



The Story of the Great Seal of the State of Idaho

Idaho became a state on July 3, 1890 and that same summer a talented young woman came to the state capital at Boise to visit relatives. Emma Sarah Etine Edwards (later she married mining man James G. Green) was the daughter of John C. Edwards, a former governor of Missouri (1844-48) who had emigrated to Stockton, California where he acquired large land holdings.

Emma was exceptionally well educated for a woman of the time and she had dropped into Boise on her way home from a year spent at art school in New York. What was to be a short visit turned into a lifelong stay,



Boise's Pierce Park



for she fell in love with the city and its people and opened art classes

where the young people of the community learned to paint.

Shortly after her classes started, Emma Edwards was invited to enter a design for the Great Seal of the State of Idaho. Acting on Concurrent Resolution No. 1, adopted by the first state legislature, a committee was appointed with instructions to offer a prize of one hundred dollars for the best design submitted.

Artists from all over the country entered the competition, but the unanimous winner was young Emma

Edwards, who became the first and only woman to design the great seal of a state. She was handed the honorarium by

Governor Norman B. Willey on March 5,

1891. Miss Edward's account of how she

came to select the successful design for the seal included this comment, "I said to myself that the seal must represent the principal things of the state, must suggest our hopes

for the future, and must depict not only the material side of our growth, but also the ethical."



Governor Norman B. Willey

In 1957, the Idaho legislature authorized the updating and improvement of the Great Seal in order to more clearly define Idaho's main industries: mining, agriculture, and forestry, as well as to highlight the state's natural beauty. Paul B. Evans and the Caxton Printers, Ltd. were commissioned



Emma Edwards created the Great Seal painting at left, which was shown in the Idaho Building at the Chicago 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (top and above).

to revise the seal. The official Great Seal of the State of Idaho can be seen in the office of the Secretary of State.

The collection of the Idaho State Historical Museum contains over 250,000 artifacts, including a painting of the Great Seal by Emma Edwards Green. The Museum holds hundreds of historical paintings, from portraits of Idaho governors to an 1863 depiction of Boise, as well as contemporary works by well-known Idaho artists.



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Symbolism in Idaho's State Seal

Excerpted from comments by Emma Edwards Green, designer of the seal



“The question of Woman Suffrage was being agitated somewhat, and as leading men and politicians agreed that Idaho would eventually give women the right to vote, and as mining was the

chief industry, and the mining man the largest financial factor of the state at that time, I made the figure of the man the most prominent in the design, while that of the woman, signifying justice, as noted by the scales, liberty, as denoted by the liberty cap on the end of the spear, and equality with man as denoted by her position at his side, also signifies freedom.”

Importance of game

“Idaho has a game law, which protects the elk and moose. The elk’s head, therefore, rises above the shield.”

Mining symbols

“The pick and shovel held by the miner, and the ledge of rock beside which he stands, as well as the pieces of ore scattered about his feet, all indicate the chief occupation of the State.

The stamp mill in the distance, which you can see by using a magnifying glass, is also typical of the mining interest of Idaho.”



Shield and tree

“The shield between the man and the woman is emblematic of the protection they unite in giving the state. The large fir or pine tree in the foreground in the shield refers to Idaho’s immense timber interests.”

State flower

“The state flower, the wild Syringa or Mock Orange, grows at the woman’s feet, while the ripened wheat grows as high as her shoulder.”

Agriculture symbols

“The husbandman plowing on the left side of the shield, together with the sheaf of grain beneath the shield, are emblematic of Idaho’s agricultural resources, while the cornucopias, or horns of plenty, refer to the horticultural.”

Star and river

“The star signifies a new light in the galaxy of states... The river depicted in the shield is our mighty Snake or Shoshone River, a stream of great majesty.”

“In regard to the coloring of the emblems used in the making of the Great Seal of the State of Idaho, my principal desire was to use such colors as would typify pure Americanism and the history of the State. As Idaho was a virgin state, I robed my goddess in white and made the liberty cap on the end of the spear the same color. In representing the miner, I gave him the

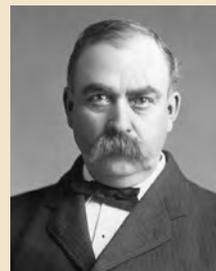


George Shoup

garb of the period suggested by such mining authorities as former United States Senator George L. Shoup, of Idaho, former Governor Norman B. Willey of Idaho, former Governor James H. Hawley, of Idaho, and other mining men

and early residents of the state

who knew intimately the usual garb of the miner. Almost unanimously they said, ‘Do not put the miner in a red shirt.’ ‘Make the shirt a grayish brown,’ said Captain J.J. Wells, chairman of the Seal Committee.



James H. Hawley

The ‘Light of the Mountains’ is typified by the rosy glow which precedes the sunrise.”