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A FORT BY ANY OTHER NAME:
INTERPRETATION AND SEMANTICS AT COLONY ROSS

Reference

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A FORT BY ANY OTHER NAME: INTERPRETATION AND SEMANTICS AT COLONY ROSS

Introduction

In 1812, an outpost of the Russian-American Fur Company was established on the shores of Northern California (Nova Albion). Ivan Kuskov named the settlement Ross, the archaic name for the Russian motherland. In the preceding year, Kuskov had arranged to lease the land needed for the colony from the native inhabitants, the Kashaya Pomo. This lease was formalized and reconfirmed in later years. As was customary for Company outposts, Kuskov constructed a fort-like enclosure, surrounded by a stout palisade, complete with cannon. His fear of attack may have been the result of previous Company experiences with the native people of Alaska, rather than any real sense of hostilities on the part of the California inhabitants. Within a few years, any fear of attack upon Colony Ross probably disappeared.

Spanish, and later Mexican, reaction to the creation of Colony Ross was one of political protest. Ross was perceived as a Russian fortress, the "Presidio de Ross." The Russians, however, commonly referred to Ross as a settlement or colony. With the arrival of the early Americans, following the Company's sale of Ross to John Sutter in 1841, the name "Fort Ross" was applied to the settlement, and has stayed with us to the present day.

Today, the former Ross settlement is preserved within Fort Ross State Historic Park, a unit of the California State Park System. The park receives approximately 200,000 visitors a year, and one of its primary missions is to preserve and interpret aspects of life at Ross settlement. Currently, a major archaeological and historical project is underway that promises to reveal important details about day-to-day life at Ross. As a result of the increased research underway at Fort Ross State Historic Park, the current and past interpretive programs are being re-evaluated for historical accuracy. It is probable that the defensive aspects of Colony Ross have been over-emphasized in both the priority of reconstruction and interpretation. This is in part due to the use of the term, "fort," instead of "colony" or "settlement," in the park's name. This paper will serve as a preliminary discussion of semantics and interpretation at Fort Ross State Historic Park. The author will attempt to distinguish the Russian "Koloniiia Ross" from the "Presidio de Ross" and "Fort Ross" of the Spanish, Mexican, and American imaginations, and in doing so, will illustrate the semantical pitfalls of interpreting daily life at the Russian settlement.

Russian Fortifications and Ross as a Fortified Settlement

During the Russian expansion across Siberia, "ostrogs" (forts) were established in order to control rivers and portages (Gibson 1969:4). There were special books detailing the construction of these fortifications and they were apparently distributed by the Russian American Company to the founders of their North American outposts.

For example, in a letter dated August 9, 1794, Grigorii Shelikhov directed Alexander Baranov to establish the fortified settlement of New Archangel (Sitka), noting that:

"You should refer to information in the books on fortifications. A good number of these have been sent to you" (Dmytryshyn et al. 1988:436).

Baranov established New Archangel in 1799, in order to counter American and English trade with the Tlingits (Koloshes). The Tlingits captured the settlement in 1802, and attempted to attack it again in 1809 and 1813. When Captain Basil Golovnin visited New Archangel in 1817, he noted that:

"The fort stands on a high rocky hill beside the harbor....and being enclosed by a thick palisade with wooden towers serving as bastions and being provided with dozens of guns of various kinds and calibers and a sufficient number of small arms and ammunition, it is really awesome and impregnable to the local savages, but it is no fortress to a European power, even to the power of one frigate" (Gibson 1976a:10-11).

Tikhmenev, in his history of the Russian American Company, also notes the vulnerability of the New Archangel fortifications to the vessels of European powers (1978:418). He describes the fortifications as follows:

"The main fort built on a high promontory where the chief manager's house is built, is armed with seventeen cannon from twelve to twenty-four pounds caliber. The port is separated from the Kolosh village by a high palisade extending from the seashore to the north of Swan Lake and for about thirty sazhen on its opposite shore. Where the palisade begins on the seashore, the port is protected by a blockship with three guns; and by the so-called Kolosh battery of six guns. There are four towers three stories high at the corners of the palisade; in the second story are placed from three to six cannon depending upon the size of the towers. A battery of twelve cannon from six pounds up to one pud caliber is in the harbor, the cannons directed toward the Kolosh village. The garrison is made up of all the male adults in the settlement, numbering 550. This includes about 180 soldiers from the Siberian infantry regiments and about 90 sailors from the navy and merchant marine. Every man knows his duties in case of alarm and has firearms" (Tikhmenev 1978:420).

