

*With kind regards from
Philip Ward.*

The Preservation of Totem Poles
on the Upper Skeena.

The following is a report of a brief visit to the Gitksan Villages of Kitwancool, Kispiox, Kitwanga, Kitsegukla and Gitamaks (Hazelton) from the 18th to 22nd of July, 1967. In response to a request for technical advice from Mrs. M. H. Sargent of the Skeena Totem Preservation Committee, Mr. John Smyly and Mr. Philip Ward both of the Provincial Museum Staff visited the Hazelton area to study the problem and to advise the Committee.

The area is of special interest for several reasons;

1) The five villages still occupied by the Gitksan form a compact group in a region where the population is still predominantly Indian.

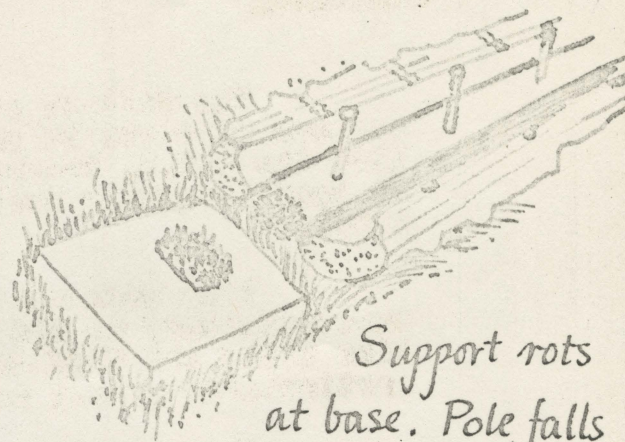
2) A considerable number of poles survive in their original locations, while relatively few have found their way to museums either in Canada or elsewhere.

3) Although the sites are somewhat inaccessible (all but one are on Indian Reserves) they have been the subject of previous preservation schemes during the last forty years; thus providing a unique opportunity to study the effectiveness of various methods of conservation.

In the following pages the various schemes will be described in chronological order.

KITWANGA, -1925.

Pole bolted to cedar upright which is set in flat concrete base which collects water.

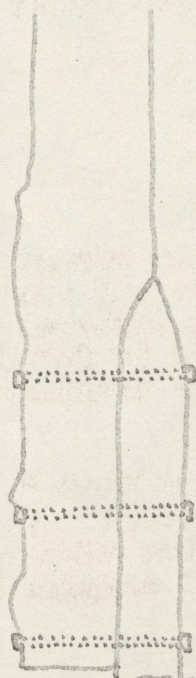


Support rots at base. Pole falls and splits along line of bolts.

Base not wide enough to keep weeds from foot of pole.

KITSEGUCLA - 1930s?

Similar, but much cruder work at Kitsegukla survives in good condition because rough, domed base sheds water. Well-drained position on edge of bank is fortuitous. Probably amateur work of 1930s.



Bolts are still a source of weakness. Pole is splitting vertically.

KITWANGA

The village of Kitwanga was the site of the first serious attempts to protect totem poles. Between 1925 and 1928 the C.N.R. re-erected a large number of poles as described at some length by Barbeau ("Totem Poles of the Gitksan", Ottawa, 1949).

This work was recognized quite early to be aesthetically unsatisfactory as the poles were re-erected in a single straight line along the Hazelton Cedarvale Road and were repainted in particularly garish colours.

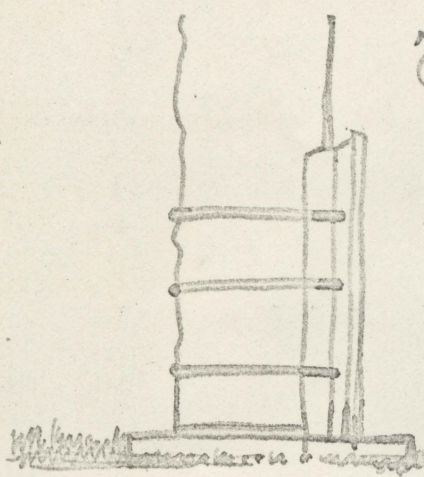
The method used was to bolt the pole directly to a cedar upright which was set in concrete. The weakness of this method is that the cedar uprights have themselves rotted at ground level. Indeed they have rotted more quickly because they were set in concrete than they would had they been set directly in the ground. Two or three of the poles have fallen for a second time. Because the poles had been attached to the uprights by large bolts passing through both pole and upright those poles which have fallen for a second time are now ruined beyond repair because they are split lengthwise their whole length.

