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The Niles project remembering Essanay

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THE NILES PROJECT

Remembering Essanay

A Thesis-Project Report

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology,
and the Department of Radio, Television, Theatre, and Media Arts
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

In Special Major:

Visual Anthropology

By

Kristy Joelle Sorensen

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ABSTRACT

THE NILES PROJECT Remembering Essanay

By Kristy Joelle Sorensen

Niles, a small frontier railroad town in the early 1900's, became the western studio location of the Chicago-based Essanay Film Manufacturing Company from 1912 to 1916. How does this history relate to and/or construct the town's identity? Why has the town hosted celebrations that recognize this history? Is the filmmaking image more powerful than others? How is this history revisualized in the town? What meaning do people attach to these images? How do people remember this history? The project sought to answer these questions by unveiling the Niles silent filmmaking history and how the history is remembered by the Niles community.

The project includes a Website, Written Project Report, and Exhibit. The Website contained a historical tour of Niles, and introduced the project and exhibitor. The Project Report documents methodology, theoretical applications, research findings and analysis. The Exhibit displayed historical and recent photographs, paper artifacts, and new memorabilia.

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I. Research Questions

Niles is a town with a history that is retold in the local newspapers and other local publications repeatedly, host to events, home to generations of families, isolated and separated, rich in stories and politics, and once the home of Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, a major player in early filmmaking industry. The town has hosted celebrations, festivals, and symposia in remembrance of this history. After reviewing the materials mentioned above I was led to make the following deduction and ask questions related to its identity construction.

Niles, a small frontier railroad town in the early 1900's, became the western studio location of the Chicago-based Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, who was a major player in the movie making business in the 1910's. The town's population of 1,400 was increased by forty-two. The cast and crew of Essanay arrived by train in 1912. They filled up the town's hotels, so the residents boarded the remaining cast and crew members. A barn became a make shift studio. Locals became hired hands and actors, or their possessions became props. Then, four years later production stopped and the cast and crew packed up leaving for the developing Hollywood area or other studios, and the Essanay studio in Niles was shut down. How does this history relate to and/or construct the town's identity? Why has the town hosted celebrations that recognize this history? Is the filmmaking image more powerful than others? How is this history revisualized in the town? What meaning do people attach to these images? How do people remember this history?

II. The Context

Historical Review of Niles: From mid-1800's to early-1900's

THE RANCHO — Seventeen-thousand acres of land was given to Don Jose de Jesus Vallejo in 1842 by the Mexican Governor, Don Juan Alvarado. Don Vallejo was raised and educated in the Monterey area. He came to Mission San Jose, one of the California Missions, as a Civil Administrator in 1836. He resigned from that post four years later and devoted his time to the ranching business. He was returning to a business he knew well because he had grown up working on the family ranch. Don Vallejo constructed six adobe buildings and a flour mill on his rancho. Don Vallejo named his ranch -- Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda. His village of buildings became known as Vallejo Mills.

Trouble began for Vallejo in 1846 when American soldiers lead by John C. Fremont passed through. The soldiers took horses, saddles, flour, oxen, and Vallejo's small collection of rifles and guns without fair compensation. It was the first major loss for Vallejo. American settlers that had crossed the Sierras or came by ship to San Francisco had been settling around Vallejo's Rancho. Some rented land from Vallejo, others assumed the land. Soon Vallejo was fighting 145 different lawsuits over ownership of his property. He was financially stretched paying court costs, construction bills, liens, and taxes. In order to pay debts, Vallejo was forced to sell off most of the rancho, but in the end, he defaulted on the final mortgage payment on his rancho and the holder, J.G. Clark, foreclosed. The remainder of the rancho was awarded to Clark in 1865 after a long court battle.

Vallejo died penniless in 1882 and his home was torn down in 1892. The only remaining structure is one of Vallejo's adobes. The adobe was remodeled in early 1930s by the California Nursery and restored in 1974 by the City of Fremont and community

groups. It stands as the centerpiece to the surrounding twenty-acre historical park within the gates of the Mission Adobe Nursery on Niles Boulevard which is located just North of downtown Niles.

THE RAILROAD — Central Pacific Railroad and Southern Pacific came through Vallejo Mills in 1869 completing their first transcontinental railroad. The main line split into two branches in Niles, one headed to Oakland, the other to San Jose. In 1877, Central Pacific purchased two-hundred acres to add to its fourteen acres and laid out the design of the present town. The main street was called Vallejo Mill and the business fronts were built across the street facing the railroad tracks. In 1879, Central Pacific officially named the station after one of its attorneys, Judge Addison C. Niles. Soon after the town was renamed to Niles also. In 1910, Western Pacific constructed an eastern line through the Niles Canyon. By 1913, Niles had three churches, three hotels, several general stores, and its own bank. As the railroad transportation gave way to automobiles, service to Niles Depot declined. Sometime in the 1960's service to the depot ceased, the exact date is unknown.

The Niles Depot was purchased by the Tri-City Society of Model Engineers in 1981 to save it from being demolished by Southern Pacific. The City of Fremont provided the land where the depot presently resides on Mission Boulevard near the Sullivan underpass which is at the North end of town. Saving the depot was a community effort of donated time, funds, and services that enabled the Society to purchase and move the depot. It is currently a Railroad Museum and home for the Society.

ESSANAY FILM MANUFACTURING COMPANY — The actor, Gilbert M. Anderson, obtained his first major success playing multiple roles in "The Great Train Robbery." This picture is still recognized as one of the first significant American films among enthusiasts, scholars, and the motion picture industry. Anderson sought out George K. Spoor, a successful distributor of movie equipment with an abundance of

money to invest in new ventures, and convinced him to co-found the Chicago-based Essanay Film Manufacturing Company. Small theatrical and film companies were making films, even “Westerns” in the mid-West and East. Anderson, not wanting to surrender creative control to Spoor coupled with his desire to make “Westerns” in the West, began his venture west from Chicago to Colorado, and then to California during the period of 1908 to 1912. The summer of 1911 was spent shooting films in San Rafael, California. On occasion, Anderson sent out a crew to scout new filming locations. It was during one of these scouting expeditions that cameraman Jess Robbins brought word of Niles. The small town of Niles had everything within close proximity -- a canyon, a small town with necessary amenities, a railroad, the ocean, San Francisco, and a distinctive setting. Anderson and 42 cast and crew members arrived in Niles by train in April of 1912. Anderson signed a contract with Frank Mortimer for the use of his barn as a temporary studio location and settled into shooting. In August of 1912, six of ten bungalows were built and occupied by cast and crew members. The remaining four bungalows were completed in December of 1913. That same year construction of the Essanay Film Manufacturing Studio on Front Street (now Niles Boulevard) was completed. The studio included a scenario office, a projection room, carpenter shop and scene dock, wardrobe and prop areas, and dressing rooms. The studio operated until February 1916, when the company then consolidated its operations in Chicago.

While in Niles, Essanay made approximately 400 films. Anderson himself made 120 westerns featuring the “Broncho Billy” character. Essanay is known for other series as well, such as the “Snakeville Comedies” starring Ben Turpin, Victor Potel, Harry Todd, and Margaret Joslin. Charles Chaplin was also among Anderson’s troupe of actors. Chaplin made five films during his three months in Niles: “A Night Out,” “The Champion,” “In the Park,” “A Jitney Elopement,” and most notably, “The Tramp,” the character that Chaplin continued to use throughout his film career.

In 1931, 18 years after Essanay closed in Niles, Ed Rose purchased the studio hoping to revitalize the filmmaking business in Niles. The attempt failed, the contents were auctioned, and the studio was subsequently torn down. The studio's site is now home to private businesses, small apartment complexes, a convenience store, and an empty lot.

CALIFORNIA NURSERY — The Nursery was established by John Rock in 1865. He moved the nursery to Niles in 1884. George Roeding, Jr. bought the nursery in 1917. The nursery's primary product was fruit trees, ornamental shrubs, and roses. It was famous for its citrus fruit trees, 50 varieties of olive trees, and 400 varieties of roses. In 1915, the 400 palm trees that lined the "Avenue of the Palms" in the Pan-Pacific Expo were grown on the nursery grounds in Niles. With only two trees per flatbed car, it took two full trains to deliver them to the fair. The nursery is still in operation today under the name of Mission Adobe Nursery.

The Researcher's Perspective

When the City of Fremont was incorporated in 1956, it brought together five townships: Mission San Jose, Warm Springs, Irvington, Centerville, and Niles. Each of these towns names have been incorporated into the City of Fremont as districts. My mother tells me that when she first moved to Fremont with my father in 1960 it was common to refer to where you lived by district, even to the Bay Area locals who lived outside the City of Fremont boundaries.

I was born in Fremont's local hospital and raised in a house near the High School I would attend. Growing up, I remember my mother pointing out changes to the area, such as farmland turned into tract homes or commercial areas like The Hub (one of Fremont's two main shopping areas when I was a child). She also told me how the old carriage house in The Hub's parking lot was saved from destruction and moved to its current location. It is still being used as Fremont Candlelighters Halloween haunted house. I remember her telling me how roads had changed from dirt to paved or from two lanes to six. As a child

in the seventies and eighties, I watched Fremont change continue to from a farming and ranching community to a sprawling suburbia.

I left for college in Southern California in 1987 and only returned for visits until 1995. I had moved to the east coast after college graduation and was living in Washington D.C. Metropolitan area when I decided to move back to California to pursue graduate school. Upon returning to Fremont, I quickly discovered that Fremont had grown substantially in population. I noticed that most of the orchards had been replaced with new homes or strip malls. The hills once occupied by cattle, ranches, and a local winery had also been replaced with acres of homes.

I had always been intrigued by Niles' town facade, old homes, and its historical architecture, its visual elements. I have fond memories as a child of coming to Niles to go to the butcher shop with my mother. When time allowed, my mother would entertain my intrigue with Niles by walking along main street with her and window shopping. My mother brought up the silent filmmaking and studio that had been in Niles, filling me with the stories she had heard and read, mostly in the local newspaper over the years, about Essanay studios and that Charlie Chaplin had made some movies in Niles.

Niles' location is off the beaten path of Fremont and is the Northeastern border of the city. To the west, Niles is cut off by Alameda Creek. To the east, it is cut off by the hills. You can enter Niles from the south by one road: Mission Boulevard -- which runs from 680 to San Leandro and intersects Niles Canyon. From the north you can enter Niles from Mission Boulevard, or by winding through the streets of central Fremont, through residential areas, crossing Alameda Creek and city borders into a neighboring city, then double backing into Niles. The other former townships (Mission San Jose, Centerville, Irvington, and Warm Springs) have spread and blended into each other, but Niles continues to be seen as a quaint town which is land locked from many modern developments by railroad, hills, and the Alameda Creek.

