



UTILITAS • FIRMITAS • VENUSTAS

Northern California Chapter  
Society of Architectural Historians

The Newsletter

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Fall 2016

*Live like the ONE PERCENT (circa 1915) for a DAY!*

## Chateau Carolands Will Be Centerpiece of NCCSAH Tour of Palaces of the San Francisco Peninsula

The NCCSAH Fall 2016 program, on Wednesday, September 28, will explore the great palaces of the San Francisco Peninsula, the premier place in the Western United States for grand country houses and palatial estates beginning in the 1860s. We will tour five of the most spectacular residential interiors in Northern California, including Chateau Carolands. *(Program is sold out; see page 8.)*

The Carolands has been called one of the last of the great homes built during the Gilded Age, a period of mansion-building that included such famous residences as the Vanderbilt family's Marble House, Biltmore Estate and The Breakers. In California these included Filoli and The Huntington mansions.



Chateau Carolands Photo: Ward Hill

Harriet Pullman Carolan (1869-1956) was the daughter of George Pullman, the American industrialist who created the Pullman Company. In Chicago, in 1892, Harriet Pullman married Francis Carolan of San Francisco and moved with him to California. In 1912, she acquired 554 acres of land in Hillsborough on which to build her dream house. The result is a Beaux-Arts masterpiece inspired by the court architecture of Louis XIV.

In 1913, Mrs. Carolan commissioned plans from the Parisian architect Ernest Sanson, at the time one of the foremost designers of prestigious private homes in France. Sanson, aged 76 and near the end of a long and distinguished career, never visited the California site. San Francisco architect Willis Polk was engaged as the structural designer and manager of construction to execute the project. The leading French landscape architect Achille Duchêne, inspired by the great 17th century works of André Le Nôtre, designed the gardens.

*—Carolands continues on page 7. Brief profiles of the four other houses on the tour begin on page 2.*



*Kohl Mansion, The Oaks. Photo, and below, courtesy of Mercy High School*

### **The Oaks - The Kohl Mansion, Burlingame (1914)**

In 1912, architects George Howard and John White designed the 42,000 square-foot Kohl Mansion, one of the largest and most elaborate commissions for their San Francisco-based firm that designed many houses in Burlingame and Hillsborough during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Completed in 1914, the “Jacobethan-style” manor house with its dark-red brick masonry construction represents an unusual departure from the typical neoclassical style or wooden half-timber Tudor style built for wealthy clients during this period on the Peninsula. The original owner of the house and its 40-acre estate—known as The Oaks for the many large, old oak trees on the property—was bon vivant C. Frederick Kohl. Son of William H. Kohl, who made his fortune in shipping and fur trading with the Alaska Commercial Company, Frederick Kohl grew up on the family estate in nearby San Mateo.



*Kohl Mansion Music Room.*

Arranged around a large central terrace, the manor’s U-shaped plan has two large identical wings with steeply pitched gabled roofs forming the main

south facade. The main entrance opens into an octagonal, groin-vaulted vestibule that has a crenellated roof parapet. Despite its medieval features, the interior plan has a distinctly neoclassical symmetry. The main hall, or music room, reminiscent of an Elizabethan central hall, is the central circulation space. The huge, 60-foot-long rectangular space with 40-foot-high vaulted ceilings dominates the first-floor plan.

The Sisters of Mercy purchased Kohl mansion and the 40-acre estate for their convent in 1923. The Sisters occupied the residence until 1932, when they constructed a separate motherhouse and novitiate east of the mansion. Since 1931, the structure has served as the site of Mercy High School.



