BIG BEAVER:
THE CELEBRATION OF A CONTEMPORARY TOTEM POLE BY NORMAN TAIT, NISHGA

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ABSTRACT

In April 1982, Nishga carver Norman Tait hosted the raising of a fifty-five foot totem pole named Big Beaver at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, Illinois. Over the winter of 1981-82 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Tait and five apprentices had carved the pole with images inspired by a story given to Tait by his maternal uncle, Rufus Watts, a man Tait calls grandfather. In the early spring of 1982, Watts had taught dances and songs to Tait, Tait's apprentices and other family members and the dancers created costumes and ceremonial paraphernalia for the pole raising ceremony in Chicago. In Chicago in April, members of the Northwest Coast artistic community and staff and patrons of the Field Museum participated in the contemporary Nishga cultural performance.

This thesis is an ethnography of the events leading up to and including the pole raising ceremony. It is a case study of the revival of native Indian traditions, a revival that has been occurring on the Northwest Coast since the 1950's. The work addresses four questions. 1. How are native Indian visual and performance forms created from orally transmitted tradition? It describes how the contemporary native carver and his grandfather brought forward their traditions. It discusses the role
of museums, anthropology, media, marketplace and other artists. 2. What is the nature of the communities generated by the artistic activity of a contemporary native carver? Included are descriptions of the Nishga and Northwest Coast artistic communities' participation in an expanded native Indian cultural project. 3. How does a museum contextualize a native Indian cultural performance and what meta-messages are communicated? The Field Museum refers back to the Native American participation in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago to contextualize their events in 1982. Were the messages that were overtly expressed in 1893 covertly communicated in 1982? 4. What changes occur in traditions that are brought forward in a contemporary cultural performance? There is a simplification of the traditional Nishga system of cultural messages and a shift in emphasis. There are also changes in the types of alliances for the production of the contemporary totem pole and an adoption of the traditional ritual system for the modern pole raising. The thesis concludes with some questions and discussion on how to assess contemporary native Indian cultural performance in non-traditional settings.
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Figure 1. The Big Beaver totem pole at the Field Museum, Chicago Illinois. May 1982 (Field Museum of Natural History).
It looked so big while we were carving it until the people came around it, and then realized how big the people are...this pole would be silenced if it were not for people.

Norman Tait
I. INTRODUCTION - BRINGING FORTH TRADITION

Traditions "are, ordinarily, the things that we take for granted, the unquestioned assumptions and the handed-down ways of our ancestors. But it has become a commonplace of modern history that even the most traditional societies are no longer sure of what it is they can take for granted. Confronted by swift currents of internal and external change, they have been compelled to restate themselves to themselves in order to discover what they have been and what it is they are to become.

Milton Singer

In April 1982, Nishga carver Norman Tait raised a fifty-five foot totem pole called Big Beaver, which he had carved, at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, Illinois. He was assisted by his grandfather, apprentices, dancers, members of the Northwest Coast artistic community and Field Museum staff and patrons. In bringing some of his native Indian traditions forward into contemporary expression, Tait produced a restatement of Nishga and Indian identity in which a past and present were articulated and a future was empowered.

This thesis is an ethnography of the events which led up to and included this pole raising performance. It is a case study of the revival of artistic and ceremonial traditions, a revival that has been occurring on the Northwest Coast since the 1950's (Ames 1981, 1983, Duffek 1983, Hall and
Blackman 1981, Halpin 1981b, 1982, 1983, Macnair 1977, 1980, Vastokes 1977). In the revival of traditions there has been both a loss and change of cultural distinctions and meanings. These transformations have created the possibility of new statements for native people that are relevant to situations in which they live today. This thesis includes the description of a number of works by Norman Tait which, like works of other contemporary artists, assert a contemporary Indian and tribal rather than a traditional family and clan identity.

The transformation of traditions has also provided greater access to aspects of native Indian culture, such as the art, for cross-cultural audiences. Traditionally complex statements of social identity have been simplified and in some cases reconstructed. (We will see Tait and his grandfather adapt the complex traditional Tsimshian system of cultural messages in the production of Big Beaver and in its pole raising ceremony.) In some art there has been a shift in emphasis away from totemic messages towards mythological associations and universal dimensions of meaning (Halpin 1981b). Old artistic forms are being evolved and new media are being explored by contemporary artists. There is a
movement towards more realism and single-figure representations (loc. cit.)

There has also been growing support for a purely aesthetic approach to both contemporary and traditional Northwest Coast art by some museums, anthropologists, curators, marketers and critics. As well, there has been an outcry against the divorce of native art from the matrix of cultural meanings (see Ames 1984-85). Whatever the point of view, arts from the Northwest Coast are eliciting more serious attention in the rich pluralism of art in the world today.

The new art is not all "great art". The fact that a revival is occurring, however, and that some of this new art can stand with pieces from past Northwest Coast societies (Macnair 1977, 1980, Halpin 1983) and with other styles of present-day art in artistic excellence, demonstrates the vitality of the creative spirit among the contemporary native Indian people. The transformative process also poses a challenge to all who participate in the revival (artists, native communities, anthropologists, museums, dealers, media and consumers [Ames 1981]) to continually examine the grounds for artistic distinctions and criteria for judging quality. It also poses a challenge to anthropology and museums to examine
the role they are taking and could take in influencing the revival’s direction (Ames Ms., Halpin 1983).

Communities are being generated by the revival of artistic traditions on the Northwest Coast. In traditional Northwest Coast societies, art was an integral part of a social and ceremonial matrix. It was used in cultural performances in which people demonstrated their family identity and connections with the supernatural. Today, native Indian artists are increasingly involved in reviving dance, song and ceremonies as well as art. Communities of native people and the artists are joining together in revitalized expressions of performance traditions.

There is a community of another sort that is evolving in the process of revival that I call the Northwest Coast artistic community. It is made up of native Indian artists of various tribal backgrounds, non-native artists producing native Indian arts, curators and anthropologists who all contribute to one another’s work, thereby furthering the larger phenomenon, the revival of Northwest Coast Indian traditions. We will see how a Nishga community and the Northwest Coast artistic community operated for Norman Tait in becoming a Nishga carver and in producing the Big Beaver totem pole and its accompanying pole-raising ceremony.
I take the position that what is transpiring in the revival of native traditions on the Northwest Coast has, at least potentially at this point, positive ramifications for many people as well as native Indians. The revival of Northwest Coast traditions provides opportunities for people from diverse ethnic origins and disciplines to contribute to each other and to celebrate the creative human spirit. It is with this attitude that I document Norman Tait's production of the Big Beaver totem pole and its celebratory raising in Chicago.

Prefacing the Ethnography

I gathered ethnographic material by interviewing Norman Tait and video taping the carving process, dance rehearsals, costume making and pole raising performances. I examined news releases and project statements from the Field Museum and letters from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (hereafter D.I.N.A.) in the Public Archives of Canada. I also relied heavily on participant observation during the preparation time in Vancouver and the pole-raising time in Chicago.

During my fieldwork I was fortunate to be part of a Mandala Media video crew that documented the pole carving and raising, and produced
several educational programmes. (The Field Museum of Natural History and the British Columbia Ministry of Education, Special Education Branch provided funds for the video project.) As well as providing me with means of support during the pole carving in Vancouver and travel expenses for the pole raising cultural performance in Chicago, the project provided me with video tapes to study.

I participated in field situations prior to the totem pole study that provided a background sense of the contemporary native art world and a taste of contemporary Nishga life. I worked for Norman Tait and his wife Cathy in their studio-gallery, Wilp's Tsak. My duties included writing a newsletter for Tait's clients and people interested in his activities. I also had an opportunity to join Norman Tait and Cathy Cohen-Tait, Tait's apprentices and one of the apprentices' wives on a canoe trip from Prince Rupert, B.C. to Tait's village, Kincolith, at the mouth of the Ness River. It was a hundred mile trek in two cedar dugouts which Tait and his apprentices had carved, plus two aluminum canoes. We traced a traditional Nishga food gathering and trading route, were feasted with traditional foods by elders in Port Simpson and attended a potlatch and canoe naming ceremony in Kincolith. These experiences deepened my understanding of
the native culture in which Norman Tait, Nishga carver, lives and creates art.

The work of Milton Singer (1959: xiii) provides a useful concept for this paper, namely, cultural performance. He writes that:

Indians [East], and perhaps all peoples, think of their culture as encapsulated in such discrete performances, which they can exhibit to outsiders as well as to themselves. For the outsider these can be conveniently taken as the most concrete observable units of cultural structure, for each cultural performance has a definitely limited time span, a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance.

Singer found that by studying performances he was able to learn much about tradition and change in contemporary India. By studying the pole raising performance, including the preparations and the actual event, I was able to learn about the revival of Nishga tradition on the Northwest Coast.

As well as using cultural performance as my conceptual frame, I wish to introduce another theatrical metaphor: backstage and frontstage. Erving Goffman, in Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), describes frontstage, which he also calls the front region, in the following way:
when one's activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed. It is clear that accentuated facts make their appearance in what I have called a front region (1959: 111).

Backstage, or back region, Goffman describes as a place where suppressed facts make an appearance....It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed....Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character (loc. cit., p. 112).

The Tait cultural performance in Chicago had both front and backstage aspects. The thesis primarily describes the backstage preparations by Norman Tait, his apprentices and the performers who accompanied him to Chicago, including the areas of problems, conflict and stress. As well, there are descriptions of performances in front of audiences in which a harmonious and coherent impression was generated.

Norman Tait’s performance in 1982 is framed by a description of the Field Museum contextualization of the event. Although the Field Museum material forms a backdrop to the Tait performance, it is primarily
frontstage material, in that it is based on the public rhetoric of the Museum from its event brochures, news releases and project statements. What is backstage to the Museum rhetoric, in the sense that Goffman uses the term ("where suppressed facts make an appearance"), for the most part, is beyond the scope of this paper. I will only point to some questions and offer some discussion regarding the backstage of the pole raising as a Museum cultural performance in the chapter on the pole raising.

This thesis consists of eight chapters including introduction and conclusions. As well as this introduction, "Bringing Forth Tradition", there are two other chapters that set the stage for the ethnography. Chapter Two, "A Museum Commissions a Living Exhibit", describes the events in Chicago which led up to the Tait cultural performance in that city. It includes descriptions of Native American participation in the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, which the Field Museum used to contextualize their activities with Native Americans in 1982. Chapter Three, "The Creation of a Nishga Carver", is a biography of Norman Tait as a carver and describes his reconstruction of the Nishga artistic tradition. It introduces the the Northwest Coast artistic community and the effects of Tait's work on his participation in his native community. We see what
events led up to the Field Museum commission.

Chapters four through six are primarily descriptions of the backstage preparations for the cultural performance in Chicago. Chapter Four, "From Oral Tradition to Artistic Image", describes how Tait received the story which he used to inspire the pole imagery from the man Tait calls "grandfather", his maternal uncle, Rufus Watts. The chapter follows Tait's creative development of the pole images and includes the story and the pole sketch.

Chapter Five,"Drawing the Images Out of Wood", describes the transformation of a cedar tree into a totem pole. It focuses on Tait's creative process in carving the images in wood and on his work with his apprentices. The chapter includes a description of the pole carrying ceremony with which the pole was sent on its way to Chicago.

Chapter Six, "Becoming Nishga Dancers", follows the formation of a Nishga dance group. It includes descriptions of the dances, songs, costumes and ceremonial paraphernalia. Attention is also paid to the teaching/learning process and to the generation of a sense of community.

Chapter Seven, "The Pole Raising - A Cultural Performance", is about the frontstage performance in Chicago. It includes descriptions of the last
minute backstage activity and then the event itself. We see how the Northwest Coast community steps in to support Tait's cultural performance. I conclude with a description of how the project led Tait back into his native community and some discussion of the pole raising as a Field Museum cultural performance.

Chapter Eight, "Conclusions", asks how we can assess contemporary native Indian cultural performances.

In Appendix I, I examine the differences between the traditional acquisition and preparation of a tree for a totem pole and how Norman Tait went about these activities in 1981-82. In Appendix II, I discuss the sculptural features of the Big Beaver totem pole and demonstrate what makes this pole Tsimshian and Nishga in style.

Anything in quotation marks in the biographical chapter and those chapters describing the preparation of the totem pole and the dancers and the performance of the pole raising ceremony, that is not otherwise identified, was spoken by Norman Tait.
Chapter Notes:

1. I am using community here in the sense that Robert Redfield uses "intermittent community" in *The Little Community* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp.7-8. He uses the following criteria to delineate this term: 1. isolated day-to-day, 2. "loose, shifting in personnel, almost entirely without formal institutional organization", 3. members come together to help each other with various tasks and there is a social component, 4. members gather for ceremonial occasions, 5. distinctiveness as a community lasts as long as members are gathered, 6. sometimes there is a physical centre where the community gathers.
II. A MUSEUM COMMISSIONS A LIVING EXHIBIT

This is the opportunity to live up to our predecessors of 1893. In honor of this coming together and recognition of the NWC [Northwest Coast] continuum, an expression of friendship between Field Museum (Chicago - US) and the NWC peoples (Canada - Alaska) would be the commission, carving, and raising of a Tsimshian (sic) 50' totem pole.

Field Museum Exhibit Opening Plan

In May 1980 a committee of Native Americans\(^1\) from British Columbia and Alaska convened in Chicago to advise the staff of the Field Museum of Natural History on the Museum's re-installation\(^2\) of its Northwest Coast and Inuit collections. The Museum asked the committee's advice on commissioning a totem pole to complete the Museum's collection of twenty-six totem poles and house posts. The raising of the new pole was to mark the opening of the re-installed exhibit. On the advice of the committee the Museum commissioned a Tsimshian pole from Norman Tait who was the Tsimshian representative on the committee. (The Nishga are a sub-group of the Tsimshian language group.) Part of the agreement struck with Norman Tait was
that he bring a troupe of Tsimshian dancers and singers to Chicago for
the pole raising in April 1982. Kwaguitl and Tlingit dancers were
invited to perform during April and May of that year as well. Prominent
contemporary Northwest Coast and Alaskan Inuit artists were invited to
sell their art, to demonstrate their creative skills, to share their
knowledge and to participate as special guests in the exhibit opening
events.

The Native American participation in 1982 had an historical
precedent in Chicago. In 1893 Native Americans, along with native
peoples from other parts of the world, participated in the World's
Columbian Exposition in Chicago. They demonstrated and sold their arts,
and performed dances, songs and ceremonies in habitations constructed
on the Fair grounds. The Field Museum in 1982 looked back to the 1893
World's Exposition to contextualize its cultural performance. In this
chapter I will describe the two situations of Native American
participation in Chicago occurring ninety years apart, concentrating on
the peoples of the Northwest Coast. This description is to act as a
backdrop to the native staging and performing of the Museum initiated
event in 1982.
Native Americans Invited to Chicago in 1893

In 1890, Chicago's financial elite won the site of the World's Columbian Exposition for Chicago over New York. To do so, they raised ten million dollars in backing and waged a successful lobby in Congress (Rydell 1980: 80-87). The Exposition was to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the landing of Columbus and to celebrate progress since that time in America. It was also viewed as bringing financial benefits to many businesses in the Chicago area.

Twenty-seven and a half million visitors attended the Exposition over its six month operation from May to October 1893.

The President of the Exposition, H.A. Higinbotham, called the Fair "an epitome of progress" (quoted in Rydell 1980:129). The Exposition board of directors approached the Smithsonian Institution for assistance in classifying the exhibits and setting up several ethnological displays. G. Brown Goode, who was appointed by the Smithsonian to do this task, called the Fair an "illustrated encyclopedia of civilization" in his draft of a system of classification for the Exposition (quoted in Rydell 1980: 92). Goode said the object of the Fair
was to enable visitors "to understand and appreciate the wonderful progress that had been made in everything" (quoted in Rydell 1980: 92).

The board of directors also hired Fredric W. Putnam from Harvard's Peabody Museum to be Chief of the Department of Archaeology and Ethnology. Putnam was in charge of amassing and exhibiting living ethnological exhibits of native peoples of both Americas. Putnam intended to demonstrate the evolutionary ideas about race that were popular in the fledgling science of anthropology. He also saw the Exposition as an opportunity to prepare the ground for a major ethnological museum in Chicago. The Columbian Museum was indeed established at the close of the Fair, and was later renamed the Field Museum of Natural History.

The impetus to create living ethnological exhibits came from the success of ethnological villages of French colonized people at the Paris Exhibition of 1889. These villages were considered one of the main attractions for over thirty million visitors (Rydell 1980: 109). Smithsonian delegates to an anthropological and archaeological Congress held at that time in Paris reported that the ethnological villages were an "effective and popular" approach for demonstrating
evolution (quoted in Rydell 1980: 109). In the Chicago Daily Tribune May 31, 1890 (quoted in Dexter 1966: 316), Putnam was reported as saying:

"to all who visited the World’s Fair in Paris last year, the Ethnographical Department proved to be one of great attraction, and the study of man as he has been in the past and as he is in the present in distant countries was made possible by object lessons of the greatest interest (emphasis added)."

He continued with a statement of his intention to create at the Chicago Exposition:

"a perfect ethnographic exhibition of the past and present peoples of America and thus make an important contribution to science, which at the same time will be appropriate, as it will be the first bringing together on a grand scale of representatives of the peoples who were living on the continent when it was discovered by Columbus, and by including as thorough a representation of prehistoric times as possible, the stages of the development of men on the American continent could be spread out as an open book from which all could read (emphasis added)."

Putnam saw Native American tribes as being rapidly "absorbed by several republics" (quoted in Dexter 1966: 316). He believed that Native Americans coming to the Exposition would do more than serve science
and education; it would be an opportunity for them as well. Putnam wrote in the *World's Columbian Exposition Plan and Classification* (quoted in Rydell 1980:118) that:

> this gathering of different natives of this continent at such a time and place can but be benefical as it will afford them a grand opportunity to see and understand the relations of different nations and the material advantages which civilization brings to mankind.

With nearly one hundred assistants, Putnam took up the work of his department. He sent fieldworkers all over the Americas to collect material culture and data. Edmund Carpenter (1975: 16) points out that collecting for the World's Columbian Exposition led to the inadvertent creation of a new type of specimen: the "anthropological specimen". Living artists were commissioned to create work which was "consciously more traditional in form, but in craftsmanship came out of the souvenir industry".

Indian agents of the United States and Canada were asked to help collect materials and to arrange for representatives from Indian tribes to travel to Chicago for the Exposition. Putnam initiated arrangements with the United States Army for the services of Captain C.C. Cusick to be
Franz Boas was Putnam's chief assistant and did work on the Northwest Coast for the Exposition. Having developed a close working relationship with Kwaguitl George Hunt of Fort Rupert, he recommended that Hunt lead up a party of Kwaguitl to Chicago for the Fair. On September 24, 1892 Putnam wrote to A.W. Vowell, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Victoria, B.C., for permission "to engage the services of 14 Indians from Fort Rupert". They would "exhibit their arts, such as basket weaving, carving, painting, etc. on the Fair Grounds". In the letter, Putnam laid out the terms of the arrangement. The Kwaguitl would receive monthly compensation and provisions which would be deducted from the proceeds of the sales of their work. If the sales of their work did not cover their expenses, the Kwaguitl would not be held responsible for the difference. Their transportation would be provided (Public Archives of Canada 1970: 95535). (Small parties of Tsimshian and Haida also travelled to the Exposition.4) The Native Americans who came to the Fair were regarded as living specimens by Fair officials. This attitude did not correspond with
that held by other people. The Canadian Pacific Railway, for example, caused Putnam some difficulty. The Railway had agreed to transport exhibit specimens one way for free. Putnam assumed this arrangement included living specimens. After sending the Northwest Coast representatives home at the conclusion of the Fair with only food money for the journey, Putnam was sued by the Railway for the cost of their transportation (Dexter 1966:328).

Several sites were established at the Exposition for ethnological displays. After persistent demands, Putnam received an entire building which he named the Anthropological Building. According to Ralph Dexter, “This was the first use of such a name, and the exhibition introduced a novelty to the public” (1966: 315). The Anthropological Building contained ethnological and archaeological exhibits, laboratories and a library. Visitors could be measured by physical anthropologists and could view statues of what were considered the ideal modern American human types: a male student from Harvard and a female student from Radcliffe (Rydell 1980: 110).

The Smithsonian Institution had exhibits in the Government and
Women's Buildings. In one exhibit in the Government Building it exhibited life size statues of Native Americans in traditional dress engaged in typical activities in their natural environments. The Bureau of Indian Affairs of the Interior Department created an Indian school to which small groups of students from governmental Indian schools were sent during the Exposition. The intention was to demonstrate the education and development of citizenship among young modern Indians (Dexter 1966: 326).

Putnam's living ethnological exhibits were created on a narrow strip of land between two parks. The area was called the Midway Plaisance. The Native Americans were housed in dwellings that were typical of their area and were situated among restaurants, entertainment and ethnic villages from other parts of the world. The Northwest Coast representatives lived in several cedar plank houses, portions of which they brought with them. Some of the houseposts and totem poles of the Fair village became part of the Field Museum's collection.

In the World's Columbian Exposition, Plan and Classification, Putnam wrote that his intention with regard to the visiting Native Americans was that "the presentation of native life be in every way
satisfactory and creditable to the native peoples, and no exhibition of a
degrading or derogatory character" would be permitted (quoted in Rydell
1980: 117). A group of Native Americans wrote to Putnam in
appreciation of his public statement:

In the name of the Nations of the Indian Territory; of the Dakotah Indian Nation; of the Six Nation Indians of New York; and of the Latin-Indian nations of the North and South, permit us to extend to you the assurance of our appreciation of your public announcement, that in the reunion of the Nations of the earth at the World’s Columbian Exposition, the perpetuation of any Wild West Show at the expense of the dignity and interest of the Indian Nations will by you, be neither encouraged nor countenanced (quoted in Dexter 1966: 325).

Putnam believed that it was possible for there to be "as much
instruction as...joy on the Merry Midway" (quoted in Rydell 1980: 121).

It was difficult, however, to prevent the living Native American
exhibits from becoming a show of exotica and a "wild west"
entertainment event. Northwest Coast totem poles received the
following description in the caption under a photograph of the replicated Northwest Coast village (Buel 1894 n.p.).

Prominent features of their villages are called by them Totem poles, high and grotesquely carved tree
trunks which, though not regarded as divinities, are believed by the Alaskans to have the power to preserve the village against the machinations of evil spirits. They pay no homage to these images, nor even bestow upon them any care, so that if one tumbles down it is suffered to remain prostrate, because the Alaskans believe that each Totem pole is the embodiment of a ruling and beneficent spirit, and to interfere with it in any way would arouse its anger.

A young entrepreneur from San Francisco, Sol Bloom, was put in charge of the installation of the Midway exhibits. He worked for the Division of Works and not in the Department of Archaeology and Ethnology. His intention was entertainment and financial success. The Chicago Exposition management, with concern for its investment and knowledge of the drawing power of the ethnological villages in Paris in 1869, advocated a popular presentation of their living ethnological displays (Rydell 1980: 109). Bloom, who had visited the Paris Exhibition, had been impressed by the French colonized peoples' villages. He had been most attracted to what he called the "spiritual intensity" of exotic performers. In his autobiography, Bloom related that:
a tall skinny chap from Arabia with a talent for swallowing swords expresses a culture... on a higher plane than the one demonstrated by a group of earnest Swiss peasants who passed their days making cheese or milk chocolate (quoted in Rydell 1980: 117).

While in Paris, Bloom contracted a troupe of Algerian "dancers, acrobats, glass eaters, and scorpion swallowers" (quoted in Benedict 1984: 49) to come to Chicago. He set up these exotic performers on the Midway along with the Native Americans in their replicated habitations. Bloom later remarked in his autobiography that although he had no quarrel with Putnam's scientific capabilities, Putnam's involvement on the Midway was similar to having Albert Einstein manage the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus (Rydell 1980: 117).

There was an actual wild west show, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, set up just outside the Exposition grounds which, I am sure, added to the wild west atmosphere generated on the Midway inside the Exposition. The show outside was described (Buel 1894 n.p.)

two hundred Indians, of various tribes, and companies each of American, English, French,
German, Mexican, Cossack and Arbian cavalry, besides cowboys vaqueros, female riders, dancing dervishes, athletes, rifle experts, bucking ponies, a herd of buffaloes, and other attractions expositional of the great plains and rough riders of the world (emphasis added).

The New York Times June 11, 1893 said of the displays: "The late P.T. Barnum should have lived to see this day" (quoted in Rydell 1980: 115). Leading anthropologists hailed the living exhibits as a great "object lesson" (quoted in Rydell 1980: 83) which communicated the intended message in racial evolution. The Chicago Tribune, November 1, 1893 (quoted in Rydell 1980: 122) described the Midway as having provided the American people with an opportunity to see where they had come from.

What an opportunity was here afforded to the scientific mind, to descend the spiral of evolution tracing humanity in its highest phases down to its animalistic origins.

The Native Americans did not fare as well as Putnam had intended. They did not earn as much selling their arts as they or the Exposition facilitators had hoped. The Indians complained of poor
treatment: they were victims of verbal abuse. A publication called *Midway Types: The Chicago Times Portfolio of Midway Types, 1893* (quoted in Rydell 1980: 119), described Native Americans as:

Savages, pure and cunning, they gave to the Midway the shadows of characters that cannot be civilized and solemnity of appearance as deceptive as the veiled claws of the tiger.

In a thesis on American international expositions, Robert W. Rydell II discusses how World’s Fairs demonstrate the prevailing American attitude towards non-white non-industrialized peoples including Native Americans. He points out that the Battle of Wounded Knee was fought three years before the Chicago Exposition and argues, that this incident (at least partially), caused people to regard Indians as “apocalyptic threats to the values embodied in the White city” (1980: 119).

One of the outspoken critics of Putnam’s exhibits of Native Americans was a political appointee to Putnam’s Department, Emma Sickles. Putnam dismissed her for refusal to do ethnological work (Dexter 1966: 327). She was re-appointed, but also made statements to the press. The *New York Times* October 8, 1893, quoted her as saying
that Putnam's exhibits were designed "to work up sentiment against the Indian by showing that he is either savage or can be educated only by government agencies" (quoted in Rydell 1980: 118). She criticized the Indian ceremonial performances as "a brutal and cruel exhibition" and a "presentation of low and degrading phases of Indian life". She was quoted in the *New York Times*, October 8, 1893, as saying that "self-civilized Indians" had been kept out of the Fair because "the public would wake up to the capabilities of the Indians for self-government and realize that all they needed was to be left alone" (quoted in Dexter 1966: 327).

Dance rituals performed by members of the Northwest Coast Indians received unfavourable publicity from other sources besides Emma Sickles. Albert J. Hall from the Church Missionary Society in London, England, who had seen the Hunt party dance, wrote a letter August 24, 1893 to the Indian Affairs Department in Ottawa deploring the "displays of paganism" and "disgraceful proceedings". He pointed out that these dances were "part of the system known as 'Potlatch'" and that they were being performed by the very people who have aborted government efforts to abolish these practices, namely the Hunts. He
urged that the government cancel the Hunt engagement. Hall supported his pleas with a copy of an article that appeared in the *London Times* August 20, 1893, titled "Horrible Scene at the Fair" which reported blood letting and eating of human flesh (Public Archives of Canada 1970: 105597).

In a resulting exchange of letters in which they referred to the "atrocious orgies" and "disgusting performances", Canadian Government officials denied knowledge of the intention of the Canadian Indians to perform these dances and denied knowing that George Hunt had been "instrumental in preventing the enforcement of the law against the Potlach (sic)" (Canadian Public Archives 1970: 85,529 p.1). J.S. Lark, the Executive Commissioner to the Canadian Pavilion at the Exposition, claimed no power to stop the performances because the performances were occurring in the United States, but said he would ask the Fair officials to take some action (Public Archives of Canada 1970: 85,529 pp.1-3).

Lark, and other Canadian Government officials, went as far as to claim that the Canadian Government had no responsibility for the Northwest Coast Indian participation in Chicago—only one year after
exercising power to authorize it. Lark stated the "Indians, like white men, are free to make arrangements with whomsoever they please, and the Department cannot prevent their doing so (Public Archives of Canada 1970: 85,529 p.2). Indian Superintendent Vowell in Victoria wrote to Lark in the fall of 1893: "it is scarcely necessary to say that the presence of these Indians, under the care of Mr. Hunt, is quite unauthorized so far as this Department is concerned" (Public Archives of Canada 1970:85529 p. 5). Vowell wrote R.H. Pidcock, Indian Agent from Cape Mudge, B.C., asking him whether he had attempted to frustrate Kwaguitl participation in Chicago. Pidcock reported that the responsibility was entirely Boas for it was he who commissioned George Hunt "to persuade about a dozen Indians to go to the Chicago Fair, as specimens of British Columbia Indians". Pidcock insisted that he, Pidcock, strongly advised the Indians who asked his advice on joining the Hunts, not to go as he "did not consider it in any way to their advantage". Pidcock also criticized the choice of George Hunt as leader: "I should not consider that he was at all a fit and proper person to have charge of a party of Indians" (Public Archives of Canada 1970: 107495). Despite the criticism brought against him and his Department, Putnam
called himself "a true friend to the Indian race" (quoted in Rydell 1980: 118). He always attested to the authenticity of the native dance performances and the anthropological value of his living exhibits. He was pleased with the reception of all the work of his Department. In the Inter Ocean November 1, 1893 (quoted in Dexter 1966: 330), Putnam was reported as saying:

I am satisfied, and I am pleased that it is so universally acknowledged to be a success. This is especially gratifying since this is the first time in the history of world's expositions that anthropology has been ranked as one of the great departments.

Native Americans Invited to Chicago in 1982

In 1974 the Field Museum of Natural History drew up a master plan for re-development. The Northwest Coast and Inuit collections, started under Putnam and Boas for the World's Columbian Exposition, were targeted as the first collections to be re-installed. The "Maritime Peoples of the Arctic and Northwest Coast" exhibit was created with two and one half million dollars from government funding agencies, private trust funds, and museum revenues. Approximately three hundred people worked on the project over a seven year period.
The Museum's literature often referred to the links with the 1893 Exposition with statements about where the collections and Museum began. The "ancestors" of the 1893 Native American representatives were described as returning to Chicago to open the re-furbished exhibit (Field Museum News Release January 1982). In Chicago for the opening in 1982 was Kwaguitl artist and performer Tony Hunt whose great-uncle David performed the same programme of dances at the 1893 Exposition (Maritime Peoples Program of Events Winter/Spring 1982). His great-grandfather, George Hunt, had collaborated with Franz Boas and led the Kwaguitl party to Chicago ninety years previously (Field Museum News Release April 1982). Also in Chicago in April 1982 was Haida artist Robert Davidson, whose great-grandfather Charles Edenshaw had carved and performed in Chicago in 1893 (Chicago Sun-Times February 23, 1982).

1992 was pointed to as an important centenary for Chicago and the city was applying to host another World's Fair (which they did not receive). Links drawn between 1893, 1982 and 1992, and the continued connection with the Northwest Coast and Inuit peoples, were seen as strengthening the application (Field Museum News Release January 4,
1982). The Chicago Sun-Times April 18, 1982 discussed the irony of
"these things 'born' of one world's fair" being "handsomely packaged in
anticipation of another". The article goes on to quote the Director of
the Museum, Lorin Nevling Jr., "If the world's fair does occur in Chicago
in 1992 we want to be ready with our contribution."

The Statement of Purpose of the Field Museum reads:

To preserve, to increase, and to disseminate
knowledge of natural history.

To enhance in individuals the knowledge of and
delight in natural history.

Natural history for the Field Museum includes:

All life, past and present, human and non-human, and
the evolution of life.

The composition and evolution of the earth and its
neighbours.

The Statement of Purpose continues that the Museum achieves its
purpose by acquiring and preserving collections, promoting and
publishing scientific research, and educating through exhibits, lectures
and other media. The discussion in this paper will focus on education
because it was the Education Department, in conjunction with the
Exhibition Department, that facilitated the "Maritime Peoples" exhibit and its adjunct programming, including Native American events.

The Museum expressed concern for attracting visitors and facilitating satisfying museum experiences when they designed their programming. There was also a Museum agenda to "broaden its base of participation by people throughout the Chicago area and beyond". The Field Museum has one million visitors a year. Non-museum member participation had increased from ten to thirty-four percent in recent years and "as a non-profit, private institution we [the Field Museum] can survive as long as our broad based participation increases" (Re-installation Program Statement p. 1). There was an intention to involve Chicago's urban Native American community in the programme. Although Northwest Coast and Inuit peoples were not part of that community, it was felt that the exhibit would be important to all Native Americans because it reflected "Indian heritage and a contemporary continuum" (p.4).

