

УДК 94(47)+94(054.6)+930.253

DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2020-4-1201-1214

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Foreigners in the Provincial City: Documents of the Smolensk City Duma of the First Half of the 19th Century

Abstract

The article reviews decisions of the city government regarding foreigners: consideration of petitions to be ascribed to burgers or merchants (of those who had already taken citizenship of the Russian Empire); evaluation of urban real estate; collection of taxes. The study is based on documents of the fond of the Smolensk City Duma from the State Archive of the Smolensk Region. Despite some losses (materials prior 1812 are not preserved in the fond), the archival documents highlight various issues of provincial city life. The author gives instances of the former prisoners of 1812 war or the so-called “immigrants from abroad” (those who had taken

citizenship of the Russian Empire) being ascribed to Smolensk burgers. The law exempted former prisoners of war from all burger taxes and duties for 10 years and “immigrants from abroad” for 6 years. Materials of the Smolensk City Duma name foreigners among Smolensk artisans and merchants, doctors and pharmacists of gubernia level. They had property in the city and paid taxes. Some were well respected and were elected to city Duma or administration. Documents of the archival fond allow the researcher to learn family circumstances that influenced the fates of foreigners living in Smolensk in the first half of the 19th century. The number of foreigners in the provincial city was insignificant and tended to decrease. However, the author points out that statistics included only those who retained citizenship of their native country, not taking into account foreigners who accepted Russian citizenship. Documents of the Smolensk City Duma show that they were quite numerous. However, presence of foreign-born individuals in the daily life of the gubernia city became commonplace.

Keywords

Archival sources, prisoners of war of the Napoleonic armies, foreigners, Smolensk City Duma, first half of the 19th century, ascribing to burbers, foreign merchants, urban real estate, State Archive of the Smolensk Region (GASO).

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Submitted 26.04.2020, published (for citation):

TIKHONOVA, A. V. Inostrantsy v gubernskom gorode. Po dokumentam Smolenskoj gorodskoi dumy pervoi poloviny XIX veka [Foreigners in the Provincial City: Documents of the Smolensk City Duma of the First Half of the 19th Century. In Russ.]. IN: Vestnik arhivista / Herald of an Archivist, 2020, no. 4, pp. 1201-1214. doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2020-4-1201-1214

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Полностью материал публикуется в российском историко-архивоведческом журнале ВЕСТНИК АРХИВИСТА. Ознакомьтесь с условиями подписки [здесь](#) .