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# 'They Were Known Accordingly': The Journey of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole at the Denver Art Museum

## Abstract

In 2019, two Kaigani Haida (Alaskan Haida) totem poles (Xaadas Gyáa'ang) were re-raised in the renovated Northwest Coast gallery of the Denver Art Museum. Lee Wallace and his family, descendants of Haida carver Dwight Wallace and Dwight's son John Wallace, led a ceremony that publicly acknowledged the Wallace family's connection to the two poles, reintroduced Haida cultural protocols into their care and viewing, and set the stage for future collaborations between the museum and family. This study explores the history of the poles and the intersecting forces that shaped their journey from Sukkwan, Alaska, to Denver, including shifting ideals of preservation, rights to cultural patrimony, and assertions of Indigenous sovereignty in Southeast Alaska. Through interviews with Lee Wallace, as well as DAM employees, this thesis situates the pole-raising ceremony within the larger and ongoing journey of the poles, as well as within pushes to decolonize or Indigenize museums.

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'They were known accordingly': the Journey of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole at the  
Denver Art Museum

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Presented to  
the Faculty of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences  
University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Penske Stranger McCormack  
June 2023  
Advisor: Dr. Kelly Fayard

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Author: Penske Stranger McCormack

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### **Abstract**

In 2019, two Kaigani Haida (Alaskan Haida) totem poles (Xaadas Gyáa'ang) were re-raised in the renovated Northwest Coast gallery of the Denver Art Museum. Lee Wallace and his family, descendants of Haida carver Dwight Wallace and Dwight's son John Wallace, led a ceremony that publicly acknowledged the Wallace family's connection to the two poles, reintroduced Haida cultural protocols into their care and viewing, and set the stage for future collaborations between the museum and family. This study explores the history of the poles and the intersecting forces that shaped their journey from Sukkwan, Alaska, to Denver, including shifting ideals of preservation, rights to cultural patrimony, and assertions of Indigenous sovereignty in Southeast Alaska. Through interviews with Lee Wallace, as well as DAM employees, this thesis situates the pole-raising ceremony within the larger and ongoing journey of the poles, as well as within pushes to decolonize or Indigenize museums.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Xaadas Gyáa'ang  
Haida Totem Poles

Gyáa'ang uu ts'úu iist tlaa hliyaagang.  
Totem poles are made out of red cedar.

Ts'úu í'waandaa iist uu tl' k'íidaangaan.  
They were made out of large red cedar trees.

Awáahl náay xáaku tl'áangaa gyáa'anggaangaan.  
They stood in front of houses.

Ahljii gaak uu tláa'an tl' únsiidaangaan,  
They were known accordingly,

Isgyáan nang gúust tl' k'wáalaas  
And they also knew

háns gán tl' únsadaan  
which clan they belonged to. (Lawrence 1973, 16)

### Introduction

In November of 2019, a pole-raising ceremony was held at the Denver Art Museum (DAM). Two Kaigani Haida (Alaskan Haida) totem poles, a storytelling pole and a memorial pole, were raised and reinstalled in the freshly renovated Northwest Coast gallery in the presence of the descendants of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Haida carver Dwight Wallace (Gid K'wáajuus). Lee Wallace, his daughter Markel Wallace, his grandnieces Andrea Cook and Valesha Patterson, and Valesha's son Tristen led the ceremony, guiding the poles into their new places and soothing them with song and drumming. Lee Wallace told the story of the Land Otter Pole. The ceremony, as well as the feast and gift-giving that took place afterwards, “generated conversations about collaboration and stewardship, the importance of cultural protocols, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge” (Lukavic and Patrello 2022, 116). Importantly, it was a public acknowledgement of

the connection between the totem poles and the family and established a relationship between the museum and the family. It also reintroduced Haida cultural protocols to how the poles are viewed and cared for in a Western museum context—an input which had been absent since the poles came to the DAM.

The term “totem poles” refers to the monumental pole-carving practices of several Native American and First Nations groups of the region commonly referred to as the Northwest Coast. Poles have specific names in their respective communities, and different Native communities have different practices or beliefs surrounding poles and pole-carving. Broadly speaking, in their traditional contexts, totem poles keep and display some form of history or memory that is specific to the family, clan, lineage, or other group that owns them. Though there is often some overlap between different traditions, for the purposes of this thesis I am speaking specifically about Haida totem poles, or Xaadas gyáa’ang (Kaigani Haida). Gyáa’ang translates to “man standing up” and refers specifically to house frontal poles, but there are several other types of poles that will be discussed in Chapter Three (Moore 2018, 31). As is reflected in the short story at the beginning of this chapter, the clan or lineage a Haida pole is owned by is intrinsic to its meaning. However, totem poles have been consistently misinterpreted and misconstrued by non-Native audiences, including notable anthropologists. As monumental art forms, they were widely targeted for collection by museums in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while anti-Native government policies and missionary activity in the U.S. and Canada sought to eliminate totem pole-carving and raising as a means of disrupting Native lifeways. Many totem poles were stolen from Native villages while the villages were seasonally unoccupied. In other cases, totem poles were sold by individuals as a means of survival in the economic, societal, and political contexts of settler colonialism.

As this thesis will show, the legal ownership and exhibition of Haida totem poles by non-Native museums presents inherent tensions with the cultural protocols they are situated within (Krpmotich 2014, 109). Created within systems of reciprocity and respect between moieties and lineages, they are one of many kinds of highly valued property that record family histories and

symbolize the rights and status a lineage has earned. Traditionally, they are not physically preserved, and are allowed to return to the earth as part of a natural life cycle. However, collectors of Northwest Coast art saw the physical deterioration of totem poles as a sign that they were abandoned, and commonly used this as a justification for their theft and preservation in museums. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC-a US federal government sponsored work relief program run during the Great Depression) followed this same logic when implementing the totem pole restoration project in Southeast Alaska, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Five. Characterizing the totem poles and their village sites as “abandoned” and their tradition at risk of dying out, the CCC employed Native carvers to remove historic poles from villages, restore them, and reinstall them in sites where they could be physically preserved and viewed by non-Native audiences. The importance of physical preservation of cultural heritage is still leveraged by Western museums to justify their control of Native cultural belongings; the focus is on the physical integrity of the material. However, in many Indigenous perspectives, the focus is on the participation of belongings in cultural lifeways. Furthermore, Haida concepts of ownership over inalienable property like totem poles have complex implications for museums’ right of possession under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA, passed by US Congress in 1990). So, in many ways, the manners in which totem poles are presented and cared for in museums are contradictory to traditional cultural protocols. However, through the continuous shifts and cultural survivance, Northwest Coast Native communities have adapted the traditions surrounding totem poles and continue their ceremonial meaning in vastly different contexts.

In the context of pushes to “decolonize” or “Indigenize” museums, the two totem poles at the Denver Art Museum sit at an interesting juncture. They were sold, or alienated, from their traditional ownership by Haida master carver John Wallace, the son of Dwight Wallace and the clan leader with the inherited rights to the poles at that point in time. When employees at the DAM reached out to the descendants of Dwight Wallace, they were driven by a sense of obligation, and a sense that involving the family in the care of the poles during such a crucial change was a

prerequisite, not an option. In many ways, this sense of obligation is indicative of large fundamental shifts in museology regarding Indigenous sovereignty over cultural heritage and the importance of collaboration with originating communities. The ceremony itself also left a strong impression on employees and shifted their perspectives on the poles and the larger collection, which is connected to ways in which Indigenous sovereignty is lived out in negotiated spaces (Clifford 2013, 88). However, the DAM's stewardship of the poles remains an uneasy one, both in the eyes of the employees, and from the perspective of Lee Wallace, as it is understood that "Haida concepts of tangible and symbolic property do not conform to—and even supersede—the museum's stewardship of the house frontal and memorial pole" (Lukavic and Patrello 2022, 129).

The goal of this thesis is not to draw larger generalizations based off of this case-study, nor is it specifically focused on the pole-raising ceremony itself, which is described eloquently and in-depth in Lukavic and Patrello (2022). Rather, my goal is to situate the pole-raising ceremony within the larger and ongoing journey of the poles, and examine the constellation of practices, concepts, and forces that have shaped and continue to shape that journey. I do so by analyzing personal interviews of Lee Wallace and three DAM employees present for the pole raising ceremony, as well as a discussion of salient topics in how totem poles came to be in museum collections, what aspects of their stewardship challenge traditional cultural protocols, and how Northwest Coast groups use Western property language to assert their ownership. Grounded in a theoretical framework of critical museology and museum anthropology, I describe the story, but a story of the journey of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997).

### **A Note on Terms**

The word "totem" is a misnomer, originating from the anthropological term of totemism (Algonquin, *dodem*), and refers to an animal that a kinship group descends from (Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 5). While the term misconstrues the meaning of carved poles, it is still in use colloquially by Native communities who carve poles. "Crest poles" and "monumental poles" are also used in some scholarly contexts. However, I have learned through my research that using

these terms may be considered to be dodging the real issue, in that nothing will correctly describe carved poles and their contexts except for their term in the language of their community. I therefore will be using the general term “totem poles” for the purposes of this thesis, while acknowledging that the term “totem” implies a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose and meaning of the poles.

It also should be noted that when I use the term “totem poles,” for the purposes of this thesis I am referring to poles that are considered to be clan or lineage property, or otherwise the property of communities. Some totem poles that are carved by Native carvers may not have been carved using cultural protocols, such as in tourist contexts. While poles carved for such contexts should be respected and not considered in any way a dilution of cultural practice or skill, this thesis concerns the ethical implications of museums housing those poles that are clan property or community owned. Totem poles in non-Native contexts that Native carvers and communities consider as being culturally appropriate in place are therefore not being addressed here.

I will be using words and names from different Native languages, some of which have multiple spellings that are appropriate or have been spelled inappropriately in the past. I have endeavored to use the most recent spellings from the most direct sources I encountered, but I am aware that a given spelling may not be appropriate or remain appropriate. I welcome all corrections or specifications in this regard. Furthermore, the language of the Haida people has multiple dialects and different spellings for those dialects. Xaad Kíl is the Gaw Tlagée (Old Masset) Haida dialect, and Xaayda Kil is the HIGaagilda (Skidegate) Haida dialect. Subdialects of Xaad Kíl are spoken in Alaska, and those subdialects are spoken of collectively here as Kaigani Haida. Lachler (2010) points out in the *Dictionary of Alaskan Haida* that, even within dialects, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar vary (9-11). When I am referencing a source using a different dialect of Haida, I will specify which dialect. Otherwise, I will use Kaigani Haida sourced from the *Dictionary of Alaskan Haida*. I will not italicize words from the referenced Native languages, as this labels Native languages as “foreign” and Other in the ancestral homelands in which they have been spoken for far longer than English. This is a choice on my part, which I

recognize is not the only appropriate approach or one that will necessarily always be considered appropriate.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, I refer to Lee Wallace, Markel Wallace, Andrea Cook, Valesha Patterson, and Valesha's son Tristen collectively as "the Wallace family" when referring to their role as representatives for the family at the pole-raising ceremony.

### **Chapter Summary**

As my thesis research follows the journey of the poles, I have oriented my chapters to reflect that journey while grounding discussions in the necessary context. Chapter Two describes my research questions and the research design I used to pursue them. This chapter also discusses interlocking themes in methodologies that shape my research: the critique of traditional "research" as an imperialist and colonialist paradigm, the Indigenous research paradigm, desire-centered as opposed to damage-centered research, and Native "survival." I discuss similarities between these ideas and those discussed in ethnographic portraiture, which, though not a direct methodological framework for my thesis, has strongly influenced my research goals and methodologies. The chapter ends with my positionality statement, in which I discuss my positionality as a white researcher.

Chapter Three introduces the stories told on the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, as well as what is generally known about when and how they were carved and raised. The chapter then provides a short background contextualizing Kaigani Haida presence in southeast Alaska by discussing: the origins of the Haida people on Xaadláa Gwáayaay, now known as Haida Gwaii; the migration of Haida people into Lingít Aaní, or Tlingit land; European contact; the impacts of settler colonialism; and ongoing Native resistance to the settler colonial project up to the present day. The chapter then situates Haida totem pole carving and raising within Haida lifeways surrounding kinship and lineage property, including the origins of Haida pole carving as told by John Wallace in the story of the Master Carver, to ground the understanding that Haida totem poles cannot be separate from family, yahgwdáng (Kaigani Haida: respect), and the cultural

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<sup>1</sup> See Baker et al. 2021.

protocols that reflect these. The chapter concludes with a short summary of the lineages of Dwight Wallace, his wife Sarah Wallace, and his son John Wallace, as well as the villages where they were from. Taken all together, this chapter serves to ground the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole within the Haida lifeways and cultural protocols that they were created within and still belong to.

Chapter Four contains the theoretical background that guides my thesis, which is organized into three sections. The first establishes museums as colonial and imperial structures, U.S. museums in American anthropology, and briefly discusses the impact of settler colonialism on the way in which Native American belongings were and are collected and exhibited in U.S. museums. The second discusses critical museology and museum anthropology. The third defines the concepts of museum “decolonization” and “Indigenization,” museum collaboration with originating communities as decolonizing and Indigenizing processes, and how the concept of the “Contact Zone” has been applied to, and critiqued in, the museum context. The chapter then includes a literature review, which examines relevant themes and topics as they apply to totem poles, organized in three sections. The literature in the first discusses and critiques how anthropologists formed and naturalized the concept of the Northwest Coast, and how their collecting practices regarding Haida totem poles and other highly valued property fits into this idea. The literature in the second section discusses how concepts of kinship and ownership over Haida totem poles conflict with Western property language and museum ownership, as well as case studies regarding the ways in which those conflicts are discussed and resolved. The literature in the third section discusses the field of conservation as it relates to the Western museological priority on physical preservation, bringing that priority into discussion with different Indigenous perspectives regarding the meaning and care of objects, and how denial of those perspectives undermines or denies Indigenous sovereignty. The debates and considerations within the physical preservation of Haida totem poles are specifically discussed.

Chapter Five provides an overview of how the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole came to the DAM. The chapter first gives an overview of the CCC totem pole restoration project and the

motivations behind it, including the perception of Haida and Tlingit totem poles and villages as “abandoned” and the desire to physically preserve them as part of a pan-American artistic identity. The chapter then provides an overview of the life of Haida Master Carver John Wallace and his role in the CCC totem pole restoration project. Next the chapter discusses John Wallace’s choice to sell the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole at the 1939 San Francisco Golden Gate exhibition, followed by an overview of the reaction of the Forest Service to the poles’ sale. Finally, the chapter gives a brief account of the ways in which the poles were viewed and cared for in between their installation in 1971 and the DAM renovation, before concluding with a brief description regarding John Wallace’s Master Carver pole.

Chapter Six discusses the pole raising ceremony itself, beginning with the poles being lowered at the beginning of the renovation project and following the process through to the ceremony and feast. The chapter then analyzes the reflections of three DAM employees present for the ceremony: Chris Patrello, Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Indigenous Arts of North America; Gina Laurin, Senior Objects Conservator, and Dakota Hoska (Oglála Lakǰóta), Assistant Curator of Native Arts. Their reflections are organized and discussed around the four themes of community and collaboration, decolonization and Indigenization, Indigenous belongings in collections, and the connection between the Wallace family and the poles. The chapter concludes with my observations of the public reopening of the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native art gallery on October 24, 2021, the first time I saw the poles in person and the first time they were on display for the public since they were lowered in 2017.

Chapter Seven is oriented around my interview with Lee Wallace regarding the pole raising ceremony and the poles’ stewardship at the DAM. I frame our discussion as a discussion about the future of the poles, as Lee Wallace’s reflections focused on fundamental questions of whether the poles should be at the DAM and, if not, what should be done. Though he does not come to a conclusion, he discusses how John Wallace’s sale of the poles, the need for the poles to be physically preserved, and his own experiences regarding repatriations as a tribal leader complicate and inform his thoughts on the matter. The chapter then supplements his discussions



of the sale of the poles with a discussion of Haida totem poles as inalienable property, which Lee Wallace made clear at the beginning of the interview. Lee Wallace also discusses the practice of making copies of totem poles, as well as the importance of stories to totem poles and their meaning. I then briefly discuss the use of memorandums of understanding, held in trust agreements, or other forms of shared custody agreements that provide alternatives to both legal and physical repatriations.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. The chapter begins with a concluding discussion of the connecting themes in the ongoing journey of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, revisiting the research questions. The chapter then provides an overview of other totem poles being carved and raised now, and the role they play as assertions of Indigenous presence and sovereignty as well as family history and connection to the land. The chapter then includes an auto-ethnography section, where I briefly describe the impact my time in Ketchikan had on the way in which I see and understand my research topic. I then discuss Lee Wallace's thoughts about possibly carving a totem pole to be erected in Juneau. I finish with a personal interest of mine that I was not able to find conclusive information on: the nature in which totem poles are alive or contain life. I end with these sections to, while concluding my thesis, convey that what is discussed here is ongoing, and this version of the story is one version and one moment in a continuity that reaches on into the future.

## Chapter Two: Research

### Research Design

This project aims to trace the route of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, from their carving to their current place at the DAM, to possibilities in their future, and examine the shifting tides around them that affect how they are viewed, valued, and treated, and by whom. The goal of the project is to provide an in-depth examination of the poles' lives and the forces that have shaped their journey, as well as the perspectives of those invested in their current stewardship. While much has been written about Haida totem poles, especially in the case of those that were stolen, they are less frequently discussed as inalienable cultural property, which highly contextualizes their stewardship by groups other than their clan or lineage. It also shapes how museum professionals view and interact with them, as museum ethics shift to incorporate the perspectives of source, or descendant, communities in the care of Indigenous culture (Peers and Brown 2003, 1). The journey of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, though specific, may reflect certain truths about the larger discourses of decolonization and Indigenization of museology in the U.S. In doing so, I aim to center that the poles are still owned by the Haida lineage, or clan, that they always have, and that the ultimate rights to the story of the poles will always belong with them.

Shaped by consistencies I noted across literature about the museum collection and stewardship of totem poles, my research questions are:

- How did the poles come to the Denver Art Museum? How do the historical contexts of how they came to the Denver Art Museum shape discussions around them and their potential futures?

- How have concepts of preservation surrounding the Land Otter Pole and the Memorial Pole changed over time? How are these related to the operational museology surrounding them? How are these related to shifts in critical museology?
- How are these changes related to differing understandings of ownership, scholarly privilege, cultural preservation, cultural sovereignty, and the meaning of the poles themselves?
- What is the significance of the relationship between the Wallace family and DAM as shaped by the collaboration with the poles?
- Can these relationships and changes to operational museology be described as decolonizing or Indigenizing? If so, how?

These questions, while broad, are umbrellas beneath which more specific questions surrounding the poles may be asked and investigated.

My research includes a review of the literature surrounding Haida totem poles, as well as the stewardship of Northwest Coast Art in museums, semi-structured interviews, and auto-ethnography. I also did in-person archival research at the DAM and the Tongass Historical Museum and observed the first public reception of the poles at the Denver Art Museum at the reopening of the Martin building on October 24, 2021. My research also includes auto-ethnography drawn from my experiences as an intern at Ketchikan Museums. These methodologies are partially guided by insights of ethnographic portraiture. While the methodology is not fully applied here, as it is structured for a long-term sociological study, key aspects have been influential. These methodologies form a qualitative study telling a story of the poles' journey and the decisions regarding their stewardship.

### **Case Study and Sight Selection**

I was introduced to this case study after attending Chris Patrello's virtual talk "On Behalf of the Family: Discussing the Legacy and Meaning of a Haida Pole Raising Ceremony" in December 2020. I selected it as a case study for my thesis after meeting with Patrello, the coordinator of the

pole-raising ceremony and, at the time, Andrew W. Mellon Post-Doctoral Curatorial Fellow of Native Arts at the DAM. I selected it because it is an example of totem pole stewardship in a non-traditional environment, a collaboration between a museum and a Native group, and the incorporation of Native cultural protocols into museum practice. Most importantly for myself and my priorities, I selected it because Patrello was supportive of my interest and, while in no way promising their participation, Patrello believed members of the Wallace family present at the ceremony would potentially be interested in participating in my thesis research, and that my interest would not be an imposition or inappropriate.

The DAM renovation included a large-scale reinstall of the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Art Galleries, as well as the Indigenous Arts of North America Gallery. The Indigenous Arts of North America Collection is made of over 18,000 objects representing artists of over 250 Indigenous nations (<https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/collection/indigenous-arts-north-america>, accessed 2/22/2023). As part of this, the DAM Native arts department formed its Indigenous Community Advisory Council to inform how the museum represents Native people (<https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/blog/dams-indigenous-community-advisory-council>, accessed 2/22/2023).

As part of its land acknowledgment, the DAM also makes three commitments:

- Building authentic and sustained relationships with Indigenous people at multiple touch points across the museum.
- Centering, elevating and supporting Indigenous people in our programs and practices and providing meaningful access to our resources including collections, programs, tools, and spaces.
- Actively listening to and integrating Indigenous voices to grow as an inclusive and accessible space. (<https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/our-commitment-indigenous-communities>, accessed 2/22/2023)

While my research is not on the overall renovation itself or the broad implementation of these commitments by the DAM, the renovation of the galleries, the formation of the advisory council, and the statement of the museum's commitments to Indigenous communities all reflect the shifts in museology regarding the stewardship and representation of Indigenous belongings through collaboration with originating communities (Peers and Brown 2003).

In the summer of 2022, I lived and worked in Ketchikan, Alaska as an intern with Museums Alaska, Inc. I worked at Ketchikan Museums, which encompasses the Tongass Historical Museum and the Totem Heritage Center (THC). I did not conduct interviews or any other research on human subjects, as determined by the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) during my summer internship. My work there primarily helped direct me to more in-depth literature regarding my case study, as well as informed and refined my own understanding of the way in which historic Haida and Tlingit totem poles are understood and discussed, as I conducted archival research for projects separate from this thesis. Though I include photographs from the Ketchikan Museums collection, my experiences in Ketchikan primarily informed the way in which I understand and speak about totem poles. I also visited Totem Bight Historical Park and Saxman Village Totem Park during this time. While these latter visits did not necessarily contribute historical information, they were invaluable for experiencing totem poles and the way in which they behave, sculpturally, in space. Therefore, I include a brief auto-ethnography section.

### **Participants**

The informants for this project were contacted based on their connection to one of two groups who participated in the pole-raising ceremony: the Wallace family, and museum professionals who witnessed and participated in the pole-raising ceremony. Participants were contacted through snowball-sampling, being put in contact with me both through one another and through shared acquaintances, in all cases via email (Bernard 2017, 146). Dr. Christina Kreps introduced me first to Chris Patrello, Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Indigenous Arts of North America at the DAM, in December 2020. Patrello was the first participant contacted, and he supported my research at the DAM. Though John Lukavic did not participate in my research, he

assisted with and signed my Letter of Support for my IRB research. Patrello put me in contact with Gina Laurin, Associate Director of Conservation and Technical Studies and Senior Objects Conservator at the DAM, and Dakota Hoska (Oglála Lakǰóta), Assistant Curator of Native Arts at the DAM, both of whom participated. Patrello also reached out to the Wallace family via email on my behalf. However, I was ultimately introduced to Lee Wallace, again via email, by Dr. Angela Parker (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Cree), Assistant Professor of the Department of History at the University of Denver and friend of the Wallace family. I was introduced to Parker by my advisor Dr. Kelly Fayard (Poarch Band of Creek Indians). Because of time-constraints during my time in Ketchikan, concerns regarding the safety of the Wallace family during an ongoing pandemic, as well as respect for their busy schedules, I was not put in contact with other members of the Wallace family.

### **Interviews and Analysis**

Participation took the form of 1 hour- to 1.5 hour-long semi-structured interviews, both in person and over video call. Separate sets of questions were designed for the DAM employees and for Lee Wallace, reflecting different relationships to the poles and the ceremony. Questions were sent to the participants via email to review prior to the interview. Interview questions are included in Appendix A. Participants were given a physical and digital copy of the IRB informed consent form, which established that they did not have to participate, they could cease participation at any time including after the interview, and they could redirect the topic of conversation at any time based on their comfort and what they felt was most relevant. The form also included consent to be recorded, direct quotes transcribed and included in my thesis, and consent to be published, with options to opt out of each. After beginning recording, I briefly went over these understandings and recorded verbal agreement. As a semi-structured interview, I asked all my pre-set questions and, based on responses, asked follow-up questions formed by perceived connections between topics, including relevant topics I knew of in the existing literature. Though questions were set out in a default order, I changed the order of questions if one connected to the response of another question. The time spent on each question also

responded to the individual participant's area of interest and where they guided the conversation. After these questions were asked, I asked about and gave time for any reflections or opinions not discussed in the interview beforehand.

Questions for the DAM employees were grouped into four main sections. Questions in the "general" section concerned the individual's position at the museum and relationship to Indigenous collections, as well as their broader opinions regarding decolonization and Indigenization in museums, the stewardship of Indigenous collections, and collaboration with Indigenous communities. Questions in the "poles" section concerned more specific perspectives and experiences regarding the poles themselves. Questions in the "ceremony" section concerned specific perspectives and experiences regarding the ceremony. Questions in the "ongoing relationship" section concerned specific perspectives and hopes for the museum's relationship with the Wallace family. Questions in the "general" section were either asked first or last, depending upon the preference of the participants.

In recognition of Lee Wallace as a Haida Elder taking time and effort to meet with me, as well as in acknowledgment that he was not meeting with me as part of a salaried position, I provided Lee Wallace with compensation for his time in the form of a \$25 Visa gift card and a small gift, both of which were included in my IRB project. I began my interview with Lee Wallace by confirming appropriate words and names to use, including the term "totem pole," the terms "replica" and "copy," the name "Dwight Wallace," and the titles "Land Otter Pole" and "Memorial Pole." I also asked how he would explain the practice of Haida monumental pole carving and the potlatch to someone without a Haida cultural understanding, to ensure that my understanding was as grounded as possible. Questions were centered around the topics of the poles being at the museum, the ceremony itself, totem pole carving, the preservation and conservation of totem poles, totem poles being in museums, and museums in general. However, the interview itself was primarily guided by Lee Wallace and the perspectives he wanted to share, with the questions providing support for this discussion. In the conducted interview, we were not able to address

questions about museums in general, and because of the incredibly busy nature of summer in Alaska, we were not able to find a time to schedule a follow-up interview.

All in-person interviews were masked and took place only after COVID-19 vaccination rollout, and with the participants' full comfort in the setting and time. Audio data collected through face-to-face interviews was recorded on my iPhone. Interviews that took place over Zoom, or Microsoft Teams were also recorded on my iPhone, with backups recorded via those programs when available. Audio recordings were then initially transcribed to text using the transcription software Descript, then checked manually word for word. The abstraction performed in the translation from audio to text is not a negligible one and should be acknowledged as another way in which my perspective consciously and unconsciously shapes the story (Kvale 1996, 178). Transcriptions were shared with participants once completed for the opportunity to edit, clarify, or omit anything contained within. The direct quotes included were lightly edited to remove repeated words and words or phrases that were judged to be filled pauses, such as "like," "you know," and "uh." Larger phrases that cut off, or were immediately rephrased, were also cut out, indicated by "...". This was done for clarity of reading and is not intended to cast judgments upon individuals' speaking voices.

Interviews were analyzed through open coding of the transcriptions, which was done by highlighting on the digital document and organizing direct quotes via Excel spreadsheet beneath identified themes. However, while I did analyze Lee Wallace's transcribed interview using open coding, I decided, for the purposes of this thesis, that it was more useful and respectful to include the entirety of his perspectives on each topic rather than breaking down individual statements or trying to make connections across what he spoke about. This can be roughly ascribed to a grounded-theory approach. I have tried to ensure that no assumptions, theories, hypotheses, or themes were introduced to the analysis of each participant's contribution that did not spring directly from the participants and research. Participants were given the opportunity to review the analysis of their interviews and to reject interpretations that are not true to their experiences in the thesis draft. This is an attempt to acknowledge the ethnographic research as a co-construction of



narrative, as well as a commitment to “reporting back” and “sharing knowledge” as Smith (2012) describes them, as a way to hold myself accountable to the people my thesis represents (16).

### **Methodology**

With the history of anthropological research considered, the idea of “research” in Indigenous contexts can be a fraught one. In the chapter “Anthropologists and Other Friends,” Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) criticizes the harmful trends among even well-meaning anthropologists who conduct extractive research on Native American communities. Deloria addresses the ongoing problem of non-Native anthropologists who compile theories on the lives and culture of Native people and claim to represent it accurately, both without taking into consideration the social, political, and economic conditions Native communities are situated within, and without consulting with the appropriate people about their interpretations. In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori, Ngāti Awa, and Ngāti Porou iwi) addresses the harm that Euroamerican research has caused and continues to cause Indigenous communities, and what can be done to imagine new ways forward using understandings of colonial frameworks, Western methodologies, and Indigenous pedagogies.

Susan A. Miller (Seminole) (2008) explains the Indigenous paradigm that emerged from global Indigenous activism of the 1970s by centering on four main concepts: “Indigeness, sovereignty, colonization, and decolonization” (10). This theoretical framework is defined and distinguished by the assumption that “the cosmos is a living being and that the cosmos and all its parts have consciousness,” and that scientific and other non-Indigenous worldviews that ignore this reality open up pathways for harm to be done to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Sovereignty and self-determination are inherent to Indigenous sovereignty. The term “sovereignty” is complicated by its association with European concepts of sovereigns and the control they can exert over other people’s lives (13). Kanien’kahaka (Mohawk) political scientist Gerald (Taiiaki) Alfred also argues that “sovereignty” in the context of the European nation-state locates rights and power within the state, whereas Indigenous political theory recognizes rights and power within the individual. In her 2009 open letter to researchers, Eve Tuck (Unangaŋ) calls

for a moratorium on damage-centered research within disenfranchised and dispossessed communities, specifically within Native nations. She identifies the ongoing problem of researchers focusing on damage or depletion, therefore framing entire communities under the structures of experienced harm. To address this, Tuck advocates for a desire-centered research paradigm that, while acknowledging loss and damage that is present, includes and elevates hope, wisdom, visions of the future, and the complexity of lived experiences (417). Tuck discusses damage-centered research in the wake of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People in 2007, the fourth International Polar Year from 2007-2009, and a general growth in researchers wanting to document the harm that Native communities have experienced from settler colonialism. However, a focus on documenting oppression acts as an extension of centuries of extractive, colonizing research in which Native communities are both “overresearched” and rendered invisible by subsuming their lives within settler narratives of researchers (Tuck 2009, 411-12). While many communities used damage-centered research to accomplish goals, Tuck pushes against the assumption that damage-centered research effectively does what it claims to, and questions, even if it does work, “are the wins worth the long term costs of *thinking of ourselves as damaged?*” (415, emphasis in original).

This is connected to the idea of Native “survance,” which George Vizenor (Minnesota Chippewa) (2008) writes about in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Vizenor writes that “Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name” (13). Survivance subverts the connotations of victimhood inherent in the word “survival” to include resistance, vitality of traditions, and courage, as well as continuation into the future. These concepts of desire-centered research, as well as Native survivance, are central to my research methodology, as is the need to carefully balance them with the need to “speak the hard truths about colonialism” and not deny the ongoing system of settler colonialism or claim that it is an event that has passed (Lonetree 2012, 164).

I use the practices outlined in Schensul and LeCompte's *Ethnography in Action: A Mixed Methods Approach* (2016) to structure my goals, attitudes, and understandings regarding community collaboration and consultation. Schensul and LeCompte define ethnography in action as "the use of ethnography as a way of learning, knowing, synthesizing, and interpreting directed to the accomplishment of specific action-oriented tasks and desired outcomes" (4). This is related back to Sol Tax's action anthropology, which not only acknowledges but embraces the disruptions that anthropological research causes communities, so long as "the results are imminently useful to the community and easily outweigh the disturbance to it," as determined by the community itself and not by a paternalistic philanthropic determination that one has done good (Tax 1975, 515). While there are flaws in the way Tax's action anthropology was carried out, it signaled an attempt to address and rectify the harms intrinsic to anthropological research.

