



LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

When Hollywood Came to the Cowell Ranch

By Frank Perry

Several years ago the Friends hosted a lecture by historian Randall Brown on early-day motion pictures shot on the Cowell property in Santa Cruz. He told about *Diamond in the Rough* and *The Danites*, both filmed in 1911 by the Selig Polyscope Company. As far as anyone knows, these were the first fictional stories filmed in Santa Cruz County. Unfortunately, neither movie has survived.

Technically, these were not “Hollywood” films. William Selig was the first to set up a motion picture studio in southern California, but it was in the Edendale section of Los Angeles (now Echo Park) rather than in Hollywood. Only a few years later, the motion picture business shifted to Hollywood, soon making the town name synonymous with “the movies.”

Recently, the Capitola Historical Museum received a collection of photographs and other memorabilia relating to movie-making in Santa Cruz. Because the collection included scenic views of the Cowell Ranch—some depicting what is now the Cowell Lime Works Historic District—the Museum shared it with The Friends. A selection of these photographs is published here for the first time.

On at least two occasions, the Cowell Ranch came close to being immortalized in a Hollywood picture. But first, here is some background.

From 1915 to 1926, Santa Cruz was especially popular with movie companies. The peak years were 1916 and 1917. Seventeen movies made in Santa Cruz County were released in each of those years, based on a list compiled by Ann Young titled *On Location in Santa Cruz County* (available on the Santa Cruz Public Library website). A dozen movies were made here in the 1930s and half dozen more in the 1940s.



Leav Collection Capitola Historical Museum

View of the Cooperage. On the right is a large stack of cordwood, perhaps for the cookhouse. In the distance above the Cooperage is the Haybarn. Circa 1930 based on the cars.

Two people played an especially important role in attracting film companies to Santa Cruz: Bob Jones and John Mowry. Jones was proprietor of the St. George Hotel and Mowry operated the Santa Cruz Cab Company (later changed to Yellow Cab Company). Needless to say, they had a financial stake in this enterprise. The crews and actors needed hotel rooms and transportation.

Mowry’s first involvement with movie makers seems to have been in June of 1925, when he assisted members of a Fox film company scout out potential shooting locations. He quickly realized the benefits of film-making to his taxi business. In the fall of that year, he provided cab service for two more film productions: *The Dixie Merchant* and *The Johnstown Flood*, both released the following year.

Eventually, Mowry began devoting a substantial amount of time promoting Santa Cruz and other northern California locales to movie companies. An article in the *San Francisco Call-Bulletin* of June 19, 1948, called him Hollywood’s “Nature Boy.” He was of “vast importance to the industry as chief salesman of northern California’s scenic spots.”

(continued on p. 6)

In the Newspapers, 100 Years Ago . . .

July 11, 1919. "M. Rodgers, who is in the Henry **Cowell** Lime and Cement company's employ, has had the stitches removed from an ugly cut on the head which he received through being thrown from his seat when his horse became frightened on the way to Rincon."

September 5, 1919. "Joseph Rodriguez, 82, Tells of Early Santa Cruz Days — 'In 1861 I hauled lime for Henry Cowell, driving ox teams out onto the old Cowell Wharf, which was in great use in those days. I received \$85 per month from the **Cowell** company.'" [This would have been when Davis & Jordan owned the business or after 1865 when Cowell bought Jordan's share.]

September 13, 1919. "Mrs. Charles Lehman, . . . Mrs. T. L. Lambrecht, and daughter Laura . . . who had a serious accident near the Big Trees yesterday, are resting comfortable today. They were driving on the road leading from the river to the **Cowell** Grove. . . ."

October 16, 1919 [Thursday]. "Mr. and Mrs. Joe Bettencourt of Ocean Street entertained Sunday evening in honor of five friends who left Wednesday for their homes in Portugal. Those honored were Manuel and Frank Maranda, Frank Correia, Antone Silva, and John Reis. These gentlemen have all been employed by the **Cowell** company for the past eleven years, and have many friends here. They are returning to their parents, and in the case of two of the men, they are returning to their wives and children."

