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By  
Charles S. Greene

THE  
Overland Monthly

Vol. XXII. (Second Series).—July, 1893.—No. 127

FORT ROSS AND THE RUSSIANS

TRADITIONS and ivy are said to grow well in but one place on the Atlantic seaboard of this country, at Newport. On the West Coast it is quite as difficult to find the combination. Fort Ross alone seems to fill it well. Even there the ivy is not very abundant, though it covers the side of the old hotel, and creeps into one of the bedrooms and festoons its mantelpiece. But the traditions are abundant enough. All around are evidences of a history that had its close half a century ago. All the people have stories to tell of the ancient days. There is even a "haunted chamber," where the ghosts of the past walk at night. The smallest tottler of the group of children there, a little fellow of only three years, will pick up one of the rusty hand-wrought spikes of curious shape that are part of the soil in places, and tell you that "the Ooshians made that." Of course traditions that had their source all within the nineteenth century are not venerable by any but Californian standards, yet they nevertheless impress the visitor of today as venerable.

The bastions of the old fort are fast falling to decay. The roof of one is gone, and of the other will hardly stand more than two or three winters more. Even the solid redwood logs of the structure itself are rotted so that a cane



A RUSSIAN MADONNA.



may be thrust into their substance wherever it is sapwood, though the heartwood still is sound. Thus the bastions bow a little more each year to the southward, where the fierce gales sweep in from the ocean, and by-and-by will fall. And well they may; for they have overreached their three score years and ten, which is pretty well for wooden buildings that, so far as appears, never had a touch of paint.

But these are the chief marks still left of a settlement that might have had far-reaching effects on California's

cisco, and their familiar system of the mission and the presidio, with its resulting pueblo, was in more or less prosperous working from Baja California to San Francisco. They knew that Russian settlements had been made in the extreme North,—that Hudson Bay men and the representatives of the new and aggressive American Republic were growing unpleasantly numerous on their coasts and northern boundaries, and strict laws were made to enforce Spain's well-known colonial policy, forbidding trade and intercourse



South Bay, Cal.

A VIEW ON THE DUTCH ROAD NEAR SAN FORT.

history. On this spot for thirty years the Russians kept up the best garrisoned, best armed, and strongest fortress in California.

A slight sketch of the history of the settlement (drawn chiefly from Hittell and Bancroft as authorities, with addition of some reminiscences of General John Bidwell) will be necessary to make the description of it as it is now best understood.

The Spaniards by the opening of the present century had possession of all of California as far north as San Fran-

co with foreign vessels, except such succor in distress as humanity demanded.

But the English, Russians, and Americans, were not easily kept at arm's length, especially the last two. The Yankee traders were ubiquitous in their handy vessels, and wherever there were furs to be taken the Russians were bound to go. But that meant far down the coast, for the valuable sea otter in those days was found in large numbers in San Francisco Bay and yet farther south, while many fur seals were taken on the Farallones.



San Francisco.

Ever since 1741 when the coast had been given to North and by 1745 permanent settlements had been made there. They were frequently hostile and to new arrivals.



San Francisco.



[July,

1893.]

*Fort Ross and the Russians*

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Edw. H. Smith

VIEW NORTH EASTION.

Ever since 1741 when Bering discovered the coast, Russian attention had been given to Northwest America, and by 1745 permanent settlements had been made there. These settlements were frequently hostile to each other and to new arrivals, and were also

engaged many times in wars of extermination with the natives, but by 1785 they had begun to consolidate, and in 1799 had been formed the great Imperial Russian-American Fur Company that was to rule until Russia gave up all claims on American soil in 1868.

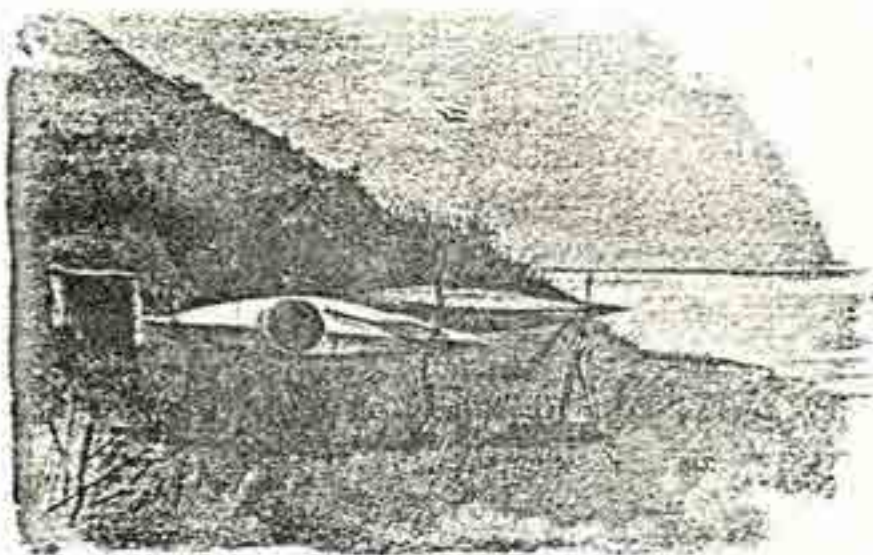
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Edw. H. Smith

VIEW OLD CHAPEL.