My first trip back into Niles since I was a teenager brought back nostalgic memories. I was reminded of the trips to the butcher shop, and the walks downtown, but the town had drastically changed. The butcher shop closed long ago, so had the bank, pharmacy, grocery store, service stations, and the like. I walked the town again, snapped photographs, and took note of a few things: 1) Despite the changes and lack of business mix one would have found in downtown areas years before, the old buildings managed to survive demolition and modern replacements; 2) The town was adorned in Chaplin images on its facade and inside the businesses, many of which were antique or collectible dealers. Since my initial intent was to make a documentary, I went back to Niles with an 8mm camera and tripod. A video survey of the town would tell me what I had to work with visually and maybe even further spur the research focus. During this videoing¹, I had a few interesting encounters and took note of a few things once again. People stopped and took notice of my videoing. Shopkeepers came outside and watched me from the sidewalk. Some even ventured across the street to ask me what I was doing. I explained my graduate student status and my focus on early Niles history as my research topic for the thesis-project. Immediately they began to elaborate on details of Essanay, Broncho Billy, Charlie Chaplin and other names that I had not heard before. Of course, I was told, Niles early history is more than just about Essanay. The world famous California Nursery was also here and Niles is historically a train town. At that point, I only knew Essanay history from a few articles I had read in local newspapers, and of the train depot that had been moved to avoid demolition some years ago. I was unfamiliar with the history of California Nursery. It appeared to me that the locals had stories to tell and were certainly willing to talk. I continued to make my way down the main street with my video camera and tripod

¹ Just as "filming" means to capture moving images onto the medium of film, "videoing" means to capture moving images onto video tape (DV, Beta, 8mm, S-VHS, etc.). I use this term instead of "taping" because "taping" has become commonly used to refer to recording onto tape via a VCR. The video industry usually

surprised by all the attention I was raising. What captured my attention that day was when a middle-aged man drove by me in a pick-up truck giving me a long look. I was just off the sidewalk near the flagpole which sits in between two parking lots that are across the street from most of the towns buildings. I watched him pass, drive a couple of blocks, turn into the opposite entrance of the parking lot, drive toward me, pull up passenger side next to me, and inquire what I was doing. Admittedly, I was now a bit stunned by the attention that a little 8mm camera, tripod, and I were receiving. I gave this man the now rehearsed grad student thesis scoop. He followed up with questions on the focus of my research: What part of Niles early history? I told him of my interest in Essanay and the silent filmmaking, pointing out the interesting Chaplin images. His response: “Ah yes, only in Niles would we worship a pedophile.” I told him I was unaware of this. He seemed surprised that I didn’t know Chaplin liked the younger women and went on to tell me the details of his love affairs with under-aged girls. He passed me his card before he drove away, not the only one I’d receive that day, but certainly the most memorable. After he was out of site, I shook my head somewhat in disbelief of what I had heard, and then chuckled realizing I wasn’t sure what I was in for, but there was certainly something to be uncovered regarding this silent filmmaking history in Niles.

The Chaplin images that adorn the town suggest a special regard for him, an acknowledgement of his presence, even an advertisement of Niles history. Certainly these are not representative of the diverse opinions about Chaplin that I continue to encounter nor representative of the stories about Essanay. My experience that day videoing with an 8mm camera in Niles made me realize that Niles’ early history could potentially be a matter of controversy, and was likely not a static history but an active history through the retelling of stories and revisioning of history.

refers to “videoing” as “going out on a shoot” and the images captured as to what was “shot.” I prefer not to use industry jargon, but layman terms instead, to which “videoing” is acceptable.

III. The Thesis Project

This project was originally designed to be a documentary. It became apparent that my research could easily make an interesting historical documentary, but would not serve well as an anthropological documentary. However; material, data, and photographs would suit an exhibit presentation and could draw on public interest through presenting the silent film history in the context of Niles participation in this history and its remembrance of Essanay. So the thesis-project was changed from a documentary to an exhibit.

The exhibit was hosted by Fremont's Museum of Local History which is located in the Mission San Jose district. I had an opening reception for Niles residents and business owners, family, and my SJSU professors. The following day the exhibit opened to the public for an eight week showing.

The exhibit (see Appendix) was dividend into seven sections:

1. An 18 x 24 poster with text welcoming the visitor and explained the graduate studies research;
2. An 18 x 24 poster with text explaining the state of the silent filmmaking industry in the 1910's;
3. An 18 x 24 poster with text defining Essanay's role during this filmmaking period in Niles and reproduced photos of the exterior and interior of the Niles studio and bungalows built for the cast and crew;
4. An 18 x 24 poster with text to present the known and unknown Niles Essanay cast and crew members and reproduced photos of portraits, film stills, and group stills identifying most of the known cast and crew members;
5. An 12 x 18 poster with text explaining how Essanay artifacts are difficult to acquire, and a display of reproduced Essanay Heralds, an Essanay Newspaper, movie posters; and original postcards, stamps, magazines, and ads;

6. 5x7 photos, advertisements, t-shirts, stamp cancellations, flyers, and programs with text recounting the ways in which the public remembers Essanay;
7. a 18x24 poster acknowledging and appropriately thanking all the contributors to the exhibit.

Due to the layout of the Museum and its building structure, I had to provide self-supporting walls to mount all my materials. Ten 4'x8' walls and five 2'x8' walls were built with 1"x4" frames and 4'x8' sheets of 1/8" mahogany plywood. The construction design of the walls is frequently used in staging (i.e., sets for plays or studio sets). The surfaces were painted two different colors: a dark color for the welcome and historical sections and a light color for the public memory and acknowledgements sections. Black and white photos were scanned from slides, cleaned up in Photoshop, printed on special inkjet photo paper, and then spray mounted onto foam core. Color photos were produced from negatives then dry-mounted or digital images were printed and then spray mounted onto charcoal gray mat board. Other materials were placed in plastic sleeves or mounted onto foam core when appropriate. All items were then mounted to the walls by double sided foam tape or fun-tak (a special sticky moldable material that has a pottery clay like consistency). The walls were hinged together with specially made non-movable steel joints at 90° and 45° angles creating "V" and half hexagon shapes. Strut was placed across the top of the walls to add cross braces and to provide a method for hanging track lighting where it was needed. Torso mannequins were acquired to display t-shirts and 4 podiums were built for the mannequins to rest upon. A display case was borrowed from a local merchant to display artifacts.

The Museum's executive board, upon my request, provided a letter of support and acknowledgement of my forthcoming exhibit so I might seek donations of materials. It was a successful tool, I paid full price for very few items, receiving materials discounted at least 25% to as much as 100%.

Visitors' Response

A survey was provided for visitors to respond to the exhibit. A total of thirty-five surveys have been filled out between May 19th and June 2nd. Of those thirty-five: nine are Niles residents, twelve are Fremont (non-Niles) residents, eight are from other cities in the Bay Area, and eight are from out of the area. Respondents were asked to select an age group -- eight were 65 years of age or older, thirteen were between the ages of 50-64, ten between the ages of 31-49, and only four between the ages of 18-30, which means two-thirds of my respondents were age 50 or older. Twenty-three of thirty-five surveys that have been filled out compliment the exhibit, saying: "Beautiful job with the pictures. The display is lovely."

"The photos are lovely. Visually, it is very pleasing to see and easy to follow -- great presentation."

"This exhibit was so informative."

"Well Done. Gave a realistic feeling for the era. Presentation was artistically pleasing."

"Learned there is so much more to Niles than I even imagined."

"A very professional presented exhibit -- artistic and clear. Very informative."

"A beautiful exhibit. Much appreciated."

"Absolutely a great display of a piece of history I knew nothing about. Thank you for bringing it to the surface."

"Easy to comprehend. Soothing!!"

Five of the twenty-three extend their compliments to comments about my contribution to the history, saying:

“Without people like Joelle (and there are few with her commitments) we would have no one to record this beautiful history and we believe her work will play a significant part in the resurgence of our beloved Niles.”

“Beautiful way to archive the history of Essanay and the Niles region. It’s important work that should be treasured and well-received.”

Regarding the public memory section, “very creative -- sharing the process of preserving history. History in the making.”

“I’m elated that you’ve cared about all we’ve done these past 4 years with the NEPC (*Niles Essanay Preservation Committee*)². You’ve givin (*sic*) us a memorial to our efforts. Thank you for that.”

“I am an Essanay enthusiast. I have not seen most of the pictures before, that you have on display...We in Niles share your passion for reviving and celebrating these individuals and to their contributions to Niles.”

Seven of the thirty-five went beyond compliments and critiqued or questioned or reacted to exhibit elements, saying:

“I think the exhibit could be improved if you could have some copies of these interviews” referring to newspaper articles from the 60’s and 70’s that interviewed elderly residents who said that Chaplin was not liked by the townspeople.

“This part wasn’t as clear to me (*public memory section*) -- I would have like(*sic*) a more detailed narrative that the “cast & crew” section had. I appreciate the interest and passion that Niles residents have for their history.”

² *Italics* in parenthesis are my additions. Non-italic text in parenthesis are respondents text.

“Would have liked more text (*public memory section*) explaining how you felt the Essanay years influenced the Niles community. Perhaps you can make available a synopsis of your thesis to the public?”

“It always surprises me the interest in and visual representation of Chaplin and B&W film that remain in Niles. I wonder if it is simply an interest in local history or more an idle fascination with ‘what might have been’ (if films stayed in Fremont and did not move south to the LA movie mecca).”

“This section (*public memory*) was really good because it gave me perspective of how people and the area have been indelibly affected by the presence of Essanay.”

“Might have been nice to have had more info on the Charlie Chaplin days of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Also would have liked a couple of paragraphs on how you interpreted the effects of the movies on Niles. You set up the premise in the first panel and then didn’t really conclude it.”

I am not surprised by the compliments. To my knowledge, nothing like this has ever been done and in a community laden with people who want to save their history and their historical town, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that they would positively receive an exhibit focused on a part of their history. Certainly by doing an exhibit on the history and how its remembered will contribute to public memory. The exhibit not only adds to the memory, but also delivers academic jargon and meaning to their memories. This exhibit places the history in a new perspective by recognizing many of the cast and crew members and their contributions, not just Broncho Billy and Chaplin; and acts as a mirror reflecting how the Niles community remembers their history, how it’s celebrated, displayed and used by those who see the exhibit. Will this exhibit have a lasting affect? Maybe on a few that are deeply involved in preserving Essanay’s history, but not likely on the Niles community

at large. The community is far too busy, immersed in politics and battles over how the town is to be redeveloped and revitalized.

I struggled with the public memory section the most. I needed to find a balance between identifying the elements of how Essanay is remembered without overwhelming the general public with academic research data and analysis. I expected some criticisms in this area because I decided less was better in this section. I really wanted to hear more from the community about what they thought and I wanted to influence those thoughts as little as possible. However, the lack of attendance by the Niles community has put a damper on this.

If I had this to do over, I would have found a place in Niles to host the exhibit. Although the Museum of Local History is an appropriate place for such an exhibit, it has not garnered the attention nor attendance that I would need for it to really add to the research data. However, it does reinforce that the crucial factor in the redevelopment, revitalization, and preservation of the town is the use of this heritage and history, not “history” in and of itself.

IV. Literature Review

WRITTEN DATA — The history of Niles has been recorded and retold in local newspapers. This data research includes several newspaper articles (including but not limited to “Washington Press”, “The Oakland Tribune”, and “The Argus”), a 1977 thesis on Niles from a Cal State Hayward graduate student, several entries in books (including A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture Thorough 1925 (1926)).

