

Russian Spring



This Russian coin was found by Richard Cerutti in the South Bay and donated to the Chula Vista Library. The thick copper coin is 5 kopeks and was minted in 1793. On one side is the profile of Catherine the Great who died in 1796. On the other side two eagles face opposite directions under a crown. The two eagles represent church and state and come from the old Byzantine Empire.

RUSSIAN SPRING'S MYSTERY by Richard Cerutti, from the *Bulletin* of the Chula Vista Historical Society, Feb.-Mar.-Apr. 1983.

If a person goes back and digs through old San Diego newspapers and magazine articles that date back prior to the turn of the century, one can find stories that mention a fresh water spring located on Coronado's Silver Strand. To the early residences of San Diego, this spring was known as the Russian Spring or Spring of Russian Wells. In the 1870's the Russian Spring was a favorite picnic spot for those who either had a boat, or could afford to charter a boat that could take them to the bay to the Spring on the Silver strand. When I first heard about the Russian Spring over 17 years ago from a blind coin dealer in Chula Vista, I did not believe there could be a fresh water spring on a sandy peninsula such as the Silver Strand. It wasn't until I started to find early maps and read early U.S.G.S. water surveys that showed and talked about a spring on the Silver Strand, that I started to do any serious research to see if there was any truth to the stories about the Spring. After spending three years searching for the Russian Spring on the Silver strand, I was able to re-locate the spring just a few months before it was bulldozed by the Coronado Cays development. Fortunately I was able to photograph the spring and collect a few relics (NO BURIED TREASURE) before it was destroyed. The Russian Spring may be covered over, but the mysteries that it contained pertaining to its' early beginning and the early history of San Diego are just beginning to be unlocked. To be continued **RUSSIAN SPRING'S MYSTERY UNLOCKED**.

RUSSIAN SPRINGS MYSTERY UNLOCKED By Richard Gerutti

Last month in the BULLETIN I briefly touched on a bit of historical information that mentioned a fresh water spring on Coronado's Silver Strand called the Russian Spring, or the Russian Well. I began to realize, after my rediscovery of the Spring, that there was a greater historical significance than just a favorite picnic spot in the 1870's. In 1900, a local magazine called THE SILVER GATE, featured a story entitled, "The Fight of The Paso Del Mar". The author of this story was Arnot Loop and he used Bayard Taylor's famous poem that centered around San Diego's early days at La Playa. Mr. Loop added his own version to the story and it appeared to have been written as folklore and not intended to be taken seriously by the readers of the SILVER GATE. I felt there was some degree of truth to the story when I read across it, telling about the shipwrecked Russian whalers and the Russian Wells and the rescue of the little blond haired Russian girl that later became known as Loma". I found what I felt was the first clue to the origin of the Russian Spring after doing a considerable amount of historical research to find out if there were any Russian whaling ships shipwrecked near San Diego prior to the 1850's which was about the time the "La Loma" story was supposed to have taken place.

The following is a part of Arnot Loop's "La Loma" story":

In those days San Diego was the shipping point for all of the products of the great ranches of the Southwest, and here the rancheros sent their hide and tallow packed trains to meet the vessels that would occasionally put into La Playa. Many coasting vessels would come up from the lower coast with cargoes of abalone and other materials, unload their ships and return with provisions that were needed at home. It was such a vessel, which having beat its way up the coast from Mazatlan, came in and proceeded to carefully work its way through the narrow channel that separates the Coronado peninsula from the mainland to the common mooring ground off La Playa. While the crew was engaged in this work, one of the men noticed a movement along the shore, looked like some small animal or bush. The crewman was about to shoot at the moving object, the vessel got closer to the shoreline and to the surprise of all aboard, the small animal proved to be a little golden-haired child of five or six years of age and she was wandering around alone and bewildered. It required but a minute to effect a landing and to catch the little girl aboard the boat. They then proceeded upon their way to La Playa. The news of their arrival and their strange discovery was soon heralded throughout the village. The little girl spoke in a language wholly unintelligible to her discoverers and continually pointed to the ocean and to the place where she had been found. Men of all nationalities lived in the village of La Playa, some were driftwood from the sea who had been thrown upon the shore of this far-away corner of the world but there chanced to be a Russian sailor among them. The Russian sailor could understand what the child was trying to say and in her childish ways she told him of the home she had left and about the voyage on the sea, she told of the winds and storms and finally of the shipwreck and how they had aimlessly drifted in a boat until they had at last been dashed upon the shore of Coronado. She told them that her father and his crew were sleeping over where she had been found. The Russian sailor questioned her about her mother and she pointed to the ocean and told how her mother had become sick and had died and her father had buried her mother at sea. The people in the village feared the worst, they organized a search party and proceeded to the island to look for the missing father and his crew.

