

P R E F A C E

All the totem poles, house posts and frontals, and the stately grave pillars of British Columbia and Alaska have been included in this monograph, as far as the author knows. The only exception is the important lot studied and published in his *Totem Poles of the Gitksan, Upper Skeena River, British Columbia* (Bulletin No. 61, National Museum of Canada, 1929, pp. 275; illustrations, 33), now out of print.

The scope of this study is explicitly restricted to the geographic area and historical period covered by the native art of the totems. Yet it is more comprehensive, for it forms but one of many chapters in the growth of native arts in the various parts of the world, and illustrates æsthetic principles well-nigh universal and belonging to all times. It is obvious that the mythology and folk tales, on which the oral literature of the north Pacific Coast thrives, form only a local branch of world-wide themes, some of which were familiar in classical antiquity. They have passed into America from Asia with scattered migrating tribes across Bering Strait or via the water route of the Aleutian Islands; the latest of these tribes to come, only a few centuries ago, was the Salmon-Eater (Gitrhawn) clan with which this monograph begins. The growth and ramifications of this ancient lore are now so overwhelming, their occurrence in the totem pole area so intense and rich, and their adaptation in the plastic arts so impressive, that the author has been impelled to commence other illustrated monographs concerning such subjects as Bear Mother; the Immaculate Conception and Redemption themes; the Dragon or Hydra myth nowhere more familiar than in the northern Rockies; Orpheus in America, in which a journey to the other world is made to rescue a loved one; the Thunderbird and the Divine Raven or Zeus and Prometheus; the Rock or Ruck, a huge bird which carries people on its back or under its wings; the Flood and the Promised Land; Jonah and the Whale; Pygmalion and Galatea; the Strong Man or Samson; the Hermaphrodites; Janus or the double-faced keeper of the gates.

Another monographic study of large size, now in progress, entitled *Haida Argillite Carvings*, bears out the same conclusion as the present one on Totem Poles, that is, that the arts of the north Pacific Coast as known to us are a recent growth, almost entirely within the nineteenth century, and mostly in its latter part. Totem poles and pillars, highly perishable in the open, all range from 50 to a 100 years of age; so with the smaller items; wood carvings, silver and metal work, leather decorations and Chilkat weaving. A historian is not justified in stating that the plastic arts they represent have come down from prehistoric times; archæological research belies such assumptions. The argillite or slate carvings of the Haidas were made only for sale to seamen and curio collectors from the days of Captain Cook to those of later-day tourists. The oldest specimens, in the museums of America and Europe, go back only to the 1820's. Older than the totem poles and most of the perishable wood carvings we know, they tell a plain story of their own. At the beginning, from about 1825 to 1840 (as evidenced by the Scouler specimens in Paris and the large Wilkes Collection of the National Museum in Washington), the figures and objects represented are non-totemic; they are imitative of Chinese, British, or American art as it could then be grasped from afar, or they are mostly portraits or caricatures of white or oriental folk. In the 1840's smoking pipes, flutes, and plates

with silver-like engravings and rope borders began to prevail. The earliest miniature totem poles of an archaic type (mostly portals) appeared in the late 1860's. This is made clear in our large museum collections with reliable catalogue information. Like the monumental totems of the same period, which they helped to develop by providing training to the workers, they were the creations of individual craftsmen whose names the author has traced, along with their activities, their production, and many aspects of their æsthetic principles, down to the present time. These argillite carvers prepared the ground for the totem makers of the Haidas; usually they were the same, in the 1850-1900 period. Yet all of them have come to the end of a century-long journey, unique in American art history. Native arts, however ancient or recent, are now a feature of the past.

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INTRODUCTION

TOTEM POLES: THEIR GENERAL CHARACTER

The totem poles of the north Pacific Coast of America, in British Columbia and Alaska, are known all over the world. The excellence of their decorative style at its best is nowhere surpassed by any other form of aboriginal art, and as an expression of native personality and craftsmanship they are impressive and unique. Many of them, along with vast collections of carvings and paintings, are treasured by the museums of Europe and America. Other monumental carvings of the same coast stand in the public parks of western cities — Seattle, Victoria, Vancouver, Prince Rupert, Ketchikan, Juneau, and Sitka. But it is in their true home that these picturesque creations can be seen to best advantage. At the edge of the ocean, amid tall cedars and hemlocks, and in the shadow of lofty mountain peaks, they create impressions as unexpected as they are exotic. Deep-set in moist, dark green, semi-tropical surroundings, in an atmosphere often laden with bluish mists, their bold profiles are strangely reminiscent of Asiatic divinities and monsters.

The art of carving poles belongs to the past. Racial customs and stamina are on the wane everywhere, even in their former strongholds. With the exception of a few poles recently carved and erected in the upper Skeena River, and in southern Alaska under the auspices of the WPA, totem poles as such are no longer made. Most of those erected from forty to seventy years ago have fallen from old age, and since disappeared in decay. Some were sold, cut down, and acquired by museums or public institutions. A few were removed, without the consent or knowledge of the owners, in maritime raids upon deserted Indian villages. A number were destroyed by the owners themselves during religious revivals under the banner of Christianity; for instance, those of a southern Tlingit village in Alaska, and of two Tsimshyan tribes (Gitlarhdams and Port Simpson) in the winters of 1917 and 1918.

