



A GEOGRAPHICAL INTERPRETATION OF ETHNIC SETTLEMENT
IN AN URBAN LANDSCAPE: RUSSIANS IN SACRAMENTO

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Adaptation of immigrant groups to their new environment, with resulting settlement patterns and culture change, has been a theme of study in both urban and cultural geography. A number of contemporary geographers have dealt with this topic, including Jakle and Wheeler in their study of the Dutch in Kalamazoo, Doeppers with his analysis of ethnic neighborhoods near Denver, and Novak's study of Puerto Ricans in Manhattan.¹ Geographic processes and culture change are also themes in Gordon's book *Assimilation in American Life*.²

This research project focuses on ethnic settlement and the cultural landscape of Russian immigrants in Sacramento, California, and will deal with the following questions:

- 1) What are the forces operating in an American city to create and change ethnic neighborhood patterns of settlement?
- 2) When and why did Russians settle in Sacramento?
- 3) Why is a tightly clustered pattern of settlement in a

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suburb of Western Sacramento (Bryte), and a more dispersed pattern in other parts of the city? Is dispersal more common in 1970 than in 1950 or 1960?

- 4) Finally, how is the pattern and distribution of this ethnic group related to the processes of assimilation and acculturation in American cities?

Russian Settlement in the United States

Old World conditions forced most of the early Russian people to emigrate from their homeland, so the majority of the immigrants arriving in the United States were of peasant origin. Many came to escape the poverty and problems of czar dominated Russia. The major index of peasant status is land, difficult to achieve in an American city, so Russian neighborhoods leaned heavily on their customs and kinship patterns in order to maintain some sense of stability in a new environment. When Russian immigrants first arrived in this country, they were motivated to settle in a particular location because of job opportunities there, but, more importantly, because Russian neighborhoods already existed there. This latter pull on the new immigrants resulted in homogeneous Russian neighborhoods in many large American cities. By 1910, thousands of Russians had already settled in this country, with the majority concentrated in urban or quasi-urban settings.

Throughout the twentieth century, Russians continued to migrate into the United States, sometimes in large groups, sometimes individually. Large urban centers like New York,