I incorporate these methodologies into my research in a number of ways. I shared transcripts and my thesis draft with my participants to hold myself accountable to their perspectives. I do not bring my own analysis or deconstruction to Lee Wallace's thoughts about the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, instead trying to support the points he makes with my own research and connections. Most notably, I completed an internship with Ketchikan Museums in the summer of 2022. I worked on a variety of projects, including an inventory of the historic Haida and Tlingit totem poles housed at the Totem Heritage Center (THC). I designed this project, guided by my summer supervisors and coworkers, to best be of long-term benefit to the community by supporting ongoing projects surrounding the poles. Though living in Ketchikan was useful for furthering my thesis research, I was also motivated by the ideals of ethnography in action and action anthropology. Because of the scale of my thesis topic, the conditions of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and my own place in the discussions and relationships surrounding the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, this thesis focuses more on providing a discussion that could potentially inform later action, rather than encompassing action itself. However, I also wanted to be of practical service to ongoing efforts to care for totem poles appropriately, as determined by their communities.

To all these ends, my approach to writing out my research is highly influenced by the concept of ethnographic portraiture. The goal of an ethnographic portrait is to use detailed description of perspectives and contexts to both produce a portrait of the case study and reflect larger ideas. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) relate portraiture to Clifford Geertz's "thick description," and his understanding of ethnography as interpretive; portraiture urges balancing these "humanistic" elements of interpretation, subjectivity, and imagination with "rigorous and systematic attention to the details of social reality and human experience" (9). This involves a dedication to both aesthetic and empirical description. Because portraiture is a sociological approach and, in some ways, dependent upon a relationship between the researcher and the subject(s) of their portrait over time, I do not use it fully as a methodological framework. However, I relate key aspects of it to what has been previously discussed in this section. Portraiture attempts to push against what Tuck (2009) calls damage-centered research, searching for places of "goodness" rather than failure, while being careful not to impose personal definitions of good, or deny difficult realities, complexities, and truths (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997, 9). Portraiture acknowledges that research is inherently interventive within people's lives, and that imagining research as positivist or objective is both incorrect and neglects the potential for transformation (11). In contrast, portraiture positions the researcher as a storyteller, making the acknowledgment of one's own subjectivity and hand in shaping the narrative of research not a weakness, but an opportunity for a more truthful story to be told (13). Finally, portraiture does not claim to tell the story, but a story. I therefore use the methodology primarily as a tool for viewing my own role in my research, as well as in the writing and telling of this particular story.

### **Positionality Statement**

Though Smith (2012) explicitly states that her book is not a how-to manual nor primarily a resource for non-Indigenous researchers, the considerations within it are incredibly relevant (9). Among many other specific ethical considerations, she brings up judgments that may be made of a non-Indigenous researcher:

These questions are simply part of a larger set of judgements on criteria that a researcher cannot prepare for, such as: Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other

baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix up our generator? Can they actually do anything? (10)

I bring up these questions as part of addressing the ethical consideration of my own positionality.

I am a white researcher, just at the beginning of their career, who is not an expert in anthropology, art, or totem poles, and certainly an outsider to the Wallace family and the Haida people. My attempt to try to tell a story about the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, as an outsider, is an ethically rife one that must continuously be reckoned with through transparency, humility, and accountability.

I remain conscious that, while I researched a certain span of time, the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole are connected to an endlessly unfolding web of lineages, histories, stories and truths, connecting them to other poles, carvers, families, clans, places, and resistance. Focusing on their lives within the museum world cannot separate it from those connections and meanings. Following the words of Smith (2012), as well as the goals of action anthropology (Tax 1975) and ethnography in action (Schensul and LeCompte 2016) my goal for this research and my own professional practice is for it to be useful to the concerned community in the manner they dictate. While I am not trying to make broad claims about the state of decolonization and Indigenization in the U.S., and it is impossible to synthesize everything that is important about my subject matter, I believe that an ethnographic portrait of the Land Otter Pole and the Memorial Pole, in its specificity, has the potential to have an impact on discussions of decolonization and collaboration in “operational museology” (Shelton 2013), or conventional, Eurocentric museum practice.

Chapter Three: Where They Were



Figure 1: The Land Otter Pole in front of the clan house in Sukkwan. "Totem pole and house remains at Sukkwan Village." Image Courtesy of Ketchikan Museums: THS 75.11.8.126



Figure 2: "Totem poles at Sukkwan Village." The memorial pole is the leftmost pole. Image courtesy of Ketchikan Museums: KM 77.3.5.92



Figure 3: "Sukkwan Village: Houses and totem poles." The Land Otter Pole is in front of the second house from right. The memorial pole is at the far left. Image courtesy of Ketchikan Museums: 75.11.8.43



Figure 4: "Sukkwan Village: houses and totem poles." The Land Otter Pole is in front of the middle house. Image courtesy of Ketchikan Museums: THS 69.11.2.1

## Introduction

I found the photos above in the last few days of my internship at Ketchikan Museums. I had spent much of the summer working on a project for the Totem Heritage Center (THC), going through the decades of files they had for each pole and compiling the information in one place. To that end, I had spent weeks scrutinizing, digitizing, and otherwise interacting with pictures of the totem poles at the Tlingit villages of Village Island and Tongass Village, as well as poles at the Kaigani Haida village of Old Kasaan, in order to connect the photographs with the poles. Though it was difficult at first for someone with no experience at it, I had gotten better at recognizing individual poles quickly in the grainy black and white photos. When I opened the folder of pictures for Sukkwan, I thought I was going to need to go through a similar process of peering and cross-referencing to correctly identify the poles I was looking for. Instead, the first picture above was on



the top of the stack. Each subsequent photograph I flipped through, the Land Otter Pole was visible right away. When the memorial pole was visible, it was evident as well. It felt sort of sublime to suddenly be looking at them, not in a museum, but out where they had been, the Land Otter Pole in front of the clan house, the Memorial Pole looking over the water. It felt like having unexpected, honored guests.

This chapter will first give the names, lineages, and connections of some of the individuals connected with the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole as is present in existing literature, followed by Lee Wallace's introduction of himself. I will then discuss the origin of the Land Otter Pole and the Memorial Pole and convey the stories told through the poles. I will then give a short background of Kaigani Haida presence and history in Southeast Alaska as has been discussed in literature, beginning with one of many histories drawn from Haida cosmology, and continuing through the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 up to contemporary struggles. Next, I will contextualize totem pole carving and raising within the larger constellation of Haida kinship, potlatches, and clan property. Finally, I will close with an overview of how many Land Otter Poles have been carved, and Lee Wallace's thoughts on there being multiple carvings.

### **Individuals**

Dwight Wallace (Gid Kwáajuss) is yahgu 'laanaas Raven clan, from the Haida village of Klinkwan, the name of which comes from a Tlingit word meaning "Shellfish Town." His wife Sarah and her brother, qaskwáay, are sralándaas Eagle clan, as is Dwight and Sarah's son, John Wallace, following Haida matrilineal kinship structures. Sarah is from Sukkwan (saxq'wa.áan). Wallace is considered one of the preeminent Kaigani Haida master carvers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was descended from other carvers. It has been theorized that John Wallace may have been given the Haida name of his paternal grandfather, Gaiuda or Gaowdaul, who was also a carver, due to an early interest in carving totem poles (Wright 2001, 313). John Wallace's wife Mae Skillie Wallace (jotsingah) was yahgu 'laanaas Raven clan, and her grandfather (first name not known) who carved the Memorial Pole was unknown Eagle clan (see Wright 2001, 197 for Dwight

Wallace family chart). I close this section with Lee Wallace's introduction, which he wrote for me when I asked him how he would like to be introduced:

"With four generations of Haida carvers before me in my family, my Haida father gave me a Haida name Guugwaangs. (One who stays away from home for long periods of time, wanderer). My father [is] full blood Haida. My mother was Tlingit and Tsimshian, her maternal mother was Tsimshian eagle. Growing up in my father's household and the rich past of Haida carvers, the paternal side was dominant. My mother came from a rich Tsimshian and Tlingit background also." (Lee Wallace, Personal Communication, January 3, 2022)

### **The Story of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole**

The stories of totem poles are inherited in the same way that the poles themselves are. These stories can only be "told" or interpreted by those with the rights to do so. The story may be reproduced with the understanding that it is a reproduction, and not the story itself (Moore 2018, 30). However, it would not be appropriate to try to interpret or convey the meaning of a story that I do not have the right to. I will convey the stories of both poles as told by John Wallace, with the understanding that I do not mean to be telling the stories themselves.

The Land Otter Pole and the Memorial Pole were both carved around 1870 and raised in the village of Sukkwan. Sukkwan is located on Sukkwan Island, off the coast of Prince of Wales Island in the Alexander Archipelago. The land is Lingít Aaní, Tlingit land, that has been long inhabited by Haida people, as previously discussed. The name is a Haida version of the Tlingit place name meaning "Town on the Fine Underwater Grass," referring to the edible seaweed that grows there (<https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmc/exhibitions/aborig/haida/hvsuk01e.html>, accessed 23 March, 2023). The Land Otter Pole is a house frontal pole, or gyáa'aang in Kaigani Haida. It is also referred to as a storyteller pole. As is seen in the photos, it stood at the front of a clan house in Sukkwan. The Land Otter Pole was carved by Dwight Wallace for his wife's brother, qaskwáay. Below is the telling of the Land Otter Pole story as told to Viola Garfield by John Wallace in 1941, published in Wright (2001, 199).

Ku.ł qe – name of Tlingit man about whom the story is told. One family went to Cape Chommaney camping. One man take his dog and the dog swam for shore. On the beach he

saw his smashed canoe. He found a cave in the rock and there were two men with no clothes. Their mouths were large and they put their hands over their mouths and looked at him. When they talked they talked quiet, esp[ecially] when they saw him. Their body all right but ears and head changed.

He got dry cedar bark and got a drill and made a fire. Used ear wax to help start it.

If people drowned the dog is changed quick by land otters. Man killed his dog and dried its skin and put it over his head. Next day his "sister" came and cried and cried and his brothers too. They went ashore and felt good because they thought they had found the brother. They had hunting clubs. Man took his club and jumped at his "sister" and clubbed her. Ku.ł qe killed many land otters, others came on sticks that they use for canoes. Land otters use logs for canoes.

He saw his "brother" and took his club and hit his "brother" and killed land otters.

Brother-in-law came and talked differently (like with false teeth!) with a sister and talked nicely to him. Then they talked Tlingit to him but he killed them.

Others of his family came and saw smoke. They talked plain Tlingit and said "that's our brother." They were the real relatives. Man put on his dog headdress. He asked the sister for tobacco to prove if this was really she. She gave him some and he knew they were really his relatives. He went with them to the camp. He told the story of what he had seen.

Tiny face in man's mouth is mink which the land otter sent to try to get the man when he was asleep. In his hands is a club with carved head. This he used to kill land otters. His dog headdress on his head. In his hands he holds the land otter. Land otter is holding the logs they use for canoes. Under the log is land otter man with spirit changed by the land otter.

Next is the Stone or Rock cave with the mink in its mouth. This is the cave where the two land otter men were living and the mink lived. Under it is one of the men in human form before he was changed.

Lower figure is stone cave again with a sting ray in its hands. This fish has some shaped tail (and ear) as a land otter, or so the people think. Tlingits eat sting rays but Haidas don't. (Garfield 1941: notebook 1, Hydaburg, Klawock: 61-65) (Wright 2001, 203)

First Wallace tells the full story of the pole, then he explains to Viola Garfield which beings in the story align with which carving on the pole. When Wallace told the story to Garfield, he was carving his version of the Land Otter Pole for Totem Bight (2001, 203). The story told on the Land Otter Pole is a Tlingit story; on making a replica for John Wallace's version of the Land Otter Pole, Tlingit master carver Nathan Jackson comments that, because John Wallace had Tlingit lineage, it was not inappropriate for him to carve it (Brown 2009, 37).

John Wallace also gave the stories for both the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole in a letter to John Aldon Mason, then curator of the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania, and the stories were passed on to the DAM (Wallace 1941). He stated that the Land Otter Pole had not been painted, but specified the areas that were painted on the Memorial Pole. He also explained the story and figures. The Memorial Pole is named after its type, *k'áal* in Kaigani Haida. As Wallace explains, the Memorial Pole was carved as a grave-marker for Sarah Wallace after

she passed away. It was carved by the grandfather of John Wallace's wife, Mae Skillie Wallace.

Wallace wrote of the Memorial Pole:

This pole was set up by my uncle as a gravestone for my mother. My wife's grandfather was hired to carve the pole. Only a little paint was used because paint was hard to come by in those days and native paint was used. The eyebrows were painted black, also the eyeballs. The mouths were painted red and the frog at the bottom was painted blue-green with a rare paint that came from Queen Charlotte Islands. The stick in the Woman's hand was painted red.

The old woman holding the medicine man's cane and wearing the spruce root hat represents the grandmother who instructed the children of the clan. The figure at the bottom is a frog. The people belonged to the Eagle clan.

The grandmother instructed the grandchildren not to harm any living thing. One day one of the boys went to hunt and saw frogs. He made fun of them. Another day he went to hunt and lost his way. A man met him and said 'the chief wants you in his house.' It was a large house and everyone was eating. Only a little boy lay ill in the corner. His father called in medicine men but they could not cure his son. Then the boy called on his grandmother's power and cured the child. He then saw that this was the same frog that he had teased and made ill.

(Wallace 1941)

I begin with the stories of the poles because Lee Wallace, in my conversation with him, placed the importance of totem poles in their stories and the lessons that they can convey. These stories ground the coming discussion by grounding the meaning and importance of the poles themselves.

### **Short Background**

Xaadláa Gwáayaay, now commonly referred to as Haida Gwaii, translates to "land of the people," the home of supernatural ancestors and the place where human ancestors were created (Krpmotich 2014, 17; Lachler 2010, 8). I give the story of the origin of Haida Gwaii as transcribed in Wright (2001, 9). Haida Gwaii was created by the supernatural being Raven when he found he

was unable to find a place to rest on an existing reef. After traveling to the sky country and then to beneath the sea, he was given a gift of two stones and instructions on how to use them to create the land. From these two stones, Raven created Haida Gwaii and the mainland of what would come to be called British Columbia. Supernatural beings came to Haida Gwaii, and it was from these beings that the Haida families descended (See Wright 2001, 11; references Enrico 1995, Swanton 1905).

Haida kinship, which will be discussed more closely later in the chapter, cannot be extricated from history and place in the land; lineages and their associated crests trace back to the beginning and time and life on Haida Gwaii (Krpmotich 2014, 64). Haida kinship must be understood as being intrinsic to the story of creation and life on Haida Gwaii, not an overlaid system upon something preexistent. Furthermore, while this thesis focuses on the Kaigani Haida and Haida presence in Alaska, it should be understood within the context of Haida Gwaii as the “epicentre of creation and geography” and the grounding of Haida identity within the landscape (18).

During the eighteenth century or possibly earlier, members of the Haida from the northern island of Haida Gwaii canoed up to Prince of Wales archipelago in what would come to be called southeast Alaska. Lachler (2010) writes that these people were known as *K'íis Xaat'áay*, and their descendants are the Kaigani Haida. The lands that the *K'íis Xaat'áay* moved into had been occupied by the Tlingit for thousands of years. In 1996, ancient skeletal remains of Shuká *Káa* (Tlingit for “Man Ahead of Us”) were found in Shuká *Káa* Cave on Prince of Wales Island in southeast Alaska (Lindo et al. 2017). The archeologists and researchers involved reached out to the tribal governments of Prince of Wales, the Craig Tribal Association and the Klawock Cooperative Association (Dixon 2009, 1). These tribes named the individual and were able to determine if and how subsequent research was completed. Shuká *Káa* has been dated to ~10,300 calendar year B.P. A genomic study was done in partnership with Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI), a non-profit regional corporation representing Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures. The study indicated at least 10,000 years of genetic continuity between Shuká *Káa* and

Indigenous groups living in Southeast Alaska today (Lindo et al. 2017). Rosita Worl (Shangukeidí (Thunderbird) Clan Tlingit), director of SHI, states about the study, “We supported DNA testing of Shuká Káa because we believed science ultimately would agree with what our oral traditions have always said – that we have lived in southeast Alaska since time immemorial” (Study Reveals 10,000 Years of Generic Continuity in Northwest North America 2017). After this study was completed, Shuká Káa was repatriated to the tribal governments of Prince of Wales, and he was reburied. Science is not necessary to confirm Indigenous traditional knowledge and at many points may be manipulated to undermine it. The study is mentioned here because it is one of the many ways SHI has chosen to assert the original and continuous presence of Alaskan Native peoples in the region, again, since time immemorial. Movement around the region, archeological studies, the theories of anthropologists, and settler colonial land theft cannot undermine the history of Alaskan Native groups in, and ongoing traditional rights to the land.<sup>2</sup>

The Haida who moved into the region established several villages, one of which was k'áyk'aanii, or Kaigani, from which the term of Kaigani Haida is drawn (Moss 2008, 35). The period of movement is often described as a Haida “migration,” and the timing of it has been disputed. Some oral histories place Haida communities as having been present in southeast Alaska since the time of the great flood that features prominently in both Tlingit and Haida oral histories. In *Memories of Kasaan* (Laforet 1971), Kaigani Haida Elder Walter B. Young tells the story of how the Haida people split during the flood:

At the time of the flood, three parties of Haida left here and got separated. There are three divisions: Masset people, Skidegate people, and us. The Masset people call us Xiśhadai, “the old people”. There was an island called Xisgwai'ay, “the old island”, and it is known that the Alaska Haida settled here during the flood. (1971, 3)

Monteith (1998) also transcribes the story of the flood as told by C.W. Brown (57-58). This flood has been theorized as aligning with one of several different changes in sea level between 11,000 and 9,000 B.C (59-60). The period of the Haida migration is more consistently discussed as

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<sup>2</sup> See Kan and Henrikson (2015) for more on the history of Tlingit interactions with neighboring Northwest Coast and Alaskan Native ethnic groups.

happening later, however, including by notable anthropologists MacDonald (1989) and Blackman (1973), whose descriptions were largely based on the reports of Swanton (1905). According to various sources, the migration may have been as early as the 1720s or may have occurred in the 1780s and 1790s. Enrico (2004) also argues, on the basis of Tlingit loan words to Haida as well as Tlingit place names on Graham Island, that there was a period of close intermarriage and communication that precedes the move of the Kaigani Haida into Tlingit lands (292). It is also shown in the use of Tlingit names for places occupied by the Kaigani Haida.

The Ketchikan and surrounding area are the ancestral lands of the Taant'a K̄wáan, also known as the Tongass Tribe, of the Tlingit. Monteith (1998) provides an in-depth ethnohistory of the Taant'a K̄wáan, including ongoing struggles for land and cultural sovereignty in the face of the U.S. settler colonial project. While there is not currently a similar resource for the Kaigani Haida in Southeast Alaska, their interactions in settler contexts are frequently tied closely to those of the Taant'a K̄wáan, so Monteith (1998) is a good resource for the specifics of these. The Saanya K̄wáan, or Cape Fox Tribe, of the Tlingit also have a closely tied history to the Taant'a K̄wáan and presence in the region. Today they are based out of Saxman, Alaska, roughly a mile away from Ketchikan.

It has been speculated that multiple isolated contacts between Haida and Asian peoples were made over a period of centuries, due to the presence and frequency of Japanese shipwrecks along the Pacific Northwest Coast (Wright 2001, 16). The British and the Spanish pushed towards the region from the south by the beginning of the seventeenth century, but there is no record of any contact being made. Russian exploration came from the northwest, and the 1741 expedition of Vitus Bering and Alesei Chirikov led to Chirikov's ship coming within seventy-five miles of Haida Gwaii. Later, fifteen men were sent to shore near Lisianski Strait and later presumed killed by Tlingit residents. In the following days, two canoes with Tlingit people were sighted gesturing at the ship, but contact was not established. The first European contact was with the Spanish on July 19 and 20, 1774. Juan Pérez commanded the first expedition up from Spanish occupied Monterey to "formally take possession" of the territory through the placing of crosses (Wright

2001, 17). However, he was forbidden from antagonizing any Native peoples or trying to force them from the land and was provided with goods for gift and trade. He was able to establish contact with the Haida and exchange materials at Langara Island. Many accounts of encounters and trade remain from the following years of the early contact period leading up to the nineteenth century. These accounts include descriptions of carving and monumental poles (96).

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, three prominent chiefs, gannyaa, gu.uu, and yaahl dâajee, left the Northern areas of Haida Gwaii to the villages on Dall Island and Prince of Wales island. A meeting between Captain William Douglas and gannyaa at Kaigani was referenced by gannyaa and later by Albert Edward Edenshaw as the first contact between Europeans and the Haida, despite European contact having been established fifteen years prior and gannyaa having met Douglas before (Wright 2001, 40). However, Wright states that it may be considered the most important visit because of the exchange of names between Captain Douglas and gannyaa, the latter of whom often would refer to himself as Douglas gannyaa. It may also be considered the first visit in the sense that it was the first point European sailors actually set foot on Haida lands. There were many other interactions between European groups as they sought to establish commerce with the Haida and other Native groups.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, around the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the period of colonization would shift from one of exploration and trade to one of settlement, and the inherent violence of the settler colonial project.

Smallpox epidemics brought by traders and settlers devastated Alaskan Native communities from the 1770s onwards, killing in waves with periods of lesser impact in between, and only began to slow around the 1880s. The estimated population of 184,000 people in the Northwest Coast prior to contact was reduced to an estimated 37,000 by 1880. Prior to contact, the Haida had a population of 14,200. A census taken after the epidemic showed a population of 1,598 (Boyd 1999, 309-21). Boyd tied the loss of life to the large number of totem poles carved and raised in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as mourning family members raised memorial and mortuary poles

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<sup>3</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of this time period, see Ira Jacknis's chapter "From Explorers to Ethnographers, 1770-1870" in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas* (2013).



(222). The devastating losses also pushed migration, as people moved villages to be closer to medical care and economic resources.

Very close to the slowing of the epidemics, Russia sold Alaska to the United States with the Treaty of Cession in 1867 (Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 39). The Treaty made all Alaskan Native peoples into wards of the U.S. federal government, but did not establish civil authority, instead making the military the core authority interfacing with Native people in Alaska. The military came into severe conflict with Tlingit communities in particular and responded to resistance by large-scale attacks on Tlingit homes and people (40). The discovery of gold in Auk territory further worsened conditions for Alaskan Native communities as settlers took over Native land and disrupted natural resources with salmon canneries and fisheries. The Organic Act was passed by the U.S. government in 1884, which extended the laws of Oregon to Alaska and brought the territory under civil authority instead of military authority. Notably, the act did not extend the reservation system that was in place in the rest of the country. The act instead stated that “Indians or other persons in said district were not to be disturbed in the possession of any lands actually in their use of occupation or now claimed by them” (Hinckley 1996, 195; Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 40). However, there was not a specific definition of what constitutes “lands actually in their use,” and there was no route for creating a secure title, which would lead to large-scale land theft (Moore 2018, 8). One example of land theft would spawn a long-running conflict with the establishment of the Tongass National Forest, which is intimately tied to the creation of totem parks in Southeast Alaska.

The 1884 Indian Advancement Act in Canada created and enforced a potlatch ban that directly attacked a way of knowing and being in Native communities that practiced potlatching. Weiner (1992) writes on how Western concepts of individual ownership were a part of colonial perspectives, distinguishing Native people as “primitive” based on an absence of individual property and economic exchange irreconcilable with Western perspectives (30). The attack on potlatching by missionaries and government entities was therefore an assertion of the preeminence of capitalist conceptions of property, as another push for and justification for

assimilation. While there was never a formal potlatch ban in Alaska, missionaries and the attitudes of non-Natives created what Jonaitis and Glass call an “ad hoc” ban on potlatching. In 1904, for example, Alaska Governor John Brady tried to eliminate potlatching without a full ban by encouraging a final Tlingit *ku.éex*’ in Sitka, after which some individuals relinquished their regalia, though others felt an increased sense of pride in their displayed culture and traditions (Jonaitis 2017, 54). Blackman (1977) also wrote about how some missionaries particularly targeted traditional funeral practices, which would involve a mortuary or memorial pole and a mortuary potlatch, through the use of grave-markers (50). Trying to dissuade the displays of wealth that a potlatch would entail, missionaries encouraged the substitution of Christian songs and prayers, as well as tombstones ordered from Victoria, Canada that took several weeks to arrive, rather than a memorial or mortuary pole (51). Cole (1985) notes several other examples of people selling their totem poles, in some cases for the money needed to build grave-markers (299). Krmpotich (2011) states that the removal of crest poles from Haida villages in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was akin to removing libraries, and that “the removal of the poles, combined with the criminalisation of the potlatch, eliminated the primary foci for collective remembrance” (149). Missionaries were and continue to be a lasting influence on southeast Alaska, as detailed by Dombroski (2001), including an event in 1992 when converts of an all-Native Pentecostal church burned items seen as non-Christian, with reports of Native regalia having been burned. In the early twentieth century, converts to Christianity inspired other members of this same village to burn totem poles (3). New villages either started by or highly influenced by missionaries built single-family homes rather than the large clan houses, disrupting dynamics of kinship and community. Missionary efforts were accompanied by the economic forces of salmon canneries. When first being established, salmon canneries tended to be located near preexisting fishing villages, acknowledging to some extent the clan property and traditional territories of different communities. However, U.S. military presence bolstered the land claims of cannery owners, and canneries were soon built according to salmon supply, with villages relocating to those sites as well (26).

Further disruptions to Native lifeways were caused by the Canadian government's 1894 amendment to the Indian Act, which created the residential school system and allowed for First Nations children to be forcibly removed from their homes and families (Milloy 2017). With the intention to "kill the Indian in the child," children were barred from speaking their languages or practicing cultural lifeways. As with the potlatch ban, the U.S. government did not enact an official policy, but did create and encourage a Christian-focused residential school program that tried to assimilate Native children by separating them from their communities. The horrific treatment of the children at residential schools would disrupt Native communities and families and cause ongoing intergenerational trauma that is still felt today.

The attitudes of missionaries, government sentiment against potlatching, and the shift of Native populations away from smaller villages led to great shifts in lifeways and traditions. Haida Elder Gwaanad Diane Brown recalls,

According to our Elders, missionaries and Indian agents just went along mowing totem poles down and heaped them up in front of Skidegate and set fire to them. But also some of our poles made it down south, too: white people picked the select few that they thought were the best ones and took them to here, there, and everywhere. But it was a really horrible time in our history. You see old pictures of Skidegate and Massett and there are hundreds of poles. Nang King.ay 'uwans said his father said they mowed them all down or they were certain to go to hell. They said we worshipped them. (Krpmotich and Peers 2013, 11)

I bring up this point because it is important to summarize that attempts to dissuade or eradicate totem pole carving were part of a larger attempt to assimilate or disappear Native cultures and communities on the Northwest Coast. A decrease or complete halt in totem pole carving would continue to be felt for generations (Moore 2018, 28; Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 40). Among the causes was the inability of carvers to pass on their teachings to new generations due to boarding schools. Haisla carver Henry Robertson specifically remembers a principal stabbing his hand with a pencil as a punishment for carving totem poles in secret (Jessiman 2011, 369). Potlatching in Canada had to continue in secret until the repeal of the ban in 1951. However, while the harm of the ban and attitudes surrounding it should not be understated, it should not be assumed that it was successful in eradicating the lifeways it targeted. In the case of totem poles, Blackman (1973) argued that many of the cultural practices and beliefs surrounding totem poles were

transferred to grave-markers, and that what was often described as cultural loss was in fact an example of cultural survival.

In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Alexander Archipelago Reserve in Southeast Alaska. It was re-designated as a national forest in 1907 and renamed the Tongass National Forest after the Taant'a Kwáan's English name. It was expanded in 1909. At no point was there compensation for Tlingit and Haida land claims. The United States Forest Service, which still has jurisdiction over the forest, tried to establish a pulp industry. However, the Department of the Interior had proposed the establishment of Native reservations in Alaska, which would pull large amounts of land from the Department of Agriculture's control and prevent the 50-year logging contracts that pulp companies demanded (Moore 2018, 8). From 1938 to 1941, secretary of the interior Harold Ickes approved village constitutions that would set up Native reservations, though the system was eventually rejected by Native people. The Alaskan Native Brotherhood (ANB) was formed from Native communities across Southeast Alaska in 1912, and in 1929 began exploring legal options for asserting Tlingit and Haida territories in the Tongass National Forest. The conflict between the Forest Service and Native people with land claims in Tongass National Forest was the background for the CCC totem park restoration project, which will be discussed further in the next section. In 1935, the Jurisdictional Act provided the avenue to sue the federal government for compensation for lost lands. The Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska negotiated the settlement through *Tlingit and Haida Indians of Alaska v. the United States* until 1959. There are many conflicts over land and resource management in southeast Alaska that I will not lay out specifically here but were crucial steps in developing the current state of Native land and resource rights.<sup>4</sup>

In 1971, Congress established the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). The act, rather than putting in place the reservation system, formed twelve regional and over 200 village "corporations," to which it distributed \$962.5 million dollars and forty million acres of land

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<sup>4</sup> For a more in-depth summary of these in southeast Alaska, particularly in the traditional territory of the Taant'a Kwáan and their neighbors, refer to Montieth (1998).

(Montieth 1998, 241). The corporations are for-profit, with Alaskan Native people incorporated as shareholders. On the federal side, this was meant to encourage economic development in Alaska. However, several southeast Alaskan communities, including Ketchikan, were not included in a village corporation or the Sealaska regional corporation, which left the only option as enrolling as a member “at large” (241). Eventually the Native people in Ketchikan organized and attained federal recognition as Ketchikan Indian Community (KIC), which is a “landless” community under the parameters of ANCSA. The law also only allotted shares to those before 1971, so that individuals born after could only become shareholders through inheriting shares. In addition, in the original law, shares could not be sold for 20 years, after which point, they would become negotiable property, meaning they could be sold to non-Native people (Clifford 2013, 218). When the 20-year deadline was approaching, many were afraid that continuous poverty would force Native shareholders to sell shares, causing further drain of economic and environmental resources to non-Natives as a form of neoliberal privatization. In 1991, a set of amendments were passed both extending the restrictions on sale to non-Natives and addressing the failure of the law to provide for individuals born after 1971.

There are pros and cons to the corporation system that are commonly discussed. The act was ultimately meant to be an assimilationist one, extinguishing traditional land rights through compensating Alaskan Natives for their loss with both money and land. However, the land granted to the corporations was sometimes not in communities’ traditional territories and could even be large distances away from where the corporation is actually located (Montieth 1998, 242). Montieth also points out that in the early days of their formation, Native corporations often did not have access to corporate managers from their own communities, so the only options were corporate managers whose primary concerns were short-term profitability, rather than vested interest in the community or the land (243). However, he points out that at the time of writing, more corporate managers have been able to be sourced from their own communities, and corporations are able to be run more consistently according to the values of their communities. The profits distributed to shareholders allow some Native people who would otherwise need to

leave the region for economic purposes to stay in their communities. Corporations also often provide funding for cultural programs and educational opportunities. The Sealaska Heritage Institute was formed in 1980 as a non-profit regional corporation “to perpetuate and enhance Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian cultures of Southeast Alaska” (“About” website).

The Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA) was passed in 1978 and addressed subsistence issues. The act was meant to define what constituted subsistence activities and how they could be used but ended up restricting subsistence activities based on whether the act considered people to be “rural” or “nonrural” (Montieth 1998, 246-47). Ketchikan, for example, is considered a non-rural community, and therefore does not have subsistence eligibility. This ignores the importance of subsistence activities and their products in Native lifeways and traditions, as well as disregarding the economic importance of subsistence activities for some people within non-rural communities.

