



FORT ROSS  
CONSERVANCY

# NEWSLETTER

[www.fortross.org](http://www.fortross.org)

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## News from the Fort Ross Conservancy

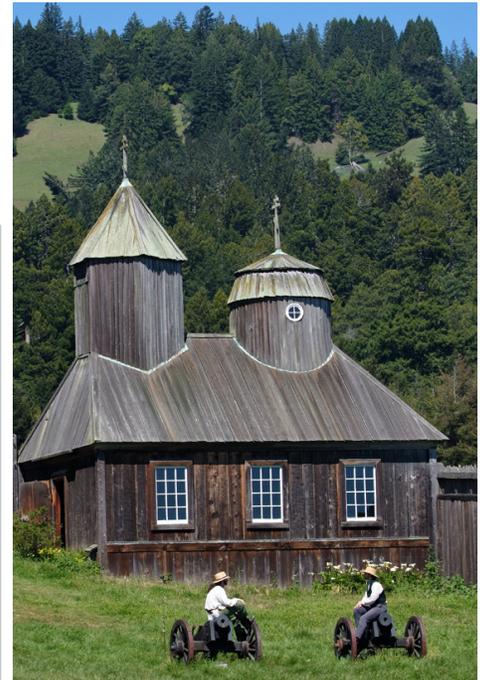
It's been a busy season for us at the new Fort Ross Conservancy. As you know, we've changed our name and expanded our mission.

But for this year in particular, we've morphed from a historical organization to a grant writing, fundraising, event planning team, with our hands in more than a dozen 2012 events!

Did you know that with the help of Dillen Associates, FRC is organizing the west coast premiere of the

**Juno & Avos** rock opera, on tour from Russia, with ticket proceeds benefiting Fort Ross Conservancy? Performances will be July 25 at the Herbst Theater in San Francisco, and July 27 at the Wells Fargo Center for the Arts in Santa Rosa. Tickets go on sale the third week of May; see [www.fortross.org](http://www.fortross.org) for more information.

FRC is also providing critical organizational and financial backing for the **Fort Ross Bicentennial Weekend** (July 28 & 29), which will feature a remarkable lineup of U.S. and Russian performers, including the Pyatnitsky Chorus from Russia and a cameo performance by Rybnikov theater. We'll also have new costumes and scenarios, great food, and all our favorite craftspeople working their trade in the fort compound. If you're interested in helping out during our big July weekend event, please send us email at [info@fortross.org](mailto:info@fortross.org).



**Hardcopy Newsletters:** Several of you have wondered if we are still sending out hardcopy FRC newsletters. We apologize for the dry spell but looking ahead, members will receive two hardcopy newsletters each year, and everyone on our email list will receive our monthly e-news. Also please know that our website, [www.fortross.org](http://www.fortross.org), is updated almost daily and is the go-to au courant location for finding out more on Fort Ross/Salt Point projects and events.

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# Renova

## Fort Ross Foundation

As many of you recall, in October of 2010 leadership from Renova signed an MOU with the State of California and an agreement with the Fort Ross Interpretive Association (now Fort Ross Conservancy). These partnerships, which have been in operation for 18 months now, aim “to raise awareness of the historical and cultural significance” of the fort.

Although we keep our website up-to-date on funded projects (see [www.fortross.org/join-support/renova-fort-ross-foundation/](http://www.fortross.org/join-support/renova-fort-ross-foundation/)), we are long overdue in providing a direct update to our membership. Over the past year, Renova has provided funding to California State Parks (CSP) and Fort Ross Conservancy (FRC) for the following projects:

- Provided CSP substantial funding to replace the Rotchev house roof, the National Landmark original Russian-built structure; work to commence late 2012.
- Funded CSP 15-person interpreter training to staff Fort Ross Bicentennial Weekend, this year’s big event. These interpreters come from around the state to learn the history of Fort Ross and to help with day-of logistics.
- Funded FRC’s improvements to the Visitor Center, including new audio/visual equipment, new carpeting, a kitchen upgrade, and more.



