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## Santa Cruz History

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John Dong: the Cowell Ranch Cookhouse

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### Publication Date

1967-04-01

### Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3pq7c3q0#supplemental>

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JOHN DONG

THE COWELL RANCH COOKHOUSE

An Interview Conducted By  
Elizabeth Spedding Calciano

Santa Cruz  
1967



John Dong, with grandson and George Cardiff  
Pointing to the old stove in the Chancellor's Office in  
the Cookhouse

February 14, 1965

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- John Dong, with grandson and  
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## INTRODUCTION

The University of California, Santa Cruz, is fortunate indeed to have as its campus a 2,000 acre section of the old Henry Cowell ranch. It is fortunate in the size and location of the land, in the abundance of redwood and madrone, and in the view that is revealed from the lower meadows. It is also fortunate that this was the section where the headquarters of the ranch was located and that a number of the old ranch buildings were still standing when the University acquired the land. One of the earliest decisions that Chancellor Dean McHenry and the campus planners made was that many of these historical buildings would be preserved. The old ranch cookhouse was one of the most intriguing. Although run-down and unused for a number of years, its weather-beaten red paint made it stand out among the others. It was this building that was chosen to be renovated and converted into the Chancellor's interim on-campus office.

Quite naturally the University is interested in the history of the land it has acquired and the buildings that were here. From its inception the Regional History Project has worked to help piece together the fragmented and often elusive history of the Henry Cowell family and their Santa Cruz ranch. When it was discovered that the last Chinese cook for the Cowell ranch, John Dong, still lived in Santa Cruz, it was quickly decided to ask him if he would be willing to be interviewed; he very kindly

agreed.

John Dong, or Dong Hong Goon as he is known in Chinese, was born in 1909 in Canton, China. His father had been born in San Francisco and had worked for many years in the United States, but had chosen to return to China to marry. He made several trips between China and the United States, and on one of these he brought his son with him. This was John Dong's introduction to the Cowell ranch, since his father was at that time the ranch cook. Although Mr. Dong was only in grade school he soon found himself working as the cook's helper. In later years Mr. Dong himself became the cook, and it is mainly these years that he discussed in this manuscript. He talked briefly about S.H. (Harry) Cowell and Frank George, the ranch manager, but most of the interview was devoted to a description of his daily schedule, the way he got his supplies, and the foods he most commonly prepared (including bean pie!). He also explained the floor plan and the equipment of the old cookhouse.

In the history of our county there have been numerous cookhouses with Chinese cooks. They have been located at lumber camps and ranches scattered all over our mountains and lowlands. Although this manuscript deals with the Cowell cookhouse and fairly recent times, most of what Mr. Dong relates holds true for other cookhouses and earlier periods. In many ways the Cowell cookhouse was an anachronism -- the menus and working conditions



were not at all unlike those in the cookhouses of preceding decades.

Mr. Dong was interviewed in the back room of his grocery store on October 24, 1965. At first he seemed a bit shy of the microphone, but he was most willing to answer all the questions that were posed. A portion of the tape is preserved in the Regional History Project Office for those who might wish to listen to the conversation.

The manuscript was edited by the interviewer and was returned to Mr. Dong for possible additions and corrections, but he approved the manuscript without change. The picture of Mr. Dong was taken by Vester Dick. Bates Elliott, the architect who redesigned the cookhouse, very kindly sent us copies of his drawings of the original building and floor plan. From these Wendell Simons drew the floor plan that appears on page 31a.

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

April 12, 1967  
Regional History Project  
University Library  
University of California, Santa Cruz

DONG YUEN

Calciano: I understand your father was a cook at the Cowell Ranch. Oh yes. He cooked for Cowell about ten or fifteen years before I came to the United States. He used to cook up in the old cookhouse way up in Felton.

Calciano: Is that the IXL area?

Dong: Well, I've never been up at that place, and he didn't tell me about that. He had already moved to the ranch down here before I came in.

Calciano: I see. What year did he start cooking for Cowell?

Dong: I'm not exactly sure what year. Maybe 1915 or 1912 or something like that.

Calciano: That's quite a long time ago.

Dong: The Cowells have got quite a ranch. It's all over Felton and Rincon. It's all over the place.

Calciano: When your father came over to this country, had he been hired to come over and cook for Cowell, or did he just get to this country and happen to find the job with Cowell?

Dong: No, I think he just found the job with Cowell.

Calciano: Once he got over here?

