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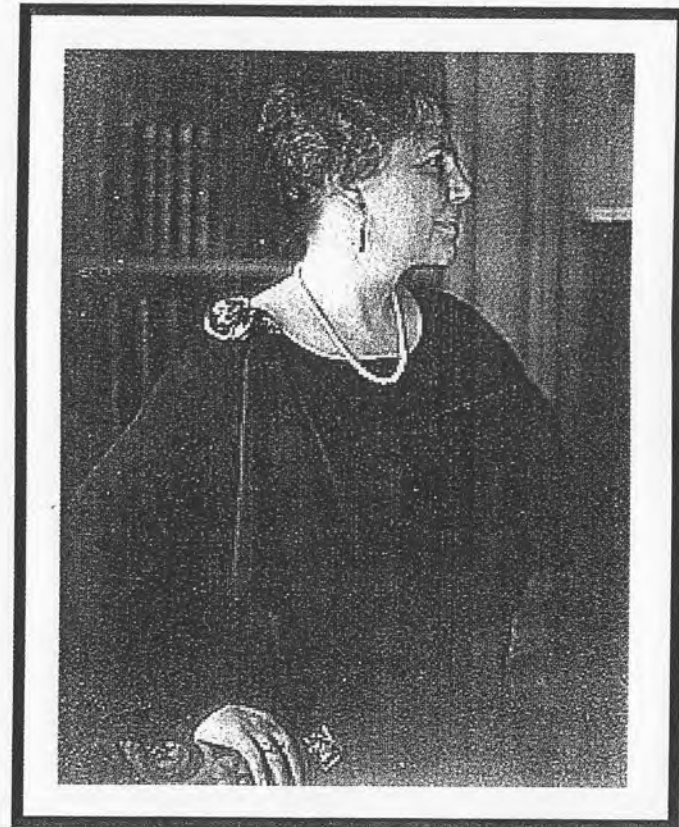
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Western States Jewish History



Hattie Hecht Sloss
(exact date unknown)

**“YES CERTAINLY!”
THE LIFE AND WORK OF
HATTIE HECHT SLOSS,
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA,
1874 - 1963**

by Helen Sloss Luey

Publisher's Note: Material for this article has been collected from published books, journals, and newspapers; archives of organizations; family materials at the Western Jewish History Center; personal family records; memories, and oral history. The writer is Hattie Hecht Sloss's granddaughter.

On June 19, 1899, a vibrant young woman of Boston said “yes certainly” to a promising young California lawyer and, in so doing, assured the enrichment of civic, cultural, and Jewish life in San Francisco for the next half century. The bride was Hattie Lina Hecht; the groom, Marcus Cauffman Sloss.

Marcus Sloss, known formally as M.C. Sloss, was “Max” to his friends and “Dick” to Hattie. Hattie Hecht Sloss sometimes used her married name in formal documents (Mrs. M. C. Sloss) and sometimes her own full name. She was “Hattie” to her friends and “Auntie” to her husband.

Marcus Cauffman Sloss made distinguished contributions in California, most significantly as a member of the California Supreme Court from 1906–1919. His achievements have been well documented.¹ Hattie Hecht Sloss was also a dedicated and effective leader in the community, recognized in many publications and historical books. This paper documents the full scope of her activities and contributions.

Early Years

Hattie Hecht was born June 12, 1874, the first child of Louis Hecht of Boston and Rose Frank Hecht of Baltimore. A brother, Simon, was born in 1876, and a sister, Sally, in 1878. In 1881, when Hattie was seven, Rose Frank Hecht died. The three children moved into the home of Jacob and Lina Hecht.

Jacob and Lina had a double connection to the children. Lina Frank Hecht was the sister of Hattie's mother Rose Frank Hecht. Jacob Hecht was the brother of Hattie's father, Louis Hecht. Having no children of their own, Lina and Jacob Hecht opened their home warmly to their three motherless nieces and nephew, as well as to another niece, Lina Frankenstein.

Jacob and Lina Hecht were prominent and philanthropic members of the Jewish community of Boston. For 15 years, Jacob was president of the United Hebrew Benevolent Association. Lina was the founder of the Hebrew Industrial School, which later became the Hecht Neighborhood House. Both were leaders at Temple Adath Israel, one of Boston's oldest synagogues.² The home environment held values of religious and social propriety, along with respect for education, culture, and community service. Leaders in many fields were guests in the home, and conversation was stimulating.

Jacob and Lina were observant Orthodox Jews. Sabbath observance was so strict that, according to family legend, young Hattie was obliged every Friday to cut pieces of toilet tissue into usable lengths, because the exertion of tearing was considered unacceptable on Sabbath. A frustration of childhood was that Hattie was never allowed to attend a Harvard football game, as these always took place on Saturdays.³ A more titillating prohibition of Hattie's early years had to do with evening attire. Despite protest, none of the three young women in the home were ever allowed to wear the then fashionable décolleté evening gowns, because, it was sometimes whispered, “your Aunt Fanny went wrong in a low-necked dress.”⁴

Hattie's educational achievements were substantial, although not documented in usual ways. After graduating from Miss Hersey's School in Boston, she wanted to attend college, but her Aunt Lina thought it more appropriate to arrange for private tutoring by several

professors at Harvard. The topics she studied are not known, but she undoubtedly acquired a formidable knowledge of English literature.

Family history indicates that Hattie's strongest relationship through her formative years was with her Aunt Lina, with whom she shared many interests and values. Lina supported Hattie's drive to learn, shared her love of music, and introduced her to philanthropic opportunities in the community.

