



# LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

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## *Last Years of the Cowell Ranch*

By Frank Perry

Imagine the smell of bacon and hotcakes wafting out the kitchen door of the old Cook House, the loud calls of peacocks up near the ranch house, and the sights and sounds of cattle being herded each spring into corrals. For Joseph M. Conde of Santa Cruz, such sights, sounds, and smells bring back fond memories of the Cowell Ranch in its last years before becoming a University of California campus.

This past December, Joe and his brother, Jim Lorenzana, generously shared their memories and family photos in an oral history that will be deposited in the UCSC and Museum of Art & History libraries. Their parents and grandparents worked for Cowell, and Joe even lived for about a year and a half in the Cook House (now the UCSC Admissions Office). "My grandmother was the cook there during the time my grandfather was the manager, and my mother took over from her when she quit," says Joe. Their mother cooked meals for the ranch workers until the Cook House closed in 1958 or '59.

### *Family Connections*

Joe and Jim's connections to the Cowell Ranch go back over a century. "My father [Joseph P. Conde] worked for the Cowell company for some thirty years, mostly up at the lime plant at Rincon on Highway 9 and then later at the ranch," says Joe. "My grandfather [Joe Netto] also worked at the ranch for some forty years or so. The last few years he was the general manager." Jim and Joe's mother, Helen Netto, was one of about ten children and married Joseph P. Conde in the late 1930s. After her

husband died in 1952, she married George Lorenzana, Jim's father. George Lorenzana was ranch manager for much of the 1950s, overseeing cattle operations. The Lorenzanas date way back into local history, being early settlers of Branciforte. Around 1900 Jim's grandfather, Jesus Lorenzana, drove ox teams that pulled wagons loaded with lime barrels.

### *Lime Kilns*

Joe may well be the last person who still remembers seeing the lime kilns in action. The last of Cowell's lime-making plants, located at Rincon, shut down just after World War II. "It was quite an operation. I saw the lime being burned. I remember going up there when I was 4 or 5 years old," he recalls.

His father took care of the boilers and the kilns. "Every once in a while, they had to tear down the boilers

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Jim Lorenzana, left, and Joe Conde examine the wood stove where their grandmother and mother made meals for the Cowell Ranch workers.

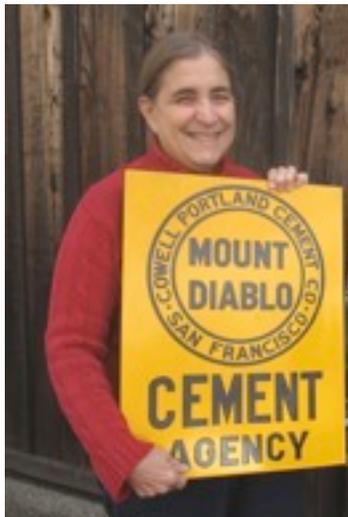
## Election Results

A big thank you to those members who returned their ballots last fall. Don Lauritson was elected to a three-year term on the board. Frank Perry was elected president and secretary for this year. Cynthia Mathews was elected vice president for this year. The job of treasurer will continue to be performed by the staff liaison, now Alisa Klaus.

Tremain Jones left the board with the expiration of his term to devote time to his graduate studies. We thank him for his service and wish him all the best in his endeavors.

## Thank You, Sally!

Sally Morgan—staff liaison for the Friends and an environmental planner for UCSC—left her position with the University in February to take a job in San Francisco. We wish her all the best with her new job.



Sally played a key role in the founding of the Friends four years ago and put in many, many volunteer hours for the Historic District. She helped write grants, supervise student interns and volunteers, and facilitate special events. The Friends owe a good deal of its progress these past few years to Sally's dedication. We are pleased to announce that Sally will be continuing her association with the Friends as a member of our Advisory Board.

We welcome Alisa Klaus, UCSC Associate Planner, as our new staff liaison. Alisa has a background in both history and geology—an ideal match for the Cowell Lime Works Historic District. She can be contacted through the Friends email address: [limeworks@ucsc.edu](mailto:limeworks@ucsc.edu).

## 100 Years Ago...

The following article appeared on the front page of the *Santa Cruz Surf*, June 28, 1912. Ernest Cowell, oldest son of Henry and Harriet Cowell, had died a year earlier, leaving a widow, Alice.

