

The Charles M. Russell Room

Featuring the Collection of
Malcolm S. Mackay



Historical Society of Montana

Veterans and Pioneers Memorial Building
State Capitol Grounds, Helena, Montana

The Artist . . .

CHARLES MARION RUSSELL, 1864-1926

Will Rogers once said, "Charlie Russell wasn't just another artist. He wasn't 'just another' anything!"

And J. Frank Dobie, the Sage Texan who has so well chronicled the West, has written:

"One cannot imagine Charles M. Russell living in a world without horses. If the wheel had never been devised, he could have been content. The steamboat had carried traders and trappers up the Missouri River and become a feature in the pageant of the West before he was born; he accepted the steamboat, respected it. When in 1880, at the age of sixteen, he went to Montana, he traveled by the railway to its end and then took the stage. The Far West was at that time still an unfenced and comparatively unoccupied expanse of grass and mountains; he accepted and respected the steam engine as one of its features. As it hauled in plows, barbed wire and people, he would, had he had the power, have Joshuaed the sun to a permanent standstill. The Russell genius was averse to change. . . ."

"Russell's devotion to old times, old ways, the Old West did not come from age. It was congenital. Even in infancy he pictured the West of Indians, spaces and outlanders and knew what he wanted. . . He wanted room; he wanted to be left alone; he believed in other people being left alone. . . In one respect he was far ahead of his contemporaries, who generally said that the only good Indian was a dead Indian. He had profound sympathy for the Plains Indians. . . When sometimes he spoke of 'my people' he meant the Horseback Indians. He called the white man 'Nature's enemy.' The Indians harmonized with Nature and had no more desire to "conquer" it or alter any aspect of it than a cotton-tail rabbit."

"Over and over, he pictured schooners, freight wagons, pack horses, Indian buffalo hunters, cowboys, Northwest Mounted Police, horse thieves, cow thieves, stage robbers and other horseback men. Bull-whackers, mule-skinners, stage drivers and their contemporaries of the frontier were as congenial to him as 'Nature's Cattle'—among which the coyote and the tortoise were in as good standing as the elk and the antelope. . . ."

"Russell's opposition to change was but the obverse of his concentration upon the old. His art can be comprehended only through an understanding of his conservatism. It was not the conservatism of the privileged who resent change because change will take away their privileges. It was the conservatism of love and loyalty," Dobie says.

Will Rogers also said: "He loved Nature—everything he painted God had made. In people, he loved Human Nature. In stories, he loved Human Interest. You never saw one of his paintings that you couldn't tell just what the Indian, the Horse and the Buffalo were thinking about. . . He was a great story-teller. . . He not only left us great living Pictures of what our West was, but he left us an example of how to live

in friendship with all mankind. A Real Downright, Honest to God Human Being."

Montana is terribly proud of her adopted son, "Charlie" Russell. No one has ever painted her portrait so vigorously or so well. No one—in word, picture or by any other device—has yet captured the pioneer flavor of her formative years, more vividly.

This is a representative collection of Russell's. It is neither the best nor the largest. But it is the beginning of our State's renaissance—the public consciousness that for all too long we took "Charlie" Russell for granted. Now we are bringing his work home, reciprocating the respect and admiration he so long felt for Montana. We hope that the paintings in this gallery will constantly increase, hereafter, so that the world may share Montana's pride and appreciation for The Cowboy Artist.

The Donors . . .

In 1952, the Historical Society of Montana raised \$59,000 by public subscription, of which \$50,000 went to buy the Malcolm S. Mackay collection. This comprises much of the work now in this room. This money was raised entirely by public subscription without recourse to any state funds or services. The residue in the fund is used to maintain this collection and to buy additional Russells. Consisting of 12 oils, 6 water-color and gouaches, 18 pen and inks and 8 bronzes, the Mackay collection has been valued at \$250,000.

