

Lazar Gurfinkel's Father Michael Gurfinkel



This is a picture of my father, Michael Gurfinkel, wearing the pupil's uniform of the grammar school in Khotin in 1894. My grandparents had four sons and four daughters. My father was the youngest in the family. The oldest was Aron, then came Isaac and Samuel. After Samuel three daughters were born: Lisa, Fania and Shesia. There was another daughter after Shesia whom I didn't know and then came my father. My father Michael, his Jewish name was Michel, was born in 1878. My father and his brothers studied in cheder. Their sisters studied at home with teachers from cheder. They studied Yiddish, Hebrew, the Torah and Talmud, mathematics, literature and French. After the boys finished cheder they continued their education at the Romanian lower secondary school. After finishing grammar school my father finished a course for pharmacist assistants in Kazan. He wanted to get higher education, but it was difficult for a Jew to enter university [because of the five percent restriction]. My father's older brother, Isaac, helped him to get into Moscow University. The Association of Noble Families of Kishinev issued a request to the rector's office of Moscow University to admit Michael Gurfinkel, pointing out that his brother had contributed a lot to the

Russian Empire. This document was signed by the marshal of the nobility in the province and a gentleman of the monarch's chamber. My father went to Moscow with this paper and obtained a permit to take entrance exams. He was admitted and studied at the Pharmaceutical Faculty for five years. He was very hard up and if it hadn't been for charity meals at a students' canteen sponsored by Morozov, a Russian merchant, he wouldn't have been able to complete his studies. My father couldn't find a job in Khotin after graduating. There were only two pharmacies in town and no vacancies. He found a job at a private pharmacy in Tambov, a Russian provincial town. Later he worked in Fastov, near Kiev, for several years. When the owner of one of the pharmacies in Khotin died, his widow inherited the pharmacy. She had no special education and was looking for a manager. My father's sisters wrote to my father and told him to come to Khotin. He arrived and became the manager of that pharmacy.