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SOME POINTS OF INTEREST

at

FORT ROSS

STATE HISTORICAL MONUMENT.

*John C. McKenzie*  
John C. McKenzie  
Curator  
Fort Ross.  
3/1/48

photography by

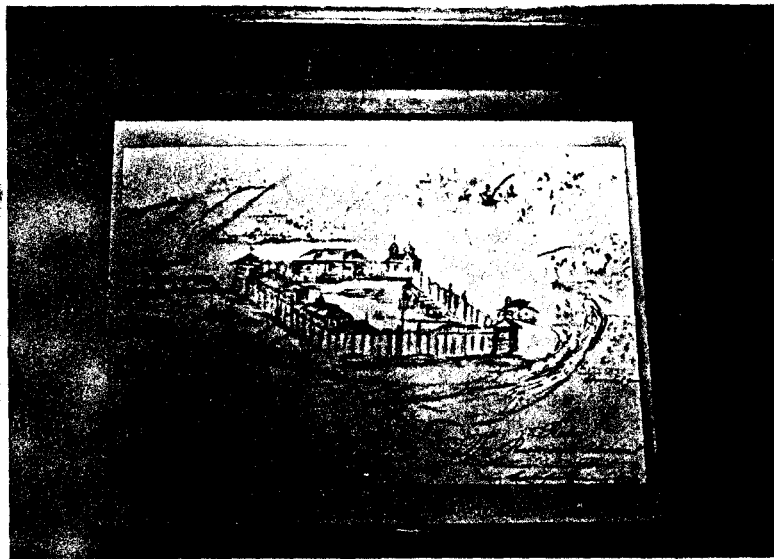
Edward F. Dolder  
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THE COMMANDER'S HOUSE, FORT ROSS



The Commander's house is the only large log building of the Russian period which now can be found at Fort Ross. From the records of those who visited Fort Ross during the Russian occupation, 1811 to 1841, it seems that this building was one of the most ornately furnished buildings in the whole of California. There were tapistries on its walls, the finest of carpets covered its floors. The furniture was that of a princess. In the pantry was cut glass and silver and service equal to any in Europe. The possibilities for entertainment and comfort in this building must have seemed beyond belief to the early guests at Fort Ross.

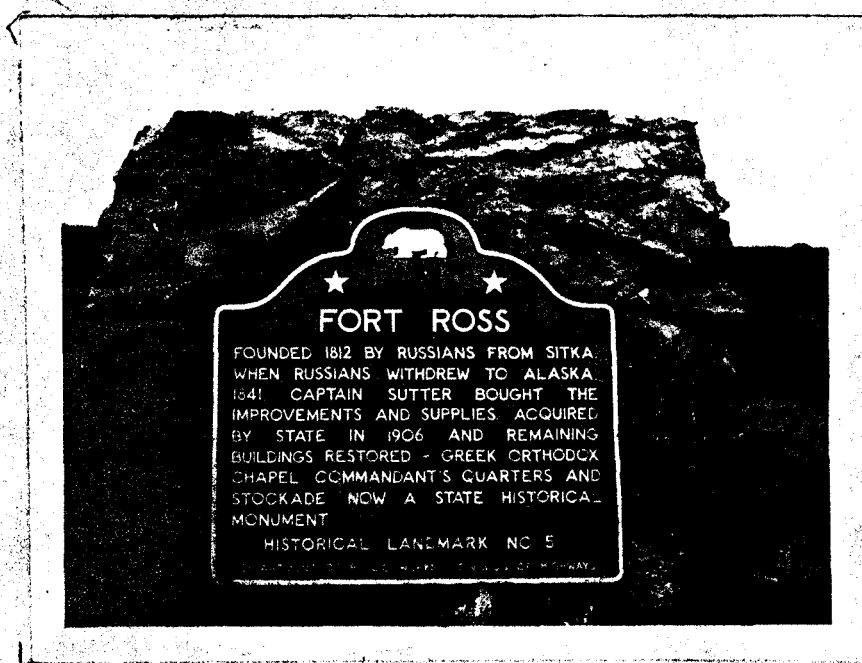
POINTS OF INTEREST AT  
PORT ROSS HISTORIC MONUMENT  
Cazadero, California.