ALEUTIAN BIDARKAS, DONALDSON.

The Czar and others of the royal family were interested in this company. Yet it was strictly a commercial enterprise, and the hold it got on its territories, however extensive and permanent, had but little of political significance and was readily relinquished for commercial reasons. Political supremacy in America was no part of the famous policy of Peter the Great. This, it seems to me, must be borne in mind, to understand the whole course of Russian dealings in America,—at Fort Ross included.

But Yankee enterprise was needed to

point out the southern way to Baranof in his Sitka castle. In 1803 one Captain O'Cain arrived at Sitka, and bargained with the company to take a party of their Kodiak otter hunters and their bidarkas to southern waters, there to hunt for furs on shares. This trip proved successful, and similar trips were made by a vessel or two each year until 1815. These bidarkas were skin boats, commonly holding only one man, as those shown in the sketch, but made also with two openings; and still larger craft bore the same name, for Payeras tells



FORT ROSS IN 1841, DONALDSON.

FORT ROSS IN 1841, DONALDSON.

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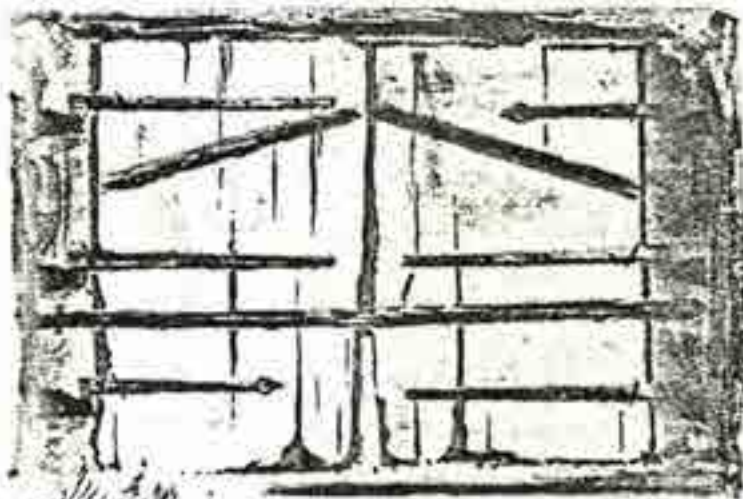
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how he and the Imperial Mexican Commissionado, Canonigo Fernandez, were later rowed from Ross to Bodega in a bidarka. It is a possible conjecture, however, that the good prelate mistook the name, for he was not much used to boats and was wofully seasick on this trip. At any rate, that carried fifteen oarsmen. The otter hunting was probably done in the smaller boats.

But the Sitka people were not of the sort to allow men of another nation to do for them what they could do them-

and was specially pleased with a spot about twenty miles up the coast from Bodega Bay, where a little open plateau of good soil overlooked the sea, cut off from the surrounding country in several directions by deep gulches, so that it was easy of defense. Moreover, it had pasturage, timber, running water, and what its inhabitants to this day claim is "the best climate on the Coast." To this place, thenceforth to be called Fort Ross, he acquired a semblance of title for his company by purchase from



Ross Window

SOUTHWEST, SALLY BONE.

selves, and the visit of the Imperial Chamberlain Resanoff to San Francisco in 1806, celebrated for its tragic tale of love, had put them still further in possession of the facts of the situation. They knew that the reserve of the Spaniards, was not absolutely impregnable, and so a bold move was undertaken.

In 1808 Ivan Kuskof, Baranof's lieutenant, started on a preliminary voyage of observation, and early in 1809 dropped anchor in Bodega Bay. Then, and on a second voyage in 1811, he made explorations of the neighboring territory,

the Indians, paying, according to Bancroft's citation from Payeras, stout old prefect of missions, who was grieved and scandalized at this occupation of Spanish soil by foreign heretics, "three blankets, three pairs of breeches, two axes, three hoes, and some beads."

The actual settlement was made in 1812, when Kuskof arrived on the Chirikof with ninety-five Russians, and forty bidarkas with two Aleuts to man each bidarka. They arrived in March or April, and by September had the fort and village completed.