October 27, 1919. Judgment by default has been entered in the superior court in the \$1,500 damage suit brought against Miss Helen E. **Cowell**, Menlo Park society girl and daughter of Henry E. Cowell, by Martin Perkocha, whose automobile was struck by a limousine driven by Miss Cowell on the state highway at Menlo Park on August 19 last. Perkocha alleged negligence upon the part of Miss Cowell. [The initial "E" in Henry Cowell's name may be an error. Few if any other spellings of Cowell's name show a middle initial.]



Ron Kustek

New Staff Liaison

Erika Carpenter joined the Physical and Environmental Services unit of the Physical Planning Development and Operations Department (PPDO) at UCSC in June and replaced Alisa Klaus as the staff liaison to the Friends. She grew up in Corralitos and went to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where she obtained her bachelor's degree in soil science. She has been working as an environmental planner in San Jose and the Monterey Bay area since 1997. Her interest in the preservation of historic resources was cultivated while she was resident of San Juan Bautista for eight years and had the opportunity to serve on the Historic Resources Board. She is excited about the opportunity to combine her passion for both historic preservation and environmental planning in her role at UCSC. She currently lives in Aptos with her husband Jesse and their four-year-old daughter, Megan.

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Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District



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Board members, UCSC staff, and supporters met for an informal groundbreaking at the Cardiff Shed site in June.

Cardiff Shed Nearly Completed

It's been a long time in the works, but the historic Cardiff Shed building is nearly put back together. Many thanks to all those who have helped with this project, including several past UCSC students. Architect Dennis Diego, a member of the Friends board, drew up the plans. Redtree Partners L.P. and Cen-Con, Inc. made generous contributions, which along with funds raised from Friends memberships, made completion of the project possible. We'll be holding a ribbon cutting early next year. All members will be receiving invitations.

Erika Carpenter



Concrete slab is poured.

Frank Perry



The shed takes shape.

New and Renewing Members

Our sincere thanks to these new and renewing members. Their donations enable the Friends to continue its mission of education and historic preservation.

George Brown
Neal Coonerty
William Dawson
Joe Hall
Hal Hyde

Virginia Jansen
Michael Luther
Elena Reese
Steven Schnaidt
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Thanks also to the recent donors to the Friends and Support Groups Faceoff to raise money for a Cardiff Shed interpretive sign: Jean Balgrosky, Eric Bitter, Erika and Jesse Carpenter, Ann and Dobie Jenkins, Erin Jhang/Jun, Rainbow Mitchell-Fox, Emmy Mitchell-Lynn, Frank Perry, Frank Zwart.



Frank Perry

Historic Pillar Destroyed

A few months ago a driver destroyed one of the historic Cooperage pillars next to Coolidge Drive. The driver was southbound when he or she drove off the road, colliding with the stack of stone. Presumably the vehicle suffered substantial damage. The University staff are investigating sources of funding to rebuild the pillar. A request for restitution has been submitted to the Campus Police Department. Although no longer used, it was purposely left there when part of the building was dismantled in the 1960s. It was used in tours to demonstrate that the Cooperage used to be much longer than it is today.



A Closer Look — 1866

In the last issue, we examined more closely the often-reproduced early 1900s panoramic view of the Cowell Lime Works. In this issue we take a closer look at an 1866 photograph taken from a similar location.

The photograph was taken by Lawrence and Houseworth of San Francisco as part of a series of eighteen photographs depicting Santa Cruz. The set includes the downtown area, waterfront, San Lorenzo River, and factories for making leather and paper. The Library of Congress and the Society of California Pioneers have posted these images on their websites.

