

KOOTÉYAA DEIYÍ

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KOOTÉYAA - TOTEM POLES

Northwest Coast art (NWC) evolved over several thousand years in the rich and complex Indigenous societies of the Pacific Northwest of North America. Wood carvings, weavings, and other cultural pieces depicting NWC art were aggressively collected by museums and Western explorers and acclaimed as one of the most distinctive and unique art traditions in the world. One of the most distinctive and widely-known art forms in NWC art is the totem pole. Totem poles were carved from large red cedar trees and erected in front of our villages, welcoming visitors who arrived by sea. The totem poles were carved with the crests and spirits of our clans and depicted significant events and clan histories.

MOIETIES & CLANS

The Tlingit and Haida societies are divided into halves called moieties, identified as Eagle and Raven, while the Tsimshian have four major clans, Raven, Eagle, Killer Whale, and Wolf. Oral traditions suggest that the Tlingit Eagle clans descended from a common ancestor. This interrelationship explains why so many crests are shared among the Eagle clans. The Ravens are assumed to be a more archaic population. These moieties are then sub-divided into clans and the clans are further sub-divided into social units called “houses.” The Tlingit are also divided into geographical regions called *kwáans* composed of resident clans who owned lands and waters in the area.

CRESTS

Crests are the most important symbols of our history and clan identity. They were acquired by our ancestors in the ancient past and represent crucial encounters with animal persons and spiritual beings. Crests that appear on totem poles, regalia, and clan objects are owned by their respective clans. Crests serve multiple purposes:

- They identify a clan and its membership. They distinguish its clan members apart from others and define relationships to other clans.
- They serve as title to the object on which it is placed and to the site and geographic region where the event occurred.
- They symbolize the special relationship a clan member has to the animal depicted on the crest.
- They embody the spirit or being depicted on the crest.

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1. SEALASKA CULTURAL VALUES POLE

This rare style of pole, which is carved on all sides, is the first of its kind in Alaska. The pole represents all three tribes of Southeast Alaska—Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian—and their four cultural values:

- Haa Aaní: Honoring & Utilizing Our Land
- Haa Latseení: Strength of Body, Mind, & Spirit
- Haa Shuká: Honoring our Ancestors & Future Generations
- Wooch Yáx: Social & Spiritual Balance

Design: The pole features (top to bottom) three human figures, Eagle and Raven, “Strong Man” ripping a sea lion in half, Sun and Moon within the Raven wings, Salmon, and Man Holding up the World.

Carver: TJ Young, Haida Master Artist, Hydaburg, with assistance from Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian carvers



2. & 3. TLINGIT EAGLE & RAVEN POLES

These poles honor the Eagle and Raven clans that once were present among our Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures. They include the crests used by clans of both moieties. The diseases brought by Westerners in the 1800s significantly impacted Native communities and the Native population. The population was reduced by nearly 50 percent and a number of villages were abandoned. Some clans became extinct or were severely diminished in numbers and never fully recovered. Other Eagle and Raven clans that survived continue to use these crests. These poles are dedicated to the Tlingit Eagle and Raven clans and to the ancestors of these clans.

Designs: *Eagle Pole:* Eagle, Wolf, Killer Whale, Thunderbird, Brown Bear; *Raven Pole:* Diving Whale, Raven, Frog, Beaver, Salmon.

Carvers: *Eagle Pole:* Tommy Joseph, Tlingit Master Artist, Sitka; *Raven Pole:* TJ Young, Haida Master Artist, Hydaburg



4. L'EENEIDÍ POLE

The Leeneidí clan are of the Raven moiety. Their name derives from Teel' Héeni (Dog Salmon Stream). They primarily live in the Áak'w Kwáan region and in what is now known as the Juneau Indian Village.

Design: The designs on the Leeneidí pole include four of their crests. The top design features a Star, which derives from one of their clan houses known as “Little Dipper House.” Below that are Dog Salmon and Lucky Lady, which were obtained through supernatural encounters. It also depicts a Leeneidí clan member. The lower design features Raven with the Box of Daylight. According to oral tradition, Raven opened the Box of Daylight and released the Sun, bringing daylight to the world.

Carver: Robert Mills, Tlingit Master Artist, Kake



5. WOOSHKKEETAAN POLE

The Wooshkeetaan clan are of the Eagle moiety. A living history and legendary migration persists in the story of a name, Wooshdaxk'í Tláa (Mother of Two Clans, a name carried today by a Kaagwaantaan woman) who was part of a group who left Gatheeni (Glacier Bay) after the ice fields began to advance.

Design: The designs on the Wooshkeetaan pole include three of their crests. The Eagle crest represents their moiety membership, Berners Bay Mountain represents their ancestral homeland, which continues to be a sacred place for the Wooshkeetaan, and the Shark crest was obtained through a supernatural encounter.

