






Montana's Charlie Russell: Art in the Collection of the Montana Historical Society


An Abbreviated Timeline for Charlie and Nancy Russell

1864  Born in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 19, to Charles Silas and Mary Mead Russell. Charlie had four brothers—Silas Bent, Guy, Ed, and Wolfert—and one sister, Susan.


1876–77  Wins ribbons at the St. Louis Agricultural and Mechanical Fair for his sculptures.


1878  Born in Taylor County, Kentucky, on May 4, to Texas Annie Mann and James Al Cooper. Cooper abandons Annie before Nancy is born. Annie later remarries her first cousin, James Thomas Allen. Annie and Allen have one daughter, Nancy's half-sister, Ella Carrie Allen.

1879–80  Attends Burlington Military Academy in Burlington, New Jersey.

1880  At sixteen, comes to Montana's Judith Basin. Works initially for Pike Miller herding sheep, but the two soon quarrel and part company. Shortly thereafter, Charlie is taken in by Jake Hoover, a prospector, hunter, and trapper.


1881  Acquires Monte, his beloved pinto. Monte remains Russell's favorite until the horse's death in 1904.


1882  Gets his first job as a cowboy when he begins working as a "night hawk" for the Judith Basin spring roundup.


1887  Sketches *Waiting for a Chinook* on a piece of cardboard from a shirt collar box. The image comes to symbolize the devastating



effects of the hard winter of 1886–1887 on the open-range cattle industry and, in Nancy's words, "earns Charlie his fame."

1888  First published illustration, *Caught in the Act*, appears in *Harper's Weekly*.

1890  James Allen moves his wife Annie and her two daughters, Nancy and Ella, to Helena.

1893  Exhibits at least one painting at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Decides to forgo the cowboy life so that he can devote his full attention to becoming an artist.

1894  Annie dies. James takes Ella but leaves sixteen-year-old Nancy to fend for herself. Concerned about her welfare, an acquaintance of Annie's finds employment for Nancy as a live-in housekeeper for Ben and Lela Roberts in Cascade, Montana.

1895  and  Meet at the home of Ben and Lela Roberts in Cascade. The Robertses were Charlie's friends and Nancy's employers.

1896 Marry at the Roberts's home in Cascade, on September 9. Move into a small "honeymoon cabin" on the Roberts's property.

1897 Move to Great Falls where Nancy increasingly assumes the role of Charlie's business manager.

1900 Build a home at 1219 4th Avenue North in Great Falls.

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1901  Produces his “Western Types” series of pen-and-ink sketches depicting sixteen frontier characters.

1903 Build a “log cabin” studio for Charlie out of telephone poles adjacent to their house.


1903-04 Make their first trip to New York City.

1905 Buy property on the shores of Lake McDonald in what would, five years later, become Glacier National Park. The following summer they spend the first summer in their new cabin, which they christen Bull Head Lodge in honor of Charlie's signature buffalo skull.

1908-09  Participates in the roundup of the Pablo-Allard buffalo herd on the Flathead Indian Reservation.

1909  Donates his watercolor, *York*, to the Montana Historical Society museum in Helena.

1911 The prestigious Folsom Gallery in New York hosts Russell's exhibit, “The West That Has Passed.”

1912  Paints *Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole* for the House of Representatives in the Montana State Capitol. Measuring twelve feet high by twenty-five feet wide, the mural is Russell's largest work and considered by many to be his masterpiece.

1912 The first Calgary Stampede features an exhibit of Russell's work.


1914 Sell *When the Land Belonged to God* for Helena's Montana Club for \$3,000.


1914 Befriend Joe De Yong, the only artist who could rightfully claim to be Russell's protégé. De Yong remained extremely close to both Charlie and Nancy throughout their lifetimes.


1914 Travel to London for an exhibit of Russell's work at the Doré Gallery.

1916 Adopt their only child, a son, whom they name Jack Cooper Russell. Jack was born on September 9, and was three months old when the Russells adopted him that December.

1926 Has surgery on July 3 to remove a long-growing goiter at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. The surgery is successful but ultimately proves to be “too little too late.”

1926  Spends his last summer at their beloved Bull Head Lodge in Glacier National Park.

1926  Dies at home in Great Falls on October 24 and is buried at Highland Cemetery on October 27. Following Charlie's death, Nancy and Jack relocate permanently to Pasadena, California.

1940  Dies in Pasadena, California, on May 23 after several years of failing health. By the time of her death, she is estranged from Jack.

1996 Jack Russell dies in San Diego, California, on January 9. He spent most of his career working as a highway engineer.