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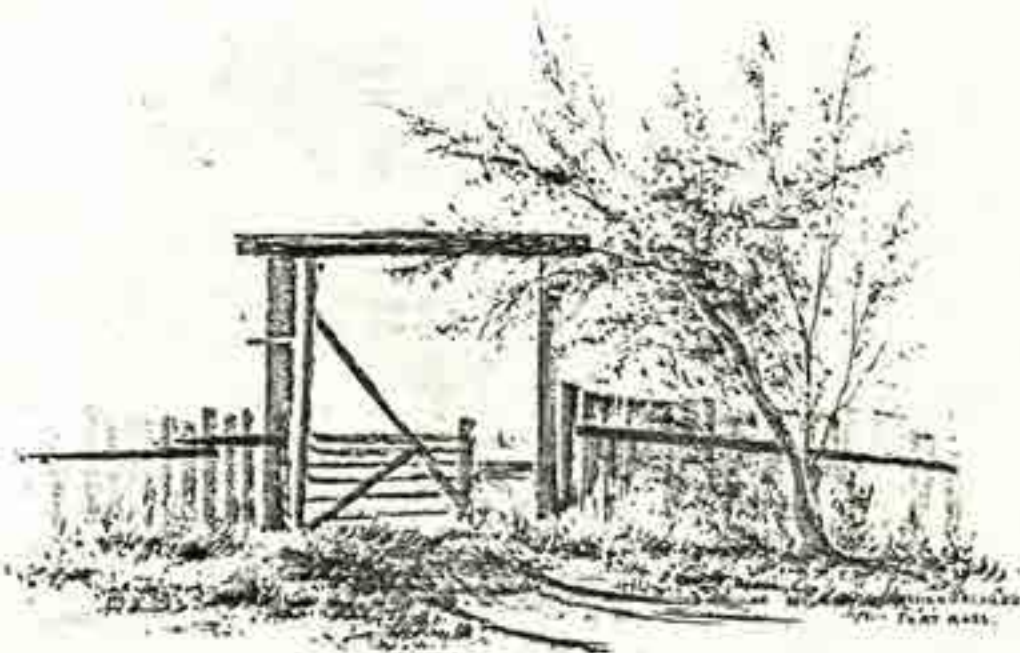




The motive of the Russians in making the settlement, beside the fur-taking already mentioned, was to provide a base of supplies for the Sitka colony. I quote a paragraph from an article in the *San Francisco Times*, of Jan. 16, 1869, by Father Agapius Honcharenko, a Russian refugee in California, who in his "Little Ukraina" settlement, near

running through a certain portion of the land occupied is to this day known by the name of Russian River.

Favoring the Russian plans also was the condition of the Spanish colonies then, and for the ten or twelve years following the settlement, and the general upheaval in Europe and on the eastern shores of America. In this same



HOW PHOTO

LOOKING SEWARD FROM THE OLD RUSSIAN QUARTERS.

Haywards, has given Russian matters much attention.

One of the greatest troubles of Barinof was keeping the colonies supplied with subsistence, and the actual necessities of life. The connections of the colonies with Russia were from the best through Siberia. Frequent shipwrecks made these connections irregular, and placed the colonies in a critical position. To insure all of the articles of first necessity, and from the difficulty of raising breadstuffs on the islands, Barinof used all possible means to secure firm connections with Manila, the Philippine Islands, the Sandwich Islands, and at last with California; where he and Nushof established a colony in the territory belonging to the Spanish government. This was called Fort Ross. The stream

year of 1812 began the revolts that were not to cease till Spain's dominion on the continent of America was entirely overthrown. The California settlements were not actively engaged in any of these hostilities, but as a result of them the supply ships failed to arrive, and the Spanish troops at the presidios were unpaid, and had to depend on the products of the mission industries, dealt out to them rather grudgingly by the friars. In this way they were in no condition to undertake to dislodge these intruders on Spanish soil,

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FORT ROSS.

EDD LANSING, FORT ROSS.

however firmly their governors might be convinced that Ross was in California, which they claimed extended to the Straits of Fuca, while the Russians then or afterward in the controversies were apt to claim that the Spanish title, based on the discovery by Columbus, extended no farther north than San Francisco, the bounds of actual occupation, and the territory north of that was unoccupied land under the general title of New Albion, given it by Drake.

And there was still another reason for friendliness between Russian and Spaniard,—each had what the other eagerly desired. The Russians wanted the Californian wheat and furs, and had to exchange for them many articles of wool, iron, and leather, made by their mechanics at Sitka and Ross, that the Spaniard could not get from the disturbed mother country, and were far too easy-going to make for themselves. The bells in certain mission churches were cast at Sitka, and the Russian wrought iron, both from Sitka and Ross, was much desired. When the Aleutian bidarkas first came boldly into San Francisco Bay, the authorities at the

Presidio had not a single boat with which to pursue and bring to terms these daring poachers. The only resource was to guard the springs, so that no fresh water could be obtained. Later several boats built at Ross were sold to the San Franciscans. Indeed, the activity of the Russians and those they ruled seemed marvelous and unexplainable to the Spaniards.

