



LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

Interview with Wilbert Patten

By Frank Perry

Oral histories can be a great source of historical information, and I have been fortunate in being able to interview a number of people with recollections of the Cowell Lime Works and surrounding lands.

Back in 2011, at a 150th birthday party for Samuel Henry Cowell, I met Wilbert Patten. Mr. Patten grew up in Santa Cruz and had roots going back deep into the area's past. He was born here in 1927 and died in 2015, four years after he generously agreed to share some of his memories of growing up near the Cowell ranch, escapades as a boy, and family stories about the Cowells. Here are some excerpts from the interview.

Mr. Patten's family history in Santa Cruz on his mother's side goes back to the 1830s. "That was when Nicholas Dodero came to Santa Cruz. He was my great-grandfather. He was given a Mexican land grant up off of Spring Street, from Spring Street to King Street, all the way up to Meadow Road and beyond. That was the [Rancho] Tres Ojos de Agua—Three Eyes of Water."

Patten grew up on River Street near the east side of the Cowell Ranch. "That's why if we went hunting or hiking, it was always on that side. We would just walk up the railroad tracks and up onto the property."

I asked if as a kid he got into trouble for trespassing. "No, we never did, but we never ran into anybody. The only one who we were afraid of was Frank George."

Frank George was the Cowell Ranch manager. "I can remember the sign: 'Warning, private property.



George Silva photo, Wagner Collection.

View of the upper quarry (then called the Rincon quarry), circa 1925. This was before Wilbert Patten played there in the late 1930s. Over the next few years trucks would replace wagons.

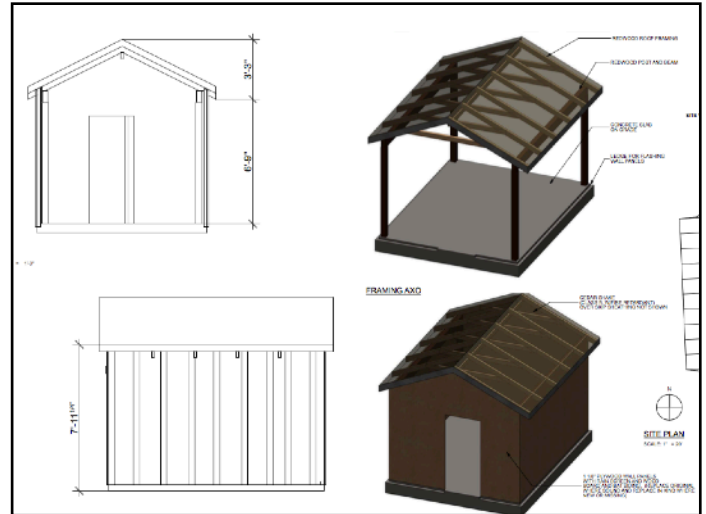
No hunting, camping, or trespassing allowed on these premises. Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company.' [Mr. George] accused my brother of shooting the elk that was in the elk pen, which my brother didn't do. . . . They knew we went up there, I guess."

Mr. Patten did not have much success at hunting. "The only thing I ever killed was up there was quail. I killed nine quail in one shot one day at the spring [in Pogonip]. But that was the only thing I ever killed up there. Shot up a lot of trees."

I mentioned how deer are abundant on the UC campus. "Well, there were quite a few then, too," he said. "A lot of the local people, especially during the Depression days, [went hunting]. My brother ran into a couple of guys up there one day who had a dead deer. My brother, being very gullible, took the story that they told him—that they were walking and they ran into this deer that somebody had killed.

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June 2, 1919. "The \$5,000 pacer, Butt Hale, owned and driven by S.H. **Cowell** of this city, took the free for all pace yesterday at Golden Gate Park stadium in 1:36, thus keeping up the record this fast pacer had when purchased in the east."



