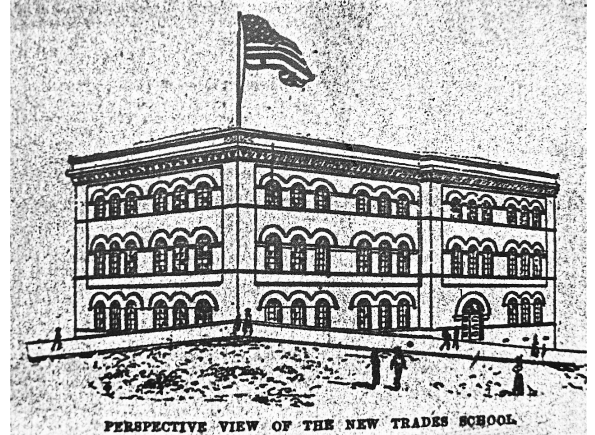


The Origins of Polytechnic High School

By Kathy (Bertsch, Class of Spring 1964) Compagno

We all understand that 1914 is the date on our Poly's cornerstone, that is, the cornerstone for the Poly building that we knew between Frederick and Cole. But in fact, that building did not open for students until 1915. So even the dates for the building have some confusion!!!

Some of the earlier editions of Poly's Parrot Newspaper cite 1912 as the first year it was published, while the Yearbook collection at San Francisco Public Library has an issue from 1911. It is not clear if there were earlier yearbooks or not, but clearly the school was functioning as Polytechnic as early as 1911, when the yearbook contained a photograph of the 'New School Construction' [with some of the temporary structures showing in the background]. The yearbook was dedicated "To Our New Polytechnic High School", shown as an architect's drawing. By June of 1912, we have photographs of The Industrial Building and The New Machine Shop, showing that Poly's shop buildings were built before the main three story classroom building. The 1914 Journal had more architectural drawings of the proposed new building under construction, from several different perspectives.



Luckily for us, the new building made the students very reflective in the 1915 Journal, and one Lois Park wrote a History of Polytechnic, which confirms the previous 30 years of our Poly's history as a school in various locations and buildings. Before the building we knew, students attended class on the same site in temporary buildings which were erected after the 1906 earthquake and fire had destroyed the downtown campus at Bush and Stockton. In addition, there were a few terms where students attended class at what is now called U.C.S.F. Medical Center,

"When school reopened after the great catastrophe, the old building having been burnt, the teachers and pupils sought shelter in some vacant rooms in the Affiliated Colleges. Here classes were held for a term and a half, while the Board of Education put up two or three earthquake shacks on the lot where the new building now stands. (This lot had been purchased in 1905 and plans for a new building were made at that time, but they were destroyed in the fire.) The school moved into the shacks, and as it was constantly growing, more shacks were added from time to time until the present unsightly collection was formed."

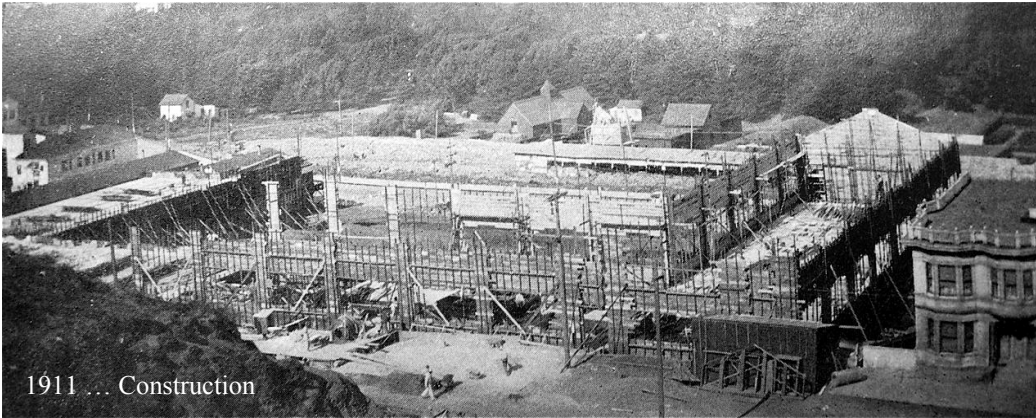


Amazingly, the archival files at S.F. Public Library has a photo of Poly's class of 1906, wearing formal suits and dresses [the girls with elegant hats] standing amongst the rubble of their school at the corner of Bush and Stockton. This location had been the site of a high school since 1891, originally called Commercial High School. In 1894, manual training was added to the program, and the school's name was changed officially to Polytechnic High School. A small clipping dated 24 November 1894 carefully preserved at the library has an image of 'Polytechnic High School on the Corner of Stockton and Bush'. Sadly, we have only a portion of the article,

***"FOR MANUAL TRAINING
The New Polytechnic High School;
Equipment of a Modern Institution
Professor Walter F. Bush, the Principal, speaks of Its Aims***

Parents, generally, are anxious that their children while at school should be prepared for the battle of life, where the majority of them will be compelled to rely upon their own exertions for a living. Teachers are keenly alive to this fact, and recently a great impetus has been given to industrial education in San Francisco. . ."