Not even a remnant remains of the famous clusters of former days at Massett, Yan, and Skidegate, among the Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Islands. The Kaigani-Haida totems of Prince of Wales Island have vanished or have been removed to other locations in public parks. Scarcely any are left among the Bella Coolas, the Kwakiutls, and the Nootkas, and in a few years even these will have disappeared. Of the fifty or sixty Haida poles still standing along the sea-coast in several deserted villages visited by the author in 1947, only about a dozen could be removed for preservation elsewhere. The rest are in an advanced state of decay.

The best collection of poles, still fairly complete in 1930, was that of the upper Skeena River in British Columbia, a short distance southeast of the Alaskan border. It comprised more than a hundred poles or carvings in scattered groups of from four to over thirty poles, each in eight tribal villages of the Gitksan nation. (The Gitksans are one of the three nations of the Tsimshyans.) But grave deterioration has since set in, sometimes in the form of "restoration". Another of the three Tsimshyan nations, on Nass River to the north, still possessed, in 1927, more than twenty of their poles; these were scattered from Gitiks, near the mouth of the Nass, to Gitlarhdams,

midway up the river. Although the poles of Nass River tribes were among the finest and most elaborate in existence, ranging up to 80 feet in height, those of the Skeena were, on the whole, of inferior size and quality. Nearly all the Nass River poles by now have been purchased and removed by the author for various institutions in Canada, the United States, Great Britain, and France.

A number of the Skeena poles are crude, archaic, and older than any of the poles on the coast, where constant moisture hastens decay. Only a part of the long shaft in many of them is decorated. They occur up river, far inland — from 150 to 250 miles — at the edge of the area where this art once was the fashion. Nowhere else but on the Nass were poles to be found so far inland. The Canadian Government and the Canadian National Railways, in 1928 and 1929, inaugurated the policy of preserving the Skeena River poles in their original location, and a decade later the Forestry Branch of the United States Government adopted a similar policy in Alaska.

The fame of this striking form of native art might lead one to suppose that our ethnographic literature concerning it is rich in proportion. But it is not. In the articles, usually illustrated, of such observers as James Deans, Dr. Franz Boas, Dr. J. R. Swanton, Lieut. George T. Emmons, Dr. C. F. Newcombe, W. A. Newcombe, and others, we find only brief or casual descriptions of poles or of models. Their notes usually lack the necessary historical context, and it is too late now to recover it. The only substantial contributions to the knowledge of this subject are the author's monograph *Totem Poles of the Gitksan*, published in 1929, and a smaller, valuable book mostly on the totems of Alaska, by Edward L. Keithahn, entitled *Monuments in Cedar*.

The figures on totem poles consisted of symbols and illustrations, many of them comparable to our heraldry, and others commemorating historical events. They were not pagan gods or demons as is commonly supposed; they were never worshipped. Usually they illustrated myths or tribal traditions. Their meaning and associations inspired veneration rather than actual religious devotion.

The poles of the Tsimshyans and the Tlingits in particular — though this is also largely true of those of the Haidas — were monuments erected by various families in the tribe to commemorate their chiefs after their death. They corresponded to our tombstones. After the people had given up erecting totem poles, they often had some of the same crests carved from stone or marble at Port Simpson or Vancouver, and placed as tombstones in their modern graveyards. The owners' object in showing their coats of arms on poles or posts was to enhance their prestige and to publish at large their claims to vested rights and privileges. These emblems or totems varied with each family; they were their exclusive property, jealously guarded. They embodied legends, phenomena, and the animals of the country. The Eagle, the Raven, the Frog, the Killer-Whale, the Grizzly Bear, and the Wolf are among the most familiar themes. The Thunderbird, the Woodworm (a local form of the Dragon), the Strong Man (the Samson story), and several others were borrowed from mythology. Some animals are less frequently seen, and so seem to be quite recent as crests: the Owl, the Salmon, the Woodpecker, the Beaver, the Starfish, the Shark, the Halibut, the Bullhead, Split-Person, the Mountain-Goat. The Puma, Moon and Stars,

Mirage and Rainbow are fairly restricted in use. All these symbols were property marks, proudly displayed on houses, garments, and household possessions.

The legendary origin of most of these emblems is explained in traditional narratives that used to be recited at the winter festivals or potlatches, after totem poles had been erected. In spite of the decay of tribal customs, they are remembered by members of the older generation, who can still tell how their ancestors long ago met with tribulations and adventures; how they were harassed and rescued by spirits and monsters; how benevolent spirits appeared in visions and invested their 'protégés' with charms; how ancient warriors conquered their enemies in warfare. The carved illustrations of these stories served a definite purpose besides commemoration and ownership; they made familiar to all members of the tribe the legends and traditions of the past.

Soon after the death of a chief, the prospective heirs appointed his leading nephew to the post. The induction of the successor took place in the presence of a large number of invited guests, and during elaborate festivals where liberality was an outstanding feature. The name of the 'uncle' passed on to the 'nephew', and the erection of a totem pole crowned the event. Groups of related families mustered all the resources available to make the feast memorable, for their standing and influence depended on display. Power and wealth were ruling factors in the social life of the Northwest Coast people.