An early example of Hattie's commitment to service and culture is her contribution to her Aunt Lina's support of a promising young writer. Lina was closely involved with the programs at Hecht House. A thirteen-year-old participant, Mary Antin, attracted the attention of the director, Golde Bamber, for her writing ability. Both Lina and Hattie read the young woman's manuscript, supported the writer and her family, and arranged for the manuscript to be translated and published.⁵ The book was dedicated to Hattie Hecht, "with the love and gratitude of the author." Hattie and Lina set things up so that proceeds from sale of the book enabled the author to continue her education, instead of going to work in a factory to help support her impoverished family. Since Mary Antin was in frail health, they believed that this opportunity saved her life as well as her future work, as she would have been likely to succumb to illness in the unhealthful environment of a factory. Mary Antin subsequently published one other book, *The Promised Land*, and spent her adult life supporting the Progressive Movement, especially in regard to women and immigrants.⁶

The Hecht home also was a center of hospitality and, by age 14, Hattie was a deputy hostess.⁷ Among the beneficiaries of the Hecht hospitality was a young law student, M. C. Sloss.

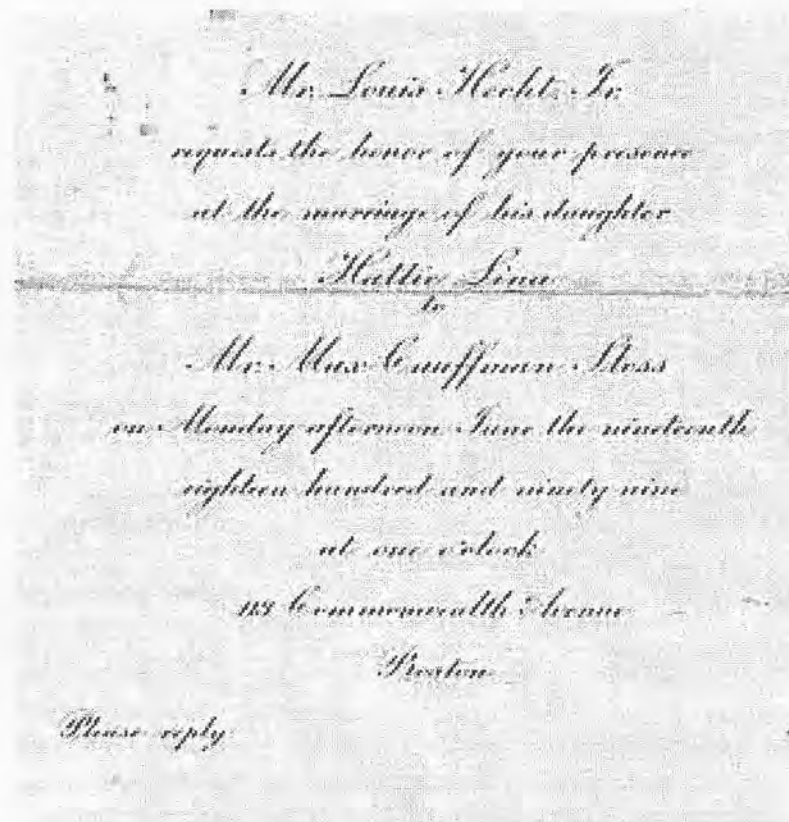
Entry into San Francisco

Max Sloss returned to San Francisco after completing law school in 1893. Some time thereafter, Hattie came to San Francisco with her father, and was able to spend more time with Max. In 1899, Max traveled to Boston, ostensibly for business purposes, but his trip ended with a well-received, surprise announcement of his engagement to Hattie Hecht.⁸

Moving from Boston to a new and less developed community must have been wrenching, but there is no evidence that Hattie spent much time mourning or complaining. The only preserved hint of sadness or awkwardness is in a poem written years later by her son Richard:

It's a San Rafael story, familiar to few,
Of my Grandpa Sloss, whom I never knew.
My mother used to tell it to me,
And it proves its own authenticity.
She and my father came to dwell
With the rest of the Slosses in San Rafael
Right after their Boston wedding in June
And a transcontinental honeymoon.
On its final day they had traveled far
By carriage and ferry and railroad car,
And the bride was tired – she longed for rest,
And she found herself more than a little depressed.
It wasn't the people, she used to say –
They had been her good friends for many a day –
But her own situation had undergone change
So drastic, it made her whole world seem strange.
She played up as brightly as she was able
At dinner, with twelve or more at the table.
The subsequent talk in the living room
Did little or nothing to lessen her gloom;
And when the long evening came to a close
And all the rest of the family rose
And straightened the cushions, and put out the lights,
And emptied the ash-trays, and setthings to rights,
She stood in the middle, ignored and dejected,
A fish out of water, forlorn and neglected.
The only one of the others who saw
And who understood, was her father-in-law.⁹
He was quick to supply what the newcomer lacked

As he smilingly said, with habitual tact,
 "Suppose you close up the piano, my dear,
 "And that way you too will know why you're here."
 Her spirits grew light as a feather once more.
 She was one of these people not merely a friend,
 And this was her home and her journey's end.
 A kindly word was all that was needed
 Where flowery speeches would not have succeeded.....¹⁰



Invitation to Wedding of Hattie Hecht and Max Sloss

Hattie's new family was prominent and successful both in the Jewish and general community. Her father-in-law, the Louis Sloss described in the poem above, was a California pioneer and a founder of the large and successful business, the Alaska Commercial Company. Max was the youngest of Louis Sloss and Sarah Greenebaum Sloss' five children. Max grew up in a prosperous family that was actively engaged in the economic, political, social, and cultural life of San Francisco. He took advantage of excellent educational opportunities, graduating from Harvard with a *magna cum laude* in 1890 and then earning an LL.B with honors in 1893.