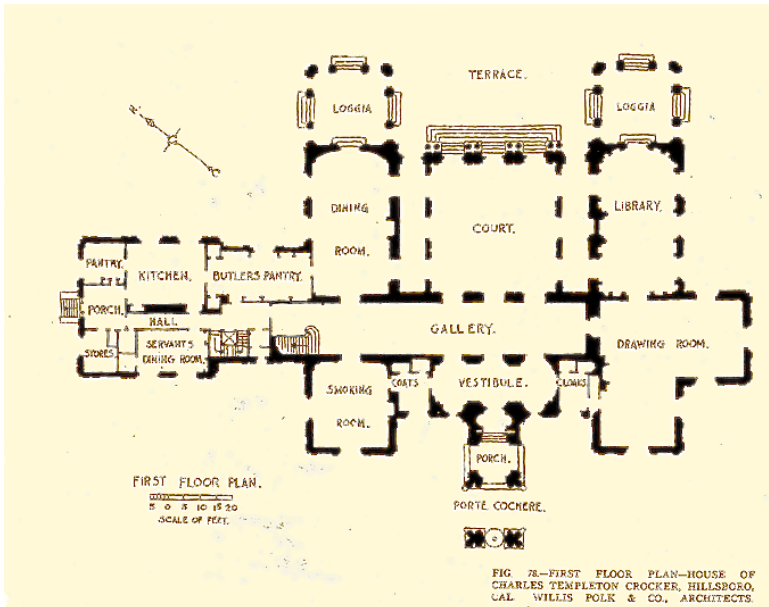
*Photo: Francis Johnston. Library of Congress*

### **The Uplands – Charles Templeton Crocker Mansion (1915)**

Mercurial San Francisco architect Willis Polk designed The Uplands, one of the most lavish commissions of his career, for Charles Templeton Crocker, grandson of railroad magnate Charles Crocker. Completed by 1915, at a reported cost of over one million dollars, the 37-room mansion, with its formal gardens, was a place for grand entertainments, particularly on weekends.

The architecture of *The Uplands* combines elements of the grand Newport, Rhode Island mansion *Rosecliff*—itself a





*Uplands first floor plan. Architectural Record, October 1917*

rendition of the Grand Trianon at Versailles—with a curious mixture of English Gothic and Italian Renaissance classicism. In 1915, author Porter Garnett insightfully referred to the design of *The Uplands* as a “more varied, free and personal interpretation of classic architecture than a rendering of the neoclassic.”

Constructed of reinforced concrete, the three-story residence has symmetrical front and rear facades composed of a complex series of recessed planes formed by projections from the central block and the stacking and detailing of the three floors. A prominent porte cochere, projecting from the center of the front (west) facade, provides a strong focus for the main entrance.

A large, Venetian-inspired court or ballroom sits at the center of the 35,000 square foot first-floor plan, which includes an elaborate and richly decorated dining room. The mansion’s 12 bedrooms and 12 bathrooms accommodated the Crocker’s many and frequent overnight guests.

The Crystal Springs School purchased the mansion and 10 acres, in 1956. Although the terraced formal gardens have been redeveloped for school-related uses, the house has retained its original historic character in its use as a private school.

## Why the Peninsula?

For wealthy San Francisco residents of the 19th and early 20th centuries seeking desirable sites for a country house, the Peninsula south of the city offered two distinct advantages: climate and ease of access.

Unlike their counterparts in the rest of the country, the rich and socially prominent families of San Francisco did not seek to escape the torrid heat of summer in the city, but rather to flee summer chill. Fog and overcast in San Francisco can result in summer temperatures over 30 degrees cooler compared to a mid-peninsula town like Menlo Park.

The Santa Cruz Mountains, which stop south of San Francisco, divide the Peninsula into two zones. The coastal zone experiences the cool marine influences of fog and ocean breezes, in contrast with the warm and sunny days on the bayside of the peninsula. The mountains act as a barrier preventing marine air from migrating to the east, while allowing pleasant cooling in the evenings.

Other nearby areas that offered similarly pleasant summer weather, Marin County to the north, and the East Bay, were at a distinct disadvantage when it came to access. Travel to both, before construction of the bridges, involved taking a ferry boat and a carriage or, later, a train or streetcar to reach a destination in “the country”. The bayside terrain of the Peninsula, on the other hand, is flat and easily traveled from San Francisco.

The Spanish developed El Camino Real near the Bay as the main road joining the Mission and Presidio of San Francisco with San Jose to the south. And so it remained the Peninsula’s main travel route until completion of the San Francisco-to-San Jose Railroad, in 1863. With that, a man could leave his Montgomery Street office and join his family at the summer house, in time for dinner, after a short trip on the train.



