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## Santa Cruz History

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Adalbert Wolff: The Cowell Ranch, 1915

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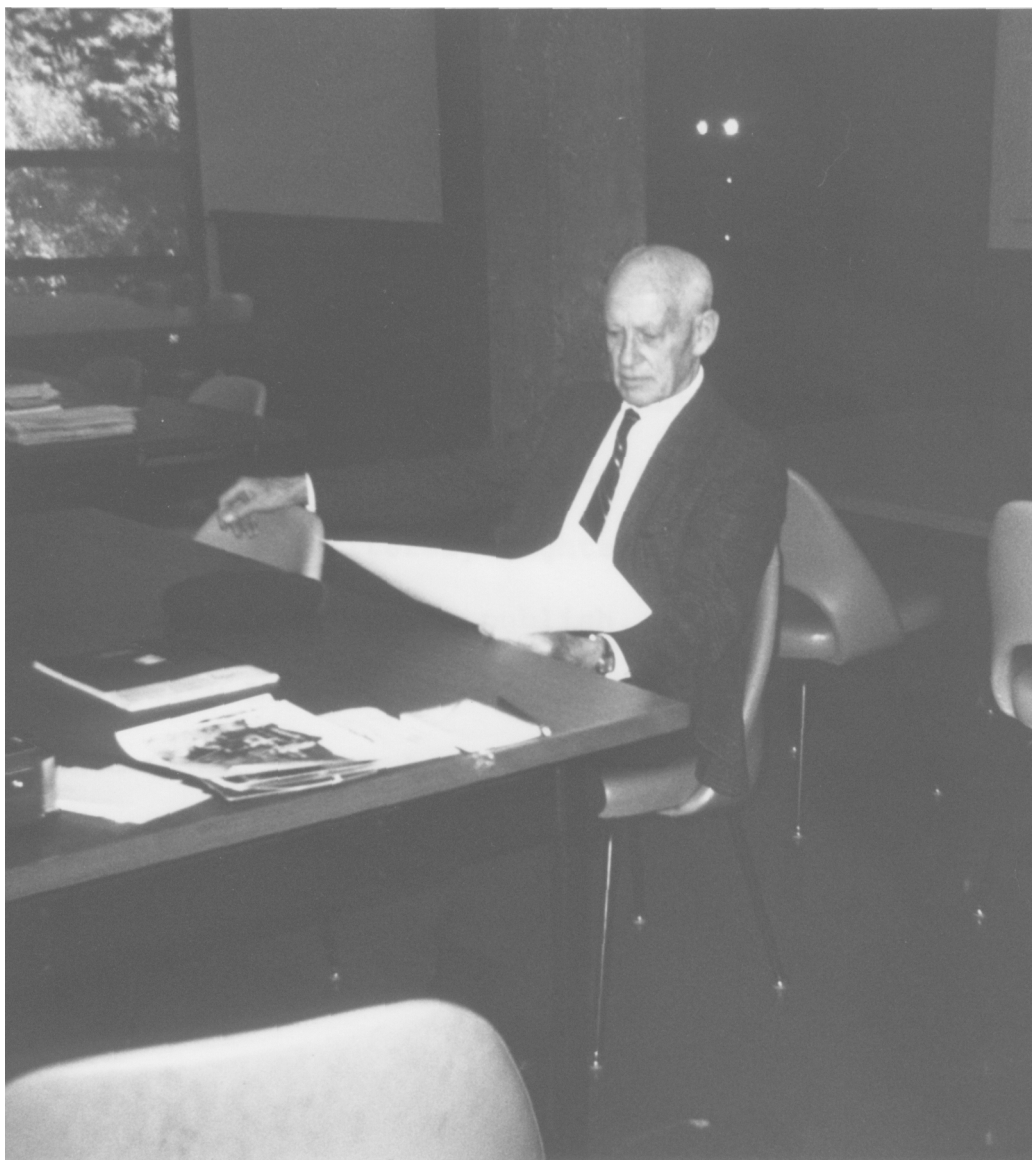
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ADALBERT WOLFF

THE COWELL RANCH, 1915

Interviewed and Edited by  
Elizabeth Spedding Calciano

Santa Cruz  
1972



Adalbert Wolff  
Looking at pictures of the Cowell Ranch  
Special Collections Room, University Library  
February 20, 1971

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Adalbert Wolff looking at  
pictures of the Cowell Ranch  
in the Special Collections Room,  
UCSC, February 20, 1971

Frontispiece

The Cowell Ranch

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## INTRODUCTION

The Cowell Ranch naturally holds an interest to those of us associated with the University of California, Santa Cruz campus, since our campus occupies 2,000 acres of what was once a 10,000-acre ranch. From its inception, the Regional History Project has worked to put together the fragmented, often elusive, bits of information that exist about the ranch, its activities, and its people. If our motives are a bit parochial in nature, the results nonetheless have a wider application, for in documenting the history of this ranch, we are documenting a representative of such operations in California and the West.

The Cowell Ranch was no family farm; it was a huge industrial operation involving both lime production and cattle raising. While lime production may have been peculiar to this ranch, other huge ranch complexes existed in California whose "industrial" aspects were agricultural in nature or simply cattle raising on a huge scale. Several of these big ranches belonged to the Cowell complex, others to other empire builders. But the story that appears as we conduct interviews on the Cowell Ranch is not so much the story of how an empire was built as it is the activities that went on at the base of the empire—the everyday ranch work, the people hired, the salaries paid, the food and lodging, the local ranch management.

