



Henry Cowell, father of philanthropist S.H. Cowell, made his millions in limestone and lumber in lands now lying in Henry Cowell State Park and the UCSC campus.

Philanthropy

S.H. Cowell Foundation Keeps Local Programs Alive

SINCE 1956, more than 50 charitable and non-profit organizations in Santa Cruz County have been blessed with some \$4 million in grants from a single source: the S.H. Cowell Foundation.

Giving money away for good causes was the request of Samuel Harry Cowell — one of six children of Henry Cowell, limestone and timber magnate in the gold rush days — when he left a \$15 million estate behind upon his death in 1955. The affluent landowner, businessman and philanthropist spent his entire youth in Santa Cruz. Although he spent his adult years in San Francisco, he continued to maintain an expansive cattle ranch here and never lost his love of the area.

Hence the sturdy Cowell Foundation — among the top 10 grant-making foundations of its kind in the state — was established “to return to the people of (northern) California the fruits of the Cowell enterprise.”

In recent years the charitable trust — now with assets of over \$50 million — has bestowed its wealth to several the following areas: education (general and minority scholarships), programs for the homeless, employment training, disabled and handicapped assistance, family planning, childcare, social services, cultural arts, and youth alcohol-abuse programs.

In Santa Cruz County, the San Francisco-based foundation has shared both its fortune and its land holdings (Samuel Cowell owned property in 16 counties).

Of the original 10,000-acre Cowell ranch, 40 percent went for what is now Henry Cowell State park, and another 2,000 acres — the prime chunk of the prized parcel of land — went to UC for a new campus (the university land was not an outright grant, but a “bargain” sale). In addition, the foundation funded construction of both Cowell College (\$925,000), the first of the eight colleges to be built, and the student health center (\$1,092,000).

The Cowell foundation promises to figure prominently in the headlines

for the next several years because it still owns Pogonip, the 614-acre jewel whose future is presently being debated among community leaders. Cowell's four-member board of trustees, headed by president Max Thelen Jr., (an attorney), is not prepared to give this strategic greenbelt property away, and has set a pricetag of \$15 million for its purchase.

“Giving money or land away indiscriminately is not the way a foundation works,” said Bill Plageman, an Oakland-based attorney representing the Cowell Foundation. “In some cases, including Pogonip, there is a responsibility to the trust to get a return because Cowell is a perpetual entity and has to keep increasing its assets. Otherwise we might as well give everything we have away in one year and go home.”

A plethora of organizations in Santa Cruz are already grateful to Cowell for past generosity. In 1986, 11 grants totaling over \$500,000 were handed out in this county.

The grants are made for a specific purpose rather than for general use. For example, last year the city of Santa Cruz was pledged \$50,000 towards the purchase of a permanent homeless shelter (which hasn't been accomplished yet). The mid-county children's drop-in center in Soquel received 1986's largest grant, \$300,000, for the purchase of equipment.

Smaller grants were awarded to Soquel's Group Home Society, Inc. (\$45,000 for purchase and renovation of a new group home for teen-age girls); Watsonville's Popper-Keizer advanced school for gifted children (\$30,000 for three-year minority scholarships); and the Kuumbwa Jazz Society (\$12,000 for technical equipment).

“The Cowell trustees and (five administrative) staff take a hands-on approach to grant-making,” remarked Plageman. “They make a point of being sure that the organization is solid and is going to provide the service it says it's going to provide. Every grant application is thoroughly reviewed and an on-site visit is arranged. Nothing is done blindly.” •