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by  
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## IVAN KUSKOV AND THE FOUNDING OF FORT ROSS

Atop a steep bluff along the Sonoma Coast stands Fort Ross, beckoning yet proudly aloof, a monument in wood for 180 years. The creation and legacy of Ivan Alexandrovich Kuskov, Fort Ross was Russia's most distant colonial outpost; it was also California's first permanent settlement north of San Francisco. For nine years, from 1812 to 1821, Ivan Kuskov served as the Russian-American Company's top administrator and manager at Fort Ross. As a Russian settlement and trading post, then as an American ranching center and lumber depot, and finally as a State Historic Park, Fort Ross through the years has owed its very geographical location, architectural distinctiveness, and structural longevity to the deeds and decisions of Ivan Kuskov.

Born in 1765, shortly after the accession of the Empress Catherine the Great, Kuskov spent his youth in the area of Totma, a remote provincial town, some 400 miles northeast of Moscow. In 1787 he went to Eastern Siberia, where in Irkutsk he slowly worked his way upward. By 1800 he was in step with the fortunes of the steadily growing Russian-American Company. In later life Kuskov emerged as Russia's premier explorer and colonizer along the eastern rim of the Company's vast North Pacific frontier. In the Company's employ for over 30 years, Kuskov confronted challenge and adversity in Siberia, Alaska, and California before retiring in 1821, at age 56. His last dozen years in Company service he spent in California, as explorer, administrator, architectural supervisor, diplomat, and host to the first rare visitors to reach Fort Ross through the distant wilderness of California's North Coast. Upon retirement, this talented but unsung frontiersman made his way home to North Russia, via Alaska and Siberia. Almost 35 years absent from Totma, he died there at age 58, a mere two years after leaving his post at Fort Ross.

What can we determine about the character and personality of the founder of Fort Ross?

The few terse and scattered sources that remain divulge only hints and clues about this intrepid frontiersman. For 30 years Ivan Kuskov appears in fragmentary memoirs and official records as a dutiful, indeed consummate "Company man," ever carrying out instructions, upholding order, and watchful of the Company's best interests from every angle. And yet, out in the field, far from distant superiors in Sitka and St. Petersburg, Kuskov consistently made his own reasoned, informed decisions. Indeed, contemporaries regarded his performance as exemplary. Navy Captain Vasily Golovnin summed up Kuskov as "a man the like of which the Company hardly possesses elsewhere in its service." <sup>1</sup> The well known botanist, Adelbert von Chamisso, called him "versatile and competent in every respect." <sup>2</sup> Upon Kuskov's retirement, his superior, Matvei Muravyov, testified to his "noble behavior, high level of honesty, and steadfast zeal for the common welfare of all." <sup>3</sup> The record of his achievements suggests that Kuskov was in fact a blend of the loyal and honest with the rough and ready.

Kuskov undertook the steps necessary to establish and oversee Company outposts successfully for 25 years (two each in Alaska and in California), often during critical moments of their existence. When instructed by his Company superior, Alexander Baranov, to found a post in California, Kuskov chose the best site under the circumstances at hand. After three reconnaissance voyages to California in three years' time, he took full advantage of the resources available and the most opportune settlement site north of San Francisco. Yet despite his efforts to put the Russian presence in California onto solid economic foundations, the venture would, in the long run, fail. Over time, the colony's economic, demographic, diplomatic and legal status became so tenuous that the Company was forced to sell. In 1841, 20 years after Kuskov's departure, his creation, Fort Ross, was sold and evacuated.

What kinds of information allow us a glimpse at the life of this founder of Russia's settlements at Fort Ross and Bodega Bay? The threads of information that survive include official

Company correspondence and records, among them even a few of Kuskov's own dispatches. However, most important are the memoranda to Kuskov from his boss in Sitka, the Company's Manager-in-Chief (until 1818), Alexander Baranov. Among the infrequent visitors to Fort Ross in its early years were a few curious Spanish officials and several Russian naval officers who left memoirs or accounts relating to Kuskov and his settlement. And several accounts (both Spanish and Russian) describe Kuskov's diplomatic visits to San Francisco in 1815 and 1816. Moreover, a few visual sources are extant from the Kuskov period: a portrait, probably painted to commemorate his retirement (or marriage); a rough diagram of the fort (1816); a composite map, sketch, and list of structures at Fort Ross (1817); a map of Bodega Bay; and a few paintings of local Indians (1818).

Among the few recent scholarly studies, the most thorough is a biographical sketch by Svetlana Fyodorova. This able scholar notes that Kuskov was a shrewd manager, kind-hearted, courteous, and "ever ready to assist Russian navigators however he could." <sup>4</sup> Fyodorova tempers this commendation with other traits: an "audacity and resourcefulness, an aspiration to know the world, and at the same time an imperiousness and toughness, . . ." <sup>5</sup> This assessment balances well the outgoing and charitable side of Kuskov's character with the assertive and authoritative dimensions of his personality.

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Amidst the broad expanse of forested, North Russian lowlands, once dominated by the medieval city-republic of Novgorod, lies the provincial river town of Totma. Here, the Kuskovs, a commercial bourgeois family, numbered 20 adult males by the late 18th century. The census of 1795 indicates that Ivan Kuskov had two brothers, Dmitry (a year older) and Peter (eight years younger). Ivan's father, Alexander, was by then deceased. <sup>6</sup> Fortunately, a few aspects

of young Ivan's early years in Totma are described in surviving records. Kuskov's first biographer tells us that he "was born in 1765, had a cheerful disposition, and was affable in his relationships with people and faithful in carrying out his duties." <sup>7</sup> This brief character sketch, based on local interviews, blends a congenial personality with a dedication to orders and responsibilities.

In 1787, at age 22, Kuskov left Totma, evidently under circumstances not fully legal, for he seems to have departed without the internal passport required of all Russians for domestic travel. Making his way to Irkutsk, in eastern Siberia, far from the reach of home authorities, he eventually concluded a work contract with a fellow North Russian, Alexander Baranov, in 1790. This agreement was to loom large in determining the course of Kuskov's (as well as Baranov's) subsequent employment and career. The close association with Baranov, later Manager-in-Chief of Russian colonies in America, would survive until Baranov's death in 1818. The contract stipulated that Kuskov would attach himself to Baranov in a "commercial situation" and that he would follow Baranov from Irkutsk to "Yakutsk and to Okhotsk" on the Pacific, in the employ of Grigory Shelikhov, a rising star in the Irkutsk commercial world. From here the two enterprising Russians would proceed to America to work at the trading post recently established on Kodiak Island by Shelikhov and his partner, Ivan Golikov. Their trading company was the parent organization of the future Russian-American Company.

The Kuskov-Baranov contract stated that should Baranov return to Siberia from North America, Kuskov was also obligated to "proceed back to Irkutsk." Throughout, Baranov was to provide Kuskov's travel and food expenses, as well as supplies. Kuskov, however, was responsible for his own clothing and footwear. Baranov was to pay him an annual cash salary of 100 rubles and "one share of land-animal and other produce." <sup>8</sup>

Although Kuskov had now secured for himself a long-term job as Baranov's chief assis-

tant on the North Pacific frontier, it appears that he was forced to accept such employment due to a large debt (1690 rubles) owed to A. P. Neratov, a Totma merchant. Seventy-five rubles of his salary were to be paid to Neratov each year. Moreover, Kuskov's share of profits in kind would not be paid to him until the debt to Neratov was erased. Biographer Fyodorova states that "only utter helplessness could have compelled Kuskov to accept such onerous conditions of semi-bondage for a period that lasted over 22 years." <sup>9</sup> Kuskov's continuing status without an internal passport may have contributed not only to the contract (along with the debt), but also to a condition of "self-exile" along Russia's remote eastern frontiers. If we assume that Kuskov remitted the debt payments on schedule each year, then he may indeed have become financially solvent about the time that he founded Fort Ross.

Shortly after signing the contract with Baranov, Kuskov went to Okhotsk, Russia's only Pacific port at the time. In August 1790 he and Baranov set sail for America on the galiot *Three Saints*. Shipwrecked on Unalaska Island, they were forced to winter there; next spring they built a large skins baidara and proceeded to Kodiak Island. The following July they reached their destination, after an 11-month ordeal. At Kodiak Baranov took over the management of an outpost that had already served as Shelikhov's American headquarters for nearly a decade.

Of Kuskov's activities during his first few years in America, the record tells us little. However, Fyodorova characterizes his Alaska experience overall as a "school of management and administration for him." She concludes that both Baranov and Kuskov needed:

a remarkable organizational talent and tenacity to keep the free-booting Russian *promyshlenniki* in line, to supply them with provisions and necessities, to organize large parties of Aleuts in kayaks to hunt sea animals, to construct Russian forts and to reconnoitre suitable places for new ones, to defend against unfriendly Tlingit Indians, to build and launch sailing ships, and to establish trade relations with American sea captains who visited the Russian settlements. <sup>10</sup>

Such were the usual tasks of an early Russian administrator in the Alaskan colonies. As Baranov's assistant at Kodiak, Kuskov was steadily given more important assignments. Between the years 1797 and 1806 he was entrusted with administering outposts at Nuchek Bay and at Yakutat, and he temporarily took over the Kodiak post in Baranov's absence. We find him supervising both exploratory and fur-hunting expeditions; he was also instrumental in holding hostile Tlingit Indians at bay in the Yakutat and Sitka areas.

