



Charlene Duval, Executive Secretary

cduval@sourisseauacademy.org

Leilani Marshall, Archivist

lmarshall@sourisseauacademy.org

Phone: 408-808-2064

Sourisseau Academy

Smith-Layton Archive presents:

New Almaden: A Model Company Town

by Charlotte Sunseri

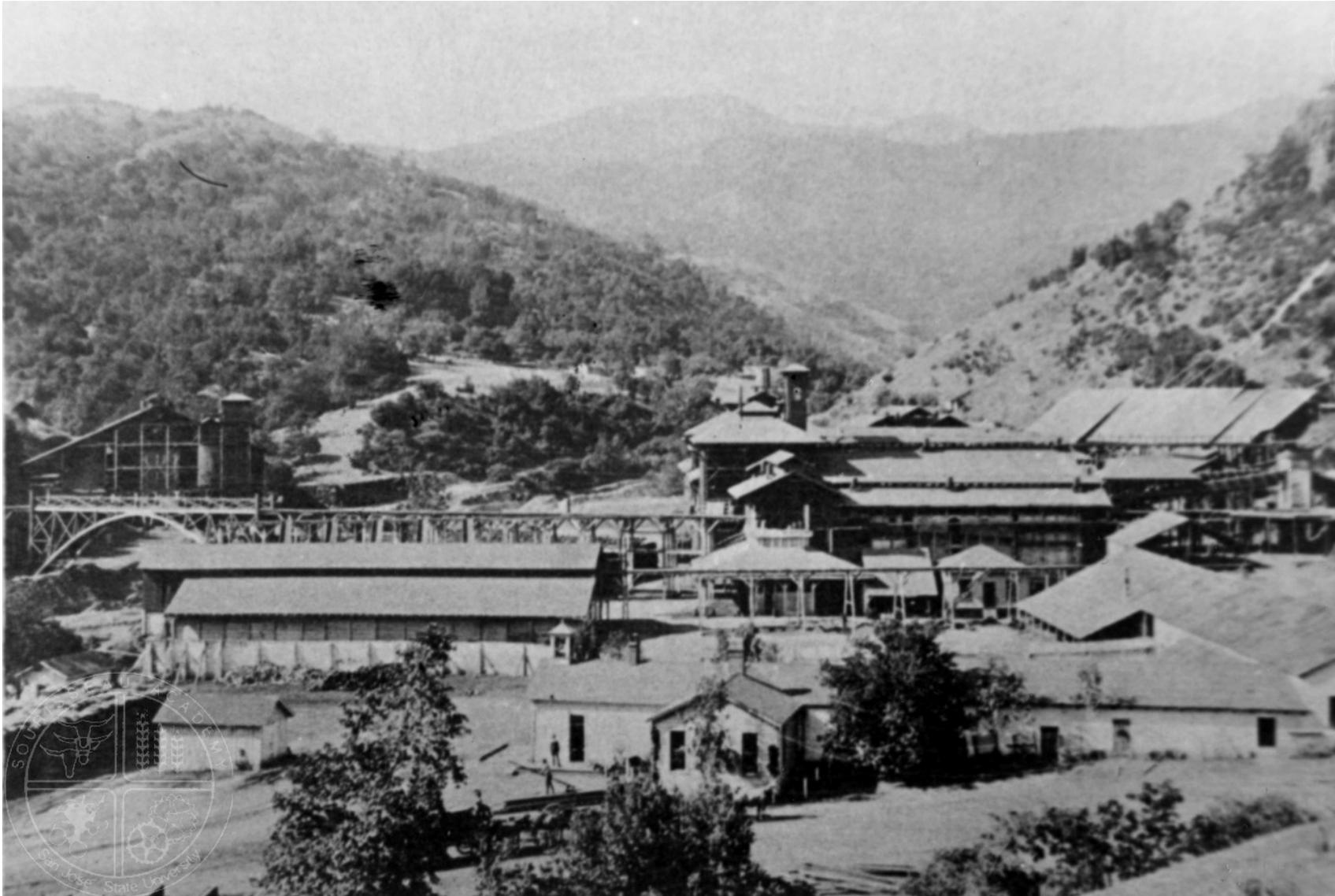
Les Amis (The Friends)

March 2018

Sponsored by Linda L. Lester

Your donations help us purchase historic photos. Thank you!

