

# The Cowell Story, A Saga Of California History

## Railroad Entrance To 'Big Trees'



The ancient sign which greeted railroad visitors to the Henry Cowell Big Trees still stands. Here Caretaker Robert Mansfield looks over the sign from the railroad tracks in the rear of the Big Trees resort.

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## Cowell Ranch Home

## Henry Cowell Developed, Harry Cowell Retained Some Of The State's Great Land Holdings

By Jane Haas

Samuel Henry Cowell, at 92, spends most of his time, now, in front of the big picture window overlooking the bay at 2610 Jackson street, in San Francisco, reliving the days he and his family were creating what can be termed nothing less than the fabulous saga of the Cowells.

In his beautifully furnished, three-story home, which extends through the block from Jackson to Pacific street, the aged tycoon lives alone, except for his faithful servants and a few close friends and business associates who visit him.

And he remembers clearly those days in Santa Cruz, when he was a student at the Bay View school, and his father was beginning to build up the vast empire which eventually extended throughout the state of California and as far north as the San Juan Islands in the state of Washington.

Today, Samuel Henry Cowell, known to Santa Cruzans as Harry Cowell, is the only direct descendant of the family who remains alive. There are numerous distant relatives, but none who can claim direct association with the fabulous Cowells.

Henry Cowell Sr. came to Santa Cruz with his family in 1865, when he was about 45 years old. Years before, he and his brother, John Cowell, arrived in California during the Argonaut days. Later, John returned to the east, but Henry stayed on to gain fame and fortune as a land and cattle baron.

Cowell was born in Wrentham, Mass., a small community outside of Boston. There the family had a homestead of 160 acres, which had been theirs for years and years. The home is still a part of the Cowell holdings, and has been such for 130 years.

Henry had five children, Isabella M., Ernest, Samuel H., Helen and Agnes, Samuel H. or Harry Cowell, as he shall be called henceforth, was four years old at the time the Cowells arrived here. He was born in San Rafael.

After Henry looked around in Santa Cruz, he bought into a firm which operated a lime-making venture.

For \$100,000 he purchased the interests of Albion P. Jordan, a partner, with Isaac E. Davis.

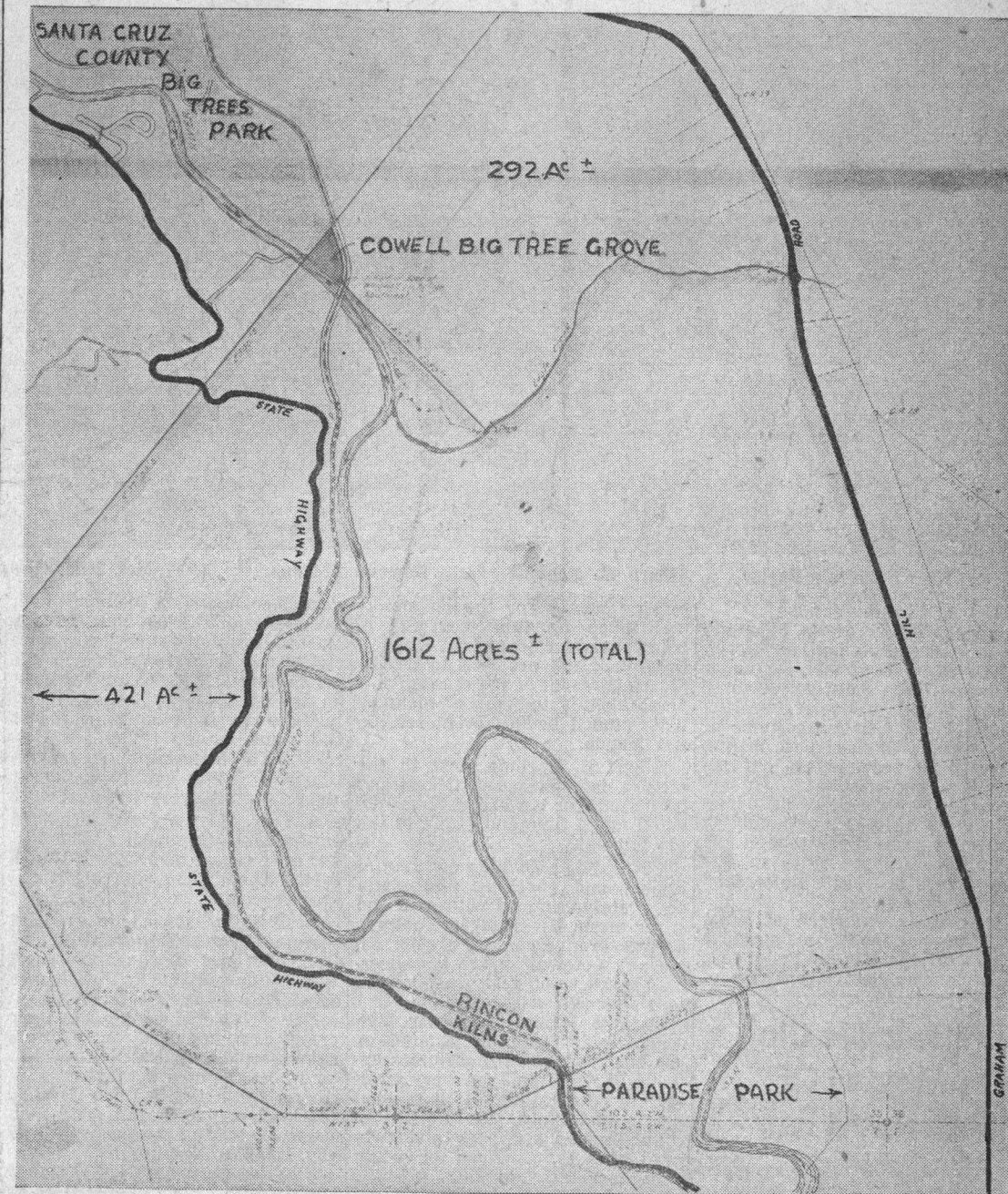
Jordan came from Brunswick, Maine, and Davis from West Boylston, Mass. Both had been in the California Gold Rush of 1849. Later, they were working as engineer and fireman on a Sacramento river flat, when they burned in the ship's furnace, a sample of lime rock found near Mount Diablo.

