NORTHWEST COLORED BEAD CHART NO. 3

featuring

THE RUSSIAN BEAD

by

ELIZABETH HARRIS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD TODD

Vol. 21

Northwest Colored Bead Chart No. 3

featuring

THE RUSSIAN BEAD

by

Elizabeth Harris

The story of the discovery of the Pacific Northwest and the trade beads that accompanied its exploration is told in the history of the fur trade. It began when the Russians overthrew the Tatars and Ivan, the Terrible, became tsar in 1547. Ivan recognized a great need for foreign trade. Fur was the most readily available natural commodity for which there was a high demand abroad. The fur trade was made a government monopoly, but the fur hunting was turned over to private enterprise (8).

Adventurers, dreamers, loners, psychopaths and a few men of great genius seized the opportunity. Singly and in groups they penetrated the great frontier east of the Urals. Since profit was the only motive, they decimated the wildlife as they went and so were forced to move ever further east until they reached the Pacific at Okhotsk in 1639. From the natives on the coast they learned that there was a land beyond the horizon (8).

In 1728 the government sent Vitus Bering, a Dane in the Russian service, to determine if there was a land connection to whatever lay beyond. He discovered the Bering Straights and turned back without seeing the North American continent. In 1741 he was sent out again. This time he reached the coast of Alaska and returned with tales of the wealth of furs along the coast, fur seals and sea otter. The Russians immediately started to build boats to use in exploiting this new fur source (5).

Catherine, the Great, is thought to have let slip the news of this Russian presence in the north Pacific. The ambassadors of the other European countries lost no time in advising their home governments. Spain reacted by sending colonists into Alta California and in 1775 an expedition that sailed north to the coast of what is now Washington where they planted a cross and claimed the land for Spain (5).

James Cook investigated the area for the English. In 1778 he put into Nootka Sound on the west side of Vancouver Island where his crew engaged in some barter with the Indians. He then continued north along the coast until turned back by bad weather. The expedition headed southwest for the Sandwich Islands where Cook was killed. The ships continued on to China. Here the crew was amazed at what the Chinese were willing to pay for the sea otter pelts they had obtained at Nootka (1).

When news of the profit potential in the fur trade

reached England, merchants outiftted ships to exploit it. They traded what was essentially very cheap merchandise to the Indians, sold the furs in China at high prices and bought silk, tea, porcelain, and other exotic wares that commanded good prices at home, a very profitable trade (5).

In 1784 the Russians established their first colony in Russian America on Kodiak Island. Supplying the colony and transporting the furs to market were equally difficult. They were eager to trade with the Chinese for tea, their national drink, but the Chinese were not happy with their presence in Siberia and imposed very rigid trade restrictions. Trading could take place only at Kyakhta on the Mongolian border. Here the Chinese built a fortified town and 150 feet away the Russians did the same. The furs from Alaska had to be shipped to Okhotsk and then taken overland to Kyakhta. At the slightest offense the Chinese locked the gate of their town and shut off the trading (5).

When the Americans learned of the English success in the fur trade, the Boston merchants outfitted ships and sent them around the Horn to claim their share of the bonanza. One of the first to reach the Alaska coast found the Russian colony close to starvation and sold them some of their own stores. Thereafter the Americans engaged in a three way trade. They carried supplies to the Russians; took on board a crew of Aleut hunters with their skin boats; sailed south to poach sea otter in Spanish waters off the coast of California; returned the Aleuts to their homes; took on board the furs the Russians had accumulated and carried them by way of Hawaii to Canton on shares. For the Russians this was a great improvement over transporting the furs to Kyakhta and dealing directly with the increasingly capricious temper of the Chinese. When the Chinese stopped all trading at Kyakhta from 1785 to 1792, the Americans saved the Russians from disaster. In China the Americans sold the furs and bought Chinese goods for which there was a ready market at home. The risks were great, but one successful trip made rich all connected with it (5).

As a counterpoint to all this maritime activity others were seeking an overland route to the fur country. In 1793 Alexander Mackenzie of the Northwest Company reached the coast. As a result a series of trading posts were established. These were absorbed by the Hudson Bay Company in 1821. The latter greatly extended the system of trading posts and became a major force in the fur trade (6, 3).