Thus there were nearly every year several ships that came from Sitka and Ross to San Francisco, bringing merchandise and carrying away for the North cargoes of wheat; and this traffic, though entirely illegal, and done against the formal protests of the Spanish governors, was no whit the less profitable, especially in the early years of the settlement. Later too, after the San Rafael settlement had been made, no little of this trade went on by land.

Nearly every year some formal complaint was sent by the Spanish, and later by the Mexican, authorities, to the Russians, that they were occupying soil that did not belong to them, warning them to depart, demanding to know by what authority they did these things.



To this Kuskof gave no satisfactory reply, feigning not to understand as long as he could, and when the "no sabee" ruse availed no longer, saying that he was but a subordinate, and but did as he was instructed; that they must go to Baránof. No better results followed an appeal to Sitka; for Baránof in turn referred to the home government at St. Petersburg, and so the farce was re-enacted each year. The Spanish governor gravely reported these matters to the viceroy, with an estimate of the number of troops, infantry and artillery, necessary to dislodge the Russians, a number never forthcoming. It is amusing to read of this mild and almost kindly controversy, that interfered not at all with the trade and friendly intercourse here on this sequestered slope; while the mother countries of both these colonies, and all the civilized world beside, were engaged in the throes of the Napoleonic wars, the war of 1812, and the Spanish-American revolutions.

And truly the task of trying to capture Fort Ross was not an alluring one,—especially to the Spanish forces in

California, where the comandante at the San Francisco Presidio had sometimes to send to an incoming foreign ship to borrow the powder before he could return her salute. Its stout redwood logs would stop anything less than a cannon ball. It was mounted with some forty guns when fully armed, and there was beside an abundant supply of small arms. The discipline was always very strict. Sentinels guarded its sally port, and there were from two to four hundred men at the settlement, all more or less trained as soldiers. So the strong walls of Fort Ross gave it peace, and never faced civilized foe; though Alvarado speaks of an easily repulsed attack by a Sotoyome chief, soon after its founding. Yet, most unaccountably, bullets have been dug out of its timbers,—one of them is in the museum of the Society of California Pioneers at San Francisco,—and the proprietor of the hotel at Ross showed me a three-inch cannon ball, and assured me that it was cut out from the inner wall of one of the bastions, having passed entirely through the opposite wall. Pos-

sibly these may have been shot into the fort by the Russians trying to show its strength, for that even a "pirate down" ever took a ship of the strength of the fort as a discipline had another purpose. It was attacked by the Spaniards, by the boring Indians, or any other force, was largely to keep inside the governor and his officers, most of the men were Aleuts and Siberians. To keep these men from all of Kuskof's stern

Kuskof, governor of the colony, in all the Russians at Ross. His personality in matters of the yards called him "Pie" in count of his wooden legs. He was to have been a doughy honest old fellow, who was a guest of high degree, with the appliances of this wilderness, but he was under him with an iron

The buildings of the fort, constructed by him, show his executive ability and activeness, though he was a merchant, and not a professional. "Time was no object with the Russians," one of the pioneers told me, speaking of the fort. All the woodwork of the buildings, of hand-hewn logs as similar to a broadaxe, showing the felling and hewing, and it was wonderful. The joints fit together at the corners undecayed, so closely that a blade can hardly be inserted between them after all these years. The faces are still smooth and show marks all their work. The building was the governor's headquarters. The hotel, has logs judged to be eight feet thick, and forty or fifty

VOL. XXII—2



Old Russian Grave

Wm. J. Smith

LOOKING TOWARD THE FORT FROM THE RUSSIAN GRAVEYARD.



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sibly these may have been fired at the fort by the Russians themselves, in testing its strength, for there is no record that even a "pirate vessel warping down" ever took a shot at it. But the strength of the fort and its strict discipline had another purpose than to resist attack by the Spaniards, or the neighboring Indians, or any foreign foe. It was largely to keep internal peace. Beside the governor and a few Russian officers, most of the inhabitants of Ross were Aleuts and Siberians, often convicts. To keep these in awe required all of Kuskof's sternness.

Kuskof, governor for the first nine years of the colony, is the man who, of all the Russians at Ross, has most fixed his personality in memory. The Spaniards called him "Pie de Palou," on account of his wooden leg; and he seems to have been a doughty, frascible, but honest old fellow, who entertained well guests of high degree, astonishing them with the appliances of civilization in this wilderness, but who ruled those under him with an iron hand.

The buildings of the fort, all of them constructed by him, are monuments to his executive ability and military exactness, though he was himself a merchant, and not a professional soldier. "Time was no object to those old Russians," one of the present inhabitants told me, speaking of their handiwork. All the woodwork of the fort was made of hand-hewn logs and planks. An ax similar to a broadax was used for both felling and hewing, and their skill with it was wonderful. The logs of the bastions fit together at the corners, where undecayed, so closely that a pen-knife blade can hardly be inserted between them after all these years, and the surfaces are still smooth. Great solidity marks all their work. The building that was the governor's house, now part of the hotel, has logs in its attic that I judged to be eighteen inches in diameter, and forty or fifty feet long. The

chimney and fireplace are made entirely of hewn granite slabs, finely surfaced, and fitting together with great exactness. The metal work all over the place is still largely their hand-wrought iron. A good example of it is in the hinges of the old sally port, (p. 5.) still standing.