In addition to the Mackay family of Roscoe, Montana and Tenaflly, N. J., the Society is deeply grateful for the loan or gift of 41 additional Russell works now showing in this gallery. Some of these are old acquisitions of the Society. For the others, we are indebted to Col. Wallis Huidekoper, Big Timber; Mr. C. R. Smith, New York City; Mr. Ernest Klepetko, Lago Colony, Netherlands West Indies; The Montana Stock-growers' Association; Mr. C. V. Rubottom, Livingston; Miss Maude and Miss Florence Fortune, Helena; Mr. and Mrs. John Sullivan, Butte; Mrs. W. M. Nichols, Helena; and Naegele Printing Co., Helena. Hereafter, except for the predominant Mackay collection, other donors names will appear with the title and description of each major painting.

His Work . . .

PAINTINGS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1-21. In Russell's own estimation he was an "Illustrator." This large group of pen and ink work was done primarily to illustrate books. Most of the titles pertain to the books, not to the pictures; therefore they are not used here. Drawings 12 through 16 are from a series of 24 studies of frontier types, meticulous in detail as to appearance and accoutrements. 3 and 5 appear originally in Malcolm S. Mackay's book, **Cow Range and Hunting Trail**. 4, 8 and 10 are the gifts of C. R. Smith.

22. This excellent pen and ink has been extensively reproduced under the title: **The First Printer**, which is self-explanatory. Loaned by Naegele Printing Co.
23. **Traders' and Trapper's Return**. No reproduction has ever been made of this fine original oil, which has always hung in the Mackay home at Tenaflly, New Jersey. It was painted in 1911. Many Russell authorities believe he did his finest work at about this time.
24. This water color has no formal name. The figure on the horse is Theodore Roosevelt. Given by C. R. Smith.
25. **York**. This unusual water color, was given to the Historical Society in 1909 by Russell. York was the negro member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Everywhere, the Indians were amazed by his color. In this scene the Mandans are examining York to see if his color is genuine. Lewis and Clark are seen at the right.
26. **Indian Camp**. A very early work. In 1891 Russell did not use the brilliant colors for which he was later so famous. The squaw is scraping a hide, probably a buffalo hide. Notice, too, that in these early Russell's, Indian faces were much darker and more clearly defined than in later pictures. The draftsmanship "shows" in the painting's lines. There is little of the bold execution so typical of later periods.
27. **On the Warpath**. A maurauding Indian war party is on the trail, probably on a horse-stealing expedition. Note the brighter colors, now beginning to appear in 1895.
28. **Watching the Settlers**. This companion piece, painted in the same year as 27, depicts a war party scouting an immigrant wagon train in typical circle encampment. Both this and 27 travelled all the way from Lago Colony, Netherlands West Indies. Loaned by Mr. Ernest Klepetko.
29. **Indians Discovering Lewis and Clark**. The noted early explorers are here depicted travelling up the Missouri river.
30. **Indian Hunter's Return**. This oil is remarkable as a study of Indian camp life, in vivid detail, and as a winter scene. The brave on the right is making the sign for bear.
31. **Chief Takes Toll (1913)** This is one of Russell's famous paintings. The Indian is making the sign of the chief. His object is to exact toll from the trail boss for allowing the cattle to pass through Indian country.
32. There is no formal title for this picture. It has been called **Charles Russell and His Friends**. Here Russell is introducing his country, his Indians and his cowboys, near Cascade. Russell gave the painting to Malcolm S. Mackay for Christmas in 1922, calling it a "poster." It hung over the fireplace at Tenaflly.
33. **Men of the Open Range or Riders of the Open Range (1923)**. This, too, is a famous work. Notice the spur marks on the shoulder of the horse in the foreground and also the blinders. The horse is a bad actor and the cowboy, unlike his companions, hasn't yet relaxed.

