



# LIME KILN CHRONICLES

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

## Sarah Cowell

By Rainbow Mitchell-Fox Bitter and Eric Bitter

Historians have come to recognize the window of time from approximately 1870 to 1900 as, “The Gilded Age of California.” Although a brief period in history, it was marked by the rapid growth in entrepreneurship, migration to the state, and expansion of higher education for women, to name a few. It was also the period when Sarah, the fifth of six children born to Henry and Harriet Cowell, lived most of her life.

After returning to his east coast home from his business dealings with his brother in San Francisco, Henry Cowell married Harriet Carpenter in Massachusetts on November 2, 1854. The newlyweds moved to the San Francisco area to start and raise a family consisting of Isabella, Roland, Ernest, Harry, Sarah, and Helen. Harriet and the children moved to Santa Cruz in the middle of July, 1865. Henry made the move and joined his family about October 1.

Sarah was born in Oakland in 1863 and spent the early part of her life growing up with her siblings in the Cowell ranch house (now known as the Cardiff House on the UCSC campus). She attended church with her family, made her way through Bay View School with her siblings, and enjoyed life on the ranch. She and her sister, Helen, must have enjoyed learning as their names were found in an 1878 honor roll listing in the newspaper. Sarah was a regular on the honor roll list in her class.

The Henry Cowell brand was growing into a well-known name around Santa Cruz, yet he worked at keeping the family out of the spotlight while still



This clipping from the *San Francisco Call*, 1901, shows some of the city's prominent society women who were doing charity work. Unfortunately, it does not show Sarah Cowell. There are no definite images of her.

supporting and participating in the community. His name was found in a newspaper article as attending a ball to commemorate the opening of the Pacific Ocean House in 1866. He was mentioned in another article for his contribution of \$1,000 to the building of a new Congregational Church. He was recorded as sponsoring events at

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

**July 26, 1924.** “Thirty eight hundred acres of the famous old Marsh Grant in eastern Contra Costa [County] has again passed into other hands. The **Cowell** Lime and Cement Company on Friday received a deed to the property from the Balfour Guthrie Company of San Francisco and London. . . . It is reported that the Cowell interests will use the lands just purchased for the purpose of running cattle.”—*Martinez Daily Gazette*

**August 28, 1924.** “A complaint was filed through Attorney J. H. Morris yesterday by the Henry **Cowell** Lime and Cement Company against the First National Bank for money had and received.”—*Santa Cruz Sentinel*. [See A.S.T. Johnston story in the *Lime Kiln Chronicles*, Fall/Winter, 2016-2017]

**October 17, 1924.** “The old **Cowell** barn that has stood as a landmark on the Cliff Drive, opening at Bay St., has been removed to the rear of the building now being used by the S. H. Cowell Co. as a warehouse for storage of lime and cement.”—*Santa Cruz Sentinel*

**October 30, 1924.** “S. H. **Cowell** arrived last evening from San Francisco and is here on a business trip.”—*Santa Cruz Sentinel*

**November 29, 1924.** “The **Cowell** Lime Company and its subsidiary, the San Benito Lime Company, owners of the quarry and kiln in the Cienega section announce the re-opening of the same within a short time.”—*Santa Cruz Sentinel*.

**December 14, 1924.** “Pete Sawyer has completed the building of a small concrete reservoir dam on Cave Gulch creek for S. H. **Cowell**. The dam is located only a few hundred yards below the wagon bridge that crosses the stream leading to the abandoned upper lime kiln plant”—*Santa Cruz Sentinel*.

***New and Renewing Members  
Thank you!***

John & Bridget Barnes	Alisa Klaus
Neal Coonerty	Sally Morgan
Dave & Linda Dawson	Larry Pageler
Lee & Emily Duffus	Patricia Paramoure
Mary Gerbic	Tom Schreiner
Virginia & George Jansen	Steven & Alice Schnaidt
Patricia Johns	Mark & Patricia Traugott

***Lime’s Influence Reached Far and Wide***

While the local manufacturing of lime was restricted to Santa Cruz, Felton, and the North Coast, all of Santa Cruz County was connected in some way to this important industry during the late 1800s. Whenever a brick chimney, fireplace, or foundation was built, lime mortar was used. Early-day tanneries in the San Lorenzo and Soquel Valleys used limewater to soften the hides and prepare them for tanning. Lime was also used at the paper mills in Santa Cruz and Soquel and was an essential ingredient at the sugar refineries in Soquel and Watsonville.