After noting the results of this experiment, they leased land in the Santa Cruz mountains, near Lexington, and began lime-making operations. However, this kiln failed to pay off, because it cost \$12 a barrel to cart the lime to San Jose.

So, in 1853, they came to Santa Cruz and bought land from the Weeks family, which started the business that continued without interruption until 1946.

The small kiln was near what the county termed "the road to the redwoods," which is Bay street now. The redwoods are those in what is now Weyer's gulch, where Eli Moore's small sawmill made lumber for the first frame house in Santa

## Map Shows Area Of New Park



Here is a rough outline of the entire 1612 acres of the Samuel H. (Harry) Cowell contribution to Henry Cowell Redwoods State park. The park starts at the boundary of Paradise park in

the south and reaches from Graham Hill road on the east to well beyond the San Lorenzo drive on the west as shown by the straight lines at the far left of the map.

The new park runs from Graham Hill road in the north to Eagle Creek and thence to the Cowell Big Trees grove and the 120 acres of the present County Big Trees park.

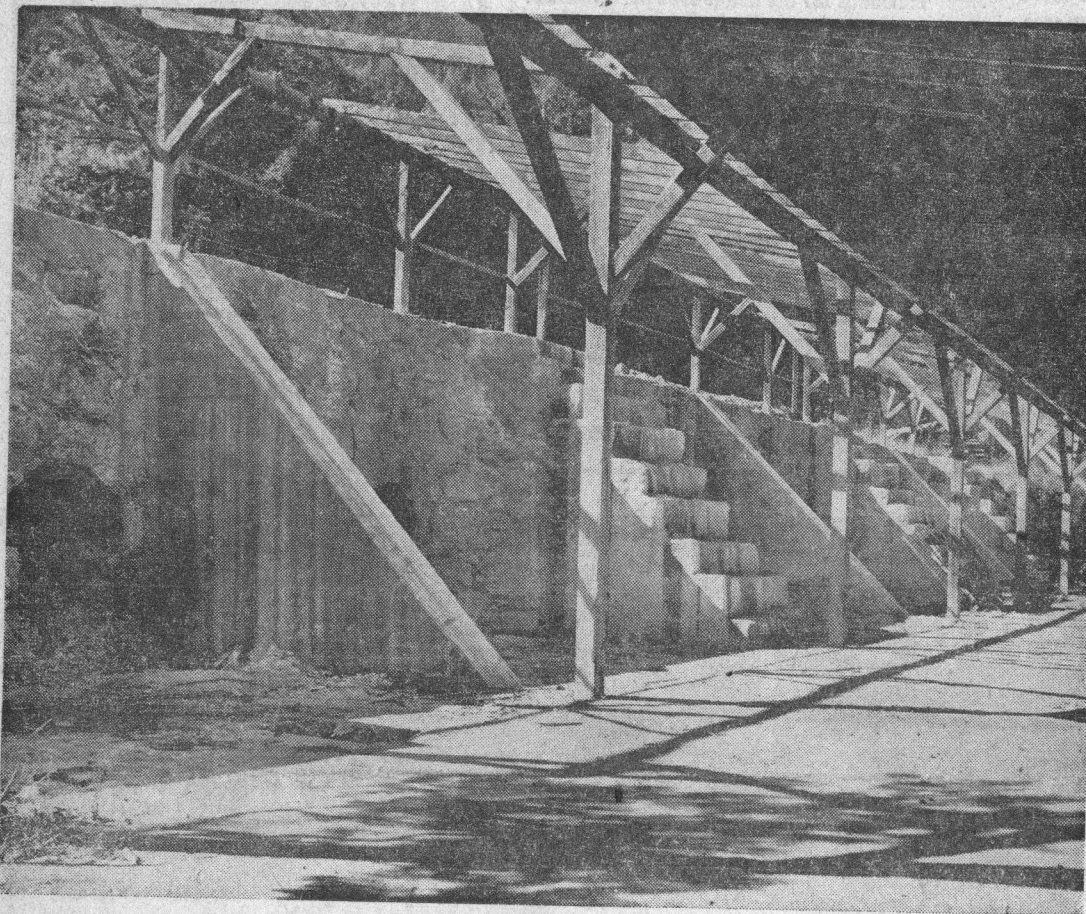
## Famed 'Garden Of Eden' Hole





Located on top of a rolling hill above the intersection of High and Bay streets, the old Cowell home at the Cowell ranch has one of the most beautiful views in all Santa Cruz. At various times all of the Cowells visited this home.

## Empty Hearths At Rincon Kilns



Relics of a bye-gone era, the empty hearths at the Rincon kiln retain their element of curious interest for visitors.

Instant demand for the lime in San Francisco made it possible for the firm of Davis and Jordan to buy schooners, which carried their product until the railroads were the popular mode of transportation. They burned lime in a kiln near