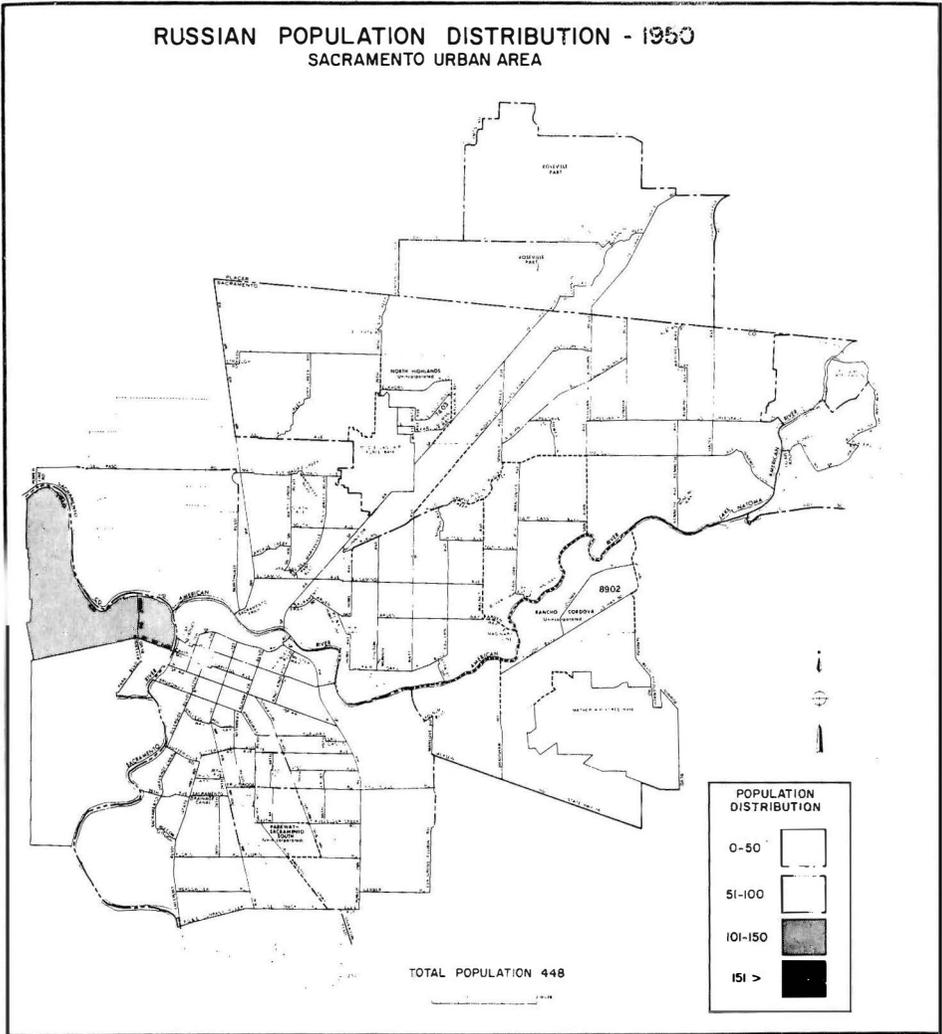


Figure 1

Russian Population Distribution in the Sacramento Urban Area in 1950. Source: Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Sacramento, California, Washington: U.S. Government Publ. Office, 1950.

Boston, Minneapolis, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles still have substantial numbers of Russian immigrants today.³

Russians settling specifically in California have followed this same general trend and today live mainly in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Los Angeles, for example, has a great number of Russians belonging to the Molokan sect; Pauline Young's study of this religious group has added to our understanding of Russians in California.⁴ San Francisco, too, has a large population of Russians today, and Tripp's thesis on their geographical location patterns as well as Dunn's work with Potrero Hill Russians has added to our knowledge of Russians in California urban areas.⁵

Russians in Sacramento

As a case study in immigration and settlement, residential patterns, and assimilation of Russians in the United States, Sacramento offers an excellent example. About four thousand persons of Russian descent currently live in this moderately sized city, their distribution and residential patterns typify Russian settlement in American cities and exemplify an ethnic culture landscape and assimilation in urban areas. The residential distribution of this group has shown several major trends, including clustering in a western Sacramento suburb, minor clustering in two other neighborhoods of Sacramento, and dispersed settlement throughout many of the remaining census tracts of this urban region (See Figures 1, 2, and 3). Most Russians in Sacramento are clustered west of the Sacramento River in the small suburb of Bryte.

Western Sacramento

Sacramento's western suburbs are part of the East Yolo County region and include the three areas of West Sacramento, Broderick, and Bryte. This area was first developed after a large reclamation project filled in the land after 1911, thus protecting residents from flood danger.⁶ The area's westernmost community, Bryte, is located on this reclaimed river land, bounded on the south by the Southern Pacific railroad tracks, on the north by the Sacramento River, on the west by Yolo County agricultural land, and on the east by the suburb of Broderick. The D.W. Hobson Company was the original developer of the area.⁷ Riverbend, as Bryte was originally named, was bought up by the West Sacramento Land Development Company, and consequently changed rapidly from an agricultural area to a developing residential region.

Sacramento Boulevard is Bryte's main access road; neighborhoods extend off this arterial highway to the north, eventually reaching as far as the river. Small, frame houses are the norm here with large backyard gardens and small, neatly trimmed or hedged or fenced front yards. Very few sidewalks have been paved here and the street pattern is only occasionally a grid.