Based on this documented date, I would suggest 1894 as the year that our Polytechnic High School began its long history, lasting almost 80 years until its last class graduated in June, 1972.



1911 ... Construction

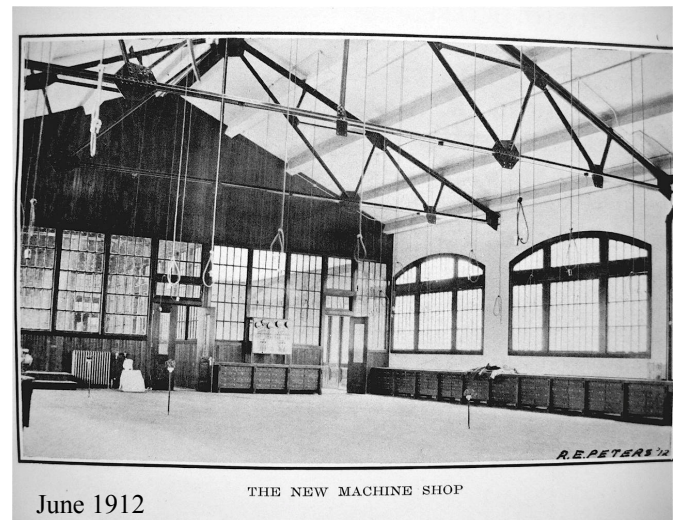
Although, should we be like Lowell High School, which recently claimed an anniversary of 150 years, dating from the establishment of the very first school for secondary education opened in San Francisco in 1856?? This first school was originally called Union Grammar School, as many objected to using public money for higher education, but by 1860 it was called San Francisco High School. In 1865, the establishment of Boys' High School and Girls'

High School ended co-education until the late 1880s, when girls applying to the University of California were allowed to attend classes at Boys' High. Girls' High School opened at Bush and Stockton, so it can be considered the forerunner of our later Polytechnic. Boys' High School moved in 1875 to a site on Sutter Street between Gough and Octavia Streets, where it survived the 1906 fire because it was west of Van Ness Avenue.



June 1912

THE INDUSTRIAL BUILDING



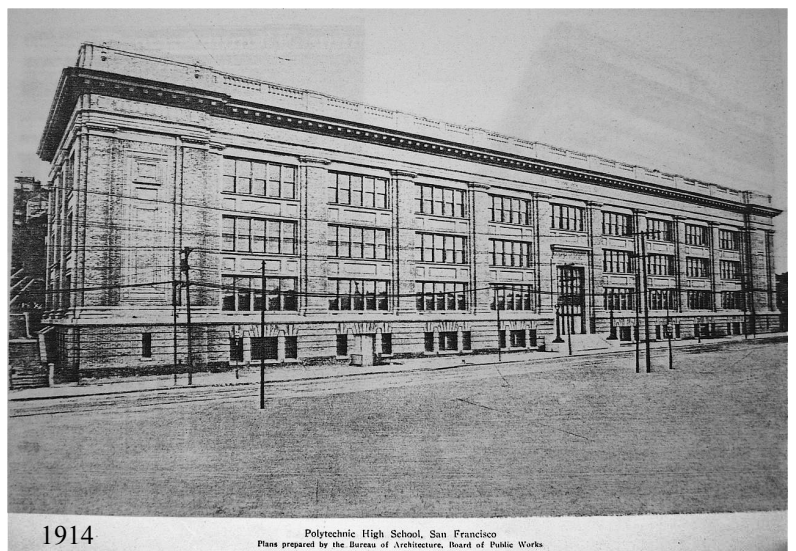
June 1912

THE NEW MACHINE SHOP

But Polytechnic had a more convoluted path: in 1883 a commercial department with 36 pupils was organized in the Boys' High School and given a separate building on Powell Street near Clay with the name Commercial High School. When enrollment increased to 450 students by 1891, the school was moved to new quarters at Bush and Stockton [presumably mingling with the Girls' High School at this point]. The addition of manual training in 1894 changed the name to Polytechnic, then in 1900 the commercial department was again separated to re-establish Commerce High School, which continued as a separate high school.

Geography at Bush and Stockton gives Poly roots back to the Girls' High School, while the commerce department gives it parallel roots back to the Boys' High School. Both of these legacies extend directly back to the original Union Grammar School in 1856, which suggests many dates that we could claim.

As my personal opinion, I incline to 1894, when Polytechnic appeared with its own name which endured, and when it first had the manual training courses which ultimately became the core of Poly's unique identity during the 1900s.



1914

Polytechnic High School, San Francisco
Plans prepared by the Bureau of Architecture, Board of Public Works

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