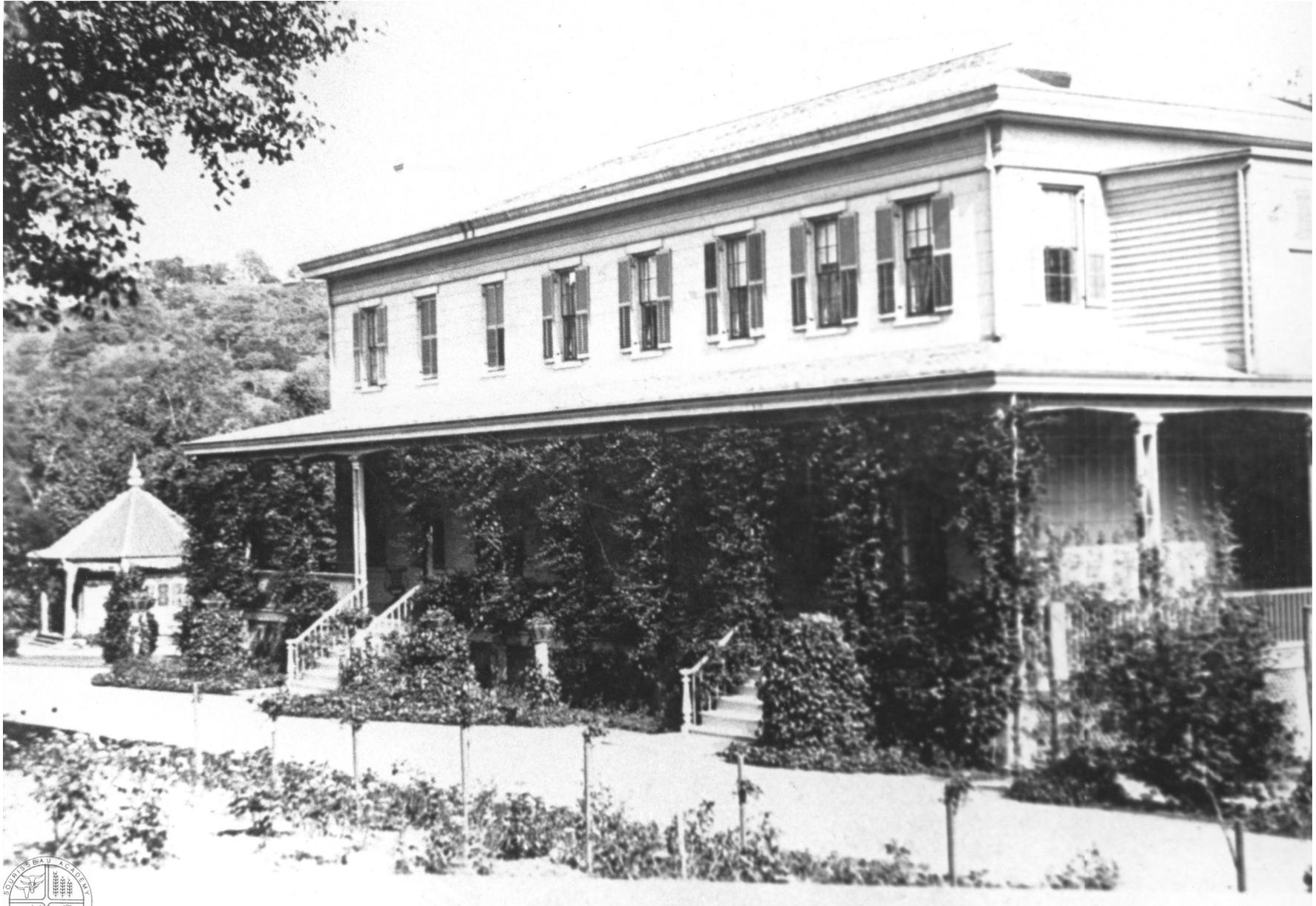
<http://www.sourisseauacademy.org/>



[31] **New Almaden, 1845-1976.** Mercury—also known as quicksilver or cinnabar, and used to extract gold and silver ore—was a valuable commodity in the Gold Rush of the American West. The Almaden Quicksilver Reduction Works and its seven associated mines were the second-largest producers of mercury in the world and were named for the mercury-producing Almaden mines of Spain. Today, their company town, known as the Hacienda, is a National Register Historic District. The Santa Clara County Almaden Quicksilver County Park encompasses the area where the mineshafts were located and the sites of English Camp and Spanishtown. This area is a National Historic Landmark.