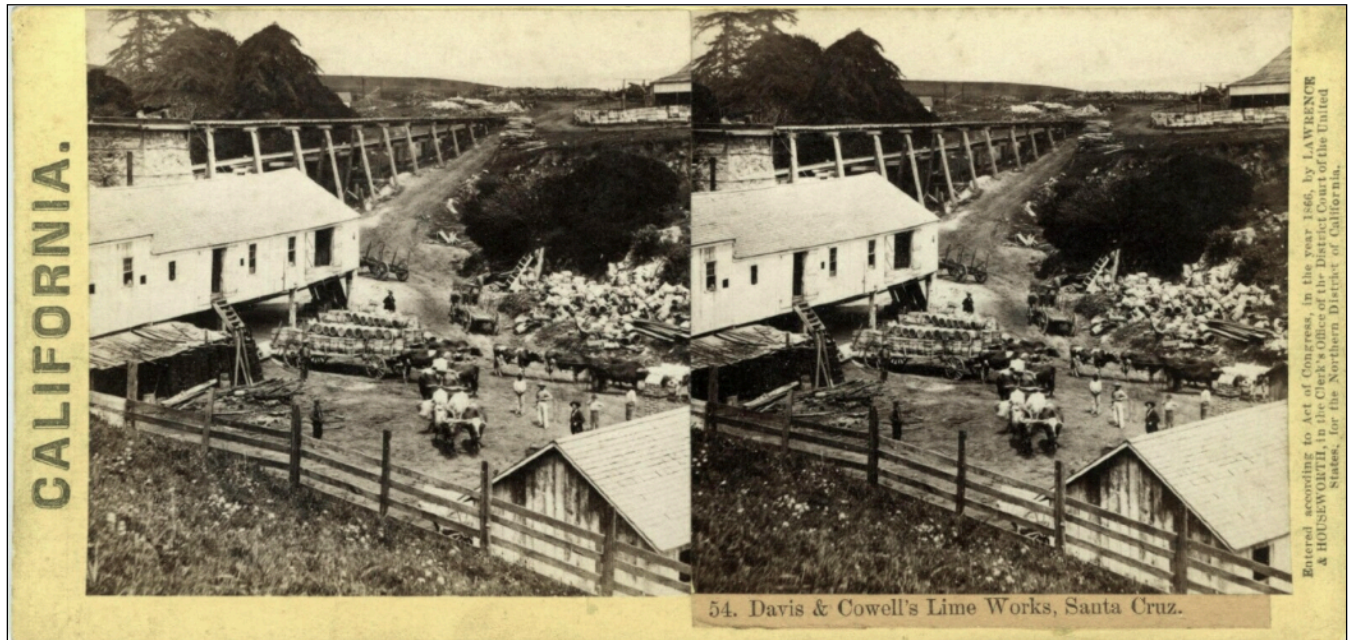
The photographs were published as stereo pairs. Stereo photography was very popular back then. To see the picture in 3-D, it was viewed through a stereoscope. With practice, however, the 3-D effect could also be achieved without the aid of a special viewer.

A story in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, January 12, 1867, reported on the publishing of Santa Cruz views:

“Stereoscopic Views — We are indebted to Messrs. Lawrence & Houseworth, the opticians, San Francisco . . . for a No. 1 hand stereoscope—prismatic lens—with a select number of excellent views of Santa Cruz, Yo Semite [sic] Valley, etc.” Lawrence & Houseworth not only produced the photographs, but also made and sold the stereoscopes for viewing them.

The photograph was taken from the west hillside, just north of where the Cook House is now, but south of the Cooperage. It looks to the northeast and shows many important features. Henry Cowell had bought A. P. Jordan’s half of the business the previous year, and it was renamed the Davis and Cowell Lime Works.

The long building on the left is the Cooperage. This is where wooden barrels were assembled for packaging the lime and shipping it to market. Like the present Cooperage, it is elevated above the ground, but appears to be on thick wooden posts instead of stone pillars. Also, the roof is on two levels, suggesting that the building was constructed in two sections, perhaps at different times. We



Private collection

Stereo images such as this were taken with a special camera that had two lenses, 2 1/2 inches apart.

know from a newspaper account, that this Cooperage was destroyed by fire in February, 1869. The Cooperage being such a critical part of the business, presumably it was quickly rebuilt with a new Cooperage, which is the one still standing (barely).

