

Putin Hopes for More Cooperation with U.S.

Oct. 19—Russian President Vladimir Putin today sent greetings to participants in a Russian-American meeting celebrating the 200th anniversary of Fort Ross (named for “Rossiya,” or “Russia”), site of the southernmost Russian settlement on the West Coast of North America, and now a public park in California’s Sonoma Valley. Russian media coverage of the telegram stressed that the President was extending a hand of peace and cooperation to the United States, at a time of increasing strains between the two nations.

Putin’s message, as translated on the Kremlin website, reads, in part:

“The 200th anniversary of Fort Ross is a major event in the cultural and social life of Russia and the US, a milestone in our common history. The founding of the first Russian settlement on the North Californian shore did more than just open a path to exploring vast territories, developing trade, agriculture and businesses. What is particularly important is that it also brought the people of our two continents closer, helping them establish friendly, fruitful contacts.

“Until now Fort Ross is a bright example of the joint efforts of Russian and American citizens, representatives of the indigenous population of North America, business and civic communities. The exhibitions of the museum complex allow visitors to discover the lesser-known facts of the American continent settlement during the first half of the 19th century and provide an opportunity to learn more about Russian traditions and customs of that time. In this regard, they play an enormous educational and

humanitarian role.

“I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has been helping preserve this unique monument in its original state, as well as those participating in establishing the Russian American Cultural Heritage Center. The significance of this work of preserving our common patrimony for our descendants can not be overrated.

“I am confident that this memorable anniversary of Fort Ross, which has brought together representatives of Russia and the United States, will become a symbol of spiritual ties, friendship and trust between our countries and our peoples.”

Twenty-five Russians and 90 Aleuts established the settlement in 1812, and developed a community which housed 260 inhabitants at its height. It was the first settlement in California to have windmills, orchards, and vineyards, and was guarded, at one point, by 12 cannons that were veterans of Russia’s successful defensive war against Napoleon in 1812-13. In 1841-42 the settlement was sold to an American. Russian-American cooperation around the Pacific Rim remained important throughout the 19th Century, including for purposes of restricting the British Empire’s presence in the region, and it is still a crucial area for cooperation today.

In 2009, when California, under then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, sought to slash \$24 billion from the state budget, Fort Ross was among 100 California state parks on the chopping block. In New York for the UN General Assembly that year, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called for Fort Ross to be preserved, as a reminder of longstanding good relations between the U.S.A. and Russia, for nearly two centuries before the Cold War. He called on Russian-American businessmen to raise money to save Fort Ross, and pledged Russian government support. The effort, together with some funding restored by California, succeeded.