There seems to be but one sketch extant of the Fort Ross of early days, that drawn by Duhaut Cilly, a Frenchman, who spent three days at the fort in 1828. This he published in a book of his travels. A sketch from a copy of this plate I am able to give (p. 4.) by the kindness of Mr. Call, who now owns the land on which the fort stands. The work itself is to be found in the Bancroft Library.

Four ships, that is to say, schooners and brigs of 160 and 200 tons, were built at Ross, and at least one at Bodega, and this work, with the agricultural operations and all the trades carried on, made the place such a hive of industry that it is no wonder the Spaniards were astonished. And yet, strange to say, the venture as a whole proved unprofitable after a few years. The ships did not compare well in durability with those made of more seasoned and better woods, there were years of crop failure from the rust caused by the damp sea fogs. The Yankee traders brought manufactured goods that undersold the products of the artisans at Fort Ross, and the fur-bearing animals were soon exterminated. In addition to these things, the Mexican authorities continually grew more jealous of foreigners, and though less jealous of the Russians than of English or Americans, still they came again and again with their demand that the Russians evacuate their territory. Now, it is not to be supposed that the Russians feared Mexico. It does not even appear that they ever really expected an attack, and they would hardly have been moved much if they had. Negotiations begun for the cession by Mexico of the territory were



rather hampered by the fact that Russia had not then acknowledged Mexican independence. But the game was no longer worth the candle, and orders were



FARALLON HOUSE.

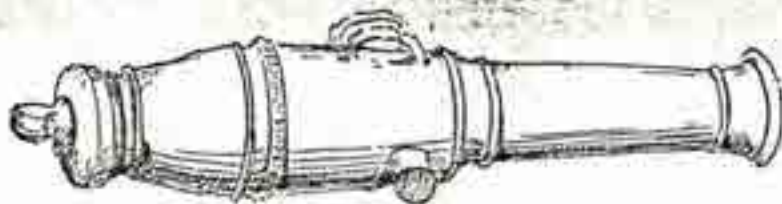
given to sell the property and abandon Fort Ross.

A long time before the final abandonment it had been the custom to send back to Sitka by each vessel some of the Kodiak huntsmen, who had been thrown out of employment by the failure of the otter and fur seal. There had been maintained on the Farallones, all through the time that Fort Ross was occupied, a station of Aleuts under a Russian officer. The purpose of this colony, beside fur hunting, was to capture seals and gulls, and dry them for use by the Aleuts at Ross, who preferred seal meat to the venison and bear meat of the mainland, to say nothing of beef or mutton. This station on the Farallones was given up in 1840. There are to this day certain ruined stone huts on the South Farallon, that are called by the light keepers "the Russian houses," though doubt is cast on the matter by some persons, who think that these houses were built by the egg company in later years. An in-

spection of them casts little light on the matter, but the solidity of the work at Ross, and everywhere that the Russians went, seems to make it probable that they would not have occupied the island twenty-eight years without leaving some traces.

For more than a year negotiations were carried on with Vallejo at San Francisco, regarding the sale of the property; but the stubborn refusal of the Mexicans to consider the buildings, "built on their land with their timber," in fixing the price made this bargaining fruitless, and another purchaser was found in Captain Sutter. He had arrived in California in 1839, from the Sandwich Islands, and had at once established himself at New Helvetia (forerunner of Sacramento), but had not yet built the famous Sutter's Fort. It is quite possible that he had his own fort in mind in this purchase, for he used the guns to arm it. One of them, a brass four pounder, he afterwards presented to the San Francisco Society of California Pioneers, after it had seen service in the southern campaigns. Sutter's Fort also, though of a different material (adobe), is much like Fort Ross in general plan, a square stockade with a bastion at each end of one of its diagonals.

For \$31,000, or rather, for his promise to pay that amount in installments in the absence of sufficient money, Sutter was given all and sundry the properties that the Russians could not remove,—the fort buildings, 41 cannon,



SUTTER CANNON.

A brass four-pounder, cast in St. Petersburg in 1804. Presented to Fort Ross by the Czar. Sold with the Fort to Sutter, and mounted on Sutter's Fort. Used to salute the American flag on its first hoisting at Sutter's Fort, at sunrise, July 23, 1840. Used by Commodore Sloat in his advance from San Pedro to Los Angeles, and in the fight San Pascual, December 6, 1845, and at Los Angeles, January 8 and 9, 1847. Now in the museum of the Society of California Pioneers, in San Francisco.



