

# COWELL LIME WORKS HISTORIC DISTRICT

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

*Cowell Lime Works, first decades of 20th century. View to the northeast. Cooperage (#8) and kilns (#9, #10) in foreground at left, workers' cabins (#6) and Barn H (#17) at far right. Note massive pile of cordwood (fuel for the kilns) at right.*



**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 the 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 probably housed the 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 (Admissions Office)** 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 at

the south end of the building 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).

**5 QUARRIES** Across the street from the cook house, at the Campus Main Entry kiosk, is one of several quarries on campus where limerock was obtained.

**6, 7 WORKERS' CABINS** Across the street from the cook house is the site of five workers' cabins (6), all of which are being restored. 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.



*The lime works and cooperage, 1866*

**8 COOPERAGE** Here, workers assembled barrels used to ship lime to market. After being filled with lime, the barrels were placed in wagons and hauled down what is now Bay Street to be loaded onto outgoing ships.

**9, 10 THE BAY STREET 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 in from above, and wood for fuel was fed through the doorways below. After about 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, Davis and Jordan built a tramway with cars to transport limerock and cordwood down Jordan Gulch to the kilns. The stone abutments are from a later trestle.

**12 BLACKSMITH SHOP** During its heyday, the ranch employed a full-time blacksmith. Used for blacksmithing until the early 1950s, it is now an art studio.

**13 HAY BARN** Framed using large timbers with mortise-and-tenon joints secured by wooden pegs, this barn may date from the 1860s. Recent archaeological digs uncovered domestic debris from the same period.

**14 POWDER HOUSE** Blasting powder kept in this structure—one of the earliest lime works buildings—was used to dislodge deposits of limerock in the quarries.

**15 JORDAN GULCH** The powder house lies at the edge of Jordan Gulch. The tramway ran along the gulch to connect several Cowell Ranch quarries with the kilns.

**16, 17 BULL BARN (Barn G) and BARN H** This structure sheltered the many oxen used at the ranch and lime works. The Cowells persisted in using oxen long after other ranches had switched to horses. Another (17) large barn (Barn H) was remodeled for administrative use by the university.



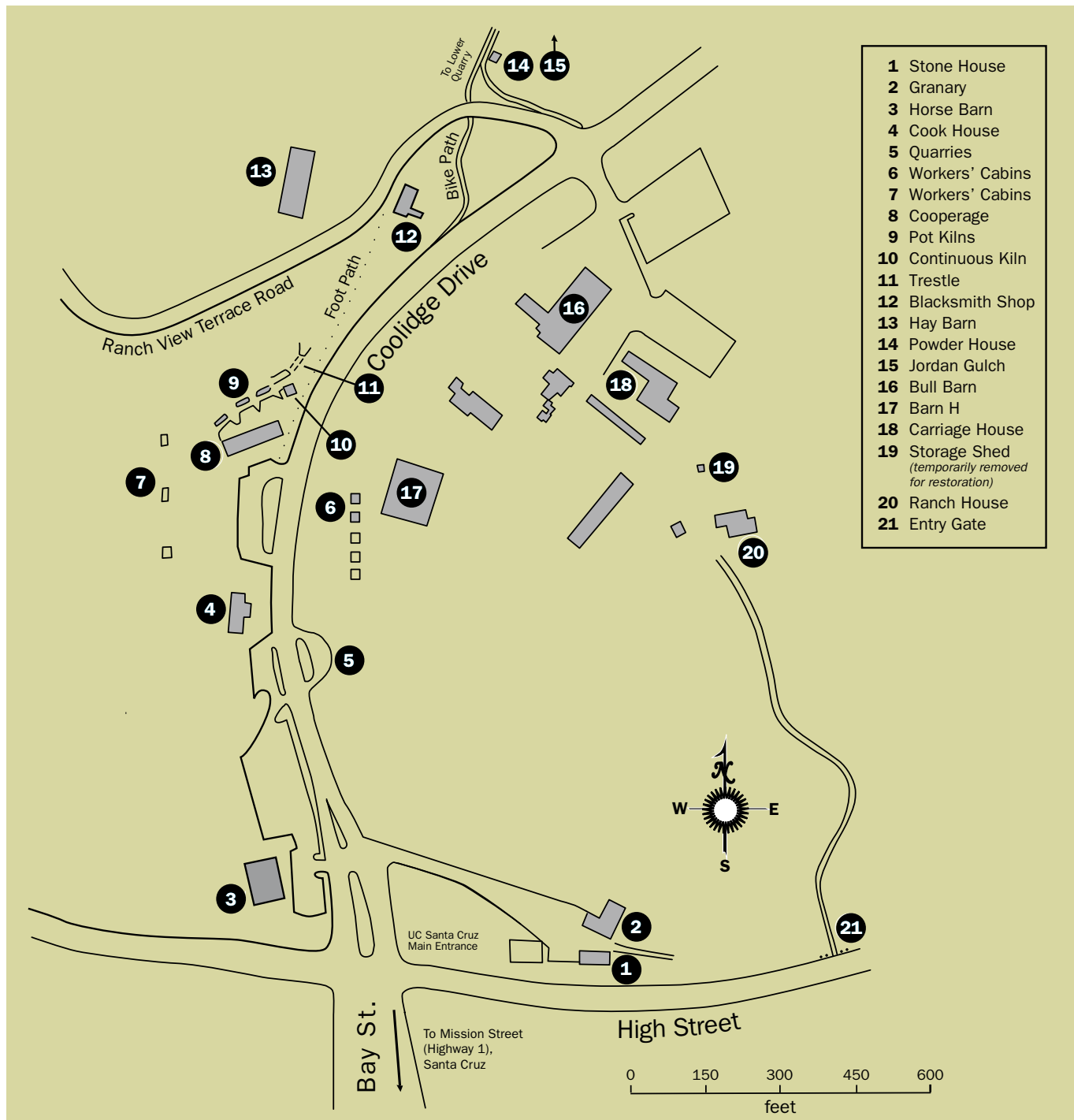
*Kiln workers standing between cooperage (right) and kilns*