what is now High and Bay street and shipped it out from Elihu Anthony's small inclined wharf, at the end of Bay street, which the purchased from Anthony. It remained until December 31, 190 when a heavy storm washed most of it away.

To accommodate the new operations, a large warehouse was erected there by the company.

For years West Cliff drive was cut off from Monterey bay because of the warehouse. It was when W. O. Kerrick was mayor that Harry Cowell agreed to straighten out the road by cutting off about 100 feet of the building, giving the city a strip of land at the same time.

Cars used to run down the narrow wharf to the bay, loaded with barrels of lime, which in turn were pulled back up to the base of operations by horse power.

Before and after Henry Cowell bought into the lime company, business flourished. They traded their \$150,000 steamer "Santa Cruz," which was too big for the California coast trade, for the Rincon Rancho, which took in the San Lorenzo valley, from what

is now known as Paradise Park to Graham's Zayante rancho.

Kiln operations were moved to Rincon, which not only brought the lime rock supply nearer, but also made available more wood for the necessary fuel.

In 1888 Davis died, and Cowell bought out his interests for about \$400,000.

It was during this time that Pacific Portland Cement company put in a plant and Cowell took over the agency, selling its products.

In 1898 Cowell incorporated under the name of the Cowell Lime and Cement company, here in this county. Later, the company operated a cement plant at what is now known as Cowell, out of Concord, in Contra Costa county. This plant operated from 1907 until 1946, when it was discontinued for lack of raw materials. The plant boasts about 2000 acres and about 50 houses built for and rented to the cement company employees.