The fortification of New Archangel was a necessary precaution against the Tlingits. The defensive nature noted above suggests a very cautious approach to settlement planning. The Tlingits' 1802 attack on New Archangel reinforced the need for caution. However, there was some controversy about the effectiveness of fortified outposts. Lieutenant Zagoskin, in his 1841 visit to Fort Kolmakov, noted that:

"The concept of a fort required the building of a wall or enclosure, the sending of Russian carpenters, the transport of provisions especially for them, and a useless increase in the number of men to maintain a useless watch....I agree with all the managers of our posts in this country that a walled enclosure which is not manned by sentries (and sentries are out of the question given the limited numbers of our

men) is far more dangerous than buildings set right out in the open. It is easier to set fire to a wall, and such piles of snow are heaped against the outside of it in winter that they offer an easy access to the fort" (Michael 1967:252).

When Kuskov began construction of Ross in 1812, he may have had in his company builders familiar with the Siberian ostrog architecture utilized at New Archangel (O'Brien 1980:9). A walled-enclosure was constructed in which a number of the settlement's primary structures were located. Although Kuskov had arranged to lease the land from the local Pomo, common sense probably dictated that he fortify the settlement. This may have been a result of recent native attacks on Alaskan outposts (Gibson 1976a:132). The fortifications of Ross settlement were described by numerous visitors (cf. Carter 1946:9; Del Cioppo 1979a:2, 1979b:6; Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan 1972:106; Farris n.d.:8). The fortifications consisted of a wooden enclosure, the walls of which were about twenty feet high. Two blockhouses with cannon, were situated in the northeastern and southwestern corners. Each of the four walls of the enclosure had a door defended by a mortar. When the ship Apollo visited Ross in 1822, Achille Schabelski described the fortifications, and noted, "All that I observed was in excellent order" (Farris n.d.:8). In an 1833 confidential report to Mariano Vallejo, however, it was reported that, "The fort is in a constant state of deterioration," and that, "The walls and buildings are constructed of weak timbers....The walls could not withstand a cannon ball of any calibre" (Del Cioppo 1979b:6). In that same year, Wrangel noted that, "...almost all the buildings, and the palisade itself with the watchtowers are so old and dilapidated that they need repairs, or they will have to be replaced by new structures" (Gibson 1976a:114). A decade earlier, in November 1824, a strong wind had collapsed three of the fortified walls (Gibson 1976a:137). It is probable that the fortifications of Ross were better cared for in the early years of the settlement, when the threat of attack seemed a greater possibility.

Duhaut-Cilly visited Russian California in 1828, and was impressed with Ross settlement's civil defense. He noted that,

"Much order and discipline appear to exist at Ross; and though the director is the only chief who is an officer, everywhere is noticed the effects of a minute care. The colonists, at once workmen and soldiers, after being busied all day with the labors of their various occupations, mount guard during the night. Holidays they pass in reviews and in gun and rifle practice" (Carter 1948:11-12).

When Father Mariano Payeras visited Ross in 1822, he noted that two sentinels chimed bells each hour (Del Cioppo 1979a:2). In the 1833 report to Vallejo, it was reported that a sentry was stationed at the gate, and checked all who entered or left the compound (Del Cioppo 1979b:6). The report to Vallejo also noted that, "The settlement has no military force, for those residing there are all businessmen or merchants," and that, "Each commissioned individual keeps a musket in his house," while, "Sixty extra muskets and eleven rifles are kept in a gunrack in the antechamber of the commander's house" (Del Cioppo 1979b:6). As Bancroft noted, "The presence of these guns [cannon], with the natural strength of the site and the strict system of sentinels and drill never relaxed, gave to Ross the appearance of a military fortress rather than a fur-hunting and trading post" (Bancroft 1966: 630). But was Ross a military fortress?

