



# LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

**Dear Members.** We hope that you are staying safe during the coronavirus outbreak. Many UCSC staff are working from home, and students are taking classes via the internet. This issue of the *Lime Kiln Chronicles* looks a little different (6 pages) due to limited printing resources. We hope to be back to our usual format in the Fall.

## *An Interview with Richard Nutter*

By Frank Perry

### Introduction

A while back at the annual picnic of the Soquel Pioneer and Historical Association, the organization's then president, Richard Nutter, mentioned that he visited the Cowell Ranch in the 1950s to give advice on agricultural matters. Mr. Nutter was agricultural commissioner for Monterey County for many years, but at that time was fresh out of college and working for the commissioner in Santa Cruz County. He is now retired and generously agreed to grant me this interview about his recollections of the Cowell Ranch.

He provides considerable background information on the kind of advice given to the Cowell Ranch and similar ranches during that era, including weed control, pest control, etc. Many of these policies are different today. But I asked him to begin by telling a little about his rich family history in the area.

### Interview

RN: There has been a branch of my family consistently in Santa Cruz County, and specifically in Soquel, since 1850. My grandson is there now, and almost everyone was involved in some type of agriculture, whether it be timber, fruit crops, vegetables, or livestock. My grandson is raising a few hogs there. So they have some of their fingers in agriculture.



View of the Cowell Ranch, late 1950s. Hay barn and blacksmith shop can be seen in the distance. Photo courtesy of Les Strong.

When I went to school, I went to the University of California at Davis and studied pomology, which is the study of pome, stone, and small fruit—those that have cores (which is pome), those that have pits (which is stone), and small fruits like berries and strawberries.

My family at that time had an apple dryer and vinegar plant, and ran some cattle between Soquel and Capitola. The freeway went through our property. So there wasn't anything for me to do agriculturally if I wanted to be around Santa Cruz County.

FP: Because you lost so much of the property to the freeway?

RN: Yes. So when I returned from the University at Davis—this was in the mid 1950s—I got a job as an agricultural biologist with the County Ag. Commissioner's office. I was assigned to from Aptos, north. I worked the north part, assigned to Santa Cruz for about fifteen years. Then I was appointed Agricultural Commissioner in Monterey County, and at one time I was Agricultural Commissioner in Monterey County and Santa Cruz County at the same time, but I served in that position [Monterey County] for about thirty years. I've been retired for a while now.

(continued on p. 4)

### *In the Newspapers, 100 Years Ago . . .*

**February 10, 1920.** "Mayor Kratzenstein, at this morning's council meeting, called attention to the growing need of an adequate water supply to serve the future need of this city and suggested that the city commissioners meet with him at an early date to discuss the advisability of taking steps to secure the water of Fall Creek as an additional source of supply for the city water system of Santa Cruz. . . . The Cowell estate is the only owner now left that the city would be compelled to deal with. . . . It is thought that the city will be able to make satisfactory arrangements with Mr. Cowell."

**March 4, 1920.** "A practical work in connection with the slogan, 'Save the Redwoods,' is being instituted by the forestry class of R. E. Burton at the [Santa Cruz] high school. The Cowells have given permission for the taking from their land of enough small redwood seedlings to furnish them to every grammar school in the county desiring them."

**June 9, 1920.** "One of the popular places for surf bathing at the beach is near where the old Cowell wharf used to stand. The bathers mostly live in the immediate neighborhood and for the most part go to the beach in autos."

**June 17, 1920.** "The beach from the old Cowell wharf to the mouth of the San Lorenzo river is strewn with seaweed as a result of the heavy ground swell that has been running lately. The result has a tendency to make the beach present a rather untidy appearance, and the same should receive some attention before the seaweed commences to decay, the odor from which is far from being like the perfume of the roses."

**July 1, 1920.** "The stork of the animal kingdom has again made its appearance at Henry Cowell's private zoo, located on the old family homestead on High Street. The latest arrival is a little baby buffalo, and another mother cow will soon give birth to one. At this rate of propagation, stories of extermination of the buffalo will soon be a forgotten memory."