The Museum described the commissioned totem pole as important because it would act as "a visual hallmark" and would "arouse public interest, stimulate curiosity and wonder, and invite attendance" (Field
Museum exhibit Opening Plan p. 2). The Museum hired a psychologist, Dr. Ross Loomis, as a consultant on their exhibit design to maximize visitor enjoyment. For the "time limited" visitor, designers presented basic concepts by using large size exhibit elements that were "dynamic, appealing and visually stimulating". These included dioramas, land and life-size house models, and mannequins in active poses. For the visitors who wanted more in-depth orientation, there were the artifacts in their proper "human context" with photomurals, audio-visual presentations and information panels. For the serious student, there were many related and similar artifacts in series so that comparisons could be made of a "variety of elements such as form, function and regionalism" (Re-installation Program Statement p. 2-3).

The new exhibit featured artifacts from the Northwest Coast and Arctic together so that visitors could compare how the peoples of these two cultural areas solved similar problems. The exhibit was also arranged so that comparisons could be made with exhibits of other Native American cultures in adjoining halls. Visitor's could easily compare typical dwellings of the Kwaguitl, Inuit and Pawnee, for example. The artifacts in the "Maritime Peoples" exhibit were arranged
into five sections: environment, food technologies, housing and community life, religious practices, and art. The exhibit primarily represented the time period of 1850 - 1920, but also included work by contemporary native artists and pointed to continuity, revival and evolution of traditions.

Adjunct educational programming was described as complementing and extending this exhibit. It acted "as a cohesive unit to maximize public understanding of, and enjoyment in, the Museum's extensive and significant permanent exhibition of the Pacific Northwest Coast collections" (Re-installation Program Statement p. 4). Many different programming formats were employed. These included volunteer training, free loan materials such as teachers' handbooks, classroom experience boxes, and posters for schools and community groups, materials for handicapped persons, a library and programmes of audio-visual presentations. There were lecture series, symposia, adult courses, workshops, cultural excursions, self-guided printed gallery tours. Also included were programmes of traditional dance and ceremony, demonstrations of artistic techniques by Native American artists, a series of celebratory events for the exhibit opening week and
a sales gallery of contemporary fine native art from the Northwest Coast Indians and Alaskan Inuit.

The work of creating the "Maritime Peoples" exhibit and its adjunct programming required the expertise of a diverse team of people. The "Re-installation Program Statement" had this to say about the undertaking:

A significant factor in the successful planning and development of this vast undertaking has been the unity of purpose among the curatorial, exhibition, and education staff. Although independent work has been necessary, every major decision has been made through positive group interaction and consensus (p. 2).

Carolyn Blackmon, Education Director of the Field Museum, was in charge of the re-installation interpretive programmes. On the suggestions of the National Endowment for the Humanities, a governmental funding body which supported the project, a Native American Advisory Committee was formed to advise the Museum on the exhibit undertaking. The members represented the seven major language groups on the Northwest Coast and the eighth represented the Alaskan Inuit. The following is the list and the description of the members,
taken from the "Re-installation Program Statement" (p. 3-4):

**Doug Cranmer, Kwaguitl.** Artist and hereditary chief of the Nimpkish band and great-grandson of George Hunt, associate to Franz Boas. Worked with Mungo Martin at the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Victoria, with Haida artist, Bill Reid, and with the City of Victoria on a restoration project. Currently teaches in Alert Bay and helped supervise the construction of a native "plank" house as part of a new native museum at Alert Bay.

**Joseph Senungetuk, Eskimo-Inuit.** Artist in wood, ivory, silver, and prints; attended the University of Alaska and received BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute. Served as writer and editor for Indian Historical Press, San Francisco, and artist-in-residence at Visual Arts Centre in Anchorage. Featured speaker at numerous universities and conferences; initiated cross-cultural exchange programs between Eskimo, Tlingit, and non-natives at Sheldon Jackson College in Ketchikan.


**Nathan Jackson, Tlingit.** Artist in wood carving and jewelry, currently teaches at Sheldon Jackson College in Ketchikan. Attended Institute of American Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Held exhibitions at Alaska State Museum and carved poles
for the 1964 World’s Fair, the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, and the City of Seattle.

Joe David. Nootka [Nuu-chah-nulth/Westcoast]. Widely recognized artist, print-maker, and carver. Active in ceremonial life of tribe; dancer and expert on Nootka shamanism. Studied with Duane Pasco and Bill Holm; held one-man exhibition at the University of British Columbia Museum, and acted as consultant on Northwest Coast films made by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.


Carol Cordova. Salish. Assistant tribal manager of Skokomish tribe, attended Evergreen State College in Olympia. Currently assisting director of the Twana Cultural Program with historical research and a demographic survey.

Emily Schooner. Bella Coola. Selected by her tribal council as official Bella Coola representative to Field Museum. Currently serves as coordinator of tribal cultural activities.

Members of the Committee advised the Museum on “conservation, documentation, and presentation of artifacts in their proper cultural context” (Gallery Nine Brochure). They also gave advice on adjunct educational programming and in some cases, participated in that
programming. Along with Haida artist Bill Reid and curator/art
historian Bill Holm, the Advisory Committee members were also asked
to recommend other resource people for other Chicago events
(Re-installation Program Statement p. 14).

Programme Director Blackmon kept in close telephone contact
with advisors, event participants and in some cases, managers of
participants. The chief liason person for Norman Tait and his dance
group was Cathy Cohen-Tait, Tait's wife and business partner. Letters
confirmed arrangements. A contract for the totem pole was drawn up
and signed with clauses regarding responsibility, insurance, times and
money. One clause stated that Tait had to guarantee that the "artistic
and technical quality of the production would meet acceptable
standards" (Memorandum of Agreement p. 1). (It did not say how this
would be judged.) Tait was to be paid thirty-two thousand dollars for
the fifty-five foot totem pole and four thousand dollars for a model.6

The Field Museum arranged transportation, accommodation and
honoraria for the Native Americans they invited to take part in the
exhibit opening. They negotiated with Canadian Pacific and Burlington
Northern Railways to transport the pole free of charge. They arranged
with various airlines for the donation of free and reduced flights for their invited guests. Daily expenses for hotel and food were provided to resource people for short stays in Chicago. Honoraria were provided for performances, demonstrations and lectures.

The Museum provided eight Nishga Dancers with sixty dollars a day each for expenses. (Two additional performers took responsibility for their own expenses.) Eight Nishga dancers received one hundred dollars each for each performance and the five apprentices received one hundred dollars for each carving demonstration. There were four dance performances for all the dancers, and the apprentices had the opportunity to demonstrate carving at least twice; several of them three times.

The Museum provided facilities to sell the work of the Native American artists. The Museum Gift Shop featured Northwest Coast crafts. A contemporary art gallery, Gallery Nine was opened in conjunction with the "Maritime Peoples" exhibit and featured fine art from the Northwest Coast and Alaska for sale.

The visiting Native Americans were guests at press luncheons and a Museum members' dinner, as well as serving as resource people at
exhibit previews. Many of them also participated in dance and music performances. All individuals and groups were under their own charge and were expected to be available only at pre-designated times to fulfil specific roles. The events at the Field Museum for Native Americans in 1982 were opportunities for work, and for acknowledgement as artists, performers and cultural experts.

All events took place in the Field Museum except for the pole raising which was out in front of the main entrance. Most of the dance performances and all art demonstrations took place in the enormous Stanley Field Hall (seventy-five feet high by seventy feet wide by three hundred feet long). A stage was set up in the hall for performances. The Kwaguitl and Nishga dance groups each had a painted screen to be hung as backdrops for their particular performances. A Museum members' dinner was held in this hall at which the Kwaguitl Hunt Family Dancers performed. Adjoining the main hall were the halls containing the "Maritime Peoples of the Arctic and Northwest Coast" exhibit and Gallery Nine. Press luncheons were held downstairs next to the cafeteria, after which guests previewed the new galleries.

The Museum publicized events with Native Americans as a
way of enhancing the new exhibitions. The Re-installation Program Statement (p. 13) describes the performances of the Hamatsa by the Hunt family as providing “greater understanding of museum collections by showing them in actual live context” (emphasis added). The diversity of regional styles and materials illustrated in the exhibit were demonstrated by coastal artists in carving and weaving demonstrations outside the exhibit galleries. One of the stated intentions of the contemporary art gallery was to complement the “Maritime Peoples” exhibit so that “greater insight and appreciation can also be gained by comparing these pieces with those in the permanent exhibit. These insights will permit identification of regional variations in style, technique, and material” (Gallery Nine Brochure). A symposium on contemporary native art which included Haida artist Robert Davidson and Nuu-chah-nulth (Westcoast/Nootka) artist Joe David was described as a “special opportunity to familiarize yourself with the masterful and diverse artistic traditions of the Northwest Coast” (Calendar of Special Events April 1982).

The Museum provided didactic materials on the traditional native societies to explain the Native American performances and demon-
strations, which in turn, extended the exhibit. The Field Museum published articles in its monthly bulletin and a variety of brochures and calendars of events. Newspaper coverage was carefully guided by the Museum's Public Relations Department. The following are examples of the contextualizing done for dance performances in Museum brochures.

In these descriptions, the impression was created that there has been a continuity in the ceremonial tradition on the Northwest Coast—which was not the case for most tribes. Continuity was certainly not the case for the Nishga. The Maritime Peoples Calendar of Events Winter/Spring 1982 states that:

Dance and ceremony are an integral part of Northwest Coast tribal society. They serve to commemorate both religious and secular events, including birth, marriage and death, the transfer of tribal crests and territories, the coming winter, or the catching of the season's first salmon. Artifacts on display in the exhibits "Village and Society" and "Spiritual World" galleries were worn in such dance performances.

These traditional dances are still performed today. Norman Tait and members of his Nishga Dance Group perform a series of authentic Tsimshian dances.

In the Calendar of Events for May, 1982, the Tlingit performances are
Each Tingit dance and its song is owned by a lineage, and is literally considered family property.

Every public occasion, such as a birth announcement, a newly formed alliance, marriage, or death, is accompanied by a prescribed set of songs and dances. Highly elaborate costumes and carvings accompany each dance and are specific to it. The Gie Sun troupe perform dances that were adjunct to housebuilding or memorial ceremonies known as potlatches.

In the Maritime Peoples Calendar of Events for Winter/Spring, 1982, the Hunt Family dance performances are described as follows:

Each dance was considered valuable, inherited family property.

The Hunt family has been keeping these traditional dance forms alive for generations...The program presents a ceremonial cycle of dancing traditionally held in late fall known as the winter ceremony and features the Cedar Bark Dance, Hamatsa, and Cannibal Bird Dance.

The Museum often made reference to the fact that some of these dances were the same as those performed by the Hunt party in 1893.

The idea of change in native Indian cultures is suggested in the
exhibit, and also reinforced in descriptions of Native American
programming. Visiting curator Ron Weber, wrote the following piece in
the "Maritime Peoples" exhibit brochure:

Not until the late 1940's was the native population
again on the rise, and by the 1950's the art style had
been re-vitalized. Today the Northwest Coast
culture is strong and influential.

The revival on the Northwest Coast is indeed, widely acknowledged.
Whether it is truly a cultural revival has yet to be demonstrated.

Programme descriptions also addressed the revival. The April
1982 Calendar of Events' description of the contemporary art symposium
titled *Echoes of the Past, Tides of Change*, began: "Traditions are not
static, they live when passed on. Without a future, traditions die". The
artists participating were described as having "rescued their heritages
and are taking them forward". They are "pioneers", and this event was
billed as an opportunity for "an intimate look at the contemporary
renaissance taking place". Norman Tait's apprentices, who were also
members of his dance group, were described as "continuing both native
visual and performing arts traditions and infusing them with renewed
spirit and vitality" (Calendar of Events, April, 1982) (emphasis added).
Part of the revival on the Northwest Coast is due to the active role of non-native artists who work in the Northwest Coast tradition. The Field Museum invited highly regarded non-native artists to participate in the gallery of contemporary native arts and to attend its opening. (This work was not part of the permanent exhibition, although John Livingston did assist in creating a Kwaguitl house portion for the exhibit.) These individuals, like the artists of Native American ancestry, were described as having:

mastered and demonstrated extraordinary ability and shared their knowledge and skills with native communities. These artists play pivotal roles in the renewed interest of the native people of the Arctic and Northwest Coast in their traditional cultural heritage (Gallery Nine Brochure).

Artists of non-native ancestry included were Duane and Katie Pasco, John Livingston, Cheryl Samuel, and Steve Brown.

As part of acknowledging the revival, the Field Museum also acknowledged quality and ingenuity in contemporary Northwest Coast art. They lauded individual artists for demonstrating "excellence in traditional continuity" and "innovative creativity" (Calendar of Events,
April, 1982). Gallery Nine was set up for the exhibition and sale of the art of "renowned" contemporary Northwest Coast and Inuit artists. It was the result of a meeting Education Director Blackmon held with the Native American Advisory Committee in Vancouver, B.C. in the summer of 1981. At that time committee members expressed concerns for:

The state of the contemporary art, public awareness of artistic standards, artist visibility, and recognition of excellence (Gallery Nine Brochure).

By showing the art of contemporary artists committed to excellence in a special gallery, the Museum provided an opportunity for people to develop recognition of fine quality and from that make good collecting decisions. "After visiting Gallery Nine" The Opening Calendar of Events stated, "you will understand why these traditional art forms achieved prominence among collectors of fine art".

The Museum contextualized Norman Tait's pole in many ways. The pole was the Museum's first "outdoor artifact". It was described as completing the tribal representation of the Museum's collection of totem poles and house posts, most of which are inside the exhibit halls
(Preamble to Memorandum of Agreement with Norman Tait). It was produced for the "Maritime Peoples" exhibit as were other artifacts. Kwaguitl houses were constructed by member of the Hunt family and Kwaguitl masks were carved by Doug Cramner and Richard Hunt. Nuu-chah-nulth (Westcoast/Nootka) carver Lance Wilkie carved a traditional Nootkan salmon fishing canoe and Nuu-chah-nulth (Westcoast/Nootka) weaver Margaret Irving wove appropriate mats and baskets (Field Museum of Natural History Bulletin April, 1982: 23).

Unlike these artifacts created for the exhibit halls, however, Tait's pole was a "contemporary piece" of carving (Preamble to Memorandum of Agreement with Norman Tait). The others were designed for the particular time frame of the exhibit (1850-1920).

The totem pole was also hailed as the Museum's "first monumental work of art" (Maritime Peoples Calendar of Events Winter/Spring). It was intended to become part of the art life of Chicago along with pieces by Miro, Picasso, Chagall, Calder, Bertoia and Oldenberg (News Release April 10, 1982). The pole was described as celebrating a continuing Native American culture: "The pole will be a
permanent reminder of Native American people, their craftsmanship; a symbol of a living culture” (Field Museum exhibit Opening Plan p. 2).

The pole and its raising were also intended as a restatement of the Museum’s identity. The Museum made suggestions to Norman Tait as to how the pole was to represent them and their history. The following is from the Preamble to Memorandum of Agreement to Norman Tait:

We would make suggestions regarding the theme of the pole, although his [Norman Tait’s] own interpretation of this historic event would predominate. Suggested themes would include: a remembrance of 1893 and the Museum symbolized as a guardian and maintainer of cultural heritage; the revitalization and recognition of Northwest Coast culture and art form; and mutual recognition and appreciation for the cooperation we have achieved and will continue to preserve. Whatever Mr. Tait’s decision, the pole will be traditional in Tsimshian elements of style and form.

Norman Tait rendered a Nishga story on the pole and did not follow the Museum’s suggestions. The raising, however, was most often hailed in the Museum’s literature as celebrating a museum event. The raising was called the “herald”, “mark”, “signal”, “crown”, and “kick off”
the "Maritime Peoples of The Arctic and Northwest Coast" exhibit. In a news release April 7, 1982 it was stated:

A totem pole is traditionally raised by Northwest Coast Indians to commemorate a special event in the community. Field Museum commissioned Norman Tait, a Nishga carver from Vancouver, B.C., to carve the pole in celebration of the opening of the exhibit.

More will be said in the chapters to come about the performance of Norman Tait and his contemporary Nishga dancers. I wished here only to convey the attitudinal ambience promoted by the Field Museum with regard to the events featuring living Native Americans, and to look at the historical precedent to which the Museum referred. In the following section of this chapter I will summarize my comparison of the public anthropological settings that brought Native Americans from the Northwest Coast to Chicago in 1893 and 1982.

**Summary Comparison of 1893 and 1982 in Chicago**

In 1893 a private group of citizens invested their own money to initiate a world event which included amassing ethnological collections
and enlisting Native Americans for exhibits. In 1982, a private institution using government, privately donated, and self-generated funds initiated events which featured Native Americans to complement and extend an exhibit of re-installed ethnological collections. Both groups looked to the past and future to create a context for what they were doing. Those who facilitated the Exposition in 1893 looked back to Columbus and forward to the establishment of an ethnological museum. In 1982 those in that ethnological museum looked back at the Exposition of 1893 and forward to a potential world's fair in 1992.

Twenty seven and a half million people attended the six-month event in 1893. In 1982 the focus was on maintaining and expanding the one million visitors per year to an ongoing institution. Visitors were described in terms of members and non-members, citizens of Chicago and beyond, lay community and scientific community, and casual, purposeful and serious visitors. The concern was to maintain a public profile that would insure continuing financial support and fulfill the Museum's public purpose.

In 1893 the key words used in descriptions were "evolution", 
"race", "progress" and "civilization". In 1982 the words were "tradition", "heritage", "revival", and "contemporary". The 1893 event organizers saw themselves as illustrating racial evolution and hailing progress in America. In 1982 there appeared to be less faith in modern American life. The following statements were made in description of anthropological exhibits in the Field Museum's visitors' guide:

many peoples have succeeded in creating happiness and beauty and in discovering adoptions to nature in areas where we ourselves have failed (p. 15 emphasis added)

Messages from Other Cultures—societies that lived harmoniously with their environment. The hope is that people today can achieve this same sense of harmony (p. 11 emphasis added).

The re-installed exhibit and its programmes were described as celebrating a positive aspect of both Native American and museum life, namely creativity. In 1982 Native Americans were special guests to the Museum. They acted as consultants and contributors to the Museum's celebration of the revival of native traditions, and to the Museum's celebration of itself and its history. The Education Department in 1982
lauded the rich diversity in traditional and contemporary cultural life in America. The aim was to facilitate an appreciation for "our heritage" in a world culture. We will see more of this in the speeches in the chapter on the pole raising.

The focus in 1893 in the Ethnological Department was education of the American public about the science of anthropology and a popular topic of the time: racial evolution. It promoted an assumption that civilization, as was demonstrated in non-native industrialized America, was naturally absorbing all other "inferior" life ways. Living Native Americans in their typical dwellings set against the "Great White City" were an object lesson for visitors to the Fair. The attendance of Native Americans was seen as an opportunity for them to see the advantages of becoming civilized. The attitude to them was paternal: Exposition anthropologists, United States and Canadian government officials, and the United States Army were charged with taking care of them.

The Native American attendance in Chicago in 1982 was described as beneficial to all concerned as well, but with an attitude of sharing resources. Lorin Nevling Jr., Director of the Museum, in a letter to
Norman Tait, June 26, 1980 wrote:

it is most important to acknowledge and honor our **mutual desire to exchange resources**...Field Museum recognizes our responsibilities to your communities and **welcomes the opportunity to work together for our mutual benefit** (emphasis added).

With an attitude of co-creativity, the museum dealt directly with Native American participants or managers of specific groups of participants.

In 1893 anthropologists and an entertainment entrepreneur facilitated the living exhibits of Native Americans. In 1982 a museum educator, with education and exhibition staffs, and Native American advisors facilitated events featuring Native Americans. In 1893 the Native Americans lived as ethnological specimens on the Midway for the summer, demonstrated their crafts, and sold what Putnam called their "peculiar trinkets" (Dexter 1966:320). They basically lived off the proceeds from their sales. In 1982 the Native Americans were accommodated in hotels for short periods of time, were granted fees for all services as well as sales revenues for their work, and participated
in scheduled events in the Museum. They exhibited, sold, demonstrated and discussed their "fine art".

Integrity with regard to native peoples was valued by the chief organizers in both situations although it appears to have been less easily maintained in 1893. In the 1893 "honky-tonk" setting and the ranking of races on an evolutionary scale, Native Americans did not fare well. Their reception in Chicago was also coloured by the memory of recent battles between Indians and Whites. For the most part, Native Americans at the World's Columbian Exposition were treated as "savages".

In 1982 there was more talk of comparisons of aspects of culture, empowerment of diversity, and acknowledgement of evolution of traditions with the attending Native Americans described as "pioneers". Whether acceptance of these principles of diversity, evolution and egalitarianism goes beyond talk is hard to determine. There was at least a spoken intention in the literature circulated by the Field Museum during its celebration in 1982. I will discuss the attitude to Native
American performances more in the chapter on the pole raising (chapter 7).
Chapter Notes:

1. I have primarily used "Native Americans" in this chapter because this term includes Inuit and Indian, both of whom were represented in the exhibition and events in 1982 at the Field Museum. It is also the term used by the Field Museum. When I focus on the Northwest Coast in the remaining chapters, I switch to "Indian", "native people" and "native Indian" because these are the terms most often used by the indigenous people themselves on the Northwest Coast.

2. The Field Museum describes the "Maritime Peoples" exhibit as a "re-installed exhibit". Presumably they mean the artifacts that came out of the old galleries are going back into the refurbished space.

3. Some of the major staff under Putnam, who were prominent or became prominent in anthropology, and the areas they worked in for the Exposition included:

   Dr. Franz Boas - Chief Assistant, worked on the Northwest Coast, in charge of Physical Anthropology
   Harlan I. Smith - Ohio and Michigan Archaeology
   George A. Dorsey - South American Archaeology
   Alice C. Fletcher - Indians of Western United States
   Lt. Robert E. Peary - North Greenland
   Dr. Sheldon Jackson - Aleska and Siberia
   James Dean - British Columbia Ethnology

Other disciplines represented in Putnam's Department besides anthropology were: neurology under Dr. H.H. Donaldson and psychology under Prof. Joseph Jastrow (Dexter 1966:331-332).

4. I do not know the terms by which the Tsimshian and Haida took part in the Columbian Exposition.

5. Belly dancing from Egypt came under criticism from some people although it was very popular. Putnam attested to the authenticity and
professionalism of these performances as he did with Northwest Coast performances. Dexter (1966: 325) quotes from Putnam's writings:

the national Danse du ventre which not being understood was by many regarded as low and repulsive. What wonderful muscular movements did those dancers make, and how strange did this dance seem to us: but its it not probable that the waltz would seem equally strange to those dusky women of Egypt?

6. no model has been completed as yet (Fall 1985)
III. THE CREATION OF A NISHGA CARVER

Studying and researching the Northwest Coast art tradition as a whole, gradually led me to search for the art of my own people.

Norman Tait

In the early 1970s Norman Tait joined the revival of native traditions on the Northwest Coast through the production of art. He took up wood carving seriously after many years of casual whittling. Like other artists of the revival, Tait studied museum collections, anthropological documentation, and sought out elders to retrieve and reconstruct knowledge of his artistic tradition. He began to interact with members of the artistic network on the Northwest Coast, including artists from other tribes, anthropologists and curators, to further his inquiry. As well as carving wood, Tait learned to work in silver, gold, ivory and horn and in serigraph prints. He sold pieces in the marketplace, fulfilled commissions and participated in exhibitions. He was also invited to be a consultant and teacher. He initiated several cultural projects which acted as restatements of Nishga identity, for and sometimes within, his native community.
Growing Up in Several Worlds

Norman Tait was born in 1941 in the Nishga village of Kincolith at the mouth of the Nass River in northwestern British Columbia. (The Nishga are part of the Tsimshian language group along with the Gitksan, Coast Tsimshian and Southern Tsimshian.) Tait was the first son of eight surviving children born to Josiah and Sadie Tait. Josiah Tait was a fisherman and part-time trapper. He was a chief in the Wolf clan and very knowledgeable about the old Nishga ways. However, he encouraged his family to adopt modern non-traditional lifestyles.

Sadie Tait fished with her husband, worked in canneries and sold her Cowichan-style knitted goods as she brought up the children. She was from a high ranking family in the Eagle clan and she was a devout Christian. Tait related the following description of his mother's upbringing:

She grew up closely with her father. Though her father was very Christian, he still had stories that he told. She tried to keep Christian but she still had her native values that went along with it, sort of undercover. Deep down somewhere she felt that it was still part of her life, so she hung onto them in the background.
Tait's early life was a mixture of native tradition and a modern native lifestyle. The family spoke Nishga first and English second. Tait remembers at four and five years of age avidly listening to old Nishga stories told by an uncle, while they sat around a fire in a forty-five gallon drum. Tait said that most of the other children were not interested in what the old man had to say, and disappeared when the invitation was extended for storytelling. He related, "I'd find the best place and sit myself down. That's the end of the evening for me!"

Tait also remembered following his mother into her Christian practices: "It was good for her, so it was good for me, so I went". At school-age Tait was sent to Christian Residential School in Edmonton, Alberta. Not only was he cut off from family life in his village for most of the year, he was forbidden to speak his native language during that time as well (Lowndes MS. a: 2). He eventually turned away from Christianity because it lost its meaning for him:

It wasn't what I remembered and I slowly drifted away from it. I didn't want it anymore. By the time I grew up I did not want to come back [to Christianity].

During the summers Tait had contact with numerous other native
and non-native groups. His family spent summers in cannery villages, such as Sunnyside, near Prince Rupert. Here native peoples from the Skeena and Nass Rivers, Alaska and other coastal and inland areas, as well as Asian people congregated for the summer work. Tait remembered the separation and covert rivalry among the different groups. The Chinese community gathered around their foot baths and the Japanese around their saunas. He remembered the derogatory labelling and tricks played on other groups, including the white managers, by the young people.

As Tait was growing up, there was some continuity in tradition among the Nishga. For example, there was affiliation with clans by matrilineal descent. Tait was born an hereditary chief in the Eagle clan through his mother's line. Potlatches were part of his childhood, though they were what Tait calls "modernized". They were held at funerals and, in reduced form, at boat launchings and house openings. At funerary potlatches Tait remembered:

There were dances; there were Indian dances. I remember fools' dances. There were no chief dances; there were no welcome dances. They were more fun than that. But then everything else was followed except for the dances: the traditional
giving to guests, the traditional giving to opposite clans. All that was still intact and still is. Giving of names has always been done.

Tait remembered the buffooning performances at funerals were to "bring the spirits up":

In a death, everyone is sad so they sort of come in dancing, sort of attack the mourner with all the funny things happening. They drag the mourner out to dance and play with him, he or she. They have fun with her or him, whoever. They bring him out, or her out of his sadness and bring him back to the real world.

Buffoonery was also used to humble chiefs at their name giving:

To humble a chief...to remind him that he is still one of us, that his feet are still on the ground, he's not flying higher than anyone else.

Tait stated that the buffoonery created an important cycle with more serious ritual activity in Nishga culture. I would suggest that this cycle is a recreation of an earlier cycle in Tsimshian society. Traditionally, there were the potlatch and halait orders of power, each with songs, dances and ritual performances, which were juxtaposed to create an oppositional cycle. The halait performances demonstrated connections with the supernatural; the potlatch performances asserted
social identity. Marjorie Halpin suggests that these halait performances created a ritual atmosphere of chaos, "topsy-turvydom". Some halait naxnox performers, for example, interacted with visiting chiefs with insults and abuse. The structural order of ranked social relationships was re-established by the potlatch at which time the insulted chiefs were compensated (1981: 27).

Tait said that people must be returned to a "normal, happy" state after they are thrown into abnormal states in ritual today as they always have been in Nishga society. Humour is used to transform the abnormal ethos of seriousness and sadness at death, and to humble a chief whose power has been inflated at his name-giving ceremony. We will see more of the modern cycle with the song-dances that were learned for Chicago.

While Tait was growing up, smaller potlatch ceremonies were held when boats were launched. The boat's name was called out, and gifts such as candy, fruit, cigarettes and pop, were distributed to all those who gathered at the launching site. House warmings mixed elements of Christian and traditional native ceremony. Houses were christened with Christian prayers and hymn singing. And following the
Nishga tradition, food and gifts were given away and the house name was called and witnessed.\(^3\)

Tait remembers Nishga names given ceremonially to people. He did not receive his first formal Nishga name, however, until he raised a totem pole. This was a pole he carved and raised with his father in 1973 for the incorporation of Port Edward, which is near Prince Rupert. Tait was given the name Enah-ohg-logh, meaning "Black-Bear-with-no-fur-on-the-side" (usually referring to a bear that had slept on that side while hibernating). At his name giving, Tait was humbled in a long speech made by his aunt, Mercy Robinson. He did not understand all of the speech which was in Nishga. (This was before he refreshed his knowledge of Nishga language by attending classes in Kincolith in 1976.)

Tait related:

They have a way of humbling potential chiefs. Depends on who is telling it [story connected with this name], could be a porno joke to really put the guy down. I think that's what happened to me when I was given that name. Mercy was the one that called it and she went on and on and on. The people that could understand were having a great time.

Tait's second name was given to him after he led the party of paddlers
in dugout canoes into Kincolith in 1981. The name was Ena-awotc meaning "Grizzly-Bear-coming-down-into-the village". Tait said of his second name:

[It was] from my great-great-great uncle from Greenville. I think the name's been dormant for such a long time, they don't know exactly who was the last owner. They knew it existed and they were waiting for someone to take it.

The name was believed to be very old and its bestowal acknowledged Tait as a very important person. The giving of this name at a potlatch was interrupted by a buffooning performance by Tait's second wife, Cathy Cohen-Tait, who was dressed in stuffed out baggy clothes and Halloween mask. Cohen-Tait is Jewish and had been adopted into the Wolf clan when she married Tait. She was accompanied by other members of the Wolf clan in her buffooning performance. As well as humbling Tait, the "mocking disrespect" acknowledged him as a person of high status. (Tait received a third name after the Big Beaver pole raising--chapter seven.)

Potentially any of Tait's actions or inactions can be regarded by his people as strengthening or weakening his name, his family and clan. Becoming an artist of renown had a strengthening function that has also
brought Tait unease at times. At feasts Tait was seated at the table with elders, all of whom were twenty to forty years his senior. He is uncomfortable with this for he feels like an outsider because he is younger and is not living in the village or even in the north. Tait expresses some sadness also that he was chosen to be seated in such honourable company. He feels that “power has been shifted” to him because of his artistic achievements that rightfully should stay with the old Nishga people because they are the links with tradition. He said:

There is nothing like old people. You can’t replace old people, people that can reach right back into their grandparents.

The honouring in the village setting has also increased the expectations placed on Tait to participate more in his family and community, about which Tait feels conflict. More will be said of this dilemma as we proceed. At this point, I wish only to establish that Tait was raised with some involvement in the old ways of his people. I wish also to point to some of the areas of tension for a man who grew up in a traditional culture that is in transition and who now operates in urban Canadian culture as well.
Tait's father was aware of the transition of Nishga culture and was adamant that his family prepare themselves for non-traditional and non-native life styles. Josiah Tait saw the old ways becoming non-viable in a modern world and there was much about Nishga tradition that he did not pass on. Tait regrets not having learned more of the old knowledge, for example, about trapping, from his father. His father had had his territories and knew all the families of animals within them. He carefully trapped only animals of certain ages so that the ecology of the land would not be disturbed. Tait said that by the time he thought to ask his father, the old trapping ways had been disrupted by haphazard hunting and by the dissolution of the system of family territorial rights. His father also had a stroke in 1975 which impeded his ability to communicate.

Tait received his first learnings about wood from his father. Working with wood was part of their family history:

The family comes from a long line of house builders and carvers. In the winter they built houses and boats, and naturally they just continued to whittle away with their totem poles, although it meant less at that time [during the first seventy years of this century].
Tait’s father whittled figures from Nishga legends on small totem poles and plaques as a hobby and to give away. Tait says of his father:

> Because of the life they [Josiah’s parents] chose for him being chief, he had to know the legends and naturally when you knew the legends you know the figures, the poles, you start to go into it. When having all these people around, like his uncles and his father who were carvers and boat builders, that’s where he learned from. A couple of generations ago they would have handed him over to an established carver at about the age of six and he’d be stuck with that man until he was twenty-one.⁴

Tait started whittling with a pen knife with his father. It was also a hobby for him in the beginning.

