



# LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

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## *A Tale of Two Immigrants*

By Frank Perry

During the nearly 100 years in which lime was manufactured commercially in Santa Cruz (late 1840s to 1946), the majority of the lime workers were European immigrants. In the early days, many were Irish; later, Italians and Portuguese predominated. At last fall's History Fair, several people with family connections to the local lime industry stopped by the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works table. Later, I met with two of them, Santa Cruz residents Ida Tarantino and Jim Bosso. Both had grandfathers who came here around the turn of the last century and worked for the Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company. Both came from the same part of Italy, but their family stories are different in many ways.

### *Agostino Puccinelli*

Ida Tarantino's grandfather, Agostino Puccinelli, was born October 18, 1871, in Montecarlo, a town in Tuscany not far from Florence and Pisa. As a young man he studied to be a priest, but changed his mind and instead emigrated to the United States in about 1896. Ida says life was very hard in Italy and there were few jobs. He first lived in Chicago, and it was there that he became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

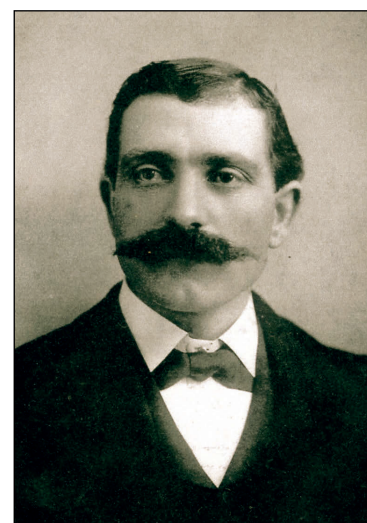
By 1900, according to census records, he was living in Santa Cruz. He worked for Cowell for only a few years. In a group photo of Cowell workers, he is posing with other men who are holding tools such as shovels and small hammers, and there are four lime barrels in the foreground. It would seem that he was most likely involved directly with the lime

making process, or perhaps he worked making or loading the barrels of lime for shipping.

After he left his job with Cowell he worked at the Kron Tannery (later known as the Salz Tannery and now the Tannery Arts Center). In June, 1905, he married Ida Meschi, another Italian immigrant, still in her teens. She was from Lucca, also in Tuscany. In those days you had to have a sponsor to settle in America, and Ida was sponsored by her uncle, who also lived in Santa Cruz. She worked as a maid in the Kron household.

While he was still working at the tannery, the couple purchased a dairy cow, then another, and so on, until pretty soon he quit his job with the tannery and became a full-time dairyman. The Santa Cruz Dairy eventually had hundreds of cows and was located on Encinal Street near where Costco is today. They also had dairy cattle on the coast just north of Santa Cruz.

They milked twice a day and sold raw milk. They mostly had Holsteins, which were known for the great quantity of milk they produced. They also had some Jerseys, which



Agostino Puccinelli as a young man (Photo courtesy of Ida Tarantino).

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## 100 Years Ago . . .

Some news from the first half of 1917:

**January 18.** A minor scandal erupts when it is discovered that City Commissioner James T. Jones gave farmer Dave Schafer permission to grow grain on City Reservoir land in violation of the deed from **Henry Cowell**. The city attorney advises Mayor Howe that it is "necessary for the city council to pass and spread on the minutes a formal disavowal of the act of commissioner Jones." Failure to do so could result in the land reverting to Cowell.

**March 26.** Ottavio Ribaga, hotel owner and chef famous for his ravioli dinners, dies. "The deceased was born in Tiarno, Austria, fifty-four years ago. When a young man of twenty-six, he came to Santa Cruz County and for a time cut wood for the **Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company**." [His birthplace was probably Tiarno di Sopra, now part of Italy.]

**April 18.** Fred Lazzaroti offers a tree from the **Cowell Ranch** to a Santa Cruz women's group needing a flag pole. "As Mr. Cowell is a patriotic citizen and not immune to the persuasive smiles of the ladies, it is assumed that he will tell young Fred Lazzaroti to get busy with his ax." [This would have been S. H. Cowell, son of Henry.]