Adalbert Wolff, who was born in 1888 in Elberfeld, Germany,

is currently a stockbroker with Brush, Slocum and Company, Incorporated, in San Francisco. He was referred to us by Harold Hyde, UCSC's Vice-Chancellor - Business and Finance, who knew that in 1915 Mr. Wolff had spent six months on the Cowell Company's Santa Cruz Ranch. We were delighted to set up an interview appointment with Mr. Wolff. Although his having been here such a short time would tend to limit the amount of information he could give us, what he could tell us would have the added value of a very specific time element. We hoped he could pinpoint which of the activities that we had learned went on in "the early days" were still occurring in 1915 and which had ceased by that time.

Mr. Wolff was an excellent interviewee in that he did not guess at answers. When a question fell outside his area of knowledge, he was frank to state that he did not know. Conversely, the items he did mention were related with care and precision. Indeed, for several days prior to the interview he had been thinking about his six months on the ranch, trying to make sure he would recall items that would be of interest to us.

The interview was held the morning of February 20th, 1971, in the Special Collections Room of the University Library. It was one of those glorious days that Santa Cruz sometimes experiences in February. The air was warm, the ocean was iridescent, and the winter rains had washed the coating of dust



from the redwoods so their deep green stood in strong contrast to the rich blue sky. Since Mr. Wolff had graciously offered to drive all the way down from his residence in Palo Alto for the interview, we were very glad that Santa Cruz was at her best. Mr. Wolff seemed to enjoy the trip and before coming to the interview spent a bit of time with Mr. Hyde going through some of the old buildings at the entrance to the ranch. When he arrived at our office he appeared to be relaxed and yet at the same time eager to do the interview on the Cowell Ranch.

The manuscript was edited by the interviewer and sent to Mr. Wolff for his corrections and approval. He checked the manuscript over carefully for accuracy and returned it promptly. The picture of Mr. Wolff used as the frontispiece was taken by the editor the morning of the interview. The photograph on page 14 is from the University Library's Regional History collection.

Copies of this manuscript are on deposit in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, and in the Special Collections Department of the University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz. This manuscript is part of a collection of interviews on the history of Santa Cruz County which have been conducted by the Regional History Project. The project is under the administrative supervision of Donald T. Clark, University Librarian.

Elizabeth Spedding Calciano

December 27, 1971

Regional History Project

University Library

University of California, Santa Cruz

GETTING A JOB ON THE COWELL RANCH

Calciano: Where were you born, Mr. Wolff?

Wolff: In Germany.

Calciano: Where in Germany?

Wolff: A place called Elberfeld which is not far from  
Cologne.

Calciano: How did you happen to decide to come to the United  
States?

Wolff: I worked for one of the large German chemical  
companies. I had been their apprentice and one thing  
and another for some years, and they sent me to New  
York, but I was there a year and a half, and I didn't  
like it, and I had an idea I wanted to go West, so I  
quit and went to Canada.

Calciano: Oh?

Wolff: Went to Winnipeg.

Calciano: Well how did you find your way down to the Cowell  
Ranch?

Wolff: Well, from Winnipeg I finally wound my way to  
Vancouver, and then I wanted to get in the shipping  
business. I had some ... well, that appealed to me --  
ships, I thought, were wonderful, so I came to San  
Francisco, and I got in with one of the old-time firms

in shipping, Meyer, Wilson and Company, and that was fine until the war broke out. They had a lot of sailing ships on the way to Europe, from Europe, but then everything stopped and I was out of a job, so I needed a new job, and I called on a lot of people including the little office of the Cowell Lime and Cement Company in San Francisco. It happened that Mr. Cowell was there, so he offered me a job as timekeeper on his ranch here, and I didn't know what a timekeeper was, but I needed a job and a ranch appealed to me, so I took the job there was. (Laughter)

Calciano: And this was what year?

Wolff: 1915.

Calciano: How old were you at that point?

Wolff: I was 27.

Calciano: How long did you stay with the Cowell Ranch down here?

Wolff: Half a year.

Calciano: Half a year. (Laughter)

Wolff: During the good months. (Laughter)

Calciano: What caused you to move on?

Wolff: I really never did want to become a rancher or anything like that, so I looked around the city. I found another job, and it happened to be with the

Standard Oil Company at that time, and I said goodbye.

Calciano: Well now tell me, what exactly did a timekeeper do down here? I thought most of the men just sort of worked all hours here. I didn't know that they were paid hourly.

Wolff: Well, that's a minor mystery. Now a timekeeper's supposed to keep time of the men who work and so on, which I never did, because a man by the name of Johnson, who was in charge of that type of the business at that time, he did all of that himself. So I sat around there, and since I lived at the house with Frank George and his wife, and Frank George was in charge of all the agricultural part, I went with him a lot. They taught me how to ride, and every other day, about two, three days, Frank George came along and said, "Wolff, saddle up your horse. We're going to rope in a steer to be slaughtered and feed all the men."

Calciano: Oh yes, yes.

Wolff: And I did a lot of that sort of thing. It was a lot of fun.

Calciano: According to one of the cooks, it was always a tough steer. Is this true, or did you.... (Laughter)

Wolff: No, no, no. They had the best of meat.

Calciano: They did? Well good.

Wolff: The men had steak for breakfast, for lunch, and for dinner. And they ate it in no time flat. They needed it. They worked hard.

Calciano: Yes, I imagine they did. So you actually didn't do much in the bookkeeping or timekeeping field at all?

Wolff: No, no. Not at all.

Calciano: You lived at the house. That's rather unusual. I imagine you and the Georges were the only ones who lived in the house?

Wolff: That's right. As a matter of fact, that was my understanding when I took the job, that I was to live at the house. But they informed me when I came down here, "Well, you're living in the house at night, but you eat in the cookhouse." And I wasn't used to that sort of thing; I didn't like it very much. And when Mr. Cowell came down sometime later, every month or two he used to visit the ranch, I talked to him about that. "Well," he said, "that's the way it is. If you don't like it, you know what you can do." (Laughter)

Calciano: He was a man of few words?