When Kuskov began construction of Ross settlement in 1812, Tlingit hostilities against Alaskan outposts were very recent occurrences. Although he had negotiated some kind of lease agreement with the local Kashaya Pomo and Bodega Miwok, Kuskov would have known that their territories extended only a short distance inland, and that the nearby interior was inhabited by potentially hostile tribes, as witnessed by Spanish intrusions into the North Bay. It appears that Kuskov fortified Ross settlement as a precaution against Indian attack, rather than a fear of other Euro-American powers. Since his builders came from New Archangel, they would have been familiar with the Siberian ostrog architecture utilized there, and it would have been a natural decision to so-fortify Ross.

Reactions to the Establishment of Ross

Native American reaction to the establishment of Ross appears to have been favorable in the initial years of occupation. An agreement was arranged by Kuskov in 1811 with the Kashaya Pomo for constructing Ross settlement adjacent to their village of Mettini (Khlebnikoff 1861:249-250). In 1817, Captain Leon Hagemeister visited Ross in order to extend and formalize a lease with the Pomo (Tikhmenev 1978:139-140). The lease that resulted from Hagemeister's effort represents the only official treaty ever made by a Euro-American power with a California Indian tribe. In 1825, Governor Muravyov visited Ross and met with Mannel, a local Pomo chief, in order to reconfirm the Russian lease (Tchitchinoff 1978:22).

An agreement was also arranged with the Bodega Miwok in order to develop Port Remyantsev on Bodega Bay. Apparently, the local Native Americans preferred Russian settlement of their traditional territories as protection against Spanish incursions, and attacks by interior tribes local to the Spanish (Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan 1976:129-130; Golovnin 1861:80-81; O'Brien 1980:11). Bancroft (1966:299n; citing Alvarado n.d) notes that an attack was made on Ross by a Sotoyome chief shortly after the founding of the settlement, but was easily repulsed. There appears to be no other account of this or any other attack made on Ross, other than livestock and property damage in later years.

Upon the establishment of Ross, intermarriages among Russian and Native Alaskan men with Kashaya and Bodega women became commonplace. Jackson (1983) has described the marriage of Andres Aulancoca, a Kodiak Aleut, with Talia Unuttaca, a Bodega Miwok woman. By 1820, there were at least 42 local Indian women living with Russian, Creole, and Native Alaskan men of Ross (Fedorova 1975:12).

Along with the women, there would have come visiting family members, who in turn helped supply the colonists with food and much-needed labor. Schabelski noted in his 1826 visit to Ross that, "The smallest services which they [the local Indians] rendered to the Russians were generously recompensed" (Farris n.d.:9). Archaeological studies conducted within the vicinity of Ross suggest that a major shift took place in the location of Kashaya villages after the arrival of the Russians, with residential sites being relocated closer to the settlement so as to maximize exchange (Lightfoot et al. 1991:115).

With an increase in agricultural activity in the 1820's, the Ross colonists began to require increasingly more Native American labor. Whereas, in the initial years of the settlement, local Indian workers had come voluntarily to Ross settlement, in subsequent years, they had to be physically coerced into working the agricultural fields and bringing in the harvests. If the harvest failed, the Indian workers were held responsible, and forced to stay at Ross in order to work off the debt of the lost crops (Gibson 1976a:130). Naturally, it became increasingly difficult to arrange for Indian labor. By the early 1830's, the relations between the colonists and the Native Americans appears to have broken down. In 1834, Wrangel reported that at times as many as 150 Indian workers were rounded up and forced to work in the fields for one and one-half months without rest (Gibson 1976a:128). He described one particularly desperate venture in which an attack was made on the interior plains 43 miles inland from the settlement, and, 75 men, women, and children were brought to Ross with their hands tied, driven like cattle to work the fields (Gibson 1976a:128). The Indians fought back, mounting guerrilla attacks against Company property. In 1833, Vallejo was informed that the Russians were sometimes "very harsh" with the local Indians in order to harvest their crops (Del Cioppo 1979b:6). Furthermore, the report to Vallejo noted that,

"The commander and his subordinates are very disgusted with the Indians who have left their posts on the nearby rancherias. The Russians have killed a few who were seen some distance away from Ross and had stolen a considerable amount of wheat. In extreme exasperation the commander said to me that if my orders included hostilities against the natives, that he personally with 30 of his men would assist me in tracking down and attacking them" (Del Cioppo 1979b:6).

