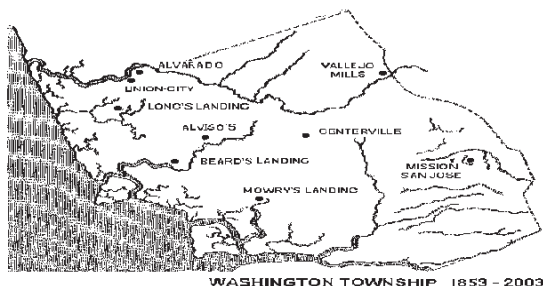


Washington Township Historical Society



NOV - DEC 2021

VOL. 45

NO. 06

PRES.: JOHN WEED

(510) 651-2482

V.P.: PAUL SETHY

(510) 656-4075

REC. SEC.: TIM SWENSON

(510) 489-8944

TREAS.: DON BARSII

(510) 342-8355

MEETING DATE: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2021, 7:00 PM
LIVE AT THE WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP MUSEUM OF LOCAL HISTORY
AND VIRTUAL ON ZOOM, <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/76473734687>

Washington Township Historical Society Editor: Al Minard

Guest Speakers:

David and Rena Kiehn from the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum (NESFM)

This non-profit is located in a building known as the Edison Theater when it was completed in 1913. The Edison Theater showed silent films with a live pianist who tried to match the music they performed to the action on the screen. A decade later, the Niles Theater opened next door and the original theater building was put to other use. (Unfortunately, the "new" theater burned to the ground in 1959 and no movies were shown in Niles for another 46 years.

The western division of the Chicago-based Essanay Film Manufacturing Company was based in Niles from 1912 to 1916 and the studio building was just down the street where upwards of 350 one and two-reelers films were made. The beautiful canyon and small town were also featured in many a film. Gilbert "Broncho Billy" Anderson, the screen's first cowboy movie star, was the A of S & A (Essanay). The "S" was George K. Spoor, the money man, who was at the home office and studio in Illinois. Besides Anderson, the most prominent performer to be in Niles was Charles Chaplin, who is still known around the world, even today.

Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum rented the 100-seat auditorium starting in late 2004 and began screening films every Saturday night, just like in the old days projecting prints onto the white-painted wall with live musical accompaniment as of January 2005. (The pandemic shuttered that process in March 2020 and we

hope to start up again as soon as it seems appropriate.)

The museum added more space as it became available in the various corners of the building to meet the ever-expanding needs of the organization. The original lobby was restored and back in use by 2006 and an expanded store was established in 2009. In 2016, another storefront was utilized to house the motion picture camera and projector collection, a research library and increased storage. The owner, Vickie Lopez put the building (and the now vacant lot next door) in her trust to be donated to this 501(c)(3) museum. Mrs. Lopez passed away at the age of 93 in late 2019 and the keys were turned over in early 2020 (just before the world shut down)

The Museum has been collecting prints of silent films for many years. With David Kiehn's research, many films thought to be "lost" have been found and identified and in some cases restored or preserved for future screenings. Other times, important facts have been uncovered about these cinematic treasures adding to their historical importance and legacy. In addition, he has been able to replicate missing title cards and screen credits to films that were incomplete or missing footage due to an optical printer he built in his garage.

NESFM is now looking to do a major building and restoration program to add a foundation and upgrade the plumbing and electrical in the century-old building while also restoring and preserving the historic exterior.

The Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum has become one of the must-see places for silent film aficionados and is truly a Fremont landmark and tourist destination.



Local singer selected for OSCAR competition Page 15



Niles Geographic Live virtual events coming to local performing arts center Page 5



Film museum acquires historic theater Page 20

What's Happening

TRI-CITY VOICE

Fremont, Newark, Union City & Castro Valley, Hayward, Milpitas, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, Sausalito

"Accurate, Fair & Honest"



Scan for our FREE App or Search App Store for TCNews

Fun Fact: "Broncho Billy" Anderson was awarded an honorary Oscar in 1958 and we have it!