### Pity the Worries of the Rich

#### THE WIDOW OF ERNEST COWELL IN HARD STRAITS FOR A LIVING

Being a social factor in San Francisco, and living at the Fairmont Hotel under the care of a physician and nurse, costs Mrs. Alice M. Cowell quite a tidy sum of money every month.

While testifying yesterday before Superior Judge Graham in support of her petition for a monthly allowance of \$1,500 as the widow of Ernest Cowell, who left a \$1,000,000 estate, Mrs. Cowell itemized some of her principal monthly expenses.

Following are the items:

Rent of three rooms at the Fairmont	\$450
Clothing and person effects	\$500
Automobile hire	\$600
Meals a la carte	\$300
Physicians fees	\$250
Nurse's salary	\$100
Nurse's meals a la carte	\$150

Monthly total \$2,350

Under her husband's will Mrs. Cowell is entitled to receive \$1,000 a month for seven years, and after that the income on \$250,000. She asks the \$1,500 family allowance in addition to the \$1,000 a month.

This is Mrs. Cowell's second petition for an allowance of \$1,500 a month. Her first petition was granted by Judge Graham during March, 1911, shortly after the death Ernest Cowell. The sisters and brother of Ernest Cowell, Isabella M, Helen E., and Samuel H. Cowell, are opposing the second petition. They opposed the first petition also, and their appeal from Judge Graham's order is now pending in the State Supreme Court.

It is the contention of the sisters and the brother that the estate of Ernest Cowell is not now producing any net revenue, and they urge that the estate is not able to pay the \$1,500 monthly allowance to Mrs. Cowell.

William B. Dewey



## Sunday, April 22nd

### *Adventures in Timber Frame Construction*

Explore this traditional method of construction that uses large, carefully-fitted and joined timbers held together with large wooden pegs. Many utilitarian buildings such as barns were constructed this way in the 1800s, including the historic **Hay Barn** and **Cooperage** at UCSC. Over the past few decades, the U.S. has experienced a revival of timber frame construction. Such buildings can be assembled quickly and are resistant to earthquakes and fire.

**Lecture:** Joel McCarty, Executive Director, Timber Framers Guild, Alstead, New Hampshire ([www.tfguild.org](http://www.tfguild.org)). Mr. McCarty will tell about timber frame structures, how they are built, and share with us his adventures with Guild projects around the country. MAH Auditorium.

**Demonstration:** William Hurley, Dos Osos Timber Works, Los Osos, California. Mr. Hurley will show and describe both traditional and modern tools used in timber frame construction. He will then make some demonstration cuts. MAH Atrium.

**Date:** Sunday, April 22, 2012, 2-4 p.m.

**Admission:** \$5.00. Free for members of the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works and The Museum of Art & History.

**Location:** The Museum of Art & History (MAH), 705 Front Street, Santa Cruz.

For more information, phone the Museum at 429-1964, ext. 7010.

Sponsored by the  
**Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District**  
 and  
**The Museum of Art & History (MAH)**

## Saturday, May 5th

### *Botanical Tour of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District*

Join plant experts Angel Guerzon and Suzanne Schettler, and historian Frank Perry as they explore the plants of UCSC's Cowell Lime Works Historic District. Ever wonder why grass doesn't grow under walnut trees? Why Coyote Brush spells doom for meadows? Or how big a Monterey Cypress can grow in 145 years? We'll learn about all this and more during a leisurely 2-hour, one mile walking tour.

Meet at the Barn Theater parking lot at the campus main entrance, corner of High and Bay, Saturday, May 5, 2012, 10 a.m. Free parking. \$3 donation requested for tour. Friends members are free.

Angel Guerzon has spent many years working in the retail plant business and is a horticultural consultant and landscape designer.

Suzanne Schettler is the proprietor of Greening Associates ([www.greeningassociates.com](http://www.greeningassociates.com)), a local company that specializes in restoring habitats with native plants.

Frank Perry is president of the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District and co-author of the book, *Lime Kiln Legacies*.



F. Perry

This white, climbing rose, "Lamarque," was popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s and should be in full bloom by May 5th.

## Little By Little

### Old Limeworkers' Cabin Looking Good

Beginning last June, student interns and volunteers from the community have been working weekly on restoring Cabin B. These photos show the dramatic results of this effort. The siding and roof are nearly done. Next will come the door, window, and interior. Funding for materials has come from the Cabrillo Civic Clubs of California including the Santa Cruz chapter. Some of the wood being used is recycled barn wood, a gift from Jean Dempsey. Other wood was supplied by the University from trees cut on campus to make room for building construction.