However, the fact that most of the poles still stand after forty years (though in somewhat perilous condition) is high tribute to the quality of the work.

KITSEGUKALA

Little has been recorded of the various rather haphazard efforts at Kitsegukala and consequently they are difficult to date; but the methods employed place them somewhere between 1928 and 1940. The picture is further confused by the fact that new poles were still being erected as recently as 1945 and probably since.

Here it appears that fallen poles were re-erected close to their original sites as both they and the newer ones are scattered throughout the village; thus creating a more satisfactory overall effect despite the poor quality of the poles themselves.



'GITEMULDO POLE', HAZELTON, - 1960.

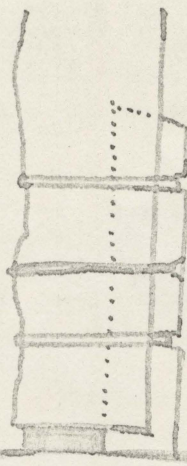
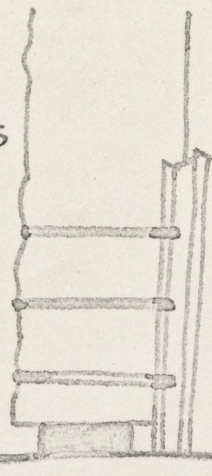
Pole bound to massive 'T'-section steel supports with steel rods.

Grass around base is kept short.

KISPIOX, 1966.

Much lighter 'I'-girders used for solid poles.

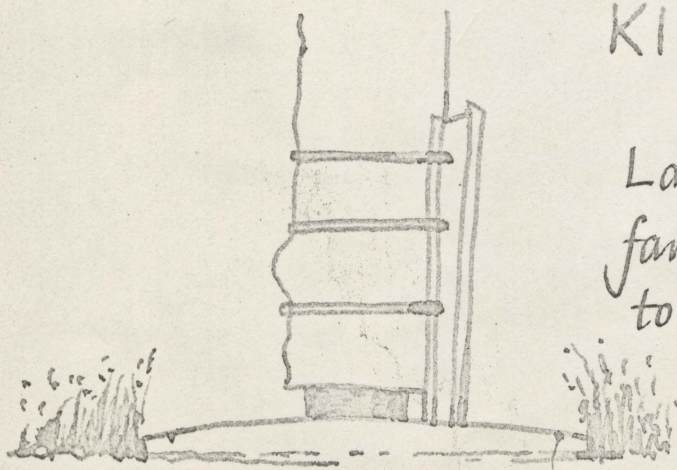
Poles raised on bricks above slightly domed bases.



Concrete pillars used for hollow backed poles.

KITWANCOOL, 1967.

Larger base keeps undergrowth farther away - dome is more pronounced to improve drainage.



GITAMAKS (HAZELTON)

The Indian village of Gitamaks has occupied two different sites. The first, occupied until the 1890's was on a low flood-plain on the north bank of the Bulkley River, just above its junction with the Skeena. The last poles on this site were swept away by floods in 1936 and no sign of the village now remains.

In the late '80's or early '90's the village was moved to a terrace overlooking the Skeena above Hazelton and it is from this site that the surviving poles were taken.

Three inferior poles and one good one were re-erected by the stadium at Hazelton during the late 1940's and in 1960 the best pole in the village (the "Gitemuldo Pole") was re-erected on the river bank beside the Skeena Treasure House Museum.

After removal from its old site the Gitemuldo Pole was thoroughly cleaned of all moss and lichen and lavishly treated with Cuprinol before being erected on a concrete base in which were set two heavy 'T' girders; to which it was bound by steel rods passing around the pole. After seven years there is no sign of any fungus infestation nor of any other deterioration.

This operation, which has been strikingly successful, represents the genesis of the more ambitious scheme of the Skeena Totem Preservation Committee now completed at Kispiox and currently in operation at Kitwancool.

