



# LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

## *Cowell Ranch Memories*

By Jim Burns

In an effort to document and interpret the history of the Cowell Lime Works, volunteers, staff, and students have acquired and studied many resources: deeds, old newspaper articles, census records, mining reports, and other important artifacts. In addition, a number of people have shared their rich memories through oral histories, providing important layers of intimacy often missing from official documents.

Barbara Wagner is one such person, generously agreeing to participate in an interview in which she recalled—often with great clarity—the years in which her father and grandfather worked at the once-bustling ranch and quarries in the hills above Santa Cruz.

Now a resident of Oregon, Wagner was born in Santa Cruz in 1937, approximately a dozen years after her father—George Silva—began working at the Cowell Ranch. Her father was one of the many men of Portuguese descent who worked there. In fact, her maternal grandfather—Manuel Quadros—also worked for the Cowells in the 1920s and helped build many of the

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L to R: Students Silvia Sosa and Claudine Lim with staff liaison Alisa Klaus and the history trunk.

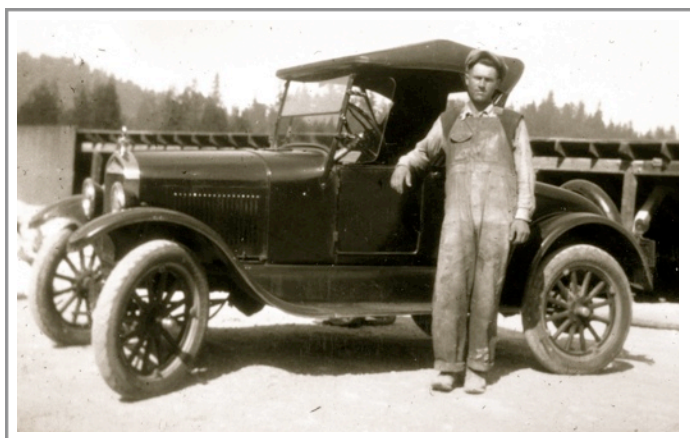
## *New Teaching Resource Available*

Santa Cruz County teachers and home-school parents can now check out a “history trunk” assembled by UCSC students. Included are archaeological artifacts from various sites in the historic district, samples of marble and other rocks for a rock identification activity, large prints of historic photos, “character cards” for students to learn about real people who worked in the lime industry in Santa Cruz or who lived at the Cowell Lime Works, and a Jeopardy-style “Lime in California History” game.

Claudine Lim initiated the history trunk project in Fall, 2012, then spent six months studying in Shanghai, where she also taught English to young Chinese children. When she returned to campus for her senior year, she continued to work on the history trunk. She intends to pursue a career in international relations.

Silvia Sosa, a history major with a minor in education, found that this project made her “think critically about how we present historical information.”

The trunk is aimed at 4th graders and is available at the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History for a small rental fee. Call the Museum at 831-420-6115 for details.



George Silva at Cowell's Rincon lime kilns, c1930. The car is a Ford Model T Runabout.



100 Years Ago . . .

## Municipal Wharf Had Early Ties to Cowell

Dedicated in December of 1914, the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf was a publicly-funded effort to rekindle Santa Cruz's glory days as a seaport and boost the local economy. It reached deep enough water to accommodate small freighters, and had a railroad track and large warehouse. Santa Cruzans hoped that by building the wharf, the Federal government would be prompted to erect a breakwater like the one completed at Los Angeles in 1910. Santa Cruz would then become an important shipping center like it had been a few decades earlier.

Santa Cruz County's vast lime rock reserve was one of the reasons for building the wharf. According to the *Santa Cruz Surf* (Nov. 26, 1913) a new wharf would open up world markets for Cowell and Santa Cruz lime. Prior to 1908, when the Cowell company had its own wharf, it had shipped lime as far away as China and Japan, said the *Surf*, but this volume had been shut off by lack of marine shipping facilities.

Cowell did, indeed, put the new wharf to use, at least initially. On May 4, 1915, the *Santa Cruz Evening News* reported, "Mr. Cowell enjoys a splendid wharfage rate on lime and he can ship from his kilns at Rincon by water at Santa Cruz without any other terminal charges." On July 8, 1915, the paper noted, "A [railroad] carload of lime and a carload of vinegar were shipped south over the municipal wharf this week."

Although there was some shipping during the wharf's formative years, the "great seaport" never materialized, and the wharf instead became a Mecca for fishermen and tourists. Today, few people realize that the wharf owes its origin—albeit in a small way—to the local lime industry.