70 stand of flint lock muskets (these he declared, on examination, to be some of those thrown away by Napoleon's troops in the flight from Moscow), 2000 cattle, 1000 horses, 1000 sheep, and a long inventory beside.

He sent John Bidwell to take possession of his new property for him. Bidwell arrived in the first week in January, 1842, but unfortunately the Russians had all sailed away (Bancroft says on January 1, 1842) before he arrived, and so the historian is deprived of the testimony of General Bidwell's strong and clear memory as to what manner of men they were.

But of the Fort as they left it and the life of the days that followed immediately on their going, no better picture can be gained than by a talk with General Bidwell.

He made his home most of the time at Bodega, five miles inland from Bodega Bay, at a place where the Russians had quite a settlement because the wheat lands were better there. There were a dozen houses and two threshing floors. These were made of three-inch planks, were circular in shape, and about one hundred feet in diameter. The grain was tramped out on them by horses, just as the Californians did on their earthen threshing floors.

On the Russian River, not far from Bodega, was the ranch and vineyard of Don Jorge, a Russian of means and scientific attainments, who outstayed his compatriots.

The trip up the coast from Bodega to Ross was a most interesting one of about twenty miles by road. The most exciting part of it was the crossing of the Slavianka (the Russian name for Russian River) on the sand-bar that the ocean waves washed up at its mouth. This was a matter of no little danger, as the bar often shifted and was full of quicksands. Two or three people generally went together, ready with riatas, to help each other in case of need.

Another excitement of the road was the danger of meeting grizzly bears, which at that time were very numerous. There was one little barranca that the road skirted, where in the springtime it was no uncommon thing to look down and see the backs of four or five grizzlies in the deep clover that they like to feed on in that season.

Whales are not uncommonly washed ashore, dead, on that coast, and a dead whale was sure to attract the grizzlies. The Mexicans said a grizzly could smell a whale one hundred miles. At any rate, on the road skirting the ocean it was necessary to be cautious in approaching a dead whale.

The Indians around Fort Ross at that time spoke Russian, beside their own dialect, and knew but little Spanish. It was some time before it was easy to communicate with them. Bancroft speaks of the many Indians showing a mixture of Russian blood.

There was plenty to eat at the Ross of those days, and it is no wonder that the Russians disliked to leave it for the Sitka fare. Grizzly meat, antelopes, ducks, geese, sand-hill cranes, as well as beef, veal, pork, and mutton, were plentiful. Trout were numerous, and salmon crowded the little streams in spawning time. There was an abundance of wild strawberries and huckleberries, and the orchards yielded apples, peaches, and grapes. Bidwell recalls the making of three barrels of cider that first year.

The large orchard, of some two hundred apple trees, is still in bearing on a pretty sheltered slope about a mile northeast of the Fort. The apples are mostly small, for the trees have been neglected, and are covered with "old man moss"; but some are of good size and flavor still. It is said that this orchard was used as a park by the Russian officers and their wives, and was planted with flowers and kept in good order. A plank fence eight feet high surrounded it, (and is still standing in places,) to



keep out the Indians and Aleuts. It certainly is a delightful spot, sheltered by the redwoods to the east and north, and overlooking the Fort and the ocean beyond.

In 1842 the old windmill was still standing north of the Fort, a low, strong building, with a log sixty feet long as a sail axis, that a crowd of men could take hold of to push around to the proper angle to the wind. This building has since disappeared, but one of the great burr stones is standing in the hotel yard, and is pointed out as "the millstone that killed the beautiful Russian girl." I inquired how it happened, but got no more satisfactory reply than, "O, she got tangled up in it somehow."

And this brings us again to the Fort Ross of today, already spoken of on many points. I visited it in April, this year. The start is made at eight o'clock in the morning from San Francisco, and Fort Ross is reached at about six in the evening of the same day. First the boat to Sausalito, then by train to the pleasant resort of Cazadero, at one o'clock, — where the road ends. Here we were to take the stage. I paid for our party, and asked for the tickets.

"We don't give tickets, but I've put you on the waybill."

Thus made freight of, we took the stage, the ladies up beside the driver, who proved to be a merry fellow, and told them stories that made them laugh, and stories that made them thrill a bit, especially the one of the robbers that held up the stage at the Bend of the Cañon, when "the big fellow with the mask and shotgun started out from behind that tree, — right there!"

The day had been almost rainy when we left San Francisco, and all the way there were dashes of Scotch mist till late in the afternoon, but this only freshened up all the vegetation to wonderful brilliancy close at hand, shading off into soft grays and blues in the distance that were unspeakably beautiful.

