

HI-LINES



Wibaux, Mont. - (406) 796-2423

A century in the making

by Connie Begger

Another year has come upon us in western North Dakota. A new government has promised change. Fuel prices are down by almost 50 percent from this time last year. The Minnesota Vikings are doing well this season. Two things have stayed the same—the wind keeps blowing and the cattle market continues to go up and down.

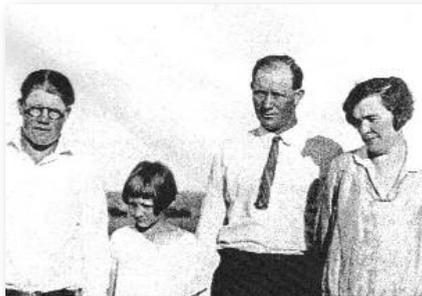
This month takes us back to 1907, and six generations of Danish descendants, the Niensens, more commonly known as Nelson. Carl Oluf Nielsen (Charles O. Nelson) was born to Jens Nielsen and Emma Cecile (Hansen) Nielsen Jan. 24, 1887, in Shennington, Wis.

Charles grew up early, working at the early age of 12, driving a team of horses and working in the woods, lumbering. At the age of 17, he left his family home in Wisconsin and headed west to North Dakota for threshing jobs and work on the farms. As most men of his age in this era, he became fascinated by the cowboy way of life and traveled into western North Dakota, before settling on the Little Missouri River, near Mar-marth, and soon acquired work at the Jack O'Bannon ranch. During this time, the open ranges of North Dakota were succumbing to county surveying and homesteaders, as the early settlers were beginning to move into the area.

So in 1907, Charles moved to Montana and began working on the Charles Kenyon ranch, located on Rattlesnake Creek, in the south end of what is now known as Wibaux County, Mont. The Kenyon ranch was a horse outfit, raising



Tom, Taylen and Brent Nelson—three generations.



Left: Stanley, Marjorie, Charles and Alberta Nelson at home (right), about 1925-27.



stock for the U.S. Cavalry, and horses to be used as farm laborers.

It didn't take long for growth to spread to Montana, as homesteaders were still moving west. After only two years of living on the Kenyon ranch, Charles took up homesteading just down the road

from his home in Wibaux County, located on Section 34 in Township 11. David Maggah and two of his three daughters, Alberta and Jean, lived in this same township. Alberta and her father each took a homestead.

On May 5, 1912, Charles and Alberta ⇨



Above: Brent, Vallie, Reggie, Taylen, Gavin and Tom Nelson.
Right: Tom, Warren and Brent Nelson

became Mr. and Mrs. Charles Nelson, and began their life together on Alberta's homestead, which lay near the road that now connects Wibaux and Baker, Mont. Their neighbors to the north were featured in a March 2007 article, the Sheephook ranch, that was purchased by the Beaver Valley Land Company and managed by George Brungard of Salona, Penn. The Sheephook ranch is now owned and operated by David and Barbara Maus, of Wibaux, Mont.

Charles and Alberta were active in their newfound life along Beaver Creek. Charles continued to build his cattle herd, along with sheep and many horses, and eventually added land holdings, to acquire most of the present Nelson Livestock Company. Together, they had two children, Stanley and Marjorie. A third child, Charles, died in infancy. Stanley and Marjorie attended country schools and both graduated from high school at Ollie, a small town in eastern Montana that no longer exists.

Following high school, Marjorie went to college at Billings, Mont., earning a diploma in education. She taught in the rural schools of Wibaux and Fallon counties, including schools in Carlyle, Wibaux, Sidney and Baker, Mont. She later received the elementary life certificate in December 1942. In 1948, Marjorie married Herman Brungard, the son of Anna and George Brungard, Marjorie's neighbors to the north. Herman's father had signed a mortgage years before to purchase the machinery, livestock and grains on the Sheephook ranch, and the option to purchase Section 1 where the ranch house was located.



Stanley Nelson married Jean McCullum of nearby Baker, Mont., in 1945, and they later made a home on the Nelson ranch. Marjorie's father was from Medora, living there while Teddy Roosevelt was in Medora. It was said that while Teddy was running for president, he had a train stop in Miles City, Mont. There, President Roosevelt called out to Jean's father, "Hey banjo man, how you doin'?", as he, too, played the banjo. Jean's brother-in-law, Tom Connors, was a horse wrangler for Teddy Roosevelt's Roughriders at the age of 12, living in Texas at the time, breaking horses for the Roughriders.

By 1954, the Stanley Nelson family had grown to include sons Charles, Thomas (Tom) and Warren Nelson. Stanley was a founding member of the Wibaux Conservation Board, serving over 60 years, the longest in our nation's history.

