

# Story of Seal of State of Much Human Interest

Did anyone ever tell you the history of the great seal of the state of Oregon?

Perhaps not. It is not written in any book, though it should be, and there are but a few men within the great state of which it is the insignia who know the story.

The writer heard it the other day from the lips of one who knows—of the four or five pioneers who designed the seal; heard how it came about that within its circumference there is depicted a broad sweep of water, a bold headland, a lordly elk and various implements of agriculture, not to forget a real "prairie schooner" such as sheltered the persons and the few—the very few, worldly possessions of those staunch and hardy adventurers who in the brave days of the early '50's came to tear the veil of mystery from the smiling face of an unknown land.

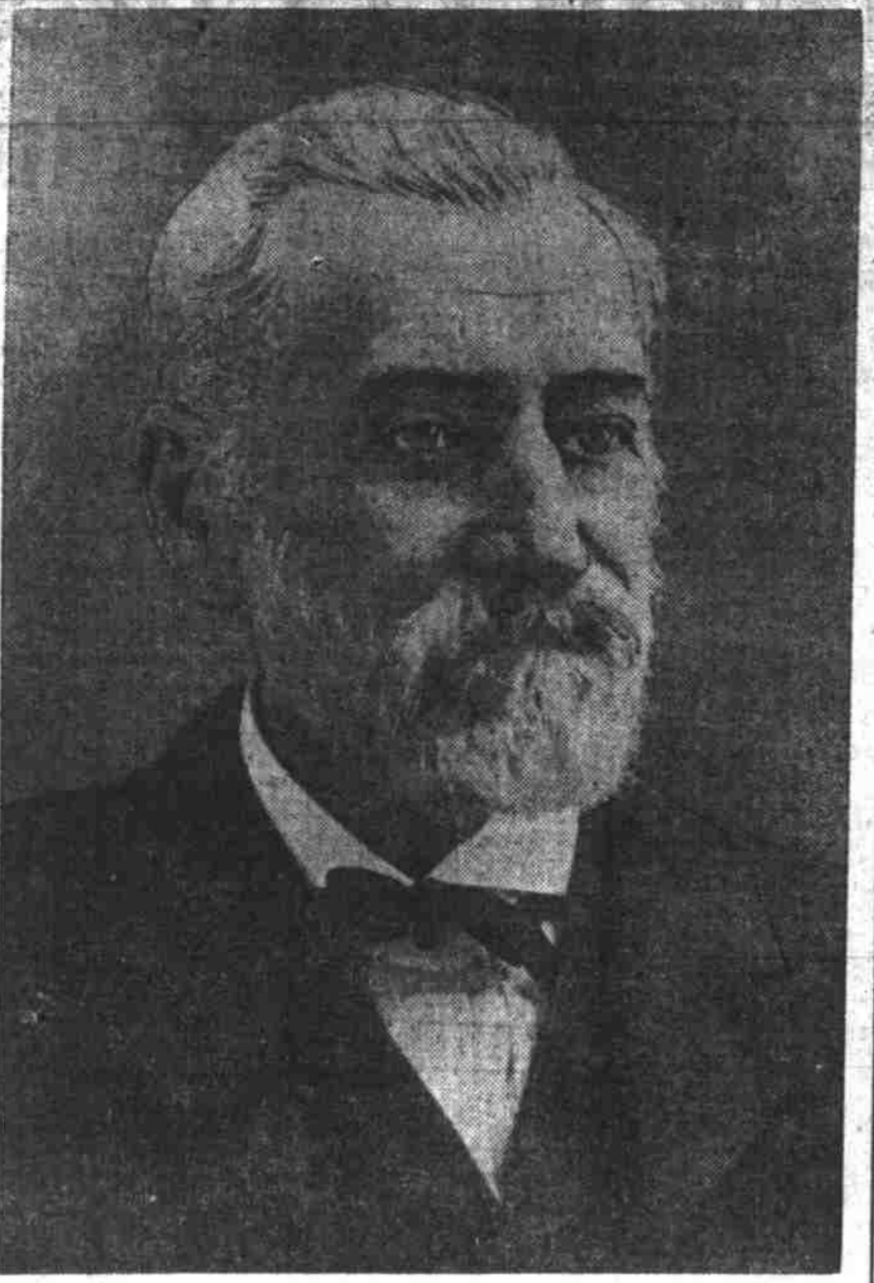
And now attend, all ye lovers of the out-of-doors, ye mighty hunters of big game—all ye every one of you "who in the love of nature hold communion with her visible forms," foxes who told the tale, which is history at first hand, is the man who placed the antlered elk upon the seal and by so doing gave a permanent prominent and official position to a noble animal and one that is essentially typical of the days when Oregon was but a state in the making.