This drawing represents the fort as it appeared in 1826. It was drawn from a point directly west of the fort. It seems the artist drew two sketches of the fort and later added the details of the hills and neighboring buildings. Dr. Essig of U. of Cal. have copies. The buildings outside the stockade resemble Aztec Indian dwellings not California Indian dwellings in one drawing.

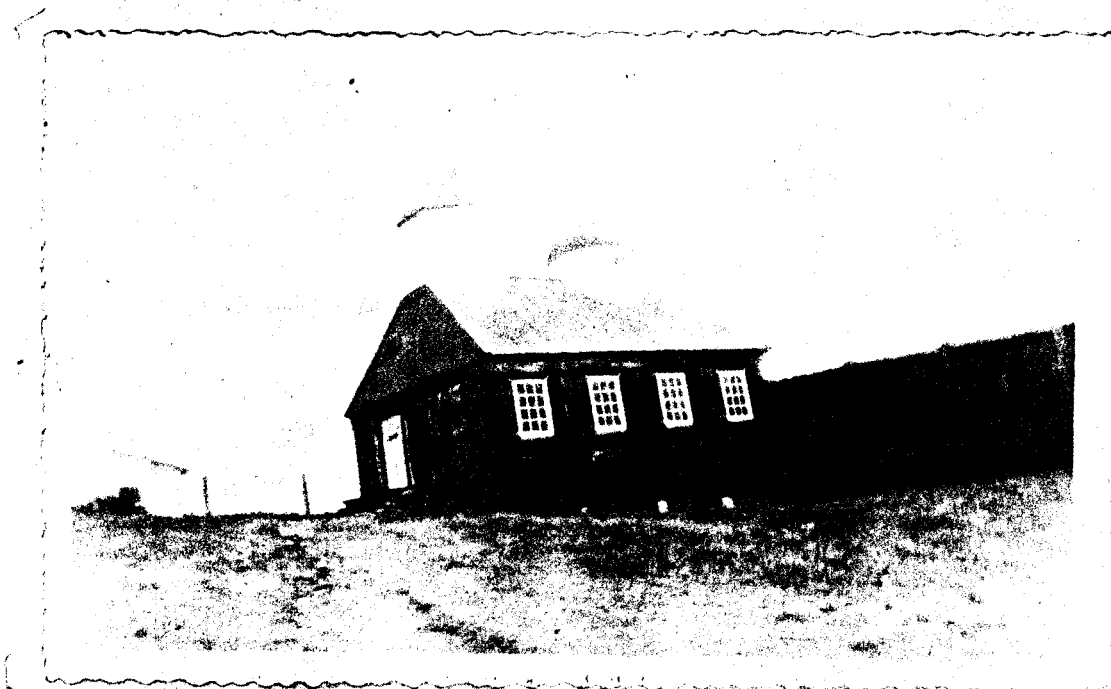


A view from the east drawn by the French explorer Dahout-Cilly about 1835 and appears in "Voyages Around the World. Paris. 1835.



