

EDGAR SAMUEL PAXSON

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1852—1919

"Montana's Unassuming Artist"

ED PAXSON (1852-1919) was a survivor, hardened hawking frontier adventures, debilitating wartime injuries, and an endless occupation with his contemporary, Charles Russell, to become one of the state's most respected artists. His depictions of Montana's historical events comprise an irreplaceable graphic record.

BORN IN NEW YORK in 1852, Edgar Samuel Paxson arrived in Bozwell, Montana in 1877. In order to make a living, Paxson pursued a number of occupations, but in so doing always carried with him a sketch pad and pencil. With these he captured the details of the frontier life he so carefully observed.

ENTIRELY SELF-TAUGHT, Paxson began his professional art career as a painter of signs and scenic backdrops for theatrical performances. By the early 1880s, Paxson, who had moved to Butte with his family, withdrew from the hectic world of the stage to concentrate on a career in western art. Initially, he produced Indian portraits, three of which hung in the Montana pavilion at the Chicago World's Fair (1893).

DURING THE 1890s, Ed worked intermittently on his masterpiece, the 9-by-6-foot epic, *Captain's Last Stand*. He spent months interviewing both Union and Native American participants, he made numerous trips to the battlefield, and he corresponded endlessly with military specialists. Audiences will consider this Paxson documentary painting the most accurate depiction of the Little Big Horn Battle. Other well-known Paxson history paintings include six documentary panels commissioned by the state in 1912 to adorn the walls of the House of Representatives annex¹, and eight similar panels commissioned for the Missoula County Courthouse in 1914.

LIKE HIS CONTEMPORARY Charles Russell, Paxson treasured the passing of the Old West and attempted to record the heroic and the subtle aspects of pioneer life. Upon his death in 1919, Russell remarked:

"I am a pioneer too, but Paxson has done some things that I can not do. He was a pioneer and a pioneer painter. Paxson has gone, but his pictures will not allow us to forget him."

¹To view these murals, walk to the west end of this corridor and take the elevator or stairs to the third floor. Exit to the left and follow the "Russell Painting" arrow to the annexes of the House of Representatives.)

