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For Merchants' Benefit: Hard Cases in the Practice of Entrepreneurs' Petitions Consideration in Peterhof in the Time of Great Reforms

Abstract

The article addresses an important issue that ties together the history of the Ministry of the Imperial Court, interactions between merchants and government, and history of palace towns, such as Tsarskoe Selo, Gatchina and Peterhof. Palace towns were exempt from gubernia administration and were governed by special structures within the Court Department. Drawing on materials from the Russian State Historical Archive, the author analyses the procedure for consideration of the private entrepreneurs' petitions on trade establishment in Peterhof in 1855–1860s. The article focuses on petitions rejected by local authorities and reformulated and

readdressed to superior authority. Having studied different scenarios of interaction between Peterhof merchants and the Ministry of the Imperial Court officials, the author concludes that submitted applications were tried on the merits and refusals were supported by evidence. The Court Department officials checked proposed edifices for conformity with construction rules, took into account the nature of future enterprises, personal and business qualities of the applicants, and, in case of alcoholic products, estimated their influence on the public order. Negative response to first petition did not preclude other, which could be addressed either to the town administration or to superior bodies, all the way to the Court Department. Merchants who wished to open a new trade enterprise or to expand business used this opportunity to renew their petition. When they reformulated the essence of their request or expressed their readiness to satisfy conditions set by the authorities, entrepreneurs were granted their applications.

Keywords

Archival documents, sources, Ministry of the Imperial Court, Alexander II, Peterhof, petition, trade.

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