



# LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

## *On the Eve of UCSC*

By Frank Perry

In the 1950s and early 1960s only deer and cattle roamed across the hills where university students soon would arrive. A while back I was fortunate in being able to interview cattleman Les Strong, who still remembers that period well. Les began his involvement with the Cowell Ranch in 1950 and continued until the early 1960s when the University acquired the property. Now a resident of Idaho, Les generously shared his memories of the ranch and its people.

It all began in 1950 when Joe Netto, Cowell Ranch Foreman, came out to Les's place on 30th Avenue in Live Oak to see if he would come up and cut some hay for them. It was May, and Les had just finished cutting volunteer hay in fields near Aptos, the Santa Cruz west side, and at the Capitola Airport.

"Normally they planted 250 acres of hay, but that year the barns were all full and they only planted about 22 acres. Their normal hay man wouldn't come in. So I started in 1950 putting up hay, and I did that until the University bought the place."

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Photo: Isabella Anderson

Students screen soil for historic artifacts.

## *UCSC Students Dig Into History*

This spring UCSC archaeology students are again conducting an excavation within the Historic District. This year is a little different from past years in that it is being done as an official class through the Anthropology Department. Pat Paramoure, who did her master's thesis on the archaeology of one of the worker cabins, is the instructor.

The class began in early April and will run into June. There are 12 students, 3 assistants, and one volunteer. The main purpose of the class is to give students hands-on experience in archaeology. They are learning about proper excavation techniques, cleaning and cataloging artifacts, and writing archaeological reports. In addition, the project will no doubt shed further light on the history of the district.

The students are excavating where one of the west cabins was located. According to oral history, these cabins were used by Italian immigrants, while the cabins on the east hillside were used by Portuguese. The students will be comparing artifacts from the two sites as part of their analysis.

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Photo courtesy of Les Strong

Group of riders at the Cowell Ranch, 1950s. Les Strong is on the far right. Large barn is now called Barn G.

100 Years Ago . . .

## Kilns Convert to Oil

"Some people who have watched the steady diminution of the woodland on the Cowell ranch have worried about the time when the fuel supply should be exhausted. Now comes crude oil when the trees are far gone, and both fuel and rock promise to be inexhaustible. . . . The limestone here reaches 200 feet in depth, and sixty years of quarrying has only scratched the surface."

—Santa Cruz Surf, September 13, 1915

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Thanks to support from memberships and donations, The Friends was able to purchase some of the tools needed by the class. These will be used in future years, too.

Members of the Friends are cordially invited to an "Open Hole Day" on Saturday, June 6, from 10 a.m. to noon. The students will be giving tours of the archaeological excavations and sharing what they learned. Visitors may park in the Barn Theater Parking lot or in the lot that is just to the left as you enter Carriage House Road from Coolidge Drive. Walk over towards the reconstructed Hay Barn and a student will direct you to the nearby dig.



Photo: Isabella Anderson

The students have already unearthed some keys to the past—in this case, literally a key.



Photo: Isabella Anderson

## Alumni Tours

Some forty people were treated to a special tour of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District for Alumni Weekend on Saturday, April 25. The tour was one of several dozen events that weekend, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the University. While Alumni Weekend is an annual event, the activities were especially well attended this year because of the anniversary.

Friends board president Frank Perry entertained participants with some of the growing collection of fascinating stories from the district's rich history. "I try to make the tours both educational and entertaining," he says. "If people have a good time as well as learn some new things, then they will want to support our mission to preserve the rich history of this site."

UCSC students Isabella Anderson and Ariel Kelly assisted with Frank's tour, and archaeology volunteer Elizabeth Tjoa-Cole gave a short talk to the group about the student excavation.

Friends vice president Cynthia Mathews participated in tours of the Quarry Amphitheater, sharing historic photos of the quarry and inviting alumni to join our Friends group.



Photo: Isabella Anderson



## "Bring Back the Quarry" Campaign

The UCSC campus has many special places. One of these is the Quarry Amphitheater. "I think it's beautiful, breathtaking," said Campus Architect Emeritus and Friends board member Frank Zwart in an interview last fall. "It always reminds you of where you are, surrounded by the campus's natural splendor, its history, and an extraordinary piece of landscape architecture."

