



# NEWSLETTER

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

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## Dear FRC Members,

### Happy Birthday Fort Ross Conservancy!

It's our birthday—Fort Ross Conservancy is forty years old this year. We incorporated as a non-profit in 1976, spent our youth as Fort Ross Interpretive Association, and changed our name to Fort Ross Conservancy in 2012. But consistent across the decades and name changes is the tremendous dedication that Metini / Fort Ross inspires across our local, national, and international communities.

For forty years, and even before that when the group operated without the legal credentials, the Fort Ross community worked hard to make things happen. This diverse community stepped up to protect, preserve and promote Fort Ross in concrete ways, and calling them "friends' groups" doesn't do their robust activities justice. These individuals saved the Call House from serious neglect and went on to furnish and make publicly accessible the Call

House museum. A Kashia native plant garden was created. The wider community successfully fundraised to build the original Visitor Center, re-build the fallen chapel, and historically furnish the various replica buildings that California State Parks constructed. Academic research



was undertaken, historic trees catalogued, events were organized. If I were to choose one word to describe the many people who dedicated so much time, energy, and love towards Fort Ross, I would

call them intensely "passionate." People disagreed, compromised and eventually built bridges across the diverse groups who invested so deeply in this spectacular stretch of land.

As a small tribute to these good people who have given so much to Fort Ross, FRC has scanned four decades of newsletters we have archived in our "brick and mortar" library, and we've made these newsletters available via our digital library at [www.fortross.org/lib.htm](http://www.fortross.org/lib.htm). Just use the digital library's search box and enter "newsletter" to see a list of the editions available. Once you open a newsletter in PDF you can search the file for any words/patterns.

To read the written record and hear the energy in these voices is both humbling and inspiring.

We are all "living history" through the living history, and some day an academic will use this digital library to tell the Fort Ross story from a political or sociological vantage point. After all, it's worth noting that FRC has been active in preserving and promoting the park for longer than the Russian era itself, which was, originally at least, the reason that these lands were protected. (The Kashia, the First People at Metini, have called this place home for centuries. That's a record that won't soon be broken.)

Please enjoy the excerpts from several decades of newsletters that follow and read the memorials that acknowledge two of our most dedicated supporters.

While this newsletter's theme appears to be retrospective, we too look forward to working hard to make things happen. FRC is still young and energetic – 40 is the new 30, after all – and we're now preparing to tackle several essential projects. We are working on a 5-year plan to ensure Fort Ross remains a vital and valuable site for all our communities. We will be laying out our newest initiatives and launching a capital fundraiser in the coming months, and we hope you'll join us in defining the next decade of Fort Ross activism. Stay tuned.

With appreciation,

Sarah Sweedler

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## Excerpts from Newsletters Past

### From the February 1979 Newsletter:

Our exciting news this Spring is the visit to Fort Ross, February 24 of Peter Kalifornsky, a native Alaskan nearing seventy years of age, whose great, great-grandfather worked at the Fort as a trapper for the Russians. His visit to California, the state which gave its name to his village and his tribe has been made possible by the Fort Ross Interpretive Association and professors of linguistics at U.C. Davis and U.C.L.A. Kalifornsky is a Dena'ina Athabaskan who was born in Kalifornsky Village on the Kenai Peninsula of southcentral Alaska. For most of his life he has led a typical twentieth-century Dena'ina man's life of hunting, trapping and fishing. He is one of only two people left on the peninsula who speak the Dena'ina language, which is connected with the Navajo. He may be able to tell us some of what happened to his people once John Sutter bought the Fort.

During the winter months the Book and Gift Shop has been open on weekends and visitors are greeted by a roaring fire and a cup of hot spiced cider. It takes a special sort of person to brave the north winds and rain and even snow, but there is a special beauty too in the racing clouds, the sheep grazing inside the high walls, and an occasional whale spouting out at sea.