The commander's offer was turned down, and apparently no attack was made upon the renegade forces. In addition to destroying standing wheat in the fields, the hostile Indians stole livestock, killing as many as 100 head of cattle in 1838 alone (Gibson 1976a:131).

By the time the Russians abandoned Colony Ross in 1841, it is obvious that their good relations with the surrounding Indian tribes had fallen apart. This was in part due to their harsh measures at obtaining Indian laborers, but it may also have been a result of increasing pressure upon the local native people by the encroachment of Vallejo and the Californios. Nevertheless, relations with those Kashaya Pomo and Bodega Miwok who had intermarried with the colonists remained positive. When the colonists departed Ross in 1841, a number of their Indian wives accompanied them to Alaska. Even today, the Kashaya language is characterized by Russian and Native Alaskan words learned during Russian times (Oswalt 1988), and the Ross colonists are remembered in a relatively-positive manner by the Kashaya people (cf. James 1972; Lawson 1988; Pritchard 1970:16). There remains an interest by the Pomo in their Russian and Alaskan connections (Kari 1983:6; Patterson 1988).

In the years immediately following the Russian abandonment of Ross, the local Kashaya were left with relatively little defense from attack. In 1841, following the Russian departure, but before John Sutter took possession of the former settlement, the local Pomo were attacked by a band of American settlers (LeBaron 1983). The Pomo appear to have survived the attack by securing themselves within the walls of the compound, then slipping

away into the hills after darkness set in. In 1845, a major raid was made by local Californios against the Kashaya Pomo in order to capture laborers. Known as the "Castro and Garcia Raid," as many as 200 Pomo were captured in this attack (Cook 1976:224; Farris and Clark n.d.).

Spanish reaction to Colony Ross was mixed. In October, 1812, shortly after the founding of the settlement, an officer and seven soldiers from the Presidio of San Francisco appeared at Ross, and investigated the premises (Tikhmenev 1978:136). The Russians explained the purpose of their settlement, and requested a trade arrangement with the Spanish. The officer returned to Ross the following year, and announced that Governor Don Arillaga would permit trade to be conducted, but under certain restrictions. With the death of Governor Arillaga, Spanish resistance to Colony Ross became more vocal, with strong appeals that the Russians destroy their settlement. The Russians politely refused to do so. Mission San Rafael Arcangel was founded in the North Bay in 1817 in an effort to halt Russian expansion.

Following their independence from Spain, the Mexican authorities immediately called for the abandonment of Ross settlement. In 1822, they issued an urgent demand that Ross be destroyed within six months (Tikhmenev 1978:229). Once again, the Russians politely refused to comply with such a demand. As was the case with the Spanish, the Mexican authorities continued to press the issue on diplomatic levels, and did not, or could not, resort to military action. In an attempt to block the Russians, Mission San Francisco de Solano was founded in 1823 on the site of what would become the town of Sonoma. In 1832, the Mexican authorities resorted to a new tactic aimed at halting Russian expansion south of Ross. California Governor Figueroa was directed to implement the colonization laws of 1824 and 1828 making it easier for foreigners to acquire land, and to facilitate the creation of new communities north of San Francisco to block Russian expansion south (Weber 1982:182). Unable to raise enough food to feed their Alaskan colonies, and unable to expand to more favorable lands, the Russians were forced to abandon Ross settlement, selling it to Captain John Sutter in 1841.

Fort Ross or Colony Ross?

When Ivan Kuskov founded Ross settlement in 1812, he probably did so with the memory of the Tlingit's 1802 destruction of New Archangel on his mind (cf. Ramsay and Pierce 1976:128-150). Although he had arranged an agreement with the local Kashaya Pomo, Kuskov undoubtedly felt apprehensive about relations with the surrounding Indian tribes. As was traditional for Russian American Company outposts, Ross was founded as a fortified settlement. It is important to remember, however, that most structures and most colonists were located outside the palisaded compound. The fortified enclosure was constructed to protect Company assets, and to provide a defensive position should the settlement be attacked. As the years progressed, Ross settlement grew well beyond the fortified compound, and in many ways, obscured it.

