

LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

A Rough Life

By Frank Perry

Since its inception fourteen years ago, the *Lime Kiln Chronicles* has probably painted—for better or for worse—a romanticized picture of life at the lime works. The men certainly worked hard—quarrying limerock, hauling cordwood, loading and unloading the kilns, making barrels, and so forth. But there must have been fun times too. One can just imagine the men, after dinner at the Cook House, relaxing in their cabins, smoking, drinking, playing cards, and swapping stories of the old country. We know from their descendants, that many were fine young men who went on to start families and pursue other work. Some even established their own Santa Cruz businesses in later years.

It does not take a lot of imagination, however, to figure out that when you gather together a bunch of young men from different countries, speaking different languages, they are not always going to get along. Some of the stories from the early years read like the script from a 1950s television western. Take, for example, this story from the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, January 4, 1879:*

This part of the county is noted for its deeds of bloodshed and cold-blooded murders. The latest attempt, which proved a fizzle, occurred last Monday evening at Cowell's lime kiln, between a couple of the fighting fraternity—a Yankee and an Irishman. As it rained Monday the men employed at the kilns could not work, came to town, and getting slightly confused with stimulants, returned home during the afternoon of said day. The Irishman and the Yankee quarreled over some frivolous matter,

and one angry word brought on another till one challenged the other to fight a duel, which offer was accepted. Seconds were selected, and shotguns chosen as the weapons. The Irishman bade the men around him good-bye, and after saying his prayers remarked that "one of us has to die, so give me a decent burial if I go under." The Yankee looked perfectly cool, and did not seem to bother his head about the result. Both men stepped up to the scratch, thirty paces from each other. Both fired at the word three. When the smoke cleared away, the Yankee was seen stretched upon the ground, apparently lifeless. The Irishman took one glance at his victim, and terror-stricken scampered off into the woods, where he was found the next morning, and told to return, as he had been made the victim of a sell. The guns were simply loaded with powder by the seconds, the Yankee being let into the secret, and he was to keel over and pretend he was shot, to

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Cabin B as it looked in 2005. During restoration, a bullet was found imbedded in the north interior wall.

* Note that old newspapers often made reference to the nationality of the people in news stories. The articles here are quoted exactly as written.

In the Newspapers, 100 Years Ago . . .

July 25, 1922. Deputy Game Warden E. V. Moody has two deer heads in his possession that he found on the **Cowell** property on the ridges back of Rincon, which are more familiarly known as the Marshall fields. . . . Killing deer out of season is a serious offense. . . .

October 11, 1922. Handsome cups will be awarded to the winners [of the Farm Bureau fair] as follows: **Cowell** trophy . . . to the school making the highest number of points.

November 1, 1922. Nathan R. Rowes, for over fifty years a resident of Santa Cruz and well known as a veteran cooper, passed away this morning at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Mae Stockinger, on Walnut Avenue . . . He put in over thirty years of service for the **Henry Cowell** company, working both at the cooperage shops located at the upper and lower kilns. In recent years he also worked at the Holmes lime kilns at Felton. He was a man of a most genial disposition and had many friends.

November 25, 1922. The plowing season is now under way in nearly all the sections of Santa Cruz, and on many of the ranches of larger acreage small tractor plows are busy turning up the soil, where formerly the old fashioned plow was depended upon to do the work. On the **Cowell** ranch tractors are being used to a large extent and the amount of ground that can be turned up during a day is surprisingly large. The last rain made soil conditions ideal for [the] plowing and planting of cereal crops.

November 27, 1922. A shooting range has been placed in position on the **Cowell** ranch, just north of the city water reservoir on upper High Street. There are painted targets, both for short and long range shooting.

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.

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Joan Gilbert Martin

Local historian and editor Joan Gilbert Martin passed away in September. She was just shy of 92. Joan co-authored the book on the history of Pogonip (including its lime kilns) and, with Stanley D. Stevens, transcribed and indexed the Leon Rowland card file at Special Collections, UCSC. She helped edit eleven local history publications and in 2009 was named "Historian of the Year" by the History Forum at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History.