KISPIOX

The re-erection of ten poles completed last year was the first major effort of the Skeena Totem Preservation Committee.

This restoration has been subjected to vociferous and ill-informed attacks in the Vancouver Press, which will be dealt with at greater length in the postscript. It is, from an aesthetic point of view, unsatisfactory; the poles being erected in two parallel rows facing the road and attached to their upright supports by steel rods which pass right round the poles (in one unfortunate case, around the neck of the figure whose protruding tongue contributes to the general impression of acute distress!).

The position^{ing} of the poles in regimented rows was in no way the fault of the Committee - it was forced upon them by the Indian owners of the poles, who insisted upon this arrangement. Fortunately the Committee resisted the owners' demands that the poles be painted in what they called "bright Vancouver colours" (referring to the Stanley Park totems) and compromised only to the extent of painting the eyes and mouths of the figures.

As for a method of support - by ~~bands~~^{rods} binding the poles to short 'I' girders set in concrete - though unattractive, it is from a technical point of view, unimpeachable.

Two most important innovations were introduced here. Firstly, the concrete bases were slightly domed in order to prevent puddles from forming and secondly, the bottoms of the poles were raised above the concrete bases on bricks. This has proved effective in keeping the bases dry. The fungicide used to prepare poles for re-erection is Pentachlorophenol. This method is far superior, both in concept and detail, to that used by ourselves at Thunderbird Park; and has already been improved upon in the bases now prepared for re-erection of the poles at Kitwancool.

KITWANCOOL

Kitwancool is the gem among the villages of the Gitksan. It contains almost all the worthwhile poles in the area and the Committee wisely left it till last in order to gain experience both of techniques and of relations with the owners. They ^{rightly} likely felt that any mistakes they might make should be at the expense of the very inferior poles at Kispick.

This approach, however, has the drawback that the poles at Kitwancool, which are, in any case, generally older, are also now in a more fragile condition than those at the other villages.

The pride of Kitwancool is the "Hole-in-the-sky Pole" which is the only one now standing in its original position and which, because of its uniqueness and the technical problems it presentw was the main reason for Mrs. Sargent's request for advice.

About a dozen other poles were still standing until this year (many of them in perilous condition) when they were taken down and prepared for re-erection. Many others had already fallen and were lying rotting on the ground. Some of these could be saved if it were possible to move them indoors where they could be preserved under supervision.

The bases already prepared for re-erection of the poles taken down this spring represent a technical improvement upon those used at Kispiox and clearly demonstrate the intelligently practical approach of the Committee. These bases are sited very close to the original positions of the poles in an irregular line along the edge of the terrace above the river and it has been agreed that the poles are not to be painted at all. These two decisions represent considerable victories for the Committee, which amply justify their circuitous approach to Kitwancool by Kispiox.

way of

TECHNICAL PROBLEMS.

The earliest restorer in the area (Thompson at Kitwanga in 1925) clearly recognized the causes of decay in totem poles standing in the open and attempted to combat them in his work.

Poles suffer serious attack by fungi in two places: at the top - and to a lesser extent on the other horizontal surfaces - where the end grain is exposed; and at ground level where the wood is constantly damp. This latter is the more serious, for rotting at ground level will cause the pole to fall where it will rapidly disintegrate. This is why in almost all re-erection schemes the poles are cut off at ground level the stump remaining in the ground is of little use anyway and after re-erection, the less contact the pole has with the ground the better.

Modern fungicides are remarkably effective in protecting poles against further rotting. Two fungicides have been used in this area, Cuprinol which proved so effective at Hazelton and more recently on the advice of the main pole users in the area (B. C. Telephone and B. C. Hydro) the Committee has used Pentachlorophenol at Kispiox and Kitwancool.

Both appear to be satisfactory. On the advice of the same companies the Committee is sealing the end grain of re-erected poles with Pol-kat grease and this, though unsightly, appears also to be effective. We did however advise them that a clear polyester or if conditions in the field prohibited its use a clear polyurethane would be preferable.

in evidence It should be understood that in this case, sophisticated methods are not practical. At Kitwancool there is no electric power and little skilled assistance is available, the dry season is of extremely short duration and the site which is in the middle of an Indian village is totally unsupervised. Vandalism is perhaps the greatest danger and is everywhere inevitable. The throwing of beer bottles at totem poles has recently assumed almost the proportions of a national sport among the Gitksan, and any fallen pole is likely to be broken up and burned. This has recently happened to part of one of the best poles at Kitwancool.