Over the past year, architect and Friends board member Dennis Diego generously volunteered to draw up plans for reconstruction and shepherded the project through the UCSC planning process. Redtree Partners LP generously donated funding for the project, which was matched by the Friends. Thanks for all those memberships! We hope to see the building assembled this summer. We'll have a full report in the fall *Lime Kiln Chronicles*.



Friends Welcome Rainbow, Emmy, and Howard

The Friends welcome two new board members and a new development liaison.

Rainbow Mitchell-Fox has a deep love of the nature and history of Santa Cruz County. She grew up here, attended Cabrillo College and graduated from UCSC with a degree in Legal Studies. She helped transition the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History from a city-run institution to an independent nonprofit, served on its board of directors as president, and also served as Interim Executive Director.

Emmy Mitchell-Lynn is a student at Cabrillo College where she is president of the Cabrillo History Success Club. She has a serious interest in regional history and is also a volunteer with the Capitola Historical Museum.

Howard Heevner is Assistant Vice Chancellor for University Relations, where he oversees Annual Giving, the UC Santa Cruz Alumni Council, Alumni Engagement, the Special Events Office, and Advancement Services. He replaces Anne Hayes as our development liaison.

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.

John & Bridget Barnes	Don & Brenda Lauritson
Keith Brant & Janelle Del Carlo	Cynthia & Bill Mathews
Dennis & Yolie Diego	Rainbow Mitchell-Fox
Bill & Glennie Doyle	Emmy Mitchell-Lynn
Lee & Emily Duffus	Pat Paramoure & Michael Boyd
Mary Gerbic	Redtree Partners LP
Hal & Dottie Hyde	Tom Schreiner & Jeannette Echenique
Rick Hyman	Janet & Richard Schwind
Mary Ellen Irons	Mark and Patricia Traugott
Pat Johns	Frank Zwart & Julia
Judy Jones	Armstrong-Zwart
Alisa Klaus	


Santa Cruz County

History Fair

Displays, Demonstrations, Old Photos
Activities for all ages

Learn about historic local industries, archaeology, early settlers, genealogy, Indigenous Peoples, how to do historical research, and much more!

Saturday, May 18, 2019, 12 noon to 4 p.m.
Capitola Community Center at Jade Street Park, Capitola
Free Admission



