

Ellen Story



Gallatin History Museum

*Hamilton*

BOZEMAN, MONT.



Gallatin History Museum

Story family portrait, circa 1915. Front row (l to r): Rose Story Hogan, Nelson Story Sr., Ellen Trent Story. Back row (l to r): Thomas Byron Story, Walter P. Story, and Nelson Story Jr. In front of the Nelson Story Sr. mansion on Main Street in Bozeman.



ELLEN TRENT STORY

Born in 1844 in Leavenworth, Kansas, Ellen Trent had little opportunity for schooling by the time she married Nelson Story, Sr. in 1862. The couple came to Montana in 1863, the time of the gold strikes in Bannack and Virginia City. Ellen occupied herself baking pies and bread, which she sold to the miners. She stayed in Bozeman in 1866 when Nelson went East on his famous cattle drives. While waiting for their first home to be built (c. 1869), they lived at the Guy Hotel, or "Guy House." The first home, located first at the site where the old post office stands at Babcock and Tracy, and later moved to Tracy and Main, and then to Mendenhall, was the birthplace of Ellen's children. Three sons and a daughter survived, but three other daughters died in their early years (three, one and two years old, respectively).

With her husband's success in the cattle business, the flour industry and other business ventures, Ellen became less burdened by homemaking chores although she enjoyed cleaning house at the mansion built in the 1880's on Main Street. Her grandson, Malcolm Story, relates that she would often be seen with a favorite black-handled turkey-feather duster and was a good seamstress. She made butter from rich Jersey cows' milk, and enjoyed cooking.

The mansion became a gathering place for friends at Ellen's "high teas" and other parties, where someone could usually be found to play the piano. Sam Lewis, the black pioneer miner who practiced a thriving barber's trade at his business on Main Street, often played the banjo. The mansion was also known as a workplace for numerous members of the community, including Lizzie Long, who worked as a cook.

Ellen was known, according to her grandson, as a disciplinarian who ran her home strictly. But she was well-loved by her family and grandchildren. Some gestures of regard for her that still exist today are the Ellen Theatre, named for her, and a friendship quilt which Ellen's friends made for her. Her grandson, Malcolm, gave the quilt to the Gallatin County Historical Society, for their Pioneer Museum.

# MRS. N. STORY EARLY PIONEER DIES SATURDAY

Highly Esteemed Bozeman Woman  
Passes Away at Her Home After  
An Illness of Several Months.

Mrs. Nelson Story, one of the highly esteemed pioneer women of Montana, who came to Alder Gulch with her husband in 1863 and three years later came to Bozeman, where she has since made her home, died Saturday afternoon, February 9, at 3:45, at her home, after an illness that has kept her confined at home for several months. Her husband has also been very ill, but is feeling better and is able to be up some every day. Arrangements have not been completed for the funeral.

Mrs. Story was Miss Ellen Trent, a daughter of Mathew and Frances (Doyle) Trent. She was born near Farley in Meigs county, Mo., July 22, 1844. When a child she moved with her parents to Leavenworth, Kansas, where she was married to Nelson Story shortly before they started across the plains to what is now Montana. They arrived at Bannack, June 4, 1863, and about that time gold was discovered in Alder Gulch, and Mr. Story left his wife for a short time at Bannack while he went to the new mining camp and staked a claim and then went back for his wife. After mining for a time Mr. Story sold his interests there and went to Summit, where he opened a small store, and Mrs. Story tended the store while he packed goods from Virginia City with 12 jacks.

In 1865, he sold the store and goods and Mrs. Story went to Virginia City while her husband went to New York and then to Texas, where he purchased cattle that he drove to Montana, reaching Bozeman with his cattle and freight December 4, 1866. He then brought Mrs. Story from Virginia City, and for 57 years they have lived in Bozeman.

# FEW IMPORTANT CASES ARE ON COURT DOCKET

Fifty Jurors Impanelled and Trials Will  
Begin Monday, Feb. 25. Jerry  
Sawyer First Case.

The next term of court in which trials by jury will be held has been called by Judge B. B. Law for Monday, February 25. Following the selection of the jury panel which will hear the cases, the court set the different cases for trial, consulting the attorneys interested in the matter.

There are not many cases to be tried at the coming term of court, which is not expected to last more than three weeks. There are not more than three criminal cases to be tried at this time, the most important of which will be the alleged robbers of the Salesville bank, George "Bad Eye" Dyer and Tom Martin or Jack Welsh. This case is set for Friday, February 28.

The first case on the calendar is that of Jerry Sawyer, charged for the third time of bootlegging. He has been convicted twice of a similar offense and has not only been fined but has served jail sentences. He was arraigned on the third charge yesterday, and pleaded not guilty to the charge of possessing intoxicating liquor, contrary to law.

The case of Harrison and Thompson, in connection with the wheat stealing cases at Manhattan, will also be one of the cases to be tried.

The most important of the civil actions is the case of H. C. Biering and M. S. Cunningham against Richard T. Ringling, which is a suit on a contract. The damages claimed by the plaintiffs is \$300,000.

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# RESTAURANT STUNG

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small store, and Mrs. Story tended the store while he packed goods from Virginia City with 12 jacks.

In 1865, he sold the store and goods and Mrs. Story went to Virginia City while her husband went to New York and then to Texas, where he purchased cattle that he drove to Montana, reaching Bozeman with his cattle and freight December 4, 1866. He then brought Mrs. Story from Virginia City, and for 57 years they have lived in Bozeman, for a time in part of a double log house north of the city, and later in a log cabin on Main street. In 1869, their frame house was built on the southeast corner of Main street and Tracy avenue, and in this house they made their home and with most generous hospitality entertained their friends until 1887, when they moved to the elaborate home on West Main street, where they have since resided and have had many pleasant social affairs and family gatherings. For a time Mr. and Mrs. Story spent the winters in California, but for the past ten years they have remained at home.

Mrs. Story and her husband have been identified with the Society of Montana Pioneers and with the Pioneers' Society of Gallatin county, and always enjoyed meeting with their old-time friends at the annual gatherings.

Of the seven children born to Mr. and Mrs. Story, one daughter and three sons survive, all having been at home part of the time during the mother's illness. Mrs. Gerrett L. (Rose) Hogan of Los Angeles, California, who was here for several weeks the early part of the winter, came Saturday morning. Nelson Story, Jr., lieutenant governor of Montana, who resides in Bozeman; T. Byron Story, also a resident here; and Walter Story of Los Angeles, who is coming for the funeral. There are 11 grandchildren and one great grandson, Nelson Story, IV. Three brothers survive. Mrs. Story, one in Erie, Kansas, one in Santa Monica, California and Taylor Trent of Bozeman. One sister, Mrs. F. L. Beenpe of Bozeman, is now at her winter home in Los Angeles, California. Mrs. Story had many warm friends in the community, especially among those who had known her in early days.

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# Great-great granddaughter tells tale of pioneer woman

By EVELYN BOSWELL  
MSU News Service

Ellen Story is usually described as the wife of Bozeman pioneer Nelson Story Sr., the grandmother of Malcolm Story, or the relative of someone else in the renowned Bozeman family.

It's about time someone knew the silent story of Ellen, says Amanda Drysdale Schulster, a Bozeman native who researched her great-great grandmother for a Women's Studies project at MSU.

Ellen Trent Story went from being a girl in Missouri to one of the first women in the gold mining camps at Alder Gulch to one of the wealthiest women in Bozeman, Schulster said.