### *New Development Liaison*

Clea Hermanson is our new University Relations representative. She grew up in Santa Cruz on a commune called "Chicken Hill." Her father was a graduate student at UCSC and mother a potter and artist who studied under Edward Carillo and Al Johnsen at UCSC. Clea was in the founding class at the Santa Cruz Waldorf school, and then attended Indiana University where she received her BS in Public and Environmental Affairs. She also studied in the Netherlands and was an intern for Congressman Lee Hamilton in Washington D.C. After returning to Santa Cruz, she worked in Silicon Valley where she met her husband, Chris, a medical device inventor. They live in Bonny Doon with their three children, Dylan, Oliver, and Carly. Clea is excited to join the team and partner with the Cowell Lime Historic District to reach their goals through fundraising and community outreach.



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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## Cardiff Shed Completed

We are pleased to announce that the Cardiff Shed is completed. We had hoped to install the interpretive sign, have a ribbon cutting, and begin using it to store historic artifacts early this year. Unfortunately, these activities had to be put on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic.

We would like to once again thank all those who 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.

Erika Carpenter



## Sign Replaced

The historic district has a new sign thanks to the UCSC sign shop. The old sign dated back to the 1960s or 1970s and was destroyed when struck by an automobile last year.

## New and Renewing Members

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

Ruth I. Antolini	Patricia R. Johns	Pat Paramoure
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Erika Carpenter



Erika Carpenter

## Vegetation Removed

For several years vegetation has been overtaking some of the historic structures, including the cabins, lime kilns, and gateway to the Cardiff Path. The vegetation not only blocked the view of the structures but in some areas was a fire hazard. Recently, UCSC grounds cleared away much of this vegetation. Special thanks to Traci Ferdolage (Associate Vice Chancellor of Physical Planning, Development, and Operations), Julie Sutton (Grounds Manager), and the grounds staff.



Richard Nutter at the 2019 Soquel Pioneers annual picnic. (Photo courtesy of Jim Hobbs, Soquel Pioneer and Historical Association)

As an ag. biologist, one of the jobs was dealing with agricultural crops, not only the production of them, but the regulation of chemical use, dealing with predators, dealing with other types of pests (ground squirrels and gophers). We did plant quarantines (plants coming into the county or being exported out); we dealt with seeds and nurseries.

While I was working in this north county area, the Ag. Commissioner's office was in Watsonville where there was the biggest part of the agriculture. But still, when I first started, there were lots of chickens in the Live Oak area. The Farmer's Feed [Co-Op] was still operating there. The Poultry Producers had their warehouse and egg grading facility on River Street. There were orchards all through the county—in the Bonny Doon area and the Highlands area. I remember at the time there were 45 acres of chestnuts—all kinds of stuff. Santa Cruz County is one tenth the size of Monterey County, but I fit in well with Monterey County because I came from a county that was similar, but only one tenth the size. So I knew the crops very well.

One of my jobs was keeping agricultural statistics. We kept track of the amount of field crops that were grown, people that grow grain, and that added up to our total agricultural values. One of the properties that grew grain was the Cowell Ranch—the UCSC property. One time—the only time I ever knew of—they grew flax on the property.

FP: I heard they grew flax there.

RN: Flax has a blue flower. It's all blue. There was a guy named Les Strong leasing it at that time. He used to run cattle. Do you know him?

FP: He lives in Idaho now and I have talked with him on the phone. I did a couple of interviews with him. [See *Lime Kiln Chronicles*, Spring/Summer 2015, <https://limeworks.ucsc.edu/newsletter/LKCSpring2015.pdf>]

RN: I did meet George—the caretaker who lived in the yellow house on the front of the Cowell property . . .

FP: George Cardiff?

RN: George Cardiff. I did meet him and knew him to talk to when I was on the property. I think he lived in the house at that time.

Earlier in my life, when I was a young kid of 14—this was during the war—there was a feed store in Soquel called Soquel Feed and Supply. The owner was Oscar Kasji—K-a-s-j-i [pronounced kashee], a Dutch immigrant. He delivered feed to a lot of the broiler/frier people who were growing chickens and to dairies and other types of livestock. He was right across from what was Maddock's Bakery, below Soquel High School. They delivered hay and all kinds of feed. So I got a job driving a truck. I would go down to Tres Pinos and pick up a load of barley. I knew that if you got there at 2 o'clock they were taking a siesta, so you had to wait for them to wake up from the siesta.

