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An Archaeological And Archival Search For Evidence Of The Village At Fort Ross Occupied
By Native Californians, Native Alaskans And Russians

by

Glenn Farris

INTRODUCTION

The settlement of Fort Ross under the aegis of the Russian American Company (1812-1841) was a notable multi-ethnic community composed of Russians, Native Alaskans (both Eskimos and Indians), a Creole population of mixed Russians and American natives, and a village of Native Californians, mainly Kashaya Pomo, but with a number of Coast Miwok, Central Pomo and Southern Pomo people.

Archaeological excavations have focused most strongly on the area inside the stockade wall which was the residence primarily of the RAC officials and visitors. This work tended to accentuate the image of Fort Ross as a frontier fort and give it a military cast. However, it failed to address the notable fact that Fort Ross was primarily a domestic, complex multi-ethnic community that mostly lived outside the stockade walls. In fact, 50 of the 59 structures known to have composed *Selenie* (Settlement) Ross were outside the stockade.

The other notable areas excavated have been the Alaskan Native village by Kent Lightfoot and crews from UC Berkeley (Lightfoot et al. 1997) and the Kashaya village of Métini by Kent Lightfoot and Otis Parrish and more recently by Sara Gonzalez. These have provided us with valuable new insights into the daily life of these ethnic groups in the colony. However, the notable residential area which has not yet been subjected to archaeological testing is the village occupied primarily by ethnic Russians and their California Indian, Native Alaskan or Creole wives. This village lay approximately in the area extending from the Call House up through a series of Call era outbuildings running along the small creek adjacent to the house. Archaeological testing of this area has a tremendous potential to inform us on the domestic lives of this mixed community that was almost uniformly Russian male and Native American females. Such a study would help balance our picture of the overall Fort Ross community.

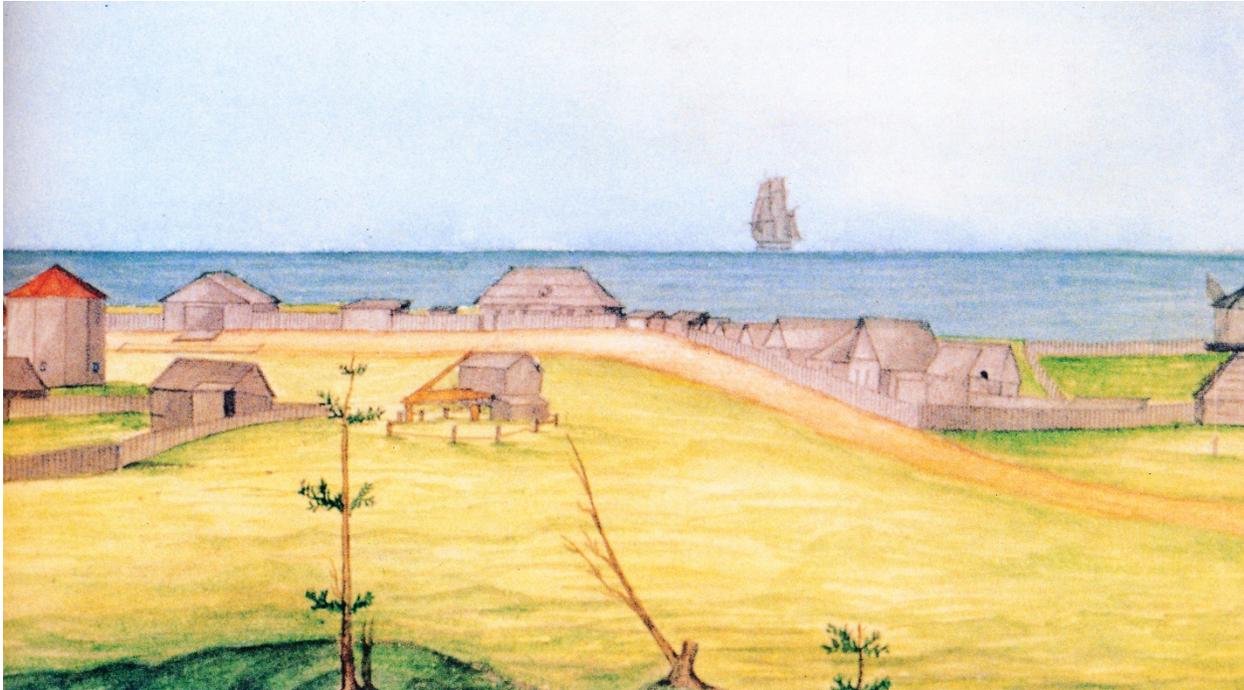
At present, we believe the site of the village lies under the area of Call Family era buildings, some of which are currently used by CSP as a maintenance yard. For purposes of better management of this cultural property, archaeological testing should be done to better define the most sensitive areas that might be affected in any subsurface work done in the maintenance area.