Dong: Yes. When he came over to Santa Cruz. You know he used to live in Monterey.

Calciano: Oh really?

Dong: So he came over to Santa Cruz looking for a job and he looked up to Cowell's place.

Calciano: How did he happen to decide to come to the United States in the first place?

Dong: Well, my father was born in the United States.

Calciano: He was?

Dong: Yes. He was born in San Francisco, and then he went around and stayed in Monterey for quite a long time you know, before he got married, and then he go back to China.

Calciano: Did he go back to China to get married?

Dong: To get married, that's right. At the time he worked at Monterey, he used to own a restaurant or I think some kind of a wagon. I don't know what he called it -- you know, go out and pick up vegetables or something like that.

Calciano: Oh, you mean door to door?

Dong: That's it. Door to door, going that way. So finally he quit that job, and then he come here to Santa Cruz. And then he find a job at Cowell's place.

Calciano: I see. Did he grow his own vegetables when he was in that business?

Dong: Yes, I think so but I never see it.

Calciano: So he went back to China and got married. And how long

did he live there that time?

Dong: Well, I don't know, but I had a sister and brother before I got there. Well, the last time he stayed in China for three years before he came to the United States.

Calciano: And he brought all his family over?

Dong: Yes. He brought all his family over.

Calciano: Were you born in China or the United States?

Dong: In China.

Calciano: I see. And then you told me the other day that your father went back to China again, and you went with him.

Dong: The first time I go back to China, I go with him, so then he stay in China. He never come back to the United States any more.

Calciano: Oh, he stayed there?

Dong: Yes, he stayed there. He stayed there I think fifteen years in all before he pass away. He went back there in 1927 or '28.

Calciano: Even though he was born in San Francisco, did he feel China was his homeland?

Dong: Oh yes. He do. He do. He like China very much. You know when he was young, grandpa took him back.

Calciano: Do you know how your grandfather happened to come over

to this country?

Dong: No I don't. I never even see my grandfather.

Calciano: So your father worked for Cowell from 1912 or 1915 until 1928?

Dong: Yes. Till 1928. Then he take me back to China again.

Calciano: Was there anything that made your father decide to go back in 1928 rather than earlier or later?

Dong: Well, I think he feel he wants to retire. He was almost sixty, you know. So finally he think China was more better than the United States, I think.

JOHN DONG (DONG HONG GOON)

Calciano: I see you've got Chinese newspapers here. I gather you talk and read it as your native language.

Dong: Oh yes. I'm a pretty good Chinese reader. I didn't go to school too much in the United States, so I don't understand too much, but I went long enough to learn some things.

Calciano: When you go back to China, do you feel right at home?

Dong: Yes. After I stay in China three or four years, I almost lose everything before I come back to the United States.

Calciano: Oh. You have to learn the English language again?

Dong: Yes, yes.

Calciano: Oh dear. When you were the cook for the Cowell's, you lived right in the cookhouse, didn't you?

Dong: Well, that's the only place to stay. You board in a little room next to the kitchen.

Calciano: Were you married at this time?

Dong: Yes.

Calciano: You were married, but you had to live up there?

Dong: Yes. But my wife is not here though. I didn't bring my wife over.

Calciano: Oh, she was still in China?

Dong: Yes, she was still in China. She just came over about three years ago.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Dong: Well, one thing, I hate to take her over here because my mother is still living, see. So we had to have a nurse with her. My mother just passed away about a couple of years ago.

Calciano: So you made several trips back and forth to China?

Dong: Yes. A couple or three times.

Calciano: Were both your sons born in China, too?

Dong: Yes. My boys were born in China too.

Calciano: I was wondering, since your wife and family just came over from China three years ago, how did they avoid getting caught in Red China?

Dong: No, it was not that reason that they stayed. My mother was still in China so it was all or nothing.

Calciano: Yes, but they had no problems getting out?

Dong: No.

Calciano: What city were they in?

Dong: In Canton.

Calciano: Well, that is now in Red China, isn't it? Yes, well, now it is, but before, no. But they get out in Hong Kong.

Calciano: Oh, with your mother?

Dong: Yes. They lived there the last few years.

Calciano: I see. Is it difficult now for people to get people out of China?

Dong: Well, yes, some are easy, some are hard. Some people easily come back and forth, but if someone sees, they won't let them get out at all.

#### COOK'S HELPER

Calciano: How did your father learn to cook? Did he already know when he went to work for Cowell?

Dong: I don't know. I don't know if he already know or if maybe he asked someone to learn how. I don't know.

