State Liquor Board members are indicted

BY LOU CORSALETTI, DEE NORTON and JOHN WILSON

The three members of the State Liquor Control Board and a former chairman of the board were charged today with grand larceny and fraudulent appropriation of alcoholic beverages.

The charges are contained in a county grand-jury indictment made public yesterday.

The board members are Jack Hood, chairman; Leroy Hittle, and Don Elderidge. The former board member is Garland Sponburgh.

A third charge names only Hittle, Hood and Elderidge. It accuses them of using their positions to obtain special privileges— obtaining quantities of alcoholic beverages "without cost to themselves."

The indictments were made public after Presiding Superior Court Judge James Maffett issued an order quashing the arrest warrants of Hood, Hittle and Elderidge and directing that summons be issued to them instead. This means the board members will not have to submit themselves to jail.

It was learned later in the day that Lt. Dick Chalmers and Richard Robinson, county police officers assigned to serve the warrants, as the Liquor Board members, were called back to Seattle by radio before they reached Olympia.

A county officer said he received word that the quash order had been issued before the secret indictment had been made public and warrants served.

Sponburgh is believed to be in Chicago. He and the three present board members will testified before the grand jury.

Grand larceny is punishable by up to 15 years in prison. The indictment accuses the four of grand larceny involving liquor "with intent to deprive and defraud," the Liquor Board and state.

The maximum penalty for fraudulently appropriating the liquor in prison and a $5,000 fine.

Illegal use of special privilege to obtain special privilege is a gross misdemeanor. It carries a maximum of one year in jail term.

The first count of the indictment states the four defendants "did then and there, secret, withhold and appropriate the same liquor," to their use and to the use of persons other than the true owner of the liquor, and that they的日子里 to the grand jury this year.

Two recent articles by The Times shed light on some of the practices which were being carried out.

The first article told how the board furnished free liquor to Gov. Dan Evans. The article said the liquor for official functions at the mansion.

Evans said furnishing free liquor to the press was a common practice for years, was ordered stopped when he first took office in 1965. Evans said he began accepting the free liquor after he found how expensive it was to entertain guests.

Officials said the free liquor was samples supplied to the board by distilleries seeking board approval to stock the submitted brands in state liquor stores.

After the story was published Hood said no more free liquor would go to the mansion.

The second article told how more than 40,000 bottles of free liquor flowed out of the Seattle warehouse during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1970.

REPORTERS also discovered it had been a practice for board members to take any type of liquor out of stock and write it off as a sample.

Hood, pressed by reporters as to what the board had done with its share of the free liquor answered angrily:

"It isn't anybody's business."

More than 3,000 bottles were listed as going directly to the board while 36,000 other free bottles went to 74 men who represent the distilleries that do business with the state.

Hood said he didn't know what happened to the 36,000 bottles other than "to assume they consumed them."

The liquor representative told State Auditor Robert Graham that the free liquor was used for "routine business purposes."

Earlier this year Graham investigated an audit which showed that a 180,000 bottle of free liquor was delivered to state liquor stores.

Several key legislators have said they'd investigate the issue further to the next Legislature.

ALL THREE present members of the board were appointed by Evans.

Hood was named to the board in 1968, filling the vacancy caused by the death of Albert C. Thompson, Jr.

Hood had been serving as state banking supervisor, a post to which he was named by Gov. Dan Evans.

Prior to becoming banking supervisor in 1965, Hood served four two-year terms in the House of Representatives as a Republican from Whatcom County.

Previously Hood was a banker in Ferndale, Whatcom County.

ELDRIDGE was named to the board in January, 1975, replacing Garland Sponburgh.

Eldridge was speaker of the House of Representatives at the time.

A legislator 18 years, Eldridge drew praise from both sides of the political aisle when he was confirmed by the State Senate unanimously.

Eldridge, a Republican, was from Mount Vernon.

HITTLE, a longtime correspondent in Olympia for the Associated Press, became a board member in April, 1957.

Sponburgh, a retired Coast Guard commander, had been appointed to the board in 1961 by former Gov. Albert Rosellini. Sponburgh was a member of the State World's Fair Commission and had headed the State Safety Council.

Board members are paid $18,000 a year.