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The Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) Society of Russian Red Cross Rural Nurses in the service of zemstvo medicine in the late 19th to early 20th centuries

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The article deals with the activities of the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) rural society of nurses in Russia at the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries. The beginning of nursing societies can be traced to 1844, when the first Holy Trinity Sisters of Mercy Society was established in St. Petersburg. Similar nursing societies appeared in almost every provincial city in Russia during the second half of the 19th century. Sisters of Mercy worked in hospitals, almshouses and shelters and regularly traveled to epidemic-prone regions. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were 115 nursing societies in Russia. Their work has always attracted the interest of historians and doctors. In 1879, Doctor of Medicine P.A. Ilinsky in his work “Russian women in the war of 1877–1878. An essay on the activities of nurses, medical assistants and women doctors” described in detail the heroic work of the nurses in caring for the wounded soldiers during the Russian-Turkish (Balkan) War of 1877–1878. Many academic articles, monographs and dissertations have been devoted to this topic in recent times, reflecting in detail both the domestic life and the professional activity of the Sisters of Mercy. At the same time, the rural nursing societies have received hardly any historical and historiographic analysis. Based on one example – the Emperor Alexander III Memorial Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) Society of Red Cross Rural Nurses – the role and importance of this community in the development of zemstvo medicine at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries are examined. The society’s activities are addressed, as are the reasons for which such rural communities of nurses could not become widespread in tsarist Russia.

Keywords: *history of medicine, nurses, rural communities, Russian Red Cross Society, zemstvo medicine, epidemics, charity*

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Introduction

Russia’s first society of nurses – the Holy Trinity Sisters of Mercy Society – was established in 1844 in Saint Petersburg.

Duchess Therese Petrovna of Oldenburg and the daughters of Emperor Nicholas I – Maria and Alexandra – were actively involved in its establishment. A department for nurses, a women’s hospital, a boarding house, a shelter, a correctional school and a department of repentance and, a little later, an almshouse for the terminally ill opened under the society. The so-called compassionate widows – widows of

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indigent officials and military officers living in homes for widows built for this specific purpose in Moscow and Saint Petersburg – became the blueprint for nursing societies [1]. The Nikolskaya and Krestovozdvizhenskaya nursing societies were established in Moscow and Saint Petersburg in 1848 and 1854, respectively. Nurses were involved in combat operations for the first time during the Russo-Turkish (Crimean) War in 1853–1855 by caring for the wounded. Their work was highly praised by N.I. Pirogov [2]. Prior to the Russo-Turkish (Balkan) War in 1877–1878, Russia had more than 20 nursing societies whose members were officially allowed to work in military hospitals [3]. At the outbreak of World War I, Russia had 115 nursing societies under the remit of the Russian Red Cross Society (RRCS) [4]. During this period, nursing societies were established in almost every province, as well as several district cities.

The work of city and provincial nursing societies in Russia has been abundantly investigated. Among essays in the pre-revolution era that deserve special note is the work of Doctor of Medicine P.A. Ilinsky, in which he described the heroic work of nurses in the theatre of operations during the Balkan War between 1877 and 1878 [5]. Monographs in recent times have also been devoted to this topic [4, 6]. The work of major nursing societies has been thoroughly studied: Holy Trinity, Krestovozdvizhenskaya, Nikolskaya, Pokrovskaya, Assuage My Sorrows, Iverskaya, Kaufmanskaya, Strudzovskaya, Kasperovskaya and other nursing societies, located in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The work of most provincial nursing societies in major cities has also been subjected extensive historiographical analysis [4]. At the same time, there is virtually no work in literature devoted to rural nursing societies. This article attempts to examine the work of rural nursing societies in Russia using the Emperor Alexander III Memorial Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) Society of Red Cross Rural Nurses as an example. The scope of the investigation was circumscribed by the purpose behind the creation of rural nursing societies, the scope of their work, their role in the development of zemstvo medicine and the reason why such societies never became widespread in tsarist Russia.

