



Edgar S. Paxson (1852-1919)

In his early years was a scout, guide and telegraph line walker in the west. His many encounters with Indians gave him many of the images and themes for his later paintings, several of which hang in the Missoula county Courthouse.

- **1852-Birth.** April 25, 1852 in East Hamburg, New York.
- **1874-Marriage.** Edgar married Laura Johnson in 1874.
- **1919-Death.** Edgar died on November 9, 1919.
- **Paxson** began work by painting signs and carriages for his father's carriage-building business.
- **1875.** Set out for the West empowered by a growing sense of the importance of the events transpiring throughout the American West, the injustices suffered by the Sioux in the Black Hills, and the ensuing battle on the Little Bighorn River in southeastern Montana.
- **Work.** Stagecoach guide, hunter for cattle ranchers to provide fresh venison for cowboys, scout, messenger, artist.
- **1877.** Arrived in Montana Territory where he experienced the trauma of the Bannock War, came to know long anxiety-filled nights while camped in Indian country, and lived through many face-to-face encounters with hostile Indians. He also experienced the camaraderie of high country hunting expeditions and shared campfires with both Indian and white companions.
- **1878.** Lived in Deer Lodge MT where he painted signs and scenery for theatrical backdrops.
- **1881.** Moved to Butte MT where he painted scenery and established his first studio. He began to produce easel paintings of historical subject and portraits of Indians.
- **"Pistol Grip".** Edgar wrote articles about trapshooting and hunting for a sportsman's journal under his pen name "Pistol Grip."
- **1898.** Mustered into the Army and sent to the Philippines for active service during the Spanish-American War.
- **1906.** Moved from Butte to Missoula where he opened a studio in his home. The Paxsons were very involved in the social society.
- **Paxson was believed to be entirely self-taught in his art.** His works were the most truthful to the appearance of the land and the people in the northern Rockies where he spent most of his life. They captured the essence of the fast-disappearing Old West of which he personally experienced. Paxson was not merely an artist-illustrator but a documentary picture maker – an artist-historian. It is known that he studied other artists' work and may have taken an art class in Chicago in the early 1900's.
- **Some artwork examples:**
 - **1899 Custer's Last Stand.** Twenty years of research, eight years of painting, and over 200 figures went into this 6' x 9' work during which he established friendships with both Indians and soldiers who had fought at the Little Bighorn. Paxson toured the site one year after the battle with Major Reno, who had helped bury the dead.
 - **1904.** Exhibited paintings at the Louisiana purchase Exposition in St Louis Missouri
 - **1905.** Exhibited paintings at the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland Oregon
 - **1911.** Commissioned to paint six scenes of Montana history for the Senate chambers at the Montana Capitol in Helena.
 - **1912.** Commissioned to paint eight paintings for the Missoula County Courthouse.
- **Friends.** Charles Russell, Buffalo Bill Cody, Captain Jack Crawford, Granville Stuart.