The Collectors

So far, I have dealt mainly with the Indian side of the historical circumstances that produced our holdings of Haida art. In order to understand how it came to be collected, and by whom, for whom, with what documentation — and even how it came to be considered 'art' — it is helpful to look at some of the forces operating within the collecting societies of the time. The collections would not be in our museums if we had not defined them as valuable and sponsored their collection. We might notice, too, that the reasons we treasure them now are not entirely the reasons they were first collected. It is our attitudes which have changed: what was originally valued as curiosities and later as ethnological specimens we have since defined as fine arts (recognized)

From the beginning, the white men were avid collectors of Indian-made things. Of course, so were the Indians avid collectors of the white man's products — else there would have been no trade! But the white man's purposes have not always been the same — and his purposes determined what he recorded or failed to record about the things collected. For the present purpose, the investigation of individual artists' styles, what it is necessary to ask is: for what things do we have an adequate sample? How accurate can we expect the documentation to be?

The Collectors (see also Keller, 1967, Ch VIII)

3 periods?

1. Curios
   a) Explorers Traders — Dixon etc
   b) Collections — Russian
2. Scrimshaw — Argillite 1815–

only samples pre 1875

3. 1876–1909 Coincide:
   i
   (a) Growth of Anthropology/ethnology in US
   (b) " " museums
   (c) Expositions

full samples of 1850–1900 stuff

great demand

great supply

ii
(a) Museums, conversion, release of old things
In 1900 the great totems of Massett were for sale at $1/ft.
old "ikons"
new crafts — slate, model etc.

great collectors — Emmons
Newcombe, Swan,
Dealers: Aaronsen, Cunningham (HBC) Afferds)

4. Miscellaneous
- Loose ends: Inaccuracy

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