- Funded FRC’s Historic Orchard Project, Phase 1 and 2; see story in this newsletter.

- Create new historic costumes and re-enactment scenarios to be performed at Fort Ross Bicentennial Weekend.

- Digitize the site-specific manuscripts and photos found in FRC’s library.

- Provide operational support for FRC and CSP to allow us to succeed in planning and implementation of 2012 events, and find paths toward longer term sustainability.

- Provide outreach: In both 2011 and 2012, RFRF brought 50+ students from SURF, the Stanford US Russia Forum, to Fort Ross for a day of history and community service; RFRF

also sponsors Fort Ross’ presence at UC Berkeley’s SpringFest and many other local venues.

- Funded much-needed new entrance sign at Fort Ross State Historic Park.

Future projects under consideration include: repairing the water well in the fort compound, safeguarding the cemetery and improving its trail access; and repairs to the chapel.



Stanford US Russia Forum students at Fort Ross



In addition, RFRF has funded its own Fort Ross-related projects and outreach that will surely benefit Fort Ross for years to come. For Renova Fort Ross's listing of funded projects, please see their website: [www.fortrossfoundation.org](http://www.fortrossfoundation.org)

There is one important caveat: RFRF's goals do not include funding general park operations. While its support has provided significant improvement to park infrastructure, to preparing for 2012 events, and perhaps most notably to public awareness of Fort Ross both nationally and internationally, Renova Fort Ross Foundation has determined that funding daily operations required to keep Fort Ross open is not part of its mandate.

Journalistic tendencies being what they are, the press both here and in Russia often leads with grand headlines such as "Russian Company Saves Fort Ross" or some variant on that theme. Renova has been fantastically generous and help from it, and the Russian government, has changed our immediate destiny. However, in light of the California budget crisis and the slow degradation of the state park system, Renova has not saved Fort Ross. We are still operating under severe "service reduction" and there are very few concrete signs that the park's short term future will be any better than what it is presently. Until a few weeks ago, Fort Ross was only open on the weekends; as of now **we are open three days a week - Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.**

## Letter Writing Campaign

Twenty-twelve is our bicentennial, and interest in the park is exceeding expectations. Several travel agencies here and abroad are putting together summer packages and our event calendar is robust. However, no one enjoys driving to Fort Ross to find the gates locked and the visitor center dark. We need your help.

FRC is kicking off a letter writing campaign in support of increasing park hours during our bicentennial high season. We have sample letters available on our web site, or feel free to pen your own reasons why our park should be open this year. We ask only that you:

1. Write a letter with your own message, or copy the letter provided at [www.fortross.org](http://www.fortross.org). Make sure to ask that **Fort Ross be open 7 days a week during its bicentennial summer season.**
2. Include your name and address so that your representatives know that a California voter cares about this issue.
3. Send your letters to Governor Brown and your state representative either via US Post or via email.
4. Also please send copies of your letters to us at the Fort Ross Conservancy. You can email them to [info@fortross.org](mailto:info@fortross.org) or send them via US Post.

We will hand-deliver copies of all letters to Sacramento and meet with our leaders directly.

*"We finally arrived at the garden, and I was very pleased by what I saw, because I had helped with the planting of the fruit trees there. The big peach tree that Mr. Benseman had brought in 1814 is covered with fruit, but only very few of them were ripe. The trees brought by Mr. Hagemeister in 1818 have yielded an abundance of fruit..."*

K.T. Khlebnikov, Travel Notes, 1822.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FORT ROSS ORCHARD

## PART I

by Susan Rudy

Inland and overlooking Fort Ross is a warm southern facing terrace with the remnants of an old orchard.

Planted first by the Russians soon after their arrival and further expanded and nurtured by the ranching families that followed, the orchard is a living monument to a historical time now past.

The site bears no known pre-settlement evidence. But it was likely used by native peoples as they moved along the nearby path that became Fort Ross Road, perhaps stopping to use the abundant water on site and collecting food and game.

Although the native people left no evidence, we do know that the Russians selected this spot overlooking the fort to plant their orchard – tending it between 1814 and 1841.