[32] **Mining the Wealth of Mercury.** The mines at New Almaden began operation in 1845 when the cinnabar ore deposits on the Rancho San Vicente property of Jose Reyes Berreyesa were identified as containing mercury and sulfur. The success of the California Gold Rush relied on the ready supply of quicksilver from New Almaden, yet the wealth produced at this mine far exceeded the fortune of any gold mine in the American West. One mine, the Randol Shaft, produced \$10 million by 1896—with inflation, that would now be worth over \$275 million! This image reflects New Almaden in 1847 when Baron, Forbes & Company was working the mine.



[33] **Casa Grande, c1880.** New Almaden's wealth and power was embodied in its orderly company town and imposing Casa Grande, which at 18,000 square-feet was easily the largest house in the town. Built in 1854, this two-story structure with a wrap-around veranda housed the company's general manager and was a space for hosting company events.



[34] **Automobilists Having Lunch at the Casa Grande, 1908.** Casa Grande was the focal point of the surrounding Hacienda neighborhood, which contained orderly rows of cottages for the company's residents, nestled along Alamitos Creek. Even after the mine's heyday, the grounds of Casa Grande hosted elegant picnic luncheons and croquet for middle-class and elite society. This photo was taken during the Santa Clara County Automobile Association's outing to the Hacienda in 1908.



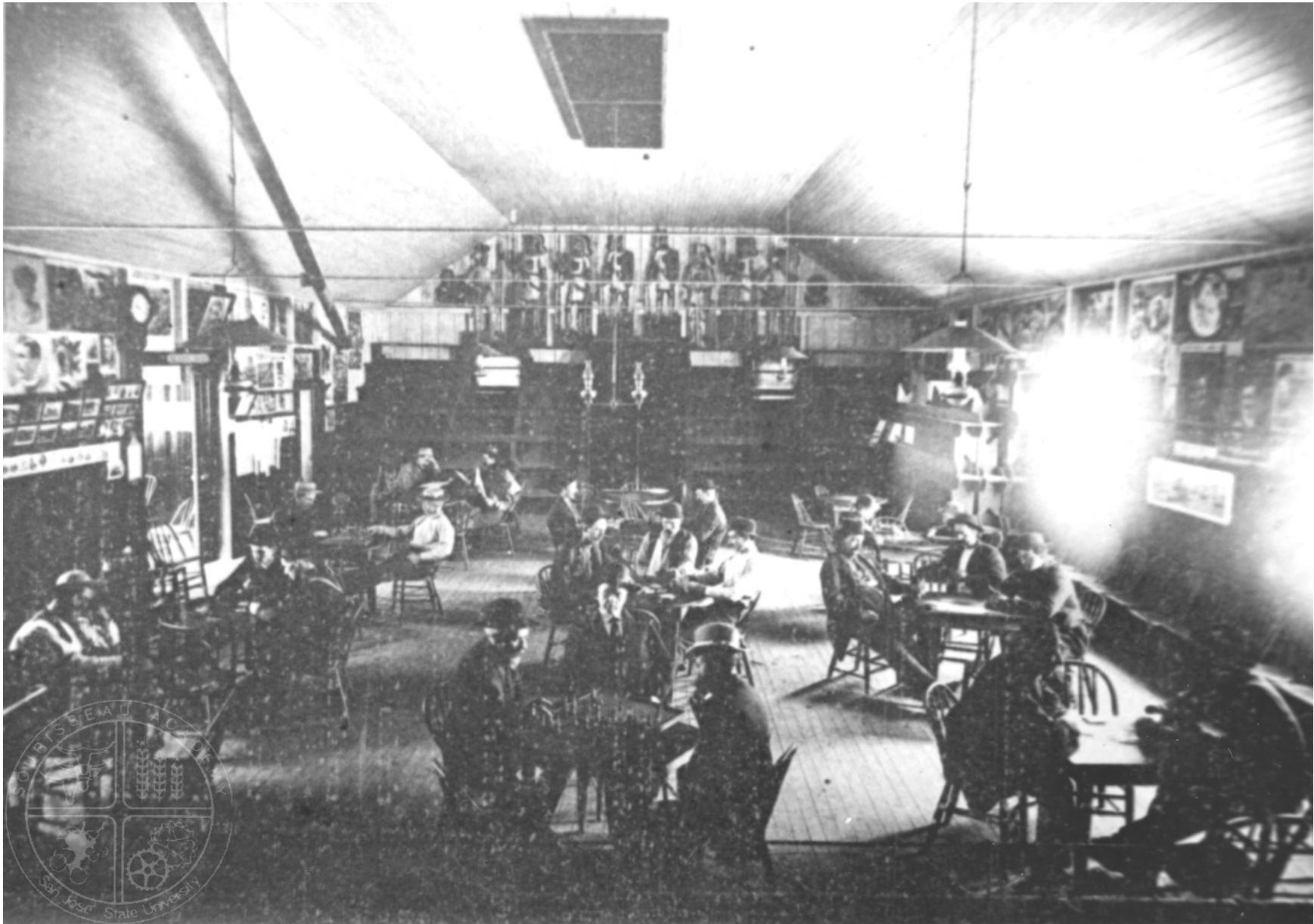
[35] **Casa Grande's Pagoda and Garden, c1880.** The grounds of the manager's residence, the Casa Grande, included a Chinese "pagoda" (actually a gazebo) that was a gift of the emperor of China in the 1850s. There was also a five-acre garden landscaped by horticulturalist John McLaren (famous for his work as superintendent of Golden Gate Park), and a picturesque lagoon. This control of nature symbolized power inherent in the upper class and naturalized differences between management and blue-collar workers.



