SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

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Fall 2026

San Mateo Coastside Tour Slated for NCCSAH Fall 2026 Program

This fall, NCCSAH is presenting a bus tour tracing the route of the Ocean Shore Railroad (1905-1920), which was intended to link San Francisco with Santa Cruz and open the San Mateo coast to real estate development. The scheme failed but several stations remain (our tour will stop at some) and much of Highway 1 traces the railroad route.



Photo: Sam Mazza Castle, Pacifica. Courtesy Mazza Foundation

We will gather Wednesday October 21, at 9 a.m., at Little Brown Church, home to the Pacifica Historical Society Museum, at 1850 Francisco Blvd., in Pacifica. Following coffee and bagels, we will hear from Pacifica Historical Society President, Steve Johnson, and see the restoration of Ocean Shore Railroad car #1409. Boarding our bus, we will drive south on Highway 1 through the Tom Lantos tunnels, which bypass the treacherous Devil's Side, and stop at two former Ocean Shore train stations.

We will have a tour and box lunches at the National Register-listed 1853 Johnston House in Half Moon Bay. After lunch we have scheduled a short walking tour of the town of Half Moon Bay that will include the National Register listed Community United Methodist (originally Methodist Episcopal) Church, built in 1872, the Old County Jail, and the Simmons House, of 1865.

Boarding the bus, we will travel north, stopping at the former train station in El Granda, a resort town laid out by Daniel Burnham's assistant, Edward H. Bennett. Following another stop at the train station at Vallemar, we conclude with a guided tour of the noteworthy Mazza Castle. The day's program will end around 4:00.

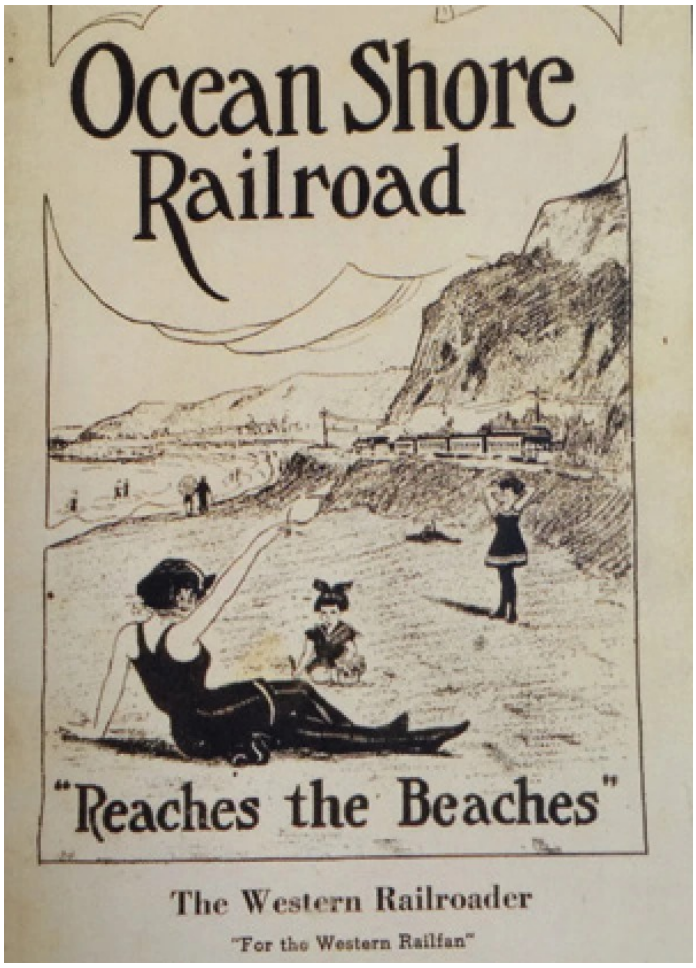
Ocean Shore Rail Line Brought the Prospect of Development to the San Mateo Coast

On May 18, 1905, the incorporation of the Ocean Shore Railroad Company (OSRC) brought the San Mateo coast its first real estate boom. The scheme was to link San Francisco with Santa Cruz by rail and open the entire San Mateo coast to development. San Francisco businessman J. Harvey Downey led the OSRC plan to build 80.26 miles of rail down the rugged coastline, a considerable engineering challenge. The unstable topography included high cliffs 200 to 300 feet above the shoreline. The rail bed had to cut into steep hillsides. A 400 foot tunnel constructed at Pedro Point opened out to a 700-foot cliff. Tall railroad trestles had to be constructed over canyons and gullies.