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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## Cooperage Update

(From a UCSC Press Release by Christy Tall)

A generous anonymous gift is helping UC Santa Cruz honor its history, reimagine the entrance to campus, and create a unique meeting and event space for the campus and the greater community.

The generous gift is intended to lead and jumpstart fundraising to support the rehabilitation of what is known as the Cowell Ranch Cooperage, one of the oldest buildings on the UC Santa Cruz

campus. Built in 1869, the cooperage was originally used to construct and house wooden barrels for storing and shipping lime, heated from quarried limestone in the adjacent lime kilns. The building has undergone several iterations in its 155-year lifespan, including when it was shortened to make way for Coolidge Drive, which became the main entrance to campus. It is believed to be the only remaining free-standing cooperage in California.

Similar to the renovation of the nearby Cowell Ranch Hay Barn, the cooperage project will involve rehabilitating the building, consistent with its historical significance, while also reimagining it for everyday use by the campus and broader community. Along with the hay barn, it will be an important anchor building for what is known as the gateway area to campus. Unlike the hay barn, the cooperage was constructed as a “bridge truss” rather than as a traditional building. Workers did their barrel work not only inside the structure but beneath it. It is obvious how the building has been reinforced over time to keep the structure intact.

When rehabilitated, the new building will be multi-use and be an important venue for campus and community engagement. It may include event and lecture space, a small coffee shop, and open collaboration areas. While the space will be an important asset to the entire campus, it will be stewarded by the administrative offices of the UC Santa Cruz Foundation and the Alumni Association.

The cooperage is in the Cowell Lime Works Historic District, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2007. The general revitalization of the area represents UC Santa Cruz’s commitment to preserving history, honoring the original inhabitants of the land—the Awawas-speaking Uypi Tribe—and those who followed, and reimagining the spaces for present-day use. While the building will represent a certain point in time, the campus plans to have the surrounding landscape honor earlier times. Planning remains in the early stages.

Chancellor Cynthia Larive said she is excited by the latest historic district project, calling it a sure-to-be “showstopper” at the gateway to campus.

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## Membership Renewal

Last year nearly everyone who renewed their membership did so via our website: [limeworks.ucsc.edu](https://limeworks.ucsc.edu). Consequently, we have decided not to include membership renewal envelopes with the *Lime Kiln Chronicles*. This saves us considerable time and expense. If however, you would like to renew by sending a check, you can still do so by sending it to:

Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District  
Mail Stop PPDO  
University of California  
1156 High Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

**Make the check to the UCSC Foundation and put Friends Cowell Lime Works on the memo line.**

Membership renewal is once a year, either in the Spring or Fall depending on when you joined. If your address label says S24 (Spring 2024) or older, then please renew. If your address label says F24, then you don’t need to renew until then. Of course, additional donations are welcome at any time.

(continued from page 1)

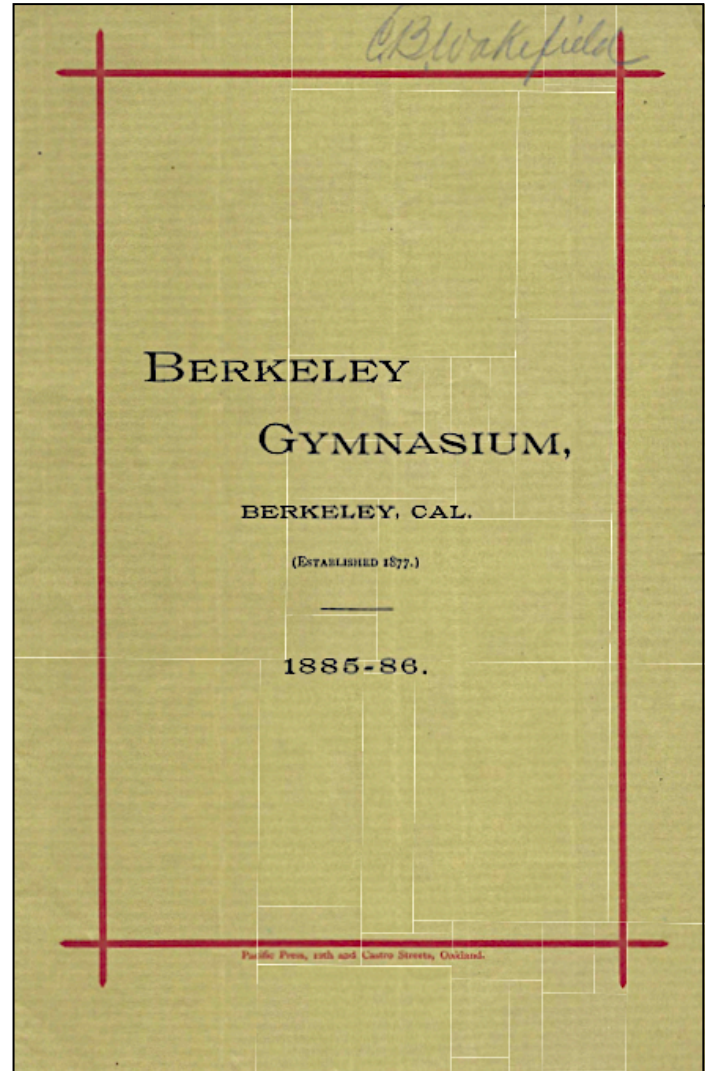
the family-owned property in Sycamore Grove. Henry's name was also found in a newspaper article as a pallbearer in 1870. Then, in 1871, Henry was listed as tasked to the Committee of Arrangement at the Grand Citizens Ball. He was also an active member of the Sycamore Club.