Through it all, historical records describe her as being the perfect woman.

William Davies wrote in a diary during the gold rush days that Ellen was a "lovely vision of womanhood amidst such surroundings, such clear, clean cut features, such glorious black eyes and hair that was almost blue-black like a raven's wing."

Documents at the Gallatin County Historical Society and Pioneer Museum described Ellen as "a woman of energy and character, industrious, sincere and faithful, a woman of very fine impulses, always so pleasant, devoted wife and mother, her chief concern being that her boys receive a thorough education."

Everything she found on her great-great grandmother raved about what a good woman she was, said Schulster, who examined public and family documents, visited the family burial plot, and interviewed older family members for her project.

The "perfect" Ellen was born July 22, 1844, in Platte County, Mo. as Ellen Trent.

She moved with her family to Kansas when she was around 10, and it was there that she met Nelson Story, an Ohio farm boy who had left the family farm and landed in Kansas City.

No marriage certificate is available for Ellen and Nelson, but the family Bible says the couple was married in September 1862, Schulster said.

Ellen would have been about 18, although other records give varying ages.

The Storys wintered in Denver and moved to Montana in March 1863 because of the gold rush. Quoting records she found at the

"She lived in a tent for the next six months, surrounded by some of the most desperate characters ever to curse a mining camp."

—Amanda Drysdale Schulster, Bozeman native who researched her great-great grandmother for a MSU project

MSU library, Schulster said.

"She (Ellen) lived in a tent for the next six months, surrounded by 'some of the most desperate characters to ever curse a mining camp; a trying and disagreeable situation for a refined, sensitive woman to be placed in.'

"There was, at times, a perfect reign of terror in camp; no law in the land, and the desperadoes seemed to have everything their own way until the more law-abiding citizens formed a vigilante group."

By the fall of 1864, Ellen was living in the Summit district of Alder Gulch in a hewn-log house, selling pies and managing the mercantile store that she and Nelson owned.

On Feb. 2, 1866 while in Virginia City, she gave birth to her first child — a daughter named Alice Montana Story.

Later that year, the family moved into a single-roomed log cabin north of Bozeman.

They eventually built a log house in town, then one of Bozeman's first frame houses and finally a \$125,000 mansion with money earned from gold, cattle and real estate.

From 1890 to 1910, Ellen and Nelson wintered in a sumptuous house in Los Angeles.

"Materially, Ellen Trent Story wanted for nothing," the records said.

"She always had the best clothes, jewels, etc. ... Ellen Trent Story drove a fancy Phaeton, or rather her driver drove it for her. It was silver-plated, where nickel was generally used, and had patent leather seats, dash and top-sides."

Ellen Story had seven children, with three daughters dying before the age of four, Schulster said.

A daughter and three sons lived into adulthood. Ellen died Feb. 9, 1924 at the age of 79. She is buried in the Story plot at Sunset Cemetery in Bozeman.

## MSU-Bozeman Communications Services

# Montanan History and Family History: G-great Granddaughter Researches Silent Story of Ellen Story

by Evelyn Boswell

BOZEMAN -- Ellen Story is usually described as the wife of Bozeman pioneer Nelson Story Sr., the grandmother of Malcolm Story, or the relative of someone else in the renowned Bozeman family, according to Amanda Drysdale Schulster of Bozeman.

It's about time someone knew the silent story of Ellen, says Schulster, who researched her great-great grandmother for a Women's Studies project at Montana State University-Bozeman.

"Obviously, you know, Bozeman was not an all-male enterprise," added Lynda Sexson, Schulster's advisor for the project. "This became a settled community. A settled community involves families. He (Nelson Story) touted himself always as a family person."

Ellen Trent Story went from being a girl in Missouri to one of the first women in the gold mining camps at Alder Gulch to one of the wealthiest women in Bozeman, Schulster said. Through it all, historical records describe her as being the perfect woman.

William Davies wrote in a diary during the gold rush days that Ellen was a "lovely vision of womanhood amidst such surroundings, such clear, clean cut features, such glorious black eyes and hair that was almost blue-black like a raven's wing."

Documents at the Gallatin County Historical Society and Pioneer Museum said Ellen, while in Bozeman, "was a woman of energy and character, industrious, sincere and faithful, a woman of very fine impulses, always so pleasant, devoted wife and mother, her chief concern being that her boys receive a thorough education."

Everything she found on her great-great grandmother raved about what a good woman she was, said Schulster who examined public and family documents, visited the family burial plot, and interviewed older family members for her project. The 38-year-old researcher said she didn't edit her findings to make her family look good.

"There's no account that said she was a weakling or a sap," Schulster commented.

She would like to know, Schulster said, why it was so important for Ellen Story to be ideal. Why was she always idolized? Why was it so important for Nelson Story to have a wife with those qualities, when he apparently threw temper tantrums that were "out of this world?"

"Ellen Story's livelihood is contingent upon her remaining 'a good woman,'" Schulster commented. "Ironically, Nelson Story is also dependent upon his wife to be silent and good."

The Ellen she discovered made family and friends her priority, Schulster said. She wasn't outspoken in the community and wasn't active politically. She took little interest in organizations. And even though the Ellen Theatre in Bozeman was named after her, she was not a theater person.



"She was not a social butterfly at all," Schulster said.

Schulster did come across "tons of information," however, about Ellen attending card parties. "It was typical of women of her class," Schulster said.

Records at the Pioneer Museum said Ellen Story retained her interests and skills in household arts despite her growing wealth. "She also allowed her Jersey cows to graze on the lawn of the mansion, and she churned the butter made from their rich milk.

The perfect Ellen started her life far away from Montana, according to Schulster. She was born July 22, 1844 in Platte County, Missouri. Known then as Ellen Trent, she and her family moved to Kansas when she was around 10. It was there that she met Nelson Story, an Ohio farm boy who had left the family farm and landed in Kansas City. Nelson broke sod and hauled timber for his future father-in-law, Matthew Trent.

No marriage certificate is available for Ellen and Nelson, but the family Bible says the couple was married in September 1862, Schulster said. Ellen would have been about 18, although other records give varying ages.

The Storys wintered in Denver and moved to Montana in March 1863 because of the gold rush, Schulster said.

"Ellen Trent Story was one of the first women in the great camp at Alder Gulch," Schulster reported.

Quoting records she found at the MSU-Bozeman library, Schulster said, "She (Ellen) lived in a tent for the next six months, surrounded by 'some of the most desperate characters to ever curse a mining camp; a trying and disagreeable situation for a refined, sensitive woman to be placed in.

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By the fall of 1864, Ellen was living in the Summit district of Alder Gulch in a hewn-log house, selling pies and managing the mercantile store that she and Nelson owned. On Feb. 2, 1866 while in Virginia City, she gave birth to her first child - a daughter named Alice Montana Story. Later that year, the family moved into a single-roomed log cabin north of Bozeman. They eventually built a log house in town, then one of Bozeman's first frame houses and finally a \$125,000 mansion with money earned from gold, cattle and real estate. From 1890 to 1910, Ellen and Nelson wintered in a sumptuous house in Los Angeles.

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Ellen Story had seven children, with three daughters dying before the age of four, Schulster said. A daughter and three sons lived into adulthood. Ellen died Feb. 9, 1924 at the age of 79. She is buried in the Story plot at Sunset Cemetery in Bozeman.

Apparently, no one had ever done any formal research on Ellen until Schulster, Sexson said.