A more encouraging feature is the total absence from the area of wood-boring insects. Careful examination of wooden objects both indoors and out reveals no trace of powder post beetle or of any similar insect.

The prevailing winds in the area are westerly and the backs of all the poles at Kitwancool, which originally faced east are noticeably less damaged by fungus than are the fronts. The Committee plans to re-erect the poles very close to their original positions but facing west rather than east thus taking advantage of this phenomenon. This is also in accordance with the wishes of the Indians, who point out that the poles should face the road which has replaced the river as the main avenue of approach to the village.

It has been previously mentioned that the poles re-erected forty years ago at Kitwanga are once again in danger owing to the rotting of the wooden uprights to which they were bolted. This rotting is largely due to the collection of water on the flat concrete bases in which the uprights were set, and it is apparent that this danger has been avoided in the more recent schemes. Since the re-erection of the Gitemuldo Pole at Hazelton, in 1960, there has been a progressive improvement in the design of the concrete bases favoured by the Committee. This, combined with the practice initiated at Kispiox of raising the base of the pole on brick has ensured that there should be no direct

contact between the pole and any standing water, and the situation is still further improved by the larger bases which are to be used at Kitwancool. These will keep the tall weeds which grow in the area at a greater distance thus ensuring that a minimum of water reaches the foot of the pole, and incidentally, giving greater protection against grass fires.

The much criticized practice of attaching the poles to their steel supports by rods, though unattractive, is undoubtedly correct; as it does not in any way damage the pole. This is sound practice since it would still be possible at some future date to take advantage of any developments in conservation techniques.

The methods now being used at Kitwancool represent an improvement on anything I've seen elsewhere. It is the result of intelligent observation and interpretation of the methods used in the area during the past forty years; and it offers the best hope of prolonging the lives of poles which are still sufficiently sound to remain outdoors. I see no reason why with proper maintenance, the re-erected poles at Kitwancool and for that matter, at Kispiox, should not stand almost indefinitely. have

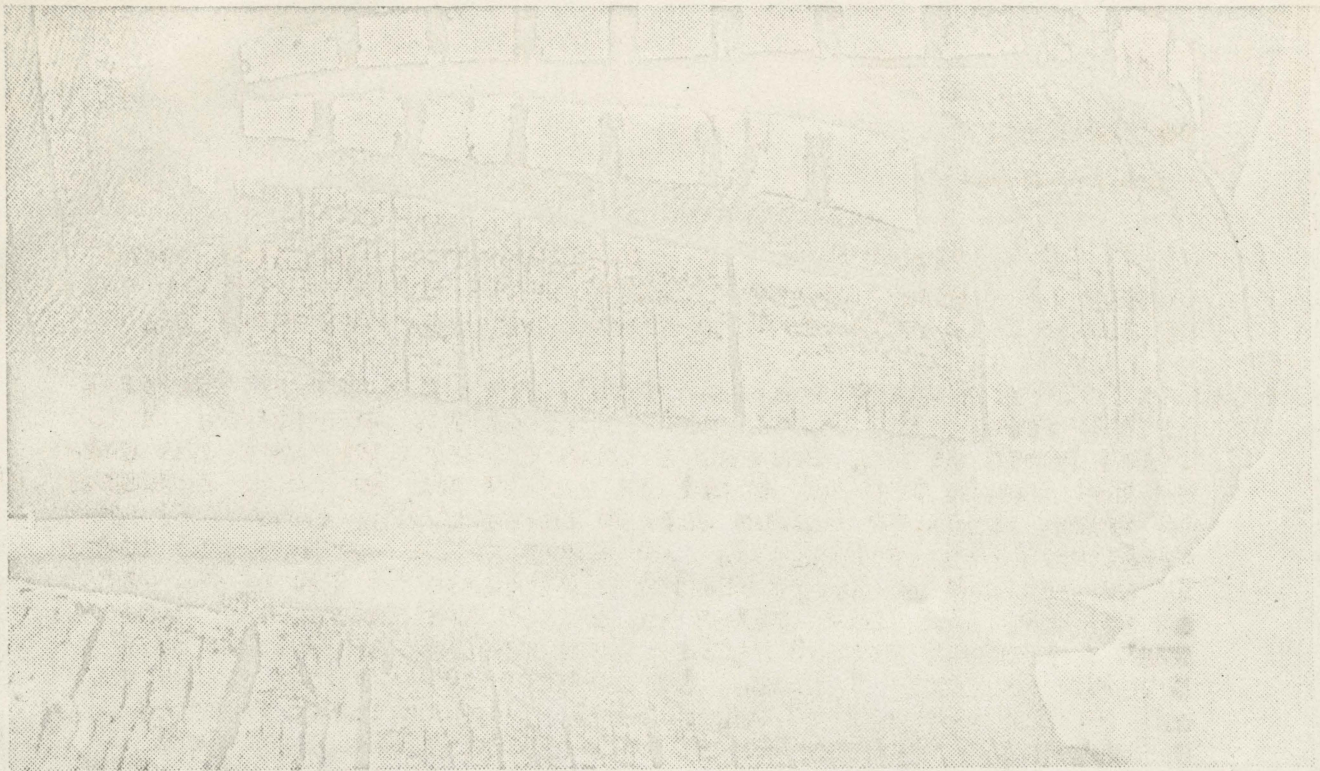
The "Hole-in-the-Sky" Pole at Kitwancool.