Wolff: That's right.

Calciano: So you ate with all the workmen then and shared their food?

Wolff: Yes, yes.

Calciano: And aside from the steak all the time, was the rest of the food pretty good, or....

Wolff: Oh, the food was wonderful.

Calciano: Umhmmm.

Wolff: I mean no French cooking or anything like that, but it was always ample and good. There was no dessert, of course, but after they finished their meals some of the men would go out on the little porch and eat a big baked potato. That was their dessert.

Calciano: How funny! Was it a white potato or a sweet potato?

Wolff: No, no, just a regular white potato.

Calciano: Did they put butter or sugar or anything on it?

Wolff: No. They just took it in their hands and ate it, peels and all. Just like you'd eat a butterhorn. You see it only took them ten minutes or so to eat their steak and the rest of the meal, so when they left the cookhouse, they'd take a potato along with them.

Calciano: That's interesting. Was the cook at that time a Chinese cook?

Wolff: Chinese, yes. Two cooks they had.

Calciano: Two cooks. Were they running two cookhouses at that time, both this one and the Rincon one?

Wolff: Yes. Rincon was entirely separate.

Calciano: Ah. Did you have anything to do with Rincon?

Wolff: No, no. Well, we'd visit occasionally, but no, the operations were quite separate.

Calciano: When you said two cooks, did you mean there were two cooks at the cookhouse down here near the ranch entrance?

Wolff: Yes. Actually, one of them was really more of a helper than a cook.

Calciano: About how many men were working on the ranch at this point?

Wolff: I'd just have to guess. My guess would be maybe -- oh possibly somewhere around thirty or forty, but that's a guess.

Calciano: That's including both the Rincon and....

Wolff: No, no -- here.

Calciano: Oh, just this one?

Wolff: Just here, yes.

Calciano: And not including the Felton....

Wolff: No, no, not including that.

#### RANCH OPERATIONS



Lime Production

Calciano: What were the main ranch operations? Was it mostly lime, or were they doing a number of other things, these thirty or forty men?

Wolff: No, the main operation really was the lime, and they of course had the quarry. As a matter of fact, they had two quarries, and they dynamited there and broke the lime rock off. Then they carted it down to the kilns, and at first the kilns were loaded with redwood stakes -- want me to tell you about that?

Calciano: Yes, please.

Wolff: We ... well the stakes came from Felton, and I'll (laughter) never forget the day when Mr. Johnson and I went up to Felton -- we always went on that little bit of a road in a buggy, and it was a beautiful ride. The country, of course, was gorgeous as it is now, and then out of Felton we went up into the woods, and there were men who were cutting cords of wood on piecework. In other words, it was our job to count the number of cords that they had staked out in the woods, you know, and then they got paid accordingly. And I was never so tired in my life (laughter), because it was on steep inclines and gullies; we had to climb up and down all day long and measure these things

(laughter) so they would finally get paid. Well anyhow, so they got these big heavy stakes of redwood, and then they'd cart them down and load them in the kilns down at the bottom and put the lime rock on top, and they started them with oil and then the wood took over.

Calciano: Oh! They used both? Oh.

Wolff: Yes.

Calciano: Now these were the kilns that were right down by the cookhouse?

Wolff: By the cookhouse, yes.

Calciano: They were still using those.

Wolff: But the kilns in Rincon -- that was entirely separate. I don't know much about that.

Calciano: Were the Rincon ones pretty new, or had they been going for a number of years already?

Wolff: I wouldn't know.

Calciano: About the operation at Felton, now I've hiked back on that trail that goes into there, and of course there's just ruins of things now, but it seems that I saw cabins where the men must have lived in the Felton area, and then there's machinery as though there were some sort of mill there. Was there....

Wolff: Well now, that I really don't know. We never got into

that sort of thing.

Calciano: You were just counting wood? (Laughter)

Wolff: I was just counting wood, yes. And not omitting the fact that we stopped for a few drinks on the way (laughter), in Felton.

#### The Quarries and Kilns

Calciano: Now which quarries were they blasting in at this time?

Wolff: Not the one down below. They were blasting in the one up above.

Calciano: When you said the one down below, it's the one you drove by as you came up here?

Wolff: Yes, but back of the -- not far from the cookhouse.

Calciano: Yes. There's a lower one that's halfway between the cookhouse and these buildings. [The University Library and Central Services]

Wolff: Yes, that's right.

Calciano: And then there's one up above these buildings that's now an amphitheater.

Wolff: Yes. They worked the upper one.

Calciano: Did the little tram road still exist? At one point they had a little gravity railroad, sort of a tram road, that carried rock, but I've been told it just ran from the lower quarry to the kilns.

Wolff: I really can't ... my memory is a little hazy on that.

Calciano: All right.

Wolff: (Laughter) It's a long time ago.

Calciano: I'd much rather have somebody say they don't know than to sit there and dream up an answer. (Laughter)

Wolff: Yes.

Calciano: I have some questions about the various kilns that were on the ranch, and I don't know whether you were here long enough to know about them or not, but we've been having trouble pinning down the dates when various ones were operating and weren't operating. Now you say the ones by the cookhouse were operating in 1915 and Rincon was. There are also some kilns that were known as the Adams kilns or S & A kilns that were over on the other side of Empire Grade. Did you ever go over there?

Wolff: No, no. I never knew anything about them.

Calciano: Did you ever know anything about the Bonny Doon kilns?

Wolff: (Pause) No.