It was during this period that the Russian Crown (Tsar Paul I) incorporated and chartered the Shelikhov family company; in 1799 it became the Russian-American Company. About this time Baranov was busy at Sitka, establishing the Company's new North American headquarters (to be called New Archangel). Despite all efforts, however, Baranov and Kuskov were unable to prevent the Tlingits from destroying this new post in 1802. Yet a few years later, we find Kuskov helping Baranov resettle and reconstruct the fort by leading a detachment of 900 men (450 baidarkas) from Yakutat to Sitka. <sup>11</sup>

To prepare for the move back to Sitka Baranov directed Kuskov in 1803 to supervise the Company's first systematic shipbuilding activities in Alaska. With increasing numbers of American and British trading ships in the Russian colonies came the opportunity not only to purchase foreign sailing vessels, but also to gain expert advice on how to build such ships in Alaska. With the initial help of a New England shipwright named Lincoln, hired by the Company in 1806, the Company established its own shipyards, largely under Kuskov's supervision, first at Yakutat and Sitka, and later at Fort Ross. Kuskov oversaw the construction and launching of five ships during his Alaska years. The last of these was the schooner *Chirikov* (begun by Lincoln in 1808); upon completion it would convey Kuskov on several of his first trips to California. <sup>12</sup>

Besides defense, exploration, and shipbuilding, Kuskov ably managed sea-otter expeditions and diplomacy with the ever sensitive Tlingits. During Baranov's absence from New Arch-

angel in late 1806, Kuskov was given temporary charge of the chief Company post. Here he completed the building of storehouses, the residence of the Manager-in-Chief (Baranov's "castle"), and several other structures. Adroit diplomacy with a local chief helped stave off an ominous siege mounted by over 2000 Tlingits.<sup>13</sup> Such administrative, architectural, and negotiating experiences prepared him well for demands later placed on him at Fort Ross.

After a dozen years in Alaska, Baranov resolved to have Kuskov officially acknowledged for his unstinting service to the Russian-American Company. Consequently, when the *Nadezhda* arrived from St. Petersburg in August 1805, its most illustrious passenger, Count Nikolai Rezanov, the Company's official inspector of operations, carried with him a special award of recognition. Next month, on September 26, 1805, Rezanov formally presented to Kuskov, for his "diligence," a gold medal placed on a Ribbon of St. Vladimir, to wear around his neck.<sup>14</sup> (Kuskov proudly displays this, over 15 years later, when he posed for his only known portrait.)

Moreover, it was about this time that the Company's Main Office in St. Petersburg petitioned Tsar Alexander to assign Kuskov the service rank of Commerce Councillor. Such an honor, conferred by Imperial decree for worthy individuals of non-gentry background, entitled the recipient formal and legal entry into the merchant "estate," according to the Table of Ranks system, established by Peter the Great. Thus, in October 1806 the tsar officially promoted Kuskov to merchant status, as "Commerce Councillor" (*sovetnik kommersii*). The dispatch of Kuskov's elevation to titular rank was sent off immediately to Alaska, and almost one year later, in September 1807, the news reached New Archangel.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, Count Rezanov had gone to San Francisco, where he established a productive relationship, both diplomatic and commercial, with the resident Spaniards. Although not the first Russian to arrive in California (the Shvetsov-O'Cain joint fur-hunting expedition reached

California waters in 1803), Rezanov was the first to deal directly with Spanish authorities and to assess the possibilities of a future Russian presence in the area. Upon his return to New Archangel, Rezanov recommended that Russia (under Company auspices) settle "New Albion," the territory north of San Francisco Bay, before time ran out. "There remains just one unoccupied stretch," he wrote, "whose resources we need so much. If we pass it up, what then would posterity say?"<sup>16</sup> Baranov, swayed by this line of thinking, had just the man in mind for such an enterprise. Commerce Councillor Kuskov could be entrusted with the initial exploratory moves, in accordance with Rezanov's vision. Officially, of course, ultimate approval for a Russian presence in California was needed from the Tsar himself.

Rezanov had projected the establishment of an initial colony near the mouth of the Columbia River. From here the Company could "expand little by little southward toward San Francisco Bay, which marks the boundary of California."<sup>17</sup> More specifically, however, Rezanov and the Company Directors sought to establish an agricultural base in New Albion to help feed the struggling colonies in Alaska. Indeed, at the time, this territory, from San Francisco Bay north to the Columbia, was only minimally contested by Spain and Great Britain.

Despite Rezanov's untimely death in 1807, the Company forged ahead with preparations to explore the New Albion coastline. The Directors ordered an advance party to investigate the terrain and to choose a suitable site for settlement. Kuskov, as assistant manager of operations in Alaska, was placed in command of two ships then at Sitka: the *Nikolai* and the *Kodiak* (formerly the American ship *Myrtle*). Ostensibly, the expedition was dispatched to hunt sea otter in the rich, untapped California waters, but Kuskov was also expected to examine settlement sites at various points south of the Columbia. Indeed, Baranov directed him to "survey and describe the entire coastline in all its detail from the Strait of [Juan] de Fuca to California and to put it onto maps," with charts of the various harbors, bays, straits, and anchoring spots.<sup>18</sup>

Fyodorova considers the year 1808 a turning point in Kuskov's life. At this time the Company's headquarters were relocated formally from Kodiak Island to New Archangel, on Sitka Island. This move to the southeast "served as a signal for a new thrust in Russian aspirations -- toward the shores of California." <sup>19</sup> Although several hunting expeditions of Russian *promyshlenniki* had already gone south, in company with ships from Boston, the first all-Russian voyage to California, since Rezanov's pioneering venture in 1806, was placed under Kuskov's supervision in 1808.

The expedition left Sitka on October 14, 1808. As Kuskov's ship, the *Kodiak*, proceeded southward, the *Nikolai* was shipwrecked near Gray's Harbor. So Kuskov and his men reached the shores of New Albion alone. The first site that Kuskov seriously considered was Trinidad Bay, where the party spent 10 days. By December 15, Kuskov, his officers and crew had reached Bodega Bay - a major objective of the voyage. Here the *Kodiak* stopped for repairs, while Kuskov sent out several fur-hunting expeditions. (As it turned out, the ship would remain at Bodega Bay until the following August 1809). After reconnoitering the area, Kuskov could report to Baranov that he considered "the best harbor to be Tuliatelivy Bay, named after the natives that lived there." This was most likely Campbell Cove, tucked in the lee side of Bodega Head (locally called *Tiu Tuia*). <sup>20</sup> Still unaware of the wreck of the *Nikolai*, Kuskov planned to wait at Bodega until its expected arrival. Besides changing sails and rigging, Kuskov anticipated negotiations with the Spanish regarding permission to trade and hunt in San Francisco Bay. Should permission be denied, he intended to proceed southward along the coast.

Kuskov's first stay in New Albion was not without troubles. Repairing and properly equipping the ship was not finished until May, much later than expected. The *Nikolai*, of course, never arrived, and hunting was initially poor. Moreover, the problem of desertion emerged for

the first time among the Russians in California. After one month at Bodega, four sailors fled to the Spanish, and others subsequently threatened to. Two baidarkas of Kodiak hunters later made the break as well. Kuskov soberly concluded that "Since we could not rely on many [of the crew], we were forced to give up both our [anticipated] negotiations with the Spanish Presidio of San Francisco and our voyage southward. I could not confidently leave the ship, for [deserters] might possibly fall into the hands of enemies cruising in these waters."<sup>21</sup> Kuskov was anxious not to let either Spanish or Americans get wind of the Company's initial activities or ultimate intentions in New Albion. He summed up the results of his trip to Bodega as follows:

The entire party twice tried to search for our deserters: at Bodega Bay, around Trinidad Bay, and inside the northern arm of San Francisco Bay, where one might roam all over, and where we undertook most of our fur-hunting activities. In all, we took in 1,866 adult and yearling sea otter pelts, 476 young-pup pelts, and 423 fur seals.<sup>22</sup>

Little did Company officials realize how bountiful was this first annual sea-otter "take" from California waters, relative to leaner years soon to follow.

According to Company historian, P. A. Tikhmenev, the lack of construction materials at Bodega, and especially the desertion attempts, forced Kuskov "to postpone his intentions to a more propitious time."<sup>23</sup> Thus, on August 18, 1809, the *Kodiak* left Bodega Bay, and after a difficult voyage reached New Archangel on October 4.<sup>24</sup> Despite advantages, Bodega Bay was assuredly not the best location for the Company's prospective agricultural settlement. A need for further reconnaissance, under more favorable conditions, was next on the Company's agenda.

