

TOTEM POLES

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To properly understand the Totem Pole it is essential to have a knowledge of the "Potlatch". This traditional ceremony of the Pacific Coast Indian has long since been under Government ban, and in its original form is probably extinct. In olden days it formed the basis of the social order and played an essential part in the life of the native. As you probably know, the Coast Indian had no written language. He had no way of recording business or other transactions. He therefore performed all his business dealings publicly, so that there were plenty of witnesses. In the Potlatch, he had just such a public stage.

It became the custom to erect a carved pole to commemorate a "Potlatch" to record some historical event, or to establish the lineal descent of the family records of the Chief. This custom began on the Queen Charlotte Islands with the "Haidas" a fact which can be easily understood, since that was one of the earliest points of contact with the fur traders and the fur seal was taken in abundance in those waters; and on the Islands was the finest stand of cedar on the Coast. Dr. Marius Barbeau has recorded all the poles known to have been carved with the names of the artists, and if you are interested in the subject his two volume book entitled "Totem Poles" is well worth owning. This can be purchased at the Queen's Printer, Ottawa, Canada, also in some book stores.

We recognize six different types of Totem Poles. The House Pole, Mortuary pole. The memorial pole was the equivalent of our tomb stone and was raised in memory of a Chief by his successor. The heraldic pole recited the mythological history of the family. The Potlatch pole was the largest pole raised and was the one over which much rivalry developed. It was often distinguished by having one to three high hatted figures or watchmen on the top. The sixth type was known as the Ridicule pole or "Shame" pole. It was generally erected to ridicule or shame some person of high standing for not fulfilling his obligations. In some cases the figure representing the subject of derision would be carved up-side down.

A discussion of Totem poles would not be complete without reference to the Black or Argillite Poles of the Haidas. These miniature poles are only produced on the Queen Charlotte Islands and they are made from argillite, which is found on a mountain not far from Skidigate. The carving of these poles probably preceded the carving of the large poles and in many cases were the patterns used for the latter. Unfortunately there are very few artists left and the supply is limited. The quality of the work does not compare with the masterpieces produced by Chapman, Edenshaw and others in the early days.

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Reproduced from an article by Dr. R.G. Large- Author of two books- "Soogwilis" and Skeena, River of Destiny.

LEGEND OF "WOLF" TOTEM POLE.

THE POLE STANDING IN FRONT OF THE MUSEUM OF NORTHERN B.C. was carved by Chief Charles Dudoward of Fort Simpson, B.C. as a Centennial project- and is a copy of a famous "Naas" River pole-

This Totem pole formerly belonged to a Nishga Chief Dauk and stood in front of his lodge at Gitlakadamix on the Upper Naas River. The carved figures seen on the top of the pole represent the principal actors in legends describing the origin of the family crests. The owner of the totem pole belonged to the "Wolf" Clan. The principal legend which explains how the Wolf was adopted for the family crest is as follows:

One day long years ago, a great lava eruption took place at Bitwunshilku on the Upper Naas River. The molten mass pushed the waters of the river back across the valley to the mountainside and formed a great lava plain which extends from the head-waters of the Kshluich to the canyon at Gwinsha. The fiery flow overwhelmed villages and fishing hamlets in its path, and the people fled to the surrounding hills. Among these fugitives was an Indian Chief named Gum-lu-gidis, the ancestor of the owner of the pole. Gum-lu-gidis fled with his family to the highlands of the Shkamal river where they camped. Night after night they had no rest, but were disturbed by weird sounds and voices accompanied by the beating of tom toms. At length the Chief and some of his braves determined to set out and discover where the sounds came from. The legend describes how they found themselves in the abode of the "Luluks" Spirits of the dead, where they beheld many strange things. Escaping from these haunted regions, Gum-lu-gidis, overcome by fear, again took up his flight- this time across the grease trail to the Skeena River, leaving the Naas with its terros far behind. When the winter snows had melted and the ice had left the river, Gum-lu-gidis and his companions travelled down the Skeena River in dug-outs made from cottonwood trees until they reached the Island of Khern- now known as Kaien Island on which Prince Rupert is situated. Not very long after they had settled Gum-lu-gidis' rest was once more disturbed, this time by the nightly howls of wolves which seemed to be calling Gum-lu-gidis by name. The old fear overcame him after the howling had continued for two nights, the old Chief determined to meet his fate. Dressed in his ceremonial robes, and face painted he set out alone from the camp, armed with his Chief's tomahawk set with abalone shell. Following the direction from which the sounds proceeded, Gum-lu-gidis came face to face with a large white Wolf. Raising his tomahawk prepared to defend himself he noticed the animal was in great pain and unaware of his approach, as it was vainly trying to dislodge a sharp piece of deer's bone which had pierced its jaw. Gum-lu-gidis said "Brother do me no harm and I will remove the bone." After Gum-lu-gidis had removed the bone, the wolf became very friendly, and each time the Chief went hunting the White Wolf killed a deer for him- thus supplying him and his family with food. So, the legend states Gum-lu-gidis adopted the White Wolf for his "Crest" and in his ceremonial dances always wore a white wolf skin robe. After some years of peace, Gum-lu-gidis became homesick and returned to the Naas, for he longed to fish once more in the water of the Kshliich where the "Hangiwozuch" (White salmon) spawn.

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H A I D A

THE LEAF AND FLOWER POLE OF THE HAIDAS OF YAN

Queen Charlotte Islands, B.C.

This pole about 25 feet high, contains the following figures:-
1. The Eagle, at the top. 2. Two stems with leaves and folowers in low relief rising in curvilinear, about one third of the length of the whole pole. 3. Two Grizzly Bears sitting erect, one above the other. Hollow back pole.

This pole belonged to Chief Gayaw, a member of the Stlinlanawa Clan of the Ravens, formerly of the Tiyan tribe, particularly the family of the Gayaw journeyed several times by dug-out canoe to Victoria, Vancouver Island, and acquired wealth there (because of the sea-otter trade, Tiyan village being located in the best area for sea-otter hunting) These people greatly admired the garden flowers in the "Whiteman's" town, and when they came home, were the first to adopt them as a family emblem and have them carved on their totem pole.

This pole during World War ll was cut down without permission by members of the Royal Canadian Air Force and removed to their station. Later on, the withdrawal of military forces from the Queen Charlotte Islands, this pole, together with another of Yan, was taken to Prince Rupert, and was about to be removed privately by a member of the Air Force when the Indian Agent at Prince Rupert objected, and had the poles removed to the grounds of the "Museum" of Northern B.C., Prince Rupert, where they stand to-day.

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The Museum of Northern B.C. was opened on August 2nd, 1958, in celebration of the 100th birthday of British Columbia, and was erected as a permanent memorial of the Centennial by the people of Prince Rupert.

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The Book "Skeena, River of Destiny" written by Dr. R.G. Large is on sale at the Museum and was another Centennial project. Dr. Large is the President of the Museum and has been for over six years. Price of this book is \$3.00.

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