ARCHIVAL INFORMATION ON THE RUSSIAN VILLAGE

Although there were a number of private houses and work buildings that surrounded the stockade at Fort Ross, some perched on the sides of the Fort Ross Creek, and others out on the north side of the fort, as seen in the 1828 drawing by Auguste Bernard Duhaut Cilly, below,



there was also a group of houses forming a village that extended from near the Call House up along the small creek that lies adjacent to it. This village was captured in a drawing by Il'ya Voznesenskii in 1841, the same year the Russians departed from Fort Ross. He shows a dirt road or street running along in front of the houses and circling around toward one of the entrances to the stockade. One of the two Fort Ross windmills also appears on the right hand side of the drawing.



In the final inventory of Fort Ross made the same year as the Voznesenskii drawing, 24 individual family houses are mentioned, but this number accounts for the whole area of Fort Ross (Farris 2012:288). These houses were grouped by size in the inventory as follows:

Four houses—35 feet x 17.5 feet

Eight houses –31.5 feet x 17.5 feet

Nine houses—24.5 feet x 14 feet

Three houses—14 feet x 14 feet

The most common factor seems to be that the widths of all the houses ranges from 14 to 17.5 feet. These figures should be useful in identifying foundation plans if such are found. The inventories also say that, “each house has a small garden; the houses are covered with planks, their floors are of wood, and they have square windows.” In another version of the inventory made for John Sutter appears the phrase, “All these houses are covered with double planking; they have glazed windows and each has a floor and a ceiling” (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:433). Since the buildings noted as being built with planks at Fort Ross generally have also involved post holes, it is likely that these post hole remnants will be the most distinguishing feature. Similar finds were noted at the sites of the New Warehouse and the Officials’ Quarters. The statement that windows were noted on the houses gives some hope that broken window glass

would be found and under analysis be distinguished from the later Call era glass (Cf. Cohen 1992).

Only six or seven houses are visible in the Voznesenkii drawing in the area of the little village. A wooden fence runs along the road in front of the houses. This feature could turn out to be important because it would have utilized post holes in its construction which would be very amenable to detection. This would be particularly the case if the houses were constructed as sill-on-ground structures (like the Rotchev House and the Magazin) rather than post and plank structures like the Officials' Quarters. In the 1841 inventory, in addition to the 24 houses, there were 8 kitchens and 8 bathhouses listed (Farris 2012:288) that would suggest the possibility of the discovery of brick ovens or thermal features associated with heating the rocks for the *banyas*.

In 1845, three years after the Russian departure, we have a description of the village by Ernest Rufus, a German immigrant who, along with William Benitz, took up residence at Fort Ross and petitioned for the German Rancho, just to the north of the fort. Rufus stated:

At that time [there was] a village of about twenty-five small dwelling houses north [sic] of the stockade. These houses were in keeping with the houses of the peasants already described in Bodega. They were small, being probably not over twelve by fourteen feet in dimensions, and constructed from rough slabs riven from redwood (Munro-Fraser 1880:366).

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