Kuskov conveyed his impressions of the abundant sea-otter population and the potential in agriculture and stockraising. In light of these comments and of Rezanov's earlier observations of New Albion's unclaimed, unoccupied territory, Baranov decided to gain further support from Company superiors in St. Petersburg. He proposed to the Main Office that they establish a base in New Albion, "more for agricultural than for commercial advantages."<sup>25</sup>

The Main Office was impressed by Baranov's arguments that such a settlement might relieve the constant strain of insufficient food supplies in Alaska. Through the offices of the State Chancellor, Count Nikolai Rumiantsev, the Company petitioned Tsar Alexander for his "acquiescence in allowing this plan to be executed." On December 1, 1809, Rumiantsev informed the Main Office that although "His Majesty declined . . . to found a settlement in New Albion at state expense, he would let [the Company] establish a settlement on its own, however it pleased, with the assurance of His Imperial support."<sup>26</sup> With such authorization and encouragement, the Main Office thereby conveyed its formal permission to Baranov "to undertake this task": to found an outpost north of San Francisco.

Even before official confirmation reached New Archangel, Kuskov had set out (in 1810) on board the *Juno* to make a more detailed survey of the New Albion coastline. His plans were upset, however, when well-armed Indians attacked his ship near the Queen Charlotte Islands and forced him to turn back to Sitka. Undeterred, Baranov and Kuskov reordered their plans, and Kuskov left again for New Albion, this time in January 1811. The schooner *Chirikov*, under the command of Capt. Christopher Benzeman, took 30 days to reach Bodega. As the sea otter were not numerous locally, Kuskov sent off a party of 22 Aleut baidarkas to hunt in San Francisco Bay. Here they were met by two joint Russian-American hunting parties; the aggregate hunting "fleet" in San Francisco Bay totaled 140 baidarkas. The disconcerted Spanish authorities eventually decided to post sentries around the Bay at the springs where the Aleut hunters obtained fresh water. With this, Kuskov's expedition was forced to leave, but not before the hunting parties had taken over 1200 sea otters. Kuskov's first encounter with the Spanish, however indirect and guardedly hostile, did not bode well for future relations. Before heading north, Kuskov stopped at the Farallon Islands, to stock up on sea-lion meat; these rocky islets would

later serve as an important food and supply base during his Fort Ross years. By late June 1811, the *Chirikov* left for Sitka, arriving a month later. <sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, Baranov received the authorization he had sought from the Main Office in St. Petersburg. The Imperial Government had approved the Company's request to found a settlement in New Albion wherever Baranov considered it most appropriate. First, he resolved to occupy Bodega Bay, despite problems of harbor safety, and to rename it in honor of Count Rumiantsev, as a sign of respect for his recent efforts in gaining the Tsar's support, his patronage of the Company, and his status as State Chancellor. As for the anticipated settlement itself, Baranov evidently followed Kuskov's advice, agreeing to a site some 18 miles north of Bodega Bay, "abounding in all kinds of timber suitable for construction, pasturage for stock, and soil for agriculture, as well as providing fresh water year-round in the stream that flows there." <sup>28</sup>

According to one account, Kuskov first considered establishing his settlement along the banks of the Russian River. Called "Shabakai" by the local Indians, the river was given the name "Slavianka" (i.e. the "Slavonica") by the Russians, and most likely approved by Kuskov himself. He and his exploration party ascended the river about 45 miles (70 *versts*) - almost to the site of present-day Healdsburg - before determining that the valley offered no compelling advantages for founding a settlement. <sup>29</sup>

Another account relates that Kuskov, immediately upon arrival in the area, "sent out his foreman [Sysoi] Slobodchikov and his navigation apprentice Kondakov with ten Aleuts on foot to reconnoitre between Bodega Bay and the Slavianka." <sup>30</sup> The unsatisfactory nature of this coastal stretch led Kuskov to chose the area at Fort Ross cove, some ten miles north of the Russian River. If both sources are correct, Kuskov explored by river, land, sea before deciding upon the Fort Ross location. His quest for an appropriate site, of course, had to respond to two chief considerations: utilizing the abundant sea-otter population (whose furs found ready markets at

home and in China), and initiating an agricultural venture adequate to feeding the languishing settlements in Alaska (and beyond, to the Siberian seaboard).

A third successful voyage to New Albion began in November 1811, when Kuskov left Sitka "with 25 Russian *promyshlenniki* and 40 Aleut kayaks." His contemporary, Kiril Khlebnikov, claims that this contingent left on the schooner *Chirikov*, under Benzeman's command, and by early 1812 had enough timber prepared at the Fort Ross site to begin construction. <sup>31</sup> Indeed, Tikhmenev states that "In 1811 Kuskov finally succeeded in consolidating the site he had chosen. That winter he met some of the most important native leaders, gave them medals and gifts, and persuaded them voluntarily to cede the area needed for the settlement." <sup>32</sup>

However, Khlebnikov implies that Kuskov stayed on at the Fort Ross site through the spring of 1812, whereas Fyodorova (following Potekhin and Tikhmenev, in part) concludes that Kuskov returned to Sitka sometime after "winter," i.e. late 1811 or early 1812. Here he held "final consultations with Baranov regarding further actions"; thus, the voyage of November 1811 was also "only preparatory." <sup>33</sup> Whether or not Kuskov actually traveled to New Albion three times (1808-09, early 1811, and 1811-12) or four (returning again in February or March 1812), the sources at least agree that he completed the necessary physical and diplomatic preparations for the establishment of Fort Ross at some point during the winter of 1811-12.

Once Kuskov had decided upon the actual Fort Ross site, called "Me-te-ni" by its seasonal Indian occupants, he made plans to move north from Bodega Bay. The *Chirikov* crew moved its belongings from the Bodega base to the cove, situated at 38° 40' North Latitude. Here they unloaded goods and equipment; the ship itself they pulled on shore. <sup>34</sup> At first, the new settlers pitched their tents, and with cannon at their disposal they posted sentries at night. Despite Kuskov's initial agreement with the local Indians, they took precautions against an unfamiliar

indigenous population; memories of hostile Tlingits at Sitka no doubt made them wary. The site Kuskov had chosen for constructing the fort, on a gently sloping bluff, roughly 110 feet above sea level, provided excellent observation in almost all directions. <sup>35</sup>

The Russians and Aleuts faced difficulties in hauling lumber to the construction site. Although timber stands were not far away, Kuskov had, at the time, no available animal power (horses or oxen) to help transport logs and beams. Thus, the men had to drag them by hand and shoulder. The work force was divided between those who cut, those who hauled, and those who built. By late summer the stockade area was enclosed "with a smooth, standing framework, within which they set up the first residence," presumably Kuskov's own. <sup>36</sup> The palisaded enclosure formed a near rectangle, roughly 294' by 343'. Its walls were "thick, squared beams, 21 feet high, and topped off by wooden pickets all around." <sup>37</sup> A pair of two-story blockhouses, complete with portholes for cannon, stood at opposite corners of the stockade, one built with seven sides, and the other with eight.

An early historian of Fort Ross, V. A. Potekhin, asserts that "Kuskov founded the settlement and fort on May 15," 1812, whereas Khlebnikov, a prominent Company official, writes that the colonists "founded the settlement in June." <sup>38</sup> However, the day designated to raise the flag formally at Fort Ross was August 30, 1812, name-day of the reigning Emperor Alexander I. For the dedication ceremony, the settlers fashioned a full-sized ship's mast and positioned it in the center of the compound. After the customary prayers were read, the Company flag was hoisted to the top of the new flagpole, accompanied by cannon and rifle fire. During the inauguration, the name "Ross" was chosen, after lots were drawn before the ikon of the Savior.<sup>39</sup>

A major reason for Kuskov's choice of the Fort Ross site was the abundance of timber nearby, especially redwood. To build a coastal settlement of wood would have been difficult along the unforested shoreline south of the Russian River or at Bodega Bay, given the technology the

Russians then had at hand. In two years' time a number of wooden structures were completed, both inside and outside the stockade. Within the compound Kuskov supervised the construction of his own two-story, seven-room manager's residence, with storerooms for supplies, weapons and powder. A barracks for the Russian employees and a two-story ware-house were also built at this time. By late 1815, over twenty-five cannon protected the fort. <sup>40</sup>

By 1817, additional structures included a long, one-story, multi-purpose building, which housed the offices (and perhaps residence) of such administrative personnel as clerks, bookkeepers, and job supervisors; also inside the building (reconstituted today as the "Officials' Barracks) were a kitchen, jail-cell, metal workshop, and storage room. Scattered around the compound at various locations were a bell house (on the site of the future chapel), a well, a foundry and copper-smith's shop, and another two-story warehouse. <sup>41</sup>

On the bluff, between the cliff and the stockade, the Aleuts built their huts with great effort and care. Kuskov wanted them to have the best accommodations possible, so he allowed them originality in construction and let them place their homes as they wished, without regard to regular pattern or lay-out. <sup>42</sup> By 1817, 14 of these redwood "yurts" stood outside the stockade walls. Elsewhere were workshops, a baking kitchen, a windmill, stockyards for sheep and cattle (once obtained from the Spanish), and a pig-sty. Near the mouth of the creek, in the ravine, were a boat shed, a forge and tannery, and a bathhouse. <sup>43</sup>

During the first four years, Kuskov ordered shipments of supplies from New Archangel. The cost of materials sent to Fort Ross (through December 1815) was roughly 54,000 rubles. <sup>44</sup> Military and defense items (powder, cannon, rifles, sabres, etc.) comprised the largest expense, about 40%. Tools and equipment for construction and shop work came to almost 30%. Clothing and cloth goods amounted to another 20%. Additional categories were housewares

(ikons, glass and pewterware, heating irons, casks, etc., 7%); agricultural implements (4%); and mathematical, navigational and musical instruments (i.e. bells and an organ; 2%).