Rural society of nurses: aims and objectives

The first rural society of nurses (Mary Magdalene) was established by Princess Maria Mikhailovna Dondukova-Korsakova in the village of Burigi in the Porkhovsky district of the Pskov province in 1862 [7]. It was named after May Magdalene – the namesake saint of its founder. The second rural nursing society in Pokrovsk was established at the behest of the priest of the Pokrovskaya church, in the village of Podberezhye in the Novoladozhsky district of the Saint Petersburg province, Father Konstantin Lorchenko, and the zemstvo doctor of that district, Alexei Stepanovich Petrovsky [8, 9]. The society is officially considered to be established in 1895 although it started training nurses earlier in 1891 [8, p. 5].

The nursing societies fell under the jurisdiction of the Red Cross and were its local units. Both societies were under the patronage of Empresses Maria Alexandrovna and Maria Fedorovna. According to their charters, both societies were run by a local committee, which comprised a priest, a doctor, a head nurse and committee members.¹ The societies were stationed in special stone houses with accessory buildings. They had their own farm, orchard and vegetable garden. The societies also had small clinics: the clinic at the Mary Magdalene society had eight beds and the one at the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) society had four beds. The purpose of the rural nursing societies was described by K. Lorchenko: these were schools for training patient care, practical schools for agriculture and craft for women [8, p. 9]. It was particularly on the woman – “the mother, enlightened by the light of Christ, well-bred, free of prejudice, superstition and ignorance, well-versed in rules of sanitation and hygiene, experienced in the branches of agriculture amenable to the female hand (such as fruit growing, bee-keeping, gardening), who, ultimately, knows craft, in which she can be engaged for the benefit of her family”, [8, p. 3] on whom he pinned hopes for better peasant life and the development of the Russian countryside in post-reform Russia.

¹ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXIII of the regular session and District Reports with supplements 1898, Saint Petersburg, 1899. P. 105.

Among the afflictions in the Russian country-side in the second half of the 19th century, the founders particularly singled out the “intellectual barbarism of layfolk” and “low moral standards of peasants”, a “dearth of material resources” and the related “difficult sanitary conditions, scarcity of food” [8, p. 1; 9, p. 11]. In light of this, the main task facing rural nursing societies was exerting further “influence on the people”: “getting closer to them, gaining their trust” long before “general education awakens public consciousness and prepares it to grasp common sense and the utility of scientific medical practices” [9, p. 10].

In both cases, the staff of the nursing societies included literate peasant girls who had reached the age of 18 years and had graduated from the parochial school. At the society, the girls took a three-year training programme, after which they remained with the society or returned to their families, which meant the number of staff changed constantly [8, p. 12–13]. Nurses cared for the sick, promoted basic rules of personal hygiene among peasants and worked on the subsistence farm. The Mary Magdalene society had a school which taught literacy to peasant children. The children took classes five times a week and adults took classes on Saturdays and Sundays. In the first three months of the Mary Magdalene society, seventy adult peasants learned to spell and perform four fundamental operations of arithmetics [7].

Therefore the main purpose of the nursing societies, as envisioned by their founders, was the overcoming of entrenched superstition, promulgation of sanitary and hygiene rules, prevention of infectious diseases, treatment and caring for the sick, and teaching literacy to peasants and their children. Rural nurses with a peasant background were to act as go-betweens for zemstvo doctors and peasants. As future mothers and housewives, spending a lot of time with children and the elderly, they were able to assist zemstvo authorities in controlling and providing early warning of epidemics, provide proper care and correct implementation of medical recommendations, without which “all measures to prevent and eradicate infectious diseases in villages would not achieve their intended purpose”.²

² Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXIX of the regular session and District Reports with supplements 1894 Saint Petersburg, 1895. P. 123–124.

Zemstvo medicine and the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) rural society of nurses

Zemstvo doctor A.S. Petrovsky played a significant role in the establishment of the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) rural society of nurses. He was not only involved in training future nurses, demonstrating the advantages of nursing care to the professional community at the Congress of Zemstvo Representatives and Doctors of the Saint Petersburg Province between 20 and 22 March 1893, advocating for the need for rural nursing societies at the N.I. Pirogov Memorial Congress of the Society of Russian Physicians in 1893, but also appealed to the noble class and members of the imperial family for assistance [9, p. 9].

