

LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

From Scout Camp to University

By Frank Perry

Over the years I have had the pleasure of recording and sharing through these pages the memories of several people with a first hand or family link to the history of the UCSC campus lands. John Law Smith is unusual in that he has multiple connections—two from when it was the Cowell Ranch and two from after it became UCSC.

John grew up on 9th Avenue in Twin Lakes just east of Santa Cruz. His mother was raised in Capitola, and it was in Capitola that his parents met while his father was painting the old fire station. They married in 1935.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s his father worked for the Pacific Limestone Products Company. The company quarried limestone at the north end of Spring Street, adjacent to the Cowell Ranch. The company made poultry grit and other products under brand name “Kal Kar.”

Just before the war, when John was four or five years old, his father would let him ride in the company’s eighteen-wheel truck and trailer. They would head down to the Southern Pacific’s Eblis Siding (aka Potrero Siding) that ran parallel to the South Pacific main line and Quintana Street. His father would pull up next to an empty boxcar and use a special pallet to make a bridge between the bed of the truck and floor of the boxcar. “Soon the really hard work would begin. I can’t remember how long it took my father to unload the truck and trailer. It must have been a good half day’s work.” His father used a small hand truck to transfer the 100-pound sacks of



John Law Smith

John’s father drove this truck and trailer to haul limestone products to Southern Pacific boxcars.

chicken grit to the boxcar, three or four at a time. John watched his dad make trip after trip from a vantage point on top of the pile of sacks, “so he could keep an eye on me.”

When he was a little older, John joined the Boy Scouts, eventually achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. He still has vivid memories of the grand “Camporees” held by the local troops on what is now the upper UCSC campus.

“That was a weekend event done once a year, basically to bring all the scouts in the community together. It included Sea Scouts, Explorer Scouts, and Boy Scouts. The 450-500 Boy Scouts formed up at the head of Spring Street.” From there they hiked up the hill to Chinquapin trail and along that to Marshall Field.

“We’d set up our campsite, then show off our outdoor skills.” These included everything from lashing poles together to make a lookout tower or signal tower, to demonstrations of semaphore and knot-tying.

“We had the basic Boy Scout mess kit, which included an aluminum frying pan with a top that served as a plate, a fork, knife, and spoon, and various small pots.” Each group was responsible for their meals. Sometimes they

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John Law Smith

John with dad, c1941.

In the Newspapers, 100 Years Ago . . .

January 4, 1921. "Rumors to the effect that the old St. Charles Hotel site owned by the **Cowell** estate would be improved by the building of a service station thereon, materialized this morning when the necessary permit was granted to the Standard Oil Company." [The hotel was at the NW corner of Mission and N. Pacific and burned in 1919.]

January 8, 1921. "The Henry **Cowell** Lime and Cement Company . . . have started civil action in the courts as a result of alleged boycott methods being used against them. . . . The action comes as the culmination of a series of boycotts declared by the Building Trades Council of Santa Clara County against various cement corporations." [Cowell lost this suit.]

May 4, 1921. "Last evening when Mayor Kratzenstein had been assured of his re-election, he ordered a fine two-year-old fruit cake cut and served to a number of friends. . . . The cake was presented to the mayor two years ago by the Chinese cook of the **Cowell** Lime and Cement company, but was not cut at that time on account of another cake being served, but was enjoyed immensely last night after the lapse of two years, during which time the fruit cake sweetened with age. Mayor Kratzenstein believes the decoration on the cake, a Chinese castle, was placed there especially as a token of good luck, and if so, it certainly produced the desired result. . . ."

May 4, 1921. "One of the features of the animal paddock, located on the **Cowell** homestead on High Street, are the herds of buffalo and elk that have not only become adapted to their new quarters but are propagating in numbers."

June 9, 1921. "At the present time your supply of water from the Municipal system leads from Laguna creek to the **Cowell** reservoir at an elevation of 400 feet. This reservoir was intended for a capacity of 60 million gallons, but has never been built beyond the 45 million gallon capacity due to leakage into an underlying porous limestone formation." [The reservoir was where the Arboretum is now.]

Harold (Hal) Hyde

We are sad to report the passing last fall of Hal Hyde, longtime member of the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District. Hal was 97.



Born in Watsonville, he had direct ties to several early settlers of Santa Cruz County. Hal served in Patton's Third Army during World War II, and (as a member of the Army Reserve) attained the rank of Brigadier General. He attended UC Berkeley and earned an MBA from Harvard Business School in 1949.

