



UTILITAS • FIRMITAS • VENUSTAS

Northern California Chapter
Society of Architectural Historians

The Newsletter

Volume 10, Number 1
May 2007

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.



Essanay Film Studio

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.

(Continued page 2.)

UPCOMING EVENTS & NEWS

**California Preservation Foundation
Spring 2007**
Hollywood
May 3-6, 2007

**AIA National Convention and Design
Exposition 2007**
San Antonio, TX
May 3-5, 2007

**Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU)
2007**
Philadelphia, PA
May 17-20, 2007

**California Council for the Promotion of
History Conference 2007**
San Gabriel Valley (Arcadia)
October 25-27, 2007

**Environmental Design Research
Association (EDRA) 2007**
Sacramento, CA
May 29 to June 3, 2007

**APTI 2007
(Association of Preservation Technology)**
San Juan, Puerto Rico
September 13-16, 2007

**National Trust for Historic Preservation
Conference Fall 2007**
Saint Paul
October 2-6, 2007

**Traditional Building Exhibition and
Conference Fall 2007**
New Orleans
October 17-20, 2007

**Vernacular Architecture Forum
Spring 2008**
Fresno
May 7-10, 2008

NILES TOUR continued

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.



Essanay Studio film star Charlie Chaplin.



NCCSAH Tour of

NILES 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:
<i>The Champion</i> (1915) starring Charlie Chaplin
<i>The Making of Bronco Billy</i> (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 lissamck@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,



Essanay Studio cottages

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



Niles Boulevard, c. 1910.

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:
Jody Stock
NCCSAH Newsletter Editor
Architectural Resources Group
Pier 9, The Embarcadero
San Francisco, CA 94111
phone: 415-421-1680
e-mail: jody@argsf.com

Remember you do not have to be a member of the National SAH to become a member of NCCSAH

Join or Renew Now!!

Individual \$20.00

Student \$10.00

Make Checks to NCCSAH

NCCSAH Officers:

President, Ward Hill
Vice President, David Blackburn
Treasurer, Lissa McKee
Secretary, Jody Stock
Pres. Officer, Richard Sucre

To become a member of the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians

or to renew your dues
return this form and your dues check to
Lissa McKee, Treasurer - NCCSAH
307 Starling Road
Mill Valley, CA 94941

Name _____

Affiliation _____

Occupation _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____

Work Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail address _____



UTILITAS • FIRMITAS • VENUSTAS

The Northern California Chapter
Society of Architectural Historians
The Newsletter

c/o Lissa McKee
NCCSAH Treasurer
307 Starling Road
Mill Valley, CA 94941

The mission of the NCCSAH is to further the objectives of the Society of Architectural Historians of which the Northern California Chapter is an official affiliate; promote the study and discussion of our region's architectural history and its related fields; visit significant works of architecture; and increase public awareness and appreciation of our architectural heritage. Membership is open to anyone interested in architectural history and its related fields who agrees to pay the annual dues and subscribe to the by-laws of the organization.