



The Call House

Built in 1878

Welcome to the Call House Museum. This building is the only one from the "ranch era" (the period after the Russians left in 1841) here at Fort Ross.

It is open for guided tours only. Its artifacts and renovation were done "in house" by park staff and volunteers, with grants from the Sonoma County Landmarks Commission and the Mercedes Pearce and John Stafford Trust. The cooperation and encouragement of the Call family descendants helped to recreate the life style of George Washington Call (1829-1907) and his young Chilean wife, Mercedes Leiva (1850-1933), who bought 2500 acres of the Fort Ross or Muniz Rancho in 1873. While maintaining a house in San Francisco, they began to develop the ranch (cattle, dairying and orchards) and a harbor for lumber products and local produce.

The Calls built this residence in 1878, as a headquarters for the ranch and shipping operations, and a home for their family, which eventually included nine children. They built the one and a half story front section (the living and bed rooms) and incorporated an earlier, one story structure built by a previous owner, William Benitz (dining rooms and kitchen) on the back. The Call family lived in this house almost a century until son Carlos, the last occupant, died in 1972.

For further information please contact:
 Fort Ross Interpretive Association
 19005 Coast Highway One, Jenner, CA 95450
 (707) 847-3437

This house was first opened in May, 2003, and is considered a work in progress. Many of the furnishings belonged to the Call family. Others have been purchased and are meant to be typical of a well-to-do American family living on the isolated California coast ca 1880-1910.

THE SITE: The Call House faces south, into the sun and is protected from the strong prevailing northwest winds. But it presents a blank and armored face to the winter storms: there are no view windows. Mrs. Call was a passionate flower gardener; her front garden is being restored with the roses and fuchsias she loved. The broad front porch served as a gathering place, an outside room. It provided a view of the ocean and harbor, and an entrance to G W Call's office (right, not open) from which he conducted his many business affairs. On the left is a bedroom with a private entrance for visitors—often sea captains. It is not open but has been re-created inside.

THE NEW HOUSE: The front, central section, gable-roofed, has only 1700 square feet, but includes a sitting room, a parlor, five bedrooms, a guest room, office and cook's room! The ceilings are high, the windows are large and plain. The walls are painted, horizontal tongue and groove boards. The plumbing was primitive; the lighting was by kerosene or candles. Some of the children slept in the full attic.

1. **THE SITTING ROOM**, also an entrance hall, has the only fireplace, and was the family's chief gathering place. It and the adjoining parlor were the only carpeted rooms. Comfortable chairs, books and Mrs. Call's sewing were part of this room. Family pictures hung on the walls.
2. **THE GUEST ROOM**, (left off the sitting room) has been furnished for the occasional visitor. The naval uniform actually belonged to Capt. Schaefer of the Calls' "butter boat", the *Mary C.* launched around 1900 (see photo on mantel).
3. **THE PARLOR**, with its formal "Gothic" settees, was used for special occasions and music-making. Its sliding doors were usually closed. The grand piano, made in Boston in 1873, was a gift from nephew Asa Call, and was sent to the family "around the Horn".
4. **THE MASTER BEDROOM**, a little larger than the others, had the only closet and perhaps gathered some warmth from the fireplace. Its window now opens onto a hall added later. Mrs. Call made the crazy quilt; the wedding dress was her daughter Laura's, made in 1907.
5. **A CHILDREN'S BEDROOM.** Like the others, this room has a bare wood floor and one window. The tin bath and doll's chair were found in the attic. Two (unfinished) bedrooms lie beyond. The hall was a later addition when the bathroom (not open) was added.

6. **THE DINING ROOM** is in the long, one story "Benitz" section, with its gambrel roof, built in the 1850s or '60s. The windows are small-paned (12 over 12), with narrow mullions and old, wavy glass. The floors are bare. The large oval dining table seated twelve in its unmatched chairs. On the south wall are a food pantry and a door to the attic stairs. A door (east) leads to the long, covered porch and the cook's room (not open).
7. **THE KITCHEN**, large and plain, is beyond, dominated by the original wood stove, restored by a local craftsman. The wood box was filled through the window. The corner sink is original; its drainboard is newly made. A dairy room formerly stood outside the west wall.
8. **THE MEN'S DINING ROOM** is at the back of the building. The farm workers took their meals here apart from the family. They had a separate entrance and a washing up sink on the porch.

OUTBUILDINGS from the Call ranch days are not restored, and include **THE COTTAGE**, first a school, then a laundry, then a guest house; a **TOOLSHEED**, used for a generator and then as a garage; a **PRIVY** (now gone) was north of the tool shed. Other **BARNs** are farther north. G W Call built the **SCHOOLHOUSE** which stood on the cliff near the ocean from 1885 to 1923, when it was moved up to Sea View Road. It was retired in 1972, and moved to Stillwater Cove Regional Park, four miles north, where it may be viewed. **THE ORCHARD**, one half mile north up Fort Ross Road, is open to the public. It was begun by the Russians and continued by Wm. Benitz and GW Call. (Brochure at Visitors' Center.)

The **FRONT GARDEN** is being tended and restored; a plan and plant identifications are planned.

REFERENCES *Fort Ross**; *The Caretakers***; *My Life at Fort Ross* by Laura Call Carr ** (*for sale at Visitors Center ** in research library)

Below: *Mercedes Call in her garden*

