

Arctic and North. 2025. No. 61. Pp. 226–240.

Brief article

UDC [94(470)''18/19'':614.885](045)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37482/issn2221-2698.2025.61.273>

Sisters of Mercy and Peculiarities of Providing Medical Assistance to Fishermen in Murmansk in the Late 19th — Early 20th Centuries

Oksana V. Zaretskaya^{1✉}, Cand. Sci. (Hist.), Associate professor

Elena Y. Kolebakina², Cand. Sci. (Hist.), Associate professor

Nikita I. Lysenko³, Postgraduate student

^{1, 2} Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Naberezhnaya Severnoy Dviny, 17, Arkhangelsk, Russia

³ VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, 336 Nguyen Trai, Hanoi, Vietnam

¹ o.zaretskaya@narfu.ru ✉, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1623-3143>

² e.kolebakina@narfu.ru, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1001-7507>

³ nlysenkon@mail.ru

Abstract. The article examines the activities of the sisters of mercy of the Arkhangelsk Red Cross Community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The authors compare the forms of their work in peacetime and during wars. Based on the analysis of the annual “Reports of the Arkhangelsk Local Administration of the Russian Red Cross Society”, the following main areas of activity are identified: caring for the sick and wounded (both in hospitals and medical centers in the Arkhangelsk province and at the front), fundraising for the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society, organization of a surgical hospital for children under the Community, training and certification of junior medical personnel. Particular attention is paid to the provision of medical care to Russian fishermen on the Murmansk coast during the spring and summer fishing season. The quality and changes in the medical services provided in the Arctic climate in the early years of the 20th century are analyzed. Examples of the activities of the medical and sanitary detachment of the Arkhangelsk institution of the Russian Red Cross Society in Kiberg (Norway) are presented. The novelty of the study consists in a comprehensive analysis of the initial stage of the medical and sanitary detachments’ activities and the specifics of training medical personnel to provide seasonal medical care to residents of the Arkhangelsk province going out to fish.

Keywords: *Murmansk coast, Arctic, sisters of mercy, medical and sanitary detachment, fishermen*

Acknowledgements and funding

The research was conducted with financial support from the Russian Science Foundation, project No. 24-28-20340, “Charity as a sociocultural phenomenon in the European North in the 19th and early 20th centuries: fundamental ideas and practices”.

Introduction

There are topics in Russian social history the study of which not only expresses respect for the past but also provides valuable historical experience for the present. In the context of the current rethinking of spiritual and moral values in Russian society, as well as the transformation of the social security system and the development of non-profit organizations, the study of centuries-old

* © Zaretskaya O.V., Kolebakina E.Y., Lysenko N.I., 2025

For citation: Zaretskaya O.V., Kolebakina E.Y., Lysenko N.I. Sisters of Mercy and Peculiarities of Providing Medical Assistance to Fishermen in Murmansk in the Late 19th — Early 20th Centuries. *Arktika i Sever* [Arctic and North], 2025, no. 61, pp. 273–289. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37482/issn2221-2698.2025.61.273>



This work is licensed under a CC BY-SA License

experience in charity work is becoming increasingly relevant.

Studying the history of charity and social support at the regional level contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by social institutions. Analysis of the activities of the Russian Red Cross Society allows for a detailed examination of both the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the past.

In the pre-revolutionary period, information about charitable initiatives of Arkhangelsk, published in central publications, was primarily informative, while more in-depth research could be found in local newspapers ¹. Currently, there are no comprehensive, generalizing studies devoted to the history of the formation of free medical care in the Arkhangelsk province. Medical and sanitary aspects of this topic were addressed in the work of A.A. Kirov and A.P. Tyukina, published during the Soviet period [1], as well as in modern scientific articles [2, Komissarova E.V., Petrova I.A.]. The works of local historians examine key issues related to the charity of Arkhangelsk merchants and women ² [3, Ovsyankin E.I.]. It is also important to mention the authors who studied church charity and the social role of the Orthodox Church in the development of this phenomenon in Russia [4, Kolpakova O.V., Koblova N.A., Shigurova A.B.; 5, Leontyeva T.G.; 6, Syromyatnikov V.E.; et al.].

The topic of charity and social support in the North was covered in the works of E.Yu. Kolebakina [7; 8; 9], A.S. Kuzychenko [10], M.L. Golkova [11], and other researchers. The Pomor Encyclopedia also provides a brief description of social support in the Arkhangelsk province, citing the names of merchants involved in charity work [12, pp. 56, 78, 86, 213, 277, 308, 401, 425].

Despite this, the regional history of charity, including the activities of the Russian Red Cross Society, requires more detailed research.

The methodological basis of the current study is a synthesis of general scientific principles and specific historical methods. These methods imply a concrete historical approach to the analysis of the phenomena under study, their comprehensive assessment, and consideration of dynamics and inherent contradictions. A key element of the research methodology is the comprehensive use of a variety of documents and materials, which allows all factors to be taken into account for a more in-depth retrospective analysis of the processes.

