

9 July, 1970

Curator of North American Ethnology,
The University Museum,
University of Pennsylvania,
33rd and Spruce Streets,
Philadelphia, Penn.

Dear Sir:

I visited your museum in mid-June, on a tour to gather materials for a book I am doing on personal styles in Haida art, but it was at a time when the curators were not around, and I was unable to seek you out.

What specifically interests me at the moment is the very fine Haida totem pole outside your building. I have some information on it which I can share with you, and I want to ask if you have more. Your information might not all be in the catalog, but may be in old correspondence to Dr. Culin from Dr. C. F. Newcombe or the Rev. J. H. Keen. In Dr. Newcombe's private papers, now in the Provincial Archives of B.C. in Victoria, I found a letter from Rev Keen (who was a missionary at Masset, although the letter was addressed from Metlakatla) to Dr. Newcombe, dated November 19, 1900. It includes this:

I now send the story represented on Amos Giatlant's (Russ) pole, and also an outline sketch, which I fortunately found among my notes I got the story and particulars of sketch from Walter Ging-e-kwon, the Massett Haida (still living) who carved the pole in question.

Newcombe wrote on the letter: "Pole to Culin - Phila."

I have not been able to find the story or the sketch in Newcombe's papers, and my guess is that he sent them on to Philadelphia. If that is so, I would very much like to obtain xerox copies.

It would help my study to be able to attribute your pole definitely to Walter Ging-e-kwon (the "King-ego" of Barbeau), as very few of the good old poles have been firmly attributed. Your pole, by the way, appears in an old photograph of Masset (see Barbeau, Totem Poles, Vol. 2, fig. 295, p. 553). It stood next to a quite similar pole which went to the museum at McGill University in Montreal. One of the model poles carved for J. R. Swanton by Charles Edenshaw of Masset seems to combine elements of both of these poles: it has the big bear with the long tongue on the upper part, like yours, but has a large Raven at the base, like the McGill pole (see Swanton, Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida, Plate V, 1).

I was sorry to see that the bottom part of your pole is missing. Does it still exist? I hope that before long you will find a way to move it indoors, as we have done with all of ours, in order that it may be preserved indefinitely.

Thank you, and I hope that you can let me have this information.

Yours sincerely,

Wilson Duff,
Associate Professor.