Thanks to his efforts in the establishment of the society, he was able to solicit support from Countesses E.A. Vorontsova-Daskhova, M.F. Sheremetyeva, M.V. Orlova-Davydova and V.A. Abaze, as well as Princess V.Y. Trubetskaya.³ In response to the personal appeal by A.S. Petrovsky, Empress Maria Fedorovna wrote that “it would be very useful to establish such peasant societies in other places as well in order to provide the people, especially during epidemics, with women from the same environment with experience in providing care, familiar with basic rules of hygiene and first aid”.⁴ The Pokrovskaya rural society of nurses was brought under the main branch of the RRCS. Countess M.F. Sheremetyeva became the trustee of the Pokrovskaya society. The society was locally run by the Novoladozhsky committee which consisted of five honorary members, one permanent member, one elected member and twenty active members led by the chairman of the zemstvo council.⁵

The society was officially opened on 16 June 1895, although back in the winter of 1891 A.S. Petrovsky had organised nursing training courses at the Novoladozhskaya zemstvo

³ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1896. Saint Petersburg, 1897. P. 14.

⁴ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1896. Saint Petersburg., 1897. P. 92.

⁵ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXIII of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1898. Saint Petersburg, 1899. P. 105.

hospital which he headed. His first students were Maria and Evdokia Kharicheva and Evdokia Ilina, graduates of the Podberezhskaya parochial school, where Father K. Lorchenko taught [8, p. 5; 9, p. 5]. From 27 January 1892, nurses were already serving at the Novoladozhskaya zemstvo hospital, and Maria and Evdokia Kharicheva continued their training at the Christ the Saviour society in Saint Petersburg.⁶ From 1893, nurses worked during epidemics under the leadership of other doctors in the Novoladozhsky and other zemstvos. Following the successes achieved, a decision was made at the zemstvo assembly to award the nurses a Red Cross, which they had to wear on their left sleeves. This mark was to identify rural nurses and indicate that “they can assist when needed, commensurate with their abilities, during war”.⁷

By the time the Pokrovskaya rural society of nurses was established, seven doctors, a chemist, six midwives, one midwife assistant and twenty medical assistants were already serving in the Novoladozhsky district zemstvo.⁸ There was not enough medical staff to cater for the vast territory and so the zemstvo was forced to invite temporary mid-level medical personnel [10, p. 224]. District zemstvos, which had to fund district hospitals on their own and bear additional costs on tackling epidemics, found the work of rural nurses of particular benefit due to the fact that had to shoulder the entire burden of organising and developing rural medicine. Rural nurses lent assistance to the zemstvo free of charge: they took care of infectious patients in various facilities and the sick in private homes and surrounding villages. For instance, nurse Troyanovskaya headed the almhouse of the Novoladozhsky Benevolent Society from 1895 for free. Another nurse filled in as a medical assistant at the district hospital under the leadership of doctor Martynov. Some nurses travelled to neighbouring villages to care for the seriously ill, regularly travelled to areas affected

by scarlet fever, typhoid and recurrent fever, dysentery, cholera and other epidemics.⁹

The Pokrovskaya society had an average of four to six students (candidate nurses). Not only peasant girls were accepted for training: in 1882 Father K. Lorchenko recommended lower middle class girls Lidia Ilinskaya and Olga Kononova for training [9, p. 7]. The primary focus was on care and skills of communicating with patients. Rural nurses were required to possess “fundamental knowledge about hygiene and sanitation”, know symptoms of epidemic diseases and methods of preventing their spread, be able to provide first aid in the “basic and most urgent cases” and, under the personal supervision of a doctor, perform the following medical procedures: “measure temperature of those with fever, be on duty in wards, monitor intake of medication, dress wounds and sores”¹⁰ [9, p. 6]. After passing examinations, students received certificates and went on to serve in the nursing society. The society had from four to eight nurses on average. Annual reports from the Pokrovskaya society in the Novoladozhsky district zemstvo assembly show that in the year of its official opening (1885), the society already had two nurses. From 1896 to 1897, the society took in eleven students every year. From 1902 to 1904, the number of those wishing to train dropped to two people a year. The society had its highest number of nurses (eleven) from 1910 to 1911.¹¹ By 1915 the number of full-time nurses had dropped to four, although three more war-time nurses and one auxiliary war-time nurse were taken in. During World War I, all were sent to serve in the Grand Duchess Victoria Fedorovna Novoladozhsky detachment of the Red Cross [11, p. 337].