Despite this lack of a grid system, Bryte does not appear disorderly. Cars are at a minimum on the streets and many pedestrians are usually visible. Mostly one notices the elderly Russian people working in their gardens or yards or

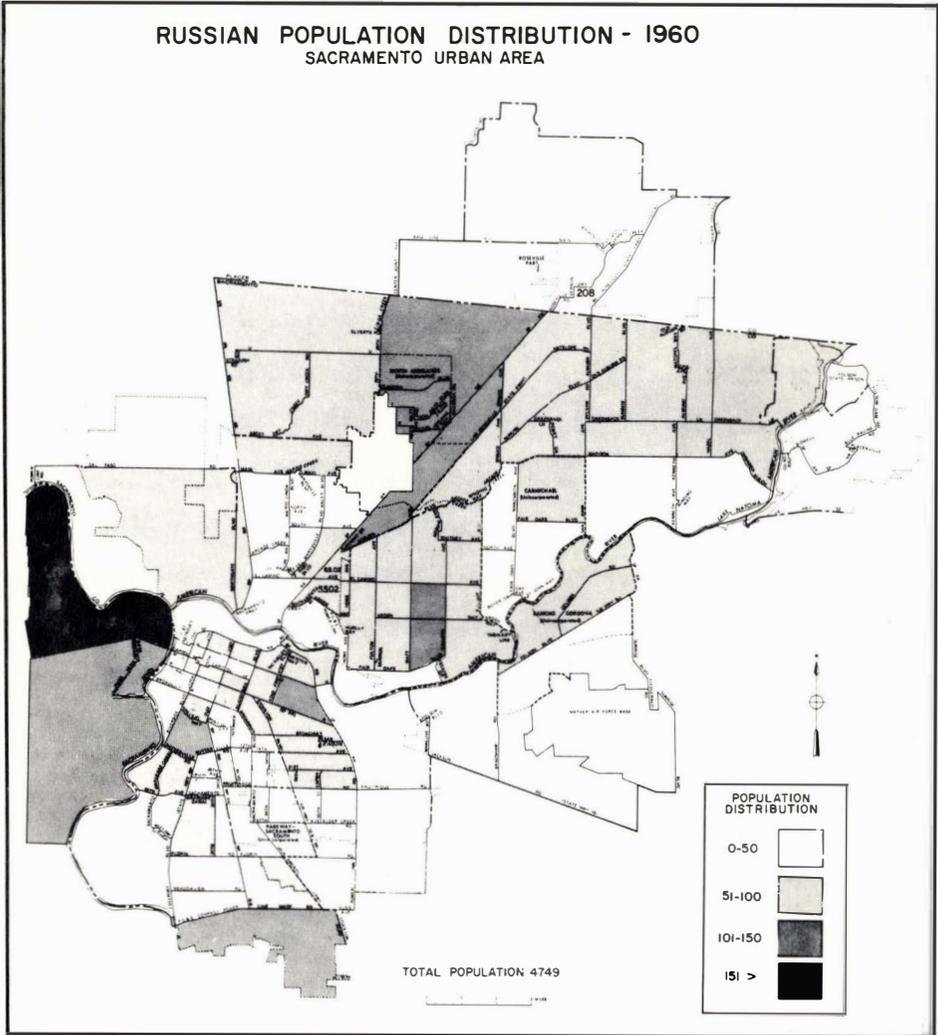


Figure 2

Russian Population Distribution in the Sacramento Urban Area in 1960. Source: Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Sacramento, California. Washington, D.C.:U.S.Government Publ. Office, 1960.

walking along the edge of the street carrying their packages.⁸ Houses with families of Russian surnames are distinguishable by their neat, well trimmed appearance, and especially, by their front yard fence or hedge. The fences result from a homeland tradition of maintaining and protecting ones own property; most front fences have a gate and lock for additional protection.⁹ In comparison, the homes and lawns of other ethnic groups in the neighborhood are less well maintained. This may partially be explained by a difference in social status between the mainly middle class Russian homes and the predominantly lower middle class properties of other groups. Cultural values may also play a part in the differences observed.