It is with great humility that I try to speak of that ride in the fresh new foliage of the California April, — of the marvelous diversity and wonderful delicacy of the countless shades of green, of the beauty and variety of the wild flowers, and of the perfect pictures presented at each new turn of the road. It was hard to tell on the steep grades on the mountain side whether it was better to look at the bank close at hand on the left, and see the flowers, — iris, yellow violets, trilliums, scarlet larkspurs, saxifrage, and nemophilæ, the dainty ferns, maidenhair and gold back, and the little redwood trees two inches high, — or to look away into the cañon at the right, and see the great redwoods two hundred feet high and the stately convocations of many forest trees, where even the madroño had to stand up straight and tall, reaching upward toward the light that sifted through the branches, — and away beyond to the opposite sides of the cañon, even down the cañon in one clear time making out the great blue bulk of Mt. St. Helen, dim in the mist. That mountain, by the way, bears the name given it by the Russians.

It was about five o'clock when we reached Sea View, a little wayside tavern and postoffice, where the stage road climbs out on the ridge of the hills over Fort Ross and allows a glimpse of the ocean. There we transferred to a private team sent from the Fort and driven by one of the good natured brothers that lease the hotel. We were glad to get out of the stage, for though our eyes had been delighted the whole way, our bones had been sadly racked, as the four horses dragged the mud wagon through rather than over the heavy road, when the wheels sank in up to the hubs in many of the spring-holes.

Yet the ride down to the Fort, three and a half miles, was worse in some respects; for the pitch is very steep, and it seemed as though the heavy jolts would throw us out on the horses'

backs. But here, too, us, the red the little pine trees of the of light-green every bough with delight. bines and fe the winding Ross, our go nearer.

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backs. But there was beauty enough here, too. The great ocean lay before us, the redwood trees were about us, the little pines were making Christmas trees of themselves with tiny tapers of light green needles at the end of every bough, and the girls were wild with delight over the beautiful columbines and ferns. And at each turn of the winding road we could see Fort Ross, our goal, growing nearer and still nearer.

We reached it at about seven o'clock and received the proverbial warm welcome of an inn by being surrounded by a group of chattering children, each struggling to get possession of something of our baggage to carry in. Supper followed, and soon to bed, hardly waiting to admire the great stone fireplace in the living-room of the hotel, a monument of Russian skill. Not even the shades of the ghost chamber, where the girls were put, could keep awake travelers so tired.

The days passed only too quickly, crowded full of things to do and see. The most interesting objects are the bastions of the Fort, and the chapel. The condition of the bastions I have spoken of already, and one of my companions, who had been there the year before, remarked sadly on the effects of the storms of one winter on the old watch towers. In the roofless bastion to the south there are a pair of interesting old cannon wheels, wooden, half a foot thick, a foot and a half in diameter, and bound with iron. There is little else left in the structure. The floor of the second story and the staircase are indicated by only a few crumbling beams. The north bastion still has a roof and a part of the flooring, but these will not last long. This bastion is used as a shelter for an unsavory lot of black pigs.

The old bastions have eight sides, and this point is one that I can settle by authority. Bancroft speaks of them

as hexagonal, while Hittell correctly says octagonal. A sketch plan made while at Fort Ross showed eight sides, and that was my clear recollection as well, but when I mentioned Bancroft's error to the artists that had been at the Fort with me, they declared positively and independently that there were but six sides. Mr. Fenn's drawing in the *Century* for Nov. '90, showed four sides, while one in *Harper's* a year or two earlier, showed but three. I then questioned four other persons who had seen the buildings, and the responses were equally divided. One of these that said eight, found a photograph, and was shaken by it in her belief, and sent it to me to prove that after all we were wrong. Meanwhile a letter had been written to the Fort to ask for positive testimony, and received the reply that eight was right.

It surely is very deceptive to look at, for there are very many positions in which an octagonal building shows but three sides to the eye, and the impulse to double the number seen for the whole number of sides is very natural.

The stockade has all been removed except the old sally port already spoken of, which does duty as part of the wall of a wagon shed; but twenty years ago when the present owner, Mr. Call, first went to Ross, the stockade was complete. It was built of three-inch redwood planks set upright in a slot in solid logs imbedded in the ground, was twelve or fourteen feet high, and surmounted by a cheval de frise of iron spikes. Loopholes for musketry and embrasures for cannon were in proper places, especially around the portal. The stockade was one hundred varas, 275 feet, square, according to Vallejo; 300 x 280 feet according to another authority, 1088 feet in circumference by the inventory of sale to Sutter.

The chapel is in better preservation than the bastions, though it makes one's heart ache to see how it needs a little



care that would do much toward preserving it; just a nail here and there, where a loose plank will be ripped off the roof by the next gale for the lack of it. The building on the exterior still bears quite a churchlike look, with its square belfry and curious round cupola; the roof on the weather side is nearly bare, but under the lee of the cupola has gathered a sod some three inches thick, which bears a fine crop of foxtail grass. In the interior the sacrilegious hand has wrought havoc, for the building has been used as a stable and is fitted up with stalls. The modern Californian cares more for his horses than for his soul.