**June 2.** "Woo Yen Ho Shew, a young Chinese cook at the kilns of the **Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company** above High Street, was found dead in his bunk in the cookhouse this morning." A later investigation by the coroner determined that Shew died of natural causes.

**June 22.** Santa Cruz High graduates the largest class ever. "The **Ernest Cowell** scholarship of \$150 was awarded to Alfred Paget, a most deserving lad."

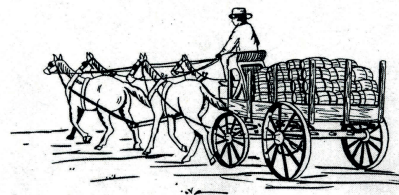
## Leadership Changes

The Board of Directors recently welcomed a new board member, Alverda Orlando. Alverda is a retired Santa Cruz librarian who has been involved with many different historical organizations through the years and co-authored the *Lime Kiln Legacies* book. Alverda will take over as secretary.

Don Lauritson replaces Cynthia Mathews as vice president. Frank Perry will continue as president, and Staff Liaison Alisa Klaus will continue as Treasurer. Anne Hayes, Social Sciences Director of Development, advises the Friends on matters regarding membership and development.

Board member Elise Levinson stepped down to pursue other interests. We thank Elise for her several years of service on the board.

Other current board members are Cynthia Mathews (also a member of the Santa Cruz City Council), Dennis Diego (architect), Frank Zwart (retired UCSC Campus Architect), Jim Burns (former UCSC Director of Public Affairs).



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Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District



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Over 25 organizations participated in last fall's History Fair, which was organized by the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District. Left: Board Member Don Lauritson answers questions at the Friends table. Below, one of the five rooms at Loudon Nelson Community Center used for the fair. (Photos by Crystal Birns)

## *History Fair a Success!*

The Friends organized a second Santa Cruz County History Fair last October. The fair was held in conjunction with the City of Santa Cruz 150th Birthday celebration and occupied most of Loudon Nelson Community Center. The fair was even bigger and better than the 2015 fair, with more participants and greater attendance. Many thanks to all the participating groups and to the City of Santa Cruz for their support as co-sponsor.

Speakers were Gordon van Zuiden, who talked about photographer Ole Ravnos; Carey Casey, who spoke about an 1870 aerial drawing of Santa Cruz; Sierra Ryan and Katie Hansen, who talked about their forthcoming book on Santa Cruz County heritage foods; and Martin Rizzo, who discussed the status of local indigenous peoples here in Santa Cruz 150 years ago.

Volunteers the day of the event were: Dennis Diego, Rick Hyman, Alisa Klaus, Don Lauritson, Jill Perry,

Rainbow Mitchell-Fox, Frank Perry, Elizabeth Schilling, and Harriet Talan. We are indebted to each of these volunteers for giving up part of their Saturday to make this such a wonderful event and to the Friends board in general for support and planning. Of course, each of the over 25 participating organizations had their own volunteers who helped with setting up, staffing, and taking down their booth.

The event was not only a fun and educational event for the community, it also helped the various organizations with outreach and networking. It was such a rewarding experience to have so many local history enthusiasts gathered together in one place. "I've found my people," said one volunteer with a big smile.

A representative of our organization has met with some of the participating groups to see about planning another History Fair, perhaps in 2018.





Agostino Puccinelli (back row, far left) and Angelo Seghetti (front row, 4th from left) posed with other Cowell lime workers in this early 1900s photograph. (Photo courtesy of Ida Tarantino)

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produced milk with a higher fat content. The milk sold by Santa Cruz Dairy was a blend of the two.

Agostino Puccinelli retired from the dairy business in 1947 and died in Santa Cruz three years later at age 79. His wife, Ida, died in 1962 at age 74.