Hal was likely the last surviving member of the committee that helped get UC to build a campus here. He then served as UCSC's first Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance. He tells about this in an oral history which is available on the McHenry Library website.

Hal had an extraordinary record of community service. He was a founding trustee of Cabrillo College, a co-founder of the Community Foundation, a supporter of local scholarship programs, and helped design the Henry J. Mello Center for the Performing Arts in Watsonville.

Hal wrote an article on the Kal Kar quarry for the Fall/Winter 2013 issue of the *Lime Kiln Chronicles*. Friends President Frank Perry interviewed Hal a while back about the Historic District during the campus's formative years. That interview will be in this fall's *Lime Kiln Chronicles*.

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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More Than Lime

By Frank Perry

When I give lectures or lead walking tours, I always show some of the old Cowell advertisements. Of course, LIME is in large letters. But in smaller letters are other products that the Cowell company sold. Invariably, one word catches people’s eye: hair. Why did Cowell sell hair? What kind of hair was it?

The list of products advertised on some of the old Cowell receipts is more specific, listing “Goat Hair” and “Cattle Hair.” Such hair was very important in the application of lime plaster. Cattle hair was mixed with the plaster to add tensile strength. Longer hair from Angora Goats was used to give strength to cast ceiling rosettes.

The lime companies had an interesting relationship with tanneries. The tanneries bought lime to mix with water for soaking the cattle hides. The limewater solution loosened the hair so it could be more easily removed. The hair was then sold to the lime companies who sold it to plasterers.

Some of the goat hair came from animals raised in Santa Cruz. Cowell’s flock in 1897 numbered 1,100 animals according to an article in the *Santa Cruz Surf*. The hair was harvested by shearing the goats each January. Called mohair, it was also sold to the garment industry.

In the 1890s, the Henry Cowell & Co. headquarters was in San Francisco at 211 and 213 Drumm Street. The company’s bright yellow receipt advertises sixteen products, mostly masonry supplies. It shows three kinds of lime, two kinds of cement and plaster, the aforementioned hair, and various kinds of tile, clay, and sand. It also lists

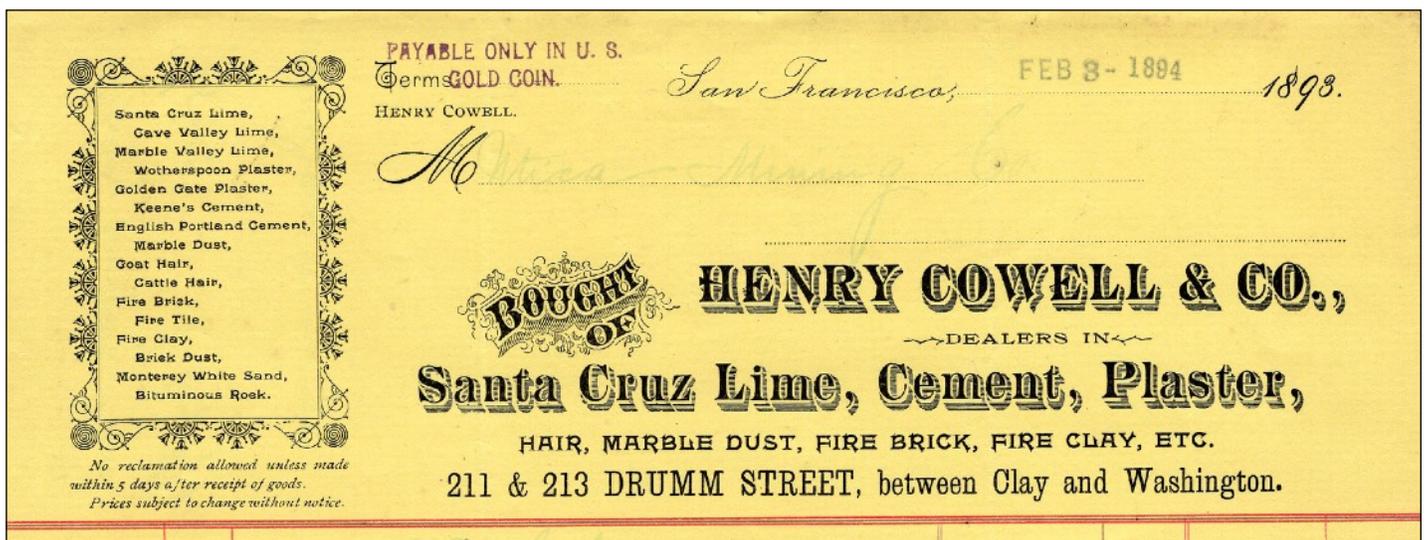
marble dust, brick dust, and bituminous rock. Cowell manufactured some of these products but was only a dealer for others.

