

## **Boris L. Kagan: Physician, Educator, Activist and Revolutionary**

By Jo Ann Goldwater



I had a great uncle (my grandmother's brother) who had a very interesting life. Boris L. Kagan (Abraham, as he was known to his family) was born in Riga in 1871 but went to medical school in Moscow, became an eye specialist and graduated in the early 1890's.

He subsequently opened a hospital in Voskresensk, about 55 miles from Moscow. He made several trips to visit his family in New York City and actually worked at the Sydenham Hospital there from 1908 to 1910. He fled Russia because of the pogroms, but somehow he was drawn back there by his work. He died in Russia in 1912 of typhus, but is still remembered by the people of the area for his wonderful work in helping everyone, described as a physician, educator, activist and revolutionary.

When I first began this research, I knew very little about my great uncle, except that he had started a hospital in a small town near Moscow. Last year I asked a Russian speaking person if she could look on the net to see if the hospital still exists. She did a search and found a web page showing that a plaque was unveiled to his memory in October 2011, and also learned about the monument and street named after him. I discovered more on my own by using Google translate. It's not perfect, but it's amazing how much information you can obtain. I'm hoping one day to be able to take a trip to Moscow and visit Voskresensk. I hope I can get in contact with others who may be interested through this Kehila Link. The article that follows is a translation of a Russian web page about his work.



Visiting the Kahn family in New York, 1905-6.  
Dr.Kagan is seated on the right.

### **Boris Kagan and His Patients by Oleg Kanov**

He embodied the ideal of a doctor, was a model of selfless service to the cause of medicine, indomitable desire for creativity and helping people. Boris Kagan can be



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rightfully considered the founder of the health care system of Voskresensk. Kagan, who lived in our town in the late 19th - early 20th centuries, enjoyed enormous respect in the community: all the young and old alike admired his tireless virtuous responsiveness and energy. He passed away nearly a century ago. In Voskresensk is a street, a monument and a plaque dedicated to Kagan, but also remaining in the community is his living memory. Equally important to the present day, his example of embodied humanity and kindness should not be forgotten.

### **Birth of the Clinic**

The initiative to create a Resurrection Hospital belonged to Prince Andrei Alexandrovich. It was built near the forest lodge Chemodurovskoy. It was here in 1891 that Boris L. Kagan came to work. He was appointed head of the Livenskij Hospital by the Bronnitsky district local boards. This event marked the beginning stages of the formation of a genuine health care system for Voskresensk.

B.L. Kagan was born in 1871 in Kovno province (now Lithuania). He graduated from the Riga school, then the medical faculty of Moscow University. Each stage of the life of Boris L. emphasized his ardent enthusiasm and an innate desire to serve the good of the people. These qualities have contributed to the fact that from the earliest days of the hospital he gained the respect of patients, and patrons of the clinic - the representatives of the princely family Lieven.

He refused help to no one, tirelessly treating patients. Crowded conditions in the Livenskij Hospital, as well as its location in a dense forest, seriously hampered the work of the local doctors. Kagan correctly assumed that it would be better to move it to another location. At the suggestion of the Princess AP Liven it was decided to build a new hospital on the edge of the forest Krivyakinskogo (now the hospital campus). There were built the clinic, maternity home, hospital kitchen, the physician's house, and laundry. It is from this hospital that much later grew Krivyakinskoy's first City Hospital, and one of its buildings to the present day is still a station of blood transfusion.

### **Selfless service**

The building of the new hospital contributed to an increase in the number of patients - peasants from Bronnitsy and Kolomna, county, railroad and factory workers came to be treated. Kagan, with even greater fervor, continued his activities. His remarkable performance and dedication to medicine called forth a genuine admiration and respect from colleagues. Noteworthy in this respect are the memories of Kolomna doctor KI Shevlyagin: "In the spring of 1898 I was at ospoprivatelem Kagan, and I had to sleep in Krivyakine. I remember the impression that he made on me: almost never sitting down, always jumping up and running around. He was constantly in motion; it seemed to me that somewhere behind the wall there was a whole line of people in need of assistance. I could not stand it, at



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last, and asked if there was no leisure time for Boris L. during the day? Boris laughed at it and said it was always this way." (From the book Goshkevich VN Goshkevich NV).

In addition to direct treatment, Kagan sought in every way make life easier for the patients. Local boards periodically introduced the so-called "pyatachkovye fees" that were collected from outpatients for consultations and for medical prescriptions, which led to a decrease in the number of patients seeking medical help. According to LB Ryabkov in his book "Pages of History Kolomna Zemstvo," BL Kagan, along with the other country doctors MA Morozov and AN Khabarov, repeatedly argued at the meetings of the Zemstvo for the abolition of these taxes from the peasants. Especially important was the abolition of fees during epidemics. "The best way to curb the epidemic - ambulance. Payment of all chronic and acute patients - it is an outpost in front of the hospital " said provincial doctors. In 1906, "pyatachkovye fees" were finally abolished completely, as a result - an increase of almost a third in the number of patients.

Kagan's amazing and selfless benevolence helped draw the attention of the wealthy citizens of the Zemstvo to the problem of health. Honorary trustees of the hospital were Krivyakinskoy, Earl S. Orlov-Davydov, Princess AP Lieven, a landowner and a hereditary honorary citizen of VA Balin. They donated their money to buy furniture and medical equipment.

### **The tragic death**

In 1909, BL Kagan was transferred to work in Kolomna Zemstvo hospital, and here he gained the love and respect for patients and physicians. But his way of life and bright light was suddenly interrupted by the man's tragic death. According to one version, in winter 1912 Kagan picked up on the street an elderly woman dying of typhus. He took her to the hospital, but caught the disease himself, which resulted in his sudden death.

The news of the death of BL Kagan strongly affected the public and the Kolomna district Bronnitsy. For many it was a personal tragedy, the loss of a loved one who had done so much for the benefit of people. Hundreds of those who were indebted to him for life and health helped carry the great doctor along his last path. Notice of the funeral, published in the Moscow newspaper "Russian Gazette", clearly shows the degree of public respect and reverence felt for Kagan.

Local merchants and manufacturers established a Kagan Fund, and put on his grave a monument engraved with this inscription: "The victim of unconditional love of neighbor, Boris L. Kagan." Unfortunately, this monument is now lost; there is no plaque on the grave of Dr. Kagan today. In our city, we have done a lot to perpetuate his memory: named a street after Kagan, placed a memorial bust in the hospital



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campus and a memorial plaque on the building where he worked. Hopefully, his gravestone and monument will also be restored.

Boris L. Kagan left a large and bright trace in the history of Voskresensk. For us the example of his remarkable devotion to the ideals of humanity and kindness is very significant. His memory is important to the physicians of Voskresensk as an example of professionalism and dedication, paired with a genuine concern for people.