were "sleeping" on the land. It was some time before they could be found, but at last when they were discovered (at what has ever since been known as the "Wells") there were seven dead men lying near the little hole which they had scraped out in their effort to find water. That was all left of the Captain and his crew, no one to tell the tale except the little girl found wandering at daybreak upon the sandy shore. Truly they were "sleeping" and the sleep that knows no waking; the bodies were the remains of a boat, broken and partly burned, supposed to be the boat in which they had reached the shore. The location of these wells are supposed to have been of the southern end of the peninsula where it joins the mainland." Little Golden Hair or La Loma as she afterwards became known by of her being found near Point Loma will be continued, in our next Bulletin.

RUSSIAN SPRINGS MYSTERY UNLOCKED By Richard Cerutti

In the March BULLETIN I mentioned what I found was my first clue to the origin of the Russian Springs when I started the historical research to see if there was truth to the La Loma story. First of all I found documented evidence that there was a few Russian fur trading ships shipwrecked prior to 1850 up along the North Pacific coast. After searching through the historical records of the Russian-American Fur Company a Russian owned fur company, that had colonies in Alaska had established a colony at Fort Ross near San Francisco, I found something helpful. I discovered that in 1825 the company was granted a permit from the California Commissioner at Monterey to hunt sea otters along the upper and lower California coast, from the mission at San Luis Rey (San Diego county) to Todos Santos (Ensenada), Baja, California. The Russian fur hunting ship called THE BAIKAL spent some time during 1825-26 at San Diego hunting sea otters. I believe it is possible that the fresh water spring on Coronado's Silver Strand, that later became known as the Russian Spring, served as a base camp for the Russians when THE BAIKAL was in this area hunting for sea otters. The location of the spring was not only ideal for hunting sea otters off the Coronado Islands and Point Loma: location near the south end of San Diego bay where the Russians could easily collect salt in natural evaporation ponds. There is no historical records that show the Russians harvested salt in San Diego bay, only at San Quentin bay in Baja. Salt was a very important commodity to the Russian-American Fur Company tanning hides and they went to great difficulty and expense to obtain it. In 1968 a remarkable discovery was made that added a new dimension to the Russian mystery. A 40 pound pewter tablet was dug up by Admiral Chappie in his yard on "I" Street in Coronado, just four miles north of the Russian Springs. I first saw the tablet on display at the Serra Museum about ten years ago and I knew immediately that it was Russian. There is no inscription on the tablet, only an early Russian military insignia, an anchor and an ax. Historical researchers at the Serra Museum could not unlock the mysteries of the tablet, so they just called it the "THING". After spending a great deal of time studying Russian symbolism and history, I came to the conclusion that the anchor on the tablet could be a symbol for HOPE. In the Bible, Jesus used an anchor as a symbol for hope (Hebrews 6:19). The ax, I believe, is a symbol of COLONIZATION. The Russians used an ax to clear the land for their colonies in Northern Russia. Yes, the tablet found in Coronado could have been planted by the Russians, claiming Russian sovereignty over San Diego, in hopes of a future colony. When Richard Henry Dana, Jr., was here in San Diego in 1835, he mentioned in his book, TWO YEARS BEFORE THE MAST, "A Russian ship which had been in these parts a few years before had built a large oven for baking bread, and when the ship and crew sailed away, they left the oven standing." The historical records show that the Russians were forced to buy grain from the Spanish when Fort Ross could not grow enough grain to supply the colonies in Alaska, due to its northern locality. The records also show that the Russians had plans for southward expansion of colonies in California. San Diego had an ideal climate for growing grain, it had salt, and it had a sheltered harbor. Believe it, or not, the Russians were here! Were it not for a slight turn in historical events they might have stayed. Our place on the map that we call San Diego - who knows, might have been known as NEW MOSCOW??????



This USGS map of the Coronado Cays in 1953 shows two small ponds in the center of the area where Trinidad Village will be developed in the 1970s. These may have been the local Russian Spring. See the exhibit on the [Coronado Cays](#).

