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Bair Museum Features Paxson Watercolors

The Charles M. Bair Family Museum is currently featuring a special exhibit, "Edgar Samuel Paxson - Illustrations from The Life of L.B. Stateler, A Story of Life on the Frontier." The work is on loan from Virginia Lee Speck and runs from May 1 to July 15, 2012.

Unlike other Western artists of his day including Charlie Russell and Frederic Remington, Edgar S. Paxson was largely unknown, yet he was a prolific artist who lived in Montana from 1877 and personally knew many of the participants of the era's major events.

Born in 1852 to a Quaker family in upstate New York, Paxson spent most of his childhood in the woodlands, learning to hunt and trap game with the help of his uncles. Inspired by his meetings with Kit Carson and Captain Jack Crawford (the "Poet Scout") in New York, he became restless to explore the frontier, and by age 20 was travelling across America, eventually making a home in Deer Lodge, Montana with his wife Laura.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn took place the very year Paxson was making his way west to Montana. The violence and drama of the Battle of Little Bighorn, and the vibrant character of George Armstrong Custer was a passionate reminder for him and inspired him to capture the story of the brutality and tragedy of the Old West on canvas.

He started researching the battle shortly after arriving in Montana, interviewing Indians who had participated in it and soldiers who had first arrived on the scene. From their interviews he made detailed journals about the equipment, attire, and physical location of each man on the battlefield creating individual figure studies of each man on the battlefield. It took Paxson six years to complete his most famous painting "Custer's Last Stand" which now hangs in the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, in Cody, Wyoming.

In 1912, Paxson was commissioned to paint eight murals in the Missoula county courthouse where they still stand in the entrance hall. He also created six scenes depicting significant events in early Montana History for the House of Representatives Lobby in the Montana State Capitol. Paxson was often praised for his attention to historic detail, as opposed to a romantic or artistic view of the west. His paintings depict scenes largely faithful to the historic record.

Paxson was a prolific painter and did some of his most important work in the beginning of the 20th century. It was during this time that he accepted several commissions to illustrate books, and the eight original watercolors in this exhibit were completed in 1907 for the *Life of L.B. Stateler, A Story of Life on the Frontier: Containing Incidents, Anecdotes, and Sketches of Methodist History in the West and the Northwest* by Edwin James Staley.

The Bair Family Museum will be open 10am to 5pm, Saturdays and Sundays through the month of May. The Museum complex will open 7 days a week, 10am to 5pm beginning Friday May 24 through Labor Day.

The new Bair Art Museum which opened in 2011 sits adjacent to the original Bair Family home and barn in Martinsdale, Montana. The state-of-the art 7,300 square foot museum houses the Bair's collection of valuable western artworks, priceless Indian artifacts, and an eclectic collection of American and European paintings.

When to go: The Bair Museum is now open 10am to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday through May. Beginning May 24th, the Museum will be open through Labor Day, 7 days a week.

Costs: The ticket price includes the Museum entrance and a Home Tour. \$5 for adult, \$3 for seniors, \$2 students. The last tour is at 4pm.

Location: Bair Family Museum is located at 2751 Montana Hwy 294 in Martinsdale, Montana between White Sulphur Springs and Harlowton.

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