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The Tikhvin Old Believer Almshouse in the Second Half of the 18th – First Half of the 19th Century

Abstract

The article highlights the history of establishing and functioning of the Old Believer almshouse of the Pomorian congregation, operating in the city of Tikhvin since 1764. In some sources, it is called “monastery” and “skete,” as nuns lived there. The main sources used in the article are

documents stored in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts and in the Russian State Historical Archive; most are being thus introduced into scientific use. Among the identified documents are decrees and petitions related to the monastery establishing and its property acquisition in the 18th – early 19th century. The sources demonstrate the role of the Tikhvin Old Believer almshouse in maintaining ties with Old Believer spiritual centers in the Olonets gubernia, St. Petersburg, and Moscow. The skete housed locally revered relics: miraculous icons, relics of saints (some from Novgorod). Old Believers from other regions came to worship them, especially during the Tikhvin spring fair. There were active contacts between Tikhvin and Vygovskaya Old Believer community. The skete also promoted consolidation of the uezd inhabitants, gathering in Tikhvin to worship local shrines, to perform repentance, to make a prayer (nachala) for non-observance of the Old Believer rules, which was important for the priestless communities: thus, they returned to the community by the decision of the skete council of spiritual mentors. The article focuses on tragic closing of the prayer house and almshouse and its rearrangement into edinovertsy church. It happened during government repressions against the Old Believers in 1854. The Tikhvin Edinovertsy Church, founded by the Ministry of Internal Affairs official Yu. K. Arseniev, was the first in the Novgorod eparchy, antedating similar developments in the region. The success of this Ministry project sprang from readiness of the officials to forcibly take control of relics and locations sacred to the Old Believers (monastery's revered icons, including those with relics, its cemetery with its prayer house, where the ancestors of the Tikhvin Old Believers were buried).

Keywords

Historical sources, Old Belief, monasticism, edinoverie, Novgorod gubernia, Tikhvin.

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