### *Angelo Seghetti*

Angelo Seghetti was born in 1882 in Lucca, Tuscany, and began working for Cowell near the turn of the century.

According to his grandson, Jim Bosso, Angelo made the journey from Italy in the steerage section of a ship. He arrived in New York with \$38, just enough for the train fare to Santa Cruz. Jim is not sure how he came to work for Cowell, but it was his first place of employment here. He worked for several years, saving his money, before sending for his wife, Concetta, and son Ardito.

Angelo Seghetti lived to age 90, so Jim got to know his grandfather well and remembers many of the family stories. Jim said that as you go into the main entrance at UCSC, the Portuguese cottages were on the right and the Italian cottages were on the

left. There were two men per cabin, and they had double beds.

When his grandfather worked there in the very early 1900s, payday was still just once a year—on Christmas. Angelo earned \$1.50 per day, which was more than most of the other workers because he spent extra time grooming and feeding the animals such as the horses and mules. Although such pay was low even for those days, the workers were supplied everything they needed, including room, board, and a store to buy supplies. The men turned in their clothing once a week to be washed and exchanged for a clean pair. Concetta worked for a while doing the washing, for which she earned 50¢ per day.

Angelo used to drive the team of horses pulling a wagon full of rock from the quarry down the road to the then-new lime kilns at Rincon. At the kilns, the rock was cooked until it converted to lime. The road was fine in the summer, but it could get real slippery after winter rains. Once in a while the wagon would start to slide off the road, and Angelo would have to whip the team to recover.



Many if not all of the Italian and Portuguese lime workers went by nicknames. Back in Italy, Angelo had been a drummer in an army band, and continued as a drummer in the Cowell band. So, his nickname was “Tombalino” (drummer in Italian) according to the family.

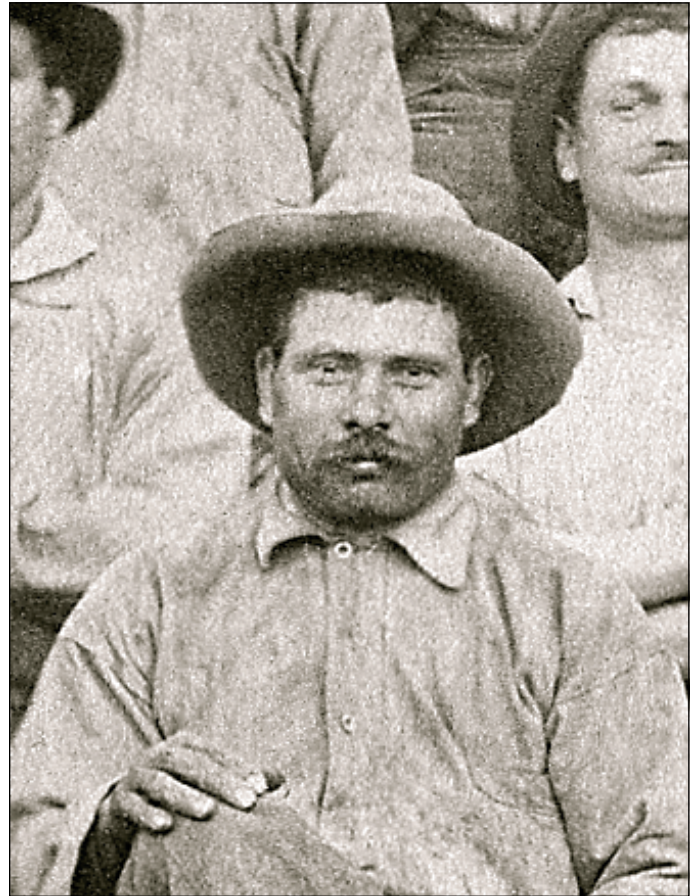
After Concetta and Ardito arrived, the couple had three more children, all girls. Angelo left Cowell sometime in the 1910s and worked as a farmer on the North Coast. Later, he ran a hotel and restaurant near the south end of Pacific Avenue.

