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## The Astrachan - Kahn - Starobinetz Family

by Ken Kahn

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According to a family legend, Itska Astrachan, a.k.a. Itzele Astrachan, the father of my 3rd-great-grandmother Judasha Astrachan Starobinetz, ferried Napoleon's troops across the Berezina River near Borisov during their retreat from Russia in late November, 1812. I once found a book written by one of Napoleon's generals in which he mentioned that Jews had provided ferry service but he didn't mention names. His remarks were quite anti-Semitic; he considered the Jews traitors to their own country. They had little reason to be loyal to the Tsar.

Itska Astrachan (1788 -1857) and his second wife Elka (b. 1791) had at least six children. Their son Mendel (b. 1811) was Shmarya Levin's grandfather. He lived in Berezino - at least during the late 1870s -1880s - at the time Shmarya Levin described in his autobiography *Forward from Exile*. The chapter in which Levin describes his boyhood visits to the home of his maternal grandfather, Mendel Astrakan, in Berezino, can be read in the "Resources" section of this KehilaLink.

Itska's daughter Judasha Astrachan (1824 -1914), Mendel's younger sister, married Hersch David Starobinetz (b. abt 1810). They had at least six children. Their son Shmuel Starobinetz (photo, right) was my second great-grandfather. Nobody in the family knows the connection to the city of Astrakhan, which has a long history of inhabitants and visitors from the East. I believe it must have been taken no later than the early 1880's. I like this photo so much that I printed it and it hangs on my wall. Shmuel looks a bit Asian and I've always thought that some of the Astrachans show a bit of Asian heritage.



Shmuel Starobinetz

My earliest knowledge of the Kahns (Kagans) is that my great-grandfather Akiva Kagan (1857? - 1935) was born in a small town, Laskowicze. There was only one other Jewish family there so the family moved to Berezino when their sons were old enough to go to school. Berezino is also where their cousins the Astrachans lived. Akiva Kagan married Elka Starobinetz (1861 - 1944), from Poghost, whose father was Shmuel Starobinetz, pictured above. The

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Starobinetz, Kahn and Astrachan families lived in Berezino and Pogost until WWII.

This is one of my favorite family photos (below). It shows seven Astrachan siblings in Berezino in 1916. As you see, three of the brothers were in the Russian military at



that time. This photo is particularly moving because Bronia, Nuya, and Nuya's adorable daughter Edia were all killed in the Holocaust, as were the siblings' father, Leib Nison Astrachan (1864 -1942) and mother, Bassia Starobinetz (1868 - 1942). Girsch David "Grische" and Isaac were physicians who immigrated to New York and practiced medicine there. Loka lived out his life in Paris. Jacob died in 1919 (I don't know the circumstances), and I do not know what happened to Esfir.

I have been researching my family's history since 1988 when I acquired a letter written in 1973 by my grandfather's cousin Sol Feldbaum from Pogost, in which he asked members of the family to contribute to a family tree, and some responses he had received. Sol's stories appear elsewhere on this KehilaLink. I have a great deal of additional information about the Astrachan - Kahn - Starobinetz relatives so feel free to contact me if you would like to learn more.