

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bodega Bay With Style Celebrates Early Russian Days

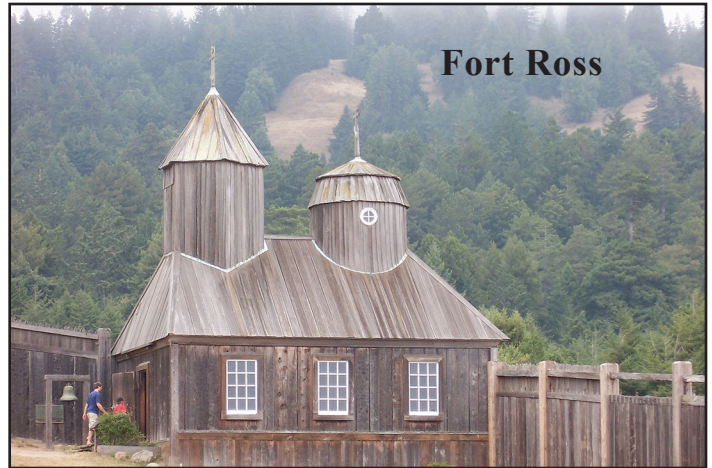
by Robin Rudderow - 2012

Ivan Aleksandrovich Kuskov would have been proud of how the harbor port community he founded as Port Rumiantsev 203 years ago celebrated him this April. The specific occasion was the 200th anniversary of his return (March 15, 1812) to the port on the Chrikov, carrying supplies and craftsmen and Aleut natives, to build Fortress Ross. Today, we know Port Rumiantsev as Bodega Bay. But back then it was the most southern Russian harbor on the Pacific coast for 33 years.

In a series of special tributes this year, Bodega Bay as a community pulled out all stops to celebrate in style. From April 3-10 the tall ships, The Lady Washington and the Hawaiian Chieftain arrived as the center pieces in a series of celebrations (The Lady Washington is said to resemble the Chrikov of 200 years ago and is a reference point to the mode of travel by early explorers).

The celebrations for the community included a Vodka Tasting & Caviar evening at the Bodega Harbour Yacht Club on Friday, April 6, The Russian Collection Performing Arts Ensemble music and cultural event at The Bodega Bay Grange on April 7, all-day exhibits and lectures at The Tides Wharf, and most important, the special VIP luncheon given by the Bodega Bay Area Chamber of Commerce at The Duck Club on April 5. It was a special setting because the view from the Duck Club overlooks the area that was once Port Rumiantsev.

At the luncheon were community leaders, but also two special guests from Russia, Vladimir Kolychev, the President of the Russian American Historical Society in Moscow, and Yulia Yerykalova, Director of the Tot'ma Regional History Museum and sister city of Bodega Bay (Kuskov of course was a native of Tot'ma). Other special guests included the Russian Consulate's Deputy Consul Khalit Aysin of San Francisco, Natalie Sabelnik, President of the Congress of Russian Americans, representatives of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, and others. Chamber president Sissy Blanchard welcomed all, starting the proceedings with an official vodka toast.



EARLY RUSSIAN DAYS

In very reverential tone, the luncheon guests listened to a blessing and greetings given by Joanne Campbell, a tribal elder for the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. Mr. Khalit responded, reminding the audience that the Russians of that day came in peace and lived in peace with the Coast and Bodega Miwok and that these relations still exist today. He presented Ms. Campbell with replicas of the Russian American Company flag that once flew at Port Rumiantsev and Fort Ross and the Russian Navy Ensign – all to re-create the gift exchange that would have taken place two centuries ago.

Natalie Sabelnik extended greetings from the Russian American community and read a proclamation to Bodega Bay on behalf of the Congress of Russian Americans. She also formally introduced the Russian guests and helped translate their remarks.

Yulia Yerykalova presented an official gift to people of Bodega Bay on behalf of the people in Tot'ma in the form of restored oil portraits of Ivan Kuskov and his wife, Ekaterina. Responding and presenting a gift on behalf of the Bodega Bay community was Adri Boudewyn, of the Rancho Bodega Historical Society, who presented specially made spheres of old growth redwood from circa 1840 to both Ms. Yerykalova and Mr. Kolychev. The gifts were symbolic of the past and present and of the forests that served Ivan Kuskov so well when building the Fort Ross stockade.

This was followed by a story about the meaning of the “**Russian possession plaques**” by John Middleton, former president of the Fort Ross Interpretive Association, who said these plaques were buried in secret places by early Russian explorers to proclaim the places where they were found as Russian land. He said that about 20 of these plaques had been buried and showed a copy of the one discovered in Sitka, Alaska. He said research tells us that Port Rumiantsev had been assigned the #14 plaque, although it has yet to be found.

E. Breck Parkman, senior state archaeologist for California State Parks explained “Kuskov the Man”, how he thought and how he acted. He said Kuskov’s reputation was as a thoughtful man, with a practical bent, who strived for peace with the Native population. Jackie Pels, a poet and writer, provided the close of this luncheon with a reading of a specially commissioned poem.