Cutting a large red cedar tree, transporting it overland or by sea for considerable distances, carving and finally erecting it, often required years. Delays were numerous and unavoidable. The owners needed time to gather their resources, and expenditures were necessarily made in instalments. First a tree was selected and felled. The 'allies' or opposites (that is, the family of the father) took charge of the work and no relative could accept a stipend. The workers and the guests were fed and paid publicly, before the ceremonies were concluded. Then a carver was hired, also from the 'father's' clan, who, should he lack the necessary skill, was privileged to appoint a substitute over whom he 'stood' ceremonially, assuming the credit for the work. The carving was accomplished as secretly as possible. Figures were selected by the owners from their list of available crests, as these might exceed half a dozen in number. The most costly item was the actual planting of the pole in the ground. When enough food and wealth had been amassed, invitations were sent forth to all the leading families of the neighbouring tribes. Eventually the pole was erected in the presence and with the help of the hundreds — sometimes the one or two thousand — gathered for these festivities which were so important a feature of this tribal life until sixty years ago.

As there was a lack of modern equipment, the raising of a large tree trunk required the greatest ingenuity as well as the closest co-operation of several tribes. The butt of the pole was introduced into a six-foot hole, out of which a trench was dug, and the small end was raised gradually by means of wooden props. A rope of cedar bark, sinew, or trade materials was then attached to the upper end of the shaft and passed over a stout supporting frame. Numerous hands then pulled the rope until the mast was finally hoisted into position.

Though the totem pole villages of the Haidas have been the most widely known, they have now virtually ceased to exist. Those of the upper Skeena are the only ones that still retain some of their earlier features. Kispayaks, Gitsegyukla, and Kitwanga claimed, as late as 1930, about twenty poles each. Their own alien and bizarre appearance was enhanced by the striking background of darkly wooded and mist-shrouded, ice-capped peaks. Gitwinkul is the most remarkable of these tribal villages. It stands on the Grease Trail from the Skeena to the Nass, claiming the largest number of poles now standing anywhere in a single cluster. Even in 1925 it was still most impressive. Its poles were among the tallest and best, as well as the oldest. Each year, however, brings some veterans down.

These carved memorials usually faced the main highways of river or ocean. They stood apart from each other, in front of the owner's house, and dotted the whole length of the village in an irregular line. Changing times forced the removal of most villages to new quarters in the last sixty years, and the poles were forsaken in the abodes of the past. Here and there trees have grown round them, and sometimes it was not easy to find them in the forest. This was particularly true along the Nass and on the Queen Charlotte Islands. As it is, they lean precariously, tottering in every wind, and destined to crash down, one by one.

Little printed information is available on the actual carvers among most nations. The author has retrieved enough material from near oblivion for a detailed history of plastic art and the making of totems on the north Pacific Coast. The carving of totem poles once was a very popular art. Although some artists were at times preferred to others for their skill, their choice for specific tasks was governed by customs rather than concerned with craftsmanship. (This did not apply to the Haidas as it did to the Tsimshians and the Tlingits.) Each family of standing had every inducement to employ its own carvers for important functions in ceremonial life. For instance, the hundred totem poles of the upper Skeena were produced by more than thirty local carvers and thirteen outsiders. Six of the outsiders were from the Nass, and had been engaged in the earliest period when the Skeena carvers were not yet proficient in the new calling; three others were from the lower Skeena, and four from the Bulkley River, a tributary of the Skeena. The Skeena carvers belonged to independent and widely scattered social groups or families: 23 were of the Raven-Frog phratry, 9 of the Wolf, 5 of the Eagle, and 3 of the Fireweed. Seventy-eight out of the hundred poles are ascribed to Gitksan artists, and the balance is credited to outsiders.

THE GROWTH OF TOTEM POLE CARVING

It is an error to suppose that totem poles are hundreds of years old. The nature of the materials from which they are made and the climate to which they are exposed render this an impossibility. A green cedar pole cannot stand upright much beyond fifty or sixty years on the upper Skeena, where precipitation is moderate and the soil usually consists of gravel and sand. Along the coast, it cannot endure beyond half a century because of the muskeg foundation and the intense moisture that prevails most of the year. For instance, the totem poles of Port Simpson, which are exposed to warm rainy winds, all decayed on the south side first, and most of them tumbled to the ground in less than fifty years. The well-

known poles, now in our parks and museums, were carved after 1860, and many of those seen in Indian villages, such as Alert Bay, were erected after 1890.

The art of carving and erecting memorial columns is not really so ancient on the north Pacific Coast as is generally believed. Popular misconceptions in this respect used to be fantastic. Nobody seemed to question the statement on labels that some poles were one or two hundred years old, when the actual age, still verifiable, was much nearer sixty or seventy. Even such poles as these were among the oldest obtained in the Haida country.