Battles, judicial and otherwise, continue to be fought for tribal sovereignty in southeast Alaska. These are often related to struggles for tribal sovereignty in the mainland United States and in Canada, but the context of ANCSA often alters or compounds challenges. For example, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), originally put in place in 1994 and reauthorized in 2013, tried to address the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW, more recently called Missing and Murdering Indigenous Peoples) epidemic created by intentional failures within Federal law and law enforcement. However, because of the nature of ANCSA, Alaskan Native corporations are not governmental entities and do not have criminal or civil adjudicatory authority over the communities they represent. Therefore, under the original VAWA, Alaskan Native corporations had few options for prosecuting or protecting against domestic abusers and sexual violence. The Not Invisible Act of 2019 was signed into law in October 2020 to address these inadequacies through increasing intergovernmental cooperation, as well as to create an advisory committee (Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska 2022). The 2013 and 2022 reauthorizations of VAWA also attempt to address these inadequacies by bolstering Alaskan Native communities without land bases. The 2022 reauthorization also calls for the Alaska Tribal

Public Safety Advisory Committee to be established within one year (Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt 2022).

The Southeast Alaska tribes fought to protect the Tongass National Forest from Trump-era rollbacks of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule of 2001 (Roadless Rule) for portions of the forest. The Roadless Rule prohibits the construction and reconstruction of roads, as well as timber harvests, within inventoried roadless areas. The Trump Administration exempted over 9 million acres from this policy, leaving the forest vulnerable to logging and industrial development, and disenfranchising the Native communities who have stewarded the forest for 10,000 years. Among other forms of advocacy including providing public testimony and participating in advisory committees, Southeast Alaska tribes also petitioned the USDA for the creation of a “Traditional Homelands Conservation Rule” to protect traditional use of the Tongass by Alaskan Native people. In 2021, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), under the guidance of the Biden Administration, announced it planned to restore the protections (Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska 2021). The USDA Forest Service and the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska also signed a joint agreement in 2020 for the creation of the Indigenous Guardians program, which will support collaborative projects and programs centering community-led Indigenous stewardship of the national forest system, incorporating technical knowledge, conservation science and natural resource management (Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska 2020).

This is only a very small sample of the efforts of Native communities in Southeast Alaska to assert their inherent sovereignty and stewardship of the land they have occupied since time immemorial. Those efforts are ongoing and are connected to the efforts of Indigenous groups elsewhere in Alaska, as well as in the U.S. and Canada.

## **Haida Totem Poles in Context**

### **The Master Carver and Overview of Pole-Carving**

Now there's different types of totem poles. You know, the ones at the Denver Art Museum, one is a memorial pole, carved in memory of an individual. There's a story pole, which—the

Land Otter pole is a story pole. They tell clan stories. And there's mortuary poles, where actually some remains of an individual would be placed in somewhere within the totem pole. And so those are...and there's a crest pole just depicting the crest of an individual. 'Cause a lot of times these were placed in front, or near the front of, a clan house to identify who's staying in that particular clan house. (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022)

While I will be referencing totem poles largely as a group, totem poles are carved to serve several purposes, as Lee Wallace explains in the preceding quote. Each kind records and conveys aspects of cultural memory (Brown 2009, 1). House frontal poles are usually raised in front of a clan house and mark the lineage of the owner of the house. House posts are interior posts that support the house roof and tell stories of the family crest. Story poles, like the Land Otter Pole, tell a story and display the ownership of that story. Memorial poles commemorate a person or an event. Mortuary poles have the remains of an individual interred inside. Shame poles, or ridicule poles, call attention to an unpaid debt, an insult, or other action that a person or group is expected to make right (12-13).

Scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in their extensive mapping and theorizing on totem poles, largely attributed the practice of pole-carving to the fur trade. An increase in wealth as well as access to iron tools is generally considered to have facilitated more monumental poles. However, Wright (2001) notes that earlier scholarly debates about the actual origin of pole-carving ignored Haida oral histories (9). Wright goes on to describe several oral histories that trace Haida histories back to times “even before Raven first discovered humankind” that reference house frontal poles (9-12). One history very directly describes the practice of pole-carving. In 1941, John Wallace told Viola Garfield a story about the being who Wallace called o'át kung (“bright salmon jumping and flashing”), who taught humans how to carve poles (14). Garfield called the being “Master Carpenter” or “Master Carver” in her publication, and the name came to be used for the pole Wallace carved for Totem Bight depicting the story. The full story is transcribed in Wright. The story tells about a chief's elderly sister, who was abandoned to starve when the rest of the village left to fish elsewhere. She was saved by her granddaughter, who hid coals for her in a clamshell.



Prayers led to the old woman becoming pregnant and having a baby in a single night, and the baby grew into a young man in the span of six months. One night, he dreamed of a man who helped him learn to craft a bow and arrow and kill a bear who is stealing his mother's food. He later dreamed again of the man, who came tattooed all over his body, with human faces painted on his finger and toenails. He told the boy that, when they go to sleep the next night, he and his mother should not open their eyes until the sun is up. The next night they heard loud noises throughout the night, but neither opened their eyes. When they were sure the sun was up, they opened their eyes and found themselves in a large house that had been carved on the inside. Outside, there were three totem poles on the front, one at each corner and one by the door, and the front of the house was carved as well. The chief sends a slave to bury his sister's body, and through the slave hears word of the large house and the totem poles. All the people returned to the village to see the woman and the house. The chief dressed up his nieces in the hopes that one would marry the boy. However, he did not dress up or present his sister's granddaughter, who was considered too poor. The boy wanted to marry the granddaughter who saved his mother's life (Wright 2001, 12-14).

Wallace also noted that prior to the introduction of iron tools by traders, totem pole carving was done with iron nails found in driftwood. Wallace states that these iron nails were incredibly valuable, and traded for one slave each, and "that his father's father was the first generation to know this" (Wright 2001, 14). Several other stories reference beings and people that were the first to carve large poles (14-15). All of this, Wright concludes, confirms that house frontal poles were carved long before the arrival of Europeans and were essential elements of Haida life and histories. While the availability of iron tools and the nature of the social and political landscapes during the 19<sup>th</sup> century increased the number and monumentality of poles, pole-carving itself should not be understood as being brought about by those interactions.

Wright (2001) states that *stlanlaas* is an approximate Haida term for artist, translating to "good with their hands" (6). However, in many dialects, including Kaigani Haida, there are not exact translations for the terms "art" or "artist," signifying the differences in how what is labeled

such in English is understood in Haida culture (Lachler 2010, 490). Haida artists were, and in many circumstances still are, chiefs, leaders of their communities, and cultural carriers who “inherited the privilege of being trained as artists” (Wright 2001, 5). This section will discuss the ways in which what has been considered Haida “art,” and Haida totem poles specifically are embedded within Haida lifeways.

### **Haida Totem Poles and Haida Kinship**

A discussion of Haida totem poles is a discussion of moiety, lineage, and family history, and how Haidas assert the resiliency of these structures. Through the depiction of crests, poles usually tell a story of contact points between humans and spiritual beings. Poles also convey sets of rights to the family that commissioned the pole as well as their descendants (Wright 2001, 6). They are one of many pieces of Haida belongings that do so—as Jisgang (Nika Collison), “[w]hile Haida art fulfills many roles, it is social function that is its truest responsibility” (Krpmotich 2014, 106). In this section, I will give an overview of where poles are located in Haida understandings of kinship and property to the best of my ability. To do so, I will first explore the concept of yahgudang (Kaigani Haida: yahgwdáng) and its importance in discussions of kinship. Next, I will give a summary of the Haida system of relatedness. Then, I will give a brief overview of potlatches and how they interact with concepts of property. Finally, I will go into the context of lineage crests, before discussing Haida poles specifically. A source I consult frequently is *The Force of Family: Repatriation, Kinship, and Memory on Haida Gwaii* by Cara Krmpotich (2014), which focuses on Haida repatriation efforts from the perspective of kinship. I take the same approach as Krmpotich, in that I view concepts of “family” and therefore “kinship” as being central to any discussion of Haida life because that is how Haidas describe it. Kinship, here, is not an analytical framework, and does not mean in the “classificatory” or “descriptive” sense that Murdock (1934) and Swanton (1905) attempted to overlay on Haida communities. As Schneider (2004) writes, “there need be—there could be—no grounds for distinguishing the ‘kinship’ system from the ‘religious’ system, from the ‘nationality’ system, from the ‘educational system’ at the

cultural level” (270). In this section I will focus on the centrality of Haida kinship to cultural and social exchanges, material culture, and what it means to be and act Haida.

Traditional Haida concepts of property are tied to reciprocity between moieties, the nobility and rights of a lineage, and the public performance of respect (Krpmotich 2014, 108). All of these are linked to the overarching Haida concept of *yahgudang*. Historically defined as “respect,” it has multiple meanings. Boelscher (1988) describes *yahgudang* as both to be respectful and “to be fit for respect,” which also entails having respect for oneself (71). Examples of having respect for oneself includes abstaining from drugs and alcohol, dressing well in public, and respecting one’s place in cultural hierarchies like arranged marriages. In Kaigani Haida, *yahgwdáng* is to respect and *yahgwdangáa* is “to be respected, thought highly of” (Lachler 2010, 654). Krmpotich (2014) states that “[r]espect is contingent on knowing who you are as an individual, but also in knowing that your identity as an individual is largely determined by your relations--the interdependence of persons, families, and communities” (98). *Yahgudang* is therefore lived out through a wide variety of acts, behaviors, and attitudes, including the creation, ownership, and use of property and material culture (101). *Yahgudang* is connected to the status of *yahgid*, or nobility, that sets one apart from the class of commoner or slave; one cannot earn it for oneself but may bestow it on their children through throwing a 'wa'lal or house-building potlatch (Murdock 1934, 360). However, the majority of Haida are located within the sphere of *yahgid*, so the concept of acting as a high-class person has much to do with cultural expectations and aspirations (Krpmotich 2014, 102; Boelscher 1988, 70-71). Boelscher (1988) writes that the idea of being a commoner “existed mainly as a moral imperative pointing out what happens if reciprocal obligation is declined and ritual observance neglected” (60). In the article “In Honor of Nastáo: Kasaan Elders Look to the Future,” Breinig (Kasaan Haida) explains that “the valued behaviors embedded in *yahgid* amplify how *yahkwdáng* should be demonstrated through words and actions meant to support and nurture the community” (2013, 61; italicized in original). Breinig also explains *yahkwdáng* as connected to traditional Haida food-gathering activities that tie Haida to the land and water, and that are key experiences of being Haida (64). In this way, being fit for respect as a Haida is

something one *does* as much as something one is, and one does it through correct and respectful behavior as a member of a family, lineage, and community.

From the perspective of kinship studies, Murdock (1934) summarizes Haida kinship as divided into two exogamous matrilineal moieties, the Eagles and the Ravens, which are both subdivided into clans, which in turn may sometimes be divided into subclans or houses (356). Each of these encompass multiple “nuclear” families from the Western perspective. Anthropologically, a moiety is defined as “one of two exogamous subdivisions (often clans or groups of clans) that together comprise a whole society” (Parkin and Stone 2004, 458). In the Haida dialects, moieties are k’waalaa, or k’wáal in Kaigani Haida (Krpmotich 2014, 74; Lachler 2010, 616). K’waalaa are descended from two different supernatural beings; Raven k’waalaa is descended from Foam-Woman, and in Haida may be called yahl or Kaay xil. Eagle k’waalaa is descended from Djila’qons, and may be called guud, Gidins, Gitans, or Kuustaayak. Practices are exogamous, as Ravens must marry Eagles, and vice versa. Multiple lineages exist within each k’waalaa—upwards of thirty on Haida Gwaii in the 2010s. The word for lineage is gyaaging.aay in the Skidegate dialect, gwaay gang in Old Masset, and gwáayk’aang in Kaigani Haida (74). Krmpotich notes that “clan” and “lineage” are both used colloquially, but as “clan” as an anthropological term can be misleading, she uses lineage. However, “lineage” is not defined in the *Dictionary of Alaskan Haida* (Lachler 2010, 94). Rather, “clan” is the translation for “gwáayk’aang.” In my experience in Ketchikan and Saxman, “clan” is the more commonly used English word to describe the same unit. For this section, I will use the term “lineage” as it is more accurate as a kinship term, and in later sections I will use the term “clan.”

Lineages are inherited matrilineally from one’s mother. A combination of smallpox and long periods of cultural oppression once diminished knowledge and understanding of lineages. However, today on Haida Gwaii it is normal to know one’s lineage and to express it publicly through speech or crests (Krpmotich 2014, 80). Everyday social interactions commonly include “extended” family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins from both parents; however, responsibility for grandchildren’s care and well-being is located with matrilineal

grandparents, and “lineage cousins” are the same as siblings in the Haida languages (78). There are also processes that align with the kinship term of “complementary filiation” wherein a father’s relatives have certain obligations concentrated around life milestones and death. Blackman (1977) states that “[i]n essence, one’s status in life and one’s remembered life status following death hinged upon the reciprocity between one’s own and one’s father’s lineages” (40). So, while one inherits their lineage from their mother, their father’s lineage will consistently be a part of the balance of respect and reciprocity between moieties. Individuals inherit their lineage from their mothers, and traditionally must marry an individual of the opposite k’waalaa/k’wáal. As marriages for love have become the norm, strategic adoption is practiced to “correct” the moiety of one’s spouse (77). Adoption may also be used to incorporate a non-Haida spouse into the larger community, which is especially necessary if the non-Haida spouse is a woman, and her children will inherit her lineage. Adoption may also be used to let individuals fill the role of a lost loved one, such as adopting a brother after one has been lost. Krmpotich (2014) states that “[a]doptive relationships are not symbolic; they come with feelings of obligation, responsibility, and often affection. They are used to normalize, formalize, and reaffirm Haida kinship as the dominant social institution on the islands” (77). Ancestors, or kunniisii, are also actors in everyday life and individual experience; they come to “visit,” are offered food in ceremonies, offer interventions, and in general both care for and are cared for by their descendants (93). In all these exchanges, emphasis is placed on reciprocity and connection between moieties and lineages, as well as one’s place as a descendant, and therefore one’s place in the system of relationship and continuous history of Haida Gwaii.

Haidas also believe in transmigration, or reincarnation. Every person knows themselves to be a reincarnated ancestor, whether or not they are aware of who (Krmpotich 2014, 95). There is a belief that children pick who they will be born to, and some individuals may be able to indicate before their death the lineage they will be reborn into (94). This leads to complex and multilayered relationships between parents and children, with the simultaneous acknowledgment of the child’s continuous individuality and growth and their identity as a beloved ancestor (94). This also gives

rise to certain speculations when it comes to repatriation of stolen ancestors, such as “Nika Collison remembered her fellow committee member, Jenny Cross, raising the possibility that, because of reincarnation, they could be repatriating themselves” (97). Individuals often experience reincarnation through the surfacing of lost or hidden knowledge, and the connection to certain materials. Nika Collison, as a Haida delegate visiting the Pitt Rivers Museum for a consultation, recounts encountering a Tsimshian-style naaxiin (Chilkat) apron and being caught by it, despite her usually being “extremely Haida-centric!” (Krpmotich et al. 2014, 110). She states that “Gwaaganad, my Auntie Diane, said when you are inexplicably drawn to a piece it’s probably because we knew it when we were someone else, a long time ago.” Some Haida also anticipate, with the return of ancestral remains to rest and care among their relatives on Haida Gwaii, ancestors will be able to reincarnate, and therefore old forms of knowledge and skill will begin to resurface (97). This idea of cycle or continuity with the past is also evidenced in “Haida names,” which connect an individual with ancestors in the past who have had the same name. Several Haida names may be earned and bestowed throughout one’s life, and often are gifted at public events, ceremonies, and potlatches. Haida names may be thought of as a form of property, since similar rules and etiquette guide how they are treated and granted; the name should usually originate in the same lineage as the receiver, but in many cases it may be required that the senior female of the lineage the name originated be the one to give the name, or else that a descendant of the namesake be the one to do so (86). Non-Haida individuals who are given Haida names are usually given more recent names rather than ones with a longer history. Krmpotich states that:

The continuity of Haida kinship comes not just from people’s current activities with their lineage and opposite *k’waalaa*, but also from knowing that their family has interacted with other families on Haida Gwaii for thousands of years. Haida senses of self often stem from being able to fulfill the complement of social responsibilities and duties—including continuing to interact with and have responsibility for their ancestors—that are a result of belonging to a lineage. (Krpmotich 2014, 92; italicized in original)

In some ways, this is like what Carsten (2004) describes as a “processual” view of personhood and kinship, while in other ways it is distinctly fixed (310). One’s identity as a Haida person is fixed and inherent, both through one’s lineage and through transmigration of the ancestors. However, it is also something that one must continually live up to, develop, and earn through

respectful behavior. Boelscher (1988) describes it as the “double sense of being owned and being part of” a lineage, something that someone both is and does (29).

Crests are defined as “images of animals or other entities that ancestors encountered and earned the right (sometimes through their own death) to claim for their clans as identifying symbols” (Moore 2018, 7). Crests, which Boelscher (1988) calls “symbolic property,” display lineage and the sets of rights conveyed to it, and, by extension, to the individual (142). Crests are inherited, like lineage, matrilineally, and property that bears crests is the same, but they may be earned or transferred between lineages in a variety of social processes. Any change in crests belonging to a group “implicitly marks the history of the individual or collection transactions that occurred between lineages of the same and opposing moieties” (150). Boelscher writes that the meaning of symbolic property “is only revealed through the dynamics of its genesis and existence over time” (142). The meaning and significance of crests and crests property is therefore understood within their continuity throughout time, between generations, and between lineages. Boelscher writes about the many different words for property and the transfer of it, particularly in the context of potlatching (66-70). In understanding lineage crests and their place in Haida culture, it is important to note that the words for crests are synonymous with words regarding kinship and ownership in Haida dialects. Krmpotich (2014) writes that the words for crests are the same as the words for “lineages,” *gyaaging.aay/gwaay gang* (Skidegate/Old Masset) (Krmpotich 2014, 87). However, according to the *Dictionary of Alaskan Haida* by Lachler (2010), this does not seem to be the case in the Kaigani Haida dialect. The word for clan is *gwáayk'aang*, while the word for crest is *kuníisii*, the word for one’s own crest is *gasíi*, and the word for a crest object is *gyáagaa* (533). *Kuníisii* is both “ancestor” and “crest.” Distinction is made in Haida between alienable and inalienable property through separate pronouns; the pronoun *díi* is used for inalienable property, such as family members and body parts (Krmpotich 2014, 108; Lachler 2010, 19). However, Krmpotich (2014) writes that *díi* is also used for inalienable property such as crest objects, while *nang* is used for alienable property (108). In Kaigani Haida, *gyáagan* is the possessive pronoun used for alienable property, but the consulted dictionary does not state if *díi*

or *gyáagan* is used for clan property in Kaigani Haida; the dictionary states that “most” nouns are alienably possessed (Lachler 2010, 19). I specify these differences both because Krmpotich (2014) notes the connections between terms for kinship and terms for property to make observations about Haida conceptions of property, but these terms are not necessarily equivalent in Kaigani Haida. However, the connections between crests and kinship are still evident linguistically in *kuníisii* meaning both “crest” and “ancestor.” As ancestors are understood as both individuals one is descended from and a multilayered identity one is, crests and their display are part of signifying the connections and events of the past as continuous forces in the present and future.

Highly valued property is considered so because of its ties to kinship and its ability to place an individual within the story of a larger whole (Krmpotich 2014, 109). However, lineage crests today may be placed on many different materials, including t-shirts, hoodies, canvas bags, and water bottles (91). Rules continue to govern who can wear what crests in this context as well; however, non-Haida people may wear any crest-bearing merchandise. Crests may also be drawn in different styles by different artists without changing their meaning or significance, though individuality or similarity with others may be expressed stylistically (91). While wearing crests informally or formally is a source of pride, some Haida note that crest-bearing regalia bestows an increased confidence, as well as the sense that “you know who you are” (88). Krmpotich argues that the relationships and history that an object has taken part in that transform them and their value, and that “[t]he history of transactions on Haida Gwaii is simultaneously histories of family, and reciprocally, histories of self” (112). The property that bears the crest or crests of a lineage is the lineage’s property, and while an article of this highly valued property may be in the care of one person in that lineage at a certain point in time, it cannot be alienated from the ownership of the *gyaaging.aay/gwaay gang/gwáayk'aang* (108). It is in this context that Haida totem poles should be understood.

The creation and raising of poles are tied to the potlatch—a generic English term for several major ceremonies that may be thrown as part of social processes in Northwest Coast



communities. Murdock (1936) described five different kinds of Haida potlatches, while Blackman (1977) added a sixth. According to the *Dictionary of Alaskan Haida* by Lachler (2010), a potlatch given for the completion of a new clan house is a 'wáahlaal, and a memorial potlatch during which a memorial or mortuary pole is raised is a sak'áa (645). The dictionary also defines a sanáagad as "a type of potlatch," while Boelscher (1988) defines a "sang naagad" as "a minor version of the waahlal in which only a totem pole was erected" (66). The other kinds of Haida potlatches are gadaang, or a potlatch given by a person to address an insult or offense, and a gaan sangaada, given to save face or restore honor. Boelscher also states that to give a potlatch is "gyaa 7isdla," meaning "giving things away" (italicized in original). However, Boelscher was not focusing on Kaigani Haida, and Lachler (2010) defines gyáa isdla as "to give, bequeath" and does not define it explicitly as potlatching (98). Rather, to give a potlatch is 'wáahlahl (645). Blackman (1977) added the "tagwanaa," which is a potlatch given when a young girl completes puberty (italicized in original). Other celebrations that do not fit into these categories but adapt aspects of those traditions may be referred to as "doings."

Potlatches have been a subject of fascination for anthropologists, often as an essentialized social, ceremonial, and economic institution (Blackman 1977; Murdock 1934). Anthropologists break down the potlatch as serving many purposes, including bestowing rights and prestige on the hosts and their lineages; connecting to supernatural beings and ancestors; strengthening the group through economic exchange between moieties; and a visual display of unity and identities (Kramer 2013, 723). However, examinations from anthropologists often serve to misconstrue or misunderstand the significance of potlatches. Dena Klashinsky (Musqueam and Mamalilikulla) recounts being asked to explain a potlatch to a group of children but feeling uncomfortable when a UBC Museum of Anthropology curator suggested that she simplify the explanation to "that it's like a party with a lot of presents" (Clavir 2002, 131). Klashinsky refused to over-simplify her peoples' traditions, instead giving an explanation that was both comprehensive and understandable (Clavir 2002, 131-132). While meant for children, it confronted both the over-simplifying and over-complexifying of potlatches in anthropological writings. Later in the same

book, Klashinsky critiques a video about Kwakwaka'wakw potlatches that highlighted mystical and spiritual aspects and made it seem very separate from life. She states that "[i]n reality, the potlatch is political, social, and cultural. It is a means through which we govern ourselves as First Nations people" (203). I asked Lee Wallace for a brief explanation of the potlatch, to make sure my understanding was aligned as fully as possible:

Well, I'll try to do it as briefly as I could, but there's a system throughout the whole Northwest Coast, and maybe it even goes beyond the Northwest Coast. Maybe it goes into other areas...but, in the Northwest Coast, you host some event—whether there's a new person coming into leadership, maybe there's a story pole that's carved and erected, maybe even under a longhouse totem pole. And so...You want other individuals to witness the event. And a lot of times you send out invitations, well in advance, maybe a year...within that time period, you're preparing, your clan's preparing for a potlatch, which includes hosting guests, housing them, feeding them many meals. And then there's a portion of the potlatch where you're sharing song and dances. And so, it's just a real part of sharing the host's story that they're doing, in the event. And so, then a lot of time, what takes place in the Northwest Coast is, if you're invited to a potlatch, you're sometimes expected to reciprocate at some point down the road. And so...a big part of the potlatch is...before your guests leave, you're giving 'em gifts of different sorts of things, where they'd be giving gifts of food or some artwork or robes or blankets, skins, or maybe canoes, different types of things that are given away. And throughout time, things have changed. In recent potlatches around that I've been participating in as far as, witnessing or being part of is, you're giving away gifts of items that you would buy at a, say, at Costco, or at Walmart, or different places where you'd buy things and give them away. And of course, there's food that's given away. Food that we prepare, like jarring fish, smoking fish, and dried fish, and you give that type of thing away for food. And sometimes these potlatches would last for days. Typically, around here, they're usually lasting like two, three days, ones that I've witnessed during my time. And perhaps in years

later, maybe Dwight, maybe those lasted longer. (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022)

A pole is commissioned by the host of the potlatch from an artist of the opposite moiety (Moore 2018, 7). The host invites members of the opposite moiety to witness the pole's raising at a potlatch. Other commissioned property bearing the host's clan crests will also be "brought out" before these witnesses. Food and gifts are distributed to the guests, an expensive endeavor that brings honor and prestige to the host. More potlatches, and more poles, gathers the host more prestige. Poles should be understood as intrinsically tied to this process, and to the ideas of reciprocity and respect that it entails.

After being raised, poles may stand as part of a house, interior or exterior, or may stand in memory of individuals as either mortuary or memorial poles. In the case of mortuary poles, ancestors may be interred within, while memorial poles commemorate a person whose remains are elsewhere. Shame or ridicule poles may be erected as a part of an unresolved conflict between clans or people. However, as pieces of material culture, they are unique in that they are a part of the setting of everyday life and often in the background and foregrounds of daily tasks and interactions, so collective memory surrounding them is highly conditioned by experiences that happen close by (Krpmotich 2014, 137).

Breinig (2013) states that "*yahkwdáng* embodies reaching out to others, kindness, and understanding our genealogical relationships to each other, our histories, and our place in the world" (63; italicized in original). Yahgudang/yahkwdáng as a core ideal of Haida culture is inherently tied to relatedness and one's knowledge of one's place in the larger system. Haida poles act out yahgudang through the expression of reciprocity between moieties and lineages in a potlatch, as well as through displaying the rights and status that have been conveyed to a host and their descendants. They may also assert sovereignty, represent cultural pride and resiliency in the face of settler colonialism, and open discussions about historic wrongdoings. While non-Indigenous fascination with poles may be based on their physical qualities, their value for Haidas relies on their display of what it means to be Haida. On the production of "traditional" forms of

Haida material culture surrounding repatriation of ancestors, Krmpotich (2014) notes that the motivation “was not a desire for the return of particular types of objects, but rather a desire (particularly on the part of elder advisors) to *act respectfully*, to act as family, or, synonymously, to act as Haidas” (130, original emphasis). In this way, the value and meaning of Haida totem poles is found within the larger meshwork of ancestors, lineages, relationship, alliance, resistance, and connection to the land.

### **The Land Otter Poles and Their Story**

Dwight Wallace carved the story of the Land Otter into a pole at least twice: once, in a pole carved for the 1876 US Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, now in the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History; the other, the pole raised in Sukkwán. The pole raised in Sukkwán came first, and, while it is uncertain if the 1875 pole should be considered a “copy” of the pole at Sukkwán, it is certainly a similar story and design (Moore 2018, 95). John Wallace also carved a replica of the Land Otter Pole at the behest of the Forest Service, which will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter Five. A copy of this pole was also carved and raised.

When I asked Lee Wallace about poles sharing the same story, he responded that it was significant if it indicated that the artist liked the story, though it is often hard to say if the artist liked the story, or if the person commissioning it did. It is at least possible, then, that Dwight Wallace chose to carve the story of the Land Otter multiple times, once in a traditional context and once for an outside context. Lee Wallace said that “[t]o me it shows the importance of the story, the message of the story” (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022). While I have not had these stories interpreted for me, I believe it is appropriate to continuously center that the Land Otter Pole tells a story, that story is deeply significant, and that the rights to that story, like the rights to the poles, remains nested in the values of yahkwáng, Haida kinship, and family history within the land.

## **Chapter Four: Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter contains the theoretical background that I locate my thesis research within, followed by a review of the literature relevant to the journey of the poles. I have organized my theoretical background into three sections that create a broad structure. The first establishes that museums are based in imperialism and colonialism, and in the case of the U.S., are built to serve the settler colonial project. The second gives an overview of how these origins and ongoing structures are addressed and critiqued in critical museology and museum anthropology. The third discusses the terms “decolonization” and “Indigenization” and how they are being applied to museums. I then conduct a literature review in the subsequent sections, exploring in-depth topics and case studies that situate Haida totem poles within the conversations described in the theoretical background. In doing so, I keep in mind the insight that “[l]ooking for points of thematic convergence is like searching for the patterns of texture and color in a weaving” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997, 12). Taken all together, the theoretical background and literature review create a tapestry upon which the journey of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole can be viewed and understood.

### **Theoretical Background**

#### **Colonialism and Museums**

A foundational understanding of my thesis is that the theoretical and methodological approaches of museums reflect the social, political, and economic contexts of imperialism and colonialism. Smith (2012) describes colonialism as a function of imperialism, specifically related to how an imperial nation views and interacts with cultural Others and points out that this means Indigenous experiences of colonialism are highly specific to place and time despite sharing similarities with other colonized communities (24). U.S. museums are characterized specifically

by the objectives of settler colonialism, which Wolfe (2006) defines as a version of colonialism that seeks to remove and erase the Indigenous peoples of an area in order to appropriate the land and resources for colonizer use (388). Simultaneously, settler colonial societies adopt and appropriate symbolic indications of Indigeneity to distinguish themselves as independent and distinct from the original colonizing entity (389). This is seen in American anthropology, which is argued by Yanigasako (2005) as fundamentally based in settler colonialism, its study of Native American peoples functioning to confine them to the past and justify their continued erasure while also appropriating their identities to distinguish American anthropology and the nation-state itself (79). Settler colonialism is also ongoing, as “elimination is an organizing principal of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence” (Wolfe 2006, 288).

Bouquet (2012) describes the genesis of public ethnography museums in the Age of Imperialism, and how they served the aims of colonial powers (65). The collections presented cultural materials as scientific specimens and visual representations of the cultures of colonized people and served to justify and naturalize the colonial project to citizens, helping them understand and situate themselves against cultural difference. Though formed from the collections of wealthy elites that were primarily displays of wealth and exoticism, in public museums audiences were able to imagine the collections of these public institutions as being “for” them, part of the collective identity and ownership of the public (66). Museums served as the homes of anthropology when the field was forming in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, what is often discussed as the “museum age” (Sturtevant 1969, 622). Though anthropology would later move to universities for a length of time, the field of anthropology strongly shaped how museums formed as public institutions, with museums serving as financial support and as venues for the dissemination of anthropological theories (Ames 1992, 39; Kreps 2019, 2). U.S. museum representation of Native people is directly tied to “salvage ethnography” or the drive to acquire material culture and preserve it before the cultures it belonged to inevitably disappeared (Lonetree 2012, 26). Presentation of Native peoples as solely in the past, using only cultural materials that ethnographers deemed as being culturally authentic, erased the ongoing

presence of those peoples (Jonaitis 2013, 758). Therefore, as Lonetree (2012) argues, the relationships and interactions between museums and Indigenous communities should be understood within discussions of self-determination and cultural sovereignty (19).

### **Critical Museology and Museum Anthropology**

Post-colonial, postmodern, and Indigenous critiques of museums and anthropology gained traction in the 1980s (Kreps 2019, 6). The New Museology offered some analysis and reworking of the political and social roles of museums in communities, proposing to democratize museum work through orienting museum missions and functions around the needs of the community (Vergo 1989; Kreps 2003, 10). The museum, rather than being a cultural authority, is an educational resource that a community, through participatory approaches, organizes and understands its identity. The idea of cultural preservation is also expanded to include the “support of knowledge, customs, traditions, and values associated with objects” rather than concentrating on the physical material of objects as encoding knowledge (Kreps 2003, 11). However, Shelton (2013) argues that the New Museology stopped short of productively critiquing not only museums as they are, but what political and social forces formed their functions.