Fort Ross was called simply Ross by the Russians (Gibson 1969:24). The settlement was not referred to as a "fort." However, the fortified enclosure was sometimes referred to as a "small fort" or "fortress" within the overall settlement of Ross (cf. Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan 1976:129-130; Gibson 1976b:186; Ramsay and Pierce 1976:22). The

settlement was most often called Selenie Ross (Settlement Ross) or Koloniia Ross (Colony Ross) (Schwartz 1979:38; Watrous 1975:6). Iliia Gavrilovich Voznesenskii, for example, titled his famous 1841 painting of the settlement, "Ross Settlement" (Blomkvist 1972:105-106). Yegor Chernykh, the agronomist, also referred to Ross as "Ross Settlement" (Chernykh 1967; Gibson 1968).

Although the Russians did not consider Ross to be a fort, the Spanish did. In all likelihood, Settlement Ross became Fort Ross when the Spanish military delegation from the Presidio of San Francisco visited and inspected it in October, 1812. The fortifications of Ross would have appeared impressive to the Spanish soldiers. The Spanish presidios, including those at Monterey and San Francisco, were notoriously antiquated, and could not have withstood an attack by artillery (Moorehead 1975:161). When Schabelski visited the Monterey and San Francisco Presidios in 1822, he noted that,

"The forts, built both at San Francisco and Monterey, fallen into disrepair, are supplied with cannons on decrepit, old gun carriages which break at the first discharge of the cannon. I noticed in San Francisco such a one which dated from the year 1740. In visiting Monterey, I found only one soldier, asleep" (Farris n.d.:5).

On one occasion, the San Francisco Presidio had to borrow powder from a visiting Russian ship in order to fire a proper cannon salute from their only functioning gun (Bean 1973:56). Upon seeing the well fortified enclosure at Ross, and the organized and well-disciplined civil defense, it is not surprising that the Spanish dubbed the settlement "Presidio de Ross" (cf. Jackson 1983:240). When in 1818 Cea Bermudez, the Spanish foreign minister, demanded that the Russians destroy the Ross settlement, he referred to the establishment as a "fortress" (Barratt 1981:212-213). The Russians replied that what Cea Bermudez had considered a fortress was actually "an area surrounded by a fence" and that "The guns there were mainly ornamental and provided an inadequate defence against an enemy" (Barratt 1981:213).

Following independence from Spain, the Mexican authorities in California continued the effort to force the removal of Colony Ross. They, too, perceived Ross settlement as a fort. Father Mariano Pareras, visiting Ross in 1822, referred to the "Russian fort" (Del Cioppo 1979a). Similar reference was made in an 1833 report to Mariano Vallejo (Del Cioppo 1979b). Perhaps exasperated by the situation with the Mexican authorities, Ferdinand von Wrangel termed Ross "this so-called fortress" during his 1833 visit (Gibson 1976a:114).

When the first Americans began arriving in the area, they took a lead from the Californios, and referred to the Russian outpost as "Fort Ross" (Cordes 1962:2). The name stuck, and remains with us today.

Interpretation and Semantics at Fort Ross State Historic Park

Ross settlement has traditionally been interpreted as a fort at Fort Ross State Historic Park. This is partly a result of the name given to the park, and a result of a somewhat incorrect or incomplete perspective of Russian California by Americans. It might also be conjectured that in some unconscious way the situation has been aggravated by the long

Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union. However, the situation has likely arisen mostly as a result of reconstruction scheduling. To date, all reconstructions at the park have occurred within the fortified enclosure. Since becoming a park in 1906, the palisades have been rebuilt at Ross, and inside them have been rebuilt the Northwest and Southeast Blockhouses, the Chapel, the Kuskov House, the Rotchev House, and the Officials Quarters. Three structures remain to be rebuilt inside the compound: the Warehouse, Storehouse, and Barracks. Although the vast majority of Russian-era structures were situated outside the walls of the compound, there are currently no plans to reconstruct any of them. Instead, as public funds are made available, plans are to continue reconstructing the compound structures. At the same time, the park has been slowly acquiring cannon with which to fortify the reconstructed enclosure. This has resulted in a less than desirable perspective of Ross settlement. One potential problem with this is that visitors to the park are given the wrong impression of the former Russian settlement, and thus a false sense of history. Without the benefit of the numerous structures that would have crowded the landscape outside the palisades, the reconstructed compound resembles a U.S. cavalry fort depicted in a Hollywood Western movie. This has led Reverend Vladimir Derugin, of the Russian Orthodox Church, to remark,

"...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 its 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 expeditions, merchant shipbuilding, and most of all social cooperation governed by values such as freedom and non-violence" (Derugin 1991b:1).