The three kinds of lime listed are Santa Cruz Lime, Cave Valley Lime, and Marble Valley Lime—each made at a different California plant owned by Cowell. Santa Cruz Lime, of course, came from one of the several quarry and kiln sites Cowell owned and operated near Santa Cruz. Cave Valley Lime came from a location east of Auburn in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Marble Valley is off Highway 50 about halfway between Sacramento and Placerville and is another location where Cowell had kilns.

“Wotherspoon Plaster” was a very high-quality plaster manufactured in New York and used for art (busts), and decorative work. “Golden Gate Plaster” presumably refers to plaster made by the Golden Gate Plaster Mills of San Francisco. This company made several products.

Two kinds of “cement” are listed: “English Portland Cement” and “Keene’s Cement.” Broadly speaking, the word “cement” can refer to any substance that helps objects adhere to each other (ie. rubber cement, contact cement, etc.), so context is important. In the building trade, the word usually refers to Portland Cement, which is mostly made from limestone, but also contains silica, alumina, iron, and gypsum. It is one of the most important building materials in the world. Mixed with aggregate, it can be used to make concrete sidewalks, roads, bridges, foundations, walls, and even entire buildings.

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Part of a Henry Cowell & Co. receipt from February 3, 1894 listing some of the products sold by the company.

Portland cement did not come into widespread use in California until the very early 1900s, following the erection of several cement plants here. Prior to this, Portland cement was mostly imported in barrels from Europe. Use was limited because of the cost of importation.

Portland cement was invented in England in the early 1800s and was so named because, when hardened, it resembled Portland Stone, a gray building stone quarried on the Isle of Portland off Dorset.

Keene's Cement was something entirely different. It was made of gypsum (the main ingredient in Plaster of Paris) mixed with alum, exposed to intense heat, and ground to a fine powder. It could then be mixed with water to make moldings and other trim. When dry, it was very hard and took a high polish.

Two kinds of dust were offered: marble dust and brick dust. Marble dust was added to the final coat of plaster when a hard, shiny surface was desired. Brick dust was used to color plaster.

Fire bricks (also known as refractory bricks) are bricks used in kilns and fireplaces. They are made from special clays and can withstand heat better than common (red) brick. Firebricks are usually a yellowish color. Cowell did not make bricks, but imported firebricks from northern England, both to sell and to use in his lime kilns.

Firebricks are usually stamped with the name of the manufacturer. People sometimes think that the bricks in the lime kilns of the Historic District say "COWELL" on them. In fact, they say "COWEN." Joseph Cowen & Co. was a well-known maker of British firebricks from about 1823 to 1904.

Fire tiles, like fire bricks, were able to withstand heat better than ordinary tiles, so could be used in fireplaces.

It should be noted that some of these products, such as brick dust, fire bricks, and fire tiles, are still sold today.

The Davis & Cowell company was selling "Monterey White Sand" as early as the 1880s. Anyone who has driven around the outer Monterey Peninsula may have noticed dunes made of a very white sand. This sand used to be quarried extensively, which is why there is not nearly as much of it as there used to be. A book titled *Mines and Mineral Resources of Monterey County*, published in 1966, says this sand was quarried as early as 1903 and that it was so pure it was exported to San Francisco to make glass. The Cowell receipt indicates it must have been quarried even earlier. Presumably, masons used it when very white plaster was desired.

The last item on the list is bituminous rock (see LKC, Spring/Summer 2013). This was a natural mixture of tar

and sand that was quarried in the foothills of the Santa Cruz north coast. The material was broken up, heated, and used as an old-fashioned type of street pavement. Cowell and several other companies quarried this type of rock and exported it north to San Francisco. This type of pavement was once common in Santa Cruz, but there are only a few examples left. The ground under the Historic District's coopeage is paved with bituminous rock as is the floor of the horse barn at Wilder Ranch State Park.

Symptomatic of the increasing interest in Portland cement, Henry Cowell & Co. in 1898 changed its name to the Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company. Ten years later it opened up its own cement plant in Contra Costa County. That product was sold under the name "Mt. Diablo Cement." Several old watering troughs at UCSC have "Mt. Diablo Cement" cast into the side. There are at least two at the Arboretum, one at The



Cowell's San Jose store at 58 West Santa Clara Street. (Special Collections, University Library, UCSC)

Farm, one in the Historic District, and several others.