Ames (1992) is one of the first to write about the anthropological study of museums (39). However, Kreps (2019) notes museum professionals who wrote anthropological literature on museums prior to this. Ames (1992) states that “[w]e need to study ourselves, our own exotic customs and traditions, like we study others; view ourselves as ‘the Natives’” (10). Shelton (1997, 2013) defines three different museologies; operational museology is the practical and procedural aspects of museum work, while critical museology and praxiological museology study operational museology through different lenses. Shelton locates four core epistemological positions within critical museology. The first is that history is neither universal nor bounded and is in fact constructed in different ways by the different perspectives and understandings of different cultures and societies. The second is that the practice of collecting has been naturalized and rationalized within the museum field to make it an objective and scientific practice, and therefore legitimize museums as repositories for those collections (10-11). The third is that operational

museology both creates and legitimizes the authority of museums and their collections, positioning them as resources of knowledge and culture as well as the authority on what constitutes knowledge and culture (11). The fourth is that, while the objects within museums have different meanings depending on the context in which they are viewed and by whom, and that meaning is not fundamental or objective within the body of an object (12-13).

The question of the objects and the nature of the knowledge they hold is a fundamental one for museums. Silverman (2015) discusses a pluralized sense of multiple knowledges, or “ways of knowing,” that intersect and overlap upon the objects that they have been assigned to throughout place and time (3). Critical museology destabilizes the legitimacy of the standard of operational museology, including denaturalizing museum “best practices.” “Appropriate museology” is defined by Kreps (2008) as “an approach to museum development and training that adapts museum practices and strategies for cultural heritage preservation to local cultural contexts and economic conditions” (26). This can include Indigenous models of museums and systems of preservation. In some cases, this can mean questioning what is cared for in material culture and what it means to care for it, unlearning concepts of “preservation” and “damage” (Clavir 2002). This goes hand in hand with the idea of the museum “object.” Gell (1998) defines the “anthropology of art” as a study of “social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency” and argues that objects of art should be considered social agents (7). Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama (2013) describe that while the term “artifact” is preferable to “object” because its connotations of relationship, though both terms still convey inanimacy (260-61). Kramer (2017) discusses the use of the term “belongings” at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (UBCMOA), which acknowledges the multiplicity of ways of knowing that shape relationships to belongings and recognizes that belongings may be owned by Indigenous people while stewarded outside of their communities (157-158). However, Kreps (2003) also argues against the idea that the practice of collecting and physically preserving material culture is purely a Western one, stating that this belief maintains “the superiority of western, scientifically based museology and



systems of cultural heritage preservation” while ignoring other cultural approaches to preserving material heritage (1).

Besterman (2006) makes the point that “[t]he museum practitioner certainly has a duty of care to an object, but that responsibility has meaning only within an ethical context of human interaction” and that museum ethics are by nature a matter of the social responsibility of the museum to its communities (431). As critical museology and museum anthropology deconstruct the functions of museums, it is made clear that the way in which museums care for their collections is not an objective or scientific practice, but a value-based series of judgments that reflect settler colonial ways of thinking. Now, museums are taking steps to acknowledge that museum care of Native belongings is not solely about belongings, but about social responsibility to their owners.

#### **Decolonization, Indigenization, Collaboration, Sovereignty**

Decolonization here means “a process designed to shed and recover from the ill effects of colonization” (Miller 2008, 15). In a museum context this means, broadly, the deconstruction of Western cultural and scientific hegemonies through establishing “shared authority” with community partners; collaborating with so-called source communities<sup>5</sup> in affirmation of self-determination and cultural sovereignty; and participation in community activism against the ongoing harms of colonization (Lonetree 2012, 19). Indigenization, likewise, refers to ensuring museum practices and ethics surrounding cultural patrimony are rooted in those of the Indigenous peoples they represent (Phillips 2011, 10).

Collaboration with Native American and First Nations communities in repatriation and collaborative stewardship is embedded in theories that the process could decolonize or Indigenize museums. Amy Lonetree (Ho-Chunk) argues that, when museums do decolonizing work through collaborative work with Indigenous communities, they “become places for building momentum for healing, for community, and for restoring dignity and respect” (2012, 164).

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars and activists have problematized “source communities,” as the term frames the museum-community relationship as inherently extractive (Peers 2014). I use it here for clarity until I find an alternative, not in dismissal of these critiques.

However, many question whether museums, theoretically and operationally based in Western imperialism, can possibly be decolonized. Furthermore, decolonization and Indigenization describe an infinitely broad and intricate array of cultural protocols, landscapes, and collaborations that can and have taken place. Collaborative stewardship is one way that museums may theoretically decolonize and Indigenize museum practices, consulting and collaborating with descendant communities on the physical and spiritual care of their cultural patrimony. Clifford (1997) argued for the imagining of museums as “contact zones” between a dominant culture and source communities, while acknowledging the asymmetry in power inherent in such collaborations. Boast (2011) criticizes the proliferation of the idea, arguing that programming meant to share power may easily turn into neocolonialism where museums provide space for conversation without providing avenues for meaningful change. He writes about the contact zone as turning into “a *clinical collaboration*, a *consultation* that is designed from the outset to appropriate the resources necessary for the academy and to be silent about those that were not *necessary*” (66). Lonetree (2012) agrees with his argument, adding that “tidy stories of successful collaboration” obscure ongoing issues, including but not limited to noncompliance with NAGPRA (39). On the concept of collaboration and of reconciliation in settler colonial contexts, Delucia (2018) states:

In a region still strongly shaped by settler colonialism, “collaborative” arrangements ought to be viewed as pragmatic, time- and site-specific connections that proceed imperfectly, rather than as long-term, finalized agreements to dissolve differences— or as bids for reconciliation, a perhaps premature endeavor in places where cultural conflict still seethes and where foundational political dilemmas about the exercise of Indigenous sovereignty remain profoundly unresolved. (9)

However, Lonetree (2012) does still maintain the potential of museums to serve Native communities, writing “[t]he possibility of decolonizing and indigenizing museums lies in transforming these sites of colonial harm into sites of healing, and restoring community well-being” (166).

In museum and community collaborations, repatriation is one of the “major arenas” (Silverman 2015, 5). Native American ancestors, belongings, and cultural patrimony are held in museum collections on presumption that only scientific epistemologies are capable of discovering

and distributing the history that they represent (Dumont 2003, 114). Pawnee scholar James Riding In (1996) claims that the opposition to repatriation can be traced back to archaeologists' operating on fundamentally different metaphysical and intellectual planes from Native Americans, dismissing Indigenous forms of knowledge as superstitious or mythical, and therefore irrelevant (Riding In 1996, 238). This sense of authority over history extends to the assumption that "science had a moral obligation to teach living Indians about the past" without the permission of Native American people for this to take place (246). Scientists and museum professionals against repatriation assume that their logic is mundane, commonsense, and foundational to any valid form of knowledge, therefore their authority is absolute (Dumont 2003, 111).

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990), brought about by Native activism since the 1960s, makes repatriation of ancestors and associated funerary objects mandatory for museums receiving public funds (Fine-Dare 2002). In the chapter "Reclaiming the spirits of culture: Native Americans and cultural restitution", Kreps (2003) describes the changes NAGPRA both symbolized and motivated in the museum field, tying these changes to larger shifts in museums regarding human rights and accountability to communities. Atalay (Anishinaabe-Ojibwe) (2019) discusses the connection between the repatriation of tangible heritage and the reclamation of intangible heritage, including songs, stories, Native languages, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), ceremonial practices, and other cultural practices and protocols (79). Atalay also discusses the feeling of healing and increased sense of well-being in that may occur in Native communities as a result of this reclamation of tangible and intangible heritage, including a holistic view of health that transcends the physical body (80). However, Colwell (2019) finds that this sense of healing among participants in repatriation is highly individual and complicated; it also does not strongly correlate to whether individuals feel repatriation is a spiritual burden for tribes or problems they identify within NAGPRA (100-101). Emphasis on NAGPRA compliance has also led to what Wheeler, Arsenault, and Taylor (2022) call the "NAGPRA/Not NAGPRA" dichotomy, wherein museums draw a hard line on when and how they consult with Indigenous communities as solely what is dictated by NAGPRA. This

dichotomy ignores the ethical obligations of museums to Native communities as well as forgoes the potentials of collaboration. Colwell (2017) reflects both upon the rigors and difficulties of repatriation nearly thirty years after the law was passed:

Initially, I was convinced I could show how the interests of museums and Native Americans are not antithetical. I was determined to find common ground. But after my first days on the job, I learned that common ground is so elusive because every object contains within it the seeds of conflict that have germinated over the decades between religious freedom and academic freedom, spiritual truths and scientific facts, moral rights and legal duties, preserving historical objects and perpetuating living cultures. When I followed the biography of each object, I saw the bright line between right and wrong fade to shades of gray. I learned that sometimes it was tribal members who stole objects and sometimes curators who wanted to give things back. Sometimes it was Indians who worked for museums and non-Indians who worked for tribes. Sometimes keeping an object in a museum destroyed it, while allowing it to naturally decay gave it life. As I was learning this summer morning, some of the hardest fights are those within a tribe. Repatriation, I discovered, is a tangled web. (Colwell 2017, 8)

The conflicts surrounding repatriation and the compromises it leads to can often conflict with Indigenous cultural sovereignty. Clifford (2013) writes about how Indigenous communities may alternate and interweave assertions of negotiated, or pragmatic, sovereignty, with “all-or-nothing”, or ideological, sovereignty (88). Jonaitis (2017) connects this idea to Tlingit ceremonies surrounding repatriation, through which they assert protocols into their relationship with museums (56). Jonaitis writes,

The complex ceremonial interactions between staff and Tlingit within the museum setting can represent yet another form of these empowering expressions of cultural self-determination, a process we might call repatriation sovereignty.

So, while museums may not be sites where ideological sovereignty can be acted out, expressions of that sovereignty can be made through the way in which repatriations take place. Of possibilities other than repatriation, Laforet (2004) writes,

Although this imbalance could be addressed through redistributive mechanisms other than outright transfer, the argument is made, at the table and elsewhere, that the only means of addressing the impact of the colonial initiative is to reverse the transactions that brought the museum its claim to ownership (Laforet 2004, 47).

Another connected theoretical framework is “dancing sovereignty,” written about by Tsimshian art historian, curator, dancer, and choreographer Mique'l Dangeli. Dangeli defines dancing sovereignty as,

[S]elf-determination carried out through the creation of performances (oratory, songs, and dances) that adhere to and expand upon protocol in ways that affirm hereditary privileges

(ancestral histories and associated ownership of songs, dances, crests, masks, headdresses, etc.) and territorial rights to land and waterways among diverse audiences and collaborators. (Dangeli 2016, 75-76)

Dangeli describes this sovereignty as being separate from conceptions of sovereignty rooted in Western legal definitions, as it is grounded specifically in Northwest Coast Native conceptions of protocol. She defines protocol as “bodies of law which form Indigenous legal systems” and are central to Indigenous forms of governance and nationhood. All these show that collaboration between Native communities and museums offer an opportunity to assert negotiated sovereignty in colonial spaces by asserting the importance of cultural protocols, and in many cases, by asserting ownership.

### **Summary**

Museums are inherently colonial institutions and, as venues for anthropological collecting practices and dissemination of anthropological theories, are built to be servants of the settler colonial project. Pushes to decolonize and Indigenize museums and their practices offer a route forward for Native individuals and communities to address the harms of colonialism, heal and increase senses of well-being through cultural revitalization and perpetuation, and assert Native survivance. However, “decolonization” may easily be used as a buzzword or an idea that is not fully committed to, and neocolonialism may be lived out in collaborations. The third understanding is that repatriation of Native American ancestors, belongings, and cultural patrimony, when requested, is the duty of museums, not only legally but ethically, as a part of larger obligations. These understandings form the framework of my research, which is itself further informed by the understandings of research as having been, and often continuing to be, a harmful imperialist paradigm. I bring in the Indigenous research paradigm, desire-centered research, and Native survivance as they are essential elements when researching and writing about topics concerning Native people. The following sections, which comprise my literature review, situate Haida totem poles within these understandings.

### **Anthropologists, “Northwest Coast Art,” and Totem Poles**

As Ira Jacknis points out in the chapter “From Explorers to Ethnographers, 1770-1870” (2013), “there is nothing natural about what scholars today call the ‘Northwest Coast’” (46). This is to say, the Northwest Coast is not naturally formed into a cohesive region by landscape or organization of Native communities who live there, but by the opinions and perspectives of settler scholars trying to organize and typify Native existence according to their own logics. Following Jacknis’s definition, I take “Northwest Coast” to indicate the lands of Native people extending from Yakutat Bay in Alaska, down along the coast into the south of Oregon (46). The Native communities there include, but are not limited to, the Haida, Tlingit, Heiltsuk, Nuuchahnulth (Nootka), Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl), Coast Salish, Chinook, and Tsimshian (alternative spelling: Ts’msyen).

The designation of the material culture from different communities as art, as well as the collection and display of what was deemed as art, was an integral part of the process through which anthropologists judged and organized the Northwest Coast. Townsend-Gault, Kramer, and K̓i-ke-in (2013) write that the way that the term “art” is understood and interpreted is linked to understandings of racial and cultural differences, which are in turn linked to political and disciplinary structures, which are then “inseparable from the history of museums, schools, universities, and systems of support and patronage, both public and private” (1). This means that, within the term “art,” there is an inherent, subjective judgment about what constitutes something as being worthy of the term, as well as an unspoken judgment about what is not. Political and social conditions, including perceptions and biases regarding race and culture, motivate how this decision is made. The designation of Indigenous material culture as “art” judges it by a Western standard, and implies that the material indicated is separate from, or even elevated above, other aspects of life or tradition. By claiming that one type of material culture is equal to a European artistic standard, it implies that other forms of material culture from the same community are not. Gell (1998) argued that theorizing and classifying Indigenous art primarily serves to expand the artistic sensitivities of Western art while simultaneously assimilating it within those categories (3).

For this reason, the suitability of “art” is hotly debated. However, the alternative practice of classifying material culture as “artifact” is also problematic. Richard W. Hill (Tuscarora) (2000) writes that museums and anthropologists have historically cast Native people as “ethnographic beings who produce cultural artifacts rather than art,” casting their creating as a “technological process rather than a personal quest for understanding” (40). In this view, the disbelief in a people’s ability to create “art” is linked to a disbelief in their full ability to explore or imagine.

The concept of the Northwest Coast as a region is strongly shaped by Franz Boas’s ideas of cultural relativism, and the subsequent need for anthropologists to find a system to organize and understand Indigenous peoples that did not rely on cultural evolutionism (Miller 2013, 204). The idea of the culture area was the prevalent replacement, dividing the continent by regions based on different anthropologists’ perspectives on environment and culture. Franz Boas (1891) referred to the Northwest Coast as a separate cultural group when studying and categorizing the physiology of Native people. His book *Primitive Art* (1927) includes the chapter “Art of the North Pacific Coast of North America,” dedicated to the formal analysis of material culture across different Northwest Coast communities and providing standardized interpretations, largely ignoring the styles and choices of individual artists. Franz Boas wrote about totem poles frequently as a metric of cultural diffusion, attributing the invention of totem pole carving to the Kwakwaka’wakw, and concluded that other groups like the Haida had adopted the practice (Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 49). John R. Swanton, who studied under Boas, focused on the Tlingit and Haida for part of his career, compiling and publishing volumes of Haida myths and stories. Alfred Louis Kroeber (1923) distinguished the Northwest Coast as being culturally distinct from a core “American” Native culture group. In both cases, European conceptions of art were used to categorize and solidify a region. Kroeber, for example, labeled the Tlingit and Haida as an area of “cultural intensity” based on their art, implicitly casting a judgment not only about what constitutes art but the importance of art in determining cultural development (Miller 2013, 204; Kroeber 1923). Marius Barbeau was also fascinated with totem poles, particularly those of the Nisga’a, and attempted the two-volume publication *Totem Poles* (1950) in addition to many other

publications on the topic. It was his theory that totem pole carving was a byproduct of Native communities' participation in the fur trade, rather than an ongoing historical cultural practice (Barbeau 1952). Another notable anthropologist, William Duff, pointed out that part of Barbeau's argument was based on a harmful proposition that the level of cultural development in the region in prehistoric times was too low for the Native people there to have been skilled carvers. Duff argued against this assumption, and that the accomplishment of the Native carvers and communities be properly acknowledged (Duff 1964, 94; Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 52). Duff's opinions and writings were in line with the political movements of the times he worked in, including the Red Power movement. Unfortunately, in his later years, he began to take liberties with his interpretations of totem poles, including projecting theories of genital representations onto them, which were understandably received poorly by Native audiences (Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 185).

Laforet's (2013) chapter "Objects and Knowledge: Early Account from Ethnographers, and Their Written Records and Collecting Practices, ca. 1880-1930" addresses the pervasiveness of collecting as an ethnographic practice. Laforet states that in their collecting of Northwest Coast art for major museums, James Swan, Adrian Jacobsen, and George Dawson set the precedent for "[c]ollecting as an ethnographic practice" rather than simple accumulation of rare and valuable objects (129). She places Franz Boas as the start of the full realization of this practice. These collections, once in museums, became part of systematic representations of cultures, and the classification of them. Boas's 1897-1902 Jesup Expedition was a significant length of time in his ethnographic collecting, and the results would become part of the collections at the American Museum of Natural History. When Swanton began his fieldwork as a doctoral student, Boas gave him a long list of objects, symbols, and information to look into, and questions to ask about them (Laforet 2013, 142). He requested that Swanton try to acquire full-size totem poles of different kinds for the American Museum of Natural History. He also specifically requested that Swanton look into the meaning of carvings on totem poles and suggested that "it would be well to obtain a number of well-carved models of authentic totem-poles with full explanation" (transcribed in



Laforet 2013, 143). Swanton collected relatively little from the Haida, aside from these aforementioned model totem poles which he commissioned (Swanton 1905, 131). Swanton would use these model poles for part of his work “Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida”, which included a detailed account of many totem poles, who they belong to, and how lineages are represented in them (122-124). These collecting practices, and the collecting of many other individuals, are the subject of Douglas Cole’s *Captured Heritage* (1985). In *Captured Heritage* (1985), Douglas Cole attempts to provide an overview of how the material culture that became “Northwest Coast art” was collected. A core part of his argument is that, while some material culture was directly stolen, in many cases it was sold by Native people attempting to navigate an imbalanced economic system in the context of settler colonialism. However, Cole characterized a litany of approaches and collecting practices as a “scramble”, which Laforet (2013) critiques as “[occluding] the history and character of documentary collections and the intellectual environment in which Boas, his colleagues, and students worked” (136). This argument points out that the perspective of today tends to lump all collectors of that time period together, as participating in a mad dash for art motivated by the same basic instincts and greed. However, Boas, his colleagues, and his students viewed their collecting as being distinctly different from that of curio hunters, focused on the preservation of objects as ethnographic evidence of a society through methodical and meticulous collection and documentation (137). These collecting practices also went hand-in-hand with Boas’, and many others, disruption and theft of Native remains (Lonetree 2012, 13; Rohner 1966, 172). The materials that Boas, Swanton, and other ethnographers collected during their fieldwork turned into public museum collections, and their interpretations about the represented Native cultures did as well (129). Jonaitis (2013) writes that “the history of ethnographic museums and the history of anthropological thought parallel one another” (757). The collections of these ethnographers were therefore manifestations of the idea of the Northwest Coast that the ethnographers themselves created.

A controversial figure in the history of Northwest Coast collecting is Louis V. Shotridge (Stoowukáa), a Kaagwaantaan clan Tlingit man who collected over 475 ethnographic objects

from the Northwest Coast for the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania (Preucel 2015, 41). He wrote journal articles about Northwest Coast art and represented Northwest Coast Native peoples to non-Native audiences through exhibits and lectures at the University Museum and elsewhere. He challenges popular stereotypes about Native American people, and his exhibits incorporated traditional Tlingit understandings. However, his collecting practices often violated cultural protocols, which he himself acknowledged being conflicted about when discussing attaining the Kaagwaantaan shark helmet:

It is true that the modernized part of me rejoiced over my success in obtaining this important ethnological specimen for the museum, but as one who had been trained to be a true Kaguanton, in my heart I cannot help but have the feeling of a traitor who has betrayed confidence" (1929, 343).

Colwell (2017) describes the efforts of Shotridge to acquire at.óow (clan property, discussed more later in this chapter) for the University Museum through persuading the keepers to sell, despite the resistance or reluctance of the keepers to do so (159). Of specific controversy was his incredibly drawn-out, hotly contested and ultimately unsuccessful efforts to sell the Whale House and its contents, property of the Gaanaxteidi clan (158-60). In some cases, he resorted to or attempted to resort to theft. Shotridge and others earnestly believed that changes to traditional lifeways necessitated they sell their at.óow, both for financial reasons and so that the property could be preserved in museums where white people could see them (159). When he finally gave up trying to force the sale of the Whale House, a Peace Ceremony was held to attempt to repair his relationship with his community, but it did not resolve the harm done; after he died in 1937, people said he was murdered for taking away the clans' things (160). Later, other people tried to either steal or sell the Whale House and its contents, with heated disagreements about whether it was stealing or selling, leading to the civil suit *Chilkat Indian Village v. Michael R. Johnson* (165).

These collections are clear examples of salvage ethnography, aiming to preserve and record the ways of life and forms of knowledge that the ethnographers believed were destined for disappearance. This perspective commonly ignores the violence of settler colonialism that was engineered to erase Native people and their lifeways (Lonetree 2012, 28). Devastating diseases

like smallpox, coupled with economic need, created the conditions for the alienation of cultural property in the Makah Nation, explained by one tribal member:

A lot of people died of smallpox. And they'd find these objects [that had been put away] and they'd say "Well. Jeess." You know. "Nobody owns these. Let's go sell them." And some families . . . entire clans died from the smallpox epidemic so a lot of these objects got to other places and they really had no ownership. It was really hard to tell when you lost all those linkages to the past. (Tweedie 2002, 52)

Potlatches drew negative attention from European missionaries and colonial governments, who saw in feasting and the exchange of valuable property a waste of time, wealth, and resources (Kramer 2013, 723). While the U.S. government did not have a potlatch ban, potlatches in Alaska were still targeted by Christian missionaries and government officials--many remember stories of missionaries encouraging the destruction of poles (Moore 2018, ix). In both Canada and Alaska, non-Native attitudes towards potlatches led to the large-scale theft and collecting of highly valued property by private collectors, government institutions, and museums (Cole 1985). Totem poles were no exception. Excusing the poles and villages as "abandoned," non-Native people frequently cut down poles from their places when communities were occupying a different village seasonally (Moore 2018, 34). In other cases, as is shown by Shorridge, Northwest Coast Native people, facing pressing fears of disappearance and assimilation, in some cases chose or were coerced into selling clan property, both as a means of survival and as preservation of highly valued belongings (Colwell 2017, 159; Preucel 2015). It is important to note that this large-scale theft was not unique to the Northwest Coast, but occurred all across the U.S. For example, R. Stewart Culin's collecting of sacred belongings in Zuni for the Brooklyn Museum was enabled by a smallpox epidemic, land theft, drought, U.S. military actions taken to intimidate Bow Priests, and orders from the Bureau of Indian Affairs prohibiting Native traditions (Colwell 2017, 17-19). Ethnographers, collectors, and other individuals collected Native culture all across the U.S., and the practice both was motivated and directly enabled by the U.S. settler colonial project's systematic attempted erasure of Native people (Lonetree 2012, 26).

Collected totem poles were often prominently displayed in international expositions (Jonaitis and Glass 2013, 119). The first was the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, for which

James G. Swan, having failed to purchase an existing totem pole, commissioned a pole from Dwight Wallace. An avid collector of Northwest Coast art, Swan traveled to Prince of Wales Island specifically to acquire monumental art for the Centennial Exposition. At the village of "Klawack" (Klawock, Tlingit: Láwaak) he tried to purchase one of the Kaigani Haida poles there. A chief's wife told him that most of the poles were gravemarkers, and as such, " 'we will not sell them any more than you white people will sell grave-stones or monuments in your cemeteries, but you can have one made'" (Douglas 1985, 23). Swan did so through the trader Charles Baronovich, who oversaw the carving of the pole at Kasaan. This "Swan pole" is the version of the Land Otter Pole at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Jonaitis and Glass (2010) write that the totem pole and other artifacts on display at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 were meant to "to exhibit the 'savagery' of Native Americans" in order to justify their exploitation, and the totem poles on display were received accordingly (125). The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 presented them similarly, within an imagined timeline of progress within which American people could locate themselves at the forefront (126). Franz Boas was charged with the anthropological presentation, and as a result of his own anthropological interests, the Native communities of the Northwest Coast, in particular the Kwakwaka'wakw, were represented. Not only were totem poles and clan houses on display, but a group of Native people were brought to live at the exhibition and present for the extent of it, with very poor living conditions and outbreaks of measles and smallpox (128). Jonaitis and Glass writes that this shift in presentation of Native people, from feared and hated in Philadelphia to inferior but fascinating and inventive in Chicago, reflected a similar shift in the U.S. government's consideration of them, from political threat to interesting anthropological subjects (128). At the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Centennial Exhibition, Alaska governor John Brady presented totem poles, clan houses, house posts, and other monumental pieces of art, aiming to draw new settlers to Alaska by highlighting its environmental and visual interest (134). In this case, though the tone was still culturally evolutionist, an effort was made to explain the meaning of the poles and, for the first time, attribute them publicly to their Native owners (135). The Great Depression

corresponded with a large gap before the next international exposition, the San Francisco Golden Gate International Exhibition in 1939. Before that occurrence, however, the ways in which totem poles were viewed and received would undergo a large shift in the form of the CCC totem pole restoration project, which will be discussed in-depth in the next chapter.

In the case of the totem poles of Alaskan Native communities, Viola Garfield and Linn Forrest's book *The Wolf and the Raven* (1948) about the CCC totem park poles was long an authoritative source. Garfield conducted research in southeast Alaska, among other regions, and assembled a truly stunning amount of detailed research about the individuals and communities involved in the CCC totem park project, including who the totem poles in the CCC project belong to and who gave them permission to be restored and relocated. Unfortunately, much of this research remains unpublished, but is publicly accessible as the Viola Edmunson Garfield Papers at the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections. Tlingit carver Charlie Staast' Brown, of the Neix.ádi clan of the Saanya Kwaán, made sizable contributions to *The Wolf and the Raven*. The book was originally planned to attribute the poles to their Native carvers and the individuals and clans who owned them, and Charles Brown was to be acknowledged as a co-author. However, difficulties in getting the book published led to it being restructured to appeal to non-Native audiences. Clan affiliations and other individual attributions of the poles were removed, and Charles Brown was removed as a co-author. Emily L. Moore (2018) addresses this in her book *Proud Raven, Panting Wolf: Carving Alaska's New Deal Totem Parks* (2018), which is an invaluable resource for understanding the way totem pole carving is practiced in Southeast Alaska today through examining the intentions and impacts of the CCC's totem pole restoration project. Moore argues that the Tlingit and Haida communities who allowed for their totem poles to be restored, as well as the Tlingit and Haida carvers trained and employed in the parks, reappropriated an assimilative project to assert community and family histories and continued presence in the region. Furthermore, she argues against the common trend of art historians either disregarding or dismissing the poles carved for the CCC project as unworthy successors to the poles carved in the 19th century. Importantly, Moore brings to the surface the gaps in Garfield's

book and published research, and in doing so, emphasizes what Garfield omitted; the intrinsic importance of which clan or family each pole belongs to (137).

Though totem poles had long been discussed as monumental forms of art in the field of art history, their carvers were not afforded the same emphasis or attention. This approach simultaneously designates totem poles as art and denies that their makers are fine artists. Robin K. Wright's book *Northern Haida Master Carvers* (2001) highlights Haida master carvers of the 19th and 20th century, emphasizing them as artists and reconnecting poles to those who made them. She includes the stories of totem poles when they have been recorded. She also highlights the importance of poles in Haida lifeways by beginning with different Haida stories of how monumental pole-carving was taught to them. She highlights the carvers' roles as artists in their communities and the influence of their work on the style of Northwest Coast art. Wright also traces the relationships between the artists she discusses, confirming the importance of the familial and clan relationships between individuals and groups.

Though "Native Northwest Coast art" is still a field of study, the assumptions and interpretations are being fundamentally questioned. The authors of *Unsettling Native Art Histories on the Northwest Coast* (ed. Bunn-Marcuse and Jonaitis 2020) explain the current ethics of studying Northwest Coast art as: that Native artists recorded Native history through their artistic works; that those recorded histories belong to their communities; that "Indigenous artists, scholars, and communities are the experts on their own histories;" and that scholars and cultural institutions must accept these tenets as part of their obligations to Indigenous communities (Bunn-Marcuse 2020, 4). There is a particular focus on how material culture may "embody survivance and demonstrate connections to family, to land, to sovereignty" (Bunn-Marcuse and Jonaitis 2020, 5). To center Native forms of material culture as embodiments of community and survivance is to disrupt the idea that those forms can be judged as "art" separately from the communities that produce them. To do so also contradicts the assumptions that spurred the collection of Northwest Coast art—that Native communities were destined to disappear or assimilate. For many Indigenous cultures, including many of the Northwest Coast, the honor that

is conveyed with the designation of “art” reflects the importance and value that material culture holds (Townsend-Gault, Kramer, and K̄i-ḱe-in 2013, 1). The dichotomy between art and artifact is intrinsically linked to the way in which ethnographers studied and categorized the Northwest Coast and is well-represented in the way that totem poles have been studied. In their original contexts, totem poles are expressions of family history, highly specific to the place, time, and knowledge of those who own them. They are one example of material culture, yet they have drawn considerably more attention from non-Native audiences than other forms of material culture from the same communities. Jonaitis and Glass (2010) describe totem poles as part of a distinct “intercultural history” between Northwest Coast peoples and settler colonialism due to the fascination they have drawn from non-Native audiences. As an extension of this, prominent anthropologists analyzed totem poles to the extent that “[i]n some ways, the history of ideas about totem poles parallels the history of anthropological approaches to aboriginal cultures” as they interpreted the significance of totem poles according to their own anthropological theories (Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 53). In the popular imaginations of settler populations, in the fields of academic study, and in museum collections, totem poles were routinely disassociated from their histories to suit different ends.

### **Totem Poles, Museums, Kinship, and Ownership**

In her chapter “Fighting with Property: The Double-Edged Sword of Ownership” (2013), Jennifer Kramer provides an overview of the pitfalls and complications of using Western “property language” to describe and defend Indigenous perspectives, specifically when it comes to the Northwest Coast. Despite the inability of property language to describe or acknowledge many important concepts and understandings of their cultures, Native communities still leverage those concepts to repatriate belongings and assert their sovereignty as nations. Kramer brings up this current conflict as a juxtaposition to the many anthropologists in the past, including Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, who tried to explain potlatches as “fighting with property” (724). Titled after an idea originating with the Kwakwaka’wakw and the Tlingit, Kramer writes:

In the contemporary context, the original potlatch idea of ‘fighting with property’ is an apt metaphor for the way in which Indigenous authors are now strategically mobilizing property

language to fight to protect their rights to the control of all aspects of their culture, self-representation, and self-determination. (Kramer 2013, 730)

This may be connected to the idea of “negotiated” versus “ideological” sovereignty (Clifford 2013, 88). Driven by the authority of colonial governments, the necessity for Northwest Coast communities to use Western property language to be recognized is an affront to ideological sovereignty. However, the ability of the same communities to leverage that language uses the short-term outcomes of negotiated sovereignty to bolster broader claims. These points all make it clear that while legal ownership is being discussed, it should be understood as a flawed system based on Western concepts of property. However, even though imperfect or directly misleading, these terms are leveraged by Indigenous people to assert sovereignty. I refer in this section and proceeding sections to “inalienable possessions” or “inalienable property”, following the definition “[w]hat makes a possession inalienable is its exclusive and cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time” (Weiner 1992, 33). Inalienable possessions cannot be transferred outside of a particular group, including by an individual who may have rights or ownership of them for that moment of time. Colwell (2014) discusses the concepts regarding inalienable possessions and compares “intrinsically sacred objects” and “extrinsically sacred objects” (17). Taking the Liberty Bell as an example, Colwell defines extrinsically sacred objects as those that become sacred through historical contexts, as well as through other characteristics including capacity for multiple meanings, inanimacy, and that their sacredness can “dissipate through radical recontextualization.” In comparison, intrinsically sacred objects are made sacred through creation or ritual, cannot accommodate multiple meanings, are animate or actors, and their “sacredness always dissipates despite radical recontextualization.”