Reverend Derugin goes on to say that the park's cannon appear to be so overemphasized that it is as if they were the main attraction and symbol of Fort Ross (Derugin 1991b:2). For a number of years now, it has been a tradition at Fort Ross State Historic Park to have visiting dignitaries fire the cannon as a salute. In recent years, Professor Lydia Black of the University of Alaska, Dr. Igor Dubov, Director of the Leningrad Ethnographic Museum, and Father Innocent Veniaminov, namesake and great-great-grandson of Bishop Veniaminov, have all fired the cannons at Ross (cf. Parkman 1989, 1990). The firing of cannons to salute visitors appears to have been a tradition of the Russian colonists at Ross. In 1822, for example, when Don Augustin Fernandez de San Vicente and Father Mariano Payeras visited Ross, they were welcomed with a four-gun salute (Del Cioppo 1979a:2; Morrison 1963:10). However, when Mikhail Petrovich Lazarev visited Ross that same year, his ship's seven-gun salute was not answered due to a shortage of shells (Barratt 1981:225).

Living History Day, a one-day interpretive event held each summer at Fort Ross, is tremendously popular with park visitors. More than 3,000 people attended both the 1990 and 1991 events. Dozens of park staff and volunteers come dressed in period costume, and

during the course of the day, recreate day-to-day life at Ross settlement. Included in the day's activities are traditional crafts such as candle-making and weaving, blacksmithing, cooking, folk dancing, and singing, as well as musket and cannon drills. The gun drills are conducted as part of a dramatic re-enactment of a Mexican military delegation visiting Ross in order to trade. The firing of the guns is especially popular with visitors, perhaps because of the sound and smoke produced by the firing. It is also popular with the living history participants.

The attention paid by the park to cannons and drills can be confusing, though. When the staff of the Leningrad Ethnographic Museum visited the park in 1990 (cf. Parkman 1990), Head Curator, Elena Tsareva, declined a request to fire the cannon, stating, "But we [Russians] are a peaceful people!" It was apparent that she misunderstood the intent of the cannon salute, and perhaps viewed it as an American exaggeration of Soviet military aggression. When Professor Lydia Black visited the park in 1991, she noticed an advertisement for the "Fort Ross Militia," informing members of the practice schedule prior to Living History Day. Her first reaction to the advertisement was, "What militia?" Indeed, it is possible that the park is creating more of a "fort" than history will support. By recreating the fortified enclosure, and nothing more, there has been created a false sense of defensive urgency. This in turn has affected the way in which Ross settlement is interpreted.

For example, when Wrangel described Ross settlement in 1833, he referred to the fortified enclosure as a "so-called fortress" (Gibson 1976a:114). However, when this same description appears in the park's official booklet on Ross, the words, "so-called," are dropped, thus altering the meaning of Wrangel's statement (O'Brien 1980:15). Wrangel appears to have been exasperated by the Californios' insistence that Ross settlement was a fortress. In his description of Ross, he writes that "at two diagonally opposite corners in connection with the palisade have been erected two watchtowers with cannons defending all sides of this so-called fortress" (Gibson 1976a:114). In the park booklet, however, this same description appears as "at two diagonally opposite corners in connection with the palisades have been erected two watchtowers with cannons defending all sides of this....fortress" (O'Brien 1980:15). Thus, a fortress is created in the minds of the public.