Calciano: Or the IXL kilns?

Wolff: No. But I do remember the brand name IXL which was on barrels or someplace or other, but I never heard of any kilns there, no. I don't know.

Calciano: And then at the end of the row of kilns down by the

cookhouse, there's a big square box kiln. It's there now I mean, and I just wondered ... do you remember whether it was there when you were here?

Wolff: I don't remember that at all. Now that's a little difficult to remember, but as far as I do remember, there were just the regular kilns. I don't know how many there were, four or so, right opposite the house that still stands there.

Calciano: Yes. Right. I was just trying to pinpoint whether that one had already been built.

Wolff: No, I don't remember that at all. Probably it wasn't there at that time.

#### Barrelmaking

Wolff: By the way, this could possibly offer a little bit of interest. One thing that I did, and that was within the province of Mr. Johnson, every once in so often I went up on the top of that barnlike building opposite the kilns where the cooper made barrels....

Calciano: Oh, you watched him?

Wolff: No, I didn't watch him, well I could have watched him if I had wanted to, but he made them there. And when he had enough ready, and they needed the barrels to put the lime in, then I took them from the upstairs,



## The Cowell Ranch

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| A. Cooperage                                       | G. Fuel Wood                 |
| B. Kilns are located below<br>the canopy of boards | H. Box Kiln                  |
| C. Tram road to lower quarry                       | I. Barns                     |
| D. Oil storage tank                                | J. Carriage House and stable |
| E. Worker's Shack                                  | K. Barn                      |
| F. Blacksmith Shop                                 | L. Worker's Shack            |

the upper part of the building, and just threw them down on the earth. And it had to be done just a certain way, because if they landed on the edge, the whole thing broke apart. But they had to go so the rounded part of the staves hit the earth, and then they were all right, and it was always quite a problem. We always lost some of them. And I also had to count them because the cooper got paid by the number of barrels. See he was on a piecework basis.

Calciano: Were they using metal hoops, or were they using hazel hoops at that point?

Wolff: No, I think they were metal hoops.

Calciano: Was the barrelhead mill operating at that point? Down by the granary and stonehouse?

Wolff: (Pause) No, I don't recall that at all.

Calciano: Do you recall a building even standing there? It apparently burned down a number of years ago.

Wolff: I'm not sure.

Calciano: Okay.

#### Hauling the Lime

Calciano: How did they take the lime down to the wharf? Or did they take it to the wharf?

Wolff: No, they took it to the station.



Calciano: The railroad station?

Wolff: To be shipped by train.

Calciano: 7th!

Wolff: Yes.

Calciano: And did they use horses or trucks or....

Wolff: Horses. There were big carts, and the barrels were put on the cart, and then there were the horses -- I'm not sure whether there was a team of two or four horses; I ought to know, but I don't - but anyhow, they carted them down to the railroad station. Where would they send them from the wharf?

Calciano: Well, in earlier years they loaded the barrels on the ships that went on up the coast to San Francisco.

Wolff: They didn't do that when I was there. They went to the station.

Calciano: I see. At one point there used to be a scale in between the granary and the stonehouse where they'd weigh the wagonloads. Were they doing that when you were here, or were they just counting barrels?

Wolff: Yes, yes, there was a scale there.

Calciano: What were they using it for when you were here?

Wolff: (Pause) Well I didn't have anything to do with that,

but apparently ... well I only ... isn't that strange. I don't know that they used it even. But they could have used it by weighing the whole cart and, knowing what the weight of the cart was, deducting that. It would give them more or less the weight of the lime. I'm not sure. I think there was some kind of a scale there, but I don't know if it was operating while I was down there.

Calciano: Umhmmm. They might have switched over to just counting barrels, shipping by barrels, instead of by total weight.

Wolff: Well they don't need a scale for that, of course.

Calciano: Yes. Right. That's why I was wondering whether they still used it or not.

Wolff: Yes. Well of course they weighed it at the station, naturally.

Calciano: Oh yes, for the freight charge, you mean?

Wolff: Yes. They would have to do that. Yes.

Calciano: Was this the period when the empty barrels were still shipped back free by the railroads or not? Do you know about that?

Wolff: I never saw any empty barrels come back.

Calciano: Oh! They didn't reuse them? That you saw?

Wolff: Not there. No.

Oxen

Wolff: Another thing I'm hazy about is the oxen.

Calciano: Oh, I was going to ask about them.

Wolff: Well they had oxen, and I'm sure that they had oxen when I was there, too. They used the oxen to carry the wood from Felton to the kilns. That was the principal occupation of oxen. And it must have been the oxen because ... well the reason my memory is a little hazy, I knew a woman who lived, while I got to know her, down close to Santa Cruz. She ran a hospital there, and she had the most gorgeous picture that she took once of these oxen -- six oxen and a cart or carts, you know -- and I seem to confuse that in my mind with what actually happened on the road, but I know there were oxen there, because one time they got one of the steers, and they wanted to train him to put him into the oxtteam.

Calciano: Oh?

Wolff: And that was quite an operation. The steer was awfully wild, and they got him into a barn that had a top on

top, but there was open space down below, and they tied him up, and the poor animal, he just strained at the leash and ... well, it didn't work, because he cut his head all open by the ropes, you see, and then the maggots came and set in, and he never did make the oxteam.

Calciano: Oh dear.

Wolff: So they must have had oxen on the road when I was there. It's silly not to remember exactly something which today would be so spectacular.

Calciano: Were these the workmen who were trying to train it, or was Cowell taking a hand in it?

Wolff: No. That was Mr. Johnson took care of that.

Calciano: He's ... he was the bookkeeper though.

Wolff: Johnson?

Calciano: Wasn't he?