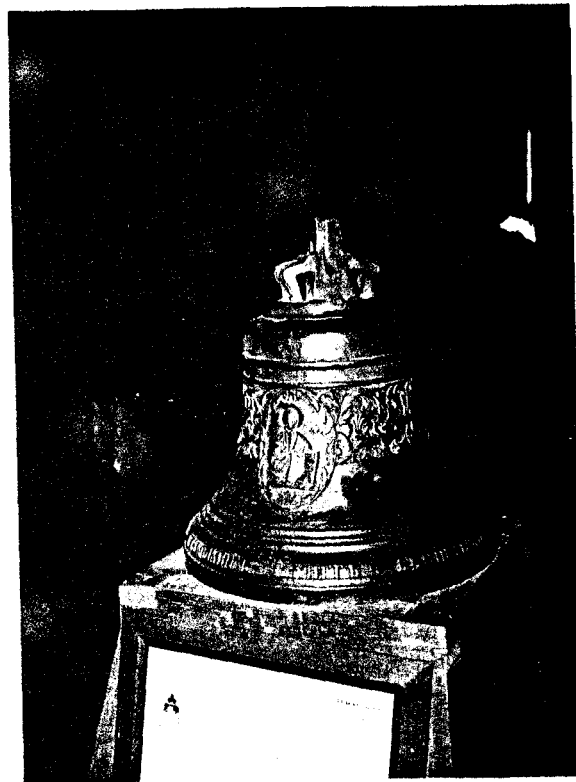
A monument and plaque placed at the fort by the Division of Highways in October 1948.

There are two such plaques at the fort the other is on the Old Russian Chapel. They differ mainly in the date given for the departure of the Russians to Sitka. The sale to John Sutter was arranged shortly after 1839. But the colonists did not leave the fort until 1841. The Russian agents remained until 1844 to complete the transfer of the property. Hence the other plaque gives the date 1844 as the date of departure.



The Chapel at Fort Ross was one of the fort's most outstanding buildings and still commands the interest of thousands who visit the fort. The original chapel was 36 feet long and 24 feet wide with the bell tower and cupola as shown in the picture. In 1906 the great earthquake caused this building to collapse from the eaves down. Later the chapel was taken apart and reassembled. Part of the new lumber was taken from other Russian buildings which were torn down at that time. The present structure is essentially the same as the original building in size and design. The green roof goes back to the days when wood replaced sheet copper in chapel and church roofs. Below is a view of timbers at the possible location of the Russian cemetery. By Dr. Essig U. of Cal. Entomologist. Oct 6. 1927.





This is one of the three bells which originally hung in the Old Russian Chapel at Fort Ross. The other two were taken to Sitka when the Russians left. The prominent lettering is in the Russian language and reads ; "Cast in St' Petersburg factory of Master Merchant Machaa Makarov Stokokena." There are two figures in base-relief one the sides of the bell. the male figure facing the camera bears the inscription in a Greeko-slavin language , "Jesus Christ". The female figure, possibly that of Mary, on the oposite side of the bell carries a scrole on which is written a prayer "Dear Lord, Foregive us and Receive everybody." This is also in the slavic script. Many men who are familear with present-day casting methods have remarked about the delicate and intricate base-relief and scrole work on the bell. They remark that it would be almost impossible to duplicate the bell today.

this remarkable old bell has had quite a history. it hung in this chapel long before there was a priest at Fort Ross. the first known priest was Father Ivan Veniaminov who stayed from July 1, 1836 to September of the same year. When John A. Sutter purchased the fort in 1839 he took the bell to his fort at Sacramento. there it was used as a signal and alarm bell. As such it seems to have been a considerable annoyance to some of the pioneers who shared Mr. Sutter's hospitality. it disappeared from Sutter's fort and was not found until 1866. in that year the city of Petaluma organized a fire department and bought the bell from a San Francisco junk yard. in 1916 the bell was taken down and stored in the coal bin of the jail at Petaluma. until 1925 it remained in the coal bin under the guardianship of the chief of police. this gentleman was interested in the bell and time and again refused to allow the removal of the bell. in 1925 the bell was presented to the Native Son of the Golden West. This organization stored the bell in an old adobe near Petaluma until 1945. on September 3 they were instrumental in returning the bell to the old chapel at Fort Ross. it was gratefully received with fitting ceremony by the Division of Beaches and Parks.

\*Around the World in Eight Hundred Years.

