

Finding Aid to the Theodore G. Nelson Papers

Nelson, Theodore G., 1880-1961

Theodore G. Nelson papers, 1906-1960

.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 631

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

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BIOGRAPHY

Theodore Gilbert Nelson was born January 26, 1880, in Rock Dell Township, Olmstead County, Minnesota to Ole G. and Gulbjor Nelson. When Theodore was fifteen months old his parents moved to a homestead near Hatton, North Dakota. Besides farming, O.G. Nelson served four years in the North Dakota Legislature, and was president of Farmer's Insurance Company. Theodore went to the Traill County School and in the summer of 1897 attended Red Wing Seminary at Red Wing, Minnesota. Dissatisfied with this, he attended the State Normal School at Mayville, North Dakota. After developing tuberculosis, in 1898 he traveled to Norway for a year to regain his health, and while there he taught in an English language school. He returned to Mayville Normal for a year and then started farming in Traill and later Dunn counties. In 1906 he became involved with the American Society of Equity movement and went to Chicago where he served as president of the Department of Grain Grovers and also as editor of

the Equity Farm Journal. In 1908 he was instrumental in getting the Federal Grain Inspection Law passed and in 1910 he attended the joint American Society of Equity and Farmer's Union Convention in Missouri. By 1911 his health failed, so he moved to Eastgate, Texas, then in 1915 returned to Dunn County to farm. In 1916 he opened the Nelson Land Co. at Dunn Center which developed town sites and sold land for the Northern Pacific Railroad.

In 1917 he helped organize the Independent Voter's Association which fought against the Townley led Non-Partisan League, also publishing the Independent, later the Rural Independent, the IVA's periodical. In 1918 he managed S. J. Doyle's campaign for governor and in 1921, led the successful campaign by the Plain Citizens Political Reform Association to recall Gov. Lynn Frazier, William Lemke and John Hagan, the first such recall in the nation. At this time he acquired his nickname, "Two-Bit Nelson". In 1923 he was a delegate to the Northwest Agricultural Price Stabilization Conference and the National Wheat Conference at Chicago. In 1924 again in poor health, he moved to Eugene, Oregon, in 1925 was in a Loma Linda., California Sanatorium, and then went to Beaumont, California, where he raised cherries. In 1926 he went to San Bernardino, California, where he formed the Nelson Realty Co. In 1933 he returned to Eugene, Oregon, where in 1936 he was nominated by the Townsend Club for Senator, and in 1937 established Sunset Retirement Home in Eugene. In 1938 he moved to Salem where he ran Nelson's Poultry Farm, managed a Producer-Consumer Co-operative Market and ran Nelson's Realtors. He started the Oregon Pension Federation to work for national pensions. In 1957 he published Scrapbook Memoirs containing family history as well as history of the Equity Society, the IVA-NPL battle and other events in his life.

He was married June 20, 1901 in Traill County to Julia Rendedal of Mayville, North Dakota. They had four children, Orlinda, Thelmer, Norwald and Gertruda, and then they were divorced. On June 4, 1916, Mr. Nelson was married in Minneapolis, Minnesota to Eva Hultgren of West Union, Minnesota. They had three sons, J. Manning, Harold, and Merlin. Mr. Nelson died June 26, 1961 and is buried at Belcrest Memorial Park, Salem, Oregon.

He was a Master in Salem Grange, a President of Salem Sons of Norway, was a Y.W.C.A. "Four-minute Man" and a Senior Member of the Society of Real Estate Appraisers. He was San Bernardiano's Man of the Year, and a member of St. Mark's Lutheran Church of Salem.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Theodore Nelson Papers consists of correspondence and subject files. The [Correspondence Series](#) from 1907-11 covers primarily his membership in the American Society of Equity and his function as President of the Department of Grain Growers, including letters to and from Charles Pierson, P.E. Cooper, S.D. Kemp, Attorney General Lyndon Smith, D, Mahoney and Thomas Barrett. The later group includes a 1918 letter from Charles Edward Russell, one to B.G. Skulason (1933), a 1944 letter to the Oregon War Ration Board, a number of letters to Leonard Sackett of the Institute (1954-60), and letters to and from M.W. Thatcher and Thomas Croll concerning the Grain Terminal Association (1955). Also, there is correspondence with the Cooperative Wholesale Society of London (1950).

In the [Subject Files Series](#) is material from the American Society of Equity including proceedings of the 1907 Convention in Indiana, the 1907 A.S. of E. Directory, material from the Department of Grain Growers including a 1909 Fargo Convention, and Equity Cooperative Elevators (1908-10), a set of records on correspondence (1907), proceedings of a 1908 Wisconsin Convention, and miscellaneous items including the A.S. of E. by-laws and song, the Equity Farm Journal, an open letter from J.A. Everitt (1910) and a 1908 list from the Chicago Exchange. There is material from the Citizen's Clean Court Committee (1922) opposing Andrew Miller as judge, items from the co-operative market system in

Salem, Oregon, and items about rationing during World War II, from Nelson's chicken farm. Of interest is the record of the 1908 Federal Grain Inspection Hearings, and material from the 1918-1922 politics in North Dakota including pamphlets and clippings, there are proceedings of the 1923 Wheat Conference including an address by Samuel Gompers, and the Constitution of the Winter Wheat Growers (1909). There's a message to the 1909 Legislature by Gov. John Burke, and a 1915 report to the N.D. Legislature on Terminal Elevators, and material on the Salem Retirement Center.

SEPARATIONS RECORD

The following items have been removed from the Theodore Nelson Papers and sent to the section indicated.

Books (Library book collection, consult main catalog for call number and location)

Scrapbook Memoirs, Theodore Nelson, 1957

Broadsides (Institute broadside collection)

Lynn Frazier poster, *Dunn County Farmer's Journal*, June 16, 1921

Farmer's Equity Journal-, advertising poster

Newspapers (Institute newspaper collection)

Rural Independent January, 1923-July, 1924 (*Independent*)

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

1/1 Biographical Information and Inventory

Correspondence Series

1/2 1907-11

1/3 1918-60

Subject Files Series

American Society of Equity

1/4 Convention, 1907

1/5 Directory, 1907

1/6 Grain Growers Dept., Equity Cooperative Exchange, 1908-10

1/7 Miscellaneous Material

1/8 Records and Correspondence, 1907

1/9 Wisconsin Convention, 1908

1/10 Citizens Clean Court Committee, 1922

1/11 Cooperative Markets; War rationing and the chicken farm, 1938-45

1/12 Federal Grain Inspection Hearings, 1908

1/13 Independent Voter's Association - clippings

1/14 Legislature - message from Gov. Burke, 1909; terminal elevators, 1915

1/15 National Wheat Conference, 1923

1/16 Political pamphlets, 1918-21

1/17 Salem Retirement Center and other clippings

1/18 Winter Wheat Grower's, Constitution, 1909