The upper part of the continuous kiln can be seen behind the Cooperage. It was built in 1861 and is also still standing (although the upper part was removed). What looks like iron bands are wrapped around the kiln, and there is a prominent trestle going to the top. As the name implies, this kiln was intended to run continuously, with lime rock poured in the top and the finished lime removed from the bottom every few hours.

Behind the tall trestle is a shorter one going to the pot kilns, which are out of the picture. When enlarged, the tramway going to the pot kilns can be seen in the distance to curve to the left, heading up Jordan Gulch to the quarries. There also two ore cars sitting on the track and at least three piles of rock nearby. This may have served as a sorting area. Only the finer-grained rock could be used in the continuous kiln. The pot kilns were less finicky.

Beyond the piles of rock are what appear to be stacks of cordwood.

Of course, the viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the foreground with the wagons, teams of oxen, and men. It looks like each wagon was pulled by 8-10 oxen, but they are not fully hitched up, so it is hard to tell for

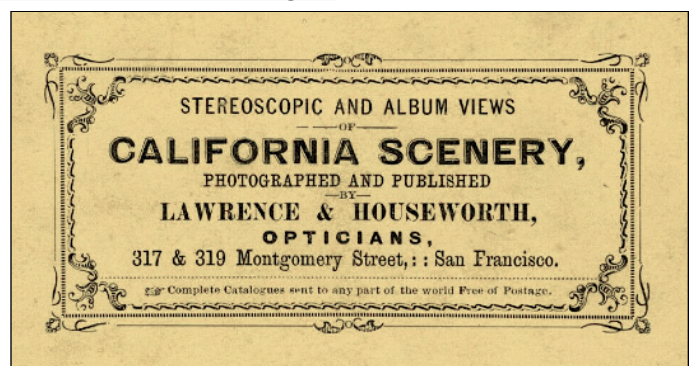
sure. There are two wagons, one behind the other. It's hard to count the barrels, but if there is a double row top and bottom, then the nearer wagon has around 50-60 barrels.

The purpose of the building in the lower right is not certain. It has a chimney, so it may have housed some of the workers or perhaps was an early Cook House.

A disorganized pile of use barrels, hoops, lumber, and a ladder rests against the hillside. Barrels were recycled, so these barrels may be ones that were returned and were waiting to be refurbished.

The barn in the upper right is in the vicinity of the present Barn G, but appears to be a different barn, no longer standing.

A lot of the interpretation of this photograph is speculation. But these interpretations seem reasonable until new evidence comes to light.



The label on the back says a complete catalogue of photos will be sent to any part of the world, free of postage.



John Mowry in an undated photograph.

(continued from page 1)

Mowry developed a close working relationship with movie location managers, who would contact him with requests. These could be very specific, as in this letter to him, dated August 29, 1933, from R. C. Moore of the Fox Film Corporation Studio:

In one of our pictures, which is about ready to go into production, we have a fishing scene along a creek or small river supposed to be in Ohio. This stream of water should not be over twelve or fifteen feet wide and not running too swiftly, so as to have rapids which will cause too much sound, as a great deal of dialogue takes place in these scenes. The trees along the banks should be willows, cottonwoods, sycamores or any other type of an eastern tree. Also, do not want to show any mountains in the background.

He asked Mowry to wire him collect and also to send pictures.

It was with these kinds of requests in mind, that Mowry assembled a large portfolio of Santa Cruz County scenes, including many of the picturesque Cowell Ranch. Mowry regularly corresponded not only with Fox, but also with RKO, Universal, MGM, Paramount, and Frank Lloyd Pictures.

The Cowell Reservoir, now the site of the UCSC Arboretum, was nearly the site of a major scene in *Maid of Salem*. This movie was filmed for Paramount in September of 1936 on the Colt Ranch off Empire Grade and starred Claudette Colbert and Fred MacMurray.