Carver: Nathan Jackson, Tlingit Master Artist, Saxman



6. KAAGWAANTAAN POLE

The Kaagwaantaan, who are of the Eagle moiety, are identified as the Wolf clan. They migrated northward from the Naas River and settled at Kax'noowu (Ground Hen Fort). They spread to Hoonah, the Chilkat area, and Sitka.

Design: The designs on the Kaagwaantaan totem pole include five of their crests. It depicts Killer Whale mounted on a clan hat, a Kaagwaantaan clan member, Killer Whale, Eagle, and Bear. These crests were obtained through supernatural encounters.

Carver: Nicholas Galanin, Tlingit/Unanga Master Artist, Sitka



7. HAIDA EAGLE POLE

The Haida of Southeast Alaska, known as the Kaigani Haida, migrated from Haida Gwaii in Canada to Southeast Alaska in the late 17th century and settled in several different sites on Prince of Wales Island largely concentrated in Hydaburg, Kasaan, and Craig.

Design: The Haida Eagle pole depicts a classic Eagle clan hat, the Eagle crest, Frog, Beaver, and Bear, all of which they obtained through supernatural encounters. The Haida believe that everything has a spirit, including elements of the universe such as the stars, moon, and sun.

Carver: Warren Peele, Haida Master Artist, Hydaburg



8. L'UKNAĀ.ÁDI POLE

The L'uknaĀ.ádi, who are of the Raven moiety, are identified as the Coho clan. The name derives from a salmon stream south of Klawock. They separated from the Gaanaxteidí clan after they migrated to the Chilkat area.

Design: The designs on the L'uknaĀ.ádi totem pole include White Frog, which was obtained through a supernatural encounter, Raven, Coho, and a clan member.

Carver: Mick Beasley, Tlingit Master Artist, Juneau



9. SHANGUKEIDÍ POLE

The Shangukeidí, who are of the Eagle moiety, are identified as the Thunderbird clan. Their oral traditions vary in identifying the clan's original homeland, which includes migration of the Naas River in British Columbia and a coastal migration.

Design: The designs on the Shangukeidí totem pole include four of their crests. The Thunderbird, White Bear, and House Lowered from the Sun were obtained through supernatural encounters. The bottom crest represents a historical encounter with a US military officer who failed to adequately compensate the Shangukeidí. As payment for this debt, they took his name and the military uniform.

Carver: Jackson Polys, Tlingit Master Artist, Saxman



10. ISHKAHÍTTAAN POLE

The Ishkahíttaan clan are of the Raven moiety. Their name derives from Ishkahít (House on a Fish Hole) that was located on the east bank of the Chilkat River. They live primarily in the Taku and Teslin regions of Southeast Alaska including the Juneau-Douglas area.

Design: The designs on the Ishkahíttaan totem pole include three of their crests. At the top is the Raven with the Box of Daylight, where Raven opened the box and released the Sun, bringing daylight to the world. The other two crests are the Frog and Sea Lion, which were obtained through supernatural encounters.

Carver: Jon Rowan, Tlingit Master Artist, Klawock



11. YANYEIDÍ POLE

The Yanyeidí are of the Eagle moiety. Their name derives from Yan Hít (Hemlock House) which was located on the Taku River.

Design: The designs on the Yanyeidí pole include the Eagle, two women traveling in a canoe under the Taku Glacier, Brown Bear, Wise Woman, and the Wolf, which were obtained through supernatural encounters. The story of two women traveling under the glacier has a song that was later adopted as a land claims song when the Tlingit were lobbying for the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

Carver: Joseph Young, Haida Master Artist, Hydaburg



12. HAIDA RAVEN POLE

The Haida of Southeast Alaska, known as the Kaigani Haida, migrated from Haida Gwaii in Canada to Southeast Alaska in the late 17th century and settled in several different sites on Prince of Wales Island, largely concentrated in Hydaburg, Kasaan, and Craig.

Design: The Haida Raven totem pole includes the Raven, Butterfly, Wolf, Killer Whale, and Bear, which were obtained through supernatural encounters. The Haida believe that everything has a spirit, including elements of the universe such as the sun, moon, and stars.

Carver: TJ Young, Haida Master Artist, Hydaburg



13. TSIMSHIAN POLE

A group of Canadian Tsimshian migrated from their homeland to Southeast Alaska with a missionary in 1887 when their cultural traditions were banned. They settled in Metlakatla, on Annette Island. The Tsimshian, nevertheless, continued to maintain their cultural values and beliefs. Today they are renowned for their Northwest Coast arts.

Design: The designs on the Tsimshian totem pole symbolize the four Tsimshian clans: Raven, Killer Whale, Eagle, and Wolf. Each of these four clan crests is paired with another figure: Killer Whale with Grizzly Bear, Raven with Frog, Eagle with Beaver, and Wolf with Crane. Like the Tlingit and Haida, the Tsimshian believe that everything has a spirit and their ancestors had spiritual encounters with these animal beings, which allowed the Tsimshian to claim them as crests.

Carver: David R. Boxley, Tsimshian Master Artist, Metlakatla