The archival record is thin in many areas. Fremont Main Library, the Niles Branch of the Fremont library, and the Local History Museum have some news clippings, photographs, and relevant publications. UC Berkeley library has the “Washington Press”, a local paper during the early years of Niles, on micro-fiche, but the newspaper during the critical years of Essanay’s activity in Niles is missing (The micro-fiche isn’t missing, but the newspapers themselves were not available to be converted to micro-fiche). The Louis B. Mayer Library at the American Film Institute (AFI) in Los Angeles has some books that include history of Essanay. The Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (the Academy) in Beverly Hills has collections from Essanay cast and crew members, but there is no cataloging system, which makes locating information difficult. UCLA’s Library has a couple of photos and a few Essanay films in their archives. The Library of Congress and British Film Institute also have a collection of Essanay films. I recently learned that the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles also has some collections, which came as a surprise. As I understand it, the museum was the only place available years ago for those working in the film industry to donate their collections. Subsequently the museum has continued to add to their collection even though two other libraries have formed to archive such materials. Apparently it is a contention among the entities. I’ve also consulted with several film scholars and history buffs, including a Berkeley resident that has spent five years researching Essanay’s history.

VERBAL DATA — There is one account of a Bay Area radio broadcast that gives a brief account of the studio's presence and legacy in Niles. Geoffrey Bell interviewed many Essanay cast and crew members years ago to write a book. He gave his collection to UC Berkeley but the library has failed to catalogue the collection even after repeated requests, thereby keeping it out of the hands of other researchers.

VISUAL DATA — I viewed two of four documentaries that I know have been made about Niles: one in the 60's, one in the 70's, one in the 80's, and one in the 90's by a professor at the University of Arkansas, which chronicle Anderson's career. The three previously mentioned documentaries focus on the studio's history and the people involved. Each tours the town, showing the locations of where things happened. Essentially, a showcase of "this is where it happened." In addition to my photographs and videotaping, I have also gathered historical photos or visual materials, and other sources of video or film footage that are from or relevant to the 1912-16 history. Historical photographs or visual materials (i.e., movie poster of Chaplin's The Tramp and Essanay's logo) have been scanned and saved as digital images. Other sources of video, such as a Fremont resident's (who happens to be a professional video editor) home video of Charlie Chaplin Day from 1994, have been duplicated for my research files.

PUBLIC MEMORY DATA — I've relied on several works about memory, representation of place, and historical tourism to develop my research analysis as guides to past research findings and comparisons to what is happening in the town of Niles. These works include: Martha K. Norkunas' book The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California; Lucy R. Lippard's book On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place; G.J. Ashworth's paper "The Uses of Heritage: The past as a political resource"; Richard Handler's book On Having A Culture: Nationalism and the Preservation of Québec's Patrimoine; and Dean MacCannell's book The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class.

VISUAL TECHNIQUES — I used several visual anthropological books as references to visual anthropological methodology and techniques. I depended upon Collier and Collier's book, Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method as my guide to photographing subject matter during the course of this research.

V. Methodology

Human Subjects & Interviewing

San Jose State University's Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board approved my request to use human subjects for "The Niles Project". Interviews were conducted with life-long and recent Niles residents, business owners, fellow researchers on Niles History or silent film era, and scholars.

Interviews were both structured and unstructured. Some interviews were recorded on video, others on audio tape, and others by notetaking. Long-term residents, scholars, researchers, and others that have extensive and/or pertinent information to offer on the history of the town were typically recorded on videotape. Those that had limited information or anecdotes were recorded on audio tape. Those that had some insight into silents, or Chaplin, or passing information, I record by pen. I used a mix of methods to record my long term informants.

A decision to seek a structured interview is based on two points: 1) their knowledge of Niles History, particularly of the Essanay Era, and 2) their activity in the community. For example, one elderly resident that I interviewed on videotape, who has since passed, was a life-long resident of Niles. The Essanay studio was said to be a playground for local childs before it was torn down. He confirmed these stories with his own tales of playing in the studio. One of my informants was previously a Niles resident and returned nearly twenty-years later to find the town drastically changed. Since his return he has been extensively involved with various community groups, and has a zealous personal interest in the Essanay Era. Identifying who my key informants were, and getting tapped into the town and residents, was a slow process.

Much of my information has been collected through unstructured, informal interviews. These informants often offer their thoughts about Niles, but I also asked

questions such as: “What is it like living here for you?” “What do you think of the town’s makeover?” (The town had its streets and sidewalks redone by the City), and so forth. These “conversations” revealed the residents view of their community and history.

Data Collection

WRITTEN DATA — Anthropological methods of notetaking and journaling have been employed. Additionally, I created contact lists and a filing system to track my research and used flyers and postcards to communicate with the community in addition to verbal communication. I have also collected advertisements, newsletters, flyers, and so forth that have been created by Niles Associations or committees to communicate with the public.

VERBAL DATA — Formal and informal interviews have been conducted with local residents and/or business owners, professional and amateur scholars of silent films and Essanay history, descendants of or members of the Niles Essanay cast and crew members.

VISUAL DATA — I have photographed the town facade annually and during major construction. Events have been video taped and/or photographed.

MATERIAL DATA — I collected paper artifacts as data on how images were employed during Essanay’s activity and how cast members were recorded through articles in trade magazines. Other artifacts such as props and equipment from the studio were auctioned off in 1931. A newspaper article about the auction indicates that Niles residents bought several of the items, so the possibility remains that a resident might have such items.

After two years of research I found information to be repetitive and the project had become stagnant, and I was in need of a way to revive the project. I realized I was too much on the outside. I came to town for frequent visits but rarely met anyone new.

Informants were friendly and had become more interested in how my project was going than sharing with me. So I moved into Niles, on 2nd Street, diagonally across the street from the Essanay bungalows. It wasn't my intent to be in such proximity to historically significant buildings, but the California style bungalow, which I live in, was available for rent. Niles is a highly desirable place to live and buying or renting is competitive. For several months I asked my informants to keep their ears open that I was wanting to move into Niles, but it took me posting a sign in the local coffee shop and coming through town almost daily before getting any leads. In September 2001, I will have lived here for two years. Moving into Niles definitely breathed new life into the research. My research questions needed little revising, but the results and the conditions of the research certainly came from more obscure resources and situations than I had anticipated. Since I was around town much more and able to attend more local meetings because I was hearing about them, I finally began to feel like I was on the inside. I also learned that I could no longer ask to "interview" people. I had to participate in town events, go to local parties, and attend meetings and still more meetings (Main Street, HARB -- Historical Architecture Review Board, City Counsel, Planning Commissioners, local committee meetings, Museum of Local History) to keep the flow of information and channels of communication open. I had to talk about local politics and participate in order to learn more about how Niles history is remembered by the community. Formal interviews were in short supply, but conversations about town politics could go on for hours, and so, that is how my research was revived and how the information flowed for the last two years.

VI. Data Results

Niles continues to go through transformations. The land's first known use was by the local Ohlone natives. In 1842 the land was granted to Jose de Jesus Vallejo by the Mexican government. By the 1860's Vallejo lost his rancho to squatters and debt, and the railroad had spiked its lines into the land. The original town was located at the mouth of Niles Canyon, but the railroad company designed the current town landscape and moved the town to its current location. Early in my research, I referred to Niles as "Old Town" using terminology common to American towns that have survived demolition and have mostly been revitalized. However, when using such terminology in reference to the current town, I was corrected by long time residents and I ceased using the term. "Old Town" is the first town that was built at the mouth of the canyon. That same distinction is not commonly made among newer residents. The catch phrase that seems to be spreading is to call Niles "Historic Niles." The town's original buildings faced the railroad tracks, depot, and freight station. Apparently this was common practice among the railroad companies who desired the trains to be the featured focal point. Buildings have been altered, some demolished, and new buildings, architecturally distinguishable by era, have been built at either end of town but the town's facade is still recognizable from pictures as early as 1910. Niles was the original railroad town. When the Essanay cast and crew arrived by train in 1912, the town was being serviced by some twenty trains a day. Southern Pacific closed the Niles depot and quit service sometime in the early 1960's (by all accounts I have been able to confirm). However the town remained a thriving downtown shopping and service area to residents until the late 1970's.

Even though the City of Fremont's population had continued to grow, Niles' downtown businesses began closing. American shopping trends had changed dramatically. Shopping centers first began replacing the downtown areas, then enclosed

massive shopping malls and chain stores replaced downtown open air shopping and services. The corporate business model that swept our nation standardizing products and creating household names, swept the nation again this time creating retail chain stores. The nation's shopkeepers and small family owned and operated businesses were replaced, which in turn, changed the retail population's work force from the independent self-employed to the dependent employee. This change in shopping trends and the retail ownership caused many downtown areas to suffer economic hardship or devastation. This trend and economic shift was recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In 1977, the National Trust launched a special demonstration project to address preservationists concerns over the destruction of old downtowns. Three mid-western cities were selected to test a comprehensive approach to revitalizing downtowns. By 1980 thirty more demonstration cities were selected and a manual was developed to train downtown managers. From this project grew the National Main Street Center which is under the management of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. A City of Fremont employee brought the Main Street program to the attention of the Niles Merchant Association which in turn brought it to the attention of a resident community group that had formed out of concern for the preservation and need for economic restructuring of the downtown area. They were concerned that the Niles downtown would be demolished and wanted more mixed businesses and services. Together, the city and the two Niles groups, formed the Niles Main Street Association in 1995. The new Main Street Association received its non-profit status on April 10th of 1996.

The Niles Junior Chamber of Commerce was formed in the 1930s and the Niles Merchants Association evolved from that commerce group. The Niles Commerce group and then the Niles Merchants Association (commonly known as The Merchants) hosted street events and festivals over the years which continued to bring customers back and kept Niles in the public memory. The local newspaper often wrote articles on such events and

continues to do so. The annual August Antique Flea Market that draws thousands of people annually was started by the Merchants in 1964. When Niles Main Street Association (commonly known as Main Street) formed, the Niles Merchants Association was set to fold and its board, a resident community group, and members of both were to make up the board and members of Main Street. Allegedly, the Merchants previous adversaries and a few Merchants that opposed the formation of Main Street prevented the Niles Merchants Association dissolution at the last minute.