Repatriation efforts are often extended to totem poles as forms of inalienable property that were lost through historic wrongdoings. As of December 2022, the National Museum of Scotland announced that it would repatriate a totem pole to the Nisga’a Nation of British Columbia; the pole was looted by Marius Barbeau during his research. Both this pole and the G’psglox pole are examples of international repatriation, which are guided not by NAGPRA but by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In January of 2022, Hereditary Chief



Snuxyaltwa (Deric Snow) of Nuxalk First Nation filed a lawsuit against the Royal B.C. Museum for failing to return his great-grandfather's pole after promising to do so in October of 2019 (Szeto 2022). In February 2023, it was returned to Bella Coola ("Nuxalk Nation celebrates return of totem pole after more than a century" 2023). A mortuary pole was taken from the Haida village of SḠang Gwaay by the Totem Pole Preservation Committee (TPPC), formed by the University of British Columbia, the BC Provincial Museum and the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs (Rowley 2020). The Haida Repatriation Committee requested the pole be repatriated in 2017, and it was returned to Haida Gwaii in 2019 along with other poles being returned from the Museum of Vancouver. In these cited cases, the totem poles had been stolen. There is significantly less focus placed on totem poles whose legal ownership under Western law was transferred by someone of the lineage they belonged to. This may be because non-Haida people do not always understand that Haida totem poles are collectively owned by their lineage. In the sources I consulted, Krmpotich (2014) most explicitly laid out that Haida totem poles are the property of a lineage (107-108). Boelscher (1988) writes about the ownership of crests and crest property as intrinsic to their meaning, stating that crests "can thus be only understood in connection with the transactions involving ownership and changes in ownership" (151). Changes in ownership that are outside of Haida cultural protocols, such as the transfer to museums, may be viewed as at odds with the meaning and purpose of crests and crest property. The Star House pole, attributed in part to Albert Edward Edenshaw and commissioned by Chief Anetlas of the K'ouwas Eagle clan in 1879, seems to have been sold by a Haida person, and Haida people were employed to take it down from its place in Old Massett and transport it (Peers et al. 2018, 12). Jisgang (Nika Collison) states in the publication about the Star House pole that Haida people 'maintain that anything which served a societal function that was sold during the Potlatch Ban period is argued to have been sold under duress.' This statement not only highlights the violence of the settler colonial project that contextualizes any Haida sale of clan property; it also gestures to the tensions and inadequacies of Western conceptions of property to take into account the full scope of that context. In Krmpotich (2014), Vince Collison (Haida) expresses his frustration with the

Field Museum's sense of ownership over Haida totem poles, stating that the poles at the Field Museum belong on Haida Gwaii (43, 109). Krmpotich states that "museums rarely occupy a social position that would, according to Haida cultural protocol, sanction them to be the possessors, caretakers, or handlers of lineage property—including bodies" (110). Totem poles came to museums, either through sale or theft, at a time when the right of Northwest Coast Native communities to their own ancestors and material culture was being fundamentally attacked. Though what museums have the right to own and steward is being questioned and addressed, as in the case of ancestors, there is a lag that Collison and Krmpotich note, where museums are not yet recognizing that they are not the appropriate caretakers for Haida lineage property, regardless of how they came into legal ownership of it.

This is tied to the ways in which museums conceptualize their ownership of collections as compared to the way that Northwest Coast Native communities conceptualize ownership, which Laforet (2004) discusses at length in her chapter "Narratives of the Treaty Table: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of Tradition:"

For the museum, the physical object is at the heart of property, where the collection is concerned. The idea that an object, once purchased, becomes the property of the institution is fundamental to the museum's operation. On the north coast, the most important aspects of property are nonmaterial and lie in the rights to produce and use objects that represent historical event and privilege. The north coast and museum paradigms employ contrasting ideas of property to arrive at concepts of symbolic capital that have vastly different implications for the ideal biography of an object and its separability from particular persons. (46)

Museums imagine the transfer of a physical object is the transfer of property itself, whereas in many Northwest Coast perspectives transferring the physical object implies the transfer of the rights symbolized by the object. The transfer of those nonmaterial aspects to those who do not have the right to them is impossible, so therefore the transfer of the physical object conflicts directly with its life and meaning. I link these aspects to key aspects of intrinsically sacred objects (Colwell 2014, 17). Totem poles do not exhibit all the traits Colwell identifies for intrinsically sacred objects, such as reproductions being inherently as powerful as the original. However, Colwell explicitly notes that his dichotomy is not meant to be understood as absolute, and that the concept of "sacred" is itself a very broad one (18). Totem poles do reflect a number of the

provided traits; they are explicitly owned symbols of family and clan history, and as such they cannot accommodate multiple meanings from external sources (17). Furthermore, while their knowledge is not necessarily secret—indeed, the public telling of their stories during a potlatch is an intrinsic part of their function—the knowledge can only be conveyed by those with the rights to do so, to those deemed appropriate to hear. I point out these specifically because these are key reasons why museums are not considered suitable stewards for Haida totem poles, which do not lose their meaning and significance despite their recontextualization.

Laforet (2004) also notes that, similarly to ideas of transferability inherent within Western ownership, museums also tend to imagine their collections as inalienable property (46-47). These conflicts, and the sense of ownership museums maintain over their collections, are lived out in repatriation discussions. Jonaitis (2017) also references Rosita Worl's reflection that museums are often open and respectful in the initial stages of consultation, "[b]ut when the group goes home and files a repatriation claim, the reactions [of some museums] are very different. Lawyers get involved and they talk differently than anthropologists" (55). Haida lawyer gii-dahl-guud-sliiaay (1995) argues that museums are not appropriate to represent First Nations culture based on the conflicts between First Nations perspectives and the rationales that justify museum collecting. gii-dahl-guud-sliiaay identifies two rationales as continuing the colonial contexts of museums; the "truth rationale" assumes that anthropologists and other academic know and can convey the "truth" of First Nations cultures, and the "access rationale" which "attributes importance to public education about cultural objects, regardless of whether this results in the death of a culture or not" (194). She also notes that, despite initiatives to address these issues in museums, museums often counter First Nations' requests for repatriation of cultural property by requiring First Nations to prove an object's importance (198-99).

I turn to the Tlingit concept of at.óow, which is relevant in discussions of totem poles being in museum collections. This is not meant to equate Haida and Tlingit traditions or conflate them as one group; the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA) makes it clear that they are and have been two separate and distinct peoples from time immemorial.

They were brought together in their current political sense by common interests in supporting and defending their people and ways of life (<https://www.ccthita.org/about/history/index.html>, accessed 7 May, 2023). There are shared values and understandings between the two groups, laid out on the cited web page, including some cultural lifeways regarding kinship. I bring up at.óow because, while it is specifically a Tlingit cultural practice, some characteristics of at.óow can be seen in other forms of valued property in other Northwest Coast Native communities, including Haida lineage property. I discuss at.óow and Haida lineage property together here specifically because how the character of their ownership interacts with Western property law, and the inability of museums to possess that ownership appropriately, seems to be similar enough to be productively discussed together. Haida lineage property is also collectively owned by the lineage, and the caretaker for lineage property is one part of a succession of caretakers, from which it cannot be alienated in Haida understandings. I also do so because there is a gap in the literature surrounding repatriation of Haida lineage property that was sold, not stolen, while there are case studies present for the repatriation of at.óow.

At.óow can be described most simply as “sacred objects representing the lineage crests” (Kan 1986, 196). However, there are many complexities to the way at.óow is created, owned, and understood, only a general sense of which can be given here.<sup>6</sup> At.óow can be physical objects bearing crests, such as crest hats, totem poles, and button robes, but can also be “intangible” heritage such as stories, songs, celestial bodies, names, and histories (Jonaitis 2017, 49). Like the Haida, the Tlingit have two exogamous moieties of Ravens and Eagles/Wolves, though it has been argued that the two moieties may be better understood as the Ravens and the opposites of the Ravens (Montieth 1998). Physical property becomes at.óow of a clan when it is presented in front of the clan’s moiety’s opposites during a potlatch. As the opposite moiety witnesses and validates the presented at.óow, “the ancestors are made manifest, the clan’s history reified, and future generations honored” (Jonaitis 2017, 49). This process also makes the possessions collective property of the clan, though they may have designated clan caretakers that care for

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<sup>6</sup> See Worl (1998), Dauenhauer (2000), Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1984), Kan (1989)

them for a period of time. As is made clear by Jonaitis, because at.óow is both collectively owned and sacred, it falls under NAGPRA compliance as both cultural patrimony and a sacred object. As cultural patrimony, at.óow must be sold by those considered to have the right to do so at the time of sale in order for another party to have the “right of possession” under U.S. law. Historically, the person who possessed legal ownership under U.S. property law may not have been the clan caretaker; for example, Chief Shakes VI of the Naanya.aayí clan was ordered by Christian reformists to leave his clan property to his wife and her son, rather than to his sister’s son Charley Jones as dictated by Tlingit matrilineal inheritance (Colwell 2017, 147). His wife later sold large amounts of at.óow, some of which ended up at the Denver Art Museum (152). In other cases, the traditional caretaker was the seller, as in the case of Louis Shotridge and those he persuaded to sell (159). Situations such as these can lead to difficulties pursuing NAGPRA claims; Harold Jacobs, cultural resources specialist for the CCHITA, communicates specifically that clan leaders, as the caretakers of at.óow, do not have the right to claim it as personal property and let it leave the clan (52). However, in addition to proving that something is clan property, an object of cultural patrimony, and a sacred object, the clan must show that the individual who brought the object outside the clan did not have the permission of the clan to do so. Jonaitis writes about the difficulties of proving this:

Museums base their arguments for right of possession both on the collection documentation—such as the correspondence between the Alaska State Museum and William Paul—and the anthropological literature that refers to cases in which individuals sell or give away clan property without controversy. In the museum’s opinion, this demonstrates that at the time the object came into the museum’s possession, such action was generally acceptable. As a senior anthropologist of the northern Northwest Coast comments, clans often adhere to an essentialist perspective on their culture that does not take into account the changing values about clan rules and obligations over the years. But the ethnographic information on which museums base their arguments is treated as fact within a contextual vacuum. In truth, these were events occurring during periods of cultural and economic stress that doubtless explains at least partially why individuals in clans were so willing to alienate their objects. Moreover, privileging published data over indigenous histories is itself a colonialist act. To analyze the occasions during which objects were alienated in the past would contribute interesting and useful nuances to the arguments concerning right of possession. (Jonaitis 2017, 53).

The first and ending part of this statement addresses the colonialism inherent in privileging collection documentation and the perspectives of anthropologists regarding controversy or lack

thereof. Unfortunately, museums have some room under NAGPRA to require clans to prove there was no group consensus for the sale of clan property. It may be difficult to prove this to the extent that Western law can require, which leaves the right of possession in a nebulous place. For example, as is referenced in the quote above, Teeÿhittaán clan caretaker William Paul donated the Yéil Aan Kaawu Naa S'aaxw (Leader of All Ravens Hat) to the Alaska State Museum in 1969. The Teeÿhittaán clan later submitted a repatriation claim, stating that even as clan caretaker, William Paul did not have the right to alienate the crest hat from the clan without clan permission. The NAGPRA review board found that the Alaska State Museum could not prove the clan approved of donating the clan hat. However, the museum still did not relinquish ownership, instead settling on a shared custody agreement with the clan (52). Conversely, the Field Museum maintained that though the Kaagwaantaán clan Sea Monster Hat was cultural patrimony under NAGPRA, they still had right of possession. However, they agreed to “voluntarily” return the hat (52-53). Preucel and Williams (2005) write about the repatriation of the hat, as well as its use in the Centennial Potlatch in 2004 (16). In both cases, the museums maintained their right of possession over the knowledge of Tlingit clan representatives in different ways that reinforced colonial senses of ownership. In the block quote above, Jonaitis (2017, 53) also addresses a similar point to the one Jigsang (Nika Collison) (Peers et. al 2018, 12) asserted about lineage property being sold under duress; museums do not take into account the stresses individuals in clans navigate at different time periods. In a conversation with Nora Marks Dauenhauer about repatriation (Tlingit, Lukaax.ádi clan), Chip Colwell (2017) asked about Tlingit people who sold at.óow to collectors and museums (136). Dauenhauer responded that they would do so when money was needed,

[b]ut she insists that I have to put such decisions into the context of the times. Poverty. Boarding schools. Elders who didn't believe in their children. Children who didn't believe in their elders. Everyone believing their culture had taken its final breaths.

“And the churches thought that at.óow were the works of Satan!” she exclaims. “Even twenty-five years ago, the churches would get people to burn at.óow.” She shakes her head in disbelief. Her eyes flare. “That's burning your identity—burning your soul!” (137)

Dauenhauer acknowledges the changes that Tlingit people who sold their at.óow were navigating, including a disjuncture between generations. I would argue that all these reflect the

perspective that Tlingit people doing what they thought was best in one time period should not prevent Tlingit people from doing what they think is best now.

When repatriations do happen, the ways in which *at.óow* or lineage property are returned reflects this, as cultural protocols may be extended to the repatriating museum. One example is the repatriation of four poles stolen from the Tlingit Saanya *Kwáan* by the Edward H. Harriman Expedition in 1899 (Moore 2010). After the poles were repatriated from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, National Museum of the American Indian, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, and Field Museum, the Cape Fox Corporation donated a cedar log to each museum. The museums then commissioned Tlingit carvers Nathan Jackson and his son Stephen Jackson (who now uses the artist's name Jackson Polys) to carve new poles from the cedar logs. Moore dubs the practice of commissioning Native artists to fill the space of repatriated objects, replicas or otherwise, as "propatriation," and argues for its possibility as a way to build collaborative relationships between communities and museums. Moore also discusses how this exchange emulated Tlingit cultural protocols surrounding the commissioning of totem poles. In doing so, the Cape Fox Corporation incorporated the repatriating museums into Tlingit understandings of reciprocity and respect. However, the new poles did not exactly copy the poles they were carved to replace, with differing degrees of departure. Nathan Jackson's poles are inspired by the same stories as the old poles, but depict them differently, with Jackson stating, "I felt that the original pole was the original pole; I would make a rendition of my own" (Moore 2010, 128). Moore connects this to a refusal to provide the museum with a copy of *at.óow* that the museum had not purchased nor brought out at a potlatch. It also reflects that the story within the pole, as well as the right to depict it and tell its story, is more important than specific physical characteristics. Jackson Polys made more radical changes in his designs for the new poles, including a two-dimensional interpretation, continuing and adapting the tradition of carving in a new format (132). Moore describes the effects of the exchange between the museums, the corporations, and the carvers:

Cape Fox Corporation's choice to nevertheless honor the museums' return of their at.óow with a reciprocative gift inserted Tlingit protocols into a relationship that had previously ignored them: the gift effectively positioned the museums in a new, Tlingit-defined relationship of reciprocity with the tribe. (Moore 2010, 133)

The gift and carving of the new poles went beyond replacing repatriated poles and involved the museums in Tlingit cultural protocols that both acknowledged what had taken place and set standards for future relationships.

Another example of fitting museums into Tlingit protocols comes from the Smithsonian Institution (Hollinger et. al 2013). The Killer Whale clan crest hat (Kéet S'aaxw) was repatriated to the Dakl'aweidí (Killer Whale) clan from the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in 2013. Prior to the repatriation, the hat underwent 3-D digitization with the understanding that the data would be used in a culturally responsible way (204). When a 3-D reproduction was made, again in consultation with the Dakl'aweidí clan and other Tlingit representatives, great care was taken to emphasize that the reproduction was not a true crest object, but "a very good facsimile" (204). It was this distinction that made it permissible for the museum to keep and display the reproduction. There were some interesting reflections from Tlingit people about this distinction during the Sharing Our Knowledge Clan Conference in 2012, including L'uknax.adi clan leader Herman Davis commenting "I have to pay my opposites for my crest hat. How do I pay a machine?" (215). However, this is not to say the reproduction was disregarded; Harold Jacobs (Yanýeidí), Cultural Specialist for the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, and others decided it was appropriate for the reproduction to be danced alongside the original hat "to put life into the hat by dancing it at least once before it went back to the museum" (212). The replica hat is also continuously available for clan members to check out of the Smithsonian collections and dance in important events if the clan leader authorizes it. The reproduction therefore has the distinction of being valued regalia, while still not being at.óow.

This process may be compared to the processes and attitudes surrounding a later use of 3-D technology. While at the Smithsonian, Harold Jacobs recognized the Sculpin Hat as a crest hat of the Tlingit Kiks.ádi clan of Sitka, Alaska. The hat's condition was unstable, and it would not be able to be used or danced in ceremony if returned. Jacobs, having had the experience of working



on the Killer Whale hat collaboration, asked whether the 3-D technology could be used to scan the hat, digitally “repair” the damaged section, and create a new hat that could be brought out by the Kiks.ádi clan, worn, and danced. The leader of the Kiks.ádi clan, Ray Wilson, Sr. (Aanyaanáx), agreed to this, and it was eventually decided that two new hats be made; one would be a replica for the museum to keep for educational purposes, and one to be given to the clan and used as the new Sculpin hat. The old hat would remain at the museum. It is important to make clear that the new hat was not intended to be a replica of the old Sculpin hat; it was intended to be, fully, the same hat. This means that, while the replica for the museum would not be at.óow, the hat carved for the clan would. The clan leaders determined that the cultural protocols for carving a crest hat should be carried out as fully as possible at all stages. The Kiks.ádi clan are of Raven moiety, so the hat needed to be made by members of the Eagle/Wolf moiety. The museum employee scanning the old hat and the employee using the Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine to mill the new hat would both need to be Eagle/Wolf moiety. One of the two museum professionals working on the hat, Eric Hollinger, had already been adopted into the Dakl’aweidí clan of the Eagle/Wolf moiety. However, Smithsonian Institution Exhibits Specialist and model maker Chris Hollshwander needed to be adopted into the Kaagwaantaan clan of the Eagle/Wolf moiety. After the hat was made, it was brought to Alaska along with the old hat so that it could be ceremonially dedicated, and the spirit moved from the old hat to the new one. The new hat was dedicated and danced in ceremony in 2019, while the old hat remained at the Smithsonian.

Though repatriation proceedings are not meant to be potlatches, they incorporate elements of cultural protocols. Rowley (2020) writes that museum staff and members of the Haida Nation worked together to return the pole stolen from SḠang Gwaay “in a good way,” which included family connected with SḠang Gwaay singing and speaking to the pole when it left the UBC Museum of Anthropology, the Haida Repatriation Committee welcoming it and other poles with song as they arrived in Haida Gwaii, and hereditary chiefs both thanking museum staff and reminding all about how much work there is to be done. After the Tlingit Kaach.ádi clan Frog Hat

was repatriated from the Oakland Museum, it was celebrated along with the rededication of the Chief Shakes house in Wrangell. Harold Jacobs suggested the hosting clans invite Susana Macarron Bice, Oakland Museum history department registrar, to the celebration to see the clan hat and other at.óow used in ceremonies. The experience struck Bice and educated her on the importance that at.óow be repatriated (Jonaitis 2017, 51). Museum professionals assisting with repatriations have been adopted into Tlingit clans as expressions of gratitude, as well as to reinforce the connection between the museum professional and the clan. Jonaitis writes:

Repatriation involves the encounter of different realms of culture and values, and part of the ceremonialism involved in repatriation is strategically designed to encourage museum staff to acknowledge Tlingit epistemology and temporarily weaken their attachment to the colonialist values of their institution. (51)

This is not an experience solely attached to repatriation. For museum professionals involved in consultation and collaboration, the experience can radically change the way that they experience the belongings in their care. The Penn Museum has a history of loaning Tlingit clan property out to the Central Council to be used in potlatches, which Espenlaub (2015) states gives the chance for the museum to see the objects used as intended in their traditional context, and ultimately supports NAGPRA claims by displaying the significance of their cultural ownership to museum staff (506). After consulting with the Haida delegation to the Pitt Rivers Museum, one museum professional reflected that consultation “really changes your attitude, your respect for objects, your interest in objects. It broadens it hugely to see a group of people come in and breathe life into the things by telling you so much about them, and their reverence toward them is just so inspiring” (Krmpotich et. al 2013, 184). Devorah Romanek, another employee at the Pitt Rivers during the consultation with the Haida delegation, brings up the idea of a “third space” in unequal encounters between cultural groups (Bhabha 2004):

Bhabha advocates a fundamental realignment of the methodology used for cultural analysis in the West. Such a rethinking, he claims, might provide a basis for the West to develop more fulfilling relationships with other cultures. The visit by the Haida delegation led me to reflect upon this idea, in that the knowledge that was exchanged or repatriated during the visit resides in a space born of this relationship. It is the relationship of people to objects and of people to one another, a third space. It is believed that this space can create new relationships between groups that might otherwise be polarized. (Krmpotich et al. 2013, 194)

Jonaitis (2017) writes of the inclusion of museum professionals in Tlingit cultural protocols during repatriation, “[e]ven if repatriation actions are conducted under the most positive of circumstances, it would be naïve to conclude the players are equal. Nevertheless, by embracing non-Natives into their clans at such ceremonies, the Tlingit create temporary parity” (51). This embrace is even further lived out in adoptions such as the adoption of Eric Hollinger and Chris Hollshwander. Colwell (2019) writes that “[o]bjects embody knowledge and identity, but also relationships” (95). In these instances, Tlingit fights for, and with, their property not only reaffirm the centrality of history and relationship to those objects, but bring museum professionals into those relationships and fundamentally shift the way they relate to those objects. Krmpotich (2014) states that the Haida concepts of material and immaterial property are situated within their ability to express *yahgudang*, and therefore, repatriation of Haida lineage property should be understood within a framework of *yahgudang* (106):

[t]hrough the use of *yahgudang* as an interpretive strategy, what we usually consider the “politics” of repatriation is transformed into a much more localized negotiation of identity and control. *Yahgudang* is not apolitical, but the dichotomy it privileges is not one of colonial/colonized relations; it is one of lineage/non-lineage relations. (Krmpotich 2014, 106; italicized in original)

This does not mean that colonial/colonized relations are irrelevant. Rather, a refusal to subsume highly specific protocols into broader assumptions of what it means to be Native or non-Native asserts the importance of Haida lifeways.

Western museums conceptualize their ownership of the collections in their care as based in the physical objects. However, Northwest Coast Native perspectives frequently conceptualize ownership of certain kinds of property, such as Tlingit *at.óow* and Haida lineage property, as both collective and inalienable (Laforet 2004). This can lead to conflicts with repatriation claims, wherein museums privilege colonial systems of ownership and forms of knowledge to maintain their own ownership. Yet when museums do honor repatriation claims, it provides an opportunity for Native communities to integrate cultural protocols into the museum’s practice. These experiences can also shape the perspectives of non-Native museum professionals, who are able

to expand their understanding of the belongings in their collections beyond what is provided for by Western concepts of ownership.

### **Conservation, Indigenous sovereignty, and Totem Poles**

Repatriation and the field of conservation often conflict. One famous example is the G'psgolox pole, which was repatriated from the Museum of Ethnography in Sweden to the Haisla Nation in 2006 after 15 years of negotiation (Jessiman 2011). The pole, stolen from the Haisla village of Misk'usa in 1929, lived at the Museum of Ethnography in Sweden until repatriation was initiated by the Haisla Nation in 1991. The Haisla Nation's pushes for repatriation were met with many challenges, due in some part to the Museum of Ethnography's collections being legally the property of the Swedish government. The Haisla Nation made significant progress in repatriation negotiations after offering to carve two replacement poles, one for the Museum of Ethnography and one to stand in the G'psgolox pole's original location so that it may go through the natural aging processes. Meanwhile, the community agreed to preserve the G'psgolox pole in a climate-controlled container until the community is able to build a cultural center to house and preserve it according to museum standards. Many people involved in the repatriation had strong feelings about the museum placing conditions over the return of the pole and felt that the pole should be allowed to return to the earth. Others thought that it would be a good thing for the pole to be physically preserved so that younger generations could learn from it. Members of both stances thought that the museum should not have the authority to refuse return of the pole in any circumstance. However, as a "voluntary" international repatriation, the Museum of Ethnography was able to maintain legal control over the pole until the Haisla Nation agreed to its terms. The pole was returned to the village of Kitimaat in British Columbia in 2006.

This is one example of conservation ethics being weaponized to undermine Indigenous cultural sovereignty, which can be traced back to the hegemony of Western scientific epistemologies and the concept of what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) calls "metacultural artifacts." Though Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's discussion focuses on UNESCO and the concept of world heritage, she details the process through which a cultural asset is deemed of high enough value

that it becomes viewed as the heritage of humanity, shifting “from a privileged relationship to a cultural good deriving from notions of ancestry, descent, and inheritance to a relationship based on interest, choice, freedom, democratic notions of inclusion, participation, consent, and investment” (184). Metaculture is also related to “scholarly privilege,” which Michael Ames (2003) associates with “the ways museum and university scholars attempt to classify, represent, and control their fields of study in the name of ‘science,’ ‘academic freedom,’ and ‘scholarship’” (171). This practice and moral argument, Ames notes, is disrupted by Indigenous peoples’ claims to sovereignty over their history and culture. Through the Museum of Ethnography’s authority as a cultural and scientific institution, they were able to reframe the pole as the heritage of humanity, which all of humanity should have access to, therefore legitimizing themselves as its caretakers and maintaining their full control over the pole’s physical body and history. To allow the pole to return to the earth would be to deprive the larger global community of its imagined rightful access. This could also be seen as the pole, though an intrinsically sacred object by definition of its community, being reframed by the Museum of Ethnography as an extrinsically sacred object. While extrinsically sacred objects and the cultural values they represent can be threatened by physical destruction, the physical destruction of intrinsically sacred objects may preserve and perpetuate cultural values (Colwell 2014, 17). The physical preservation of objects therefore has highly different implications depending on who makes those decisions, how, and for what purpose.

While much attention has been paid to the decolonization of curatorial practices, rigid Western scientific hegemonies are deeply embedded in the “best practices” of conservation, both preventive and interventive. Critical to discussions of Native sovereignty is the understanding of “science” as political, as Clayton W. Dumont, Jr. (Klamath) (2003) describes in “The Politics of Scientific Objections to Repatriation” (109). Dumont writes that “powerful scientists have always thought they possessed the singularly correct means for knowing about their own and everyone else’s history” (2003, 116). This is connected to the ways in which conservation has been weaponized in the past to prevent the return of ancestors and belongings. Moses (1993) notes

that many First Nations people consider museum requirements of preservation to be a form of control that amounts to forcing a “tacit acknowledgment” that museums, as representatives of a settler colonial society, have the right to determine how First Nations access and interact with their own cultural patrimony (7).

Clavir (2002) points out relevant Enlightenment ideals to conservation as: “(1) the belief in the separation of the religious and the secular; (2) the belief that science can provide objective knowledge about the nature of the universe; (3) a belief in the value of knowledge gained from enquiry; and (4) the belief that one has a right to gain this knowledge and to use it to educate others” (2002, 29). Conservation locates intrinsic knowledge or meaning within the physical body of an object that can be maintained and extracted via certain scientific practices. Conservation also assumes that this information can and does exist separately from cultural context, so it is possible and beneficial to separate objects from cultural lifeways in order to preserve and glean the information encoded at that point. This is tied to the ongoing recognition of, and care not to remove, “ethnographic dirt,” or a certain amount of material that on other objects may be considered unclean or unsightly. Conservators therefore reveal, and maintain, a version of an object while aiming to reveal the “true” version, or the one with the most identified meaning and knowledge embedded. Therefore, up until recently, the field of conservation considered ethnographic collections to be primary sources about peoples and places in time, rather than active participants in lifeways.

To care for this information, conservation prioritizes keeping the physical material of an object as unchanged as possible for as long as possible. Laforet (2004) discusses about the link between preservation of museum objects and Western concepts of time, wherein all people regardless of education can be expected to view time as a dichotomy between a theoretically endless, linear extension of the “past” and the current “present.” To freeze a museum object in one point in time supports this perception:

Even though in popular practice the internal differentiation of the past beyond a certain point – for example, 'a hundred years ago' – becomes less and less important to anyone but scholars with an interest in a particular period, in an overall linear framework every object can be seen as the physical representation of a moment that will never come again. (Laforet 2004, 41)

Therefore, even if a museum visitor has no concept of the culture or time an object is from, they will presumably be able to understand, based on the idea of “preservation” itself, that the object belongs to a time separate from the present. Bangstad (2022) writes about this idea of museum collections being “permanent,” and how the attempt to preserve an object unchanged from one point onward is imagined as being an “invisible” and “passive” action by museum professionals, when in reality it is a value-based judgment that forever shifts the life and future of the object (4). Some of the methods used for this goal can be incredibly harmful and have long-lasting effects. One particularly widespread issue is chemical treatment; museums routinely treated proteinaceous materials like wool, hide, and wood with pesticides to prevent pests, and toxic residues remain today. The residues are usually very difficult to remove without damaging the physical material. However, if the residues are left, it can make handling and interacting with the material dangerous. Repatriated Indigenous belongings may have a ceremonial role to fulfill that pesticide residue complicates or prevents, depending on what their communities decide to do. Discussions about museums can take responsibility for the effects of chemical treatment are beginning to be more common (Odegaard and Sadongei 2005; Seifert et al. 2005; Odegaard 2019).

In contrast to the belief that there is one objective way to best understand and care for an object and its value, Native communities may understand and care for their belongings in highly specific and diverse ways, and no one approach can be applied across the board. Rossoff (2003) opens the chapter “Integrating Native Views into Museum Procedures: Hope and practice at the National Museum of the American Indian” with the unambiguous statement, “[o]bjects are alive and must be handled with respect” (72). The concept of objects being alive is intrinsic to discussions surrounding preservation in museums. However, the ways in which objects are alive are varied and specific, and the ways in which they must be respected even more so. Rosoff

states clearly that traditional care practices are implemented on a case-by-case basis, and that practices that are at one point appropriate for an object may be judged as inappropriate in the future (73). Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama (2013) put forward two conclusions about museums with Indigenous collections, specifically Hopi:

1. Artifacts are members of communities and can continue functioning in a meshwork of relationships with humans in the home community, as well as in the museum. Museum personnel should therefore rethink the concept of “objects” and animacy.
2. Everything has a natural life cycle analogous to the human cycle of birth, growth, useful life, rest/repose/retirement, and death. Museum personnel should therefore rethink the concept of “preservation.” (266)

It is important not to highlight or assume “animacy” for Native belongings as equating them with people; in some cases, this may be appropriate, but in others it is not (267). However, it is important to consider what “animacy” means and what past and current museum ethics assumes about the inanimacy of “objects.” Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama state that “[I]n the end, the social relationships between artifacts and humans are important, not the question of whether animacy is a fact or a metaphor” (268). Considering objects as part of social systems disturbs Eurocentric assumptions of meaning and value, which in turn disturbs understandings of how that meaning and value should be cared for. Clavir (2002) lays out that while the traditional museum’s focus on the “loss of authenticity/integrity in an object = loss of tangible link with past,” the perspectives of the First Nations participants are often oriented around how a “link with past is made tangible by participating in traditional lifeways” (79). Clavir offers an alternative definition of cultural preservation, synthesized from the perspectives of Native American and First Nations peoples, as “the active maintenance of continuity with indigenous values and beliefs that are part of a community’s identity,” placing the focus on the perpetuation of culture (2002, 73). Interaction with cultural patrimony as well as usage in ceremonies and tasks is also, in many cases, considered necessary for its spiritual, or “conceptual,” care (2002, 92). There is also a difference in the concept of “heritage”; whereas from a Western perspective heritage is often a material object, from a First Nations perspective heritage is processual, cultural, and part of a lived tradition (Clavir 2002, 245). From the latter perspective, preserving the physical integrity of an object does



not preserve its life. Critical to an object's meaning is its ability to be used in the preservation and perpetuation of cultural processes.