### From the November 1979 Newsletter:

Momentum is building - buildings are building - and every week at Fort Ross one sees either: the Officials Barracks or the Kuskov House taking more form. The long pause, while Sacramento worked, is over. Now those of us on the front lines are excited about the potential. At the last board meeting \$1,000 was approved for "opportunity" buying to start supplying the extensive "Want Lists" Mike Tucker has provided. At the August meeting he showed us what rooms there would be and what items were needed to make them represent the years of Russian residence. Lloyd Geissinger offered to be chairman of the furnishings for the jail, Bud Lucky of the office, and Eve Crittenden of the kitchen-pantry. Her committee is Helen Platt, Sue Wright, Lida Schneider and Nora Barr. At staff suggestion Helen journeyed

to San Francisco to see a fine copper Russian Samovar and purchased it. The purchase was approved by Glenn Burch, Lloyd Geissinger and Bud Lucky. A shocking \$404 leads us to hope the others we need (the "Want Lists" ask for several) may come as gifts or at least for less. But we jumped in feet first and now we know we're committed to that kitchen and pantry project. This is where we hope school children and visitors can live the experience of the time as it was in 1835. The other rooms are still orphans and need volunteers to form committees who will go to work. The time for action is here at last!

The Russian orchard has had some effective attention also! Every tree has been numbered, catalogued and researched. There is a report that makes good reading at the Fort. The public interest in the Indian culture is effectively demonstrated in the sale of the fine small baskets we have had at the sales counter. There is only one left and we hope those working at transplanting sedges at Warm Springs Dam good luck. If the sources of supply for materials dry up, so too will the basket craft disappear. Has anyone researched what materials exist on state property at Fort Ross?

### From the April 1980 Newsletter:

Moved, seconded and carried. Resolved: that the treasurer be directed to set aside \$10,000 and be authorized to disburse these funds as directed by the Executive Secretary, or his designated alternate, for artifacts, contracts with artisans for reproductions, or raw materials to be made into display items to be used in the Officials' Barracks and Kuskov House now being reconstructed at Fort Ross State Historic Park. These funds are now in addition to the \$1,000 already designated for opportunity purchase. NOTE: This money was earned by Fort Ross Interpretive Association sales counter and special events.

Did you ever go shopping by committee? We did - ten men and women met in San Francisco at the huge Gift Show and then Cost Plus. We surveyed every sample of brass, copper, basket and wood! Then we voted! Honest - it was great fun and the booty included copper basins, tinned

copper plates, pots, baskets, wooden boxes, glass bottles - many, many things to be checked off the Officials' Barracks "Want List". We'll show these all at the April 25th meeting. There we'll also show you the items bought by catalogue and made to order by local craftsmen. A handsome copper tea kettle and two cooking kettles have been donated by Nora Barr.

### From the Summer 1984 Newsletter:

Ground-breaking for the Visitors Center. Ranch Day and the joint Boards of Directors meeting all took place June 3. After brief speeches from representatives of Parks and Recreation, legislative offices and State Park Foundation, John McKenzie turned the first shovelful of earth and three cannons boomed to mark the event. Spontaneously members of the audience representing many segments of the Fort Ross Community stepped forward, spoke a few words and broke more ground. Now the building site near the parking lot is staked out, fenced off, and its trees cleared off so the heavy equipment can move in for the foundation work. Steve Hill of DOR-AN Builders walked your reporter over the bare land, pointing out the location of the numerous rooms of the Center to be. Cement will be poured by late August. Completion is scheduled for early 1985. Then the displays need to be installed before the long term dream comes true.

### From the Spring 1985 Newsletter:

Spring fever always gets us when the poppies spread sunlight along the roads and in the fields. That means Fort Ross beckoned and the north wind blew the four editors of your NEWSLETTER down the road. It sailed us straight into the entrance to the towering rooms of the new Visitors Center. Bill Walton led us into the halls and back rooms as workmen scaled the rafters and ladders overhead. It was such a busy place we wished for hard hats and tried to keep out of the way of what was going on. It's pretty exciting. My biggest surprise was the auditorium for film projection, talks, maybe even meetings! The possibilities for community use are titillating. Bring folks together and things happen. Is it time for another college level history course to be held at Fort Ross? The former course under the auspices of Sonoma State was well attended and a worthy bit of education. Florrie Milligan conceived and implemented it as a requirement for docents. A high standard was maintained by a variety of teachers who knew their stuff. Let's do it again.

