

FORT ROSS ORCHARD

The original **Russian-American Company** orchard was established in 1814. Eventually it encompassed two to three acres, and contained approximately 260 trees. *K.T. Khlebnikov's Reports 1817-1832* state: ". . . insofar as fruit trees are concerned . . . the first peach tree [was brought] from San Francisco . . . in 1814 . . . In 1817 grape vines . . . from Lima, and in 1818 peach trees from Monterey. In 1820 we sent 100 cuttings of apples, pears, cherries, peaches and bergamots; these were small cuttings which produced their first fruit in 1828."



The Inventory and Bill of Sale Transferring Possession of Russia's California Properties to John Sutter in 1841 lists: ". . . 207 apple trees, 29 peach trees, 10 pear trees, 10 quince trees, 8 cherry trees, also some vines." John Bidwell, Sutter's manager, described the Russian orchard as: ". . . a small but thrifty orchard consisting of apple, peach, pear, cherry, and quince trees - the peach trees had not shed their leaves and several were in blossom; the quince and more than half of the apple trees were as green as in summer. Pear trees I am informed come to great perfection . . . The wine grape is cultivated and grows to perfection. . ."



Old pear trees
Pyrus communis 'Vicar of Wakefield'

The young trees in this orchard, planted in the 1980s, were grown from cuttings of the original parent trees, some of which may have been grown by the Russians. Beyond these daughter apple trees are two thirty-five foot pear trees thought to be over a hundred years old, yet still producing an abundance of fruit.

Historically, there were two additional orchards established by the families who ranched the land after the Russian settlement. **Wilhelm Benitz** who bought Fort Ross in 1849 added an extensive planting. In 1858 he wrote: "I am now especially dedicated to the cultivation of fruit trees. I have an orchard of 450 apple trees, and 150 of other kind of fruit. I will have a piece of land fenced, where I will plant 1800 apple trees next winter. These trees already give fruit in the second year. . ." The Benitz orchard, located on the north side of Fort Ross Road, was once reported to have over a thousand trees, though no trees remain today. Apple trees have a shorter life span than many other fruit trees such as pears.



George W. Call bought Fort Ross in 1873. He used both the Benitz and the old Russian orchard for commercial purposes. In 1898, for instance, 481 boxes of apples were shipped by schooner to San Francisco. The family planted a variety of fruit and nut trees, especially prunes and plums, on the hills to the south. Some of these trees bear fruit to this day.