

Hans Nielsen, 1898-1951

Hans Nielsen, formerly colony manager at Thule, northwest Greenland, was killed in a traffic accident in Copenhagen on 4 September 1951.

Hans Rudolf Johannes Emil Nielsen was born in the village of Qaersut, Umanak district, west Greenland, on 19 March 1898. When he had completed his education in Denmark, his relative and close friend, Dr. Knud Rasmussen, put him in charge of the trading post at Thule, where he served for more than twenty years.

Hans Nielsen's work in Thule has been of immeasurable importance to the Eskimo population of the district. His unflinching sense of justice and fairness gave him undisputed authority both among white men and among natives. He was thereby able to keep up the morale of the Eskimo by preserving the most valuable of the old tribal customs and to enlist their full cooperation in the enforcement of the game laws, a matter of vital importance after the introduction of firearms. As long as Hans Nielsen was in Thule, the natives were spared most of the difficulties that ordinarily beset primitive people on their first contact with Western civilization.

Many Danish, American, and British expeditions, which visited Thule between the two World Wars, have enjoyed the boundless hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Nielsen. Hans Nielsen was a practical man with a thorough knowledge of his district, and his advice has saved many an inexperienced traveller from difficulties, if not from disaster.

In 1941 Hans Nielsen left Thule to accept a position as colony manager in Egedesminde, and later moved to Godhavn. A few months before his death he had retired because of failing health and had planned to settle in Denmark.

Hans Nielsen is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter, and by his mother, who after the death of her first husband married Dr. Alfred Bertelsen, Medical Counsellor to the Greenland Administration.

J. C. TROELSEN