The main objective of this article is to examine the specific activities of the Arkhangelsk branch of the Red Cross in providing medical assistance to Russian fishermen on the Murmansk coast during the pre-revolutionary period.

The work utilized a variety of sources, which can be divided into the following groups:

- Official reports, such as “Reports on the Funding and Activities of the Arkhangelsk Institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society” and “Protocols and Proceedings of the Arkhangelsk Medical Society”. These documents make it possible to track the dynamics of

¹ AEN — Arkhangelsk Eparchial News; ACN — Arkhangelsk City News; APN — Arkhangelsk Provincial News.

² Barashkov Yu. Yakov Efimovich Makarov. ATK Newspaper, 1996, March 9, p. 16; Zelenina T. Merchant's Wife Plotnikova. Pravda Severa, 1995, January 11, p. 4; Ovsyankin E.I. Not Fear of Hell, but Compassion Forced the Rich to Charity. Pravda Severa, 1999, July 28, p. 11; Smirnova M.A. Do Good! Volna, 1996, No. 21, May 31, p. 8; Yakovlev S. First Guild Merchant. Pravda Severa, 1989, August 19, p. 3.

development, identify sources of funding and methods of charity.

- Periodicals: “Arkhangelsk Provincial Gazette” provides an opportunity to analyze the history of charity in the region and to describe the social practices implemented by various organizations and individuals. Since its founding in 1838, the newspaper regularly covered topics related to charitable events.

The establishment of the mercy sister training system in Arkhangelsk

The roots of public medical care for wounded and sick soldiers date back to the Crimean War (1854–1855), when the Russian Red Cross Society (RRCS) was founded.

The Russian Red Cross Society was officially established on 3 (15) May, 1867, with the approval of the Charter of the “Russian Society for the Care of Wounded and Sick Soldiers” by Emperor Alexander II. In 1879, the RRCS was renamed, and its honorary members included the Emperor, grand dukes and duchesses, as well as high-profile secular figures and members of the clergy.

One of the main tasks of the Russian Red Cross Society was the training of medical personnel. In 1877, with the active support of the director of the obstetric school, A.S. Stern, the Arkhangelsk local administration organized lectures on field surgery and the rules for caring for the wounded and sick³. Training was provided free of charge to anyone who wanted to become a sister of mercy and care for soldiers. Women of all Christian denominations and social classes, literate in Russian, aged 20 to 45, and free of chronic illnesses, were accepted into the ranks of sisters of mercy. Small-pox vaccination was also required; married women had to obtain their husbands’ consent to participate in the program. In the event of military action, all trainees were required to work for the RRCS until the end of the war⁴.

In 1877, with the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War, the Society’s leadership called on Arkhangelsk residents to actively raise funds and medical supplies to support the Russian army⁵. As a result, about 10,000 rubles were collected, which were used to purchase 17 beds, named “Arkhangelsk beds”⁶. This equipment was sent to the Red Cross hospital in Bucharest⁷. During the war, 12 sisters of mercy left the the Kholmogory Monastery for the front to provide assistance. After the peace treaty was signed, the Society did not cease its activities and continued to raise funds to help the wounded and sick.

Between the Russo-Turkish and Russo-Japanese Wars, the administration actively replenished its volunteer ranks and supported the victims, as well as trained sisters of mercy. Additionally,

³ From the Arkhangelsk local administration of the Society for the Care of Wounded and Sick Soldiers // Arkhangelsk Provincial News, 1877, No. 38, May 23, p. 2.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ From the Arkhangelsk local administration of the Society for the Care of Wounded and Sick Soldiers // Arkhangelsk Provincial News, 1877, No. 48, July 27, p. 3.

⁶ From the Arkhangelsk local administration of the Society for the Care of Wounded and Sick Soldiers // Arkhangelsk Provincial News, 1877, No. 91, November 24, p. 3.

⁷ From the Arkhangelsk local administration of the Society for the Care of Wounded and Sick Soldiers // Arkhangelsk Provincial News, 1878, No. 11, February 20, p. 3–4.

it provided medical equipment to fishermen on the Murmansk coast and collected the necessary resources for these purposes.

Organizing medical assistance for Russian fishermen on the Murmansk coast — the first medical and sanitary detachment

In the harsh Arctic climate and extremely difficult (mostly manual) work conditions, fishermen in Murmansk were always in need of medical care. Of particular interest for research is the work of doctors and sisters of mercy in organizing medical care for Russian fishermen on the Murmansk coast during the spring and summer fishing seasons.