Our statuette visits here and there for photo opps.



Be part of our progress!

Film museum acquires historic theater

BY ROB KLINDT
PHOTOS COURTESY OF
NILES ESSANAY SILENT FILM MUSEUM

Tucked away in the historic Niles area of Fremont is a cinematic treasure trove of silent movies, vintage projectors, cameras, posters, photographs and movie memorabilia. Welcome to the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum and its recently acquired Edison Theater.

Located at 37417 Niles Blvd., the museum and theater are in a two-story building constructed in 1913. It was just down the street from the now-demolished Essanay Studios building, which produced hundreds of movies during the early 20th century and was home to comedian-actor Charlie Chaplin. One of his most famous films, "The Tramp" was filmed in Niles in 1915.

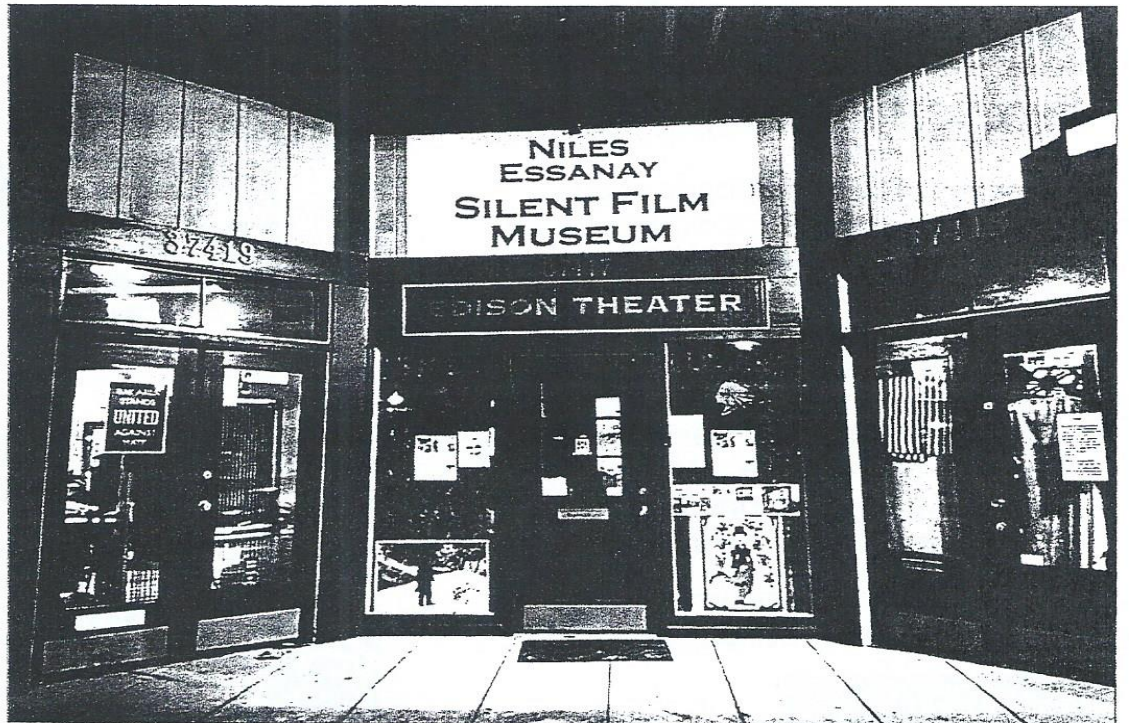
"Preservation and education of early film history and Niles history" is an important goal of the museum, said Museum President Dorothy Bradley. In recent years, the Edison Theater, just behind the museum, has become a favorite spot for film aficionados to screen silent films with live music. Sadly, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum and theater are currently closed to the public, but museum officials are hopeful the facility will reopen late this year.

