Larry Hightower of Ellensburg went on a "goodwill" tour around the United States, Canada, and Mexico from 1946 to 1950 to promote the State of Washington. His trip was unusual because he pushed a wheelbarrow during most of his travels. Throughout the trip, he sent correspondence, pamphlets, and artifacts to personal friend Earl Coe, Washington’s Secretary of State. This collection of ephemera and artifacts was later donated to the Washington State Library and several photographs of Hightower and his wheelbarrow can be found in the Digital Archives.

A veteran of World War I, Hightower had been a cowpuncher in Ellensburg until about the summer of 1946. It was then that he decided to make a "goodwill" tour for Washington State. Initially planning to encircle the globe, Hightower left Ellensburg on July 4, 1946 with 150 cheering onlookers. He was pushing a specially-fitted wheelbarrow with headlights, generators, radio and antennae, and rear-view mirror. Hightower was followed by the press and was a guest speaker at many schools, radio and television shows, and local civic groups. Ultimately traveling 20,204 miles, he returned to Ellensburg on November 17, 1950, his 50th birthday. Hightower went through 20 pairs of shoes, 21 pairs of jeans, 11 jackets, and four pairs of rubber wheelbarrow handle grips.

Hightower’s connection to the Secretary of State’s Office began in 1946 when Secretary of State Belle Reeves gave him a pat on the back and sent him off with a small state flag which he carried throughout his travels. His only income was his Federal disability check, but when this failed to arrive, Secretary of State Earl Coe personally loaned Hightower $25 as he passed through Olympia in 1948.

“Men have accomplished many things, but no one picked a wheelbarrow for something like this,” Hightower said. “I picked the most primitive type of travel - a one-wheeled vehicle.”