In 1900, just after he and Hattie were married, he was elected to a Superior Court judgeship, beginning a judicial career that lasted until 1919. The family's social, political, and economic position in San Francisco, combined with Max's independent achievements and wisdom, gave Hattie a fertile environment to nourish and direct her energy and concerns.¹¹

Hattie was recognized early as a new ball of fire on the scene. A newspaper account of the engagement states: "Miss Hecht is a handsome, winsome girl and has the added grace of many accomplishments."¹² Other accounts describe her as a "small dynamo"¹³ "spectacularly outgoing," and "a sparkling and incessant conversationalist."¹⁴

Barely five feet tall, not described as beautiful, she did not put energy into her appearance. She dressed well, in keeping with the conventions of the time, but she never used make-up; she never owned so much as a lipstick. She attracted plenty of attention, however, almost entirely through the force of her personality.

Her first child, Margaret Rose was born June 16, 1900. Two sons followed: Richard on February 1, 1904 and Frank on November 18, 1908. While routine child care duties were relegated to members of her household staff, Hattie was responsible for household organization, entertaining, and relationships with increasing numbers of relatives and friends in the community. She could have remained pleasantly occupied with such matters. Less than a year after her arrival in San Francisco, Hattie brought her early interest in philanthropy and culture to her new and less sophisticated community.

Community Contributions and Leadership

Hattie Hecht Sloss' contributions to her city and state spanned almost sixty years and a wide range of issues and fields, including: services for immigrants, child welfare, comprehensive social services, education, music, poetry, art, religion, and social justice. To emphasize and demonstrate the scope of her activities and range of abilities, the following summary is organized around areas of activity instead of chronology.

—Social Welfare

National Council of Jewish Women—Founder of San Francisco Section. On August 27, 1900, a meeting of Jewish women was convened at Temple Emanu-El to learn about the National Council. "Young, small, sparkling-eyed and endowed with limitless energy, Hattie Hecht Sloss stood before that audience and so inspired them with her logic and spirit that 158 ladies became Charter Members in San Francisco.....The enthusiasm of Mrs. Sloss was contagious and the pride of participation in so fine a service launched this new group As was fitting, the first President was Mrs. M.C. Sloss."¹⁵ Once established, the section developed programs to serve children and immigrants, and also engaged in work to promote peace and progressive social legislation. After serving as president for two years, Hattie remained active in the section and supported its programs faithfully for the next fifty years. Among her programs was a study group about philanthropy, which was led by Jessica Peixotto, a professor of social economics at University of California, Berkeley, and one of the first women to achieve that level of academic stature.

Beginning in 1900 and continuing through the 1940's, Hattie was a strong supporter of San Francisco Associated Charities and particularly of one component, The Children's Agency. Both programs were directed by a charismatic pioneer social worker, Katharine Felton. Hattie was a friend and advisor to Katharine Felton throughout her long career. The Children's Agency addressed the most basic needs of children, including economic help for destitute families, health care, moving children from primitive, under-funded and ill-

managed orphanages into foster care, and then setting up systems to select, support, and monitor foster parents. These programs experienced overwhelming new challenges after the 1906 earthquake. In later years, Katharine Felton moved on to create a unique partnership of public and private resources to address the social and legal needs of dependent children.¹⁶ Throughout these years, Hattie served as mentor and a resource, giving Katharine Felton access to the people in the



Hattie Hecht Sloss - Date Unknown

community best able to move her plans forward. Her advocacy on behalf of the Children's Agency continued after Katharine Felton's death in 1940. In 1945, in her capacity as President of the Children's Agency, she wrote to Harry L. Hopkins, special assistant to President Franklin Roosevelt, to protest a proposal to permit women with young children to go into military or related services. Her argument was that this would endanger children, and "what is more important in the (post war) world that the training of future citizens?"¹⁷

Hattie represented Associated Charities on a committee with other agencies, and advocated there for the creation of a coordinating organization, the Community Chest. She remained a director of the Community Chest during its early years.¹⁸

Perhaps on the strength of her work with Associated Charities, Hattie was appointed to the California State Board of Charities and Corrections (subsequently the State Social Welfare Commission). The Board was the only body set up to monitor the growing number of institutions set up to care for dependent people, specifically, "fel-

ons, insane, feebleminded, women misdemeanants, adult blind and wayward boys and girls." Hattie served as chair of the Children's Committee and, in that role, advocated for reform within institutions and for movement of children from institutions into "boarding homes." Her committee also advocated for preventive health care and for facilities for children exposed to tuberculosis or suffering from malnutrition.¹⁹

One listing in the Board's report makes plausible a story maintained for many years in the oral history of the family. The report lists St. Vincent's Home in San Rafael as one of the institutions that was "reorganized and improved" following intervention by the State Board. Oral history has it that, in her role for the State Board, Hattie visited this orphanage and was appalled at the both physical conditions and level of care. After exhausting her usual methods of advocacy without success, she requested and got an appointment with the Archbishop, Edward H. Hanna. The interview did not go well; Archbishop Hanna was polite and regretful, but asserted that he had no authority over this institution. Hattie, standing up to her full five foot height and with her hand on the door preparing to exit, is reported to have said: "That building, as I recall, has a cross upon it. If that cross, Your Grace, were a Star of David, I would be ashamed of it."