Anyway, I[also] used to go down to the Cowell Cement and Supply at the end of Pacific Avenue near the S.P. Depot. A fellow by the name of Harold Ritchy was manager of that place.

FP: I've heard that name.

RN: He was there for many years. I think they must have gotten their coal in rail cars back there somewhere and put it in gunny sacks. So we'd go in there and get ten sacks of coal. People were still burning coal in those days. That's when I first became aware of the Cowell properties. At one time they must have sold cement—lime and cement.

FP: They had a cement plant up in Contra Costa County long ago.

RN: That's when I first became acquainted with Cowell. They did grow barley, and I only remember one year of flax at that property. One of their concerns was ground squirrels. Two hundred ground squirrels will eat as much as one steer. So that's why you need to control ground squirrels.

FP: They still have issues with ground squirrels.

RN: Back in the 1870s Monterey County had a bounty on ground squirrel tails. They paid two cents a tail. They wouldn't pay for a grizzly bear, Mountain Lion, or Coyote, but they would pay two cents for a squirrel tail. While I don't have a lot of memories of the place, I do remember them raising livestock and grain on the property.

FP: Les Strong said he grew a lot of hay.

RN: Hay, too, that's right.





By the late 1950s the ranch was mostly used for raising cattle. Barn G is on the left. Carriage House would be just out of the picture on the right. Photo courtesy of Les Strong.

FP: He said it was oat hay. He said at first when they started working there it wasn't clean hay. It had a lot of weeds.

RN: Yes, I'd imagine so.

FP: They let him spray to get rid of the weeds before they sowed the hay.

RN: That's one of the things we used to do—issue the permit for use of the material to spray.

FP: Do you know what kind of spray they used?

RN: Yes, it was 2-4-D, 2-4-5-T. It's a broad leaf weed killer. It only killed the broad leaves. In those days they didn't have the concern that developed from what was called agent orange.

FP: It got a real bad name during the Viet Nam War.

RN: I think that was a contaminate of the material. I worked with a fellow who would take the 2-4-D and if he got poison oak, he'd rub it all over. I even knew him to take a jigger of 2-4-D and [makes a drinking sound]. It was cut with water, of course. His name was Ken Tweedy.

FP: And how long did he live?

RN: Oh, he lived for quite a while [laughs].

FP: I don't know much about what they sold at the Cowell store. Did they call it a store?

RN: I think they had building supplies, cement, coal. The other place that sold coal was Ebert's.

FP: Did you advise people on the Cowell Ranch what to do about the ground squirrels?

RN: Yes, we did. The county ag. commissioner system was set up in 1881. That was before the University farm advisor and agricultural extension programs came about. That was about in 1918. So the ag. commissioner's office and staff were involved in advising and recommending things throughout the agricultural community way back into the 1800s. One of the things they started doing was making poison baits available—at cost—to farmers. There wasn't any place you could buy them otherwise. During those days and up until maybe the 1980s, you could go into the ag. commissioner's office and buy strychnine—that alkaloid, the powder. We'd recommend that you take carrots, cut them up in pieces, put them in a bag like [you would with] flour, shake it around on the carrots, and put the carrot down the gopher hole. We did what we called vertebrate pest control—anything with a vertebra that was damaging agriculture. We also manufactured squirrel bait. Squirrel bait was different from gopher. It had to be because squirrels are very difficult to control. In the summer time they have an estivation, instead of hibernation, they go into a resting stage where they are not as active in some areas. So you want to time it before they have their young or right afterwards. We provided treated grain for the Cowell Ranch and anybody else that had ground squirrel problems. All the counties in California did that. As the regulations became more rigid and the EPA became involved . . . Santa Cruz County stopped producing bait.

That was one of the major programs. They had it for depredating birds, gophers, and mice. In some counties, like Monterey County, we had an animal control program with people who just did coyote and lion control, anything involving stock depredation. There had to be a loss for us to respond to those types of calls.