Rock there was quarried to make lime as early as the 1850s. The quarry did not reach its massive size, however, until the twentieth century when it became the source of limerock for Henry Cowell's new kilns at Rincon. Those kilns and the quarry shut down in 1946.

Author Peggy Townsend, writing for the UCSC Newscenter, takes up the university part of the history:

*The idea that a gaping hole could be recycled into something useful—even beautiful—seems to first have been mentioned in 1962 by pioneering landscape architect Thomas Church, who played a major role in the design of UC Santa Cruz.*

*It was four years later, however, that Dean McHenry wrote to Church pitching his own ideas for the site. UCSC's first chancellor envisioned concerts, lectures, "pageants and dramas."*

*Church, apparently busy, turned over design of the site to his longtime colleague, and former UC Berkeley faculty member, Robert Royston.*

*Royston, one of the most influential landscape architects of his generation, was known for designs that were modern, dynamic, and human-centered. His plans for the amphitheater, which would go on to win an award from the American Society of Landscape Architects, reflected his interest in applying principles of modern art to shaping the landscape.*

*Sections of seats were angled and asymmetrical, and the space between benches varied from row to row. A boulder was left to rise from one side of the stage, while a stand of Oregon maples rimmed the back of the space. Completed in 1967, the amphitheater cost \$82,600.*

Where explosions once jarred boulders loose from the quarry walls, music, lectures, and cheers from graduations soon echoed through the chasm. Famous speakers have included *Roots* author Alex Haley, Congresswoman Bella Abzug, and architect Buckminster Fuller. Film director (and part time Santa Cruz resident) Alfred Hitchcock received an honorary doctorate there.

Sadly, the amphitheater had to be closed in 2006 because of safety issues and lack of funding for repairs. A fundraising campaign is now well under way to restore

Photo by Brian F. Bagley



Author Alex Haley speaking at the Quarry Amphitheater in May, 1978.

the theater to its former glory and bring it up to modern building codes and standards. If you would like to help, contact Linda Navone, 831-415-2666 (lindan@ucsc.edu).

### Save the Date . . .

## THE COWELL SESQUICENTENNIAL

EXPLORE 150 YEARS OF HISTORY AT UCSC

Displays, Demonstrations, Lectures

Learn about lime making, redwood ecology, the Ohlone, archaeology, historic building restoration, the Farm, and much more.

Hands-on activities for children and adults

**Saturday, October 24, 2015**

**11 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

**at the Hay Barn**

(exact time subject to change)

*It was 150 years ago, in 1865, that Henry Cowell bought part of the Santa Cruz lime business of Davis & Jordan, setting in motion a chain of events that led to the opening of UCSC 100 years later.*

Photo by Frank Zwart



## Hay Barn Rises Again

On March 21 hundreds of spectators watched as the framework to the Hay Barn was assembled and lifted into place. Like the original barn, the large timbers are held together with mortise-and-tenon joints and wooden pegs.

The timbers are Douglas Fir like the originals, and were carefully selected by Karl Bareis of Santa Cruz Timberframes in Bonny Doon. Bareis and his crew meticulously cut each joint in advance. Although they had never before been together, the parts fit together almost perfectly. Only a few needed a little trimming and extra persuasion. A giant crane lifted the larger pieces into place while workers connected the joints.

Some of the original timbers were re-used, and these can be distinguished from the new wood by their dark color. About half the siding was also re-used, most of it installed on the west side. The reconstructed barn will have some modern amenities, such as a slab floor, insulation, and restrooms.

Members of the Friends are encouraged to stop by and take a look at the progress on through the summer. A dedication ceremony will be held in September. In October, the Friends will be holding a special event there: the Henry Cowell Sesquicentennial. See more on page 3.