Calciano: lie never talked about it?

Dong: No. But when I learn how to cook, my father was

teaching me.

Calciano: Did your father ever mention whether things were different at the ranch in his early days there?

Dong: Well, maybe he tell me something too, but I forgot all about what he tell me anyway. I couldn't get that answer.

Calciano: All right. Now you started your cooking career as a helper, didn't you?

Dong: Oh, yes. The first time I was a helper out there and I was still going to school, too, at that time.

Calciano: How old were you?

Dong: Oh, about eleven or so years.

Calciano: Oh really?

Dong: Yes. But I helped them out. I washed the dishes or something like that. But when school started, I'd go down to the Mission Hill.

Calciano: Mission Hill School?

Dong: Mission Hill, way down at the end of the street. I walked back and forth.

Calciano: Was it a grade school?

Dong: Yes, a grammar school. There used to be one that was down the hill there. The old one. But afterwards they move up to Mission Street. What's the name? Mission and King Street.



Calciano: That's where it is now.

Dong: Yes. Yes.

Calciano: But it used to be right on the hill?

Dong: Yes, right on the hill. That old one. Two story.

#### COOKHOUSE SCHEDULE

Calciano: When you started working as the cook at the cookhouse, what was your schedule?

Dong: We started serving breakfast at six.

Calciano: That was a big hot meal, I suppose?

Dong: Oh yes. But everybody start working at six-thirty, so you've got to get that done before you start getting ready for everything else.

Calciano: And would you have any of the preparations done the night before?

Dong: No. Every meal's about the same thing. We don't have any special thing at all. You know how Harry Cowell was. (Laughter) He was a stingier one than anyone else.

Calciano: Oh really?

Dong: Yes. He don't put anything in the kitchen. Only beans, potatoes, something like that, or some bread.

Calciano: Any bacon maybe?

Dong: No. You don't see no bacon around there do you?

Calciano: Oh really? So what would you cook for breakfast?

Dong: Get some steak.

Calciano: Oh!

Dong: They'd be killing a beef up there every week. So every meal we'd have a beef. Beef every meal. Nothing else changed. Steak stew or something like that, and that's about all. I got up at four o'clock to start cooking.

Calciano: My that's early. Did you have a helper most of the time you were there or not?

Dong: While I was there, no. Before, my dad used to have a helper.

Calciano: Were there more men when your dad cooked?

Dong: Yes, but while I was there, there was not over only fifteen men. When my daddy lived there, there was always over thirty-five or forty.

Calciano: I see. So after breakfast you'd wash up, and then I suppose it would be time to start cooking lunch again?

Dong: Yes. You're just cleaning up and then you start lunch. After lunch, I'd take about an hour off. That was all. Then I'd start dinnertime. I'd have dinner at five-thirty or six o'clock.

Calciano: And then once you had washed up after that, you'd have to go to bed, I guess.

Dong: Eight o'clock already. Have to go to bed.

Calciano: Eight o'clock. That was really a working day.

Dong: Oh yes. You work long hours, but you don't get long pay though.

Calciano: Oh no?

Dong: The first time I worked there, they only give me fifty-five dollars a month.

Calciano: A month?

Dong: Yes.

Calciano: Oh my. Was that when you were grown up or when you were a helper?

Dong: When I was a helper, yes. After I start alone by myself I only make seventy-five dollars a month. That's all he paid me.

Calciano: For about fourteen hours work?

Dong: Yes. Fourteen hour a day and Sunday too. Everybody don't get much pay up there, though.

Calciano: Why did you stay so long?

Dong: Well, there wasn't no place to go and nothing to do. I might as well stay and enjoy it. One thing I liked about that place is nobody bother you. The boys wouldn't care about whatever you doing as long as you get the job done, so that's O.K. Year by year you stay. You don't even know.

Calciano: When did you finally quit?

Dong: After Frank George died.

Calciano: Was it because he died that you decided it was time to move on?

Dong: Well, after he died Joe Netto took over. His wife stayed there with him, so he don't need me anyway.

Calciano: I see. And did you buy this grocery store then?

Dong: No, I run a surplus store for a few years. Then I quit there and went out near Berkeley in Oakland. Then I stayed there four years running a restaurant. So finally I quit that one and then I come back here. I stay almost ten years here.

S.H. (HARRY) COWELL

Dong: One thing. Before Harry Cowell dies, he comes back to the ranch and every morning he was eating at the cookhouse.