Practical and theoretical training was conducted in both the zemstvo hospital, where students were assigned in turns, and the society’s

⁶ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1896. Saint Petersburg, 1897. P. 90.

⁷ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1896. Saint Petersburg, 1897. P. 91.

⁸ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1896. Saint Petersburg, 1897. P. 67.

⁹ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1896. Saint Petersburg, 1897 P. 92. Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1896. Saint Petersburg, 1896. P. 8.

¹⁰ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1899. Saint Petersburg, 1900. P. 72.

¹¹ According to “Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly” for 1894–1911 (Saint Petersburg, 1895–1912).

clinic which received regular visits from zemstvo doctors.¹² These doctors conducted outpatient visits and inpatient treatment at least twice a week. In different years, the society had from 52 to 80 inpatients (the highest number – 103 – was recorded in 1897, the lowest number – 19 – in 1902–1904). The society served 800 to 2000 outpatients a year (the lowest number of patients – not more than 840 – was recorded in 1902–1904, and the highest – 3980 – in 1911). Doctors were also supposed to attend to patients in neighbouring villages at home. However, due to the heavy workload on doctors, these visits were often conducted by nurses: by 1911, nurses had attended to 124 of such patients.

Zemstvos, therefore, had an interest in setting up and supporting rural nursing societies. During outbreaks of scarlet fever, typhoid and recurrent fever, dysentery, cholera and other infectious diseases, the Pokrovskaya nursing society in particular enabled the Saint Petersburg provincial zemstvo to solve, with minimal financial cost, the problem of the shortage of medical staff to work in districts and travel to villages. Nurses not only helped care for the sick, prepare medicines, measure temperature, carry out dressing, but also solved many everyday and sanitation and hygiene tasks (they prepared food, kept facilities clean, washed linen, etc).¹³ However, despite the obvious benefit of rural nursing societies, A.S. Petrovsky's calls to "promote this matter as much extensively as possible" for the entire rural province and the appeal by the Novoladozhsky zemstvo public health committee to district doctors to train peasant girls nursing care at hospitals did not yield the desired outcome [12]. Rural nursing societies did not become widespread in Russia. Only two new rural nursing societies were established in the 1910s: in the Novoukrainka village of the Elisavetgradsky district¹⁴ and the Aleksandria Khersonskaya province.¹⁵ At the

¹² Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1900. Saint Petersburg, 1901. P. 65.

¹³ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXIII of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1898. Saint Petersburg, 1899. P. 105.

¹⁴ RGVIA F. 12651 Op. 3 D. 131 On the establishment of rural societies of nurses.

¹⁵ RGVIA F. 12651 Op. 3 D. 232 On the opening courses for training nurses in the city of Alexandria of the Kherson Province.

same time, the first society of rural nurses – the Mary Magdalene society – in the Porkhovskiy district of the Pskov province, which had opened in 1862, was disbanded. Therefore at various times in its history, Russia had just four societies "for training rural nurses". There were very few of these societies in Russia owing to the poor effectiveness of their work, which did not justify the funds invested in them. As evidence, it was pointed out that soon after its establishment, the Mary Magdalene society served several neighbouring villages, but by the time it was shut down, its operations were limited to just one rural parish [7].