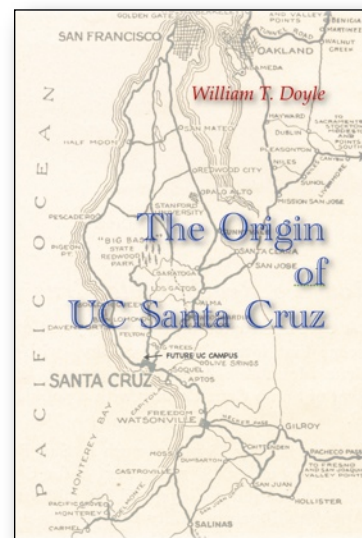
Photo by Frank Zwart



## New Book Traces UCSC Beginnings

Ever wonder why the University of California decided to locate a campus in Santa Cruz? That question is the subject of a new book titled, *The Origin of UC Santa Cruz*, by William T. Doyle.

"The story that unfolds on these pages captures the dreams of a generation of Santa Cruz County visionaries who joined forces with educators, elected officials, community and business leaders, and others to do something extraordinary," writes Chancellor George Blumenthal in the foreword. "You'll read about the high-stakes contest between Santa Cruz boosters and their counterparts in Santa Clara County, who dearly wanted a UC campus of their own in the Almaden Valley. We know which visionaries emerged triumphant, and their legacy thrives today, on campus and among the thousands of students, faculty, staff, and alumni whose lives have been transformed by this special place."



The book is divided into three parts. In Part 1, the author gives the background story of plans in the 1950s to build more UC campuses and how the property was acquired from the S. H. Cowell Foundation. In Part 2, he chronicles the site selection process from 1956 to 1961. Part 3 is composed of short biographical sketches of the people who made UC Santa Cruz happen. Wherever possible, the author tracked down the people or their descendants to get firsthand information to ensure accuracy.

William T. Doyle was one of the founding faculty members of UCSC. He taught botany and served as Dean of Natural Sciences and Director of the Institute of Marine Studies before retiring in 1991.

*The Origin of UC Santa Cruz* can be purchased online through Lulu.com. All profits from the sale of the book benefit Special Collections and Archives at the McHenry Library, UCSC.



Photo courtesy of Les Strong



Les Strong poses with a Jackson Fork (used to lift loose hay into a barn).

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That first year Les cut hay in the field behind the horse barn and behind where Peace United Church and Westlake Elementary School are today. After he cut it, they raked the hay with a dump rake. "It was a small dump rake, and they raked it into windrows. Then, they had a rake that I'd never seen before, a big, huge dump rake. The thing was almost five feet high. They went down the windrows each way and bunched up the hay. Then the hands, they came in and they shocked the hay. It sat in those shocks for three weeks, which caused it to go through a sweat and cured the hay."

Les then baled the hay with a stationary baler, driving the baler from shock to shock. "I had a twelve-year-old boy and a thirteen-year-old boy who would put the wires through the bales. We baled 82 tons of hay in 10 days—the three of us." The next year they planted 250 acres and got 500 tons off it. "Now that barn—I hope the big hay barn is still there—that barn by itself would hold 300 tons." (This is the barn that is now being rebuilt.)

Many of Les's memories are of the cattle on the ranch. "We had a wonderful record on calving. He [Cowell] had plenty of bulls and I kept moving them around and kept them working, and we were in the high nineties on calf production [over 90% of the cows had calves]. Above the slaughterhouse barn was that nice south slope and that's where we calved out, right there. We had the blacktop road around the quarry. We could go up on the right side and come down on the left side out through the field, all down hill, so we never got stuck in the mud. We never chewed up the pasture. It was a wonderful place. They'd [also] go up in the timber there where the colleges are and calve out. It was a good setup. We ran cattle on

10,000 acres. When we sold them, I had raised every one on the ranch except two."

Les explained why some of the fences near Barn G and the Carriage House are made of vertical timbers. Les went to Cowell's ranch in Contra Costa County, and there was a yard full of railroad ties that had come from Cowell's nearby cement plant. Some of these were brought to Santa Cruz to make cattle pens. They worked really well. "The cows couldn't see out. It was too tall. They never tried to jump over it." The pens also worked well for training colts. "They'd keep their mind on their work."