Lampson. Robin

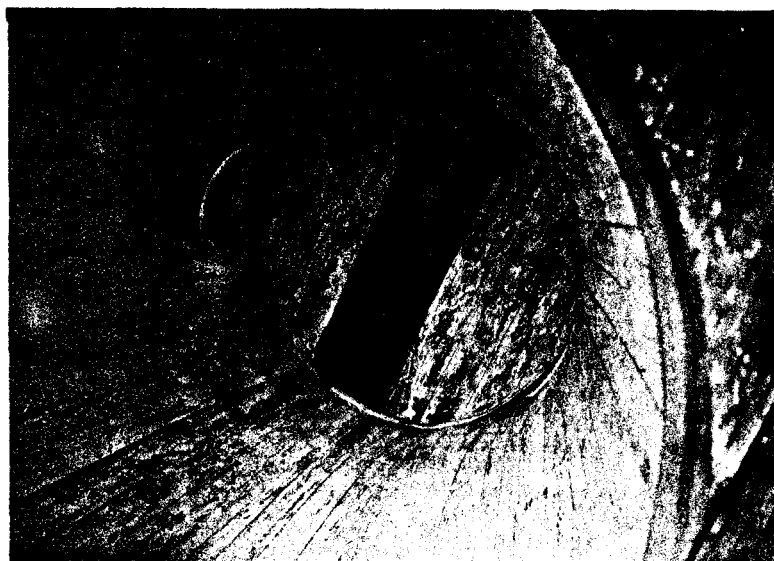
National Motorist/V

National Automobile Club.

March 1938. pp. 5-6. et seq.

Curisy Miss. E. Call.

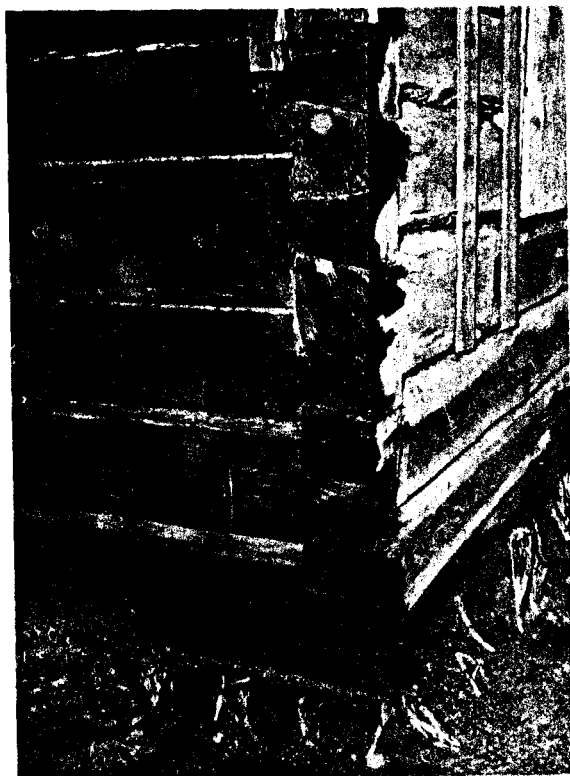




this is a view of the interior of the cupalo of the Russian Chapel. points of interest are; the round windows on opposite sides of the cupalo and the long tongue and grooved boards which line the cupalo. As the interior, shown, is bell shaped rather than simple barrel-shaped these boards require careful fitting their entire length. The ~~roof~~ ceiling here is more than eighteen feet high, while that of the chapel is only eight feet high. the opening is ten feet in diameter at the bottom and about eight feet in diameter at the top.

it is interesting to note that this cupalo was originally covered by a domed roof resembling the present structure. this roof was made of 13 or 14 matched and naturally curved branches of local madrone wood. there may also be some argument about the presence of the small circular windows in the original tower. this point is not shown clearly in many of the early drawings and photographs.