"She did wonderful work. I'm enormously pleased," Sexson commented.

Schulster said she couldn't find much research material on Ellen Trent Story compared to the men in the family.

"The only existing accounts of Ellen Story largely focus on her 'being' rather than on her 'doing,'" Schulster said. "With little or no autonomy, she is always located as secondary and relational, as wife, as mother, mother-

in-law, grandmother.

"Further, included in nearly every account are the births and deaths of her children," Schulster said. "The structure of the patriarchy demands that she be a vessel, and most valued for her reproductive capacity."

Schulster will attend graduate school this fall to start work on a master's degree in sociology, but she plans to continue her work on Ellen Story, Schulster said. Part of that research will involve additional interviews with Schulster's mother, Martha Story Drysdale of Bozeman.

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# Montana

## NUGGETS

by Michael Dougherty

### Museum of the Rockies

ON THE MSU CAMPUS AT 600 W. KAGY BLVD., BOZEMAN. 994-2251

When you walk through the Museum of the Rockies, you travel through more than four billion years in time. Learn about the history and prehistory of the northern Rockies region through exhibits ranging from paleontology and Native American artifacts to historic photography and antique vehicles. Start your walk through time with a look at the universe and Montana's Big Sky in the Taylor Planetarium. The Taylor Planetarium is one of 25 facilities in the world with a computer graphics system that can simulate flight through space. It is the only major public planetarium in the surrounding three-state region.

The museum is well known for its paleontology research. On display are several important finds, including the skulls of *Torosaurus*, *Tyrannosaurus Rex* and *Triceratops*, and an 80 million-year-old nest of dinosaur eggs. Working at Montana sites, the museum's curator of paleontology, Jack Horner, has discovered important information about dinosaur biology and in recent years has made discoveries of international significance. One of the most spectacular finds, a *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, has been cast in bronze and the 38 foot long and 15 foot tall skeleton stands in front of the museum.

Montana's rich agricultural history is portrayed at the museum's living history farm where the daily life of early homesteaders is recreated for visitors.

The Museum of the Rockies is open daily from 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. in summer, and 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 12:30 p.m. - 5 p.m. on Sundays in winter. An admission fee is charged to nonmembers. For more information about exhibits, tours and planetarium shows call (406) 994-2251 or visit [www.museumoftherockies.org](http://www.museumoftherockies.org).

*Reprinted from The Ultimate Montana Atlas and Travel Encyclopedia.  
www.ultimatemontana.com*

### The Story Family of Montana

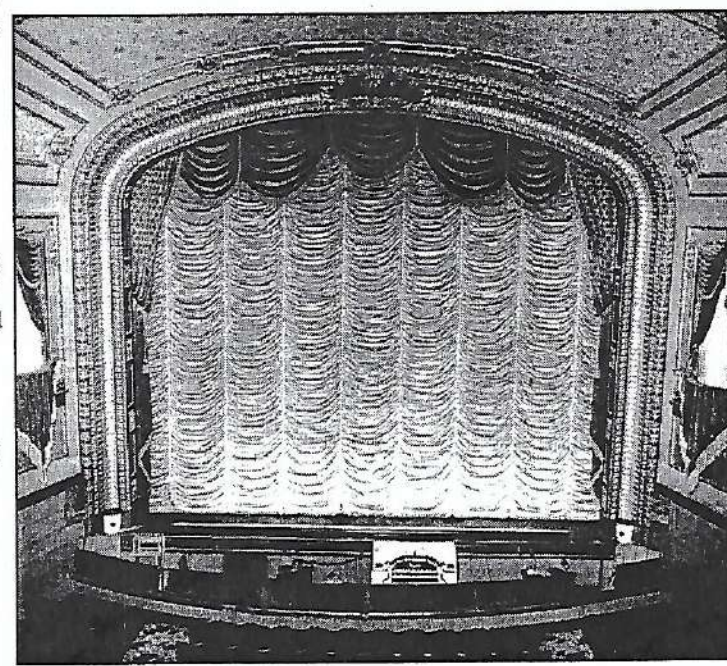
Nelson and Ellen Story met and married in Kansas before coming to Bannack and Alder Gulch in 1863. Nineteen-year-old Ellen baked pies and bread to sell to the miners while Nelson operated a store and mined a claim from which he took \$40,000 in gold.

It was in Alder Gulch that Story's famous participation in frontier justice took place. Road agent and robber George Ives had been charged with murder by an informal judge and jury. A crowd of several thousand spectators gathered as darkness fell. Ives stood on a packing box with a noose around his neck. A rescue party of his friends stood up with their guns, but "quick as thought" Story pulled the box (or kicked it, depending on the version you hear) out from under Ives and he was hanged.

The Storys decided to settle in Bozeman, and Ellen stayed there in 1866 while Nelson went down to Texas to drive his famous herd of 3,000 longhorns and a wagon train up to Montana. He had to outwit the U.S. Army, who wanted to turn back the expedition for its own safety. Story had to sneak 3,000 longhorns past the troops in the dark. These cattle that were driven into the Gallatin Valley formed the nucleus for Montana's cattle industry.

Ellen gave birth to seven children. Three sons and one daughter survived. Nelson's successes in cattle, a flour mill and other business ventures enabled them to build a 17-room mansion in the 1880s. This exquisite building was torn down in 1938. Marble columns from the mansion were salvaged to decorate the family plot.

The Ellen Theatre on Main Street was named for Mrs. Story. Nelson Story was instrumental in bringing Montana State College to Bozeman. Both lived long and productive lives and were major figures in building the Bozeman community. Both are buried in the Bozeman Cemetery. **E**



*The Ellen Theatre in downtown Bozeman is named after Ellen Story.*

## Nelson Story Faced Death Many Times . . .

# Freighter, Miner, Vigilante, Catt

By ROLF OLSON  
Chronicle Staff Writer  
JOHN SAXMAN  
Chronicle Photographer

Nelson Story is remembered best for trailing the first cattle into Montana Territory in 1866. But his life included shooting a claim jumper, assisting vigilantes hang a man, helping John Bozeman survive a brawl, and amassing a fortune which touched both coasts of the growing nation.

His grandson, Malcolm, who resides in the old Jack Mendenhall mansion on South Willson, spun the tale from memory of the

family legacy. Malcolm is a grandfather himself now.

Nelson was born April 4, 1838 in Burlingame, Ohio. His mother died when he was young and his father, Ira, remarried. Although his home in Meigs County was the site of Athens University, Nelson never went to college and "lit out" at age 19 in 1857 because there was nothing there to hold him. The slavery issue was bubbling then and John Brown in Virginia was becoming important.

Nelson went to "Bleeding Kansas," which was half slave and half free — a seedbed of dis-

content. At Fort Leavenworth, then a growing community and now better known for a penitentiary than anything else, he courted Ellen Trent for whom the Ellen Theater in Bozeman eventually was to be named.

To make ends meet, he broke sod and saved his money to buy oxen and wagons. Two years later, 1859, he started freighting to Denver which, at that time, was no larger than Gallatin Gateway is now.

But Story ran into trouble at both ends of his world. In Ohio the brother of his girl didn't like the courtship and showed up one night with a friend and invited Nelson outside. The brother started to swing when Nelson produced a pocket knife and sliced his arm. That ended the fight before it really started.

At the other end, in Denver, Story discovered two of his oxen were missing and, after a search, found two fresh carcasses in the butcher shop. Apparently he had little trouble identifying his stock since the shod hooves and hides were still on.