The OSRC retained right-of-way grants through San Francisco to the railroad's station at 12th and Mission Streets. Over 4,000 men worked on the rail line during early 1906. The April 1906 earthquake caused landslides at many points along the route, tunnels collapsed and construction equipment fell into the sea. Undaunted, the railroad promoters considered the 1906 earthquake a boon to their real estate development plans.

As a result of the thousands of people fleeing San Francisco for the suburbs after the 1906 earthquake and fire, the population of San Mateo County increased significantly between 1906 and 1911. The County experienced the "biggest real estate boom it had ever seen," largely concentrated within the existing Peninsula towns. Despite significant damage to the railroad bed, building continued and the line opened to Moss Beach in 1907. Also in 1907, E.B. and A.L. Stone opened a quarry on Calera Creek near Rockaway Beach to supply limestone for San Francisco and materials for the OSRC track as the line extended southward.

Almost immediately, five communities were established along the OSRC rail line: Edgemar, Salada Beach (now Sharp Park), Brighton Beach, Vallemar and San Pedro Terrace (Linda Mar), the beginnings of what would later become Pacifica. George Rich built the Vallemar station in conjunction with the subdivision by the Surf Beach Realty Company. Later Montara, Moss Beach, Princeton, El Granada and Miramar were laid out south of Devil's Slide.



At El Granada the railroad hired nationally renowned architect D.H. Burnham to lay out a town and hotel resort which they pronounced the future "Coney Island of the West." The development however never got off the ground. The line to Half Moon Bay opened in 1908. Lots in the new subdivisions along the OSRC route sold for $10 down and a $3 monthly payment. The railroad promised coast side living with an easy commute to San Francisco.

—continued on the next page

The dreams of large scale residential development, however, never came to fruition. A few small houses for summer or weekend use were built in Salada and Rockaway Beach. Speculators (who eventually went broke) bought many lots, thus few houses were actually built. In addition to real estate development, the OSRC investors hoped to transport produce from isolated farms and attract tourists for the scenic ride down the coast and rail travelers for the considerable more direct route from San Francisco to Santa Cruz.



A section of the line was built north from Santa Cruz but the connection was never completed. While construction of the railroad along the San Mateo Coast made it all the way down to Tunitas Creek, a crucial 26-mile gap still existed between there and Swanton in Santa Cruz County. The OSRC went into receivership in 1911, but it continued to operate for another nine years. Some thought the railroad would have been a success if completed between San Francisco and Santa Cruz. The problems with slides and flooding that plague Highway 1 today also undermined the OSRC, often closed during the winter for expensive repairs. Cars and trucks on improved roads also affected their business. The Ocean Shore Railroad ceased operation in October, 1920.

The coming of the motorcar marked, however, the beginning of a new era for the Coastside. Improved roads brought an influx of weekend travelers. The coast highway largely followed the alignment created for the railroad. In 1924 Captain and Laura Dunnigan built “Snug Harbor” tourist cabins at the mouth of Rockaway Canyon. In 1927, Charles Gust opened his hamburger stand at Rockaway Beach. In 1929, construction began on the Sharp Park golf course.

Salada Beach and Brighton Beach combined to become the town of Sharp Park in 1935. Real estate developers bought parcels owned by the Ocean Shore Land Company in anticipation of the construction of Highway 1. Joining the towns on the north coast to Half Moon Bay,



Our fall tour traces much of the route of the Ocean Shore Railroad and includes some of the several stations remaining along the way.