This is the only old pole still standing in its original position. Not only is it one of the oldest poles standing anywhere but it is also of supreme quality and unique design. Whatever else may happen, it is vital that this pole be saved. The difficulty is that its design makes it unsuitable for re-erection by the well-tried methods now being applied to the other poles. It is a hollow-backed ~~entrance~~ entrance pole about thirty feet high and at the base some four feet wide but not more than about eight inches thick. Some six feet from the ground is the opening of a large door and the front surface of the rest of the pole is richly and elaborately carved.

Our discussions of this pole with Mrs. Sargent and her colleagues were carried out both at Kitwancool and far into the night at Hazelton. Our recommendation was that the

pole should be removed to some safe place and there preserved under cover while if possible a good replica should be erected in its place. Various types of shelter and various ways of exhibiting the pole were discussed but it was evident from the amount of vandalism that it would not be possible to exhibit the pole in a horizontal position at Kitwancool. The Committee was commendably reluctant to accept our recommendation that the pole should be removed from Kitwancool therefore much of our discussion was concerned with possible methods of protection if the pole remained in situ. We discussed at some length the possibility of erecting within the curve of the hollow back of the pole a tubular steel or aluminum girder structure which would rise the full height of the pole and would relieve it of the aero-dynamic pressures to which it is subjected in high winds. As such a structure would be both unsightly and dangerous because of the temptation it offers to children to climb it, we also discussed the possibility of concealing it by planking on the side away from the pole. This however would spoil the whole effect of the pole for, one would then be unable to see the sky through the doorway. We also discussed the possibility of re-erecting the house to which the pole was once attached and concealing the lower part of the tubular steel structure within the house itself. Such a house, we felt, could also serve as a museum in which to store parts of fallen poles which are in evidence all around Kitwancool. Such a scheme, while attractive, would hardly be practical in the absence of responsible supervision; for the house, though locked, would most probably be broken into by vandals.

Thus the discussion came back to our original suggestion that the pole should be removed from Kitwancool to some safe place and replaced by a replica. It would not be difficult to persuade the Indians of the advantages of such a scheme, for they would undoubtedly prefer a bright new pole. The real difficulty lies in finding a suitable carver. As there do not appear to be any competent carvers among the Tsimshian people, the possibility was discussed of commissioning Henry Hunt to carve a replica. The Committee would be able to raise funds for such a project, but would expect Mr. Hunt to carry out the work either at Kitwancool or in Hazelton. One wonders, however, what Mr. Hunt's reaction would be when he saw the poles carved some years ago by Mungo Martin still lying on the ground at Kitwancool. These, which were part of an earlier scheme, are the victims of bureaucratic confusion, which has resulted in the preparation of bases to receive them which are so inadequate that no one has yet dared to erect the poles.