Nelson brought suit against the butcher but lost the case and was ordered to pay court costs. Feeling he was swindled, he hitched his teams and started for Fort Leavenworth without paying. The sheriff soon rode after Nelson but took a wrong fork in the road and that quirk of fate halted what undoubtedly would have been a showdown.

Malcolm recalls as a young man when his grandfather, 75, won a handgun contest with a .38 Smith and Wesson at gophers on Trail Creek. It was about 1915 and the family, including two uncles, had driven out in their \$10,000 Stevens-Duryea limousine. When the contest was over, none had bettered the old man.

After the freighting incident, Nelson went into silver mining in

second sluice constructed in that territory. In June 1863 he headed to Bannack, then territorial capital of Montana, and arrived just a few days after Fairweather discovered gold in Alder Gulch.

Nelson heard about it, went to Alder and staked claims which he did not work. Rather he started freighting again with a mule packtrain.

He returned to Fort Leavenworth to get Ellen who returned to Montana with him. He worked his gold claims and in June 1866, after two years of digging, he had \$30,000 in dust saved. During those two years he employed as many as 50 men.

On one occasion somebody told him several men were jumping his claim at night. Story grabbed his 10 gauge Damascus-steel double barrel shotgun and came upon the claim jumpers that night.

"You're on my claim. Get off," he ordered.

One of the jumpers, Alex Carter, grabbed another man as a shield, whipped out his percussion revolver and cocked the hammer. In the same instant Story fired, blowing Carter's right hand off. Not realizing yet what had happened to his arm, Carter attempted to pick-up the revolver.

Malcolm said the man used as a shield was unscratched. And although Story had ample reason at the time to have killed them both, he voluntarily paid Carter \$5 a month from then on as some compensation for his missing hand.

Story became what Malcolm termed "a prime mover" in the Vigilante in December 1863 when the Plummer gang probe started and the first hanging was scheduled. The intended victim, George Ives, gave a sob story and said he wanted to write his mother before being strung up.

Meanwhile, a dozen of Ives' road agent friends called "Innocents" stood with guns drawn and one threatened:

"We'll shoot the rope in two." Another shouted, "then we'll

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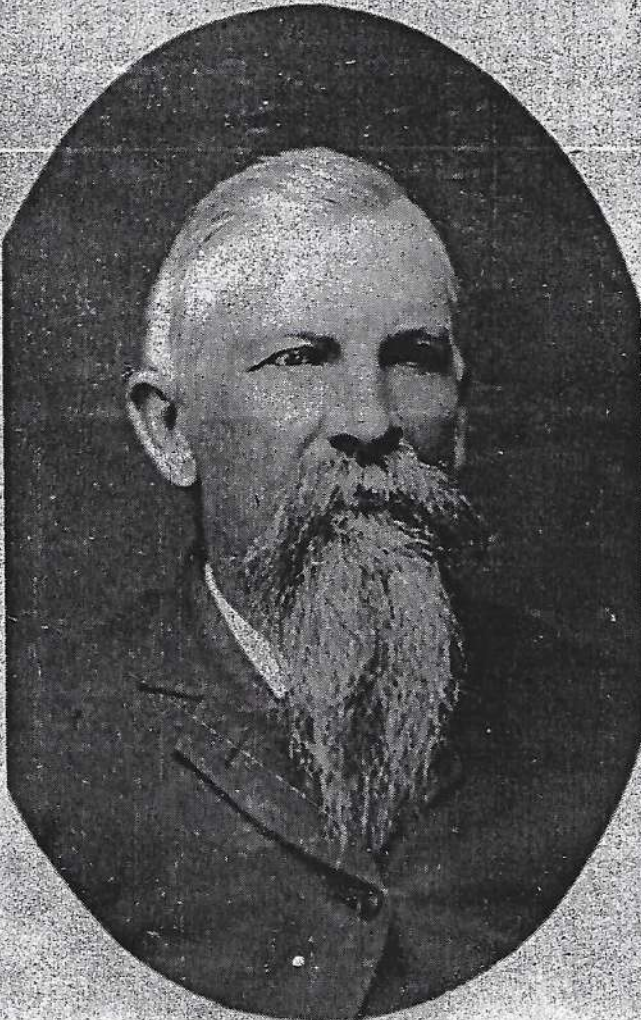
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# Wellman, Merchant, Founder ...

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is an end in itself. He opened a mercantile store. He invested heavily in California enterprises. He built his cattle herd to nearly 20,000 head which he sold for quarter of a million dollars when a dollar stood firm. He built flour mills. He built half of Bozeman. He owned ranch land. He was fantastically wealthy.

Story might have been shot by a Denver sheriff trying to catch a man who refused to pay court costs. He might have been killed by a claim jumper who used another man as a shield. He might have died kicking a crate from a strung-up road agent. The cattle drive nearly halfway across the nation would have been a feat for any lifetime.

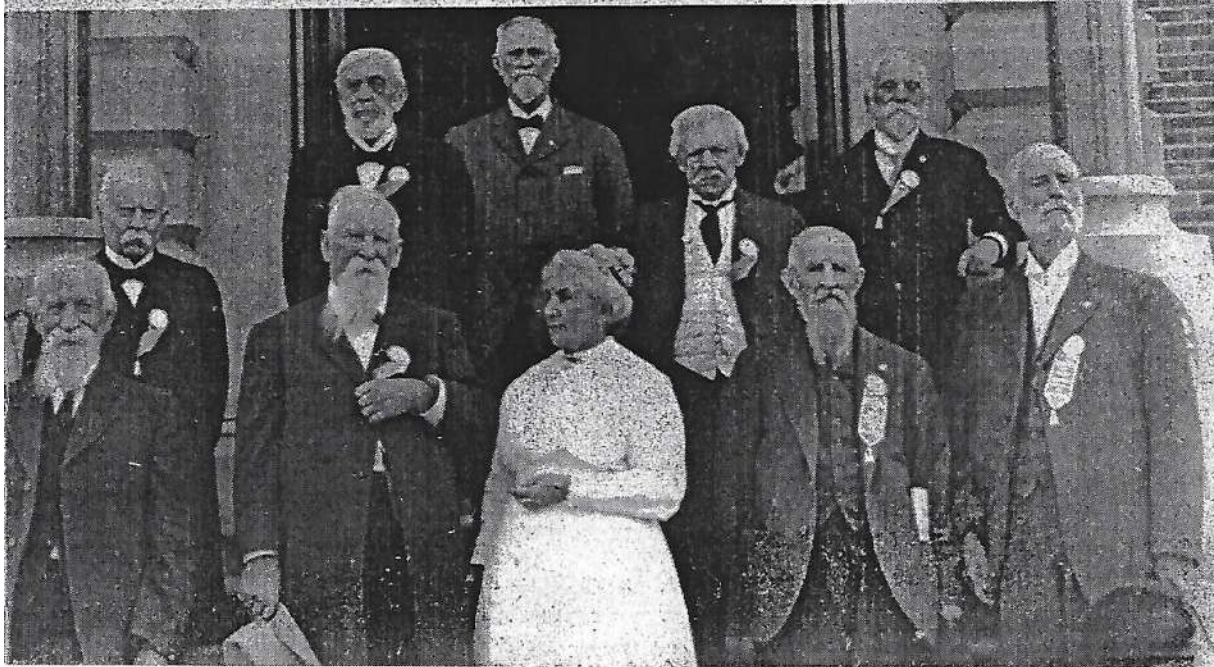
For all his accomplishments, Nelson Story stood only 5-9. He died in bed at 87 in March 1926.