—Above: Southbound train of the *Ocean Shore Railroad at today’s Devil’s Slide. Photo:* wikipedia.org

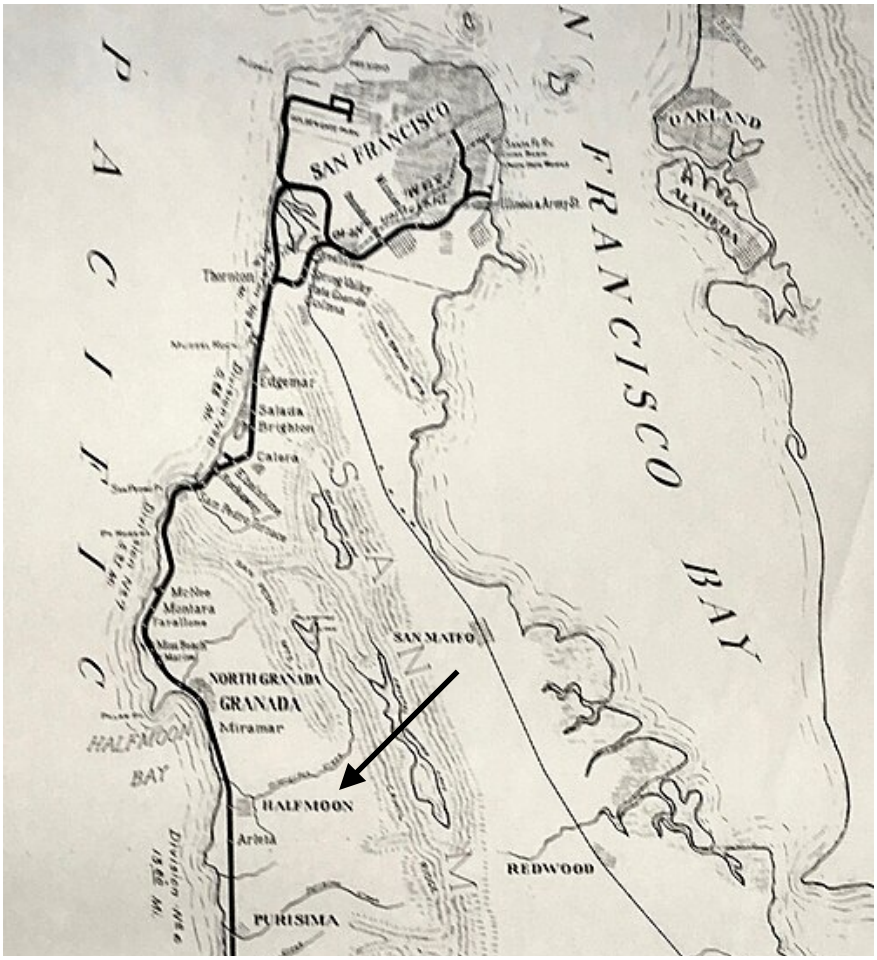
Left: Northbound train, perhaps experiencing some delay—or maybe just posing for an impressive portrait. Photo: www.oceanshorerailroad.org

Advent of a New Mode of Transportation Leads to Further Changes on the San Mateo Coast

The coming of the motorcar marked the beginning of a new era for the Coastside. Improved roads brought an influx of weekend travelers. Real estate developers bought parcels owned by the Ocean Shore Land Company in anticipation of the construction of Highway 1. During this period, in 1900, the reinforced concrete arch, closed spandrel Pilarcitos Creek Bridge was constructed on Highway 1 to provide a more reliable transportation connection to Main Street in downtown Half Moon Bay. The bridge was the first reinforced concrete bridge in San Mateo County and an early use of pre-stressed concrete techniques.