In all, the Cowell interests have lands and holdings in 15 counties while Harry Cowell himself has income properties in 16 counties in California.

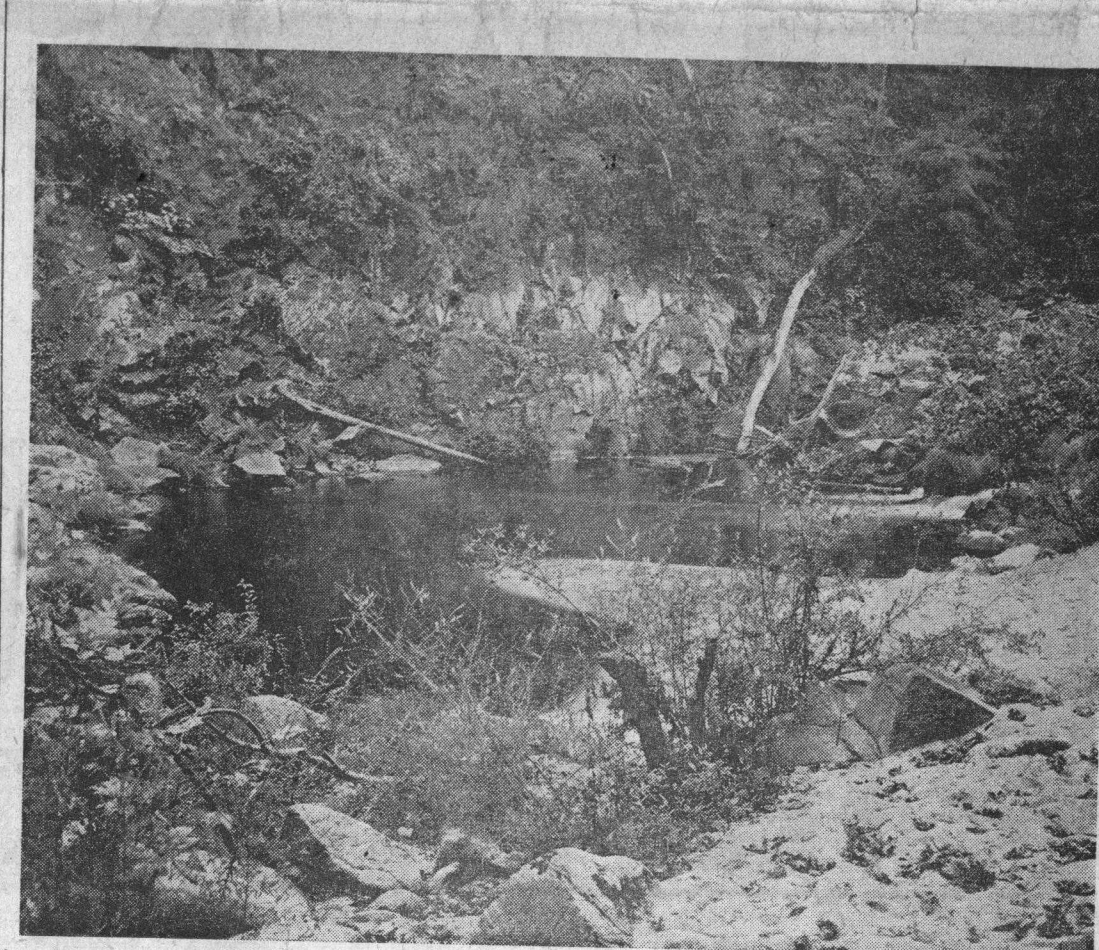
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## The 'Neck Breaker'



One of the popular trees among the visitors at the County Big Trees park is the "Neck Breaker," a towering Redwood whose

growth seems almost endless. It will attract the attention of thousands more visitors in Henry among the rocks at "The Garden



Great favorite of young swimmers and fishermen, the Garden of Eden hole in the gorge is included in the Cowell property

now part of the Henry Cowell Redwoods State park. In the past 50 years many Santa Cruz youths

got their first trout in this hole and had many a fine adventure among the rocks at "The Garden of Eden."

## Thirty Years Ago At Rincon Kilns



This picture, taken in 1923, shows the Rincon kilns in full

operation for production of lime. The trestle is in the background

with the homes of the workers visible at the far left.