Main Street continued in the tradition of the Merchants by hosting events and festivals and added a few more in the process. One of these added events is the Annual Broncho Billy Film Festival and Symposium. The first symposium and film festival was lead by Bruce Cates, a Main Street board member, and organized by Main Street members and other interested parties. It was held the first weekend of June in 1998. My research had begun in the Fall of 1997 with plans to be videoing Niles from May 1998 to November 1998. I attended the first symposium with a still camera and notebook in hand snapping pictures and listening to anyone who would talk. The grandeur of the event impressed and surprised me. Essanay family members had been found and agreed to participate in the panel delivering interesting tales. A film scholar and restorer of silent films, an archivist for the Margaret Herrick library, and historian were among the panelists. Several of the attendees were not locals including parties interested in silent films from Los Angeles. The following day was the film festival and Charlie Chaplin Day. One of the downtown parking lots had booths and a stage which hosted a Chaplin look-a-like contest. Charlie Chaplin Day has been an on going annual festival for years growing out of the Essanay Days that can be traced to the 1950's. I spent the day with a crew of two camera operators and a production assistant roaming the town recording the event. My impression of the event is that its success exceeded expectations and garnered more attention than the Main Street group had anticipated. The first weekend of June 2001 marked the 4th Annual

Broncho Billy Film Festival and Symposium. The Niles Essanay Preservation Committee (NEPC) formed as a result of the film festival and symposia. The Committee is under the Main Street umbrella. From this committee grew the Niles museum project which has become the passion of several of the committee members. The museum would establish a place for a permanent exhibition of Niles Essanay and silent film history. Additionally, it is seen by the museum group as a safe haven for locals to donate relics, photos, and personal collections of any relevant materials. The Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum was incorporated in April of 2001. The first board was formed that same month and the 501c3 application is in process. The museum group is its own entity in Niles with currently no official affiliations with any other group in or out of Niles. Some of the NEPC members serve on the board of the museum, but that is out of a common interest and personal interest in Essanay and silent film history not because of any associations with Main Street or the Merchants.

Niles residents carry a particular pride about their town, many are long time residents, but even the relatively new residents quickly adjust to being "Niles" residents. Many have explained to me that they have the best of both worlds; access to the city goods, while living in a small town. Residents know their neighbors. People still sit out on the porch in the evening, take walks, and the children can still roam the streets. Residents say they feel safe and belong to a community, something that the rest of Fremont seems to be missing. Before I became a Niles resident, when Niles residents ask me where I was from, I said, "Centerville," because I knew that if I said Fremont, they'd ask what part, meaning what district or former town. To anyone else that asked me, I'd answer with just "Fremont." If you ask a Niles resident where they are from, they will say, "Niles." It would be uncommon for anyone from the Niles District to answer, "Fremont" first. In fact, friends during Jr. High and High School, even referred to their home as "Niles."

Even other Fremont residents refer to “Niles” separately. Now that I’m a resident, I say, “Niles,” even to people who live elsewhere in the Bay Area. I have adopted the separatist language as has my roommate and another friend who has moved into the area. It was common when I was growing up for other Fremont residents to refer their district as the area in which they live, but I do not find this to be so anymore, except from long time older Fremont residents. I believe this can be attributed to the passing generations and the technological boom in Silicon Valley spurring a massive population growth in the Bay Area bringing many new residents to Fremont who do not know its early history. Newer residents eventually will learn of Niles if they stick around or explore their new home city. Its hard to miss with a huge NILES cement sign on the hill that faces Niles on the east (The sign has been likened to Hollywood’s).

Due to Niles’ location within Fremont, its not surprising that the town residents feel a certain separation from the City. In addition to Niles being isolated by location and identified as its own community, it also has maintained its “old town” buildings. The buildings have been altered, some losing their second floors, others with new siding; but upon visiting Niles, you have a sense of stepping back in time into a western frontier town. The homes on 2nd and 3rd Street and on the letter streets (i.e., “J Street”) that were built individually in the late 1800’s and early part of the 1900’s, also add to this time travel. Niles still has a small school with wood floors and an ornate auditorium ceiling which is the third elementary school in Niles built in 1939.

Many families are second and third generation Niles residents. Some residents are living in family homes that have been passed down from one generation to the next. It seems nearly impossible to live in Niles and not know some of the other residents and business owners, at the very least your near neighbors. People are fairly friendly. It is common to see people out walking dogs at all normal waking hours. It’s widely commented on that Niles residences are filled with dogs and cats. Currently, Niles has

annual events that require residents participation including the Christmas home tours and the Garden tours during the Wildflower Festival. During the August Antique Flea Market, the residents participate by having yard sales; and, there are several parties hosted by residents the evening before the Antique Flea Market. The thousands of visitors drawn annually fill up the streets with cars and people. There is not a vacant spot to be found near Niles past 7 am on that day. I asked people what makes Niles different from the rest of Fremont? Why do they live here? What do they like about Niles? Repeatedly the phrase was uttered: "There's something about Niles." I've asked, "What is that something?" and have heard people repeat that phrase with "I don't know, but..." before it. After living here for awhile, I thought I'd put my finger on what that something was, but I now think that it is a combination of things about Niles: 1) The nostalgia for the past or the American neighborhood community, 2) The view of the hills, 3) The proximity to the canyon and trails, 4) A small town feeling without the small town location, 5) Having a town school, 6) The old homes, 7) The appeal of the architecture and history, 8) The linkage of the town's identity to American icons like the train and filmmaking. Whatever it is, it is a common shared feeling and it appeals to the residents and business owners and connects them to the Niles community.

VII. Theoretical Application

REPRESENTATION OF PLACE – There are several things simultaneously occurring in Niles. There is the revitalization and redevelopment of Niles that the City of Fremont, the Merchants and Main Street are working towards. This revitalization and redevelopment will enhance tourism in Niles. Lucy Lippard in her book On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place states that “across the United States, towns devastated by capital flight, technological shifts, or union-busting make spectacles of themselves, desperately framing and reinforcing their histories to make the picture appealing” to those who might bring business to town. Included in Niles’ creation of a “spectacle” or destination are the annual events that bring visitors to town, celebrate Niles history, brings community members together to organize the events, and keeps Niles in the public’s memory. The preservation of the town’s facade, history, and culture while meeting the demand for a functioning township that the residents can use, live in, and at the same time, attract a mix of businesses is largely the motivation behind the effort to revitalize and redevelop Niles by the community. No one wants to see Niles turn into Pleasanton or Palo Alto’s old downtown, but they do want restaurants and services (like a gas station, dry cleaners, etc.) while maintaining the same old Niles community. They want a facelift for the facade and land, and the downtown business mix restored without change to the community’s culture. Restoring the business mix is also about restoring the culture. Many Niles’ community members remember what Niles use to be like and they want that back. Additionally, if the town can be restored to a thriving economic downtown, it is unlikely the buildings will be demolished in the future thereby avoiding losing more of Niles history and culture.

How Niles should be redeveloped and revitalized has caused a rift between Main Street and the Merchants since the two groups have differing opinions into which City

officials have been dragged into, willingly or not. For example, before the town's main street standard size sidewalks were replaced with fifteen foot sidewalks a couple of years ago, the width of the sidewalks was debated. Additionally, telephone poles were replaced with underground phone lines, modern lampposts were replaced with antique reproductions, and plant boxes, trash cans, and public benches were added. Each of these changes were also points of contention between Main Street and the Merchants with City officials placed in the middle. The most opposition came from the Merchants, because the 15 foot sidewalks were not historically correct. To those that argued that the 15 foot sidewalks were not historically accurate, others respond that the sidewalks, paved streets, parking lots, and electricity are not historically accurate if you go back far enough. So, are we going to rip out all that too? The Niles Concept Plan, a design for new construction and redevelopment of the area, has been another source of debate because the plans indicates changes in land usage. For example, the plan suggests demolishing a strip of homes on Mission Boulevard that are separated from the downtown area by the railroad tracks and replacing the homes with a mix of residential and commercial buildings. The homes are a sore sight to some who point out that they are rundown and/or the land could be better used. The Niles Concept Plan has been revised multiple times. The architects and planners were hired by the City to create the plan. The Niles community has had several opportunities to have input on the plan through public meetings. There are those who have a strict view of Niles and feel that nothing should be demolished or severely altered, only cleaned up and restored to its original beauty. Others want the old downtown buildings preserved but want to add more public use buildings including a town plaza, and possibly a pavilion and recreation area. This means building on land around the railroad tracks which will significantly alter the overall look of the town.

Within all this chaos of debate, politics, division, and meetings, exists one idea: the representation of this place called Niles -- how it will be seen, how its history will be

remembered, and how best to merge the past with the future. It is about the contemporary use of past to create a “place” or destination. In Ashworth’s essay “The Uses of Heritage,” he states that, “heritage is the contemporary use of the past.” Ashworth divides how heritage is used to satisfy modern demands into three categories (p.1): 1) Cultural resources; 2) Economic resources; and 3) Political resources. He states that the use of heritage as a cultural resource, is valuable in itself and forms “the basis for collection and display in which both museums and monumental buildings play a central institutional role.” The train depot, when returned to its original location and restored, will be a cultural resource. Additionally, plans for conversion of the Merchants train car into a museum and the plans for the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum will add two more cultural resources. The use of heritage as an economic resource “supporting economic activities, either directly as an industry in itself or indirectly as a contributor to the locational preferences of economic activities,” has been happening for years in Niles through the events hosted by community groups in the downtown area. Lastly, the use of heritage as a “political resource in the creation or support of states at various spatial jurisdictional scales and the legitimation of their governments and governing ideologies,” is happening on a smaller local scale in Niles. The Niles Main Street Association is a predominantly a political group who is legitimized through the National Trust for Historic Preservation while working toward a local goal of redevelopment, revitalization, and the preservation of Niles with the City of Fremont. If Niles was not an old downtown, Main Street would not have the backing of the National Trust nor would the Niles community have this political outlet to negotiate with the City of Fremont on how Niles is to be redeveloped, revitalized, and preserved.

“Cultural tourism operates within the United States on three fronts: arts tourism, history tourism, and the less acknowledged but ubiquitous ethnotourism” (Lippard, p. 72) In Niles, the second form of cultural tourism: history tourism is already being employed by

community groups through the plans for two museums, the draw of the historical town, advertising it as a “historical district” in Fremont, and the events celebrating Niles.

Additionally, the archeological remains of the Vallejo Mill could also be used to draw tourism, but has yet to be employed. Martha Norkunas explores the contemporary use of the past that created a new economic base for Monterey in her book The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California . The fishing industry in Monterey Bay sustained Monterey’s economy for years, but when the tides turned in the fish population, the industry was devastated and nearly bankrupted Monterey’s economy. The City’s economy now depends on tourism. The town already underwent redevelopment, revitalization, and preservation of its historical buildings, where Niles is in the beginning of this process. Could Niles follow in Monterey’s footsteps? According to Norkunas accounts of the undercurrent politics and public memory of Monterey’s history, it certainly reminds me of Niles. However, whether Niles has similar results as Monterey’s redevelopment, revitalization, and preservation, will take years to play out.

VIII. Report of Findings and Research Analysis

Public memory has directed the use of Essanay history and the images of Chaplin in the community of Niles. Past events, such as Essanay Days and Charlie Chaplin Day, are a direct result of the public's memory in which lies the desire to celebrate and keep the memory of Essanay alive. Stories of Essanay cast and crew members and of the studio have long lived in the public memory but many have proven to be exaggerations or untrue. Community members recognize these exaggerations or untruths when they preface their stories with a statement like: "I've heard, but don't know if it's true..." Additionally, the "loss" of history (not to be confused with public memory) felt by community members has spurred some into action. Specifically, The Broncho Billy Film Festival and Symposium was initiated as a result of the desire to unveil facts and return first hand accounts of Essanay history to the community of Niles. The Broncho Billy Film Festival and Symposium, which led to the formation of The Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum, are the catalysts in making the memories more historically factual. The film festival and symposium event along with the recent formation of the museum group created a format and example of how Niles' history is used in the community. From this data emerged the six subdivisions of public memory which I used to analyze my research, they are: 1) Creating New Memories; 2) Recording History; 3) New Essanay Memorabilia; 4) Public Art and Signage; 5) Event Advertising; 6) Essanay Artifacts.