Still there can be made out with study the early arrangement of the edifice. The round cupola is nearly over where the altar must have been, and is open over it, while the rest of the room is ceiled. We climbed up the narrow steps to the ghostly attic and up into the belfry, noting everywhere the great solid beams and fine joinery in this hand-hewn timbering and planking that is characteristic of all the Russian work at Ross.

It is said that in its prime there were fine paintings in this chapel,—eikons like the famous Sitka Madonna. Nothing of this kind is left, but there is an old hand-carved lectern and great candlestick that show much patience and skill in cutting out the round forms now so easy to make with a lathe. In the bar-room of the hotel establishment are two quaint old pews or seats from the chapel. They are rudely made of solid three-inch sticks, and the seat is so deep that one thinks that there must have been giants in those days to have such amazing length of thigh. Possibly furs or upholstery, now all gone, may have filled in some of the space.

The old cemetery is another interesting spot. It lies across the gulch to the eastward of the Fort, on the brow of a hill where the ocean breeze sways the

arm of the wooden cross as it hangs rusted loose on its wrought-iron nail. There are signs of a dozen or more graves beside the curious, wooden structure shown in the sketch (p. 8) and the round wooden pillar. This pillar is said to have had a carved top and cross above it, now gone. Some of the Fort people speak of it as the whipping post, but I can hardly believe that that useful appliance could have been so far away from the Fort. It is a matter of record that there was whipping enough, as well as many executions, in the stern discipline of the Fort.

The graves are marked by wooden slabs prone on the earth. These slabs seem to have had no inscription on them as a rule. One with an inscription was found a few years ago and brought to San Francisco, but so many of the letters were gone that it proved undecipherable. The letters had been painted on, and the paint had preserved the wood under it so that they seemed to be carved. It was probably only an ordinary record of name and dates. It was given to the Woodward collection, and perhaps lost in the recent dispersion of that property.

A few years ago Mrs. Gertrude Atherton, who made Fort Ross a hermitage for literary work, bribed some of the boys at the hotel to go over with her and excavate one of these graves. The redwood coffin was found in good preservation, except that the lid had fallen in and the interior was filled with earth. Search in this showed the shin bones, the soles of the shoes, and some buttons, all that remained to indicate that there had been an occupant. Mrs. Atherton was much disgusted; for she needed a dead Russian for literary purposes, and had hoped at least to get an officer with his trappings, if not indeed records buried with him.

There are now not so many buildings at Ross as in Russian days; hardly more than a score are left of the fifty-

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nine that are spoken of as being there at one time. There is truth in the remark of the landlord: "Guess it was livelier times here eighty years ago." The present population is but fifty souls. There is a post office and a store, as well as the schoolhouse, hotel, and saloon mentioned. The school is taught by Miss Call, daughter of the owner of the Fort, and consists of nine children, — three of one family and six of another. Some fifty small schooners a year are loaded at the little landing with wood, fence posts, tan bark, and dairy products.

But business was calling us back to the city, in spite of the dreamy charm of this romantic old spot, and so we prepared to "go down below," as they speak of it there,—an expression that gained color from our unwillingness to return to the world,—and the rest of them.

One of the landlords took us up the grade again, and beguiled the way with pleasing converse. He told us the supplement to the stage driver's narrative of how the stage was robbed.

"A young fellow came along, kind o' slick looking, and asked if he might stop awhile. Then he wanted to jim around a little to pay for his board, and we set him to fixin' things up about the place. Soon we found out that he was pretty bad medicine, and I told him that he had better move on. He had found out where everything lay, and that night he and another fellow came back,

and bored around the lock of the saloon building door, and stole a rifle and a shotgun, and some cigars and liquor. The next day they held up the stage at the Bend of the Cañon. They caught them afterward, and they are now in San Quentin."

Soon the stage came along and we got in, to insult with our freshness the feelings of one weary passenger, who had been riding since six o'clock the evening before, without a wink of sleep all night. A day in the "wet dust" of the road and the rush of the train, and we were through with our trip.

The importance of the episode that Fort Ross stands for lies here, in my mind. The Northern world has been brought under European civilization by two currents; one moving west, the one sung by good Bishop Berkeley, familiar to us all—not perfect, indeed, but on the whole making for freedom and light, and working itself clearer as time goes on,—and the other moving east, though the whole width of Asia, the Aleutian chain, and down the west coast of America. This current has been little celebrated in song and story, for, sadly mingled with Asiatic barbarism, its mark is absolutism and cruelty. Ross, and Bodega, its appendage, are the extreme westerly mark of this current. There it met and was turned backward by the westward stream of empire, which has now made the whole of America free. No man can prophesy that the end is yet.

*Charles S. Greene.*



OLD RUSSIAN WROUGHT IRON KEY.