The Americans were not far behind. Lewis and Clark reached the mouth of the Columbia River in 1805 (29). A year later over one hundred trappers left St. Louis headed for the Rockies and beyond. In 1811, John Jacob Astor founded Astoria as the headquarters for his American Fur Company (32). The Americans were on the coast to stay.

In less than one hundred years the Northwest Coast fur industry had destroyed itself. By 1828 the sea otter and fur seal populations were so depleted that it was no longer profitable to send ships. By 1840 the beaver on which the mountain men depended were in serious decline. The Russian

colony became so unprofitable that the government was willing to sell it to the United States in 1867 (5).

To condense the history of the Northwest Coast fur trade into these few paragraphs much had to be omitted, but still the reason for the romantic aura that surrounds the beads the fur hunters traded to the Indians is apparent.

The bead that has caught the interest of both student and collector is popularly known as the Russian bead, Plate I. It is a drawn bead. The glass was shaped before being drawn so that the resulting tube would have six, seven, or eight sides. After the tubes were chopped into bead size lengths, both ends of the ridge between adjacent sides were ground off. The results should be beads with 18, 21, or 24 facets. Deviations in the process will occasionally result in more or less.

Plate I shows a good sampling of the range of sizes and colors in which the beads occur. A red is also known. Early collectors assumed the beads were made in Russia. However, the world distribution of the beads suggests that they were the product of one of the major bead making industries. Early writers attributed them to Venice (33), but they do not appear in any of the Venetian sample collections with which we are familiar. The general feeling now is that the beads were made in Bohemia (Czeckoslovakia). In confirmation Peter Francis, Jr. reports seeing them in the Museum of Glass in Jablonec (9). Arthur Woodward reports that an unopened package of the beads was found in the warehouse of the Russian American Fur Company in Sitka in 1867 marked "Brussels" (33). Belgium was a repackaging and trans-shipment point for beads from central Europe. This tends to support a Bohemian origin.

The unresolved question is how the Russians obtained the beads. There is a persistant story that the beads were stocked in the European godowns in Canton. Since the Russians did not have direct access to this source, did the American and English traders buy them there and resell them to the Russians? Possibly. Certainly ships that outfitted in Europe; including the Russian-American Fur Company's first supply ships that completed their outfitting in Fallmouth, England, in 1803 (30); could have brought the beads. Polly Mille makes a very pursuasive case for the Hudson Bay Company being the source (16). John Jacob Astor also sold beads to the Russians. Unfortunately, the type is not known (23). The answer may be that the beads were obtained from all of these sources. Let us hope that some one interested in beads will pursue this question in the archives of the Russian-American Fur Company in Russia.

The Indians of the Northwest Coast valued blue beads above all others (23, 33). One blue bead they called the "chief bead" meaning that it was the most highly valued of all (33). A controversy has arisen as to whether the Russian bead or a wound pale blue bead (16A-C) was the chief bead. Both sides support their position on the Journals of Lewis and Clark. The entry for Saturday, November 22 (3)rd, 1805, seems to be the source of the confusion. It

PLATE I

GENERAL NOTES - Beads are shown full size. For reference purposes the beads on each line should be considered to be lettered A, B, C, etc. reading from left to right.

NOTES, PLATE I - All beads are made from drawn tubes and have unfinished ends. The colors of the layers of compound tubes are listed starting with the outer layer.

LINE 1. 6-sided, translucent, simple tubing. A-D. Deep ultramarine blue. E-H. Deep blue.

LINE 2. 6-sided, translucent, simple tubing. A-D. Blue green. F-G. Emerald green. H. Pale yellow green. I. Pale aquamarine blue.

LINE 3. 6-sided, translucent, simple tubing. A-D. Deep amethyst. E-I. Amber.

LINE 4. 6-sided, simple tubing. A-D. Clear. E- Transparent smoke. F-I. Opaque black (deep purple?).

LINE 5. 6-sided, translucent, compound tubing. A-G. Medium blue, milky blue core. H-K. Clear, milky core. Dichroic.

LINE 6. 7-sided, translucent, simple tubing. A-C. Deep ultramarine blue. D, E. Deep blue. F, G. Amber.

LINE 7. 7-sided, simple tubing. A. Translucent blue green. B-F. Clear. G. Opaque pale turquoise.