During the late 1800s, Santa Cruz was a growing town known for its industries of lime, leather, and lumber. It was also becoming a destination for the quickly growing tourist and hospitality industries, fueled by growth and accessibility of transportation and hotel accommodations respectively. People were able to visit Santa Cruz for a day at the beach, or longer. The county boasted numerous resort accommodations along the shores of Capitola and Santa Cruz. The mountains also offered their own attraction of majestic redwood trees. While the Santa Cruz area was growing as a resort town with significant industries, San Francisco was taking over the West Coast as a fast-growing city of significance.

San Francisco was a boom town first created by the Gold Rush and then by its growth as a bustling seaport. Businesses, financial institutions, and cultural activities were the draw of visitors who became new residents. It was the destination spot for those to see and the place to live in Northern California.

Sometime in 1879, Henry moved the family from Santa Cruz to San Francisco. The Cowell business had grown to serve the Pacific Coast and had well-established offices, warehouses, and properties in the Bay Area. One could speculate that the move was business related. However, San Francisco offered the family a more refined life that included nearby higher education for his children and social activities not widely available in Santa Cruz.

By the mid 1870s, San Francisco became a city of prominence. It had grown from about 57,000 in 1860 to just under 150,000 people in 1870. The Palace Hotel, the world's largest in its day, opened its doors in 1875. Wealthy families of California, and beyond, flocked to San Francisco to build grand homes in this bustling city. Names like Leland Stanford (the railroad tycoon), Ben Holliday (the stagecoach baron), James Phelan, Sr. (real estate and liquor



This catalog for the Berkeley Gymnasium (preparatory school), 1885-1886, lists Henry Cowell as a patron and Sarah E. Cowell as having been a member of the class of 1881.

magnate), and the wealthy banker, William Ralston, all moved their families into palatial residences along Van Ness, Post, Mason, Stockton, and Powell Streets. Upon their return, the Cowell family's first residence was located at 1812 Pine Street. Later they moved into a larger home at 413 Hyde Street. The San Francisco 1880 census has the entire family living there, including Sarah (described as a student).

Though education was impressed upon only men of affluent families, Henry encouraged all his children, including the daughters, to seek higher education. So, after graduating from Bay View



Alert readers will recognize this photo from the article last Spring on Helen Cowell. It is purportedly shows two of the Cowell sisters and was taken at the corner of what is now the Cardiff House at UCSC. Note the Carriage House in the distance. It could well be that one of these women is Sarah. (Special Collections, Univ. Library, UCSC)

grade school, and the move to San Francisco, Sarah enrolled in the Berkeley Gymnasium. This preparatory school, modeled after the German-style of education, was located across the bay from their San Francisco family home. The school was situated at base of the University of California, Berkeley campus, and founded on the principal goal to prepare students for a college experience. A newspaper ad for the school boasted that coursework and school faculty were of the highest caliber and proudly displayed a patrons list of prominent names.

