RUSSIAN PRESENCE IN CALIFORNIA EMERGED IN early 19th century. First voyage of Russian promysh- lenniki (a general term for Russian trappers and fur traders of Siberia and Alaska) Timofey Tarakanov and Afanasyi Shvetsov, led by American sailor, merchant, and ship contractor Joseph O’Cain, reached California in December 1803. Russian empire has already established its permanent settlements in North America by then. In 1799, headquarters were founded in the site named Fort Saint Michael (Russian: форт Архангела Михаила), which in 1804 became a capital of new province named Russian America. Fort Saint Michael was at the same time renamed to New Archangel (or Novo-Arkhangelsk, in Russian: Ново-Архангельск). 1799 marked another very important achievement in the development of Russian colonization eastwards. Emperor Paul I eventually signed an Ukase of 1799 (Указ о создании Российско-американской компании), which had officially brought a Russian American Company (RAC) to life. RAC received a monopoly on trade on Russian territories in the North Pacific. However, due to harsh conditions of life in Alaska and difficulties with agriculture, the first Chief Manager of Russian America, Alexander Andreyevich Baranov alongside with his colleagues from RAC made a decision to explore territories


2 Letter of Emperor Paul I concerning the establishment of the Russian-American Company, the protection over the Company and the granting of privileges to it for the period of 20 years, Archive of Museum of Russian Culture, San Francisco: List of Documents of the Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire on the Russian Presence in California and the history of the Ross Fortified Settlement (1806–1843), December 27, 1799.
southwards from Russian settlements. In mainland Russia in 1803, new emperor, Alexander I, was finally convinced by nobles Nikolay Rumyantsev and Adam Johann von Krusenstern to give his permission for First Russian circumnavigation. It set sail in August 1803, sponsored by Rumyantsev and led by Krusenstern alongside with Yuri Lisyanski. Exploring the shores of the Pacific was among the goals of circumnavigation. One of the key members of the expedition was Nikolay Rezanov, a son-in-law of RAC founders, Grigory and Natalia Shelikhov, and one of its key figures. Rezanov didn’t come back to St. Petersburg, but stayed in New Archangel, where he himself experienced extreme difficulties of life in Alaska. According to his own words, the settlers nearly faced starvation. In winter 1806, he was appointed a commander-in-chief of another voyage, which was sent by Baranov to explore lands located in the north of Spanish territories of the Viceroyalty of New Spain in what is today North California. He set sail on February 25 with a main purpose of finding supplies for the northern colony. Nikolay Rezanov arrived at Presidio of San Francisco in March 1806 with a goal to trade with local Spanish post and negotiate possible establishment of a new Russian colony northwards of the Spanish colony.

At Presidio, Rezanov met local commandant, José Dario Argüello and was received with peace and help. He also met Argüello’s daughter, Concepción, with whom he fell in love. Rezanov was hoping to establish permanent trading relations with Spain and sign a contract. Spain did not express hostility to Russia once the latter emerged in the America in the late 18th century, which served as a base for hope. This goal was not fulfilled as Spanish colonists were forbidden to trade with foreign settlers under still valid His Catholic Majesty’s Laws of the Indies. Rezanov planned to use his relationship with Concepción in order to gain favor of local authorities. He succeeded with Argüello family but didn’t manage to win over the governor of Alta California, José Joaquín de Arrillaga. Although several Spanish colonists were in favor of trading with Russians their party didn’t prevail. He did manage to secure necessary supplies of grains and other foods, traded certain number of goods as well and returned to New Archangel. In 1807 Rezanov took a trip back to mainland Russia to deliver his reports in person to tsar Alexander I. However, he died during the trip and his great plans for colonial development were no longer to be implemented.

Baranov, facing continuously supplies shortages, was desperate to find a new source of obtaining them. While plans for permanent trade with Spain became a fiasco, he finally decided to establish a permanent settlement in Californian territories explored by Rezanov. In 1808 he sent one of his men, Ivan Kuskov, with a mission to secure a suitable location for a new settlement. Kuskov had conducted several voyages in years 1808–1812 and finally established a stronghold which he named Ross. During that time, he also claimed a small port, which he named Port of Rumyantsev (порт Румянцева, port Rumyantseva) and the Rumyantsev Bay (залив Румянцева, Zaliv Rumyantseva) in honor of the Russian Minister of Commerce Count Nikolai Petrovich Rumyantsev. This place is known today as Bodega Bay. Kuskov named a river nearby

3 A.V. Grinev, Russia’s Emperors and Russian America (for the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty), „Russian Studies in History” 2015, vol. 54, no. 1, p. 18.
6 The couple’s love story became a ground for a plot of one of the first Rock Operas in Soviet Union – Juno and Avos, written and 1979 by Andrey Voznesensky and composed by Alexei Rybnikov and was one of the very few examples of Russian America’s commemoration in Soviet period.
10 Raport I.A. Kuskova A.A. Baranovu o prebyvanii promyslovoy partii v zalive Bodega, 5 oktryabrya 1809 g., [in:] Rossiysko-Amerikanskaya Kompaniya i izuchenie Tikooke-

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10. Raport I.A. Kuskova A.A. Baranovu o prebyvanii promyslovoy partii v zalive Bodega, 5 oktryabrya 1809 g., [in:] Rossiysko-Amerikanskaya Kompaniya i izuchenie Tikooke-
– the Slav (Славянка, Slavynka). Today it’s known as Russian River. The new settlement was founded 19 nautical miles north of Bodega Bay, close to the ocean, but at the same time far enough to be secured from the risk of Spanish attack. Kuskov started building the stronghold in March 1812 and finished it in August. On August 30th (Old Julian calendar), which happened to be a name day of tsar Alexander I, a special religious ceremony was held in order to consecrate the new establishment. The Russian flag was raised.

First settlement consisted of Kuskov, 25 Russian settlers and 80 Aleuts. It’s important to note, that such terms as Russians or Aleuts were used in very broad understanding, regardless of an actual ethnic background. The same way, representatives of RAK would usually refer to all American sailors as Bostonians.

Controversies surrounding the name Fort Ross

The name itself has been disputed by the scholars. Since Russians didn’t use the Russian equivalent for the words fort or stronghold to describe the whole settlement, some researchers argued that the name Fort Ross is not an appropriate one. Russian colonists would usually refer to the new settlement as Колония Росс (Koloniia Ross – Colony Ross) or Селение Росс (Seleniie Ross – Settlement Ross), whereas Spanish settlers would use the name Presidio the Ross, according to their own terminology. Although the fortified part of the settlement had been referred to as крепость / fortress (James R. Gibson 1976, E. Breck Parkman 1992), but only as a specific entity within the broader colony of Ross. Therefore, the Russian name КрѢпость Россъ (Krepost’ Ross), which welcomes visitors at the entrance of the fort today should be considered as a modern interpretation of already existing English term Fort Ross/Fortress Ross (as on the entrance). The name Fort Ross became popular in 1840s. Due to the presence of the Americans, who came there after the sale of the settlement to John Sutter. The name remained commonly used ever since. In 1909 the Fort Ross State Historic Park was established. E.B. Parkman argues that the decision to name it exactly this way came from an “incorrect or incomplete perspective of Russian California by Americans”. As a result “[...] visitors to the park are given the wrong impression of the former Russian settlement, and thus a false sense of history”.

The military connotations of the name have also brought discontent among some Russian American clergy. Reverend Vladimir Derugin, of the Russian Orthodox Church stated in 1991: “it has now become clear to all who care to see, that Fort Ross was never a “fort.” Yet on the spot interpretation and presentation continues to promote this fairy tale so close to our John Wayne, Rin Tin Tin, Rambo fascination. It would be justified to conjecture that cannons at Ross had indeed been fired, but only as salutes to incoming ships, to the raising of the flag or maybe to honor the deceased. Such firing would be perfectly appropriate as long as their proper, peaceful historical nature was clearly depicted. It is almost as if Fort Ross would cease to be interesting and marketable to tourists if it’s true, peaceful past was presented and stressed, almost as if peace, human success, and progress, and the common good are too boring. Yet that is exactly what Ft. Ross was all about: agricultural work, scientific research and

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expeditions, merchant shipbuilding, and most of all social cooperation governed by values such as freedom and non-violence”\(^\text{14}\).