<https://researchersanonymous.weebly.com/history--historians.html>

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(Spring and Fall) by the
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Quarry workers at the Cowell Lime Works, early 1900s. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, University Library, UCSC.

scare the Irishman, who is now the laughing stock of the neighborhood.

This next news item appeared in the *Santa Cruz Daily Surf*, September 18, 1888:

John Antone was arrested yesterday for battery committed on Frank Sylvia Sunday. He pleaded not guilty and his trial was set for the 24th inst. Both men are employed at Cowell's lime kilns and Antone knocked Sylvia out because he, the latter, had saved up more money out of his wages than had Antone, and this made Antone mad. Antone's savings will probably be further diminished.

Such violence occurred at other lime-making operations as well. This story in the *Santa Cruz Surf*, October 24, 1889, happened at the I.X.L. lime kilns near Felton and was titled "The Race War":

An Irishman and a Portuguese got into an altercation at the supper table Sunday evening, October 13th, at the I. X. L. lime kilns, and this developed into a general row, the fellow laborers of each man taking sides according to nationality.

Now, whichever side was in the wrong, will be found out legally, as many arrests have followed and several more trials will be held. It is not the province of a newspaper to publish one-sided rumors of a case, when the law has been invoked.

The fight between the opposing parties became very lively and the four Irishmen were forced to take to their cabin, after a bloody contest. Here the Portuguese assailed them later and nearly demolished the front of the cabin with large stones and severely injured two of the four men. One of the Irishmen escaped to the woods, badly injured, and the three other escaped to Felton and reported the matter to Constable Drew, who went to the kilns and arrested two of the ringleaders of the Portuguese. These he brought to the jail in this city, along with one of the Irishmen, who was very badly wounded and needed the attention of Dr. Knight. He was the person who first started the fight with the Portuguese at the supper table.

It seems that after Constable Drew left Felton for Santa Cruz that the two Irishmen who escaped from the cabin must have aroused a number of their friends and countrymen in Felton to avenge the injury done them. These friends proceeded in a body to the Portuguese cabins and there badly treated several Portuguese, wounding them about as badly as the Irishmen had been. Warrants were sworn out and six men arrested. One was released. Of the other five, four were convicted at the trial last week and one acquitted. The case of the two Portuguese, arrested for participation in the first conflict, have not been set yet.

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ISAAC E. DAVIS.
HENRY COWELL.

DAVIS & COWELL,
DEALERS IN
SANTA CRUZ LIME
CEMENT, PLASTER, HAIR, LATH AND LATH NAILS,
MARBLE DUST,
FIRE BRICKS, FIRE CLAY, ETC.
Cor. Front and Washington Streets, San Francisco.

Advertisement in the *Pacific Coast Business Directory*, 1867. Courtesy of Special Collections, University Library, UCSC.

The I.X.L. company was located on Fall Creek, where the old lime kilns still stand. Henry Cowell took over operations there around 1900. Today the site is the Fall Creek Unit of Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, and the old kilns are a popular hiking destination.

Not surprisingly, making lime was dangerous work. The men had to exercise a fair amount of caution, especially when working in the quarries or around the kilns. The *Sentinel* of August 29, 1861, reported on a bad accident at the Samuel Adams kilns:

A man by the name of Grant was seriously burned at the lime-kilns of Adams & Co. on Thursday the 29th inst., by the falling in of one of the walls of a kiln. The hot rocks caught his legs as he was retreating and burned them in a shocking manner.

Adams sold out to Davis and Cowell in 1869 and his kilns (now on Wilder Ranch property) became known as Cowell's upper kilns while those at the UCSC entrance became Cowell's lower kilns.

At Cowells, a worker fell into one of the kilns:

A man named John Manasa, employed at Cowell's lime kiln, last Saturday accidentally fell into one of the kilns, which had just been filled with lime rock, preparatory to burning.

This report was in a newspaper called *The Local Item*, December 15, 1876. The middle 1870s seems to have been a period with more than the usual number of accidents.