**18 CARRIAGE HOUSE** Once a drive-through barn-like structure, it now houses UC administrative offices. The Cowells kept their riding horses and carriages here.

**19 CARDIFF SHED** A small storage shed near the end of the Carriage House, dating from the 1860s, has been disassembled temporarily for restoration.

**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 works 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 Foundation property manager, later lived in the house. It is now the UCSC Women's Center.

**21 ENTRY GATE** The driveway that runs from the ranch house front porch to High Street was the carriage entry for the house. At the end of the drive, a white picket fence with elaborate white-painted wooden gate posts marks the original "owner's entrance" to the Cowell property.





**Stabilization of the Cooprage** Built in 1869 and long unused, the distinctively designed building had deteriorated significantly due to weather and insect damage and appeared to be vulnerable to collapse in the next severe storm or earthquake. Thanks to the support of the S. H. Cowell Foundation, the structure has been stabilized, preventing its collapse and providing the campus and Friends with an opportunity to seek funding with which to implement a restoration program.



**Official Dedication of Cowell Lime Works Historic District** In fall 2009, the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District, UC Santa Cruz Chancellor George Blumenthal, and local, state, and federal elected officials dedicated a brass plaque commemorating placement of the District on the National Register of Historic Places. The plaque is located near the Cook House (now UCSC's Office of Admissions. UCSC is also the only UC campus to possess a nationally recognized Historic District.

**Historical Context** In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Henry Cowell and his sons ran a thriving industrial operation on what is now the UC Santa Cruz campus, heating limestone quarried on the site, with local redwood as fuel, to produce lime—then a key component in mortar, plaster and many essential industrial processes. The cooprage, where shipping barrels were built and filled with lime, and adjacent lime kilns, together with the Historic District's many surviving support structures, comprise the most complete 19th-century lime production complex remaining in California, and perhaps in the Western United States.

**Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District: What We've Accomplished, Where We're Going**

A Self-Guided Walking Tour of the

# COWELL LIME WORKS HISTORIC DISTRICT

UC SANTA CRUZ

**Restoration of Lime Workers' Cabins** With support from the Cabrillo Civic Club and other donors, the Friends and student volunteers are restoring six cabins, looking to complete the first one in 2011 as an interpretive exhibit. Archaeological and historic preservation work around the cabin has provided a glimpse into the daily domestic life of the workers. It has also provided a physical record of the simple redwood construction techniques used to build the cabins. Tobacco cans, a man's gold ring, a Portuguese religious medal, a woman's mother-of-pearl hair pin, cattle bones, seashells, and a large assemblage of clothing fasteners excavated from the site reveal much about the lives of those who worked for the Cowell operations.