From the start, Fort Ross was an ethnically mixed settlement. The traditional Russian-Aleut work parties that had long been a feature of Company operations in Alaska Kuskov now utilized in constructing the fort and its buildings and in hunting off the coasts of New Albion and Alta California. In 1811, Baranov had allocated Kuskov, for construction purposes, a contingent of 25 Russian craftsmen with the "necessary materials." Eighty Aleuts were also dispatched, especially for sea-otter hunting and transport purposes.<sup>45</sup> Except for Kuskov himself, these rugged Company employees, both Aleut and Russian, remain largely nameless, since no ship's log nor other description of the *Chirikov* crew from 1811-12 has survived. Moreover, due to the nature of the expedition, it is unlikely that any women, Russian, Aleut or Creole, were on board. The Company did not employ Aleut women as fur hunters, and the few Russian women in North America lived at New Archangel until later times.

The Company's first systematic survey of its colonial population in America was undertaken in early 1818. According to this, the head-count at Kuskov's post had changed very little over the previous six years. The number of "Kodiak residents" totaled 78 (living in their 14 yurts). There were 27 "Russian *promyshlenniki*." No sex differentiation is provided for Fort Ross under the category "indigenous population" (i.e. Kodiak-Aleut); among the Russian count, however, the 27 are listed as males "of all ages." No Creoles (defined by the Company as ethnically mixed, with Russian fathers) are listed at all. <sup>46</sup>

Thus, toward the end of Kuskov's tenure as manager at Fort Ross the "core" population of Company employees stayed fairly constant in number. By June 1820, according to Kuskov's figures, the adult male population consisted of 23 Russians, three Yakuts (from northeast Siberia), five Creoles, and over 100 Aleuts, Kodiaks, etc. By October 1821 about a half-dozen Hawai-

ians and Indians were also listed as adult working males. Kuskov recorded the number of wives (legal and common-law) and children as well. Altogether, the resident population in 1820 totaled 273, including 54 children under sixteen.<sup>47</sup> Within eight years the settlement had almost tripled in size; since much of this increase involved the local Indian population, this aspect of demography will be discussed shortly.

Manager Kuskov's success in placing his outpost on a firm footing was in large part due to the friendly relationships he cemented with local Indian chiefs, both Kashaya Pomo, at Fort Ross, and Coast Miwok, at Bodega Bay. The very site Kuskov selected for his community was adjacent to the seasonal Indian settlement of Me-te-ni (in Russian: *Med-zhy-ny*). Topographical evidence indicates that this Pomo site was located north of the stockade on the plateau above Fort Ross Creek. There is little evidence in the Russian sources of Kuskov negotiating directly or in any major way with the local Indians for initial occupation or cession of the land. However, it was "one of the main elders or chiefs, named Chu-gu-an," to whom the location belonged, and who "willingly ceded it to the Russians for some appropriate gifts."<sup>48</sup> The oft-cited Spanish "account" of such an event, rendered over a decade later and popularized by California historian H. H. Bancroft, indicates a Russian payment of blankets, breeches, axes, hoes, and beads, but with no clear reference to Kuskov, to situation or even to time context.<sup>49</sup>

Regardless of what transactions may have accompanied the initial Russian occupation of Indian land at Fort Ross, Company officials became concerned about the legality of their claims to the area, especially in the eyes of European powers. Spain was particularly incensed at the proximity of the Russians in an area considered merely an extension of California and so close to its settlements on San Francisco Bay. Official complaints from Madrid reached St. Petersburg by 1817 via the Spanish ambassador. But well before a formal Spanish protest arrived, Com-

pany authorities had dispatched Lt. Capt. Leonty Hagemeister from St. Petersburg to Russian America; among his several objectives was the confirmation of Russian claims to Fort Ross through a written contract or "treaty" with the local Indians.

In late summer of 1817 Hagemeister sailed from Sitka to Fort Ross. A prospective agreement regarding mutual relations and the cession of land had to be understood and approved by the local chiefs. Hagemeister brought along silver medals inscribed with words "Allies of Russia" for distribution to appropriate Indian leaders. In September, at a gathering of Indian and Russian dignitaries at Fort Ross, hosted by Manager Kuskov, a text of the proceedings was drawn up and signed. The most important individuals present were Hagemeister, representing the Company, and Chu-gu-an, the chief (*toyon*) whose people inhabited the Fort Ross area.

The "treaty" text itself may best be viewed as a testimonial that the six Russians who signed it witnessed the Indians' responses to the negotiations and courtesies exchanged at Fort Ross as indicated; no Indian signatures nor symbols appear on the document. The account opens by simply stating that the Indian leaders (*nachal'niki*), "Chu-gu-an, Amat-tan, Gem-le-le, and others," were invited to Fort Ross on September 22, 1817. They "conveyed their greetings, in appreciation of the invitation."

In turn, Hagemeister extended to them the Company's gratitude for their "cession of the land for the fort, buildings, and workshops, located on places that belonged to Chu-gu-an," called "Med-zhy-ny." Hagemeister expressed his hope that the Indians would have "no reason to regret having the Russians nearby."<sup>50</sup> To this, Chu-gu-an and Amat-tan stated their "satisfaction" with the Russian occupation of the site; they could now "live unthreatened by other Indians who used to attack them," in conditions of security prevailing "only since the settlement was founded." The Russian presence no doubt interjected a welcome but sobering element amidst the Indians' customary social and intertribal relations.

In response to the chiefs' reply, the Russians distributed gifts, and upon Chu-gu-an they conferred a silver medal, embellished with the Imperial double-headed eagle and denoting the recipient's special status as an ally of Russia. Chu-gu-an was informed that the medal "gave him the right to the respect of the Russians," an attribute that the medal itself seemingly bestowed upon him. The Pomo chief was advised not to visit the Russians without the medal (serving perhaps as a protective or military-style "pass"). Moreover, it would "impose upon him the obligation to support and assist" the Russians, "should the situation demand it." The Indians' response to this condition was to "declare their readiness" to comply and, overall, to express "gratitude for the reception given them." <sup>51</sup>

The event concluded with "hospitalities," and in honor of the "main chief," Chu-gu-an, a one-gun salute was fired, as the Indian guests left the fort. The written record of the proceedings overall, and specifically the references to the chiefs' replies, was certified "exactly as given in our presence" by the Russian officials, and signed in order of importance. Besides signatories from Hagemester's ship were two from the Fort Ross area: Kuskov and the acting harbor-master at Bodega Bay, Prokofy Tumanin. Also to sign was the Company's new Commissioner of Commerce for Russian America, Kiril Khlebnikov, visiting New Albion for the first time. It is perhaps indicative of Kuskov's good relations with the chiefs that they were not required to sign a document such as this, so foreign to their own values.

As several recent scholars have pointed out, this treaty is "still the only written agreement between an occupying culture and a group of California Indians in the pre-American period." From this perspective alone it is important. <sup>52</sup> However, the testimonial is also significant in local terms, for it shows that, in the face of Spanish opposition, Kuskov could ill afford to alienate the nearby Kashaya Pomo, some of whom were already working seasonally in and

around Fort Ross. Fortunately, during the Kuskov years the main thrust of Russian economic enterprise was construction and fur-hunting. For these purposes a mixed Russian-Aleut labor force sufficed, despite difficulties. Moreover, the Russians, unlike the Spanish, made no attempt to proselytize; the Company's mission was economic, not religious (indeed, in its first decade the settlement lacked even a chapel, let alone visiting or resident clergy). Thus, the Russians during the early years did little to disrupt traditional patterns of local Indian life. Moreover, the Spaniards' aggressive missionary outreach among the Indians north of San Francisco Bay made Russian behavior in New Albion look all the better by comparison.

With the Coast Miwok Indians Kuskov established and maintained friendly relations since first visiting Bodega Bay in 1808. Evidence of this mutually supportive relationship comes from the observations of several Russians who visited "Port Rumiantsev" in late 1818. Vasily Golovnin, Captain of the sloop *Kamchatka*, claimed that the local Indians called their own chief *khoibo* (i.e. commander), whereas "in similar fashion they call Mr. Kuskov *apikhoibo* - the great commander." <sup>53</sup> When Valenila, a Miwok leader (*starshina*), came to visit Golovnin on board ship, he brought "various headdresses, arrows, and domestic implements" as gifts. Through an Aleut translator, Valenila requested that "Russia take him under its protection." The chief wanted more Russians to settle locally, "so that they could defend the [native] inhabitants from Spanish oppression." He also wanted a Russian flag to raise "as a sign of friendship and alliance with the Russians, whenever Russian ships should appear along the coast." <sup>54</sup> Evidently, Kuskov's presence at Fort Ross was not close enough to suit this Miwok spokesman.