"Once subdivided, Bryte developed a distinctive social characteristic sheltering what may be the largest Russian settlement north of San Francisco."¹⁰ Five Russian families who came to Bryte in 1911 were among the first pioneer families settling there. Others of Russian origin trickled in from San Francisco throughout the 1920's and 1930's, most from Vladivostok, Siberia, or Harbin, Manchuria.¹¹ According to Michael Lokteff, who arrived in Bryte with his parents in 1950, the area reminded these early immigrants of home with its fishing and hunting amenities and its rural atmosphere. "Many of these original settlers had contact with other relatives in San Francisco, and spread the word that the natural characteristics resembled those with which they had become familiar in Russia."¹²

Although Russian immigrants continued to settle in the

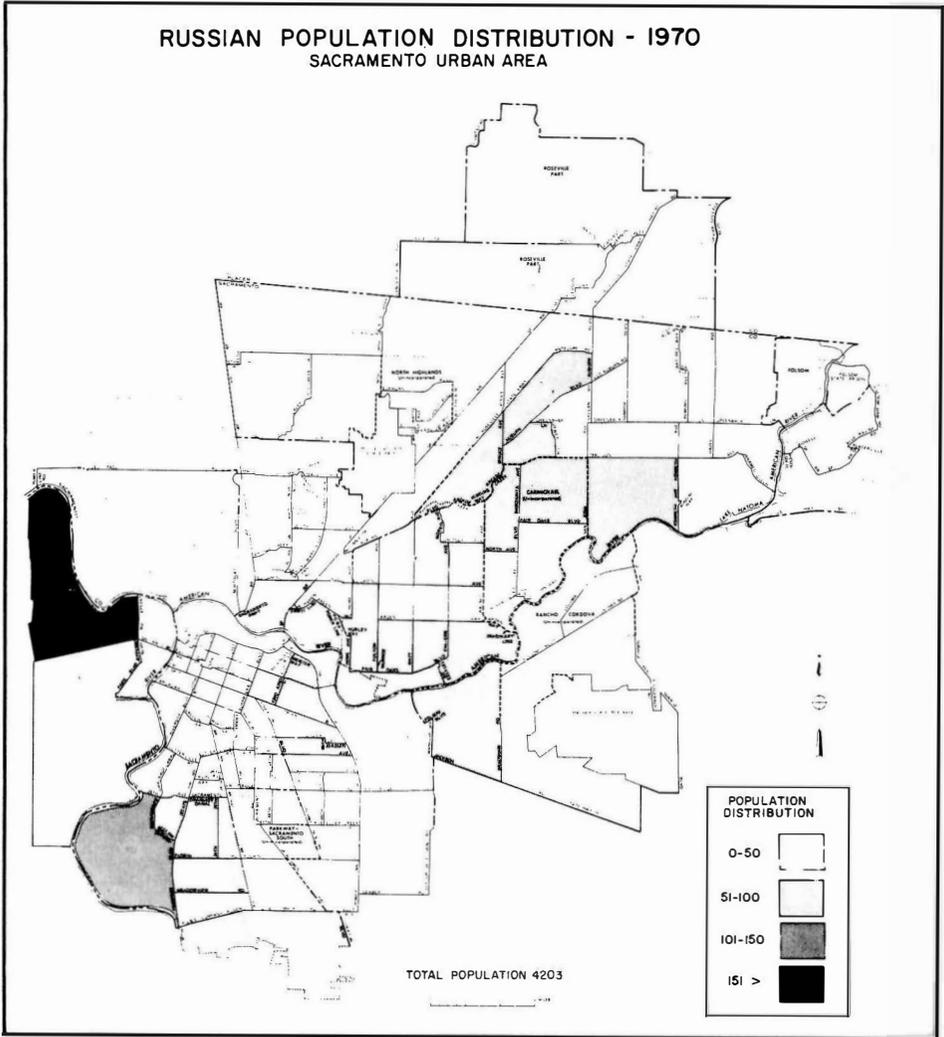


Figure 3

Russian Population Distribution in the Sacramento Urban Area in 1970. Source: Census Bureau: Census of Population and Housing, Sacramento, California. Washington, D.C.; U.S. Government Publ. Office, 1970.