In 1970, Tom and Warren began breeding purebred Simmental cattle, with their first calves coming from a mostly black/white-faced herd. The ranch is a true believer that Sim-



mental cattle work well for crossbreeding with other cattle, as they have a leaner carcass, and work well with the cattle that have a little more marbling. Although Tom and Warren have tried different breeds of cattle, the Simmental breed has worked the best for them and seemed to be their mainstay. They've proven to do a good job for Nelson Livestock.

Tom Nelson always knew he wanted to raise quality cattle. He had raised a few polled Herefords while in high school. He did attend college in Bozeman, Mont. Tom and Renee (Efta) Nelson were married in the fall of 1971, and had two sons, Brent and Nathan. Warren graduated from Wibaux County High School in 1973, and played college football in Bismarck, N.D. He returned to the Nelson Ranch a few years later, to combine his education in livestock and agriculture with Tom's desire to raise quality seed stock.

In 1990, NLC added purebred Angus into its quality breeding program, to offer more to their customers. Their breeding sire selection now consists of big spread bulls that are medium framed but have that explosive growth after birth. This breed of livestock is functional, and is a breed that is deep and thick with growth, and has the ability to work in any environment.

Today, Nelson Livestock Company (NLC) is owned and operated by brothers Tom and Warren Nelson, fifth-generation Nelsons, to raise cattle in southern Wibaux County, Mont. Warren actually lives at the original home-site that David Maggah and his daughter, Alberta (Nelson), homesteaded in 1909, 100 years ago. Tom and Warren's brother, Charles (C.D.) Nelson, and his wife have a small ranch near St. Phillips, Mont. C.D. is a retired pilot and now helps his two brothers. Tom and Renee's son, Brent, along with his four young children, also live on the Nelson Ranch. Brent teaches at Dawson Community College at Glendive, Mont., and spends his time off working

and being a part of his family's legacy. His son, Taylen, 10, is following close behind, adding yet another generation to Nelsons' 100 years in the cattle business. Tom and Renee's other son, Nathan, teaches in Crosby, N.D., and was married in December 2008.

The Nelsons are now, and always have been, a horseback outfit. The ranch has some fairly rough terrain, making it almost impossible to access lands with a motor vehicle or even with ATVs. They do all their gathering and most of their calving by horseback. Now, the sixth generation of Nelson descendants are carrying on the tradition. Tom's son, Brent, has two sons, Taylen and Gavin, and two daughters, Vallie and Reggie. All four kids were riding horses and helping their Grandpa Tom this past summer, which he affectionately refers to as his "AI crew."

Nelson Livestock Company raises its cattle like the commercial breeders. They don't use creep feed or supplements to feed the calves, letting the cows work for themselves. The Nelsons have used all the technology available to them, such as ultrasounding, artificial insemination, embryo transplanting and using carcass data. Maternal efficiency while selecting high fertility and calving ease is important to their program, along with maintaining moderate-sized cattle with high efficiency.

A secondary "crop" that NLC is proud to have on its land is the bountiful wildlife. Mule deer, white-tail deer, antelope, wild turkeys, sharp-tail grouse, pheasants, fox, coyotes, rabbits, skunks, raccoons, badgers, cottontails and hawks, along with numerous ground nesting and song birds inhabit this beautiful part of eastern Montana.

Tom jokes, while the land is beautiful, rugged and vast, it's not much fun fixing fence.

Tom is currently on the Montana Simmental board, while Warren Nelson is running for the Northeast Montana Simmental board of directors. They both see more crossbreeding with Simmental, following right behind Angus. There's a lot of market acceptability and potential, with crossbreeding being the most efficient way of raising cattle. They feel Simmental beef provides a leaner, more tender and better-tasting meat, with little carcass waste.

NLC participates in efficiency tests, and have had steers go through several programs to be DNA marked, in hopes that the data gathered will only further improve Simmental crossbreeding acceptability, efficiency and the bottom line for Montana and Dakota beef producers. They also have been working with the Montana Branded Beef Association, trying to get upwards of 60,000-70,000 cattle, using several Montana cattle producers to acquire the desired herd number, and get programs implemented, where DNA markers and data can be established, to sell branded beef. This will be a benefit to NLC customers and other producers, enabling them to move forward in our changing markets.

Feb. 11 is the scheduled date for Nelson Livestock Company's 34th annual sale, and the celebration of 100 years of Nelson legacy in eastern Montana. They will be selling about 100 head this year, including Simmental, Sim-Angus and Angus bulls. In years past, customers have come from all over the United States, Canada and Mexico. Most come from a 100 to 150 mile radius. NLC will be serving lunch around noon, with the sale to commence at 1 p.m.

For more information, you can reach Tom at (406) 588-3371 or e-mail nlcsim@midrivers.com.