One of Golovnin's junior officers, Fyodor Matiushkin, confirms this: although Golovnin gave the Indian chief ("Vallennoela") some axes, hoes, etc., "most important of all was a Russian military flag, which he was told to raise as soon as he saw a ship like ours." <sup>55</sup> In this light, the Russian "imposition" of diplomatic conditions in exchange for a national emblem seems to re-

semble the provisions that accompanied the silver medal given at Fort Ross to Chu-gu-an. Yet by contrast, Golovnin implies that the Miwok "need" to raise the Russian flag was voluntary. Overall, however, the ominous threat of hostile Spanish actions lay behind the Indians' search for a trustworthy, "outside" ally.

From his interview with Valenila, Golovnin concluded that no one could "assert that Russians occupied foreign lands and settled on the New Albion coast without any right to do so." <sup>56</sup> To him, the friendly Russo-Indian relations which Kuskov had established further validated the implicit legality and justice of Russian claims to this territory, by right of "first settlement." Moreover, he concluded that, instead of hunting Indians down and putting them in irons, as the Spanish did, Russians "often give them various items which, even if insignificant, are valuable in their eyes, and even . . . marry their daughters." When Russians hunted overnight in the forests, they returned to Fort Ross safe and sound, a further "tribute" to the tolerance and respect that Russians and Indians accorded one another and to Kuskov's "sensible behavior." <sup>57</sup>

Matiushkin relates how a large number of Indians gathered at Fort Ross in 1817 to ask for Kuskov's protection. As a "solution," Kuskov persuaded the Indians to "settle in the forests and mountain gorges, and then to attack the Spanish unexpectedly." The Indians, accordingly, followed Kuskov's advice and settled in "forests visible from Port Rumiantsev, toward Tomales Bay." <sup>58</sup> Kuskov's "re-settlement" strategy evidently ended, at least momentarily, the Spanish threat. Such encouragement of Indian counter-attacks against the Spanish seems to contradict the usual image of the peaceable, unruffled Kuskov. However, it may reflect an exasperation he felt, by then, in his unsuccessful diplomatic relations with the Spanish.

According to Matiushkin, Kuskov was upset by the Spaniards' having "put up all kinds of obstacles to keep his colony from growing." <sup>59</sup> Indeed, it was "only the natives' attachment to

the Russians and their hatred of the Spanish [that] encouraged him." Since Spanish missionaries had expanded their quest for Indians to the very shores of Tomales Bay, "all the Indian bands had fled for safety under the guns of Fort Ross or to Port Rumiantsev, where," as Kuskov put it, "they think that four falconets and three Russians can defend them from the Spanish." <sup>60</sup>

Despite the generally cordial relationship between Indian leaders and Russian officials, the local Indians retained a certain reserve, distance, and autonomy during the Kuskov years. Kuskov himself recognized their "peaceful and kind dispositions" and indicated that "in the beginning they came to us very often, and seemingly remained quite content with the relationship." However, once the fort was constructed, "they appeared very seldom, especially the men." <sup>61</sup> Indeed, Fyodor Luetke, who visited a Miwok village at Bodega Bay in 1818, comments on the utter indifference toward things Russian which he witnessed among both men and women. <sup>62</sup> Such assessments suggest an alternative side to the portrayal of Indians eager to obtain Russian military protection, as drawn by Golovnin and Matiushkin. And conversely, several Indians were sentenced in 1821 to work on the Farallon Islands for having killed horses at Fort Ross and Aleuts near Bodega Bay.

The relative absence of Indian males at Fort Ross may be explained by the Russians' live-and-let-live attitude in economic, social, and religious matters. The settlement's reason for existence depended neither upon a native labor force nor upon the conversion of native souls. Only when the Russians turned away from maritime enterprises, especially fur hunting, with its Aleut-Kodiak work force, and increasingly emphasized agriculture and stock raising was Indian labor, seasonal or otherwise, especially sought after. <sup>63</sup>

There were instances of both Russians and Aleuts who lived among the Indians (often as deserters who returned) and understood their language. Aleut and Kodiak Islanders served frequently as an intermediary element between Russians and Indians. The Aleut settlement itself,

outside the stockade walls, was visibly in a position to enhance closer contacts with the local Indians, especially when residing at nearby Me-te-ni. Since Aleuts and Kodiaks during the Kuskov years comprise a population four to six times larger than the Russian, they became chief initiators in establishing "family ties" with local Indians. <sup>64</sup>

In June of 1820 Kuskov prepared for Company authorities a "Register of people who live at the settlement and fortress of Ross." This included Russians, Alaskan peoples, and local Indians. The 273 residents included 148 men, 71 women, and 54 children under 16. <sup>65</sup> Among the men, no Indians were listed: the breakdown included 23 Russians and 121 Alaska natives (of various backgrounds, and mostly with Russian first names). Russian men in fact comprised only 8% of the settlement's total population; no Russian women or children were indicated.

Kuskov's "register" indicates that among the women living with Russian men four were "from the region of Ross" and one a "Bodegin," presumably a Coast Miwok from Bodega Bay; another, evidently a Pomo from the Ross area, lived with a Creole man. Data on Indian women living with Aleut men include seventeen "common law wives from the region of Ross," ten from the Russian River area, and nine from Bodega Bay. <sup>66</sup> Altogether, 42 of the 71 women at Fort Ross (about 60%, and 15% of the total population) were specifically of local Indian origin. By contrast, only 20 of them were of Alaskan background, as Kodiak, Aleut, or Creole. The remaining half-dozen women were unspecified. Interestingly, only the Kodiak and Creole women had Russian names, indicating that they had been baptized and could enter into formal, Christian marriage. The potential labor pool of resident Indian wives Kuskov sought to put to good use; by 1818 he was "teaching Indian girls who have married Aleuts to spin wool." <sup>67</sup> Indeed, the development of family life at Fort Ross would in time result in a burgeoning Creole population (mostly children); a number of them, as wives and children, were sent from Alaska to join

their Russian or Kodiak husbands and fathers. Within a dozen years after Kuskov's departure, Creoles would constitute the settlement's largest socio-ethnic group.

\* \* \* \* \*

For nine and one-half years, from the spring of 1812 to late fall 1821, Ivan Kuskov faithfully executed his responsibilities at Fort Ross in the service of the Company . Not once returning to Alaska, he served under four Managers-in-Chief during this period: Baranov, Hagemeister, Yanovsky, and Muravyov. He had done his utmost to establish the settlement on a firm economic foundation, especially in the areas of agriculture, horticulture, stockraising, and shipbuilding. Along with a few administrative assistants, his personnel comprised Kodiak and Aleut hunters and fishermen, and a largely Russian contingent of craftsmen, skilled as carpenters, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, coopers, block-makers, and shipwrights. <sup>68</sup> Although Kuskov rarely traveled beyond Bodega Bay, he dispatched *promyshlenniki* to reconnoiter the North Coast as far as Humboldt Bay and Trinidad, and to explore the Sacramento River - for some 70 miles. Even in these first few years, Russians became aware of such distant locales as the Eel and Petaluma Rivers, Clear Lake, and Lassen Peak. <sup>69</sup>

Moreover, Kuskov established commercial and diplomatic relations, however tenuous, with the Spaniards at San Francisco. Initially he hosted Lt. Gabriel Moraga, who made three "fact-finding" trips to Fort Ross (1812-14), under circumstances somewhat strained. <sup>70</sup> In 1815 and 1816 Kuskov made his only two known trips to San Francisco; these too were fraught with difficulties. Despite a brisk "unofficial" trade in various commodities between Russians and Spaniards, the Spanish authorities repeatedly demanded that Kuskov abandon his settlement, "occupied in violation of international law." His usual reply was that he could do nothing without the express permission of Company superiors. <sup>71</sup> The 25 cannon that Kuskov acquired im-

plicitly warned that Fort Ross would defend itself if directly threatened. To smooth relations, both Kuskov and Baranov sent gifts to the Spanish governor, when appropriate.<sup>72</sup> Kuskov's diplomatic tactics and the strength of his fortifications were enough to dissuade the Spanish from any open hostilities. However, shortly after Kuskov's second trip to San Francisco Spanish expansion northward began, with the founding of Mission San Rafael in 1817, followed by the establishment of Mission San Francisco Solano (in Sonoma) in 1823.