Wolff: Well I don't know what you call him. He didn't live here. He lived in a house on High Street. We passed it today coming up on High, with a lot of rocks bordered against the street with the house on top there. The house, of course, belonged to Mr. Cowell. But I wouldn't call him just a bookkeeper....

Calciano: No. He was manager.

Wolff: He was the manager, yes.

Calciano: Yes. That was wrong on my part. But I was just surprised to hear him taking an active part in the training of the animals too.

Wolff: No, it wasn't ... I beg your pardon, I'm getting them mixed. Now I remember that Frank George did it. Frank George.

Calciano: Ah. Yes.

Wolff: He was the one who lived here in the ranchhouse.

Calciano: Yes.

Wolff: And the way it comes back to me is because Johnson and George didn't like each other too well, so Johnson afterwards said, "Well, what do you expect?"

Calciano: (Laughter)

Wolff: So.... (Laughter) Incidentally (laughter) as far as the Johnson situation is concerned, Johnson never liked me too much because, as one of the Portuguese men said to me, "Well," he said, "Mr. Johnson wants you to be a Johnson man and not a George man."

(Laughter) Because I'd really nothing to do, and so I went along with Frank George.

Calciano: Sure, sure. That's interesting.

Wolff: I went riding, and later on we rounded up the steers.  
Does that interest you?

Calciano: Yes, it does.

Cattle Roundup

Wolff: The country really was quite wild; nobody had ever trespassed there or anything like that. There were no trails or roads, so they had something like 250 head of cattle, and Frank George and I went out to round them up as much as possible so they could be branded and cut ... you know what that means? Cut?

Calciano: Well ... there's two things you could mean.

Wolff: Where the steers were castrated.

Calciano: Yes.

Wolff: That's what they call a cutting.

Calciano: Okay.

Wolff: And then the branding, of course.

Calciano: I didn't know if you maybe meant notching the ears as a second brand, or whether you meant the castrating.

Wolff: No, they didn't notch them. They just branded them.

Calciano: I see.

Wolff: With a hot iron. So we went way out there, and of course I got my own horse, and he had his horse, and

it was a lot of fun, and we finally found them way up in the hills, and we chased them, and they went down a steep gully, and we went pell-mell after them, never stopping, and then all the cattle disappeared into some very dense bush, and I think, "Here we are stuck." Well, nothing of the kind. So Frank George, he had his head way down close to the neck of the horse and went right into the bush, and what could I do? I did the same thing.

Calciano: (Laughter)

Wolff: Through we went, and we found the cattle and brought them in. And then we had a great time -- we got them in the big corral, all those we had, and then they were roped and branded, the young cattle, the cows you know, were branded. First they were roped and (laughter) we had a Roman circus there trying to rope them and throw them. Wish you'd seen their faces; it was a rodeo. I thought it was wonderful.

Calciano: You tried it?

Wolff: Yes, I tried it. I did it. I wasn't very good at roping, but I got on to it to some extent.

Calciano: Did any of the lime workers help in this operation?

Wolff: No, no.

Calciano: No. Just....

Wolff: Oh, they just stood around. No, we did the work.

S. H. COWELL AND HIS EMPLOYEES

Samuel H. (Harry) Cowell

Calciano: Was Cowell down at all during the roundup?

Wolff: Oh, he enjoyed that. He was there for that surely.

Calciano: So you got to talk with Cowell on several occasions and meet him?

Wolff: Well ... no, I didn't really (laughter) have any kind of a conversation with him. He wasn't that kind of a man.

Calciano: (Laughter)

Wolff: He was rather taciturn, and ... I do remember one little bit of an incident. This was of course during the war in 1915. Germany was at war with Russia, and of course I was a German citizen at that time, and while we had this branding, somebody had brought up a lot of watermelons, and it was hot you know, and we had these watermelons, and Henry Cowell gave me one of the watermelons, and that was just after the Germans had captured Warsaw, and he reached at me and said, "Here's to the fall of Warsaw," because his sympathy



was not necessarily with Germany, but it was certainly not pro-Russian at that time.

Calciano: Very interesting.

Wolff: But that's one of the few times he spoke to me.

(Laughter)

Calciano: He ... as you say, he was very taciturn. Do you think that he was sort of defensive and felt people were always trying to take advantage of him, or was he just....

Wolff: No, I didn't have that feeling at all. He was a big man; he had his own special horse here, a beautiful palomino horse, also a heavy horse, and he sat on that, and he rode around, and he traveled a lot between these different ranches, but he was a ... well everybody said he was extremely fair, and his word was his Bible. When he said something, he meant it.

Calciano: I see.

Wolff: But no, I not at all had the feeling that he was on the defensive at all. But he was the boss.

Calciano: He was the boss. Yes.

Wolff: Of everything.

Calciano: Right. But a man that you respected as being the boss; not a man that you resented, it seems.

Wolff: Oh, you never questioned it. (Laughter)

Calciano: Well that's true, too. (Laughter)

The Workmen

Calciano: He seems to have had quite a lot of loyalty among his workers.

Wolff: Loyalty?

Calciano: Loyalty, yes. Did you notice this or were there a lot of disgruntled people working for him?

Wolff: Well all I can speak for are the men on the ranch, and those are the workmen. And most of them I think were pretty permanent, and they were happy, seemed to be happy enough, and they had their living; they were saving money, of course. Even though they got only a dollar a day, they had nothing to spend it on. And I don't think that ... I never heard of any of them going downtown and going on a carousing spree and so on; they probably saved it all up, and they were pretty contented, I believe. I never heard of any discontentment.

Calciano: Do you have any idea what the workmen did for their recreation in the evening hours, or did they just go to bed? (Laughter) Did they play cards or drink wine or gather in one particular place?

