

Meniailenko M. RUSSIAN EMIGRANTS AND FORT ROSS.
Presentation at the Fort Ross bicentennial conference 24 - 27 April 2012.

Prior to Russian revolution the Russian population of San Francisco was very small. When the territory of Russian America was sold to the United States, Russian Orthodox Church moved its Diocesan and administrative headquarters from Sitka to San Francisco, and Holy Trinity Cathedral became the center of the Orthodox Church in North America from 1872 to 1905. On March 2, 1897 Russian Orthodox Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska Nicholas (Ziorov) visited Fort Ross. His diary was published at the same year ¹. However, Russians themselves were a minority at the local parish at that time.

Thanks to the California Landmarks League, in 1903 the Fort Ross was chosen for preservation. With the support of San Francisco-born newspaper magnate and congressman William Randolph Hearst stockade and a part of surrounding territory was bought from private owners and handed over to the State of California in 1906.

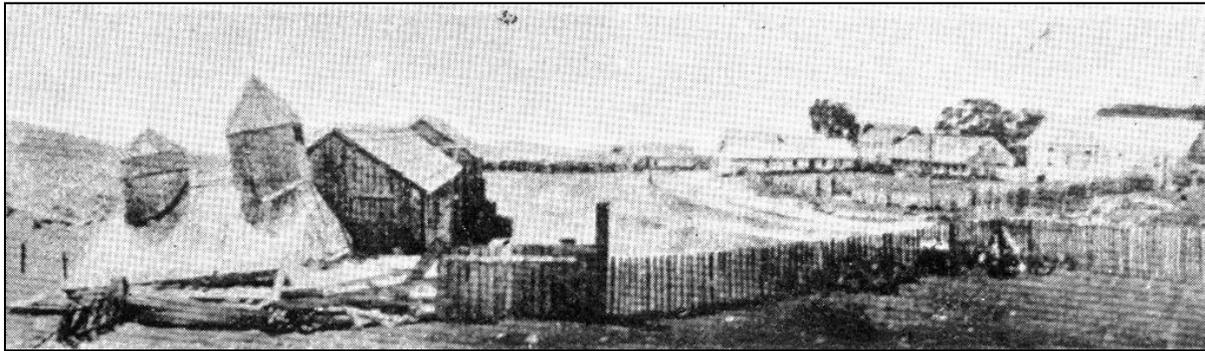


Fig. 1. Fort Ross after earthquake in 1906 ².

After earthquake of 1906 the chapel, the commander's house and bastions had been restored by 1922.

By 1923 the Russian population of San Francisco increased considerably, in large part due to the arrival of Russian Civil War refugees, and Russians became the predominant group at the local parish. Rector of Holy Trinity Cathedral archpriest Vladimir (Sakovich) and a group of Russian immigrants made the first pilgrimage to Fort Ross on July 4, 1925. With consent of local authorities, archpriest Vladimir held an Orthodox liturgy at the Fort Ross chapel. The road to Fort Ross along the ocean shore (built in 1875) had been closed long ago, so the journey using ferry for trans-bay service took two days.

During this visit, Russian immigrants realized the scope of work to be done at Fort Ross. It was not easy to find the original borders of Fort Ross as well as the borders of surrounding territories, which originally belonged to this settlement. Of the four walls surrounding the Fort only two remained, and an asphalt road crossed the fortress territory. Some details of the restored chapel were not historically accurate: there were four windows instead of three and the cross was restored incorrectly.



Fig. 2. Fort Ross, 1920-1930s³.

In order to make Fort Ross a worthy monument to Russian explorers, A.P. Farafontov (scientist-orientalist from Harbin), and his like-minded friends created a group of 13 people called "The Executive Committee of Fort Ross." The Committee sought to address urgent problems. Main tasks of Committee were fundraising for restoration and improvement of Fort Ross; collecting documents, portraits, certificates, and objects, related to the settlement; organizing an annual tree planting event on the site of the former garden; restoration of graves; and creation of a cemetery.



Fig. 3. Executive Committee of Fort Ross, 1936⁴.