Despite Kuskov's many successes, Fort Ross failed in one major respect: the fur industry. Kuskov's men had brought in over 2,300 sea-otter pelts on their first trip to Bodega Bay, whereas ten years later (1818) the annual intake had sunk to a low of 13.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, with the plummeting fur catch and the diplomatic stand-off with the Spanish came distant rumblings of dissatisfaction with Fort Ross, as suggestions of abandoning it were first voiced in St. Petersburg.<sup>74</sup> All this coincided with the departure (and subsequent death) of Alexander Baranov. The retirement of the aged "Lord of Alaska" in 1818 signalled new administrative changes in the North American colonies, and the Company chose to appoint naval officials, with their distinctly different administrative style, to the chief post at Sitka.

Shortly after Baranov's retirement, Kuskov also sought to relinquish his command at Fort Ross; indeed his original contract of 1790 had implied as much. In 1819 he entered his first formal request to return home, "after having served the Company for a for a good many years."<sup>75</sup> By mid-1820, however, no official action had been taken. Kuskov worried about his deteriorating health and sight; moreover, his clerk had recently died and was not formally replaced. Hampered by these limitations, Kuskov could not get the necessary work done.<sup>76</sup>

Zakhar Chichinov, then a teenage son of a Fort Ross *promyshlennik*, provides an unusual glimpse of a "fatherly" Kuskov about this time. In his memoirs Chichinov recalled that Kuskov had post-retirement plans of advancing the education of his young "pupil." In his spare time,

Kuskov would "teach me a little, . . . and he promised my father to give me some more schooling as soon as he was relieved of his position at Ross." <sup>77</sup>

In mid-1820 Company agent Kiril Khlebnikov was carrying official correspondence from Sitka and St. Petersburg, en route to Bodega Bay, when he was shipwrecked off Point Arena. When Kuskov arrived at the scene, he immediately asked if his request for retirement and replacement had been granted, as promised by Manager-in-Chief Yanovsky. Khlebnikov could only reply that it had not; indeed, the letters from the Company Directors and Yanovsky himself all asked Kuskov "to stay on in America." After reading this several times, Kuskov "wept, so much did it grieve him." Yet he resolved to wait patiently until formally relieved of his post: ". . . having maintained a good name for myself for 30 years, I do not want a reproach to be made at the end of my career that might tarnish my years of service." <sup>78</sup> In addition, Kuskov's lost clerk would not be replaced - yet another burden for the weary manager. Little did he anticipate remaining in command for well over another year.

The official decision to allow Kuskov to retire was ultimately linked to the appointment of a new chief executive for the Company's American colonies. In 1819 the Main Office had recommended replacing Kuskov with Karl Ivanovich Schmidt, a Swedish navigator from Russian Finland recently hired by the Company. <sup>79</sup> However, Yanovsky, as Acting Manager-in-Chief, chose to delay Schmidt's appointment until his own permanent replacement was confirmed. When Matvei Muravyov was duly appointed, the Company Directors recommended that he arrange to replace Kuskov with Schmidt once he arrived at his new post in Sitka. <sup>80</sup> When Muravyov officially began his tenure as chief executive, in September 1820, formal confirmation of Kuskov's retirement and replacement followed shortly thereafter.

Over two years passed between the first mention of Kuskov's replacement in Company

correspondence and his actual departure from Fort Ross. Due to administrative difficulties and delays, Kuskov's leaving Fort Ross was no easy matter to resolve. Only in late 1821 could he bid farewell to his adopted "home" on the coast of New Albion. Now, at age 56, failing in health and eyesight, but not in spirit and expectation, Kuskov looked forward to an honorable return to Russia and the town of Totma, some 11,000 miles away. But first, he had important matters to resolve in Alaska.

By mid-January 1822 Kuskov was in Sitka. In a dispatch to St. Petersburg, dated January 18, Manager-in-Chief Muravyov wrote tersely: "Kuskov has handed over his post to Schmidt and has arrived here on his way back to Russia."<sup>81</sup> During the next three months Kuskov seems to have been busy in Sitka, ordering his financial affairs and preparing for his prospective wedding to Katerina Prokhorovna, a young woman evidently of North Russian origins, whose family name is not known. Indeed, nothing is known about her prior to 1822, and even then the circumstances of her acquaintance with Kuskov are not recorded. According to Kuskov's first biographer, after the death of her parents, Kuskov asked her to marry him. If indeed Katerina had lived at Fort Ross, a parental tie with the local *promyshlennik* Prokhor Yegorov may have existed.<sup>82</sup> At any rate, in Sitka in early 1822 the couple quickly agreed upon wedding arrangements; no doubt they were eager to return to their "home region" in North Russia.

In his last years Kuskov had sought to begin a new, more settled, "respectable" life on his own terms - quite different from his work as a Company administrator in remote California. An important step in this direction was marriage. Thus, the couple made plans for an April wedding at the Church of the Holy Resurrection on Kodiak Island (the oldest Orthodox church in Alaska). Muravyov wrote to the Kodiak Mission in advance that "Mr. Commerce Councillor Kuskov wishes to enter into legal matrimony with the girl Katerina during his stay at Pavlovsk Harbor." Moreover, he arranged to have the Company's Kodiak Office provide Kuskov with enough

cash to buy "four cloaks of sable," presumably for the wedding party.<sup>83</sup> The event was to be celebrated in style.

Kuskov's wish to "do it right" included having a local artist paint two individual portraits of Katerina and of him, probably in Sitka, before their departure to Kodiak Island.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, before leaving Sitka, Kuskov procured a travel permit allowing him to obtain relay-horses on his overland trip back. Dated April 14, 1822, this document would indicate that the newly-weds arrived in Okhotsk (August 27), in Yakutsk (November 28), and in Irkutsk (January 24, 1823).<sup>85</sup> As the Kuskovs traveled west, they carried their most valuable heirloom for posterity: the two portraits, carefully protected throughout the arduous 15-month journey home. They also brought with them from Alaska a young girl (probably Creole), Nadezhda Kamenskaya; she too would accompany them all the way to Totma.

In Irkutsk, the administrative capital of Eastern Siberia, the Kuskovs spent eleven days; here the local authorities provided them with the appropriate "visa," or internal passport. The entries on this document give an indication of the Kuskovs' itinerary for the duration of the journey. The intercontinental travelers left Irkutsk on February 6 and reached Totma five months later. As official evidence of their "homecoming," they presented the visa to municipal authorities, as recorded on July 4, 1823.<sup>86</sup> After 18 months of travel by land and sea, from Bodega Bay to Totma, Ivan Kuskov stepped foot again in his home town, over 35 years later.

In their haste to return as quickly as possible, the Kuskovs had resolved not to proceed first to St. Petersburg. There, the Company's Main Office, anticipating the retired administrator's arrival, had prepared a "final computation" of what the Company still owed for services rendered. Accordingly, Kuskov was to receive a sum of 58,425 rubles and 23 kopeks, as well as "six sea-otter pelts and 7000 rubles in paper currency."<sup>87</sup> With such financial resources

anticipated, Ivan and Katerina Kuskov could plan to build a new life together with some degree of comfort and substance.

Yet Kuskov's return brought with it unexpected surprises that probably aggravated his already weakened physical condition. As it turned out, his status as a Totma citizen in good standing had never been cleared by local authorities. In 1809, Kuskov had sought to resolve this problem by forwarding 400 rubles in back taxes and fees. However, the Totma City Council had subsequently failed to inform the Company's Main Office of his "clean slate." Consequently, this led to his omission from the State census of 1816, and Kuskov thereby remained "excluded from the ranks of the Totma citizenry."<sup>88</sup>

As a result of his strained, ambiguous legal and financial status, the ailing Kuskov did not purchase a house in Totma, but rather rented one, for the residence where he spent his last days did not show up as real estate after his death.<sup>89</sup> Thus, a small, one-story, two-bedroom log house on a narrow side-street, not far from the center of town, became Kuskov's last home. The building where Totma's most famous native son lived and died now serves as a regional museum, a monument and landmark attraction for visitors from around the world.

A sole surviving document in Totma attests to the last three months that Kuskov spent there. It simply states that "former Totma townsman, I. A. Kuskov, died childless in October of 1823."<sup>90</sup> Neither the exact date of his passing nor the precise location of his grave is known. Kuskov was buried somewhere in the cemetery of the nearby Spaso-Sumorin monastery. For funeral expenses his wife and his younger brother Peter were given 1800 rubles. His movable property was valued at a sum just over 70,000 rubles.<sup>91</sup> The "insolvent part" of Kuskov's estate and fortune passed on to Katerina, who remarried a few years later. Ironically, it was a full century later, in the decade following the Bolshevik Revolution, that both Kuskov's diaries, brought back from Fort Ross but never edited or published, and his tombstone either disap-

peared or were destroyed.<sup>92</sup>

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The founding of Fort Ross, Kuskov's creation and legacy, was controversial from the start. Not only did Spaniards, from nearby San Francisco to distant Spain, immediately oppose the undertaking, but many Russians, from inside the Company and out, also came to express reservations about the venture in New Albion. The settlement and its location were criticized on a number of grounds: diplomatic, economic, navigational, legal, and financial. In all respects the responsibility for establishing the distant outpost on the Fort Ross site lay most directly with Kuskov. In a larger sense, however, the decision to expand southward came from Baranov and the Company Directors in St. Petersburg. The original idea, of course, was Nikolai Rezanov's, as recommended to the Minister of Commerce in 1806.