Later, Hattie's social welfare leadership grew to a national level. Appointed first by Mrs. Herbert Hoover and then by Eleanor Roosevelt, she served as local chair of the National Women's Commission on Mobilization for Human Needs. The role of this commission was to maintain and enhance the strength of local private charities, in the face of the devastating economic conditions of these depression years.²⁰

—Music

Perhaps the most passionate of all of Hattie's interests was music. In an interview with the *News* Music Editor in 1939, she replied to a question about her strongest memories of Boston with "The Boston Symphony, of course."²¹ One can only imagine her distress in the early years of her life in San Francisco over the lack of a local

symphony and opera. She was a member of the original group organized in 1910 to start a symphony in San Francisco. She was one of the first 58 people to agree to contribute \$100/year for five years.²² Always on the Women's Auxiliary, she became a member of the Symphony's Board of Governors. She was known as one of the most regular attendees at symphony performances and a passionate advocate for it in the community.

Hattie was also involved in the establishment of the San Francisco Opera Association. Beginning in 1923, Max was on the Board of Governors for the Opera Association, while Hattie served on the Women's committee. During the initial efforts to form the association, she was the 2nd most successful solicitor of subscribers.²³ She became a member of the Board of Governors of the San Francisco Opera Association – perhaps replacing her husband, who had no interest in music. (He claimed to be tone deaf, and almost never attended musical performances.)

In 1939, Hattie initiated a radio program designed to support the work of the symphony. She served as host for "Know Your Symphony," a weekly program in KNBR. On each program, she gave an accessible lay person's analysis of the works to be performed, and often she interviewed the visiting soloist for the week. Her gracious and perceptive interviewing style enabled her guests to generate informed enthusiasm among symphony supporters.²⁴ The program continued for fifteen years, until 1954.

Poetry

A lifelong lover of poetry, Hattie served as president and literary director of the Browning Society for many years. She compiled a book of Victorian poetry which was published in 1929.²⁵ She hosted a radio program on KYA on the subject of poetry. The program included a competition among poets, and the winning poems were read on the air. These poems were later collected into an edited book.²⁶ Hattie expressed her passion for poetry in a statement read on the radio in February of 1954, as an introduction to a reading of her favorite quotations: "Because, to me, poetry expresses facts, ideas and emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative and

powerful than that of ordinary speech, I decided to make my confession of faith in that medium. I agree with Samuel Coleridge, who so aptly said: 'Prose—words in their best order; Poetry—the best words in their best order.' The sentiments expressed in the following quotations have guided my approach to life, helped me in my decisions and difficulties, and are my philosophy. They give me courage and inspiration in all times of stress and are my constant help and solace." The quotations come from Shakespeare, Browning, Tennyson, The Hebrew Bible and New Testament.²⁷

—Other Arts

Hattie was also a patron of artists. Her early work supporting a writer, Mary Antin, has been described above. In her adult life, she supported a Czech-born landscape and portrait artist, Max Pollak. Among the works of this artist are etchings of Max and Hattie Sloss. In a letter to Hattie in honor of her 70th birthday in 1944, Max Pollak wrote: "...I feel an urgent desire to express to you my most sincere appreciation and gratefulness for the warm interest you have always shown in my art....More than once during these trying times you have given eloquent expression to your conviction that whatever happens in the world around us, art must survive and has, more than ever before, the obligation to carry the spiritual flame through the dark. Personally I also have to thank you for having given me the rare opportunity of making a number of etching plates for you, a work that partly through your unusual artistic understanding, partly through the lack of any superficial restrictions placed on me during the execution of the work—an even more unusual experience for a portrait artist—gave me the possibility to create in perfect artistic freedom and with unconfined enthusiasm."

Another outlet for Hattie's commitment to art was support of two national expositions in San Francisco. In 1915, she chaired the Women's Board for the Panama Pacific International Exposition. In 1939, she was on the Women's Board and on the Fine Arts Committee for the Golden Gate International Exposition.

Hattie collected art on the theme of mothers and children. A part of that collection was donated to the Mills College Museum.

—Education

Education was central in Hattie's interests in child welfare and development, but was expressed most directly in her support of Mills College. From 1931 to 1945, she served on its Associate Council, assisting the college in fund-raising and in relationships in the community. Some of her advocacy in the area of child welfare was done in conjunction with Mills College and their professors. She sponsored lectures on poetry at the campus and also a prize given to the student with the best personal library on campus. In 1942 Mills College awarded her an honorary Master of Arts degree.²⁸

—Justice

While her husband devoted his entire distinguished career to the field of law, Hattie found her own way to participate. In 1940, she was appointed by Judge St. Sure to the role of chair of a Grand Jury for the Northern District of California, United States Court. In a letter in 1944, Judge St. Sure states that he appointed "an outstanding woman as Foreman—the first of her sex to serve in that capacity in San Francisco and, I think, in the Country." She served during 1941. One case during her tenure received newspaper coverage. "The Federal trust-busting machinery disposed of the price-fixing case against California's redwood industry in half an hour, assessing fines totaling \$20,000. Within that brief 30 minutes, a Federal Grand Jury voted seven antitrust indictments; they were returned before Federal Judge St. Sure; the defendants pleaded *nolo contendere* and Judge St. Sure set the fines."²⁹

Jewish Community Life – Controversial Commitments

Soon after arrival in San Francisco, Hattie became affiliated with Temple Emanu-El. Under the leadership of Jacob Voorsanger, this synagogue was strongly in the Reform movement, explicitly distinct from the Orthodox traditions Hattie had known in Boston and from the more traditional practices of recent immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia. There is no evidence that the different beliefs and practices troubled Hattie; it seems plausible, from subsequent developments, that she found them congenial.

Temple Emanu-El was the Jewish center for philanthropy as well as religious observance for upper class Jews of German origin. It was there, during her first year in San Francisco, that Hattie demonstrated leadership and assumed her first official role, President of the San Francisco Chapter of National Council of Jewish Women.