This photo shows the aspect of the typical half dove-tail corner in the Commander's House at Fort Ross. The slope of these dove-tails is about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 inches to 8 inches. On each face there is a hidden key or lock extending down from the slanting lower face into the face below. This key generally measures 5 inches long and expands from 2 inches in width to about 3 inches in width toward the end of the log. Thus there is a dove-tail and key lock alternately at right angles to the one above and that below on each contact face shown.



In this photograph the top three logs on either side of this corner are undisturbed originals. The walls average  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches in thickness. Each is grooved on its lower surface to receive the curvature of the round log above and then chinked with native moss. This seems to have been done by the use of the adze, ax, mallet and chisel, and slick.

The picture here gives some idea of the key and dove-tail cut. This view shows the painted inside surface of a wall log and its lower surface detail. The notch to the left of the card is the narrow end of the wedge cut to receive the key in the next log.





This picture has several points of interest. The large log in the foreground is inverted as regards its position in use. Note the groove which is typical of the lower side of most wall logs. The cut with the triangular faced step is the upper half of an end to end lock joint. This was used to tie the first and last logs in the long side walls of the Commanders house. Thus the problem of tying the wall together was solved. The flattened log in the background with the large groove illustrates one half of the most common end to end log joint used in the walls of this house. Its chief claim was simply that it kept the logs from rolling. When window or door openings were made a tongue was left in each log and the window frame was grooved to anchor the logs.

In the center of the picture is a log which has been shaped out to receive the ends of log used as the face and rise of a stairway on the outside of the building.

(The peculiar spots on the plate are probably due to an accident in developing and show incomplete solution of developer crystals.)

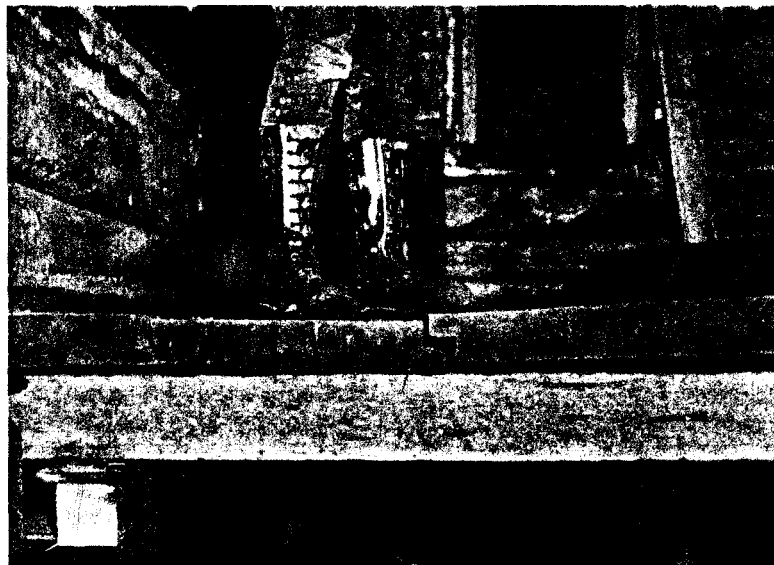
This is a cross-section study of original flooring as found in the Commander's House. The boards shown here are 15, 18, and 26 inches wide respectively and 4 inches thick, especially at the end of each board and at points where the board crosses a floor joist. The lower side is often left rough as slip.

The average board is about 20 inches wide. The rabbeting along the edges overlaps from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches and is quite well-done.

Some partitions reset directly on the flooring and the door frames were tenoned into the floor. The presence of the old mortis scars may assist in locating some of the original partitions.

The picture on the right shows the way the floor joists were framed in. The notched log in the center does not support the floor but seems to be a cross tie to hold the log wall in place.

The lower limits of the white calsimine may indicate the level of the old floor or the top of the mold board. The reason for the patched hole above this joist has not been determined.