Meanwhile, the celebrations continued April 28-29 when the 39th Annual Bodega Bay Fisherman’s Festival was held -- dedicated to the Port Rumiantsev days with the bi-lingual theme of “OCEANS REIGN - ВЛАДЫЧЕСТВО ОКЕАНОВ”



Bodega Bay's Sister City: Tot'ma, Russia (2011) Tot'ma, Russia is the birthplace of Ivan A. Kuskov and since October 1998 has been our sister city. It is one of the ancient Russian cities, dating back to 1137, and is the administrative center of Tot'ma municipality of Vologda Oblast. It is situated on the bank of the Sukhona River, has a population of 10,338 people, and is known for its many beautiful churches. A black Aleut fox in a gold field is in the city coat of arms as the city inhabitants hunted fur-bearing animals. Tot'ma is called a city of navigators. More than 20 expeditions were equipped for exploring the Pacific Ocean by Tot'ma merchants, who as a consequence of these travels provided one fifth of all the fur skins used in Europe in centuries past.

Origin of Port Rumiantsev name (2011) Port Rumiantsev was named after Count Nikolay Petrovich Rumyantsev, Russia's Minister of Commerce and later Foreign Minister, who influenced early Russian American Company affairs. He was part of the nobility and aristocracy and funded Russia's first naval circumnavigation in 1803-1806 as well as later expeditions seeking scientific information on the flora and fauna of California and ethnographic information about native Californians.

Russians collected and named California Poppy (2011) Russians collected and named California Poppy (2011) Russian voyagers in the early 1800s were among the first to record California's unique cultural and natural history. The Russian circumnavigation by the brig Riurik (1815-1818) under the command of Fleet Lieutenant Otto von Kotzebue, had on board the naturalists Friedrich Eschscholtz and Adelbert von Chamisso, and the artist Louis Choris. They recorded hundreds of species found in the San Francisco Bay area including the California poppy, *Eschscholtzia californica*, so named by Adelbert von Chamisso for a fellow naturalist.

Short history of the Russian occupation of Bodega Bay The food shortage at Sitka, Alaska, in the winter of 1805-1806 forced the Russian American Company to look for more temperate climates to grow food and hunt sea otter, prized in the fur trade. That search took Russian explorers down the Pacific Coast, especially to California, looking for suitable harbors and locations to start an agricultural settlement.

Russian sea otter hunters first came to California on board American otter-hunting ships as early as 1803, and first entered Bodega Bay in 1807 aboard the American ship Peacock, which took in 1,231 otter skins. On board the Peacock was Vasili Tarakhanov, Russian supervisor for the Aleut otter hunters, who saw the potential of Bodega Bay as a port and reported that back to his superiors in Sitka.

That's how in 1809, commerce counselor Ivan A. Kuskov, representing the Russian American Company, ended up in Bodega Bay. His ship was the "Kad'iak" and with him onboard were 150 Aleut hunters, including 20 women, and a Russian force of 40 men. They settled at what is now Campbell Cove and named it Port Rumiantsev. It remained so until 1842.

At Campbell Cove, Kuskov and his people built a number of structures to warehouse dry goods and food supplies (some of the warehouse foundations could still be seen on the Gaffney ranch in 1949). They also built a few houses, a large bath house, various huts and corrals and had a number of small boats for servicing ships in the outer bay. They were also successful in hunting otter. After 10 months they returned to Sitka with 2350 sea otter pelts.

It was the custom of the Russians to secretly bury a Russian Possession Plaque wherever they settled land. One such plaque is believed to have been buried at Campbell Cove.

It was one of 20 buried by Russian explorers along the Alaska and Pacific coast, to formally mark Russia's claim to the land. The plaques read "Land of Russia." Each plaque had a separate number. With the exact location of burial sites now lost, it might only be through accident that additional plates come to light. The number for Bodega Bay was 14.

On March 15, 1812, Ivan A. Kuskov returned to Port Rumiantsev on the “Chirikov”. He brought with him 20 Russians and 80 Aleutian natives and a ship full of supplies to begin the journey north to build Fort Ross, 24 miles north of Bodega Bay in Kashaya Pomo country.

They named the colony Fortress Ross. Though there was some tension with the Spanish and later Mexican governments – which claimed ownership of California all the way up to present day south east Alaska -- the Russians remained until 1842. Much later in history, the fort became a designated National Historic Landmark and is known today as Fort Ross State Historic Park, often visited by Russian scholars and tourists.

To honor the memory of Ivan A. Kuskov, Bodega Bay has a sister city relationship with Tot'ma in Russia, the birthplace of Kuskov and a city known for its many beautiful churches. That city goes back to 1137.

Ivan Kuskov Returns to Port Rumiantsev (2011) Port Rumiantsev, March 15, 1812 – The Russian-American Company schooner, Chirikov, anchored at Campbell Cove today, arriving from Sitka and bringing with her RAC's commercial counselor, Ivan A. Kuskov.

The vessel is delivering hardware and other supplies needed for construction of an agricultural and trading settlement to be known as Fortress Ross, 24 miles north of here.

Kuskov, 47, brought along a party of 25 skilled craftsmen and 80 Native Alaskans. They comprise the initial working crew to begin building the Russian empire's most southern settlement on the Pacific Coast.