### Life in the colony of Ross

Activities conducted by the settlers were of various types. From ship building to cattle raising to agriculture\(^\text{15}\). Russians were the first to build a windmill in California. Historic mill was reconstructed and placed in on the historic site in 2012, following the various projects and activities related to bicentennial of Fort Ross\(^\text{16}\). Russians were also first to use redwood on a larger scale as lumber to build houses and storages. Redwood was believed to be the most fire-resistant wood. However, in ship building inhabitants of Ross, led by Vasily Grudinin, a craftsman from Irkutsk, used mostly oak and pine. Grudinin supervised construction of 4 ships between 1816–1824: the Rumyantsev, the Buldakov, the Volga, and the Kyakhta. All of them turned out to be non-durable and the ship building was eventually abandoned in 1820\(^\text{17}\).

Agricultural work was based mainly on cereal. Russians planted wheat, rye, barley, but also maize, beans, flax, poppy, potatoes, beets, cabbage, radishes, turnips, peas, pumpkins, garlic, watermelons, etc. Since main Alaskan settlements of the empire were facing starvation, those products were not only supposed to feed local residents, but also those in New Archangel, Kodiak islands and elsewhere. One of the things Russians missed the most was buckwheat. Therefore, buckwheat was too among cereal planted in Ross colony. However, due to high humidity and close vicinity of the ocean, the crops turned out to be far from anticipated, so farming couldn’t have become a source of profit either. Some of men in charge were advocating to the management of RAK or even tsar himself to expand the colony towards the land. They wanted to take advantage of the weakness of Spain and Mexico respectively. Among those men were Ivan Kuskov, first commander of the fort and Dmitry Zavalishin, a merchant, adventurer and later Decembrist. The latter visited Ross in 1823–1824 and developed a strong idea to annex entire California to Russia. As a result of his involvement in the Decembrist movement in 1825, he was sent to Siberia. During his exile, he wrote the accounts of his travels in North Pacific. “Because of the purchases of wheat, we had to travel throughout the northern part of California, at first at horseback to purchase it and then by water to transport it; thus, did I visit all of the paces that later became famous with the discovery of gold. I visited the missions of San Rafael and San Francisco Solano [Sonoma], the only ones built on the northern side of San Francisco Bay, the latter with the very aim of impeding the expansion of the Russian colony of Ross, which I visited on this occasion, too. I was also at San Pablo [Bay] and on the banks of the Sacramento River, where I proposed that a new Russian colony be established (it was here that gold was first found) – wrote Zavalishin – […] But the superior climate, rich soil, and capital location on the Great Ocean, with one of the best ports in the world, constitute the unalterable and inalienable advantages of California, and from this [fact] naturally sprang the desire to expand our colony of Ross at least as far as the northern shore of San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento River, and to that extent it was then still possible. For that reason – keeping in mind such an expansion of our colony – I took advantage of my official travels throughout California in order to make every possible inquiry and to collect the necessary information for reaching the said goal […]”\(^\text{18}\). Neither Zavalishin’s nor anyone else’s persuasions resulted in any further territorial

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\(14\) V. Derugin, *Ross Colony Settlement’s Cemetery Restoration Project*, on file at California Department of Parks and Recreation, Northern Region Headquarters, Santa Rosa, California 1991, p. 1.


\(18\) D. Zavalishin, *An excerpt from a Journal of a visit to Alta California during the round-the-world voyage of the frigate “Kreiser”, [in:] California through Russian eyes*
development of Russian settlement. On a contrary, the scope of activities was smaller and smaller.

Hunting sea-otters, sea-lions and seals was another type of activity that was supposed to guarantee profit\textsuperscript{19}. The pelts of otters were of very high value. Even though otters made up only 5% of all pelts acquired by Russian hunters, they were mostly desirable. Especially on Chinese markets. Russian merchants would most commonly trade in Kyakhta. Since the trade with Spanish proved itself still unsuccessful, Chinese market became a main source of profit. According to James Clifford a single pelt of sea-otter in 1820 was worth $100 on a Cantonese market. The same amount of money would be made within a full year of agricultural work by a farmer from Pennsylvania\textsuperscript{20}. Nevertheless, hunting also eventually was abandoned. As the population of otters was declining from early 1830s, so did the hunting. New hunting parties emerged, and new weapons (guns in particular) were introduced. In early 1840s the animals started disappearing and the hunting stopped being profitable as more and more resources had to be provided\textsuperscript{21}. Sea-otters are now considered as an extinct species in the area around Ross. They didn’t manage to repopulate throughout almost 200 years.

Hunting was most commonly conducted by the natives that came with Russians from Alaska. They are usually referred to as Aleuts in Russian primary sources, but actually they comprised of all indigenous tribes from Alaskan coast and Kodiak islands. Some of them were of mixed, Russian/Native origins, who were called Creole by the Russians. In general, the Russian Californian community constructed of people of various ethnic origin. Among those usually known as Russian, were actually also Finns, Germans, Poles, Ukrainians and others. There were also Buryats and other indigenous peoples of Siberia. All of them: Russians (of various ethnicities), Aleuts (and other Indian tribes) and Creoles would commonly engage in mixed marriages with local natives, Kashaya and Pomo most frequently. Therefore, the little Russian colony in California was very multicultural which finds its legacy today. The census of 1820, conducted by Ivan Kuskov, shown following national structure at the colony: Among 260 inhabitants, 14.6% were Russians, 6.5% creoles, 51.2% Eskimos (126 Konigs, 7 Chugach) and 21.5% Californian Natives (from Kashaya, Pomo and Miwok tribes). Census also included: 3 Aleuts, 5 Yakuts, 4 “Sandwichians” (Hawaiians), 2 Tlingits, 1 Tanaina Indian and 1 unidentified\textsuperscript{22}.

The sale

Russians eventually decided to leave Fort Ross in April 15, 1839\textsuperscript{23}. All of the endeavors mentioned above proved themselves unsuccessful. Although last commander, Alexander Rotchev, was advising against selling the property, the management of RAK decided to do so. Rotchev has been stationing for only a year and still believed in success of his mission\textsuperscript{24}. Reluctantly, he had to seek for buyers. The Russians were approaching various potential purchasers. From British Hudson Bay Company to the French to the Mexican government. None of them seemed to be interested. Eventually, they found an interested party. A Swiss-German businessmen, holding US citizenship named John Sutter\textsuperscript{25}. Although Sutter acted as a private investor, he was under the supervision of the Mexicans. He wasn’t much interested in the land and in continuing the activities of the fort. Sutter recently opened his own ranch, which he named New Helvetia, and needed to equip it with various accessories, weapons,

\textsuperscript{19} A. Ogden, \textit{A California Sea Otter Trade. 1784–1848}, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1941, p. 58–60.
\textsuperscript{21} A. Ogden, \textit{A California Sea Otter Trade}, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibidem, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{24} V. Bezyazchyny, \textit{Alexander Rotchev; The Last Commandant of Fort Ross}, “Santa Rosa Press Democrat”, 30\textsuperscript{th} VII, 1967, p. 4–5.
materials, etc. He also needed timber and other building supplies. John Sutter bought the Fort Ross from Alexander Rotchev for 42,857 rubles and 14 kopeks (equivalent of $30,000). The sale took place in December 1841 and this date is considered as an official end of Russian rule over Fort Ross. Since it wasn’t until January 1842 when Russians finally left the fort, sometimes a year 1842 is considered the last year of Russian period at Ross. Thus, Russian permanent presence in California would constitute of exact number of 30 years. Paying the Russians off took Sutter a lot of time, he was redeeming his debt in installments and the entire sum never actually reached imperial treasure in Sankt Petersburg.

John Sutter’s New Helvetia was eventually transformed into Sacramento and the restored fort is now known as Sutter’s Fort State Historic Park.