LINE 8. 7-sided, translucent, compound tubing. A, B. Deep blue, milky blue, deep blue core. C. Medium blue, milky blue, medium blue core. D. Same as C except partially coated with irridescent purple. E, F. Clear, milky core. Dichroic. G. Clear, milky, clear core. Dichroic.

LINE 9. 7-sided, opaque, compound tubing. A-D. Slightly translucent white, opaque white core. D shows surface deterioration common in white beads. E. Deep blue, milky blue core. F, G. Medium blue, milky blue core. H. Pale turquoise, pale milky turquoise core.

LINE 10. Hand facetted 5-layer, translucent, compound round tubing; dark blue, milky blue, dark blue, milky blue, dark blue core.

BEADS FROM THE
FENSTERMAKER COLLECTION

Plate I

says, "...demanded ti-a-co-mo-shack which is chief beads and the most common blue beads, but few of which we have at this time (29)." The "and" after chief beads seems to indicate that chief beads and the common blue beads are two different things. However the entries of January 9, 1806, and March 19, 1806, make it clear that "common blue beads" was intended as an appositive of chief beads. This reading supports the view that the pale blue wound bead was the chief bead (27). Lewis and Clark were skilled observers. If the chief bead had been facetted, one could expect them to have noted it. As it was, "common" was the most descriptive term they could apply. In 1778 Cook found that some of the natives had a few light blue wound beads that must have come from the Russians. They valued these beads highly and were little interested in the white beads he offered (1). It would appear that this preference for the wound blue bead dates from the first European contact.

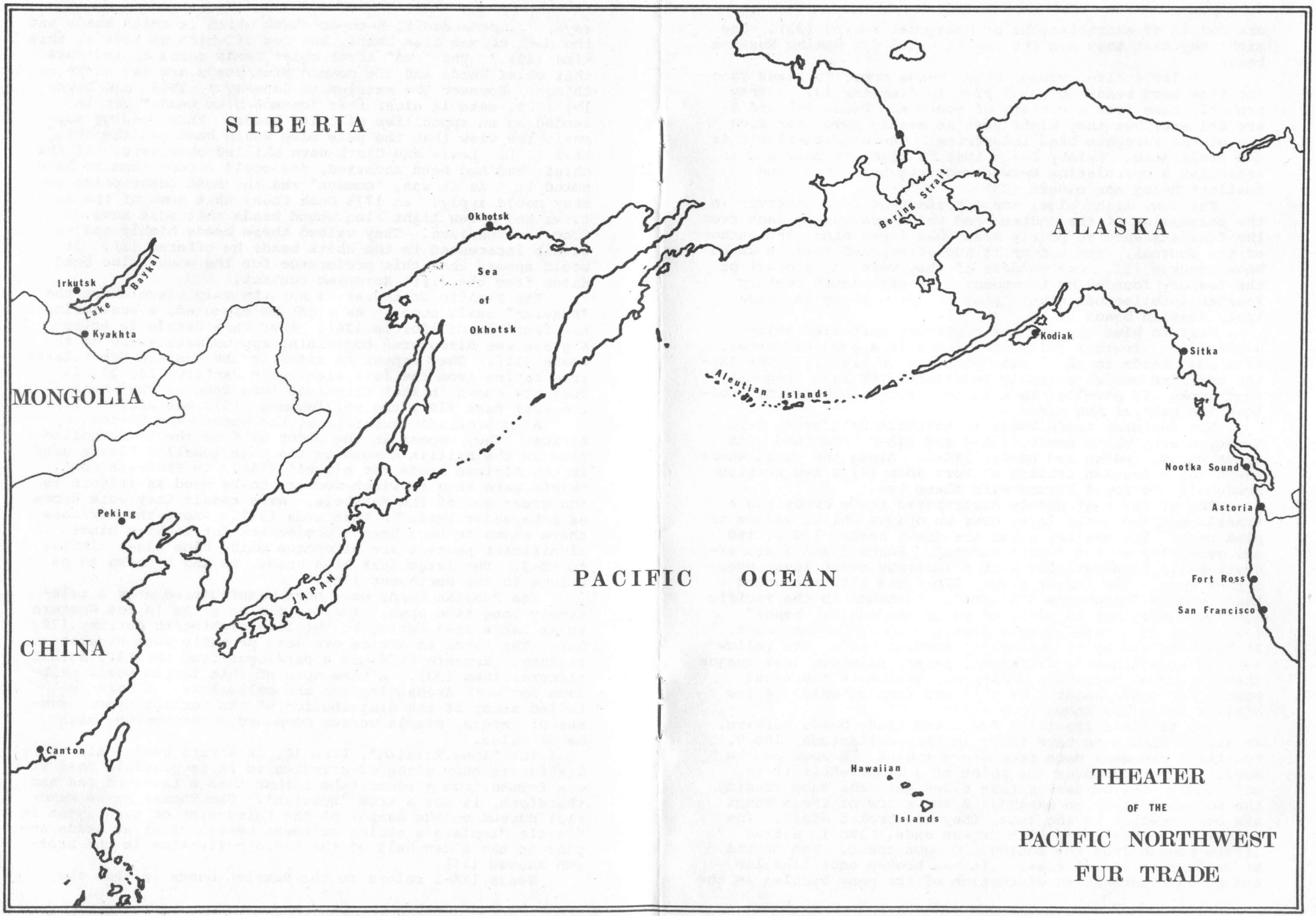
The Pacific Northwest is not the only place where the "Russian" beads occur. As might be expected, a scattering are found in California (26). Near Casa Grande in Arizona a grave was discovered containing approximately 800 of the beads (11). They appear on sites in the Western Great Lakes area dating from the late eighteenth century (10, 20, 22). They are known in such disparate locations as Guatemala (13), the Near East (19), the Philippines (15), and Africa (31).