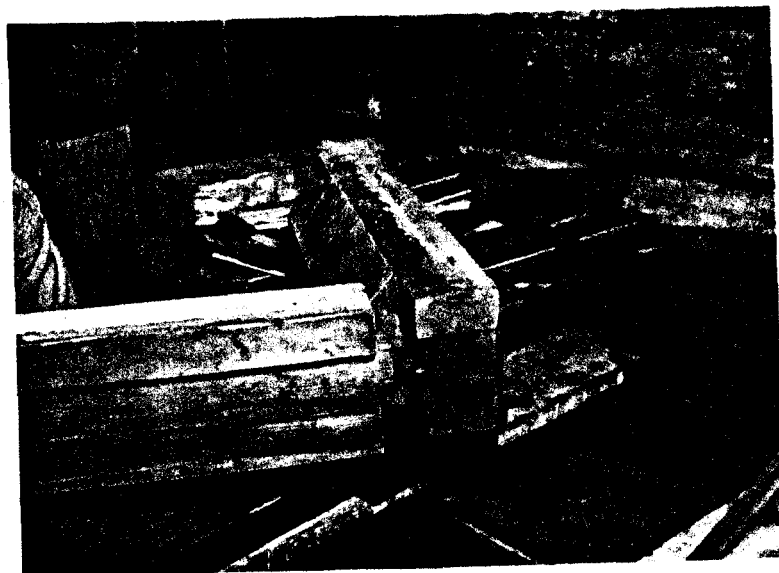
This picture shows the cuts needed to put a doorway through an interior log wall, in this case. The detail is also true of the other doorways through log walls, in the Commanders' House. The tongue shown on the sides of the opening fit into the groove mentioned on the side of the door frames. The extreme height of the opening is necessary to allow the header to come down on the tenons which rise from the frame. As in the window frames a wide shim is driven into the resulting opening above the header, one from each side of the wall, and wedged tight.

The lighter colored rings of wood in these original logs is the sapwood. This doorway is not original but a later mutilation which requires restoration in the pattern of an original doorway.

### An Original Door Frame.

The opening is 78 inches high and 28½ inches wide. The frame is made solid and held together by a set of mortis and tenon joints and bevels. Each side of the frame is tenoned into the floor. Down the side of each frame is a plow 3½ inches wide and 1½ inches deep into which the edge of the partition or the ends of logs are made to fit as a tongue. Thus anchoring the wall. The widest dimension of the frame is 7" by 8". On the side away from the camera there is a steep bevel. The jamb is a solid part of the whole frame. The door fitted flush with the camera side of the frame as shown. The hinges do not have loose pins, are iron and wing-type, 6" long with 4" wings, and secured by screws.

This figure shows the detail of the joining of the sides and header of both door and widow frame. Note the groove and the bevel shown. The header is on the right. The typical mortis and tenon joint is seen center.



This shows an original window frame in place with the old molding. The sill has been cut through in later mutilation. Note the deep bevel. There is a  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. rabbit on the outside which forms the window jam. All joints are mortis and tenoned. The header is secured by the wide shim which shows above the top molding.

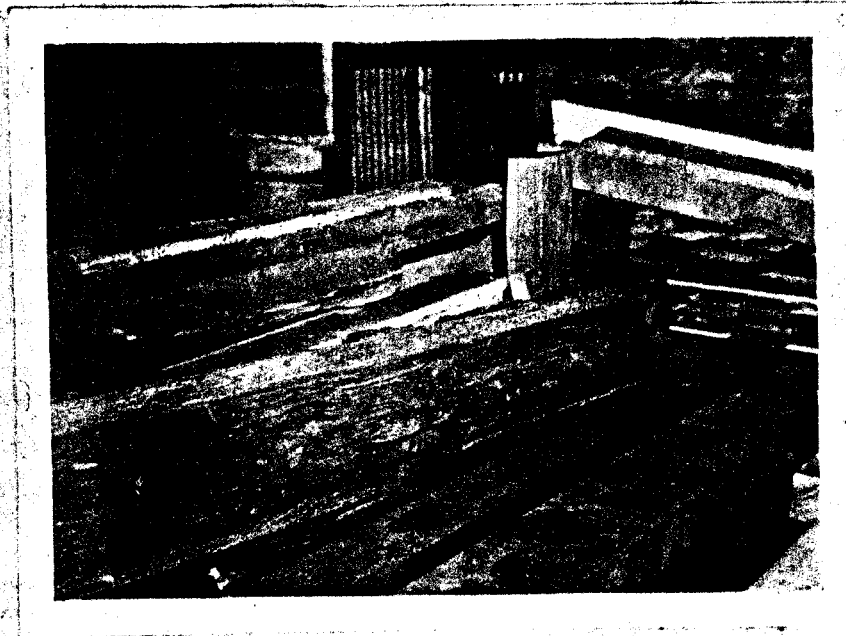
The picture below gives a better view of the detail in the header of the window and also the typical door frame. Notice the deep inside bevel, the rabbited window jam, and the mortis.