The first detachment for this purpose was created in 1881 at the initiative of the Governor of Arkhangelsk, Prince N.D. Golitsyn. In order to provide medical care to sick fishermen on the Murmansk coast, a medical and sanitary team consisting of six sisters of mercy was formed annually in March. Until 1890, it consisted of nuns from the Kholmogory Monastery, but since March 2, 1890, after the establishment of the Red Cross community in Arkhangelsk, sisters of mercy from this new organization were sent to Murman [8, Kolebakina E.Yu., p. 65].

The dispatch of the Red Cross medical and sanitary detachment to Murman in 1881 was motivated by two key objectives: firstly, to provide medical assistance to sick fishermen, and secondly, to study the local living conditions of colonists and fishermen in order to determine what kind of assistance was most needed and when. This detachment was sent from Arkhangelsk on June 10, 1881, on its first voyage on the steamship “Arkhangelsk”. The detachment worked in two locations: in Teriberka, consultations were provided by doctor E.M. Dementyev and three sisters of mercy; and in the Sem-Ostrovov settlement, three sisters of mercy and volunteer doctor Vladislav Romualdovich Gulevich.

Vladislav Romualdovich Gulevich (abt 1848 – after 1892) was a doctor and nobleman. He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at Kazan University in 1874. He was exiled to Arkhangelsk province in 1877, accused of exempting several peasants from military service while working as a zemstvo doctor in Kostroma province. When in 1881 the Arkhangelsk branch of the Red Cross Society assembled a medical detachment to provide assistance to Russian fishermen on the Murmansk coast, V.R. Gulevich volunteered to participate. Even after his amnesty, he continued his work in the North, leading a sanitary detachment in Murman and Kiberg in Norway in 1884–1885, 1887–1890. He authored two books on fishing, working conditions and life of industrialists in Murman, and a report at a meeting of the Arkhangelsk Medical Society in 1885, entitled “On the Etiology of Scurvy in Murman”⁸. Vladislav Romualdovich wrote that scurvy was more common among Russians than among Norwegians, as they set out on navigational voyages during Lent or immediately after it, when their bodies were weakened. Norwegians ate meat and dairy products, and therefore could withstand cold temperatures. In addition, patients with scurvy often visited the doctor when their

⁸ Kola North: An Encyclopedic Lexicon from A to Z. URL: http://lexicon.dobrohot.org/index.php/ГУЛЕВИЧ_Владислав_Ромуальдович (accessed 16 November 2024).

condition was already very advanced, as they hid their illness because Russian industrialists believed that scurvy was not a disease but a simulation, and that only lazy people suffered from it [13, Gulevich V.R., pp. 24–39].

Due to the lack of necessary premises, during the first year of the mobile detachment's existence, patients were treated in tents, one of which was intended for patients requiring constant care, and the other — for the paramedic and hospital staff. The nurses and the hospital pharmacy were located in a government apartment [14, Gulevich V.R., p. 109].

In a report by doctor Leonard Petrovich Iskerskiy, who was in charge of the mobile hospital and Red Cross emergency rooms in Murman in 1882, it was noted that, despite the short duration of the medical and sanitary detachment's stay in Murman from June 15 to August 30, 1881, this experience showed that “during the Murmansk fishing season, medical assistance is not only absolutely necessary, but must also be strengthened so that it is permanent from year to year, rather than occasional”⁹.

Over a month and a half, care was provided in the Teriberka emergency room and in the Sem-Ostrovov location to 136 sick and 88 diseased people [14, Gulevich V.R., p. 111–115].

However, the main result of the first detachment's work was the understanding that fishermen need medical care not only during the summer months, but throughout the entire fishing season, especially in early spring, when they arrive on the Murmansk coast. During this period, the number of sick fishermen is particularly high due to exhaustion from the long journey, Lent, and the cold spring weather.

Activities of the second medical and sanitary detachment on the Murmansk coast

The analysis of the first detachment's activities resulted in fundraising and the construction of special buildings for emergency rooms by the spring of 1882. By the summer of 1882, a camp in Sem-Ostrovov was purchased and adapted for emergency rooms; in the same summer, “a new building for the emergency room was built in Arkhangelsk and shipped disassembled along with the household equipment by steamship for installation in Tsyp-Navolok, which was later named after Her Majesty, the august patroness of the Red Cross Society, the Empress”¹⁰.

It was also proposed to purchase the camp of colonist Kononov for use as an emergency room in Teriberka, and it was decided to renovate and adapt an unused government hospital building for emergency rooms in the Gavrilovo location.

Between the 1881 and 1882 navigation seasons, there was active correspondence between the chairman of the local Arkhangelsk Red Cross office and the director of the Department of Internal Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Baron F.R. Osten-Sacken. A decision was made to organize an emergency center near Kiberg, Norway.

⁹ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1882. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1883, p. 6.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 7.