Hattie remained active at Temple Emanu-El for the rest of her life. She attended services every Saturday. She served on its Board and on many committees, including the Sunday School committee during the 1920's. She supported the Temple in all of its programs, both for members and for unaffiliated and needy Jews throughout the community. She was a loyal, creative team member. One of her achievements was arranging for voting machines to be brought to the Temple from City Hall, so that immigrants could learn how to participate in American elections.³⁰

Along with her husband, Hattie was active in the YMHA and YWHA (Young Men's Hebrew Association, and Young Women's Hebrew Association). From 1923—1925, she served on an advisory committee which studied the feasibility of establishing a Jewish Community Center, a social and recreational center for the Jewish Community, separate from synagogues. In 1925, at the committee's recommendation, plans for the Center began.³¹

Hattie's anti-Zionist views developed naturally within the Emanu-El community. Inspired by Jacob Voorsanger's teaching in the early 1900's, Hattie and many members of her elite circle believed that Judaism was a religion which did not determine or affect national loyalties. These views prevailed through the 1920's, even as Rabbi Meyer and Newman supported Zionism and as Jewish organizations throughout the country became increasingly concerned about European Jews during the growth of Nazism. To be sure, the anti-Zionists were not indifferent to the plight of refugees. They supported efforts to help and settle refugees, including those who chose to settle in Palestine. But they steadfastly opposed the creation of a Jewish State.

The anti-Zionist contingent at Temple Emanu-El got a huge shot in the arm in 1930 with the arrival of a new rabbi, Irving Reichert.

Reichert was a passionate anti-Zionist as well as an advocate for the "ultra Reform" trend of creating distance between current observance and "medieval nostrums" of earlier practice.³² As concern about European Jewry mounted during the 1930's and as national Jewish organizations supported efforts to create a Jewish State in Palestine, he continued to argue against establishing such a state.

Leaders in the Reform movement were split on the issue and, in 1935, the Central Conference of American Rabbis resolved to "take no official stand on the subject of Zionism." By 1942, political realities had changed and the movement was starting to support David Ben-Gurion's call to Jews to replace the British Mandatory Administration in Palestine, with the "Biltmore Program," a step to statehood. Rabbi Reichert was among the disaffected minority at that conference, a group which met later in the year and formed the American Council for Judaism (ACJ).

ACJ's main premise was opposition to Jewish nationalism, especially the formation of a Jewish state. Accordingly, the group also believed that Jews should feel allegiance to and should participate fully in the nations in which they lived. The argument was that the existence of a Jewish state would make Jews everywhere appear to have (or perhaps actually have) "dual loyalty," and hence be more subject to anti-Semitism.

Rabbi Reichert became a national vice-president of ACJ and its official spokesman in the West. He organized a San Francisco Section, which became one of the largest and most effective in the country. He was one of two vice-Presidents; Hattie was the other.

Through the rest of the War and the wrenching years that followed, ACJ and the Zionist controversy caused rifts at Temple Emanu-El and some loss of membership. But the majority in leadership positions continued to support Rabbi Reichert and his views, Hattie especially strongly.

Until 1948, Hattie's loyalty to Rabbi Reichert and ACJ seems understandable, consistent with her experience as a privileged, integrated Jew in San Francisco and with the philosophies of her

mentors and friends. Its idealistic premise resonated for her. But the landscape changed in 1948. By then, the tide had turned; the needs and the numbers of displaced Jews had roused the consciences of the world and Israel was headed for statehood. Gradually, ACJ members moved to other organizations, with an agenda that fit political reality. Hattie's son Frank expressed concerns about ACJ, and later withdrew from the organization. But Hattie never wavered. She was a member of ACJ as long as she lived.³³

Leadership Style

Looking at the form and sum of Hattie's community work, some themes emerge.

All contemporary descriptions speak of her remarkable energy, enthusiasm, and persuasiveness—qualities that contributed to her success in recruiting leaders and soliciting funds.

Her knowledge and articulateness became well-known, as shown by her having been invited to be major speaker at many conferences and events.³⁴

Her story is also one of loyalty. She stayed active in the organizations that meant the most to her for her whole adult life—in one instance for over 50 years. She maintained her affiliation with ACJ long after history had eroded its relevance and most of her friends had moved on. While some of her projects were time-limited, her primary interests—child welfare, acculturation, music, poetry, Judaism—were lifelong.

Determined as she was, Hattie did not like conflict. She valued handling things in a gracious and genteel way. Once, she wrote to the national leaders of ACJ expressing concern that their tone was too strident and divisive.³⁵

Her son Frank picked up this trait in a clever poem about some close call at the opera. One must assume that her opera guest on this occasion was someone well-known in the ACJ.

Lines Stimulated by a Narrowly Averted Diplomatic Incident
After (long after) Ogden Nash.
Oct. 24, 1950.

To H. H. S.

People who go to see *Manon Lescaut*

Expect the proceedings to be at least as harmonious as a meeting
of an international organization like Unesco.

Even in Box S, which is occupied by the kind of people who are
sometimes unpleasantly called sheenies,

The only sounds heard should be Puccini's.

Each Sloss or Koshland guest or scion

Should keep his thoughts far removed from the ideological
conflicts that rage over Zion.

Whether you admire or loathe Ben Gurion,

This is no time to turn the fury on.

And if ordinary people are supposed just to sit back, pull out
handkerchiefs, and dab eyes,

How much more so in the case of Rabbis.