A considerable quantity of the beads were traded in Africa. They appear in the older half of the Levin collection in the British Museum on the page labelled "Beads used in the African trade for slaves" (14). In Rhodesia the chiefs gave them to witch-doctors to be used as tribute to the great god of the Matabele. As a result they were known as ambassador beads in that area (31). Among the Africans there seems to have been a preference for lighter blues. A significant percent are of opague milky blue glass similar to 9E-G. The large dark blue beads, 6A and B, seem to be unique to the Northwest (10).

The Russian beads have been manufactured over a relatively long time span. They appear on sites in the Western Great Lakes area dating to the late eighteenth century (20, 22). The beads in Africa are most probably late nineteenth century. Kenneth Kidd has a catalogue from the 1920's that pictures them (23). A time span of this length poses problems for both archaeologists and collectors. A more detailed study of the distribution of the variant types; number of facets, simple versus compound construction; might be of value.

The "long Russian", Line 10, is a rare bead. All of its facets show signs of grinding so it is possible that it was formed from a round tube rather than a facetted one and, therefore, is not a true "Russian". The Thomas Burke Memorial Museum on the campus of the University of Washington in Seattle displays a string of these beads. Similar beads appear in the older half of the Levin collection in the British Museum (14).

Beads 11A-I relate to the Russian beads in that they


SIBERIA
Okhotsk
Sea
of
Okhotsk
Bering Strait
ALASKA
Irkutsk
Lake Baykal
Kyakhta
MONGOLIA
Kodiak
Sitka
Aleutian Islands
Nootka Sound
Astoria
Peking
JAPAN
PACIFIC OCEAN
Fort Ross
San Francisco
CHINA
Canton
Hawaiian
Islands
THEATER
OF THE
PACIFIC NORTHWEST
FUR TRADE

are formed of short lengths of hexagonal tubing (33). One might say that they are the raw material for making Russian beads.

The light blue, wound, chief beads occur in sizes ranging from seed beads to about 12mm in diameter (33). They probably came from a variety of sources. Beads 16A and B are Chinese, but they might just as easily have been from one of the European bead industries. One characteristic is the small hole. Quimby feels that it might be possible to establish a correlation between age and hole size, the smallest being the oldest (23).

The few, light blue, wound beads that Cook observed in the possession of the Indians and which presumably came from the Russians were so poorly made that James King, the author of the Journal, remarked on it and attributed them to an unknown source (1). One wonders if they were the product of the factory founded by Lomonosov, the eighteenth century Russian intellectual giant, near St. Petersburg and were truly Russian beads (21).

Next to blue the Indians reputedly preferred white beads (29). In this collection there is a good assortment from seed beads to the large cylinders on Line 16. The latter are rare beads, probably Venetian. 16E is a fragment that broke off parallel to a large internal bubble that follows the path of the wind.

