mrs. Morcombe	1931-1936
	13	Newspaper Articles by Mrs. Morcombe	1936-1937
	14	Newspaper Articles by Mrs. Morcombe	1936-1937
Box 2	1-2	Newspaper Articles, Vol. I and II	1935-1936
	3-6	Newspaper Articles, Vol. I and II	1936-1937
	7	Activity Pictures and Portraits (News Clippings)	1929-1933
Box 3	1	Activity Pictures and Portraits (News Clippings)	1934-1937

Series 3. Miscellanous Records, 1936

Container	Folder or Book	Folder Title	Date
Box. 3	2	Newspaper Articles	1936

Appendix A
Timeline of Selected Events

1874	Elizabeth Sohm is born in Iowa.
1878	Silver Street Kindergarten, the first free kindergarten west of the Rockies, opens in San Francisco.
1894	Mothers Club of San Francisco Boys Club is formed in San Francisco. Name is changed to First Mothers Club of San Francisco in 1923.
1895	Mothers Club is formed at Occidental Free Kindergarten in San Francisco.
By 1897	Laguna Honda Mothers Club is organized, first one in San Francisco connected to a public school.
1897	Phoebe Apperson Hearst and Alice Birney convene the Mothers Congress conference and create the National Congress of Mothers.
1897	California Home and School Child Study Association organized in San Francisco.
1900	Los Angeles Federation of Mothers Clubs is formed in Los Angeles. Later known as Los Angeles Federation of Child Study Circles.
1902	Los Angeles Federation of Child Study Circles changes name to California Congress of Mothers and Child Study Circles, and joins the national PTA organization.
1907-1908	Mothers Clubs and California Home and School Association merge to become San Francisco Congress of Mothers, to cooperate with the public schools.
1908	National organization changes name to National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations.
1910	Northern California Congress of Mothers formed of Bay Counties members. Likely also known as Bay Federation of Mothers Clubs.
1911	California Congress of Mothers and (Child) Study Circles becomes California Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations.
1912	Bay Federation of Mothers Clubs, including nine counties, becomes the Second District of the California Congress.

1918	Elizabeth Morcombe, nee Sohm, joins PTA in Iowa.
1923	Joseph and Elizabeth Morcombe arrive in San Francisco; she joins Parkside PTA.
1924	National group is renamed National Congress of Parents and Teachers.
1925	Statewide group is renamed California Congress of Parents and Teachers.
1926	Selena Sloan Butler starts the National Congress of Colored Parent Teacher Association (organized separately from the main national group; they merge in 1970).
1927	Second District is redistricted to include only San Francisco. Earlier organization is referred to as Old Second District.
1929	First article published by Morcombe appears in the collection.
1931	State Organization of Fathers Councils is created in San Francisco, functioning only in California.
1934	Morcombe becomes Regional Director of Publicity for the California Congress of Parents and Teachers.
1935	Morcombe becomes President of San Francisco's Second District of the California Congress of Parents and Teachers, serving a 2-year term, and leads 10,000 San Francisco women. She receives national recognition for her publicity work.
1937	Morcombe becomes Publicity Director for the district's PTA and editor of the Journal. She receives life membership in the National Congress and also becomes a member of the board of Journal Trustees.
1957	Death of Elizabeth Morcombe in Alameda County.
1970s	California Congress of Parents and Teachers adopts alternate name, California State PTA. Name changed to California Congress of Parents, Teachers, and Students, Inc. (retained California State PTA).

Appendix B
Index to Morcombe Articles in *Parent-Teacher Journal*

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VI, No.4	6
VIII, No. 5	19
X, No. 9	21, 53