

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Revised

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

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| 1. STATE California | 2. THEME(S). IF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE, WRITE "ARCH" BEFORE THEME NO. XX (Architecture) and XV (Fur Trade) |
| 3. NAME(S) OF SITE Fort Ross Commander's House | 4. APPROX. ACREAGE 4 acres |
| 5. EXACT LOCATION (County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet) Sonoma County, on State Highway 1, 87 miles north of San Francisco | |
| 6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (Also administrator if different from owner) State of California (Division of Beaches and Parks) | |
| 7. IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant) | |

Statement of Significance

Built in 1812, the Commander's House is an excellent original example of the Russian methods of log construction.

History

Fort Ross was established as a Russian American Company fur trading post by Ivan Kuskoff and 95 Russians and 80 Aleuts from Sitka, Alaska, in the spring of 1812. The post was constructed on the same general plan utilized by the Russians for their fur trading posts in Alaska. Fort Ross was an quadrangular enclosure which measured about 276 by 312 feet. Hand-hewn redwood timbers were used for all construction, including the stockaded walls, which were 12 feet high. Two two-story blockhouses, one 7-sided and the other 8-sided, were located at diagonally opposite corners of the stockade.

Inside the walls were the commander's house, officer's quarters, a two-story barracks for the Russian employees, a chapel, and 3 storehouses and offices; outside the walls were 37 redwood huts for the Aleuts, a windmill, farm buildings, granaries, cattle yards, a tannery, and workshops for blacksmiths, coopers, bakers, and carpenters. The fort was completed in 1814. In December, 1841, the Russian American Company sold Fort Ross to John A. Sutter and the last Russians left the post in January, 1842.

(Continued)

8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works)

Hubert H. Bancroft, History of California (7 vols., San Francisco, 1884-90), II, 58-62, 294-320, 628-52; IV, 158-89; Harold Kirker, California's Architectural Frontier (San Marino, 1960), 3, 13; Fort Ross State Historical Monument (Leaflet, California Division of Beaches and Parks, 1955).

9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, HABS, etc.)

Historic American Building Survey: CAL 1313 Russian Barracks 4 photos (1934). Jessie S. Douglas, "Brief Historical Account of Fort Ross," (N.P.S. Typescript, San Francisco, July 16, 1935). Olaf T. Hagen, "Historic Sites Survey Report: Fort Ross, Calif.," (N.P.S. Typescript, San Francisco, S.F. Aug 20, 1941).

10. PHOTOGRAPHS: 617, 1407, 1609

11. PRESENT USE (Museum, farm, etc.)

12. DATE OF VISIT

ATTACHED: YES NO Excellent (Restored) State Historical Monument Apr. 12, 1958

14. NAME OF RECORDER (Signature)
Charles W. Snell Charles W. Snell

15. TITLE
Historian

16. DATE
Feb. 8, 1967

* DRY MOUNT ON AN 8 X 10 1/2 SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. GIVE LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

(IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER)

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SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on the regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as many Supplement Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical order of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, its name, and the word (cont'd), as, 6. Description and Importance (cont'd) . . .

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| STATE | NAME(S) OF SITE |
|------------|-----------------------------|
| California | Fort Ross Commander's House |

7. Continued:

The Commander's House, erected in 1812, is a one-story dwelling that measures approximately 36 by 48 feet. The walls, which are not parallel, equal, or at right angles to another, are comprised of hand-squared redwood timbers that are mortised together at the corners. No saws or augers were used, but the intricate and strong long-joining was done with the use of the adze, axe, broadaxe, chisel, and plane. The high-pitched peaked hipped roof, which also varies from side to side and end to end, was built in two layers and is made up of skillfully split and hewed boards that are up to 23 feet long and over an inch thick; these each have two chiseled grooves down their upper side near each edge to keep the water away from the cracks. The residence has a hall and 7 rooms, with indications that there may once have been an eighth room. By 1818 the house had glass in its windows, which was imported from Russia.

The Commander's House, largely an original building, was still virtually intact and little-altered in 1906 when the Fort Ross site was donated to the State of California. This building, now a part of Fort Ross State Historical Monument, is being carefully repaired and restored and is open to visitors as an historic house museum.

