

POTRERO BRANCH
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REFERENCE

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The San Francisco Molokans, a fascinating if little-known Russian community on Potrero Hill, are the subjects of an intriguing collection of photographs currently on display in the second floor rotunda of the San Francisco Public Library, Civic Center.

The exhibit, "The Potrero Hill Russians," was loaned by Linda Lee Loskutoff and is the result of her talents as a photographer and collector. Ms. Loskutoff was herself born and reared in the Molokan community. The 55 photographs cover the period from 1905, when the first Molokans came to San Francisco, to recent years, and show the Molokans pursuing their traditional life and religious faith in their relatively isolated Potrero Hill neighborhood.

Represented are both group portraits (including one long panoramic picture of some 130 persons posed along Southern Heights Street in 1942) and individual character studies. The people are observed in costume, gathered for weddings, funerals and christenings, singing, gardening, carding wool, visiting and gossiping, attending Mothers' Club meetings, and engaged in war relief activities during World War II. Children are shown attending the Russian School, held weekdays after American School, in the basement of the first Russian Christian Molokan Church. A particularly engaging group of photographs is devoted to recording the church feasts, especially the making of "Lapsha," the feature course of traditional Molokan Church

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dinners. The making of "Lapsha" is a community social event, comparable to the American sewing and quilting bees of the 19th Century.

The photographic exhibit is complemented by a selection of caps, shawls, bonnets and household tools, as well as by books and articles about Molokan culture.

Historically, the Molokans were a Russian peasant sect that dissented from the Greek Orthodox Church of Russia in the 17th Century. They endured religious persecution and were finally exiled to Southern Russia. Their ardent pacifism led to a renewal of hostilities during the Russo-Japanese War. Between 1905 and 1907, many Molokans fled from Russia, and about 5,000 settled in California. A second wave of Molokans came to Potrero Hill between 1947 and 1952, when the Iranian farms on which they had previously settled were seized by the Iranian government.

"The Potrero Hill Russians" may be viewed at the Library throughout May and June.