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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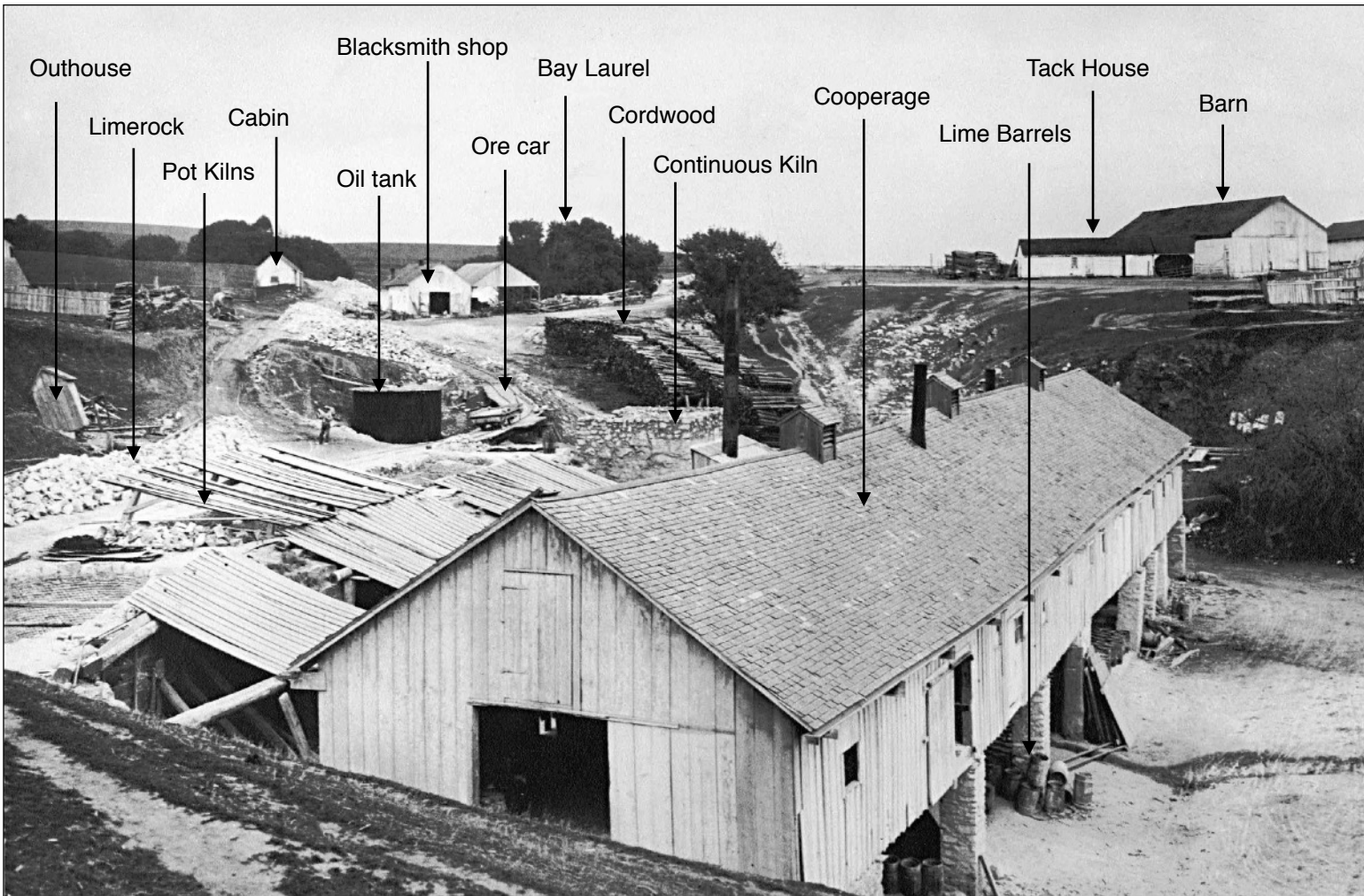
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A Closer Look . . .

We shared this historic photograph in the last issue of the *Lime Kiln Chronicles* and mentioned that it was worth studying closely. Here is a more detailed analysis of this important image.