## Working the Trades at Fort Ross

Most historical documentation that describes life at Fort Ross is written by Russian American Company administrators or travelers passing through the area. There are, unfortunately, very few narratives which describe directly what daily life was like for the many Russian, Alaska Native, Creole, or Kashia workers whose energies brought the settlement to life. This project explores several of the most common trades with the hope of shedding a little light, albeit indirectly, on the people who practiced them.

The **Common Earth, Common History** project strives to acknowledge these craftspeople and find the commonality between two historic settlements, Fort Ross and Izborsk, Russia, by highlighting crafts and trades practiced at both historic parks. By searching historical documents for references to the most prevalent trades - **blacksmithy and metalworks, ship building, brick making, woodworking and**

**coopering, fiberworks, and tanning** - we hope to better describe both the crafts and daily existence at Settlement Ross.

Thanks go to Leyla Holt for culling the history books (Glenn Farris' *So Far From Home*, Gibson/Istomin/Tishkov's *Russian California*, and *The Khlebnikov Archive*) to prepare the relevant excerpts such as this one which attests to the variety of products manufactured at Fort Ross:

"The brickworks and tannery were in a fairly satisfactory condition; in particular the latter produced a considerable number of good tanned hides. Coopering was improved as much as possible. On the brig *Kyakhta*, which arrived at New Archangel [Sitka, Alaska] in 1826, 50 shoe-upper hides, 10 yuft hides, 100 sea lion skins, 150 chamois skins, 4 thousand bricks, 10 barrels of clay, and 5 barrels of pitch, besides a thousand puds of wheat, were shipped from the settlement."

"Also among the articles made for Californios or ordered by them at Ross in the first half of the 1830s were 'two-wheeled carriages', carts, wheels, barrels, 'sundry furniture', doors and sashes, 'copper boilers', 'caps of red cloth', cartridge pouches, millstones, whetstones, and so on."

From *Russian California, 1806-1860, A History in Documents. Volume II*, edited by James R. Gibson and Alexei A. Istomin, © 2014, The Hakluyt Society.

FRC thanks the U.S. Embassy in Moscow's **Peer-to-Peer grant program** for the opportunity to work on this project and Captain Michael K Barritt and Will F Ryan of The Hakluyt Society for supporting this endeavor.

Please check out our webpages at [http://www.fortross.org/izborsk\\_fortross.htm](http://www.fortross.org/izborsk_fortross.htm) for more details on the trades at Fort Ross.



## Barbara Black

Barbara Charles Black, who lived almost all of her nearly 97 years on the Charles ranch above Meyers Grade, died in Santa Rosa on Sunday, September 20. She was well known here as the daughter of two Sonoma Coast pioneer families and as an expert sheep raiser and horse breeder. Her published obituary centered on this side of her life, but we in the neighborhood and at Fort Ross also knew another important part of this amazing woman: as a devotee not only of the local ranching history and practices, but of its natural history, and its social, cultural, and industrial happenings as well.

Barbara's maternal family, the Calls, are mentioned but briefly in the paper's obituary, but they and Barbara, as an important Call descendant, played a big role in the history of Fort Ross, beginning with George and Mercedes Call's 1873 purchase of 2500 acres of the Muniz Rancho (including the old Russian Fort), through their management and enlargement of their holdings into the 1970s. Barbara's mother, Mary Addie (Call) Charles, the fourth Call child, born in 1872, instilled in her daughter a great love for and interest in everything concerning the Call House and Ranch. Mary Charles lived until 1957; she was a good historian, a longtime powerhouse up at the Fort Ross School, and of course a heavy influence on Barbara, who also supported the school in her time.