The internal decoration of the chapel and the interiors of surviving buildings were lost, and furniture was missing. In 1926 Archpriest Vladimir (Sakovich), with a blessing of Metropolitan Platon (Rozhdestvensky), asked all Orthodox parishes in America for a help in the restoration of the Fort Ross chapel, which had "no icons and no utensils of the church". The support of Russian immigrants has made it possible to restore the authenticity of the crosses, the interior of the chapel, and the chandelier.



Fig. 4. New interior of the chapel ⁵.

In order to breathe life into the surviving buildings, it was important to have the Fort Ross national park functioning. Russians organized annual visits coinciding with services at the Fort Ross chapel on July 4th - Independence Day. In 1930s the firstborn child of L.P. and V.P. Lebedev (members of the Executive Committee of Fort Ross) was baptised at the Fort Ross chapel. Russian Orthodox Church Abroad joined the worship services at Fort Ross on Memorial Day.

The Executive Committee Fort Ross members began to systematically collect information related to Russian settlement on the Pacific coast.



У входа в Церковь на Форту Росс.
Снимок сдѣлан в день крещенія сына — первенца
Л. П. и В. П. Лебедевых — членов Инициативной
Группы «Форт Росс».

Fig. 5. Lebedev family's son was baptised in the Fort Ross chapel⁶.

A.P. Farafontov and M.D. Sedyh entered corresponded with director of historical library and museum in Juneau (Alaska) A.P. Kashevarov, director of University of California libraries G. Priestley, member of the Library of Congress Mr. Vinokurov (Washington), and with the American Historical Society of California. They also contacted representatives of Russian emigre maritime associations: Chairman of the Wardroom in San Francisco M.Y. Gordenevym, vice-chairman of the Marine Society in New York, N. Dvorzhitskim, and with counter admiral D.V. Nikitin. Committee members identified almost hundreds publications with unique historical

information, drawings and photographs, they prepared and published corresponding bibliography in seven editions of the newspaper "Новая заря (New Dawn)" (San Francisco) starting with edition number 2184 in late 1930-s. A.P. Farafontov devoted his special article "Seventeen outstanding books published in Russia" to key Russian publications about the development of the Pacific coast. The article was published in 1938 in the Orthodox newspaper "Свет" (Wilkes Bare, PA).

In 1936 members of the Committee (V.N. Arefiev, P.S. Olenich, and A.P. Farafontov) travelled to Fort Ross to take measurements and photographs. P.S. Olenich and V.N. Arefiev made an exact plan of the territory acquired from the Indians, which was significantly larger than the boundaries of the park.

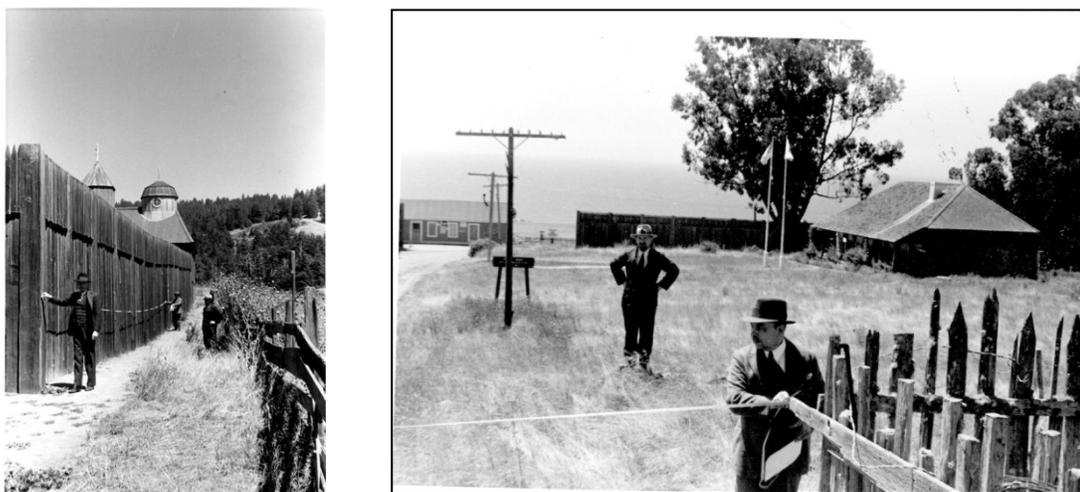


Fig. 6. Members of Executive Committee Fort Ross took measurements, 1936⁷.