**Packwood, the Pioneer.**  
"Way back in 1857, more than half a century ago, the constitutional convention met to draw up the new state's organic law. One of the members of that convention was William H. Packwood Sr., then a resident of Curry county. It was William H. Packwood Sr., soldier, miner, Indian fighter, hunter, pathfinder and publicist that stood sponsor for the lordly elk that graces the great seal of the state. The incident is best told in Mr. Packwood's own language:

"I was member of the constitutional convention from Curry county. A committee to design a seal was appointed and was composed as I remember of L. H. Grover and J. C. Shields of Marion county, Mr. Burch of Polk county, and myself of Curry county. There may have been five members on the committee, but I only remember four as having met in the committee-room. Mr. Grover was chairman.

"After talking the matter over for a time we concluded it would be proper and fitting for the design of the seal to show that Oregon extends to and is bounded on the west by the waters of the Pacific ocean. We also decided that by showing vessels departing and at anchor we could indicate the commanding position of the state as regards ocean commerce. Cape Blanco was, I think, at that time the most westerly point of land to be depicted on the seal, which shows it washed by the waters of the Pacific ocean and dominating the shipping in the fairway. Cape Blanco and the ships were, I think, Mr. Grover's idea. He drew a sketch while the balance of us looked on and suggested one thing and another to be placed on the seal.

**How Wagon was Chosen.**  
"The wagon, I believe, was inserted at the suggestion of Mr. Burch. It seems to be one that has fulfilled its purpose, having finished its long westward journey and come to rest where land and ocean meet.



William H. Packwood Sr., Pioneer and One of the Designers of the State Seal.

go there by wagon. "Dr. McLoughlin was not prepared to answer this question offhand, but after pondering over it for a few minutes he replied that he thought men who had taken wagons over the Cascades, through Taylor's pass, could drive to the islands all right.

"This story simply illustrates the confidence reposed in Dr. McLoughlin by the emigrants and the high opinion held by the doctor in the prowess of the emigrants. This wagon on the seal may have been one of this island train, but the driver, being unable to see a place to land on the other side, cached it at Cape Blanco, there to become a pictorial monument to the men and days that are, alas, now past and gone. It is such a wagon as was used in those days by emigrants crossing the plains—a boat for crossing rivers, or a fort wherein a defense might be made from the attacks of hostile Indians.

mind at the time. The incident occurred at Elk river in 1852 or the early spring of 1853. At the time it was simply looked upon as an ordinary happening of our daily frontier life. Viewing it now, after the lapse of more than 50 years, it seems worth relating, the more so because it suggested the design of the elk on our state seal.

"At the time I was a member of company C, First regiment, United States dragoons, then stationed at Fort Orford. I was quartermaster-sergeant of the post and had in charge a number of cavalry horses and also a number of mules which were used for packing. When not on scouting duty against the Indians we would send a sergeant in charge of a detail of men out as a horse guard, their duty being to allow the horses and mules to graze and thus save the barley which cost us 9 cents a pound by the schooner load from San Francisco.

**Elk Were Hunted.**  
"Sergeant George H. Abbott, in charge of a detail of eight or ten troopers, was camped on the north side of Elk river, the land being owned by Indians being daily run out on Cape Blanco to graze. At that time elk were numerous in the vicinity and they became accustomed to seeing men that they would frequently mix with the horses and mules and would sometimes come in at night to where our animals were picketed and graze about as if they were accustomed to that sort of thing.

"One morning a friendman who belonged to our company, went up to see if the horses were all right and found a lot of elk had cut in a number of places. He ran back to camp and reported what he had seen. Sergeant Abbott had the only gun in camp and he and I went to the United States mounted rifle that shot a paper cartridge we made ourselves, using a one half ounce ball. When our duty was over we loaded the rifle from a powder-horn, using a patch on the ball to make it fit the bore of the gun. To load and fire three shots a minute was considered a good record.

"Our cavalry weapons were muskets, carried in one-horned boxes and were buckshot—fair for Indians. They carried a heavy charge of powder and held up a good distance. I remember Abbott took a flock of geese on the beach, killing one. I stepped the distance, making it 390 yards.