Wolff: No. They just stayed in their little shacks, and there was nothing in the way of social activities going on at all. No, they just stayed, I think, pretty much by themselves. Of course some of them, some of the Italians, for instance, they had wine. I suppose the others too.

Calciano: Did they make it, or did they buy it?

Wolff: I think some of them made it, yes, and it was pretty horrible too. (Laughter) I tried it once and then never tried it again.

Calciano: But Cowell had no strong feelings one way or the other about....

Wolff: Oh that wasn't his business. He didn't care.

Calciano: He didn't care.

Wolff: Not as far as I know of, no. He treated his men fairly. They felt, everybody said, that there was a feeling he treated them well; he paid them not a munificent wage, but he paid them enough, and apparently it was in keeping with what was standard at that time, you know, and that was it.

Calciano: That was a period when there was no health insurance and no compensation and so forth.

Wolff: Never heard of things like that.

Calciano: Yes. Nobody had heard of anything like that. I wonder were there many accidents on the ranch ever that you knew of?

Wolff: I don't remember a single one.

Calciano: Even with all the blasting and everything?

Wolff: No, no. But I'm sure that if anybody had been hurt on the ranch, Mr. Cowell would have taken care of him. I mean I just feel that way.

Calciano: I see.

#### Wages

Calciano: Were most of the men who worked here single or married?

Wolff: No, most of the men were single. Some were married, but most of them were single. Most of them were Portuguese, and, as I say, they worked hard. They were fed well, and they were happy enough I guess. They got a dollar a day. That was a famous saying: "Another day, another dollar." Of course they got all their food and living accommodations, if you call them that, the shacks that you can still see on the ridge. And then the ambition of many of these men was to work long enough so they could buy a heavy gold watch chain

and then go back to Europe and visit their families and tell them how prosperous they were in America (laughter), then coming back afterwards.

Calciano: That's interesting.

Wolff: That was a famous thing.

Calciano: Had most of them already been here for some years, or was Cowell hiring new workers all the time?

Wolff: As I recall it.... Well I was here only about half a year, but I don't recall any amount of turnover there, no.

Calciano: You mentioned the phrase, "Another day, another dollar," but you were in the management area. What type of salary were you getting from Cowell?

Wolff: Well, Mr. Cowell, who happened to be in the office when I called there ... it's all by coincidence. If he hadn't been there at that time, I never would have been here at the ranch. "Well," he said, "all right, you can come, and we'll pay you \$75 a month and found, and you live at the house."

Calciano: And what?

Wolff: Found they called it. Found -- that was board.

Calciano: Oh! That's a new word for me ... thank you.

Wolff: And so I said, "Let me think it over," and he said, "That's all right. You think it over and come back." So I came back, and the first man I saw then was Mr. George. He had nothing to do with Frank George who was here, but he was in charge....

Calciano: William George.

Wolff: Maybe. He was in charge of the commercial land there in the city, and I told him I want the job. He said, "Why do you want to go down there and bury yourself on that ranch?" "Well," I said, "Mr. Cowell has offered me the job, and I want it." "Well," he said, "if you want it, all right, if he told you. You'll get \$65." I said, "No. Mr. Cowell told me \$75." (Laughter) He said, "What!"

Calciano: (Laughter)

Wolff: So he went right into Mr. Cowell's office, and he came back and he said, "Yes, Mr. Cowell always stands by his word. And that's what it is." So I got \$75 and found.

Calciano: Very good. Now I've heard that in the early days the men were paid once a year. I'm not talking about the management workers like you, but the lime workers. Now had this changed by 1915? Were they paid oftener? Do

you remember?

Wolff: Well, for certain reasons I never had anything to do with the money, and I couldn't tell. But I doubt very much that they would hold out their wages all that time. But I can't talk about that. No, I got mine.

Calciano: You got yours. (Laughter) And did he have a sort of company store here down in the stonehouse at that point where men could charge their work clothes and supplies?

Wolff: No, no.

Calciano: That was gone by then?

Wolff: All they had was the storehouse by the present, close to the present main entrance there -- I think it's still there.

Calciano: Yes.

Wolff: Where they kept flour and all sorts of provisions, but that was for the use of the cookhouse. And they kept powder there, things like that.

Calciano: Oh, they kept their blasting powder there?

Wolff: Yes. As a matter of fact ... I don't know how much you want me to tell you about these things....

Calciano: Lots! (Laughter)

Wolff: I used to go there with Mr. Johnson. He would say, "Let's go down and get some flour and eggs," one thing

and another, and, "We will need some powder." So he went in the corner and picked up one of these black powder kegs, maybe 25 or 40 pounds, something like that, put it on the floor, rolled it down to the end of the room, and I said, "God's sake, is that safe?" "Well," he said, "It always has been."

Calciano: (Laughter)

Wolff: Then we loaded it on some cart or something and it went up to the quarry.

Calciano: How funny!

Wolff: It's all pretty primitive.

Calciano: Yes.

A.S.T. Johnson

Calciano: Now Johnson at some point was fired. Was this at all when you were here?

Wolff: No, it was not.

Calciano: Do you know about it?

Wolff: I heard about it. Only secondhand. A few years ago, it may have been five years ago, something like that, I came up here; some of the buildings were here, but not all of them, and there was a man, an old man, living



at the house where the Halls live now....

Calciano: George Cardiff.

Wolff: Oh, so that's George Cardiff? And he told me, I suppose you got that from him....

Calciano: Well, I partly got it and I partly didn't. I gathered that it was embezzlement, or....

Wolff: Do you want me to tell you about it?

Calciano: Yes.

Wolff: Now this is all secondhand, but....