Besides building the cement plant, in the early 1900s Cowell also opened retail stores. A receipt dated 1915 is from a store at 58 West Santa Clara Street in San Jose. There was also a store in Santa Cruz, and there may well have been others.

By this time, Cowell had added plumbing supplies to its offerings. The list on the 1915 receipt includes 60 feet of 5-inch sewer pipe, 100 feet of 4-inch sewer pipe, 10 feet of 3-inch pipe, and a variety of fittings. The 4-inch pipe was 10¢ per foot for a total of \$10.

Perhaps someday a catalog or other more detailed listing of products sold by the Cowell company will turn up. In the meantime, old receipts clearly show that Cowell sold more than lime.



Spike Camp (Marshall Field) during the 1953 Boy Scout Camporee.



would dig two trenches, pile up the dirt between them, and put canvas over the dirt to make a table. To eat at the table, the boys would sit on the ground with their legs down in the trench.

“First aid was a big part of scouting, and there were demonstrations on how to use first aid items. There would be opportunities to do things at the Camporee that counted towards a particular merit badge. There was hiking, forestry, woodworking, and so forth.”

In the 1950s, his dad always had a couple of horses and would volunteer to help Les Strong (see LKC, Spring/Summer 2015) harvest hay at various farms in exchange for some of the hay. “He’d load up his horse trailer a couple of times, bring it back to his barn, and be in good shape for the winter.” Somewhere around that time is when Les started working on the Cowell Ranch (now UCSC). “I guess he worked for George Cardiff. The Cowell Ranch had a big D7 Caterpillar there, and I loved tractors! Somehow or another I convinced Les that I could do some disking for him, in fact I’d love to do some disking. Lo and behold, one year he says, ‘John, you still want to do that tractor work?’ Yea! ‘Well, see this field out here, we’re gonna plant some winter oats. How would you like to disk that whole area up?’ I didn’t know how big it was, but he gave me a little instruction on the D7 and I disked up that whole area.” This was where the faculty housing is today at the base of the campus (bordering West Lake School) and also up toward the lower quarry. “It was a three-day job, as I remember. The first afternoon I got off the tractor, all I could see in the rearview mirror of my truck was two white eyeballs and a red tongue. I was covered with reddish dirt from head to foot. What a kidney-jarring experience that was.”

The Cowell Ranch also ran cattle. “In the spring, they’d have a roundup. So I’d get one of my college buddies who loved to ride horses. He and I, dad, Les, and a couple of others would go out hunting for cows, round them up, and bring them back. That was quite an experience. Not many kids get a chance to do that. We were strictly volunteers, but we didn’t hesitate at all. It was a heck of a lot of fun.”

John got to meet Old Joe, who was mentioned in the last LKC and several other issues. “He was pretty bent over by then, but he told some stories. Probably the most interesting one—and I shared this many times with my cohorts up at the University—was about sinkholes. They used to throw the renderings from butchered cattle in the sinkholes. He told a story about going into one with a couple of other fellows. It was cavernous and so large that one could ride a horse down to the ocean in this cavern. I had no reason to doubt him, you know? Then I’d get remarks from someone and I’d begin to wonder if Joe was pulling my leg.”

While Joe’s story was surely exaggerated, there are no shortages of voids in the campus limestone, as the University would later discover during the planning and construction of some of the buildings.

John attended Monterey Peninsula College and San Jose State in the 1950s and served in the Army from 1960 to 1962. Upon returning to Santa Cruz, he went to work for his father and developer Howard Dysle on the Rolling Woods subdivision. There, he worked part time outdoors as a carpenter and part time in the office as an estimator.

After gaining experience at that job, he was recruited by UCSC personnel manager John Mortenson to work as a building inspector for the Office of Architects and Engineers, or A&E. This later became Physical Planning and Construction.

During his four years with Physical Planning, he witnessed first hand the construction of many of the campus’s early buildings. “Jack Wagstaff was the Campus Architect. Louis Fackler was a mechanical engineer, basically number two in the department. At any given time there were four to seven architects in the office and an electrical engineer. Harry Tsugawa was the campus landscape architect. Then there were the field guys, who were basically construction inspectors. That’s where I landed.”