I asked Les if he knew "Old Joe," a workman mentioned in the George Cardiff oral history. "Yes, that was Joe Bargetti. I think he came in 1906, I believe. He had a nice flock of sheep. He grazed the driveways and kept them all neat and clean with his sheep. Joe also ran the horse barn."

Les had several "Old Joe" stories. Joe did not know how to drive and, once, when somebody tried to teach him, he crashed into the woodshed behind the Cardiff House (now known as the Cardiff Shed). "He used to help me feed. He'd get on the truck and kick the bales off for the cows. One day I was in kind of a hurry, and we were there in back of the horse barn, heading toward Pogonip—that field—and I stepped out and said, 'Here, Joe, steer this truck.' He almost had a heart attack. But he steered it, and I kicked the bales off that day. He was a super guy."

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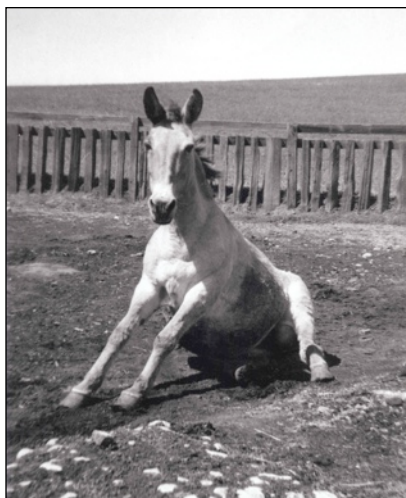
One of the railroad-tie fences (Carriage House in distance).



Branding at the Cowell Ranch, 1950s. Barn H in background.

Photo courtesy of Les Strong

Photo courtesy of Les Strong



Maude The Mule sitting in the bull pen across from the Blacksmith Shop, about 1955. Maude lived well into her thirties and was originally purchased from Vincent Locatelli of Boulder Creek.

I asked Les if he ever met Mr. Cowell. “No, no. He never did come to the ranch [while I was there].” The closest contact he ever had to Mr. Cowell was when Cowell was having the land cleared at Marshall Field off Empire Grade. “George Cardiff talked to him all the time. I was up there clearing it off (it was old hay fields years ago), clearing off the brush, trees, and stuff. And Cowell told George that you can clear any trees that are under 8 inches. He didn’t want any trees that were 8 inches and over taken out. That was the only contact I ever had with him. We put up 350 acres, I think for two or three years.” Les said that there were still a lot of horses around Santa Cruz back then and that they sold most of the hay they grew.

Les then told me the story of the disappearing cattle. “When the University bought the place, I stayed on for another year. A guy named Jack Beckett leased it. He brought in steers. There was about 400 of them. When it came time to round them up, I found 300 pretty easily. I rode thirty days straight, out through the back, looking for that hundred head. I couldn’t find them, but I met every deer on the ranch.”

Les explained the problem to Led Engelsman, the foreman at Wilder Ranch. “I don’t know what the heck I’m going to do because we’ve got to gather them, but I can’t find them. He says, ‘Well, you have to ride at night.’ I said, ‘Sure, Led, I’d likely kill myself riding at night.’ He said, ‘No, those calves were raised over in Baker, Oregon, with a sheep herder, and he never used horses.’ And he said they were afraid of the horses. So I started riding at night, and I’d gather up 10 to 15 head and I’d take them to Wilders or to somewhere out in the back—to a neighbor. That’s how I gathered that last hundred head—at night.”

I said that it sounded scary. “Well, it was. You know, in the back of the campus, along the road toward Marshall

Field, [the University] drilled a lot of test holes to find sink holes in the limestone. They were all cul-de-sacs—and that doggone manzanita brush, full of stickers. One night I had a pretty good group—foggy, you couldn’t see—and the cattle went down that cul-de-sac. So I’d have to ride through them, narrow you know, to that drill rig. I’d ride through them, go down to the drill rig and head them back. I think there were five different cul-de-sacs that I’d have to get them through after dark. It was quite an experience.”

It wasn’t all work on the ranch. There was some fun, too, especially for the grandchildren of George and Violet Cardiff. The Cardiffs lived in the old ranch house—today known as the Cardiff House—while Mr. Cardiff managed the Cowell properties in Santa Cruz. It was a wonderful place for the kids to ride horses.

