

# LIME KILN CHRONICLES

Newsletter of the *Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District*  
University of California, Santa Cruz

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## ***Friends News***

It is with great pleasure that I report that our initial membership drive has been well received. Many thanks to those who have joined the Friends.

We have accomplished much since the idea for this friends group was hatched a year ago. We have established a board of directors and advisory board, chosen officers, drafted bylaws, created a website, published this first newsletter, received formal recognition by the University, and have begun working closely with University staff, students, and community groups. Most importantly, we have begun to take steps towards our immediate goals of saving the historic cabins, cooperage, and hay barn, and establishing educational programs for school children and adults.

We hope you enjoy this inaugural issue of our newsletter. In the coming years we will be sharing news of our progress as an organization and publishing articles by students, historians, and others chronicling the district's diverse and fascinating history.

If you are reading this newsletter and are not yet a member of the Friends, will you consider joining? We depend on community support to help preserve the district's history for future generations.

Frank Perry

*President of the Board of Directors*

## ***Bricks Tell of 16,000-mile Voyage***

The bricks lining our lime kilns are a special kind known as firebricks or refractory bricks. They differ from common red bricks in that they are yellowish in color, slightly larger in size, and, most importantly, can withstand the great heat of the kilns without expanding or cracking. Anyone looking closely at the bricks exposed around the kiln doorways quickly notices that they have names pressed into them, names such as COWEN, SNOWBALL, and T CARR. Firebricks, unlike common bricks, are often "branded" to advertise the maker.

In the late 1800s and very early 1900s most of our firebricks were imported from Europe, primarily from Great Britain. The COWEN bricks were made by Joseph Cowen & Co., Blaydon-on-Tyne, England. SNOWBALL was made by James and George H. Snowball, Swalwell, County Durham, England. T CARR indicates Thomas

(continued on p. 2)



Photo by F. Perry

This COWEN brick is a "key" brick, the shape used to make an arched doorway.

**HENRY COWELL & CO.,**  
 MANUFACTURERS OF  
**SANTA CRUZ LIME,**  
 Dealers in Bituminous Rock,  
 Importers of English, Portland and Rose-  
 dale Cement, Plaster, Hair, Marble Dust,  
 Fire Tile, Fire Bricks, Fire Clay, Etc.  
**211-213 DRUM ST.**  
 Between Clay and Washington.

(Bricks... continued from p. 2)

Carr & Son, Newcastle-on-Tyne, England. All were shipped 16,000 miles around Cape Horn to the West Coast. It was surprisingly inexpensive to send bricks by ship back then because they doubled as ballast. In fact, it was cheaper to ship British firebricks by sea to California than to ship American firebricks by railroad from the Midwest.

Bob Piwarzyk, a member of the Friends advisory board, has been studying local lime kilns and historic firebricks since the 1970s. Bob has recorded eight different brands from within the Historic District. At present Bob is working with brick historian Karl Gurcke (a cultural resource specialist with the National Park Service) on an index of British firebricks imported into North America.

According to Dr. Gurcke, in his book *Bricks and Brickmaking*, old bricks can be an important source of historical information and "can give clues to how, where, and even when they were made." Although Henry Cowell did not manufacture firebricks, he sold imported bricks along with other masonry supplies. Advertisements for Cowell's company and similar companies in the late 1800s almost always mentioned firebricks.

Earlier this year the British Brick Society (yes, they actually have one) published an article by Terence Paul Smith titled "Some Sources of Firebricks Used in London." The author noted that COWEN bricks were exported as far away as "Santa Cruz, California, and to New Zealand." Smith had accessed Bob's list of Santa Cruz area firebricks available on the Santa Cruz Public Library website. Thanks to the internet, brick historians on both sides of the Atlantic have been learning more and more from each other as they try to piece together the nineteenth century international brick trade. Needless to say, Bob was very pleased that his research is being used by others. "I think there will be a lot more exchanges of information in the future."