However, this is not to say that preservation of physical integrity has no place. It is easy to take this criticism and consideration of this view in the opposite direction and assume that all Indigenous peoples want their belongings to eventually return to the earth. Assuming that "natural decay" or a "natural life cycle" is appropriate in all cases could be seen as similar to the view of Native people as inherently outside of modern life (Clavir 2002, 79). First Nation communities may view physical integrity as evidence of and a tie to the skills, traditions, and memory of ancestors, as well as sources of knowledge in continuing those traditions forward (246). Clavir notes the idea of a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" paradigm when it comes to the preservation of physical objects and the preservation of cultural lifeways. However, this is not unanimous between informants and across all material heritage. In some cases, a "one-but-not-the-other" approach may be more culturally appropriate. It is also important to keep in mind Clavir's point that setting up Indigenous practices and perspectives as antithetical to those of museum conservation feeds a false dichotomy, ignoring Indigenous museum professionals, as well as Indigenous museums and cultural centers that make use of traditional museum components (69). These challenges and collaborations correlate with appropriate museology, which proposes that museum practices should be adapted to serve their specific local context and communities, rather than maintain any one core standard (Kreps 2008). Appropriate museology can also incorporate, or be fully determined by, Indigenous museological practices, the inclusion of which affirms cultural sovereignty over the scientific values of conservation ethics and the colonial framework it represents. Kreps (2009) describes Indigenous museological practices, including curation and how belongings are cared for, as "tangible expressions of the intangible" in contrast to Western museum practices that have focused on the tangible (197). Kreps argues that Indigenous curatorial traditions themselves qualify as forms of intangible cultural heritage according to the definitions set forward by the Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural

Organization (UNESCO) in 2003; the forms of care practiced over tangible cultural heritage symbolize both care for intangible cultural heritage and are themselves forms of heritage (199). However, Kreps also cites the critique by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) that the Conventions, and other similar “lists” of what qualifies as world heritage, both reframes communities’ cultural heritage as the heritage of humanity and may dissociate cultural practices from their cultural contexts and understandings (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006, 171; Kreps 2009, 203-204). I connect these critiques to assumptions about how Indigenous cultural practices should be understood and integrated into physical preservation in museums as well as attempts to compile one-size-fits-all templates of care.

An example of this is that one unnamed Haida person interviewed by Clavir (2002) believed that while some belongings or sacred beings should be allowed to deteriorate, Haida totem poles in particular should not, because they are no longer fulfilling the particular ceremonial function that demands it (155). She states that the idea that “objects should be allowed to complete ‘their natural cycle,’ was part of the highly politicized nature of the relationship between First Nations and museums (and, in particular, of repatriation).” This is to say that repatriation is a function of Indigenous sovereignty, so any attempts by museums to place conditions on what happens to repatriated belongings is to place conditions on sovereignty. So, while the idea of a natural life cycle is an important one, it may sometimes garner disproportionate attention. The idea that Haida poles are no longer fulfilling a certain ceremonial function can be linked to Moore’s proposition of a radical recoding; Haida poles in museums and cultural centers may be viewed as fulfilling new roles, for which a natural cycle is no longer desirable. In other words, the way in which Haida people believe Haida totem poles should be physically cared for adapt and change over time according to what is needed for their intangible aspects to be cared for in the contexts of the time and place, and people also may individually agree about what the best method is. Both approaches—preserving Haida poles in museums and demanding that belongings be returned and allowed to pass away—are part of the self-determination that is embedded in discourses surrounding Indigenous belongings.

When it comes to Native belongings in non-Native museums, the focus is often on repatriation, as it should be in many cases. However, in other cases, Native people may make the decision that belongings should remain in museums temporarily or for the foreseeable future. This can be accommodated through various collaborative stewardship agreements, for which there is no one set approach, but rather a plethora of ever-evolving methods and documents that are adapted to serve specific, unique aims and relationships. Todd (1998) provides an examination of the history of and issues surrounding the conservation of totem poles. Totem poles traditionally are left where they are when they fall over; while terms like “deteriorate” and “decay” have been used from Western scientific perspectives, such terminology reflects a misunderstanding about what is happening when poles rest. Todd writes that “[i]n Haida philosophy, the concept of time passing acknowledges and honors the process of life and death and gives regard to the artists and the society of the past” (407). During the course of my internship, I learned that saying that a pole has “returned to the earth,” has been “allowed to rest,” or has “passed away” better reflects the aforementioned perspective. Fallen poles also frequently serve as “nursery logs” for cedar saplings to grow from, therefore participating in the lives of the poles that will be carved from those cedars (Moore 2018, 186). An interpretive sign at Totem Bight Historical Park accompanies two fallen totem poles and is titled “Continuing the Cycle.” Another part of the logic behind letting poles pass away is that the commissioning of a totem pole and it being publicly “brought out” functions as part of the important social process of the potlatch (Moore 2018, 7). Similarly, the prestige that is accrued through multiple potlatches, commissioning more totem poles is directly correlated to an individual and lineage accruing more honor and prestige (Moore 2018, 7). The value of totem poles could be therefore explained as processual, located very strongly in their commissioning, carving, and witnessing, rather than on their ongoing physical integrity. To spend time, money, and effort on restoring or conserving an older pole’s physical integrity, rather than on the commissioning and carving of a new pole, is outside of this system of value. According to Todd:

By denying history evident through aging, the impression that is created through the practice of surface rebuilding—when compared to the Haida practice of overall preservation of the old

poles and their environment at Ninstints—is not of time passing or of the past, but only of a newly built present. (Todd 1998, 407)

To this point, Todd cites the decision for the Ninstints World Heritage Site on the island of SGang Gwaay to allow standing memorial and mortuary poles to return to the earth in their original placement, under the protection and monitoring of the Haida Gwaii Watchmen.

This practice has historically come into tension with non-Native conceptions of preservation and care when it comes to totem poles. Todd places the beginning of conservation treatments for poles in Canada with efforts by the National Museums in Ottawa and the Canadian National Railway in the 1920s. The latter of these employed Native men to restore existing poles and place them along railroad routes to be visible to travelers. Dawn (2006) argues that this project's primary aim was to disrupt Gitksan and other bands' resistance to the government's assimilatory efforts, presenting their totem poles as monuments to the past and their communities as long passed. The CCC totem pole restoration project is another example, labeling poles in their village sites as "abandoned," reflecting the deeply ingrained Western perspective of what matters in material culture and how that should be cared for (Moore 2018, 27).

However, Native communities' attitudes and practices regarding the preservation of their poles should not be oversimplified. Todd (1998) also provides an in-depth discussion of the different approaches to totem poles restoration that may be considered appropriate, including total restoration of the pole to its original appearance, or as close to the original appearance as possible. He notes that this approach may be taken when preserving the story that pole tells is the priority, rather than maintaining the original materials of the pole (406). Increasingly often, the decisions surrounding preservation and conservation of poles are made with consideration of descendant communities' perspectives, if not with their full authority being acknowledged. Conservation work on poles at the Totem Heritage Center in Ketchikan occurs only with the permission of the family that has the inherited ownership, as well as the permission of the Alaska State Museum (Todd 1998, 408). Family members are a part of the conservation process, using songs and formal blessings. In his online article "Conserving Wood" Todd (2002) recounts the conservation of the Tongass Island Raven at the THC, wherein Esther Shea sang a song and,

[A]sked the Raven to understand that the treatment was meant to help the people who were alive now to be more closely linked with their ancestors from the past. She asked the Raven to understand that no harm was meant and that the effort to preserve the wood and to keep the materials stabilized was so the Raven could continue to remind the native people of their culture, their symbols and the past. (Todd 2002, Ketchikan Museum Object Files)

In this case, the pole has taken on a role that it did not have previously, and so different treatment of it is necessary, as decided by those who have inherited the right to make that decision. I tie this to the focus on the perpetuation and continuation of culture and community in First Nations perspectives as recorded in Clavir (2002, 72). As will be seen in the following section, the forces surrounding the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole that led to their presence at the DAM are linked to non-Native focuses on physical preservation. However, although physical preservation is not a traditional practice in the care of totem poles, in some cases it may be desirable or even vital for the roles that totem poles now fulfill in the perpetuation of cultural practices. In the case of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, their physical preservation is directly tied to their potential futures.

### **Conclusion of Literature Review and Theoretical Background**

The thematic points of convergence, as described in this theoretical background and literature review, create a net of connections between concepts and case studies, through which the journey of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole may be understood. Western concepts of preservation, the status of museums as cultural authorities, and the conditions of settler colonialism all motivate and justify the alienations of Haida totem poles from their communities and their continued stewardship there. The ownership of Haida lineage property, including totem poles, in museums sits at inherent conflict with Haida cultural protocols. Efforts to navigate this tension, either through repatriation or other collaboration between museums and the appropriate representatives, include assertions of the importance of ownership, kinship, cultural protocols, and sovereignty.

However, there is a gap in the literature regarding Haida lineage property as inalienable, despite sharing parts of these aspects with Tlingit *at.óow*, which is frequently discussed as inalienable and collectively owned. I also note a gap in the discussion of totem poles generally as

objects of cultural patrimony or collectively owned, with discussions largely focused on stolen totem poles. It is unclear from my existing research why these gaps exist, if there are differences in cultural protocols that explain it, etc.; this will be left for future research. This thesis fills these gaps in the literature by discussing the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole explicitly as inalienable property of clans, as Lee Wallace made clear to me in the quote that precedes the next section. As will be established in the following chapters, a story of the journey of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole offers a case study of the intersections between the colonial legacies of museums and their obligations to Native communities, the role of preservation in the perpetuation of Native culture, and differences in cultural concepts of ownership.

## Chapter Five: Where They Went and How They Got There

### Introduction

Let me say this about how [it is] that those particular poles ended up there. The background is, they were part of our family's possessions, and with my grandfather, John Wallace, being a noted carver, he went to the San Francisco Exposition. And with that, he brought those two particular poles with him. And then, at some point when the fair ended, he decided he'd sell 'em, which he had the right to. I say he had the right to, 'cause they were family possessions. But this is where it would get kind of tricky, where in most cases...there's an ownership of clans. Clans own 'em. But I think he was going through a time period where he was getting introduced—and he traveled a lot in his adulthood with his carving career. And he experienced the cultural changes of what's going on with the Western civilization...So, he decided to sell them. Right or wrong. I mentioned that...clan-wise, maybe he didn't. But at that time, he was the head person of the particular family, and he decided to. (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022)

In this section, I will give a brief overview of the circumstances and particulars of how the Land Otter pole and memorial pole came to be at the DAM. I begin with the quote above, because this is the immediate answer that Lee Wallace gave me when I asked him about his thoughts on the poles being at the DAM. I also begin here because I did not know, fully, that Haida poles were collectively owned before this point. I had read in Krmpotich (2014) that they were inalienable property, but I had not understood the full implications (107). I knew that Tlingit at.óow, as described in the previous chapter, sometimes has similar aspects to Haida lineage property and is collectively owned, but as they are not equivalent to one another, I did not assume they were the same in ownership. My initial research into the DAM curatorial files simply left me glad that the poles had not been stolen, as so many had been. However, when Lee

Wallace laid out for me explicitly what is quoted above, it greatly changed my understanding of the poles and their place at the DAM. The point of this chapter or subsequent chapters is not to place any judgment one way or the other on John Wallace's decisions concerning the poles. As Lee Wallace points out, it is difficult for him to say whether this choice was right or wrong. This chapter is meant to present a timeline regarding the poles leaving Alaska, as well as some of the intersecting tensions John Wallace navigated as a Haida carver and clan leader in the 20th century, which contextualize his decision.

I will begin with a brief description of the CCC totem park project and its implications for the way that totem poles were, and continue to be, viewed. The next section will discuss the life of Dwight Wallace's son John Wallace prior to the CCC totem park project. The following section will talk about the sale of the poles at the San Francisco Exhibition, and the roundabout route the poles took from San Francisco to the DAM. Next, I will discuss the reaction from the Forest Service, as well as how the conflict with the Forest Service was resolved. I will then give an overview of the way that the poles have been viewed and cared for at the DAM up until the renovation. The conclusion will briefly describe John Wallace's choice to carve the Master Carver pole at Totem Bight.

### **The CCC Totem Pole Restoration Project**

The CCC totem pole restoration project operated in southeast Alaska from 1938 to 1942. A part of the New Deal, its core mission was to remove totem poles from "abandoned" Tlingit and Haida village sites and install the poles in "totem parks" that were easily accessible to tourist steamships. If the original poles were not in good condition to be moved and could not be restored, they would be copied. Moore (2018) examines the totem pole restoration project in great detail and should be referred to for more in-depth accounts of the carvers involved. Moore places the motivations for the restoration project within a larger initiative by the U.S. federal government to establish a national narrative of history and art that was quintessentially American (11). The projects appropriated cultural arts and practices from many Native groups to serve the national imagination and was ultimately assimilative. However, Moore argues that the program



was reappropriated by Tlingit and Haida communities as an assertion of clan histories, community presence, and traditional land and resource rights in the face of this legal battle and the larger settler colonial project. She also argues against disparaging views from art critics and historians that the totem poles produced by the CCC project were somehow illegitimate compared to past totem pole carving. The program established six totem parks across Southeast Alaska: Totem Bight, Saxman, Kasaan, Hydaburg, Klawock, and Shakes Island. The program also employed over two hundred Haida and Tlingit men in the restoring of old poles and carving of new ones, facilitating the training of a new generation of carvers at a time when the craft had been systematically discouraged (Brown 2009, 9). The program restored forty-eight poles from villages, created copies of fifty-four more, and an additional nineteen were created from people's memories of poles that had returned to the earth (9).

The Forest Service had long considered totem poles and their village sites as important resources; the agency recommended Tuxekan and Old Kasaan's totem poles and clan houses for monument status in 1907 (Moore 2018, 14). In 1922, anthropologist T.T. Waterman assembled a report on the state of Haida and Tlingit totem poles and urged their preservation as important parts of American heritage. Despite the Forest Service's long held interest in totem poles, there was no funding put towards their preservation until the CCC project (14). Initial funding came from the Works Progress Administration, but funding was sustained by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC in Alaska initially did not hire Alaskan Natives, arguing that, as long-term wards of the federal government, Native people did not qualify for emergency relief (15). The Alaska Native Brotherhood had to lobby both Alaska's territorial governor and Congress for three years to be included within the program. In 1937, Congress changed the policy to require that 50% of enrollees in Alaska be Native. The CCC Indian Division had been created in 1933 to hire Native men to work on their reservations and had distinct differences from the rest of the CCC that affected the projects in Alaska. When projects were close enough to home, Native workers could live at home and work as day laborers rather than moving and camping with the projects. There was also not an enforced age range or marital status, as there was with non-

Native individuals (White 2016). Finally, the CCC in Alaska was overseen by the Forest Service, rather than the army (Moore 2018, 15).

C.M. Archbold was the Forest Service district ranger for the southernmost district of the Tongass National Forest, and a key figure in the restoration project. While traveling around what he called “abandoned Indian villages” between 1937 and 1938, he photographed and assembled an archive of monumental totem poles that could be of interest for restoration by the CCC (Moore 2018, 27). His archive, and the program in general, framed Native people as neglecting or abandoning the totem poles, villages, and land. This perspective ignored the factors that aimed to separate Tlingit and Haida people from their poles, including missionaries’ condemnation of totem poles carving, pushes from government officials to stop potlatching, and the systematic shift of educational and economic resources away from the villages (28). It also assumed that the preservation of meaning and the preservation of physical integrity are linked, and that poles that were being allowed to deteriorate in the southeast Alaskan rainforest must no longer be valued. As has been established, poles were always allowed to return to the earth as part of their natural life cycle, and the key difference at the time was that new poles were not being carved to replace them. Tlingit and Haida people did not consider the poles or villages to have been abandoned, nor did they consider their ownership of and care for those places to have ceased.

Regional forester for Alaska B. Frank Heintzleman explained that the CCC restoration program’s purpose was to preserve totem poles as “interesting and instructive historical objects” for both Native and white audiences (quoted in Moore 2018, 3). Although the CCC project focused on relocating poles, Heintzleman and other members of the Forest Service expressed wanting to restore the poles within their village sites, considering their original placement to be part of their historic value (43). However, Moore notes that it is interesting that the restoration program began around the same time that the Tlingit and Haida communities were preparing to sue the federal government over land title to the Tongass National Forest. Totem poles and other structures were records of Tlingit and Haida continuous use of the land, so one would imagine that acknowledging those records and actively seeking to preserve them would work against the

Forest Service's interest. Moore points out that, at the very least, the Forest Service used the project to publicly leverage a cooperative relationship with Native communities at a time of legal conflict (16)

The project was also linked to the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) in 1934, which was also known as the Indian New Deal. The IRA included significant, albeit flawed, reforms to the Dawes Act of 1887, some of which highlighted art as an economic resource for Native communities (breakdown on Moore 2018, 13). A year later, the Indian Arts and Crafts Board was established to encourage Native communities to produce art as an economic resource, as well as to market Native art forms to Americans. This included incorporating traditions and material heritage from different ethnic communities into an essentialized artistic tradition that could be considered distinctly American. René d'Harnoncourt was a key proponent of this view, serving as the general manager for the New Deal's Indian Arts and Crafts Board. He later became the director of the Museum of Modern Art and put on the 1941 exhibit *Indian Art of the United States*, for which a heraldic pole by John Wallace was set up in front of the building (11).

The totem pole project itself was hotly contested as the plan for it was being developed. One notable shift was that the CCC project could not spend federal funds on private property, so the ownership of involved poles had to shift from clans to communities (32). The poles would also be restored using federal funds, rather than commissioned and carved through the balance of a potlatch. The removal of poles from their villages, restoration through funds provided by the federal government, and transfer from clan ownership to communal ownership fundamentally challenged core beliefs and practices surrounding totem poles. Tlingit and Haida communities and families had a variety of responses to the memoranda of agreement that the Forest Service presented, including initially refusing to participate but later opting in (40). Moore argues that the initial resistance to the project shows a grappling with the changes that the totem parks presented; however, Tlingit and Haida communities' participation in the project evidences that they must have been perceived as having what Moore calls "cultural legitimacy" (39). The totem parks must have been seen in some way as a legitimate place for the totem poles to be viewed

and interpreted for communities to, after careful consideration, allow the poles to be raised. In some communities, the project was viewed as a way for maternal uncles to fulfill their traditional obligations to train their nephews; totem pole restoration and carving provided an opportunity to pass on the stories and knowledge embedded in poles (44). There is also a notable overlap between individuals who participated in the CCC program as carvers and individuals who testified in federal hearings about aboriginal land claims in the Tongass National Forest (10). Those who testified were able to directly reference totem poles within the parks as record of their families' right to the land being discussed in the hearing (42-43). While the totem pole restoration project proposed practices far different than anything done before, some Tlingit and Haida communities were willing to adapt the new practices to perpetuate traditional practices and buttress contemporary struggles.

For the duration of the totem pole restoration project, John Wallace was involved with the removal of poles from village sites and their reinstallation in new contexts. He was commissioned to make exact copies of historic poles according to the tastes of non-Native officials in the Forest Service and CCC. The way that totem poles were being treated and viewed was changing greatly, and as a lead carver, John Wallace was at the center of those changes.

### **John Wallace**

John Wallace was born around 1861, at what Wright (2001) places as the height of the totem pole carving era (313). His Haida name was Giauda or Gaowadaul after Dwight Wallace's father, who was also a carver; Wright points out that Dwight Wallace's father would have been in the first generation of Kaigani Haida carvers following the timeline of the 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Haida migration. John Wallace displayed an early affinity for totem pole carvings, and according to an autobiography dictated to his daughter and transcribed in Moore (2018), Dwight Wallace was determined that his son would become an artist (87). He was worried about the continuance of pole carving among the Haida. John Wallace, however, was determined to get a Western education by attending a boarding school, and ran away twice to schools in Sitka and Massett:

I wanted to have an education as I knew education was a good thing to have. After I went to school for a year at Massett my father came after me and took me away. His idea was for me

to become an artist, he use [sic] to tell me later in my life I would make money from carving totem poles. He didn't want them to lose the art of carving among the Haidas. When he took me away the second time from school I gave up hopes of trying to get an education and took my father's order in carving totem poles. (Moore 2018, 87)

Dwight Wallace would have some reason to believe totem pole carving would make John Wallace money. As discussed in previous chapters, demand for totem poles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was high. As discussed, Dwight Wallace carved totem poles for non-Native audiences, including for a world fair. Moore notes that it also makes sense that Dwight Wallace would view totem pole carving and boarding school as "incompatible," as most schools in the residential school program were religious, and strongly against totem pole carving (Moore 2018, 87). After returning to Klinkwan, John Wallace apprenticed with his father, and some features of Dwight Wallace's poles in the 1870s would seem to indicate that John Wallace helped with them. The pole James Swan commissioned from Dwight Wallace for the Centennial Exposition of 1876 has a distinctive cheek crease in a man's face that would later feature consistently in John Wallace's work (88). He also carved as a young man while living in ráwk'aan, including a "single fin" whale grave monument commissioned by Moses Kuł Kit for his uncle, head of Brown Bear House (kuts na.as) of the Mud Eaters (Quetas Ravens) (Wright 2001, 314).

However, towards the end of the 19th century, pressure against traditional Haida cultural forms, and totem poles in particular, led to a significant decrease in the commissioning of totem poles. John Wallace, married with six children, became a commercial fisher for his livelihood, supported by his family working at a cannery in Hunter's Bay. Wallace would later convert to Presbyterianism and build a church in Klinkwan (hlanqwaán). After a visit to Seattle where he saw many public schools and churches, Wallace became determined that the Haida people needed to take steps to provide better education. This drive for education would lead Wallace and other Kaigani Haida people from Sukkwan, Klinkwan, and Howkan to establish a new Haida town on Xiktaa Creek, where the Alaskan government promised to help build a public school and a sawmill (Moore 2018, 89-90). Wallace was called "the Father of Hydaburg" in recognition of these efforts. He did very little totem pole carving at this time. He may have also been part of destroying some totem poles, such as in one instance in 1905 when some of Dwight Wallace's poles were

cut up in order to build a boardwalk in Klinkwan (Moore 2018, 90, see Garfield 7). In *Silent Storytellers of Totem Bight State Historical Park* (2009), Lee Wallace reflects that his grandfather's conversion to Christianity affected his beliefs about carving, as Christian missionaries at the time were staunchly against the carving of totem poles. He notes particularly that John Wallace, whose first language was Haida, may have had trouble interpreting scriptures written in English. Missionaries often misconstrued totem poles as being idols for worship and interpreted them as against the bible's teachings. Lee Wallace states that:

A lot of the time things are taken out of context, and I think for him it was, 'Here it is in black and white. I shouldn't be worshipping these images.' And here were these images he'd been worshipping his whole life. (Brown 2009, 11)

However, John Wallace was eventually able to reconcile his faith and the carving of totem poles, and he returned to carving in the 1920s (9). He carved several canoes for private collectors on the East Coast, as well as two poles for the office of the secretary of the interior in 1931. His son Bill helped to carve the canoe, so John Wallace not only reconciled his own carving practice but was willing to pass at least some aspects of it on (Wright 2001, 314). Wallace also carved a pole for a cannery on Prince of Wales Island at the age of seventy-six.

When the CCC totem park project got started, Wallace was the only professional carver in the program, and trained many people who would go on to be prominent carvers (Moore 2018, 23). He was eighty years old in 1938 when he began work with the totem pole restoration project. He worked alongside Tlingit lead carver Charles Brown (Neix.ádi). According to anthropologist Priscilla Schulte (adopted Tlingit Bear Clan), the carvers were aware that the intended purpose of the parks was tourism, but they carved for their own purposes, including to train the next generation. Schulte states that "[t]hey knew that this wasn't how they carved poles in the past, but it would perpetuate the art" (Brown 2009, 7).

### **San Francisco Exhibition**

When C.M. Archbold traveled to Sukkwan to take photos for the archive, he identified the Land Otter Pole and the Memorial Pole as the only two poles that he considered suitable for the project. In the caption of the paired photographs, he notes the deteriorated tops of both, and

recommends that, should they be restored, the tops be cut away and “capped with copper or galvanized metal” (Moore 2018, 29). However, the poles were never restored by the CCC.

John Wallace met René d'Hamoncourt through the CCC program, for which Wallace served as lead carver at Hydaburg. D'Hamoncourt was the general manager of the New Deal's Indian Arts and Crafts Board, but also, at the time, was curating a Native arts exhibit for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition. He was highly impressed with Wallace's work and considered him to be one of the most prominent and knowledgeable living Northwest Coast Native carvers (Moore 2018, 90). D'Hamoncourt invited Wallace and his son, Fred Wallace, to serve as demonstration carvers within the courtyard of the Indian Building. John Wallace brought several poles with him to the exhibition, including the Land Otter Pole and memorial pole. Over the course of two months, John and Fred Wallace carved a tall heraldic pole and a smaller house post. It was during the exhibition that John Wallace met Frederick Douglas, then “curator of Indian art” at the DAM.

Cole (1985) notes that, in the eighteenth century, Northwest Coast art tended to be viewed as “artifacts,” though that term was not commonly in use; he observes that the DAM seems to have been the first museum to exhibit Northwest Coast objects as art, beginning in the 1920s (282). Frederick Douglas was an early proponent of viewing Native material creations as art. He also argued against the idea that adaptations and innovations made by Native artists made their works inauthentic or lesser, stating that “[i]nvention or adaptation of new forms does not necessarily mean repudiation of tradition but is in fact often a source of its enrichment” (1948, 10). Indeed, his work with d'Hamoncourt on the Indian Court was focused on presenting Native art and artists as being fine art, though the argument was for their benefit to American art and culture as a whole. According to later letters, an agreement was made that Wallace would sell both poles to the DAM (Douglas 1946a). Douglas called John Wallace “a good friend of mine at the San Francisco Fair” and noted that he was given the first opportunity to buy the poles. Douglas was immediately determined to bring the poles to the museum and embarked on an enthusiastic fundraising campaign; he closed one letter to the director of the DAM at the time with the statement that “the

important thing is to GET THEM!!!! Love will find a way; Hope springs eternal, etc., and so forth” (Douglas 1939). However, despite raising the required amount for the purchase, the money was lost in transit. The poles were instead sold to the Fairmount Park Association in Philadelphia. There, they were found to be “unusable” and were donated to the University of Pennsylvania Museum (catalog card, Denver Art Museum object file). It does not seem that poles were ever raised again in this time period.

In 1946, Frederick Douglas began writing letters asking about the status of the poles and the possibility of the DAM acquiring them. In one letter, Douglas noted that he “always felt cheated by their loss and [is] overjoyed to get the chance of regaining them” (Douglas 1946b). Douglas’s contacts at both the University Museum and Fairmount Park Association were amenable to the transfer, though there was brief confusion about which institution actually had legal ownership of the poles. When it was established that the University Museum did own them, it was agreed that they would be donated to the DAM so long as the latter paid for shipping. The poles were accessioned to the DAM on October 16, 1946.

At some point after leaving Sukkwan, four of the six rings that formed the top of the Memorial Pole were removed. It may have been a preservation decision, as Archbold had stated that the tops of both poles were rotten and should be removed. However, there is an alternative suggestion. The previously discussed Star House pole from Old Masset, Haida Gwaii had five of nine rings removed from the hat of the central watchman figure and one of five removed from the right watchman figure (Peers et al. 2018, 13). A story at the Pitt Rivers Museum by staff was that the Haida removed the rings before taking the pole down from Star House, as they felt the honor conveyed by the rings would be “excessive” for the new placement at Oxford University. As far as I am aware, this story has not been confirmed by Haida representatives, and I do not assume it is the case for the Memorial Pole, but it is an interesting suggestion to make note of.

The poles would not be erected for at least a year after arriving at the DAM; in a letter responding to a request for photographs, Frederick Douglas stated that both poles were “flat on their backs in the yard and securely wrapped in water proofing” (Douglas 1948). It is unclear what



the purpose of the delay was for raising the poles, but it may have been in anticipation of planned repairs. In one letter arranging the poles' transfer to the DAM, Douglas indicated he planned on having repairs done, stating that "I have in Denver a craftsman who is perfectly capable of putting these old poles in good condition" (Douglas 1946a). On October 9, 1948, a Curator of Indian Art Willena D. Cartwright wrote to an unnamed United States Ranger in Norwood, Colorado that the museum "owns a full-size totem pole which we are repairing" (Cartwright 1948a). This letter was one of many Cartwright wrote between 1948 and 1949, attempting to attain a 12' by 24" log of smooth cedar to replace the removed top of the Memorial Pole. She was referred to other sources by the Forest Service and by private lumber companies, and it was noted more than once that a section of smooth cedar of those dimensions would be difficult to come by. She ultimately succeeded, however, and on August 11, 1948, Cartwright wrote a letter to A.C. Lighthall of the Oregon Lumber Company confirming the log's arrival and thanking him for the donation (Cartwright 1948b). She states that the log "suits our purposes exactly." However, there must have been some issue, as the log was never used to repair the memorial pole, and there is no record of what happened to it. It may have been decided that the pole would be too tall with the repair, as it may have made the Memorial Pole even taller than the Land Otter Pole. Eventually, both poles were erected outside of the Chappelle House, where they would remain until 1971.

It is unknown in entirety what other repairs or restorations were and weren't made to the poles during this time. A face on the Land Otter Pole, which had been lost since its removal from Sukkwan, was replaced in 1967 by Kwakwaka'wakw carver Tony Hunt Sr. There are several places where the pole had undergone some kind of conservation treatment, including an area of "passive" fill that supported the pole structurally but did not alter the pole itself. There are areas of old fungal activity, as well as flaking and splits in the wood, that can be expected from being outside first in Sukkwan, then in Pennsylvania, then at the Chappelle House (Gina Laurin, Personal Interview, January 14, 2022).

### **Reaction from the Forest Service**

John Wallace's sale of the two poles, as discussed by Lee at the beginning of this chapter, is a complicated matter. The impacts of his decision on the poles will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 7. For the purposes of laying out a timeline, I note here that the sale of the poles led to conflict with the federal entities. The director of Alaska's Office of Indian Affairs, Charles Hawkesworth, wrote to John Wallace in February of 1940 after learning that the poles had been left in San Francisco. Hawkesworth argued that the poles should be installed at the totem park in Hydaburg that was currently being constructed by the CCC (Moore 2018, 92). Calling Wallace "the Father of Hydaburg," he stated that Wallace more than anyone should want the poles returned and placed in Hydaburg. He also claimed that the poles were the property of the Yeilatzie family, and as such, Wallace did not have the right to sell them. This was refuted by Wallace and by several other residents of Hydaburg, who attested that Wallace inherited both poles matrilineally through his mother's brother. The accusation understandably offended Wallace: Hawkesworth had been the first teacher at the school Wallace established in Hydaburg, and Wallace had him adopted into his clan. Wallace wrote to Hawkesworth, "I believe you've known me long enough to believe that I would not take someone else's property" (Moore 2018, 92). He went on to state that the poles he had sold were in such poor condition as to be unusable for the totem parks, and in fact that other poles in better condition were being discarded by the CCC in favor of carved replicas—Wallace himself was in the process of carving such replicas for the park in Hydaburg. He therefore offered to carve two replicas of the poles he was selling. Moore argues that this was Wallace using the "Forest Service's language of originals and replicas," situating his selling of the poles within the existing logics of the totem park project that he was participating in (92).