The financial state of rural societies of nurses based on the example of the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) society

For more than 20 years, rural nurses in the Novoladozhsky district worked for free as caregivers in the zemstvo hospital, went on assignments during epidemics and gained the respect of zemstvo doctors and the district zemstvo assembly.¹⁶ However, the report on the audit of the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) nursing society conducted in 1904 by the representative of the main branch of the Red Cross, Major General I.P. Mikhailov, suggests its decline. It should be noted that by that time, Father K. Lorchenko had died, and doctor A.S. Petrovsky had been transferred to another province [12]. Without guidance, nurses continued to work in an economic and political environment that was extremely challenging at that time. Chairwoman of the Novoladozhsky society for combating leprosy noted: "The general unrest in Russia has completely destroyed any interest in public endeavours, one way or another unrelated to matters associated with the so-called liberation movement, and so that warm support which came ...from all sides ...has now ended abruptly, putting us in an extremely difficult position".¹⁷ Donations from philanthropists dried up, as did membership contributions and collections for charity.

¹⁶ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1895. Saint Petersburg, 1896. P. 7.

¹⁷ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1906. Saint Petersburg, 1907 P. 49.

In the end, the committee confirmed that the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) society of nurses had only two nurses (instead of six) and nine students, local peasant girls who had graduated from the parochial school.¹⁸ The society's clinic initially had two wards (male and female). At the time of the audit, all patients – both women and men – lay in the same ward. The head nurse of the society – dresser O.V. Kotlyarova – lived in the other ward with her mother. Due to the absence of a doctor, she headed the hospital, attended to and treated patients, determined medication and issued prescriptions. The audit report noted that food was being prepared in the same kitchen used to boil dirty linen of patients and nurses (“cold lavatory, seat covered with ice, cold air blowing through the window”).¹⁹

The society had household (vegetable garden, poultry, a horse, cows) and field (hay-making, planting oats) duties. It had one male worker to work the field and handle heavy work, and sometimes a female worker. The vegetable garden was maintained by nurses who carried out some field work; housework was carried out by nurses only.²⁰ According to the audit of 1904, the society's farm had 3 cows, 1 horse, 25 chickens, a few ducks, a sheep, a calf and pig. The society was unable to keep wage workers due to the scarcity of funds. The nurses were still able to mow hay for the year, but had to give up other field work. According to the inspection report, “we are now buying oats and rye which we used to grow on our own”.²¹

It cannot be said that local authorities denied the society assistance. The Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) society received annual funding from the Red Cross (750 rubles), the provincial zemstvo assembly (750 rubles) and the district zemstvo (100 rubles).²² A considerable part

of the society's income came from donations and membership contributions. In 1898 the society received a 405 ruble donation from Countess and Count Sheremetyev, 100 rubles from Father Ioann Kronshtadtsky and 500 rubles under the will of Mrs. Zapryagaeva.²³

However, the funds were clearly not enough. The Pokrovskaya society faced financial difficulties from 1899 to 1900. The primary objectives for the leadership of the society during this period were the replenishment of nursing staff, raising funds to maintain the society and finding ways for cheaper equipment of nurses and students²⁴. As possible alternatives of solving the funding problem, the society proposed a lottery which could raise a net 750 rubles, as well as a special allowance for the upkeep of “permanent vital medical staff of the society”.²⁵ However, the proposed measures did not yield the desired outcome. The funds were still not enough even for uniforms, and the audit committee confirmed that nurses were dressed “differently and slovenly”.²⁶

The miserable state of the society was conveyed to the chairman of the main branch of the Red Cross, Count I.I. Vorontsov-Dashkov (pictured).²⁷

The dearth of funding was not the only reason behind the deplorable state of the Pokrovskaya nursing society. Equally important was the lack of interest in the society among the wealthy, for whom charity was a “personal and special calling” [13, p. 101, 516; 12 p.78]. Societies in Moscow and Saint Petersburg and many provincial societies received a lot of attention and constant patronage from the high class. For instance, the Assuage My Sorrows society was under the direct patronage of Emperor Alexander II, and after his death, Alexander III and Nicolas II [15]. The Nikolskaya and Vladychne-Pokrovskaya society was under the patronage of Empress Alexandra

¹⁸ RGVIA. F. 12651. Op. 3. D. 240. On the inspection of records management, bookkeeping and financial reporting of the Pokrovskaya society of nurses of the Novoladozhsky district of the Red Cross Committee.

¹⁹ RGVIA. F. 12651. Op. 3. D. 240. L. 8.