CREATING NEW MEMORIES — The symposia and film festivals have drawn repeat and new audience members annually. For whatever reason a person chooses to attend, s/he will have a common memory with the other attendees. These events are local social affairs as well as historically informative and entertaining.

RECORDING HISTORY — For the last four years the Niles Essanay Preservation Committee in collaboration with Niles Main Street office has hosted the

previously discussed symposium and silent film festival. By inviting and asking Essanay family members (only a few removed descendents still live in Niles), child actors, film scholars, and historians to share their knowledge in a symposium or roundtable format, the community regains lost knowledge of the town's heritage. By recording this history on video, the planning committee acquires a new record of Niles history. Loss of the tapes would equate a loss in the visual record and the details of the speakers stories, but the events are recorded in the public's memory through newspaper articles, memorabilia, advertising, and by their participation.

NEW ESSANAY MEMORABILIA — At these events memorabilia, such as programs, reproduced postcards, silent films on video, books, replicated Essanay hat pins, stamp cancellations, T-shirts and other items have been made available for purchase to help attendees further remember their experience at the symposium and film festival.

PUBLIC ART AND SIGNAGE — At the very least, any local, or visitor, is reminded of Essanay's presence in Niles by the Chaplin images that adorn the town facade or other Essanay historical memorabilia that can be found in the stores. Shopkeepers are usually unwilling to part with such items, quickly defining the items as decorations or as personal collections on display. These images, clippings, posters, or other memorabilia represent Essanay. Locals recognize the memorabilia and associate it with their memories of Essanay and the silent filmmaking that took place in Niles, even if the item does not originate from Essanay. For example, several posters of Chaplin in *The Child* can be found in stores. This common movie poster of *The Child* is a film Chaplin released four years after he left Essanay.

EVENT ADVERTISING — It is certainly not unusual to see Chaplin's or Broncho Billy's image used to advertise the symposia or the film festival. Chaplin's star power is monumental even today, but he did only spend three months in Niles. Some Essanay cast members were here for years and are largely unrecognized by the local

community. Broncho Billy, Chaplin, and the Essanay studio front with the bungalows in the background are the most frequently used images; therefore the most recognizable.

However, the symposia and film festivals have not focused on Chaplin or Broncho Billy, but on the wider picture of Essanay and early filmmaking history, combined with showing early moving pictures. Some of the films have not been shown in Niles since their original releases. The advertisements successfully draw audiences using recognizable images, resulting in introducing the attendees with new information, which in turn changes and adds to the public memory of the Essanay studio in Niles.

ESSANAY ARTIFACTS — The artifacts or memorabilia that have been found or shared make a major contribution to the historical and social record. They provide evidence on how films were made, distributed, received by and sold to the public. It shows how the business has changed and remained the same. There is no doubt that the film industry gained rapid popularity and actors had devout fans even in the 1910's.

Essanay artifacts or memorabilia are difficult to come by and not without a price. This historical evidence of Essanay has itself become a "collectible." Resources for such items cross international borders. Only a few items were produced under the direction of Essanay Film Manufacturing Company and even fewer items originate for Niles Essanay productions or are relevant to the studio's time in Niles. Often these items come by way of dealers profiting from collectors seeking such items. For postcards a collector can expect to pay \$10-\$20, for trade magazines nearly \$40. However, I recently watched two Photoplays with Edna Purviance on the cover go for \$80 and \$108, so like any collectible item there are variables that can severely affect the price. Non-paper artifacts, such as Essanay Studio props or equipment virtually do not exist in the collectors' market. If any such items do exchange hands, it is likely among private collectors who make private deals. If such items did exist in the collectors market, they would be high-priced and

competitively bid upon among the many silent film collectors, scholars, museum and libraries.

Regarding non-paper artifacts, the four items that have surfaced during the course of my research were a sword, a coin, a ring, and a hat pin. The latter came from a Niles crew member descendent and the pin has been replicated, made into a lapel pin, and sold at the film festival and symposium. I did acquire one and placed it in the exhibit. The ring was shown to the same descendent and a couple of the Niles Essanay Preservation Committee (NEPC) members. The ring was described as having the Essanay Indian head logo stamped into it and was made for a male. Apparently, the rings were made for the cast and crew members as were the lapel and hat pins. The coin bears Chaplin's head and has "Jitney Elopement" inscribed around the edge. Apparently, these coins were passed out as advertisements and keepsakes to film goers. I learned of the coin's existence from a fellow collector who I met through another contact. The collector kindly sent me a jpeg image of the coin through email. Allegedly, a resident has a sword from the studio prop room. It was shown to a Niles business owner a few years back who offered to purchase it and was flatly turned down. It has never been shared with NEPC nor any known researchers on the subject matter, myself included. I only learned of its possible existence a few weeks before my exhibit opened.

Conclusions

How does this history relate to and/or construct the town's identity?

Whether a Niles resident is old enough to remember Essanay Studios or had family members that passed stories down to them or are new to the area does not matter. Residents and business owners alike, have different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, have different belief systems and lifestyles, but the history is something the Niles community has in common. This history contributes to town's identity because the memories are shared by the Niles community.

Why has the town hosted celebrations that recognize this history?

This is probably the most difficult question to answer because there are multiple answers given. For some, it's about remembering the history, just as Memorial Day is a national holiday for remembering all the soldiers that died fighting for our country. Essanay Days, Chaplin Days, and the most recent addition, the Broncho Billy Film Festival and Symposium is about remembering an industry's history that continues to provide entertainment to Americans and people worldwide. For others, this is about keeping Niles on the map. Drawing people to the downtown area keeps the businesses alive, which means the buildings won't be sacrificed and demolished. If that were to happen it would change the Niles community, and that "community" is what the residents want protected. Residents and business owners alike have affection for the Niles township, regardless of politics, debates, and differences.

How is this history revisualized in the town?

There are images that represent Essanay. Images of Chaplin adorn the town even though he spent a short three months in Niles and most of his career working for others or himself. A pizza parlor, named after Broncho Billy, is a host to western memorabilia and relics. The Essanay bungalows (homes built on G Street and 2nd Street for the cast and crew members) represent the studio's presence. Even the train represents Essanay in the matter of how the cast and crew arrived. Of course it was how most people and goods came and went from Niles and surrounding locales during the railroads' mass transportation days. These images live in the public's memory and these images keep the presence and stories of Essanay alive and well in Niles. Most notably Essanay and Chaplin is revisualized through signage and public art. As previously discussed, building facades have images of Chaplin and it is common to find old pictures or movie posters of Chaplin inside the stores. A wood carved statue of Chaplin that stands close to five feet is a relic from The Florence bar in town. In the antique shops you can find Chaplin lamps, phones,

toothpick holders, and the like for sale. It is a whitewashed image of the history. A museum that will display a historical account of Essanay is underway, but the bungalow still has to be paid for, the City of Fremont will have to issue permits, and artifacts and other historical evidence still needs to be garnered. Nonetheless, the result will give the community the most elaborate details of the history of Essanay and I will venture to say it will have an effect on how the town revisualizes the history.

Is the filmmaking image more powerful than others?

The filmmaking image is a powerful image globally. It is likely the most popular art form today and certainly the most economically powerful art. What other art makes billions of dollars every week? Chaplin was one of the highest paid actors of his time. When I interviewed his daughter Jane, I asked her if she was surprised by the attention that she had received at the opening night festivities of the Chaplin Comedies Film Festival. Many people had asked her for an autograph, which I found odd; after all, she is not an actor. Jane claims that it is common for people to ask for her autograph. What I realized after talking with her is that she is a celebrity by default. She has inherited her father's status. We talked about the images of her father around town, I asked her if this was common also. Again, Jane said it was common for his image to be replicated and on display in places he lived or frequently visited. Case in point, as a centerpiece to a park and on the shores of Waterville, Ireland (see Appendix) rests a bronzed statue of Chaplin in costume with a cane in hand and a headstone memorializing his vacations to and friendships with the people of Waterville. Chaplin has had an astounding impact on people all over the world. Using his likeness to recreate his presence in a place is a brush with greatness. However, is the filmmaking history more important to the Niles community than the rancho, train, or nursery history, thereby making the images more powerful? In part, yes, because films are so popular, the history is also more popular to the general public, which means it can be used to draw visitors to town; but in the Niles community

itself, the train image is equally a powerful image. The restoration of the Niles Depot, including returning it to its original location, is a top priority among the Merchants, the property owners group, and Main Street, where the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum is only the focus of a small group of individuals. Why is the train a priority among so many? Because the Pacific Locomotive Association, a group of train hobbyists, run old trains from Sunol through Niles Canyon and then back for entertainment and to draw visitors to Sunol. Returning the depot to town is only part of the plan. They also want a platform built so passengers can get off the train in Niles thereby bringing business to town. This research focused on the Essanay period, but by no means is it meant to discount the importance or relevance of other periods in Niles' history.

What meaning do people attach to these images?

This common history is popular art. Who doesn't like movies? Going to the movies is Americana. To have a piece of that American tradition in your own backyard and to have had Chaplin make movies here, including one of his most recognizable early films "The Tramp," it is not only an easily identifiable source of pride to the Niles community but it is a landmark for the masses. This is where it happened. Once upon a time, movies were made here in Niles, before Hollywood even existed. Niles could have been Hollywood. Niles was the first Hollywood. Niles just didn't have a movie or two filmed here, Niles had a studio and bungalows for the cast and crew members to reside in. This was home to one of the major film producers during the early filmmaking years. This is Niles' claim to fame.

How do people remember this history?

Essanay is remembered through celebrations, festivals, symposia, and signage, as I've already discussed, but it is also remembered through storytelling. Not only can a visitor ask any business owner about the Chaplin images and get a more complete story about Essanay studios and the filmmaking that happened in Niles, but most residents can

also tell the stories. One of my early observations in my research is that Niles has a rich oral history. Even so, after twenty minutes of stories regarding Essanay, a person will disqualify herself/himself by saying, “but I don’t know very much.” People know of Essanay, but also recognize the limitations of the historical knowledge, which was a motivating factor behind hosting symposia. Many recognize that with the passing of the elderly community members so passes the first hand knowledge Essanay history. The symposia are a format to revive this knowledge. Additionally, the history is remembered in the newspapers, and not just the local newspaper. The San Jose Mercury News, Oakland Tribune, and SF Examiner & Chronicle have all written articles on the history in recent years. The Pacific Historian, a west coast historical journal, wrote an article about Essanay and Niles. Revisiting the history through newspaper articles, storytelling, and events keeps the memory alive.

