WE NEED YOUR HELP

Your membership in the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District helps build broader support for our efforts to preserve this unique part of Santa Cruz and California history.

Your direct financial contributions and donations in kind (labor or materials) accelerate restoration and expansion of the Historic District’s historical and archaeological research activities.

Your volunteer participation assists with restoration and interpretation of district history.

Your assistance in helping develop and implement a tour program composed of volunteer docents and local historians.

Please show your support for the Historic District today by becoming a member.

For more information, please visit our web site at limeworks.ucsc.edu, or contact the Friends of Cowell Lime Works Historic District at limeworks@ucsc.edu or (831) 459-1254.

This self-guided walking tour of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District has been made available through the generous support of the Bay Tree Bookstore at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the Museum of Art & History @ the McPherson Center, located in downtown Santa Cruz.

The definitive book on the lime industry in California, Lime Kiln Legacies (for details, see website at limekilnlegacies.com), is available at the Bay Tree Bookstore, as are art posters depicting Historic District structures, which may also be purchased online at slugstore.ucsc.edu.

Proceeds from the sale of the posters support ongoing efforts to preserve and protect Historic District structures.

“Monumental work!”

I am overwhelmed with Lime Kiln Legacies—sincerely so much history, so much more of the history of technology, geology, transportation, labor, the economy, and culture.

—Judith Steen, editor of The Salsafied Companion to Santa Cruz Architecture

Art posters depicting Historic District structures are available at Bay Tree Bookstore.
Cowell Lime Works Historic District

A vital building material in the 19th and early 20th centuries, lime played a key role in the development of the nation; particularly after the Gold Rush. In the 1850s and '60s, the Cowell Lime Works Historic District, which encompasses some 30 acres at the main entrance to the University of California, Santa Cruz, was the center of the largest lime manufacturing region in California. The district includes four lime kilns, the cook house, cooperage (where barrels were made), hay barn, Cardiff House, workers’ cabins, and many other structures from the 19th century. In 2007 the district was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Use the map and descriptions of historic structures on this page as your guide to taking a walking tour of the district.

1 STONE HOUSE (paymaster's house) For years, Henry Cowell paid his men only once a year, the payroll would be brought from San Francisco, secured overnight in the stone house, and distributed to workers the next day. By the 1890s, when paydays were once a month, the stone house became the commissary, where employee bought Levi's, work boots, and other supplies.

2 GRANARY Seed from barley and oats grown on the ranch were stored in the granary. The original route of Bay Street—called Lime Kiln Road in the 1850s and '60s—followed what is now Cardiff Place up from the lime kiln to the road across High Street and ran between the granary and the stone house, where it served as the main entrance to the lime works. Ox-drawn wagons loaded with barrels of lime followed this route to the company wharf at the end of Bay Street.

3 HORSE BARN (Barn Theater) Henry's son, Harry Cowell, was fond of animals, especially cattle and horses. This barn probably housed the draft horses that did the heavy work on the ranch. Riding horses were kept in the carriage house (18). The university converted the barn to a theater in 1968.

4 COOK HOUSE (Admissions Office) The Cowell ranch produced most of the food needed for its workers, who were fed in a communal dining room in the ranch's cook house. The kitchen had a huge wood stove (still present) and a sink. A small screened shed at the south end of the building served as the meat cooler, while a cluster of outbuildings and animal pens in front housed small stock (as evidenced by a pig feeder—the round concrete structure located near the front door). 5 QUARRIES Across the street from the cook house, at the Campus Main Entry kiosk, is one of several quarries on campus where lime was obtained. 6, 7 WORKERS' CABINS Across the street from the cook house is the site of five workers' cabins (6), all of which are being restored. Three more workers' cabins (7) were located on the hill behind the cook house. In 1870, 37 workers (including quarrymen, lime burners, cooperers, teamsters, two cooks, and laborers) lived in cabins on the lime works site.

8 COOPERAGE Here, workers assembled barrels used to ship lime to market. After being filled with lime, the barrels were placed in wagons and hauled down what is now Limekiln Road to be loaded onto outgoing ships.

9, 10 THE BAY STREET KILNS The lime kiln complex adjacent to Coolidge Drive consists of three pot kilns (9), each with four doorways, and a smaller, taller continuous kiln (10). To make lime in the pot kilns, limerock was loaded in from above, and wood for fuel was fed through the doorways below. After about five days of firing, the rock was converted into lime. When cool, the chunks of lime were removed through the doorways and packed into barrels for shipment.

11 TRESTLE In 1860, Davis and Jordan built a tramway with cars to transport limerock and cordwood down Jordan Gulch to the kilns. The stone abutments are from a later trestle.

12 BLACKSMITH SHOP During its heyday, the ranch employed a full-time blacksmith. Used for blacksmithing until the early 1950s, it is now an art studio.

13 HAY BARN Framed using large timbers with mortise-and-tenon joints secured by wooden pegs, this barn may date from the 1860s. Recent archaeological digs uncovered domestic debris from the same period.

14 POWDER HOUSE Blasting powder kept in this structure—one of the earliest lime works buildings—was used to dislodge deposits of lime in the quarries.

15 JORDAN GULCH The powder house lies at the edge of Jordan Gulch. The tramway ran along the gulch to connect several Cowell Ranch quarries with the kilns.

16, 17 BULL BARN (Barn G) and BARN H This structure sheltered the many oxen used at the ranch and lime works. The Cowells persisted in using oxen long after other ranches had switched to horses. Another (17) large barn (Barn H) was remodeled for administrative use by the university.

18 CARRIAGE HOUSE Once a drive-through barn-like structure, it now houses UC administrative offices. The Cowells kept their riding horses and carriages here.

19 CARLISLE SHED A small storage shed near the end of the Carriage House, dating from the 1860s, has been disassembled temporarily for restoration.

20 RANCH HOUSE (Cardiff House) This was built in 1864 for Alphonso P. Jordan, an original owner of the lime works. After Henry Cowell purchased Jordan's half of the works in 1865, Cowell moved in with his wife, Harriet, and five children. The Cowells lived here until 1879 and, although they owned many California properties, always considered this their home ranch. George Cardiff, Cowell Foundation property manager, later lived in the house. It is now the UCSC Women's Center.

21 ENTRY GATE The driveway that runs from the ranch house front porch to High Street was the carriage entry for the house. At the end of the drive, a white picket fence with elaborate white-painted wood en gate posts marks the original "owner's entrance" to the Cowell property.