Native technique reached its fullest development in the last century, and after 1860. It hinged upon European tools, the steel axe, the adze, and the curved knife, which were made in imitation by the natives or were traded off in large numbers to them from the days of the early circum-navigators, that is, after 1778. The lack of suitable tools, wealth, and leisure in the prehistoric period precluded elaborate structures and displays. The benefits accruing from the fur trade at once stimulated local ambitions; they stirred up jealousies and rivalries, and incited sustained efforts for higher prestige and leadership. The overmastering desire everywhere was to outdo the others in ingenuity and wealth, power and display. The totem pole came into fashion through the rise of these ambitions, fostered mostly by the fur trade. It became the best way of announcing one's own identity in the commemoration of the dead, the decoration of houses, and in the perpetuation of traditional imagery. The size of the pole and the beauty of its figures proclaimed the fame of those it represented.

Feuds over the size of totem poles often broke out among the leaders. The bitter quarrel between Hladerh and Sispegoot is still remembered on the Nass River. Hladerh, head-chief of the Wolves (*Larhkibu*), would not allow the erection of any pole that exceeded his own in height. Sispegoot, head-chief of the Killer Whales, disregarded his rival's jealousy. When his new pole was carved, over seventy years ago, the news went out that it would be the tallest in the village. In spite of Hladerh's warnings, Sispegoot issued invitations for its erection. He was, however, shot and wounded by Hladerh as he passed in front of his house in a canoe. The festival had to be postponed for a year. Meanwhile Hladerh managed, through a clever plot, to have Sispegoot murdered by one of his own kinsmen. He later compelled another chief of his own phratry to shorten his pole twice after it was erected; and he was checked only when he tried to spread his rule to an upper Nass village.

Before totem poles had reached imposing proportions among the three leading northern nations, the carvings that preceded them were mostly graveyard carvings. The crests as a rule were painted with ochres on the house fronts or carved on head-dresses and small ceremonial objects. The impressive crop of totem poles that became known from 1880 to 1900 was the first of its kind to stand anywhere. The oldest poles of Gitsegjukla (at Skeena Crossing on the Skeena River) have stood only since the fire destroyed the earlier village in 1872; those of Hazelton were carved after the establishment of the Indian reserve about 1892. But several of the poles in the other villages — including Kitwanga — were many years older and are, therefore, particularly interesting as an illustration of the growth of totem-

pole carving within two or three generations in the nineteenth century. The Haida and Tlingit poles were all, with rare exceptions, erected after 1850. The earliest lot, much smaller, is unknown to us.

The poles of the upper Skeena were, on the average, erected in the past fifty or sixty years. The five or six oldest slightly exceed eighty years of age. Many are less than forty years old. It is safe to say that this feature of native life among the Gitksans became fashionable only after 1870 or 1880. Six out of nearly thirty poles at Gitwinkul — the earliest of these villages to adopt the art — exceed sixty years of age, and only a few poles at that time stood in the neighbouring villages.

Native accounts and the evidence of what the earliest carved memorials were, among the three northern nations of the coast, led to the inevitable conclusion that carved house-front poles and house corner posts were introduced many years before the first detached columns appeared. Several houses and posts of this kind were still remembered by the elders and have been described to us; a few were even to be observed, though most were in an advanced state of decay. The archaic style of house decoration was abandoned as soon as the natives gave up building large communal lodges in the purely native vein, and memorial columns that could no longer serve as ceremonial doorways — or traps — became the new fashion. Actually, some of the upper Skeena villages never adopted the fashion wholesale, and at least four of them boasted of no more than a few poles, some of which were put up only after 1890.

Internal evidence tells the same tale. The carving technique on several of the oldest poles — those erected over seventy years ago — is self-revealing, particularly as it discloses anterior stages in the art. It is essentially that of making masks or carving small/detached objects; or again, of representing masked and costumed performers as they appeared in festivals rather than the real animals or objects as they existed. The carvers had not yet acquired the skill of their successors, who had advanced to the point of thinking of a large pole as a unit, which called for breadth of decorative treatment. Hæsem-hliyawn and his contemporaries of Gitwinkul, among the Gitksans, have been responsible for the advance of the art beyond its first stage; and yet they belong, from the point of view of location and affiliation, to the Nass as much as to the Skeena. The totem poles of Cape Fox and Tongas (southern Alaska) are said to have been the work of Nass River carvers, and the house posts of Klukwan in the Tlingit country to the north were from the hands of Wrangell craftsmen.

The fashion of erecting large wooden memorials in most parts, except the Haida and Nass River districts, was plainly derivative. During the stages of its evolution it spread from the Nass southeastwards to the upper Skeena, as some of the leading carvers of the coast were invited to transplant their activities to parts still unprovided with native craftsmen. But the demand for foreigners here was shortlived. Local talent soon developed. Stimulus for it was constant, the demand pressing. The imitativeness and inexperience of the new recruits to the art was at first only too evident, and their efforts were often crude. Progress to a point was rapid, but they remained on the whole inferior to their contemporaries of the Nass and the Queen Charlotte Islands to the west.

Hæsem-hliyawn and Hlamee, of Gitwinkul, both represent distinct periods of the craft among the Gitksans. To Hæsem-hliyawn, the greater

of the two artists, goes the credit of carving some of the best poles in existence. He belonged to the little group of Nass River and Gitksan carvers who excelled their compatriots, among whom we note Nees-laranows and Hlamee. Their carvings were on a par with the best ever produced on the Nass and the Queen Charlotte Islands. In other words, they are nowhere surpassed in excellence.