Totem at Kispiox appears to be choking because of the steel collar around pole.

Amateurs rile sculptor

By DONNA MASON

B.C.'s Indian artifacts are in as much danger from well-meaning but incompetent restoration attempts as from neglect, says Vancouver sculptor Peter Ochs.

"A recent restoration of the village of Kispiox, just north of Hazelton, destroyed the original concept of the village," he said.

"The totem poles were set up with metal strapping which destroys their appearance. Also they were taken out of their original positions and set up in two straight lines. They look like fence posts or telephone poles."

Originally, the poles were set up in front of homes, generally following the curve of the river.

Ochs said the Skeena Totem Preservation Committee, which did the Kispiox work, seems to have no interest in preserving the original concept of the poles.

"Restorations like this one mess things up completely. Museums are full of totem poles. What counts is to be able to see them outside, in the village setting. This is no longer possible at Kispiox."

The Skeena committee plans to restore another village in the area next summer. "This one, Kitwancool, is the only intact village remaining in northern B.C., and it gives us one last chance to preserve something in

its original form in the original setting," Ochs said.

There are 18 poles standing at Kitwancool, and another 15 lying down. "In addition, there is a huge old house, built entirely of hand-carved timbers, which I understand the committee intends to tear down.

"This house is a museum piece in itself, and I would suggest that it be restored and set up as a museum to house the fallen poles."

Poles lying on the ground have a life span of about five years, compared to 20 or 30 years for the standing poles. The Kitwancool house and poles are between 70 and 80 years old, Ochs said.

"I think the provincial government should adopt a definite policy on restoration, and not leave it to local groups who are enthusiastic, but lack technical skill and understanding."

"These groups seem to be more interested in attracting tourists and stimulating local business than in preserving the traditional concept of the village. Not enough imagination and care are being expended."

In a letter, Recreation Minister Kiernan told Ochs the Skeena committee plans a "more artistic grouping of poles" at the Kitwancool site.

"To me this is a terrible signal that they intend to alter them and remove them from their original

sites. This is exactly what I'm against."

"Interest in preservation of these artifacts is just starting now when it's almost too late. Restoration should be under the direction of experts in the field, but this isn't happening."

Kitwancool and Kispiox are two of six Tsimshian villages once located in the Hazelton area. "The others have pretty well disappeared, at least in their original form. Kitwancool is the only one which really retains the original village structure."

One of the original poles from Kitwancool is now at UBC. "For some reason they've left it outside, lying on the ground. I think this is one of the finest poles in B.C. but they're not taking care of it."

Ochs outlined methods other than external metal strapping which may be used to reset totem poles. "They can be set in a cement base, like those at UBC's Totem Park, or supporting poles may be set in the core.

"These methods don't alter the appearance, as metal strapping does."

Ochs has been studying B.C. Indian artifacts for several months on a Canada Council grant. He will leave for Europe to study methods of preserving wood carvings at the end of February.

POSTSCRIPT.

Reproduced here are clippings from Vancouver newspapers of January and July 1967; which refer to the activities of Peter Paul Ochs of 1836 Island Avenue, Vancouver 15.

For obvious reasons, their contents are of interest to the Provincial Museum and particularly to myself. I first heard of Mr. Ochs more than a year ago, when the award of the Canada Council Grant to enable him to study conservation of totem poles in Europe caused considerable amusement among conservators in England. As there is no western red cedar in Europe and no large wooden structures in the open, and as all the old totem poles in Europe are indoors in museums, such a project seemed rather like sending an Eskimo to the Equator to study igloos. It seemed particularly so to me, as, at the request of Mr. Abbott, I had already devoted considerable time to the study of this problem and had discovered that there was no knowledge or experience of it in Europe.