The need to develop this area of activity for the Red Cross sanitary detachment was driven by the following circumstances: “Before the start of the Murman fishing season, every April, our fishermen come to the eastern shores of Norway, especially to Kiberg, near Vardø, to engage in spring cod fishing. Following the general fish migration from west to east, they gradually move to the camps on the Murmansk coast. Fishing near Kiberg is carried out under much worse conditions than in Murman. Lacking camps on the foreign coast, our fishermen, wet from fishing, returning to the harbor, are forced to shelter from the cold, wind and bad weather in their boats, stretching out sails like tents and lighting small fires as space allows. Such conditions ... contribute to the spread of typhus, and meanwhile, there are no facilities for the sick in Kiberg”¹¹.

It was also noted that treatment in a Norwegian hospital was too expensive for Russian fishermen (one paper ruble per day), and no one agreed to transport the sick to the Vardø hospital and lose valuable fishing time.

The chairman of the local Arkhangelsk Red Cross, Prince Golitsyn, visited almost all the camps on the Murmansk coast in the summer of 1881 and got acquainted with the conditions of the fishing industry there, the living conditions of the fishermen and the climatic conditions. Following a statement by the Russian consul in Finnmarken, Bukharov, that “...during the Kiberg fishing season, it is the baiters and assistant workers who, suffering from injuries to their hands when baiting and untangling the nets, are most in need of medical assistance. Consequently, the charitable activities of the Red Cross should be directed to these people. Cases of serious illness are rare”¹², a decision was made to establish a medical station in Kiberg in 1882, equipped with bandages, with one sister of mercy and a paramedic, on the condition that a doctor would periodically visit the fishermen near Kiberg.

Thus, the activities of the second medical detachment on the Murmansk coast in 1882 were significantly expanded compared to the previous year: both in terms of the number of days (from March to August) and the number of mobile emergency rooms in the camps.

The medical team of the local Arkhangelsk Red Cross Community in 1882 consisted of two doctors, five sisters of mercy, one paramedic and three hospital staff. In addition, the Arkhangelsk Medical Department allocated five more paramedics [14, Gulevich V.R., p. 126].

In the official report by doctor Leonard Petrovich Iskerskiy, who was in charge of the mobile hospital and Red Cross emergency rooms in Murman in 1882, it was noted that at the time of the detachment’s arrival at Kiberg, there were between 50 and 70 shnyaks, or 250–350 fishermen and assistant workers.

¹¹ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1882. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1883, pp. 11-12.

¹² Ibid, pp. 15-16.

The detachment's work at Kiberg was fraught with serious problems. Dr. Leonard Iskerskiy, paramedic Andrey Matveev, and sister of mercy Anfisa Mefodieva, who brought with them three beds, supplies and medicines, discovered that the local administration had not been notified, and that the local Norwegian doctor in Vardø protested against the Russians opening an emergency room. The issue was only resolved after the intervention of the Russian consul general in Christiania¹³. On April 18, 1882, after receiving official notification of the right to provide medical care to Russian fishermen and the right for a Russian doctor to provide medical services among them, the emergency room began operating under the banner of the Russian Red Cross Society.

In 1882, emergency rooms operated in five locations, but they were opened and closed not simultaneously, but rather according to the movement of fishermen following the fish (Table 1).

Table 1

Assistance to fishermen at the end of the 19th century in five locations

Location	Working periods	Staff	Activities
Kiberg	April 10 – June 5	Paramedic Matveev and sister of mercy Anfisa Mefodieva	The emergency room in Kiberg is equipped with both inventory and a full supply of medications and hospital supplies for the next year's activities.
Sem-Ostrovov	June 1 – August 30	Paramedic Matveev, sister of mercy Illaria and sister of mercy Anna Petkova	Construction is complete in Sem-Ostrovov
Tsyp-Navolok	April 7 – June 11	Doctor V.R. Gulevich, paramedic Stanislavov and two sisters of mercy Fekla and Illaria	The works on setting up the emergency room has been completed. The Mariinskiy Emergency Room in Tsyp-Navolok is equipped with both inventory and a full supply of medications and hospital supplies for the next year's activities.
Teriberka	June 13 – August 29	Doctor V.R. Gulevich, paramedic Shirman, sister of mercy Gorbatova paramedic Belta-kov paramedic Stanislavov and two sisters of mercy, Anfisa and Illaria	Renovation of the industrialist Kononov's camp, purchased in 1881, to convert it into a hospital. An emergency room for five patients is ready for permanent use, as well as rooms for a pharmacy, a paramedic and nurses.
Gavrilovo	April 16 – August 30	Sister of mercy Illaria and sister of mercy Anna Petkova	Renovation of a hospital built in 1868 in Gavrilovo. Two rooms and a 16-bed emergency room were renovated.

Despite the fact that, in addition to medical problems, numerous repair and construction tasks had to be addressed during the 1882 navigation season, the detachment provided care to

¹³ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1882. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1883, p. 20.

1,076 patients across all locations, an average of 8 patients per day and 5 visits per patient. The highest number of patients was in Gavrilovo, where there were also a significant number of infectious diseases (typhoid fever and dysentery). Doctors explained this by the low-lying terrain, constant dampness and decaying fish entrails scattered on the shore and in the water, as the weak current carries nothing away, and if it were not for the cold, even in summer epidemics would be inevitable ¹⁴.