### ORCHARD CULTIVATION IN EARLY CALIFORNIA

The local Pomo Kashaya, like most California Indians, were not gardeners in the sense that they cultivated food plants; permanent garden plots were not part of their culture. Rather, they managed naturally occurring plants, using fire to promote preferred plants, and to control succession. They moved from place to place, collecting plants for food and basketry as they became ripe or ready. The Spanish missions established between 1768 and 1853 brought the first European plants and the "culture of gardening" to what they called Alta California. Throughout the mission system, the Spanish grew fruits, grains and

vegetables commonly cultivated today, including: pears, olives, figs, grapes, cherries, plums, peaches, apricots. Some missions were more successful at agriculture than others, for various reasons. It is quite possible that some of these plants made their way to Fort Ross as starts or cuttings.

A modern orchard looks very different from an 1800s-style orchard planted by the Missions or Russians. In early orchards the trees were of unnamed or unknown variety. They were often seedling trees and they grew to be very large. Because pruning was not practiced, they were tall, wild and shaggy. The various types of fruit trees were planted mixed together. Grapes for wine making were thrown in the mix as well.

### THE FORT ROSS ORCHARD

When the Russian arrived in 1812, they spent their first few years building structures and concentrating on commercial ventures such as sea otter & seal skin hunting. By 1814 there was time to consider growing fruits and vegetables; indeed many private gardens were cultivated outside the stockade walls.



Russian cherry tree in the orchard. Photo by Susan Rudy

The first tree planted in the Fort Ross orchard was a peach brought by Benzeman from San Francisco on the schooner *Chirikov* in 1814. It was an unknown variety and by 1820 was producing fruit. Grapevines from Lima, Peru came next, delivered as shoots by L.A. Hagemeister in 1817, and these began to produce fruit in 1823. Hagemeister brought more peaches in 1818 from Monterey. In 1820 the brig *Buldakov* delivered over 100 various fruit saplings – apples, pears, peaches, cherries and bergamot, again from Monterey. Though small when planted, they were all bearing in 1828.

The orchard was growing and protected by a stockade fence made of redwood slabs or planks eight feet high. By 1826 records show there were 400 trees and 700 vines.

Fruit was produced for fort use; there was not enough to sell or send to the Alaskan settlements. It no doubt contributed to the prevention of further outbreaks of scurvy which had occurred in 1818 and 1819.

However, the Russians also wanted to grow grain, as bread is an important mainstay in the Russian diet. Unhappy with their inability



to grow grain near the fort, between 1833-1841 the Russians settled several sites inland, away from pests and the cooling effects of the Pacific Ocean, with the hope of farming more successfully. Only one of these sites, the Chernykh Ranch located in the upper Salmon Creek valley, grew anything other than grain. Chernykh Ranch eventually grew several fruit trees and 2000 grapevines.

The Fort Ross orchard meanwhile appeared to receive only passing care: in his Travel Notes of 1822, K.T. Khlebnikov complained that some of the 100 trees that had been delivered in 1820 “were all planted in one line next to the fence in a disorderly fashion, and eventually they will become unsightly.” When he asked who was responsible for the trees care, Carl Schmidt the manager of the settlement replied “nobody...because Mr. Kuskov had sent home the sole Aleut who used to look after it.”

On the Russian departure in 1841, the orchard was about one-and-one quarter acres, and contained 260 trees – 207 apples, 29 peach, 10 pears, 10 quince, 8 cherry and also

some vines. The redwood plank fence was still intact. Nearby, just upslope, was another small fenced orchard of 20 fruit trees and some vines, and part of a private house used by the fort manager.

Following the sale of the fort to Sutter, and the removal of many of the Russian buildings and goods, the property’s new managers would greatly expand the orchard, adding many new trees of named varieties and using new horticultural methods.

**Editor’s Note:** Thanks to several grants from the Renova Fort Ross Foundation, the orchard is now receiving much-needed care, including fence replacement, vegetation management, and in coordination with a historic landscape architect, creation of an assessment and stabilization plan. Also thanks to Susan Rudy for her incredible work on this project to ensure the historic orchard continues to bloom well into its third century.