In 1936 A.P. Farafontov appealed to all Russian emigrats via the newspaper "Новая Заря (New Dawn)" in two large articles. He raised the question: why Russian organizations had not put at the heart of their activities "taking care of Fort Ross, its exaltation, pointing out at the fact that the public understands and appreciates what has been done by Russian heroes ...?". From Shanghai G.E. Rodionov responded with full support and has become an active member of the Committee. Soon a special fund "Fort Ross" has been established. First contributions were made by members of the Committee of Fort Ross.

The illustrated album "Fort Ross - an outpost of the former glory of Russia in America. 1812-1937" was released for the 125th anniversary of the Fort. It included about 15 reproductions of rare drawings and photographs of the former Fort, as well as photographs reflecting the activities of the Committee of Fort Ross. It was produced at the expense of members of the Committee, printed by the publishing house "Slovo" (Shanghai), and all proceeds from its distribution were donated to the "Fort Ross" fund.

The album was sent to the Native Sons of the Golden West, engaged in landscaping of the Fort Ross park, and to other American organizations interested in its restoration. To promote the Fort and for fundraising purposes the album was sent to a number of prominent figures of Russian emigration and Russian organizations. It is known that the album was sent to the

Archbishop of San Francisco and Metropolitan of All America and Canada, Theophilus (Pashkovsky), Bishop of Chicago Leontius (Turkevich), head of the Russian Orthodox Mutual Aid Society (Wilkes Bare, PA) P. Kohanik archpriest, teacher of Orthodox courses in New York York Archpriest J. Chernavin, conter-admiral B.P. Dudorov, conter-admiral D.V Nikitin (Seattle, WA), general N.G Volodchenko, rector of the Russian Institute for the Americans in the Roerich Museum in New York City E.A. Muscov, editors of newspaper "New Russian Word" (New York), forthcoming handbook of V.D. Crimskiy "Russian America", writer, G.D. Grebenshchikov, Professor G.L. Lozinsky (Paris), Professor S.G. Svatikov (Paris), former director of the Harbin Commercial Schools of CER (Chinese Eastern Railway) and a public figure N.V.Borzov, and to the universities ...

Soon Russian emigrants in New York, Seattle, Sacramento and Los Angeles began to create branches of the Russian Historical Society in America.