According to the *Sentinel* of September 15, "Unit Manager John Burch will have a conference with S. H. Cowell again this morning in regard to using the Cowell tract near the reservoir for staging the big mob scene at 'Gallows Hill' . . . If this scene is staged here, approximately 1,000 extras, many of whom have already been signed up, will be used."

Cowell, however, refused to grant permission for the filming. The newspaper did not say why, but the thought of a thousand people on his ranch (potentially with gates left open, cattle escaping, etc.) was probably not all that appealing. Had the scene been shot here, about \$10,000 in additional money would have been left in the area, claimed the paper. Instead, the mob scene was shot in Hollywood the following week.



This beautiful view was sent to Hollywood film makers to promote shooting on location in Santa Cruz County. It depicts part of the Cowell Ranch, probably west of the Cave Gulch area. 1930s or 1940s



On the right is the cookhouse. The other two buildings are no longer standing. c1930

Movie production here all but ceased in the 1950s, due to a labor dispute between hotel and restaurant owners and the local culinary and bartenders union. The dispute began in 1950 and continued for more than half the decade, putting Santa Cruz on a union blacklist and keeping Hollywood film producers and many conventions from coming to Santa Cruz.

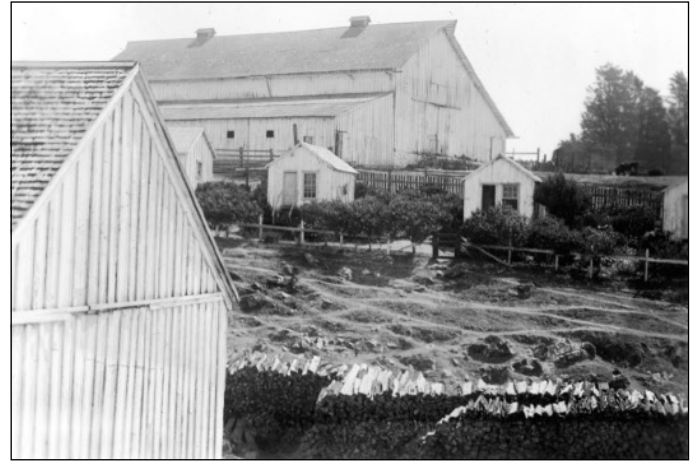
In June of 1955 movie location scouts for Allied Artists, Inc., informed the Chamber of Commerce of their strong desire to film the movie *Friendly Persuasion* on the Cowell Ranch. The story took place during the Civil War and was to star Gary Cooper. Allied Artists was also interested in building a location studio that could be rented to other movie companies. How the movie people came to know about Santa Cruz is not certain. Mowry had died a year earlier, but likely his photos were still circulating around



Cooperage (left) with the Carriage House (right) and what is now "Barn G" in the center. c1930

Tinseltown. With renewed incentive, the chamber launched a major effort to help settle the dispute.

In July famed producer/director William Wyler toured the Cowell Ranch by land and from the air. According to Ralph Ring, manager-secretary of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, the director was ecstatic over what he saw of Santa Cruz. "Wyler said that in all his picture making experience he has never seen a more naturally wonderful area than ours," according to Ring.



Four of the five cabins on the east hill are visible here and are surrounded by what are probably small fruit trees. c1930

By late July, however, the dispute had still not been settled and time was running out on the movie deal. Wyler warned that he simply could not bring unionized movie personal to Santa Cruz under the current circumstances. By the start of August, labor/management negotiations remained at an impasse, thus ending the Cowell Ranch's possibility as the locale for the Wyler movie. It was, instead, filmed in the San Fernando Valley.



The Cooperage, with the Blacksmith Shop in the distance, c1930



Frank Perry

The Cooperage turned 150 years old this year. Originally used to assemble lime barrels, it has been a landmark at UCSC's main entrance since the founding of the campus in the 1960s. Compare with the image on page 7. Photo was taken September 29, 2019.

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