Wallace ended up carving a replica of the Land Otter Pole for installation at Totem Bight. However, it was not an exact copy. Moore notes that the largest change was the inclusion of an octopus to the base of the pole, "to better suggest, he told Garfield, the beach scene where the man battled the land otters" (Moore 2018, 93). The Forest Service either did not realize or did not

object to the change. It may be more likely that the former was the case, as the Forest Service would go on to strenuously object to Wallace's changes to the designs of the replica of the Howkan Eagle, to the extent of forcing him to carve another version that fit their specifications (Moore 2018, 99).

### **The DAM Prior to the Renovation**

In 1971, the poles were brought into the building designed by Italian architect Gio Ponti, now renamed the Martin building. They were brought in while the building was still under construction, as there would not be a way to bring them in after construction was complete. They were mounted against a wall, with a pedestal surrounding them that prevented visitors from close enough to potentially touch or otherwise affect them. Inside, the poles were integrated into environmental control to be expected for museum "best practices." This includes stabilized temperature, environmental controls, and low light levels. Hill (2000) was impressed by the DAM's methods of presenting Native art when visiting the museum in the late 1970s, stating that it "literally freed objects from glass cases and presented them as fine art rather than ethnographic specimens" (43). Visiting the same gallery twenty years later, he was again impressed. He writes about being particularly impressed with the Northwest coast gallery and the presentation of the totem poles and house front, stating that "this display of the monumental art of the Northwest coast is nonparalleled in the art world" (59).

They were not disturbed again until 2017, when they were lowered as part of the massive reinstallation project taking place throughout the Martin building. Gina Laurin, who has been working as a conservator at the DAM since 2006, has never performed "invasive," or interventive, treatment on the poles (Gina Laurin, Personal Interview, January 14, 2022). She has performed passive and reversible fills to support fragile areas of extensive loss and where the wood is friable (Personal Communication, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023). The poles are regularly dusted and vacuumed.

### **The Master Carver Pole**

In Chapter 3, I included a telling of the story of the Master Carver as told by John Wallace. He later carved a pole representing the Master Carver that was raised at Totem Bight. The subject

matter was his own choice, as was its design, which was significant after the Forest Service questioned both his decision to sell his poles and his carving of the Howkan Eagle. Moore (2018) writes that his choice of the Master Carver story “confirmed his role as a tradition bearer” after several conflicts with the Forest Service (100). It also made a statement about Wallace’s role and ability as a Haida carver in the face of the vast threats to totem pole carving as a tradition that had taken place over time. In the dramatic shifts involved within the CCC totem park project, Wallace asserted his role as a clan leader, his skill as a carver, and his traditional rights.

Jonaitis (2013) states:

When the understandings of museum objects change radically, as they have over the past thirty years, their previous wrappings do not vanish but instead become enveloped by the new meanings, which resonate in varying ways with the older ones. Understood in this way, museum representations of Northwest Coast art remain always centered on the object itself but acknowledge the impermanence of any single perspective on that object. (757)

I refer to this quote because the Land Otter Pole and the Memorial Pole have undergone many changes to the way that they have been viewed throughout their lifetimes. Those views have not switched places with or replaced one another but compounded and intersected. In their original placement in Sukkwan, they told a story that qaskwáay had earned the right to tell and stood in memorial to Sarah Wallace. At the San Francisco exhibition, they served as testaments to a white audience of totem pole carving’s laudability as an art form, equal to Western art forms and worthy of inclusion within an American narrative of art. In the DAM, they were, and are, monumental and exquisite works of two Haida master carvers. The next chapter describes the pole-raising ceremony performed by the descendants of Dwight and John Wallace, and how the interaction with the DAM publicly recognized the family’s importance in the life and understanding of the poles.

## **Chapter Six: Re-Raising the Poles and How They Are Now**

### **Introduction**

This chapter concerns the pole-raising ceremony for the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole held at the DAM. I will begin with the lowering of the poles and how they were stored while the gallery was being renovated. Next, I will discuss the logistics of reaching out to the Wallace family and establishing that a pole-raising ceremony was necessary. I will then give an overview of the ceremony and feast itself, followed by a section discussing the reflections from three DAM employees who attended the pole-raising ceremony. The first is Chris Patrello, then Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow in Indigenous Arts of North America and current Assistant Curator of Anthropology at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. With John Lukavic, DAM Curator of Native Arts, Patrello was one of the most directly responsible for the coordination of the pole-raising ceremony. The second is the DAM's Associate Director of Conservation and Technical Studies and Senior Objects Conservator, Gina Laurin, who heads the conservation of the poles. The third is Dakota Hoska (Oglála Lakǰóta), then Assistant Curator of Native Arts and now Associate Curator of Native Arts. Hoska began the DAM's Indigenous Community Advisory Council along with John Lukavic and Jan Jacobs (Osage). I will conclude the chapter with a description of the public reopening of the Martin building, including my personal observations from my attendance.

### **Renovations to the DAM and Conservation Assessment**

In November of 2017, the DAM was in process of a large endeavor; the deinstallation, renovation, and reinstallation of the Martin building. The Martin building houses, among other collections, the Indigenous Arts of North America, Northwest Coast and Alaska Native arts, and Latin American and art of the ancient Americas. The project, brainstorming for which began in 2012, would include moving over 50,000 artworks to offsite storage beginning in 2017. However,

among the collection, the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole presented a unique challenge; their current placement had been, quite literally, built around them, and there was no other gallery in the museum where they could be reinstalled. This led to two further challenges. The first, there were very few other places the poles could be moved to for storage during the two years it would take to renovate the Northwest Coast gallery, and the second, they would need to be reinstalled while the building was still being renovated. I will discuss the first challenge here; the second challenge will be discussed more thoroughly during the description of their raising.

In November 2017, Andrew Todd, a conservator who specializes in totem poles, came to the DAM to consult on the best choice for the poles being lowered, stored, and reinstalled. Todd's assessment of the poles was that they were stable. He made note of the many past repairs to the poles:

New wood has been attached and carved in many locations in the past. The newer added wood has, in many cases, weathered from outdoor exposure before being moved into the museum. Many different kinds of attachment and a variety of materials and methods have been used to attach new wood and sometimes even, cementacious [*sic*] materials have been used. (Todd 2017)

All repairs were also noted as being "relatively secure and in stable condition." While the poles were technically stable, it was decided that steel frames would be necessary to safely support the poles. The poles, once re-raised, would be bolted into heavy metal plates installed in the floor of the gallery. In his recommendation of the design of the frames, Todd references "Creating Steel Mounts for the Exhibition of Totem Poles" by James Hays (2011). Art fabrication company Demiurge LLC was brought in to construct the steel frames and to install the poles. The frames were designed to be installed "permanently" into both poles using lag screws; while the frames can potentially be removed without altering the poles, the changes made to install the frames are permanent. This decision was made for the long-term structural support of both poles, as the poles, when reinstalled, would not be up against a wall, but freestanding in a central area of the gallery. The decision was also made with the understanding that the poles may need to be moved again in the future.

On November 20, 2017, all visitor activity in the Martin building was halted. In January 2018, the steel frames were installed while the poles were upright, then both were lowered into separate wheeled cradles. They were wheeled from the gallery into the adjacent rotunda, and from there, out to the Remain Bridge extending between the Martin building and the Hamilton building. The windows of the Remain Bridge were lined with 3M NV-15 window film in addition to perforated film used for exterior advertising, both of which prevented heat gain and fluctuations within the bridge. A box was installed around them, as well as a temporary wall so that the poles were not accessible to members of the public using the bridge. Gina Laurin explains the process of lowering the poles, and how they were stored and monitored:

From a museum conservation point of view, it was a good way to deal with the poles structurally and also to protect the surface. Once we secured them into their custom fabricated cradles which were on wheels, we were able to roll them out of the Martin building, over the bridge and into the Hamilton building for storage. We prepared an isolated place for them where they could rest undisturbed. We covered them individually in polyethylene sheeting and built two boxes to cover/protect them. The environmental conditions (RH and temperature) were digitally monitored and checked weekly. For further protection, we built a wall and enclosed the pieces with one behind-the-scenes access point to continue to keep them safe for the 3-year duration. (Gina Laurin, Personal Communication, April 6, 2023)

The poles remained there until November of 2019, when they were raised in their new places with a pole-raising ceremony led by the Wallace family.

### **Reaching Out to the Wallace Family**

In Lukavic and Patrello (2022), the authors state that “[p]rior to the planning of the ceremony, the Native Arts department only had intermittent relationships with community members and artists from the Northwest Coast, and these were expressed in limited ways” (119). To research the possibilities for presenting the poles, as well as the rest of the collection that would be going into the Northwest Coast and Alaskan Native art, Chris Patrello and colleagues went on a fact-finding mission to Seattle, Vancouver, and Victoria. The purpose of the trip was to connect and

consult with professionals who could advise about what the museum's obligations are to Indigenous communities in the region, and how to approach fulfilling those obligations. The professionals consulted included Jennifer Kramer, curator at the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, and Aldona Jonaitis, the director of the University of Alaska Museum of the North. After this trip, Dr. Emily L. Moore at Colorado State University connected the museum to Lee Wallace through email. Over several months, discussions established that a pole-raising ceremony would be appropriate.

"We felt that it was our duty to honor these cultural protocols," Patrello states. "And then really just became a function of seeing if we can make it happen...if Lee and his family were interested" (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021). Unfortunately, the ceremony was constricted by budget and by the fact that the gallery was technically an active construction zone at the time. Initially, Lee Wallace wanted a larger number of people present than the budget or safety precautions would allow for. While not meant to be potlatches themselves, pole-raising ceremonies at museums do emulate several key aspects of potlatches, and a large number of people present to witness the event is important; the pole-raising ceremony for Lee Wallace's totem pole at the Eiteljorg Museum was a very public event and included news outlets (Feldman 2019). Patrello also noted that, ideally, the pole-raising would have been more public, but that "we tried to marry the practical reality with the sort of the protocols that are necessary" (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021). However, Patrello notes that the DAM consciously chose not to publicize the pole-raising ceremony to news outlets and similar media, out of concern that it would shift the focus of the ceremony to the museum rather than the family and the poles:

I think in a lot of these situations, museums get very, very excited when they're able to do things like this. And they want to tell people about the justifiably great things that they're doing. We just felt that this is a gesture of good faith, in a way of honoring cultural protocols. And we weren't too concerned with—we didn't want to put ourselves at the center of it. (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021)



Eventually, it was decided that the delegation would include Lee Wallace, his daughter Markel, his nieces Andrea Cook and Valesha Patterson, and Valesha's son Tristen. The rest of the attendees were staff of the DAM and invited guests, including professors from DU, Emily L. Moore, and other people with relationships to the museum.

### **The Ceremony and Feast**

This section will be an abridged version of the ceremony, its logistics, and what it signified. For an in-depth account, see “On Behalf of the Family” (2022), the article written by John Lukavic and Chris Patrello about the ceremony, which includes some of the knowledge and perspectives shared by the family members during and after the ceremony.

Prior to the ceremony, the DAM reached out to Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute tribal representatives to ask for their permission for the ceremony to take place, as Lee Wallace would be calling ancestral spirits as part of the ceremony. The poles were moved with forklifts, guided by Lee and Tristen while Markel Wallace, Andrea Cook, and Valesha Patterson sang from a landing overlooking the gallery. The day after the ceremony, the museum hosted a feast in honor of the family. The family entered in a procession, with Tristen leading and announcing that “the Haidas are here” in *Xaad Kíl* and telling the audience that they came in peace. They then sang a welcome song, followed by a series of speeches. Lee began by introducing himself and telling the audience his ancestry. Markel, Valesha, and Andrea all gave their own speeches, parts of which are quoted in Patrello and Lukavic (2022) and will not be reproduced here. An important element of the speeches was giving thanks. Lee Wallace explained that:

You know, when we say *Háv'aa* or when we say *Gunalchéesh*—*Gunalchéesh*—the quick and easy translation is ‘thank you.’ But when you translate a language into English, that it means much more than a simple ‘thank you.’ It really means without you, without all of you at the Denver Art Museum, this wouldn't have happened. (Lukavic and Patrello 2022, 128)

Lee Wallace later shared the story of the poles, and his thoughts on how those stories are relevant today. He also shared the stories of *Gaagiixiid*, or wild man, who lives alone in the forest for so long that he loses his sense of self and becomes incredibly hungry (Lukavic and Patrello 2022, 129). Lee Wallace connected the story to struggles with drug and alcohol addiction and

spoke about how love and prayer is used to bring people back to themselves, their families, and their communities. His connecting of songs, stories, and ancestral traditions to the daily struggles Haida people face is an important reminder that Haida totem poles generally, and this pole-raising ceremony in particular, are inseparable from all Haida lifeways and contemporary struggles and celebrations.

Lee Wallace reflects on the impact of the ceremony on his nieces:

...they started to realize the history of the poles and Dwight Wallace and John Wallace and, and knowing that we're part of the family, it was really touching to them. And so, when the poles were moving along, and they start lifting it with the— of course the difference there, we do it here, it's all manpower, most of the time. And so, we...I had him right there by me. I was right by the pole, and with Christian, and the girls were off to the side, drumming and singing, and so, just to have them there, witnessing it and in the presence, seeing the pole moving and getting erected and hearing the songs...I think it was pretty touching to the younger people. (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022)

Here, Lee Wallace describes the pole-raising ceremony as a way in which younger members of his family were able to connect with family history and both enact and witness Haida traditions. Lukavic and Patrello (2022) talk about this as “intergenerational transmission of knowledge” within the pole-raising ceremony (116). As records of family history, this is a core part of Haida totem poles’ cultural functions. Within the pole-raising ceremony, the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole were once again able to fulfill this role.

### **Reflections and Analysis**

Museum professionals have traditions of knowledge that both reflect how they value their collections and guide how they care for them (Peers and Brown 2003, 7). The reorientation of museums to serve their respective communities, as well as the reflexivity of critical museology and museum anthropology, have changed and continue to change those traditions (Shelton 1997, 2013; Vergo 1989). As collaboration and consultation with descendant communities becomes more common, museum professionals are introduced to different ways of viewing and valuing the

belongings in their care. This is not to say that the relationship between the community and their belongings is replicated, but that museum professionals may become more aware of their place in the life of objects and not solely their physical care. In the case of the pole-raising ceremony at the DAM, I argue that the ceremony may be viewed as a form of what Jonaitis (2017) describes as “repatriation sovereignty,” connected to Dangeli’s (2016) “dancing sovereignty,” involving DAM employees in Haida cultural protocols and challenging the museum’s colonial structures.

All three of the museum employees were asked the same set of questions, but they responded to different ones at more length. Open-coding highlighted different areas reflective of their roles at the museum as well as their differing connections to the pole-raising ceremony. Chris Patrello highlights ethics, his personal relationships with the Wallace family, and the obligation of the museum to descendant communities. Dakota Hoska discusses, as a Native curator, the importance of serving community while being conscious not to speak for Native communities. She also discusses the rewards and complexities of collaboration, and the past, present, and future of museums. Gina Laurin highlights conservation ethics, the knowledge of objects, the connection of the poles and the Wallace family, and objects being alive. Both Laurin and Patrello speak about the pole-raising ceremony changing the way that they viewed the poles and their relationship to collections. All three discuss the shifts in museum practice to include Native voices in decision-making. All three discuss the impact of witnessing the family raise the poles. From these codes, I identified four emergent themes, or “points of convergence,” relevant to my thesis research: community and collaboration; decolonization and Indigenization of museums; objects in collections; and in regard to pole-raising ceremony itself, the importance and impact of witnessing the connection between the Wallace family and the poles (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997, 12).

### **Community and Collaboration**

When planning the ceremony, Patrello recalls stressing, as a department, that the ceremony was an obligation:

In retrospect, what was really kind of important to us is that this process kind of challenged us, or encouraged, us to articulate more formally what our commitment to Indigenous peoples is, which has had sort of repercussions for moving forward...we have now a public statement about our commitment to Indigenous peoples and communities. So, I think it was a good opportunity for us to take stock of what we have been doing up until this point, what we haven't been doing that we would like to do, and then kind of publicly stating that to internal and external stakeholders. So, what that looks like now is...a lot of museums do a land acknowledgement and that's about it. Our land acknowledgement is part of that broader commitment, which has bulleted points of "this is what we're gonna do." And that was written in consultation with museum leadership and our Indigenous Advisory Council. So, I think...the pole-raising ceremony kind of was an opportunity to state, take stock of what we've been doing well and what we could do better, and then articulating that. (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021)

Patrello emphasizes "commitment" here several times, as well as the obligations that museums have to Indigenous communities. I connect this to the idea that museum ethics are a matter of social responsibility to communities, and that the care for objects in their collection only has meaning within that context (Besterman 2006, 431). For Patrello, the pole-raising ceremony was significant not only as a single event, but for how it pushed the museum professionals involved to set forth specific steps and goals for the museum as a steward and partner. Patrello also highlights that the museum's land acknowledgment does not stand on its own but is part of a broader commitment and action plan for the future. I also connect this to the criticism that museums may use collaborative projects, as well as the idea of "the contact zone," to mask or overshadow ongoing colonial structures and avoid sharing authority (Boast 2011, 66; Lonetree 2012, 222).

Furthermore, for Patrello, the pole-raising ceremony established interpersonal relationships with members of the Wallace family that he values.

We felt that this was a prerequisite to honor these cultural protocols and to make sure that the family was included in that decision-making process. They could have very easily said, “Thanks, but no thanks. We can’t come.” Right? But it was obviously, I think, important to them to accept the invitation and participate. And I think...in retrospect, I think what it really did...you know, it's great to have a relationship with the Wallaces. We send them holiday cards now, and a woman who came—I gave a lecture about the ceremony, and a woman watched the lecture as participant just so happened to be in a drawing class at the time. And she drew a picture of one of the images I showed of Valesha, Andrea, and Markel showing, displaying their regalia. So, they have their backs to the camera and they're showing the crests on the backs of their button blankets...she was like, “Oh, do you want a copy?” And I'm like, “Well actually, can I have a copy for Andrea, Valesha, and Markel?” Right? So, like little things like that, that like, just like our, you know, no one could have predicted that. (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021)

In both this quote and the preceding one, Patrello emphasizes the relationships formed with the Wallace family, both in terms of the museum’s established obligations to them, and in terms of his relationships with the family members as an individual.

As a Native curator, Dakota Hoska defines her curatorial practice as support and service to community, community in this context referring to all Indigenous people. She is clear that she is not speaking for all Native people and all Native communities, but rather “supporting a larger community voice, a larger cohesive voice of Indigenous hopes and wishes and dreams for the future” (Personal Interview, June 1, 2022). When it comes to Native cultural belongings at the DAM, she considers not only their stewardship, but their accessibility to their communities :

It's really good and interesting that we're having this conversation because I was speaking to a class yesterday and...I realized, “Wow, this is really where...the priority for me.” They asked me, what are the tenants of my curatorial practice? And I said, the first and most important thing is to support and serve my community. Now, I'm defining “community” broadly as all Indigenous people. And I realized what I was saying, just how important that is for me.

And that really...is the underlying thing that keeps me going in curation. And so, when you ask, what does that have to do with cultural objects, or stewarding these cultural objects, I guess I feel like my position has everything with not only stewarding these objects, but also making them accessible to community members for education, for educational purposes, rebuilding purposes...if that's what they're looking for. I say that in kind of a guarded way, because...I know that Indigenous people are very strong and they don't need my help to rebuild, but if they are looking for things that might be sources of pride for future generations, I think our arts are definitely one of those things that they could look to. So, making that accessible for them, and supporting younger generations, making room for Indigenous people to have their own voice, I think that's the most important aspect of my job. And it's more important to me than me getting to have a voice if that makes sense. I guess for me, that's not really what it's about...I feel like I'm really trying to make space for people. I feel like that's kind of consistent, too, with how we are taught to act and be in this world, in that, when I'm giving a speech and stuff, I'm expected to be very clear that I am not talking for a whole community. I'm just talking for myself. And so that's why I'm in this position. But really, it's not a position where I should be talking for myself. I hope I'm not doing that. Of course, you never know how your actions are perceived...by another person. But that it's really just about supporting a larger community voice, a larger cohesive voice of Indigenous hopes and wishes and dreams for the future. (Dakota Hoska, Personal Interview, June 1, 2022)

Dakota Hoska also speaks on the challenges and rewards of collaboration, highlighting that museums, as Western institutions, may have expectations for timelines and outcomes for collaboration with Indigenous communities that are not the priority for the community, and it can be difficult to find solutions that are satisfying to everyone (Personal Interview, June 1, 2022). She states, however, that “the positives far outweigh the negatives”, and that, during her work as curatorial research assistant on the “Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists” at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, she gained the understanding that collaborative work “is the only way to do it.”

Gina Laurin also reflected that the DAM has been much more engaged in terms of outreach, particularly to the Latinx and Indigenous communities connected to Denver. What's more, conservators have begun to be included in conversations about education and how the objects are represented, which was not always the case (Gina Laurin, Personal Interview, January 14, 2022). This reflects both the perception of conservation as an objective scientific practice, as well as shifts in the understanding of the role collections care has to play in decolonization and Indigenization of museum practices (Clavir 2002).

### **Decolonization and Indigenization**

I asked Patrello his perspectives on the decolonization and Indigenization of museums. He responded that,

I think decolonizing is one of those things that has been used so many times that I think people have very different definitions of what that means. And I think Indigenizing is a little bit more clear. You're amplifying, privileging, and facilitating Indigenous perspectives over and above the museum's. And...is it possible to decolonize a museum? I guess that depends on how you're defining decolonization. So, if you're defining it as uprooting the colonial systems that produce museums. I think that's a very tall order. Because you're talking about—a community label doesn't decolonize the museum. Because we still have a Native American Art Collection, African Art collection, an Oceanic Collection, a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Painting and Sculpture Collection, a Modern and Contemporary Collection. The sort of classificatory systems that we use to organize the collection comes from an enlightenment, and modern, way of ordering the world. Not to get too Foucault in here, but...it's really hard to envision a museum that has a fundamentally different structure. Now, I guess the generous reading is, well, of course, it's heuristic, right? It makes some things easier to see as it obscures other realities. But...I think Indigenizing might be a better word for what we're trying to do...as I said before, I think we're trying to facilitate and create spaces in which people can speak for themselves. And we provide the historical context to understand what these artists and community members and community leaders are saying...and I guess that's maybe the role

of the museum there, is to provide the context, to understand the really important things that Indigenous people are saying. And in that way, I think you can come closer to maybe Indigenizing a space than you can to decolonizing it. I look at it as...kind of a loaded word, but democratizing the space, right? Kind of dismantling the hierarchy of authority that museums have historically relied on. I think, not thinking of yourself as an expert, but as somebody who has the knowledge of what they know and what they don't know and has the tools to create spaces for conversation and dialogue. And I think that that's kind of a good approach, and a useful approach. So yeah, I guess whether those things are possible depends on how you're defining those things, but certainly, I think to truly enact any sort of meaningful change in anything, you have to fundamentally rethink the structural underpinnings of whatever that thing is. And you know, museums are...really complicated places. They're really, really great, and they're really, really troubled, and they're all of these things. So...I think both decolonization and Indigenization are aspirational, right? So, even if they're not attainable, necessarily, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't pursue it. For me, at least, right? That's the aspiration, and let's do everything we can to get there. And then who knows where you are in 20, 30, 40, 50, a hundred years, right? I think that that's kind of the goal. (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021)

Patrello refers to both the complex colonial structures and the systems of thought guiding them that are part of museum structures. He acknowledges that these structures are so deeply ingrained that decolonization may be completely impossible. He also points out that "a community label doesn't decolonize the museum," again nodding to the ways in which museums may use community collaboration to mask ongoing colonial structures (Boast 2011, 66; Lonetree 2012, 222). Patrello places Indigenization as more possible, but places both decolonization and Indigenization as "aspirational" though necessary endeavors.

Hoska spoke about where museums are going. When considering the history of museums as colonial institutions, many wonder whether it is possible to decolonize or Indigenize museums enough to justify their continued existence. Some scholars debate whether the priority should be



trying to find a different way, rather than continuing to try to rehabilitate the existing system.

Hoska's response was that:

I feel like the museums we'll know in the future aren't the museums that we have right now, and I'm very open to that process. And I think what's going to make the museums of the future better are these kinds of conversations, and more community involvement. I think we really have to think about what museums were set up to do, right? And that was basically to show some white dude's riches and let him have tea parties with a bunch of other white people to show how rich he was, and how smart he was, and blah, blah, blah. And that's our legacy, right? In the museum world. So, we'll never be able to abandon that history, but even if we shut down all museums and we did allow them to transform into something new and better, that legacy would still be there. It would still exist, and it would still be a story. So, even if we started all over and all fresh, anything we build is going to be either pushing against that, or embracing that, or whatever. So, I feel...it would be so nice if we could label this and say, 'No...we're Indigenizing the museum, and now we're done.' I just don't think it will play out like that. I think we had to have this term 'decolonization' that started a movement. It was really important. Now we have to have this term 'Indigenizing.' It's a great way to look at it. It's really important. And it's important to think about, what would that mean, Indigenizing the museum? And I sat in a meeting the other day and they wanted us to think about 'the post-museum world.' And that was also a great term and an expansive term too, something that can really change your philosophy around these institutions. But...I feel like I am in the boat rowing to the other side and I'm willing to do the rowing. But I haven't seen the other side yet. I don't know if that makes any sense. So, I feel like, I mean, I'm along for the ride...I hope I always err on the side that supports the community the best. But I'm just interested to see where this is gonna go and where it can go and participate in these conversations. And hopefully, if you have enough people of goodwill and good intention and who are willing to have these conversations, just really thinking of, for the betterment of society and not for how

they can leave their mark on society, we'll get there. That's what I think. (Dakota Hoska, Personal Interview, June 1, 2022)

I compare this reflection to Chris Patrello's answer to the same question. Both Patrello and Hoska acknowledge the importance of the ideas of decolonization and Indigenization, while being careful to contextualize what they actually mean in museum spaces. Both express doubts that decolonizing the museum structure is possible, with Hoska stating that even to do away with museums entirely and start from scratch would be reacting against the colonial structure and therefore incorporating its legacy. Hoska references the history of collecting and representing Native cultures, including as primarily a display of wealth (Bouquet 2012, 65). However, both also emphasize the need to move forward, placing Indigenization as a more feasible way to do so, and place particular emphasis on doing the work even when there are not clear-cut solutions and answers.

### **Objects in Collections**

The pole-raising ceremony is also linked to one of the core epistemologies of critical museology, that objects within museums have different meanings founded in different systems of knowledge, or ways of knowing, and that meaning is not fundamental or objective within the body of an object (Shelton 2013, 12-13; Silverman 2015, 3). While many steps involved in the lowering and raising of the poles reflected an emphasis on physical preservation, such as the installation of aluminum armature and the monitoring of their environment while housed on the bridge, the pole-raising ceremony incorporated traditional forms of care into a non-traditional context.

Gina Laurin describes her experience of belongings as being strongly shaped by her role as a conservator, as the work requires an "inside-out" understanding of the physical materials, and conservators regularly see the indications of use and the life of an object before it came to the museum (Gina Laurin, Personal Interview, January 14, 2022). She refers to the scientific grounding of conservation in her explanations and describes conservation as "preservation-forward" compared to curation, focusing on the preservation of the "integrity of cultural heritage material in function and use" (Personal Communication, April 6, 2023). However, Laurin also has

a background in archeology and anthropology, which she references when discussing her understanding of the idea of cultural property and the importance of connection with the group, communities, and owners. This is an interesting note, as anthropology is often discussed as contributing to the view of objects as inert scientific specimen that divorces belongings from their cultural life and meaning. For Laurin, however, in the context of an art museum where form is the emphasis of many pieces, her background in anthropology and archeology gives her greater understanding of the significance of cultural property. When I brought up the idea of cultural use and the idea of “damage” that may occur during it, she brought up the concept of “use wear” in conservation and stated that she considered it part of the life of the object. Throughout the interview, I was interested to hear that Laurin incorporated various phrases that do not necessarily fit with the conceptual underpinnings of conservation, stating at one point “I do feel like it—they're happy, it's happy.”

As discussed by Clavir (2002), conservation as a field is imagined as being scientific and immutable. However, that is not the case; knowledge of how materials age, as well as ethical choices about how much repair should be done, is constantly being updated. Gina Laurin, having been in the field for thirty-five years at the time of interview, reflects on how things have changed:

...[I]t was really focused much more on, “Okay, let's get this fixed and how can we best make it look” and not necessarily full restoration or anything, but “Let's get it fixed.” So, if that meant, we did have to put in a new handle on a piece...Never do that now, right? We wouldn't do that now. We would still put it together and stabilize it, but. The materials have changed as well. So, materials that we used in the very early days...I mean, our field really developed...as a conservation field in the seventies so...it was still kind of being developed. So, there are materials that I used back then that I wouldn't use now because we know they don't hold up well, or they change color, or they don't. And same with paintings, right? It changes, it shifts color. So, you're not going to use it. So, and now we have material science in our field too. So, yes, I would say that there's been a lot of advancements on the science side, but also on the outreach and community side. And our code of ethics, these were

developed, I think it was in the eighties for them? So, we were still mentioning things like that, cultural, but they get updated...we're definitely aware of cultural property and what its meaning is. (Gina Laurin, Personal Interview, January 14, 2022)

Laurin also explained that the approach to the poles has largely focused on preventative conservation, rather than interventive, which she is glad for, and she explicitly stated, "I think that keeping the integrity of the piece means that you don't bring it back to an original, restored position." This tension is reflective of the perceived ethics of restoration versus those of conservation, and what is considered the true version of an object (Clavir 2002, 4). The emphasis on preventive conservation versus interventive conservation can also be connected to the imagining of physical preservation as a passive action in the life of an object (Bangstad 2022, 4). In their newly installed places, the poles also are shielded on the bottom by sheets of plexiglass, which Laurin was concerned about causing a loss of intimacy for those viewing them but was ultimately necessary to prevent visitors from picking at them.

Although Laurin's understanding of objects is highly characterized by the field of conservation, Patrello and Hoska also discuss the idea of an "object" in a museum collection. However, their focuses tended towards questions of access and how objects were viewed by the public. Hoska specifically spoke about the line between art and artifact when working with Ute representatives on the reinstallation:

There was even a lot of pushback—and I know I'm as guilty of this as anybody, I want our work to be seen as great works of art, art in their own right. And part of a legacy, a cultural legacy. And, you know, the Ute were very quick to say, "We didn't consider this art in the same way that Europeans. This was an extension of our lifeways." And so, understanding that nuance and how that has to be appreciated, not within these Western contexts, but in the way that the community itself defines the idea of making and creating, and how it values this terminology of the Western art world, or devalues it. (Dakota Hoska, Personal Interview, June 1, 2022)

While some Native artists and communities may assert their creations as art as an assertion of cultural achievement, others may reject the measure of a Western art metric. In the case of the Northwest Coast, it may be an appropriate way to convey the importance of certain belongings and the value placed upon them (Townsend-Gault, Kramer, and K̓i-ke-in 2013, 1). Dakota Hoska reflects upon the meaning of access and education in museum settings.

...this access to our materials becomes, I don't know if you wanna say shrouded or couched in the terms that, "Yeah. But if we give it to you, who has the right to it, all the rest of the world will be robbed of its beauty" ...this desire to own these things really becomes couched under this more noble idea of educating the world and which is seen in Western society as being a very good thing, right? And so, there is a real disconnect between how European-based models of knowing, ways of knowing privilege this kind of education. And for instance, Indigenous communities, some might really believe that education isn't for all, it's for the people who are ready for it. (Dakota Hoska, Personal Interview, June 1, 2022)

This privileging of access and education for the public is connected back to the connection between what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) calls "metacultural artifacts" (185). Hoska interprets the past of museums as being motivated by a sense of right to access, and a right to education. It is also connected to the way in which public museum collections allow the Western public to imagine Indigenous belongings as "theirs." The idea of "scholarly privilege" is also relevant (Ames 2003, 171).