A retrospective observer of Company affairs, Ivan Petroff, has suggested that with the departure of Baranov and of Kuskov from Russian America, an era came to an end. After them, he writes, the higher Company positions in America "were held by men of education and ability." Although the government had bestowed rank and honors upon Kuskov, he still belonged to that "class of shrewd, but rough and uncultured fur traders, slightly polished by the intercourse with foreigners."<sup>93</sup> Compared to his four successor managers at Fort Ross, Kuskov was indeed a self-made, self-educated man of the eastern frontier. And in an arena of increasing international contact and contention, Kuskov knew only his native Russian language and displayed a certain reserve and caution in his infrequent encounters with Europeans or Americans.

Regardless of inadequacies, Kuskov's last boss as Manager-in-Chief, Matvei Muravyov, provided him with a final, glowing testimonial. The only formal evaluation on record that summarizes Kuskov's character and service to the Company, Muravyov's commendation was given

just prior to Kuskov's leaving New Archangel for Russia in April 1822:

Commerce Councillor Ivan Alexandrovich Kuskov has long continued his service in America, to the honor of his own name and for the benefit of his Fatherland.

During his most recent assignment in America he commanded the settlement and outpost of Ross, on the shores of New Albion. Mr. Kuskov founded and constructed this fort. He established a shipyard and had three mercantile ships built there, which have been of great use to the Russian-American Company colonies.

Amidst savage peoples who lived near the fort, he engaged in stockraising, horticulture, and some agriculture. He reconciled groups of Indians hostile to one another, and for many years he kept these wild people in friendly relations with those who lived at the fort solely by means of kindness and fairness. He has been under my authority since September 15, 1820, and as a token of my esteem for him I am pleased to testify to his noble conduct, his high level of honesty, and his steadfast zeal for the common welfare of all.

His experience and knowledge of local circumstances have been so valuable that it is hard to replace him with anyone at all. I warmly wish him every happiness, and with deep regret I bid him farewell. <sup>94</sup>

Kuskov took with him to Totma this testimonial of his efforts at Fort Ross and in America. As a kind of epitaph to his greatest accomplishments, a copy remained among the Kuskov family papers, unpublished for nearly a century. Only now, almost another century later, have we begun to recognize how well these words validate what is known of the founder of Fort Ross, Ivan Alexandrovich Kuskov.

## ENDNOTES

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- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 233.
- 7 E. V. Kichin, writing in 1848, as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 231.
- 8 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 232; a brief sketch of Kuskov's early life also appears in Kovalev, p. 261.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 233.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 233-34.
- 11 Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 234. In heading these large flotillas and in his coastal explorations Fedorova considers Kuskov's courage as "extraordinary."
- 12 Kirill T. Khlebnikov, *Zhizneopisanie Aleksandra Andrieevicha Baranova, Glavnago Pravitelia Rossiiskikh Kolonii v Amerikie* (Moscow, 1835), p. 125; in English: *Baranov: Chief Manager of the Russian-American Colonies*, trans. by C. Bearne, ed. by R. A. Pierce, Materials for the Study of Alaska History, No. 3 (Kingston, Ont.: The Limestone Press, 1973), p. 70. (Hereinafter cited as Khlebnikov, *Baranov*; Russian edition (R), English edition (E).) Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 234.
- 13 Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, p. 115 (R)/ 65 (E).
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 98 (R)/ 55 (E).
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 120 (R)/ 68 (E). The text of Count N. P. Rumiantsev's notification letter to Kuskov (October 13, 1806) is in Kovalev, p. 262; Rumiantsev addresses Kuskov as a "merchant of Totma."

- 16 N. P. Rezanov to the Minister of Commerce, letter of June 17, 1806, in P. A. Tikhmenev, *Istoričeskoe obozrenie obrazovaniia Rossiisko-Amerikanskoi Kompanii i diestvii eia do nastoiashchago vremeni* (St. Petersburg: Naval Press, 1861-63, II: 267; in English: *A History of the Russian-American Company*, trans. and ed. by R. A. Pierce and A. S. Donnelly (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1978). (Russian edition hereinafter cited as (R), English edition as (E).)
- 17 Tikhmenev, II; 233 (R); also cited in S. B. Okun', *Rossiisko-Amerikanskaia Kompaniia* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1939), pp. 114-15; in English: *The Russian American Company*, trans. by Carl Ginsburg (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 121. (Russian edition hereinafter cited as (R), English as (E).)
- 18 Baranov's instructions to Kuskov, dated at New Archangel, October 14/26, 1808 (No. 39), in N. N. Bolkhovitinov *et al.*, ed. *Rossiiia i Ssha: Stanovlenie otnoshenii, 1765-1815* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), p. 344 (doc. # 276); in English: *The United States and Russia: The Beginning of Relations, 1765-1815* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 544. (Russian edition hereinafter cited as (R), English as (E).)
- 19 Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 235.
- 20 Kuskov's report to Baranov, dated at New Archangel, October 5/17, 1809, in Bolkhovitinov, p. 376 (R)/ 596 (E), doc. # 304. Golovnin, "Plan zaliva Rumiantseva" (Map of Rumiantsev Bay), p. 332 (R).
- 21 Kuskov's report to Baranov, in Bolkhovitinov, p. 376 (R)/ 597 (E).
- 22 Kuskov's report, *loc. cit.*, p. 376. Khlebnikov gives a slightly larger sea-otter catch of 2,350 overall; "Zapiski K. Khlebnikova o Amerikie," in *Materialy dlia istorii russkikh zaselenii*, issue no. 3, supplement to *Morskoi sbornik*, no. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1861), p. 137; in English: *Colonial Russian America: Kiril Khlebnikov's Reports, 1817-1832* (Portland, Ore.: The Oregon Historical Society, 1976), p. 107. (Hereinafter cited as Khlebnikov, "Zapiski"; Russian edition as (R); English edition as (E).)
- 23 Tikhmenev, I: 208 (R)/ 133 (E).
- 24 Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," p. 137 (R)/ 107 (E). Khlebnikov erroneously claims the voyage took 49 days.
- 25 Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, p. 127 (R), 71 (E).
- 26 Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," p. 172 (R)/ 129 (E); also Bolkhovitinov, p. 503, 503 n (R)/ 622n (E).
- 27 Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," pp. 137-38 (R)/ 107 (E); Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 236.
- 28 Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, p. 147 (R)/ 83 (E). Fyodorova claims, without supporting evidence, that it was Kuskov who, on his first trip to Bodega Bay, renamed it in honor of Count Rumiantsev, "Kuskov," p. 236.
- 29 V. A. Potekhin, "Selenie Ross" (Ross Settlement), in *Zhurnal manufaktur i torgovli*, October 1859, bk. X, pt. IV, p. 10.

- 30 Anonymous, "Istoricheskie zapiski ob organizatsii . . . Ross" (Historical Notes on the Founding . . . of Fort Ross), cited in Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 238. (Hereinafter cited as "Ross," *loc. cit.*)
- 31 Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 236. Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, p. 147 (R)/ 83 (E); here Khlebnikov puts the number of Russian craftsmen as 25, whereas his "Zapiski" gives an improbably high figure of 95, p. 138 (R); see comments in Fedorova, "Kuskov," pp. 252-53 nn., and in *Colonial Russian America*, p. 107 n.
- 32 Tikhmenev, p. 208 (R)/ 133 (E); presumably, the site was adjacent to the seasonal Indian settlement of Me-te-ni (Russian: Med-zhy-ny); see Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," p. 167 (R)/ 129-30 (E).
- 33 Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 236; see also Tikhmenev, I: 208 (R)/ 134 (E), and Potekhin, pp. 9-10.
- 34 "Ross," *loc. cit.*, p. 238.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 237; Potekhin, p. 11; Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," p. 138 (R)/ 108 (E); Tikhmenev, I: 208 (R)/ 134 (E). Potekhin claims that 166 steps were built into the hillside, from cove to bluff.
- 36 "Ross," *loc. cit.*, p. 238.
- 37 S. G. Fedorova, *Russkoe naselenie Aliaski i Kalifornii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), p. 254; in English: *The Russian Population in Alaska and California*, trans. and edited by R. Pierce and A. Donnelly (Kingston, Ont.: The Limestone Press, 1973), p. 358. (Hereinafter cited as Fedorova, *Naselenie*; Russian edition (R), English (E).) For wall dimensions (42 by 49 *sazhen*), see Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," 138 (R)/ 108 (E), and *Baranov*, 147 (R)/ 83 (E).
- 38 Potekhin, p. 10; Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, p. 147 (R)/ 83 (E).
- 39 Tikhmenev, I: 208 (R)/ 134 (E); "Ross," *loc. cit.*, p. 238; Potekhin, p. 10. The name "Ross" is a stylized, somewhat poetic version of *Rossii* (Russia), popular at the time.
- 40 Fedorova, *Naselenie*, p. 255 (R)/ 358-59 (E); Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," p. 238 (R)/ 108 (E); Tikhmenev, I: 208 (R)/ 134 (E). Ten brass and fifteen cast iron cannon were shipped to Fort Ross between 1812 and 1815; "Schet kapitala po novomu seleniiu Ross, vypisannyi v glavnom pravlenii iz vedomostei Novo-Arkhangel'skoi kontory, dekabr' 1815 goda" (extract from unspecified Company papers entitled "An Account of Capital Goods for the New Settlement of Ross, Copied at the Main Office from Information Received from the New Archangel Office, December 1815); type-script sent by S. G. Fedorova to Mike Tucker, Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento, California; dated Moscow, April 11, 1980 (hereinafter cited as "Account").
- 41 Fedorova, *Naselenie*, *loc. cit.*, and plate 13.
- 42 Tikhmenev, I: 208-09 (R)/ 134 (E).
- 43 Fedorova, *Naselenie*, p. 255 (R)/ 359 (E); Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," p. 138 (R)/ 108 (E).
- 44 Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, p. 147 (R)/ 83 (E)
- 45 "Account," *passim*.
- 46 *Materialy dlia istorii russkikh zaselenii* (St. Petersburg, 1861), pt. 4, supplement 1 (1818

