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HOW THE MUNIZ RANCHO GOT ITS NAME

By Glenn Farris, Associate State Archaeologist,
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Fort Ross has been long associated with the Mexican land grant that was claimed by Manuel Torres under the name, the Muniz Rancho. But who or what was Muniz? The name sounds Spanish and yet isn't. Was it a corruption of an Indian name? I found myself puzzling over this piece of trivia and simply was getting no answers until Susan Clark, a local historian from Sea Ranch, gave me a lead by citing the only known explanation of the name. It appeared on page 440 of Honoria Tuomey's *History of Sonoma County, Vol. 1*, published in 1926.

Muniz Rancho—This grant includes the historic Russian fort of Ross, and all the wide expanse of agricultural and timber lands that for 30 years had been the familiar home of the Russian colonists from 1812. Muniz was the caretaker of Ross for a time, and his name was given the grant.

However, since no one by the name of Muniz had otherwise appeared in documentation, this explanation was shaky at best. Going back to the original land grant *expediente* for the rancho, dated 1844, and its accompanying map or *diseno*, it struck me that the original land grant request explicitly did not include Fort Ross, but only the extensive area to the south. In fact, Fort Ross, appeared on the *diseno* for the German Rancho which extends to the north to the Gualala River, but only as a locational device, not really claimed to be a part of that rancho either. Somehow, in the American period, the lines were redrawn to include Fort Ross and it has ever since been considered to have been part of the Muniz Rancho. To my frustration, in all the discussion of the rancho in the *expediente*, there is no clue as to the derivation of the name. However, in its original intent, it appears to have been meant to clearly differentiate the property from Fort Ross.

Recently, I came across an earlier *expediente*, dated November 1, 1843, in which a man named Juan Maria Sainz requested the Bodega property. When his request was denied based on the prior claim of "Estevan Smith" (Stephen Smith), he requested the right to plant crops on the "Rancho de Muniny" which he described as having agricultural fields "*al otro lado*

del rio de Ross, cuyo parage ocupaban los Rusos (on the other side of the Russian River which place was [previously] occupied by the Russians). This spelling intrigued me as being possibly closer to the correct name to be associated with the property. I then checked the names of Russians at Fort Ross and one jumped out, Efim Munin. According to Richard Pierce (*Russian America: A Biographical Dictionary*), pg. 368) Munin had arrived at Fort Ross in 1820 and had worked there until 1841 when he evidently left with the other Russians. Pierce comments that in 1838, a visiting Russian officer by the name of Zavoiko, met Munin who was at that time in charge of the Kostromitinov Ranch, near the mouth of the Russian River.

It then became clear that Muniny was a Spanish corruption of Munin and in the same way that the Californios would often refer to Fort Ross as Fort Coscoff (i.e., Kuskov), they apparently came to refer to the property surrounding what we know as the Kostromitinov Ranch as "Munin's Rancho." It further seems that Muniz is simply this corruption of the name taken one step further, possibly as a transcription error on the part of the copyist on the land grant documents. And so, in a way, the Tuomey statement is correct, if inexact.

A further level of potential importance of this statement was that the "rancho de Muniny" was described as having a "*sementerías*" (sic, *sementeras*, or field for planting) being "on the other bank of the Russian River," i.e. away from the area of Bodega. This could be important in our attempts to understand the historic layout of the Kostromitinov Ranch.

As a final note, I think it is interesting that Juan Maria Sainz (also sometimes spelled Sais) had two sons, Manuel and Nazario, who were involved in the 1845 raid for Indian labor at Fort Ross led by Antonio Castro and Rafael Garcia, when William Benitz held the property. In Benitz's letter of complaint to the Alcalde of San Rafael, Timoteo Murphy, he particularly mentions "the Saises have threatened to shoot me." This may indicate that they still lived in the neighborhood.