Hæsem-hliyawn and Nees-laranows lived as late as 1868. Hlamee, their junior and follower, died after 1900. No fewer than twenty poles from their hands still stand in the three lower villages of the Skeena, seven of them ascribed to Hæsem-hliyawn, three to Nees-laranows, and ten to Hlamee.

The style of Hæsem-hliyawn was of the finest, in the purely native vein. He combined a keen sense of realism with a fondness for decorative treatment. With him, as with Oyai of the Nass, Tsimshyan art reached one of its highest pinnacles. It sought inspiration in nature, while keeping within ancient stylistic technique. Hæsem-hliyawn belonged to the generation (1840-1880) in which the art of the totem pole saw at once its formative stages and its apogee. His handling of human figures ranks among the best achievements of West Coast art — indeed, of aboriginal art in any part of the world. The faces he carved, with their strong expression and amusing contortions, are characteristic of the race. Many of them are masterpieces. From a purely traditional source his art passed into effective realism. His treatment of birds and spirit-monsters is not inferior to that of the human figure. On several of his best carvings, especially as seen at Gitwinkul, he reached into the sphere of higher art where the artist yields to his instinct and expresses himself in general terms.

The carved poles of Nass River maintain a higher standard of art than those of the Skeena and adjacent areas. They were less numerous too, as the Nass people gave up their ancient customs earlier than the Gitksans. That was fifty or sixty years ago, and most of the Gitksan poles were erected since. The technique of pole carving in both areas represents well the passage from the earlier and better art of the Hæsem-hliyawn type to that of Hlamee. Carving was at first the almost exclusive means of achieving effect, but commercial paint later gained ground at the expense of plastic form.

Nass River tribes made totem poles at an earlier date than the upper Skeena people. Many families on both sides were related, and several of the Gitwinkul villagers had their hunting grounds on the upper Nass. The Gitksans used to travel every spring to the lower Nass for oolaken fishing or to trade pelts and dried fruit cakes with the coast tribes. There they came into close touch with the Tlingits of southern Alaska and with the Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Islands. A strong cultural influence from the more progressive tribes of the coast was unavoidable and it is a trait of all these aborigines that they were keen and gifted imitators, and fond of novelty.

The Tsimshyans of the lower Skeena, or Tsimshyans proper, never wholly adopted the art of carving totem poles. When they were moved long ago to commemorate a historical event of the first magnitude, they erected a tall slab of stone, not a totem pole as they would have done more recently. Such a slab still stands at the Gitsalas canyon, at the former village of Gitsed-zawrh, on the north side of the river.

The poles erected at the Tsimshyan village of Port Simpson, established by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1833, have mostly all decayed or been destroyed. Yet they were all erected after 1857, as an early painting, "Fort Simpson in 1857", reproduced in Arctander's *Apostle of Alaska* (page 53), contains no trace of a totem pole.

If the Tsimshyans proper were not swayed by the modern fashion of erecting carved memorials to their dead, they retained the older custom of painting their symbols on their house fronts in native pigments. Although not a single totem pole seems ever to have stood in the village of Gitsees near the mouth of the Skeena, five house-front paintings were still remembered and described to the author a few years ago. Many houses of the neighbouring tribes were also painted; a feature that at one time may have been fairly general all along the coast.

This remarkable West Coast custom of carving and erecting house poles and tall mortuary columns, and of painting coats of arms on house fronts, is sufficiently uniform in type to suggest that it originated at a single centre and spread north and south. Its frontiers coincide with those of the West Coast art, embracing the carving or painting of wood, leather, stone, bone, and ivory.

This art itself seems more ancient in its smaller forms. Its origin may be remote, going back to Asia like the people themselves during late prehistory. It was partly in existence, quite conventionalized, at the time of the early Spanish, English, and French explorers (1775-1880). Most of the early circumnavigators — Cook, Dixon, Meares, Vancouver, Marchand, and La Pérouse — give evidence that masks, chests, and ceremonial objects were, at the end of the eighteenth century, decorated in elaborate or grotesque style. They also mention, without details, that house fronts and house posts were decorated with carved and painted designs. There is a striking lack of evidence as to the existence of totem poles proper or detached memorial columns, either south or north. Yet the early mariners often visited the villages of the Tlingits, the Haidas, the Tsimshyans, the Kwakiutls, and the Nootkas. The descriptions or sketches in some of their relations fail to give us any hint of the presence of tall carvings, still less of their actual appearance. For instance, Dixon examined several of the Haida villages on the Queen Charlotte Islands, but fails to mention totem or even house poles; yet he minutely described small carved trays and spoons, and left some illustrations.

There were already — from 1780 to 1800 — some carved house posts in existence. Captain Cook (*A Voyage . . .* Volume 11, page 317) observed a few decorated posts inside the house of the chiefs at Nootka Sound, where he wintered; and Webber, his artist, reproduced the features of two of them in his sketches. Meares, in 1788 and 1789, observed similar Nootka carvings in the same neighbourhood, which he describes (*Voyages . . .* page 138): "Three enormous trees rudely carved and painted, formed the rafters, which were supported at the ends and in the middle by gigantic images, carved out of huge blocks of timber." And he calls them elsewhere "misshapen figures". The earliest drawing of a carved pole is that of a house-front or entrance pole (not a real totem pole) of the Haidas, in Bartlett's *Journal*, 1790¹.