In the 1881 Oakland city directory, Sarah was listed as a student living on Durant Avenue between Bowditch and Choate in East Berkeley. Since the Bay Bridge wasn't constructed until the mid 1930s public transportation across the bay was available by ferry. From an 1881 daily newspaper ferry schedule, a Berkeley to San Francisco passenger could ride from 7:30 am and every hour ending with 11:30 am, and 1:30, 3:00, 4:00, 5:00, 6:00 pm daily. One can speculate that Sarah could easily make the 30-or-so minute trip to and from her Berkeley student housing to the San Francisco family home when she desired.

Sarah graduated from the Berkeley Gymnasium in May of 1881. The graduation ceremony was at the Berkeley Presbyterian church, as reported in the *Oakland Tribune* newspaper. Each graduating student performed an example of their talents during the ceremony. Sarah recited her essay "A Study of History," which highlighted the importance of her focus on historical studies. From Sarah's talk, the reporter wrote,

"MISS SARAH E. COWELL Spoke on the subject of 'A Study of History.' History preserves

GRADUATING CLASS OF 1881.

Myrtle Blum,	E. W. McAllister,	Richard C. Shaw,
Sarah E. Cowell,	Louisa Palache,	M. Elizabeth Weller,
Joseph A. Heyman,	Geo. W. Riddle,	Mary L. Shaw.
James C. McKee,		
<i>Graduating Address by Prof. Frank Soule, University of California.</i>		
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The Berkeley Gymnasium was co-educational, as revealed by this list of the 1881 graduates (including Sarah E. Cowell). Her brother, Samuel Henry (Harry) Cowell, was listed among the graduates two years earlier. The school prepared students for entry into the University of California. Both Sarah and Samuel Henry Cowell attended the university, but neither graduated. Older brother, Ernest, however, graduated from the university in 1880.

the monuments of the past, and hands them down, eternal, to the future. However pursued, history promotes, above all things, mental development. As a pleasure merely, it is great; but, as a study, it is sublime. It is to history that all resort in order to obey that divine command, 'Know thyself.' Poetry and history are closely joined in aim. History is an incentive to action. It is a signboard to the reader. The historian gives the greatest boon to mankind. He must be impartial and logical. It is ever advancing, we should so guide our conduct as to give a good example to the future."

Celebrating her commencement from school, she went on a trip with her sister to, "The Geysers." In another advertisement in the 1881 *San Francisco Chronicle*, the geysers were in reference to those found in the Sonoma County area.

Not much of Sarah's whereabouts was documented after her graduation from the Berkeley Gymnasium. She attended the University of California, Berkeley briefly, only appearing once in an 1884 school list of students attending the college.

During the 1880s and 1890s, announcements in the *Santa Cruz Surf* newspaper showed Harriet

Cowell traveled from San Francisco to Santa Cruz. Sometimes these trips included a "Miss" Cowell which could have been any of the three Cowell sisters. This suggests that travel between the family home in San Francisco to the Santa Cruz Cowell Ranch was a common occurrence. It's easy to imagine how the Cowell ladies enjoyed a retreat from the busy city to the resort community of Santa Cruz at their ranch.

Santa Cruz wasn't completely without activities for its social class. In August of 1890, Sarah and her father attended a "Bull's Head" dinner at Sycamore Grove. Mayor Bowman hosted the event for the officers and ladies visiting from Camp Stanford, the National Guard post, stationed in Santa Cruz.

Sarah was a modern educated woman of means and status. San Francisco was a place for her to connect with other individuals of her rank and station. In January 1896, Sarah served as one of 24 individuals on the Board of Managers for the San Francisco Nursery for Homeless Children, incorporated in 1892. The Nursery's primary mission was to provide shelter to orphaned children. She was appointed Corresponding Secretary, tasked with writing acknowledgements of all donations and keeping the list of the donor names. In the 1897 city directory, the Nursery for Homeless Children was listed as her residence. Moreover, Sarah's name was found in articles highlighting homeless children. Some fundraising events were very lavish, as detailed in a 1901 article describing a charity event at the Palace Hotel's Maple Hall.

Besides her philanthropic activity caring for homeless children, she was also an active member in the Sorosis Club. Organized in 1893 and modeled after the national organization, the Sorosis Club of San Francisco was formed to empower and nurture women's interest in philanthropy, literary, and scientific pursuits. The club met on the first, third, and fifth Mondays of each month from September to June. Sarah's sister, Helen was found in an 1895 newspaper article to be active in the club, while Sarah's name was listed in a club event in 1899. Both Sarah and Helen were in the 1903 Shreve & Co.