Suggestions for Future Research

The City of Fremont and the Niles Main Street Association, and The Niles Merchants Association, is working on the redevelopment and revitalization of Niles with the goal of creating a destination. Such a creation has two outcomes: tourism and/or nightlife. The Merchants, Main Street, property and business owners desired results and the actual outcome through the redevelopment and revitalization process would surely make interesting urban anthropological research. On a larger scale, the Niles District is only one town in the national movement to save American history and claim American heritage. There is a sense of urgency in the movement lest it will be destroyed by agencies and corporations who demolish the old and build the new without regard or thought to possible historic significance. All of which plays into creating a living history that becomes a commodity, such as Williamsburg, Virginia or Plymouth Pilgrimage in Massachusetts. Additionally, the relationships and politics in town could add to such research.

Current American popular psychological language speaks to how Americans feel “disconnected” and how we need to “re-connect” to our families, form intimate relationships, preserve our culture, and improve our communities. The festivals and events are economic tools to bring business activity into town and some events celebrate Niles history and heritage, but do the festivals and events also create a “sense of community” or a sense of belonging? Events have been going on for years, so they are not a recent manifestation by the local groups to serve their current efforts to redevelop and revitalize Niles. On a larger scale, researchers need to explore the social implication of how cities and/or towns use festivals and events.

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Appendix

Chaplin statue and headstone in Waterville, Ireland

English Text Reads:
For the man who made the movies
speak in the hearts of millions
Charlie spent many years in our
midst as a welcome and humble
guest and friend to many.
This image was created by
sculptor Alan Ryan Hall.
It was funded by the generosity
of Josephine Chaplin and by
the E.U. Leader Programme.

"Remembering Essanay" Exhibit at the Museum of Local History, Fremont

Museum exhibit shows Niles' place in film history

“It also explores how the community memorializes the fact that an extremely huge movie star from silent films to the talkies was here.”

Joelle Sorensen
Fremont resident

By Conan Knoll
STAFF WRITER

FREMONT — With images of Charlie Chaplin scattered throughout Niles and an annual film festival celebrating their work, it is clear the community is enamored with the era when Chaplin and Broncho Billy Anderson filmed silent movies.

The public's memory of Essanay Film Studios — which, at its height, churned out two films a week — is the topic of a display opening today at the Museum of Local History.

“Remembering Essanay” is Fre-

mont resident Joelle Sorensen's master's thesis. Sorensen, 32, is an anthropology student at San Jose State University.

The exhibit, which explores how the public remembers Niles history and Essanay Studios in particular, features more than 130 artifacts, about half of which are historic photographs.

“I'm interested, in particular, in visual anthropology, and when I was looking for a topic different ideas came through and this is one of them,” she said. “Here is a visual history. It is visually remembered in

town.”

Essanay Film Studios and the actors it employed have been celebrated and remembered in Niles for decades, becoming an important “representation of place” for residents, Sorensen said, using an anthropological term.

“It also explores how the community memorializes the fact that an extremely huge movie star from silent films to the talkies was here,” she said.

The museum display is divided

Please see **Exhibit**, LOCAL-3

Exhibit: Display made up of four parts

Continued from LOCAL-1

into several sections:

► **Remembering Essanay:** A display featuring early film industry history “before the talkies” and Essanay's role. It also will tell the story of how Essanay came to Niles.

► **The cast and crew at the Niles Essanay Studios:** The exhibit identifies most of the cast and crew of Essanay Film Studios with their names and their images from individual and group photos.

► **Essanay artifacts and memorabilia:** A small section of the exhibit with postcards, stamps, magazines, and Essanay's advertising sheets from the time.

► **Public memory:** A section on how the community remembers Essanay, the stories it tells about the studio and its stars and how Chaplin's image is used to remember the time.

“Remembering Essanay” runs through July 13. The museum is open from noon to 4 p.m. today. A special opening is scheduled June 2, coinciding with the fourth annual Niles Broncho Billy Film Festival.

ANITA CHIU — Staff

Joelle Sorensen puts finishing touches on an exhibit called **Historic Niles and the Essanay Studios**, which opened Saturday at the Local History Museum in Fremont.

Regular museum hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesdays, Fridays and the second Saturday and Sunday of each month.

Conan Knoll covers the city of Fremont for *The Argus*. He can be reached at (510) 353-7026 or cknoll1@argusnewspapers.com.

Exhibit Text

Remembering Essanay Welcome Section

- The Silent Film Industry Section

Cast and Crew Section

Essanay Artifacts Section

Welcome

“Remembering Essanay” is the result of over three years of study and research. This exhibit is presented to the Faculty of the Department of Anthropology and Department of Radio, Television, Theatre and Media Arts of San Jose State University and to the Public for their viewing, participation, and education. “Remembering Essanay” is a Thesis-Project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree, Master of Arts in Visual Anthropology, for K. Joelle Sorensen.

The Research Question

Niles, a small frontier railroad town in the early 1900's, became the western studio location of the Chicago-based Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, a major player in the movie making business in the 1910's. The town's population of 1,400 was increased by forty-two. The cast and crew of Essanay arrived by train in 1912. They filled up the town's hotels, so the residents boarded the remaining cast and crew members. A barn became a make shift studio. Locals became hired hands and actors, or their possessions became props. Then, four years later production stopped and the cast and crew packed up leaving for the developing Hollywood area or other studios, and the Essanay studio in Niles was shut down. How does this history relate to and/or construct the town's identity? Why has the town hosted celebrations that recognize this history? Is the filmmaking image more powerful than others? How is this history revisualized in the town? What meaning do people attach to these images? How do people remember this history?

Understanding Visual Anthropology

Anthropology is the study of humans. Cultural Anthropologists study human lifeways. Visual Anthropology grew out of Cultural Anthropologists' research methods. Instead of just the written record of notetaking and journaling, anthropologists began making audio recording and taking photographs, progressing to the use of moving pictures. This technology provided other options besides the written text, and some anthropologists embraced it. Margaret Mead, a well known anthropologist, vigorously defended the value of visually recording research, stating “that film could have caught and preserved for centuries” an image that text cannot record. (Hocking, Principles of Visual Anthropology, 1995, pgs. 3-4).

Visual Anthropology was once about taking pictures of your subject. Now a visual anthropologist might focus on the art of a culture, how the land is divided for housing or gardening, how we arrange our things or structure our homes, or what images mean to people. What we see and what it means is of importance to the visual anthropologist. Film scholars assess and study the usage of the camera lens, the meaning of movies, the techniques of a director, the history of cinema, and so forth. As a Visual Anthropologist, my research focused on how the presence of early filmmakers in a small frontier town shaped its sense of history and local identification with this history. I have not studied the film itself, nor the filmmaking process, but the response to the visual history.

Before the “Talkies”

The Early Years of the Filmmaking Industry

By the 1890's moving pictures began budding in three major cities, New York, Paris, and London. The early technology of moving pictures and projection was still crude and unstable. Moving pictures were only seconds long, leaving no time for text that became a staple in later silents. Vaudeville houses showed pictures at the end of its acts to wrap up the shows. These became known as “chasers,” intending to chase the audience out of the theater so the next audience could enter.

In the fall of 1896 Edwin Hill Amet, working on solving the projection problems of the Edison Kinetoscope, needed money to complete his invention. One night he visited the Wankegan Opera House, where he sought out the manager, George K. Spoor. Allegedly, Spoor let Amet do most of the talking and did not mention that his capital consisted of that night's show profits, twenty-eight dollars and eighty-five cents, nor that his regular business was operating a newsstand and lunchroom at the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, Wells Street Station. Amet showed Spoor the machine in progress. Amet asked Spoor for only sixty-five dollars to finish the projector requesting only twenty-five up front. Spoor made the investment and Amet's machine was completed early in 1896 and on the market in Chicago under the name of Magniscope.

Thomas Edison filed patent infringement lawsuits against people like Amet and companies developing the moving picture technology. The first blow to competitors came in October of 1907 when a Chicago court decided that the cameras used by Selig infringed upon Edison's patents. Other key players in existing studios wanted to bring resolution to the patent disputes. A meeting among Edison and those key players resulted in the formation of the Edison Licensees group, which included: Essanay, Kalem, Vitagraph, Lubin, Selig, Melies and Pathé. The agreement meant that the licensees were covered under Edison's patents and royalty payments would be made to Edison. However, one key studio, Biograph, did not sign on and what had hoped to be resolved, evolved into another legal battle. Eventually an agreement was made between Biograph and Edison. The Edison Licensees group members joined Edison and Biograph to form a new group, The Motion Pictures Patents Company in 1908, popularly known as The Trust. When those not included in the Patents Company learned of The Trust's control over equipment development, licensees of equipment and films, and fees attached to those licensees another lengthy legal battle began. It took a U.S. Supreme Court decision to end the Patents Company licensing control on April 9, 1917. The Patent Company

members no longer controlled what theaters showed nor what projectors the theaters used.

The motion picture industry had survived not only its own internal legal battle, but an external battle as well. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the industry would come under scrutiny for its lack of values, encouraging crime, juvenile delinquency, inappropriateness, among other claims from judges, children's groups, attorneys, religious leaders, sociologists, mayors and other bodies of local government. By 1909 the Motion Picture Patents company and its members cooperated with the People's Institute (a group that was not in support of censorship, but wanted to find middle ground) who formed the National Board of Censorship. The name was reconsidered when it was used to stimulate the censorship movement and changed in 1915 to the National Board of Review. The formation of this review board did not centralize the process nor did it have control over a films content, they only set guidelines. Many towns formed their own review boards which previewed and then edited films to meet their approval. Still, controversy ensued over the content and censorship of films, leading to a call for regulation by the government. The Motion Picture Association of American (MPAA) was formed in 1922 and was the first film industry organized and supported group. The MPAA issued its own set of guidelines, but it wasn't until 1934 that MPAA began to enforce its self-imposed Production Code. Films not meeting the code were returned to studios. In 1968, the MPAA formed The Classification and Rating Administration of the MPAA which replaced the Production Code with the G-X rating system we currently use.

The subject of these early pictures was another matter. The screen was a host to improvisation and recorded live entertainment -- nothing the audience had not or could not already see. Allegedly, audiences grew bored. Several motion picture companies began developing the concept of storytelling in pictures. James H. White and Edwin S. Porter of Edison made the picture entitled The Life of an American Fireman, notable for its link to Essanay. This picture was a huge success for White and Porter. In 1903, Porter started work on The Great Train Robbery, based on a road show by the same name. Vaudeville performer, G.M. Anderson came to Edison studio in hopes of being casted in this picture, which resulted in Anderson playing three different roles in the film, to which he cleverly used to further his career in the motion picture business. Anderson co-founded S & A Film Manufacturing Company with George K. Spoor. The "S" is for Spoor and the "A" is for Anderson -- popularly know as Essanay.