After Tait had been attending school in Edmonton for a number of years, his father moved the family out of Kincolith to Prince Rupert so the children could take greater advantage of the opportunities of modern life. Tait joined his family and finished high school in Prince Rupert. Tait reported to free lance writer and art critic, Joan Lowndes, that teachers recognized his artistic talents but that he declined to pursue the possibility of scholarship because the lifestyle of an artist did not appeal to him (MS. a: 2). He trained as a millright at Columbia Cellulose.
He married a woman from Kincolith and they had a daughter and son.

In the early 1970's, Tait moved his family to Vancouver. He and his wife had been experiencing marital difficulties, with both families exerting conflicting pressures upon them. On the advice of a lawyer, the young couple and their children left the north coast where the parents had grown up. Tait gave up a secure job as a millright in Prince Rupert and was placed at the bottom of the seniority list in the union in Vancouver. While sitting in his Vancouver home waiting for a call for work, Tait "took up the old knife and started whittling away". He bought a twenty-cent booklet on totem poles and began copying the images (Lowndes MS. a: 2-3). He took his work to other carvers he knew and they told him he could make money from it. One friend said, "just go to a bar and sit with it on the table. Someone's going to offer you something for it". He did go to bars and was successful selling some work. Friends also suggested gift shops. The first gift shop Tait approached was Lando's Furs on Granville Street. Tait related that then the Vancouver Museum Gift Shop approached him:

When the word started getting around that I was carving, that there was a new one on the market, and that he looks promising, the Museum started
paying a little attention and started inviting me up and go up and sell there. They used to phone me. I don't know how they got my number. They used to phone me up and say, "Do you have any carvings? We'd like to see your carvings". So little by little I started bringing my carvings in there. One day I discovered I was making more money for my carving than millrighting.

Tait began meeting more members of the Northwest Coast artistic community and started looking more seriously at what he was doing and could do. He remembered being particularly sparked to deepen his inquiry into his tradition's art, by questions from Haida artist, Robert Davidson and curator/art historian/artist Bill Holm. He remembered that their questions included such things as: "What is Tsimshian art?" "What is Nishga art?" and "How is Nishga art different from Gitksan? from Coast Tsimshian?"

**A Man in Search of his Artistic Tradition**

To develop knowledge of his tradition, Tait undertook an eclectic path that is typical of many contemporary artists of the Northwest Coast (Duffek 1983: 37-55). He went to anthropological documentation, cultural experts, museum collections and his own people to reconstruct his tradition.
Some of the anthropological documentation to which Tait turned, was Marius Barbeau's work on totem poles (1950), Franz Boas' *Tsimshian Mythology* (1916) and Audrey Hawthorn's *Art of the Kwakiutl Indians* (1967). He acquired archival photographs of Tsimshian people, villages with canoes and painted house fronts, and totem poles in their original settings from museums. These materials helped Tait develop a sense of the cultural fabric in which art was produced, as well as providing stylistic information. He studied and copied the art pieces in photographs. He used the materials as aids in remembering his past and what he was told by elders. He also used them with other people to help them remember what they knew of Nishga tradition.

Bill Holm's book, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: Analysis of Form*, became Tait's "Bible" in exploring the elements of Northwest Coast art, even though he realized:

> It was just a statement; it was a result of his [Holm's] studies, that's all it was. It wasn't meant to be studied.

Holm was important to Tait in other ways as well. Tait considers Holm a true master carver because Holm can carve any style on the Coast,
switching from one to the other "without blinking". Discussions with Holm were helpful in articulating style criteria and differences between coastal traditions.

Tait shared his thinking about his tradition and its art with anthropologists as well. Several anthropologists who were also "doing a behind-the-scenes study" of Tsimshian/Nishga culture furthered Tait's understanding and he furthered theirs:

We sort of throw everything into the pot and stir it and see what comes out...What we were getting into was deeper and deeper and deeper...We were pulling things out that we both didn't know were there.

Tait remembered interchanges over slides with Marjorie Halpin, Curator of Ethnology at the UBC Museum of Anthropology:

Hashing it out: she'd throw across her ideas, I'd throw across my ideas, back and forth like that. I get a better understanding; she gets a better understanding.

He also mentioned Carole Farber, anthropologist with the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario. With Farber, he talked "clear across the board: totem poles, costumes, what they were used for", the whole cultural gamut which mutually triggered new discoveries.
Tait said other anthropologists and museum people working in his area were more often listeners, or focused on single items in conversation which only occasionally sparked new understandings.

Tait went back to the people of his tribe for knowledge of his tradition. His father was a source up to the time of his stroke. In carving the totem pole with his father in 1973, Tait describes his father as the "soul" of the project. Tait’s mother became an invaluable source of knowledge especially when she came to feel that her Christianity and native ways did not necessarily conflict:

In later years when she realized that it wasn’t against God’s will to have our way, she brought it out and gave it to us.

She related stories that were told to her and also told about her life in her early days. Tait showed her old photographs and she would reminisce about the people, events and legends.

Tait approached several aunts and uncles, and was offered information as well. His aunt, Mercy Robinson, who was raised as a speaker in the Wolf clan, knew a great deal about the family network and social protocol on the Nass River. Mentioned already was the uncle
who plied Tait with stories as a young child. His name was Jeffery Benson. Tait returned to him as an adult. There was also a Tsimshian woman from Kitkatla whom Tait describes as taking him “under her wing”. She had been impressed by what he had done, and wanting him to continue doing well, gave him information about crests and stories.

Tait's chief source of traditional knowledge among his people was his maternal uncle (MoMoMoSiSo), Rufus Watts, whom he calls "grandfather". Watts was raised as a storyteller but buried much of what he knew when the old Nishga ways lost their importance in the early middle part of this century. At about age fifty, Watts' early learnings began surfacing in his consciousness and he watched out for an appropriate carrier for the Nishga tradition he knew. He found a nephew, Norman Tait. Tait described Watts and his search:

Most young people were not interested just to hold on, to keep it going. He felt around and felt around until he found out who was interested. It was only then that he threw out the anchor and said, "This is it, this is where I pass it on. I found the guy to take it"—and that happened to be me.

Tait spent hours listening to Watts remembering his early days when there was an active Nishga ceremonial life. In 1976, Tait spent the
winter in Kincolith taping stories, history, and discussions on artistic and ceremonial tradition and social protocol. He worked primarily with his grandfather although he taped other people as well. Tait had to brush up on his Nishga by attending language classes so that he could keep up with his grandfather (Lowndes MS. a: 5). (The passing on of tradition that occurred between Watts and Tait during the carving of the Big Beaver totem pole is discussed in the next chapter.)

With the aid of an Urgent Ethnology Grant from National Museums of Canada in 1979, Tait and his second wife, Cohen-Tait, documented the oolichan fishing and oil making process that occurs on the Nass River every spring. They recorded the process in slides and taped many hours of Watts recalling memories and stories:

My grandfather remembered the old ways and brought it back. That was great. My grandfather reminiscing like he'd say, "Look at the way they are doing it now! Do you know how we did it in those days?" Then we'd record it all.

The project helped build Tait's sense of tradition. He listened to the tapes over and over to refresh his memory of Nishga language and history.
One of Tait's major sources of learning about his artistic tradition was old masterpieces. In an interview with Lowndes, Tait called the old pieces his "silent teachers" and said that they demanded that he "listen a little harder" (MS. a: 3). He "haunted" museums in Vancouver, Victoria, Ottawa, Toronto, Portland and Seattle studying collections. The old pieces provided unique learning experiences:

When I'm amongst the old pieces, I block out the building itself, drift back with the pieces where they were before they came to the museums. It almost becomes a second world when I really get into it, away from this whole world. It is a quiet excitement, a feeling that you've gone back.

The pieces started to excite me almost to the extent I'd look at an old carving or mask and just imagine the dancer using the mask, all the smoke, all the things they went through, the old chiefs boasting, the young chiefs coming up, the little ones coming up, all that sort of excited me to a point that when I'm looking for something, my imagination runs better because I could handle these things. So you sort of get the feeling for a certain form, certain shape. It sticks in your mind better when I'm watching, handling these old pieces.

Tait studied pieces from many Northwest Coast traditions from the standpoint of artistic problems to be solved: What makes them work
as art? What makes them work as expressions of specific styles? His most particular puzzle that he worked to unravel through carving, was initially Tsimshian art and then, later, primarily Nishga art:

I studied Kwaguitl, I studied Haida but I carved Nishga, Tsimshian as much as I could. I kept going back to Haida, going back to Kwaguitl because what they did was exaggerate everything that Nishgas did so subtly.

In 1974-75, Tait was hired by the Vancouver Museum to restore a number of small Tsimshian artifacts which gave him hands-on experience of his artistic roots. He replaced and repaired broken parts, cleaned pieces, and removed second coats of paint to restore the originally worked surfaces. In 1975, working with conservator Roy Waterman and several other museum consultants, Tait restored an old Nishga totem pole (circa 1870) for the UBC Museum of Anthropology (Figure 2). Tait described this restoration work as his apprenticeship with an old master and the place he learned the most about Nishga sculptural style. The pole, called Eagle-Halibut, was carved by a prominent carver called Oyai in the second half of the last century.
Figure 2. Eagle-Halibut totem pole (UBC Museum of Anthropology).
have quoted Tait at length on his experience with this pole because of the influence it had on his development as a Nishga carver. His descriptions also give a sense of what working with "silent teachers" was like. Tait also used this pole often as a reference in creating the Big Beaver totem pole.

He taught me, he taught me a lot. Restoration my first contact. Putting new parts, new pieces into it was very much like carving it myself, matching them up. It was unreal. I could feel that man just standing there. I was his apprentice at that time. This is where I got my first true hand experience in Nishga carving, Tsimshian carving. This is where I first got my feel of the depth. I was an apprentice, a true apprentice; I'm still an apprentice.

Tait developed a deep respect for the liveliness Oyai captured in his work:

I got to a point at one time, when I discovered...he actually carved the eyeball inside the wood to make it look so real that I found myself almost daring it to blink, show me one more sign of life, but the whole pole is alive just the way it is.

He came to regard this pole as the best example of Nass River carving:

This Eagle-Halibut pole with the shaman holding a medicine box is one of the best examples I find of
Nass River carving. It has the grinning face, the looking down features. You can almost look inside the carved face itself and see the actual bone structure of the man, the roundness, the soft roundness that it has. They [eyes] don’t look blankly ahead, straight ahead, or sideways, they look down. Almost if you’re standing there and he’s looking at you, there is a communication there somewhere.

Here Tait describes his on-going student-teacher relationship with the pole, as he worked to understand Nishga style through copying it in his own carving.

When I first started copying this pole, trying to catch on, trying to carve as if this man was teaching me, I had the hardest time. The grin on his face was looking at me almost a reminder of my grandfather looking at me when I don’t understand when he tells me something and I say, “I see”. He knows I don’t and grins and grins. So when I started studying him [the shaman on the pole], he was just grinning down at me, a mocking grin and I’d say, “Oh, now I know, it’s the big cheeks, the big nose...that’s what makes Nishga poles!” He says, “That’s what makes Nishga poles alright, you little dummy, so give it a try and see how far you get!” And when I do it, I realize that’s not what makes Nishga poles.

And Tait would go back to studying the pole in the Museum and the archival picture of the pole that the Museum gave him.

Oyai’s carving style, particularly as it is expressed on this pole,
became the greatest influence on Tait's own style.

This particular pole comes back heavy all the time. It dominates me and my style. I don't think I want to go on and try anything new until I understand this pole.

Tait feels that a continuity in Nishga carving has been created through his carrying on from Oyai.

Why I really go for this pole is its connections with the old people going way back which is what I've been trying to do, trying to contact where we left off, where the carving left off and where Christianity took hold.

Oyai was part of my grandfather, my grandfather met him. I'm talking to my grandfather who has talked with him as a kid and also he [Oyai] talked to old carvers as a kid himself in their eighty's and ninety's. Real connection, really alive, works for me, all way back. Norman just one of them.

In 1980, with the help of the British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts Society, Tait started an apprenticeship programme, the Nishga Carving School, to pass on what he knew of Nishga carving and to extend the Nishga carving continuum. The programme expanded his knowledge by forcing him to articulate what he knew and gave him the
opportunity to do other kinds of projects. As well, Tait said, "It took me right away from Northwest Coast art and right into people. It brought me to people!" As other people were drawn into his work, Tait was forced to veer from of his course as an individual artist, and take on a leadership role in the communities that were generated by his artistic activity. This shift took Tait by surprise and he found the responsibility burdensome at times. Taking on apprentices was one of these community situations he generated, which led to other community involvement as his projects became more culturally encompassing. The chapters following this one describe one of these projects which saw communities generated around the creation of a totem pole.

Another expanded cultural project undertaken with apprentices, was the carving and steaming of two dugout canoes, and paddling them back to the village of origin for Tait and his apprentices. The canoes, carved in Vancouver, were shipped to Prince Rupert and then paddled to Kincolith by Tait and a crew including myself (as I mentioned in my introduction). As part of the celebration in Kincolith, the Nishga names of Tait and his family members were called to elevate them. Witnesses
and workers at the canoe naming ceremony and feasts were publicly paid with money, serigraph prints, household goods and home-knit sweaters. Tait saw this whole canoe event as taking the art back to the people. In Kincolith it generated a community camaraderie, pride in the Nishga heritage and invigorated the working of the traditional clan system. It also raised Tait's status as a chief and generated a desire in the community for more involvement by Tait to stimulate the revitalization of Nishga tradition.

**Development as an Artist on the Northwest Coast**

Tait began carving by copying old wood pieces and then moved into experimenting with motifs and other media in response to commission requests, dealers' suggestions and his own inclinations. Important also were inspiration from other artists and support from friends. He carved in red and yellow cedar, alder, ivory and horn. As well, he moved into working with precious metals and serigraph prints. To learn to work in media other than wood, Tait went to people of other traditions to study. In late 1972, having broken up with his first wife in Vancouver, Tait travelled north to study at the Kitanmax School at 'Ksan. A friend
reported internal turmoil in the school at that time, so Tait travelled on to Prince Rupert. There he enrolled in a two-dimensional design class with Haida artist Frieda Diesing. Tait said he learned some basic principles from Deising and carried on his exploration of design with another Haida artist, friend Gerry Marks. Tait and Marks worked with silver, drawing and silkscreen printing. Tait said that friends sharing what they knew with him was the most usual learning situation.

It was more a buddy system, more a camaraderie working than anything else between me and Gerry. Gerry knew more than I did and we were good friends. He wanted to share with me; he gave me what he knew.

Tait remembered concentrating on creating designs in which the elements flowed together. Marks kept reminding him of the "U-shapes" and "ovoids" of Northwest Coast style.

Gitksan silver jeweller Phil Janze taught Tait about the "ins and outs of silver; what silver could do and what it couldn't do". This teaching was also through camaraderie:

Phil Janze was the big brother who wanted to share, so he did. Just camaraderie: meeting next door,
meeting in a pub, he'd say, "Come on over and we'll crack a case".

I'd go over and we'd sit up all night drinking a bottle of wine or a case of beer talking over carving.

Tait said he learned the basics of Northwest Coast design and about the properties of the various media, by working with these artists of other traditions. Their differences in style at that point he experienced as the differences between individuals and not because someone was Haida, Gitksan or Nishga.

In 1977, on an invitation from the Vancouver Museum, Tait participated in a jewellery class taught by a master jeweller from London, England, Peter Page. Tait also referred to books on European silverwork in the development of his work with silver and gold.

The marketplace that bought and sold Tait's work, also influenced Tait's artistic development. Various dealers, with whom Tait became well acquainted were supportive and at times made suggestions according to market trends and to where they saw Tait's talents lying. Tait remembered Bud Mintz of Potlatch Arts remarking on Tait's design:
He said my design was good. He said I had a sort of flow that was hard to match. He said there were people out there that would appreciate it.

It was out of a conversation with Mintz that Tait brought out his first print. Tait reported that Mintz said to him one day:

You see that design of yours, the frog design, if you don't bring it out in a print somebody else is going to. I know somebody who's copying it already.

Within a week Tait had a frog print out. However, he found himself asking:

What am I doing? So who cares if some guy wants to copy my design and do a frog print, let him. Why am I jumping and bringing it out?

I was so against it. It wasn't carving. It was just printmaking. It wasn't carving. I couldn't understand, how could you call this art: produce, reproduce, reproduce.

Tait then had to market the prints himself. Sixty of his first set were damaged irretrievably while he transported them around Vancouver.

He received four dollars for each one that was undamaged. The price later went up to three hundred a print.

Despite his initial misgivings, Tait went on to bring out twelve
prints and two sets of greeting cards. His images were also printed on T-shirts and scarves. He was quoted later in *Northwest Coast Indian Artists Guild: 1978 Graphics Collection* as saying he discovered a challenge in print making. To work well with this medium "tighter control and a knowledge of design elements" was required and he found this very demanding (NWC Indian Artists' Guild 1978: Norman Tait).

In 1980, Tait and his second wife and business partner, Cathy Cohen-Tait, opened a studio/gallery called Wilp's Tsak (the House of the Mischievous Man). It provided studio space for Tait in which to carve wood, make jewellery and display his work. Other work from the Northwest Coast was also on show and for sale. The studio/gallery was intended to give Tait an opportunity to explore his artistic ideas free from the contingencies of commissions. It did not work out as planned and was closed while Tait was working on the Chicago commission in 1982. Other than having one brief exhibition of silverwork, he could not keep the store stocked with his work because he was too busy fulfilling commissions and working on projects with his apprentices. Cohen-Tait became pregnant and as well, was extremely busy with the Chicago commission as well.
Commissions affected the development of Tait’s work. The people commissioning work sometimes had motif ideas and personal contexts they wished addressed. This work provided an opportunity for Tait to expand the use of traditional images from a clan totemic system to tribal insignia and statements of identity in a larger culture. He also gave more emphasis to mythological themes. The people receiving this work were occasionally native, but usually non-native.

Tait’s large works—all wood sculptures—show his modern use of traditional images. Tait called a totem pole commissioned by the Province of British Columbia as a gift to the city of Phoenix Arizona, an “Eagle Clan” pole. It represented an eagle and human figure (1977). It stands at the Heard Museum of Anthropology in Phoenix. Tait carved two “Raven Clan” poles: one for the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan (1976), and the other for the University of British Columbia Alumni Association (1978). These later poles were in honour of his eldest children, who are members of the Raven clan. The children are shown as two human figures with a frog underneath them. The frog is a second crest of the Raven clan. On top of the pole is a human figure holding a raven. Tait said this top combination showed that his children were
tribal people belonging to the Raven Clan. The people receiving these pieces were primarily non-native and it is unlikely that many would know the family associations. The crests here become less a display of clan property and more a contemporary native artist's statement of identity in the Northwest Coast artistic tradition.

On large cedar doors for a Vancouver restaurant, Tait carved crests of the four clans of his tribe: eagle and beaver for the Eagle clan, wolf and bear for the Wolf clan, raven and frog for the Raven clan, killerwhale and owl for the Killerwhale clan (1981). Tait said that traditionally it would have been unlikely that all clan crests would be used together in the way that he did here, but that it could have been done. Clans usually maintained the right to their crests and displayed them to clan advantage. The context of meaning has changed so Tait felt he could use them together freely without need for permission from the various clans. Tait said the difference was that he did not claim other clans' crests as his own, nor was he using them for the "glory" of his clan over another (at least not directly). Tait said, "If I say this, the four crests... this is ours, it's us, then it's okay". The crests became insignia of a whole tradition, and their use "glorified" the tribe in a modern
world.

Tait also created work with the four clan crests for native audiences as well as for non-natives. Tait painted a ten foot by thirty-two foot mural of the four clan crests for the school in the Tsimshian village of Hartley Bay (1978). I would say that this use of the four clan crests was a statement of renewed pride in being Indian and being Tsimshian for those who live in, and to those who visit, the area.

Tait and his father carved a pole for Port Edward in 1973 which worked in a similar way as the mural in Hartley Bay. This pole's images were a statement of celebration for the village of Port Edward at its incorporation. Peoples from many native origins on the upper Coast had come to reside here. Tait related:

I did a pole with all kinds of animals representing different tribes. What they did was mostly fish. That's what brought them together in the first place. So, I put on halibut, salmon, grizzly bear to represent Wolf, Eagle top and beaver bottom: my signature; killerwhale and frog, human holding salmon.

Represented were the four clans: Eagle, Wolf, Raven and Killerwhale symbolizing the shared life of members of those clans: a human holding
a salmon, and a halibut.

As well as crests, Tait turned to myths for artistic images. Stories were often associated with traditional Nishga totem poles. In fact, one pole may have had several stories attached to it, each story connected with a crest. The pole was about the display of crests, however, and not about telling stories. Stories connected with the crests may have been told at the pole raising as part of the display of family property. As well as, or instead of using crests to make tribal statements of identity, Tait focused on telling a story on some poles. As I mentioned in my introduction, one of the transformations that is going on generally in the revival of native Indian arts is the shift toward depicting mythological narratives. Telling a story in a piece of art is one means of creating accessibility for modern native and non-native audiences.

In a commission from the Vancouver Museum Gift Shop (1979), Tait carved a house post with images from a myth of the raven stealing the sun from the chief who kept it. The pole includes the chief, a small child who is Raven in human form, and Raven in mid-transformation with the sun (Lowndes MS. b: 9).
The images for a pole commissioned by a California resident (1980), were from a family story. Tait described this pole:

That one's a story of my uncle coming across the ocean...He and his brother came across and landed on the coast with no backing, nobody to back him up. They were adopted into the Nishga clan; they were Haidas. The story is that he came across on the back of an eagle. So, that's what that pole is about: an eagle with the human underneath. Inside the wings of the eagle are two humans.

In native settings the emphasis on a story allows different statements to be made from those made traditionally or those made to non-native art connoisseurs. Again these acted as restatements of native identity and assertion of renewed pride. For the Tsimshian village of Port Simpson, Tait carved a pole to commemorate the opening of an all-native cannery (1975). The pole was called the "Beginning of Man" and it told a Tsimshian origin story. Tait related:

In the beginning there was man alone. He had no companions. Raven could fly in the dark, do everything. He says, "Where are you, you always need light. You need to light a fire to see where you are going. I'll do you a favour, I'll give you some light". He knew where to the light was. "But" he said, "who are you with? Who are your friends? Who are your family?"
"Just my family: my wife, my great grandfather". Raven said, "That's not enough! I'll give you someone from the ocean". He created a killerwhale. "Someone from the water". Beaver. "Someone from the bush". He gave him the bear. "I'll give you someone from the sky". He gave him the eagle. That's what the pole is all about.

In smaller commissioned work and uncommissioned work of various sizes, Tait explored the use of traditional image as well. The crest images carved on the restaurant doors, mentioned above, appeared on serigraphy prints, note cards and T-shirts. Tait also rendered the clan crest combinations in jewellery.

Tait used his own crests in displays of family property which took on additional meanings in contemporary contexts. In 1975 Tait carved his own clan hat, an eagle helmet, which became the property of the Vancouver Museum. He retains the right to use this helmet at ceremonial functions, such as those surrounding the Big Beaver totem pole. On the smaller dugout that Tait and his apprentices carved in 1980-81, Tait painted an eagle design. This image acted as a clan crest and when he took the canoe back to his village, the design was part of a larger restatement of Nishga identity.

Crest images also became tribal insignia in non-native settings.
On a copper, a Northwest Coast panel of designed copper that was traditionally family property, Tait carved a beaver crest design. The copper was called "Beaver House" and became the property of the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan (1977).

Tait also shifted his emphasis in creating images in many smaller works away from totemic meaning and toward mythological associations. Tait often incorporated spirit beings in his designs of animals and/or designed animals with some human features, such as feet and hands. This comes from the cosmological concept prevalent on the Northwest Coast that animals have a human spirit form under their animal robes. Tait talked about this concept in the following way:

In the native tradition all animals have their own intelligent spirit. Before a hunt or fishing expedition, the spirit of the animal or fish would be reassured that the flesh about to be taken would not be misused or wasted. Then he was asked to be generous to the hunter and his family (Young 1980:14).

Tait created many images of frogs at one point in his career after intensively studying mythology about frogs. Frogs appeared on prints, cards, pendants, bracelets and pins, and bowls. He carved a chief's medicine bowl with a frog on top (1975) that was inspired by
"stories of the Frog people and their relationships to healing power and medicine" (MacFarlane and Inglis 1977). Tait carved an alder mask of a woman with a frog emerging from her mouth and frog-like faces as eyes (1977). It was inspired by a story Tait heard in Kincolith about Frog Woman who caused a volcano to erupt destroying a village. Several children from that village had killed one of her children just for fun, and the villagers had refused to administer punishment (Lowndes MS. b: 5-6).

Many of Tait's prints were associated with myths for he found that "legends lend themselves to expression in this art-form" (NWC Indian Artists' Guild 1978: Norman Tait). A print of a halibut with a being inside was from a Nishga origin story. The story was told of a character called Gunas, who was transported in the belly of a halibut to a new site for his people. In a print called the Shaman's Journey (1981), Tait depicted a story of a shaman returning to the body of his patient--Raven--after a magical flight in a spirit canoe in which he retrieved the patient's soul. The shaman found that an evil spirit had taken up residence while he had been gone. The print image was of Raven struggling with the predicament of two souls. Only one could remain--the question in the image was, which one?
Certain forms were explored by Tait because they were simply aesthetically pleasing and/or they posed artistic challenges. Classical forms from the Northwest Coast such as grease dishes, horn spoons, clan helmets, talking sticks offered challenges to Tait in his development as an artist. Tait created a pure-form grease dish (1973), which Michael Ames, Director of the UBC Museum of Anthropology, suggested looked like a 2500 year old artifact archaeologists labelled a "whatsit" (quoted in Lowndes MS. a: 10). In a seal dish Tait carved in 1972, he "successfully integrated flat design elements within a three-dimensional form" (MacFarlane and Inglis 1977). The eagle helmet mentioned above was significant to Tait because "it incorporated exclusively Nisga'a design elements" (MacFarlane and Inglis 1977). Tait also played with visual punning, an element found in Northwest Coast art. Joan Lowndes described an example of Tait's punning in his chief's medicine bowl:

On the side of the bowl is a correctly composed Frog, his tongue flopping out, his forelegs tucked under him. But if you turn the bowl upside down you find that Tait has contrived to make his Frog also read upwards (MS. b: 6-7).

Some work posed technical problems as well as aesthetic, such
as inlaying abalone around the mouth of the eagle in the clan helmet, or steaming open canoes, or attaching arms to a seven foot Welcome Figure (1982). Tait also innovated with a speaker's Staff for a bishop who had been adopted by the Wolf clan. The staff had Wolf crests, a shepherd's crook and copper joint fitting. (Copper was symbolic of the copper that was a traditional wealth item on the Northwest Coast). Tait made the staff come apart into several pieces for easy transport because the bishop traveled a great deal, often by small plane. Tait also learned how to hinge a bracelet, and to separate five panels of design: the four Nishga clan crests and one of Tsak, the Mischievous Man in Nishga mythology.

Tait also followed his own inclinations. Lowndes noted Tait's predilection for an oval shape at one period in his life. Ovals were a favourite shape in jewellery pieces which enclosed all the design elements. A series of prints also featured figures arranged in an oval space. Lowndes, points out that the oval "tends to arrange creatures in a foetal position" and suggests that this archetypal image "must rise deep from Tait's unconscious" (MS. a: 12-13). Tait also explored images of aging in two masks: one of an old man and another of an old woman.
Tait's own work began teaching him by "talking" to him at certain points of its creation. He said at first he resisted this, and that he had to learn to listen, as he had to learn to listen to the old masterpieces that taught him so much. He said it also took time to accept his work as expressing his present carving ability and understanding of Nishga style.

Tait regards the Port Edward pole in 1973 as his "first grade papers" and said about it:

> When at first I knew that pole was incomplete, I thought: "I hope it rots down, I hope it falls down soon, won't be able to repair it so I'll get it out of my life. I know it's incomplete". I learned to live with that, as that level. I was not capable of finishing it just like a grade one student is not capable of doing grade five work. May be able to look at it and say, "That's grade five work, but no way can I do grade five work". That pole was my grade one papers.

After the Port Ed pole, I realized what was really there. I knew what to look for. Before that I didn't know what to look for. There was nothing coming out. It was just wood, wood, design. It changed after that. I went into Tsimshian carving, Nishga carving.

Tait regards the restoration work, poles he carved after the Port Edward pole, and the smaller work up until the time of the commission from the Field Museum, as his "high school" training. The commission
from the Field Museum was entering "university".

Tait talks of rest periods between major accomplishments. He often considered pieces created during these times as incomplete although they were regarded as complete by other people, and easily found their way into collections. For Tait they were learning pieces, steps building towards answering artistic problems.

There were difficult times for Tait during his creative cycle. If a "rest" period went on too long with no creative impulses, or a "barrier" came up in his work that the usual trigger mechanisms failed to release (see chapter five on the pole carving), he would get moody. When Tait was still "brewing" the ideas for a new piece and the form had not quite emerged, he was tensely hesitant about starting the work. This tension also occurred when he was about to start the finishing touches on a piece, when a piece was not quite ready to "turn around" as he would say, and tell him how to draw out its essence. At these times, Tait's energies were scattered and he was withdrawn and obviously pre-occupied. Then like a dam breaking he would plunge into the carving work with speed, clarity and focus.

Immediately after a major work was complete, Tait often felt a
loss and emptiness. Sometimes the completion demanded an abrupt transition from the private life of an artist to public life as a chief at an occasion such as a pole raising. These shifts were very anxiety provoking for Tait. Sometimes during these difficult periods, he experienced his world of support collapse around him, and at the same time feel oppressed by the obligations of family, friends and public. Sometimes he turned to alcohol and/or disappeared for long periods. He said about being an artist:

You give up a lot, a big chunk of your life, your personal life, you give it up. You're on your own. You are making a statement that has no backing at all except what you have to say, but you have to do it...You are flying free with no guarantees.

Other artists from the Northwest Coast were important to Tait in his life as an artist. Sometimes the influence was through a particular artist's work, and other times it was the shared sensitivity and support between two friends exploring a similar field.

During his early exploration, Tait remembered being deeply affected by the early work of Kwagiutl artist, Henry Hunt. He related:

Henry Hunt poles, carving, Henry Hunt did a lot deep [carving] that brought out feeling...He put a lot into his carvings and I could see it, I could feel it...That
type of carving though it's not the same as my type of carving, I could still feel it.

Mentioned already was Haida artist Gerry Marks. The camaraderie between him and Tait extended beyond specific teaching Gerry did regarding the use of some media. Tait talked of their sharing flights of associations about their work which stimulated the flow of ideas and supported each of their creative processes.

With Nuu-chah-nulth artist Joe David, Tait said few words would be spoken at times, or they would engage in conversations that would sound very cryptic to outside listeners, and yet a deep understanding would be communicated:

I would talk to Joe David, I would mention something and Joe would (snapped his fingers) like that catch it. He would know what I was talking about. We would communicate on that level.

and:

Joe would say, "This piece didn't really talk to me; I couldn't get it to talk to me" and I'll say, "Well, let him live his life. Maybe he's not ready to talk to you". He'll say, "Yeah, I guess". Things like that. When I think of it, it sounds funny. We carry on funny conversations when we do. But I go away satisfied.
Tait said these communications with friends were like those he heard between old people in his village: a few words evoked a deep experience of a shared world. Tait felt supported in his creative development by these relationships.

He was also inspired by Haida artist, Bill Reid. Occasionally Tait would take a piece of his work to Reid and Reid would give Tait "a hint here and there". Reid was also more generally inspiring. Tait said:

He keeps coming up with something new, something imaginative...Everytime he does something it affects the whole people. He gives me a little more power to think: "If he can do it, I can still do it too".

Over the years Tait came to feel a similar "quiet excitement" about some of his own work that he felt about the old pieces in museums. He also stated however, that his work did not yet express the maturity of the old pieces. His works were at his "level" and they were progressing. He felt the grinning face of the shaman on the Eagle-Halibut pole change its communication: it came to acknowledge the progression in Tait's work:

It's not a mocking grin anymore. It's slowly changing. He's not making fun anymore. Slowly coming around to an understanding. He realized I'm
learning...They're [the shaman is] saying, "Keep it up son. You're on the right track".