Calciano: When he was staying at the ranch?

Dong: Yes. When he was home he'd eat down at the cookhouse for breakfast. So every time he was home Frank George would bring bacon or something good to eat.

Calciano: Oh!

Dong: You know, bacon or eggs or something like that.

Calciano: Was the bacon for all the men or was it just for Cowell?

Dong: Just for Cowell. Yes. He eat by himself. He don't eat with all the boys.

Calciano: He wouldn't?

Dong: We have a little special room there. Only four chairs in there. He sit down and maybe he have Frank George or somebody like that eat with him. That's about all. You know, he don't eat with the men.

Calciano: I'm glad to know that because I had heard that he often ate in the cookhouse, and the implication was that he ate with the men, but I guess he actually didn't?

Dong: No, no. And he'd get up early before everybody else.

Calciano: In the morning?

Dong: Yes, he was out working. Before four o'clock.

Calciano: Oh my gracious.

Dong: Yes. He'd go out to the barn and he'd see everybody taking care of the horses. One time he get into the cookhouse by three o'clock and he holler at everybody, "Wake up." (Laughter) I get outside and say, "What do you want?" He say, "What time is it?"

Calciano: Probably he couldn't sleep and decided nobody else should either.

Dong: Yes, when he comes to Santa Cruz he goes around on horseback and everywhere he watches you, checks on you

to see how you're doing.

Calciano: Did the men seem to like him or not? Or did they find him a nuisance?

Dong: Well at that time everybody had to like him or go look for a job, and jobs were pretty scarce.

Calciano: Somebody once told me that his little dining room was nicknamed the bullpen. Did you ever hear that?

Dong: Bullpen? No, I didn't know that.

Calciano: Did Cowell treat his men pretty well, or not?

Dong: Well, he's checking up all the time, but he's not too rough on anybody. He's doing what he's doing and he wants you to get on the ball to do what you have to do. That's all.

Calciano: He was quite fair then?

Dong: Oh yes, he was pretty nice, but a little stingy.

Calciano: Oh?

Dong: I was there for many years and he only give me five dollars for a Christmas present one time one year.

Calciano: Only one year?

Dong: Only one year. Five dollars. Lucky devil. (Laughter)  
We always give him a little Christmas present. You know, buy him a little something new.

Calciano: The men would? You and all the men?

Dong: No, I do it. See, I buy it for them for Cowell or for

Frank George. We did something like that every Christmas time. We bought them a shirt or something like that for a special gift.

Calciano: I see.

Dong: But he won't get you anything.

Calciano: He was getting pretty old by the time you finished up work there, wasn't he?

Dong: Well, he was. I meet him up at San Francisco one time in the office.

Calciano: Oh. Did you have to go up to the office very often?

Dong: Well sometimes. He had a big office at Market Street. We always go up there and say hello every time we'd leave.

Calciano: Oh, when you'd quit your job?

Dong: When you'd quit your job, you'd just go up there and say hello to the manager.

Calciano: I see.

#### FRANK GEORGE

Calciano: What did you think of Frank George?

Dong: Well, Frank George is very nice to me. They both were. His missus too. He do me very good. He help me nice. Every time I quit he ask me when I want to come back to stay. I say, "Well, I'll let you know when I want

to come back." The last time I'm not going to go out to there, you know. When I get out of the service, I don't want to go back there. So I had a little surplus store down here. So finally he come to me, and many many times he say, "Well, no more cook up here yet. Go back up there," and so finally I say, "Well, yes, if they pay what I'm asking for." He say, "I'll pay, I'll pay." So finally he give me two hundred dollars a month up there.

Calciano: Well, that's not so bad since you got room and board with it.

Dong: Better than seventy-five for my whole life.

Calciano: And Mrs. George was nice to you, too?

Dong: Oh yes. She was very nice.

Calciano: People seem to have liked the Georges.

Dong: They want me to come up and see them all the time. You know, you like them.

Calciano: Did you ever meet William George, the General Manager up in San Francisco?

Dong: William George?

Calciano: Maybe he had quit by the time you went up there.

Dong: No I never meet him. Well, I know all the bosses that work up at the ranch here. The first time I come here they had a boss besides Frank George, and they had a



bookkeeper.

Calciano: Oh, Johnson?

Dong: What's his name, A.S.T. or something like that.

Calciano: Yes. A.S.T. Johnson. He got fired or something, didn't he?

Dong: Yes. He got fired. But I think I'm not sure for what matter. I better not say anything.