Essanay's Role in Silent Pictures

Niles Studio

The actor, Gilbert M. Anderson, obtained his first major success playing multiple roles "The Great Train Robbery." This picture is still recognized as one of the first significant American films among enthusiasts, scholars, and the motion picture industry. Anderson sought out George K. Spoor, a successful distributor of movie equipment with an abundance of money to invest in new ventures, and convinced him to co-found the Chicago-based Essanay Film Manufacturing Company. Small theatrical and film companies were making films, even "Westerns" in the mid-West and East. Anderson not wanting to surrender creative control to Spoor and his desire to make "Westerns" in the West, began his venture west from Chicago to Colorado and then to California from 1908 to 1912. The summer of 1911 was spent shooting films in San Rafael, California. On occasion, Anderson sent out crew to scout locations. It was during one of these scouting expeditions that cameraman Jess Robbins brought word of Niles. The small town of Niles had everything within close proximity -- a canyon, a small town with necessary amenities, a railroad, the ocean, San Francisco, and a distinctive setting. Anderson and 42 cast and crew members arrived in Niles by train in April of 1912. Anderson signed a contract with Frank Mortimer for the use of his barn as a temporary studio location and settled into shooting. In 1912, six of the ten cottages were built and occupied by August. The remaining four cottages were completed in December of 1913. That same year construction of the Essanay Film Manufacturing Studio on Front Street, now Niles Blvd, was completed. The studio included a scenario office, a projection room, carpenter shop and scene dock, wardrobe and prop areas, and dressing rooms. The studio operated until February 1916, when the company then consolidated its operations in Chicago.

While in Niles, Essanay made approximately 400 films. Anderson himself made 120 westerns featuring the Broncho Billy character. Essanay is known for other series as well, such as the "Snakeville Comedies" starring Ben Turpin, Victor Potel, Harry Todd, and Margaret Joslin. Charles Chaplin was also among Anderson's troupe of actors. Chaplin made five films during his three months in Niles: "A Night Out," "The Champion," "In the Park," "A Jitney Elopement," and most notably, "The Tramp", the character that Chaplin continued to use throughout his film career.

In 1931 Ed Rose purchased the studio hoping to revitalize the filmmaking business in Niles. The attempt failed, the contents were auctioned, and the studio was subsequently torn down. The studio's site is now home to private businesses, small apartment complexes, a convenience store, and an empty lot.

The Cast and Crew of Niles Essanay Studios

The actors, “real” cowboys, stunt riders, set constructors, carpenters, prop handlers, painters, still photographer, scenario editor, cameramen, directors, Essanay Baseball team players and townspeople made up the cast and crew. Many performed more than one role. Rollie Totheroh, began as an Essanay baseball player, tried acting, but ended up a career cameraman. He followed Chaplin to Hollywood in 1916 and remained his principle cameraman until 1954.

Many of the cast and crew have been identified in photographs and films. Many others escape identification, including those listed below. Please let us know if you recognize any of these “lost” cast and crew members.

Charles T Barton--Child Actor
Al Bundrick--Actor
Helen Carruthers--Actor
Louis Edwards--Actor
Charles E. Ellestynne--Actor
“Joe” John J. Flynn--G.M. Chauffeur
“Jack” John G. Hawks--Writer
Thomas Kelly--Actor
Violet Kelly--Child Actor
Charles H. LaDue--Actor, Cowboy
Carl “Henry” Lilienthal--Stage Driver, Night Watchman, Actor
Elsa Lorimer--Actor
Anita Murray--Actor
Hazel L. Padgett--Cowgirl
Harrington W. Padgett--Cowboy
Earl B. Pearson--Scenic Painter
Arthur A. Penn--Publicist
Jack Pollard--Actor
Eva Prince--Actor
Edward R. Robinson--Stage Mechanic
G. L. Sargent--Director
Guillaune G. Schmidt--Photographer
Frank B. Sund--Actor, Baseball player, Painter
Ethel Lee Wallace--Actor
Charley West--Electrician
Hazel F. West--Actor

Essanay Artifacts and Memorabilia

Essanay artifacts or memorabilia are difficult to come by and not without a price. This historical evidence of Essanay has itself become a “collectible.” Resources for such items cross international borders. Only a few items were produced under the direction of Essanay Film Manufacturing Company and even fewer are dated during the studio’s time in Niles. Often these items come by way of dealers profiting from collectors seeking such items.

The artifacts or memorabilia that have been found or shared make a major contribution to the historical and social record. They provide evidence on how films were made, distributed, received by and sold to the public. It shows how the business has changed and remained the same. There is no doubt that the film industry gained rapid popularity and actors had devout fans even in the 1910’s.

Exhibit Text

Public Memory Section

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Recording History

For the last three years the Niles Essanay Preservation Committee in collaboration with Niles Main Street Association has hosted a symposium and silent film festival. By inviting and asking Essanay family members, child actors, film scholars, and historians to share their knowledge in a symposium or roundtable format, the community regains lost knowledge of the town's heritage. By recording this history on video, the planning committee acquires a new record of Niles history. Loss of the tapes would equate a loss in the visual record and the details of the speakers stories, , but the events are recorded in the public's memory through newspaper articles, memorabilia, advertising, and by their participation.

Creating New Memories

The symposiums and film festivals have drawn repeat and new audience members annually. For whatever reason a person chooses to attend s/he will have a common memory with the other attendees. These events are local social affairs as well as historically informative and entertaining.

Essanay Memorabilia

At these events memorabilia, such as programs, reproduced postcards, silent films on video, books, replicated Essanay hat pins, stamp cancellations, T-shirts and other items have been made available for purchase to help attendees further remember their experience at the symposium and film festival.

Public Art and Signage

At the very least, any local, or visitor, is reminded of Essanay's presence in Niles by the Chaplin images that adorn the town facade or other Essanay historical memorabilia that can be found in the stores. Shopkeepers are usually unwilling to part with such items, quickly defining the items as decorations or as personal collections on display. These images, clippings, posters, or other memorabilia represent Essanay.

Locals recognize the memorabilia and associate it with their memory of Essanay or the silent filmmaking that took place in Niles, even if the item does not originate from Essanay. For example, several posters of Chaplin in *The Kid* can be found in stores. This common movie poster of *The Kid* is a film Chaplin released four years after he left Essanay.

Event Advertising

It is certainly not unusual to see Chaplin's or Broncho Billy's image used to advertise the symposiums or the film festival. Chaplin's star power is monumental even today, but he did only spend three months in Niles. Some Essanay cast members were here for years and are largely unrecognized by the local community. Broncho Billy, Chaplin, and the Essanay studio front with the cottages in the background are the most frequently used images, therefore the most recognizable. However, the symposiums and film festivals have not focused on Chaplin or Broncho Billy, but on the wider picture of Essanay and early filmmaking history, along with showing early moving pictures, some of which haven't been seen since their original releases. The advertisements successfully draw audiences using recognizable images resulting in introducing the attendees with new information, which in turn, changes and adds to the public memory of the Essanay studio in Niles.

Flyers and Postcard

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Remembering Essanay

An Exhibit dedicated to the History and Public Memory of Essanay

Image reproduced with permission, Fisher Collection

Stamp

Remembering Essanay

An Exhibit Presented by
The Museum of Local History

Exhibitor
Joelle Sorensen

Opening Reception
Saturday, May 19th, 2-4 pm
190 Arza Street

By Invitation Only
Please R.S.V.P. by May 9th
(510) 792-1431

Remembering Essanay

Image reproduced with permission, Fisher Collection

Presented By
Museum of Local History
190 Anza St., Fremont

Exhibitor
Joelle Sorensen

May 20th - July 13th

Special Openings
May 20th & June 2nd 12-4pm

Regular Museum Hours
Wed. & Fri. 10-4
Second Sat. & Sun. 10-4

for more info, call 510-623-7907

Remembering Essanay

An Exhibit dedicated to the History and Public Memory of Essanay

An Exhibit Presented by
The Museum of Local History

Exhibitor
Joelle Sorensen

Opens May 20th - July 13th

Museum Hours
Wed. & Fri. 10am - 4pm
Second Sat. & Sun. 10am - 4pm

Special Opening Day of
4th Annual Broncho Billy Film Festival
Sat., June 2nd 2001, 12pm - 4pm

Remembering Essanay

An Exhibit dedicated to the History and Public Memory of Essanay

An Exhibit Presented by
The Museum of Local History

Exhibitor
Joelle Sorensen

Opens May 20th - July 13th

Museum Hours
Wed. & Fri. 10am - 4pm
Second Sat. & Sun. 10am - 4pm

Special Opening Day of
4th Annual Broncho Billy Film Festival
Sat., June 2nd 2001, 12pm - 4pm

Niles On Film Again!

A Fremont Native and current graduate student at San Jose State University, Joelle Sorensen, is doing her Master's Thesis Project on Niles History. The project includes a Website, Written Thesis, and a Historical Documentary. The Website gives information about the project, the producer, and contains a historical tour of Niles. The Written Thesis will focus on how the research was conducted, what applications it has to the field of anthropology, and what the research has revealed. The Documentary will *review* this western town's history from its foundation to its present state, highlighting major industries and prominent people, and will *focus* on the film studio that thrived in Niles from 1912-1916.

To Niles Residents and Business Owners • From Joelle Sorensen

Why did I chose Niles for My M.A. Project? — Having been raised in the City of Fremont, I have long been taken with Niles' historical architecture. What I now find most compelling about Niles is not its historical landscape, but the history of its industries and how these industries have influenced the township, most prominently, Essanay Film Manufacturing Company. Rich with mostly unexplored visual data and a visual history, Niles became the most obvious choice for a visual anthropologist's Masters Thesis Project.

My Approach to the Project — My research will include interviews, participation in township events, the collection of documented and oral histories, and the collection of visual data, both historical and present through photographs and moving images (i.e., videotape). As required in academic research, measures are taken to protect participants and personal information is kept strictly confidential.

Much of Niles History is in files, attics, and the memory of its residents. I wish for this history to not be lost. If you are a Niles Resident, Niles Business owner, or Niles Historian and are available to participate in this project as an interviewee or reference; have historical documents, photos, video or other materials that you are willing to share, or for more information, please contact me at 510-892-8002.

Visit "The Township of Niles" Website
<http://theatre.sjsu.edu/mata/sorensen/home.htm>

Public Notification

The Niles District, in Fremont, CA, is the subject of Joelle Sorensen's Master Thesis Project. The project is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for her Master of Arts Degree from San Jose State University. The project includes a Website, Written Thesis, and a Historical Documentary. The Website gives information about the project, the producer, and contains a historical tour of Niles. The Written Thesis will focus on how the research was conducted, what applications it has to the field of anthropology, and what the research has revealed. The Documentary will review this western town's history from its foundation to its present state, highlighting major industries and prominent people, and will focus on the film studio that thrived in Niles from 1912-1916. **Video Taping for the documentary can occur at all sponsored or non-sponsored public events or anytime, day or night, weekdays or weekends, between May-November 1998.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR QUESTIONS
REGARDING THIS PROJECT, PLEASE CONTACT
JOELLE SORENSEN AT 510-892-8002.