#### Further Reading:

Gurcke, Karl. *Bricks and Brickmaking: A Hand Book for Historical Archaeology*. Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1987.

Piwarzyk, Robert W. "The Bricks of Santa Cruz." Santa Cruz Public Libraries website (<http://www.santacruzpl.org/history/work/limebric.shtml>)

Smith, Terence Paul. "Some Sources of Firebricks Used in London." *British Brick Society Information* 106, February, 2008.



Photo by F. Perry

### Lime Kiln Historian Visits Campus

Earlier this year, Dr. Christopher Andreae, a lime kiln historian from Canada, visited the Historic District. He wanted to compare our kilns with those in Ontario and learn about our preservation efforts. He reports that most of the historic kilns in Ontario are continuous kilns and somewhat younger than ours. We wish Chris success with his research efforts and thank him for sharing some historical references on lime making.

### Cabrillo Clubs Donate to Restoration

Our sincere thanks to the Cabrillo Civic Clubs of California for their donation towards restoration of the two remaining worker cabins. In the early 1900s these cabins were home to Portuguese immigrants who worked on the Cowell Ranch and at the lime works. The Cabrillo Clubs' donation is an important first step in our efforts to raise funds to restore these century-old cabins for use in educational programs. Members of the local Cabrillo Club #24 have also been placing temporary braces on the Hay Barn to stabilize it until funding becomes available for permanent repairs.





## *Cowell Ranch Memories:* **The Silva Family**

By Frank Perry

Although hundreds of people were employed making lime here over the years, very little is known about the personal stories of individual workers. Most were immigrants from Portugal, Italy, Ireland and other parts of Europe who labored at quarrying rock, chopping wood, making barrels, or firing the kilns. These people probably thought their lives were rather ordinary and not very interesting. Today, of course, it would be absolutely fascinating to know more about what life was like here long ago. Fortunately, one such story that has survived is that of the Silva family. Carlos Silva was a cooper (barrel maker) and blacksmith for Cowell during the 1920s. By this time Samuel Henry Cowell, son of Henry Cowell, ran the Cowell company. Recently, Jo Ann Cacace, Silva's granddaughter, generously shared some of the family stories passed down to her by her grandparents and mother.

Carlos Silva was born in 1893 on the island of Pico in the Azores. The Azores are an Atlantic archipelago 950 miles off the coast of Portugal. While still a boy, Carlos's family moved to the nearby island of Graciosa, where his father worked as a cooper.

As a young man, Carlos wanted to move to the United States where several of his sisters already lived. He was the oldest boy in a family of fifteen, although several of his siblings died as infants. Carlos did not have money for ship fare to the United States, so he took a job on a whaling ship in hopes that it would take him to America. This turned out to be a challenging task. He endured three successive voyages on whalers without once touching the American shore. On one of these, the captain was so abusive that Carlos and several others jumped ship in the Caribbean and hid in the jungle on an island. It was a month before another ship rescued them. Not until his fourth voyage did Carlos reach Boston.

After settling in Massachusetts, Carlos met Florzina Loba, another Azorean immigrant. Florzina, whose name meant "little flower," was born on Graciosa. The two married in 1917, and the following year their daughter, Marie, was born.

Carlos and Florzina disliked the cold New England winters and had heard of the mild climate in California. Around this time many Portuguese settled in the San Joaquin Valley and became farmers, but Carlos liked fishing and preferred living on the coast. He heard of a wealthy man named Cowell who would employ Portuguese. The Silva's friends and relatives had watched cowboy and Indian movies in the nickelodeons and thought that this was still what the West was like. They warned the young

couple not to go to California out of fear that they might be killed by Indians!

