

*Dedicated to Caitlyn Galloway and her farm, Little City Gardens, 2010-2016.  
She inspired us to coalesce around the oasis she created in the middle of our community  
and reminded us of the true value of being a good neighbor.*

## The History of the New Mission Terrace Improvement Association

Some of us have been wondering what put the “new” in the *New Mission Terrace Improvement Association*. But nobody remembers. The question leads one to speculate about squabbles and petty politics, but for me it became an invitation to look into the history.

The Mission Terrace Company was incorporated in April 1910 by the real estate firm Baldwin & Howell when they began planning, developing, and building the infrastructure for the neighborhood.<sup>1</sup> By January 1911, they had surveyed the land and opened a tract office at 275 Santa Rosa Avenue ready to sell lots every day.<sup>2</sup>

A *Mission Terrace Promotion Association* was in existence in April 1920 but we don't know when it was founded. It was probably sponsored by the Mission Terrace Company whose mission would have been to promote the development of the neighborhood. The first mention of the group we were able to find in the newspaper, reports their opposition of the Southern Pacific Railroad's proposal for a spur track to accommodate the asphalt plant at Arago and Paulding Street.<sup>3</sup> The *Association* complained that the S & P tracks would be dangerous for children and pointed out that there were already three asphalt plants nearby. The Mission Terrace Company would have been focused on transforming the area from its agricultural and industrial use into a residential community where working class families would want to buy homes. It makes sense that they would want to diminish the impact of the S&P railroad on the immediate area.

The *Mission Terrace Improvement Club* appears in the newspaper the very next year — in 1921. By then it was a “club” and no longer an “association.” Perhaps it had become an independent group, no longer associated with Baldwin & Howell or the Mission Terrace Company? Either way, the club was urging the City to improve Balboa Park noting the “deplorable” condition of the children's playground. They recommended improvements to both the playground and the Mission Terrace neighborhood in general.<sup>4</sup> The *Mission Terrace Improvement Club* had become the advocacy group for the neighborhood, and just like today, the needs of children and the condition of Balboa Park were paramount.

On December 12, 1921, the *Mission Terrace Improvement Club* bought Lot 12 in Block L (467 Capistrano Avenue) for a \$500.00 donation to the Mission Terrace Company. On this lot they planned to build their own clubhouse.<sup>5</sup> Both the club and the company would have found the clubhouse a mutually beneficial idea: it would enhance the value of the development and appeal to potential homebuyers.



Photo from the Balboa High School Alumni Association's reprint of the *Excelsior News*, August 20, 1928, p. 6.  
Courtesy of Emily Powell.

By March of 1922, we find this headline: *"Home Built by Mission Terrace Improvement Club Indicates Faith of Organization in their neighborhood."* Frank J. Pullen<sup>6</sup>, the President of the *Mission Terrace Improvement Club*, is quoted as saying "we are very proud" of our new clubhouse on Capistrano Avenue and "we expect to make good use of it, both for club meetings and social purposes." He is confident the neighborhood will continue to see development and improvements.<sup>7</sup> Notably, the clubhouse was built in only three months! (They knew how to get things done in those days.) However, the clubhouse, was apparently in use for only about fourteen years. By September 1935, the club had sold the property to Mr. Ambrose B. Frank<sup>8</sup>, who, days later, sold it to Elmer and Mary Lincoln.<sup>9</sup> Since then, the building has been a private residence and the club has had to find other places to meet.

On May 1, 1922, the newspaper reported on the club's May Day Festival (which sounds like an old-fashioned version of our 4th of July Parade and Picnic):

*"more than 500 children took part in the May Day Festival yesterday in Balboa Park under the direction of the Mission Terrace Improvement Club. The program included a pageant, a parade, games, and contests. Little Frances Bulsing (of 179 Santa Ynez) reigned over the celebration as queen of the May. An elaborate coronation ceremony was a feature of the pageant. The royal diadem was presented to her majesty by Supervisor Jesse C. Colman. After the coronation the queen and her court, carrying white and gold streamers, danced around a large May pole. Refreshments were served the children and prizes were awarded winners in the games."*<sup>10</sup>

Sometime between 1922 and 1948, the *Mission Terrace Improvement Club* disappeared from the newspapers, probably due to the serious effects and impact of the Great Depression and World War II.