Photo: Lisa Robinson

## Hiking the Rincon Road

A group of about twenty gathered in a parking lot off Highway 9 on October 5th to explore the route once used by Cowell to haul limerock to his kilns. The hike was organized by the San Lorenzo Valley Museum in Boulder Creek and co-sponsored by the Friends.

According to Frank Perry, who led the outing, the hike was inspired by photos from Barbara Wagner that were taken by her father, George Silva, in the 1920s and 1930s. "I wanted to see if we could relocate some of the areas where he took the pictures."

The group viewed the site where the kilns, cabins, and oil tanks were located, and matched up a tree in the parking lot to a tree in one of the old photos. "Trees can grow a lot in 90 years," said Frank.

The group then began the long up-hill hike to the upper quarry at UCSC. Although small sections of the original road bed have disappeared, most of it is still intact. Participants saw remnants of the old macadam pavement, the Reed-Lewis kilns used in the 1850s, and examples of hazelnut (used in the old days to make barrel hoops).

Panoramic view of  
the Reed-Lewis  
kilns along the  
Rincon Road.  
(photo by  
Lisa Robinson)





Courtesy of Barbara Wagner



Loading a Mack dump truck in the quarry, 1920s.

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barns and other buildings that were erected on the vast spread that overlooked the Monterey Bay.

"He never used nails," Barbara Wagner recalls of her grandfather's craftsmanship. "They interlocked [the timbers] either with pegs or like the Japanese do. What is it called? Dovetail?"

Manuel Quadros was in charge of ranch operations: farming, harvesting hay, tending the livestock. But it was the locking mechanisms he constructed to secure the building entryways that particularly impressed his young granddaughter. "His locks on the barn doors were like a Chinese puzzle where you push a button from underneath and it releases a bar that goes across and then when it drops you could open the door. I thought that was quite ingenious."

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Like the majority of the Portuguese who migrated to California, Manuel Quadros and his wife Anna had settled in the Central Coast early in the 20th century. Wagner recalls her grandfather saying that "the climate, terrain, flora, and fauna reminded him of his home in the Azores," the volcanic islands located in the North Atlantic Ocean some 800 miles west of continental Portugal. "Other Portuguese immigrants had already come and told him about [the similarities]."

Later, in the 1980s, when she herself traveled to the Azores, Wagner was able to validate Manuel Quadros's claims. While on the island of Graciosa, the island her grandfather had once called home, Wagner was struck by a familiar-looking site: the view of an adjacent island (she thinks it was Pico), which she says looked almost identical to the view of Monterey from the Buena Vista turnout on Highway 1.

The Buena Vista turnout, in fact, is not far from where Wagner's paternal grandparents—Manuel and Mary Silva—settled. In a valley in southern Santa Cruz County, they established and tended to a fertile apple orchard. Her grandfather on her father's side had also worked on a farm for the father of Watsonville icon Henry Mello, the former state senator.

But the majority of Wagner's childhood memories are quite naturally connected to the Santa Cruz home of her



Quarry workers.

Courtesy of Barbara Wagner



Family gathering. George Silva stands in the back on right.

Courtesy of Barbara Wagner

Courtesy of Barbara Wagner



Manuel and Anna Quadros, Barbara Wagner's maternal grandparents. Mr. Quadros worked for Cowell and later at the Kalkar quarry on Spring Street.

own parents, George and Emma Silva, which was located on Western Drive near the Jewish cemetery. The one-and-one-half acre parcel was located next to Emma's parents' home, and was the parents' wedding gift to young George and Emma.

From the perspective of their work at Cowell Ranch, upper Western Drive (then called Cliff Way) was a very convenient location, enabling her father and grandfather to walk a short distance up the hill to work.

Her father, George, was in charge of blasting at the limerock quarry, a job that consumed long hours, mostly on weekdays; her grandfather, Manuel, worked seven days a week because he also was responsible for feeding animals on the ranch.

Wagner remembers going—as a child as young as 3—with her grandfather to the ranch on Sundays. He would drop her off at the hay barn (now the Barn Theater), where she would entertain herself. She remembers hay being stored in the loft above the horses below. There was a vertical ladder going up to the loft and a chute for sliding back down to the ground floor. "It was good fun, climbing up the ladder and then sliding down with the hay," she says.

Wagner estimates that her father, grandfather, and other workers at the ranch earned 25 to 50 cents an hour. "It's amazing," she says. "For the salary that they were paid, the majority of these people were able to buy their own property and have their own home free and clear. You couldn't do that now."

Allowing her thoughts to travel back in time, Wagner also remembers Harry Cowell (son of Henry) and

believes he visited the ranch occasionally during the period when her family worked there. The name of Frank George, a foreman who some of the workers called an "ornery son of a gun," also surfaces. And she fondly reflects on George Cardiff, a "nice fellow" who later attended her own wedding.