The October 19, 1877 issue of the *Santa Cruz Weekly Courier* reluctantly reported on a fatal quarry accident:

The world manufactures its pleasures, disappointments, crimes, noble deeds and accidents as it revolves through illimitable space. Each day brings its welcome or unwelcome news—of great achievements, bright prospects, or of lowering [clouds] of war, railroad or bank robberies, or



Cowell lime workers, circa 1900. Courtesy Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History.

shocking accidents. The events of time seem to be, as it were, spread on an endless piece of canvas, that is continually unfolding its record to the world. It naturally comes within the province of the newspaper man to record the distasteful news for general information, and a sad task it sometimes proves to be. Last week it was suicide or murder, and this time it is a case of being crushed to death. The news came to town last Saturday, when Mr. Staffler went up after the mangled remains of the poor victim. The circumstances attending the catastrophe are related below in the testimony given before the Coroner's Jury.

The Testimony and Verdict.

Pat [Dorsey] testified that he is foreman of the men at Davis & Cowell's lime quarry and generally left it to the men to work as they saw proper; did not direct deceased to work at the place where he was killed. Have known deceased about sixteen months; he was aged about 27 years, named John Bruce, and a native of Kentucky; deceased was at work under a ledge of rock that was undermined and which broke suddenly off at a seam, and falling on him crushed him to death.

The testimony of Michael Nom and John Noe was corroborative of that of Mr. [Dorsey].

The jury returned a verdict of accidental death.

The funeral of Mr. Bruce took place on Sunday last, when a large number of his acquaintances performed the last sad rites in respect to his memory.

The *Sentinel* had this to say in its issue of the same date:

The number of accidents that have taken place at the Cowell & Co. lime kilns within the last year has caused considerable comment, some going so far as to suggest that Cowell thinks more of a \$20 piece than he does of the lives of the poor men in his employ. We agree with the *Courier* that the Grand Jury should point an eye in that direction.

Fortunately, the number of serious accidents seems to have declined in later years, or the newspapers did not cover them. There do not seem to be any newspaper accounts of fatal accidents during the first half of the 20th century.



Cabin A in March, 2022. (Photo by Frank Zwart).

A Closer Look At Cabin A

By Frank Perry

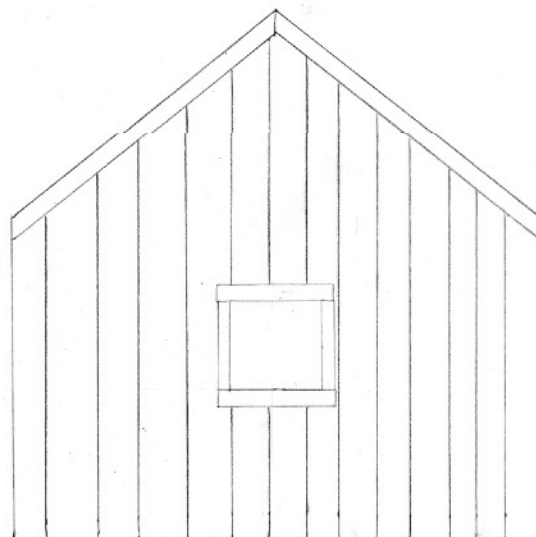
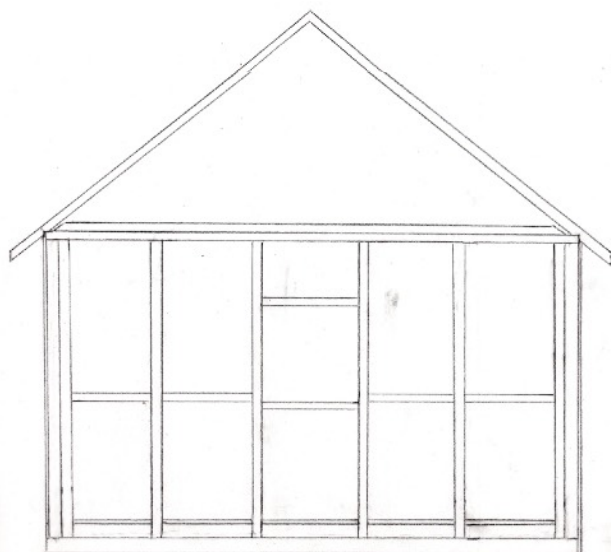
Many years ago, *Santa Cruz Sentinel* writer Margaret Koch did a series of articles on local history titled "If Trees Could Talk." Each installment told the story of a historic Santa Cruz tree and the history that it had witnessed. There was a story on the West Cliff Drive Cork Oak, the Vine Street Black Walnut, the Morrissey Boulevard palm trees, and so forth.