And since the present incumbent of Emanu-El's pulpit loves the
ACJ about as much as he would love a case of polio,

Let's rejoice that after all there will be no occasion for an encounter
that would undoubtedly have led to an imbroglio.

Hattie's philanthropy was of an elitist sort, with elements of *noblesse oblige*. Her social position, affluence, and cultural background gave her considerable power, which she used comfortably. She enlisted support from her peers, and believed that they, along with a few leading social work professionals, were able to design the best approaches to social problems of the day. The values of inclusiveness, self-help, and empowerment had to wait for the next generation.³⁶

Meanwhile, at Home . . .

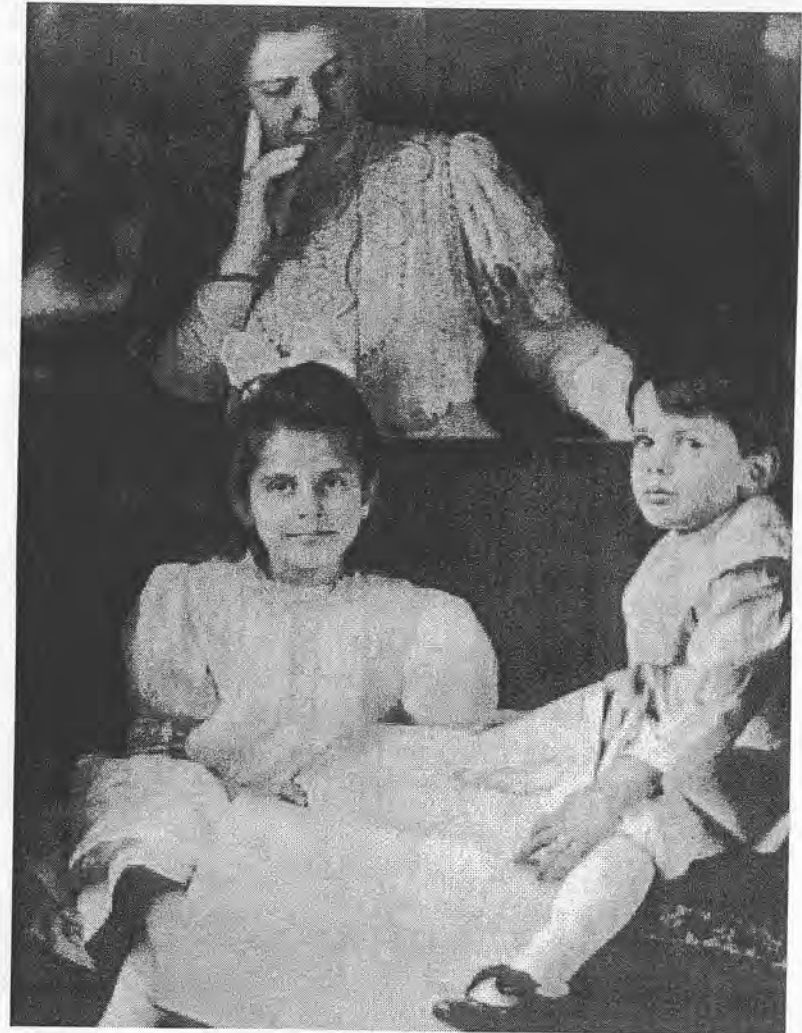
In the early years of her married life, family life was tranquil and supportive of Hattie's many outside activities. The family was prosperous, and the household included staff to maintain the home and care for the children. In later years, the children's education was enriched by governesses who were well educated and who spoke French and German in addition to English. Max supported Hattie's community work, and discussed issues with her.

Hattie and the family faced a major challenge beginning in 1914. Until then, investments inherited from Louis Sloss (largely profits from the Alaska Commercial Company), had provided steady income. This support, combined with Max's salary as a judge, allowed the family to live in the style of the upper class families of the period. In 1914, a major investment failed, leaving the family suddenly facing debts and a threat of bankruptcy. For several years, the family's financial circumstances were shaky. As a result, they moved from a spacious home on Clay Street into a more modest apartment on Powell Street. Under those circumstances, Max's salary as a Judge—an amount frozen in the state constitution and without prospect of increase—was not adequate to support a family with three children approaching college age. In 1919, Max reluctantly decided that he had to leave the Supreme Court and return to a potentially more lucrative law practice.³⁷

With help from Herbert Hoover, a long-time friend (then U.S. Food Administrator in the Wilson administration), the family was given enough time to liquidate its holdings and pay its debts. In time the debts were paid in full, and some of the investment was salvaged.³⁸ This, in combination with Max's growing income, enabled the family to return to its upper class life style, which it was able to maintain even through the difficult years of the Depression.

While the scope of Hattie's community involvement might suggest that she had little time for anything else, that does not appear to be the case. Family records include accounts of outings with friends, trips to near-by gambling establishments (where Hattie participated with gusto), frequent games of Mah-Jong, and a num-

ber of trips—most notably a six-month excursion around the world in 1923.



Hattie Sloss
with Margaret and Richard.
Circa 1907

—Children

Margaret: One shadow over Hattie's life was her relationship with her oldest child, her daughter Margaret. Tension between them started early, as Margaret did not share her mother's passion for music, poetry, and philanthropy. Her interests in college years at Mills were in journalism and theater. She was also a good athlete. During those years, evidence mounted that Margaret was lesbian. This lifestyle was hardly acceptable in the social world of the Slosses, and was kept as hidden as possible. Evidence of stress in the relationship can be discerned, in and around some placating language, from a rather cryptic letter Margaret wrote to her parents in 1921, the year she graduated from Mills:

It's very hard for me to tell you even a little of what's in my heart and soul for you. This is a time of more than mixed emotions, and I'm feeling things for which there just aren't words. But there are just one or two things that I can say, and for the rest I can trust you to read between the lines. That I'm leaving home is purely a physical thing which is in no sense true separation. But the big thing is that our relationship which is always growing stronger can never be touched by anything.