"Sergeant Abbott took the lead from the camp and was soon within 70 or 80 yards of the elk. Our favorite place—carrying a one-horned box—was in the neck. If you hit an elk almost anywhere else you are pretty sure to have it run.

"Abbott picked out a fine, large bull elk and shot it in the neck. The elk dropped in its tracks and never made a sound. Abbott then ran up without reloading his gun, which he leaned against a tree. He ran to the elk and seized it by one horn in order to pull its head back so he could cut its throat.

"He had no more than got the elk's head straightened back when the big fellow jumped up and began a regular war dance, pawing the air with his feet and running around in a circle. Abbott had to do some pretty lively work to get out of the flying, knife-like hoofs.

"Round and round they went. Abbott hanging to the elk's horn like a cat to a dead darkey, he being afraid to let go, lest the bull charge him and catch him before he could reach cover.



Family of a Pioneer. The Photograph From Which This Picture of William H. Packwood Sr., and His Family is Reproduced, Was Taken Six Years Ago, and Has Since Been Donated to the Oregon Historical Society.

had crossed the elk's neck and he and the animal furnished a lively bit of entertainment because the bullet had gone a trifle too high.

"But to come back to the seal. I was thinking of this incident while the sketch of the seal was being made, but was uncertain how the suggestion I wanted to make would be received, as if I certainly was a novel one, and I never over to where Mr. Grover was at work on the sketch and picked out a place for an elk to stand—a place where he could see the vessels sailing up and down and observe all that was new to him in this new land of ours. I have seen an elk, in advance of the herd, come out into a glade or clearing and take a stand on some point to see if the land was clear for the herd.

"I told the committee what a noble animal the elk is; how numerous they were about Cape Blanco; and that they were taking note, after the manner of their kind, of the changes being wrought by the hand of man in this new country or ours. I had asked for nothing and I suppose the committee never gave the matter a second thought, but placed the elk on the seal at the place indicated by me. There he stands today, and there he will stand, I hope, for all time.

**East on Seal.**  
"The elk was the last figure to be placed on the seal, all of the others having been sketched in at the time I made my suggestion. Other countries have animals on their seals—horns, bears, etc., etc., and I thought it wholly proper to have one on our seal, particularly so as the animal selected was so typical of the time and place. The only criticism of the matter that has ever been called to my attention occurs somewhere in the code, compiled by Judge Deady and Lafayette Lane. I presume the judge was hungry for elk meat at the time and that made him critical.

"And that is the story of the making of the seal of the state of Oregon. Most readers will agree that it is well worth knowing and well worth recording as an important happening in the state's early history.

"From my recollection of the members of the constitutional convention, but few remain. Mr. Packwood puts it: "From my recollection of the members of the convention they formed a notable group of men. From the group I have had cabinet officers, governors, senators, members of congress and judges. So far as I have been able to track of them they were all useful and honorable men up to the hour when they answered the last call. Very few are left."

"To those who govern their acts according to the patriotic dictates of their hearts Mr. Packwood's closing remark will strongly appeal.

"I feel thankful that we have the seal left from the work done in that constitutional convention. It is about all that is left of the constitution as

we made it, and what little is left may soon be 'referendum' out of existence by our new crop of law-makers. Conditions may, and do change, but I do not believe there will ever be assembled together a more conscientious body of men—men who worked and voted for what they believed to be the best interests of the state—than the members of that convention."

**Came Here in 1850.**  
"Mr. Packwood came to Oregon in 1850, and now, at the ripe age of 75 years, he can look back on a record of public and private achievement second to none. Of him it may truthfully be said that he

"Belonged to the legion that never were listed. They cried no banner nor crest; But split in a thousand detachments, Were breaking the ground for the rest."

"In 1850, Mr. Packwood was then engaged in the timber trade, and he was engaged in the timber trade on the beach and packing goods until the Indian war of 1855-6, when he shipped near Coos Bay January 3, 1855. The company made its way to Port Orford, cutting what was called the 'Seven Devils' trail through the timber, reaching their destination in May. Packwood was then transferred to the First Dragoons and served as quartermaster-sergeant. He received his discharge in 1858 and engaged in the timber trade on the beach and packing goods until the Indian war of 1855-6, when he shipped near Coos Bay January 3, 1855. The company made its way to Port Orford, cutting what was called the 'Seven Devils' trail through the timber, reaching their destination in May. Packwood was then transferred to the First Dragoons and served as quartermaster-sergeant. 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