I was reminded of this series earlier this year while working with board member Emmy Mitchell-Lynn on measuring and photographing one of the old lime-worker cabins. Suppose this cabin could talk? What are some of the sights, sounds, and smells it might share?

Today, the campus entrance is a bustling thruway with hundreds of cars, bicycles, and buses whizzing up and down Coolidge Drive just below the cabin. Around the turn of the last century (and the cabin is at least that old), Cabin A watched over the hub of the Cowell lime-making operation. There were workers tending the kilns, loading the finished lime into wooden barrels, and loading the barrels onto wagons. The men gathered across the road three times a day for meals at the Cook House. At the end of the day, they trudged up little paths through the grass to their cozy hillside cabins.

Instead of traffic sounds, there was the crackling sound of the kiln fires, the pounding of barrel hoops to force each wooden lime barrel into shape, the rattling and jingling of the wagons, and the clip clop of ox hooves. Then there were the evening conversations of the workers, probably in Portuguese, as they played

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Drawings of the cabin's south side showing framing (left) and the vertical redwood siding (excluding battens). This side is approximately 14 feet wide and 14 feet high at the peak of the roof.

cards by the light of kerosene lamps. Smoke from Prince Albert tobacco wafted through the air.

Although cabins can't talk, they can still tell stories. Several surveys of the historic buildings on campus have been done over the years, but none of these were detailed examinations of Cabin A. We wanted to determine its current condition, document how it was built, and find out what stories it might tell.

When looking up at the east hillside from the Cook House parking lot, Cabin A is the one on the left. Originally there were five cabins here, but only two remain, designated A and B by the University. Cabin B measures about 12 by 14 feet. Cabin A is larger (about 14 x 18 feet) with the longer dimension running north-south instead of east-west. It also differs in having studs to

support the walls. In the case of Cabin B, the walls have no studs and consist only of vertical redwood siding. The interior of both cabins is a single room, and each originally had a woodstove, as indicated by charred holes in the sheathing.

In the course of photographing, measuring, and making drawings of the cabin, it soon became clear that it is rather crudely built. Odd sizes of lumber were used that didn't always match. Building conventions, even for the 19th century, were not always followed. The cabin is basically a shed built from lumber that was at hand.

The siding consists of vertical 1-inch-thick redwood planks ranging from about 8 to 19 inches wide. Instead of 2-by-4-inch studs, they are 3 by 5 inches. The studs extended down below the floor, resulting in a ceiling that was only about 6 feet 8 inches high. The studs are about 24 inches apart instead of the standard 16 inches.

The rafters range in size from 1.5 by 3.5 inches, to 2 by 4, to 3 by 4 and are about 26 inches apart. There is no ridge board; the rafters simply but up against each other at the crest of the roof. The sheathing helps hold them in place and preserve the spacing.

If you have ever been annoyed by animals living inside the walls of your house and keeping you awake at night, then you would not want to have slept in Cabin A. The studs rest on 6-by-6-inch beams which also support the 6-inch floor joists. This may be hard to visualize, but this leaves a 6-inch gap at the base of



Old insulators suggest that the cabin once had electricity.

the wall and under the floor where an animal could gain access to the inside of the wall. Let's hope the workers had cats to keep the rodent population down.

One of the most dramatic examples of inconsistency concerns the top plates of the east and west walls. This is the horizontal cross piece to which the tops of the studs are fastened and on which the ceiling joists and rafters rest. The east top plate is 3 inches thick and 6 inches wide. The west one, however, is 4 inches thick by 6 inches wide. To compensate, the studs are notched one inch into the thicker plate. It seems like it would have been easier to cut all those studs one inch shorter, but that's not the way they did it.

While the cabin (especially the roof) has badly deteriorated, our study revealed that the principal timbers, floor, and much of the siding remains sound.