The 1882 report noted a shortage of bricks and other building materials, as well as difficulties in transporting doctors from one location to another. Traveling by steamship to Kiberg was particularly difficult and expensive. For moving between locations, they used a “state-owned yola (*a yola is a small, approximately 10-meter-long, wooden, sail-and-row vessel of Norwegian origin. In northern Russia, yolas were used primarily for fishing along the Murmansk coast. Before the Revolution, they were also used to transport mail, police officers, and visiting officials*), which, like its crew, was in a state of complete disrepair. The state-owned yola was leaky... during the journeys, water had to be pumped out constantly, and its crew consisted of two frail old men... they did not have the strength to row if it had not been for the favorable wind” [14, Gulevich V.R., p. 111].

Overall, the detachment’s activities in Murman in 1882 were considered successful and extremely useful, and it was decided that the detachment should be sent annually ¹⁵. It was also noted that the work of the sisters of mercy in Murman, who not only cared for the sick and assisted the paramedic with dressings, but also managed the entire emergency room, provided them with excellent training and practical experience.

Activities of the medical detachment on the Murmansk Coast in the early 20th century

By the early 20th century, the work of the medical detachment on the Murmansk coast had already become a traditional area of activity for the Arkhangelsk local branch of the Russian Red Cross Society. The terms of the detachment’s stay at the fishing grounds from April to August were clearly defined, the places for providing assistance were arranged, and the practice of moving from west to east following the fishermen chasing fish was established.

The fact that the dispatch of the medical and sanitary detachment had become habitual and almost routine is evident even in the annual reports, which became more formal and brief.

From 1900 to 1913, the number of emergency rooms where doctors and sisters of mercy provided assistance to the Pomors gradually decreased, and this was due to the gradual decline in fishing in these waters, as well as some improvement in transportation and medical services in the area: “Fishermen begin to arrive in Murman in the second half of May, travelling by steamboat, while colonists in western and eastern Murman are provided with constant medical care thanks to

¹⁴ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1882. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1883, pp. 22–23.

¹⁵ Red Cross Medical Assistance on the Murmansk Coast in 1883 // Arkhangelsk Provincial News, 1883, No. 95, November 26, pp. 2–3.

the winter and spring voyages organized by the Murmansk Steamship Company and the duty of paramedics to visit the colonies monthly to provide assistance to the sick”¹⁶.

In the first decade of the 20th century, the medical and sanitary detachment operated during the fishing season in four locations: Teriberka, Gavrilovo, Rynda, and Kiberg (Norway). The number of patients who received care was published annually in reports¹⁷ (Table 2).

Table 2

Number of patients who received medical care from the medical and sanitary detachment of the Arkhangelsk local branch of the Russian Red Cross Society in 1904–1909

Location	1904	1906	1908	1909
Teriberka	1 072	2 898	3 077	2 711
Gavrilovo	782	2 776	2 092	2 551
Rynda	300	908	1 071	1 134
Kiberg	313	516	374	405

Reports show that the highest number of cases is in Gavrilovo. This was noted by doctors from the first detachments, who noted that the main reasons were the low-lying terrain and weak currents, which did not carry away the fish entrails scattered on the shore and rotting in the water, contributing to the spread of infectious diseases¹⁸.

The lowest number of requests for medical assistance was in Kiberg near Vardø. Nevertheless, the opening of this medical station on Norwegian territory was particularly important, as fishermen arrived there in the spring (April), during the coldest weather and often after Lent, which, according to doctor V.R. Gulevich, weakened their bodies and could provoke scurvy and other diseases¹⁹. Furthermore, seeking treatment from local Norwegian doctors in case of illness was too expensive for Russian fishermen; taking them to a doctor was far away and there was no one to transport them. Therefore, the establishment of a medical station in Kiberg in 1882, equipped with bandages, one sister of mercy and a paramedic, was an important breakthrough in medical care for Russian fishermen.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the doctor, paramedic and sisters of mercy did not stay in Kiberg all summer, but came and worked there until the end of the fishing season in Norwegian territory, after which they moved to Rynda, where in 1904 the Red Cross Society hospital building was moved from Tsyp-Navolok, which had not been in operation for the last few years due to the absence of fishermen there. For example, in 1909, the emergency room in Kiberg was opened on March 28. Its activities continued until the end of May, when fishing ceased in the

¹⁶ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1906. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1907, p. 7.

¹⁷ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1904, 1906, 1908, 1909. Arkhangelsk.

¹⁸ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1882. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1883, pp. 22–23.