Sacramento urban area through the 1970's, the group who arrived in 1950 were the last large number to settle in the region. The tendency to cluster in western Sacramento fits Jakle and Wheeler's suggestion that "large influxes of ethnic immigrants intensify the degree of ethnocentricity and reduce social interaction."¹³ Due to the effects of chain migration, these 1950 arrivals found Bryte already containing familiar institutions and a cultura area much like their Russian homeland. Two Russian churches, a Russian food store, neighborhoods with familiar names, and shared cultural experiences all contributed to this perception. Bryte's clustered residential pattern is an expected reaction to ethnic settlement in an unfamiliar environment.¹⁴

These 1950 immigrants had lived most of their lives in T'ungchan, China, in the region of Manchuria near the border of the Soviet Union. Escaping from Communist rule, a group of over five thousand Russians had relocated in Manchuria prior to and during the Russian Revolution of 1917. In 1948, following the Communist takeover in China, the government ordered the Russians to return to the Soviet Union or leave for some other country. Choosing the United States, specifically California, the Russians travelled by wagon train for over a year in 1948-49, finally reaching the port of Shanghai for departure to the United States.

Upon their arrival in this coastal city, the group was informed by the International Refugee Association that they were

no longer permitted to enter the United States because of the newly developing "Red Scare" there. Arrangements were then made for the group to resettle temporarily on an island in the Philippines until permanent arrangements could be made. A government was organized, Russian schools were opened, United States army tents and World War II rations procured, and the settlement of Orthodox Russians, Baptists, Pentecostals, and other groups was organized.

This temporary settlement was only a stopover for the group on their way to America. It was a heterogeneous mix, not only in terms of religion, but also in social status. The residents ranged from peasant farmers to wealthy upper class merchants and professionals. Eventually the waiting proved too much for many, and several thousand left for South America and Australia. Near the end of 1950, the remaining Russians finally departed for California, settling mainly in San Francisco and Sacramento.

This large group of Russian immigrants was attracted to Bryte by the nucleus of Russians already there. Also, the Fruitridge Baptist Church in Sacramento sponsored many families and so settlement in this area was encouraged. Life in a new land was eased by the presence of other Russians and familiar customs and institutions.

One of the strongest and most stabilizing institutions in Bryte was the church even though the Russian immigrants were divided into several major faiths, primarily Orthodox and Baptist.

These institutional ties with Russia encouraged the retention of the original language and culture in the clustered settlement of Bryte. The intensive clustering of Russian households in this western Sacramento suburb after 1950 is the culmination of the ethnic neighborhood first established during the Russian Revolution. Newly arriving immigrants held on to these familiar customs thus adding cohesion and homogeneity to the neighborhood.

Clustered settlement in Bryte has resulted in a distinct ethnic suburb in western Sacramento. The quiet, neat appearance of this area is largely a result of this ethnic settlement; Bryte certainly differs from Sacramento's other sprawling, rapidly developing suburbs. Even adjacent Broderick, which separated Bryte from downtown Sacramento, seems modern and bustling in comparison. The ethnic mix of this region lends a Russian flavor to its visual appearance as well as to its census figures. In 1979, almost half of Bryte's population is Russian.¹⁵

Secondary Clustering in the Sacramento Urban Area

Religious factors help account for the two minor areas of Russian clustering in the Sacramento area. The first is a newly developing grouping near the new Russian Evangelical Mission on Franklin Boulevard. Established only eight years ago after a disagreement with the Bryte church, the church has encouraged the settlement of primarily the children of original Russian immigrants from the 1950 group. The census for 1980 should reflect this new cluster along Franklin Boulevard although the data shown in Figure 3 does not, because of its very recent

development.