Fate of the Settlement Ross after the sale

John Sutter appointed a manager in charge of the fort remnants. Throughout 1840s the management as well as ownership changed and finally it ended up belonging to Wilhelm Otto Benitz and Ernest Rufus. Rufus soon left and thus, since early 1850s, Benitz became a sole owner of a property, which was known as Muniz Ranch. Those events give birth to the next period of Ross’ history – Ranch era. Benitz owned the ranch until 1867 when he sold it to two entrepreneurs James Dixon and Charles Fairfax. Fairfax died suddenly in 1869. Another sale was an aftermath of his death, which took place in 1873. Fort Ross became a property of one George Washington Call. Buildings inside the fort served George W. Call for various purposes. The house of the last commander, Alexander Rotchev, became a hotel. The previous owners used it as their homes, just like the last commander. George Call on the other hand, wanted to capitalize on the growing interest in the area among the visitors. The general development of tourism influenced Sonoma County (where the fort is located) as well. Although mostly for its beautiful landscapes and other natural advantages, some interest towards historical value of the land emerged in 1880s and 1890s. Some activists showed their interest even earlier. In 1875, first organization dealing with Californian historical and cultural heritage was formed. It was named the Native Sons of the Golden West (NSGW). They were later followed by the Native Daughters of the Golden West (NDGW). In the future both these organizations contributed significantly to the development of the restoration of the fort. George Call perceived his new property in very practical terms. The chapel was turned into a stable, which in future will have received some concerns among the Russian Americans, who will have considered such a decision to have been a reason for desacralization of the chapel (see accounts of bishop Nikolai). The Call family owned the land around Ross until 1972, when it was sold to the State of California. The former Russian settlement itself was being sold out to the state piece by piece starting from 1903, when its interior was sold to California Historical Landmark Committee, which had been founded just a year earlier and consisted of representatives of 16 different organizations, among others NSGW and NDGW. 3 years later, the fort was deeded over to State Park System. It happened only 20 days before the big earthquake of 1906, that has damaged both the fort and the land significantly. Although, partially destroyed, Fort Ross became California’s 5th State Park in 1909.

The reconstruction didn’t start until 1916. Certain repairs were made throughout the next decade, but changes started with the creation of the California State Parks system in 1928. The system consisted of 5 sites and Fort Ross became one of them. The financial aspect of this decision was the most important one. The creators of the system initially allocated $6 million to be spend for the parks. Although, the Great Depression caused the budgetary limitations, stable state funding allowed the necessary work to

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27 G. Farris, How the Muniz Rancho Got Its Name, California Department of Parks and Recreation, June 6, 1996.
29 M.D. Ilyin, the history of Fort Ross, Fort Ross Conservancy Library 1975, p. 26, digital content courtesy of Fort Ross Conservancy, www.fortross.org; author maintains copyright of his or her written material.
be done. Further state-organized development was interrupted by the WW2, when Fort Ross served as a station for U.S. Coast Guard. After the war the restoration continued. 1952 brought first archeological excavations, managed by the John McKenzie, a Fort Ross curator appointed by the State Parks after the war. A year later, another archeological research was organized, but this time, under professional academic guidance. Archeological research allowed the restoration to receive valid historical ground. The excavations were conducted by Adan E. Treganza, an archeologist from University of California. Treganza was hired by California State Department of Natural Resources, Division of Beaches and Parks and concluded his work with a report giving a full picture of current state of affairs at the fort. The process of restoration continued throughout following decades with more intensity in 1970s, when another largely planned archeological excavations were conducted.

Again, just like in early 20th century, an important heritage-related milestone preceded the tragedy. Fort Ross itself received a designation of a National Historic Landmark in 1961. In 1969, the chapel joined with the same landmark. “Architecturally significant as a rare U.S. example of a log church constructed on a Russian quadrilateral plan” – a justification stated. Next year, a sudden, accidental fire burned the chapel leaving it destroyed. Newly received landmark was taken away in 1971. Restoration was being undertaken for 3 years and finally chapel was brought back to life in 1974. The landmark was restored in 1980. The Commander’s House (the new one, built by Alexander Rotchev) became a final location to be designated with a landmark in 1970. Followed by the archeological research, the sale of remaining lands by Call family to the State of California and an establishment of Citizens Advisory Committee (1972) to assist the management, Fort Ross State Historic Park became, in general terms, what it is until today.

Meaning of Fort Ross to Russian Americans – beginnings

All Russians (regardless of actual ethnic background, except from Native Californians) left Fort Ross in 1842. Therefore, neither was there any continuity of Russian American personal heritage in California, nor any other direct connection among people. Nevertheless, material heritage remained and became more and more important to the newcomers. Russian immigration to the United States through the Pacific Ocean’s Engel Island increased significantly after the October Revolution in 1917. The immigration years of late 1910s and early 1920s created a considerable and visible Russian minority in California. Most of those people decided to settle in in San Francisco Bay Area. Most of them were of upper and middle class status, usually educated. Although they represented various political agendas, they shared a discontent towards the new state emerging on the remains of Russian Empire – the Soviet Union. New Californian citizens longed for their lost homeland and its symbols: Orthodox Church, Russian language, traditions and customs.

30 A.E. Treganza, *Fort Ross, a study in Historical Archeology*, Fort Ross Conservancy Library 1953, digital content courtesy of Fort Ross Conservancy, www.fortross.org; author maintains copyright of his or her written material.


Not until they established a Russian Center of San Francisco in 1939, did they have a one common gathering place. The San Francisco parish of the Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia was only founded in 1927. Russian Orthodox Church had been active in North California earlier though. Representatives of the clergy who were residing in Alaska (both once it belonged to Russia and after the sale in 1867) never forgot about its former colony in California. A starting point for all future endeavors goes back to 1836. This is when Alaskan bishop, Ioann Veniaminov visited Fort Ross, delivered a service in the chapel and baptized numerous natives. Father Vienaminov, known also as Saint Innocent of Alaska is a crucial character in the whole history of Russian Colonization of America and absolutely key figure in the development of Orthodoxy in the new land. Thus, his visit received the status of one of the most important events during the whole Californian colony’s existence. Father Vieniaminov’s followers would later reconnect to this visit and take advantage of its memory as an argument to continue the religious mission in California.

Until Russian statehood existed in North America the contacts were easier. However, despite the sale, Russian Orthodox Church’s interest in America remained. Since certain number of converts existed, they required the priest. Therefore, Diocese of the Aleutian Islands and Alaska was established in 1870 and in 1872 it opened its first post outside the defined boundaries of the diocese. In San Francisco. Nonetheless, it wasn’t until 1890s, when the bishop headquartered in San Francisco, Vladimir Sokolovsky-Avtonomov, took actual interest in the Fort Ross. “San Francisco Evening Bulletin” noted that: “[bishop] wrote to the Czar, suggesting that the property be bought by the Russian Government, and that the buildings be as far as possible preserved or restored”[34]. The tzar remained uninterested to the discontent of the bishop. Sokolovsky-Avtonomov didn’t manage to achieve any of his goals related to Ross. He was succeeded by Nikolai Ziorov, who started another attempt with restoring the former Russian settlement. Bishop Nikolai visited it in March 1897. He was hosted by the Call family and later published his accounts of this visit. He was devastated with the condition of the fort, despaired with the desacralization of the chapel and disappointed with George W Call’s lack of interest in giving the “holy place” away to the Russian Orthodox Church. He wrote: “To my question why he allowed such desecration of the church he only muttered something that none of us could understand. When I asked him if he could leave me part of the fort, namely the church, the house with the garden, and the cemetery, and I would put everything in order and live there during the summer, he answered mysteriously, “we can talk about this tomorrow morning.” But next day when I met him on the pier he didn’t go back to the conversation. It would have been very nice for us to be able to save this sacred Russian place from the hands of this Yankee and make it look as it should”[35]. Unfortunately for him, the sacred place was not saved. Fortunately for him and others interested in the preservation of the fort, the restoration process has begun with early 20th century.