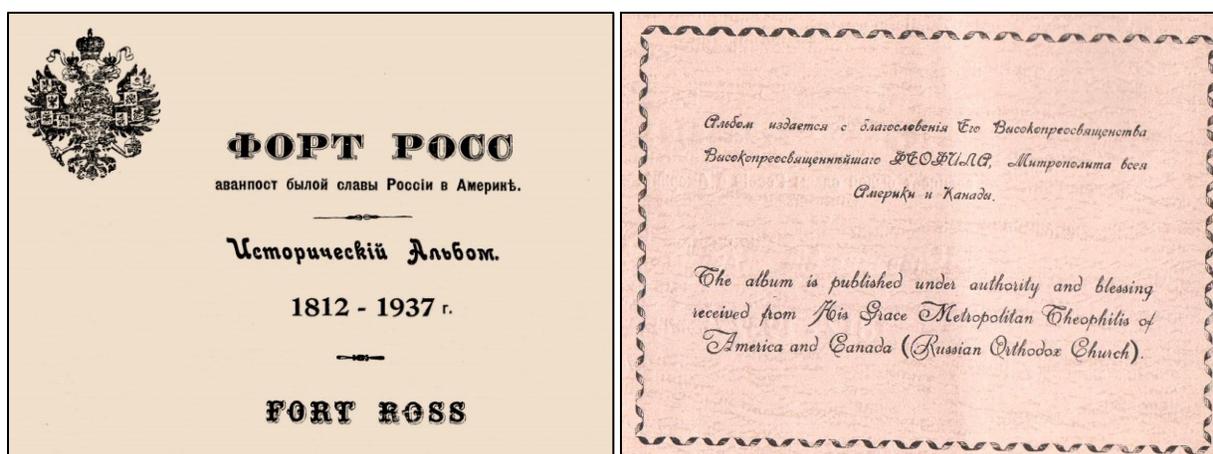


Fig. 7. The illustrated album "Fort Ross - an outpost of the former glory of Russia in America.1812-1937"⁸.

On the day of the anniversary of Fort Ross in 1937, a trip to the Russian fortress was crowded and solemn. Members of the Committee of Fort Ross, V.N. Arefiev and L.A. Sharaev filmed the anniversary celebrations. There is still a chance to find this recording in the archives of the Museum of Russian Culture. The film was shown at the evening Ball-Reception organized by the first Russian Historical Society in America – which is the name under which the Committee of Fort Ross was registered in 1937.

In 1937 Russian emigrant T.P. Ponomarev made a project of Alexander Nevsky Memorial Chapel in an honor of Russian Emperor Alexander I, who ruled Russian Empire during establishment of the Fort Ross and during its operation. It was planned to build this Chapel somewhere near Russian River for the 125th anniversary of the Fort. Corresponding drawing has been found in March 2012 in archive of Museum of Russian Culture San Francisco.



Fig. 8. T.P. Ponomarev's project of Alexander Nevsky Memorial Chapel, 1937⁹.

Russian community continued to provide a help to the Fort Ross during 1940-s. On February 1944 Metropolitan of San Francisco and All America and Canada Theophilus (Pashkowski) led the Jubilee Committee for Celebration of 150th anniversary of the Orthodox Church in America. He remembered his visit to the original chapel before the earthquake, and took care of ongoing restoration of chapel interior.

M.D. Sedyh, who led the Russian Historical Society in America during the wartime 1940s, called on the Russian community to support the initiative of Metropolitan Theophilus.

Tireless M.D.Sedyh discovered in early 1940-s information about the Fort Ross church bells in old American magazines. According to this information Russians took with them to Alaska only two out of three identical church bells when they left Fort Ross. The third one was left to John Sutter. After several years of research M.D.Sedyh managed to find the bell with the help of the Petaluma branch of Native Sons of the Golden West. A ceremony for the return of the church bell to its original location in Fort Ross after 104 years of absence was scheduled for September 9, 1945 (Labor Day).



Fig. 9. Prof. V. Petrof (left) and M.D. Sedyh, the head of the Russian Historical Society in America, 1945¹⁰.

Russian emigrants made two more presents for the ceremony. The exact copy of Russian-American company flag was presented as a gift to representatives of the park. E.M. Petrova made a tricolor flag, and Z.V. Markova embroidered the Russian Empire emblem on it.

During ceremony, the flag of California has been raised accompanied with a sound of "Glorious" (the spiritual anthem of Russian Empire), and then the flag of the Russian-American Company was hoisted over the Fort again after 133 years.

Russian Historical Society made one more gift for this event. In order to inform park visitors on the history of Russian period, the Fort Ross Historical Society members have prepared two descriptive posters in frames on the basis of their album.

The first poster - "Fort Ross in the past" - presented reproductions of ancient drawings of Fort Ross, the scheme of its borders, as well as photographs showing the fate of the buildings in the years 1828-1911.