Another example might be found in a 1987 debate concerning the placement of cannon in the walls of Fort Ross. At the time, the stockade walls were being replaced, as must be done every two or three decades. During a wall restoration project in the 1950's, a rather enigmatic archaeological feature was discovered adjacent to the western wall. At the time of its discovery, it was hypothesized that the feature might represent a gun platform, although other interpretations were also possible. In 1987, as the western wall was being rebuilt, a number of State Park scholars argued for the installation of gun platforms along the wall based on the 1950's discovery. This would have required the cutting of portholes in the walls, through which the cannons could be fired. Other State Park scholars, including the historian who had made the original archaeological discovery, as well as Dr. Svetlana Fedorova of the Soviet Union, argued against the proposal, pointing out that 1) the archaeological evidence did not support such a proposal; 2) the historic record did not support the use of guns in the walls; and 3) that such emplacements would have been unnecessary since the blockhouses were constructed to allow for firing along the walls. The guns were not placed in the walls, but the debate did reveal how a preoccupation with the

defensive aspects of Ross settlement could affect the way in which Ross is interpreted to the public. Quite probably, this preoccupation stems from the fact that only the fortified enclosure has been reconstructed and interpreted (cf. Fort Ross Interpretive Association 1991; O'Brien 1980:15-16; State of California 1978).

New Directions at Ross

Projects are currently underway that will modify the manner and direction of public interpretation at Fort Ross State Historic Park. The Fort Ross Archaeological Project, under the direction of Professor Kent Lightfoot, is a multi-year research undertaking, which will examine various aspects of the Russian-Native Alaskan-Native California exchange at Colony Ross (cf. Farris 1991; Lightfoot et al. 1991; Parkman 1992). A number of public agencies and institutions are participating in the project, including the University of California at Berkeley, Sonoma State University, Santa Rosa Junior College, the Sakalin [Russia] Regional Museum, the Kodiak [Alaska] Area Native Association, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Work is currently underway to investigate the Native Alaskan residential area at Ross.

A second major project currently in progress at Fort Ross State Historic Park entails the restoration of the historic cemetery, in which were buried those Orthodox Christians who died during the Russian occupation of Ross settlement. The University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, under the direction of Professor Lynne Goldstein and Doctoral Candidate, Sannie Osborn, is conducting a multi-year project to locate and identify the gravesites and features of the cemetery (Goldstein and Osborn 1990; Osborn and Goldstein 1991). This project is being conducted in cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church in America (cf. Derugin, 1988, 1991a; Oleska 1988). Approximately 150 gravesites have been located to date. Dr. Douglas Owsley and a crew from the Smithsonian Institution have assisted in the on-site analysis of the human remains. As each gravesite is examined, the human remains are reinterred with 'Last Rites' by the Church. At the conclusion of the project, each gravesite will be remarked with an historically appropriate marker, and the cemetery restored to its original appearance (Parkman 1990b).

As a result of the insights gained by these projects, a better understanding will be possible for the day-to-day life of the inhabitants of Ross settlement. Special attention is being paid to the role played by the Native Alaskan and Native Californian workers at Ross. Attention is also being directed toward a better understanding of the Russian and Creole colonists, especially women and children. Finally, the archaeological manifestations of the inter-ethnic exchange at Ross settlement are of utmost importance to the current research, the results of which are being shared with the public in a pro-active interpretive program (Parkman 1992).

It would appear that Ross settlement was a "fort" like New Archangel (Sitka) was a fort. Certainly, Ross was fortified, but the settlement outgrew the walled enclosure. Whereas the Russians viewed Ross as a settlement, their Spanish and Californio neighbors perceived it to be a fort. Beginning as early as 1812, Ross settlement became known as the Presidio de Ross. The first Americans to arrive in the area continued the tradition, calling the Russian outpost, "Fort Ross." That name has remained with us to the present day, and

may in some way account for the way in which the settlement has been perceived, reconstructed, and interpreted. Whereas, it may not be possible or even desirable, to alter the name of Fort Ross State Historic Park, it is possible, through park interpretation, to change the public's perception of Ross settlement to reflect more accurately its peaceful and colonial nature. As Reverend Derugin has pointed out, "There was a world of difference between such places as Ft. Kentucky and Ft. Crocket where territorial aggression was naked and native peoples were pushed out of their own lands and Ross, where the Russian, native, and Aleut peoples lived peacefully, literally side by side" (1991:2).

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