New century

In 1905 the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church in North America was moved from San Francisco to New York City, which caused the decline of interest from the clergy[36]. The next 20 years featured increasing interest among various groups of California’s citizens as well as growing number of Russians (of all kinds of ethnicities), who started coming after the revolution. Growing Russian community needed a visible symbol of their motherland. The knowledge about Russian colonization of California wasn’t common among the immigrants. They weren’t aware of the fact how

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36 M.K. Meniailenko, Dieyatel’nost’ Russkoi Emigratsii po sokhraneniyu istoriko-kulturnovo naslediya (po materialam Muzeia russkoi kultury v San Francisco), Moscow 2008, p. 22.
many sites around them had held actual historical reference to Russia (Bodega Bay/Port Rumyantsev; Farallon Islands; Russian Gulch; Russian River; Mount St. Helena). The only location fairly known to local people was Fort Ross. Once Russians found out about it, they started to organize themselves around getting to know the fate of the fort better. Seeing the fort still significantly damaged in 1920s came as a painful feeling. Some of the most active representatives of the community began thinking of contributing to the rebuilding, as well as establishing an anchor point of their hybrid identity. Among the first leaders of Russian community was Vladimir Sakovich, the Orthodox priest, a Rector Father of the Russian Orthodox Church at Green and Van Ness [Holy Trinity Cathedral].

In 1925 he was approached by Sebastopol member of the NSGW William S. Borba, who was an organizer of the annual festivities taking place at the Fort Ross on 4th of July. Members of NSGW would celebrate Independent Day of the USA as well as work on restoration of the fort, especially the chapel. Being aware of the atmosphere among the Russian immigrants in San Francisco, he came up with an idea of inviting them to join the 4th of July celebrations. This way the symbolic place would show a certain reunification of the Russians with their old homeland, while symbolic date would demonstrate their attachment to the new homeland at the same time. Since the NSGW members dealt with the chapel anyway, Borba thought that church representatives might be interested. Thus, he approached Father Sakovich and proposed to him to perform a service in the chapel during the celebration. Therefore, the chapel would become resecralized, which significance cannot be overestimated. Even though various bishops and clergymen have visited Fort Ross throughout the years after the sale, none of them have ever conducted a church service there. The service of 1925 took place for the first time since 1841 and gave birth to the tradition that exists among the Russian Americans of California (and not only) until today. Maria Sakovich, a granddaughter of Father Vladimir Sakovich recollects: “if for the Americans Fort Ross was an exotic place, for the newly arrived Russians (as well as their predecessors and successors) Fort Ross was a sacred place. The Russian place ‘outside’ of Russia had special meaning. Bishop Nikolai in 1897 noted, when he signed the guest register at the Fort Ross hotel, “I visited this place holy for every Russian”. For refugees whose country had been radically altered, the meaning of Fort Ross was especially significant. In the discovery of a Russian past in California, some found connection to an irretrievable previous life. The America to which these educated, and often cultured immigrants came felt alien. Fort Ross represented something familiar, at least symbolically”.

Towards regaining the lost heritage

The knowledge about the Fort Ross was growing among the Russian immigrants. With state funding contributing to the development of the fort since late 1920s, they were able to see more and more of the settlements restored. However, their expectations began growing considerably. They no longer wanted the mere restoration of the architecture – they wanted to reestablish their Russian heritage in a more vivid way. Therefore, in early 1930s Fort Ross became full lieu de memoire for Russian diaspora in San Francisco. In 1932 a memorial plaque was installed at the fort. In 1936 they formed an organization called Initiative Group for the Memorialization of Fort Ross. Among their goals were: building a new memorial chapel in stone and creating a museum of Fort Ross. Maria Sakovich: “From existing correspondence and minutes it is clear that the members

38 M. Sakovich, Our Shared Heritage: Highlights from the History of Fort Ross State Historic Park, p. 9, unpublished.
of the Initiative Group and Historical Society saw their activities not only as efforts to preserve what remained of Fort Ross but also to preserve what remained of “Mother Russia now crucified and torn apart.” They envisioned their museum as a repository of Russian culture, historic and contemporary, for Russians and Americans. Fort Ross also offered the opportunity for Russians to find their place in American history and, perhaps just as important, to call attention to Russian contributions to American history. These Russian patriots making their new home in America wanted recognition for their compatriots’ role in American history.”

Thus Russian colonization of America becomes both the history of Russia and the history of the United States for them. Fort Ross as a lieu de mémoire which offers a dualistic self-identification opportunity. Although those two goals (chapel in stone, museum) were never achieved, certain exhibitions are nowadays present at few sites within the State Historic Park. Apart from that, the group focused on self-education in the topic and general research. Their knowledge was based on material available thanks to publications from California Historical Society, which had taken interest in Ross earlier. The Initiative Group published several articles in San Francisco’s newspapers as well as the booklet (edited by Alexandr Pavlovich Farafontov) “Fort Ross: Outpost of the Former Glory of Russia in America, 1812–1937”.[42] This booklet, published in 1937 in Shanghai (another crucial place for Russian white diaspora), was the first example of a historical material written on Fort Ross in Russian by a representative of Russian diaspora in USA. A.P. Farafontov was one of the most active members of the diaspora. The other was Vladimir Petrovich Anichkov. In 1923 he founded a first Russian bookstore in San Francisco, called Russkaya Kniga/Russian Book.[43] V.P. Anichkov wrote himself several pieces on the fort and recited his poem during the installation of the plaque in 1932. In 1937 the Initiative Group was transformed into The Russian Historical Society in America. It started an active cooperation with California Historical Society. The rapid development of Russian Americans’ activity was interrupted by the outbreak of WW2. The war prioritized various activities as well as funding opportunities. The site of Fort Ross was affected by the war. U.S. Coast Guard turned it into its station in 1942 and stayed there until 1945. Nevertheless, Russian Historical Society in America maintained its course on restoring their heritage and bringing back its lost memory. They set a new goal: to locate the lost bell of the chapel. The quest for a bell lasted almost as long as the war itself. Members of the society were looking for it all over California, writing letters, publishing announcements, and driving around various locations.

Eventually, the bell was found in Petaluma, Sonoma County. Victor Petrov, a member of the society was sent to Petaluma to identify the bell. He wrote in 1979: “I had to save gasoline coupons for several weeks to be able to make a trip in my car to Petaluma. Finally, enough gas was purchased, and we went. We were met in Petaluma by a member of the local parlor [chapter] of the NSGW, who showed us an old shed, inside which we found the old Fort Ross bell. It was in perfect condition, with clear images of Virgin Mary and Savior on it. There were religious inscriptions in old Church Slavonic and another inscription in Russian stated that the bell was cast in St. Petersburg at the foundry of Master Merchant Michael Makarov Stukolkin. There was no doubt in our mind that this was the original Fort Ross bell.”[44]

However, research conducted by Mark D. Galperin years later, in 2012, proved that in fact it wasn’t an original Fort Ross bell.[45] At the time though, common understanding was that the bell was actually original. A special ceremony was conducted at Fort Ross on Labor Day, September 2nd, 1945. Among the participants were representatives of Russian Historical Society, NSGW and the State Park Commission. The bell was presented to the State of

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41 M. Sakovich, Our Shared Heritage, p. 11.
43 A.A. Khisamutdinov, Fort Ross: dokumenty i fotografii russkikh emigrantov, nauchnoye elektronnoye izdanye, Vladivostok 2016, p. 6.
44 V.P. Petrov, Letter to the Advisory Committee member George Lebedev, April 2, 1979, Archive of Maria Sakovich.
45 M.D. Galperin, Fort Ross Russian Bells, Fort Ross Conservancy Library 2016, digital content courtesy of Fort Ross Conservancy, www.fortross.org; author maintains copyright of his or her written material.
California together with “an exact replica of the flag of the Russian American Company”\textsuperscript{46}.