Recognition as a Nishga Carver

Tait's accomplishments as a Nishga carver and artist have been recognized and legitimated in exhibitions, sales, commissions and the media, and by invitations to act as both a consultant on and a representative of Nishga tradition. This recognition has been in the primarily non-native world of museums and art. He has also been recognized by his own people through their commissions, and by the elevation of his status as a chief.

Tait has had exhibitions in various centres in southern British Columbia and in Prince Rupert in the north, and has been part of several international shows. In 1974, Tait exhibited with other contemporary Northwest Coast artists at the Vancouver Museum. At the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona in 1979, Tait exhibited with Haida artist, Robert Davidson and Nuu-chah-nulth artist, Joe David. Several of Tait's prints were exhibited in the "Northwest Renaissance" exhibition held at the Burnaby Art Gallery in 1980. His work was included in the 1980 "Legacy:
Continuing Traditions of Canadian Northwest Coast Indian Art. This exhibit travelled to Scotland and England, was shown at the UBC Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver and is now at the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Victoria. The catalogue that accompanied the exhibit praised Tait for coming "closest to duplicating ancient Tsimshian sculptural forms" of any contemporary Tsimshian artist (Macnair et al. 1980: 96).

Tait's first one-man exhibition was a retrospective at the UBC Museum of Anthropology in 1977. It was previewed in Prince Rupert earlier that year. A Museum Note, Norman Tait: Nishga Artist, was published to accompany the exhibit. It says of Tait: "Norman Tait has become one of the foremost carvers on the Northwest Coast" (Macfarlane and Inglis 1977). In 1981, Tait had a one-man exhibition of recent silverwork at his studio-gallery, Wilp's Tsak, which was well received and the pieces were quickly acquired for private collections.

Tait has received commissions from institutions, government, private collectors and his own people. The National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan, commissioned an eleven foot "Raven clan" pole and "Beaver House" copper in 1976. In 1977, the Province of British
Columbia commissioned a twenty-five foot "Eagle clan" pole for Phoenix, Arizona. The Federal Department of Indian Affairs commissioned the ten foot by thirty-two foot mural for the Hartley Bay School in 1978. The University of British Columbia Alumni Association commissioned a fifteen foot "Raven Clan" house post which stands at the Museum of Anthropology at the University in 1978. In 1979, the Vancouver Museum Gift Shop commissioned an eleven and one half foot house post on which Tait carved the story of the Raven stealing the sun. It was acquired for the Clarke Simpkins collection and is displayed in a commercial setting.

Too numerous to mention are a variety of small pieces in silver, gold and wood commissioned by private collectors. Larger commissioned works include carved crest doors for a Vancouver restaurant in 1981. Tait was also contracted by a door manufacturing company to design panels for cedar doors. His apprentices carved them. He carved an eagle story pole for a private collection in California in 1980. In early 1982, he carved a seven foot nine inch Welcome Figure for a private collection in Vancouver.

The National Museums of Canada acquired a pure-form grease dish
(1973). The eagle helmet (1975) was acquired by the Vancouver Museum, a chief's medicine bowl (1975) by the British Columbia Provincial Museum. The UBC Museum of Anthropology purchased a large silver bracelet with negative and positive images of frogs reflecting one another. It was used in a display the Museum installed in a hospital. Tait has work in other museums and private collections in the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Great Britain and Australia as well as Canada.

Over the years since Tait started searching for his tradition in museums, museums have turned around and invited him to share the knowledge he has acquired. In 1974-75, Tait did restoration work on small Tsimshian pieces and the large Nishga totem pole. In 1975, he was invited by the National Museums of Canada to represent the Nishga nation at the opening of the “Children of Raven” Gallery at the Museum of Man in Ottawa. At the Heard Museum in Phoenix in 1977, and the UBC Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver in 1978, Tait finished totem poles in public so people could see a Northwest Coast carver in action. He also completed a pole for the private collection in California at the M.H. deYoung Museum in San Francisco in 1980, allowing the public to witness
the carving process. In 1980, the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago invited Tait to sit on their Native American Advisory Board for the reinstallation of their Northwest Coast collections. This led to the commission for the fifty-five foot totem pole.

The media has carried stories with regards to Tait's one-man exhibition at the UBC Museum of Anthropology, pole raisings in the North, and the canoe carving, steaming and journey to Kincolith. While Wilp's Tsak studio/gallery was in operation a number of newsletters about Tait's work were issued to customers, friends and people interested in contemporary Northwest Coast art. There was a masters thesis done at John F. Kennedy University in California on the pole Tait finished carving at the M.H. deYoung Museum (Feeley 1981).

Television stations have done a number of news spots on some of Tait's major work. Several video programmes have been created with Tait. Ken Kuramoto, free lance video and film producer, created an educational video programme on Tait's canoe project for the UBC Museum of Anthropology. It was also shown on the Knowledge Network. Michael Brodie and Bill Roxbourgh of Matrix Video featured Tait in a programme on the revival of Northwest Coast art. It is available
through the public school system in British Columbia.

Joan Lowndes, former art critic with the Vancouver Sun and subsequently a free lance writer, prepared articles on four artists she considered to be doing the finest work on the Northwest Coast: Bill Reid, Joe David, Robert Davidson and Norman Tait. Lowndes describes Tait as a "gifted artist". Commenting on his work in the 1977 exhibition at the UBC Museum of Anthropology, Lowndes writes: "the refinement of his small wood carvings is unsurpassed" (MS. b: 4-5). Lowndes writes of an undecorated grease dish that it "ravishes the viewer simply through proportion and line" (MS. a: 10). The Frog Woman mask she calls a "masterwork" (MS. a: 9) and says:

In execution the mask is superb. The eyelids, the pure arch of the eyebrows, the details of human hands and frogs' feet attest a master carver (emphasis added).

Tait has been acknowledged as a carver of repute by his own people through commissions for work and through tribal activity. The village of Port Edward commissioned Tait and his father to create the thirty-seven foot pole to commemorate village incorporation in 1973. In 1975, the village of Port Simpson commissioned Tait to do the eighteen foot pole to commemorate the opening of their all-native cannery. In
1981, the Wolf clan commissioned Tait to create the Speaker's Staff for Father Hannen who had been adopted into the Wolf Clan. The staff was given to the priest at his investiture as the Bishop of New Caledonia. This was an important commission for Tait because it demonstrated the vitality of the traditional clan relationships: one clan asking a member of an opposing clan to do work for them. It was special recognition for Tait also to be commissioned by his opposite clan, the clan of his father.
CHAPTER NOTES:

1. For the biographical information they provided, I wish to thank Cathy Cohen-Tait, wife and former business partner to Norman Tait; Reva Robinson, employer of Tait in a prison project with native inmates and consultant on grant applications; and Joan Lowndes, freelance writer and art critic who shared her article (two versions) on Tait which has yet to be published.

2. Steven McNeary in personal communication with Marjorie Halpin reports that "funny" dances that are like naxnox performances are being performed on the Nass River today. Naxnox performances have not been performed as such on the Nass River for at least sixty years (Halpin 1981: 280).

3. When I was in Kincolith in 1981, I attended a house opening. People of the village were seated in rows in the living room. The Church Army led people in hymns with a drum. The native Anglican minister read some verses and offered a prayer. Food that was provided by the house dwellers and their clan relatives, was given out until it was gone. We all took full plates home with us for it was improper to say, "No thanks". Several village people spoke according to Nishga tradition.

4. The Museum Note: Norman Tait: Nishga Carver (University of British Columbia: Museum of Anthropology, 1977) contains several errors regarding Tait's father. Josiah Tait did not apprentice as a carver nor did he have a totem pole standing in Kincolith. Tait says that if his father had lived several generations ago he would have apprenticed to a master carver. The only pole of his father's in Kincolith that Tait remembered was a thirty inch pole carved as a "hobby" piece that got lost when the family moved to Prince Rupert. There are no poles standing in Kincolith.

5. See Audrey Shane's Shadow and Substance: A Computer Assisted Study of Niska and Gitksan Totem Poles (University of British Columbia: M.A. thesis, 1978). She questions whether Oyai was a carver's name as Barbeau states, or the name given to more than one chief who hired carvers and who took the credit for the finished work. She suggests the
poles attributed to "Oyai" appear to have been carved by different carvers (p. 68). Tait works on the assumption that there was a very prominent carver named Oyai in the last century whose work he studies to understand Nishga style. From noticing the differences in Tait's carving style over the short span he has been seriously carving, and the differences in his apprentices' styles in work that becomes attributed to Tait, I would expect to see some variation in the work attributed to any carver in his carving life. To investigate the work attributed to Oyai further, however, would go beyond this paper.


7. According to Halpin's work on Tsimshian crests, owl is a secondary crest of the Killerwhale clan of the Coast Tsimshian and Gitksan. She does not list it under the crests of the Nishga Killerwhale clan. Grizzly appears to be the other major crest animal among the Killerwhale clan (1973: 332-469).

8. In 1985 a different version of this story was told which inspired images for a pole for the Urban Native Education Centre in Vancouver. Personal communication Isaac Tait, son of Norman Tait.

9. See Philip Dark "Among the Kilenge 'Art is something which is well done'" in Art and Artist of Oceania ed. by Sidney Mead and Bernie Kernot (Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press, 1983) pp. 25-44. Dark describes the production of a drum by a village artist in Oceania and the artist's "moodiness" during the creative process.

10. The article on Tait has not yet been published due to a change in a publisher's agreement and a change in Lownde's health.
IV. FROM ORAL TRADITION TO ARTISTIC IMAGE

Four years ago I started to get the picture there was an Eagle-Beaver story somewhere. My grandfather was telling me bits and pieces of it. They weren't really stories. We talked about family, "this person was this...and don't forget you are a Beaver. You are an Eagle first and you're crest is a beaver". That would go on that way; I was just getting remnants. I couldn't put it together until I told him I was going to carve this pole, and I was going to raise it, and could I have his help, and that's when he said I can hear the whole story--so I got the whole story then.

Norman Tait

In early September 1981, Norman Tait flew to Kincolith to speak to his grandfather (maternal uncle) Rufus Watts, about the totem pole that he had been commissioned to carve. From his grandfather, Tait received a family story and other related family property including a song, dance and costume. He used the story to inspire images for the totem pole. The pole also displayed the two major crests of the Eagle clan: the eagle and the beaver. The song, dance and costume became part of the pole raising performance.

The pole is more a work of the revival than a traditional totem pole in several ways: its images depict mythological content, and they are a simplification of the traditional system of cultural messages. The pole also arose out of nontraditional alliances in a new context. As I
mentioned in the previous chapter, traditional poles were displays of crests that belonged to a family, and stories, songs, dances, and costumes that were associated with the crests were brought out at the raising of the pole. A pole most likely had several stories attached to it, but did not depict the narrative sequence of any one story. (There were a few Haida poles, according to Wilson Duff [1976:89], that were "story poles" but that was unusual.) With the Big Beaver totem pole the story becomes the emphasis. The pole images depicted characters from the Eagle-Beaver story that Rufus Watts told his nephew, Norman Tait in the fall of 1981.

The pole was a display of some crests as well. However, the very complex crest system of traditional Tsimshian society, which has not been operable for many years, has been simplified by Norman Tait and Rufus Watts in their retrieval and reconstruction of Tsimshian traditions. In the past a totem pole would have demonstrated the clan and house affiliation of its owners with the elaborate set of crests that only they had the rights to use, and that only people within the house-clan system would easily understand. On the Big Beaver totem pole Tait and Watts only used the major clan crests of the Eagle clan: eagle and
beaver, and used in a minor way, the major clan crest of the Wolf clan, the wolf. (Majorie Halpin in her study of the Tsimshian crest system [1973], compiled approximately seven hundred and fifty Tsimshian crests approximately one hundred and eighty of which were Nishga.)

Like traditional poles, Big Beaver demonstrated social identity: the clan affiliation of its creators to an intertribal and multi-cultural audience.

The Big Beaver totem pole was created through nontraditional alliances. The most obvious one is a non-native institution commissioning a native artist to create a traditional-style work of art. The other is the relationship of Watts and nephew Tait in bringing forward this totem pole. The exchange was between a carver and a chief, so that the carver could render images in wood. It was also the transmission between an elder chief and his heir. These roles—carver and heir—had not occurred simultaneously in traditional Tsimshian society. In the past, when a totem pole was to be carved, a commissioning family looked to the clan of their "fathers" for a carver (Barbeau, 1950: 3). If the person invited to be "carver" could not do the task himself, he arranged for a skilled carver to do it. The ceremonial carver "stood over" the actual carver and often received the credit for
the work (Ibid., p.3). The completed work was thereafter associated with the family who commissioned the pole as a display of their family property in a tribal community. The carver’s name was, however, known and remembered as well.

The more significant aspect of the relationship in 1981 was that both men were chiefs in the same family and clan. The younger chief enlisted the help of the elder, so that he could fulfill a commission from outside the tribal community. The two chiefs worked on a joint project that would display their tribal heritage, primarily to members of an art and museum community.

Also going on was the transmission of knowledge from a member of an older generation to a member of the younger generation in the same family. The knowledge included story, songs, dances and information about costumes, ceremony, family history and social protocol. Transferring rights to some of the family’s property occurred as well, from the elder owner to his chosen heir. In Tait, the elder chief, Watts, found someone who was not only willing to hold onto the tradition, but also willing to carry it forward into new contexts in a world community. Together they contributed to the revival of some
Nishga traditions.

Traditionally, totem poles were most often carved to commemorate a deceased chief and raised at a memorial potlatch. The heir, whom the chief had chosen and trained before he died, would assume the chief's name and the property that belonged with that name. Members of other clans were invited to witness, and thus legitimate, this transfer of name and property.

With the Big Beaver, the ceremonial owner of the pole was the elder chief, Watts. He and Tait talked of the pole as a gift from the elder chief to the commissioning museum, and the city in which the museum was located. The pole raising ceremony acted partly as a demonstration of the transfer of the pole ownership to the Field Museum and the City of Chicago. The pole-raising, which was accompanied by a display of other aesthetic property associated with the pole, acted also as a public demonstration of the partial transfer of some property within the Watts-Tait family. Watts, the elder owner who is still alive and active, shared the rights to this property with his nephew, Tait. There was no transfer of name directly connected with the pole. (Tait received a third name at a potlatch when he returned from Chicago in
recognition of his artistic achievement. The name had belonged to a brother of Rufus Watts.)

Transfer of property was only one aspect of the event in Chicago. The emphasis at the Museum was the display of tribal artistic heritage: a traditional totem pole with accompanying cultural performances of story, songs, dances and ceremony. The Museum also billed the pole raising as a museum event: the opening of an exhibit. Tait talked about the pole raising as the display of the property of the Rufus Watts' family (which included himself), and not as always emphasizing the transfer of rights. We see more of this in later chapters.

**Acquiring the Story**

Rufus Watts is an Eagle clan chief living in Kincolith. For many years now he has been drawing a pension, maintaining a trapline in winter and participating in the oolichan fishing and oil-making process in early spring on the Nass River. He has witnessed the traditional native way of life greatly transform in his seventy-eight years. While he remembers an active ceremonial life when he was very young, he has
experienced the waning of the power in his tradition and the
development of more modernized ceremonial forms. In his teens Watts
began "putting away" much of his knowledge of Nishga tradition to
assume roles in a more non-traditional lifestyle that was taking
precedence among his people. He worked as a commercial fisherman and
cook on the North Coast and worked on road construction in Vancouver.
Watts had been chosen at a very early age to be a carrier of traditional
knowledge in what Tait calls a storyteller role. According to Tait,
Watts was "groomed to carry on the legends" by an elder clan relative.
Tait described Watts' learning process by contrasting it with his own:

His grandfather took him and sat him down and
taught him the stories. He told me how he learned
when he asked me if I had been listening to his
tapes, "And when do you listen to them?"

"Well, I sit down, pick up some wood and start
carving and turn on the tape and I'm carving."

He roared at me, "That's not the way to do it!" He
said, "You sit down and do nothing—you have nothing
in your hands, nothing in your head and you listen
and that's it!" He must have spent a lot of hours
sittin' there doing nothing and listening. One story
is eight days long so you can imagine how many days
he sat listening.
Tait went on to describe Watts as a very animated narrator of tales, "You can almost tell these people are right there after all these years, after all these people he's gone through storytelling". Tait points out, however, that stories were not just "to entertain children over a fire". They contain lessons. Storytellers were carriers of tradition and had a lot of responsibility. Tait said:

Some people came from far away just to have their children sit in front of these old people and listen to their stories. Or they would invite these old people over to their houses for the evening, feed them, give them whatever they wanted so they [would] give some stories. It [storytelling] became a pleasure to them [storytellers] after awhile when they don't worry about making mistakes.

Most of the lessons Tait remembered from stories were about moral relationships to the environment. "Storytelling was how to recognize our greed", was an example he gave. Stories often gave examples of wrong relationships to animals. Animals had human spirit forms as well as animal forms, and were bestowers of many gifts to humans. Stories tell of encounters with animals' spirit forms and point to the proper relationships. Tait described the right attitude fostered by stories:
In the old days before a hunter went out he would talk to the spirit and say, “Send me this or send me that” and he’d promise all kinds of things. “I won’t waste it; I’ll feed my family. I’ll boast to you; I’ll boast about you”. And then when they actually got the animal, they talk to the animal, “Send me more of your kind; my people need you”. When they had too much, they would say, “Go back, thank you for coming. We don’t really need you this day”.

Tait says that Watts learned a range of stories appropriate to many circumstances. And he also learned songs, dances, family names, and about family history and protocol. Some stories, songs and dances were common property and could be used by many people in various situations. Other cultural materials were family property and could only be used by the owners on very particular occasions, such as family potlatches. Watts, as a chief and with his knowledge of his family’s property, was called upon to help facilitate family tribal functions and was asked to act as a speaker.

The tribal functions were modernized and did not call upon a great deal of what Watts had learned. It was not until he began transmitting his knowledge of tradition to Tait, that he really brought forward what he had put to memory so long ago. His knowledge was
transmitted to Tait in interwoven fragments until Tait asked him for specific information for specific problems or projects. For many years, for example, Tait thought he heard what sounded like an Eagle-Beaver story woven into a lot of material on names, crests and history. Only when he told Watts about the pole project for Chicago, did he receive the whole story.

Tait describes acquiring the story as being much like a carver in the past working with a chief. They were "locked away" together discussing crests, story, family history and property, so that images could be rendered in wood. The following is Tait's description of how he acquired information for his Chicago pole:

When I went to get the story on this pole, he took me into the house and locked the door, pulled down the blinds and that was that: blocked off completely. He briefed me. He talked a lot about other things first. [He] wanted to know from A to Z what was going to happen, who it was for, why--really nothing to do with the story of the pole at all. When I completed everything, then he says, "Okay, put on your tape and I'll tell you."

We talked and talked, and at the first break one of my cousins came along with a pot of rice and some sea lion meat and just passed it through the door. He thanked her. We sat down and ate and talked and joked and made some tea. We went back and did
some taping and that was the way it was done in the old days.

Tait gave the impression of a "secrecy" around the transmission process that he engaged in with his grandfather, that he said was similar to a secrecy around similar exchanges in the past. According to Barbeau (1950: 789-790), there were two kinds of carvers in traditional Tsimshian societies. One kind worked in secrecy and one did not. For hala'it events, which demonstrated connections with the supernatural, masks and ritual paraphernalia were created by a class of carvers called gît són̓tk who acted as advisors to chiefs. Their work was shrouded in secrecy. They had the right to kill those who witnessed their making or operating hala'it contrivances. They also had the right to force non-initiates who saw their activities to join a dancing society (Halpin 1973: 76). For potlatch events, crest art, including totem poles, was created by a class of carvers of lower status, the uk̓qin̓lí. They did no work in secret (nor were they allowed to carve hala'it materials).

When the present carver suggests "secrecy" around his activity with the carrier of knowledge, are we seeing the loss of the traditional distinctions in the art and carvers in Tsimshian society? Certainly the
role of the carver is changing, as the context within which he work changes. We will see more of this as we proceed.

Tait, as carver and heir, received the Eagle-Beaver story in September 1981. The story tells how the Eagle clan took the beaver as a clan crest. Tait taped the story in Nishga. I transcribed the following translation that was done by Norman Tait’s brother Alver Tait. Watts said of this story, “It’s a true story and not been made up”.

In early winter four brothers set out to go hunting for beaver. Their family is giving a potlatch and beaver skins will be given away to visiting chiefs and used at the feasts. Skins are money.

They start off and find where some beaver have blocked up a river. They will break up the dam. The water has to drain before they go set their traps.

The next morning they start a fire and eat burned dried fish. One other young man, who was not going to go hunting with them is brought along to pack the skins. They are all brothers.

The hunters start to break up the beaver's dam. The men are standing on top and at the bottom. The water drains out into the creek and the beaver start coming out to see why the water is going down. The men start killing them.
The young man watches. He sees little beaver going away from the dam. He has nothing in his hand, and does not pick up anything, and he does not tell his brothers. He follows the little beaver to see where they are going. They get stuck by sticks on their path. The young man helps the beaver over. The beaver recognize the man and know he is helping them escape. He helps them several times and tells them not to be afraid. He will not hurt them.

The little beaver make their way to another stream in a clearing ahead. The young man does not realize how long he takes helping the beaver out. The little beaver enter a big pond. They hit their tails on the surface and go down under water. He keeps watching.

The young man approaches their new place and he is amazed to see an enormous beaver lodge with a smoke hole. He climbs on top and hears something like thunder underground. He peers down through the smoke hole and sees a fire burning. The little beaver take off their beaver coats. They have human spirit forms underneath. A big chief takes his nephews on his lap. They tell how people found them and how their uncles and grandfathers have been slaughtered. They also tell of the young man who helped them.

The young man is surprised. There is crying and wailing in the house. The young man looks around the house and sees a stick standing behind the chief. There are a lot of beaver on it.

The Beaver chief says, "We will have a feast with all the cousins and people in this house. Stand behind the fire and we will sing". The young man forgets about returning and it gets dark.
The chief takes his hat and his dance stick and begins to sing. All the beaver dance with sticks that have beaver on them. The young man watches. The chief sings a mourning song, "Hey yeah, hey yeah, hey yeah, my poor brother, poor brother, poor young". The ladies start crying. They sing until morning.

The chief calls his nephews in the morning and tells them to go out and look around. The nephews find sun shining on ice that has formed on the pond. The chief happily says, "Well, we won't be finished today! We'll feast!" They are safe with the water frozen. They continue dancing and the chief sings a happy song. They close the lodge tight from the cold. The chief can also hear footsteps.

The cold is biting at the young man's face as he leaves. When his brothers find him he has much to tell, "This is not a small thing, you must believe. The beaver are like people. I looked in their home and watched them. I saw a stick standing there full of beaver". The brothers decide to take what the little brother has learned as family property.

When they reach home their chief tells them to "fix" a pole. It takes about two years and then there is a big feast. There are all kinds of skins that are distributed to other chiefs. The pole is raised. It is called "Big Beaver", and the young man talks about the Beaver chief and sings the songs and dances the dances.

In this story, as in many Northwest Coast stories, animals are seen in human spirit form. They possess elements of human culture such as lodge, kinship system and aesthetic property. The beaver people
in this story give cultural gifts to a young man by allowing him to observe their ritual activities. A correct relationship to the environment was demonstrated by the young man when he allowed the young beaver to go free. He takes the gifts back to his family who create a social occasion to display the new family property. Tait described this kind of property as a "sign of importance of the Eagle clan, possessions to pass on. It gives recognition to the Eagle clan as a powerful group by other people on the Coast".

The Eagle-Beaver story was the property of Watts and his brothers, members of the Eagle clan. In the process of creating and raising the Big Beaver totem pole, Tait had the rights to this property passed on to him, at least in part. He talked about it this way:

He's [Rufus] told it to probably ninety percent accuracy. He will always retain something and as time goes on, things will be added. If at a point he figures he's going to go, then he will give it all, hand it over. At some point if he's too old, tired or weak to come to potlatches and talk, he'll say, "it's your turn, here's the torch. You have to know everything about it and you have to pass it on. You have to hold up our end, hold up our tribe. It's yours now". Then he'll fill it in.

Watts acknowledged Tait as primary owner, "In essence you are
headman. Over time Tait will become more associated with the story as
he uses it at public occasions. Tait said:

If a canoe was to be carved and given a name that came from the story, I'd be allowed to use the story again. At my grandfather's funeral, if I was to do a memorial pole for him, I'd be allowed to use that story again. After awhile it would become pretty well known and established that I am part of that story and I have that right, just like my grandfather now.

The story referred to two song-dances: a Mourning song-dance and a Happy song-dance. Watts owns one song-dance, the Mourning song-dance, which is associated with the story. The rights to it, like the rights to the story, were being handed down to Tait. It was only to be performed in association with the story and only to be performed by the Eagle clan. (It was performed in Chicago by members of other clans because there were not enough Eagle clan members to perform it. The other clan members covered up their clan crests.) There was also a second Happy song-dance which was common property of the Nass River people that was performed with the Mourning song-dance. There were no restrictions on its use: it could be sung and danced by anyone at any occasion. More will be said about the song-dances in the chapter on the
dance troupe (6).

The story also had a costume associated with it which included a beaver cape and helmet. These were worn by Tait in Chicago demonstrating his rights to the story and other associated property. A totem pole was part of the story as well. The pole which Tait carved from the story, ceremonially belonged to Watts and it was his "gift" to the Field Museum and city of Chicago.

Creating Images

After Tait had heard and taped the story in its entirety, he began the process of visualizing the images for the totem pole. As well as the story and Nishga artistic tradition, Tait had several other considerations. The Field Museum wanted a fifty-five foot carved column and asked that some carving be seen from the Museum entrance when the pole was in place. (The pole was to face the city of Chicago with its back to the Museum.) The Museum also suggested acknowledgement of its history, purpose and connection with the Northwest Coast, as well as acknowledgement of the revitilization
of Northwest Coast tradition.

Another consideration was a serious crack in the log that had been selected for the pole (see chapter 5). As well, Tait said, "I also had to figure out a way to make the pole attractive". Tait said that Watts had only one specific request:

My grandfather wanted the eagle on the very top, that was definite. And the beaver on the very bottom, that was definite. He wanted to have on top a flying eagle—my grandfather did not want it standing still on top—separated from the rest of the pole.

Otherwise, the image creation was left up to Tait. Watts said, "It's your wood, so you sit down, take all this [story and discussion] and put it on the pole". Some images rose spontaneously from hearing the story. Tait said, "I saw them as he told it: the way he tells stories, his actions, his emphasis". Tait talked about it this way:

I just kept imagining the figures as I heard the story over and over again on my tape and from talking with my grandfather. The figures just fell into place. Each figure almost told its own story. It was almost as if each was one chapter in the whole totem pole, like you opened the totem pole book and there it is: first chapter, second chapter.
As well as using the oral tradition transmitted by his grandfather, Tait returned to the anthropological literature, including Barbeau's work on totem poles, to further image development. Tait talked of "brooding" over, and "brewing" on, images during this time. He listened to the taped Eagle-Beaver story on his car tape deck and on a "walkman" as he helped prepare the log for carving and went for long walks around Vancouver. He also played the tape as he carved in silver and wood.

Tait worked on pole-related images from various angles and in various dimensions on paper, in wood and in his imagination. He carved two small poles on related themes. One pole had a chief with a beaver helmet similar to the one he planned to carve for himself to wear in Chicago, and similar to the one he planned for the Chief on the big pole. He sketched several horn or wood spoon designs with beaver motifs.

Other people helped stimulate Tait's image creation. Memories of his family and old people on the Nass River filled his thoughts and triggered images for the pole. Tait's apprentices also acted as catalysts. Tait and his crew would talk over coffee about the story, Nishga artistic tradition and style, problems with the pole log and their
plans for Chicago. Tait sometimes sketched out pieces of the pole design on napkins and placemats in restaurants to explain points, to answer questions, and to clarify for himself what was evolving.

It was a process that was difficult to turn off. As Tait was going off to sleep or waking up, images appeared. He describes trying to read a book to escape from the process. He would find himself at the bottom of a page having taken in nothing, his mind being so preoccupied. He would glimpse fleeting ideas, catch some of them on paper, sometimes losing the paper to the laundry. He would then go to his studio and rework what he remembered.

Once the gross features were decided upon, Tait began considering the finer aspects. The transformation of beaver to human was a major theme. The Big Beaver Chief on the bottom was in beaver form. The little beaver, who took off their beaver coats when they entered their uncle’s lodge, were depicted as human children (Nephews) emerging from behind the top of the Big Beaver Chief’s tail. The Chief in human form appeared as the second large figure. He had a beaver helmet and dance staff.

Aspects of the hunt were rendered as well. The beaver that were
slaughtered (Beaver) were shown as two pairs of beaver facing down the pole to show that they "had gone back to the earth". The four hunters (Hunters) were in pairs also, with their arms linked to symbolize their family relationship. Their features were different to demonstrate individuality. The younger brother (Fifth Brother) who was excluded from his brothers' activity, was separate from his kin. The Fifth Brother looked "down on the Big Beaver Chief on top of his head".

Other images came to Tait to fill out the pole. These were Watts as a storyteller (Storyteller), and four faces above him, to represent the many generations who have owned the story (Generations). Tait also created what he calls his "signature". He says traditionally carvers would often tuck in a personal image that did not fit with the stories or family crests. This functioned as the sign of the carver. Tait created a baby wolf and tucked it between the Storyteller's knees (Wolf). Cathy Cohen-Tait was pregnant at the time of the pole production and the baby was to be born a member of the Wolf clan. Tait also created another image of the Fifth Brother and the idea of the beaver lodge. The following is his description of the development of these images:

It just kept coming back to me. I visualized him laying there clutching the airhole and just looking
down, peeking down, and smoke coming up the hole and the beaver dancing around this big pole and the chief sitting there crying at first and then getting up to dance with his beaver headdress. It just kept coming back. There was this little man gathering the whole story. It just kept coming back. The little boy was already showing down below. There was a blank [near the top] and I didn't know what to put into it. I had filled out everything else, all that was required. And then I thought the whole thing was discovered in a beaver lodge and I don't have the beaver lodge so that was it: the little boy looking down the whole pole gathering the whole story.

The young man's second image stands below the Eagle looking through the beaver lodge smoke hole. His face appears on the other side of the pole. Tait hesitated in creating this second image of the young man because there was one image already, and because Tait had never seen or heard of a figure looking through a pole in this manner before. The image kept coming up in his mind and, needing another figure, he developed the idea. This image also satisfied the request from the Field Museum for some carving to be visible from the Museum entrance.

The image production went on until, as Tait said, "I started going back to what I did before". He found the process "fraught with labour pains" and "mental exhaustion" and, once complete, he had the feeling that a "birth" had taken place. The completed set of pole images that
Tait created for the Big Beaver totem pole are on the following pages (Figures 3, 4, 5). At the top is the flying Eagle separated from the next figure by an uncarved spike. The next image is the Fifth Brother looking through the smoke hole. As the images are drawn here, the Storyteller is next (the little Wolf is between his knees). Two of the four generation heads are shown here below the Storyteller with arrows indicating their transfer to a position above the Storyteller. Below the Generations on the sketch are two of the four Beaver followed by two of the four brothers. Next is the Big Beaver Chief in human form with his dance regalia. Tait worked the images so that the crack in the log would fall under the elbow of this figure. Next is the second image of the young man looking down over the head of the Big Beaver Chief. The Big Beaver Chief in his beaver form, is at the bottom clutching a stick with human hands. His tail is turned up with one of the Nephew’s heads shown at the top edge. The sections of images are lettered going up the pole set. These acted as guide marks for transferring the images from the sketch onto the pole log.
Figure 3. Sketch of the top third of Big Beaver totem pole (photocopy of pencil sketch, 70% of original): W. flying Eagle, R-V. Fifth Brother looking through the smokehole, Q. Storyteller (Wolf between the Storyteller's knees is not shown on sketch), O-P. Generations.
Figure 4. Sketch of the middle third of the Big Beaver totem pole: N-O. two of the paired slaughtered Beaver, K-N. one of a pair of Hunters, H-K. on of a pair of Hunters.
Figure 5. Sketch of the bottom third of the Big Beaver totem pole: G-H. beaver helmet, D-G. Chief, C-D. Fifth Brother, B. the Big Beaver Chief, A. one of a pair of Nephews.
Chapter Notes:

1. Arthur Koestler in his book *Act of Creation* (London: Pan Books Limited), attempts to describe the creative process. He describes absentmindedness as really being singlemindedness, the period of incubation, in which "the whole personality, down to the unverbalized and unconscious layers, has become saturated with the problem". He describes this state as "ripe" for different matrices of thought to collide out of which a creative act can take place (p.119).