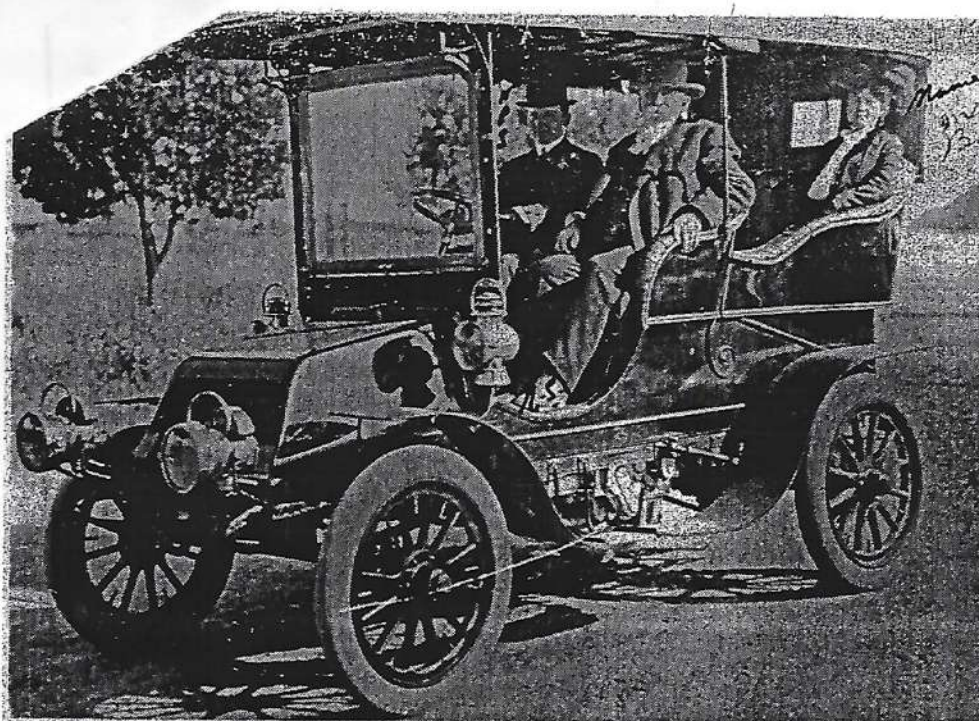
Said his grandson, an ardent admirer:

"He was built like a cedar post. I've seen the old man dab a rope on a steer and make him change ends when he (Nelson) was standing flat footed."



EARLIEST FAMILY PHOTO — Nelson and Ellen Story posed in Salt Lake City in 1866, more than a century ago, for this photograph. The child was named Alice, born that year in Virginia City where Nelson was just finishing his gold mining operations. Alice died in 1869 at age 3. Nelson's next project was to move 1,000 head of cattle from Texas to Montana.





WALTER, NELSON TAKE MAIME BAIRD FOR RIDE



FAMED TIN BOX— When Nelson completed his diggings in Virginia City where he employed as many as 50 men, he took \$30,000 in gold dust back to New York in this tin box. His grandson, Malcolm, who holds the box said

Nelson had a revolver ready at all times while on stage coaches and trains. He made it without incident and traded the dust, which was in great demand, for \$10,000 profit.

Sheriff therefore gaped and with what was described a sickly smile, asked "shall we hang him?"

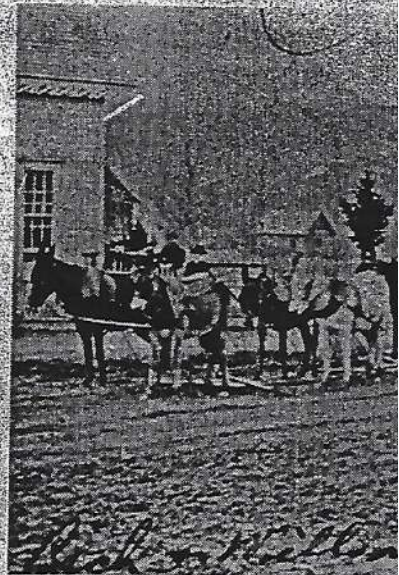
The crowd of an estimated 1,500 miners stood silent in the street. History says Nelson Story, with gun in each hand, pushed his way through from the fringes of the crowd and kicked the box from under Ives. Then he faced the innocents who never fired a shot.

The Story family account of the Ives incident is that Nelson had only one handgun. And he asked a trusted acquaintance, Ben Eziakiel, "come on." Eziakiel knew what Story meant and both of them yanked the box from under Ives with their left hands and stepped back at the ready. Nelson said he could hear revolver hammers cocking in the silence of the crowd. But nothing happened.

That broke the back of the road agents. The ringleader, Plummer, was hanged on Sunday, Jan. 10 with the last plea: "You can't hang me. I'm too wicked to die."

The Story's first daughter— they had three and all died in infancy—Alice was born in Virginia City in 1866. Four other children (Rose, Nelson Jr., T. Byron and Walter) all survived. The same year, 1866, he took his \$30,000 in gold dust in a tin box to New York. There he traded it for \$40,000 in greenbacks because gold was in demand there. He deposited all but \$10,000 which he sewed in his coat lining. He rode a horse to Tennessee to see relatives, then to Fort Leavenworth, then to Texas.

In Texas, Nelson bought a thousand head of Texas long-



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# Nelson Story Was an Early Founder

"He always wore a flat top stetson, a long tailed coat and walking boots," said Malcolm Story about his grandfather Nelson Story, who was one of the earliest founders of Bozeman.

"Nelson Story, or 'Old Man Story' as he was affectionately called," said Malcolm Story "was on hand when Bozeman was established as a town on August 8, 1864."

Many businesses, public buildings, and landmarks have boasted the name "Story", and a street in Bozeman also bears this name.

## Born in Ohio

The remarkable life of Nelson Story began in 1838, on a corn farm near Athens, Ohio, where he was born.

As a young man, Nelson heard of the discovery of gold in a place called Bannack, and he set out for Bannack on horseback.

When Nelson reached Bannack, which wasn't much more than a few tents and hastily built shacks, he found

that only women and children were inhabiting the dwellings.

After asking around, he found out that the men had gone to "Alder Gulch," where a man named Bill Fairweather had discovered gold.

## Nelson Arrived

Gold had been discovered at Alder only about ten days before Nelson arrived, so he was there almost at the very beginning. The date was June 1863.

Although he staked out a claim, Nelson didn't start mining.

Instead he continued in his already established freighting business from Denver, Colorado.

Most of the people who arrived at Alder Gulch, or Virginia City as it later became known, came as quickly as they could.

This meant that they came only on horseback, not bringing extra equipment, food, clothing or any means of transporting such things, whereas Nelson Story had a string of pack-mules,

which proved to be a very valuable commodity at that time.

## Nelson and Ellen Marry

In 1864, Nelson returned to Leavenworth, Kansas where he married Ellen Trent, and brought her to Virginia City.

Ellen made and sold pies and bread to the miners thus providing another income.

When Nelson finally got around to mining his claim, he eventually took out almost \$30,000 worth of gold, which was even of more value then, than it is now.

This \$30,000 proved to be the beginnings of the Story fortune.

## Yellowstone Transportation Co.

Although Nelson did not actually live in Bozeman until 1867 he still came quite often to manage various business interests in the area.