The family kept many cultural traditions from Italy, especially the food. Jim remembers going to big family gatherings at his grandparents’ home on River Street. On holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving they would have a traditional Italian meal first, then, after a few hours rest, have the American version with turkey, etc. Everything was homemade, with the host doing most of the cooking. While the women prepared dinner, the men would play cards.

Angelo had his own wine barrel and would make wine from grapes brought by friends from Madera and Stockton. They would stomp the grapes with their boots on.



Angelo and Concetta Seghetti in 1967 at their 65th wedding anniversary (newspaper photo). At their 60th, the paper reported that Angelo enjoyed gardening and playing bocce ball. Concetta still “loved to cook” and they both enjoyed “watching television.”



Angelo Seghetti. This closeup from a group photo with other lime workers, taken in the early 1900s, appears on page 128 of the book, *Lime Kiln Legacies*, and is courtesy of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History.

Angelo and the other Italians also liked hard liqueur and would make their own brandy. Jim says his grandfather had a shot of brandy with two raw eggs every morning at breakfast. He also enjoyed small Italian cigars made of a single tobacco leaf rolled up and soaked in brandy. As mentioned previously, Angelo lived to age 90.

In searching through old newspapers, trying to learn more about Angelo and Concetta, I was surprised to discover that the two did not become U.S. citizens until June of 1943. By then, she was 58 and he was 61. They were part of what was, at that time, the largest class of citizenship applicants ever to appear before the Santa Cruz County Superior Court—140 in all. Of the first group of 41, 31 were Italian. Of course, the United States was at war with Italy at that time.

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Not surprisingly, the stories of Agostino Puccinelli and Angelo Seghetti have some similarities, but also many differences. Both were immigrants from the same part of Italy and both worked for Cowell for just a few years. They came from different backgrounds with different skills and interests. Agostino married in Santa Cruz, while Angelo married in Italy. Both belonged to the United Ancient Order of Druids and various Italian clubs and both resided in the same Santa Cruz neighborhood. Both seem to have adapted well to their adopted country, and were successful in work and raising a family.

The story of the Cowell lime workers is a vast, sweeping tapestry encompassing many decades and hundreds of people. By collecting stories from multiple families, we get a more accurate overall picture of these people and their important contributions to local history. We are grateful Ida Tarantino, Jim Bosso, and Jim's extended family for sharing the stories of their grandfathers and thereby coloring in a few more pieces of the lime-worker picture.

### *New and Renewing Members*

Our sincere thanks to the following new and renewing members since October.

Craig and Dusty Miller  
 Janet and Richard Schwind  
 Cynthia and Bill Mathews  
 Richard Hyman  
 Patricia Paramour and Michael Boyd  
 Elise Levinson and John Kotecki  
 Tom Schreiner and Jeannette Echenique  
 Lee and Emily Duffus  
 Frank Zwart and Julia Armstrong-Zwart  
 Bill and Glennie Doyle  
 Patricia R. Johns  
 Faye Crosby  
 Keith Brant and Janelle Del Carlo  
 Glenn Oppenheim  
 Ruth and Ernest Antolini  
 Joe and Marcella Hall  
 Mark and Patricia Traugott  
 Michael D. Luther

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Terms..... *San Francisco,*..... 1895.

HENRY COWELL.

*Mc*

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 DEALERS IN  
**Santa Cruz Lime, Cement, Plaster,**  
 HAIR, MARBLE DUST, FIRE BRICK, FIRE CLAY, ETC.  
 211 & 213 DRUMM STREET, between Clay and Washington.

*200 lbs. White Cement*

**DUPLICATE.**

No reclamation allowed unless made within 5 days after receipt of goods. Prices subject to change without notice. Box 7, BUILDERS' EXCHANGE.

Receipt from Henry Cowell & Company, 1895 (Courtesy of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History).