3. Tait talks of "births" with the pole several times: 1st birth is the visual images from the oral tradition; 2nd and 3rd, the "spark of life" that comes in the final carving, and carrying the finished pole out of the carving shed (chapter 5); 4th, raising the pole (chapter 7).
V. DRAWING THE IMAGES OUT OF WOOD

I try to get the bulge, the eyeball right inside the wood and give it just that little spark of life. People call it great art. Probably a lot of other carvers see it as something different. I see it as life—real life.

Norman Tait

On August 5, 1981, a giant red cedar tree was felled in the University of British Columbia Research Forest in Haney, B.C. (one and one half hours from Vancouver by car) and transported to a warehouse on Granville Island in the heart of Vancouver. On March 9, 1982, the carved totem pole Big Beaver was carried from the warehouse by approximately one hundred people and sent by railcar to Chicago in the mid-western United States.

There are similarities and differences in production of the Big Beaver totem pole with comparable situations in traditional Tsimshian society (before this century). In Appendix I, I have created a chart to compare contemporary and traditional acquisition of a tree and technology employed to prepare the log and carve the totem pole. Here I make a general comparison of the social setting to see the continuity and transformation of traditions.

The plans for the pole raising and the occasion it celebrated were
undertaken years in advance by the Field Museum. Funding and donated services had been amassed from government, corporate and private sources. Tait established a carving schedule that fit with the time the Museum set for raising the pole. He coordinated his activities with those services, such as felling the tree and moving the pole, donated by corporate supporters to the pole project. The Big Beaver pole took approximately six months to carve. (There were nine months from the tree felling in August 1981 to pole raising in April 1982.)

Traditionally, according to Tait, "they had all the time in the world to do it [prepare the totem pole]. They took their time and they understood that was their job for the next couple of years—three years, sometimes six years". The commissioning family had to amass goods to pay the carver, his family and apprentices. They also had to provide for a cycle of feasting that was necessitated by the death of a chief. The cycle would end with the installation of his heir at a potlatch, at which a memorial pole would be erected. The whole process often took years.

The apprenticeship programme in 1981 was different from apprenticeship programmes in the past. A few generations ago, according to Tait, youngsters began with a master carver at about age
six, and continued well into their teens. At first, their work consisted of cleaning up after the master and learning to make tools. More and more carving responsibility was handed over to them as they grew older. They learned by working along side the master.

The contemporary apprentices who worked on the Big Beaver were part of a programme that was initially funded by the British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts Society. The apprentices had carved before entering the programme and continued to do their own work, which they sold, during their apprenticeship. At the start of the big pole, four of them had worked with Tait for approximately one year. One apprentice had only been part of the programme for several months. The apprentices were given full responsibility for some of the figures on the pole, under Tait's guidance. He regarded them as equivalent in capability to older teenagers in the ancient apprenticeship programmes.

Traditionally, the people living in a village where a pole was carved could watch its progress and probably participated in its moving, raising and potlatch. A segment of Tsimshian society from other villages would come to participate in some of the feasting cycle, of which the pole raising was part.
In the modern setting, people from various Northwest Coast tribes, and non-natives as well, were drawn to the pole. There were many one-time visitors who came to see an art-work-in-process that was destined for an institution they might never visit. People from various public media recorded aspects of the project, and/or broadcast news of it to a wide audience. The community which gathered to move the pole in Vancouver was a different community than the one that saw the pole raised in Chicago.

Within the traditional village settlement of clan houses, a totem pole would be carved, carried to the raising site and raised. According to Tait and his aunt, the impending move of a totem pole was advertised throughout the village. The carrying was then done by members of clans other than the clan of the owners. The owners would be in debt to the carriers for their work. The carrying and raising probably happened during the same time period. The commissioning family hosted the events that displayed their family property. At this time, the heir to the deceased chief to whom the totem pole was raised, assumed the rights to the property of his or her predecessor. Workers and witnesses at the event would be paid. In the distant past, gifts were furs, food,
and carved and woven articles. In the recent past, trade goods and
money were introduced as potlatch gifts.

A carrying ceremony was created in 1982 to celebrate the moving
of the pole. The ceremony was six weeks before the raising and several
thousand miles from the raising site. The pole moving was advertised in
a symbolic village—an urban industrial island on which the pole had
been carved. (We will see another pole moving ceremony in Chicago in
chapter 7.) The major mode of transportation for the pole was train, to
which people carried the pole. The moving services of the people and
the train were donated to the project.

Traditional ceremonial relationships were activated in the
modern setting. Members of Tait’s “father’s” clan, Wolf, were asked to
assume major work positions such as overseeing the activities and
carrying the Eagle. Whoever was available to help carry the pole was
welcomed. Fruit was distributed to participants in the carrying
ceremony. The names of major contributors to the event were collected,
so that payment could be made later at a feast. (There was talk of a
settling feast but as of spring 1985 none has been held.)

Some of the traditions surrounding totem poles are being revived
and practised as they were in the past. Other aspexts are new, others modified. In the description of the fulfillment of the commission from the Field Museum which follows, we see a blend of old and new technology, relationships, creative processes and ceremony.

The Apprentices

Tait started the Nishga Carving School in 1980 with the financial assistance of the British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts Society. Four of the five apprentices working on the Big Beaver totem pole had been with the school since its inception. Tait’s younger brothers Alver and Robert were two of the five. Alver Tait began carving as a hobby at Residential School in Edmonton, Alberta and later in Prince Rupert. He joined his brother’s Nishga Carving School in which he developed his knowledge and skills as a Nishga carver. Robert, the youngest Tait, learned to carve through brother Norman and in the school. Alver and Robert Tait, like Norman Tait, are Eagle clan members.

Mitchell Morrison, a Coast Tsimshian-Nishga originally from Prince Rupert, began carving with his brother and grandfather. At first,
he did Haida-style carving and then moved into more Tsimshian work.

Morrison joined Tait's school on Haide artist Robert Davidson's recommendation. Morrison is of the Wolf clan.

Lawrence Wilson began to carve with Gitksan-Tsimshian Glen Wood and Tahltan-Tlingit Dempsey Bob and took classes at 'Ksan. He then joined Tait's school. He is Nishga of the Killerwhale clan and was born in Prince Rupert.

Ted Barton became involved in the Nishga carving school through Morrison. He was the newest member of the group, was born in Prince Rupert and is Nishga of the Eagle clan.

Alver and Robert Tait, Morrison and Wilson had been with Tait for about one year before starting the Big Beaver project. Barton had joined in the spring of 1981 during the canoe carving project. All the apprentices carve such things as small poles, plaques and bowls for the market. Sometimes they checked their pieces with Tait for help with specific problems or for advice on improving their Nishga style carving. The Big Beaver pole was the largest project they had worked on, and it included becoming dancers.
Tait approached his teaching as well as his own work analytically and with a more synthetic-associational approach. He broke problems down into component parts and verbalized his abstract conceptualization. He discussed criteria by which artistic or stylistic decisions were made. He made comparisons between the style he worked in, and the styles of other Northwest Coast traditions.

Tait also approached his artistic tasks using his sensory faculties, followed his intuitive impulses and allowed the influence of associated materials. He relied heavily on eliciting a "feeling" for sections of the carving by using evocative metaphors such as: the eyeball that is "all the way back right inside the wood". Another frequent phrase was "skin pulled tight over bones". He demonstrated how pieces of the carving worked by moving in with his adze and bringing out what he sensed. He used his hands to feel the carving and tell him where there was too much wood or a curve was not quite right. Tait and his apprentices used their own and other people's bodies, and those of animals, to trigger an understanding of carving bodies. Tait allowed solutions to problems to arise intuitively after he had first
exhausted all analytical approaches. He encouraged his apprentices to use the same procedure by making suggestions such as "surprising" a problem area.²

Tait engaged in associative study with his apprentices to deepen the context in which they carved. They listened to the story and songs over and over. They learned to dance and made costumes connected with the carving they were doing. The pole carving was not an isolated technical task. It was part of a much larger developmental process. Tait said of this:

Everything they need to carve a totem pole: to dance, to make costumes and the courage to get up and dance and sing, all came with the pole. So by the time we got to the end, they weren't lacking very much except experience.

The teacher-apprentice relationship was not always easy during this project. Tait was disappointed at times, because he felt his apprentices depended on him too much for information. They did not spend the time discovering what makes Nishga style work from their personal inquiry in such places as museums, nor from their experience in carving. He was also frustrated with trying to facilitate an
understanding of what he describes as the “spark of life...real life” that makes “great art”. He found it difficult to lead his apprentices beyond technique into creating art with that added dimension.

The apprentices had difficulty at times with Tait’s “moodiness”, which included periods of breaking time-agreements and not being available for feedback. There was also some tension with regard to money. The apprentices questioned where the money for the pole from the Field Museum was going. They had to depend on sources outside the carving project such as carving for the market and social assistance for income.

The crew occasionally had meetings to try and clear up difficulties, and to be kept up to date on the expectations of Tait and the Field Museum. These meetings became more frequent as the departure day to Chicago approached. To achieve the cooperative goal, individual and interpersonal tensions had often to be transcended.

**Acquiring a Live Tree**

The tree for the totem pole, and the work to fell and transport it,
was provided by the British Columbia Forest Council. The tree was selected from an area that was to be thinned out in the University of British Columbia Research Forest in which the cedar trees were approximately six hundred years old. Tait needed seventy feet of rot-free, straight trunk with as few branches as possible. Its diameter at the bottom had to be at least three feet and at the seventy foot mark, two feet.

On August 5, Tait and his apprentices met a logging crew that was provided by MacMillan Bloedel Company in the designated area in the forest. Together they combed the forested banks along a roadway looking for appropriate trees. As well as assessing trees visually, they tapped on trunks with axe handles. They listened for a hollowness in the sound which suggested "aliveness", that is, not filled with rot. Several trees were brought down with a long bladed chain saw and wedges hammered into the saw cuts. The first two trees had too much rot inside. The third came down with a resounding crash. Tait immediately said: "That's it. It sounds alive." It proved to have seventy good feet, and the top, bottom and its few branches were cut off. A back hoe pulled the log out of the woods with cables and onto the road. The giant claws of a self-loading
truck picked the log up, and placed it on the bed of the truck. The log was made secure with supports and chains and transported into Vancouver.

A warehouse under the Granville Street Bridge in Vancouver was turned into the carving shed for the totem pole project. A theatre company kept stage sets and props in one area of the warehouse. The totem pole log ran across the width at the other end supported approximately ten inches off the cement floor. It was covered with plastic when the carving work was completed each day so that the wood would not dry out. The shed was cold and damp with a dim grey light coming through tall opaque paneled windows. A string of light bulbs were hung over the length of the pole which provided the primary source of light for carving. Several tool boxes stood along one wall housing chain saws, small tools, extension cords and visual materials. They were locked up at night and the key hidden for the first person on site the next morning. An old kitchen table and some odd chairs were set up between stage sets, and held coffee thermoses and mugs, smaller carvings that the apprentices were working on, plus tool bags, photographs, sketches and newspapers. A small radio blared out rock 'n roll. A tool sharpener sat on a stump end in one corner. Occasionally there were acetylene and propane
tanks and torch equipment in a corner for making and repairing tools.

The tools used to work on the pole included commercially acquired chain saws, axes, planers, chisels, mallets, carpenters' levels and blue line. These were used primarily in the preparatory work. Traditional adzes and knives were made by each carver and were employed in most of the carving work. Iron files were made into cutting edges for elbow adzes with heat, and fastened to pieces of hardwood tree trunk. The trunk had a branch still attached that served as a handle. Sizes and curves of the edges varied for the various types of work to be done. Some edges were beveled. Large and beveled adzes were used to pull out large chunks of wood. Medium adzes were used to tear off strips and chip away excess wood. Smaller flatter blades were used to clean up surfaces.

To make carving knives, the carvers reworked commercial knife blades with heat, and then attached them to hardwood handles. Handles could be gripped by one or two hands and some were carved. Some blades were left straight to be used to create outlining line for eyebrows, nostrils, bottom lips, and in ears and eyes. Curved blades of various sizes were made to work in the concave and convex areas of the sculpted wood.

From August 5 to October 31, the log was prepared for carving.
Work was usually three days a week from ten a.m. to four p.m. The bark was stripped off. The "catface", the outer layers of whitish sapwood, was removed with planers and large adzes exposing the red, tighter grained, carving surface. Tait occasionally rubbed chips in his fingers and smelled them at various parts of the log checking for an "alive" quality. He felt for oilness and dampness, and smelt for an "apple, red but not sweet apple"-like smell.

On September 15, the log was rolled onto what was designated as its front face, and the back was flattened and hollowed. The hollowing was to prevent uneven checking in the carved cedar and to decrease the weight. The beginning cutting work was done with chain saws, double headed axe, hatchet and large adzes. Carpenters' levels and blue line were employed to maintain uniformity and straightness. Most of the hollowing was done with adze work, which took many hours.

Some work was done around the crack which was found to run sixteen feet along the lower middle section of the pole. The affected area was mapped out by tapping with the back of an axe, and listening for the quality of resonance in the sound. To lessen pressure being exerted by some jammed layers of wood, horizontal cuts were made across the worst
section with a chain saw. The area was then given a kick so that the wood would spring back. There was concern that this crack would run deeper into the wood or extend further along the length of the pole.

On October 30, pulleys were rented and rigged up in the rafters above the pole. The pole was winched up in the air, turned, reset on the logs on its flattened back. The centre line was drawn up the front face with carpenters' blue line.

**Figures Emerging From the Cedar Column**

In the first week in November the images were drawn onto the pole from Tait's sketch. The pole was marked with guidelines A – W. Tait drew the Chief with dance gear first to work the worst part of the crack under its elbow. He and his apprentices then proceeded to sketch on the remainder of the images on one side of the pole. They started with blue and red grease pencils and did the final lines in black. Tait occasionally used chalk to mark guidelines in faces. For example, he chalked in a triangle for the nose, circles for the high points of the cheeks. Several times he drew in three horizontal guide lines on faces to indicate proportions: forehead to the high point of the eyeballs, eye and nose,
mouth and chin. Tait used the base of the pole, the part that would be buried in the ground, as a sketching surface to illustrate parts of the imagery. He showed a side view of the Big Beaver Chief's hand clutching a stick, a hand on a beaver holding another beaver's foot and human faces in profile and front-view.

All members of the carving crew referred back to Tait's strip of image sketches and to the photograph of the Oyai Eagle-Halibut pole. The beaver, shaman and young human on the Oyai pole were models for some of the present pole's imagery. The crew also used their own bodies as references. Hands were traced, shoulder joints were checked. They used the thickness of an upper arm to gauge the depth of the background. Robert Tait pretended to dance with a dance stick to get a sense of how hands hold one, and how a stick sits in relationship to the body. Norman Tait also said, however, that he avoided using his own body as a model too much because, "people say, 'how come that thing looks so much like you?' and they think I stood in the mirror and posed for it".

The images evolved as they were transferred from sixty-five inches of flat paper to a fifty-five foot tapered column of wood. Tait made fine adjustments to angles of joints, widths of bodies
relationships of figure features and to the flow of the images working together. As the images on the half column came close to completion Tait felt excited:

The images are coming alive. I want to work on them all night. It's starting to come together. It was stubborn at first.

This part of the work was complete "when the images got comfortable with each other". The final lines were heavily marked in black and the peripheral lines scraped off with various tools' cutting edges.

On November 5 the images were transferred to the other side of the pole. Butcher paper was lined up on the centre line falling over the final images that had been grease penciled very heavily. The images were pressed onto and traced through the paper. The paper was flipped onto the other side of the pole, the images were pressed onto the wood and drawn over with grease pencil. Tait checked the flow of the whole length of images, made a few finer adjustments and declared it complete.

In the late afternoon of November 5, Tait made the first cuts into the pole face with a chain saw. He drew the blade across the chest and abdomen of the Chief exposing the dance stick. He checked the crack by
feeling and smelling the chips from that area, and then proceeded to outline the Chief's limbs with the saw blade. Chain saws were then employed all along the pole to cut away the background. Chunks of wood were pulled free from between the blade cuts with large adzes. Medium adzes were employed to tear away strips of excess wood. Chisels and mallets, or mallet-shaped blocks of wood, were brought into use. The background was taken down to approximately four inches. Figures were angularly outlined: faces and hands became squarish blocks, limbs and bodies became rough oblongs. This rough work was complete by November 19.

Rounding the figures and rendering body features then began and continued until the first week in December, 1981 (Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). At that time a break was taken and work resumed again in January, 1982.

Tait assigned individual figures on the totem pole to each of his apprentices and encouraged them to bring out their own sense of the images (Figures 12, 13). Tait said:

I assigned each man and each beaver to each carver. That changed each image, each person, each hunter.
Everyone of them was different. I could have retraced figures over and over.

At first, the apprentices were tentative with their adze strokes but as the work progressed they all gained assurance. Tait watched carefully:

It's up to me to notice that it's an eighth inch, a quarter inch or one inch thicker than the other side, or not deep enough, a half inch not deep enough. It's up to me to catch it before the finishing because when it's finished, it suddenly sticks its head out.

He compared one side of a carved figure with the other side with his hands and his eyes. He gave instructions verbally or took a grease pencil and marked corrections. Sometimes he took an adze and with quick sure strokes showed how to flush out hidden features. Other times when a problem arose with an area that Tait could not solve immediately, he and an apprentice would discuss possible solutions and experiment together with the design.

Tait worked with one apprentice and then another up and down the pole. At one point, Tait watched Morrison work on the beaver helmet of the Chief. He then took a small adze and showed Morrison how to make the forehead more "relaxed" by getting rid of the flatness in the
Figure 6. The Wolf blocked out. January, 1982.
Figure 7. The Wolf carved. February, 1982.
Figure 8. The beaver helmet of the Chief drawn and roughly carved. December, 1981.

Figure 9. The finished beaver helmet on the Chief. March, 1982.
Figure 10. The Fifth Brother drawn on the pole above the Big Beaver Chief. December, 1981.

Figure 11. The Fifth Brother carved. February, 1982.
Figure 12. A brother/hunter. April, 1982.
Figure 13. A brother/hunter. April, 1982.
brow. With his hands, Tait checked how Robert Tait was rendering the back of a beaver. He then took a grease pencil and created a topographical-looking map on the back of the beaver to indicate heights and slopes (Figure 14).

Tait showed Wilson how to bring out the scales on the tails of the beaver. The tail on the four slaughtered beaver had patterns of roughly diamond shapes created by varying the depths of the diamonds in relation to one another. The tail on the Big Beaver Chief was in a scalloped pattern (Figures 16, 17).

Barton followed the wrong line in creating the back of the Fifth Brother that looked through the smoke hole. Tait reworked the area with an adze and created the proper shoulder, arm, and back relationship. Barton continued with the detail work (Figure 15).

Norman and Alver Tait worked together on the face of the Fifth Brother that looked down over the head of the Big Beaver Chief. They studied the photograph of the Oyai Eagle-Halibut pole and discussed their work as it proceeded. Norman Tait drew guide lines on the face-shaped block, rounded the forehead back and scooped out under the eye sockets (Figure 18). Alver Tait continued, delineating eye sockets and
eye orbs, cheeks and nose more clearly. Norman Tait brought out a central change of plane in the lower face that divided the mouth and chin into halves vertically. Between them features were completed and the surface smoothed. This face, modeled after the young human face of the Oyai pole, became the model for the numerous human faces on the Big Beaver totem pole (Figure 19).

**Solving Artistic Problems**

There were a number of areas on the pole that posed artistic problems to Tait and his apprentices. Tait said:

Some parts of the pole I couldn't lay my hands on: what's wrong with it? There was something wrong with one little part. I'd realize that is where I am stuck.

There were some deliberate tactics that Tait took to solve these dilemmas. Sometimes these brought quick success. Other times he had to wait for solutions and sometimes these solutions arose spontaneously in unforeseen circumstances.

Tait occasionally chopped into a piece of wood without seeing the image beforehand thinking "it will tell me what to do". Without a clear
Figure 14. A beaver with topographical map-like guide lines. December, 1981.

Figure 15. The Fifth Brother looking through the smoke hole. April, 1982.
Figure 16. Diamond-patterned beaver tail and head of another Beaver. February, 1982.

Figure 17. Scallop-patterned tail of the Big Beaver Chief with the heads of the two Nephews. February, 1982.
Figure 18. The face of the Fifth Brother (lower) roughly carved with guidelines. December, 1981.
Figure 19. The face of the Fifth Brother (lower) finished. February, 1982.
perception of the Eagle's tail Tait chopped into the cedar block from which he was carving the body. He trusted that the tail would emerge. The tail did begin to flare out and extend the impression of flight of the rest of the body (see Figure 22).

The most usual tactic Tait employed when confronted with an artistic problem, was to change his point of viewing. He walked up and down the pole not looking directly, but glancing out of the corner of his eyes. He stood far away, up close, on top of the pole, above it, crouched beside. He faced down the pole, up, or at an angle. Tait said the following about changing his point of viewing:

When you are looking at something directly, focusing on it, there will be one part that will take your attention, that won't allow you to visualize any other part of it. I can't do anything until I try different angles. I'm standing there looking at something else way over, and I just see a blind form of this thing sitting beside me, and just being half blind that way, you suddenly see what is in the way, where there is too much wood, where there is not enough wood, where you've brought it out too much, or you didn't bring it out enough. It suddenly changes.

Sometimes it proved better to leave an area for a period of time. One
day Tait told his brother Alver to cover up the teeth of the Big Beaver Chief and come back the next day and “surprise” it. They were “stuck” on how to make the teeth beaver-like. With a fresh view the two brothers brought out the protruding front incisors and the side teeth in relationship to them.

There were reference materials Tait called upon for assistance. The photograph of Oyai’s Eagle-Halibut pole was studied many times so that aspects of the present carving could be drawn out. On one occasion Tait went to the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology and spent time with the actual pole. He and Alver Tait had become stuck on the nose and mouth of the Big Beaver Chief. They had tried various vantage points, and had worked around and into the area to see how to bring out the features. They had discussions over the Oyai photograph about the differences between beaver and human faces. Tait finally went to the Museum to study the Oyai pole. He walked around the area, stood in front of the pole, to the side; ten feet away then thirty feet; glanced then stared. He sat on a bench across the hall, watched people and looked at other poles. At the end of an hour he took a paper and pen, drew several forms and wrote out some impressions (Figure 20). The
Figure 20. Tait's sketches after studying the beaver face on the Oyai Eagle-Halibut pole at the UBC Museum of Anthropology. February, 1982 (photocopy of ball-point ink pen sketch, 70% of original).
next day, the two Taits vigorously attacked the nose and mouth area of the Big Beaver Chief and rendered the features (Figure 21). They created a split upper lip and rounded the two halves of the lip into the split and carved large flattened oval nostrils on either side. The bridge of the nose was sharply indented.

Tait used other materials as resources as well. For the outstretched wings of the Eagle, he turned to *Adventures with Eagles* by David Hancock and a clipping of an eagle in flight from a newspaper. Tait drew one wing on cardboard and set it next to the eagle body. Apprentice Morrison sketched the other wing on the cement floor on the other side. Tait and Morrison then stood on a platform above the bird and discussed what they saw. They looked again at pictures of eagles in flight. They then cut down the cardboard wing down from eight feet to seven, and reshaped the wing accordingly. The wing forms were then cut out of cedar (Figure 22).

Sometimes tactics brought no direct solutions to artistic problems and Tait carried the problems with him into every aspect of his life. He talked about it this way:
Figure 21. Alver Tait working on the face of the Big Beaver Chief. February, 1982.

Figure 22. The Eagle with its wings aligned with its body. February, 1982.
It would always be in the back of my head no matter what I'm doing. It'll always be there and I would know something's bothering me but wouldn't know what it is. As much as I try to rub it out of my head I won't, it's still there.

Then the solutions would arise unexpectedly and Tait talked of having to "catch" them. One day while having coffee in the Granville Island Market, he suddenly saw a solution to a problem that he had been having with the hip of one of the Hunters:

What I saw was straight wood just laying there dead, no feeling, no bones inside. I could have carved what I thought were bones but the image I saw, what I knew at that point, what I could carve at that point wasn't it. This woman going by, that was it. I just saw her as that form on the chunk of wood. I just connected her thigh, her side, her hip at that point. I saw that one little section, that one little touch that was missing.

Returning to the shed, Tait took a grease pencil and drew in some guidelines, adzed the thigh into the hip crease and reshaped the Hunter's side.

One solution to a problem came in a dream. Tait and Morrison had been working on the beaver that lies over the forehead of the Chief as a
dance helmet. They could not see how to make it "beaver". Tait described this situation and the solution:

We were doing the beaver helmet on this man and there was something about it that just wasn't beaver, just won't look like beaver. It bothered me and bothered me.

This one evening I was just falling off to sleep and the first thing that hit me was a beaver, a real beaver and the part that hit me was the small nose, the small pointed nose. I wanted to run right back down there and start carving it out, but I wrote it down and when I got there I gave it out to these guys. We carved it out and it improved. That was the missing point, that was it: what we had to do was narrow the nostrils and bring it up.

The next day Tait brought the nose to more of a point. This beaver became the model for other beaver (slaughtered Beaver) that were depicted from the top-view on the pole (see Figure 9).

There were mechanical problems with the pole was well as artistic ones. The crack received specific attention at various times during the pole creation. Some pressure had been released while the log was prepared for carving. In choosing which side of the log to carve, and in creating a design, Tait took the structural weakness into consideration. Before transporting the pole, the carving crew did some mending work. They cut out one section of wood where it was feared rot
could develop quickly because of damage done to the wood fibers. A block of cedar was fitted, glued and doweled into the hole. The crack was filled with glue using a syringe. Dowels were hammered into holes drilled at various angles along the adjoining areas of wood. Ropes were tied around the pole with carpet strips protecting the carving. Wood beams were inserted in the ropes and turned like tourniquets to exert pressure on the glued region. This was left overnight. The next day the ropes were removed and dowels trimmed and the pole was then ready for transport.

The Eagle was carved from a separate block of cedar and was to fit on a spike at the top of the pole. The hole was carved in the Eagle's underside and the spike of the pole was adzed down. The two were brought together in a tight fit with tar brushed on their joining surfaces. The outstretched wings brought more discussion and the mechanics of joining them to the Eagle's body changed. Tait's first solution was to set the inside ends of the wings into the body of the Eagle, but it was decided that it would not be enough support. The insert ends were cut off and the wings then butted up against the body. A plank ran across the top of the bird from mid-wing to mid-wing with
tarred dowels inserted through the plank into the wings and bird body. The Eagle was sent to Chicago in pieces, assembled there and attached to the pole just before raising.

How to do the face of the Fifth Brother looking through the smoke hole at the top of the pole, brought discussion as well. There was talk of lifting or rolling the pole to expose the head that needed a face carved onto it. In the end the pole was sent to Chicago without this face. A block of wood was carried to Chicago, where a face was carved. On the morning of the raising, it was tarred and doweled onto the head. The pole that morning was lying at an angle out of the pit in which the base rested. This made the front of the head accessible by ladder from underneath.

**Drawing Out the Fine Detail**

As February progressed the pressure increased to finish the pole and to prepare other facets of the project. As well as carving, the carvers were learning to be dancers and making costumes (next chapter). More and more people including resource and media people plus curious onlookers interrupted the carvers in the shed. Tension began to show in Teit's face, actions and voice. He cancelled dance rehearsals for the
third week in February, so that the work could be concentrated on the pole. The number of hours worked per day, and days per week, was increased. Tait arrived early some mornings and often stayed late. Various crew members stayed in the evenings when interruptions were fewer to continue their work.

Smaller adzes and knives came more into use as the work became finer and finer. A Nishga carving style began to show on the faces (Figures 23, 24). Tait described the Nishga features as:

The large nose, the round nose, the almost perfectly round nostril on each side and the slow wide bridge on his nose is characteristic of Nishga style. And then you have the cheek: you put your hand on the cheek and you feel like pinching his cheeks. It gives you a handful, nice and round. Then when you go to his forehead you can see the eyebell underneath the eyebrow all the way back right inside the wood.

Mouths were carved into tight smiles across faces as though pulled by cheek muscles (see Figures 19, 23). Hands were given human fingers with knuckles, and muscular limbs given ankle and wrist bones (see Figures 9, 16, 26). (See Appendix II for a discussion of the sculptural style.)

Near the end of February, Tait became concerned that his “stamp”
Figure 23. Large finished face (the Chief) in profile. February, 1982.
Figure 24. Large finished face (the Big Beaver Chief) front-view. February, 1982.
Figure 25. Norman Tait rendering finishing touches to the knuckles of the Big Beaver Chief. February, 1982.
Figure 26. The beaver on the dance staff of the Chief. March, 1982.
was not on the pole, that is, his particular touch and version of the Nishga style. The apprentices had had a lot of freedom in their carving and what they produced was not always quite the Nishga style as Tait renders it. Tait brought out detail on the lower part of the pole that would be closest to scrutiny after it was raised. He took out a touch of flatness in the limbs, giving them even more fullness as they stood in high relief off the centre core of wood. He created a greater sense of "skin pulled tight over skeletal bones" in the face of the Chief by scooping more out under the eyeballs and up over the cheek. He brought out delicateness in the tiny bony fingers of the beaver on the dance staff (Figure 26). He shaved away a little bit of cedar along the Big Beaver Chief's massive fingers which accentuated the joints (Figure 25).

The apprentices continued with other completion work. With straight knives, they carved outlining lines on faces, and "U" and "V" lines into ears (see Figure 7). They smoothed the surface of the pole with small adzes and knives. They cleaned up the definition of forms against the background, with knives, and chisels and mallets.

Finally as the carving time was drawing to a close, Tait felt the images "turn around". He said:
I don't feel any resistance. It just fills me up; it overwhelms me. I want to laugh, I want to jump up and down. I want to cry. All these feelings start pouring over you.

Watts was proud of Tait and the pole and said: "Norman never missed anything in the story".

People Drawn Around the Artistic Activity

The shed on Granville Island became busier and busier as the work progressed with family and friends of the carvers, passersby and resource and media people. The resource people were asked for advice on the structural weaknesses in the wood, and on transporting and raising the pole. Roy Waterman, conservator at the Vancouver Museum, was called in to advise Tait on rot found in the head of the Eagle. Tait chopped as much of the rot away as possible, and designed a closed beak to lessen the possibility of quick deterioration. They then injected plastic into the affected area.

Men from Canadian Pacific Railway and British Columbia Hydro came to the shed to talk to Tait about the pole's transportation. They measured the pole, checked the crack and discussed ways that they could best handle it. They talked about insurance and crossing the
Canada- United States border. They discouraged a request from the Field Museum for publicity along the route to avoid possible damage being inflicted on the pole. They arranged for an unusually long railcar, sixty-six feet long, to be brought as close to the shed as possible on an old Hydro rail line. One month was need to ship the pole from Vancouver to Chicago. The best time to move it to the railcar from the carving shed, to avoid the peak traffic times on Granville Island, was a morning early in the week. The morning of Tuesday, March 9 was chosen as the departure date.

Steve Taylor, an architect friend of Tait's, acted as technical adviser for the Field Museum and came by the shed to discuss various considerations. The Field Museum wanted to raise the pole with a steel beam on the back because of the crack. Watts said that to follow Nishga tradition, there was to be no metal touching the pole in the raising. After it was up, a beam could be secured. Taylor and Tait discussed the support system for the raising and answered various queries from the Museum regarding the pit, gravel, cement and rope. The Museum asked how much the pole weighed. Taylor estimated two tons.

Media that became involved with the project included video and
film crews, television and newspaper people. A video crew, including myself, was co-sponsored by the British Columbia Ministry of Education, Special Education Division, and the Field Museum. We followed the carving process in Vancouver and the pole raising in Chicago, to create an educational programme called the Birth of Big Beaver. One film crew took footage that was to be incorporated into a feature on totem poles. Another crew, producing a feature on Nuu-chah-nulth artist Joe David, shot film of David with Tait in the shed for their production.