Ignoring this advice, the couple set out across country by train, which took a number of days. They had two-year-old Marie, and Florzina was expecting a second child. "You can just imagine what it must have been like on such a long trip, pregnant and with a two-year-old," says Jo Ann. But that was the least of their problems. When the Silvas arrived in Santa Cruz, they discovered to their horror that nearly all their possessions (clothes, dishes, flatware, and even photos) had been stolen. Thieves had cleverly opened their trunks and replaced their possessions with sawdust. All Carlos and Florzina had left were cloths they had taken in a satchel (the 1920 version of carry-on luggage) and a treadle sewing machine.

At first the family lived in a boarding house on Market Street owned by a cousin of Carlos. Soon, Cowell hired Carlos to work as a cooper and blacksmith. The family moved into a cabin at Cowell's lime kilns on Fall Creek near Felton. It was there that their second daughter, Lurina, was born.

A short time later the family moved to a cabin across High Street from what is now the entrance to the University. Today, it would be on the southwest corner of Bay and High. The cabin came with the job and had two rooms: a bedroom and a combination living room and kitchen. There were gaslights but no bathroom, only an outhouse. They did not have pets, except for a dog to keep away rats and weasels. There were at least eight family cabins in that general area of the ranch.



Marie (right) and Lurina Silva beside their house on the Cowell Ranch, 1923. Photo courtesy of Jo Ann Cacace.

(Cowell Ranch Memories, continued)

Carlos continued to work each week at the lime kilns on Fall Creek while the family stayed in Santa Cruz. He took the train to Felton Sunday night and returned either Friday evening or, if there was extra work to do, on Saturday.

Cowell moved his workers to different locations as needed. In the winter, when lime manufacturing slowed, Carlos spent more time at the cooperage in Santa Cruz (now part of the Historic District), building up a supply of barrels for the spring. This also enabled him to spend more time with his family.

Carlos assembled the lime barrels out of redwood staves held together with metal hoops. Redwood staves shrink in width as they dry, and there was not always time to season the wood, especially if there was a big order. In this case, since the lime was going to be used quickly, it did not matter so much if the barrels were green. Over time, however, cracks opened up between the staves as the barrels dried. Returned empty barrels that had been built green had to be disassembled and put back together more tightly before being reused.

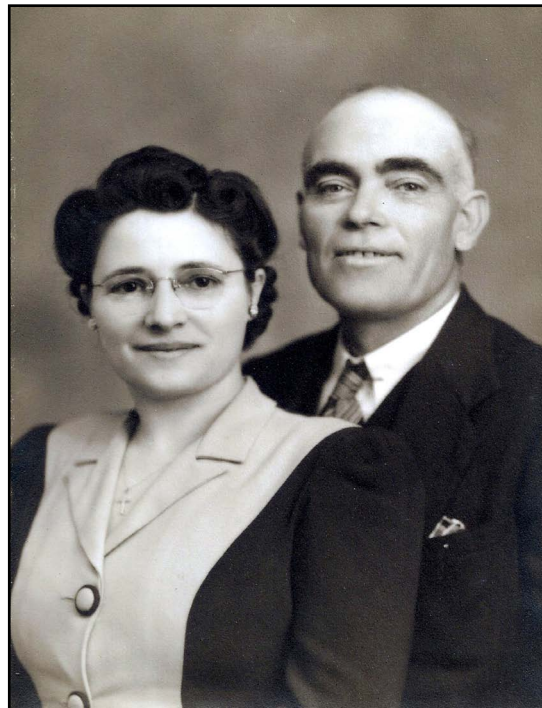
Cowell always had at least one cooper. When Cowell needed to boost barrel production to fill a large order of lime, he would bring together all the men with barrel-making skills and have a contest. This was usually in conjunction with a barbecue. The winner got bonus pay. Of course, the barrels had to be of good quality. It was not just speed that was important.

The Silvas kept pigs and chickens, and had their own vegetable garden. This was very important to Carlos. Carlos did not believe in lawns. If he was going to grow something, he wanted it to be something he could eat. This self-sufficiency helped insulate the family in later years during the Great Depression. They never went hungry.