Calciano: You've mentioned that you always ate beef. Did Cowell ever let you kill a pig?

Dong: Oh, once a year sometimes. We raise a pig, but he don't kill it.

Calciano: Oh? What did he do with it? Sell it.

Calciano: Oh! But didn't they have a pigpen in front of the cookhouse?

Dong: Yes. It used to be they had quite a few pigs up there. You know the spoil, what they threw out ...

Calciano: The garbage.

Dong: Yes, the garbage. Something like that.

Calciano: But he'd only let you have one a year?

Dong: Maybe once a year at Christmas, Thanksgiving or something like that. I remember the last time before I quit, we killed the pig for Thanksgiving Day. We had the pig all prepared for Thanksgiving and the foreman, Frank George, couldn't wait till Thanksgiving, but he

passed away two days before Thanksgiving.

Calciano: Oh.

Dong: I feel sorry for him.

#### COOKHOUSE MENUS

##### Meat

Calciano: Did you ever have any lamb?

Dong: No. No, we never killed lambs there at all.

Calciano: By the way, who would kill the cows? Would you have to?

Dong: No. One working man up there, he used to take care of the cow, milk the cow, or something like that.

Calciano: Did they just cut one out of the herd each week?

Dong: They just pick it out. Any one. They just picked it out. "But he don't pick any of the steers, or something like that. He always pick the old ones, an old cow or something like that.

Calciano: How frustrating.

Dong: It was a real job. The only thing is stew meat It's the best.

Calciano: Did you cook fish on Friday?

Dong: Yes.

Calciano: I guess you'd just about have to with all the Portuguese and Italians.

Dong: Oh yes. We have it every Friday. One meal on Friday.

Calciano: Just one meal was fish?

Dong: Yes, one meal of fish on Friday. Every week.

Calciano: Where would you get the fish?

Dong: Oh, I think he bought it down here on the wharf.  
I think from Stagnaro's.

Calciano: And what kind did he usually get you? The cheapest kind?

Dong: No, he was doing pretty good. He got what was in season. Always got rock cod or halibuts, something like that.

Calciano: Then would you usually fry it or bake it or what?

Dong: Yes. Just fry it and put in pans and bake it. I put tomato sauce over it and mixed it up. This way it tastes better.

Calciano: I imagine it was nice to get a change of pace from tough steak. Did you have much poultry?

Dong: No. We never had no chicken or turkey or anything like that. I think, maybe, once in a while, I don't know. I remember one time we had it, one or two times. I think sometimes he had one he don't want around the house and then he'd bring it down to the kitchen.

Calciano: Oh.

Dong: Maybe he have something left over...

Calciano: Maybe something too old?

Dong: Yes, so he'd bring it over to the boys and let them finish it up.

Calciano: Oh my.

#### Dairy Products

Calciano: Did you use much milk and butter and cheese?

Dong: Well, butter, we always had that cheaper kind. That Nucoa, or something like that.

Calciano: Margarine?

Dong: Margarine. Yes. Nucoa. But we didn't have no real butter at all.

Calciano: Did you have a milk cow?

Dong: Yes. We have our own milk.

Calciano: And did you use much cheese?

Dong: No, we never see no cheese, hardly. I make some cheese over there. Used the milk.

Calciano: Oh?

Dong: It make very good cheese. I just take the sour milk and add some rennet and stir it up right and it come out cheese.

Calciano: Was it a yellow cheese?

Dong: No, a white cheese. After you strain it, you keep it in

the cloth bags or linen and you get cheese. It was pretty good. Nice soft cheese.

Calciano: The men liked that?

Dong: Yes, they do. They like Swiss cheese.

Calciano: Where would you get your staples like the flour and sugar and such?

Dong: Well, those, I'm not exactly sure if he bought it in Santa Cruz or if he got supplies from San Francisco. But everything I ordered I tell the foreman, George, Frank George, and he got it. He'd bring them up here, but I'm not exactly sure if he got them from Santa Cruz or if he'd bring them from San Francisco.

Calciano: Did you use many spices? Were you allowed to?

Dong: Well, only ground pepper or something like that; not anything special.

Calciano: You didn't use thyme or rosemary or anything?

Dong: No.

#### Bread and Biscuits

Calciano: What would you serve at a meal along with the beef stew or the steak? Did you make biscuits?

Dong: Oh yes. We made our own bread. Six loaves of bread every day.

Calciano: Six loaves!