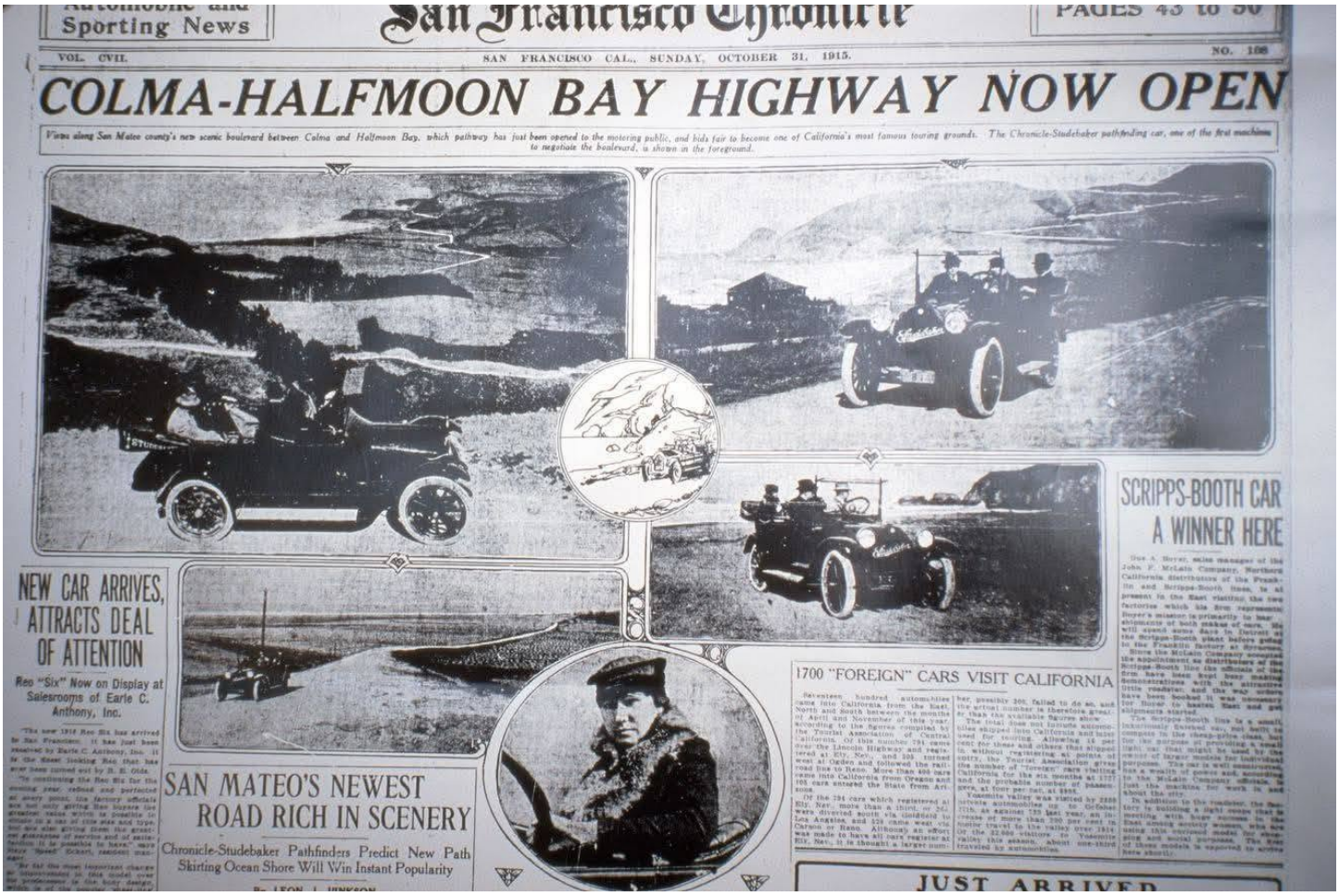
In November, 1915, Highway 1 from Colma to Half Moon Bay opened. Freight and passengers could be transported by motor vehicles now from San Francisco to Half Moon Bay. The road from Half Moon Bay to Santa Cruz County remained unpaved. In 1937 using WPA money, the scenic highway continued south from Half Moon Bay was completed to Carmel and Monterey. Highway commercial uses such as restaurants, gas stations and beach shops proliferated in response to the traffic. The dreams though that Half Moon Bay would develop into a resort like Santa Monica never came to fruition. “The town’s destiny was to remain a small, rural supply center which did not incorporate until 1959.”

The northern part of the San Mateo County coast remained largely an agrarian area until after World War II and the beginning of the California post-war real estate boom. Thousands of new single-family houses were built in the late 1940s and early 1950s in nearby Daly City. In the 1950s and 1960s new subdivisions were built in the towns of Sharp Park, Vallemar and Rockaway Beach. The coastal area from Half Moon Bay to the south however continues to be largely farms or open space.



Map shows a portion of Ocean Shore Railroad. Source: “Ocean Shore Railroad”. en.wikipedia.org
Yielding to the automobile, the line ceased operation in October 1920

Half Moon Bay has an area of 6.4 square miles and a population in the 2010 census of 11,324. Today tourism generates the most revenue for Half Moon Bay, although the area still has a thriving flower nursery business. The largest employer in the area is the Ritz-Carlton Half Moon Bay with 550 employees.