¹⁹ Gulevich V.R. Notes from observations during fisheries in Murman // Protocols and Proceedings of the Arkhangelsk Medical Society for 1889. Issue II. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1890, pp. 24–39.

area. After that, the detachment moved to the eastern shore of Murman, to the Rynada location, where it operated from 1 June to September ²⁰.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new trend emerged: medical students and medical apprentices were recruited to work in the detachments. In 1904, a junior medical apprentice working for the Onega district doctor Fokin joined the detachment ²¹; in the summer of 1905, medical student Khoroshev worked in Gavrillovo ²²; in 1908, a fourth-grade medical student from Moscow University worked in Murman ²³.

In 1905, public baths were built in the settlements of Teriberka and Gavrillovo by the Murmansk fishing expedition ²⁴ to help fishermen to cope with skin diseases associated primarily with the working conditions of Pomors in cold salt water without waterproof clothing. However, the “Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1905” notes that the construction of baths could not solve existing medical problems, and that disease prevention primarily requires “decent housing for the arriving Pomors, and there is not enough of it” ²⁵.

According to reports from the first medical and sanitary detachments, their activities in Norway were fraught with certain difficulties related to the rejection of their presence by the administration and a local Norwegian doctor in Vardø, who protested against the opening of a Russian emergency room ²⁶. However, the 1905 report on the activities of the emergency room in Kiberg, Norway, mentions for the first time that the services of the Russian doctor were used not only by Russian fishermen, but also by Norwegians, Lapps, and Finns ²⁷.

The main illnesses for which fishermen sought treatment at the emergency room of the medical and sanitary detachment were ulcers, wounds, bruises, abscesses, frostbite, eye diseases, bronchitis, dental disease, rheumatism, and blisters ²⁸. Scurvy cases are difficult to count, as they were often concealed. Among Russians, there was a belief that scurvy was not a disease, but rather a sign of mooching and simulation. The percentage of patients with infectious diseases

²⁰ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1909. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1910, p. 5.

²¹ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1904. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1905, p. 5.

²² Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1905. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1906, p. 5.

²³ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1909. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1910, p. 5.

²⁴ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1905. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1906, p. 8.

²⁵ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1905. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1906, p. 8.

²⁶ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1882. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1883, p. 20.

²⁷ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1905. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1906, p. 6.

²⁸ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1882. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1883, p. 37.

increased in 1908 and 1909: from 24–30% in previous years, it rose to 44%. This increase can be explained by epidemics of smallpox and typhus in the Onega and Kemskiy districts, where most of the fishermen came from. Many of them got the disease at home and arrived in Murman already ill ²⁹.

The Chairman of the Arkhangelsk Local Administration of the Russian Red Cross Society attributes the successful condition of the hospitals in the Murman settlements to the skilled work of specially trained hospital staff, namely, the sisters of mercy.

Before the establishment of the Red Cross sisters' community in Arkhangelsk in 1890, nuns from Orthodox monasteries in the Arkhangelsk province, primarily from the Kholmogory Monastery, worked in the mobile hospitals in Murman [8, Kolebakina E.Yu., p. 65].

The Arkhangelsk community not only began sending its sisters of mercy to Murman, but also provided their professional training and certification. Therefore, they were able not only to cook and clean, but also to assist the paramedic and doctor with dressings and even in surgeries. The professional training of sisters of mercy distinguished the medical care provided in the locations on the Murmansk coast from that of the northernmost hospital of the Arkhangelsk Public Welfare Office in Alexandrovsk, where the management of inexperienced village servants led to its decline.

The Russo-Japanese War, which began in 1904, inevitably affected the activities of both the Red Cross Society and the Arkhangelsk Community of Sisters of Mercy. The sisters continued to work in Murman, caring for the sick at the Arkhangelsk Hospital of the Public Welfare Office and in private homes in the provincial capital. Despite the war, one of the community's sisters was sent annually to enhance medical care (especially during epidemics) at the district hospitals, most often in Shenkursk, Kem, and Mezen.

A new trend during wartime was the training and dispatch of sisters of mercy to the Far East. According to the order of the Executive Committee of the Main Administration of the Red Cross Society dated March 14, 1904, five sisters of mercy from the Arkhangelsk community (Vera Chekaevskaya, Anna Kozmina, Anfusa Kekina, Evpraksiya Efremova and Anna Fedorova) left for Samara on April 8 to continue on to the Far East ³⁰.

Then, at the suggestion of the Commission, the local Administration began to form a Red Cross medical detachment with 50 beds. On August 24, 1904, a detachment consisting of a doctor, eight sisters of mercy (who passed the test at the preparatory courses), and seven orderlies departed from Arkhangelsk for the Far East. On October 2, 1904, the Arkhangelsk sanitary detachment arrived in Harbin and began its work. "The detachment included: doctor G.M. Leibson; sisters of mercy: Agniya Shuryndina, Evpraksia Taratina, Alexandra Bravanova, Anastasia

²⁹ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1909. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1910, p. 6.

³⁰ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1904. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1905, p. 9.