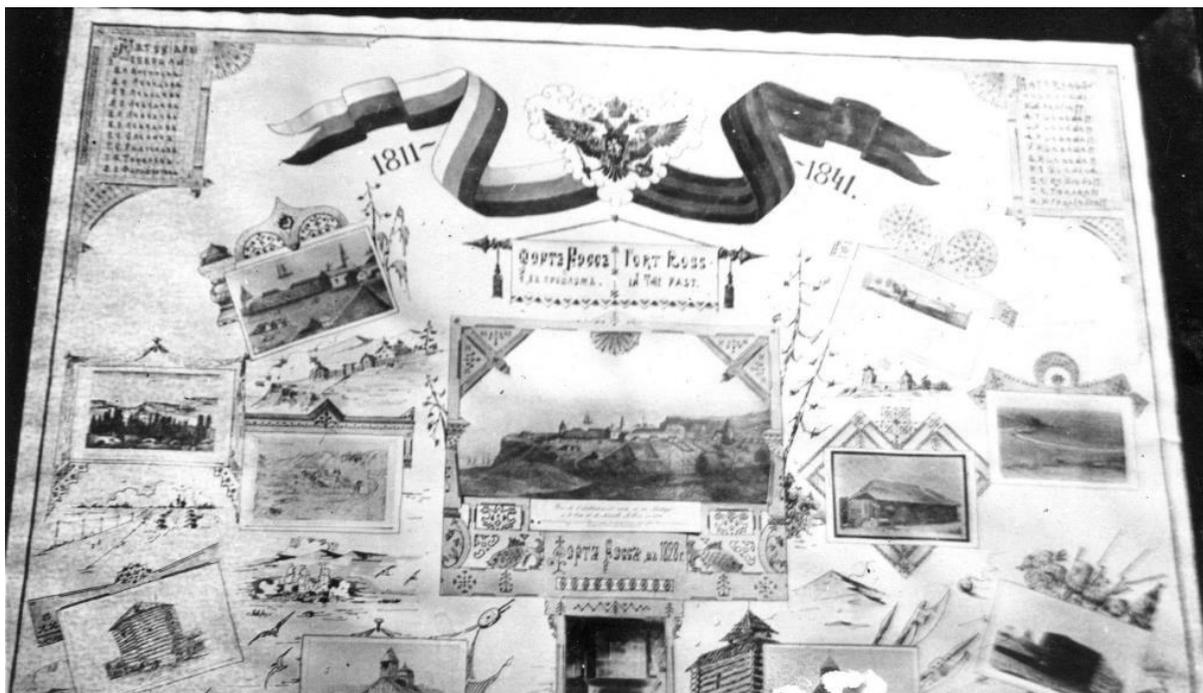


Fig. 10. The first poster "Fort Ross in the past" illustrating the fate of the buildings in 1828-1911¹¹.

Another poster - "Fort Ross in the present" - covered the participation of the Russian diaspora in the restoration of authentic buildings and interiors, and in the life of the park "Fort Ross".

It was planned to install the bell in a special bell tower. In 1945 Russian architect T.P. Ponomarev made the project of the tower for the bell. This project has not been realized. Corresponding drawing has been found in March 2012 in archive of Museum of Russian Culture San Francisco.

Russian Historical Society in America has ceased to exist legally after the World War, but in reality its members, a library, and part of the archive became the basis for the Museum-Archive of Russian Culture in San Francisco in 1948. The task of preserving the Russian emigration heritage, which experienced another "great migration" from the Soviet Russia after the World War, did not allow sufficient attention to Fort Ross problems.