Automobile and Sporting News

San Francisco Chronicle

PAGES 43 to 50

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COLMA-HALFMOON BAY HIGHWAY NOW OPEN

Views along San Mateo county's new scenic boulevard between Colma and Halfmoon Bay, which pathway has just been opened to the motoring public, and bids fair to become one of California's most famous touring grounds. The Chronicle-Studebaker pathfinding car, one of the first machines to negotiate the boulevard, is shown in the foreground.

NEW CAR ARRIVES, ATTRACTS DEAL OF ATTENTION

Reo "Six" Now on Display at Salesrooms of Earle C. Anthony, Inc.

SAN MATEO'S NEWEST ROAD RICH IN SCENERY

Chronicle-Studebaker Pathfinders Predict New Path Skirting Ocean Shore Will Win Instant Popularity

1700 "FOREIGN" CARS VISIT CALIFORNIA

SCRIPPS-BOOTH CAR A WINNER HERE

JUST ARRIVED



One of the worst hairpin turns between Colma and Half Moon Bay ocean road.

Caption reads: "One of the worst hairpin turns between Colma and Half Moon Bay ocean road." (For this they gave up the train?) facebook.com

Perfect Bay Area Weather Greeted Our Tour of the Mills College Campus

We extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation to Mills College Campus Architect Emeritus Karen Fiene, FAIA, Robert Sabbatini, FASLA, and Campus Facilities Manager Luan Stauss for their invaluable help in organizing our fascinating Mills College tour in June, 2026. Everyone on the tour developed a deep appreciation of one of the most beautiful and historic college campuses in California.

We appreciate having Mills College host our opening reception in the truly stunning Julia Morgan designed Bender Room in the original Margaret Carnegie Library. Luan Stauss presented an excellent overview of the current preservation challenges under the campus' current owner, Northeastern University. Karen Fiene and Robert Sabbatini then presented a fascinating overview of the history, architecture and landscape of Mills College.



The morning tour began in Mills Hall (1874), the College's earliest building, with an informative talk by architectural historian Bill Kostura about the building's San Francisco based architects, Samuel C. Bugbee and Son, Architects.

The morning tour continued with nearby El Campanil, Julia Morgan's 1904 bell tower, one of her earliest buildings and a tour-de-force of early reinforced concrete construction. Phil Bellman presented an excellent overview of the fascinating history, construction and design of this very significant landmark in the history of Bay Area architecture. Karen Fiene then led a tour of the Mills College Alumni House, a beautiful Arts and Crafts design by Julia Morgan.

We want to thank Chartwells (Northeastern Catering) for preparing our wonderful lunches at the Tea Shop, the campus restaurant. Everyone had a great time socializing with friends in this lovely setting. Thanks also to architectural historian Woody Minor who led our great afternoon tour of the lovely campus buildings designed by Walter Radcliff, the campus architect in the 1920s and 1930s. The tour concluded with Karen Fiene's final comments at the celestial Warren Callister designed campus Chapel.

—Betsy Yost, AIA



Photos: (above) El Campanil, designed by Julia Morgan (1904). Photo: Jane Shabaker. Left: Woody Minor address the group in front of the Music Building, architect: Walter Radcliff. Photo: Jane Shabakef

Additional photographs illustrating the day's activities appear on the following page.

Mills College Tour Photo Gallery

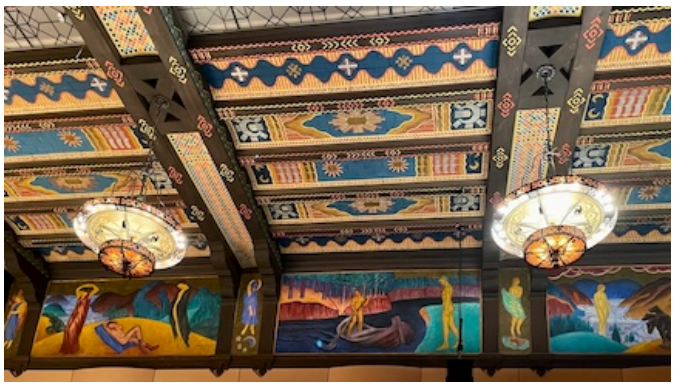












Photos: (left side from top) NCCSAH tour group posing on the steps of the Music Building (Walter Radcliffe, architect). Photo: Jane Shabaker. Chapel (Warren Callister, architect). Photo: Jane Shabaker. Ceiling and portion of wall of Littlefield Concert Hall, muralist Raymond Boynton. Photo: Jane Shabaker.