They grew fava beans, kale, anise, turnips, potatoes, onions, and garlic, which he planted according to the seasons and the phases of the moon. Fruits popular among the Portuguese community were figs, grapes, and quince, all of which grew in the Azores. Jelly was made from the quince, and many different dishes from figs. Various alcoholic beverages were made from the grapes. Being a cooper, Carlos made his own wine barrels out of oak.

Soups were common at meals because they were inexpensive dishes that used vegetables and would make the meat go a long way. One kind was made with bread, beef, mint, and spices. Another had beans, potatoes, and cabbage.

The cabins that survive today were for single men, with up to three or four men per cabin. These workers ate their meals at the cookhouse. If the weather was



Carlos and Florzina Silva. Photo courtesy of Jo Ann Cacace.

good, social activities such as making music or playing cards were done outdoors. Of course, most of the time they were working—probably ten hours per day.

Everyone was paid in coin, and none of the men used banks. Yet, there were never any locks on the doors. Paper money was not trusted and, if there was a fire, could be destroyed. Coins would survive a fire or, if not, at least the melted gold and silver was still worth the amount of the coins.

All of the Portuguese men had nicknames. Carlos's nickname was "whistler" (in Portuguese) because he liked to whistle.

Carlos liked to tell the story of the time that Mr. Cowell had a horse up in the Bay Area that needed a special shoe and Carlos was recruited for the job. He got to ride in Cowell's personal railroad car and had to "dress up" for the trip, which meant wearing his good pair of overalls.

He often remarked on how "extremely hot" the kilns were. Although Carlos did not work directly with the kilns, everyone around there could feel the heat even from a distance. One time when he started swearing about something in Portuguese, his wife warned him that he was going to go to Hell for talking like that. "I've already been there," he said, referring to the great heat of the kilns.

Carlos Silva stayed with the Cowell company for at least ten years. He liked the fact that Mr. Cowell was very fair to his workers. One time Carlos got into a dispute with one of the supervisors about



(Cowell Ranch Memories, continued)

rebuilding a barn that had blown down in a wind storm. The supervisor wanted to rebuild the barn exactly the same way. Carlos said it should be oriented differently so a strong wind could blow through the barn, making it less likely to blow over. Mr. Cowell listened very carefully to both sides and determined that Carlos was right. Carlos felt that a lot of bosses would have simply sided with the supervisor and not taken the time to hear both arguments. "Mr. Cowell was the best boss I ever had," Carlos often remarked. Carlos didn't get along very well with bosses, so this was quite a compliment.

*Have a family story to share, or a photo of someone who worked at the lime works? Even small tidbits of information are important for us to preserve. People with information to share are urged to contact the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District, mail stop PP&C, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064 or email us at [limeworks@ucsc.edu](mailto:limeworks@ucsc.edu). Our phone number is (831) 459-1254.*

Photo by Joe Michalak



### *Matchbook Memorabilia*

From 1908 to 1946 the Cowell company operated a cement plant in Contra Costa County. The plant was just east of Mount Diablo, and the cement was sold under the name "Mt. Diablo Cement." Cowell manufactured lime at several locations in Santa Cruz County, all of it marketed as "Santa Cruz Lime." Lime from Santa Cruz County had a reputation for being of high quality, and several of the local lime companies advertised that their's was "Santa Cruz Lime."

*Have an interesting Cowell artifact? We'd love to hear about it. Contact us via email: [limeworks@ucsc.edu](mailto:limeworks@ucsc.edu).*

## *The Two Henry Cowells*

To residents of Santa Cruz County, the name Henry Cowell is a familiar one, thanks to the eponymous state park near Felton. Industrialist Henry Cowell (1819 to 1903) was best known during his lifetime for lime manufacturing operations at several locations in California and in Washington. Our Historic District was home to Cowell and his family from 1865 to 1879, and the five Cowell children attended local schools. Cowell's son, Samuel Henry Cowell, donated the land for the state park with the stipulation that it be named for his father.