Visit "The Township of Niles" Website
<http://theatre.sjsu.edu/mata/sorensen/home.htm>

Exterior/landscape shots of businesses, private homes, private and public roads, and public places will be taped on non-specified dates. Private property will not be trespassed on. Permission will be granted from property owners before taping will occur on or from his/her/their property. Interior shots of any of the above listed will be taken only with the signed permission of its owners. Private Homes are not the subject of this research, however, exterior shots of homes will be taken while capturing the historical landscape of the town. Private homes that appear in the documentary will not be linked to home owners or occupants without signed permission. Any Niles home owner may refuse for his/her/their home to appear in the documentary by notifying the producer/director, Joelle Sorensen. No compensation will be given for images. All images are the sole property of Joelle Sorensen.

"The Niles Project" Video Crew and Essanay Actor Look-a-Likes

Standing: Dan Garcia (videographer), "Edna Purviance," "Charlie Chaplin," John Bishop (videographer)

Kneeling: Joelle Sorensen, Ann Hamm (production assistant)

Human Subjects and Releases

San José State
UNIVERSITY

**Office of the Academic
Vice President**

**Associate Vice President
Graduate Studies and Research**

One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0025
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<http://www.sjsu.edu>

TO: Kristy Joelle Sorensen
38227 Ashford Way
Fremont, CA 94536

FROM: Serena W. Stanford *Serena W. Stanford*
AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

DATE: June 15, 1998

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved
your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"The Niles Project"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Serena Stanford, Ph.D., immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at
(408) 924-2480.

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield, Chico, Dominguez Hills,
Fresno, Fullerton, Hayward, Humboldt,
Long Beach, Los Angeles, Maritime Academy,
Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona,
Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego,
San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo,
San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

CONFIDENTIALITY FOR THE NILES PROJECT

1. For the purpose of this project, participants are those willing to be on camera or give interviews. Informants are those who are willing to provide historical information or documents but wish for their participation to be confidential.
2. Confidentiality can only be maintained for Informants. Anonymity can be maintained for participants in the documentary through distortion of their voices and by blurring or blacking out their faces. Pseudo names will be given if necessary.
2. Personal Information (name, address, phone number, etc.) will be kept in a separate file and will be for my use only in contacting participants or informants. Once the project is completed, such personal information will be destroyed or kept in my personal files. Participants or informants names will be listed in the bibliography of the written thesis and in the credits of documentary. Those wishing to remain anonymous will be given pseudo names in the bibliography and delineated from the credits.
3. Website: Any information that comes through the web will not be secured (meaning information can be intercepted, however it is doubtful that the information would be sought after).
4. Interviewees will sign a consent form(s) prior to the first interview. Interviewees will have the option to have the images of them withdrawn from the research, however, content of interview could still be used in combination with other sources. In other words, the interviewee's exact words will not be used, but the content given can be integrated into the story of Niles History.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS FOR THE NILES PROJECT

For the purpose of this project, participates are those willing to be on camera or give interviews. Informants are those who are willing to provide historical information or documents but wish to remain anonymous. Anonymity will be maintained in the documentary and the thesis. Informants will be given pseudo names if necessary.

1. Website: "The Township of Niles" website is on SJSU's Theatre Arts Dept. server. The website contains an optional form that can be filled out by Niles residents, business owners, or Niles Historians who wish to participate or informants. See attachment
2. Flyer: "Niles on Film Again!" flyer provides a synopsis of who I am, what I am doing, why, defines the Thesis Project, and is a call for participates or informants.
3. Interviews: Interviewees will be asked to give their accounts of Niles History. Questions will vary based on topic and interviewees area of knowledge or experience.
4. Video: Videotaping will occur throughout the project. "Public Notification" flyers are being posted in The Niles Main Street Association, Niles Public Library, and in any merchants buildings where the owners agree to post. During videotaping, neither the camera nor the crew will be concealed at any time. In the interest of protecting the project, SJSU, and the towns people, myself and any crew member will be wearing visible and identifiable badges (and possible "The Niles Project" t-shirts, to eliminate any possible associate with non-Niles Project crews. I have the utmost concern that the pubic is aware of my presence.

College of Social Sciences • Department of Anthropology
One Washington Square • San José, California 95192-0113 • 408/924-5710

INTERVIEW RELEASE

The Niles Project

I understand that any interview, image(s) and/or recording taken is for the purpose of anthropological research, public education, and Joelle Sorensen's ("Principle Investigator") Master Thesis' Project, and that such interview(s), image(s) and recordings may be used in lectures, exhibits, publications, web-based information, written thesis and documentary.

I have been asked to participate in a research study about Niles — Fremont, CA — in which I will answer questions about my knowledge of Niles History. The purpose of this project is to learn about Niles History, document and record this history, and apply visual anthropology to the analysis of this history. I understand that:

1. I will be asked questions about Niles History, how I know about the History, to give accounts of personal participation in Niles activities, and provide any documentation (pictures, articles, film/video, etc.) available to the Principle Investigator. I am free to decline to answer any questions and to refuse to provide documentation.
2. Because of the care and research methods that are undertaken, and the purpose of this project is to provide a visually documented historical account, and a visual and written analysis of Niles History, the possible risks are minimal. Nevertheless, personal information about me may become public. This may be required by law. I understand that anonymity may be maintained, however, that sources for this project may become public. This may be required by law.
3. If my image(s) is(are) recorded visually by means of photographs, video, or film; or if my likeness is used in the written thesis, website, or documentary portion of the Master Thesis Project, that I will have to read, agree, and sign a separate Personal Release form.
4. The possible benefits of this study of Niles for me is the satisfaction of knowing Niles History is being preserved, restored, publicized, and broadcasted, and that I contributed to this end.
5. The results from this project will be published, but any personal information (address, phone number, etc.) will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with my permission or as required by law. If I wish to edit or delete any portion of my interview(s) I may do so by contacting Joelle Sorensen at 510-892-8002. I understand that the content of this interview will be combined with other sources to provide a historical account of Niles.
6. I will receive no compensation for participation in the project, but may request to review the results of the interview and/or the Master Thesis Project.
7. Any questions about my participation in this project will be answered by Joelle Sorensen. If any questions or complaints regarding the Master Thesis Project may be directed to the SJSU graduate student, Joelle Sorensen's committee chair, Dr. Mira Zussman, Associate Professor at SJSU (408-924-1364) or committee member, Dr. Kimb Massey, Associate Professor at SJSU (408-924-4571). Any questions or complaints about research, subjects' rights, or research-related injury may be presented to Serena Stanford, PH.D., Associate Academic Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research, at 408-924-2480.
8. My consent is given voluntarily without coercion. I may refuse to participate in this project or in any part of it, or may withdraw at any time without prejudice to the Principle Investigator or San Jose State University or any other participating institutions.

I wish to place the following restrictions on my participation or to make the following modifications to the Interview Release form:

Joelle Sorensen for The Niles Project

Date

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Phone (Requested)

Address (Optional)

City/State/Zip

The signature of a parent or guardian on this document indicates approval for the child or ward to participate in the study and a statement that the child or ward is freely willing to participate.

Name of Child or Ward

Parent or Guardian's Signature

Date

Relation to Child or Ward

Phone

Full Mailing Address

City/State/Zip

Joelle Sorensen for The Niles Project

Date

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One Washington Square • San José, California 95192-0113 • 408/924-5710

PERSONAL RELEASE

The Niles Project

I understand that any image(s) or recording taken is for the purpose of anthropological research, public education, and Joelle Sorensen's ("Principle Investigator") Master Thesis' Project, and that such image(s) and recordings may be used in lectures, exhibits, publications, web-based information, written thesis and documentary.

1. I hereby grant the right to the Principle Investigator to use my name, voice and likeness and recordations thereof by means of film, videotape, photograph and any other means whether now known throughout the world in perpetuity or hereafter devised in and as part of the Master Thesis Project tentatively called The Niles Project. I understand that portions of the interview and/or images taken of me may be edited for content. I hereby assign all rights to the Principle Investigator, without limitation or compensation, to reproduce, copy, sell, exhibit, publish, broadcast, or distribute such image(s) and recordations, and/or content of my interview in the furtherance of the above purpose and use the same by any method and any manner in any or all media without limitation, including theatrical, non-theatrical, radio, television, film/video festivals, and the promotion or exploitation, including merchandising and publications, advertising and publicity in connection therewith.
2. In connection therewith, I hereby release the Principle Investigator, crew, and San Jose State University and successors and assigns and all other persons firms and corporations involved in the production, exhibition, sponsorship, advertising or other exploitation of the recordings made hereunder from any claims, actions or causes of action of any kind, or nature resulting from any use thereof or the exercise of any rights granted herein.
3. I waive any and all claims which I may now have or may hereafter have against Joelle Sorensen, her crew, or San Jose State University. I also agree that I have no further claim on Joelle Sorensen's production of The Niles Project or any editorial or business rights in the arising video/film/photographs and ancillary material.
4. I understand that I have fourteen days to withdraw such permission given by me to Joelle Sorensen in this agreement from the date of the first recordations of my image(s), voice, or likeness and name, after which it is at the option of the Principle Investigator to withdraw the said use of my image(s), voice, or likeness and name in this agreement from The Niles Project. I understand that the content of my interview may still be used in lectures, exhibits, publications, web-based information, written thesis and documentary, but that anonymity may be maintained.

Joelle Sorensen for The Niles Project

Date

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Phone (Requested)

Address (Optional)

City/State/Zip

The signature of a parent or guardian on this document indicates approval for the child or ward to participate in the study and a statement that the child or ward is freely willing to participate.

Name of Child or Ward

Parent or Guardian's Signature

Date

Relation to Child or Ward

Phone

Full Mailing Address

City/State/Zip

Joelle Sorensen for The Niles Project

Date

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One Washington Square • San José, California 95192-0113 • 408/924-5710

LOCATION RELEASE

THE NILES PROJECT

_____ ("Releasor") warrants that he/she is the owner or other person legally entitled to possession of the location ("Location") listed below and that he/she has the full power and authority to grant Joelle Sorensen, of The Niles Project, to use the Location(s) listed below in Joelle Sorensen's production of The Niles Project Historical Documentary and derivative works thereof.

Releasor agrees to the use made of the location(s) on _____ (date/s), at no charge. The Releasor agrees to receive no compensation for the taped/filmed/ photographed images taken by Joelle Sorensen or her crew. The Releasor agrees that it has no further claim on Joelle Sorensen's production or any editorial or business rights in the arising film and ancillary material.

Exceptional care and attention will be paid to the Releasor's property, however the Releasor will not hold Joelle Sorensen, her crew, nor San Jose State University responsible for repair or damages incurred, any injury or death of any person or persons, by reason of any act or omission by Joelle Sorensen or her crew, arising out of or in connection with the use of the Location(s). Releasor is not liable for any equipment, Joelle Sorensen, or her crew's safety, losses from theft, injury or damage arising out of or in connection with the use of the Location(s).

Releasor understands that this Agreement will be interpreted in accordance with the laws of the State of California, United States of America.

Location(s) to be used:

Releasor Signature

Date

Releasor Printed Name

Phone

Full Mailing Address

City/State/Zip

Joelle Sorensen for The Niles Project

Date