The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

California's Fort Ross May Be Russian Territory, Lawmaker Says

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September 28, 2014



The chapel of Fort Ross landmark in California

Fort Ross, a 19th-century landmark on the northern coast of California, may have been illegally appropriated by the U.S., a Russian lawmaker said, urging the Foreign Ministry to launch a probe into the matter, Izvestia reported.

Mikhail Degtyarev, a State Duma deputy who made waves earlier this month by proposing a repainting of the Kremlin walls to their historic ivory hue, said the purchase of Fort Ross from Russia nearly two centuries ago may have been invalid.

Degtyarev sent a formal request urging the Foreign Ministry to dig into the issue, saying that if the sale was invalid, all subsequent developments of the property by U.S. authorities were invalid, and Russia may thus have a claim to the territory, Izvestia reported.

Fort Ross was founded in 1812 by the Russian-American Company, which had been created

by the imperial household to establish new settlements on the North America. It was named "Ross" in honor of its connection to imperial Russia, or "Rossia."

Fort Ross served as trading hub for the Russian-American Company until it was sold in 1842 to John Sutter, a California pioneer of Swiss origin.

Some Russian historians have argued that the Russian side never received payment for the transaction and that the territory thus still belongs to Russia.

Degtyarev's initiative adds to the a long list of instances in which Russian lawmakers and social activists have questioned, facetiously at times, the status of American territories that once belonged to Russia.

In the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea in March, a petition for the "secession of Alaska from the U.S. and joining Russia" appeared on the "We the People" section of White House's website. The petition had received more than 35,000 signatures one week after it was published.

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Original url:
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