New world order, new complications

End of the war definitely brought a rapid development on many aspects of life. However, to Russian Americans in California, it also brought new limitations. Even though vast majority of them expressed hostility towards Soviet Union, it was the Iron Curtain and Cold War that actually closed all the doors to the homeland. Figuratively and literally, Soviet archives and libraries became closed at large to American scholars and enthusiasts of Russian history and vice versa. This situation created a gap that lasted for almost half a century and resulted in extremely limited exchange of knowledge, materials, research, and information on “Russian America”. What is more, the first central archive of the Russian Emigration (created in 1923 in Prague as The Russian Historical Archive Abroad) was sent to Soviet Union by new Czechoslovak communist authorities. The other Russian Émigré archives (Belgrade, Paris, Beijing) were also destroyed or perished to large extent\textsuperscript{47}. Russian diaspora in California, although in despair due to those loses, decided to take advantage of their fairly good organization and established a new archive. Under the auspicious of the Russian Center in San Francisco, a Museum of Russian Culture was registered in 1948\textsuperscript{48}. Apart from the museum part, it became the second central archive of the Russian Emigration\textsuperscript{49}. Since the first one was gone, in fact the archive in San Francisco turned out to be the main and by far the largest repository of Russian historical collections outside of Russia/Soviet Union. History of Fort Ross found its place on the exhibition created in the museum, accompanied by certain artefacts brought from the fort itself. Although Russian Historical society didn’t manage to create a museum at the fort, they did manage to preserve its memory in their own museum in San Francisco. Although officially registered in 1948, the staff has been also celebrating its existence considering 1939 as the origin date. In 2009 the 70\textsuperscript{th} anniversary was celebrated\textsuperscript{50}.

Since Soviet archives and libraries were closed to Americans, people in charge of Fort Ross’ restoration process had to look for data elsewhere. Russian diaspora in California became one of the main sources of information on the topic. Certain attempts of American–Soviet cooperation were being considered, especially after the fire that destroyed the chapel in 1970. Several Soviet journalists were suggesting some financial contribution from their state. Mayor of San Francisco, Joseph L. Alioto expressed initially an interest towards this idea. However, it was met with protests and discontent among the Russian émigrés. For them such an idea was unthinkable. Fort Ross was their sacred place, legacy of romanticized motherland, wiped off the surface by the Bolsheviks. Furthermore, it was the

\textsuperscript{46} M. Sakovich, Our Shared Heritage, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{47} M.K. Meniailenko, Dieyatelnost’ Russkoi Emigratsii po sokhranieniyu istoriko-kulturnovo naslediya (po materialam Muzeia russkoi kultury v San Francisco), Moscow 2008, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibidem, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{49} Museum of Russian Culture, San Francisco, History and mission, http://www.mrcsf.org/home/19/ [access: June 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2022].

\textsuperscript{50} M.K. Meniailenko, Russkomu Tsentru – 70 let, “Russkaia Zhizn”, 10\textsuperscript{th} X 2009, pp. 8–9.
chapel that obtained a central spot within a sacred place. An altar within a church. The continuity of Russian legacy seen by annual celebration on July 4th contributed to the stronger sacralization of the chapel. They also secured its special place in the memory of Russian Americans. The debate and protests followed by it resonated in public life around Bay Area. On October 19th, 1970, a journalist from “San Francisco Examiner”, Harry Johanesen, covered the story, mentioning protest telegram sent by bishop Dimitry of the Russian Orthodox Church in San Francisco to the Governor Ronald Reagan as well as comments from Ariadna Deliamich, political editor of “The Russian Life Daily/Russkaya Zhizn”, a newspaper of Russian diaspora. Deliamich posted a very clear and firm declaration: “The chapel was a sacred shrine to the Russian Orthodox Church community. We resent very much any thought of Communist participation in its restoration. Not a single Communist nail can go into the rebuilding project if California citizens of the Orthodox Christian faith are going to participate as contributors to the restoration fund”\(^{51}\). In order not to antagonize Russian diaspora, the authorities decided not to seek financial aid in Soviet Union. Chapel was restored with American public and private funds.

**Breakthrough**

1970s brought a significant change in the management of Fort Ross State Historic Park. William Penn Mott, Jr, a director of State Parks and Recreation wanted to include more bottom-up type of management and open up for emerging grass-roots initiatives. In 1972 he established a new body, Fort Ross Citizens Advisory Committee. Various activists were invited to help manage the fort on a voluntary basis. Mott’s idea was to turn the commemorative agenda of the fort into full historical timeline, a certain flow in which all periods of the land’s history would be equally represented. Besides, such were the expectations from local communities of Sonoma County that surround the state part. Apart from natural history, he divided them into three periods: Native era, Russian era and Ranch era. Therefore, he invited representatives from all these three groups to form the advisory committee. Not all of Russian Americans were happy with this shift of commemorative policy. Some considered the fort as their and believed the Russian period should remain as a main emphasis. After all, the material culture had been left by Russians, they argued. Maria Sakovich: “The partnership between State Parks (and the Legislature) and these grassroots committees was not always smooth sailing. The bureaucracy of State Parks and the Legislature tried members’ patience. Tensions existed over the “flow of history” concept for interpretation. Strong personalities were not always easy to work with. Russian American members not trained as historians argued for a celebratory version of history. (Ethnic history was just coming of age at this time.)”\(^{52}\).

Finally, the holistic approach to the policy of remembrance prevailed. Representatives of three different groups had to learn to get along at the advisory committee. Since during first months of their activity they were mostly preoccupied with the chapel reconstruction, the common goal united them. The ceremony of opening the new chapel was an essential event for Russian Americans. It took place on June 8th, 1974. The ceremony consisted of, among others, firing a cannon, raising the Russian American Company flag, singing a hymn, and blessing the chapel before the opening\(^{53}\). Victor Porfirievich Petrov, a Russian American historian (who in early 1990s initiated opening of the Ivan Kuskov’s Museum in Kuskov’s hometown of Totma, Russia) recollected on the experience: “For all Russians this was a day of joy and pride not only because of the restoration of the historic Russian structures but also from the realization that our efforts as Russian people in America are recognized and appreciated. We felt an uninterrupted connection with the people of a long time ago who had built this fort and a deep gratitude to the country

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\(^{52}\) M. Sakovich, *Our Shared Heritage*, p. 18.

\(^{53}\) *Rededication Program. Fort Ross State Historic Park. Sonoma County, California. Saturday, June 8th, 1974, 11:0 a.m.*, A brochure from the Archive of the Museum of Russian Culture, San Francisco.
which gave us shelter and allowed us to preserve our Russian heritage on American soil”\textsuperscript{54}.

It wasn’t just the restoration of historic material culture. The ability to influence the decision-making process and to contribute to the work being carried out strengthened the personal connections of these people with the Fort Ross. It also strengthened its position in the collective memory of the entire community. The event was also covered by the main newspaper of Russian Americans in Bay Area – “Russkaia Zhizn\textsuperscript{55}, a journal published by the Museum of Russian Culture in San Francisco. June 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1974 was the day never to be forgotten.

With 1970s came first contacts with Soviet scholars. One of the advisory committee members, Nicholas Rokitiansky, reached out to Svetlana Fedorova, one of the most renown researchers on Russian America. Despite the reluctance towards Soviet academics among members of his community, Rokitiansky met with Fedorova during his trip to Soviet Union in 1972. Their meeting resulted in blossom of American-Soviet exchange on a topic, which resulted in first international academic conference on Russian America, held in Sitka, Alaska on August 21–25\textsuperscript{th} 1979. Fedorova came to Fort Ross shortly after the conference. Her research and publications, along with the work of other fellow scholars contributed to professionalization of memory practice at the state park as well as the one advocated by local Russian American community.