[36] **Randol's Model Town for Company Capitalism.** Mercury production peaked and the New Almaden villages flourished during the tenure of James Randol as the company's general manager, from 1870-1892. This 1889 image shows the Quicksilver Mining Company officials. Randol created a beneficent company town, which was both progressive and authoritarian in its design. This social idealism and paternalism fostered company-sponsored institutions, which controlled the cultural and social lives of Randol's employees while boasting of the improvement to workers' health and class advancement.



[37] **Connections to the Outside World, c1885.** During the height of Randol's model company town, a daily stagecoach and later a railroad connected the industrial center to other points in California. For the working-class men and women of New Almaden, the stark idealism of the town must have felt like a world unto itself and exaggerated the distance between this company town and San Jose, only 11 miles to the north.



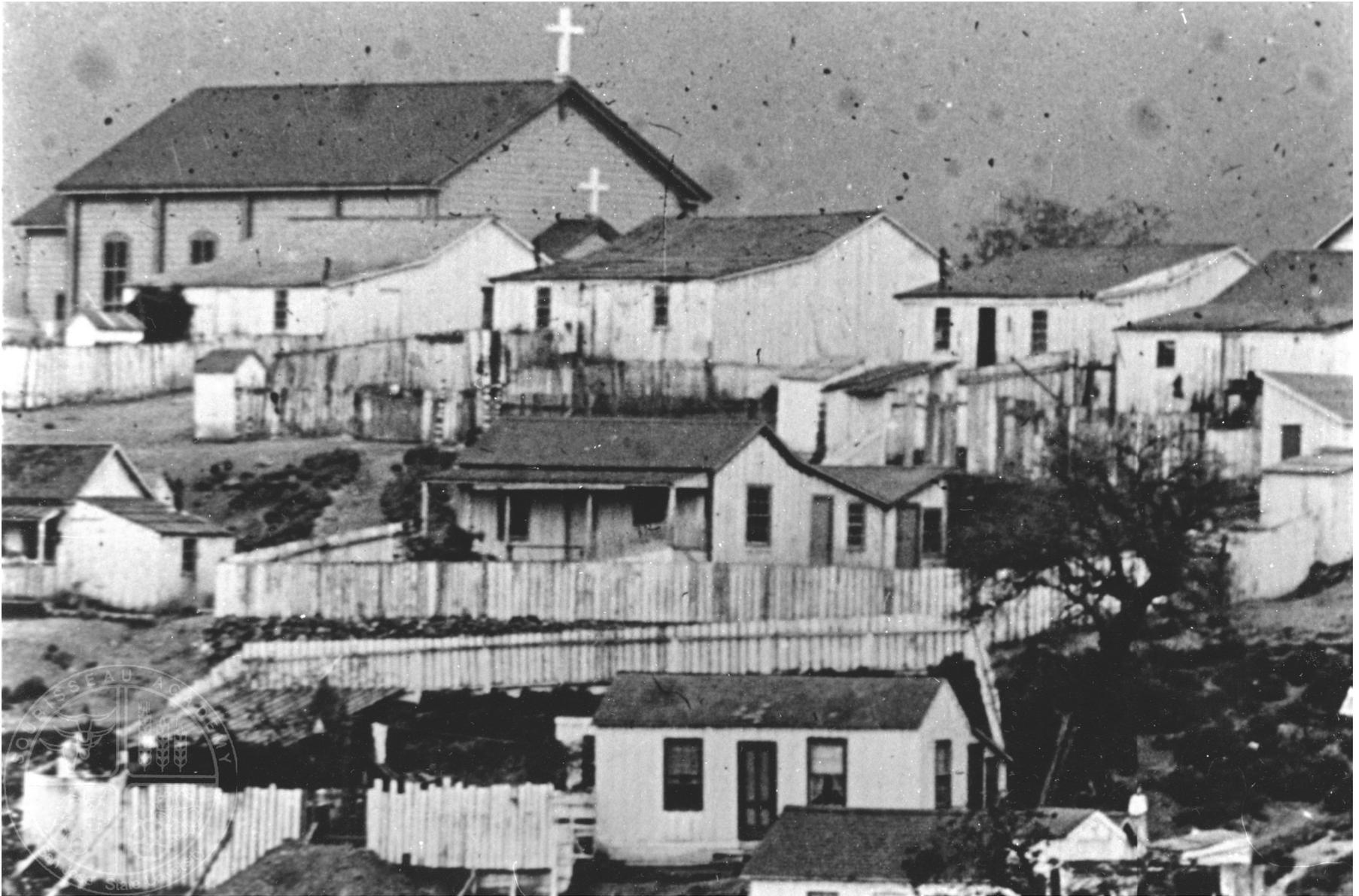
[38] **Social Life of Miners.** By 1880, there were 205 residents in the Hacienda, including company officials and some teamsters and laborers. In 1886, the Helping Hand Club Room was built to provide a reading room, dance hall, and gathering place for miners and their families, all within the surveillance of the management.



[39] **English Camp, c1865.** The housing for laborers was close to the industrial space on the Hill and set apart from management housing in the Hacienda. By 1865, the company towns were home to 1,800 residents and contained over 700 buildings. English Camp, also known as Englishtown, was a neighborhood developed for English-speaking working class, particularly the many Cornish miners. Miners rented rooms in a boardinghouse or cottages for their families. These company-owned houses went for up to \$10/month.