Dong: Yes. And besides in the morning I made biscuits or hotcakes or something like that.

Calciano: The men got a lot of starch in their diet, didn't they? Was Sunday any different? Did they allow you to cook something better on Sunday?

Dong: No. No, but Sunday in the breakfast we might serve some eggs or something like that. That's about all. Frank George had some chickens out there in that house. So whatever eggs he's got he just bring it down and use it. After that we never get any. They were high, you know.

Calciano: I gather most of your staples would come in hundred pound sacks?

Dong: The flour? Yes, hundred pound sacks.

Calciano: Sugar?

Dong: Beans and sugar, like that; everything's by hundred. You could get them to last for a month or so.

Calciano: Did you make coffee for them?

Dong: Oh yes. We had the grind-up coffee. We got the beans in the sack. You have to use the hand grinder.

(Laughter)

Calciano: I wonder whatever happened to your old grinder?

Dong: I wonder. I wonder. It used to be still out in the cookhouse, but I don't know what he's done with it.

Calciano: Those are collector's items now.

Dong: Yes, sure.

Fruit and Vegetables

Calciano: Did you get many vegetables, fresh vegetables? Dong:

Oh, yes. We raised them on the top of the hill.

Calciano: Where?

Dong: At the top of the cookhouse.

Calciano: Who grew them?

Dong: Well, one of those men took care of all those milk cows and garden work and had something to do with the butchering.

Calciano: One man did all that?

Dong: Yes. One guy did the butchering, the gardening, and milking.

Calciano: You just had one milk cow?

Dong: We had two cows.

Calciano: What kind of vegetables did he grow?

Dong: Well, all kinds. Beans, carrots, cabbage, and peas or corn, something like that. We had all kinds of vegetables.

Calciano: So that wasn't too much of a problem then?

Dong: No.

Calciano: Even in wintertime?

Dong: Even in wintertime. We cooked lots of cabbage and we got variety, you know.

Calciano: And what about fruit? Did you get any fruit?

Dong: No. Well, just like in the season you know, what you have up at the house. Peaches, or something like that, where he just bring them down to the cookhouse.

#### Desserts

Calciano: Did you make desserts for the men?

Dong: Well, yes, I make some pudding or pies every meal.

Calciano: What kind of pie?

Dong: Well, apple pies and prune pies mostly.

Calciano: Prune pies?

Dong: Yes.

Calciano: Oh my.

Dong: You haven't ever seen a prune pie?

Calciano: No; I haven't. (Laughter) I think it would be awfully strong.

Dong: We always buy' apples, the dry apples, not the fresh ones, and the prunes, always the dry prunes.

Calciano: I see.

Dong: After we cooked them you know, we used them for the breakfast. After that what we got left after that, we just mashed it up for pie.



Calciano: Would it taste like a plum pie or would it taste like a prune?

Dong: Well, it taste very good. Some people don't care for it, but I do. You've never eaten bean pie, have you?

Calciano: What?

Dong: I make some bean pie.

Calciano: Bean pie?

Dong: Yes, bean pie. You know pink beans, something like that. We always had pink beans up there. After dinner you take what you've got left and you just mash them up, put some sugar in and make pies. (Laughter)

Calciano: Oh. Did it taste all right?

Dong: Well, it taste a little sweet. Just like beans.

Calciano: Heavens!

#### THE MEAT HOUSE

Calciano: You once told me that there was a meat house right next to the cookhouse.

Dong: Yes, well we had a little, what do you call it, a cooler out there. It was a little fancy with a screen on it. We hang the meat there after we butcher it up to the slaughter house.

Calciano: Did you just hang the two halves of the cow and then cut off what you need, or...

Dong: Oh yes. You had to cut it off.

Calciano: Did you ever make roasts?

Dong: Oh yes. Roasts, stew; steak you won't get too much. It was kind of tough. You could hardly chew it.

Calciano: What did they use the basement of the cookhouse for?

Dong: Well, we don't do anything with the basement at all because it's hard to go down, back and forth. You have to lift.

Calciano: A trap-door?

Dong: I don't know what kind of door. It was lying on the other side of the room there.

Calciano: Lying on the floor?

Dong: Yes, it was lying on the floor; you have to lift it up before you go down. Every time you want to go down you have to move everything off before you lift it up, that kind of trouble, so we have never been using it.

Calciano: Do you think it was used in earlier years for anything? For keeping things cool?

Dong: Well, I don't know because of the one next to the cookhouse. I don't think they use anything down in the cellar at all.