Newspapers and television news featured stories on the pole carving and pole story, on Tait and his grandfather, and on a campaign to raise money for the dancers to go to Chicago (more will be said of this campaign in chapter 6). Many photographers took pictures all through the carving time.

Friends and relatives of the carvers were frequently in the shed. I was there watching, photographing and taking notes. Cathy Cohen-Tait was in and out consulting with Tait and the apprentices, and delivering news. She was the major liaison person with the Field Museum, transportation people and press. She set up rehearsals for the dancers, and meeting times with resource and media people.
Watts, once he arrived from Kincolith in February, was in the shed most days. He conducted dance rehearsals at noon and talked to media people. He also visited with people he had known years ago on the north coast. Theatre people on their rehearsal breaks, Granville Island shoppers and visitors, and school children came by to see the carving.

The Carrying Ceremony

On Tuesday, March 9, the finished totem pole was moved from the carving shed to a waiting railcar for transport to Chicago. Tait created a carrying ceremony to mark the completion of the pole. He said the ceremony was "like the birth of a baby. Everyone comes up to touch it [the pole] to show acceptance." People were invited from the urban Native and museum communities, the est network in which Tait and Cohen-Tait had participated, and the working population of Granville Island. The media carried public service announcements and handbills were posted at locations frequented by the carvers and their friends.

Members of the Nishga Wolf clan were invited to take the major work positions for the day. Tait talked about the clan responsibility:
The Wolf people, right from the beginning, looked after the Eagle, and the Eagle looked after the Wolf. In a case like this pole carrying the speaker is Wolf. The people that carry out the Eagle to announce the readiness of the pole are Wolf.

Two Wolf clan relatives of two of the apprentices were asked to be foreman and chief helper for the event. They prepared the sites: cleared the shed, set up a resting place for the pole outside the shed, covered the railcar with cardboard and plastic matting. They also made a plywood box for the Eagle and filled it with wood chips for packing. The Field Museum had also requested the chips for their use.

Mercy Robinson, Tait's aunt and speaker in the Wolf clan, was invited to speak. Robert Tait recorded the names of contributors to the event. A "settling" feast was to be held at some point to acknowledge and pay these people.

On the morning of the carrying, there were last minute preparations. Tait borrowed back his Eagle helmet from the Vancouver Museum for Watts to wear. A tambourine drum was borrowed from a friend. As people gathered for the carrying, various crew members hastily sewed fastening buttons and leather thongs on their button
blankets so they could wear them. The blankets were only partially complete at this point, with crest designs and borders appliquéd on the background fabric. Few or no buttons had been sewn on yet (see chapter 6 for more on costumes). Fruit was purchased from Granville Market, and transported to the shed to give away to participants. Television, video and film crews set up their equipment to cover the event.

At 8:15 a.m. Tait started slowly sounding a “heart” beat on the drum and walked around the pole. The apprentices and family members took turns on the drum until 9:00. The drumming was to let people know that the actual ceremony was soon to begin. When the drum stopped, proceedings started. At 9:00, Tait welcomed the carriers:

All you carriers, all you people here, I'm happy to see you here. A lot more to do, to go on from here for the Nass River. The strength of the Nass River comes from poles, the pride of the poles. This pole going up, we can be proud of ourselves. Be happy, proud, and go ahead and do more. Thank you.

The Wolf foreman gave instructions with a megaphone. The carved Eagle was mounted on a post and carried around Granville Island
before the pole was carried out of the shed. Tait said of this:

This totem pole was something alive, coming alive and the Eagle owned it. The Eagle was separated from it, but the Eagle owned it and led it out. It led the Big Beaver to its resting place.

The work of carrying the Eagle was given to four Wolf clan men including Morrison (Figure 27). Tait’s sister Grace Allen drummed. Watts followed behind the Eagle with Norman, Robert and Alver Tait (Figure 28), then came Wilson and Barton. Other people who had gathered came along behind. The procession went down to Granville Island Market and back to the shed. Outside the shed, Robinson introduced Tait and Watts and talked about what had just been done. Robinson said:

These two very prominent people come from the village of Kincolith on the Nass which is about one thousand sixty miles from Vancouver in the North.

If you had seen a few minutes ago, they marched around to advertise the moving of the totem pole which is traditional. Totem poles cannot be moved until this tribe has advertised the moving, therefore they had marched. In the little village of Kincolith they would have marched around the whole village and of course, Vancouver is very huge!
She also introduced the apprentices.

The pole was carried out of the shed to a resting place along side the shed, and then on to the railcar eight hundred yards away (Figure 29). It was lifted and lowered when Tait quickened a drum beat. He otherwise kept a steady rhythm for walking. The pole was carried on fourteen cross beams with five or six people supporting each one. Approximately twenty-five people lifted the column from underneath as well. The carriers included men and women, Native and non-Natives. The pole procession was led by the flying Eagle mounted on a post which was carried by the Wolf clan members. It was followed by Watts and the carvers. At the resting place, Watts sang a song in Nishga and made a speech. The speech was given in several sections in Nishga, which Robinson translated. The translated speech appears below.

However and the Eagle are very happy today that we have accomplished this.
Figure 27. The Eagle being paraded in Vancouver to announce the moving of the Big Beaver totem pole.
Figure 28. Rufus Watts in the eagle helmet with Robert and Norman Tait at the pole carrying in Vancouver March 9, 1982.
Figure 29. Carrying the totem pole in Vancouver. March 9, 1982.
I would like to extend my vote of thanks to the citizens of Vancouver for coming and participating by touching the pole, and helping with the lifting, in the ceremony of taking the pole out of where they have been labouring on it for months.

I would like to extend again, from the bottom of my heart, my thanks for coming and moving this precious pole from the people of the Nishga nation.

I once again would like to extend my vote of thanks to all of you. This is the last I shall speak again until the pole will be erected in Chicago.

When the pole had been carried to the train and lifted on to the bed of the open railcar, Tait raised his drum high, beat a lively pace, and walked the length of the pole triumphantly. Standing beside the railcar, Robinson introduced other relatives of Tait's and told the crowd about the give-away fruit. Tait gave a speech from the railcar:

I am most happy ladies and gentlemen, now the pole is up here. I am most happy because my grandfather kept telling me that he was quite sure it was going to drop and break in half. I was sure that it wouldn't. So thanks to you all it got here in one piece.

It looked so big while we were carving it until the people came around it, and then realized how big the people are, how big you are. I want to thank you
personally. I'd like to go around and shake all your hands. I don't have the time to. You don't have the time to, so thank you very much. It means a lot to me that so many people care.

I would like to thank Mercy, who is a chief in her tribe; my grandfather, Rufus Watts, who owns the story of this pole; all the carvers that made it possible: Alver, Mitch, Ted, Lawrence, Chip [Robert]. Most of all this pole would be silenced if it were not for people like you. Give yourself a hand.

After the fruit was distributed, the crowd dispersed and the train pulled the pole across the False Creek harbour tressel to the railyard.

Back at the door of the shed Tait looked into the emptiness and said:

"There'll be no reason to get up in the morning. It leaves a big hole."

March 10, Tait and his apprentices went to the railyard to cover the pole with canvas and secure the box containing the Eagle. Thursday, March 11, the pole was pulled out of Vancouver for Chicago.
Chapter Notes:


3. See Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company). Henri, an art teacher, wrote about the art spirit as "another dimension—that fascinating fourth if you like—which has to do with your concept of the significance of the whole—that ultra something which has always engaged your interest more than mere facts" (p.113).

4. The drumming pattern was like sounding the bell in Kincolith before an event. When I attended a feast in the village in June 1981, the bell was rung about 1 hour ahead. When it stopped, people knew it was time to leave their houses and head for the hall.
VI. BECOMING NISHGA DANCERS

When we got to a certain point on the pole, I decided it was time to bring Rufus down. We needed him to teach. We didn't have that much time. The work [on the pole] was slowing down because we were going into the fine work. So, gradually as we went into the two songs and the dances, we slowly found out what we needed and made what we needed.

Norman Tait

In February 1982, Rufus Watts, the elder chief, came to Vancouver from the village of Kincolith on the northern coast. He began teaching songs and dances to his nephew Norman Tait, Tait's apprentices and some family members. Members of the group made costumes and other ceremonial materials. By April the troupe of Nishga dancers was ready for their first performances at the pole-raising in Chicago.

In traditional Tsimshian society, a carver would have been asked to create the carved portions of a family's display of property and upon completion of the task, his involvement would have most likely ceased. At the display performance, such as a pole raising, the family hosting the event would perform their songs and dances. Song composers were sometimes commissioned to create new performance materials and to
teach these to family performers (Garfield 1939: 200). Costumes and
dance paraphernalia were created according to tribal canons in a
continuous and evolving tradition of aesthetic property. Performances
were assertions of personal, family and clan privileges.

In the development of the cultural performance in this chapter,
we will find the demarcations of responsibility and sources of
influence changed from traditional Tsimshian society. The two chiefs,
Tait and Watts, were hired to create performances of their traditional
privileges for display at a museum. The younger chief carved the pole,
took responsibility for its raising and was one of the performers at the
raising ceremony. The elder chief, who provided the story for the pole,
also retrieved songs and dances from his memories and taught them to
a mixed-clan group of performers. As well, he was the chief singer
and drummer and sometimes danced. The pole carver's apprentices and
their spouses became the other dancers and singers for the pole raising
ceremony. Some of the performers were of the same family and clan as
the elder chief and the chief carver, one was of a different family in
the same clan, and others were of different clans.

Ceremonial paraphernalia was inspired by the memories of the
elder chief, anthropological documentation, customs from other areas of
the Northwest Coast and pan-Indian images. In the modern
cross-cultural setting, performances were assertions of renewed pride
in being Indian and in being Nishga.

**Creating a Dance Troupe**

As well as Tait, his apprentices and grandfather, there were a
number of women involved in this aspect of the project. Some became
performers and some only assisted with outfitting the troupe. Cathy
Cohen-Tait, of Jewish ancestry and adopted into the Nishga Wolf clan
when she married Tait, was pregnant at the time of the pole creation
and did not become a performer. She co-ordinated the project and
helped sew the costumes of her husband and his grandfather. Grace
Allen, Tait's sister, became a dancer, created her own costume, and
helped with the button blankets for her brother and grandfather. Barbara
Parnell, a Haida-Gitksan of the Killerwhale clan, became a dancer and
worked on the costumes for herself and her husband, Mitch Morrison.
Lily Mercer, a Nishga of the Wolf clan, also became a dancer and worked
on costumes for herself and her husband, Alver Tait. Annie Barton, a
Kwaguitl, and Terri Morgan, a Gitksan, assisted their husbands Ted Barton and Robert Tait respectively, with their costumes. They began learning to dance but did not continue to Chicago. Several friends and relatives of the carvers assisted with aspects of the outfitting as well. Only two of the troupe had previous experience in performing Nishga material. Watts taught other members of the troupe from his memory of performances from his childhood. Mercer had learned traditional songs while growing up in New Aiyansh. Tait was the only one with a traditional piece of costume, a button blanket which he and his previous wife had made for his pole raising ceremony in Port Edward.

Twelve people began training to be members of the Nishga Dance Group and ten travelled to Chicago. The Field Museum provided travel, hotel and honoraria for eight Nishga dancers. They also provided honoraria for several carving demonstrations by each of the apprentices. The funds for the additional performers, and for additional expenses, were provided largely by the individual dancers and their spouses. Tait used income from Chicago, from wood and silver carving commissions, from serigraph print sales, and income from his studio gallery. Morrison received money from the National Museum in Ottawa for some carving.
Several of the women worked. Watts had his pension, others had social assistance and others used their tax returns for funds. The apprentices carved small pieces to sell in Vancouver, but the market was very slow at this time. They also carved pieces to take to Chicago to sell.

Grant money was applied for from several government bodies, but none was received. A campaign to sell shares in the totem pole to raise money was undertaken by Cathy Cohen-Tait, writer Hilary Stewart, myself, and wives of the apprentices. The campaign was publicized in the media and on handbills and it drew many people to the carving shed. People pledged money for a piece of the pole: ten dollars an inch to fifty dollars a face. Pledgers’ names were included with materials that were placed at the pole base on raising day. Donations covered some of the dance troupe expenses.

Dance rehearsals and costume making took place at a variety of locations. A few dance rehearsals were held in the carving shed at noon, at which time the doors were locked to visitors. Most of the preparatory activities took place in museum facilities, at a school, and in homes of the performers. On numerous evenings and weekends in February and March, the educational workshop space at the Vancouver Museum was
used. After the pole had been shipped to Chicago, performers rehearsed in the afternoons at the Haida House, a replicated cedar plank Northwest Coast building at the UBC Museum of Anthropology. A Vancouver school gymnasium was used during Easter break to paint the dance screen. Most of the dancers and their families worked on ceremonial materials at home and gathered together in each others residences. They sewed around kitchen tables, carved in Morrison's carving room and rehearsed in Morrison and Parnell's living room.

Many nights several activities took place simultaneously. Children played and slept as adults worked. Friends and relatives came by to visit and/or lend a hand. On a typical evening at Morrison's and Parnell's, members of the Big Beaver crew carved their helmets and staffs as other Northwest Coast carvers worked on some of their own work in Morrison's back room. Parnell sewed a red applique design on her husband's dance apron at the kitchen table while having tea with friends. Watts, at some point in the evening, picked up a drum. The dancers donned blankets and they practised the songs and dances.

One typical evening at the Vancouver Museum, Allen and Cohen-Tait sorted tiny pearl buttons out of bags of buttons that Tait had
collected, and sewed them into the corners of the design on his blanket. Several other women sewed borders on aprons with sewing machines. Tait drilled holes in deer hooves so they could be hung on leather to trim his apron and leggings. Watts pulled heavy thread through the holes he had punched in the beaver pelts of the cape for Tait. The carvers, some of Tait's cousins and the video crew painted the dance screen. After approximately one hour the floor was cleared, the dancers got in a circle with their dance sticks and Watts sang and drummed them through the song-dances.

Breaks were taken from the costume and dance activities to discuss the travel arrangements to Chicago and the schedule of events while there. The troupe had several other dance performances besides the one at the pole raising. The carvers were required to have almost finished pieces plus their tools for carving demonstrations. All ceremonial materials and tools had to be registered as cultural items with the Canadian and American customs, and Band identification with pictures had to be ready. Flights, hotel accommodation, travel money and materials for air freight had to be arranged. Everyone was expected to be fully prepared and informed as a member of the performing troupe.
A feeling of being a troupe of cultural representatives was generated as these people gathered to rehearse, create costumes and prepare to travel. The ambience was generally congenial, co-operative and at times festive. Food and coffee, and sometimes beer and wine, were part of the times together. There was increasing excitement as ceremonial outfitting was completed and the time to travel approached.

There were stressful times as well. At the end of January and beginning of February, the elder chief announced to his nephew that he was not coming. He said that there was not enough time to prepare a troupe adequately and he was concerned about bringing shame to himself and the family. Tait also suspected "stage fright". The women in the family mediated, which Tait said was a traditional pattern in such situations, and Watts flew to Vancouver during the second week in February.

There was also some concern about how to accommodate Watts. He had a very settled life in the village of Kincolith where he knew all of the four hundred residents. In the large city of Vancouver, he was a stranger except to a few family members and several people from his village who had moved to Vancouver. The family was anxious about
their elder guest's having a good visit, and yet, they knew they would have little time to entertain him because they were all very busy with the many aspects of the project. Watts also drank heavily at times. There was concern, therefore, that he might distract his nephews from their work, or that he would be unable to take care of himself in the city. For the first while, he stayed with his nephew, the master carver, and his wife in their small one bedroom flat. Later, he stayed with one of his other nephews, who was an apprentice, and his wife and her children in their townhouse. For the most part, family members, other troupe members and I took turns watching out for his comfort and safety.

There was tension at the beginning of the dance training. Instruction was not always clear as Watts reached back into old memories for material. At first, there was some inconsistency from one day to the next in his teaching, which caused some frustration among the performers. There was a feeling that they could not point out this inconsistency because he was an elder for, according to Nishga tradition, one does not contradict elders.

There was also tension when people missed preparatory sessions,
or were late, or ill equipped. When there was illness or injury, there was anxiety about how the troupe was going to become a performing unit. Mercer had difficulty with arthritis during the months before Chicago. Watts was hit by a car in late March and was shaken up for a number of days. Tait cut his hand in early April and was not fully functioning with an arm in a sling and on heavy medication. Money was a stressful issue for the group. The dancers had to provide much of their own financing and the project demanded most of their time and energy.

By mid-April the troupe was as outfitted as time and money permitted. Fewer people prepared to travel: Tait's parents and several people who began learning the dances were unable to go. Some things that were originally planned were dropped, modified and only temporarily finished. The dancers' outfitting was scaled down: fewer buttons were sewn on blankets, and the blankets became the major costume for everyone except Tait, who also had a beaver cape. Rattles and a log drum were scrapped; the number of whistles and tambourine drums dropped to one each. Fewer dances and songs were learned.
Becoming Performers

It had been originally intended that the group learn four songs and dances. In the time the troupe had to prepare, they learned three song-dances: two major pieces and one minor. According to Tait, two of the song-dances created a cycle. The Mourning song-dance, which belonged to Tait's family and clan, was followed by the Happy song-dance which was common property of the Nishga. Tait said these two songs were performed back-to-back so that people were not to be left in mourning.

The death song turns around with another song. Everything in Nishga culture is like that. We build a complete circle. Everyone is brought to normal again. With the death song we throw in a whiskey song to bring it right back down to earth where it's not that serious.

As I discussed in the biographical chapter, the cycles Tait describes appear to be the recreation of an earlier cycle in Tsimshian society. Traditionally the potlatch ritually re-established the balance that had been disrupted by halait demonstrations of supernatural power. In that chapter I pointed out how buffoonery was used in serious modern ritual occasions such as funerals and chief's name-giving ceremonies to re-establish the "normal, happy" human state. The Happy song-dance
followed the Mourning song-dance to re-establish the same balance.

The Mourning song-dance was a slow dirge sung and drummed by Watts. It had chanted verses and a wailing chorus. The dancers stood in a circle with their feet stationary, bouncing slightly through bended knees and turning their bodies from the waist in a semi-circle. They paused at four points: left side, front side left, front side right and right side. The dance sticks were carried and tapped on the ground at each pause to the rhythm of the drum. "The sticks do the dancing" was the image used in teaching.

Traditionally only Eagle clan members were allowed to dance this song, but as Tait said:

I couldn't get all my people up there [in Chicago] so we had to invite all my carvers to join in on the dance. In order to join in on the dance they had to cover their crests because they were not allowed to show their crests in a Beaver Mourning dance. When the Mourning dance was over they revealed their crests.

The Happy song-dance was a drinking song. It was about a woman watching the boat returning from town carrying her "half-breed" husband who was bringing liquor. It has several English words: "lamb" for liquor, "monkey" for half-breed and "steamboat" for the boat. The
carvers wrote out the words as they sounded them, so that they could learn to sing them. None of them write Nishga to any extent, and only a few of them speak the language. The following is what they wrote out:

Yaw Halia
The dum atiks steamboat, yaw halia

Will ske tath thku monkey, yaw halia
Will ske skith guldumth lamb, yaw halia

This was sung over and over by all performers. It has a lively beat and the elder teacher encouraged them to dance happily and freely. He said:

Be happy. Enjoy yourself. When you do rock 'n roll you do what you like. That's the same as this!

In this song-dance, the dancers did not carry dance sticks. They proceeded slowly around a circle with hands on their hips flaring out their button blankets to more fully display their crest designs. Movement was more individual than with the Mourning song-dance, with turning and dipping. A carved and painted cedar whistle was blown by one performer, then thrown to another, who also blew it, and on to another, until they all had a turn. They blew a series of short bursts of sound on exhalation. Passing the whistle added a playful game quality
A third song, Mountain Flower Song, was learned just before going to Chicago. It was an old cowboy ballad that had been translated into Nishga. The dance gestured the story told by the words.

Tapes of the songs were played as the carvers worked in the shed and at home so that they could acquire the feeling of the pieces. They also needed to learn the words of the Happy and Mountain Flower songs. At dance practices the troupe sometimes worked with a tape recording of the elder singing and drumming, or one of the troupe members drummed. Most often however, Watts provided the drumming and singing.

At first, Watts would not allow non-performers to witness the dance teaching. He retrieved materials from memories of performances he had witnessed at least a half century ago. The carving shed was closed at noon to everyone except the performers when rehearsals took place. Watts refused to allow video taping of the practices until the dances were learned. He expressed concern that what he was teaching could be judged as wrong by Nass River people if access to his teaching was permitted. He then allowed more outside attendance, and
eventually video taping, as the remembered material became more cohesive performance units. Those who attended were people most closely associated with the project, such as relatives, close friends and myself.

In my observation of the dance rehearsals, I became aware of certain patterns in the teaching. Song-dances were rehearsed as wholes. They were not broken down into segments that were practiced separately. Watts had a tendency to operate in whole configurations most of the time. For example, he was more likely to answer questions by telling stories weaving in information about kinship, history, social protocol, cosmology, art and ceremony, than by engaging in a dialogue of abstract concepts.

I also observed that Watts commented through joking, or by making formal statements at the end of a whole song-dance. He rarely criticized or praised individuals with direct seriousness. He would tease them, or make generalized statements applicable to everyone—usually with humour. When he did speak seriously, it was very formal and often in Nishga, which his eldest nephew translated. Watts saw Tait as the "boss", and himself as the teacher, and hence
Tait's role as more that of disciplinarian.

Comments directly from Watts, or through Tait, were rarely about specific aspects of dances. There were general remarks about following the drum or being happy in the Happy song-dance. Having the right attitude in each song-dance was more important than paying attention to the intricacies of the dance or being in strict unison as a troupe. Watts also encouraged an attitude of pride in being representatives of the Nishga. I do not know if the emphasis on attitude is a cultural characteristic in a learning-teaching situation or was particular to these circumstances. (To investigate this further would be interesting but beyond this paper.) I suspect that, at least in part, the emphasis on attitude was so obvious because of the difficulty Watts had in retrieving and re-creating details of the dances which had not been performed by his family for many decades. He was also teaching people who had never danced (other than recreationally) and he had very little time to prepare the troupe. The dance performances missed what Tait had worked to elicit in his carving and tried to have his apprentices understand— namely, that "spark of life" that is beyond, yet proceeds from, the mastery of technique. The dancing was more a moving
The proper attitude for becoming a Nishga Dancer was reflected outside of the song-dances themselves. The dancers demonstrated the proper attitude by their attendance at practices and having the right equipment, such as dance sticks and blankets, and in creating well-crafted costume pieces. The right attitude was expressed in such gestures as Parnell opening up her home for practices. Watts saw this as demonstrating her commitment. By being prepared to cover up their crest designs in the Eagle song-dance, non-Eagle clan members expressed respect for their heritage. Showing off their clan insignia proudly in the song-dance of all the Nishga people was lauded as well. Watts often thanked the group for their appropriate behaviour and built up their confidence as representatives for their people. Watts said:

I teach what I know, these dances and songs I am very glad, proud of you all. You doing it good. You'll do it real good in Chicago. You make me real happy.

Making Costumes

Button blankets were the chief article of costuming for eight of
the ten dancers. Cohen-Tait and I bought and measured out red and navy melton cloth for button blankets for the apprentices, Watts and Allen. Blanket lengths of approximately four and one half feet by five and one half feet, were cut out of the navy cloth. Red fabric was cut for bordering the sides and top of the robe, and to create crest designs that were to be appliqued in the centre. For outlining and accentuating design elements, the apprentices searched out their own mother-of-pearl or plastic buttons in the Salvation Army, sewing notion stores and traders in Northwest Coast materials.

In the educational workshop of the Vancouver Museum, the troupe sewed the red borders onto the navy blanket lengths. They designed and discussed their crest designs and then cut, glued and sewed the designs on their blankets. Tait's blanket, which he had created a number of years previous to this time, was used as a model. Several things had to be considered in working the designs in fabric. Sharp points and fine lines would not work well because they could easily fray in fabric and would not easily lie flat on the background material. Outlining with buttons had to be kept in mind so that there would not be areas of overcrowding that obscured or unbalanced the design. The size of the
blanket wearer was considered so that the design would be shown off well when the blanket was worn, and not be lost in the folds.

The apprentices created their crest designs in the fashion of northern Northwest Coast flat design with formlines, U-shapes and ovoids. Tait worked with each of them. He helped his brother Robert choose the strongest design from a half dozen possibilities and cut Barton's design into sections and re-arranged them. He worked with Morrison to scale up Morrison's design from a few inches to several feet square. He had his brother Alver make the head of his design smaller, so that it would ride better on his back. Tait pointed out how the fin in Wilson's killerwhale design should arch below his neck when he wore the blanket.

One of Allen's sons created the design for her blanket. Tait used one of his give-away print designs for the back of Watts' blanket. Alver, Robert and Norman Tait, Barton and Allen had eagles, Watts had a beaver, Wilson a killerwhale and Morrison a wolf.

The designs, done first in sketch books and on loose paper, were scaled up to several square feet on brown butcher paper. The outside edge of the design was cut and the design piece spray glued on to red
fabric. The inner design elements were cut out with straight knives and the stencil-like piece of red fabric and paper was spray-glued on the navy blanket length. The paper was removed and the red fabric sewn to the navy. Up to one thousand buttons were sewn into areas of the design and along the borders. The size of buttons decreased into the corners. Large buttons were used for eyes in the design, and on the blanket front for fastening the blanket over the shoulders of the wearer.

These blankets were used for dance rehearsals as soon as they were wearable. They were used in the carrying ceremony in March as well, minus most of their buttons. Many hours of button sewing continued right up until the time the troupe left for Chicago. About creating button blankets Wilson said:

I came to respect the blanket and the purpose behind wearing them: to represent your clan. It completed a cycle to wear them in dancing. It was the natural thing to do when you have blankets on. Brings back the old people; ideas come back when you wear it--being part of something.

The men had aprons and leggings made out of navy or black felt or wool cloth. Some were bordered in red; some had appliqued red designs. Others were trimmed with commercial fringe, bells, shells or deer
hooves. They were worn over rolled up pants or shorts.

The women made dresses. Parnell created a fringed dress out of moose hide in a Plains Indian style. Morrison painted her Killerwhale crest on the back in black. Mercer and Allen made plain coloured fabric dresses from commercial patterns. Mercer sewed pearl trim in the neckline of hers. She also made a light weight red fabric waist-length cape with black fringe which she said was like the ones that the women wear in Canyon City on the Nass River. Parnell wore a crocheted shawl. The women completed their costumes with moccasins, hair bands and jewellery. Allen carried a beaver pelt as a sign of her family's wealth.

Tait said of this pelt:

Grace was carrying a fortune when she was carrying the pelt, the family fortune: one pelt more than we needed. We used all the pelts that we needed and there was one left over.

Since Tait was the chief of the pole event, Watts made him a beaver cape. Of this, Tait said:

I wore the beaver cape because I was the leader of this group. I was the leader of the clan at this point. My grandfather handed over that leadership to me.
Watts matched and trimmed five beaver pelts and fastened them together by punching holes in adjoining areas, drawing heavy thread through and tying it off. According to Tait:

Each pelt stood for each one of the hunters: the four hunters and the little boy. It was a very prized possession, belonged to our side of the family. The cape itself my grandfather wanted to make because he said he knew what the original looked like.

Two of the beaver heads rode over Tait’s shoulders on the underside to “watch over” him. It closed with a deer antler on one side looping through a hole on the other side.

Tait and his apprentices carved crest head gear. The apprentices carved headdresses that strapped to their foreheads and Tait created a full helmet for himself. Watts wore the full helmet that Tait had carved a number of years ago, that had become the property of the Vancouver Museum. Tait said that neither he nor his crew created frontlets because they had not earned the rights to wear them. Tait said they had not done enough publicly to elevate their Nishga names (if they even had them), including hosting feasts. He also said they did not own
what went with a frontlet, such as a chilkat blanket.

Tait created a complete helmet of a beaver with a stick in its mouth. It had beaver fur on its back, red and black paint accenting facial features and a blackened tail. The Eagle helmet that Watts wore was a full helmet inlaid with abalone around the mouth, in the nostrils, and in the eyes. It also had red and black paint trim.

Robert and Alver Tait, and Barton carved eagles, Wilson a killerwhale and Morrison a wolf. These carved clan crests were fastened to the wearers' foreheads with skins covering their heads: Morrison had silver lynx fur and the others had leather. Several helmets had red and black paint trim. Morrison's wolf had moveable ears; Wilson's killerwhale had an attached fin. Tait said these headpieces were like traditional Nishga warriors' clan insignia.

Tait helped each carver bring out the characteristic features of the crest animals in their head pieces. He helped Morrison draw out the wolf-quality in the muzzle by thinning the top. He helped his brothers take away bulkiness in their carving and accentuate the bulging eye balls and bulbous cheeks. Tait commented on how much faster the apprentices worked with their adzes after months on the pole. He was
impressed by the speed with which they brought out their helmets.

Morrison said he felt “such exhilarating power” when he wore his completed helmet for the first time at a public occasion.

All the dancers had dance sticks except Watts who carried a drum.

Before dance sticks were carved, dancers used broom sticks and wood scraps for dance practices. Eventually, after many teasing remarks from Watts, the dancers acquired proper equipment. The dance sticks were smoothed tapered yellow cedar cylinders about chest height, with a carved crest figure on the top. Several of the Eagle clan members had eagles, and others chose a second crest, the beaver. Morrison and Mercer had wolves, Parnell had a killerwhale and Wilson took a secondary crest of the Killerwhale clan, the owl.

**Acquiring Ceremonial Materials**

A twenty-four foot by ten foot dance screen was created as a backdrop for some of the Nishga dance performances in Chicago. It was light-weight unbleached canvas (sewn together and hemmed by a dry cleaning establishment) on which was painted a design with acrylic paint (Figure 30). There was a giant split beaver in the centre, a child
Figure 30. The Nishga dance screen erected at the Field Museum. April, 1982.
or spirit being on each side which was framed by a series of heads. When the screen was complete it was rolled up, shipped to Chicago and stretched over their stage frame for each Nishga dance performance. The screen design was inspired by an "old, old story" that "came from many, many families" according to Tait. He described the beaver as a "large and comfortable host" and the children as "wanting to get in" on what the Big Beaver was hosting. He went on to say:

And the story went on and on and on through so many families, and I just saw faces. Each face will represent a generation so I just tried to fit in as many faces as I could surrounding the whole thing, listening in on the story like I listened in on it.

The screen was started in the educational workshop at the Vancouver Museum in March, and completed in a school gymnasium over several days in April. Templates were used for the generation heads, otherwise, Tait insisted on a free hand for the design so that a "loose, fluid design would come out of it with a power of its own". The design was painted on one half of the screen in red and black. The screen was then folded, held up to the window, and the design was traced through to
the second half and that half painted.

Tait recognized a Tsimshian quality in the design similar to that found on boxes and house fronts as the screen was being painted. To describe what the Tsimshian quality was, Tait used the metaphor of building a house: first comes the supports, second, the roof and walls, and third the people.

Tsimshian art seems to have a first, second and third to it. First, heavy overall design complete, like if you took out all the fillers, you could tell exactly what it is right away, what the whole design is all about.

Second, eyes, hands and body. Third, the story comes in. These little people, little fillers, little people doing different things, little eyes, little fillers doing different things.

The primary elements of the screen design were the major lines of the Big Beaver, children and generation heads. The secondary lines filled in the major body and face features. Tertiary elements made figures complete. Tait talked about the little dots in the mouths of the generation heads as being tertiary and said they did not contribute to the whole design. Would be too busy, teeth would be too much. They [little dots]
were so very small, added a touch, completed each face as a separate entity.

Tait also created cigar-shaped "water" lines on the children's bodies and tertiary black lines on the Big Beaver's red hands to complete these figures.

What also made the screen design Tsimshian in nature Tait said, was the "repetitive faces all around". He recognized this after the design was on the screen and I showed him a picture of a Tsimshian house front that had a similar style to Tait's dance screen design (Barbeau 1950: 106). Tait had forgotten that photograph and did not feel that it had directly inspired him, although he had studied this book extensively. He said that in creating the design, he was aware of being influenced by Haida artist Bill Reid's print of the first people coming out of the clamshell that shows a row of heads.