34. **Caught In The Act** (1888). Except for **Waiting For A Chinook** (see case in center of room), this is the oldest painting in the collection. It tells its own story.
35. **Indians and Scouts Talking**. There is no date on this water color, but it is obviously an old one, probably done in the early 1890's.
36. **The Surprise Attack** (1898). Good Action.
37. **Laugh Kills Lonesome** (1925). The cowboy on the right is Charles Russell. One must understand cow-camp banter to get the full meaning of this title in Russell's vernacular. Except for the man-talk, salty humor and ready wit of the 'punchers,' range life was lonely. But a laugh could quickly dispell the loneliness.
38. **The Roundup** (1913). This very famous painting, depicts in great detail the various activities of that famous western institution, the Spring roundup, when the cattle of the various outfits were sorted, counted and the calves branded on each major range.
39. **When Horses Talk War There Is Small Chance For Peace**, sometimes called **No Chance To Arbitrate** (1915). This, too, is a much reprinted Russell. Notice the grinning cowboy on the left.
40. **Bronc To Breakfast** (1908). This water-color is one of the finest done by Russell. There is a second **Bronc To Breakfast** very similar to this one, only done in oil, in the Pilsbury museum in St. Louis. Notice the self portrait of Russell (the man seated on the right nearest the wagon).
41. This early, wild-life water-color (probably about 1898) has no title. Loaned by C. V. Rubottom.
42. **A Pair Of Outlaws**. This water-color though not pre-tentious, it is one of the finest examples of its type and is more valuable than many more colorful ones. Donor: C. R. Smith.
43. **Best Wishes For Your Christmas** (1914). Russell loved to send Christmas cards like this one to his friends. He turned them out prodigiously.
44. **Quick Shooting Saves Our Lives** (1925). This was the frontispiece illustration in Malcolm S. Mackay's book **Cow Range and Hunting Trail**.
45. **The Buckeroo**. This picture, painted by Joe DeYoung, a protege of Charles M. Russell, was donated to the Historical Society by Wallis Huidekoper of Big Timber.
46. **When Cows Were Wild** (1926). This is one of Russell's finest, and the last picture he ever painted. Wallis Huidekoper.
47. **The Herd Quitter** (1897). This self-explanatory oil was donated by Wallis Huidekoper, as were the next three.
48. This and the two which follow, sent to the Huidekopers by Russell, were typical of the artist, who loved to sentimentalize the West he saw changing so rapidly.
49. Another of the personalized letters to old friends.

50. "Here's hoping the trail is a long one . . ." constitutes more of the famed Russell sentiment; but the verse is combined with a very fine small water-color.
51. **Portrait of an Indian**. An unusual, small oil, in format and simplicity. Obviously early because of the somber tones.
52. **Waiting For A Chinook**. (In case with bronze). The first and one of the most noted of all the artist's work—not for its artistic merit—but for the dramatic story it told and because it launched The Cowboy Artist on his real life's work.
53. **Keoma** (Number 2). Russell did relatively little portraiture, and painted few women. But this Indian maid was a favorite, so he painted three of very similar composition.
- 54-55. See the two cases in the lobby, just outside this room. 54 includes 8 more original illustrations plus two of the best known Russell books, **Trails Plowed Under** and **Good Medicine**. 55 is of great importance because it depicts rare field sketches as well as two more illustrated letters.

Sculpturing and Modeling **BRONZE WORKS . . .**

Many artists and critics believe that Russell did his finest work in bronze. They say that his genius as a sculptor really expresses itself in this media.

56. **A Bronc Twister**.
57. **Jim Bridger**.
58. **The Bucker and the Buckeroo**.
59. **An Enemy That Warns**.
60. **The Horse Wrangler**. This is a self portrait.
61. **Smoking Up**. (Two castings).
62. **Buffalo Book Ends**.
63. **The Range Father**.
64. **Indian Horseman**.
65. Russell worked extensively in clay (from which the bronze works were cast), as well as in wax. Although critics consider him superior as a sculptor, he took his sculpting genius lightly. This wax model of an Indian and his dog sled is the property of the Historical Society.

Other Facilities

In addition to this splendid collection of Russell art, visitors are invited to avail themselves of the other major public facilities of the Historical Society of Montana. These include: **THE HISTORICAL LIBRARY** (second floor), which houses one of the finest rare book, newspaper and manuscript collections in the West; **THE FORMAL HISTORICAL MUSEUM** (South wing, this floor); **THE INFORMAL MUSEUM** (South wing, ground floor, downstairs); and **THE FINE ARTS DIVISION GALLERY** (North wing, this floor), where shows of contemporary arts and crafts are changed frequently. You are welcome to use all of these free facilities. Please do.