## ***“A Chat With Cowell: The Capitalist Tells of His Successful Financial Deals”***

Historian and Friends member Stanley D. Stevens recently shared with us a newspaper article from the *Evening Sentinel*, Sept. 12, 1898, which included an interview with Henry Cowell. Cowell seldom spoke to the press, so the article provides valuable insight into Cowell's mindset. Here are some excerpts:

“Henry Cowell was in a contented frame of mind Friday when a “Sentinel” reporter had a chat with him on the narrow-gauge train from San Francisco. Mr. Cowell, who is in his 80th year, is enjoying good health. His fine physique enables him to do more work than the average man, despite the fact that he has lived four score years.”

Cowell boasted of his profits in making loans and raising grain.

“In making loans, Mr. Cowell has been uniformly successful. . . . He told of a loan of \$75,000 he made eleven years ago, which has paid him in interest \$69,300. . . . His Yolo Co. ranch will yield 20,000 sacks of wheat. Another ranch which never previously had yielded more than 3,000 sacks of wheat will this year yield 11,153 sacks.”

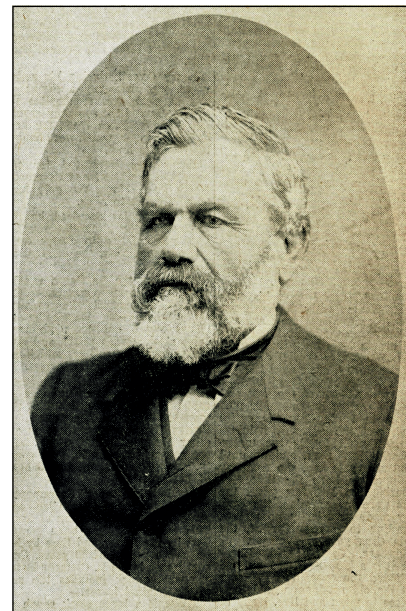
“Another instance of his financial luck is his investment in a steamer which cost him \$18,000. He has rented the steamer for five months at \$5,000 a month to parties engaged in the Yukon trade, and the rent is paid in advance.”

“I like Santa Cruz to live in,” Cowell said, “because the climate and water are good. I raised some of as fine oranges as I ever saw on my place in Santa Cruz, besides lemons. It's a wonder the people in Santa Cruz don't raise more oranges and lemons than they do.”

“The possibilities of making money in California are great,” Cowell said. “I think that Puerto Rico and Manilla will prove a good field for young men. I could have made a lot of money in Louisiana in raising sugar, but I couldn't stand the climate. In climate, California has the advantage over other states.”

Cowell had a long dispute with the California Powder Works, which manufactured explosives where Paradise Park is now. “If I was a younger

Henry Cowell.  
This is one of the few  
images of Cowell that  
has survived, and is  
from an old newspaper  
clipping.



man,” he proclaimed, “I would build [a] Powder Works on my land in Santa Cruz. I have a good stream of water and plenty of wood, so, you see, the necessary facilities are at hand.”

There were some issues at this time concerning the Cowell Wharf, located at the foot of Bay Street. “Well, if the city wants to take away the franchise, I shall be compelled to close my kilns, thus depriving about a hundred men of employment. Some of the men have been with me over thirty years. I have kilns in Washington where I can manufacture lime cheaper than in Santa Cruz.”

Cowell emphasized his contribution to the Santa Cruz economy. “Why, I have paid in wages in Santa Cruz Co. more than two million dollars, which you will admit was quite a help to the place. I have also paid in taxes \$120,000. If the people can afford to stand the loss which will necessarily follow the closing of the kilns, I surely can.”

The conversation concluded with discussion of a safety issue regarding his wharf.

“I had to put up a fence on my land near the wharf because I was afraid some accident might happen. A car is used to haul lime from the warehouse to the wharf, and as people kept walking across the rack while the car was in motion, there was always danger of accidents. I had a man stationed at the track to warn people, but I finally concluded the best plan was to build a fence.”