Tait commissioned a non-Native weaver, who had studied Haida basketmaking in the Queen Charlotte Islands, to create a ceremonial cedar bark mat. Tait talked about the traditional use of mats:

Chiefs at that time giving a name, raising a pole never dirtied their feet. Their job is over, they're
clean. They never dirty their hands. They stand back. They'd even be carried to the mat and be placed on the mat and carried away. Chief's seats, they were carried to the edge of the mat so that when they have to make a speech they just stand up on that.

Tait's mat was approximately four feet by seven feet and made from the cedar bark from the totem pole log. The bark was peeled down into thin strips, soaked and plaited in a diagonal pattern from the centre to the outside, and the ends were tucked in. The mat was rolled out in front of the pole at the pole raising for Watts and his eldest nephew to stand on during the ceremony.

Tait created two beaver designs for printing to give away in Chicago. The first was an unlimited, unsigned print in black that was run all off in Chicago on eight by eleven inch paper (Figure 31). It had the pole story on the back. These were given to people who attended the pole raising. The second, a black and red design Tait cut out of silk for screening, was printed in Vancouver by a professional printer who specialized in Northwest Coast serigraph prints. This second print was a limited edition and was given to guests at a fund raising dinner at the Field Museum during the week of the pole raising.
In Commemoration of the opening of Field Museum’s new permanent exhibit *Maritime Peoples of the Arctic and Northwest Coast* and the raising of “Big Beaver” on April 24, 1982.

*Big Beaver*  
Artist: Norman Tait, Nishga, Kincolith, B.C., Canada  
From original handcut silkscreen edition of 400 prints  
Issue date: April 21, 1982

Figure 31. Unlimited print distributed at the pole raising. April 24, 1982 (photocopy of print done on buff-coloured paper, 70% of original size).
A Westcoast tambourine drum was borrowed for dance practices and the carrying ceremony and another one was purchased for Chicago. A painted Kwaguitl cedar whistle was purchased to play in Chicago as well.

Red and black face paint was taken to Chicago for the song-dances. Black was worn in streaks across one half of the face of each performer during the Mourning Dance—signifying death. It had been intended to switch to red for life in the Happy song-dance, but this was dropped at the last moment because the setting of the raising did not make this switch easily executed.

By mid-April, all ceremonial materials that were complete were shipped to Chicago. Anything that was left, as well as personal materials such as tools, semi-finished and finished carvings and costumes, were prepared for transport with the performers. On April 17 Norman Tait flew to Chicago to prepare the pole and to participate in Field Museum events. On April 22 Morrison and Alver Tait joined Norman Tait to help with the pole. Parnell and Mercer accompanied them. The remainder of the troupe left for Chicago on April 23. The Nishga
Dancers had their first performances April 24 at the raising of the Big Beaver totem pole.
Chapter Notes:

1. In my opinion, few Northwest Coast native dance performances in non-traditional contexts have made the transition into fine artistic forms like the visual arts have. Dance in these settings is generally like "tourist art"—reinvented old forms without adherence to cultural aesthetic rules and without the "spark of life—real life" that makes in this case, great dance. See chapter 8.

2. Tait later inlaid abalone in the eyes and gnawing stick.
VII. THE POLE RAISING - A CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

It turned out that all the different experiences from different tribes came together and went into this one raising. It is so good, it came out so well.

Norman Tait

On April 24 1982, Norman Tait raised the Big Beaver totem pole at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. The Nishga Dance Group, members of the Northwest Coast artistic community and staff, patrons and guests of the Museum joined in to celebrate and witness the event.

There were many changes in Norman Tait's pole raising performance in 1982 from those in traditional village settings. Poles of this type (free standing) were most often raised to commemorate a deceased chief and to legitimate the final transfer of his property to his heir. The pole raising usually took place in front of the house of the family. The potlatch at which the pole was raised was held when the heir and family had amassed enough wealth to host a prestigious event. It went on for days and much crest property was displayed as well as the totem pole. (There were also demonstrations of connections with supernatural powers, the halait.)
The context for the Tait pole raising was determined by the non-native urban cultural institution which commissioned a cultural display. It was one of many events which were part of an exhibit opening programme. The pole raising ceremony took place outside the front entrance to the Museum. The duration was two hours (April 24, 1982, 1 p.m.-3 p.m.) and preceded another performance by the Nishga Dancers scheduled for 3 p.m. inside the Museum. Tait turned this later performance and one scheduled for 3 p.m. on Sunday into extensions of the pole raising cultural performance.

In the raising of the Nishga pole in Chicago we can see how Northwest Coast ritual tradition is being recreated. Milton Singer (1959) sees the observation of cultural performances as a means of learning what structures of a tradition are persisting, and in what way they are changing. The Northwest Coast oppositional ritual pattern was repeatedly played out in ceremonies surrounding Big Beaver with some changes for the modern context in which the ceremonies were taking place. Within traditional Northwest Coast societies, members of clans, other than the clan who owned a totem pole and hosted its raising, took honorary work roles. These roles included such things as
conducting the pole raising and formally witnessing the giving of names. By this action, other clans showed acceptance of the owners' demonstration of identity and legitimated any transfer of property. For an Eagle clan house pole in traditional Nishga society, for example, members of the Wolf, Killerwhale and Raven clans would have been asked to take legitimating roles. In Chicago, members of the Northwest Coast artistic community did the honourary work in the ceremonies at the pole raising. Members of the Kwaguitl, Haida and Nuu-chah-nulth tribes took some of the oppositional "work" roles for Tait as a member of the Nishga tribe. In some cases, white artists who are accepted as important contributors in the Northwest Coast artistic community, also took oppositional roles. Tait, Watts and their family were validated as owners of cultural property and Tait was acknowledged as Watts' heir. The Nishga Dance Group was accepted into the Northwest Coast artistic community.

**Events Leading up to the Pole Raising**

During the week before the pole raising artists, dancers, singers from the Northwest Coast and Alaska, and curators, academics and
media people specializing in these areas, congregated in Chicago. There were receptions, openings, lectures, symposia, press luncheons, members' dinner, performances and demonstrations, plus many informal gatherings. On the Sunday before the day of the pole raising, was held the symposium on contemporary native arts mentioned in chapter one, which featured several artists who were described as having "rescued their heritage and are taking them forward". Included were Inuit artists Ron and Joe Senugetuk, Haida artist Robert Davidson and Nuu-chah-nulth artist Joe David. George Macdonald, senior scientist with the National Museums of Canada, acted as moderator.

On Monday April 19, there was a dedication ceremony for the newly installed exhibit. Members of the Native American Advisory Committee, Museum officials, the Consul General of Canada in Chicago and a priest from the Chicago Indian Centre spoke. Gratitude was expressed for the sources of financial support, Museum staff and native people who made the exhibition possible. Many tributes were paid to the people "who lived the extraordinary contents of the exhibit" (Lorin Nevling, Jr., Director of the Field Museum). Robert Gaynor, the Canadian Consul General, praised these people for their "ingenious technologies"
and "treasury of aesthetic expression and metaphysical thought". Father Peter Powell talked of how the art of these peoples who lived so close to the supernatural world was a "celebration of the spirit".

In expressing thanks to the contemporary peoples who helped create this display, Lorin Nevling talked of the exhibit as:

our smoke hole to the past and the present. Because of the smoke, we cannot see too clearly and those with keener sense were needed to assist us.

The Native Advisors and the two head curators, James vanStone and Ronald Weber, were commended for creating such a clear vision within the exhibit. William Swartschild, Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Trustees of the Museum, hailed the new exhibit as being universally important because it would enable a visitor to gain "more understanding of differences among all people and become more introspective of his own ways". Many acknowledgements were made of the important responsibility of being trustees of heritage for all people.

The Native Advisory Committee members expressed appreciation for being invited to participate and also for the fine exhibition of their traditions' materials. Joe David talked about the "grand display of my
peoples's art, their fine minds and their grand efforts”. Robert Davidson talked of gaining “new inspiration and new insights” from what Chicago had preserved and expressed his intention of sharing these with his people when he returned home.

Some of the Native Americans acknowledged the disharmony that was generated by the contact of native with non-native cultures and also acknowledged the present activities at the Field Museum as an opportunity to meet and rebuild together. Nathan Jackson, Tlingit artist, expressed feeling “kind of broken hearted” seeing all the materials from his people there in Chicago. He also expressed an appreciation that the Museum was providing an opportunity for many people to know that Tlingits “are people of high culture”. Joe Senugetuk, Inuit artist and advocate for Native Americans in education, also recognized this occasion as a “time readying to have people of different nations, different races involved in re-constructing” what was destroyed in the past. Robert Davidson described how the factors that destroyed his culture: anthropology, missionaries and the Native peoples themselves, were the same factors rebuilding it. Joe David talked about the exhibit in Chicago as “this meeting ground, this place
where the world and the Universe, world history and art history is meeting my people."

Wednesday, April 21 there was a fund raising dinner for Museum members at one hundred dollars a plate. Among dinosaur skeletons, African fighting elephants and several Northwest Coast house posts in the huge Stanley Field Hall, out-of-town guests, Chicago dignitaries and Museum patrons shared a meal that included some offerings from the Northwest Coast, such as smoked salmon and bannock. Several Northwest Coast performers sang several dinner songs. The Hunt Family Dancers performed portions of their traditional Kwaguitl winter ceremonial tstsika ritual including the hamatsa and cannibal bird dances. They also performed secular summer season tlasila dances. Curators Bill Holm and Peter Macnair were members of the performing troupe. Important Chicago people and Museum personnel joined in a headdress dance in which guests danced with the Kwaguitl in Kwaguitl dance blankets and frontlets. Speeches acknowledged the link between the events in 1982 and those of the World Columbian Exposition in 1893. People were told that some of the dances performed in 1893 were performed by members of the same family in 1982. Willard Boyd,
President of the Museum, hailed the opening week as a celebration of creativity: "creativity of our forebears who founded this Museum"; and the "creativity of the contemporary Peoples of the Northwest Coast, the Arctic and Chicago". He called creativity "our never-ending frontier". Guests were given signed prints by Norman Tait or by Tony Hunt as symbolic potlatch gifts.

There were press luncheons, exhibit previews, and the opening of the sales gallery of contemporary art, Gallery Nine, during the week of the main exhibit opening. Peter Macnair, of the British Columbia Provincial Museum, presented the Field Museum with a Kwaguitl carving from his museum. Artists and culture experts acted as resource people for press, Museum personnel, members and special guests in the refurbished galleries. The special out-of-town visitors also had an opportunity to spend time in the galleries for their own study and enjoyment before the general public was allowed admittance. They were also encouraged to advise the Field Museum curatorial staff on any mistakes in the Museum's presentation.

The Museum gift shop featured craft work from the Northwest Coast and Alaska and books on these cultural areas. Hilary Stewart,
writer on Northwest Coast topics and consultant to the Museum on exhibit labels, was on hand to sign copies of her books during the week of the opening. Cheryl Samuel, weaver and author of *Chilkat Dancing Blanket* (1982) gave a lecture on chilkat weaving. Singers from the Nuu-chah-nulth performed traditional songs in several afternoon performances in the Stanley Field Hall. They were joined by other members of the Northwest Coast artistic community who knew the songs.

The Canadian Consulate in Chicago held a reception for peoples from, and associated with, the Northwest Coast. The Field Museum staff members hosted several less formal functions in their homes, as well.

April 24, "The Maritime Peoples of the Arctic and Northwest Coast" exhibit opened officially to the public with a weekend of activities that included the Big Beaver pole raising, dance performances and craft demonstrations by Kwaguitl and Nishga representatives.

**Preparations for the Cultural Performance**

The Field Museum employed many forms of mass media to contextualize the pole raising. They published news releases, bulletin
articles, brochures and calendars which gave a general cultural background and described the role art, dance, music and ceremony had in traditional native societies. They also described Tait’s cultural performance in a modern context of revival of Native American traditions and as extending and opening the “Maritime Peoples of the Arctic and Northwest Coast” exhibit.

Television, radio and newspapers publicized the pole raising event, providing traditional and contemporary cultural contextualization. Information was given on how aesthetic property was used in the past on the Northwest Coast. They also made Norman Tait, Rufus Watts and the Big Beaver contemporary media personalities. The pole story was retold with simplified explanations of family-clan property.

Pictures from Vancouver from the winter and spring, allowed Chicagoans to follow the transformation of the tree into a totem pole and to see it carried on the first leg of the journey to their city. There were features on the pole’s arrival in its new home city and on the last minute preparation. The citizens of Chicago were invited to witness and participate in raising the pole, and were encouraged to come to the new
exhibit which the pole celebrated.

On the first day of April, the pole arrived in Chicago and was stored in a lumberyard near the depot. On April 2, seven Field Museum staff visited the pole after which they made a conference call to Tait to share their excitement and pleasure. Lorin Nevling Jr., Director of the Field Museum, described his reaction to the pole by describing two analogous experiences at the Museum. He said that seeing the pole for the first time was as powerful as coming across a group of Tibetan monks in saffron and maroon robes lying prostrate in front of a Museum case of Tibetan Buddhist sacred objects, and as powerful as experiencing the lights go out in a case showing Hopi secret society materials just as a Hopi medicine man, and adviser to the Museum, said these materials should not be displayed.

The pole was delivered to the Museum on April 16 on a flat bed truck on which it was left covered with a tarp outside the front entrance until the day before raising. It was guarded by city police in motor cruisers twenty-four hours a day. A ten-foot pit was dug in front of the Museum stairs at the main entrance with a twenty foot slanting trench into which the pole base would slide. Underground electrical
wiring for the parking lot that ran through this area had to be redirected. A wooden scaffolding was constructed over the pit on which the raised pole would rest and be secured. Two A-frame supports, ropes, blocks of wood, were made ready for the raising operation. The pole raising was to be traditional Nishga style, according to Watts, who said there was to be no metal touching the pole while it was being raised. The chips in which the Eagle for the top of the pole was packed, were packaged in small clusters to be given away and sold as souvenirs.

Scaffoldings, ladder, chain saws and drills were provided by the Museum for the carvers to do the last touches on the pole. The face of the little boy looking through the smoke hole and the Eagle had to be completed and attached to the pole. Some clean up work was done as well. With the help of some Museum staff and visitors the pole was slid forward on the truck bed to expose the underside of the top section. The smoke hole was cleaned up and the head of the little boy looking through the hole was prepared for the face to be attached. Tait started the face in a block of cedar using the little boy looking over the head of the Big Beaver as the model. Apprentice Barton finished the face in the hotel the night before the raising, and on the morning of the raising it was
attached to the pole. It was tied in place and tarred dowels were
hammered into holes that were drilled through the face into the pole
(Figure 32).

The spike at the top of the pole was cleaned up and its end
brought down to fit the hole in the underside of the Eagle. The hole in
the Eagle was also worked for a good fit with the pole. The wings were
temporarily attached for a carrying ceremony the day before the pole
raising when the pole was carried into raising position. On the morning
of the raising, tarred dowels were hammered through the support beam
that ran across the Eagle's back, and into the Eagle body and wings and
then cut flush with the surface. The adjoining surfaces of the Eagle and
pole spike were tarred and jammed together.

On April 23 as the day shift of the Museum was leaving at 4:15
p.m., the pole was moved to the pit. About eighty or ninety staff,
Museum visitors and out-of-town guests gathered to do the work. As in
Vancouver, the Eagle was paraded first to announce the pole moving.
The honorary work was done by prominent members of the Northwest
Coast artistic community including curator/art historian Bill Holm,
Nuu-chah-nulth artist/singer Art Thompson, artist Steve Brown, Neah
Bay singer Greg Arnold. Several other members of this community directly followed and Nuu-chah-nulth artist Joe David drummed for the procession. Tait, his grandfather and apprentices in their button blankets came behind the others.

Once the moving was announced, Tait gave instructions to the pole movers to follow the drum. The pole was lifted off the truck bed, its top end carried up the stairs of the Museum and its base swung around and into the pit trench. The pole base was lowered into the pit and supports jammed under the lower portion of the pole that angled approximately thirty degrees off the ground from the pit edge. The pole was then ready for its separate parts to be attached and for the raising ceremony the next day (Figure 33).

**Back Stage Stress**

Tait went through a stressful preparatory time before the pole raising performance in Chicago. He was required to move from the more private role of carver and leader in a small community, to the very public role of host chief at a large acceptance ceremony for his family’s heritage. He felt anxious about things going wrong which would
Figure 32. Mitchell Morrison attaching the face of the Fifth Brother which looks through the smoke hole Chicago. April 24, 1982.

Figure 33. The Big Beaver totem pole lined up for raising.
disgrace him, his family or tribe. He had some concern about the reception of his performance by the city of Chicago and even more concern about his peer community of Northwest Coast artists, whom he saw as his real critics.

The first few days in Chicago, Tait felt alone in a foreign city as he continued the preparations for a traditional-style event that at home would have involved a large Nishga inter-clan support system. The other Nishga Dancers had not yet arrived. Tait's wife was at home in Vancouver about to give birth to their child.

As the week began Tait experienced the pressure mount to finish the pole details and raising arrangements, and to attend to requests from the Chicago press and Museum community. For several days, he disappeared, neither attending several functions nor getting on with the pole preparation at the Museum. He went off drinking and walking the streets of Chicago by himself. When the other Nishga arrived and the raising event time was imminent, Tait brought himself forward into his role as focal chief, and carried out all that was needed and expected of him. Members of the Northwest Coast artistic community rallied around and supported his pole-raising performance.
The rest of the troupe also had to prepare themselves for the cultural performance. In hotel rooms over breakfast and at night, they sewed deer hooves on aprons and painted trim on dance helmets. One night Morrison and Mercer wrote out the lyrics for the Mountain Flower Song and everyone studied copies. Reva Robinson, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology representative at the opening, helped the group in their preparation work and acted as liaison with the Field Museum.

A dance rehearsal was held in a basement classroom in the Field Museum the night Nishga arrivals were complete. Costumes were checked. Watts and Tait complimented the group on their outfitting. As they went through their dances, the elder and young chiefs reminded them of their important role as representatives of their people, saying that "everyone" would be watching them. They were to work first and play later.

Over breakfast in the Tait's hotel room on the morning of the pole raising, more was said about behaviour and attitude. While in Chicago, Tait said to watch the other Northwest Coast artists for cues on proper behaviour. He said not to take tempers seriously for they were bound to
flare up. That morning they were not to talk to people who would be
around the area in which they were doing the last things to the pole.
Tait also said they were “to make sure the Eagle is on tight. In this
wind it will be off in a year if not very secure”. As well he told them,
“When I fall down, pick up after me quickly”. There was also much
joking and teasing on all these last occasions together in Chicago which
helped ease the tension they were all feeling and strengthened the
bonding as a community.

Raising Big Beaver

The Field Museum is located on a long stretch of parkland and
ball fields. Also located there are other public institutions, such as the
Chicago Art Institute. On one side of the Museum was city-bound
Lakeshore Drive traffic, the Aquarium and Lake Michigan; on the other
side was suburb-bound Lakeshore Drive traffic, a railway line with
overhead footbridges, and a street of hotels where out-of-town guests
were accommodated. The pole was to face Chicago’s downtown core up
Lakeshore Drive (except for the little boy who would face the Museum
through the smoke hole). The Museum, with its grey granite face and
four tall Ionic columns at its entrance, was enormous behind the pole and the people gathered for the pole raising. Three grey banners with a Nuu-chah-nulth whaling design in black hung between the pillars to announce the "Maritime Peoples" exhibit. A Canadian flag flew high on a flag pole on one side of the entrance; an American flag flew on the other side. Descending from the entrances was a wide expanse of stairs on which dignitaries were seated on chairs. In the middle of a plaza that stretched beyond the stairs to a parking lot, was the pit, scaffolding and the pole being readied for raising. Bleachers were set up in a wide semi-circle around the pole raising site to accommodate most of the audience to the event. The day of the raising was sunny, very warm with a stiff wind.

Various members of the Northwest Coast artistic community "threw in their knowledge" to prepare the pole for raising. Six ropes were tied to the pole at the height of the upper beaver and were laid out along the ground at the proper angles for pulling the pole upright. Four were to the front of the pole away from the Museum at approximately ten degrees and thirty degrees off centre on each side; two ropes were to the back of the pole towards the Museum, each
approximately thirty degrees from centre on each side. The back two ropes were to steady the pole on its ascent.

Several thousand people gathered for the pole raising event, a number considered "successful" by the Field Museum. (Pole raising events are attended by many more per capita in centres in British Columbia.) Television, film and video crews, and photographers moved around the clear space surrounding the pole. Some of Chicago's urban Indian population was there as well as Museum members, staff and other citizens of Chicago. The Field Museum's special guests included the visitors from, and connected with the Northwest Coast; the Mayor of Chicago, Jane Byrne; Consul General of Canada, Robert Gaynor, and the high profile members of the Field Museum community.

At approximately 1 p.m., Tait descended the Museum stairs carrying a Canadian flag. Over rolled-up pants, he wore his dance apron and leggings with the deer hoof trim rattling in the breeze; he wore a large Northwest Coast carved silver pendant on his bare chest. He planted the flag in front of the pole pit and then returned up the stairs. He descended again wearing his button blanket and carrying his dance staff this time accompanied by the other Nishga dancers dressed
in their full costumes. Watts carried the drum; Allen carried the extra beaver pelt; someone else carried the cedarbark mat. All the dancers' faces were streaked on one side with black theatrical make-up. They came down in front of the pole pit and rolled out the mat on which Watts stood with the others close by.

The Kwaguitl dancers descended the stairs dressed in their button and chilkat blankets, aprons, leggings, shirts. They wore cedar bark and ermine headbands, or frontlets with ermine trains and carried rattles, drums, and rhythm sticks. Bill Holm was part of this group. Other members of the Northwest Community also descended the stairs wearing their button blankets. Most of them stood or were seated to the back of the pole on the stair landing. Some came down around the pole to assist Tait in various ways. Tony Hunt had offered to do the "work" of the raising. He had had more experience than Tait and Tait felt honoured by his offering to conduct the proceedings. Hunt represented an opposite social category from Tait, in this case an opposite tribe rather than an opposite clan as would have been the case in a traditional Northwest Coast setting. Of Hunt Tait said:
We did our job. Tony was taking the honour of completing our job, doing the manual task. It was like honouring them [Kwaguitl]. We carved the pole.
We were honouring them in asking them to do that.

The cultural pattern of oppositions was played out in other ways as well. Nuu-chah-nulth artists Joe David and Art Thompson dressed in Wolf headdresses crouched by the pole as it was being raised. Tait saw these two men as representing the Wolf clan of the Nishga, his father's clan, who would act as ceremonial witnesses at such occasions for the Eagle clan in traditional Nishga society. Tait also talked of this relationship in terms of the Wolf clan protecting the Eagle clan. He said of David's and Thompson's role:

Art and Joe, I saw them as guardians; they were guarding me, protecting me.

Art and Joe were honoured chiefs. They were name givers. They were representing the Wolf clan that agreed to what was going on. They were saying, "as far as we know, from our experience everything is okay".

Tait saw Haida artists Robert Davidson and Dorothy Grant as honorary witnesses, for the most part, standing in their button blankets watching.
Robert is of the Eagle clan of the Haidas. He took his position. He was saying in essence, "here is my brother raising a pole. I'm proud of him." He and his wife, prince and princess stood there; they just took their place, they knew their place.

Several Museum people, the Mayor of Chicago and Tait spoke from a podium on the stair landing behind the pole before the pole was raised. James O'Connor, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, acted as master of ceremonies. He called the raising "a special event in Chicago's history" and he described the day as very significant for Native Americans, a day which "the Museum is honoured to share". Mrs. Robert Wells Carton, Chairperson of the Women's Board, spoke of the totem pole as the "protector of the city" which it overlooks, and as a "centre of energies of the city" for it celebrated both future and past accomplishments. She also talked of the time capsule to be buried at the base of the pole containing information on the occasion and the names of people in Vancouver and Chicago who contributed to the event.

The Mayor spoke of Big Beaver as "a great symbol of the heritage, our early heritage of North America", and in "deep appreciation of the Field Museum for this great contribution to our early heritage". She gave $25,000 to the Museum from the city of Chicago.
Tait ascended the stairs waving his dance staff in the air as he turned to take the microphone. He said:

To the people of Chicago and especially to her Honour, Mayor Byrne, I would like to welcome you to witness the birth of Big Beaver. It has been in labour pains for the last six month. Where we take nine months, the totem pole takes six months. I would like to invite the people of Chicago to come forward and help with the umbilical cords of this great person, the Big Beaver.

Many people came forward to take up the ropes. After seeing approximately two hundred on the lines, Tait asked the remainder to go back to their seats and "give these people room to move". The Chicago urban native community headed one line; the Kwaguitl dancers another. Mainly white-skinned men and women of all ages and in a variety of dress styles filled out the lines. Tait had one line demonstrate how to follow the drum beat: pull the rope when the drum sounds and hold the rope taut when the drum stops. Tony Hunt stood next to the pit and directed the pulling while Tait drummed. Slowly the people on the front lines pulled the pole off the blocks as A-frame supports were jammed under the rising weight. Tait checked the progress, consulted with Hunt and issued orders over a microphone after each set of drum beats. The
back lines needed to adjust the angle and pressure of their pulling to
better guide and steady the pole in a straight ascent. The pole was not
stopped and held at various points of its ascent for songs and dances as
was, and is done, at many Northwest Coast pole raisings. Tait had
originally intended to follow this ritual pattern but because of the
wind factor and the time set for this ceremony (1 - 3 p.m.), he brought
the pole up without ceremonial delays. After four sets of drum beats
that followed in quick succession, the pole came up to the cross beams
of the scaffolding (Figure 35). The crowd cheered. Tait raised the drum
high beating upon it rapidly, a triumphant smile on his face. Tait said
later of this moment:

Watching this go up the feelings of the first pole
[Port Edward with his father 1974] came back, the
overwhelming feeling came back and there are guys
that are tying, and directing the crew—running back
and forth. They were dressed in their blankets. It
reminded me of the 'Ksan group that took care of my
first pole. At a time like this it seems the native
people take care of their own (emphasis added).

Pullers were asked to keep the ropes taut until they were tied
into rings set in cement around the pole. Several members of the
Northwest Coast artistic community climbed a ladder to the cross beam
and tied ropes around both pole and scaffolding. Tait shook the hands of all his men and hugged the women. People reached through the crowd to shake his and the other carvers’ hands and the media pressed in close with microphones and cameras.

When the pole was secured the area was cleared for the Nishga Dancers. Tait had changed into his beaver cape draping it over one shoulder because of the heat, and he wore his beaver helmet (see Figure 39). Tait had introduced the dancers earlier with his invitation to the people of Chicago to help “birth” the Big Beaver. He had said:

I would like you also to witness the first time the family of Rufus Watts will have danced and raised a pole at the same time in about eighty years. This group is very new compared to the very rich peoples of the Northwest Coast.

The non-Eagle clan members covered up their clan crests on their button blankets with red fabric; Parnell wore a shawl. The extra beaver pelt symbolizing Tait’s family wealth, was in the centre of the circle of dancers. Watts drummed and sang the Mourning song–dance and the dancers danced (Figure 37). Tait and Watts then went to the microphone and Tait introduced Watts, "Semoiget Ga-de'lip, Chief Copper Anchor, a
Figure 34. The Big Beaver totem pole raised. April 24, 1982.
Figure 35. The Nishga Dancers dancing at the pole raising.
chief of one part of the nation of the Eagle clan on the Nass River”. He then conveyed his grandfather's thanks to “all the visiting chiefs, visiting peoples, honoured guests and the Museum people...for accepting his family pole in this village of Chicago”. Watts recited the pole story in Nishga in sections while Tait translated. Tait pointed out images on the pole that related to the story as it proceeded: the hunters, the little beaver that escaped, the little boy looking through the smoke hole and the flying Eagle representing the owners of the story. He explained about the beaver as the crest of this “family Eagle clan”. Tait also explained the song-dance cycle and introduced the Happy song-dance:

The native people do not believe in mourning forever, but put away death to bring people back to normal happy life, and complete the cycle.

The non-Eagle clan members of the Nishga Dancers removed the coverings from their crest designs and the whole troupe put down their dance staffs. They all sang and danced and passed the whistle around each blowing a few toots. Watts drummed, sang and moved into the centre to dance as well. The performers followed this song-dance with the Mountain Flower Song. Tait returned to the microphone to thank a
list of specific people addressing the visiting chiefs as Semoiget, meaning "real person", a traditional Tsimshian honorary title. As a symbolic potlatch gesture, the Museum distributed copies of Tait’s unlimited edition print to everyone as payment for validating Tait, his family and the Museum’s claim to property.

Various Northwest Coast performers honoured Tait, his pole, its raising ceremony and the Nishga Dancers by performing songs and dances, and by inviting the Nishga Dancers to perform with them. Tony Hunt came forward "to pay tribute to Norman Tait and pay tribute to the fine pole that he presented to the city of Chicago". The Kwaguitl dancers performed several pieces in honour of the occasion and then invited Tait’s group to participate. Several singers, including Bill Holm, sang accompanied by drums, rattles and rhythm sticks. The Nishga women joined the Kwaguitl women in a dance and the Nishga men joined some of the Kwaguitl men in a Headdress Dance. The Nishga men put on the frontlets of the Kwaguitl men; Tait changed his beaver robe for a Chilkat blanket. Mitchell Morrison said of his experience:

Power descended from the gear. As soon as I put on the gear: no hesitation or fear of dancing with them. Sharing the dance was an honour.
At approximately 3 p.m. the activities moved into the Museum. On the stage in the Stanley Field Hall where the Nishga dance screen was the backdrop, Northwest Coast performers continued to honour the occasion. There was much hand shaking as well as more songs and dances. Tait said of this occasion later:

Everyone liked it [pole raising ceremony]; they wanted to shake my hand and said: "what a beautiful way to put it: I never thought of that as umbilical cords; I never thought of that as new birth!"

Nathan Jackson performed a song-dance from his Tlingit grandfather "to honour a brother and his totem pole" from a "neighbouring tribe". Robert Davidson sang an old Tsimshian song that had been given to his family on the Queen Charlotte Islands and Joe David sang a Nuu-chah-nulth song. Nuu-chah-nulth singers Art Thompson and Greg Arnold sang songs honouring the women and the women danced. The Nishga Dancers then sang the Happy Song and invited all those people who had honoured them, to join in the dance.

On Sunday April 25, there was a brief pole naming ceremony as part of the Nishga Dance performance that was scheduled for 3 p.m. (Figure 36). Once again the traditional Northwest Coast ritual pattern
Figure 36. Norman Tait with his beaver cape and helmet at the totem pole naming ceremony Sunday, April 25, 1982.
was brought forward: instead of members of other clans acting as name
givers for the host clan to legitimate the host clan's statement of
property, members of other tribes on the Northwest Coast took the
oppositional role to the Nishga hosts. Watts called forward
Nuu-chah-nulth Joe David, Haida Dorothy Grant, Kwaguitls Henry Hunt and
Frank Nelson to act as pole namers. Wearing ceremonial dress, looking
and pointing to the pole, they took turns calling out the name. With the
name called, the gift of the pole from Watts to Chicago was complete.
People who had gathered around were invited to join in the Happy
song-dance.

Closing the Project

Various activities saw the Field Museum, Nishga Dancers and Tait
close their participation in the Big Beaver project. The Museum placed
the time capsule at the base of the pit and members of the Nishga
Dancers put in various personal objects from the Coast. During the week
after the pole raising, the Museum had a steel beam raised up the back
of the pole for support. The pit was cemented in, the area was
landscaped and a short fence was erected around the pole base. A mixture of linseed oil and zinc was applied to the surface of the pole for preservation. In their June Bulletin, the Museum featured the story and pictures of the raising event.

The Nishga Dancers had several performances after the pole raising as well as the one on Sunday which incorporated the pole naming ceremony. Two performances early in the next week were for school children included telling the story, showing and explaining the crests on the button blankets as well as performing the three song-dances.

The carvers demonstrated their carving craft in the central hall of the Museum along with Kwaguitl carvers. The Nishga Dancers toured the Chicago Art Museum, other Chicago sites, and attended a Chicago Black Hawks-Vancouver Canucks hockey game, as well as attending parties, one of which they hosted for members of the Northwest Coast artistic community and Museum staff. April 28, the Nishga Dancers returned to Vancouver. On April 30, Mikah Tait was born to Cathy and Norman Tait.

The pole continued to be part of Tait's life now in terms of his participation in the Nishga community on the North Coast. The following
is a statement Tait made about the pole soon after returning from Chicago.