The dominant trade beads in northern California were crude, drawn, white beads, 12A-D and 14A-C, combined with green cored, Indian red beads, 14E-G. Along the coast where there was a Russian contact at Fort Ross (4) a few Russian beads will be found strung with these two.

One of the most widely distributed trade beads has a translucent red outer layer over an opaque white, yellow or pink core. The smaller sizes are drawn beads, 13G-J, and are generally called "white hearts". Beads I and J are exceptionally fine examples with a lustrous outer layer over a pink core. The larger sizes, 17D-F and 18A, are wound beads called "corneline d'Aleppo". Although in the Pacific Northwest they may be referred to as "Hudson Bay beads" (33). 18A is a rare example from the south Oregon coast. It has been ground to resemble a Russian bead. Its yellow core is significantly different, paler, slightly less opaque than the usual corneline d'Aleppo. Venice is the usual source for these beads. Is this one from Bohemia? A few similar beads are known from Africa.

Due to their fragility few blown trade beads survive. We are fortunate to have three in this collection, 18B-D. The first two were made from drawn tubing. A spot on the tubing is rotated over the point of a flame until it is soft (24). The beadmaker then blows into the tube causing the softened glass to expand. After a row of these bumps has been created in the tube, they are broken apart. The result is an oval bead with broken ends. 18D is a true little bubble from the southern Oregon coast. The method of production is not clear. It has broken ends like 18B and C, but there is no distortion of the many bubbles in the

Plate II

PLATE II

GENERAL NOTES - See Plate I

LINE 11. A-I. 6-sided, simple drawn tubing, broken ends. A, B. Clear. C, D. Amber. E, F. Dark blue. G-I. Dark ultramarine blue. J. Translucent rose, hot tumbled.

LINE 12. A-H. Opaque white simple drawn tubing. E broken ends, all others hot tumbled.

LINE 13. A-C. Opaque black simple drawn tubing; B broken ends; A, C hot tumbled. D. Opaque dark blue simple drawn tubing, hot tumbled. E. Qpaque black simple drawn tubing with vertical white stripes, hot tumbled. F (lower). 2 layer compound drawn tubing, opaque white with vertical blue stripes, translucent grey core, hot tumbled. F (upper). 2 layer compound drawn tubing, opaque black, discolored opaque white core, hot tumbled. G-K. 2 layer compound drawn tubing, hot tumbled. G, H. Translucent red, opaque white core. I, J. Translucent red, opaque pink core. K. Opaque white, opaque white core.

LINE 14. 2 layer compound drawn tubing, hot tumbled. A, B. Slightly translucent white, opaque white core. C, D. Opaque white, slightly translucent white core. E-G. Opaque brick red, translucent green core.

LINE 15. Wound beads, translucent glass. A-D. Cobalt blue. E. Medium blue. F. Pale blue crackle glass. G. Amber.

LINE 16. Wound beads, opaque glass. A, B. Turquoise blue, Chinese clay hole deposit. C. Dull turquoise blue. D. White. E. White fragment. F. White, greenish tinge.

LINE 17. Wound beads. A, B. Opaque deep green blue. C. Opaque black. D-F. Corneline d'Aleppo, translucent light red; D, E, opaque yellow core; F, opaque white core.

LINE 18. A. Wound bead. Corneline d'Aleppo facetted in the manner of the Russian bead, 9 vertical facets. Translucent light red, pale yellow core. B, C. Blown beads made from opaque, simple, drawn tubing. B. White. C. Delft blue. D. Blown bead, translucent red, white stripe. E. Molded facetted bead, translucent pink. Mold mark parallel to hole. Broken ends. F, G. Molded facetted bead, translucent rose. Conical hole, mold mark at right angles to hole. Irregular hand facetting.

glass to indicate it was drawn. A similar bead was a surface find along the Butterfield trail near San Felipe, California (26).

Molded beads are a late addition to the repertory of trade beads (31), so it is not surprising that only two appear here. 18E appears to have been made by what may be the most primitive molding method; a multi-bead, tong mounted mold is clamped around a mandrel coated with molten glass. When cold, the resulting row of beads is broken apart. The beads produced are very crude with broken ends and wrinkles in the surface of the glass. 18F and G have conical holes indicating that they were also produced with a tong mounted mold, but singly this time. The facets have been touched up on a grinding wheel to remove the mold mark. Similar beads were recovered from the 18th century Guebert site in Illinois (10).