The workers were a dedicated lot, toiling in the rain if necessary. It was pretty simple: if they didn't work, they

didn't get paid. Wagner recalls her grandfather working through a painful hernia and surviving an accident in which a dislodged rock struck him on the head as he worked in a quarry (he returned to work after reluctantly receiving stitches to close his wound).

As for the ranch itself, Wagner also recalls the lime kilns. She called them "ovens" because they looked like old-fashioned bread

ovens. She remembers wanting to explore the kilns from the inside, but feared her grandfather would not approve and would then not let her accompany him to work on Sundays.

Wagner has many photographs from that era, including one of a cook feeding chickens in front of the Cook House. There were various animal pens in the vicinity. She believes her father and grandfather may have eaten some meals there, especially on the days they hadn't taken a lunch to work.

She can also recall a small herd of buffalo on the ranch. She thinks their presence was partly an effort to protect the species from extinction.

Courtesy of Barbara Wagner



Emma Silva



Unloading a load of limerock at the Rincon kilns.

Courtesy of Barbara Wagner



Many of the men who worked at the Cowell Ranch, including her father, had side jobs. In George Silva's case, he tanned coyote and fox skins—jobs he often completed at the ranch.

It was work experience that served George well when he landed a better-paying job at Salz Tannery after World War II. "He split the hides," Wagner remembers. "I guess he'd be considered a tacker—where they tacked the hides on a frame." Having grown up on an apple farm, her father was also expert at growing apples. "When it came

vivid memories of living at home during World War II. She recalls there being military bases in and around Santa Cruz, and the enlisted men in the area were frequently on maneuvers—"it's scary when you have 50 or a 100 soldiers in unison with the guns up on their shoulders, marching down the street in front of you. My dog and I would go down to the cellar and hide until we knew the troops were gone." The wine stored there often proved to be just the tonic for her fears, she says, laughing at the memory.

Raised Catholic, Wagner accompanied her mother to Holy Cross Church every Sunday. Her father didn't go, believing that "if he went in the church it was going to fall down because he wasn't a good person," she says. "But that wasn't so; that was his excuse."

Wagner attended Laurel School (K-6), Mission Hill (7-9), and Santa Cruz High School (10-12) and also had a robust life within Santa Cruz's Portuguese community. "We belonged to the C.P.D.E.S.—you know, the Portuguese organization there on Evergreen [Street]. At the time, there wasn't a

hall there. My father belonged to the I.D.E.S, which was another Portuguese lodge."

In the early 1950s, Wagner was twice elected her community's queen—once for the C.P.D.E.S. and another time when the I.D.E.S convention came to town. The positions represented a commitment of "every Sunday, from Easter until roughly mid-October, traveling north and south, east and west of the state of California, representing Santa Cruz to all the other towns that were having their celebrations."

While Wagner's stint as royalty may have left her road weary, it's clear that the experience only enhanced her abilities as a storyteller. The experience was "good for developing social attributes as well as personality, poise," she says. "If I had to do it all over again, I'd do it."

Silo behind Barn G.  
Carriage House in  
distance.



Courtesy of Barbara Wagner



Courtesy of Barbara Wagner

Cooperage and worker cabins near what is now the UCSC campus entrance, late 1920s or 1930s.

to apples and apple trees, people from around Santa Cruz County used to call on him to come and prune and graft their apple trees," Wagner adds.

Wagner's mother, Emma, also was employed outside the home, working the press at local dry cleaners—first at Mission Cleaners (later the site of Adams, Levin, and Bosso at the foot of Mission Hill) and then at Pacific Dry Cleaners on Pacific Avenue.

Born only a few years before World War II began, Wagner thinks she may have been only four years old when her mother went to work. "So my grandmother did the baking and cooking; when my mother came home, things were pretty well done for her," Wagner says. "My grandmother was a marvelous cook; she made her own bread, and it looked like cake because it would rise so high."

"We were quite fortunate that we didn't have to buy a heck of a lot because we raised practically everything," Wagner says. "My mother sewed all our clothes; my grandmother made our sweaters. So we lived conservatively, but it was good. I'd do it all over again," she says, a phrase that she repeats during the course of the interview.

Although she was very young at the time, Wagner has



Branding at the Cowell Ranch, circa 1955. Left to right: John Strong, unidentified veterinarian, George Lorenzana, unidentified, and Johnny Drummond. In the distance (L to R) are the Hay Barn (now being restored), unidentified building, Blacksmith Shop (behind truck), and a worker cabin. (Photo courtesy of Les Strong)

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