After renting the facility since 2004, the non-profit museum association acquired the building in 2020 following the death of landlord Vickie Lopez, who put the building and an adjacent parking lot in a trust to be donated to the museum. Now, as owners, the museum association is intent on renovating, restoring and upgrading the property to meet the needs of the community.

Renovation and construction

The museum association recently hired Berkeley architect Todd Jersey to come up with plans for the space – including restoring an archway façade that graced the building's entryway when it was built.

At about 3,000 square feet, the structure was originally designed as a multipurpose building with two apartments above, two storefronts facing the street, and the theater in the back. Films were played there until the early 1920s. Later the space was used as The Egyptian Ballroom, and in subsequent



Museum and theater street entrance today.

years as a photo studio and a karate studio.

"In the 1950s the building was remodeled; they took out a bit of the entryway trim and archway," explained David Kiehn, the museum's historian. The plans call for the restoration of decorative spindles and the archway, he added.

Kiehn said the east side of the building looks similar to the original design, but the west side does not and will be restored to match the eastern wall. Practical challenges include updating 107-year-old plumbing fixtures, a slanted floor and uneven walls. Plans also call for new construction in the back to house the museum's library of 10,000 films in a climate-controlled space.

Moviemaking history

From about 1913 to 1920, Niles was a hot spot for producers of silent movies. Essanay Studios, a large Chicago-based movie production company built a western production studio in Niles to take advantage of the area's natural beauty and good weather. The studio brought

multitudes of actors, directors and support crews to the area to film early westerns, comedies and romance movies.

Arriving in 1913, Charlie Chaplin is arguably the most famous performer to have appeared in silent short movies in Niles. His most famous film, "The Tramp," was filmed in 1915 and included numerous scenes shot in the bucolic Niles Canyon roadway in the hills just east of town.

Other well-known players of the time are also part of Niles' cinematic history, including Broncho Billy Anderson (who shot a series of popular westerns), Ben Turpin, John Rand and Edna Purviance, who starred alongside Chaplin in more than 30 films. By the early 1920s the Essanay and most of the movie productions had moved away from Niles to Southern California, including Chaplin who was said to have preferred that area.

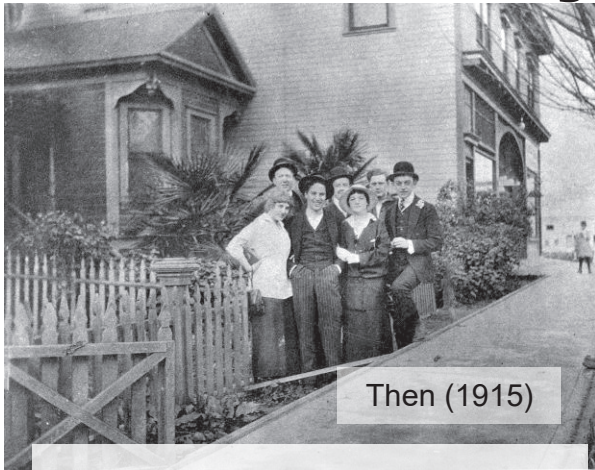
Today, the museum has many rare and unusual items in its collection including an original barn door from the Essanay

studio. The most treasured item is an honorary Oscar statuette given to Broncho Billy Anderson in 1958. It was acquired by the museum from the estate of Diana Serra Cary who performed as "Baby Peggy" in silent films and Vaudeville. "We only bring it out on special occasions," said Kiehn.

Memberships and donations

Although museum officials have big plans for renovating their facilities, the estimated \$2 million price tag is big too. Fortunately, the Kiehn said project can be done in phases as funding becomes available. He said the easiest way people can make a tax-deductible donation is to visit the Niles Silent Film Association website at www.nilesfilmmuseum.org, then click the "Donate" link and follow the prompts. Bradley added that direct checks are also appreciated because they are not subject to a third-party online service fee. Checks can be mailed to 37417 Niles Blvd., Fremont, CA 94536. For details, call (510) 494-1411 or (510) 796-1940 and leave a message.

Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum



Then (1915)



& Now



Gilbert "Broncho Billy" Anderson was the "A" of the Essanay (S & A) silent film studio and established the western division of the Chicago-based main studio in Niles from 1912-1916 after crossing the country making films from Colorado to Mexico to Northern CA. More than 350 films were shot in Niles alone.

NILES

where reel history was made

Thanks to the generosity of our wonderful forward-thinking landlord, Vicky Lopez and the Lopez family trust, our non-profit museum inherited this property in early 2020. We now wish to embark on a major building renovation to ready the building for its bright future as a permanent museum and archive. We're also renovating our auditorium to bring it back to its silent film theater roots.

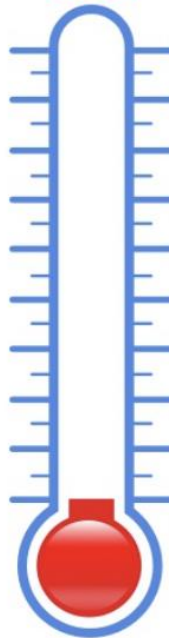
Be a part of our museum's future by making a tax-deductible donation.



Niles (now part of Fremont) is in the SF Bay Area – the place where Charlie Chaplin shot *The Tramp* and four other films in 1915.

You can donate online on our homepage and hit the **Donate** tab or send a check to the postal address (both are listed below.) Let's get that thermometer moving upward real fast!

\$2 Million Goal



Phase one would include the full building foundation, electrical and plumbing systems as well as the new wings off of the theater and full restoration of the theater itself, allowing it to reopen with a new re-found beauty and new restrooms!

- New concrete foundation *entire building*: \$200,000
- New theater bathroom wing and new plumbing *entire building*: \$250,000
- New electrical system *entire building* and new theater lighting: \$150,000
- New storage wings off of theater: \$125,000
- Restored interior walls, ceilings and floors: \$50,000
- Interior and exterior painting: \$50,000
- New roofing: \$50,000
- New exterior decks: \$50,000
- New theater heating and air conditioning: \$50,000
- New theater walls, ceilings, and floors: \$25,000
- Restoration of theater ventilation towers: \$25,000
- Restored projection room and new spiral stairs: \$25,000
- New doors: \$25,000

* Total phase one: \$1,100,000*

The second phase ** would include finishing the front building and the following construction categories with associated costs:

- New steel frame at north elevation: \$75,000
- Restoration of north elevation: \$150,000
- Restoration interior both levels: \$225,000
- New kitchens and bathrooms upper level: \$100,000
- Finish electrical including lighting for both levels: \$50,000
- Floors both levels: \$50,000
- New roof structure at solarium: \$50,000
- New roofing: \$50,000
- New windows and doors: \$125,000
- New mosaic tile at entry: \$25,000

**Total phase two: \$900,000

Total for entire building renovation/restoration: **\$2,000,000**

Get our e-newsreel emails to stay informed of all updates to our museum – film screenings, online and in person! Email Goessanay@yahoo.com and let us know to get you on the list.



Become a member of the **Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum** and get discounts on shows and get 10% off in our store. Such a deal! Individual memberships start at \$15 (Seniors / Students) and \$25 (Adult / Senior Couple)

November 22, 2021, MEETING

Will be in person at the Washington Township Museum of Local History, 190 Anza Street, Fremont, OR on Zoom starting at 7:00 P.M.:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/76473734687>

NEW MEMBERSHIP DUES FOR SINGLE ADDRESS

ONE-YEAR \$10 FIVE-YEAR \$40 TEN-YEAR \$70 PATRON: \$50.00 for one year

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

E-Mail Address _____

MAIL CHECK TO: Washington Township Historical Society PO BOX 3045 FREMONT, CA 94539