Calciano: We'll label it as hearsay.

Wolff: ... this is what he said. Well, as far as I'm concerned, I do know that I was hired as timekeeper, and I never had anything to do with keeping the time. And according to George Cardiff, that you say was his name, Mr. Cowell one day found out that Johnson had been defrauding him, and putting two and two together I can easily see how that could happen, because he made out the time himself, and if that's what he did, he could very easily have made out phony slips and then pocketed the money. I imagine it, it's guesswork on my part, but that easily could have happened you see.

Calciano: Yes.

Wolff: And then George Cardiff said when Cowell found out about it, he came down here, and he told Johnson, "I say, now, I'll tell you what you do. You take my car, you can have it, and go way back East, go as far as you can, and I never want to see you again." That's what he told me. (Laughter) But that rings true, because Cowell was a man of few words, and what he said, he meant, so that could easily have been.

Calciano: Yes. You worked in the city later. Did you ever run into Mr. George in the city?

Wolff: No, I never saw him in the city. You mean William George?

Calciano: William George.

Wolff: No, no. I never saw him again.

Calciano: Because there's some story there that I've never been able to get quite -- that one of the sisters fired him for some reason....

Wolff: No, I don't know anything about that.

Frank George, Johnson, and Cowell

Calciano: Of the non-workmen, was there just Johnson, George, and you, or were there other "white-collar" workers, so to speak?

Wolff: No.

Calciano: Just the three?

Wolff: Yes, that's all.

Calciano: You mentioned a little bit about the Johnson-Frank George feud. Could you sort of give a thumbnail sketch of what each man was like? Your impressions of them?

Wolff: Well, Johnson was a rather tall man and sort of easy-going, hail-fellow-well-met in a way, and, well I wouldn't know what way to describe him. How do you mean?

Calciano: Well, just that type of thing. Was he talkative or quiet; was he nice or was he petty and mean; was he respected or not ... just general things that would give us some inkling of the man.

Wolff: No, he wasn't petty or mean, no. As a matter of fact, when I first came down here, he met me at the station, and he took my grip and so on and was very nice, and I thought it was quite pleasant.

Calciano: Umhmmm.

Wolff: (Laughter) And it's ... well for my part, but that's a question of personal reaction you know, and I never got in any way close to him. And so some sort of a feeling was there almost from the beginning, you know,

but he was nice enough in the beginning. And then he never really did anything to me in any way, except he had his own business, and I was not a Johnson man, you see. That's it. Now about Frank George, it was just the opposite. He was not so tall, and ... Johnson was a rather robust build; Frank George was much slighter, was a wiry type of a guy, and he could ride and ride and ride you know, and sometimes we rode all day long and all we had for lunch was a little milk and a few crackers along, and that never bothered him. Frank George was very pleasant, and he talked, and his wife was, well, what I picture as a typical Boston housewife, New England housewife.

Calciano: Oh? That's right, they were from New England, weren't they?

Wolff: Yes. They were very homespun people.

Calciano: Did they ever mention that he was related to Cowell in any way?

Wolff: No, no.

Calciano: Because the Cowell family tree has got a lot of Georges on it, and I've always wondered if William George or Frank George were cousins or second cousins or anything?

Wolff: No....

Calciano: If they were, they kept it mighty quiet. (Laughter)

Wolff: Well I would think that would have come out in the conversation somehow or other if they had been related. I doubt that.

Calciano: Did you ever meet any of Harry Cowell's brothers or sisters?

Wolff: Never.

Calciano: Oh, when we were speaking of the cookhouse, did Cowell eat in the cookhouse when you were....

Wolff: He did not.

Calciano: He did not. Okay. Because I've had two absolutely different stories on it -- one that he always liked to eat with the boys, and the other....

Wolff: Well he didn't while I was there.

Calciano: Well the other comment was that he would eat there, but he always had his own little private room. But you didn't see him eat there at all.

Wolff: Well he had his own private room in the house, of course.

Calciano: Yes.

Wolff: When he slept there.

Calciano: But this was a little room in the cookhouse.

Wolff: No. Then I can tell you one other little thing that happened ... or that Frank George told me about Cowell. Now as I mentioned Mr. Cowell came down there every once in a while, you know. Well Mr. George said one time when Mr. Cowell was away, he or his wife, they cleaned up his room, they dusted everywhere, and one of the places where they dusted was on top of the cupboards where you hang your clothes, because the cupboards weren't built against the building as they are now, and he says on top of that they found three or four big gold pieces that Cowell evidently had put there one time. And he never knew why that happened ... whether Cowell wanted to tempt him or not, but anyhow, when Cowell came back, he gave them to him, and Cowell said, "Okay," and never said anything and took them.

Calciano: That's interesting.

Wolff: You see he wasn't the kind of a man you'd ask him, "Why did you do that?"

Calciano: No. Not even Frank George would ask him, "Why did you do that?"

Wolff: No.

RANCH OPERATIONS, continued

Calciano: Were the ranch buildings kept whitewashed pretty regularly or not?

Wolff: Well I was only there six months, so I don't know what they did.

Calciano: Well I just wondered, did it look kind of run-down or all spick and span when you were here, or don't you remember?

Wolff: Well it looked as you'd expect a ranch to look like ... it's never spick and span really. It is now, but that's different. But any ranch you go to is never, hardly ever, spick and span, but they are standing there and probably stand there for another 15 years or 50.

Calciano: (Laughter) Did they have a pigsty in front of the cookhouse when you were there?

Wolff: Well there were pigs there. Once they slaughtered a pig; it squealed for hours, the poor animal.

Calciano: Oh no. They didn't know how....

Wolff: They stuck a big knife into its belly and let it bleed to death.