*Villa Delizia. Pacific Coast Architect, June 1927*  
*Below: looking into the living room. Architecture, February 1928*

## Villa Delizia - Delight and Garfield Merner House

The Delight and Garfield D. Merner house, *Villa Delizia*, is one of most unusual Spanish Colonial Revival style houses on the Peninsula because of its unique plan and massing and the spatial drama, whimsy, and romantic fantasy of its stunning interior. The architect was James Mitchell, chief designer of Willis Polk & Company. He began design work on the house in 1926, although Polk himself may have done some work on the project before he died, in 1924.

The Villa Delizia design was widely lauded in its day. The house received an award from the Northern California Chapter of the AIA and was featured in the national periodical *Architecture*, in February 1928, and the June 1927 issue of *The Architect and Engineer*.

Garfield Merner was the vice president of William R. Warner and Company of St. Louis, which later became Warner-Lambert Pharmaceuticals. He and his wife Benetta (whose nickname was "Delight") decided to move to the San Francisco Bay Area after Merner visited his parents in California in the early 1920s.



Villa Delizia is a reflection of the Merners' travels in Spain and visits to the California Missions. They were

particularly smitten by the romance of Old California popularized in Helen Hunt Jackson's novel *Ramona* and

gleaned some inspiration from the sets for *The Mark of Zorro*, the wildly popular 1920 film starring Douglas Fairbanks.

In 1929, Garfield and Delight, both lovers of the arts, founded the Allied Arts Guild, in Menlo Park, an arts and crafts guild like those the Merners had visited in Europe. Its purpose was to promote an appreciation of the arts and handicrafts of California. Gardner Dailey designed the Allied Arts Guild buildings in a Spanish Revival style similar to *Villa Delizia*.

The Merners sold the villa, in 1945, because of Delight's declining health and the demands of managing a large estate. The property was subdivided in subsequent years and the house passed through a number of owners. In 1957, Willy and Donald Werbe, a real estate investor, purchased Villa Delizia. The Werbes have raised their family in the mansion where they continue to reside. The house has received few alterations in the last 50 years.



*Belmont, SW front. HABS photo, Library of Congress*

## Belmont - William Ralston Mansion (1868)

Built in 1864–68, William Ralston's Belmont was the earliest of the great San Francisco Peninsula country estates. The Ralston house, now on the campus of Notre Dame de Namur University, and the James Coleman house are the only major 19<sup>th</sup> century houses on the Peninsula that remain.

Co-founder of the Bank of California with his business partner, Darius Ogden Mills, and developer of the Palace Hotel, Ralston was one of the





most powerful and wealthy men of his time. In 1864, he acquired a small villa south of San Francisco built by Count Leonetto Cipriani. Design of the lavish remodel that incorporated part of the Cipriani villa into the construction of Belmont is attributed to architect John Gaynor, who later worked with Ralston on the Palace Hotel. The unostentatious Italian Villa-style exterior resembles, on one hand, a very large

farm house and on the other, a small resort hotel.

Despite its rather plain exterior, the house boasts one of the most grand and fascinating 19<sup>th</sup> century interiors surviving in the Bay Area. It was reputed to have had 80 rooms on its four floors. The open, irregular plan contains a variety of room volumes and configurations.

Moving partitions and immense sliding glazed doors create a continuous flow of space and the prodigious use of mirrors creates an added sense of openness. The most noteworthy interior feature, the grand ballroom, inspired by the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, has 14 full-wall mirrors and a maple, cherry, and walnut parquetry floor.



*Belmont. Top: First floor vestibule and stairway. HABS photo: Library of Congress. Above: Ballroom. Photo: Eadwaerd Muybridge. Notre Dame de Namur University*

Ralston occupied Belmont for almost 10 years, during which time he often

## Registration for Palaces of the Peninsula

[please print]

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Registration: \$40 members / \$60 nonmembers

Costs include lunch and admission fees

Total Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to Ward Hill and mail to:

Ward Hill  
NCCSAH Palaces of the Peninsula  
3124 Octavia Street, #102  
San Francisco, CA 94123

For more information please contact Ward Hill at [whill@pacbell.net](mailto:whill@pacbell.net).