Perestroika and general changes happening in Soviet Union since 1985 brought further cooperation between two countries and thus extended academic and educational exchange on Russian America and Fort Ross. Fort Ross Interpretive Association, a non-profit organization established in 1975 by the members of advisory committee developed an educational and event program. The outreach of the educational program focused on school students from around North California. Children of Russian roots expressed particular interest in the program, which included overnight stays at the fort, wearing historized cloths and reenactments acts. News about those programs went all the way to Wisconsin (and other places, the article appeared in various media outlets – see next page), receiving a press coverage from “Kenosha News” in December 1987. The daily quoted Bohdan Hladky, 11-year-old boy from Bolinas, Marin County who was among the first 30 elementary school students to have participated in this program. It’s especially exciting for me because I am of Russian descent, declared Hladky to the reporter\textsuperscript{56}. As a aftermath of the collapse of Soviet Union, more and more Russians began to visit USA. More and more Americans gained interest in that aspect of their history and Fort Ross became more popular as a tourist site. Among the benefactors of those liberties were people, whose visits to Ross were highly expected by local Russians. In June 1989, Hiermonk Innokenti Veniaminov, great grandson of Father Ioann Veniaminov came. In September 1993, Aleksei II, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, followed. He conducted a special service at the chapel, which symbolically ended the feeling of religious exile among the Russian Orthodox community in California. End of communism and further development of US-Russian relations throughout the 1990s and later put an end to the notion of sacred place, resembling the motherland hijacked by the Bolsheviks. New generations of Russian Americans, as well as new migrants driven by fast-developing business sector in California were also less affected by religion, loosening the significance of the Orthodox factor around Fort Ross. Nevertheless, the site remained to be an important lieu de memoire for them. The pilgrimages on July 4\textsuperscript{th} remain to be an uninterrupted tradition, children from all around California participate in educational programs organized in the fort, Russian newcomers frequently visit the state park and local citizens of Russian origin become engaged with the work either as state park rangers or within Fort Ross Conservancy (a non-profit organization, continuity of advisory board).

\textsuperscript{54} V.P. Petrov, Russkie v Istorii Amerikii, New Jersey 1988, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{55} A. Delianich, Den’ Radostnykh Nadezhd i Vospomina-

\textsuperscript{56} Ch. Hillinger, Russian colony life in America relived at site, “Kenosha News”, 10\textsuperscript{th} X 1987, p. 50.
Meaning of the Fort Ross to local non-Russian Americans

Fort Ross doesn’t play an important role to vast majority of Americans or even Californians. Information about Russian outpost in California isn’t present in history textbooks, there was neither a bestselling book, nor any top song. No popular tv show or film on that topic was created in the USA either. There was one feature film of Russian production though, “Fort Ross. In search of adventure / Fort Ros. V poiskakh priklyucheniy”\(^{57}\). Released in 2014, didn’t appear in American movie theaters, therefore remains unknown to the American audience. The news related to the fort don’t receive coverage in national media, hardly ever does it appear in any big state Californian ones. As a result, an average American is not even aware of the fact that such an episode in Californian history ever existed. Throughout the 20\(^{th}\) and 21\(^{st}\) century, various news on the situation at Fort Ross has appeared frequently in local Californian newspapers such as: “Independent Coast Observer, Sonoma West Times and News, The Press Democrat, Santa Rosa Republican, Oakland Tribune, The Napa Valley Register, San Francisco Examiner, Santa Cruz Sentinel. Petaluma Argus-Courier, Cloverdale Reveille”. Surprisingly enough, since the topic is a niche, news about Fort Ross appeared in enormous number of local media outlets throughout the States. Just to name few: mentioned earlier “Kenosha News” (Wisconsin) and also “Messenger-Inquirer” (Kentucky), “The Salt Lake Tribune” (Utah), “The Pantograph” (Illinois), “Albuquerque Journal” (New Mexico), “Asbury Park Press” (New Jersey), “Citizens Voice” (Pennsylvania), “Victoria Advocate” (Texas).

Explanation to that phenomenon comes with the name of the author of vast majority of non-California articles, which happens to be the same person, Charles Hillinger, originally affiliated with “Los Angeles Times”, but occasionally also with “Washington Post News Service”. Hillinger, no doubts an enthusiast of the topic, has been publishing his articles in colossal number of newspapers. Very often, the same article would be published in various media outlets with different titles. An article on educational program outreach by Fort Ross Interpretive Association was published by Hillinger in “Messenger-Inquirer” (Kentucky) as \textit{Russian years recalled at fort}\(^{58}\), “Salt Lake Tribune” (Utah) as \textit{Fort in California preserves the memories of when Russia had a West Coast colony}\(^{59}\), “Asbury Park Press” (New Jersey) as \textit{Fort Ross once part of Russia}\(^{60}\), “Albuquerque Journal” (New Mexico) as \textit{Russia still alive in California}\(^{61}\); “Austin American-Statesman” (Texas) as \textit{America’s Russian Colonists. Soviet fort turns back clock for California schoolchildren}\(^{62}\) and several others. The latter provides a reader with an interesting description as the fort is called \textit{Soviet} there. This rather peculiar epithet could be only explained with a simplified narrative in a newspaper.

Local news coverage in California resembled an interest in the topic among the residents of state park’s surroundings, mostly Sonoma County, as well as certain academic interest among scholars from Bay Area universities, James Clifford among others. He posed questions related precisely to the fact that there was a Russian historical presence on Californian coast. “I’m looking for history at Fort Ross. I want to understand my location among others in time and space. Where have we been and where are we going? But instead of a clear direction or process, I find different overlapping temporalities, all in different ways \textit{historical}”\(^{63}\). Clifford also touches upon an issue concerning American cultural memory regarding the colonization process. The general perception of an East towards West

\(^{57}\) Internet Movie Data Base, \textit{Fort Ross}, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3727780/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas [access: June 15\(^{th}\), 2022].


\(^{59}\) Idem, \textit{Fort in California preserves the memories of when Russia had a West Coast colony}, “The Salt Lake Tribune”, 13\(^{th}\) X 1987, vol. 235, no. 60.


\(^{63}\) J. Clifford, \textit{Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century}, p. 301.
direction of this process. “This westward-looking dream topography had its origin along the Asiatic and African edges of Europe, over centuries of violent and creative contacts. The dream-productive, expansive, violent—had a destination: the Pacific. Here the “West” culminated. Beyond the final ocean lay the East. At Fort Ross, even “Western” history arrives from the wrong direction. And it comes contaminated, an extension of Russia’s great Asian encounter: the Siberian frontier [...]. It is strange to stand on a California coast and imagine yourself at the farthest extension of an eastward-expanding empire centered in St. Petersburg.”

His argument could serve as one of the potential explanations for the lack of popularity and knowledge about this episode among the Americans. Since the story of Fort Ross doesn’t fit into a general narrative on the America’s beginning, it’s easier to omit it. Russians in Alaska are easily explainable and don’t interfere with a narrative. Alaska is an external territory, far away from the mainland USA, so it could’ve been colonized somehow differently. However, that doesn’t apply to California.

Nevertheless, visible material remains of local history encouraged local residents to get more interested and involved. Those people took an active role in the process of restoration and joined the Citizens Advisory Committee. Once the Fort Ross Interpretive Association (transformed in 2012 into Fort Ross Conservancy), a non-profit organization, was established in 1975, the activists became members as well. The association alongside the State Park shaped the narrative presented at the Ross towards visitors. Those two parties established a following division of tasks: State Park continued to be responsible for the maintenance of the park, whereas association received the tasks to run educational and public programs, conduct guided tours, support research and promote the history of the place. Such division remains to this day.

Fort Ross Interpretive Association (FRIA) / Fort Ross Conservancy (FRC)

Among the key challenges that both State Park employees and FRIA had to face was to create a visitor center, which would be able to accommodate a growing number of visitors. Eventually, a completely new building was built and the center opened in 1985. It’s wooden, historically stylized and located at the parking lot, on a way to the fort itself. Two parties worked together on preparation technical part of the center as well as a visual narrative of the story behind a fort. This narrative is presented till today as an exhibition located within the visitor center, which apart from it, consists of a bookstore, a library (with a small archive) and an office space. The visitor center is managed by the FRC. The narrative on the exhibition reflects the general narrative on the topic adopted already by the Citizens Advisory Committee. Presented story covers 3 historical periods: Native Californian Era, Russian Era and Ranch Era. Although the strongest focus is on the Russian Era, representatives of Cal family and Kashaya Pomo made sure to have their stories present on the exhibition as well. The exhibition emphasizes the peaceful character of Russian intensions and activities at the colony.

The mission of FRC “is to promote for the benefit of the public the interpretive and educational activities of the Russian River Sector of California State Parks at Fort Ross State Historic Park and Salt Point State Park.” They emphasize the importance of discovering the past, cooperating with local communities (including Russian Americans and Native Kashia) and continuing the restoration of the facilities. Throughout its educational program, FRC seeks to outreach Californian youngsters. The educational offer is not limited to the historical aspects. It also covers the natural qualities of the land. Two main programs are: Environmental Living Program (ELP) and Marine Ecology Program (MEP). The former provides student groups with an opportunity to travel back in time and live at the fort like its inhabitants did in first half of 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The role-playing game is based on taking

\textsuperscript{64} Ibidem, p. 303.