The financial level—that's all over: everyone is going to get paid off. The educational level is going to go on because everyone is going to say, "I remember this pole and it was done this way and done that way." The personal level people are going to say, "Oh, I remember my uncle raised it this way and the Wolves cried about it" (emphasis added).

In May 1982, Tait went up to the Nass River for a funeral and potlatch held for a brother of Rufus, another important Eagle clan chief. At that time, Tait became acutely aware that the revival on the Northwest Coast was more than artistic; it was deeply cultural and he had a significant role.

Every pole that goes up is important for the Northwest Coast. What happened to me is wonderful. I stepped out of the financial and glory world and stepped into the real work of the Native people.

Tait experienced a lively re-vitalized rivalry between the Wolf and Eagle clans in his reception on the Nass river after his pole event in Chicago. He was challenged regarding his family's ownership of the pole
story. Several members of the Wolf clan claimed that the story Tait used to inspire the pole images did not belong to the Watts family. (The charge was later dropped. Proof could not be brought forward to overrule Watts’ claim.) Tait also felt more pressure from his family to assume greater leadership because of his success in the public arena of an international museum. He was given a name that was owned by the deceased uncle, Kwaak. It is a very powerful name the meaning of which, Tait said, has been forgotten. He found his experience at this potlatch humbling and not all together comfortable. Once again, he was thrust out from being an individual artist, into being a chief generating and accountable to, a living traditional Native community. Although he felt reluctant to assume his chief’s role inside this community, he was heartened to see the re-awakened “workings of the law” that have been stimulated by his action as an individual in the larger setting of museum and art world.

Old people are going to say, “our system is still alive! the Eagle and Wolf are fighting again, isn’t that great!” The fact that the rules are coming alive again is wonderful--something big there is happening, something is waking up. I am happy to contribute to it. The greatest victory would be if I see tribes suddenly awakening and saying, “I
remember, I will feast, I want to get this name back”.

The Field Museum’s Cultural Performance

Norman Tait’s cultural performance was also a Field Museum cultural performance. The most frequent reason the Field Museum gave for the Big Beaver totem pole and its raising was for the Museum to celebrate itself. A production crew of over three hundred including Native Americans worked for seven years on the “Maritime Peoples of the Arctic and Northwest Coast” exhibit and the pole raising heralded the exhibit opening.

The totem pole and its raising served other functions as well. I look here at some of those functions and some of the backstage messages which were at least potentially communicated by the Field Museum’s actions and words. The Big Beaver totem pole fulfilled the Museum’s purpose to preserve and to disseminate knowledge about natural history. It was described as completing the Museum’s collection of houseposts and totem poles most of which were in the “Maritime Peoples of the Arctic and Northwest Coast” exhibit. Events, such as
raising the Big Beaver, were scheduled for the opening of this exhibit and were described as complementing and extending the re-installed collections. Cultural performances were described as showing collections in "actual life context". The exhibit time frame was 1850 - 1920. Was Tait's cultural performance considered a living specimen of a past culture that needs preserving?

The Field Museum extended its exhibit with literature: brochures, calendars, articles, news releases (which also contextualized the cultural performances). As well as providing information on traditional Northwest Coast cultures, the Museum acknowledged the contemporary revival and evolution of artistic traditions. They also sponsored a gallery of fine contemporary art featuring both native and non-native artists who produce high quality and innovative work based on Northwest Coast and Inuit traditions. The Field Museum also held a symposium which questioned currents of change in native artistic traditions and featured "pioneers" of the renaissance, contemporary Northwest Coast and Inuit artists. The dance traditions of the Northwest Coast, however, were treated differently from the art traditions. The Field Museum literature gave the impression that contemporary native performers
were carrying on an unbroken and unevolving tradition. Norman Tait's totem pole was described as a contemporary piece of art which contributed to the art life of Chicago. His cultural performance was framed more as an authentic piece of traditional Nishga culture.

A sense of history was important to the Field Museum's 1982 activities. Norman Tait's pole was to acknowledge the Museum's beginnings with the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and the Museum's continuing connection with the Northwest Coast. The Museum used the World's Columbian Exposition as its historic precedent to contextualize events with Native Americans in 1982: descendents of the Native Americans who had come to Chicago for the 1893 World's Fair, attended the Field Museum events in 1982. Some of the dances performed in 1893 were performed again in 1982. Singer, in an article on American historical re-enactments, argues that re-creating American history is an attempt to recapture an "authentic American identity" (1977: 450).

The intention of Native American participation in 1893 was to demonstrate racial evolution. The city of Chicago was highlighted as the epitome of human progress in contrast to native peoples living in replicated native dwellings on the Exposition site. In 1982 the Field
Museum expressed an attitude of exchanging resources with the Native Americans. Native Americans were treated as special guests, celebrated artists and advisors to the Museum. Was there, however, a covert message similar to that openly espoused in 1893?

Public relations was an important component of the events in 1982. The Field Museum was concerned with increasing the numbers and types of visitors. A stated objective of the totem pole was to stimulate interest, curiosity, wonder and to invite attendance. Norman Tait's cultural performance was made into a popular entertainment event by the Field Museum public relations department and in media coverage. Nelson Graburn describes the translation of such things as traditional native culture into understandable modern forms as rendering the exotic safe for public consumption (1977:21).

One of the targeted populations that the Field Museum wished to attract was Chicago's urban native community. The Museum described the exhibit as reflecting the contemporary native cultural continuum. The pole was a "symbol of the living culture" of all Native Americans. After a pole raising at the UBC Museum of Anthropology, an Indian remarked to Michael Ames, the Museum Director, that the event did
nothing for the native people. He said, "We don't feel at home in your museums—any of them—because they don't tell us our story" (Ames 1983:98). Who was Norman Tait's cultural performance really for in Chicago? There was a sense of romantic nostalgia in some of the Field Museum literature regarding traditional native cultures and a sense of loss in modern life. In staging a native cultural performance, was there an attempt to absolve feelings of guilt for past misdeeds of ancestral generations against the Indians (Singer 1977)? And/or was the cultural performance a vehicle for expressing a longing for a more "authentic" way of life (MacCannell 1976)?

In reflecting on the consolidation of moral structures in constructing exhibits, Marie-François Guédon (1983: 258) called exhibits ritual spaces. Visitors experienced these moral statements in an atmosphere that engendered respectful acceptance. The Field Museum not only created a major exhibit of Northwest Coast artifacts that was like a ritual space, they staged a Northwest Coast ritual as an exhibit. The ritual exhibit contained a set of prescribed formal behaviours organized into a dramatic unity associated with social transitions (Turner 1978). There were ritual acts leading up to the pole raising such
as planting the Canadian flag, entrance of the families in their ceremonial dress and speeches. Then there was the raising of the pole followed by dances and songs by the Nishga Dancers, the story, more speeches and then dances and songs by the Kwaguilth. There was a transfer of privileges from the elder chief, Rufus Watts, to his heir Norman Tait. For many of those present this may have been a participatory living exhibit experience. One of the Museum’s aims was to provide educational experiences which extended the Museum’s collections.

The ritual also communicated moral statements. The Field Museum chose to re-enact a ritual which was performed in traditional Tsimshian society to legitimate statements of property. Ranking was an integral part of these rituals with the host asserting superior status. Participants legitimated these statements by their presence. One could not help but notice how the fifty-five foot Big Beaver totem pole was dwarfed by the Field Museum building and Chicago skyline. I was reminded of the “object lesson” intended by the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893. The juxtaposition of native peoples’ dwellings on the Fair site with the surrounding modern city of Chicago was
instrumental in communicating racial ranking.

The Field Museum did more than stage a traditional native Indian ritual; they intentionally re-ritualized the performance with themselves as major players. The ownership of the totem pole was ceremonially transferred to them during the ritual proceedings. Traditionally most totem poles commemorated the dead and their raisings were a means of legitimating the passage of property to an heir. Was it communicated in the 1982 performance in Chicago that Northwest Coast culture is dead and the Field Museum is the legitimate heir to Northwest Coast traditions? They do proudly describe themselves as "maintainers and guardians" of cultural heritage.

To complete this point of view on the Field Museum cultural performance as a moral statement, I quote MacCannell’s description of what he calls "staged authenticity":

The best indication of the final victory of modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the nonmodern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction in modern society. The separation of nonmodern culture traits from their original contexts and their distribution as modern playthings are evident in the various social movements towards naturalism, so much a feature of modern societies: cults of folk music and
I wish to put forward another way of viewing the Field Museum cultural performance. Singer (1959: 148) observed democratization in contemporary cultural performances in Madras. He wrote:

The contemporary movement does not so much aspire to sectarian and denominational formations as a diffuse emotion of brotherhood which softens the rough edges of group difference (emphasis added).

In Norman Tait's cultural performance in 1982 in Chicago traditional rivalries between clans, tribes, and, I suggest, cultures, were diffused in a euphoric feeling of camaraderie. Victor Turner called it communitas: the direct experience of undifferentiated, egalitarian, nonrational generic human bonding (Turner and Turner 1978: 250). Turner also points out that communitas is always coupled with social structure and that communitas can be used to reinforce that structure, or can act as a source of criticism, mediation or modification. To say more would go beyond my objective here.
Going beyond the moral considerations of the Tait/Field Museum cultural performance altogether, I conclude with a less weighty, but equally valid, point of view. Remarking on the recent florescence of celebration in American society, Frank Manning (1983a: ix) wrote:

celebration helps to restore a wholistic understanding of the human situation. Celebration reminds us that human life is less rational, secular, materialistic, and technologically determined than was commonly thought a generation ago; that we continue to cherish myth, rite, identity, community, tradition, cosmos, and many other symbols and sentiments tinctured with acquired wisdom of the species; that we remain homo ludens, not simply homo sapiens or homo faber; that we delight in fun and laughter, relish mischief and mystery, and are inspired by paradox and ambiguity; above all, that we seek recurrently to appreciate the wonder and beauty of the human experience, and to reward ourselves for bearing with it.

Although moral statements of separation and ranking may have been communicated (and perhaps reinforced or modified) in Chicago in 1982, the Big Beaver cultural performance was an opportunity for people to share one of those less rational, yet powerful human experiences: celebration.
VIII. CONCLUSIONS

A healthy national culture is never a passively accepted heritage from the past, but implies the creative participation of the members of the community; implies, in other words, the presence of cultured individuals. An automatic perpetuation of standardized values, not subject to the constant remodeling of individuals willing to put some part of themselves into the forms they receive from their predecessors, leads to the dominance of impersonal formulas. The individual is left out in the cold; the culture becomes a manner rather than a way of life, it ceases to be genuine.

Edward Sapir

Both the Field Museum and Norman Tait considered the pole raising performance a success. It was the celebratory culmination of the creative projects in which both had been intensely engaged. An air of excitement was generated by the drama of the events. The performance drew an enthusiastic crowd (although small in comparison to pole raisings on the Northwest Coast) and people were eager to pull the ropes that brought up the pole.

For Tait the pole was well received and the proceedings went smoothly. There were congratulations from many quarters and people were delighted with Tait's birth metaphor. The Northwest Coast artistic
community contributed their knowledge and support and performed congratulatory songs and dances.

Tait's cultural performance successfully communicated contemporary cultural messages. The performance was a dramatic statement of the re-empowered Indian identity with the raising of the totem pole and the ceremonial display of costumes, songs and dances. It was a colourful pageant through which the Field Museum celebrated itself.

On the level of aesthetics, however, some of the performance did not work. The art pieces were good quality in that they demonstrated knowledge of Northwest Coast and Nishga artistic tradition. The design elements and overall unity of each piece was pleasing. Some of the work transcended technique and cultural matrix. Tait's totem pole, dance screen, his helmet and that of his grandfather, had an artistic sensibility that was not culturally bounded. They evoked a responsiveness in people whether or not they had knowledge of Nishga or Northwest Coast traditions.

It was difficult, and perhaps unfair, to examine the dance and music components of Tait cultural performance on the same aesthetic
basis. Tait's group were rank beginners who had practised for only a few months. Becoming performers had been a part time activity and adjunct to other time-consuming aspects of becoming a troupe. The troupe relied on the memory of one elder for performance materials which the elder had seen performed fifty years ago. Chicago was their first performance.

What I found lacking in Tait's performance, however, I do not find peculiar to his cultural performance. Many contemporary cultural performances from the Northwest Coast are not fine dance, music and dramatic performance (although there are some individual exceptions). In my opinion, they can be compared with the "tourist curio" stage of the plastic arts for non-native audiences prior to 1950. Not a lot of attention was paid to either cultural or universal aesthetics. Since the 1950's a range of quality has developed in the arts produced for non-native contexts that includes outstanding works of fine art.

What would fine native cultural performance look like? To examine this I turn to an exceptional performance by Korean drummer/dancers, Samul-Nori (Pacific Asia Festival, Vancouver: June 1985). Their performance, which was based on folk traditions of Korea, had a quality which brought the audience to their feet between pieces.
The dance and drumming patterns were tight and intricate and reminded me of the form lines in Northwest Coast Indian art. The performers had superb command of traditional form and technique. And, they pushed beyond mere competency with an enormously compressed power that energetically engaged the audience. Cultural boundaries, as well as performer/viewer boundaries, were transcended. Everyone became a participant.

There was a participatory component to Tait’s performance: there was the physical activity of pulling ropes and the feelings of tension and relief generated by the dramatic raising a fifty-five foot totem pole. Nishga dance and music performance components, however, did not engage people energetically and it is these components (like others in other Northwest Coast cultural performances) that I am trying to find a means of assessing.

The Korean performers were professional while Tait and his group (and many other performers from the Northwest Coast) are not. This Korean performance demonstrated, however, what is possible when, as Sapir stated in the quote opening this chapter, cultured individuals put themselves into the forms they have received from their predecessors.
and re-model them as contemporary cultural expression. The Korean performers communicated a sense of healthy vital contemporary Korean culture.

The responsibility for development of fine native Indian cultural performances on the Northwest Coast lies ultimately with the performers. It is up to them to incorporate performance aesthetics and add the "spark of life" so that a vitally alive contemporary Northwest culture is expressed. Or, as Sapir (1924: 321) wrote,

If the passive perpetuator of a cultural tradition gives us merely a manner, the shell of a life that once was, the creator from out of a cultural waste gives us hardly more than a gesture, or a yawp, the strident promise of a vision raised by our desires.

The revival of Northwest Coast traditions to date has been primarily expressed in objects. The revival of dance and music is newer, certainly for non-traditional settings. To borrow an analogy again from the plastic arts of the revival, I suggest that a non-traditional setting such as a museum is a new medium for the expression of native Indian performance traditions, perhaps like serigraph printing has been for the expression of native Indian artistic traditions. At first Tait found silk
screening very foreign and uncreative: "It wasn't traditional carving."

Later he found the challenges of the new medium and explored which aspects of Nishga tradition worked best in this format. He achieved aesthetic excellence as have many other print makers on the Northwest Coast. Possibly, the revival of Northwest Coast performance traditions has a similar future.

How can museums and anthropologists support the revival of performance traditions from the Northwest Coast? Halpin suggests, and I agree, that museums act as midwives rather than undertakers to native culture, that is, focus on the achievements of the present rather than the past; "celebrating human creativity and vitality, rather than cultural death" (1983:273). Ames (Ms. in press chapter 7, p. 9) reiterates this sentiment and states:

museums can take a useful role by encouraging experimentation with these [native] traditions, by recording the changes as they occur, and by helping to develop critical standards by which people can judge their experiments with their own cultural forms.

Echoing a similar attitude, Duncan Cameron (1971) discusses
museums as temples—and they do make spectacular sites for native Indian cultural performance—but he adds, museums as temples need the presence of a forum. Forums, places of confrontation and experimentation, insure a place for changing traditions in these temples. The Field Museum offered a forum for contemporary native Indian art and for native and white artists who are producing fine work. They offered no discussion in regard to contemporary performance of dance and music traditions. It will be good to see forums develop within museums for native Indian cultural performance and existing forums become more critical with regard to native Indian art. Museums are in a prime position to mediate among natives, artists, performers, academics, curators, critics, media and public to promote the development of a “common code, a language of objects (and of performance), with which to communicate across barriers” (Halpin 1983: 272).

I see several avenues of investigation that could lead to the development of a language of aesthetics for native Indian cultural performance. Undoubtedly the traditional peoples on the coast had a language of criticism for performance as well as for the arts (Hawthorn
An investigation of the literature, though scant on the formal aspects of dance and music, could reveal some criteria. Analysis of performance forms similar to Bill Holm's analysis of northern style design could be helpful in producing vocabulary. Perhaps the study of postures in art could contribute to performance analysis. Aesthetic languages from other cultural performance traditions and from modern performance forms could provide more universal criteria. And dialogues among anthropologists, critics and contemporary native and non-native performers could produce a language of criticism.

It is a fertile time for native Indian cultural performance. Like the revival of artistic traditions on the Northwest Coast, the revival of performance traditions is an opportunity for a network of diverse people to share their creativity and to do that courageously. I use courage here the way Bill Reid does in his discussion of exceptional pieces of traditional Northwest Coast art. He describes the creators of these pieces as having the courage to go beyond the safe point, beyond the point the mind tells one it is logical to stop (1975: 36). Taking culture as "neither knowledge nor manner, but as life", we are therefore challenged
to build upon and transcend past concepts and forms and as Sapir (1924: 326) continues, we must proceed "in accordance with the needs of the spirit in each, a spirit that is free to glorify, to transform, and to reject". To revive traditions is to bring back a "spark of life" within them.

“Creativity is our never-ending frontier” said one of the speakers at Norman Tait’s cultural performance in Chicago. And creativity is more than an aspect of some people’s individual lives; it is the source of human community. Norman Tait’s creation of the Big Beaver totem pole generated a contemporary Nishga community which joined him in bringing forward Nishga song, dance and ceremonial traditions. His artistic activity, and that of the Field Museum, also generated a wider celebratory community at the pole raising performance in Chicago in April 1982. The revival of performance traditions as well as artistic traditions of the Northwest Coast has much to contribute to the diverse and global world community. I look forward to witnessing, contributing to and celebrating the continuing evolution of the rich Northwest Coast cultural heritage and appreciate the continuing gift of this experience.
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               D.I.N.A. - Department of Indian and Northern Affairs
               N.W.C. - Northwest Coast
               UBC - University of British Columbia

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<th>Publisher/Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Holm, Bill</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td><em>Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form.</em></td>
<td>Seattle: University of Washington Press.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holm, Bill and Bill Reid</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td><em>Indian Art of the Northwest Coast: A Dialogue on Craftsmanship and Aesthetics.</em></td>
<td>Houston: Institute for the Arts, Rice University.</td>
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</table>
Macnair, Peter, L.

Macnair, Peter, Alan Hoover, and Kevin Neary

Manning, Frank, ed.

Mead, Sidney and Bernie Kernot, ed.

Naisbitt, John

Northwest Coast Indian Artists' Guild

Pacific Asia Festival

Public Archives of Canada
<table>
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<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Edition/Place</th>
</tr>
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</table>
Singer, Milton

Stewart, Hilary
1984  Cedar, Vancouver: Douglas McIntyre.

Tait, Isaac
1985  personal communication, Vancouver, June.

Turner, Victor

Turner, Victor and Edith Turner

Vastokas, Joan M.

Wagner, Roy

Young, David
**APPENDIX 1**

**COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND the 1981-1982 SITUATION OF ACQUIRING A TREE AND PREPARING A LOG**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditionally (pre-20th century)</th>
<th>1981-1982 Norman Tait's pole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tree sought in the territory of the family commissioning the totem pole for the family’s demonstration of property.</strong></td>
<td>Tree purchased from a research institution who holds rights to forest for an artist's project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If unsuccessful, the family sought tree in another family’s territory and made the proper arrangements with the owners.</td>
<td>Purchased by an economic conglomerate and donated to the carver for his international artistic project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to Barbeau (1950:3) the paternal relatives of the owners did the work of felling and transporting.</td>
<td>Tree felling and transport donated by a logging company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to Garfield (1939:209) the owners were responsible for delivering the tree to the clan responsible for carving it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tree was chosen by visually scanning for straightness and for as few branches as possible.</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trunks were tapped with adze handles. A hollow sound suggested little rot.</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree sought close to waterway so canoes could tow log to the village.</td>
<td>Tree sought close to road so logging truck could easily move the log into the city.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trees felled with adzes. Sometimes embers put in the adzed hole and charred wood adzed out more easily (Stewart 1984: 29-40).

Sometimes scaffolding was erected around the base of the tree; workers with chisels mauls slowly chopped through the tree (loc. cit.).

Smaller trees on the path of the fall softened the impact. Cedar bough piled up to cushion the tree's fall (Tait personal communication).

Ropes were tied from the target tree to others to break the fall (Tait personal communication).

The bark was usually removed and the log hollowed out in the forest before the log was moved.

Rocks that were heated in fires were used as well as adzes to remove branches and tree top (Stewart 1984: 29-40).

Skids were constructed out of a series of long poles to move the log.

The log was pulled by cedar bark ropes and pushed to a water course.

Tree cutting started by a professional faller with a long bladed chain saw.

Wedges were hammered into the sawcuts which brought the tree down.

Chain saws and axes used to remove the tree top and branches.

Giant claws of self-loading truck picked up the log and placed it on the bed of the truck.

Claws on the truck lifted the log and eased it in the of the door of the carving shed.
Canoes were used to pull the log to the village. The log was pulled and pushed to the carving site. A lot of human power was needed.

A few people operated the machinery and several others guided the log onto supports inside the shed.

Modern electrical tools and carpenters aids used to prepare the log: strip off bark and hollow back.

Traditional tools: adzes, knives, mallets and wedges used.

Traditional-style tools used for most of the carving: adzes, knives, mallets and chisels.

Before metal became available carvers used stone, bone, shell and antler for cutting edges.

Reworked iron used that was acquired commercially.

Later metal became available from trade and shipwreck.

Cutting edges were bound to hardwood handles with twine.

Bound to hardwood handles.
APPENDIX II

Sculptural Features

A. Number of Images:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Image Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full body</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>front-face</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>backview</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heads with hands</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with arms as well</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heads by themselves</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Carving Quality:

1. a 3-dimensional Eagle - attached to spike
1. b high relief remainder carved onto column of wood

2. a Eagle and Beaver are most naturalistic.
2. b Smaller human faces are flattened and as if wearing a mask.
2. c Larger figures very bulbous with features larger than life.

3. There was a very rounded flow to the carving and surfaces were very smooth.

C. Relationship of Figures on the Pole:

Little overlapping, clear horizontal divisions between major figures.
Exceptions: 1. The two Nephews emerge from behind the Big Beaver Chief's tail.
2. The Fifth Brother emerges from between and inside the ears of the Big Beaver Chief.
3. A beaver tops the dance staff of the Chief.
4. A beaver draped over Chief's forehead as a dance helmet.
5. The Wolf sits between the Storyteller's knees.
6. Two Beaver hold the feet of the Beaver below them.
D. Limbs

Generally full and muscular, ankle and wrist bones are suggested and legs are bent.

1. Figures sitting with knees bent in and to elbows
2. Figure standing with knees bent in
3a Figures standing with knees bent out
3b as if “dancing” (Tait’s term)

Big Beaver Chief
Storyteller
Chief
Fifth Brother (top)
the four Hunters
the four Beaver
beaver of Chief’s helmet
Wolf (on its back)

4. Figures with knees bent out, splayed from bodies, as if “running” (Tait’s term)
5. legs drawn up tight against haunches
6. legs drawn up with soles of feet in the air

E. Feet

Usually club-shaped blocks turned in or out.

Exceptions: 1. The beaver of the Chief’s helmet has detailed back paws.
    2. The Wolf has human baby feet with tiny toes and the suggestion of arches and heels.
    3. The Eagle’s talons are gathered up under the base of its tail.

F. Arms and Hands

Bent at the elbows and hands detailed and usually human.

Exceptions: 1. The Eagle has outstretched wings
    2. The beaver of the Chief’s helmet has paws.

clutching: 1. gnawing sticks

Big Beaver Chief
29%

2. edges

beaver of dance staff
The Nephews hold tail of the Big Beaver Chief.

The Fifth Brother clutches at smoke hole edge.

3. other figures

The upper two Beaver hold lower Beaver's feet.

other features: 1. The Storyteller holds up one arm with one pointed finger as if making emphasis in storytelling.
2. The arms of each pair of Hunters are linked across the pole.
3. There is some variation in position and openness in the hands of the four Hunters.

6. Heads

1.a Proportions: approximately a third of the large bodies
1.b one quarter or one fifth of the smaller bodies

2.a Faces: roughly divided into thirds vertically:

a) Human and face-on animal faces
   1. forehead to height of eye orb
   2. height of eye orb to bottom of nose
   3. mouth and chin

b) Top-viewed animals
   1. forehead to height of eye orb
   2. eye and cheeks
   3. snout

2.b Faces: divided roughly into thirds horizontally:

a. nose and area between eye centres
b. and eye centres to outside cheeks and forehead
2.c The smaller human faces are flatter, more mask-like with squared off tops.
2.d Larger faces are more bulbous: foreheads rounded back into log, large eye orbs, full cheeks, pyramid-shaped noses. They look like the skin has been pulled over the skeletal structure.

3. **Eyebrows**: approximately half the height of the forehead and were indicated by carved lines. They almost met in the centre. The bottom line followed the eye socket and stretched beyond it to the outside of the head. The top line arched slightly just outside the high point of the eye orb.
3.a There were no eyebrows on the Eagle.

4. **Eye Sockets**: differentiated from the forehead by an abrupt change of plane. The sockets were carved out deeply under the eyes. Larger than human eye orbs protruded from the skull and looked down.
4.a More prominent on large faces.
4.b On the smallest faces, eye orbs were only slight suggestions (These were done by the apprentices.)

5. **Eyes**: carved onto the eye orbs. The depth of the carving increased towards the eye corners. Points of the eyes hovered around the horizontal centre lines: some were above, a few dipped below and some were at centre. There was no consistent pattern. The pupils were very large and outlined with carved lines.

6. **Cheeks**: rounded peaks of three planes that:

   1. rose out of the eye socket
   2. rose off the side of the face
   3. rose up from the mouth

6.a Cheeks were very round on the large faces.
6.b On flatter human faces, cheeks were stretched to the sides of the face.
6.c Cheeks bulged to the side of the top-viewed heads of the beaver and
the Wolf, and on the three-dimensional Eagle.

7. **Noses:** bulbous triangles on face-on heads. They were indented sharply at the bridge and then flared out towards the base. They were somewhat flat on top.

7.a Noses were approximately one fifth to one third the width on the small human faces and one third on other faces.

7.b The Big Beaver Chief's nose was one half its face.

7.c Snouts on the top-viewed beaver and the Wolf were approximately one third the length of the head.

7.d The beak of the Eagle was one half.

7.e The snout of the Wolf was longer and thinner than the beaver's short pointed snouts.

7.f Nostrils on the human faces were carved outlines, round and part of the nose.

7.g Nostrils on the beaver and the Wolf were raised ovals and set to the sides of their noses.

7.h The Eagle had carved suggestions of nostril holes.

8. **Mouths:** on the face-on beaver and human faces were in tight grins right across the face.

8.a Smaller human mouth areas had a vertical change of plane at the centre from which the two sides of the mouth angled off to the outside of the face. This was most pronounced in the Fifth Brother looking over the head of the Big Beaver Chief. Other human faces sometimes only exhibited a slight suggestion of this feature (these were done by the apprentices).

8.b The top-viewed beavers and the Wolf had mouths on the underside of their projecting snouts.

8.c The Eagle's mouth was only a carved suggestion.

9. **Teeth:** except for the Eagle, all animal mouths had teeth.

9.a The two largest human faces had narrow bands of teeth.

9.b All other human faces had no teeth and their mouths were slightly open.

9.d The beaver had large protruding front incisors

9.e The Wolf had enlarged canine teeth.

10. **Lips:** Bottom and top lips were approximately the same width on each
figure. Top lips were differentiated from the above lip areas by a change of plane. Bottom lips were differentiated from chins by carved lines. All bottom lips were approximately the same size as chins or lower jaw areas. They ran parallel with chins and were generally in the same plane.
10.a The top lips on all the beaver were split, and the halves were rounded into the centre splits.
10.b Chins of the top-viewed animals slanted slightly into the pole.

11. Ears: There were ears on the beaver and Wolf, none on human faces, nor on the Eagle.
11.a On the Wolf and the Big Beaver Chief, ears were approximately one quarter of the height of the head.
11.b On other beaver, they were approximately one fifth.
11.c Beaver ears were smaller and more rounded than the Wolf’s.
11.d “U” and “V” lines were carved into the smaller beaver and Wolf ears.

H. Tails:
1. There were tails on five of the seven beaver on the pole.
1.a Two of the slaughtered Beaver’s tails were concave and two were convex. They were carved with diamond-shaped scale patterns.
1.b The Big Beaver Chief’s tail was flipped up in front and it had an overlapping scalloped scale pattern.

2. The Eagle’s tail was a feathered projection flaring out from behind its body.

I. Additions:
1. The face of the Fifth Brother looked through the pole where the smoke hole had been cut out. Its face was not carved onto the head, but was attached later.

2. The wings of the Eagle were attached, and the whole bird was attached to the pole.
3. No paint was added. Abalone was to be inlaid into the Eagle's eyes, but Tait ran out of time.

**Sculptural Style**

I. The Big Beaver Totem Pole as Tsimshian Style Carving

1. high relief, stylized realism, bold exaggeration of features, suggestion of taut skin stretched over skeletal structures

2. strong horizontal breaks, little overlapping detail

3. heads: 2:1 to body (only larger figures on the Big Beaver totem pole, smaller figures 4:1 and 5:1)

4. knees and elbows touch (in several figures, but not predominate on the Big Beaver totem pole)

5. projecting parts (the Eagle's wings, the Eagle)

6. cheeks pronounced pyramids of three intersecting planes. (Holm [1972: 81] suggests this is the most distinctive feature of Tsimshian sculpture.)

7. distinct changes of plane on faces (larger figures on the Big Beaver totem pole have more rounded transitions, smaller figures have sharper transitions)

8. eyebrows - broad and arched

9. eye sockets large and open

10. eyeballs protruding and deeply set at bottom

11. very broad noses - flattened slightly by the log surface

12. wide mouths, thin lipped and open
13. minimal use of colour (none on Big Beaver)

II. The Big Beaver Totem Pole as Nishga Style Carving

Audrey Shane (1978) delineates four styles among poles on the Nass River and Skeena.

A. Big Beaver most closely follows Niska I:

1. figures large scale, bold proportions, rendered in rounded high relief
2. horizontal divisions separate each segment into self contained units
3. heads higher than they are wide with wide broad noses, wide mouths and prow-like chins.

Shane placed the Oyai Eagle-Halibut pole, which Tait used a model, in this category.

B. The Big Beaver Totem Pole is not Niska II because:

1. does not have large and small figures alternating in same relative proportions
2. does not have Tlingit-style mouths which protrude and do not generally extend right across the face.
3. figures do not emerge from each other's ears (with the one exception - the Big Beaver Chief)

C. The Big Beaver Totem Pole is not Gitksan I or II because:

1. does not mix low and high relief, nor mix rounded, flat and sharp transitions (exception: the squared off tops of the small human faces)
2. not continuous plane on which all figures are carved. On Big Beaver's middle section carved figures stand off one plane. Larger figures,
however, occupy their own space which smaller figures sometimes share.

3. On Gitksan II poles, one third pole uncarved or lightly incised and same plane as background of carved area. The Big Beaver's uncarved spike is narrowed, squared off and approximately one eighth of total length.

D. What Makes the Big Beaver Nishga Style for Norman Tait:

1. highly sculpted forms, skin pulled taut
2. roundness of cheeks, broadness of nose, round nostrils
3. thin lipped, tight grins across faces
4. larger than human orbs looking down

III. Similarities between the Eagle-Halibut Pole by Oyai and Tait's Pole:

(Note: only lower section of the Oyai pole was used by Tait as a reference. Top half looks as if it was carved by someone else. Barbeau (1950: 53) assumes carver Charlie Morrison was responsible for at least part of this pole.)

1. change of plane to delineate the upper eye sockets and upper lips on faces
2. lower lips same plane as chin, delineated by carved line
3. similar ethos: fierce intensity created by grins drawn tight across faces and tense setting of the eyebrows and eyes.

IV. Differences between Oyai's Eagle-Halibut pole and Tait's Big Beaver:

1. Tait's limbs rounded more consistently. Some limbs of Oyai have a distinct flatness
2. Tait rendered ankle and wrist bones (has become his trade mark).