Nonmember cost also includes one year's membership in NCCSAH.

**Space is limited; reserve your place now!**

indulged his love of extravagant entertaining. Following his early death, in 1875, still shrouded in mystery, the Belmont estate went to his partner, Nevada Senator William Sharon, who owned it until his death in 1885.

Sold by Sharon's heirs, in 1895, the house went into institutional uses, first as a girls' finishing school and then as a sanitarium. In 1922, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur purchased it for their college. The college renamed the house Ralston Hall and replaced the original horizontal wood siding on the exterior with stucco. In 1966, Belmont became a National Historic Landmark.

A popular venue for weddings and musical events, the Ralston mansion closed to the public, in 2012, because of seismic issues. The Campaign to Save the Ralston Mansion has been raising funds for the building's expensive renovation.

# Petaluma: Which Came First?

NCCSAH members and friends who enjoyed a day-long program on June 12, in the one-time Egg Capital of the World did not get an answer to the eternal question of the chicken or the egg, but there was much else on the tour of the historic city of Petaluma to satisfy. Planners of the event, historian Katherine Rinehart and Todd and Janet Gracyk greeted us at the Carnegie library, now home to the Petaluma Historical Museum and Library. Following Ms. Rinehart's informative presentation on the history of this river town grown prosperous on the agricultural bounty of Sonoma County, and, fortified with coffee and pastries, our group set out for the day.



After a short walk, we found ourselves in the midst of one of the most notable collections of cast-iron front buildings on the West Coast. Nancy Sasser of the historical museum conducted the downtown tour, and Chapter member Bill Kostura, who has researched the subject of cast-iron construction in California extensively, provided additional commentary. Katherine and the Gracyks then led our group on to D Street, where many of Petaluma's prosperous families built their homes in late 19th-early 20th century.

We enjoyed box lunches in the large and beautifully landscaped garden at 625 D Street, thanks to owners Paul Heavenridge and Paula Freund. The group was also allowed to view the interior of the house, designed by prolific local architect Brainerd Jones and built in 1929. The walk along D Street and its byways that followed our lunch break allowed us to view other Jones houses, as well as homes by Albert Farr, Warren Perry, Julia Morgan, Mario Corbett and others.

A highlight of the afternoon was the opportunity to visit St. John's Episcopal Church, a small jewel by San Francisco architect Ernest Coxhead (1890) that is a masterwork of this architect's uniquely inventive play of scale and proportion. Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, we were allowed to enter the church, where congregation member Cliff Hill welcomed us. He spoke of the effort for restoration and rehabilitation of the church, which he is leading.

A visit to the Brown House, an 1893 Queen Anne residence, and a welcome pause for cool drinks, capped a pleasantly warm day of touring. The current owner, Christine Balch, regaled us with entertaining stories of her determined quest over many years to acquire this fine house. She allowed us free rein to view the entire interior, still undergoing restoration. Our thanks to Christine for her kind hospitality.

A special acknowledgement for Janet Gracyk, who prepared the excellent guide to Petaluma's residential architecture that she provided those on the tour.

See additional photos on following page.

*Above: In period garb, guide Nancy Sasser gathers her brood to begin tour of downtown Petaluma. Photo: Paul Turner*



# Petaluma Photo Gallery



Photos: Paul Turner

–*Carolands continued from page 1*

Polk designed the mansion's reinforced concrete superstructure. The walls were created using brick infill. The exterior walls were made of concrete sanded and scored to give the appearance of natural limestone. Each of the four facades of the house is different, the entrance façade on the south is plain and simple while the main garden façade on the west, with its prominent central curved bay, is the most elaborate.

Apart from its unprecedented size—its 46,000 square feet encompass 98 rooms, including 9 bedrooms and baths—the verticality of the Carolands sets it apart from other mansions on the Peninsula. It is four stories tall without ancillary wings. Also distinctive is that the main living areas, including dining room, library, and ballroom, are located on the *piano nobile*, above the first-floor service areas. These areas include a remarkable kitchen with walls and ceiling made of white or milk glass and a grand butler's pantry with a mezzanine level and walls of Delftware tile. The interior's centerpiece is the grand Baroque stair which rises up fifty-five feet from the entry hall adjacent to the porte-cochere to the expansive fourth floor skylight, forming one of the largest enclosed residential spaces in the country.