\textsuperscript{65} Fort Ross Conservancy, About Fort Ross Conservancy, https://www.fortross.org/about [access: June 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2022].
roles of actual historical characters. This program concentrates around the Russian Era, but characters to be played are of various origin, including the Native Californians. The latter takes upon Ross history from a different angle. Focused on environmental history, it seeks to sensitize children towards the climate challenges and importance of protecting the environment. Recant years brought a bigger emphasis on environmental history and the indigenous people’s long-lasting presence at that area. The current brochure promoting the park reads: “In 1812, Russian and Alaskan explorers and traders established Fort Ross at Metini, a centuries-old Kashaya Pomo coastal village.”66 Such an emphasis lies in compliance with the current trends in popular history and memory practices that tend to share stories that remained untold and fill such white spots67 with content. This is particularly related with vernacular groups, indigenous peoples, and

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other regional perspectives within the framework of ethnohistory.°

Hank Birnbaum, a bilingual guide (English/Russian) and an ELP instructor explains this new approach of FRC: “I've been working with visitors and tourists who are often surprised about the Russian story on our coast, and also know very little about the native story in America. And so as a guide, I’m trying to open eyes and understandings to those stories and not to mention just the natural history—the biggest history of all at our site. There is of course the intimate, inner connection between. There is no real separation to the natural, cultural worlds and those stories. We have ecological consequences of that, the avarice of that fur trade and all. It’s even changed the ecology with the disappearance of the keystone species such as the sea otter. We’re trying to understand that now. And the consequences with global warming and so forth. What is the legacy of those past habits and how that’s impacting our nature and what we could do about it. I’m involved all those things in different ways.”

The events organized by FRC are of different types. They range from cultural festivals to reenactments to environment protection activities. The cultural events usually feature Russian and Native performances, cuisines, songs, dances, etc. 2019 featured among others: Kolyadki (traditional Central-Eastern European Christmas songs) singing, Verbnoye Voskresenie (Palm Sunday), Alaska Native Day, Metini Day, California Coastal Cleanup Day and Harvest Festival. FRC organizes also an annual Fort Ross Festival taking place in July. Throughout those events they organizers intend to “promote public awareness and understanding of the natural and cultural history of Fort Ross State Historic Park and Salt Point State Park”, as states one of its goals.

Apart from that, Fort Ross Conservancy understands its Russian heritage as an extra value, with a potential for bridge-building. They advocate for international and intercultural cooperation, particularly in American-Russian relations. The main tool serving that end has been the annual Fort Ross Dialogue (FRD) conference. The first edition of the FRD took place in 2012 for bicentennial of the fort’s foundation. The organizers had high hopes for the FRD becoming a developing platform for fostering improvement of American-Russian relations on social, cultural, and political level. That included discussing the mutual historical heritage in California and elsewhere in the US. The conference was jointly funded by the American and Russian business partners: Chevron, Transneft, and Sovcomflot. FRC received a permanent sponsorship from the Renoma Fort Ross Foundation, a non-profit established by a Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg. Despite the deterioration of the US-Russian relations, the FRC staff remained committed to look for a dialogue and kept organizing FRD with the Russian partners. First important change took place in 2018, when Vekselberg was added to the US sanctions list. Renoma Fort Ross Foundations seized its operations in the US and FRC stopped receiving direct funding from Russia for its regular activities. Nevertheless, the cooperation with Transneft and Sovcomflot continued and until 2021 they remained as partners of FRD. Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov was among the speakers opening the conference in 2021. The situation shifted entirely on February 24th, 2022, when Russia initiated a full-scale invasion in Ukraine. FRC has closed its cooperation with any Russian official entities and businesses. They also released a statement: “FRC has no association or other formal or informal collaboration with the Russian Federation. FRC has received funding from Russian individuals, businesses and others to help fund existing initiatives, but supports and is fully compliant with U.S. government sanctions.” The board has also decided to cancel the 2022 edition of Fort Ross Festival due to the international situation.


°° Interview with Hank Birnbaum, conducted in Berkeley, CA by Kacper Dziekan on October 24th, 2021.

°°° Fort Ross Conservancy, About Fort Ross Conservancy, https://www.fortross.org/about [access: June 9th, 2022].


Meaning of Fort Ross for Indigenous Californians

When Russian arrived in California, they encountered the indigenous population. That land was inhabited by a tribe who is now officially, federally recognized as Kashia (also spelled Kashaya) Band of Pomo Indians. The Pomo Indians has been living on in North and Central California for centuries.74 As they inform on their website, the Kashia were the first to inhabit the territories of what constitutes Sonoma County today. Although Fort Ross lies within the perimeter of the county, given its significance, the tribe emphasizes their occupation of that particular area as well.75 The Pomo group is internally diverse. One of the factors differentiating respective groups is language. The Kashia Pomo have their own language which serves as a base for self-identification.76 The Kashia used the term Metini for the area they occupied.77 Once Russians arrived, their primary challenge was to keep the land despite the objection from the Spaniards. The latter claimed the entire territory surrounding their system of missions and presidios. Russian argued that the land they had chosen to occupy belongs to no one but the indigenous people. For that end, they secured a contract in 1817. It is known as a Treaty of Hegemeister – a representative of RAC, and a future Chief Manager, who signed it on behalf of the Russian Empire. Chiefs Chu-gu-an, Amat-tim, Hen-le-le, and others signed it on behalf of Kashia Band.78 This treaty served as a legal base for their mutual relations and an argument against Spain. Otto von Kotzuebe, who commanded several voyages in 1820s and 1830s visited Ross and emphasized the agreement between Kuskov and the Kashia: “The settlement of Ross, situated on the seashore, in latitude 38° 33’, and on an insignificant stream, was founded in the year 1812, with the free consent of the natives, who were very useful in furnishing materials for the buildings and even in their erection.”79

The Kashia confirmed that they agree for a peaceful cohabitation with the Russians. Several tribal members joined the colony. According to the census conducted by the commander Ivan Kuskov for the years 1820 and 1821, there were 56 “Californian Indians” at the colony.80 The Kashia referred to the Russians as undersea people which could be explained with the fact that when they had arrived at Bodega Bay in baidarkas, it looked as if they came literally from under the ocean.81 Probably the most remarkable thing in Kashia-Russian relations is that the peaceful cohabitation mentioned in the treaty to large extend actually existed. Various sources, both Russian written ones (like the observations from Pyotr Stepanovich Kostromitinov – one of the commanders at Ross, published originally in 183982) and Kashia oral agree that both parties managed to exercise amicable relationships,83 even considered

74 M.J. Kennedy, Culture Contact and the Acculturation of the Southwestern Pomo, Stanford 1956, p. 4.
75 Kashia Pomo Tribal Government, About the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians, https://www.stewartspoint.org/wp2/ [access: June 8th, 2022].
77 See the joint study prepared by one of the most devoted researchers of Fort Ross Kent G. Lightfoot (together with Sara L. Gonzalez), Kashia Band of Pomo Indians and Fort Ross State Historic Park: K.G. Lightfoot, S.L. Gonzalez, Metini Village. An Archeological Study of Sustained Colonialism in Northern California, Berkeley 2018
78 J. Nieze, The Purchase of Kashaya Reservation, Wor-
Even though Native Californians were considered to occupy the bottom of the social hierarchy at the colony. Such a phenomenon is most commonly explained with the fact that Russians wanted to “win over” the Kashia in order to have an ally against the Spanish hostility. The indigenous people were well-paid and well treated. There are examples where Russians genuinely intended to care for the health of all their settlers, including the Native Californians. Once smallpox became a serious challenge, the vaccines were provided to everyone. Kaylee Pinola, a member of the Kashia Band, an anthropologist and a Park Interpretive Specialist at California State Parks confirms this perception from the point of view of her tribe: “I should probably preface it and say that, you know, I don’t think the Russians being there was the worst thing that could have happened to us by any means. That’s mainly because when you look at the trajectory of what was going on with say the Spaniards that were just a little further south of where we were. The mission system and all the atrocities that happened with that. The Russian people being there definitely wasn’t bad in comparison. They didn’t force us to convert to anything. They didn’t tell us we couldn’t practice our culture. I think there’s a lot to be said for that. Well, it’s not like everything was kumbaya, either. We weren’t necessarily happy that the Russian people were there and that they were building forts, etc. I know the Alaska Native people have their own perspective with that as well. Considering their history with the Russian people, we were fortunate in that we don’t have that same history with them.