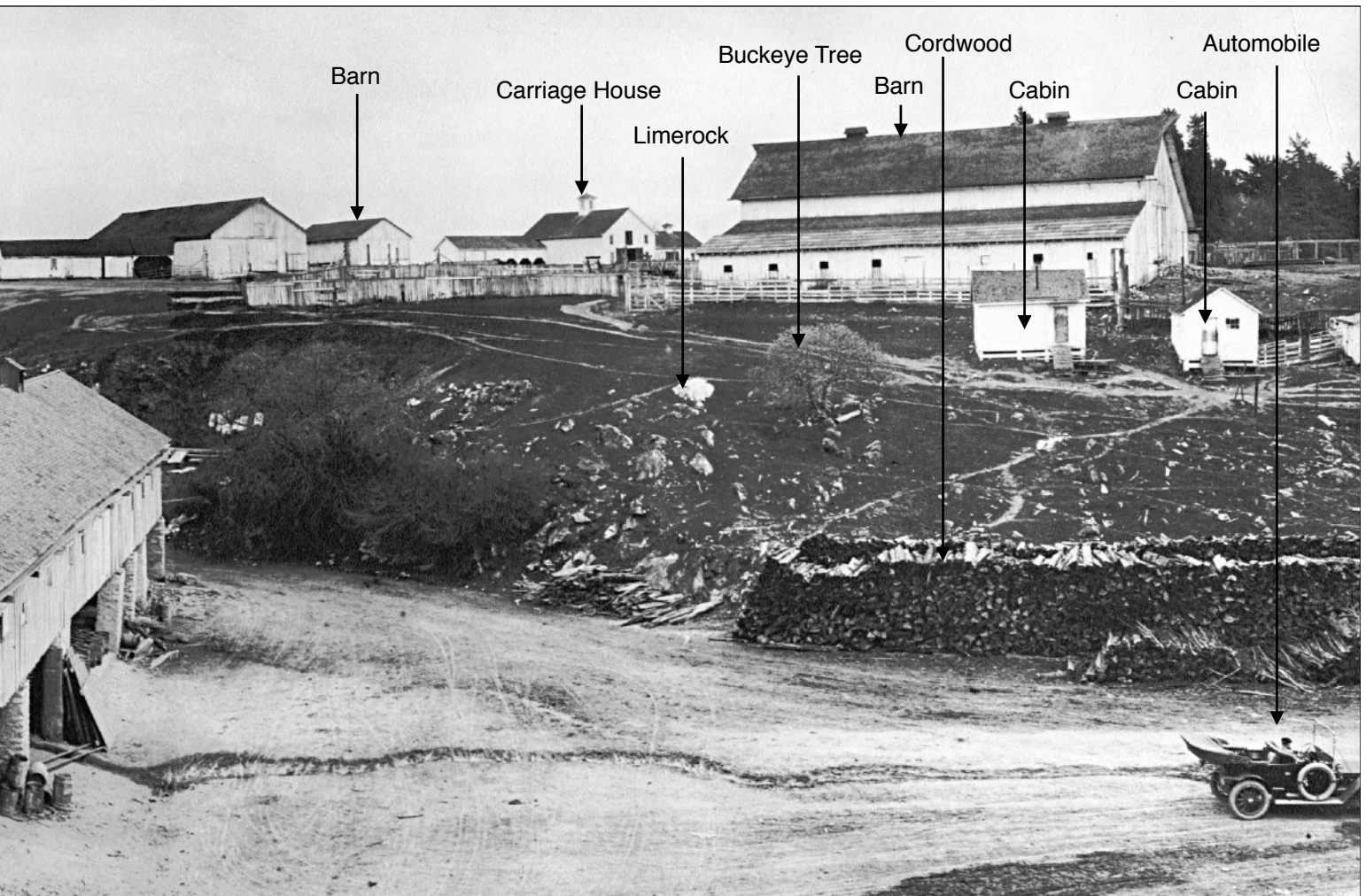
On the left is a stack of **limerock** waiting to be loaded into one of the kilns. There are more stacks in the distance, closer to the **Blacksmith shop**. This rock was broken up at the quarry and hauled down to the kilns by teams of oxen. Earlier in the history of the operation, a tramway ran from the quarry in Jordan Gulch down to the kilns. By the time this photo was taken, however, only a short section of the tramway was still used. It is seen here running from the pile of rock in the Blacksmith shop area down behind the kilns. Note the **ore car** and tracks.

Also visible on the left are the tops of the **pot kilns**, where the limerock was heated to convert it to

lime. The tops were covered with sheets of metal to control draft. The sheets over the middle kiln are propped up so that the kiln can be loaded. (They were always loaded from the top.) The kiln appears to be almost full. Between the kilns and the Cooperage is a metal roof over the work area where the kilns were unloaded through the doors at the bottom and the lime packed into barrels.

The **oil tank** contained fuel oil. Only bits and pieces of its story are known, but it was probably part of an experiment to test the use of oil before building the oil-fired kilns at Rincon in 1907. It appears that the Continuous Kiln was re-activated as part of this test. Oil was presumably used for only a short while and ceased as soon as the Rincon Plant opened.

The **Blacksmith Shop**, **Cooperage**, and **Bay Laurel** tree all remain at the site. The **Cooperage** was probably built in 1869 immediately after an earlier cooperage burned down. The second story was used



to assemble and store redwood barrels for shipping the lime. The first story was used for storage of loaded barrels. It was (and is) open and paved with bituminous rock.