Second column top left: Karen Fiene, FAIA, with Betsy Yost in front of Mills Hall. Photo: Jane Shabaker. Top right: Introduction of the day's tour in the Bender Room of the Margaret Carnegie Library (Julia Morgan, 1905). Photo: Ward Hill. Bottom right: Karen Fiene, FAIA, speaking at Mills College Alumni Hall (Julia Morgan: 1916). Photo: Ward Hill

Oceanshore Stations Repurposed





Top: Former Valmar station; middle: former Tobin Station (aka Pedro Valley Station)



Johnston House, Half Moon Bay. Photo: Garrick Ramirez

Schedule for San Mateo Coast Tour October 21, 2026



9:00 am	Coffee, tea and bagels at Little Brown Church in Pacifica (photo above)
9:30 - 10:30	Welcoming remarks by Pacifica Historical Society President, Steve Johnson
11:00 - 11:45	Bus, south on Highway 1, through the Tom Lantos tunnels, and stop at two former Ocean Shore train stations
12:00 - 1:00	Tour and box lunch at Johnston House (pictured bottom of page)
1:00 - 1:30	Walking tour of Half Moon Bay
2:00 - 2:50	Board bus and head north for visit to former Ocean Shore stations, El Granada and Vallemar
3:00 - 3:30	Tour of historic Mazza Castle
3:45 pm	Program concludes back at Pacifica Historical Society

Registration: San Mateo Coast Tour

[please print]

Name _____

Affiliation _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email address _____

Telephone number _____

Number of places on the tour:

_____ Members @ $70 $_____

_____ Non-members @ $100 $_____

Price for non-members includes one-year NCCSAH membership

Total enclosed: $ _____

Please make checks payable to NCCSAH and mail to:

Ward Hill—San Mateo Coast Tour
3124 Octavia Street, #102
San Francisco, CA 94123

Membership Dues

Is your membership current?
At $30 per year,
NCCSAH membership is still a great deal.
Please see the coupon on the last page for details.

Events Calendar

23rd Annual Architecture + the City Festival, September, 10-27 2026, presented by the Center for Architecture + Design, in collaboration with AIA San Francisco. Enjoy events celebrating San Francisco's historic and emerging architecture. aiasf.org

DOCOMOMO
Modernism, Born in California: Glen Park BART Brutalism. September 12, 2026, 10 A.M.
docomomo-us.org/events

National Trust for Historic Preservation
National Preservation Summit '26.
September 22-24, 2026, Washington, DC
savingplaces.org

Berkeley Historical Society
Exhibit: *On the Waterfront: The Other Side of Berkeley.* Thursdays-Saturdays through September 26, 2026.

Filoli
Nightfall. September 26 - November 1. A Halloween harvest party at Filoli. For details go to filoli.org

Oakland Heritage Alliance
Walking tour: *Oakland Chinatown: Cultural Resilience & Resistance.* Saturday, August 29, 1:30 - 4:00 pm.
Walking tour: *Dimond Park Shines!* Sunday, August 30, 10:00 am - 12:30 pm.
Register and purchase tickets at oaklandheritage.org

Society for Industrial Archeology
2026 Fall Tour: *Altoona, PA*
September 24-27, 2026. sia-web.org

Society of Architectural Historians
80th Annual International Conference,
April 14-18, 2027, Chicago. Registration opens January 2027. sah.org

SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

The mission of the NCCSAH is to 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 historic built environment. Membership is open to anyone interested in architectural history and its related fields.

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Vice President, Paul Turner
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Betsy Yost

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Join or Renew Now!!
Individual $30.00
Make checks payable to NCCSAH

Please send your ideas or comments concerning The Newsletter to:
Don Andreini
NCCSAH Newsletter Editor
nccsah@gmail.com

To become a member of the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians
or to renew your membership return this form and your dues check for $30 made out to NCCSAH to

Ward Hill
3124 Octavia Street, #102
San Francisco, CA 94123

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Occupation _____

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