Wooden structures, such as worker housing, are almost never preserved at historic lime kiln sites. These are probably the only lime-worker cabins left in California, and perhaps in the western United States. At

the Fall Creek and Adams Creek lime kiln sites, all buildings were classified years ago by the property owners as attractive nuisances, and removed. This was typical throughout California before their historical significance was appreciated. This makes the restoration of the UCSC cabins all the



Rafter tails and gutter, east side.

more important. They are irreplaceable tools for telling the stories of the Portuguese, Italian, Irish and other immigrant groups who came here seeking a better life in America.

The South Campus Vision Study, which was discussed in the previous issue of the *Lime Kiln Chronicles*, should be completed by the end of this year. We are pleased to report that the rough draft calls for continuing the work to restore the cabins and other historic structures in the district. How quickly this happens will depend on financial support.



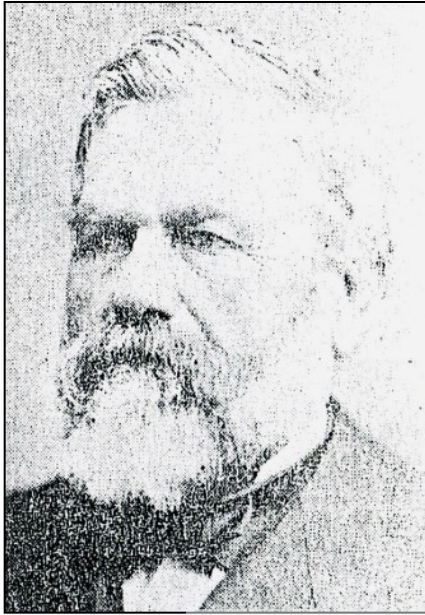
Ceiling planks.



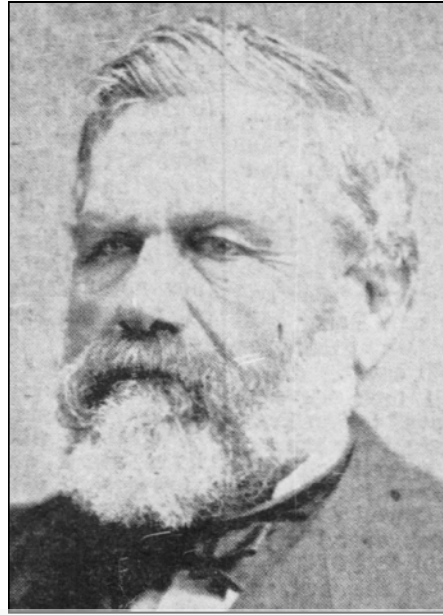
Volunteers measure the doorway.



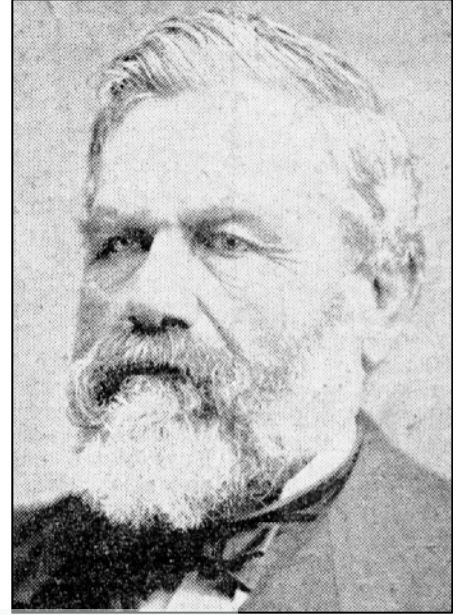
Interior wall showing horizontal planks covered by sheetrock.



A



B



C

There are only 4-5 known photographs of Henry Cowell, and only two are closeup portraits. One is in the collection of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History and appears on page 67 of the book *Lime Kiln Legacies*. The other appeared in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, November 8, 1953, page 9, when Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park was created. Actual photographs show a range of gray tones, but photographs in newspapers are broken up into little dots (called a halftone image). The former is of higher quality and is much more desirable than the latter. But sometimes, as in this case, the newspaper version is all that has survived. The three versions above were, (A) printed from microfilm, (B) downloaded from an online digital version of the paper, and (C) scanned from the actual newspaper. Clearly, the one scanned from the hardcopy preserves the most detail. Fortunately, the Santa Cruz Public Library still has hardcopies of many of the old newspapers. They are an irreplaceable resource in situations such as this.

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