Here is shown the meeting of two ceiling beams and a pillar. All are deeply grooved to receive the boards of the wall in the interior of the Commander's House. This secured the top and sides of the wall boards. At the floor these boards ~~were~~ rested on the floor and were held in line by a three inch quarter round mold board, which in turn was daped into the wall log at one end and wedged in at the pilar end. Traces of the old wall paper and the tacks which held it may be seen in the picture.

Below is shown an old log with the phinking moss in place and on the lower side, center, the notch and bar of plapecial joint used to tie the sides of the building in place and prevent bowing.

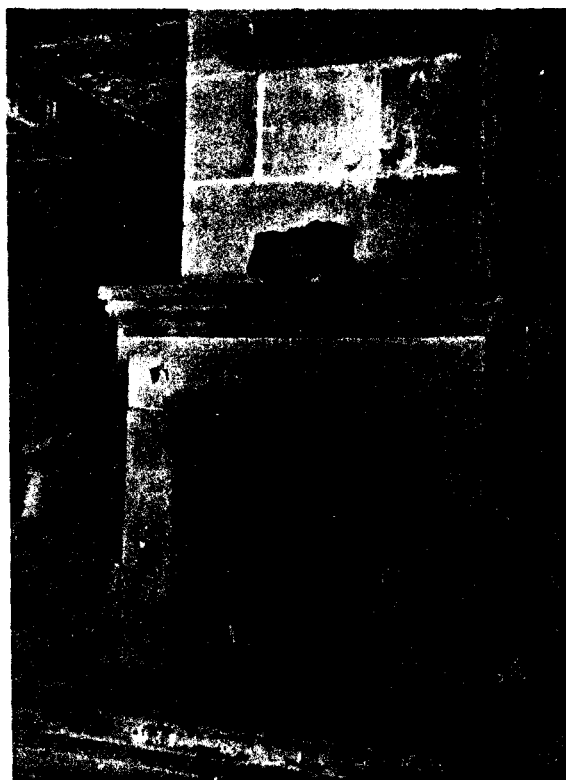




This is the old double fireplace in the Commander's House at Fort Ross. No records have been found concerning the age or origin of the fireplace. It was placed in the largest room. The notches on the ends of the fireplace were part of large closets which formed part of a wall. These were built to the ceiling

There are several theories regarding the fireplace;

- a. Built by Russians after they had been here quite a while.
- b. Built by later owners while using the building as an hotel or tavern.
- c. Stone cut in china and brought to San Francisco as balast for sailing ships. Sold to lumber baron and assembled here.



The rock it seems does not resemble any common local rock. There are no other similar fireplaces in the neighborhood. None of the early records, as far as is known, mention such a fireplace or other heating facility. Visiting Russians are uncertain in their opinion, some claiming it as Russian and others just as emphatic that it is not.

The rock on the mantel is a piece of prehistoric mud which became cracked by the sun's heat and later hardened to stone. It was found under the Commander's house during restoration.