

HISTORY

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They made a fortune in limestone

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LIME AND lumber were THE big businesses in Santa Cruz County more than 100 years ago.

With the arrival of American settlers, Alta California moved out of the easy-going days of Spanish and Mexican cattle ranchos and into a brisk Yankee economy.

The county's great stands of virgin redwood trees, crashed to the earth with the call of "Timberrr!" echoing through the glades. Mills both large and small (called muleys) sprouted like toadstools in the forests.

But it took a more discerning eye to evaluate the worth of the limestone formations which underlay the lush redwood greenery and the rolling meadowlands.

Albion P. Jordan and Isaac E. Davis possessed such discerning eyes and the knowledge necessary to build a limestone business.

Jordan was the son of Capt. Peter Jordan of Brunswick, Maine. He came west to make his fortune and perhaps find a bit of adventure along the way; in 1840 he discovered the "rocks that burned" while working with Davis. Davis was the fireman on a steamer plying the Sacramento River between San Francisco and Sacramento; Jordan was the ship's engineer.

How the two discovered the limestone is a mystery. Perhaps a miner-passenger had a piece of it as a curiosity. By then, news of the gold discovery was drawing hordes of miners, both experienced men and greenhorns, to the future state. Davis and Jordan tested the stone in the firebox.

The limestone seemed to be pretty good stuff. The two men left the ship with very little money in their pockets and walked south to the Redwood City area where they built a kiln. The lime they burned there, briefly, was the first in what was soon to become the state of California.

After working there for short time, they traveled further south to the pioneer settlement of Lexington that is now buried under the mud and water of Lexington Dam. They burned limestone again briefly, but soon realized that Lexington was not the favorable location they needed to make the business pay.

By 1853, they had located a prime source near Santa Cruz. They scouted out the limestone strata, then bought the property from the Ecks family and built their kilns on all west of the Santa Cruz Mission. Santa Cruz was still called "The Mission" in those days and the town consisted of a scattering of farmsteads and several stores "down on the flat" near the San Lorenzo. Elihu Anthony was down



Soft-focus lithograph of Albion P. Jordan's house is part of UCSC's special collection.

A glance at history

there, busily producing miners' picks in his iron foundry and the Cooper brothers had a general store. Another store was up on the hill. In fact, the town still centered up on the hill around the little Mission plaza. The Methodists, first Protestants in Santa Cruz, had built their wood church on the east corner of Mission and Green Streets.

Bay Street was a rough wagon track called "the road to the redwoods." Graham Hill Road was another crude track. The old padres' trail, up through Scotts Valley and over the mountains to Santa Clara County, started out in Santa Cruz as "sand lane." Today it is Ocean Street.

The Davis-Jordan lime business prospered. There were the endless forests of trees to cut and burn in processing the ample supply of limestone. Soon the partners were shipping barrels of lime to San Francisco and before long they owned their own schooners. They also bought Anthony's chute-like wharf at the lower end of Bay Street and they traded one of their ships for the huge Rincon Rancho. Rincon included the vast acreage reaching north from just beyond Paradise Park up through the San Lorenzo Valley to Zayante Rancho.

The two lime tycoons worked hard and made money. On March 4, 1859, Jordan and Mary E. Perry were married. He had built a house near his lime kilns and they lived in it.

However, Jordan was not long for this world. Perhaps he sensed that when he sold his share of the business to Henry Cowell for \$100,000 in 1864. Was Jordan's health failing? No one knows. But two years later, on Nov. 14, 1866, Jordan died.

Cowell had acquired the Jordan home — which he enlarged, the nearby kilns, the wharf where barrels of lime were rolled to waiting boats, and Rincon Rancho.

In 1888, Davis died and Cowell purchased the remainder of the Jordan-Davis lime business and holdings for \$400,000.

The Cowells lived in the Jordan home until 1897, when they moved to a San Francisco mansion.

The Jordan house still stands as part of the UCSC, and the lime kilns, workers' cabins and an equipment shed can be seen near the Cowell cookhouse at the Bay Street entrance to the campus. The old barn serves today as theater.

After the Cowells left Santa Cruz, the Jordan house was lived in by their ranch manager, Frank George, and his wife, and later by the Cowells' business manager and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. George Cardiff. Cardiff, who died in 1964, once estimated that the house had been built about 1857, a year or so before Jordan married.

When the Cowell property was turned over to the university for its local campus, some renovation was necessary on the old house. However, it remains essentially unchanged from the days of the Cowell family. Dean McHenry, then chancellor of the new university campus, and his wife "rescued" the pantry and the "miles-long bathtub" from proposed modernization plans. The house served as temporary quarters for several UCSC staff members and their families. Now it is in use for a women's program.

Today, a descendant of Albion P. Jordan lives in Soquel. She is Marion J. Asche, a great-granddaughter of



Lithograph of Jordan is owned by his great-granddaughter, Marion J. Asche.

the lime tycoon. And Asche's niece, Marion Jordan, is a student at UCSC. As a great-great-granddaughter of Jordan, she walks the wooded paths through property he once owned.

Two streets in Santa Cruz were named for the men: Jordan Street still is in existence; Davis Street became part of Escalona when the latter was extended through the old vegetable garden area once Chinese, then Italian.

Today the rich, black earth that produced a wealth of crops is covered with houses and streets. That part of Santa Cruz, the slope below High Street and Jordan's kilns, was wilderness when he built his house.

One of his lime quarries serves the university as an outdoor amphitheater where graduation takes place.