- census); and Golovnin, p. 316 insert (R)/ appendix 5 B-C, p. 307 (E).
- 47 Svetlana G. Fedorova, *Ethnic Processes in Russian America*, trans. by A. Shalkop, Occasional Paper No. 1 (Anchorage: Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum, 1975), p. 12. (Hereinafter cited as Fedorova, *Processes*.) Data from 1821 are found in I. A. Kuskov, "Spisok liudei sostoivshchie v selenii Ross i na Ferlone russkikh, kad'iakskikh, chugach i indeitsov oboego pola, Oktiabr' 1821 goda" (A List of Russians, Kodiaks, Chugach and Indians at Fort Ross and on the Farallons, October 1821), typescript copy at Fort Ross State Historic Park, Visitor Center Library. (Hereinafter cited as Kuskov, "Spisok, 1821.")
- 48 Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," p. 167 (R)/ 129-30 (E); in this single reference Chu-gu-an is called Chu-chu-oan. See also Potekhin, p. 9; and Tikhmenev, I: 208 (R)/ 133 (E).
- 49 Fr. Mariano Payeras, "Noticias sobre Ross," in Archivo de Santa Barbara (Film C-C/18), vol. XII, p. 249 (entry dated October 24, 1822); Bancroft Library, University of California. The extrapolation comes from H. H. Bancroft, *History of California*, vol. II (1801-1824), *Bancroft's Works*, vol. XIX (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886), p. 297.
- 50 The original text is reproduced in Diane Spencer-Hancock and William E. Pritchard, "Notes to the 1817 Treaty between the Russian American Company and Kashaya Pomo Indians," in *California History*, 59 (4), 1981, p. 308. Khlebnikov provides an alternative Russian spelling for the Indian site as "Mad-zhy-ny"; "Zapiski," p. 167 (R)/ 129 (E).
- 51 Spencer-Hancock, p. 309. Hagemeister, following Baranov, served as the Company's manager-in-chief in 1818, from January to November.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 307.
- 53 Golovnin, p. 178 n (R)/ 170 n (E).
- 54 *Ibid.*, pp. 177-78 (R)/ 165 (E).
- 55 Fedor F. Matiushkin, "Zhurnal krugosvetnogo plavaniia na shliupe *Kamchatka* pod komandoiu kapitana Golovnina" (Journal of a Voyage around the World in the Sloop *Kamchatka*, under the Command of Captain Golovnin), in L. A. Shur, *K beregam Novogo Sveta. Iz neopublikovannykh zapisok russkikh puteshestvennikov nachala XIX veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), p. 69. Compare the implements Golovnin cites with those indicated by Payeras four years later (note 49 above).
- 56 Golovnin, p. 178 (R)/ 165 (E).
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 181 (R)/ 167 (E)..
- 58 Matiushkin, p. 68.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 Potekhin, p. 12.
- 62 Fedor P. Litke [Friedrich Lütke], "Dnevnik, vedennyi vo vremia krugosvetnogo plavaniia na

- shliupe *Kamchatka*" (Diary Kept during a Voyage around the World on the Sloop *Kamchatka*), in L. Shur, *K beregam Novogo Sveta* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), pp. 152-53.
- 63 Ferdinand P. Wrangel' [Baron von Wrangell], Report to Main Office, RAC Records,, Communications Sent, reel 36, vol. 11 (No. 61, April 10, 1834), ms p. 68b. Printed translation in J.R. Gibson, "Russia in California, 1833; Report of Governor Wrangel," in *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, vol. 60 (no. 4), pp. 210-11.
- 64 Potekhin, p. 11.
- 65 Fedorova, "Processes," p. 12.
- 66 *Ibid.*; also cited by Glenn J. Farris, "The Russian Imprint on the Colonization of California," in D. H. Thomas, ed., *Columbian Consequences: Archeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands West* (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1989), I: 489.
- 67 Golovnin, p. 179 (R)/ 166 (E).
- 68 *The Khlebnikov Archive: Unpublished Journal (1800-1837) and Travel Notes (1820, 1822, and 1824)*, ed. by L. Shur, trans. by J. Bisk (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1990), pp. 100-01. (Hereinafter cited as *Khlebnikov, Archive*).
- 69 Golovnin, p. 183 (R)/ 170 (E).
- 70 Bancroft, II: 300-03.
- 71 Chamisso, II: 118.
- 72 Dmitrii I. Zavalishin, *Dielo o kolonii Ross* [The Fort Ross Question] (Moscow: University Press, 1866), p. 30.
- 73 Khlebnikov, "Zapiski," p. 139 (R)/ 108 (E).
- 74 Company Directors' Report to Matvei Murav'ev, RAC Records, Communications Received, reel 2 (No. 51, dated January 15, 1820), ms p. 4. The Foreign Ministry was having second thoughts about Fort Ross, which included terminating the manager's position.
- 75 *Ibid.* See also Directors to Semen Ianovskii, RAC Records, Communications Received, reel 1 (No. 593, September 17, 1819), ms p. 272a.
- 76 Khlebnikov, *Archive*, p. 46; also cited in Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 245. Matiushkin calls Kuskov, two years earlier, the "old man" (*starik*), p. 68.
- 77 [Zakhar Petrovich Chichinov, or Chechenev?], *Adventures in California of Zakahar Tchitchinoff, 1818-1828* (Los Angeles: Glen Dawson, 1956), p. 3. Interestingly, Chichinov is not listed in the Fort Ross "register" of October 1821, in contrast to his younger half-brother Nikolai, who was then "attached to" (*pri*) Kuskov, possibly in some service capacity.
- 78 Khlebnikov, *Archive*, pp. 46-47.
- 79 Directors to Ianovskii, *loc. cit.*, reel 1, vol. 1 (No. 593, September 17, 1819), ms. p. 272b.

- 80 Company Directors to Manager-in-Chief Matvei Murav'ev, *ibid.*, reel (No. 51, January 15, 1820).
- 81 M. I. Murav'ev to Main Office, *ibid.*, Communications Sent, reel 28 (No. 45, January 18, 1822), ms. p. 4b; cited in Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 239.
- 82 Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 239; and Kovalev, p. 261. According to E. V. Kichin, who presumably knew Katerina Kuskova in later years, her father was from Ustiug, a town not far from Totma, and had lived in India. Kichin also claims that Katerina saved Kuskov from near-fatal incidents with American Indians (at Fort Ross and elsewhere) through her knowledge of the native languages. Yegorov is the only individual listed in Kuskov's "census" of 1821 whose first name, Prokhor, corresponds to Katerina's patronymic.
- 83 RAC Records, Communications Sent, reel 28 (No. 17, April 11, 1822), p. 14b, 12a; cited in Fedorova, "Kuskov," pp. 239-40.
- 84 Fedorova describes and evaluates the two portraits in great detail, "Kuskov," pp. 242-44.
- 85 Fedorova, "Kuskov," pp. 240-41; and Kovalev, p. 262.
- 86 Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 241.
- 87 *Ibid.*, p. 242; and Kovalev, p. 262. The document is dated July 6, 1823.
- 88 Cited in Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 246.
- 89 *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- 90 Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 245.
- 91 *Ibid.*, p. 246; Kovalev, p. 262.
- 92 On Kuskov's grave, see Fedorova, "Kuskov," p. 246; on his diaries, see Chernitsyn, p. 108 n.
- 93 Ivan Petroff, "The Management and Personnel of the Russian-American Company, from Its Beginning to Its Dissolution" (ms copy: San Francisco, 1877), p. 10; Bancroft Library Manuscript Collection (P-K 23), University of California, Berkeley.
- 94 Matvei Murav'ev, "Attestat G. Kuskovu," *loc. cit.*; printed versions in Chernitsyn, pp. 120-21, and in Kovalev, p. 262.