Another secondary cluster of Russians in Sacramento is located in the Arden-Arcade area. Neighborhoods in these census tracts are largely upper middle class in social status; therefore, many of Sacramento's Jews live in this area. Since many immigrants of the Jewish faith were Russian, this region shows a minor clustering pattern.

Dispersed Russian Settlement in the Sacramento Area

As a comparison in settlement processes, Russians are also dispersed throughout the Sacramento urban area. In 1970, Russians were spread over a large area showing very little clustering, except in the three areas discussed previously in this paper. The distribution of 1970 reflects more dispersal as the Russians become more and more assimilated into the mainstream culture through time. This partially agrees with Johnston's observation:¹⁶

As minority groups become assimilated, their residential distribution becomes dispersed and shows few differences from that of the total population. At early stages, they will be concentrated in communities in the city's inner zones, but these will disappear through time and the group will spread through the whole city.

Dispersed Russians in the Sacramento area also fit the evidence gathered by Cressey, Ford, and Kiang on ethnic dispersal in Chicago.¹⁷ Their studies on residential distribution patterns showed a similar clustering in the early years and a later dis-

persal to outer zones as assimilation occurred. Bryte' clustered settlement, although not strictly central city in location, does partially support the theories of these early studies. One locational deviation from other residential patterns is Bryte's site in the urban fringe area instead of the central city, although this is consistent with Jakle and Wheeler's study of the quasi-urban Dutch settlement in Kalamazoo.

Further analysis of Figures 1, 2, and 3 shows this early clustering of Russians with a later dispersal to outlying areas of the city. The pattern for 1970 continues to show this out migration trend as the second and third generation move out of the study area. Also in support of this, the population totals for each of the years show less Russians in Sacramento in 1970 than in 1960.

Summary and Conclusions

This research project on Russian residential patterns and culture area in an urban setting has helped clarify the methodology involved in any study of ethnic settlement. Additionally, location models and settlement patterns of ethnic groups are partially supported by this population in the Sacramento area, showing an early clustering and a later dispersal through time.

Residential patterns of Russian settlement in the study area are similar to Russian neighborhood locations in other American cities. Simirendo's research on the Russians in Minneapolis shows a strict adherence to the Ghetto hypothesis.¹⁸ The original

Russian neighborhoods in northeast Minneapolis were located near the central city and grew outward until the immigrants were gradually dispersed to other parts of the city. Most moved to the suburbs, and those remaining in the ethnic core area were most strongly involved with the concept of the Russian community. Studies of other Russian settlements in American cities frequently support the early clustering pattern with increased dispersal through time as assimilation occurs.

Theories of Ethnic Assimilation and Residential Location

According to currently accepted social science theories on assimilation, Russians in Sacramento should fit one of the following models in their adjustments to American culture:¹⁹

- 1) Anglo Conformity: Complete adoption of Anglo-Saxon values and behavior and renunciation of Russian culture.
- 2) Melting Pot: Biological merger of Russian immigrants with all others and a subsequent blending of cultures into a new American type.
- 3) Cultural Pluralism: Preservation of Russian culture and values within the context of American society.

Observing residential distribution of Russians in the Sacramento area shows a continued and expanding clustering in Bryte. This suggests that the model of cultural pluralism may be dominant in this region. Certainly this must be the case among the Russians in Bryte, although other factors such as social status and educational limitations, as well as age, also work effectively to intensify clustering in this neighborhood.

Dispersed Russians have largely adopted a philosophy of Anglo conformity.²⁰ Many Russian families speak only English in their homes, encourage their children to "fit in" and seem uncomfortable discussing their Russian heritage. They tend to live in mixed neighborhoods and so dispersal results.

Attitudes toward the majority culture, then, tend to determine the dominant assimilation process and consequently clustering in Bryte is a result, at least partially, of cultural pluralism values. Dispersed patterns of Russian settlement in other parts of the Sacramento area favor Anglo conformity. Both ends of the assimilation continuum are thus represented in the study area.