Musicians, however, know of another Henry Cowell (1897 to 1965) who was an avant-garde composer, musical theorist, teacher, pianist, and publisher. This Henry Cowell was very influential in his field, and counted a young George Gershwin among his students.

With both men having identical names and both living in San Francisco for part of their lives, it should be no surprise that the two have sometimes been confused. For example, there was a case several years ago at a music concert when the music teacher introduced a piece by Cowell, "for whom our local park was named."

More troubling are errors committed to print, such as that in *A Companion To California*, published in 1978 by Oxford University Press and written by the late James D. Hart, then a professor at U. C. Berkeley and director of the University's Bancroft Library. Hart's book is a wonderful reference—a handy one-volume encyclopedia of California people, places, and events. Just about every public library in the state has a copy. Unfortunately, under Henry Cowell (the musician) Hart wrote: "California-born pianist and composer and member of the prominent pioneer Cowell family of Santa Cruz." In reality, the two Henry Cowells were not closely related—if at all.

Henry Cowell (the industrialist) was born in Massachusetts. His parents were also Massachusetts natives, and his grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War. Henry Cowell (the musician) was born in San Mateo County, California. His father was a recent immigrant from Ireland.

Hart's book has 3,000 entries, so one can hardly fault the author for making a few mistakes. He probably relied on a source that was also incorrect. In the revised edition of *A Companion to California* (U. C. Press, 1987), the author omitted the part about being related to the Cowells of Santa Cruz. In the introduction he explained that some entries had been "emended in important ways that make them different from the treatment in the 1978 edition."

Interestingly, Henry Cowell (the musician) had at least one connection to Santa Cruz County. The late composer Lou Harrison of Aptos studied under Cowell

(*The Two Henry Cowells*, continued)

and owned a piano that belonged to his famous teacher. It was an 1871 Steinway that had reportedly come by ship around The Horn. In the 1960s Harrison loaned the piano to some friends, the Jowers family, while they resided in the old Castro Adobe near Watsonville. It would be interesting to know what became of this instrument, even if it does have absolutely nothing to do with the other Henry Cowell.

*Further Reading:*

Barnes, Roger. *The Cowells of Wrentham*. Carmel, California; unpublished, 1972.

"Henry Cowell Musical Autobiography (April 6, 1961)" *Internet Archive* (<http://www.archive.org/details/HenryCowell>) Accessed October 9, 2008.

"Henry Cowell." *Wikipedia* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Cowell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Cowell)) Accessed October 9, 2008.

Paizis, Suzanne. *The Joaquin Castro Adobe in the Twentieth Century: From Earthquake to Earthquake*. Santa Cruz: distributed by Otter B Books, 2002.

Perry, Frank A., Robert W. Piwarzyk, Michael D. Luther, Alverda Orlando, Allan Molho, and Sierra L. Perry. *Lime Kiln Legacies*. Santa Cruz: Museum of Art & History, 2007.



## *Lime for the Rich and Famous*

Author Jack London was one of America's most successful writers in the early twentieth century. His books *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and *The Sea Wolf* remain well known today, even though written over a century ago. While doing research at Special Collections in UCSC's McHenry library, a curious link was discovered between the famous writer and Santa Cruz lime.

Very few business records from the Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company have survived, but Special Collections preserves a few, including the "H. Cowell Lime & Cement Co. Ledger, 1906-1914." This rare volume provides a fascinating peek into the company's operations. There are receipts from suppliers of sacks and bags; an inventory of barrels in the company warehouses; and lists of barrels used, barrels received, and barrels on hand. It takes a while to decipher some of the

abbreviations. For example, "MTY BBLS" means empty barrels. The records also list customers for its products, including sugar refineries, tanneries, and farmers.

In those days a barrel of lime cost \$1.75. Cowell gave customers a rebate of 20 to 30 cents for each returned barrel. These were then sent back to the lime-works for recycling.