**Documentation of the Cooperage Site by Student Interns** In 2009, student interns from UCSC's anthropology and history departments dedicated hundreds of hours to archaeological and historic documentation work. Students worked under the guidance of a UCSC staff member who is a professional archaeologist, and in collaboration with departmental advisors who provided academic credit for the work.



**Restoration of the Hay Barn** The hay barn, which may pre-date 1870, is a massive timber-framed structure with beautifully fitted mortise-and-tenon joints. Because of its large size, visual prominence, and age, the barn is an anchor for the district, but is highly deteriorated and in danger of collapse. UCSC and the Friends are seeking private funding for the historically authentic rehabilitation/restoration of the hay barn on its existing footprint—ideally utilizing volunteer expertise and a traditional "barn-raising" model.

**Interpretive Signs** Interpretive signs are in preparation. The signs will aid visitors in understanding the features and functions and the important contributions of the Cowell Lime Works to the regional economy of the 19th and early 20th Centuries.

**Educational Programs and Public Awareness** In summer 2009, the Friends hosted the first-ever conference on "Lime and Lime Kilns in California History." The two-day conference was attended by participants from throughout the West and generated publicity in local and regional newspapers. The conference sparked increased membership in the Friends group, renewed public interest in the Historic District, and many lively discussions about local historic preservation.

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Cowell family members at Carriage House, 1890s

- WE NEED YOUR HELP**
- The Historic District needs:
- ▶ **Your membership** in the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District to help build broader support for our efforts to preserve this unique part of Santa Cruz and California history.
  - ▶ **Your direct financial contributions** and donations in kind (labor or materials) to accelerate restoration of the district's historic structures and to expand historical and archaeological research activities.
  - ▶ **Your volunteer participation** to assist with reconstruction and in the interpretation of district history.
  - ▶ **Your assistance** in helping us develop and implement a tour program composed of volunteer docents and local historians.

Please show your support for the Historic District today by becoming a member.

**For more information**, please visit our web site at [limeworks.ucsc.edu](http://limeworks.ucsc.edu), or contact the Friends of Cowell Lime Works Historic District at [limeworks@ucsc.edu](mailto:limeworks@ucsc.edu) or (831) 459-1254.

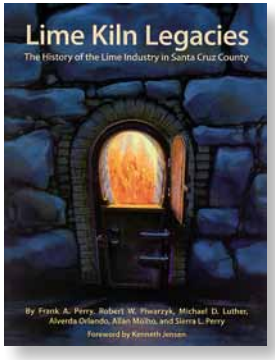
**FRIENDS OF THE COWELL LIME WORKS HISTORIC DISTRICT**



[limeworks.ucsc.edu](http://limeworks.ucsc.edu)



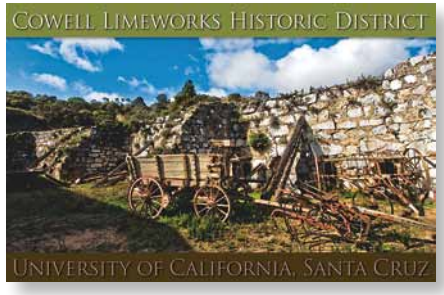
**This self-guided walking tour** of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District has been made available through the generous support of the **Bay Tree Bookstore** at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the **Museum of Art & History @ the McPherson Center**, located in downtown Santa Cruz. The definitive book on the lime industry in California, *Lime Kiln Legacies* (for details, see website at [limekilnlegacies.com](http://limekilnlegacies.com)), is available at the Bay Tree Bookstore, as are art posters depicting Historic District structures; they may also be purchased online at [slugstore.ucsc.edu](http://slugstore.ucsc.edu). Proceeds from the sale of the posters support ongoing efforts to preserve and protect Historic District structures.



**"A monumental work!"**

*I am overwhelmed with Lime Kiln Legacies—to think that a seemingly inanimate rock can be responsible for so much history! Not just local history, but so much more: the history of technology, geology, transportation, labor, the economy, and culture.*

—Judith Steen, editor of *The Sidewalk Companion to Santa Cruz Architecture*



**Art posters** depicting Historic District structures are available at Bay Tree Bookstore.

All color photos, poster, and brochure design by Jim MacKenzie; historic photos courtesy of UCSC McHenry Library Special Collections