In the first of these clippings, almost the only accurate paragraph, is that in which he quotes the Minister (correctly, but out of context). The inaccuracy of the rest will be apparent to anyone who has read this report, but two specific points are worthy of attention as indicating the quality of the whole. The "huge old house, built entirely of hand-carved timbers" which is referred to here, was in fact, built in 1928 and was built of whip-sawn timber no part of it being hand-carved. The house is, in fact, of no value and is in a state of complete dereliction. If it were to be used for any purpose, every timber in it would have to be replaced. As for the reference a little later, to "attracting tourists and stimulating local business", this would be an interesting achievement; as Kitwancool is at the end of ten miles of the worst dirt road in British Columbia which, furthermore, leads nowhere. Of particular interest, are the methods proposed by Mr. Ochs as being preferable to those used by the Skeena Totem Preservation Committee. The first method he suggests is scarcely practical for a pole which has rotted off at ground level, while the second is that used at Kitwanga forty years ago and, beginning *now* to fail. Of course, Mr. Ochs did not go to Kitwanga.

The other clipping, refers to the results of Mr. Ochs' European tour. On my way north to Hazelton, I made a point of calling on Mr. Ochs, and spent an evening with him

Preservative found?

★ Europe has medicine for tottering totems

Sculptor Peter Ochs is back in Vancouver with the big medicine he hopes will put the West Coast's tottering Indian totem poles back on their feet.

Under a \$3,000 Canada Council grant, Ochs spent four months touring European countries in a search for chemical preservatives to restore Indian

carvings in Prince Rupert, Queen Charlotte Islands and Hazelton.

He thinks he may have the answer in a West German preservative that is combined with reinforced fibreglass.

In his swing through Europe, Ochs studied the preservation of such things as medieval carvings, churches and old warships.

But, although he thinks he has found the answer to the preservation of the Indian carvings, his problem now is to test the process.

He hopes to be able to run experimental tests on some lesser examples of the art.

There are three different chemicals used in preserving and restoring European art that could be applied to totems, he said.

One penetrates the wood completely, another strengthens it and a third treats the surface.

"Any one of these or a combination might do the job," he says.

At this stage he can't say how expensive the process will be. Until he experiments, he won't know how many gallons of preservative will be soaked up by the wood.

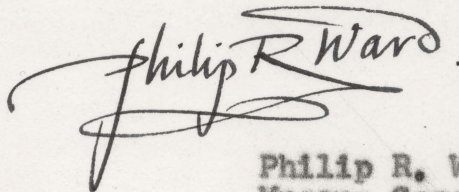
The thing that impressed him in Europe was the amazement of museum authorities when he showed them his photographs of slowly-disintegrating Indian carvings.

"The British Museum has one pole and two lifesize figures," he said. "When I told them there are at least 56 pieces stowed away in Totem Park at the University of B.C., their mouths watered."

discussing the results of his research. He was either unwilling or unable to give me any concrete information about them, but by careful questioning I was able to discover that the three materials which are to solve all our problems, are ones which have already been tried and rejected.

At Hazelton, I was interested to discover that the Postmaster who, alone, had befriended Mr. Ochs, was under the impression that he was a Provincial Government Official.

It is unfortunate, but somehow typical of Mr. Ochs that, with all the rotting and neglected totem poles in remote parts of the Province, he should have chosen to attack the one group which is conducting a skilled and successful restoration programme.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Philip R. Ward". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with a large initial 'P' and 'W'.

Philip R. Ward,
Museum Conservator.

PRW/hmb

(Inconsistencies in the spellings of Indian names are due to my attempts to select those which are phonetically most satisfactory; the more extrovert variations are Helen's!)

Pat Carney

CARNEY

This is the story of Polly Sargent and the members of the Skeena Totem Pole Restoration Committee. It is not a business story. It is more a matter of faith, and since that faith is being jeopardized by unjust criticism, it is a story that needs telling.

Polly and Bill Sargent run the Inlander Hotel at Hazelton, where the Skeena River turns north behind Alaska. Bill also runs the store started by his father, who came there in 1891 for the Hudson's Bay.



SKEENA POLE
... work ahead

Hazelton is not a prepossessing town. It is surrounded on three sides by an Indian reserve and on the fourth by the river. There was probably more action 100 years or so ago when it started as a Hudson's Bay post.

Yet the hotel is a triumph of post and beam architecture and comfortable beds and good cooking. Half the town gathers in the lobby for parties bidding farewell to an RCMP constable or welcome to a new bank manager. An Emily Carr painting hung above the fireplace, until the tourists started coming.

You have to know that the people of Hazelton are like that before you can understand about the totem poles.