Cowell recorded the name of each customer who returned barrels and the number returned. In March, 1913, Jack London returned 15 barrels at 20 cents each for a total of \$3.00.

It was during this period that London's magnificent "Wolf House," a 15,000-square-foot mansion on his ranch in Sonoma County, neared completion. It seems likely that the barrels of lime would have been purchased for interior plaster work. Tragically, the house burned down later that year, just weeks before London and his wife, Charmain, were to take up residence. Only the stone walls of the house survived, and their remains can still be seen at Jack London State Historic Park near Glen Ellen. Jack London died three years later.

Lime sold to the great novelist would almost certainly have come from Santa Cruz County. It may have been made at what is now the UCSC campus entrance, at nearby Rincon, or near Felton. Cowell operated kilns at all three sites in 1913.

Because the Cowell company was such an important supplier of lime, no doubt many noteworthy structures, including public buildings and homes of famous people, used Santa Cruz lime. Unfortunately, no comprehensive list of customers has been discovered.



Photo by F. Perry


Remains of the Wolf House, Jack London State Historic Park.

## *Join the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District*

Your membership donation will help to restore, preserve, and interpret this historic site.

All of our Friends receive invitations to special tours and events, biannual newsletter, opportunities to volunteer on restoration projects, and opportunities to be a docent for historic district tours.

In addition, memberships at the \$100 category or above receive benefits provided by the UC Santa Cruz Foundation, including their names in the annual Honor Roll of Donors, a subscription to UCSC Review, and invitations to campus and Friends Groups events.

Memberships are tax-deductible as allowed by law. UC Santa Cruz Foundation Federal Tax ID #23-7394590. 

### **Mission Statement**

*The mission of the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District is to aid in the documentation, restoration, preservation, and interpretation of the historic lime kilns and related structures and buildings of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District and other historic sites on the campus of the University of California, Santa Cruz.*

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## *The Lime Cabin Rose*

By Jill Perry

Older towns often have heritage roses growing on historic properties and in old cemeteries. Santa Cruz is no exception. Most such roses I have found in Santa Cruz are Tea roses (descendants of a couple of Chinese imports from the 1800s) and Ramblers (many dating from the early 1900s). Another group of roses popular throughout the 1800s is a class called the Hybrid Perpetuals. These resulted from crossing other Chinese imports with the roses native to Europe. (Our modern Hybrid Teas are the result of crosses between the Tea roses and the Hybrid Perpetuals.)

While Hybrid Perpetual roses are commonly found in other parts of California, such as the Gold Country, they are rarely found in our coastal areas due to their preference for a colder winter. Therefore it was a pleasant surprise to find that there is a Hybrid Perpetual still growing next to one of the historic lime worker cabins at the entrance to UCSC. A cutting from this rose was given to Mel Hulse who grew it into a plant that now resides in the San Jose Heritage Rose Garden.

At the Heritage, there is an area filled with identified Hybrid Perpetuals and, next to that, an area filled with found (but unidentified) Hybrid Perpetuals. Since we didn't know what this rose's original name was, we called it "Lime Cabin" and planted it with the other found roses. In walking through the garden, I have noticed that we have no identified rose variety



Photo by Jill Perry

The rose "Lime Cabin" in bloom.

that looks like it. But among the found roses there are several that I'm pretty sure are the same variety. One of these is called "Cerise Cup" and was originally found in the Pescadero cemetery, San Mateo County. One from Esparto (Yolo County) is called "Mrs. Parker's HP." Whatever its original name, "Lime Cabin" was obviously a popular rose at one time and capable of surviving with no summer water or any fertilizer in a number of climates in this state. Research into this rose is ongoing, and I hope that someday we will learn its proper name.

*Santa Cruz resident Jill Perry is curator of the San Jose Heritage Rose Garden, which has the largest public collection of heritage roses in the West.*

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