

Veterans Memorial Building in Niles

The Veterans Memorial Building in Niles was the fourth of ten Veterans Memorial Buildings built in towns throughout Alameda County between 1927 and 1935. County architect Henry Haight Meyers (1887 – 1943) used a monumental, often Beaux Arts style, in the bigger cities.

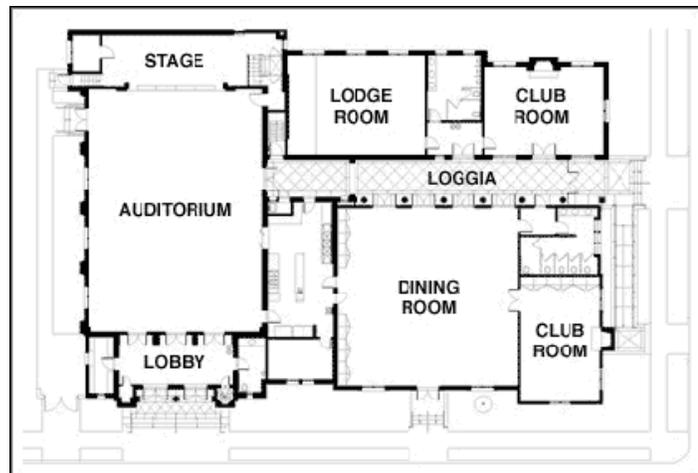
The Niles building was designed with associate architects George R. Klinkhardt and Mildred S. Meyers. The latter, daughter of Henry Meyers, took the lead role with the Niles Memorial project, promoting the 'California Spanish style' in both the Niles building exterior and interior. She later described the process in an article titled "Memorials" in the August 1935 issue of 'The Architect and Engineer,



a professional journal based in San Francisco. She notes that it was a compliment to the architects, when three other communities requested the same style developed for Niles. *[above: E Street Entrance to Auditorium]*

She noted that the California Spanish style was carried out in the interior by exposing the structural members of the roof trusses, treating these with stencil designs inspired from old Spanish ceilings, the stencils designed by herself. Walls were deliberately finished with an uneven texture, kept simple in color and given a glaze finish, as part of color studies that included the design of decorative tile and draperies. 'Old Spanish designs' inspired the light fixtures.

The Veterans Memorial Building in Niles has military references, including the terracotta bust of a World War I doughboy in a niche above the main entrance, characteristic of the memorial character of the building. Walls of local Kraftile hollow clay tile, scrolled ironwork and red Spanish tile are also original to this building. An original feature of the Veterans Memorial Building for Niles is the enclosed loggia that once faced onto a patio garden and central flagpole. In 1951, the patio replaced by a full dining wing and the flagpole moved near the sidewalk. *[above: Veterans Memorial Building floor plan (E and 2nd Street, Niles)]*



In 2000, Siegel and Strain Architects of Emeryville, were hired by Alameda County with the support of the City of Fremont. Seismic rehabilitation combined with accessibility and code upgrades recognized the historic and architecturally significant features of the original 1930 building. These historic features include the Lobby, the Auditorium with its maple floors, stenciled trusses, stage and metal lined, elevated Film Projection Room, the paneled Lodge Room linked by an Entry Hall to the Men's Clubroom and its intact fireplace. The unique indoor pillared Loggia links this interior hierarchy of 1930 spaces with the updated 1951 dining wing.

TIMELINE:

- 1842 Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda grant to Don Jose de Jesus Vallejo
- 1853 County of Alameda created from parts of Contra Costa and Santa Clara Counties
- 1856 James and Lucy Shinn settle on east side of Alameda Creek, near Vallejo's Mills
- 1857 Vallejo grant confirmed by President James Buchanan, deed signed January 1, 1858
- 1863 Southeast portion of Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda acquired by Jonas Clark
- 1869 Central Pacific Railroad completes transcontinental railroad through Niles Canyon
- 1871 Shinn Nursery operation begun with stock from the Rock and Fox Nursery in San Jose
- 1877 Jonas Clark authorizes broker to sell Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda parcels, including to the Southern Pacific Railroad (200 ac.) and the California Nursery Company (400 ac.)
- 1884 Southern Pacific Railroad acquires Central Pacific Railroad and

registers plat for Niles

- 1888 Sale of Shinn Nursery stock and goodwill to Trumbull and Beebe, San Francisco
- 1880's James Shinn acquires prime agricultural land between Niles plat and the California Nursery Company. Crops include pear orchard, sugar beets and strawberry rhubarb
- 1891 Chautauqua Circle begins providing cultural events for over three decades in Niles
- 1898 Niles Improvement Club formed by Joseph Clark Shinn
- 1900 A.J. Mayhew and J.C. Shinn begin the Niles Water Company
- 1901 Suburban Electric Company brings its lines through Niles and Niles Railroad Depot built
- 1910 Western Pacific Railroad constructed through Niles Canyon,
- 1910 Niles has over 1,500 people, 3 churches, 3 hotels, the county bank, jail and courthouse
- 1911 Niles School District parcel on School Street bought from Shinns and Southern Pacific
- 1912 Niles Grammar School moves from Old Town to the New Town
- 1914 Niles Sanitary District formed
- 1921 Niles Chamber of Commerce is re-organized and provides leadership for locating the Veterans Memorial Building in Niles
- 1921 Laura Thane Whipple chairs a Niles Memorial Day event with luncheon, parade, band, tree planting, guns in the schoolyard and patriotic speeches. This lead to local veterans organizing Township Post No. 195, with a charter finalized in 1923.
- 1927 Veterans Memorial Halls in Alameda County funded by tax rate

for county towns that can provide publicly owned or donated land for the construction of memorial buildings.

- 1927 Shinn family conditionally donates land for a Veterans Memorial Building in Niles
- 1928 Ford family donates Jane Clough Memorial Library for the people of Niles
- 1930 Niles Veterans Memorial Building is dedicated on May 30, 1930 as memorial to those who fought in World War I – to those who fell and to those who survived.
- 1930 E Street and Second Street constructed through pear orchards.
- 1937 Charter dinner for the new Niles Rotary Club held Dec. 9, 1937
- 1939 Niles Grammar School rebuilt to latest seismic standards, this time facing towards Second Street. Temporary classrooms take over part of the Veterans Memorial Building.
- 1942 Red Cross blood bank in the Niles Veterans Memorial Building during World War II
- 1951 Veterans Memorial Building at Niles expanded with a dining wing replacing former patio
- 2000 Siegel and Strain Architects, Emeryville, undertake seismic rehabilitation of the building, a cooperative effort by the County of Alameda and Fremont Redevelopment Agency