Note the lime **barrels** beside one of the Cooperage pillars. The barrels were made with redwood staves and heads. Hazelnut and later metal hoops held the barrels together. Each barrel held about 150 pounds of lime.

The **Continuous Kiln** was built in 1861 and was originally somewhat taller than it is today. Unlike the pot kilns in which lime was made one batch at a time, the Continuous Kiln could produce lime continuously. The rock was loaded in at the top and the finished lime unloaded at the bottom (See *Lime Kiln Chronicles*, Fall-Winter, 2011-2012).

The **barn** on the far right of the first picture (far left of the second picture) was nearly identical to the

Haybarn that was rebuilt a few years back (not shown in this photo). In later years these were stock barns, but earlier were most likely used to house the ox teams. The barn pictured is now offices and workshops and called Barn G.

The **Carriage House** is also used for offices, but was originally used by the Cowell family for their fine horses and carriages.

In later years the large **barn** pictured above was used for draft horses. It is used by the University for shipping and receiving and is called Barn H.

On the hillside are outcrops of **limerock**. It is unlikely any of the rock here was used to make lime, since workers would have had to haul it uphill to load it into the kilns. However, it was likely the source of the rock to build the Cook House (not shown), pillars for the **Cooperage**, and the **kilns**.

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The **Buckeye** tree in this picture is in the same location as the current Buckeye and is presumably the same tree. Buckeyes are a common native tree and produce spikes of fragrant white flowers in the spring and large nuts in the fall.

The huge stack of cordwood is a good reminder that the kilns consumed large quantities of fuel. Accounts vary widely, but the pot kilns the size of the ones here needed anywhere from 75 to 150 cords of wood for one burn. This produced about 1200 barrels of lime.

Both of the **cabins** pictured are still standing. The exterior of the one on the right was refurbished by the Friends a few years back. The cabins were built in the late 1800s and provided some of the living space for unmarried men. Each had a small woodstove and beds for 2-3 men. There were five cabins on this (the east) hillside and several more on the west hillside. There was also one near the Blacksmith Shop (demolished in the 1980s).

The **automobile** is partly cut off in the original photograph, but is important because the style is typical of around 1910. Therefore it provides an approximate date for the image.

(continued from page 1)

They didn't want to waste it, so. . . . Later on [he] wised up."

Like many young boys, Mr. Patten did a few things that were downright dangerous. "We used to hike up to the quarry [now the upper quarry at UCSC], and we found the key to their powder storage. [That quarry] was the only one that was in operation then—the one that operated up until the 1940s, sometime. We took a bunch of black powder and fuses out of there and proceeded to make a cannon, which eventually blew up like a pipe bomb. It's no wonder we didn't get killed."

As he recalled, they used one or two inch pipes. "We took a cap, like you capped the end of a pipe with, and we drilled a little hole in it. We took a fire cracker, unscrewed this thing, put the firecracker fuse through the hole, and screwed it back on. We dumped some black powder in there, packed it down, and put some rocks in there, put some paper in front of those, and lit the firecracker." It would shoot rocks out, "but it didn't shoot the rocks far

enough. So we put more powder, and that's when we got in trouble. It blew up, like a pipe bomb. Luckily, we didn't get hurt. We didn't think about that. We had a lot of fun up at Cowells. We spent an awful lot of time there."

He said he was about 12 at the time of the pipe incident. "When we were kids, our parents didn't put a leash on us. They opened the door after breakfast in the morning, told us to come back for lunch, and that was about it. They thought it was safe."

"During the war, when you couldn't get gas, we would flip a coin and see who was going to hike all the way up to the quarry and siphon gas out of the truck and pack it back. . . ."

One of the main reasons for our conversation was to discuss Mr. Patten's aunt and her relationship with Samuel Henry (aka Harry or S.H.) Cowell. "My Aunt supposedly was engaged to Cowell. My mother said that she was engaged to Cowell, and my father pretty much indicated that she was," he explained.

His Aunt, Catherine Patten, was born in 1872, so she would have been about 11 years younger than Harry Cowell. She died in about 1937.