In 1922, Margaret married the son of a family acquaintance, Ralph Kuhns. They had one child, a daughter. The marriage ended when Ralph left in 1925. Around 1930, Margaret moved to Los Angeles where she worked in the movie industry as a reader of manuscripts and, to a limited degree, as a writer of scripts. During those years, she shared her home with a woman, and family reports indicate that she was active in the lesbian community of Los Angeles. But emotional problems surfaced, including a condition which would be described today as bipolar disorder, made worse by alcoholism. Hattie and Max helped as they could. In the mid 1940's, Margaret moved back to San Francisco. Aided by a remarkable doctor and friend, she conquered her alcohol addiction; she did not drink at all for the remaining 20 years of her life. She became very productive in volunteer work, most notably with the Mental Health Association. She designed and ran a new program called "fashion therapy," in which volunteers provided clothing and fashion advice to patients in long-term psychiatric care.

Throughout these years in San Francisco, Margaret had an intimate woman friend, Grace Scott. The family knew about her, but Grace was never included in formal family gatherings. With this open secret in the background, Margaret participated fully in family life, was close to her daughter and served as special friend and mentor to her nieces and nephew. She also helped care for both of her parents through their final illnesses. Starting around 1964, the depression she had experienced earlier returned. In spite of excellent psychiatric care, her despair worsened, and she ended her own life in June of 1966.

Richard: Richard was the closest of the three children to Hattie. He always loved music, opera, poetry, and, like Hattie, was drawn to Judaism and was always active at Temple Emanu-El, serving as its president and in many leadership roles. He served also on boards of community agencies. He distinguished himself at the Concordia Club for his writing of immensely clever lyrics for their annual shows.

Sadly, Richard did not follow either of the vocational paths that might have fit him best. His love of opera and gift in lyric writing were evident early, and at one point he wanted to go to New York to try to build a career as a translator of operas. Family history has it that Hattie and Max thought that too risky a venture, and he was persuaded to stay in San Francisco and continue to practice law. It is reported that he also considered becoming a rabbi, but again was discouraged by his family—this time by his wife. While he practiced law for his career, it was never his primary interest.

Frank: Of Hattie's three children, Frank was the one who found the family legacy most congenial. He shared his mother's appreciation of music and philanthropy and his father's love of the law. He too became a lawyer and enjoyed his career. He was very active in community service, noted especially for bringing disparate groups together and creating consensus. His contributions to San Francisco philanthropy are documented in an oral history.³⁹ Also a gifted writer, he relished his thirty year membership in San Francisco's Chit Chat Club, a group of men who meet monthly to

hear papers prepared by their members. He wrote a total of 15 papers, twelve of which are collected in a book printed by the family for his 70th birthday in 1978.⁴⁰

The Sloss family was always close. Holidays and birthdays were celebrated lavishly. A happy memory of this writer's childhood is Hattie's conviction that her own birthday was an opportunity for her to give gifts to others, including her grandchildren! On all occasions, presentations of original and witty poems, songs, and skits were *de rigueur*. Hattie's three children were skilled writers, but Richard had the most exceptional skill as a writer of light verse. An example of one birthday poem, written in 1943, survives:

A Birthday Alphabet for Mother

In which are listed just a few of her specialties

A is for Arts – she's a master of those,
 B is for Browning, obscure and verbose,
 C is for 'Croistics, worked out in good order,
 D is for David, her starriest boarder,
 E's Education, important as hell,
 F is for Family, cultured and swell,
 G is Gin Rummy, productive of losses,
 H is for Home, where it's Hanna who bosses,
 I is for Israel, in which she's a mother,
 J is for Journeys to someplace or other,
 K is for Koshlands, both Mrs. And Mr.,
 L is for Loafing, at which they assist her.
 M is for Mills with its stockings of blue,
 N is New England, where sin is taboo,
 O is for Opera – unnatural rot –
 P is for Poetry, which this is not,
 Q is for Quakes, which cause her alarm,
 R is for Radio, handled with charm,
 S is for Symphony – yours you should know –

T is for Temple, where very few go,
 U is for Usefulness – hers is Class A,
 V is for Victory, coming some day,
 W's Welfare for all fellow creatures,
 X is Xperience, greatest of teachers,
 Y is for Years, — may they fill her with joy –
 Z is for Zionists – *pfui* and *oy-oy!!*

For Hattie's 70th birthday in 1944, the family collected letters from people throughout the community expressing love and appreciation for all of her many contributions. (Writers include Judge St. Sure, the judge who appointed her to the federal grand jury, Aurelia Reinhardt, President of Mills College, and Max Pollak, artist.) Then in 1949, the family held an elegant celebration for Hattie and Max's 50th wedding anniversary. The event was at a resort in Carmel Valley, and the highlight was a presentation of a skit and reading of an original work by the three children—a parody of the *New Yorker*, with each section depicting an aspect of the couple's life, work, and idiosyncrasies.

Last Years

Around 1955, Max became incapacitated with a variety of illnesses, and spent most of his time in bed at home. He maintained his calm good nature through a debilitating illness, and died peacefully in 1958. After her husband's death, Hattie became weaker, and gradually withdrew from her community activities. She saw her children and grandchildren regularly until she became completely disabled by a series of strokes. Eventually she was hospitalized at Maimonades Hospital, a nursing home, where she was in a vegetative state for about three years. Her three children rotated visits, so that at least one of them saw her every day through this painful period. She died on November 10, 1963.

