

The Gagarins

One of the most interesting gravesites in the Buxton Cemetery, if not in all of Bedford, are the distinctive white crosses that mark the graves of the Gagarin family.



The Gagarins were of royal lineage in tsarist Russia. Marie Gagarin, the matriarch of the family that lies here, was Lady in Waiting to the Tsarina Alexandra. Following the Revolution in 1917, Marie Gagarin was imprisoned by the Communists and sent to Siberia. It wasn't until 1937 that she was allowed to leave and join her family who had immigrated to the United States.

Marie's son Serge Gagarin, his wife Katerina and their three young sons (Serge, Andrew and Peter) arrived in their new country in 1924, when Peter the youngest was an infant.

According to Polly Winans Finn (née Harrison), "The Gagarins had three sons...They lived in a little house that is still on Bedford Center Road. Prince and Princess Serge Gagarin, who had experienced the grandeur of the Summer Palace, the marvelous picnics and house parties, had only their photograph albums as memories. 'Catherine' Gagarin started a couturier business. My father (James Harrison), through the bank, got her a good loan so she could get started. She worked some in Bedford and some in New York. She would go to the showings in Paris, look at all the designs and bring them home, in her head, and create these beautiful gowns. My mother was a great advertisement; she would buy a gown, and everyone would go to Princess Gagarin."

The three graves marked here by distinctive Russian crosses are those of Serge and Catherine Gagarin, and his mother Marie. The fourth white cross is a plainer Catholic Cross, and marks the grave of Henryka Prazmowska, a Polish "member" of the Gagarin family. According to Peter (the youngest of the three Gagarin sons,) Ms. Prazmowska served as nanny, housekeeper, cook, confidant, and general all-purpose companion to the family. She would outlive the Gagarins by over twenty years.