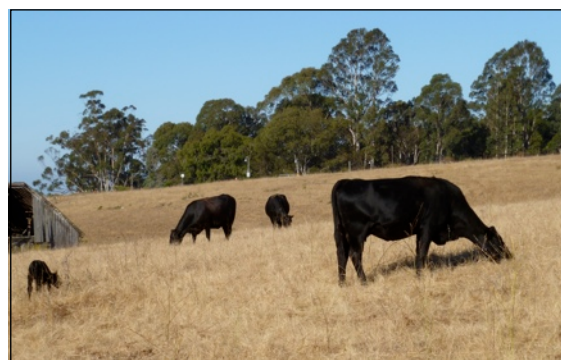
“George Cardiff had three grandchildren. He had two granddaughters and a grandson. The little granddaughter was maybe five years old. The other kids had horses but the little girl did not have one. George said, ‘What about Buster?’ Buster hadn’t worked for 20 years, I guess. We got him out and cleaned him up. This little girl could walk under him standing upright—a big horse. By golly, we got her riding Buster. She’d go out and help us move cows around the place. She turned out to be a wonderful horse person.”

After the University took over, many of the old buildings were put to new uses. The campus held an open house, and Les and his mother chatted with Chancellor Dean McHenry. “I told him, ‘They gave you Buster’s stall.’ He says, ‘What do you mean?’ Well, you know Cowell, he loved race horses. He would import the standard-bred horses. He’d buy them by the car load from back East and the South and he would ship them to Sacramento. He would race them there in the harness race, and then he would disperse them to the different ranches. This Buster was in his 30s when I arrived there.”

Ten years later, Les helped clear Dean McHenry’s land in Bonny Doon so that McHenry could plant a vineyard.

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UCSC still leases some of its pastures for cattle.





"He said, 'You're the fellow who told me I had Buster's stall.' It kind of stuck with him. We got to be good friends."

We thank Les for sharing these memories. They document a pivotal period for Santa Cruz. The building of UCSC and its opening fifty years ago not only transformed the old Cowell Ranch, but also changed the course of Santa Cruz County history. It was a major turning point in the region's development.

The **Lime Kiln Chronicles** is published twice each year (Spring and Fall) by the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District



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## Want to Save More History?

What an exciting time to be involved with campus history! Besides the Hay Barn reconstruction, the archaeological investigations, and the Quarry Amphitheater remodeling, there are also plans to restore the Slaughterhouse and Cooperage.

Located at the north end of the Farm, the Slaughterhouse was where Cowell Ranch cattle were skinned and butchered for their meat. A fascinating feature of the building is the windlass, which was used to hoist the heavy beasts up off the floor.

The Farm would like to use the building as a food processing facility where jams, honey, and other value-added products can be made.

The Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District are seeking funding for



restoration of the Cooperage. One possibility is to put the building to some type of new use. Like the Hay Barn, it has severely deteriorated, despite several repairs to the roof over the years by the University. Built in 1869, it and the adjacent lime kilns are key to telling the story of lime manufacture and shipping. The Cooperage is also a campus icon; some have compared it to UC Berkeley's campanile. Countless photographers, including Ansel Adams, have been drawn to its weathered siding, flaking whitewash, and stone pillars.

The Cooperage and adjacent kilns were at the heart of Cowell's operations. Restoration of the Cooperage will also include stabilization of the kilns so that they will not collapse in an earthquake.

If you or someone you know is interested in either of these projects, please contact Anne Hayes, Associate Director of Development. Her email address is [adhayes@ucsc.edu](mailto:adhayes@ucsc.edu). Or you may contact her by phone: 831-502-7274.



The Cooperage has greeted everyone who has ever come through the UCSC main entrance.

5



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
SANTA CRUZ





As technology changed, so did the methods for loading and unloading the kilns. This photo by George Silva from the 1920s shows one of the kilns at Rincon being unloaded by crane. Instead of removing the lime entirely from the bottom, some of it was lifted out at the top and dumped into a chute that directed it to the area in front of the kiln where it was put in barrels. (Wagner collection, Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District)

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