Harriet and Francis Carolan moved in with their staff in the autumn of 1916. They separated the following year, and, in 1918, they closed the Chateau. After Frank's death in 1923, Harriet remarried. She and her new husband occupied Carolands only sporadically, until 1928. In the score of years that followed, there occurred two changes of ownership and the sale of all but 25 of its 554 acres for development. By 1948, the Chateau itself was threatened with demolition.

The house escaped that fate when the Countess Lillian Remillard Dandini purchased Chateau Carolands, in 1950, ensuring its preservation. The Countess lived in the chateau, entertaining large parties and holding frequent charity benefits until her death, in 1973. Unfortunately, in later years the Countess lacked funds to maintain the house, and when she died, the threat of demolition arose once more. She willed the Chateau and its remaining 5.83 acres to the Town of Hillsborough for use as a French and Italian cultural center. Unfortunately she left no endowment for this purpose, and the town ruled that its charter did not allow such a use.

–*Carolands continued on page 8, col. 1*

## Peninsula Tour Sold Out

*Because of restrictions by some of our hosts, we have had to limit the number of participants on the Palaces of the San Francisco Peninsula tour. The response was so overwhelming that the the tour was fully booked, with a waiting list, within days of the initial notice of the planned program. Many members expressed their disappointment. We are, therefore, considering offering the same tour sometime in the spring of 2017. Look for a notice on this possibility in the near future.*

*The NCCSAH board regrets any inconvenience this has caused its members.*

*Those who are paid and confirmed for a place on the September 28 program will receive details as to schedule and meeting place for the tour.*

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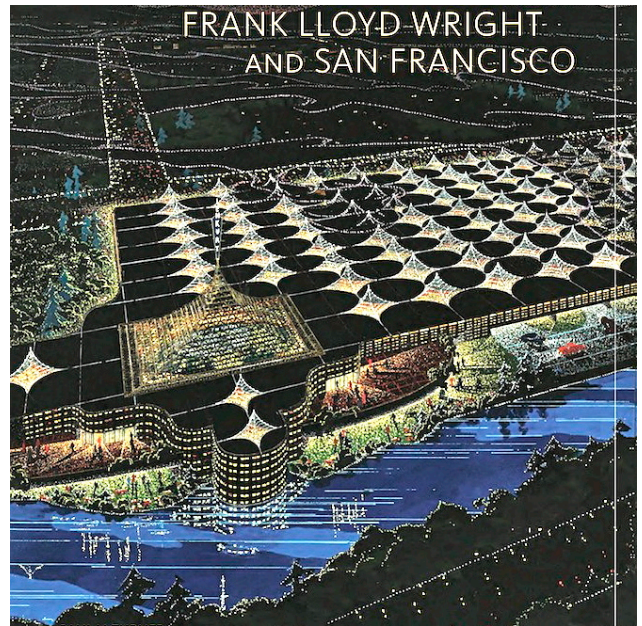
–**Carolands** continued from page 7



*Carolands grand stairway. HABS photo (1974) by Jack E. Boucher*

Another quarter century of uncertainty followed, through a period that included a failed probate sale, two foreclosures, and sporadic uses, including as the setting for an “adult” film, in 1982, and a stint as a designer showcase, in 1991. It was a persistent target for vandals. On the positive side, in 1975, the house was placed on the list of California Historical Landmarks and the National Register of Historic Places.

Though the building suffered only superficial damage in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, demolition was again considered. A development proposal, in 1997, to carve fifteen condominiums out of the building, went



We welcome publication of *Frank Lloyd Wright and San Francisco*, authored by NCCSAH board member Paul Turner. The publisher, Yale University Press, has announced October 25 as the official publication date, but the author informs us that copies may actually be on sale in early September. List price is \$65.

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nowhere, because the Hillsborough town charter bans multi-family residences.