Sanding rafters.



Installing siding, south side.



Sanding siding, west end.



Fastening siding.



Lifting rafters into place.



Fastening rafters.



Nailing sheathing,  
north side.



Fastening trim.



Mounting stove pipe  
on roof, north side.

The following people worked  
on Cabin B from June, 2011,  
through February, 2012:

- Susan Carter
- Laura Craig
- Michael Craig
- Marissa Ferante
- Emily Judd
- Emily Near
- Pat Paramoure
- Frank Perry
- Christina Powell
- Juan Rodriguez
- Talia Smith
- Christina Spellman
- Alison Ward
- Charlotte Wong

Photos: Frank Perry

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and chip all the material that would collect inside of them and clean them all out. Sometimes he used to work at night. When the kilns were operating, somebody had to be there all the time to make sure everything was running right."

Joe explains that both the boilers and kilns ran on fuel oil. Steam was used to power machinery at the plant such as crushers that broke the chunks of lime into various sizes before it was packed into wooden barrels.

There were two sets of kilns: the older ones that were no longer in use, and the new kilns. After a kiln was loaded, portable oil burners were slid into the kiln and then removed when the burn was done.

### ***Cattle and Hay***

After the last lime kilns shut down, only the cattle ranching operations remained.

"I actually worked there [on the ranch] myself, a couple of summers, when I was in school—with the hay crew. We used to plant all those open meadows in hay. It would be mowed and baled and hauled into the barns where they would bring the cattle in the spring to feed them before sale," he says.

Joe details the process: "In the early spring you have to go out and plow all the land up. Then they would sow it with hay seed and let it grow over the summer until late summer when it would start to dry out. And you mow it down and bale it into bales. Then we'd have to go out with trucks, load it onto the trucks, and haul it to the barn, which is probably the hardest part of the job." At first they had to load it by hand, but later they got a mechanical loader.

The hay was stored in the "feeding barn" (today known as the "Hay Barn"). "On one side [the west side] we put a layer of straw down and started stacking it right on the ground. We'd stack it all the way up to the rafters. On the other side, where the cattle fed, there was a loft and we would put some up on top of there, too."

The cattle—white-faced Herefords—spent the winter on the hills. In the spring they were rounded up and herded into the corral on the east side of the barn. "They were running maybe four to five hundred head at that time," he says. Along the east side of the barn, the lower part was open with a long feeding trough protected by a



The crew at Rincon, with Joseph P. Conde behind the fourth man of the front row (probably 1930s). The shed behind the men sheltered the front of the kilns. The side of the truck says, "HENRY COWELL LIME & CEMENT." Conde-Lorenzana Family Collection.

shed roof. Workers would stand inside the barn to dump the feed into the troughs.

### *Living in the Cook House*

In the late 1940s and early 1950s Joe and Jim's grandparents, Joseph and Mary Netto, lived at the Cook House while she served as cook. In 1953, after Mr. Netto died, Joe Conde (then a teenager) and his mother moved into the Cook House so his grandmother would not have to live alone.

Although the Netto's had a house across High Street from the ranch, they stayed in the Cook House while she cooked for the workers. "You just about had to because you had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning or so to fire up the stove in order to get breakfast on the table by 7 o'clock or whatever. So it was more convenient to live there. . . ."

"Preparing meals was kind of a continuous thing," adds Jim.

"You started with breakfast in the morning, and when you got finished with breakfast you started lunch, and when you got finished with lunch you started with



Joseph P. Conde and Helen Netto at their wedding, late 1930s. Conde-Lorenzana Family Collection.



Mary and Joseph Netto (Joe and Jim's grandparents). Conde-Lorenzana Family Collection.

dinner," says Joe. Supplies were purchased wholesale and in bulk.

There were only a half dozen or so workers by then, but each received three meals a day. Early each morning the men would wait on the porch to be called in by a bell hung next to the kitchen door.

Before Jim and Joe's grandparents moved in after the war, the Cook House had no electricity. Lamps ran on kerosene, and meat had to be stored in a cooler outside under a tree. By the early 1950s, however, there was electricity, a refrigerator, and even a telephone. The kitchen stove, however, still ran on wood, and there was no bathroom. One used "the conveniences" on the hillside out back.