**THE**

**Berkeley Gymnasium,**

*A Preparatory School to the*

**UNIVERSITY.**

**Accommodations for Boarders, First-class.**

**REFERENCES:**

John LeConte, M. D., President of Univ. Cal.; Eugene W. Hilgard, Ph. D., Prof. Ag. Univ. Cal.; Bernard Moses, Ph. D., Prof. History, Univ. Cal.; Martin Kellogg, A. M., Prof. Latin, Univ. Cal.; Willard B. Rising, Ph. D., Prof. Chem., Univ. Cal.

*Term will commence August 1st.*

For circular, address

**JOHN F. BURRIS, Principal,**  
1514-3ms Berkeley, Cal.

This advertisement for the Berkeley Gymnasium appeared in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* in 1877, the school's first year. Wealthy Santa Cruzans F. A. Hihn and R. C. Kirby were among the school's patrons.

*Blue Book* as club members. Among that list of names were Mrs. Mills (co-founder of Mills Collage for women), Miss Rose O'Halloran (esteemed astronomer), Mrs. Phoebe Hearst (suffragist and mother of William Randolph Hearst), to name a few members.

In 1900 Sarah's mother, Harriet, died. In that year's census it lists Sarah living at the Hyde Street address with her father and two sisters, Isabella and Helen.

Sadly, Sarah's life was cut short in a tragic horse and cart accident just days before her fortieth birthday in 1903. It happened while she was accompanying Mrs. George, the wife of the ranch manager, on a ride near the upper kilns. The *Evening Sentinel* stated that, "it is presumed the horse ran away and the cart struck some obstacle, causing the ladies to be thrown out at the top of the hill. Mrs. George was driving." Although Mrs. George was rendered unconscious and taken to her home and later recovered from her injuries, Sarah was found face down on a pile of rocks. She died within an hour of the accident from what her death records describe as a broken neck.

According to the *San Francisco Call and Post* newspaper, Sarah left the bulk of her estate to her two sisters, one hundred dollars each to her two brothers, and curiously, five hundred dollars to Rose O'Halloran (mentor and fellow Sorosis Club member). O'Halloran was likely a family

**MILLIONAIRE'S DAUGHTER.  
NECK BROKEN IN RUNAWAY.**  
[BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS—P.M.]  
**SANTA CRUZ, May 14.**—Miss Sarah Cowell, daughter of Henry Cowell, the millionaire, was killed near the lime kilns owned by her father today, and Mrs. Frank George, wife of the foreman, was badly injured in a runaway accident.

The ladies were returning from a drive when the horse became frightened, it is presumed, and ran away. The cart struck an obstacle and the ladies were thrown out. Miss Cowell was thrown on a pile of rocks and her neck was broken and she died half an hour afterward. Mrs. George was unconscious and unable to make a statement up to a late hour this evening as to how the accident occurred. Her face and head are cut but no bones are broken.

Until Mrs. George is able to make a statement the real cause of the accident cannot be told as there were no witnesses.

Miss Cowell was the youngest daughter of Mr. Cowell. Her home was in San Francisco.

The tragic news of Sarah Cowell's death was reported in newspapers throughout California. This story is from the *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1903. Mrs. George regained consciousness the next day, but had no memory of the accident. Sarah's sister, Helen, was actually the youngest daughter.

acquaintance as she was listed as the vice President of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, for which Henry Cowell was a life member. Rose lived about two miles away from the Cowell home San Francisco.

Like many of the affluent and educated families of the Gilded Age of California, the story of the Cowell family leaves historians wondering about their personal lives. However, it is clear that Henry Cowell was a shrewd entrepreneur, appreciated charities, impressed on his children the need for higher education, and simply wanted the best for his family, including his daughters. Unfortunately for Sarah, her life was taken too soon to reveal the outcome of her total contributions.



THE WOMAN ASTRONOMER AND HER TELESCOPE.  
\* [Photographed expressly for the "Examiner."]

Illustration of astronomer Rose O'Halloran of San Francisco, close friend of Sarah Cowell. (From the *San Francisco Examiner*, February 28, 1892)



Architect's rendering of the Cooperage as it will look in the future. (Jensen Architects)

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1156 High Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95064