Calciano: You mean because the meat house was there?

Dong: Yes, when the cooler was built.

Firewood

Calciano: Then there was also a wood house, wasn't there? A place for storing the wood?

Dong: Yes, yes. Just next to the, right by the door there. Haven't you still got that door going out of the...

Calciano: Out of the Chancellor's office?\*

Dong: Yes.

Calciano: But I don't think there's any shed there now.

Dong: We used to have one that supplied the wood there.

Calciano: And you'd also go out of that door to get to the meat house, wouldn't you?

Dong: Yes. You'd get to the door and the meat house was up the hill a little bit. Up from where the wood was.

Calciano: What length wood would you use?

Dong: Well we use, they all come back in long pieces, about three or four feet long.

Calciano: Four-foot wood?

Dong: Yes. So when you want to use it he called a man. downtown somewhere. So he saw it out about, oh, about that long, two feet long. So he saw the logs, piece by piece, and throw them up here. I have to chop it myself.

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\*Ed. Note: From December, 1964, till July, 1965, the Chancellor's office was located in the south end of the cookhouse.

Calciano: Oh you did?

Dong: Yes. They come in big pieces, you know. You have to split it up before you can start the fire. And every day you have to carry some in the cook-house. And you have to chop it up and carry it in, every day, you have to do that.

Calciano: Where did, you put your ashes?

Dong: Well, ashes, you must throw them out.

Calciano: Out the back or...

Dong: Out back the other way.

#### THE KITCHEN

Calciano: Now I seem to remember that before they restored the cookhouse there was just an old stove and one old sink in that kitchen and there wasn't much else. There must have been tables and things when you were working in the cookhouse. Did you have anything next to that old sink?

Dong: Well, we had a little stand next to the sink there and we piled the dishes up there when they have to be cleaned, you know. You just go on and pile dirty dishes and fill all the sink and then pretty soon you clean it out and then you just pile them up.

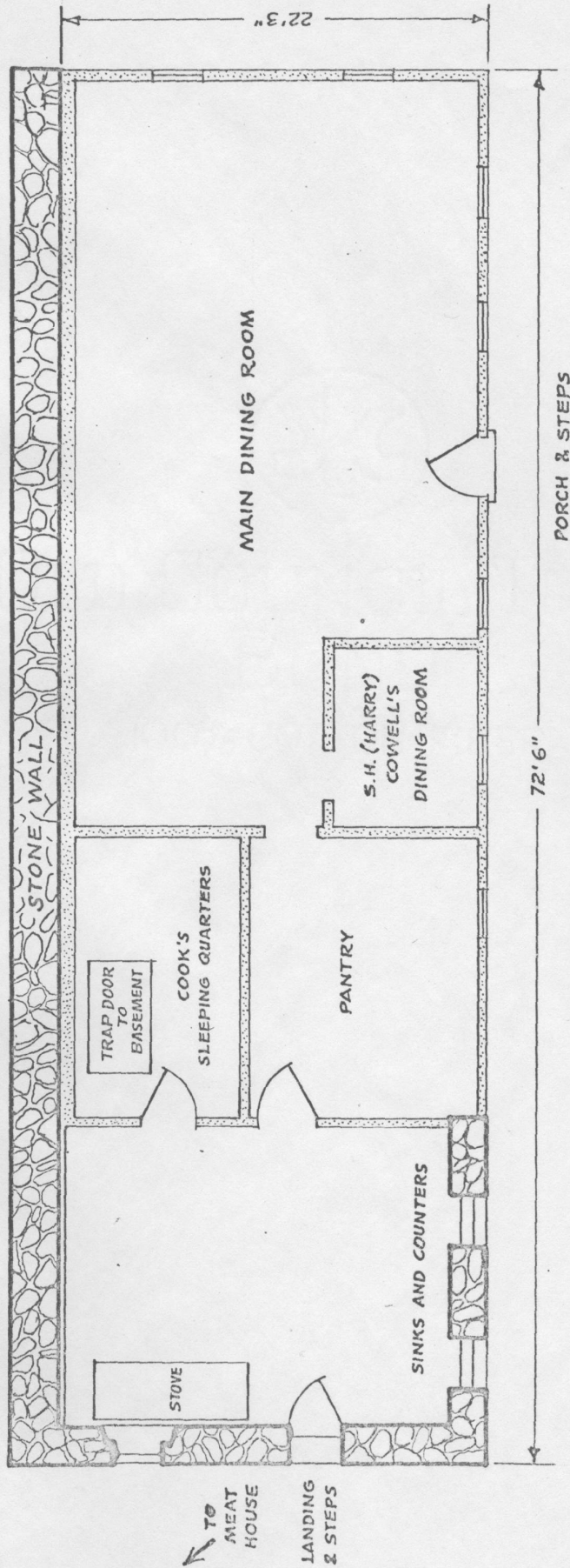
Calciano: It's an open counter?