Calciano: Oh!

Wolff: Which was pretty awful. But what they did with the steers, when we had a steer or cow we needed (of

course we needed the meat) that was something different. They had a slaughterhouse which is still up in the hills somewhere, and next to it was a corral. At one end of the corral was sort of a gangway fenced in on both sides. They drove the animal in there, then it couldn't go any farther, couldn't go back, they closed the back, and had him penned right there, and I watched it once. I never watched it again.

Calciano: Hmmm.

Wolff: I watched it once, and there was this animal, and the animal knew what was going to happen, because it could smell the blood, you know. None of it was very pleasant, but Rico, the blacksmith, came along and had a fairly short sharp knife, and he stepped up by the side where the fencing was and very carefully he found a spot in his neck, right a certain spot, put this knife down and killed the animal immediately. So it was very primitive, but extremely effective too.

Calciano: Why didn't they do the pig humanely? They didn't know how, or did they want to torture it?

Wolff: Well that happened only one time. I don't know, but it was very unpleasant.

Calciano: Yes.

Wolff: They killed the steer because the animal had to be



killed for food, but there was no cruelty involved. It was just a second and it was all over.

Calciano: The blacksmith did it?

Wolff: Yes, that was Rico, the blacksmith, he did it. And then he prepared the animal in the slaughterhouse, and I watched that once, and never did that again.

(Laughter)

Calciano: Rico did the actual butchering, too?

Wolff: Yes, yes.

Calciano: That's interesting. Was there a vegetable garden anywhere around?

Wolff: Well not that I recall. I imagine there must have been, but I don't know.

Calciano: Did the ranch have a dairy operating still when you were here?

Wolff: You mean to sell milk?

Calciano: Yes. I think it was a commercial dairy. I have never been able to find out too much about it.

Wolff: No, no.

Calciano: It was up on the Marshall Tract area, Marshall Field area.

Wolff: No, I don't think so. I never heard anything about that.

Calciano: Did they have any just for local consumption? Their own ranch consumption?

Wolff: Well, of course, they had milk here for their own men's consumption and so on.

Calciano: Yes. Did they raise hay and grain for the cattle and horses?

Wolff: Yes, sure, hay. Now whether they sold any of that or not, I don't know. I must confess I (laughter) didn't have much interest in those things at that time.

Calciano: Well you're remembering a lot for only having been here six months. Do you remember if they raised any other crops? Potatoes or any other kind of commercial crop on any of their land?

Wolff: I don't think so. I don't believe so.

Calciano: Were there any forest fires while you were here, or recently enough before you were here that you saw great evidence of it or heard about it?

Wolff: No.

Calciano: All right. We keep getting asked, "When did the ranch burn, when did the ranch burn?" And one person said there was a fire sometime in the 1918 period give or take five years and I thought, well maybe it was the six months you were here, and I could really nail it

down. (Laughter)

Wolff: No, no. There was no fire at that time.

Calciano: Okay. Were there any men that you were aware of digging gold anywhere on the ranch?

Wolff: No.

Calciano: Is there anything that I've forgotten to ask you that we should be sure to get on the tape?

Wolff: (Pause) Oh, I don't know. No, some of these things I was telling you about I was thinking about the last few days, because I knew you were going to ask me things and so on.

Calciano: Well you'll have a chance when you see the manuscript to add in a paragraph here and there if you think of things, but I just did want to....

Wolff: Oh, one thing I just happened to think of while you are asking that ... (laughter) ... which is sort of interesting in a way because you wouldn't think of that. One evening while I was up at the house and we were sitting around, there was a lot of howling going on outside, and Frank George went out. "Oh," he says, "There are coyotes."

Calciano: Oh!

Wolff: Well you don't think of coyotes now, but ... so Frank

George says, "Well, I'm going to take myself a gun and go after them." So he went after them. But that was the end of it (laughter) because he never saw a coyote, nor they him.

Calciano: Did the ranch have very many dogs?

Wolff: There was one, only one dog. He was a big brute of a dog, black; they called him Nigger, and he was mean. And he was chained all day long, which of course was poor, too poor for the dog, but.... He was chained right in front of the stable here, or carriage house, whatever you want to call it. But there were no dogs there otherwise. But in the evening, it was my job to put him inside and close the door on him. Of course the horses all went in there.

Calciano: Umhmmm.

Wolff: So I said, "Nigger, come on, Nigger, come on," and he went up the steps to the loft a little bit, and I said, "Nigger, come down, come down," and he snarled at me. That made me mad (laughter), so I took one of the whips that hung there and said, "You come down here and quick," and he did, with his tail between his legs, but that's nothing to do with the ranch; that's just a little personal experience.

Calciano: Yes. I was kind of interested, because I've heard that Cowell loved animals and loved cattle and so forth, and yet I've never heard anything about dogs or pets.

Wolff: No. There were no other dogs around there that I know of.

Calciano: When you left, was another timekeeper hired?

Wolff: (Laughter) I don't know what happened. Actually the reason I got the job is this: (Mr. Cowell did tell me that) "Well," he said, "I have a fellow," (he was German, too) "He is manager of one of my ranches down the valley somewhere," (I don't know where, maybe around Fresno or somewhere) "And now if you do as well as he does, that'll be fine, so you can come and start here."

Calciano: Oh?

Wolff: So I thought I'd be there and maybe be one of his stalwarts, but I wasn't.

Calciano: (Laughter) (Pause) You're a stockbroker now, aren't you?

Wolff: That's right, yes. Something far removed from this.

Calciano: From all your chemistry and....

Wolff: This is just one of my fond memories.

Calciano: Yes. Well this has been enjoyable talking with you.

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