Buried in files found long after Hattie's death was an envelope, reading "M. C. Sloss – to be opened after my death." The envelope

was still sealed; Max, after all, had not survived her. The letter inside, dated May 1934, reads:

Dearest – I want you to know that one of two things our years together leave is such complete harmony that not many words are needed to express what I wish to say which is this. First, for all your wonderful understanding, for your help and comfort in every situation or difficulty, and your kindness, I am deeply grateful. Perhaps you do not realize how much living with you has helped me to become a far more useful person than I could otherwise have been and that your judicious counseling and fair attitude set an example which has affected my entire habit of mind and action. Also there has never been a time when I have not rejoiced that I said ‘yes certainly’ that day in June. May God bless you over your years to come and let the knowledge of my love, admiration and devotion go with you through them.

Fondly, Auntie.”

ENDNOTES

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- 2 The Boston Walks, Jewish Friendship Trail. <http://bostonwalks.tripod.com/JewishFriendshipTrail.html>
- 3 Sally Mirlass Blake, “S. F. Matriarch ‘Remembers Things Past,’” *The Jewish Community Bulletin*, June 11, 1954.
- 4 Fanny Hecht married Dr. Gustav Liebmann, allegedly because she “had to.” Private family tree records indicate that the couple had at least four children, so perhaps all worked out well.
- 5 The book was *From Plotzk to Boston* by Mary Antin, 1894.
- 6 Letter to Frank H. Sloss from Susan Koppelman, July 22, 1981.
- 7 Blake, *op. cit.*
- 8 *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 7, 1899. Original at Western Jewish History Center, Judah L. Magnes Museum, Berkeley, CA.
- 9 This father-in-law was the well-known Louis Sloss, California pioneer and founder of the Alaska Commercial Company. His history is documented in: F. Gordon O’Neill, *Ernest Reuben Lilienthal and his Family*. Stanford, CA:

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- 10 Richard L. Sloss, Untitled poem written for Sloss – Gerstle family reunion at Gerstle Park, San Rafael on 9/14/1975. Copy in the Sloss papers at Western Jewish History Center, Berkeley, CA.
 - 11 Frank H. Sloss. (1966) *op. cit.*
 - 12 *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 7, 1899. *op. cit.*
 - 13 Harriet and Fred Rochlin, *Pioneer Jews: A New Life in the Far West*, Boston: HoughtonMifflin Company, 1984, p. 134.
 - 14 Irena Narell, *op. cit.* p.209.
 - 15 San Francisco Section of the Council of Jewish Women, “Second Annual Report: 1901-1902.” pp 11-12.
 - 16 Jean Burton, *Katharine Felton and her Social Work in San Francisco*. Stanford, CA: James Ladd Delkin, 1947.
 - 17 Letter from the Children’s Agency of San Francisco, from Hattie Hecht Sloss, President, to Harry H. Hopkins, The White House. February 9, 1945. (Original in the Mills College archives.)
 - 18 William M. Kramer and Norton B. Stern, Hattie Hecht Sloss: Cultural Leader/ Jewish Activist of San Francisco 1874-1963. *Western States Jewish History*, Spring/Summer 2003, Vol xxxv, # 3/4. p. 178.
 - 19 California State Board of Charities and Corrections, Annual Report, 1924.
 - 20 *San Francisco Chronicle* August 12, 1933. p. 22
 - 21, Marjory Fisher, *The News*, Date illegible. Copy of article at Performing Arts Library and Museum (PALM), San Francisco.
 - 22 San Francisco Musical Society. Minutes, 1912. At San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum
 - 23 Archives, San Francisco Opera Association. At San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum.
 - 24 A sample of the programs was preserved by the family, and copies are available at the Western Jewish History Center, Magnes Museum, Berkeley, CA, and at the San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum.
 - 25 Hattie Hecht Sloss (Ed.), *Certain Poets of Importance: Victorian Verse, Chosen for Comparison*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1929.
 - 26 Hattie Hecht Sloss, (Ed.), *Poetry and Prizes: Prize Poems Read Over KYA*. Mill Valley, CA: The Wings Press, 1950.
 - 27 Hattie Hecht Sloss, *This I Believe*. Published by the San Francisco Browning Society. Presented to Hattie Hecht Sloss on her eightieth birthday, June 12, 1954. San Francisco: The Grabhorn Press, 1954.

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- 29 *San Francisco Chronicle* February 27, 1941,p. 7.
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- 31 Louis H. Blumenthal) "YMHA and YWHA San Francisco History 1866-1954." *Western States Jewish History*, 2004,Vol. 36 # 4
- 32 Quoted in Rosenbaum, *op. cit.* p. 184.
- 33 Rosenbaum, *op. cit.* pp. 193-213.
- 34 Kramer and Stern, *op.. cit.*p.180,
- 35 Rosenbaum, *op. cit.*p. 207.
- 36 Her son Frank's volunteer service spanned the change from the Patrician philanthropy of Hattie's generation into the more egalitarian and collaborative style of modern social work. (Frank H. Sloss, "Tradition and Change:Continuing Education of a Foundation Board Member." *Bay Area Foundation History Volume IV Interviews Conducted by Gabrielle Morris.* Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, 1976, pp 1 - 67)
- 37 Sloss,(1966) *op. cit.* . p. 25.
- 38 Sloss, (1966) *loc. cit.*
- 39 Sloss, (1976) *op. cit.*
- 40 Frank H. Sloss, *Only on Monday*.San Francisco: Lawton Kennedy, 1978.

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