Silo next to Barn G. Carriage House in distance. Circa 1925 photo by George Silva.

Courtesy of Barbara Wagner



Mountain Lion warning sign at UCSC.  
(Photo by Boyd Jones, Flickr)

This county also had a trapper. While I was working for the County, we didn't have any mountain lions. There were no mountain lions seen then.

FP Oh. So you think the population has been growing? There are quite a few sightings nowadays.

RN: Oh, there are mountain lions all over the place. My grandfather was born here. My father was born here. I was born here. They had never seen mountain lions around because there was a hunting season on them. They were hunted until the early '70s. If you saw a mountain lion on your place, you got the gun and shot it. There were no mountain lions, and there were no coyotes.

FP: Well, there are a lot of coyotes now.

RN: Even when I was a kid growing up here, and then working here as an adult, the first time any hogs appeared was in the mid '60s—up along the Summit Road. They'd gotten into an orchard. Somebody called me. They were girdling the trees, get on their hind legs, break the limbs down, and get fruit, doing a lot of damage. The story is that the Pfyffer brothers that have the ranch up here—they [also] have a ranch in Monterey County—brought the hogs up to this county and turned them loose for future hunting purposes. They were the major people on the coast here for many years.

FP: Do you remember a silo on the Cowell Ranch? I have a picture of one. A fellow whose father worked there said they used to grow corn, grind it up, and throw it into the silo with water.

RN: Yeah, they made silage out of it. They still do that type of thing. Have you ever traveled over in the San Joaquin Valley where they have long plastic areas, all tarped? Instead of going up in silos, they get corn, run it through a chopper, and blow it into this [plastic] tube where it kind of ferments, and they use it for cow feed. That's what they were doing there.

FP: He said it smelled terrible but the cows loved it.

RN: I don't remember any corn growing there, but obviously it could have.

FP: What was the flax used for?

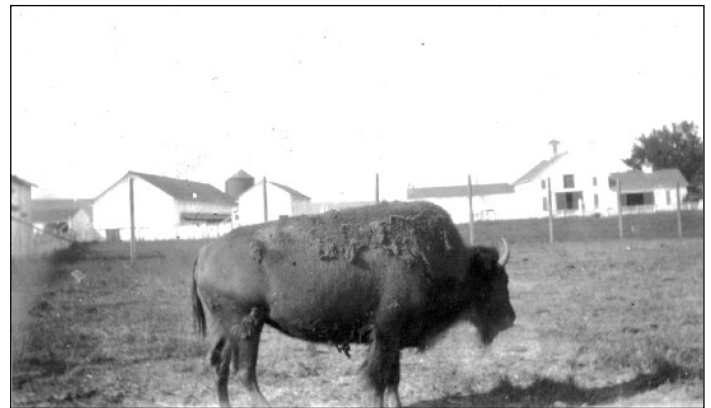
RN: It was oil, I believe.

FP: Flax seed oil?

RN: It's also used for livestock feed. . . . The interesting thing about flax is that it is the only type of grain that, if you have a car load of flax, you can't walk on it. You'll just go all the way down and drown in the stuff because the seed is really shiny and slick. If you stand on it, you'll just go right down.

FP: Anything else you remember about the Cowell Ranch?

RN: Well, you know, when I was growing up, my mother's parents lived at the end of Ocean Street across from the cemetery. My grandfather was the sextant at the Odd Fellows Cemetery. He'd look straight up the hill across from there and—I don't know if it was Pogonip or the Cowell Ranch—there were buffalo.



Buffalo on the Cowell Ranch, circa 1925. Carriage house in distance on the right. Photo by George Silva.

FP: Cowell did keep buffalo for a while.

RN: You could look across there. It was on the hillside. You know the end of Ocean Street, what they call Italian Gardens, way at the end of Ocean Street Extension? Up until recently they had cherry orchards and plums there.

FP: A nice rural area back in there.

RN: My grandparents lived right here, before you dropped down into there. It was elevated a little bit and you could see across the river and see these buffalo.

*[My sincere thanks to Richard Nutter and his wife, Stephanie, for editing this transcription for clarity and accuracy.]*