One of these interests was the Yellowstone Transportation Company which he started in partnership with several others.

At this time Bozeman was not much more than a lot of willows and a swamp, with maybe a building or two.

The company had ten, 30' x 12', 15-ton boats, which they used to transport merchandise down the Yellowstone River.

Many of the boats were wrecked on Wolf Rapids, which along with the coming of the railroad in 1882, put the company out of business.

## First Cattle Drive

In the annals of history, perhaps the one thing which Story was noted most for, was for making the first cattle drive farther north than the Platte River from Texas.

Nelson purchased 1,000 cows with calves and in April he started trailing the cattle from Texas.

Eight months later in December, he arrived in the Livingston area with his herd of cattle, however, the town of Livingston was not established until the Northern Pacific came through in 1882.

## Story Mill

In 1882 Nelson started the Story Mill in Bozeman, which is still standing near the auction yards.

"For over 40 years the mill had the most consistent payroll and business in Bozeman," said Malcolm Story.

On August 27, 1901, the mill burnt down and Nelson had to rebuild it.

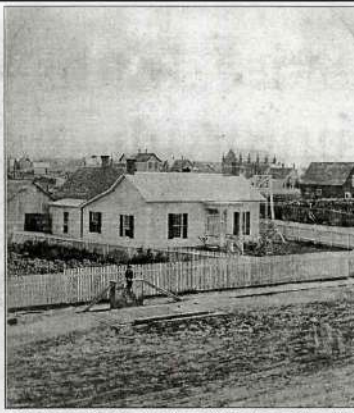
Malcolm Story stated, "Throughout his life he was always wheeling and dealing, and always had several business ventures going at once."

He made business contracts with the government, loaned money, real estate, ranched, and also operated many other businesses in the Bozeman area and elsewhere.

Malcolm stated that at one time after making his million, Nelson commented, "They think I am rich, but I have also lost a million dollars."

Nelson Story's death in 1926 brought to an end an exceptionally unusual life of an exceptionally unusual man.





This photo of Bozeman, taken two years before the Battle of the Little Bighorn, was purchased recently by Kim Scott, special collections librarian in the Renne Library at Montana State University.

## Piece of the past

2/18/04

By GAIL SCHONTZLER  
Chronicle Staff Writer

Thanks to high-speed computers and e-Bay, Bozeman has regained a bit of its lost history.

A small photo of Bozeman's oldest existing house, built by pioneer Nelson Story, went up for auction last week on e-Bay, and Montana State University won the bidding.

"I got it by bidding like a pirate," Kim Scott, special collections librarian in the Renne Library, said Monday. "This is an ultra-cool photo.

"It's another piece of the puzzle of Bozeman's past."

As the deadline approached, another bidder, who had been silent up to that point, jumped in with 60 seconds to go. Using MSU's high-speed computers, Scott was able to send in the top bid of \$192.

The undated photo was taken on a summery day by Henry Bird Calfee, Bozeman's first superintendent of schools, who took many of the first photographs of Yellowstone National Park. His stamp is on the back. Originally black and white, the 3-inch-wide stereo-images have turned sepia with age, but are still in excellent condition.

The photo shows the wood-frame home at the southwest corner of Main Street and Tracy Avenue, where Miller's Jewelry stands today.

Main Street is very muddy. An unusual swing on the side of the house matches an 1885 sketch of Story's house. A little boy in the photo is unidentified.

Scott said he believes it was probably taken in 1874, two years before the Battle of the Little Bighorn. In the background stands the Methodist Episcopal Church at Willson Avenue and Olive Street, which was completed in January 1874. Beyond that is the bare hill that would someday lead up to Montana's agricultural college.

The seller, an antique stereo-view dealer in Michigan, knew the photo was taken in Bozeman, but not whose house it was.

The Story house is "quite tiny," Scott said, "considering Montana's first millionaire was living in it."

John Russell, Gallatin Historical Society executive director, said he hasn't yet seen the photo but it sounds "quite significant."

Story's wife, Ellen, held ladies' teas, fund-raisers for the church and socials there.

"In its time, it was arguably the finest home in town," Russell said. "This house has seen a lot of history. You really wish its walls could talk."

Nelson Story made money gold mining in Virginia City but realized he could make more feeding miners, so he led a famous cattle drive from Texas to Montana. In Bozeman, he amassed a fortune in cattle, real estate, banking and milling.

Story was investigated by a grand jury for allegedly ripping off the federal Crow Agency, double sacking flour and not delivering the quality and quantity of beef charged for, but was never indicted, Russell said.

The photo will be available in MSU's special collections for anyone who wants to see it or use it for research. It was purchased with money raised by the MSU Friends of the Library and special collections' endowment interest.

"The important thing is the image has come back to Bozeman where it belongs," Scott said.

The Story house still stands on Mendenhall Street, behind the Pioneer Museum.

Gail Schontzler is at [gails@dailychronicle.com](mailto:gails@dailychronicle.com)

By **AMANDA RICKER**  
Chronicle Staff Writer

**T**here was a standing joke that Nelson Story was insulted and enraged because people kept coming to his door thinking his mansion was the county courthouse, former Bozeman architect Fred Willson wrote decades ago.

Built in 1887, Nelson's three-story, 17-room, palatial mansion had ceiling trim made of solid gold leaf, according to local newspaper accounts. The walls were hand-painted. Visitors were welcomed by a huge chandelier with crystal pendants, 8-foot doorways, walnut paneling and marble fireplaces throughout.

Nelson and Ellen Story's mansion at 412 Main Street was the elaborate predecessor to the Story Mansion his son, Thomas Byron Story, built in 1910 on Willson Avenue.

Nelson Story's mansion was demolished 70 years ago to make way for the Gallatin County High School, now the Willson School. His son T.B.'s Story Mansion - also known as the SAE House - was bought in 2003 by the city of Bozeman in an effort to preserve it.

Martha Story Drysdale, Nelson's great-granddaughter and T.B.'s granddaughter who lives in Bozeman, remembers going to Nelson's "original Story Mansion" as a child to watch the demolition.

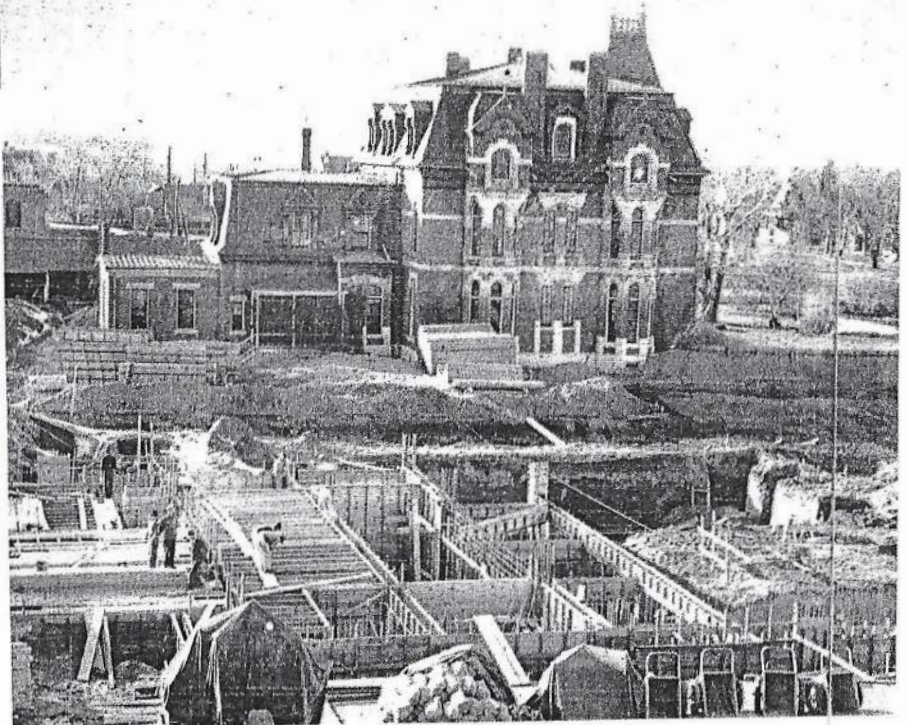
"They had started to destroy it," Drysdale said recently. "My father took me out back and there was a big crane with a wrecking ball on it. I was so young I didn't realize how terrible it was."