The hunters and traders who risked the storms and rocky coast of the Pacific Northwest in their search for furs are long gone from this world, but the beads they introduced into the area have survived for us to study and enjoy. Under the protection of our more ecologically sensitive age, the sea otters again float in the kelp beds off the California Coast, so one can say that the story has a happy ending.

Acknowledgements

The beads pictured on Plates I and II are predominantly from the collection of G. B. Fenstermaker. June Payne and Albert J. Summerfield very generously loaned beads from their collections so that as wide a variety as possible could be shown. Mr. Summerfield, Robert K. Liu and Peter Francis, Jr. made valuable contributions to the bibliography. My thanks, also, to Jamey Allen for much sympathetic listening and to Mary Byrd who brought the manuscript to its final form.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Beaglehole, J. C., ed. The Journals of Captain Cook on His Voyage of Discovery. Cambridge, 1967.

2. Begg, A. History of British Columbia. Toronto, 1894.

3. Bryce, G. The Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company. London, 1902.

4. Caughey, J. W. and N. Hundley, Jr. California; History of a Remarkable State. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1982.

5. Chevigny, H. Russian America. New York, 1965.

6. Davidson, G. C. The Northwest Company. Berkeley, 1918.

7. Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th Edition, 1982.

8. Fisher, R. H. The Russian Fur Trade, 1550-1700. Berkeley, 1943.

9. Francis, P., Jr. Personal Communication. 1984.

10. Good, M. E. Guebert Site: Memoir II, Central States Archaeological Societies. 1972.

11. Hill, B. Personal Communication. 1983.

12. Jenkins, M. R. Glass Trade Beads in Alaska, Alaska Journal, Vol. 2, No. 3, Summer 1972.

13. Johnson, S. C. Living Beads in Guatemala, The Bead Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1, Summer 1975.

14. Karklins, K. Glass Beads. Ottawa.

15. Legarda, A. G. Antique Beads of the Philippine Islands, Arts of Asia, Vol. 7, No. 5, Sept. - Oct. 1977.

16. Mille, Polly. An Historic Explanation of Alaskan Trade Beads, The Bead Journal, Vol. 2, No. 2, Fall 1975.

17. Morgan, L. Trade Beads: Alaskan Native Heritage, Alaskan Journal, Vol. 3, No. 4, Autumn 1973.

18. Orchard, W. C. Beads and Beadwork of the American Indians. New York, 1975.

19. Pfeiffer, R. M. Glass Trade Beads from Caesarea Maritima, Israel, Proceedings of the 1982 Glass Trade Bead Conference. Rochester, 1983.

20. Pope, S., ed. Beads: Their Use by Upper Great Lakes Indians. Grand Rapids, 1977.

21. Prokhorov, A. M., ed. Great Soviet Encyclopedia, New York, 1970.

22. Quimby, G. I. Indian Culture and European Trade Goods. St. Paul, 1966.

23. ------. Trade Beads and Sunken Ships in Archaeological Essays in Honor of Irving B. Rouse, R. C. Dunnell and E. S. Hall, Jr., Editors, The Hague, 1978.

24. Ross, L. A. Hudson's Bay Company Glass Trade Beads: Manufacturing Types Imported to Fort Vancouver (1829-1860). The Bead Journal, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall 1974.

25. Seamen, N. G. Indian Relics of the Pacific Northwest. Portland, 1956.

26. Soresen, C., Jr. The Enduring Intrigue of the Glass Trade Bead. Arizona Highways, Vol. XLVII, No. 7, July 1971.

27. Sprague, R. Personal Communication, 1984.

28. Strong, E. Stone Age on the Columbia River. Portland, 1959.

29. Thwaites, R. G., ed. The Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. New York 1904.

30. Tikhmenev, P. A. A History of the Russian American Company. Seattle, 1978.

31. van der Sleen, W. G. N. A Handbook on Beads. Liege, 1973.

32. Wohlrabe, R. A. The Pacific Northwest. Cleveland and New York, 1968.

33. Woodward, A. Indian Trade Goods. Portland, 1976.