“Physical Planning was the liaison between the executive architectural firms out of San Francisco, Chicago, New York, or wherever, and the contractors that were doing the building. Our mission was to enforce the California building regulations.” John had to study up on



Physical Planning staff posing in front of the Carriage House, circa 1966. John Smith is in the bottom row on the far right. (Photo courtesy of John Smith)

the regulations for schools, which were more stringent than for private residences.

Their main office was in the historic Carriage House near the base of the campus. Planning’s current home (nearby Barn G) was “still pretty darned rustic.” Buildings and Grounds, as it was then called, was just starting to move in. “I was very much interested in that barn because dad and Les Strong kept some of their equipment there before the University. I had been in that barn in the 1950s. They were taking out some of those sleepers that were 14-14 or 16x16.” These were made of milled redwood and had rested on the ground as the

foundation around the perimeter of the building. “Just the most beautiful clear heart redwood that you could ever imagine. They were structurally pretty sound, BUT, don’t let anyone ever tell you that termites don’t eat redwood!”

“My first charge were the mobile homes that came in clusters. From there I went to Cowell College. My mentor on that project was another inspector, named Wesley Graham. I got to see the happenings there through the stages of construction to the arrival of the professors and first students. It was an exciting time.”

“Cowell College is my favorite because it is going to be there forever. It’s concrete and it’s bedded on the limestone.” John then related how one of the dormitories was misplaced by the survey crew that laid it out. “They just finished pouring the foundation when somehow it was discovered. They had a hard time understanding why the architect and University wouldn’t bend a little and leave it as it is. But to the architect it was a very important matter. The builder had to bring in explosive experts with dynamite to totally demolish the foundation structure.” Then they poured a new one.

“When I first came on board, my assigned vehicle was a Korean War-era Army Jeep emblazoned with the white star and all the military markings.” Many of the roads were still not paved, so the Jeeps worked well. “I remember driving one home few times during lunch hour just to give the kids a ride around the block.”

From Cowell College, John moved on to Crown College. He inspected the landscaping, paths, parking,

Cowell College under construction, with the mobile homes in the foreground used temporarily as student housing. October 1, 1966. (Special Collections, University Library, UCSC)





The Crown Senior Commons fireplace as it looked in 1971. (Special Collections, University Library, UCSC)

etc. Kenneth V. Thimann was the first provost there. “I was also charged with doing the library building at Crown College for Dr. Thimann. That was a nice little project.” John especially remembers when an antique fireplace arrived from San Simeon. It was one of the European treasures not yet installed in Hearst Castle by the time Hearst died. “It was a beautiful stone structure, probably out of a [real] castle.” The fireplace is in what is now called the Senior Commons Room. According to retired UCSC Campus Architect Frank Zwart, Catherine Hearst was on the Board of Regents when Crown College was built, which may be how the college came to acquire the fireplace.

From Crown College he went to the Central Heating Plant and from there to the University House. The latter was built by Cacace and Pickney, well-known Santa Cruz home builders. “I got to know [Chancellor] Dean McHenry—a very gracious man, really likable and easy to talk to.” When the home was completed, John was invited to the grand opening dinner. “There were all kinds of luminaries there. When I went to work for the University, I was 27 years old, and my colleagues told me that I was the youngest person put into a position like that. Through the whole thing I was quite enthralled with what was going on around me. I thought, wow, these people are kind of famous.” John appreciated being invited to the opening. “That tells

you something about the McHenrys. That was really nice of them.”

After working at UCSC, he left to return to San Jose State for additional studies. John later got involved with the campus as the contractor for a construction project near Thimann Labs. “After I went back into construction, I built that steel arched [pedestrian] bridge over the canyon there. The layout for that was quite intricate. Cascade Metals out of Santa Clara did the iron work. It had to be just right to meet in the center. Cascade Metals set up a highline to get the stuff back in there from the road. They tied a cable between the trees. It was quite ingenious. I went to great pains to make sure I had the best local surveyor in town. They did the layout and the staking, and we built the foundations. Anyway, the arches didn’t meet right. Got into a lawsuit between us and Cascade Metals. We won, but it was quite an interesting court case.”

John’s memories of the campus lands begin after lime-making had ceased, but they span the important transition period from humble ranch to great university. We thank John for sharing these fascinating memories.



Dynamite box from the Pacific Limestone Products Co. (aka Kal Kar) quarry. Gift to the Friends from John L. Smith.

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How does Cowell measure up? In the early 1900s, the Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company produced promotional items such as tape measures and rulers. Of course, things haven't changed much. Many modern day companies give away promotional items, though now it's often pens, tee shirts, coffee mugs, and water bottles.

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