²⁰ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXV of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1900. Saint Petersburg, 1901. P. 65.

²¹ RGVIA. F. 12651. Op. 3. D. 240. L. 8.

²² Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXIII of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1898. Saint Petersburg, 1899. P. 106; Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXV of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1896. Saint Petersburg, 1897. P. 93.

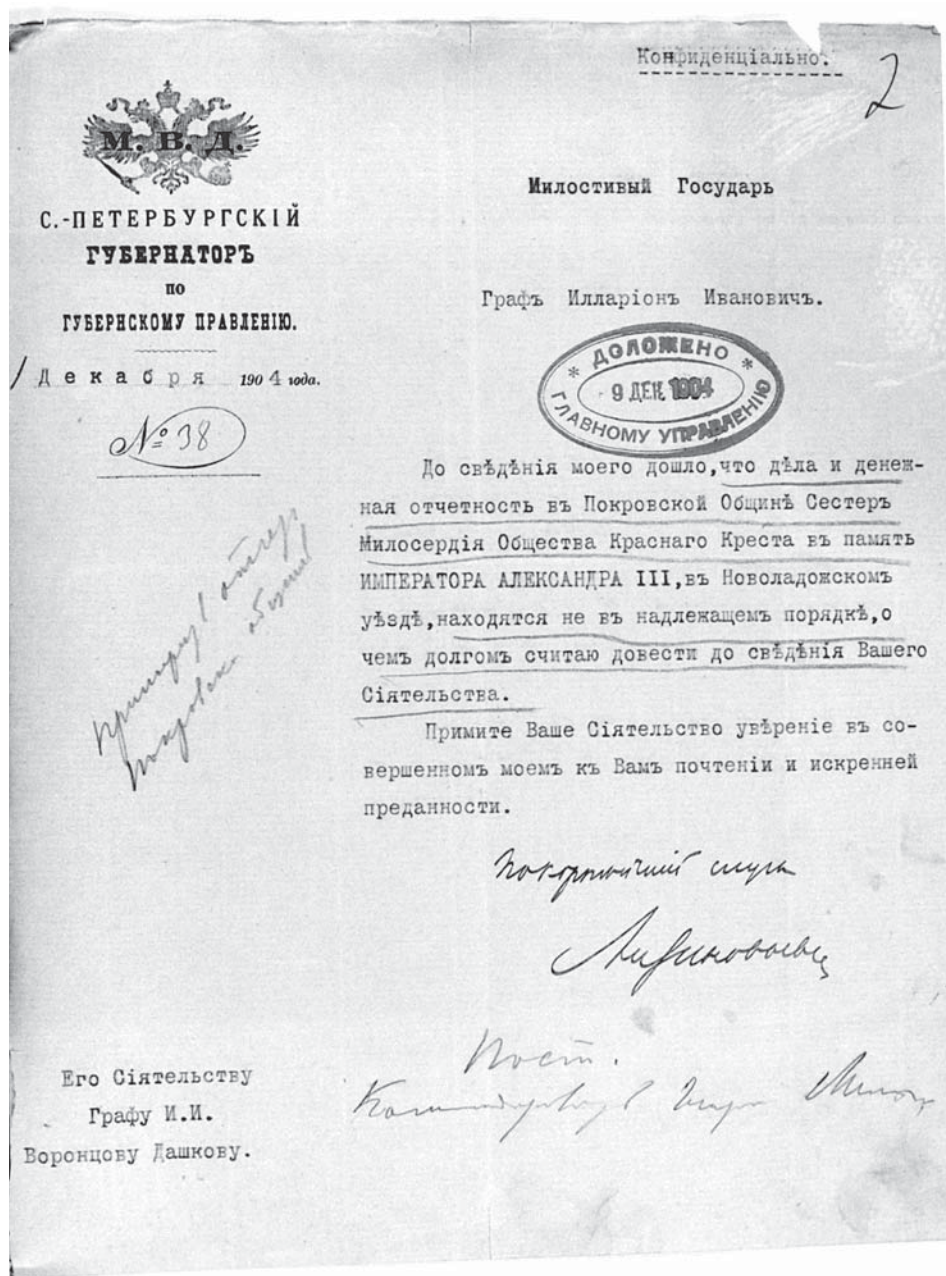
²³ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXIII of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1898. Saint Petersburg, 1899. P. 106.

