

## TOTEM POLES.

Totem poles are the product of the Pacific Coast Indian. They come in all sizes, from the miniature model to the 50 or 60 foot giant which may still be seen standing in its original surroundings. When the early explorers came to these shores, they visited, and in many cases described the villages of the natives. Nowhere is there any mention of Totem poles, so that we must conclude that they have been developed since the 1700s. They are the acme of Indian art, but they are not by any means ancient.

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 National Museum at 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 article by Dr. R.G. Large-  
President of the Museum Board, and author of two books-  
"Soogwilis" on sale at the Museum, and a new book "Skeena-River of  
Destiny" to be published in Dec. 1957.