When FRIA, the Fort Ross Interpretive Association began, Barbara, a widow in 1974, quickly became one of its authorities on the Ranch Era. She was chairman for a while, contributed to its newsletters, wrote booklets on the Dairy and the Fort Ross School, helped write grants, and was an active member for some years. When the movement began to renovate the Call House and Garden for visitors' tours, Barbara was invaluable for her knowledge of furnishings. She supervised important purchases, and her remembrances of her grandmother and other family in the house during her childhood were most helpful to all those who were involved with this big project. Since the house opened in 2002, she has given many old family items for display, as well as advice and rose bushes for her grandmother Mercedes's garden.

She was indeed, as her nephew Anthony suggested, the Grande Dame of the Ridge; I understood that from my mother-in-law (1950s). She had taught Barbara at Fort Ross School in 1933; they remained dear friends. Barbara's reputation was well earned; everyone knew she was strong-minded and rightly confident, but she was not arrogant. Barbara and George Black had no children of their own, and Barbara leaves no close family; her only sibling, Juanita, died in 1942. But she was always eager to talk about "old times", especially with younger folks. She was curious and was always happy when they were! Her own memory was phenomenal, even in her last years.



As I worked on our local history, I found her always open to discuss a myriad of subjects, on the phone, by letter or in person. (I kept many pages of notes, and others have her on tape). If sometimes my records differed from her memories, she was always willing to change her mind, if she was convinced. And of course, it was usually she who was right, and I who thus gained much invaluable information for my books. In her 90s, when she was sure she couldn't remember some certain item after I mentioned it, she would sometimes get a memory flash, which really pleased her.

Barbara's passing leaves us with just one Call grandchild, her cousin Laurie (Carr) Horn, of Sebastopol, 97 this past July. She, too, is a special asset for those of us interested in the Ranch Era at Fort Ross. We have been especially lucky to have two fine old ladies with excellent memories and sharing ways. Barbara Black, a superlative local, will be missed by all the neighbors and everyone who has been associated with Fort Ross over the years.

--Lynn Rudy

**We are planning to place a bench in the Call Garden in Barbara Black's memory. If you would like to contribute please contact us.**



## John Sperry

Our John Sperry died in early July, just 93 years old and still planning his next project. We never knew what it would involve: a new hiking trail, a kayak outing, climbing a mountain peak, or visiting a new part of the West, usually with Jodi, his wife of many years. Maybe the best label for him would be "The Enthusiast". His sparkling eyes and eternal curiosity were embodied in him as in no other I have known. It is a gross understatement to say that he will be missed, at Fort Ross and Salt Point and at the Fort Ross School, where he made himself useful and often indispensable.

The Sperrys came to our coast in 1988 and promptly built (literally) a comfortable home nestled in the redwoods. Then they jumped into the community. Jodi taught primary school for several years in Pt. Arena. John zeroed in on Fort Ross. In the 1990s, he and I were corralled by Lyn Kalani into editing the historical booklet *Fort Ross*, still a best seller today - and a great learning experience for all of us. This was the first time I saw John in action, but there would be many more. When the Call House began to be renovated, John was there. He and Paul Chappell crawled under and above the rooms, inspecting underpinnings and structure. Who knew or remembers? When the House later had any slight mechanical or electrical problem, John offered to fix it, and did, cheerfully; you could depend on it.

Any Fort Ross program involving boats, particularly kayaks and especially the Russian baidarkas, was sure to include John, usually as program manager as well as a participant. He even set up a baidarka-building workshop in our barn for a few eager paddlers; John was one of the few who was able to manage, when finished, these very delicate kayaks. (John's own baidarka rests at the moment on a rack in our barn.) His interest in Alaska was longstanding; he had taught school on King Island in the Bering Sea long before we knew him. John read widely (and shared) Alaskan books on history and exploration, and at Fort Ross promoted programs which included Alaska natives and scholars, with his usual enthusiasm - and follow through.