Zaruchevskaya, Sarra Eisenberg, Natalia Golovanova, Anna Vasilyeva, and Lidiya Ilyina, and seven orderlies sent by the Executive Commission of the Main Directorate of the Red Cross from St. Petersburg”³¹.

In 1904, at the initiative of its patron, K.G. Martsinovskaya, and D.V. Pets, together with the community’s head sister of mercy, T.F. Znamenskaya, a free workshop was organized to produce linen and other supplies for Red Cross hospitals at the front at the Arkhangelsk Community of Sisters of Mercy. Thanks to this, a full set of linen for 50 beds was produced in early 1905³².

After the end of the war, the sisters of mercy of the Arkhangelsk Red Cross Community, who were sent to the Far East in 1908, were awarded gold and silver medals for their excellent service: Vera Chekaevskaya, Anna Kozmina, Anna Fedorova and Anfusa Kekina with gold medals, and Evpraksiya Efremova with a silver medal on the Anninskaya and Stanislavskaya ribbons³³.

In October 1908, the Arkhangelsk community of Red Cross Sisters of Mercy significantly expanded its activities. A surgical hospital for children was established within the community. At the time of its opening, the hospital had five beds and treated children of both sexes up to 12 years of age, excluding infants³⁴. The chief doctor of the hospital was collegiate counsellor F.V. Grenkov, and doctors-teachers of the Community of Sisters of Mercy F.E. Sharin and A.G. Popov also worked there. In the first year of its opening, three girls and one boy received treatment at the surgical hospital; by 1909, there were already ten patients. The sisters of mercy assisted with dressings after amputations and fractures and with caring for children. These were all peasant children of poor parents, so in 1908–1909, care for children of poor parents was provided free of charge.

The hospital’s Economic Committee established the titles of honorary members with a mandatory annual contribution of 100 rubles, and members-beneficiaries, who could maintain a hospital bed bearing their names, paid 250 rubles per year. In 1909, the hospital’s honorary members included Dmitriy Ivanovich Maslennikov, Agrippina Petrovna Popova, and Ekaterina Kirillovna Plotnikova, who donated 100 rubles annually to the hospital. D.I. Maslennikov also donated 250 rubles for the maintenance of an additional hospital bed named after him³⁵.

In September–November 1908 and July–September 1909, cholera epidemics occurred in Arkhangelsk. Due to a shortage of junior medical personnel, sisters of mercy worked in two cholera hospitals in the provincial capital. As necessary, they were sent to district towns to provide

³¹ Ibid. p. 8.

³² Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1905. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1906, p. 5.

³³ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1908. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1909, p. 8.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

³⁵ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1908. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1909, p. 7.

on-site assistance during epidemics. For example, in 1908, “two sisters of mercy were sent to the Kholmogory and Onega districts to deal with an epidemic of typhus and scarlet fever” ³⁶.

In peacetime, the Arkhangelsk local branch of the Red Cross Society collected donations for those affected by crop failures and epidemics ³⁷.

A shortage of junior medical personnel challenged the Arkhangelsk community of Red Cross Sisters of Mercy to train their own personnel. The sisters were trained free of charge, and the following individuals were involved: “The Law of God was taught by the priest of the hospital church, I.A. Popov; Russian language and arithmetic — by V.I. Levakovskaya; and other subjects from the curriculum approved by the Main Branch of the Red Cross Society were taught by doctors N.V. Georgievskiy, F.E. Sharin, and pharmacist K.A. Lorenz” ³⁸. Upon completion of their training, the candidates took an examination for the title of sister of mercy, received a certificate, and were accepted into the staff of the Arkhangelsk community.

The Arkhangelsk community tried to support the health of its sisters of mercy in cases of illness acquired in the line of duty. Reports from 1908 indicate that those suffering from tuberculosis were sent to a sanatorium for treatment at the community’s expense. In September 1908, Vera Frolova, a sister of mercy suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, was sent to the Emperor Alexander III Sanatorium in Yalta for treatment ³⁹.

Conclusion

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the Russian Red Cross Society was formed in the Arkhangelsk province and became involved in providing social and medical assistance to the population. One of its tasks was the training of junior medical personnel. After the Red Cross Sisters’ community was established in Arkhangelsk in 1890, the sisters of mercy from this organization began to provide assistance to Russian fishermen in mobile hospitals in Murman. Red Cross medical detachments were sent to the Kola Peninsula during 30 years, and each year five sisters of mercy took part in them. In challenging climate and living conditions, they assisted doctors and paramedics in receiving and caring for patients, dressing wounds, and took on all housekeeping duties in the emergency rooms of the locations. The doctors of the detachment not only provided assistance to fishermen, but also studied the climatic features of the region, the conditions of the Pomors’ fishing industry, and gave recommendations on the prevention of diseases and epidemics among colonists and fishermen in the region.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

³⁷ From the Arkhangelsk local administration of the Society for the Care of Wounded and Sick Soldiers // Arkhangelsk Provincial News, 1906, No. 1, January 4, p. 1.