**NOT TO BE OUTDONE**



ERIK PETERSEN/CHRONICLE

**Martha Story Drysdale poses with photos of her great grandmother Ellen Story and great grandfather Nelson Story in her Bozeman home.**



**Above: Construction of the basement of the new Gallatin County High School (now known as the Willson School)**

design the mansion. But when the architect specified use of Indiana Limestone, Story thought he had a side deal going with the company and scrapped the plans. Instead, Story hired Byron Vreeland to design and build a \$60,000 residence that wound up costing an estimated \$100,000 to \$125,000.

"The foundation was put in and torn out three times before it was satisfactory and Mr. Vreeland told his son, Pomroy, who was associated with me, that they used up all the potatoes in Gallatin County to cut out the moldings as to contour," Willson wrote.

Story liked to sing, and read poetry and the Bible, according to Willson's notes.

Story was very religious, but did not accept theologies. Beside a passage stating that "the streets of Heaven will be paved with gold," Willson reported that Story wrote, "Fools, don't they know that if gold is that plentiful it will be cheaper than horse manure?"

### TOO BIG

After Nelson died in 1926, the mansion was handed down to his son, T.B. But in that Depression-era, the mansion became too much for T.B. to handle, Drysdale said.

"It was just so big," she said. "They could no longer keep it and so they sold it."

T.B. sold the mansion to the Gallatin County School District in 1936 for \$20,000, to make way for the Willson School's west wing, according to the Bozeman Courier.

Contractors bid between \$1 and \$3,500 for the job of tearing it down. The job was ultimately awarded to a contractor who agreed to do it for the materials.

Before the mansion was demolished, the newspaper took a survey of residents about whether it was the right thing to do. Some people said the mansion might detract from the new school building if left standing, but the general consensus indicated that the mansion should be retained for use as a library or museum.

"It is to be hoped that his (Story's) home may be preserved by the county as a museum, as a landmark deeply rooted into the lives of the present generation and of those to come," stated a March 1937 article in the Courier.

The suggestion also arose at that time to simply try to keep the mansion's facade, but it was not to be.

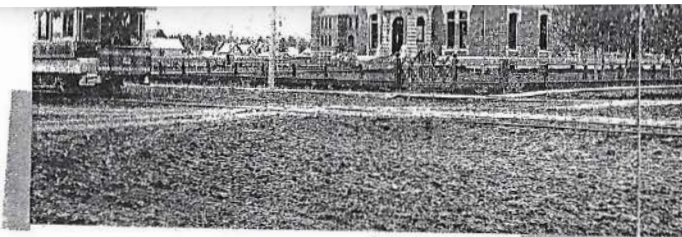
Several remnants from the mansion can be found around Bozeman. Its marble columns decorate the family plot in Bozeman's Sunset Hills Cemetery, for example.

Drysdale and Eileen Story, who was married to Drysdale's brother Pete and lives in Emigrant, both have relics from the Nelson Story mansion in their homes, including a trunk that belonged to Nelson's wife, Ellen, and a four-poster bed that Drysdale was able to fit in her home only by raising the ceiling.

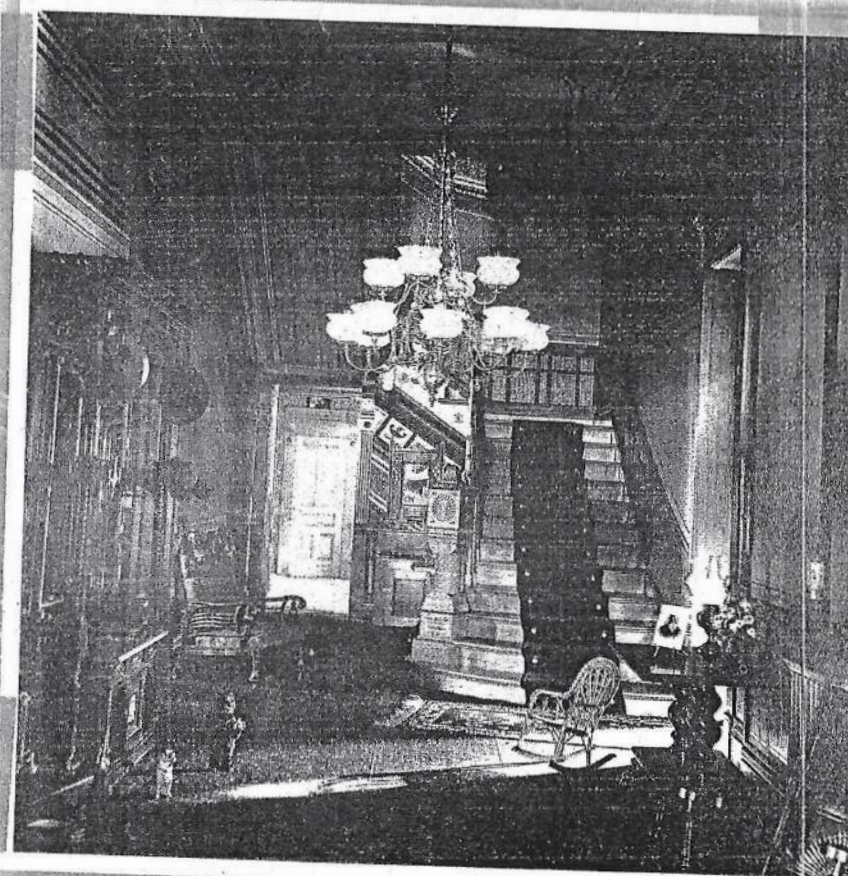
"My father was kind of a saver," Drysdale said of her father, Malcolm, who was T.B.'s son. "I'm glad."

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nears the Nelson Story mansion on Main Street in 1893.



Below: The interior hall of the Nelson Story mansion offered a grand reception in 1897.



THE NELSON STORY FAMILY

From Peter Story's "Book of Origins."

The NS story as written by Malcolm Story. Son of Ira Story, Scotchman, who was born in New Hampshire - the original ~~stessesscass~~ Story&s came from Ipswich, England. The Ira Storys came to Meigs County in Ohio in 1835. Nelson was born April 4, 1838. He attended country school, and was about two years in Ohio University in Athens. In 1858 (Another account is in 1856 at death of his father) at age 20 came to Nebraska City. He taught school before going west. In 1858 he started for ~~the~~ Salt Lake City with a wagon train. "He entered Denver on the first rrain ever to run over the "Smoky Hill" route in 1859, and started as a gold miner. He was soon engaged in freighting out of Denver. Came to Virginia City and in Summit had success in mining, having a number of men working for him on the claim - "fifty men" is one statement.

