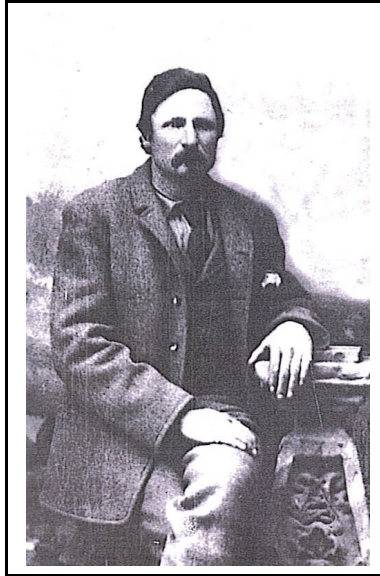


Across Oceans, Across Time[®] ...

Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



The immigrant who became known as Frank Meyers Nelson was at least the second generation in his family to suffer from wanderlust. His father, Christian Nielsen, sailed as a steamship engineer between Denmark and South America, where he died of yellow fever shortly before Frank's birth, purportedly on the island of Møn, in 1862. Following his mother's death in 1877 Frank made his way to America. His early years here are obscure; he is said to have worked for the railroad in Council Bluffs for a number of years before heading to Idaho, attracted by gold. After a few years there as jack-of-all-trades, he headed for Missoula, Montana, where he spent most of the rest of his life until his death in 1947.

In Montana Frank Nelson again turned his hands to many things. He was a ranch hand near Drummond, where he helped build the first house; drove the stage route from Drummond to Philipsburg, and tried placer mining before purchasing land and turning his hand to farming and ranching on the Big Blackfoot River in the Potoma Valley. Eventually he owned 1,450 acres in the area. He also co-owned an implement and carriage business, eventually adding automobiles to his stock of wagons.

Coming to the U.S. without knowledge of English, Frank became fluent and influential enough to play a role in the politics of his chosen home. A Democrat, he ran for the Montana legislature in 1904, and was elected Missoula County commissioner in 1908.

Frank met and married California-born Rachel Lish in 1886. The couple had five children: sons Frank, Bert, Theodore and Howard, and daughter Jennie. Information on this early western settler is on file at the museum, courtesy of a great-granddaughter, Zoe Gordon.