³⁸ Report on the funds and activities of the Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society for 1908. Arkhangelsk, Provincial Printing House, 1909, p. 9.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

In peacetime, the sisters of the Arkhangelsk Red Cross Community cared for the sick both in private homes and in hospitals of the Arkhangelsk Public Welfare Office in Arkhangelsk and other district towns of the province, participated in fundraising for Arkhangelsk institutions of the Russian Red Cross Society, organized a surgical hospital for children within the community, and launched a program for the training and certification of sisters of mercy. During the war, they not only raised funds and manufactured hospital linens for the wounded, but also traveled to the Far East to work in military hospitals. This experience was later actively used by sisters of mercy during the First World War.

The activities of the Arkhangelsk Community of Red Cross Sisters of Mercy were primarily aimed at providing medical care to those categories of the population for whom it was inaccessible due to financial or geographical reasons. The community provided low-income women with the opportunity to obtain professional education, official certification as a sister of mercy, and subsequently find paid employment, thereby fulfilling a social assistance function. These pages of our history can be seen as the precursor and source of experience for the revival of Orthodox sisterhoods in the 21st century.

References

1. Kirov A.A., Tyukina A.P. *Healthcare in the Arkhangelsk Region in the Past and Present*. Arkhangelsk, Severo-Zapadnoe Knizhnoe Izdatelstvo Publ., 1967, 144 p. (In Russ.)
2. Petrova I.A., Komissarova E.V. Russian Charity Traditions and Social Aspects of Zemstvo Medicine. *Istoriya*, 2021, vol. 12, no. 2 (100). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18254/S207987840014075-1>
3. Ovsyankin E.I. *Merchant Arkhangelsk*. Arkhangelsk, Arkhkonsalt Publ., 2000, 525 p. (In Russ.)
4. Kolpakova O.V., Koblova N.A., Shigurova A.B. Church-Charitable Institutions of the Penza Diocese for the Care of Orthodox Clergy and Their Families in the Second Half of the XIX — Early XX Centuries. *Bylye Gody*, 2023, no. 18 (3), pp. 1243–1252. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13187/bg.2023.3.1243>
5. Leontieva T.G. Church Charity during the First World War. *Russian History*, 2023, no. 4, pp. 153–164. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31857/S2949124X23040119>
6. Syromyatnikov V.E. Charity in the History of the Church: From a Pious Tradition to a Social Institute. *Bulletin of the Omsk Orthodox Theological Seminary*, 2021, no. 2 (11), pp. 212–219.
7. Kolebakina E.Yu. Organization of Overnight Shelters in Arkhangelsk in the Late XIX — Early XX Century. *XX Vek i Rossiya: Obshchestvo, Reformy, Revolyutsii*, 2022, no. 10, pp. 43–51. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34830/SOUNB.2022.79.78.001>
8. Kolebakina E.Yu. The Russian Red Cross Society in the Arkhangelsk Province in the Late XIX — Early XX Centuries. *XX Vek i Rossiya: Obshchestvo, Reformy, Revolyutsii*, 2021, no. 9–1, pp. 60–70. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34830/SOUNB.2021.17.32.001>
9. Kolebakina E.Yu. Evolution of Social Assistance and Charity in the Arkhangelsk Province at the End of the XVIII — Beginning of the XX Century. *Grotovsky Readings — 2018: Proceedings of the All-Russian Scientific Conference*. Samara, Art-Layt Publ., 2019, pp. 57–64.
10. Kuzychenko A.S. Charity in Rural Areas of the North-West of Russia in the Second Half of the XIX — Early XX Centuries. *Pskov. Nauchno-Prakticheskiy, Istoriko-Kraevedcheskiy Zhurnal*, 2011, no. 34, pp. 78–85.
11. Golkova M.L. Charity in Space of Russian Culture: Quantity or Quality? *Society. Environment. Development*, 2014, no. 3 (32), pp. 124–126.
12. Laverov N.P., eds. *Pomor Encyclopedia. Volume I. History of the Arkhangelsk North*. Arkhangelsk, Pomor State University Publ., 2001, 483 p. (In Russ.)

13. Gulevich V.R. *Notes from Observations during Fisheries in Murmansk. Protocols and Proceedings of the Society of Arkhangelsk Physicians for 1889. Issue II.* Arkhangelsk, Gubernskaya Tipografiya Publ., 1890, pp. 24–39. (In Russ.)
14. Gulevich V.R. *Murmansk Coast in Commercial and Sanitary Terms: Notes of Doctor V. Gulevich.* Arkhangelsk, Gubernskaya Tipografiya Publ., 1883, 133 p. (In Russ.)

The article was submitted 22.11.2024; accepted for publication 11.03.2025

Contribution of the authors: the authors contributed equally to this article

The authors declare no conflicts of interests