

CHARLES MARION RUSSELL

1864 – 1926

A New York newspaper once described Charles Russell as “the most famous of Montana legends,” and added: “No man in all Montana history was so adored.” Similar statements about the famed cowboy artist are legion, as are such honors as a commemorative U.S. postage stamp and a statue of Russell in the nation’s Capitol.

Russell came to Montana from St. Louis at the age of 16 to herd sheep but he didn’t like them and never included one in his paintings. During a decade of nomadic life, he hunted, trapped and spent hours sketching and painting Indians. Later, Russell worked on ranches as a cowboy, recalling: “In the spring I wrangled horses; in the fall I herded beef,”

It was his painting of cowboys in action at roundup time, entitled “Jerked Down,” that was used on the stamp issue in 1964, the 100th anniversary of the creation of Montana Territory and also of Russell’s birth.

As a participant in a dying era of frontier life and open range, Russell painted, sculpted and sketched with a profound understanding and sympathy for the people, the land and the time.

Though fame came to Russell before he was 30, he prospered only after he married Nancy Cooper in 1896 and let her manage his business affairs. In Russell’s words, she charged “dead man’s prices” for his art works.