Historians knew about the outhouses, but had long wondered where the workers took baths. "In the early days, I couldn't tell," Joe says. "But when I was up there, there was a shower room built off the Cook House. It was



Joseph P. Conde feeding pigeons near the Rincon lime kilns, c1930s. The plant's location beside the railroad track (background) facilitated the shipping of lime and the delivery of fuel oil. Note the stack of lime barrels on the left. Conde-Lorenzana Family Collection.

a corrugated metal building just as you go upstairs to the kitchen with a shower they could use. But I don't know how far back that went."

### **Mr. Cowell**

Jim and Joe's grandfather, Joe Netto, was a good friend of S. H. Cowell. "They knew each other quite well," says Joe. "I remember seeing him one time myself. I didn't meet him. Everyone was saying, 'Mr. Cowell is coming today!' So I remember seeing this big black limousine coming up the street with a little old man sitting in the back seat. That was all I saw. That was the last time he ever came to Santa Cruz as far as I remember. He didn't live much longer after that." This would have been in the late 1940s.



Bell used at the Cook House.

Historians have often painted the Cowells, especially Henry Cowell (the family patriarch), as rather tight fisted in their compensation of workers, but Joe sees it differently. "Actually, he [S. H. Cowell, younger son of Henry] wasn't that bad a person to work for if you consider the times. All during the time that my family lived there

and worked for him—that I know of—he never paid less than a dollar an hour. In the 1930s and 1940s that wasn't too bad."

"In those days a dollar an hour was a good wage, especially during the Depression years, and he never laid off anybody that was a regular employee. Everybody in my family that worked for him worked clear through the Depression."

"He even provided some benefits. You had insurance. If you got hurt on the job, you had insurance to cover your expenses. It didn't cover you if you got hurt off the job or if you got sick, but if you had an accident on the job it would pay for it. So, for the times it wasn't that bad a setup. He provided his people with a place to live. It wasn't anything fancy, but it was dry and had good food."

### **Hunting for Hunters**

The Cowell's had a long tradition of chasing hunters off the property. "The whole place was posted," Joe remembers. "In hunting season we used to have to go out and patrol the place to keep the hunters out—which was almost impossible. He [Cowell] didn't want anybody going there that didn't belong there. There was good reason for that because a lot of the time the hunters would break down fences, knock down gates, and what not, and let the cattle out. It could cause a lot of problems."

Joe remembers going out looking for hunters with his stepfather, George Lorenzana. They would take a shotgun

with them and have it visible in the truck. When they found a hunter, one of them would go over and talk to the man while the other would stay in the truck as a precaution.



Helen and George Lorenzana, mid 1950s. Conde-Lorenzana Family Collection.

### *The Ranch Winds Down*

By the 1950s the number of workers dwindled to just a few. Many of the buildings were no longer used except for storage. “The Cowells were rather strange,” according to Joe. “They would never throw away anything. Even if they didn’t use it anymore, they would park it someplace and let it rot, but not give away anything. The cooper house [now called the Cooperage] was up on stilts and underneath was storage space. It was full of old farm equipment that they didn’t use anymore—wagons, even a couple of old reapers—McCormick-type reapers. It was junk. It didn’t operate anymore but had been sitting there for years. There were some carriages in there—all kinds of things—sort of a museum.”

After Joe graduated from Holy Cross, he served in the army. He later worked for about thirty years at the Dream Inn.

Jim’s earliest memory of the Cowell Ranch dates from 1965, when he was nine years old. His parents took him

and his sister to an open house at the new University. “I remember going through there and mom pointing out which room was his [Joe’s] bedroom. . . . It didn’t look so much like a Cook House any longer.”

Today the building is the Admissions Office. Each year thousands of prospective freshmen and their parents come there to learn about the campus and line up for tours.

One recent graduate—recalling her first visit to the campus—said she immediately fell in love with the historic buildings. It seems that when she was growing up, her father would take the family on weekend drives so he could photograph old barns. Besides reminding us of the contributions to local history by families such as the Condes and Lorenzanas, UCSC’s vintage structures are also enhancing students’ experience.

The **Lime Kiln Chronicles** is published twice each year (April 1 and October 1) by the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District

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Our sincere thanks to Joan Parsons for recently donating this cart that was once used at the Cowell Lime Works.



### *Then and Now*

Above is how the Cook House looked in about 1965. Note the workers' cabins still standing on the hill behind it. At right is the same scene today. We'll be examining this and other historic photos on the May 5th tour (page 3). We thank Pat Johns of the Agricultural History Project, Watsonville, for providing the historic photo.



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