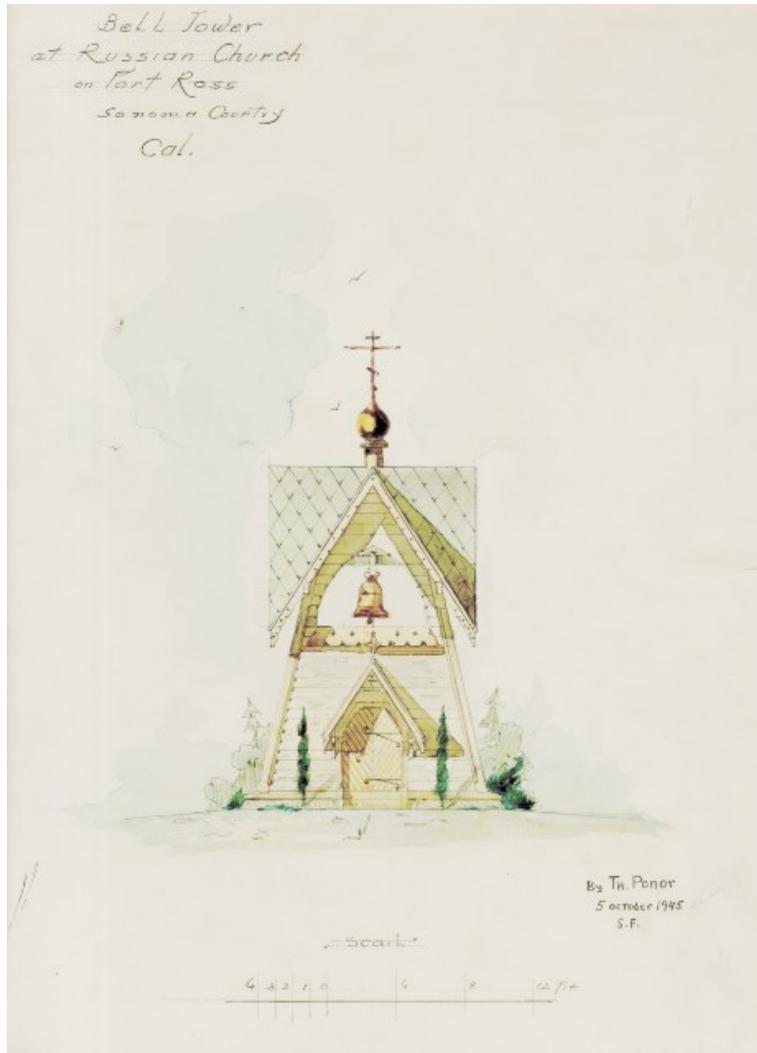


Fig. 11. T.P. Ponomarev 's project of the tower for the bell, 1945 ¹².

However Russian diaspora has not stopped its support of the park. After the closure of the Russian Historical Society in late 1940th professor N.I.Rokityansky, who has participated in the bell transfer ceremony, for many years oversaw the activities of the park.

Fort Ross chapel burned in early October 1970, and another fire in 1971 damaged Fort Ross buildings. It was a catastrophe for Russians in California. Fort Ross for them was a symbol of Russia behind the Iron Curtain.



Fig. 12. Fort Ross Chapel in fire¹³.

Russian Americans and concerned Americans donated 30 thousand dollars towards restoration. These donations supplemented the \$105,000 allocated from the state, and federal budgets. That money allowed rebuilding the chapel, restoring the commandant's house, and guarding towers.