²⁴ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXV of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1900. Saint Petersburg, 1901. P. 63.

²⁵ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXV of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1900. Saint Petersburg, 1901. P. 64.

²⁶ RGVIA. F. 12651. Op. 3. D. 240. L. 8.

²⁷ RGVIA. F. 12651. Op. 3. D. 240. L. 2.



Message to Count I.I. Vorontsov-Dashkov.

Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA) F. 12651. Op. 3. D. 240. L. 2.²⁸

²⁸ Text on the picture:

Confidential.
St. Petersburg GOVERNOR OF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
1 December 1904
No. 38

Dear Sir
Count Illarion Ivanovich

It has been conveyed to me that the affairs and financial accounts of the Emperor ALEXANDER III Memorial Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) Society of Red Cross Rural Nurses in the Novoladozhsky district are not in proper order, of which I consider my obligation to bring to the attention of Your Illustrious Highness.
Assuring Your Illustrious Highness of my highest esteem.

Humblee servant to
His Excellency Count I.I. Vorontsov-Dashkov.

Fedorovna. The Iverskaya society was under the patronage of members of the Russian imperial family and the Queen of the Hellenes – Olga Konstantinovna and Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna.²⁹ Also, Elizaveta Fedorovna was the founder and principal of the Convent of Martha and Mary. Nurses of said societies were often members of ancient aristocratic families. For example, the Mother Superior of the Krestovozdvizhenskaya society, E.M. Bakunina, was from the lineage of the Golenishchev-Kutuzov princes [16]. Princess N.B. Shakhovskaya became the Mother Superior of the Assuage My Sorrows society [17]. Nurse Y.P. Vrevskaya, who sacrificed her own life saving the wounded during the Balkan War, was a baroness [18]. The funding of these societies was largely thanks to the personal ties of their founders and trustees to wealthy benefactors – merchants and industrialists. Prominent families such as the Mamontovs, Morozovs and Tretyakovs donated huge sums.

Among the founders of rural nursing societies there were no wealthy individuals willing to become benefactors without detriment to their own pocket and interested in identifying and meeting the needs and solving problems facing the societies. During the inspection of 1904, the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) society had no permanent leadership. The local committee, comprising a priest, a doctor, a head nurse and committee members, which was supposed to manage the affairs of the society, only existed on paper. The priest of the Pokrovskaya church, who was appointed to replace the late Father K. Lorchenko, was not in any way involved in the work of the society. The district doctor, who was supposed to fulfill the duties of the doctor in charge, was rarely available (“he has not even once appeared in the past 3 months”) due to the extremely heavy workload of his immediate duties as the district doctor. He declined to be paid for the time he was not at the society.³⁰ Of the committee’s board members, only one remained, but he was also not involved in the life of the society. The only literate staff member of the society was the head nurse – dresser O.V. Kotlyarova, who worked

as a medical assistant at the hospital, signed the storekeeper’s receipts for products delivered to the society, filed requests for medicines and medical instruments, etc. She also trained practical skills on patient care. The audit report said that nurses “are helping Kotlyarova apply dressings and take temperature, but the nurses cannot read prescriptions”.³¹ O.V. Kotlyarova therefore shouldered the entire responsibility for the management and existence of the society. Circumstances in the Novoladozhsky district zemstvo were not conducive for the development of the society.

