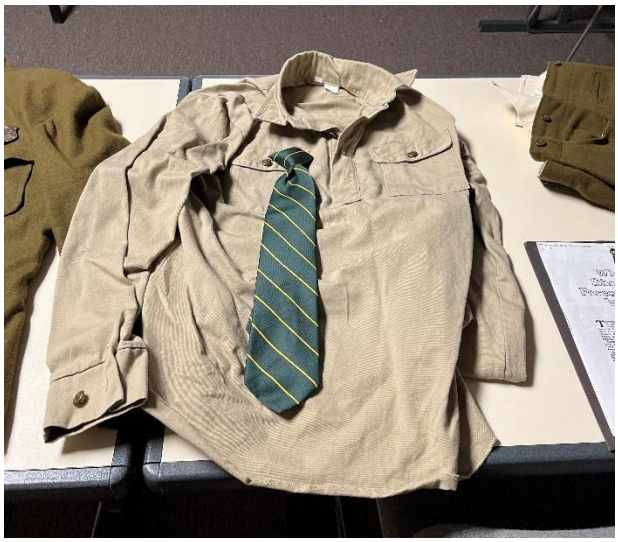
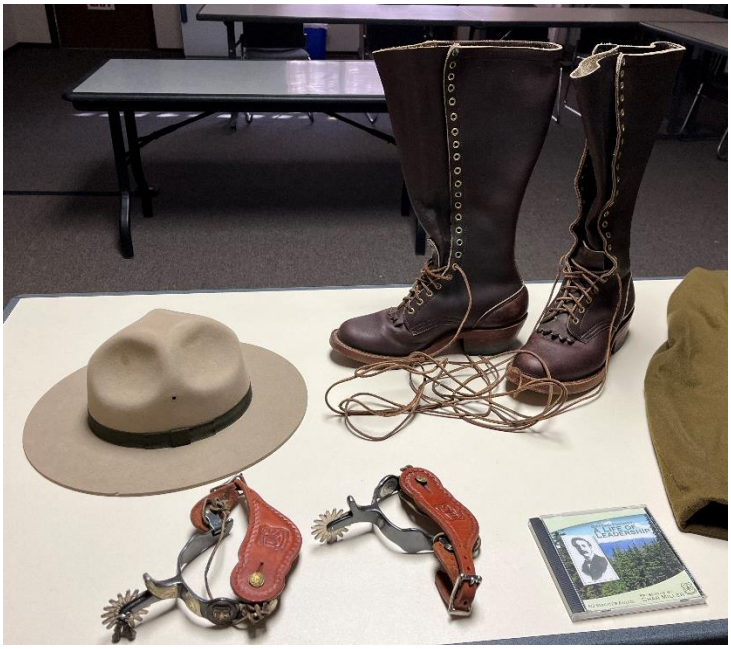
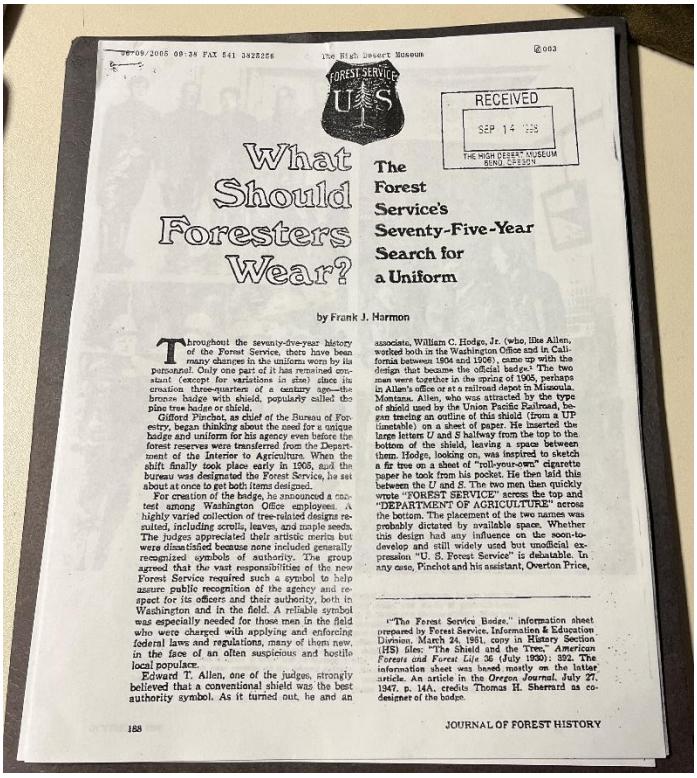
Reproduction Eldorado National Forest District Ranger uniform (June 7, 2024)







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What Should Foresters Wear?

The Forest Service's Seventy-Five-Year Search for a Uniform

by Frank J. Harmon

Throughout the seventy-five-year history of the Forest Service, there have been many changes in the uniform worn by its personnel. Only one part of it has remained constant (except for variations in size) since its creation three-quarters of a century ago—the bronze badge with shield, popularly called the pine tree badge or shield.

Gifford Pinchot, as chief of the Bureau of Forestry, began thinking about the need for a unique badge and uniform for his agency even before the forest reserves were transferred from the Department of the Interior to Agriculture. When the shift finally took place early in 1905, and the bureau was designated the Forest Service, he set about at once to get both items designed.

For creation of the badge, he announced a contest among Washington Office employees. A highly varied collection of tree-related designs resulted, including scrolls, leaves, and maple seeds. The judges appreciated their artistic merits but were dissatisfied because none included generally recognized symbols of authority. The group agreed that the vast responsibilities of the new Forest Service required such a symbol to help assure public recognition of the agency and respect for its officers and their authority, both in Washington and in the field. A reliable symbol was especially needed for those men in the field who were charged with applying and enforcing federal laws and regulations, many of them new, in the face of an often suspicious and hostile local populace.

Edward T. Allen, one of the judges, strongly believed that a conventional shield was the best authority symbol. As it turned out, he and an associate, William C. Hodge, Jr. (who, like Allen, worked both in the Washington Office and in California between 1904 and 1906), came up with the design that became the official badge.[1] The two men were together in the spring of 1905, perhaps in Allen's office or at a railroad depot in Missoula, Montana. Allen, who was attracted by the type of shield used by the Union Pacific Railroad, began tracing an outline of this shield (from a UP timetable) on a sheet of paper. He inserted the large letters U and S halfway from the top to the bottom of the shield, leaving a space between them. Hodge, looking on, was inspired to sketch a fir tree on a sheet of "roll-your-own" cigarette paper he took from his pocket. He then laid this between the U and S. The two men then quickly wrote "FOREST SERVICE" across the top and "DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE" across the bottom. The placement of the two names was probably dictated by available space. Whether this design had any influence on the soon-to-develop and still widely used but unofficial expression "U. S. Forest Service" is debatable. In any case, Pinchot and his assistant, Overton Price,

[1] "The Forest Service Badge," information sheet prepared by Forest Service, Information & Education Division, March 24, 1961, copy in History Section (HS) files; "The Shield and the Tree," *American Forests and Forest Life* 36 (July 1930): 392. The information sheet was based mostly on the latter article. An article in the *Oregon Journal*, July 27, 1947, p. 14A, credits Thomas H. Sherrard as co-designer of the badge.

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