So, our perspective is a little different, but at the same time that’s still our land. That’s still our home. We leased that land to the Russian people. And then the Russian people went, and they sold it to the people that came after them. Therefore, we don’t really have claims in a legal sense to that [the land] anymore because our lease wouldn’t be respected in the traditional court systems that we have now.

This Kashia perspective is taken into account more and more common in the area. Fort Ross State Historic Park has added the Kashia name (although spelled a bit differently: May-tee-nee) to the panel in front of the visitor center. Fort Ross Conservancy has implemented indigenous narratives into their programs and the role of the Kashia is emphasized on the new FRC website. On the main page it reads: “Russians settled on the ancestral Kashia Pomo lands called Metini and the Kashia are still very much a part of the community today.” The tribe representatives are among the board members and the community is consulted with various activities conducted by the FRC.

Cultural practices and spatial dimension are not the only examples of Fort Ross heritage in the cultural memory of Kashia Band. Although relatively short, the Russian presence in California has influenced the linguistic changes. Several Russian
words were adopted to the Kashia language, e.g., the word \textit{moloko} for milk, \textit{caynik} for a teakettle, \textit{semiya} for a seed, \textit{šulú:na} for salted/pickled, \textit{loška} for spoon or \textit{nošicca} for scissors\textsuperscript{88}. It’s interesting to note the character of those loanwords. They are either related to items that must have been brought by the Russians (scissors, teakettle, spoon) or food products and habits that were not common among the Kashia. Russians introduced agriculture (hence the seed) and such culinary customs as pickling vegetables. Some words could have been adopted to Kashia from Russian indirectly, through languages spoken by Alaska Natives who accompanied Russians in California.

\section*{Fort Ross in popular culture}

Although Fort Ross doesn’t exist in a collective memory of American citizens, there are several examples of its existence in certain products of popular culture. In the end of 19th century, a popular writer Gertrude Atherton published a number of romantic stories set in pre-gold rush California. While collecting materials and inspirations for her stories, Atherton got interested in Fort Ross. She traveled to the site and stayed in the hotel located in the house of the former commander, Alexander Rotchev. During her stay, Atherton made inquiries on the topic and discussed it with some people. Among them was Lukaria Yorgen Myers, a Kashaya Indian, who had lived at the fort during the Russian rule, remembered it and had stories to share. The material gathered during her stay served Atherton as a background for her fictional story \textit{Natalie Ivanhoff}, published in 1902\textsuperscript{89}.

Another example of Fort Ross’ appearance in popular culture can be seen in early 1950s. Due to the Cold War, the representation of a Russian colonists was far less romantic then in the early 20th century. The tensions between Soviet Union and the USA have found its reflection in a comic book \textit{Casey Ruggles. A Saga of the West}. This was a series of comic strips created by a young, 23-year-old cartoonist Warren Tufts. It was out on November 20\textsuperscript{th} 1950 and run till February 17\textsuperscript{th} 1951. The storyline was 100-year-old and located in the \textit{Wild West}. The protagonist, Casey Ruggles was an American soldier, wandering around the frontier in the 1850s. At one point, he travels to the Fort Ross, asked by John Sutter (whom Russians had sold the fort) to collect certain goods to be moved to the new fort he had built (New Helvetia, today Sutter’s Fort in Sacramento). At the same time, a fictional Russian commander, named Ivan, approaches the fort as well. The commander left it some 10 years earlier, got lost and finally made somehow his way back home. Not knowing about the sale of the fort to John Sutter, he doesn’t understand what’s happening at gets angry with Casey Ruggles, trying to stop him. Outnumbered, he has to let go. Later, Ivan meets a Native named Valenila, whom he bribes with vodka to help him attack the Presidio of San Francisco. In the epic finale, Casey Ruggles heroically defends the Presidio, defeats Russo-Indian alliance and sends Ivan back to Mother Russia. Evil Empire lies defeated once again\textsuperscript{90}. The portrayal of Ivan fits perfectly into a stereotype of Russians in the America in 1950s. He is a primitive, aggressive drunkard. The portrayal of Native American Valenila could be seen in a similar stereotype-driven, orientalist manner.

\section*{Conclusions}

Fort Ross seems to play an important role only to certain groups within US society. Specifically to Russian Americans of California and the local residents of areas surrounding the park, mostly within Sonoma County. The reason behind the lack of popular knowledge about Fort Ross among majority of US citizens could be explained with its fairly small impact on general development of the country; an unusual and contradictory development of the Russian colonization of California (see Clifford) as well as Cold War atmosphere of hostility and suspi-


ciousness between Americans and Russians, which didn’t make a good ground to popularize this aspect of common history. The story of Fort Ross has never really fit into general concepts of American cultural memory.

However, in cultural memory of Russian Americans, Fort Ross has kept the special place for a very long time. I argue that it’s full recognition as a lieu de mémoire is to be seen in 1930s with the increased interest in the topic, and most importantly, the formation of Initiative Group for the Memorialization of Fort Ross. Fort Ross remained to be a sacred place until the collapse of Soviet Union, and for some it remains until today.

Fort Ross plays also an important role in cultural memory of local non-Russian Americans. Its character is different though. Something unique, unusual, peculiar, even exotic. A source of local pride, with an emphasis of the hold flow of time and different aspects of local history.

Słowa kluczowe: rosyjska kolonizacja, Fort Ross, Kalifornia, San Francisco, pamięć kulturowa

Keywords: Russian colonization, Fort Ross, California, San Francisco, cultural memory

Summary:
Metini / Fort Ross. Russians in California – beginnings

The article presents the functioning of the heritage of the Russian colonization of northern California in the cultural memory of the inhabitants of these and surrounding areas of the state that belonged to Russia in the 19th century. The research concerns a specific location, the settlement known as Fort Ross, located in northern California. Today it has the status of the State Historic Park. The non-governmental organization Fort Ross Conservancy operates there, and this activity was analyzed using a case study research method. The characteristic elements of the cultural memory of the inhabitants of this territory were researched, such as: important historical figures, the most important events associated with for the formation of collective identity, institutions and organizations acting as memory guardians, as well as material and immaterial cultural heritage. These elements were analyzed in terms of the differentiation of their functioning in local cultural memory depending on a specific group (ethnic, cultural, religious) or specific subjects of cultural memory.

Streszczenie:
Metini / Fort Ross. Rosjanie w Kalifornii. Początki

Artykuł ukazuje funkcjonowanie dziedzictwa rosyjskiej kolonizacji północnej Kalifornii w pamięci kulturowej mieszkańców tych oraz okolicznych terenów stanu, które należały w XIX wieku do Rosji. Analizie poddano konkretne miejsce, a mianowicie osadę znaną pod nazwą Fort Ross, znajdującą się w północnej Kalifornii. Dziś ma ona status Stanowego Parku Historycznego. Swoją działalność prowadzi tam także organizacja pozarządowa Fort Ross Conservancy, którą to działalność przeanalizowano za pomocą metody badawczej case study (studium przypadku). Zbadało charakterystyczne elementy pamięci kulturowej mieszkańców tego terenu, takie jak: ważne postaci historyczne, wydarzenia kluczowe dla kształtowania się zbiorowej tożsamości, instytucje i organizacje pełniące funkcję strażników pamięci, a także materialne oraz niematerialne dziedzictwo kulturowe. Elementy te przeanalizowano pod kątem zróżnicowania ich funkcjonowania w lokalnej pamięci kulturowej w zależności od konkretnej grupy (etnicznej, kulturowej, religijnej), bądź konkretnych podmiotów pamięci kulturowej.

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