The following year, Charles Bartlett Johnson and Dr. Ann Johnson purchased the Chateau with its remaining land. Their intention was to preserve Carolands in perpetuity. Dr. Johnson undertook asbestos removal, roof replacement, extensive renovations to the mechanical systems, and meticulous restoration to bring the building back to the state originally intended by its architects. The Johnsons, like the Countess, often shared the house for charity fundraisers and other worthy causes.

The Johnsons donated the Chateau, beautifully restored, to Carolands Foundation, in 2012. Its mission includes “support of programs, projects and organizations that educate people about the rich cultural legacy, architectural heritage and historic preservation of Carolands Château.”



## Filoli Observes Centennial



*This Grand Ole House--Blueprints to Preservation.* Thursday, September 29, 2016. Guided tours, 3:30-4:30 p.m. Reception, 4:00-5:00 p.m. Lecture, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

Construction began on Filoli in 1915, at the direction of the original owners, Mr. and Mrs. Bourn. In a two-part lecture, Greg Mellburg, Ted Cardoza and Dave Herrington take you on a journey through time, from architectural design influences and engineering innovations at the turn of the century to the construction methods used, as originally built. It will explore later additions by its second owners, Mr. and Mrs. Roth, and repairs and projects taken on after Filoli became a National Trust Property, including the post-1989 earthquake retrofitting. To complement this lecture, comparisons with other grand peninsula estates will be explored. There will be a question and answer session immediately following the lecture. Pre-registration is highly recommended.  
<http://www.filoli.org/centennial/>

**Profiles on the Kohl Mansion, Uplands, Belmont and Villa Delizia by Ward Hill from his forthcoming book, *Houses of the San Francisco Peninsula: 1866-1940*.**

## Other Events Of Interest

### Heritage Homes of Petaluma's Biennial House Tour

Sunday, September 18th, from 10 AM to 5 PM. For more information, call the Petaluma Museum at (707) 778-4398 or visit their web site <http://www.petalumamuseum.com/> (click on Find All Our Current Brown Paper Ticket Events Here)

### Filoli

Exhibit: *Looking Forward to Looking Back: Celebrating 100 Years.* Now through 2016. <http://www.filoli.org/centennial/>

### California Historical Society

Exhibition: *Native Portraits: Contemporary Tintypes by Ed Drew, 1966-1971.* Now through November 27, 2016. 678 Mission St., S.F. [http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org/exhibitions/current\\_exhibitions/](http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org/exhibitions/current_exhibitions/)

### Berkeley Architectural Heritage

Lectures. *Women Speak: Four Architects on Design.* September 22, October 13, October 27, November 9, 2016. 7:30 p.m., Berkeley City Club <http://berkeleyheritage.com/calendar.html>

### SF Heritage 2016 Lecture Series

September 22, 6 p.m. *Unraveling Little Saigon's History and Influence in the Tenderloin.* Tenderloin Museum, 398 Eddy St., S.F. October 27, 6 p.m. *Bliss & Faville: Architecture and the Profession in Early 20th Century S.F.* Metropolitan Club, 640 Sutter St., S.F. November 10, 6 p.m. *Frank Lloyd Wright and San Francisco.* Mechanics' Institute, 57 Post St., S.F. Each lecture \$10 for Heritage members, \$15 for nonmembers. [www.sfheritage.org](http://www.sfheritage.org)

### Society for Industrial Archeology

Annual Fall Tour: Fox Valley, Wisconsin. October 28-30, 2016  
<http://www.sia-web.org/sia>

### Oakland Museum of California

Exhibition: *Dorothea Lange: Politics of Seeing,* November 12, 2016- April 23, 2017  
<http://museumca.org/exhibitions>

### Vernacular Architecture Forum

Conference, *Two Utahs: Religious and Secular Landscapes in the Great Basin West.* Salt Lake City, UT, May 31-June 3, 2017.  
<http://vernaculararchitectureforum.org>

### AIA San Francisco

Architecture and the City Festival  
September 1 - 30. [www.archandcity.org](http://www.archandcity.org)



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

#### **NCCCSAH Officers**

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become a member of NCCSAH**

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Please send your ideas or comments  
concerning The Newsletter to:

Don Andreini

NCCSAH Newsletter Editor

[dandreini@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dandreini@sbcglobal.net)

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

or to renew your dues return this form  
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