The state of the society slightly improved after the audit. The RRCS allocated additional funding. In particular, nurses were allocated an annual 60 rubles³² for their equipment in 1905. Grants for the upkeep of the society from the zemstvo budget also went up. By 1909, the amount allocated to the society from the district zemstvo assembly had risen from 100 rubles to 600 rubles. The Saint Petersburg provincial zemstvo also allocated the same amount. On one hand, this was evidently tied to the local self-government allocations from public coffers that has increased after the revolution of 1905–1907 (government grants accounted for up to 30% of the zemstvo budget at that time), and on the other hand to the outbreaks of typhus and cholera in 1905–1908, 1909 and 1911, on the tackling of which a large portion of the allocated funds was spent [19, p. 119, 229]. Funds allocated to the society for combating leprosy remained unchanged at 50 rubles a year.³³ The intensifying epidemics of highly infectious diseases in Saint Petersburg in the first decade of the 20th century meant the zemstvo’s heightened demand for the services of rural nurses to take care of the sick, which in turn spurred the development of the society. The increasing number of requests for missions from various districts of the province required

³¹ RGVIA. F. 12651. Op. 3. D. 240. L. 8.

³² Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1906. Saint Petersburg, 1907. P. 47.

³³ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1909. Saint Petersburg, 1910. P. 55. Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XLV of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1911. Saint Petersburg, 1912. P. 66.

²⁹ RGVIA. F. 12651. Op. 3. D. 126. Report on the work of the Iverskaya society of nurses of the Russian Red Cross Society in Moscow for 1912.

³⁰ RGVIA. F. 12651. Op. 3. D. 240. L. 7.

that the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) society increase its staffing. In 1911, the society had 11 nurses, 4 students and 2 low-level staff. Because this nursing society lived primarily on handouts from district and provincial zemstvos, nurses had to go on assignments to tackle epidemics if and when requested. The society's clinic mastered the practice of smallpox vaccination. For the first time, 23 people³⁴ were vaccinated in 1911.

The problem of the constant absence of a doctor at the society was also resolved. From 1905, the public health doctor of the provincial zemstvo, I.I. Yakubovsky, visited the society once every week, fulfilling the duties of resident doctor.³⁵ The structure of training sessions for nurses was also revamped. Practical training of students for their future duties was bolstered. To this end, students were sent on assignments to existing zemstvo and other medical facilities, with their transfer from one facility to another every two months in order to allow them to work in different conditions and under the leadership of different doctors, which in turn gave them more diverse practical skills and knowledge.³⁶ At the hospitals, students were to be in the hands of doctors rather than mid-level medical staff. The intake period for new candidates was limited from 1 September to 1 October.

Like most public organisations in small provincial (district) cities, the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) society of rural nurses had local significance. It played a certain role in solving the Novoladozhsky district zemstvo's tasks of combating epidemics and providing the rural health care system with mid-level medical staff at the very least. Among the main obstacles for the

development of the Pokrovskaya rural nursing society was the lack of constant and continuous leadership from zemstvo organisations, insufficient funding from the RRCS, as well as lack of interest in charity work among wealthy and high-placed figures [20, p. 103].

Conclusion

The emergence at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries of such a public phenomenon as rural societies of nurses was a result, on one hand, of the change in the practice of legal regulation and a simpler procedure for establishing charities in the 1890s, and on the other hand the development of the local (zemstvo) self-governance system, as well as the expansion of the powers and functions of zemstvos. Only a few district and provincial zemstvos, for which nurses were the intermediaries between doctors and patients in the process of delivering health care to the peasant population, were most interested in the establishment and the work of rural nursing societies. At no extra cost for the zemstvos, rural nurses virtually replaced medical assistant personnel which was in short supply in rural areas and demand for which was keenly felt during epidemics.

Nonetheless, rural nursing societies never became a widespread phenomenon in the Russian state between the late 19th century and the early 20th century for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was not enough funding from zemstvos and the RRCS. Secondly, the successful work of the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) society was largely due the involvement of its founders and leadership. Thirdly, the constant change of the staff of the society required constant replenishment efforts from the leadership. However, the fact that the Pokrovskaya (Novoladozhskaya) society lasted for 20 years and, like most charity organisations of tsarist Russia, was disbanded after the October Revolution of 1907, is evidence of its relevance in zemstvo medicine in the Saint Petersburg province.

³⁴ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XXXI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1909. Saint Petersburg, 1910. P. 55, 60.

³⁵ Journals of the Novoladozhsky District Zemstvo Assembly XLI of the regular session and District Reports with supplements of 1906. Saint Petersburg, 1907. P. 47.

³⁶ Ibid.

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