To follow this story, it is important to know that in 1894 Harry apparently fathered a child with the widowed Maria Antonia Majors. He promised to marry her, but backed down after his father found out about it and threatened to cut him out of the will.

"Well, I'll tell you what my dad told me. At [my aunt's] funeral, or after the funeral, he told me the story about the 'widow on the hill.' My aunt was supposedly engaged to Cowell, and the 'widow on



A bison at Cowell Ranch. In the background is the carriage house.

George Silva photo, Wagner Collection.



Wilbert Patten

the hill' had a son and she named him Henry, and so my aunt dumped him. My Dad told me at the funeral that after my aunt died he sent Cowell a letter telling him that she had passed, and let him know when the funeral arrangements were in case he wanted to pay his respects, but we never heard from him. He [my

Dad] took the time to do that anyway."

Mr. Patten remembered both elk and bison being kept on the Cowell Ranch. The bison were kept in a field near the ranch house (now called Cardiff House). "There were several buffalo that roamed in front of the house. . . . That big field, there, almost up to the quarry. They roamed pretty loose."

The elk were in a pen beside the trail that goes along the upper part of Pogonip, just below the campus. "The elk pen is right across from the spring. If you see the fence right there it is a pretty tall fence." When he was young, the road from Rincon heading south split into the "upper road" and the "lower road." The upper road went to the quarry, while the lower road went to the ranch house. These routes are mostly still there, but the Rincon plant down along Highway 9 is gone, the quarry is partly an amphitheater, and the ranch house is called Cardiff House and houses the UCSC Women's center.

As a boy, Mr. Patten used to hike up to the kilns at Rincon where some of the workers lived in cabins. "We used to go up there and stop at the cook house, and the cook would give us a piece of fresh baked pie. Berry pie as I remember, but I imagine he made other pies besides berry. He knew we [would come and beg] for a piece of pie."

In 1966 the UCSC Regional History Project did an oral history with Fred Wagner, who was born in Santa Cruz in 1872 and worked for many years as a blacksmith. Patten knew Wagner well and shared some stories that are probably not in the oral history. "Quite a character, Fred. He shod horses until he was in his nineties. One of the tools that he always carried

in his toolbox was a fifth of Seagram's Seven and some 7 Up. I used to sell him the Seagram's Seven. We used to deliver it to the house. He wasn't an alcoholic, but he liked his toddy once in a while."



George Silva photo, Wagner Collection.

The cook at Rincon, circa 1925. It is uncertain if this was the same cook who served the boys pie.

Wagner and Patten's dad were great friends. "They were a little different in age, but they did a lot of hunting and stuff together over the years. There's a story about when they took a buggy and went to Fresno. Can you imagine going to Fresno in a horse and buggy? He said they stopped at a ranch and asked the rancher for some hay. The rancher wouldn't give them any hay, so when they left they took a couple of the rancher's chickens with them. Fred told me that. He was a little devil, anyway."

Chatting with Wilbert Patten was great fun and a great honor. His stories are the kind of personal ones not found in newspapers or official records. Our knowledge of the Cowell Lime Works history is richer thanks to his sharing of these stories.

Note: Wilbert Patten's mother, Phyllis Bertorelli Patten, also loved local history and was the author of the book, Oh, That Reminds Me She tells about growing up in Grover's Gulch. Soquel.



We are pleased to report that the Cardiff Gate has two restored gateposts. When the UCSC Carpenter Shop received a work order to replace the rotted wood posts, the shop staff knew that it was important to replicate the historical feature if feasible. Not surprisingly, given the age of the posts, they found that the profiles were obsolete and could not be replicated using factory-made pieces. So they created new molder knives (steel blades) to match original design profiles, then shaped the moldings on a planer/molder machine, and hand finished the moldings. Jon Scofield, the Carpenter Shop Millwright, who had made repairs to the columns more than once in his 24 years on campus, oversaw this project using help from outside contractor Terry Boyd Construction.

Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District
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