[40] **Hard Working Men.** The working-class miners of New Almaden included diverse ethnicities and places of origin. Although most of the New Almaden company's officers were European or Euro-American, as was typical in racial and class structures of the time, half of the skilled laborers were American-born Anglos while nearly half of the unskilled laborers were Spanish or Mexican. Experienced mining workers from Cornwall and from Chile were also recruited for the effort.



[41] **Spanishtown, c1885.** Spanishtown, also known as Mexican Camp, was arranged along the slope of Deep Gulch. This area included a church, school, and homes of the many single Spanish, Mexican, and Chilean miners, as well as a few families. The redwood homes in this neighborhood were rented from the company for \$5/month. More self-sufficient miners chose to rent land for \$.50/month and erect their own dwellings in the empty lot.



[42] **Childhood in New Almaden.** Many children attended the one-room Spanish school, shown here in 1885 with their teacher in the doorway. This school taught four grades; after fourth grade pupils were taught in Englishtown's school. While this school is no longer standing, the ruins of Englishtown's school remain. Children were taught the basic subjects as well as technical skills and trades like blacksmithing, cooking, and carpentry.



[43] **Company Store, 1862.** Spanishtown and English Camp were separated by a group of commercial and professional offices. The main commercial space was a company store, which sold staples for cash or boletos (payroll credits). One could imagine the danger of running up debts at such a business! The economic control in a company town reminds us of the reality behind the song *Sixteen Tons* lyrics, which lament: “I owe my soul to the company store.”