СБОРЫ НА ВОССТАНОВЛЕНИЕ ЧАСОВНИ ФОРТА РОСС В КАЛИФОРНИИ.		DONATIONS FOR RESTAURATION OF FORT ROSS CHAPEL IN CALIFORNIA	
			
RUSSIAN CENTER 2450 Sutter St., San Francisco, Calif. 94115.		RUSSIAN CENTER 2450 Sutter St., San Francisco, Calif. 94115.	
ПОДПИСНОЙ ЛИСТ № 18		ПОДПИСНОЙ ЛИСТ № 114	
NAME	ADDRESS	SUM	SUM
Зинаида Гайдул	1100 McCallan Ave	5.00	5.00
Нарисса Богамарета		1.00	1.00
Michel Chardot		1.00	1.00
K. Caputo	372 E. 1st St.	1.00	1.00
M. Christensen		1.00	1.00
A. Mason		1.00	1.00
Б. Ано		1.00	1.00
Андр Кухарев		2.00	2.00
М. Макарова		1.00	1.00
К. Марквич		1.00	1.00
М. Ставров		5.00	5.00
Б. Суменджин		1.00	1.00
V. Volmanskij		1.00	1.00
V. Lebedeff	310 W. 14th Ave	5.00	5.00
З. Никонска	433 - 15th Ave S.F.	10.00	10.00
A. Nedezel	496 - 8th Ave S.F.	3.00	3.00
A. van Baer	494 - 8th Ave S.F.	1.00	1.00
		41.00	
Alex E. Levidy 1765 48th Avenue San Francisco, CA 94122		Alex E. Levidy 1765 48th Avenue San Francisco, CA 94122	
ПОДПИСНОЙ ЛИСТ № 114		ПОДПИСНОЙ ЛИСТ № 114	
NAME	ADDRESS	SUM	SUM
И. Трапез	1422 A Columbia	5.00	5.00
M. O. Hukonaka	2265 35th Ave S.F., Cal., 94116	10.00	10.00
А. и Б. Рухови	1200 - 33rd Ave.	10.00	10.00
Марина Lebedeff	3910 Fulton St	2.00	2.00
К. Клоповиц	2533 24th	1.00	1.00
С. и М. Мороз	21 пр. Пискарев пр.	1.00	1.00
ALEX YOUNG SPANFO	San Francisco	2.00	2.00
Sania Vera Alexander	2815 39th AVE SF	2.00	2.00
Э. Тарасов	1045 Noriega St S.F.	3.00	3.00
Раш		1.00	1.00
В. Сив		1.00	1.00
О. Колова		1.00	1.00
М. М. М.		1.00	1.00
Е. Коратчик	1166 Dolans	1.00	1.00
М. Суменджин	375 22nd Ave.	2.00	2.00
М. Марквич	7th St 53 16	2.00	2.00
S. Babinsky	646 2th St	2.00	2.00
		49.00	49.00

Fig. 13. Donation lists, 1971-1973¹⁴.

However, the original bell (the one which has been found and returned back to Fort Ross in September 9, 1945) was heavily damaged by fire, and its restoration was not possible. Then the Society of Russian Orthodox Laity in America decided to order a replica of the bell. The head of Society, N.A.Barsukov, collected more, than \$4,000. The bell was cast in the city of Louvain (Belgium) with the inclusion of material from the original bell. In 1974 more than 350 Russians from different cities, including Los Angeles, participated on the official opening of the fortress, restored after the fire. On the same day, there was a ceremony of handing over the bell for the chapel of Fort Ross by the new chairman of the Society of the Laity G.P. Tretyakov.

This Joyful event was accompanied by the firing of two cannons provided by D. Ilyin.

In 1990-1993 University of Wisconsin conducted an archeological excavation on the territory of Fort Ross in order to identify burial sites. Priest Alexander Krasovsky, with blessing from archbishop Antony, turned to the Russian community to raise funds for installation of crosses at identified Orthodox graves. In 1994 Russian scouts installed 136 such crosses!



Fig. 14. Installation of the big cross in the Fort Ross cemetery, 1994¹⁵.

With arrival of a new generation of Russians in 1990-s, Fort Ross filled with songs collected in folklore expeditions to different areas of Siberia, including the Trans-Baikal region.

Now, when Fort Ross is alive, when the history of the Russian period is presented in detail at the visitor center (which was built at the expense of the State in 1985), and the chapel of the Fort became the perfect example of historical reconstruction, it is difficult to realize the sacrifice of those who persistently and selflessly sought to make Fort Ross a worthy monument to Russian explorers. But it must be done, because there will be no future if there is no respect for the past.

Notes

1 Сообщения из заграницы. Поездка преосвященного Николая, епископа Алеутского, в Форт Росс. 2-14 марта 1897 года / Прибавление к церковным ведомостям, издаваемым при Святейшем правительствующем Синоде, 1897, №24, с. 819-823

2 Diane Spencer-Hancock and Wiliam E. Pritchard, "The Chapel at Fort Ross. Its History and reconstraction," *California history: The Magazine of the California Historical Society* 1 (1982)

3 Photograph courtesy of Museum of Russian Culture San Francisco

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 *Oakland Tribune*. "Fire destroyed a chapel a year ago this month". October 24, 1971. From Museum of Russian culture

14 Ibid. 3

15 Photograph courtesy of priest A. Krasovsky, Santa Rosa