

COWELL LIME WORKS HISTORIC DISTRICT

Lime was a vital building material in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It played a key role in the development of California cities after the Gold Rush. In the 1850s and '60s, the Cowell Lime Works was the center of the largest lime manufacturing region in California. The present historic district encompasses some 30 acres at the main entrance to the University of California, Santa Cruz. It preserves 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 for a walking tour of the district.

Cowell Lime Works, circa 1910. Cooperage (8) is on the left. Cabins (6) and Barn H (17) are on the right. Note pile of cordwood for fuel.



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 employees bought Levis, 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 bay. Lime Kiln Road crossed High Street and ran between the Granary and 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 was built in 1870 and probably housed 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 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 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). Since becoming part of UCSC, the building has been home to several different offices.

5 QUARRIES Across the street from the Cook House, at the campus entry kiosk, is one of several quarries on campus where limerock was obtained. The rock from this particular site was probably used for constructing the nearby kilns and buildings rather than for making lime.

6, 7 WORKERS' CABINS Across the street from the Cook House is the site of five workers' cabins (6), all in need of restoration or reconstruction. Three more workers' cabins (7) were located on the hill behind the Cook House. In 1870, 37 workers (including quarrymen, lime burners, coopers, teamsters, two cooks, and laborers) lived in cabins on the lime works site.

8 COOPERAGE Here, workers assembled the barrels used to ship the lime to market. After being filled, the barrels were placed in wagons and hauled down what is now Bay Street to be loaded onto outgoing ships. The university removed the eastern half of the building in the early 1960s to make room for Coolidge Drive.

9, 10 LIME KILNS The lime kiln complex adjacent to Coolidge Drive consists of three pot kilns (9)—each with four doorways—and a single, taller continuous kiln (10). To make lime in the pot kilns, limerock was loaded from above, and wood for fuel was fed through the doorways below. After four or 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, a tramway with ore cars was built to transport limerock down Jordan Gulch to the kilns. The stone abutments, some of the tracks and ties, and a few timbers are all that remain.

12 BLACKSMITH SHOP During its heyday, the ranch employed a full-time blacksmith. This building was used for blacksmithing until the early 1950s.

13 HAY BARN Built in the late 1800s and restored in 2015, this barn originally sheltered the ox teams that hauled limerock and cordwood. Later it stored hay for beef cattle. The building is framed using large timbers with mortise-and-tenon joints secured by wooden pegs.



Henry & Harriet Cowell in front of Carriage House, 1890s.

14 POWDER HOUSE This is where explosives were stored for use in the quarries.

15 JORDAN GULCH The powder house lies at the edge of Jordan Gulch. A tramway ran along the gulch to bring rock from the quarries to the kilns.

16, 17 BARN G and BARN H Like the Hay Barn (13) Barn G sheltered the oxen used as draft animals at the lime works. The Cowells persisted in using oxen into the early 20th century. Another large barn—Barn H—(no. 17) was also remodeled for use by the University.

18 CARRIAGE HOUSE The Cowells kept their riding horses and carriages here. Originally a drive-through barn-like structure, it has been used for a variety of University offices through the years.

19 CARDIFF SHED This small storage building dates from the 1860s and was used for storage and as a wood shed. It was restored in 2019.

20 RANCH HOUSE (Cardiff House) This was built in 1864 for Albion P. Jordan, an original owner of the lime works. After Henry Cowell purchased Jordan's half of the business 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 property manager, later lived in the house. It was renovated in 2015 with a new foundation.

21 ENTRY GATE A white picket fence with elaborate wooden gate posts mark the original "owner's entrance" to the Cowell property. The posts have been rebuilt several times.