¹ Cf. *The Sea, the Ship, and the Sailor*, by Captain Elliot Snow, Salem, Mass., 1925.

The custom of carving and erecting tall mortuary columns in front of the houses in the villages to honour the dead is comparatively modern, and was probably unknown before the beginning of the nineteenth century. But it is not easy to trace it back to its exact birth-place on the coast. These monuments hastily borrowed their style and features from smaller prototypes, ceremonial objects such as masks, charms, canes, and staffs. The earliest Gitksan poles, the oldest preserved, show this derivative trend, and a few poles among the Haidas and the Kwakiutls are reproductions of ceremonial staffs or carved canes. The figures were carved out of a log as if they were detached parts affixed to its surface with wooden pegs. Even the simple poles of the Nootkas as described by Cook may not represent the art of prehistory free of foreign influences. Iron and copper tools at that date were already available on the coast and were used everywhere with the proficiency of lifelong habit. The West Coast at that date was no longer untouched. The Russians had discovered its northern parts many decades before, and the Spaniards had left traces of their passage to the south. The influence of the French and the British had filtered in through contacts between intermediate tribes, and through the arrival of halfbreeds and *coureurs-de-bois* west of the mountain passes. The north Pacific Coast people, mostly because of the fur trade, had been under foreign influence at least indirectly for more than two hundred years. All the natives were eager imitators. Nowhere more than on the western sea-coast did they show greater avidity and skill in assimilating whatever suited their needs from the sundry goods and crafts of the white man. They quickly adopted the tools introduced by European traders, and improved their native technique to the full measure of their new facilities.

To emphasize the novelty of totem pole carving and single out the causes which, after 1830, promoted its growth, I shall select a few illustrations showing their connection with the fur trade, more particularly with the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company.

One of the two upper Gitksan tribes, that of Kisgagas or Sea-Gull near the outlet of Babine River on the Skeena 225 miles from the sea-coast, was not far removed from Fort St. James, the earliest fur trading-post established in 1808 in the northern Rockies. It seems that the company soon after built a subsidiary post at Bear Lake, under the direction of a Mr. Ross. A Tsetsaut party at that time raided the village of Kisgagas while most of the hunters were away, killed two men with the flint-lock musket in their possession — the first gun seen in the country — and returned home with a female captive, a niece of the head-chief whom they had killed. The young woman was rescued by the white people at Bear Lake and later sent back home. A retaliation party, under her guidance, proceeded to the Tsetsaut country, but decided to visit the white man's fort on the way. Here they had their first opportunity to see the white man and to marvel at his possessions and strange ways; to them all this was nothing less than a supernatural experience. What impressed them most was the white man's dog, the palisade or fortification of the house, and the broad wagon road — so different from their faint forest trails. All three of these they decided to adopt as their own crests or emblems after they had reached home. Waiget, the head of one family, took upon himself White-Man's Dog or Mr. Ross' Dog (called *Masselaws*); Malulek, another chief, assumed Palisade as his own; and other participants shared other similar crests. They gave two big

feasts in the course of the next two years, to which they invited representatives of other Gitksan tribes as guests. They exhibited with pride their new acquisitions, which they later carved on their totem poles. The palisade took the form of a small fence built around the totem pole.

Another family lower down on the upper Skeena, that of Harhu of Kispayaks, likewise acquired the Shingle crest (*ran'arhgyeek*), obviously from the white man's device of that name, after an ancestor once had proceeded either to the trading-post of Bear Lake or Fort St. James. This Shingle emblem on a Kispayaks totem pole is still seen in the form of parallel lines sloping down on both sides of a central ridge cut deep in the cedar.

Many instances of similar origins are noticeable on the totem poles and house frontals of the coast; for instance, the white sailor at the helm of a ship at Bella Coola (a short distance north of Vancouver Island) now preserved at the National Museum of Canada; another white man at the top of a tall pole at Cape Fox, southern Alaska; a sailing ship with a woman on its deck on a pole recently transplanted to Ketchikan, Alaska, and erroneously stated to represent Captain Cook; and the splendid Haida pole now standing in the same park at Ketchikan showing three Russians, two of them in church vestments, one above the other, two cherubs with wings outspread, and two eagles. This pole from Kasaan, a Haida-Kaigani village on Prince of Wales Island, was carved about seventy years ago and erected during a potlatch, which some old people still remember, for a native family that showed its interest at the time in the Greek Catholic Church of the Russians. Another Kasaan pole with scroll fret-work was said by an old Indian woman to have been carved by her uncle, who wanted to represent on it a Greek Catholic Church certificate in his own possession.

These emblems were at first foreign to the Indians and have remained, since their assumption, the exclusive property of a few families. The bulk of totem-pole figures elsewhere is of a different kind; it symbolizes familiar animals, legends, and natural phenomena.