John's community involvement extended as well to the public Fort Ross School, always eager for scientific and mathematical volunteers. His former students still talk about his influence on them: especially his careful exposition of the mysteries of algebra and higher math. (Fort Ross Conservancy board member Tim Kelly recently wrote on his blog a well-deserved tribute to his former mentor, telling how John had changed his life.) John's degrees and interests were in engineering and physics; (he and three other local science aficionados, Bob, Jerry, and Frank, had a lively discussion group, the Jabberwocks.) But his interest in the natural world was also great: I saw him observe - more than once - the metamorphosis of Monarch butterflies and a group of Cecropia moths. And he enjoyed making careful drawings of small



creatures that interested him. John's last Fort Ross project involved its new historical replica Russian windmill. He and master woodworker Chris Feddersohn have spent many hours fine-tuning this exciting new feature at the Fort. Early on, John improved the windmill's four heavy stabilizing poles with a more efficient rope and pulley system; recently they secured the mill's main axle with a metal cap to keep it from jumping out of its designated path. This spring, John designed and helped build a big, 36" wooden wheel to help ease the turning of the windmill's blades into the wind. The last thing he did was to buy and put together special jute ropes, finished with fine shipwright's knots and wooden fasteners for the new pulley system. These he stowed away, and showed Chris where they were kept. And then he left us.

Bon voyage, John.

--Lynn Rudy,  
FRC Volunteer, and author of  
*The Old Salt Point Township*

**Join us for the dedication of a park bench for John Sperry on Sunday, May 22nd at 11 am at Fort Ross on the bluffs overlooking Sandy Cove. A windmill turning in his honor follows at 1pm.**

# Highlights of 2016 Events

**January 1**  
**First Day Walk**

**March 12**  
**Farallones Talk**

**March 26**  
**Park Champions Workday at Salt Point**

**April 10**  
**Direct Fish Printing (*Gyotaku*) Workshop**

**April 16-18**  
**Stanford U.S. Russia Forum**

**April 23**  
**Volunteer Open House & Orientation**

**May 21**  
**Alaska Native Day**

**May 22**  
**John Sperry Dedication**

**June 25**  
**Seaweed Foray and Workshop**

**July 30**  
**Fort Ross Festival**

**October 15**  
**Harvest Festival**

**December 10**  
**Community Potluck**

Our website is updated daily.  
For details go to:

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



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## FRC Annual Members' Meeting

**Saturday, April 9th, 12:30pm**  
**Fort Ross State Historic Park Visitor Center Auditorium**

We will hold an FRC Members' Meeting on Saturday, April 9th 2016 at the Fort Ross State Historic Park Visitor Center. You must be an active member to attend the FRC Annual Members' Meeting. According to our bylaws:

*With thirty (30) days written notice the annual meeting of the members of the Conservancy for the transaction of such business as may properly come before such meeting shall be held on such date of each calendar year as may be determined by the Board of Directors.*

### **AGENDA**

- 12:30 pm – Call to Order
- Announcement of members present – 51% of which constitutes a quorum
- President's Report
- Changes to the Conservancy's Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws
- Challenges to Board Actions (at this time there are none)
- Member comments and/or questions

If you plan to attend the meeting, please call or email Sarjan Holt – 707-847-3437 [sarjanh@fortross.org](mailto:sarjanh@fortross.org).  
If you have any material or information you wish to present to the members, please send it electronically to [sarjanh@fortross.org](mailto:sarjanh@fortross.org) by March 15th, 2016 so it may be sent to the members before the meeting.



**FORT ROSS  
CONSERVANCY**

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## Contact Information

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## Highlights of Upcoming Events:

**SAVE THE DATE!!**

**April 9 - Annual Meeting**

**May 21 - Alaska Native Day**

**July 30 - Fort Ross Festival**

**October 15 - Harvest Festival**

Please check the entire list of  
**2016 Events at**  
[www.fortross.org/events.htm](http://www.fortross.org/events.htm).