## The “Old *Magazin*” Returns to Fort Ross

by Glenn Farris

As made abundantly clear by the unweathered redwood roof, the Fort Ross compound has a new addition: the “old *Magazin*,” part of California State Park’s ongoing effort to reconstruct the Russian American Company establishment of Fort Ross. The English translation of the French word “magazin” (which was adopted into the Russian language) is *storehouse* or *warehouse*. However, the English word seems too pedestrian for this dramatic new addition to the Fort Ross compound, hence the choice of returning to the original name as documented on the 1817 Fort

Ross map. The reason for calling it “old” is that the final inventories of sale for Fort Ross designated both an “old warehouse” and a “new warehouse” located inside the stockade walls. Archaeological investigations conducted by the author in 1981 determined that the “old warehouse” as identified on the 1817 map was sited where the current one has been rebuilt. In addition, a team led in the mid-1970s by Professor Rob Edwards discovered evidence that the other structure, the “new warehouse,” probably built in the 1830s, was constructed immediately adjacent to the old one.

Although the archaeological finds were successful in identifying the building’s footprint, the archaeological footprint alone does not provide detailed models for reconstruction. It was therefore necessary to study the few physical descriptions of the façade’s structure in order to match it to drawings of similar building of Kodiak and New Archangel (Sitka). In the 1841 Fort Ross inventories, the building is described as having an outside corridor with columns. We are fortunate to have an excellent drawing of just such a building from Sitka.



“View of Sitka Bay, from the governor’s house”, 1827 by F.H. von Kittlitz



Fort Ross Magazin , Photo FRC

Architectural historian Igor Medvedev, in collaboration with State Parks architect Manoushan Azam, worked out the present design. Medvedev had actually seen and measured a similar structure in Russia and thus had insights into important facets of its construction.

During the archaeological excavations in 1981, we found an interesting feature in the distribution of glass trade beads: the overwhelming majority were found in the northern half of the building's footprint. It is believed that this find identifies the location of the trade goods storage room, including small glass beads which, when spilled, were likely to slip through the floorboards and settle into the ground below the building. This picture of the newly built Magazin clearly draws on the example from New Archangel, and when combined with the archaeological findings, helps to bring back this imposing structure

that emphasizes the importance of supplies and storage needed to both support the inhabitants of Fort Ross and to provide trade goods to elicit the assistance of the local Kashaya people. While the other contemporary buildings include three residences and the chapel, it is helpful to have a representation of one of the three warehouse structures known to have existed there. This building will have the additional advantage of aiding the interpretive staff in their task of bringing the commercial side of Fort Ross alive to thousands of visitors.

**Editor's Note:** This building was constructed with funds provided by California State Park bonds. The old *Magazin* is slated to open to the public in June of this year, just in time for Fort Ross Bicentennial Weekend.

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FRC will continue to send out monthly e-news to everyone who has given us an email address, and in addition we will mail two full-fledged hard-copy newsletters per year to our card-carrying members.

We are happy to send you the hardcopy newsletter; however, online distribution costs much less. If you would like to help us lower our expenses by receiving this newsletter ONLY in online PDF format, not via US Post, please send mail to [info@fortross.org](mailto:info@fortross.org) and **OPT OUT** of receiving the hardcopy newsletter. You'll get the same formatted newsletter, in online PDF format. Thank you.

## Contact Information

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## Highlights of 2012 Events:

**Juno and Avos**, West Coast premiere of the hit Russian rock opera, by Aleksey Rybnikov and Andrei Voznesensky:  
July 25, San Francisco, Herbst Theater  
July 27, Santa Rosa, Wells Fargo Center for the Arts.

**Fort Ross Bicentennial Weekend**, celebrating the many people that lived at Settlement Ross with crafts, food, and performances, July 28 & 29.

**Russian Orthodox Church Celebration** at the Fort Ross chapel, August 25.

**Harvest Festival**, celebrating the agricultural traditions at Fort Ross, October 20.