



California Through Russian Eyes, 1806-1848 (Early California Commentaries Series)

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In the early nineteenth century, Russia established a colony in California that lasted until the Russian-American Company sold Fort Ross and Bodega Bay to John Sutter in 1841. This annotated collection of Russian accounts of Alta California, many of them translated here into English from Russian for the first time, presents richly detailed impressions by visiting Russian mariners, scientists, and Russian-American Company officials regarding the environment, people, economy, and politics of the province. Gathered from Russian archival collections and obscure journals, these testimonies represent a major contribution to the little-known history of Russian America.

Well educated and curious, the visiting Russians were acute observers, generous in their appreciation of Hispanic hospitality but outspoken in their criticisms of all they found backward or abhorrent. In the various reports and reminiscences contained within this volume, they make astute observations of both Hispanic and Native inhabitants, describing the Catholic missions with their devout friars and neophyte workers; the corruptible Franciscan missionaries; the sorry plight of mission Indians; the Californios themselves, whose religion, language, dwellings, cuisine, dress, and pastimes were novel to the Russians; the economic and social changes in Alta California following Mexican independence; and the schemes of American traders and settlers to draw the province into the United States.

Amplified by James R. Gibson's informative annotations, and featuring a gallery of elegant color illustrations, this unique volume casts new light on the history of Spanish and Mexican California.

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