The first mention, in 1948, of the new incarnation of the club, the *New Mission Terrace Improvement Association*, appeared in a newspaper clipping dated December 13th. It announced the club's Christmas party, to be held in the Masonic Temple at the corner of San Juan at San Jose Avenue (which had been built in 1923.) "Admittance will be by membership card only."<sup>11</sup>

Since NMTIA is said to have been founded in 1949, one must consider this Christmas party the inaugural event for the revitalized organization: the *New Mission Terrace Improvement Association*. Perhaps the officers of the reinvigorated, postwar club thought it best to tack on word "new" for the sake of propriety? (And how fancy to have membership cards and the use of the Masonic Hall!)

Unsurprisingly, one of the first actions of the *New Mission Terrace Improvement Association* was to complain to the City about conditions at Balboa Park. Under the auspices of the *Alemanya District Council of Improvement Associations*, a letter to Mayor Robinson was written in March 1949 inquiring about planned improvements at the park, in particular, the "convenience station" which had been promised. The letter also stated that there wasn't a "decent playground with baseball diamonds" for the children. This coalition of six improvement clubs included the NMTIA, whose President was Leonard<sup>12</sup> Fregosi.<sup>13</sup>

In 1952, the NMTIA received a letter from the City's General Manager, regarding an inquiry concerning "recreation in Balboa Park." It was addressed to the NMTIA at Druids Hall at 29 San Juan Avenue near Mission Street, which was, apparently, their new meeting location.<sup>14</sup> The General Manager states the City's intention to allocate monies for improved irrigation, two baseball diamonds, a children's playground, and tennis court lighting.<sup>15</sup>

In 1956, NMTIA's secretary Oscar<sup>16</sup> D. Ames wrote to Mayor Christopher to complain about the problems with the Alemany Emergency Hospital service and implored the City to maintain those important services.<sup>17</sup> The NMTIA was still meeting at Druids Hall, on third Mondays of the month.

In 1972, a magazine article about citywide neighborhood organizations described the NMTIA as: "*Organized for the benefit of property owners who want to retain neighborhood's single-family home density. They pool efforts on occasion to help families with problems such as sickness.*" At that time, Mrs. Rose M. White, of 306 Delano Avenue, was President.<sup>18</sup>

The combined impact on the neighborhood of the I-280 Freeway in the 1960s and of BART in the 1970s was dramatic. The NMTIA was surely an involved and active group during that time.

In the summer of 1978, NMTIA as part of the COMO consortium (Communities of the Outer Mission Organization) helped organize the sit-in at the Alemany Emergency Hospital and Health Center buildings to protest their closure — an exciting and admirable effort, but ultimately, one that failed.

Without a clubhouse, the Masonic Temple, or Druid's Hall, the NMTIA had to find other places to meet, which meant meeting in the homes of its members. From approximately 1987 through the 2000 the NMTIA met in the basement of a neighbor's house on Santa Ysabel Avenue (except for a brief interlude in 1989 when they met in a neighbor's basement on San Juan Avenue.) In the year 2001 NMTIA began meeting in the Ingleside Police Station Community Meeting Room — and has been meeting there ever since — thank you SFPD!

Over the years, no matter the location of the meeting place, one theme has remained constant: the stewardship of the neighborhood's most important amenity, Balboa Park.

Balboa Park has been a focal point for neighborhood activism for almost 100 years. The park, founded in 1910, needed an advocate in the 1920s; again in the 1940s; and in recent years as well. The NMTIA has worked with neighbors and city agencies to improve the park repeatedly over the past twenty years. Those projects include:

the renovation of the children's playground in 2006-07 (in partnership with KaBOOM! and local parents); the broader park improvements in 2008-10 (with support from The Trust For Public Land); and the creation of the skateboard park in 2012 (a collaboration between local dads and The Trust for Public Land with support from the 2008 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond.) Most recently, since 2016, the NMTIA has been keeping tabs on the pool renovation with (fingers crossed) a reopening scheduled for January 2019.

In addition to the park's needs, since 1986, the NMTIA has had a constant flow of neighborhood and district issues to advocate for or against alongside other civic groups and municipal agencies. A partial list of projects includes:

the Santa Rosa sewer project which damaged homes in 1984-85; several tree planting projects beginning in 1986; the extension of the J-Church streetcar line to San Jose & Ocean Avenue in 1991; the building of the Excelsior Youth Center / Boys & Girls Club in 1998; saving the Geneva Office Building and returning it to service, beginning in 1998; the Arco Way housing development issues in 2000; the *Save The Pool from City College* campaign in 2003; support of *Solutions Not Sandbags* since 2004 (ongoing); the massage parlor problem on San Jose Avenue in 2005; the building of affordable senior housing at 5199 Mission Street, completed in 2005; the renovation of the Excelsior Branch Library, completed in 2005; support of the *Save The Farm* campaign, 2015-16; the landmarking of the Alemany Emergency Hospital and Health Center buildings, 2016; and the illegal gambling issue at 350 Ocean Avenue in 2017.