Definite examples of totem poles erected as a result of relations between officers of the Hudson's Bay Company and the natives are too extensive for full quotation here. Yet these include some of the best and tallest samples of the art, in particular on lower Nass River.

A head-chief there named Sakau'wan — Sharp-Teeth — whose pride was deeply wounded by his wife's desertion. The young woman, who was attractive, and either ambitious or fickle, had forsaken native rank for the favours of Captain McNeil, a Hudson's Bay Company's fur trader, and had gone down the coast to live with him at Victoria.

To efface his shame in a way recognized by his people, Sharp-Teeth made use of the first opportunity in a tribal feast and, holding up in his hand ten beautiful marten skins, he began to sing on an old tune a new challenge which he had composed to cast ridicule on the deserter.

This song of challenge was: "Wait and see what a chief can do! Wait, sweetheart, that you may learn how I have raised my head again! Wait, O flighty one, before you send me word of how you pine once more for my love! Time is now ripe, woman of the bleached Victoria tribe, for you to send me a bottle of Old Tom (whisky). That is why I now dispatch to you this handful of beaver skins."

Actually the skins were even more valuable than beaver, they meant dollars to the natives, and were picked marten such as an indignant and resourceful chief could sacrifice to heap ridicule upon a woman unworthy of him and surely unable — after her escapade — to reciprocate in kind. The only way now for her to save her face was to return a gift of still greater value. This, unexpectedly, she did.

The gift which, in her absence and through her brother Neeskinwætk, she used to rebuke her former husband (with the help of her new husband, Captain McNeil) was a large Haida canoe carved out of a huge cedar tree. Thus she had made the Old Tom demanded by Sharp-Teeth into a trade canoe, decorated inside with the Bear, her own heraldic emblem, and beautifully carved at the prow. As the canoe was given in a feast to the challenger, “she went over big” — so we were told — “and had the best of him.” He had wanted to discredit her forever in the eyes of her people, because she had shamed him and he was proud. Now once more she had brought new humiliation upon him. At the time the tribe was not sure that he would retaliate.

He did. After he had gathered all his wealth in pelts, copper shields, blankets, and trade goods, he gave a big feast, invited all the neighbouring tribes and made it known that he was about to cast off his wife in a way that would brand her as worthless. As he lavished presents upon his guests, particularly those who had derided him, he sang a song which he had composed for the occasion — a taunting song.

Captain McNeil’s native mistress, in her turn, smarted under the insult, even though she lived far away from the scene of her disgrace. She decided to fight it out to the end with her former overlord. As her brother Neeskinwætk, with whom she shared the leadership of a high Wolf clan, had recently died, she decided to erect in his memory a totem pole and herself assume single-handed the leadership of the clan. Bent on using this opportunity to raise a fine totem and enhance the prestige of her clan — one of the oldest on the Nass — she would wipe out the shame which her dismissal by her husband had brought upon her. And she had the means to do it.

The best carver of the Nass at the time — about eighty years ago — was Oyai, of the Canyon tribe on mid-river, who was spending his busy life under the command and the pay of the chiefs of various tribes, carving memorial columns for them. So she made sure of his services for about a year, during which he fashioned a pole for her.

When the carving was ready she came in person to the Nass, bringing much property with her, and had the totem erected to the memory of her brother in the midst of a great celebration. Henceforth, in the esteem of the people, she would assume the rank of a high chief, on a par with her estranged husband, who had lost his power over her. She was a leader among the Wolves, as he was among the Eagles — their respective clans being the Wolf and the Eagle.

Her totem pole was a fine memorial, standing at the head of a splendid row of totems at the old Nass village of Angyadaë. After the lapse of about seventy years, I discovered it still standing on the former village site, surrounded by a growth of wild crabapple trees. Its heraldic figures carved out of red cedar were weather-beaten, yet most expressive and original.

It was evident at first sight that Oyai, its carver, deserved his reputation as the best totem carver of his generation on the Nass or anywhere.

The author has since purchased this pole from its owner and removed it for conservation to the Trocadero Museum, now Le Musée de l'Homme, in Paris.

The plastic and pictorial arts of the coast and river villages progressed in new directions throughout the nineteenth century until, after 1880, they came down with a crash among the Haidas and the Tsimshians, largely through the conversion of the natives to Christianity and the influence of the Gold Rush into Alaska. They thrived until about 1900 among the Gitksans, owing to their isolation inland, and until 1910 among the Kwakiutls. Argillite carvings, canoe and box-making of the Haidas, and the carving of totem poles, beautiful rattles, and head-dresses among the Nass River people, all belong to this period. These were meant for inter-tribal or foreign trade after prehistoric frontiers had been invaded.

