NILES AND ESSANAY STUDIOS TOUR

May 26, 2007

This May NCCSAH will be hosting a tour of town of Niles. Author and historian David Kiehn will present a slide lecture on the history of Niles and the Essanay Studios, a local silent film company. Tour participants will be treated to a screening of silent films starring Charlie Chaplin and Bronco Billy Anderson. Following the films and lunch, David Kiehn will lead a walking tour of the town. Highlights include: the Essanay Studio Cottages, Niles Library, Niles School, Veterans Building, Niles Jail, Spanish Colonial Revival style buildings by architect John Donovan, and a number of Queen Anne style houses.

Niles experienced its greatest period of growth and transformation during the early 20th century. Reflecting this period of growth, most of the buildings extant today in the Niles commercial district date from the early 20th century. Two important developments in Niles contributed to this growth: the construction of a new rail line and the opening of the Essanay motion picture studios. In 1910, the newly incorporated Western Pacific Railroad built a competing rail line to the Southern Pacific through Decoto, Niles and Niles Canyon. In 1914, the Western Pacific Railroad added a branch line from Niles to San Jose. The Southern Pacific also built a rail line joining Newark and Niles in 1910. The new rail lines encouraged a number of new industries to move into the Niles area. By 1914, Niles had 3 hotels, 3 churches and a bank.

Film making became a major industry in Niles with the arrival of Essanay Studios in 1912.

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The studio made films with a number of major stars of the time, including Charlie Chaplin, Ben Turpin and Gilbert "Bronco Billy" Anderson, one of the Studio's co-owners. Chaplin made 5 films at the Niles studio, including his masterpiece "The Tramp." Anderson chose Niles as the location for his Studio because the surrounding hills with winding dirt roads created the perfect setting for his one reel Westerns. Anderson made 375 Bronco Bill films during his career. In 1913, the Edison Company built a 400 seat movie theater in Niles to show primarily films made by Essanay Studios.

The Essanay Studios in Niles closed in 1916 when the company decided to consolidate at their Los Angeles studio.

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NCCSAH Tour of
NELS
and the
Essanay Studios
May 26, 2007

Registration for May 26, 2007 Events:
[please print]

Name:___________________________________________
Affiliation:________________________________________
Address:___________________________________________
City/State/Zip:______________________________________
E-mail address:_____________________________________

Tours and Lunch ($25 for NCCSAH members and $35 for nonmembers)
Total enclosed:_____________________________________

Please make checks payable to “Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians” (NCCSAH) and mail to: Richard Sucre, Page & Turnbull, NCCSAH Niles Tour, 724 Pine Street, San Francisco, CA 94108.

For more information please contact
Richard Sucre
E-mail: sucre@page-turnbull.com

Tour Itinerary

9:30 to 10:00 am Coffee and pastries at the Essanay Silent Film Museum, 37417 Niles Boulevard between G and H Streets

10:00 to 10:45 am “History of Niles and the Essanay Studios,” slide lecture by David Kiehn, author and historian, Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum

10:45 to 11:30 am Screening of two films made by Essanay Studios in Niles:
The Champion (1915) starring Charlie Chaplin
The Making of Bronco Billy (1913) starring Bronco Billy Anderson

11:30 to 12:00 pm Tour of the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum

12:00 to 1:00 pm Lunch (sandwich, salad, drink, and cookie)

1:00 to 3:00 pm Walking Tour of Niles with David Kiehn, author and historian, Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum. Highlights will include the Essanay Studio Cottages, The Niles Library and the Niles School, 2 splendid Spanish Colonial Revival Style buildings by architect John Donovan, The Veterans Building (Henry H. Meyers, architect), the old Niles Jail, and a number of wonderful Queen Anne Style houses.

For those who would like to take BART, AC Transit bus #332 leaves the Union City BART station at 9:37 am and arrives in downtown Niles at 9:45 am.

MEMBERS: For timely contact of news and events, please update or confirm your e-mail address with Lissa at lissa_mckee@dot.ca.gov or lissamcck@hotmail.com. Thanks!
NILES TOUR continued

Although the main Studio building at 1st and G Streets was demolished, 6 cottages built by the Studio for actors still survive on 2nd Street.

While the Niles film industry was short-lived, the attention Essanay brought to the area probably attracted a number of new businesses in subsequent years. After World War I, Niles had its most important boom period as a number of new industries move into the area. The Pacific States Steel Corporation, a lumber mill and several smaller enterprises, supplemented by a number of fruit and vegetable packing houses, opened manufacturing facilities near Niles in the 1920s and 1930s. A number of companies manufacturing tile and brick opened near Niles because of the deposits of high grade clay in the area and the excellent transportation network. These companies included the California Brick Company (makers of Dickey Mastertile) and the Kraftile Company.

Several rock and gravel companies also operated near Niles. These new industries brought a significant increase in population to Niles with the 1914 population of about 1,400 reaching 2,000 in 1930. The California Nursery Company, which had been purchased by George Roeding in 1917, continued to be a major Niles based business as the local agricultural economy also prospered during the 1920s. Founded in 1925, Kimber Poultry Company was another important new business near Niles.

Except for the Mission Boulevard bypass project of 1936-1937, little new development occurred in Niles during the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II. The bypass project resulted in the loss of direct traffic into Niles, and the commercial center began to decline during the 1940s. Niles importance as a transportation center also began to decline in the 1940s when passenger train service from Niles stopped in 1941. In the 1950s, freight rail service was increasingly superseded by the trucking industry as freeway construction boomed.

As a result of the decline of agriculture and the railroad, Niles changed from a rural transportation and commercial center into a suburban community during the post-World War II period. Beginning in the 1960s, the area north of Niles was developed with new residential subdivisions. The area south of Alameda Creek along Mission Boulevard was developed in the 1970s with new subdivisions, townhouses and apartments.
Please send your ideas or comments concerning The Newsletter to:
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