I first saw the poles four or five years ago, when I travelled the Skeena with two foresters. They were looking at timber. We scoured every byway in that handsome valley, with its strong shouldered mountains and thickly-muscled rivers.

Skewered to Past by Poles

We swung across the Skeena in a cable ferry and drove through deep forest and came, finally, to the Indian villages, silent communities skewered to the past by totem poles.

I had never seen anything like those Tsimshian poles. They were different from the Haida or the Kwakwiltl. Their crests were the frog, the bear, the halibut and the sun. They stood stoically along the road, or tilted against the sky or lay on their backs in the lush long grass.

You have to think of those poles in that setting before you can appreciate the efforts made to restore them.

Polly and the others tried years ago to save the poles, because they are our national monuments. "The tradition out of which they grew is gone," says Polly. "Each one, in its way, is a Sphinx."

But there was one problem. The poles belong to the Tsimshian people, and they are a proud, reserved group. Their pride requires them to potlach when a pole is raised. A potlach can cost the host \$1,000-\$1,200.

With Poles Went Rights

"With the poles and the crests went all the hereditary rights," explains Polly. "It was a going concern which they bought. They could say: 'Because my grandmother saw the one-eyed bear I can fish there and you can't, and I can pick berries here and you can't.'"

The committee wanted to save the poles, but not to impoverish the people. The project stalled. Then someone thought of restoring whole villages at a time. This avoids potlaching, but it requires the committee to restore all poles, good, bad and indifferent. They cannot spend their limited funds on preserving only the best.

The restoration involves 50 odd poles in the villages of Kispiox, Kitseguecla, Kitanmax, Kitwancool and Kitwanga. The various chiefs agreed, and the committee went ahead. This is what they have done.

They expanded to a 28-member group, including forestry engineers, the manager of a commercial cedar pole company whose business depends on the preservation of wood, an architect, a banker, an editor, B.C. Hydro's district manager, a lawyer, chartered accountants, Indian chiefs. All were experts on either wood preservation or Indian art.

Wood Industry Backed Plan

They sought the advice of experts all over the world on wood preservation. One member, Stan Rough, made a trip to European museums. But nobody else was attempting an outside restoration on the scale of the Skeena poles.

So they turned to industry whose success depends on preserving wood. The product they finally chose was unanimously recommended by the commercial pole companies.

They compiled a 56-page brief, which won from the B.C. government a \$20,000 matching grant. Lieut. Governor George Pearkes is their patron and their government-appointed advisor is Wilson Duff, associate professor of anthropology at UBC.

They had engineers design a metal, stressed brace to support the poles. Their biggest enemy is rot, says Polly, and that means fighting moisture. Cement or metal condenses moisture, and must be avoided or used to the minimum.

They trained Indians for the job of cleaning, treating and spraying the poles after they are taken down. The heartwood in some poles is rotten through, and there is only the skeleton left.

With Faith, No Real Trouble

They found the fragile poles could best be supported by three metal bands attached to a steel upright which keeps the poles clear of the ground. For the best pole at Kitwancool they plan on using a plastic shell which will keep the moisture out. The cost will be \$8,000 compared to the average \$650 per pole.

They have raised some \$8,000 in the north and expect to have little trouble raising the other \$12,000, so long as the people have faith in the restoration. For the committee, with the 12 poles at Kispiox raised, has no illusions about the limits of the project.

First, they cannot dictate the placement of the poles. The Indians own them and the Indians say where they will go. "A frog crest can't go on Fireweed land," says Polly. "Our only stipulation is that the site must be above flood level."

Secondly, the metal-banded totem poles are never going to look like they did in their natural state. "Nobody minds it more than me," says Polly Sargent. "It nearly breaks my heart. But it is a matter of doing what we can, or losing them. Eventually some of the best of them may be put under cover."

I remembered the crazy-tilted poles leaning against the Skeena sky and sighed.

Some critics claim that the restoration is merely tourist bait, but if you know the people of the Skeena you know that is not true. The only people who might benefit from tourists are the Sargents, and as long as steelhead run in the Kispiox, the Sargents don't need totems.

The Indians, however, might benefit from totem pole tourists. "We don't care if they do," says Polly Sargent. "More power to them. After all, they own the poles."