Future Trends

This study of Russians in Sacramento suggests a partial acceptance of the theories of ethnic settlement and resulting assimilation patterns in American cities. These theories need updating, however, to include a stronger emphasis on suburban clustering and cultural pluralism. In support of the dispersal through time hypothesis, most of the second and third generation Russians have moved to other parts of Sacramento or out of the study area altogether. Practically all of the first generation Russian immigrants still live in Bryte however.²¹

A trend in the late 1970's is toward increased clustering in Bryte, not decreased, as in previous models of location. Retired Russians from San Francisco are buying property and moving to this neighborhood in a steady stream because of the

rural atmosphere amenities offered by the semi-urban environment.²² Perception of land and land ownership has consistently been a positive value in Russian culture; home ownership is affordable in Bryte as compared to other Sacramento suburbs and even the inner city. Russians continue to perceive Bryte as a desirable and affordable place to live and stay. Therefore, the previously supported concept of immigrants settling originally in a clustered, ghetto neighborhood, then gradually disappearing to the higher status suburbs, is not entirely supported in this study of Russians in Sacramento.

NOTES

¹John Jakle and J.O. Wheeler, "The Changing Residential Structure of the Dutch Population in Kalamazoo, Michigan," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 59 (1969), pp. 441-460; Daniel Doeppers, "Globeville Neighborhood in Denver," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 57 (1967), pp. 206-222; Robert Novak, "Distribution of Puerto Ricans on Manhattan Island," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 46 (1956), pp. 182-186.

²Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

³See Jerome Davis, *The Russian Immigrant* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), Mikhail Jeleznov, *Moscow on the Hudson* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), and Alexander Simirenko, *Pilgrims, Colonists, and Frontiersmen: An Ethnic Community in Transition* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

⁴Pauline Young, "The Russian Molokans in Los Angeles," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 35 (1929), pp. 383-402.

⁵E. Dunn, "Potrero Hill Russians," *The Potrero View*, Vol. 2 (1971), pp. 3-9, and M. Tripp, "Russians in San Francisco," Uncompleted Master's thesis, San Francisco State University.

⁶*East Yolo County General Plan*, Woodland, California, (May, 1976), p.5

⁷*Op. cit.*, footnote 6.

⁸"Bryte," *Sacramento Bee* (March 6, 1977), p. S-1.

⁹An interview with Michael Lokteff of Bryte confirmed this. When Mr. Lokteff built a new house in Bryte he did not initially plan to put in a front yard fence but, "My mother-in-law made me." (Interview, Dec., 1978).

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, footnote 8.

¹¹Information summarized by the author from the *Naturalization Records* for Yolo County (1900 through 1930).

¹²*Op. cit.*, footnote 6.

¹³Jakle and Wheeler, *op. cit.*, footnote 1, p. 459.

¹⁴See Gordon and Doeppers (footnotes 1 and 2) for more on this clustering pattern and model.

¹⁵*Op. cit.*, footnote 8.

¹⁶R. G. Johnson, *Urban Residential Patterns* (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. 244.

¹⁷Cressey, Ford, and Kiang all gathered ethnic data for the city of Chicago. (Cressey, "Population Succession in Chicago--1898-1930", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 44 (1938), pp. 59-69; Ford, "Population Succession in Chicago," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 56 (1950), pp. 151-160; Kiang, "The Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Chicago," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 74 (1968), pp. 292-295. All three worked with data from 1898 to 1968, Ford and Kiang furthering the original work of Cressey.

¹⁸*Op. cit.*, footnote 3.

¹⁹Gordon, *op. cit.*, footnote 2, p. 84-159.

²⁰Telephone interview with M.Tkacheff (November, 1978).

²¹I compared the addresses of 140 Russian people in the *Sacramento City Directory* for 1960 and 1975 to determine migration patterns within the study area. A 100% sample continued to live in Bryte in 1975!

²²A conversation with Ms. D. Poole confirmed this fact. She recently sold two lots in Bryte to Russian families from Davis and San Francisco. (Local real estate offices also confirmed this information).