In 1864 he took \$40,000 in gold dust to New Yor, City. Koonce Brothers Bank gave him \$40,000 in green backs for \$30,000 in gold dust. He sewed the green backs in his coats, visited relatives in Meigs Co, Ohio, and went to the Fort Worth area in Texas. He bought 1,000 cattle at \$10, ~~xxx~~ each. This was in 1866 and he drove the cattle to "Brown's Cabins" in the present Livingston area. He also brought a "score" of wagons loaded with mercantile goods, He set up a store on January 1, 1867 on the NE corner of Main & Tracy in Bozeman. His wife who had remained in Summit, (and a child ?) came to Bozeman.

Nelson set up a "cow camp" at present Livingston, and this was a center at the time John Bozeman was Killed. In the summer of 1867 he supplied the Crow Indian Agency (at Mission Creek) with 110,000 pounds of vegetables. In 1868 he bought the furnishings from Fort C. F. Smith which was being abandoned for \$10,000. He sold \$35,000 worth of the stuff, largely in Helena. The Indians burned the fort at this point, destroying the rest of his goods. Since the government has a responsibility for guarding the fort, he was given a settlement after years of nagging the government. W. S. McKenzie assisted in this purchase and sale.

He had contracts to supply goods to the Mission Creek Agency. (This is where the stories of dishonest dealings entered in) He made \$50,000 in two years in buying, subdividing and selling Bozeman property.

In 1871 he went to California and purchased 1,000 head of horses, which were driven to Montana. Indians ~~xxx~~ stole some, the Mormons demanded some for invasion of their area, but some 500 reached the "Lee Place on Fridley Creek, Park County. Bill Lee was his partner in the horse business for 20 years."

.. In 1878 he started a bank in Bozeman,"and his profits in 1882 were \$25,000." In 1882, "At that time he had 10,000 head of cattle and owned 1,200 acres of land in and around Bozeman. His rentals amounted to \$1,000 a month...He added a large flouring mill to his possessions in 1882."

--The above Malcolm took from the Harris History ..Athens, Ohio --  
Then Malcolm added from his personal recollection

In 1888 he sold his Yellowstone Cattle, some 17,000 head scattered from Billings to Livingston, to W. D. Story, a nephew, for \$250,000 - and rights to grazing on the Crow reservation.

Nelson took the money from the cattle sale, and purchased lots throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan area. (The story has been told around Bozeman, that Nelson ~~xxxxxxx~~ looked over the young city carefully, and felt strongly that the major rapid development would take place in a certain direction, and he purchased blocks in a staggered location along that path. He was right, and the sale of the lots soon provided a fortune. "This investment yielded large rentals for the next 36 years, the rest of his life. He died March 9, 1926." "He built the W. P. Story Building on the corner of Broadway & 6th, 610 S. Broadway. His son, Walter Perry Story, took the building over in 1910, and worked off about \$750,000 in the mortgage. Walter then owned the building until his death in 1957. Uncle Walter then built the Los Angeles Stock Exchange Building. The lot has been given him by his father.

Nelson had a sumptuous home on Adams Street in L. A. where they wintered from about 1890 until 1910. After that they lived most of the time in Bozeman. Mrs. Story died here.

Story "was more prominent financially in California than in Montana. After 1910 his sons, Nelson, Jr., T. Byron, and Walter, operated his properties." His daughter, Rose, Mrs. Gerrit Lansing Hogan ("Doc" Hogan) had been given ample Bozeman business blocks, and the best L. A. block - on Spring Creek. Dr. Hogan was "an intelligent, bona fide doctor from Boston... He attended my mother at my birth. But he never "turned a wheel" after he "married the girl." Hogan lived to be about 95, and died about 1955. Malcolm continues, "My mother told me that if Nelson, St., had "paid Hogan off" and bot him a ticket around the world - they'd likely have been rid of him forever, and clean. Oh, well!"

Malcolm C. Story 12/30/67

See a long story in the Bozeman Courier, Friday, March 26, 1926, which is copied in this book of "Origins."

Had a company of 27 men to drive his cattle from Texas. Founded the Gallatin Valley National Bank.

Erected stone for Comstock, and for Bozeman and Mackenzie.

Participated in hanging of Ives in Nevada City

Cattle drive encountered Indians at Fort Reno. At Fort Phil Kearny Carrington forbade him to go further because of Indian danger. He left Kearny October 22 by night. On Dec. 21, the Indians attacked the fort and ~~xxx~~ killed some 100 men and destroyed the fort.

(Byron says Nelson took \$30,000 to NYC, bankers gave him \$40,000 greenbacks. Nelson sewed \$10,000 in his clothes "and accompanied by Allen and Petty, set out for Fort Worth,"

(Long story in Rocky Mountain Husbandman, April 28, 1938) (This story notes the conflict on number of cattle, from 250 to 3,000. Storys ~~xxxx~~ hold to from 600 to 1000

Russell Harrison helps Nelson secure lease on Indian reservation. Nelson had helped Russell in a scrape here in Bozeman.

THE STORY RECEPTION

A Brilliant Social Event at Story's Magnificent New  
Residence - Upwards of 180 Distinguished Citizens  
Present - A Brilliant Affair and Happy  
Social Gathering.

On Thursday night last, in response to handsomely lithographed invitations sent out by Mrs. and Miss Story, nearly two hundred ladies and gentlemen assembled in the magnificent family mansion which Mr. Nelson Story has recently completed and furnished in our beautiful city sparing neither time nor expense in the accomplishment of so worthy and noble a purpose.

The guests commenced to assemble soon after eight o'clock and there was scarcely any cessation until nearly ten. In many respects it was an old-time friendly and social gathering, devoid alike of ostentation and court etiquette, although the elaborate preparations and brilliantly lighted and gorgeously furnished mansion, together with the handsome and costly costumes of the ladies and gentlemen and the formal and cordial reception accorded them by Mrs. and Miss Story, indicated a social event of unusual "hightone," refinement and brilliancy. But it is not Mr. Story's nature, or that of his family, to put on or assume any extra style or aristocratic airs, especially in their own elaborate and hospitable home, so with a cordial, old-fashioned welcome the large number of invited guests were at once, and without special formality, accorded the freedom of the entire mansion and felt as much at ease as though they were making an informal call upon nearest relatives.

The young folks - and many of the older ones, with young hearts and nimble feet - were soon ushered up the spacious stairways to the large hall, in the third story of the building, where to the music of Smith and Williams band, the cheerful and gaily-attired crowd "tripped the light fantastic toe" to their hearts content. The remainder of the assembly in the meantime, following without restraint of their inclinations, circulated through the spacious halls, parlors and drawing rooms, admiring their elaborate arrangements; costly furniture and finish, listening to the sweet strains of the piano and the voice of a charming solo, or indulging in social chat, as inclination or occasion might suggest.

Supper was served in the spacious basement from eleven to one o'clock, and it was in all respects an elegant and sumptuous repast - neither pains nor expense having been spared in the selection and preparation of the toothsome viands with which the tables were loaded. The tables were also adorned with numerous bouquets of handsome flowers, their beauty and fragrance adding attractiveness and pleasure to the elegant and bountiful repast.

Altogether it was the largest, most brilliant and enjoyable social event that has occurred in the history of Bozeman. It was given principally in honor of Miss Rose Story, who recently returned from attendance at college in Fairbault, Minn., and has just arrived at the age when it is customary and proper for young ladies to enter the circles of refined society.