THE ORIGIN OF THE TOTEM OR MEMORIAL POLES ON THE COAST

When and where the totem poles or mortuary columns first appeared is an interesting though elusive point. There are two possibilities. These heraldic monuments first became the fashion either on Nass River or among the Haidas of Queen Charlotte Islands. Our evidence eliminates the Gitksans and the Tsimshians proper. Likewise, the Tlingits, and the tribes farther south cannot be considered. The Bella Bellas were painters rather than carvers. The Kwakiutl and the Nootka plastic art always remained crude compared with that of the northern nations and lapsed into grotesque forms by preference. Seldom was it at the service of heraldry as in the north, for the crest system was of minor importance on the coast south of the Skeena. Totem poles among the Kwakiutls and the Nootkas are very recent; hardly any of them, as they are currently known, antedate 1880. The most familiar of the Kwakiutl poles, those of Alert Bay, were carved and erected since 1890. None were standing when the late Dr. Franz Boas and Dr. C. F. Newcombe visited the village about that time. At first sight it seems more likely that the Tlingits of the southern Alaskan frontier might have initiated the custom of erecting memorials to the dead. They were closer to the Russian headquarters, and must have been among the first to obtain iron tools. Yet credit for originating totem poles cannot fall to them. The early circum-navigators who called at some of their villages made no mention of large carvings, not even of such house or grave posts as were observed among the Haidas and the Nootkas farther south. Further, the custom of erecting these monuments seemed modern to a keen observer of these people like Lieutenant G. T. Emmons, who was stationed on the Alaskan coast for many years in an official capacity. From Lieutenant Emmons we learn that the northern half of the Tlingit nation never had totem poles until very recently, and the few of those that sprang up in that district within the scope of his observation are the property of a family or families originally belonging to the southern tribes and retaining southern affiliations. The custom of planting poles, in other words, is only a characteristic of the southern half of the Tlingit tribes, those next to the Haida and the Niska frontiers, and cannot be said to be a typically Tlingit practice. Most, if not

all the Haida and the Niskæ or Nass River tribes, on the other hand, were totem pole carvers and owned many poles in each village. The fashion is more typically theirs than it is Tlingit.

The Haidas might next be dismissed from consideration as likely originators of the totem poles proper. The large Haida carvings, as we know them, are partly house poles, grave memorials, and partly totem poles, and the house poles are far more numerous in proportion among them than among the Tsimshians. Practically none of the Niskæ carvings, as they have come down to us, were house poles. The two large posts observed among the Haidas by Bartlett and Marchand in 1788–1792 were house portals. Though the Haida villages were often visited at the end of the eighteenth century and in the first part of the nineteenth, we find no other reference to large poles, still less to the famous rows of poles at Massett and Skidegate as they were photographed about 1880. The Haida poles, as we know them in our museums, are all of the same advanced type, of the same period (1840–1900), and presumably from the hands of carvers who were contemporaries. Their stylization was largely the result of miniature argillite carvings made by their craftsmen for the curio traffic with white buyers. The totem poles were from ten to thirty years old when the islanders accepted Christianity, gave up their customs (about 1890 or afterwards), and cut down their memorials or abandoned them in the bush. It is commonly said that the fine row of poles at Skidegate rose from the proceeds of an inglorious type of barter in Victoria. There is no evidence of totem poles among the Haidas antedating 1840 or 1850, though a few earlier and transitional ones may have served to introduce the fashion.

In all probability detached totem poles actually originated among the Niskæ or northern Tsimshians of Nass River. From traditional recollections, it is obvious that the custom among them of commemorating the dead with a carved memorial is not an ancient one; yet it antedated that of the Gitksans or the Tsimshians proper. It is more likely that the Haidas imitated them, as did the Tlingits, than the reverse. The estuary of the Nass was the most important thoroughfare of Indian life in all the northern parts. Oolaken fishing in the neighbourhood of what was called Fishery Bay, near Gitrhadeen—the largest Niskæ centre—was a predominant feature in native life. The grease from the oolaken or candle-fish was an indispensable staple along the coast. For their yearly supply the Haidas, the Tlingits, the Tsimshians, and the Gitksans journeyed by sea or overland every spring and camped side by side for weeks at a time in temporary villages of their own from Red Bluffs eastwards on the lower Nass. Exchanges of all kinds, barter, social amenities, and feuds were quite normal at Fishery Bay and Red Bluffs. Cultural features of the local hosts—whether they were willing hosts or not is open to question—were constantly under the observation of the strangers and often were a cause for envy or aggression. The Tsimshians, on the other hand, never crossed to Queen Charlotte Islands unless on war raids or isolated visits to relatives.

Nass River carvers were on a par with the best in Haidaland. Their art reached the highest point of development ever attained on the north Pacific Coast; many of their totem poles were the best and tallest seen anywhere. The Haida poles in comparison were more stylized and offered less variety. The Tlingit poles closely resembled those of Nass River, and the Niskæ claim that a number of the carved columns at

Tongas, one of the two southernmost of the Tlingit villages, were the work of their carvers, within the memory of the passing generation.

The affinities between the plastic arts of the north Pacific Coast and of the other people around the rim of the Pacific Ocean down to the South Seas should not be overlooked. Common features in the crafts, technology, and mythology of our coast natives, and of the Polynesians and the Malaysians are too numerous for them to be entirely unrelated. The early navigators noticed, about 1780-1790, the striking resemblance between the fortresses of the Haidas and other Coast tribes and the *hippahs* of the New Zealand natives. Carved portals and house posts, fairly recently erected on both sides of the Pacific, offer compelling resemblances. The manner of erection, besides, was identical. We must conclude that the spectacular growth of native crafts in wood carving and decoration is more recent than previously believed.