Dong: Yes.

Calciano: No cupboard then?

Dong: No, nothing, no.

# Cowell Ranch Cook House



SCALE  $\frac{1}{8}$ " = 1'0"

Calciano: And if you were going to mix up a pudding, where did you mix it?

Dong: Well, we had a little pantry next to the kitchen.

Calciano: Oh, that's right.

Dong: The kitchen's right here in the end, but we'd go through the dining room into a little room in the corner. And next to it was the little room we have for Cowell when he come back for lunch, or something like that.

Calciano: I think I saw the pantry. Were there a couple of bins in it that you used for flour or something?

Dong: Yes. That's it. They have a pretty big table there, because we make the bread every day and we have to have a big one.

Calciano: Well, now, keeping a hundred pounds of flour in an old open bin like that, didn't you have trouble with weevils getting in it?

Dong: No, we had a compartment; the whole thing would come out in one piece. It separated the flour and sugar, like that.

Calciano: But you never had to worry about getting bugs in your flour?

Dong: Well, sometimes we do, but we always clean it out.

Calciano: I'd think a bunch of flour sitting there would be an invitation to weevils.

Dong: Well a hundred pounds of flour, you don't have it too long. It just last a month or so.

Calciano: Is that all?

Dong: Yes. We have to make bread every day and biscuits, or something like that.

Calciano: Well, that's true.

Dong: Fifteen people use quite a bit every day.

Calciano: Somebody once told me that the stove had pipes going up where you kept things warm. Is that right?

Dong: No, they still were inside and you have some water pipes that go through the stove.

Calciano: Oh, to get hot water?

Dong: Yes. To get hot water.

Calciano: That may be what they were referring to.

Dong: Yes. But all the water pipes go in the hot water tank. The pipes go all around the stove. You have to light the stove to get hot water, otherwise, you never get no hot water. And we never had no electricity.

Calciano: No electric lights?

Dong: No. We used to have coal-oil lamps, and that's all.

Calciano: Even in the 1940's?



Dong: In the 1940's. In the 1950's. Even then.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Dong: Yes. After I quit I think they got electricity. Frank George passed away so Joe Netto take over the place. Joe Netto's wife stay there for a while so he put electricity in. She got the electricity, but while I stay there that long I never had no electricity at all.

#### THE COOKHOUSE

Calciano: The cookhouse was always red, but the rest of the buildings on the ranch were whitewashed, weren't they?

Dong: Yes. The little cabins all put on white color.

Calciano: How often would they whitewash the ranch buildings?

Dong: Oh, once was forever. I don't think we do it.

Calciano: Not very often? (Laughter)

Dong: It's like the cookhouse; I never see them paint it over before. First time like that, stayed like that. I don't think he touch it at all.

Calciano: Incidentally, the outside was red, what color was the inside of the cookhouse?

Dong: Inside? Well, inside is just like boards halfway, and all the time it was cream-colored. I think the top is just like ivory. Something like that.

Calciano: It was two colors?

Dong: Yes, two colors.

Calciano: Now you said you did work at the Rincon cookhouse when you were a boy or a young man.

Dong: Oh yes.

Calciano: Were you helper there or cook?

Dong: No, I was doing the cooking myself.

Calciano: Was your father still the cook down at the other house?

Dong: No, my father was gone.

Calciano: Now, what was the Rincon cookhouse like?

Dong: Well, Rincon cookhouse I don't think is still anymore there.

Calciano: Was it as big as this one?

Dong: Well, just about like the one up here, but it's not quite as big. Not quite as big, but I can cook for twenty-two, twenty-four maybe, and at one time too, and by myself.

Calciano: No helpers?

Dong: No helpers. One time, but not for too long, I used to cook for that many. But after, they cut it down to maybe twelve, fifteen or so.

Calciano: And was it set up pretty much the same. No electricity, big wood stove...

Dong: Yes, oh yes. The food was just almost the same.  
Except the kitchen was a little bit smaller, and that's  
about it.

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