NMTIA continues to work on numerous thankless but important projects such as: traffic calming, stop signs, speed bumps/humps, pedestrian safety, and the future impact on the neighborhood of hundreds of new housing units nearby, and the possibility of a residential parking permit program.

But it's not all business. NMTIA continues to organize and plan fun events to bring neighbors together. With sponsorship from the Roxie Food Center, we've organized the Annual Easter Egg Hunt for over fifteen years; the 4th of July Parade and Picnic for thirty years; as well as the Annual Holiday Party.

Our fantastic and ambitious neighbors have dreamed up and organized projects which further deepen community relationships. From the mundane alley cleanup days; to Mary, who spearheaded the *Mission Terrace Bridge Garden Project*; to John and Beth, who cooked up the *Pasta Dinner in the Alley* several years ago; and to the parents on San Gabriel, Otsego, and Delano who have organized Halloween block parties for several years — many thanks for your valuable contributions! Your efforts make Mission Terrace a great place to live.

The NMTIA's work is never done and can't be done without your participation. Thank you for your interest in the New Mission Terrace Improvement Association and for your help supporting and improving the community. Your involvement makes a difference.

Lisa Dunseth  
November 9, 2018

- <sup>1</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, April 26, 1910, p. 15. Proquest database.
- <sup>2</sup> Baldwin & Howell's Mission Terrace brochure, circa 1911.
- <sup>3</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, April 23, 1920, p. 6. Proquest database.
- <sup>4</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, March 15, 1921, p. 4. Proquest database.
- <sup>5</sup> Baldwin & Howell Collection, SFH 17, Mission Terrace Record of Sales ledger, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>6</sup> Frank J. and Constance Pullen lived at 460 Capistrano Avenue. 1922 City Directory, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>7</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, March 25, 1922, p. 10. Proquest database. The clubhouse building, at 467 Capistrano, is now a single family home.
- <sup>8</sup> Ambrose B. (married to Viola) Frank worked at A.B. & Co. real estate office at 4607 Mission Street; his residence was at 45 Brazil Avenue (corner of London.) 1935 City Directory, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>9</sup> CCSF Assessor Recorder's Office records: December 31, 1921, Mission Terrace Company sold to Mission Terrace Clubhouse Association; September 12, 1935, Mission Terrace Clubhouse Association sold to A.B. Frank; September 18, 1935, A.B. & V.B. Frank sold to Elmer H. & Mary M. Lincoln; June 30, 1937, E.H. & M.M. Lincoln sold to Thomas N. Jackson Jr.
- <sup>10</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, May 1, 1922, p.g 13. Proquest database.
- <sup>11</sup> News clipping found inside neighbor's wall during remodeling; date calculated from perennial calendar.
- <sup>12</sup> Leonard E. and Edith M. lived at 306 Delano Avenue. He worked at Giampolini & Co. 1948-49 City Directory, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>13</sup> COMO LETTER? Letter to Mayor Robinson from Secretary Anna L. de Surville, Alemany District Council, dated March 14, 1949. The six improvement clubs were: Cayuga Improvement Association, Mission Viaduct Improvement Association, NMTIA, Sunnyside Improvement Association, Ingleside Community Association, San Miguel Improvement Association. Copy of letter, collection of the author.
- <sup>14</sup> Druid's Hall, 29 San Juan Avenue, noted in news clipping found inside neighbor's wall during remodeling; date calculated from perennial calendar.
- <sup>15</sup> COMO LETTER? Letter to NMTIA from David Lewis, City's General Manager, dated June 19, 1952. Copy of letter, collection of the author.
- <sup>16</sup> Oscar D. and Mary Ames lived at 44 Nantucket, he worked at the Graham Paint Company. 1955-56 City Directory, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>17</sup> Letter to Mayor Christopher, dated April 7, 1956, from NMTIA Secretary O.D. Ames (who lived at 44 Nantucket.) Copy of letter, collection of the author. See also NMTIA's successful campaign to have 35 & 45 Onondaga buildings landmarked in 2016; the report can be found here: <http://commissions.sfplanning.org/hpcpackets/2015-003877DES.pdf>
- <sup>18</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, California Living Magazine, June 4, 1972, p. 27.