Patrello does not gloss over the implications and difficulties of taking steps towards collaboration.

As a museum professional, I think that we just have to accept that this is really fraught. You have to accept that there is no easy answer to any of the questions that come from the ethics of housing and stewarding...historical works by Indigenous artists...I think it would be really easy if the communities that are represented in our galleries had a consensus about whether it was right or wrong, but there isn't a consensus, right? Some people think that if you're on Indigenous land and none of this is yours and you shouldn't have any of it. And then there are

people who...want to participate in the re-interpretation and recontextualization of these things, right? I use “things” as broadly as possible, right? They are artworks, they're sacred beings, they're relatives, they're all of these things, right? Depending on what your vantage point is. And I think that you have to...as a museum professional, you just have to kind of lean into the discomfort, and lean into the fact that no matter how—you just have to accept that, no matter how ethical you try to be, no matter how much consensus you try to build, and no matter how much coalition building you try to do—that there are going to be people who are unsatisfied with that, and that is their right, right? This is a dialogue, and dialogue implies disagreement. And I think that that is just sort of the nature of it. (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021)

Here, Patrello discusses the importance of museum ethics, but also highlights inherent discomforts of stewarding Native collections. This is similar to what Colwell (2017) expressed in his earlier cited quote, that while one may come in convinced that they can find common ground between museums and Native communities, there are not always clear ways forward that fit within one's preexisting ethics (8). This is seen directly in Patrello's quote above, in his stressing of “no matter how” much or hard one tries, there will be cases in which there is no comfortable conclusion. This is seen as well as in his caveating of the term “things,” displaying the inherent weaknesses of traditional museum language to describe Indigenous conceptions of belongings (Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama 2013, 260-26; Kramer 2017, 157-158; Kreps 2019, 44-45).

All of these reflections show the changing considerations about what it means to ethically steward Indigenous belongings in museums.

### **Connection**

For Hoska, the pole-raising ceremony was one of her first exposures to Haida culture. She was struck not only by the stories communicated to the museum staff that increased the museum's knowledge about the poles, but by being able to watch Valesha Patterson's son Tristen also hear the stories of the pole and learn. She considers making the poles accessible for the ceremony to be indicative of the work that the DAM wants to do with Native communities.

Patrello places the pole-raising ceremony as at the beginning of the relationship between the Wallace family and the DAM, not as an isolated incident.

I think something that Lee said in his speech...when he said, "Thank you" in Tlingit and Xaad Kil. He said [háw'aa], and he said [Gunalchéesh]. And I think...what he articulated was that it's not the same—it's not just the same as saying, "Thank you," right? Saying, "thank you" means that that's over, right? It's not as transactional as a "thank you." It...means without us, there is no you, and vice versa, right? But we are now in a relationship of mutual obligation. And I think that that's really what will hopefully guide the relationship moving forward, that if there's anything that they need from us, that we are obligated to accommodate them. And I think if we ever need to, for whatever reason, which is probably unlikely...I mean, the poles are where they're going to be for a very long time. But if for some reason they had to be lowered...we are obligated to include Lee and his family in that discussion. (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021)

Patrello feels that the ceremony involved them in systems of mutual obligation with Lee Wallace and his family. He connects the museum's relationship and responsibility to Lee Wallace and his family directly to Haida terms and protocols surrounding giving thanks. Like Moore's (2010) argument that the repatriation of totem poles to the four repatriating museums involved them in Tlingit cultural protocols and systems of reciprocity and respect, Patrello clearly views the DAM as now involved in, and obliged to honor, Haida cultural protocols surrounding the poles.

I think it's kind of fundamentally changed my relationship to them, because I can't look at them and not think about that ceremony, and those speeches. And I think it's a good reminder to be an ethical steward, right? To do your best, to provide those opportunities for originating or descendant communities, right? That it's not just a one-off, it's not like, 'Oh, we did that, so we should feel really good about it.' So, I think it kind of just changed my kind of relationship to collections. (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021)

This is similar to the reflections from the Pitt Rivers Museum employees after meeting with the Haida delegation, as well as Susana Macarron Bice after the celebration at the rededication of

the Chief Shakes house in Wrangel (Krpmotich et al. 2013, 184; Jonaitis 2017, 51). It reflects the power in museums shifting their understanding of objects as encoding cultural knowledge to understanding them as participants in cultural lifeways (Clavir 2002, 79). It also reflects a shift away from valuing objects in collections as permanent representations of a past that is gone (Laforet 2004, 41).

I think the hope would be that, if there's anything that we can ever do for Lee or Markel or Andrea or Valesha, that we would do everything in our power to accommodate that...that would be my hope, would be that they know that they can trust and rely on us to be good stewards of the poles, but also good partners. And at the risk of being sentimental, friends, right? I think that approaching it from that perspective, I think it's really hard. I think for me, at least, participating in the ceremony and being a small part of it was really powerful. It was a really unique opportunity, and it was a really transformational moment, right? I think if I don't ever do anything in a museum again, I got to participate in that in a meaningful way, and that's a really special thing. And I hope it is for them too. I hope it was an opportunity...for them to come together as a family. And Tristan was like nine or 10 at the time...it would be really great if he looks back in his adult life at that moment and...that was a really special, special time, you know? And I...don't know what kind of role he wants to play in the cultural life of his community moving forward, but if that informs that in any way, that would be really cool.

Patrello calls the ceremony a “transformational” moment. I relate this to how Jonaitis (2017) describes Tlingit repatriation ceremonies as involving museum professionals in Tlingit epistemologies and creates distance between them and the colonial perspectives of their respective institutions (51). The pole-raising ceremony was not a repatriation ceremony, but it did have similar effects on the interviewed DAM employees of expanding their own perspectives on the poles while grounding them more firmly in Haida cultural protocols.

Gina Laurin also emphasized the significance and rarity of knowing the connection between the totem poles and the Wallaces when past collectors and museum record keeping often



disassociate knowledge of the Indigenous owners from the belongings. Gina Laurin shares that, in her career, she felt it was far more common to have record of collectors associated with an object (Personal Interview, January 14, 2022). Laurin and Lee Wallace had a conversation about the poles having possibly been soaked in salt water prior to being carved to help preserve them, which Wallace's grandfather told him about. They discussed possibly doing tests to see if there was salt residue in the wood of the poles, but at the time of research, no testing had been done. Laurin also says that the family and the ceremony helped her connect the poles to their original context and meaning.

I will say that [the Land Otter Pole] is one of my favorite pieces. I think also having that connection—since we're talking about community—connection of the family coming in. And it really did touch me, as I said earlier, but it made me be even more, I think, aware, you know, of a lot of things. And I always felt I had that anyways, but to really have the family here and to feel the presence of it and the, that it's alive, you know, we talk about things being alive.

(Gina Laurin, Personal Interview, January 14, 2022)

Here, she refers to the idea that objects in museum collections are alive, reflecting the connection between the idea of objects being alive and what it means to preserve or care for them (Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama 2013, 266; Rossoff 2003, 72). Laurin reflects that she felt the family's presence and the ceremony served "to kind of breathe, bring life back to them and to be there as the guardians, you know, to actually tell them it was okay" (Personal Interview, January 14, 2022). This reflects the concept of dancing sovereignty as described by Dangelì (2016) as she describes the self-determination enacted through performance of protocol, as well as what Jonaitis refers to briefly as repatriation sovereignty.

### **The Reopening**

The reopening of the DAM's Martin building was originally planned for 2020. However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic pushed its reopening until October 24, 2021. Its reopening was a free general admission day, preceded by three members-only previews on October 21, 22, and 23 as well as a fundraising gala on October 15.

At this point in time, I had been researching the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole for a little over half of a year. My thesis proposal was approved, as was my Institutional Review Board. It was my first time seeing the poles. I had never been in the Martin building and I tend to eschew maps at museums, so I did not know where and when I would encounter them. I followed the flow of people through the lobby and up a staircase.

One enters the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native gallery from the Sie Welcome Building, a newly built structure meant to connect the Frederic C. Hamilton building and Larry and Sharon Martin building. There is a flow of traffic from the breezeway from the Hamilton building, as well from up a flight of stairs from the Martin building, emptying into a large rotunda lined with glass windows that fill the area with light. However, the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native gallery is behind a set of double doors, as well as a turned corner, that prevents one from seeing what is inside the gallery before they go through the double doors and turn to face the open entrance. The result is that the poles are seen for the first time both from far away and all at once; a few yards of footsteps bring one underneath the entryway and into the room. As visitors cross this threshold, heads immediately tilt sharply up. Gasps and semi-quiet utterances of “wow” are common. Less common, but still repeated, are variations of the statement, “These are the poles I told you about.”

The Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole form a triad with the “Welcome Figure,” commissioned by Johnny Scow, Chief of the Kwikwasut'inuxw band of the Kwakwaka'wakw. While the Land Otter Pole is raised only slightly above the floor, and reaches almost to the ceiling, the other pole and figure are placed on higher pedestals to bring them into more dynamic play with the Land Otter Pole's height. “Facing” each other, the three create a central quadrant where many visitors flow to stand, or walk slowly, heads tilted back, gauging the daunting presence of each carved piece from multiple points in the gallery. Many visitors take pictures. Others take videos, beginning from their entrance and continuing as they approach the nexus, using their own movement and the changing position of the camera to get a more accurate (and more monumental) recording of the poles and their impact. When viewing the poles face-on, the

walls to the right have decals of a dim blue sky and the silhouette of a tree line, subtly evoking the landscape of the Northwest Coast.

If visitors turn around while standing in the nexus between the two poles and welcome figure, they can see a quote written in white text above the entryway they just passed, illuminated by a spotlight. The quote is a request for the visitors from Kwakwaka'wakw artist Marianne Nicolson ('Tayagila'ogwa): "I hope you turn inward and ask: What about *this* place? Who was originally here? What is the history that has been erased, forgotten, or placed elsewhere?" (Emphasis original). This text is informed by Nicolson's piece to the viewing visitor's right, "To Change the Shape of the World," a carved glass replication of a petroglyph commemorating an "illegal" potlatch thrown by Johnny Scow and his brothers in 1921. Commissioned by the DAM, it is Nicolson's reflection on the "gift" of the Welcome Figure to encroaching settlers.

All throughout the gallery, contemporary Native practice interacts with historical creations. In videos played on long, vibrant screens, Native artists give perspective on their own work and the work of their ancestors. On a screen in between the Welcome Figure and her own carved glass piece, Marianne Nicolson explains the history and legacy of the Welcome Figure as it had been told to her by others more closely tied to its lineage. In a display focused on ceremonial coppers and "breaking copper," Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas speaks about the importance of copper in Haida lifeways, and how that informs his art series Coppers from the Hood, where he paints on copper-plated automobile hoods in emulation of ceremonial coppers. Yahgulanaas created the piece "DAM Dancing Crane" which is mounted on the wall, a background to a mounted, broken ceremonial copper. Further down the same wall, an arrangement of works from Northwest master carvers are accompanied by a diagram showing how each carver in the collection is related to one another through familial ties and ties of carving practice. This diagram is accompanied by the explanation:

This diagram traces the intergenerational transmission of knowledge between the artists represented here. Some carvers learn their knowledge from family members, while others learn as apprentices or participants in cultural revitalization projects supported by museums.

More recently, the opening of schools dedicated to teaching Northwest Coast art has expanded the opportunities for young artists to learn from master artists in a variety of media. One moves from this first room through a pair of two massive free-standing arches that support four house posts and a house panel. The house posts were commissioned by the museum from Kwakwaka'wakw chief and artist Doug Cranmer in 1969. The house panel was carved by Jackson Ford around 1910, and its label features a picture (1937) of it in its original placement on a clan house. Throughout the room labels, object labels, and artist statements (and there are many of each) there is a focus on continuity, on Indigenous lifeways in the present tense, and on the flow of the past into the present and the future through artistic practice.

Up a flight of stairs is the Indigenous Arts of North America gallery, full of both historic and contemporary works by known and unknown Native artists, which fully deserves its own thesis dedicated to the collaborative efforts that went into presentation, interpretation, and the centering of Native voices (see McGreevey 2021 for a review of the reinstallation). Along a wall are three small balconies overlooking the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native gallery. The positioning of the gallery means that the two totem poles' "backs" are to the viewer from these balconies, showing the armature supporting them. On one balcony, an interpretive panel written by Markel Wallace gives her perspective on the poles and the pole-raising:

We come from a long line of people who roamed the Pacific Northwest and Pacific Ocean long before there were museums. The poles are our oral history and keep us connected. Our time spent together was very precious, especially being in the midst of the Land Otter Pole. Hearing my father, Lee, share the story pole's meaning and message was a great takeaway for my family members, but also, I believe for the Denver Art Museum staff.

I would like to emphasize the last line of Markel Wallace's label in the context of my conversations with the three DAM employees. As Patrello states, a community label does not decolonize an inherently colonial structure. I argue that the pole-raising ceremony on its own should not be considered a decolonizing process, as all the interviewed employees, as well as the DAM itself through the creation of the Indigenous Advisory Council, recognize that individual

acts on their own are not adequate. They must be part of a larger commitment to engage in decolonizing work despite acknowledgement that it may be aspirational. The pole-raising ceremony, independently and taken in concert with these broader commitments, could be considered Indigenization, at least partially grounding care of the poles in Haida cultural protocols understood to be ethical requirements and not options (Phillips 2011, 10). I say partially because the pole-raising ceremony was the beginning of the relationship between the DAM and the Wallace family, and as of now it has not been established what care for the poles will look like going forward. However, I would also argue that partially grounding care of the poles in Haida cultural protocols, while soothing the poles during their transition, also expanded the perspectives of the DAM staff to include what was expressed to them through those protocols. I connect this to the experiences of museum professionals as described by Krmpotich et al. (2013, 184) as well as the “repatriation sovereignty” that Jonaitis (2017, 56) draws from “dancing sovereignty” (Dangeli 2016, 75-76). These aspects included the obligations of museums to Indigenous communities, the importance of family, the transmission of knowledge between generations, and the connection between the Wallace family and the poles. This also brought in another form of knowledge, or “ways of knowing,” into the museum space that had previously been absent, adding to the layers through which the poles are understood (Silverman 2015, 3). Coming from a long history of museums claiming to be the authority on their collections and the knowledge within them, it is significant when museum professionals state that after witnessing the connection between communities and their belongings, they are no longer able to look at collections the same way.

## **Chapter Seven: Where They Will Go**

### **Introduction**

I met with Lee Wallace on the porch outside his home in Saxman, Alaska, just down the road from the Saxman Village Totem Park. We remained outside and masked, as a safety concern of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and his two young grandchildren. At this point, I had been researching the poles and the pole-raising ceremony for a little over a year and had been working in Ketchikan for a little over a month. Family members passed by and greeted him as we talked. At one point, as is predictable in Southeast Alaska, it began to lightly rain. Though we discussed the topics here in depth, Lee Wallace also shared family stories, his concerns about COVID-19 variants, and stories of his own carving practice.

This section will include Lee Wallace's reflections on the pole-raising ceremony and the poles being at the DAM, as well as discussions of the themes and concepts that he focused on during his interview. In themes relevant to this thesis, Lee Wallace primarily discussed: the ownership of Haida totem poles and other highly valued property; the possibility of repatriation for that highly valued property; the physical preservation of totem poles; the importance of the stories that the totem poles tell; the significance of Northwest Coast art. Out of respect for Lee Wallace's perspectives, I have tried not to interfere with his telling of his concerns for the poles and their futures. I have tried to make my discussion of his quotes take the form of supplementary commentary on the ideas he notes.

Lee Wallace and his family members have expressed their gratitude to the DAM for initiating the pole-raising ceremony, which may be read about more in-depth in Lukavic and Patrello's account of the ceremony (2022). I do not want to detract from that sentiment in any way; however, my interview with Wallace focused around themes that were not the focus of the article,

including Wallace's conflicted feelings about the poles having been sold and their continued presence at the DAM.

### **The Future of the Poles**

After talking through and signing the informed consent form, I began the recording by confirming the contents of the consent form and the terms that I should use, as well as his brief explanations of the practice of a potlatch, and his brief explanation of Haida totem poles. I then asked him to explain his family's connection to the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole at the DAM. He responded with the quote previously referenced in Chapter 4.

Let me say this about how [it is] that those particular poles ended up there. The background is, they were part of our family's possessions, and with my grandfather, John Wallace, being a noted carver, he went to the San Francisco Exposition. And with that, he brought those two particular poles with him. And then, at some point when the fair ended, he decided he'd sell 'em, which he had the right to. I say he had the right to, 'cause they were family possessions. But this is where it would get kind of tricky, where in most cases...there's an ownership of clans. Clans own 'em. But I think he was going through a time period where he was getting introduced—and he traveled a lot in his adulthood with his carving career. And he experienced the cultural changes of what's going on with the Western civilization...So, he decided to sell them. Right or wrong. I mentioned that...clan-wise, maybe he didn't. But at that time, he was the head person of the particular family, and he decided to. (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022)

Lee Wallace expresses feeling conflicted about the poles' placement at the Denver Art Museum. At one point, a tribal citizen from another area of the United States asked Lee Wallace his opinion, by way of the citizen's wife, who was witness to the installation. The question was whether he thought the poles should stay at the DAM or be returned:

"How do you think—what do you think about this Lee? Was it right that they're here, or should they be back?" And so, that's the pondering question I have...I've explained it already, but it kind of leads me back there again. (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022)

Part of it has to do with the way the poles came to the museum; if they had been directly stolen, as is the case with the poles stolen during the Harriman Expedition, it would be a more clear-cut decision. Lee Wallace states that “this case with the two poles at the DAM, it was very different...And again, it's really...was it right or wrong of John to do that? And maybe, a clan would clearly say, ‘Well, they should be back’”. He expresses that he believes they are well cared for at the museum, and that he is grateful for the way that the DAM handled the situation.

We discussed the repatriation of clan hats, dance robes, and other clan property, and how that intersects with these poles:

LW: ...I think the thing is, a lot of clan leaders...they're really wanting all their objects to be brought back home, versus sitting in a collection somewhere sitting there idle. And they've brought back dance robes, they brought back different items, and clan hats, large clan hats. And so...when you see them bringing it back in a ceremonial way, in the public, and you just have this feeling inside of relief that this robe is back, and it's with the rightful clan...or the hat is with the rightful clan, and they're dancing and singing. And so those are the things that...should be back.

PM: So, in that case, are the poles different because they are up and viewable...?

LW: Yeah. I actually, I guess I'm really struggling with that.

PM: Okay.

LW: The whole thing. And, although they were...they were property of the family. And...well, that was my grandfather's decision to do that...it was his. And now with me, and so many years later, actually kind of following in his footsteps as being a carver...but it was just a period of time where he was experiencing many changes in his life. Or, I don't know. [Pause] I don't know how much more we want to talk about this, but...it's kind of a thing where...yeah, I'm gonna say, “Well, what's done is done.” (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022)



Lee Wallace's uncertainty about whether John Wallace had the right to sell the poles informs his own uncertainty about whether or not the poles should be at the DAM, while repeatedly affirming that it was his grandfather's decision.

As discussed in the literature review, many Northwest Coast groups are grappling with the decisions of past cultural caretakers to sell or donate clan property, as well as the arguments museums may make to try to maintain right of possession under NAGPRA (Colwell 2017; Jonaitis 2017). However, because of the monumental size of most totem poles, the physical requirements of repatriation pose a barrier. Having served as Tribal President of the Organized Village of Saxman of some twenty years, Lee Wallace is aware of the challenges that repatriating monumental poles present. He notes an instance he is aware of; wherein repatriated totem poles were stored in conexes for long periods of time and exposed to the changes in the environment that were detrimental to their physical integrity. While museums do not have the right under NAGPRA to place conditions on repatriation such as standards for storage and display, there may well be differing opinions within communities about how something is cared for once returned (Clavir 2002, 152). Wallace believes that repatriated totem poles should be physically preserved once returned, and that "[i]f you bring it back, you better have a place for them that's in a correct manner of storing them safely" (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022). However, ultimately, he places the responsibility for those choices with clan leaders.

Wallace also acknowledges the wide "genre of different beliefs and what should happen" to poles that begin to deteriorate, including allowing them to return to the earth, as well as the practice of bringing in appropriate carvers to carve replacement pieces and make repairs (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022). Wallace himself did repair on John Wallace's "Four Story Pole" in Juneau. From what I learned in Ketchikan, while museums in the past have employed conservators for totem pole conservation and restoration, it is becoming more common to commission a Native carver of the appropriate tribe and clan affiliation, and for any such effort to be guided by consultation with the clan whose property it is, if known. It is common practice in the totem parks to carve replacements for poles after they pass a certain point, as was the case

with John Wallace's copy of the Land Otter Pole. When asked his thoughts about letting that pole return to the earth, Lee Wallace says he sees educational value in it, as "[i]t gives a visitor an education. 'Well, this is part of the past, they used to just let 'em deteriorate away.'" However, this is not appropriate for other poles, and that "there's some time periods where you wanna keep some of that stuff. There's a little balance there." In the case of the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, the importance of their physical preservation is directly tied to the difficulties of potentially repatriating them. Though traditionally poles were allowed to return to the earth, and in some cases that may still be decided, Lee Wallace's view of these two poles is that they should be physically preserved. He is satisfied that they will be well cared for at the Denver Art Museum.

With all this taken into account, Wallace has not come to a conclusion about the poles remaining at the DAM. "You know...I'm somewhat okay with it," he states, "somewhat. Maybe not totally" (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022). He is satisfied that they will be well taken care of there, and no issues with the way that they are being cared for. But ultimately, their sale and placement at the museum is something he is struggling with.

As expressed in Vince Collison's reflections about Haida totem poles at the Field Museum, some may consider it inherently inappropriate for museums to legally own Haida poles (Krmptich 2014, 43, 109). When asked about repatriation, Chris Patrello states clearly that the DAM is open to a repatriation request. He says that "if Lee called us tomorrow and said, 'We want to submit a repatriation request for the poles', we would do that. We would honor that. And we would go through the process of initiating and evaluating that claim" (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021). Both Patrello and I think that speculating on what a repatriation request would look like, when one has not been initiated, is inappropriate. However, I think it is important to note that, when discussing repatriations, too much emphasis is placed on NAGPRA and what museums are legally required to do, rather than on what decisions best reflect the museum's obligations to communities (Wheeler, Arsenault, and Taylor 2022). This is by no means a comment on anything that any DAM personnel have expressed to me or anyone else; it is reflection upon the fact that museum and community collaborations, as well as conversations

about museum ethics, are opening up more potential outcomes outside of physical repatriation, and that focusing on a NAGPRA/Not NAGPRA dichotomy ignores these.

As of now, the poles sit at a strange junction that is reflected both in this comment and in Lee Wallace's uncertain feelings about the poles being at the DAM. The DAM reaching out to the Wallace family and publicly acknowledging their relationship to the poles is a significant step; Lukavic and Patrello (2022) write that their collaboration with the Wallace family created "the space for future collaboration in whatever form Lee or his family see fit" (120).

### **Ownership**

As was discussed in Chapter Four, when the Forest Service questioned John Wallace's right to sell the poles, he asserted that they were his personal property and that he would not sell something that was not his. This seems to have been in response to Hawthorne's misunderstanding that the poles belonged to the Yeilatzie family of Howkan (Moore 2018, 92). However, at the time the Forest Service was frequently dealing with poles as collectively owned property, attaining the permission of clans to move poles, not sell them. Letters written both by John Wallace and on his behalf continuously emphasized that they were his "personal" or "individual" property, and that if he did not have the right to sell them, the Native people at Hydaburg would have objected strongly to the sale. There is not an explanation of how the poles could be his individual property, however. What could be meant was that he was the head of the family at that time and had inherited the poles according to Haida clan protocols. Part of the discussions was that John Wallace, 78 years old at the time, was not being paid as a carver at the totem parks, due to budget restrictions (Moore 2018, 203). Archbold stated in a letter to Heintzleman in 1940 that, "[s]ince Mr. Wallace is quite insistent that they are his own personal property and seeing we cannot pay him carving wages, it is felt we should not antagonize him by pressing the question" (Moore 2018, 212).

While the Forest Service did not have the right to question the sale of the poles or accuse John Wallace of selling another family's property, their sale is still a complex matter. Under Western law at the time, John Wallace had the right to sell the poles. Within cultural protocol,

perhaps he did not; he was the head of the family at the time and so the poles were in his control, but they were, and remain, inalienable lineage property. When discussing why John Wallace might have decided to sell the poles, Lee Wallace highlights the cultural changes and differences John Wallace was experiencing. John Wallace was part of the CCC totem pole restoration project, which itself was a radical departure from the ways that totem poles have been viewed and cared for. He was also elderly, relying upon totem pole carving to make money, and not being paid as a carver but as a CCC enrollee, which other carvers were also experiencing at the time (Moore 2018, 202).

In his interview, Chris Patrello cites John Wallace's conflict with the Forest Service and his assertion that the poles were his as indicative that the poles were thought of as personal property, rather than the property of the lineage (Chris Patrello, Personal Interview, December 9, 2021). I did not have this information at the time of the interview, but it has since been made clear to me, by Lee Wallace and others, that Haida totem poles are thought of as collectively owned by the lineage and inalienable from that ownership. I include Patrello's understanding because I shared it at the time, and because it is reflected in Lee Wallace's lack of conclusion about whether his grandfather had the right to sell the poles, or whether it was right of him to do so. Additionally, as was noted in the literature review, there seems to be a lack of discussion surrounding Haida clan property as cultural patrimony. Even in the case where it is known that something is collectively owned, Jonaitis (2017) noted that museums frequently cite a lack of objection or controversy from the clan or community when a totem pole is sold as a sign that the sale was acceptable (53). Jonaitis also noted that, in repatriation discussions regarding the sale of cultural patrimony, clan leaders may not acknowledge shifting perspectives and norms regarding clan property, and essentialize sale as either something someone did or did not have the right to do regardless of the conditions. Repatriations under NAGPRA mandate this kind of language, as if cultural patrimony is sold by someone who was considered to have the right to do so at the time, it no longer falls under NAGPRA. However, that is the decision of the group at that point in

time, under the conditions specific to that time, which causes issues when cultural patrimony is owned not only collectively but intergenerationally throughout time.

### **Copies**

In some cases, a museum may also commission copies of poles or other clan property in their collection from an appropriate Native carver, then repatriate the originals. Wallace references an individual at Celebration 2022 who spoke about this practice potentially helping with the repatriation of clan property back home, as museums are able to maintain Northwest coast art in their collections when the originals are returned (Personal Interview, July 28, 2022). Moore (2010) argues this repatriation process not only allows for repatriation, but it involves museums in the balanced cycles of reciprocity and respect traditionally enacted through the commissioning, creation, and display of clan property. Lee Wallace carved a replica pole for the “Golden Hill Totem Pole” in Indianapolis after the original had completely returned to the earth. After the fact, it was found out that the original pole had likely been carved by Dwight Wallace.

There is also no need for it to be an exact replica, as seen with the poles carved by Nathan Jackson and Jackson Polys. John Wallace displayed a similar attitude during his conflict with the Forest Service over the Howkan Eagle. Viola Garfield noted that Wallace “has insisted over and over that each pole or design presents different problems, hence the artist handles it differently, which is certainly logical” (Moore 2018, 99). Lee Wallace, referencing someone wanting him to carve an exact replica of a certain pole, states “They’re saying ‘We want to replicate it just the way it looks right now.’ And in artists, we like to, ‘Well, we’ll do a liking of it, but we want to do our own little version of it’” (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022). He also explains that exact replicas may not be physically possible due to the decreasing availability of large old growth cedar of good quality.

Nathan Jackson carved the copy of John Wallace’s Land Otter pole that currently stands at Totem Bight, and he recalls being confused about the design of the pole (Brown 2009, 37). He states that when he began copying the pole, he found it distinctly unlike John Wallace’s usual style or even subject matter, and references having to do his own research. The author does not

clearly state what Jackson is referring to, but it seems that Jackson is referencing that the Land Otter Pole being copied is not John Wallace's design, but Dwight Wallace's. Although John Wallace made a change to the design in the inclusion of the octopus, as well as other stylistic choices, it may not have been a design or story he would have chosen to carve on his own had he not been making a replica of Dwight Wallace's pole. The fact that the Land Otter Pole at Totem Bight is a copy of the one at the DAM is not addressed on interpretive signs, so it makes sense that the style and subject matter seem incongruous with John Wallace's usual designs for his original works. Jackson's copy is of John Wallace's version, including the octopus on the bottom section.

Totem poles are not treated similarly to clan hats. When a new version of an older totem pole is carved and raised (not in Native contexts), there is a ceremony and dedication regardless of it being a "copy." However, there is no transfer of spirit between the two poles, and they are not considered to share the same essence. To Lee Wallace, the connection between an original pole and a replacement or copy is in the importance of the story:

So, you gotta figure out is...was it the artist that liked the story? That's where it brings it to myself...I've done this Eagle and Giant Clam story I did up at Cape Fox Lodge, I did for private commission ...He got the Eagle and Giant Claim story totem pole, eight-footer...And I did the same story for the state of Alaska in Anchorage. 'Cause I liked the story, the message of the story. And it's really the message of the story. And so...I wonder if my grandfather, John, liked that story...or was it the person behind the commissioning wanted that story?

(Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022)

In this case, it would seem that John Wallace's replication of the story was motivated primarily by the Forest Service, not by his own care for the story. Whether or not the story was significant to him aside from this cannot be said with the available information. However, Dwight Wallace carved the story of the Land Otter multiple times, though each had deviations in design. The first, the storytelling pole at the DAM, was presumably raised following cultural protocol. The second, commissioned for the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, may have been intended as a

copy; since James G. Swan reportedly attempted and failed to purchase existing poles on his collecting trip (Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 124-125; Douglas 1985, 23-24). However, it is also possible that Wallace had some connection to or resonance with the story in particular. He may have been the carver of a smaller model of the “Swan pole” that is in a private collection in Seattle (Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 125).

### **Ownership and Understanding**

Another potential route is becoming more prevalent in museums with collections of Native belongings, and that is Care-And-Trust Agreements, Memorandums of Understanding, Held in Trust Agreements, or other legal agreements that can be adapted to serve collaborative stewardship arrangements between museums and descendant communities. Each individual agreement must be tailored to the individual needs of the museum, the descendant community, and the belonging(s) concerned. Broadly, these agreements outline a form of shared custody over a belonging. These agreements may be used, for example, if a community has full legal ownership over the item(s), but the community and museum agree that it will be kept in the museum for a stipulated amount of time. For example, as was discussed in Chapter 4, in 2014, the Khaach.ádi clan hat Xhixhch'i S'aaxhw (Frog Hat) was repatriated from the Oakland Museum of California. The repatriation request was submitted by the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA) on behalf of the Khaach.ádi clan in 2008 and approved in 2013. Before it was physically repatriated, legal ownership was turned over to the CCTHITA, but it remained at the museum on loan until it could be arranged to be brought back. During this time, Xhixhch'i S'aaxhw took part in an exhibition about the repatriation process.

These agreements may include details like how the item or item(s) can leave the museum for cultural use, who is allowed to visit the item or item(s), whether the item or item(s) can be put on view, and who is to be contacted about any concern regarding the items. For example, in 2004, Sitka Kaagwaantaan leader Andrew Gamble hosted the Centennial Potlatch as a centennial celebration of the “Last Potlatch” of 1904 (Preucel and Williams 2005). On behalf of his clan, Gamble requested five clan hats and one baton from the University of Pennsylvania Museum.

The museum decided that the baton and one clan hat were too fragile to travel, again displaying the link between conservation and museums' sense of ownership over Native culture. However, four clan hats were brought by museum staff to the event. Wolf House posts from the Alaska State Museum and the Multiplying Wolf screen from Sitka National Historic Park were also brought to the event and installed in the Sheldon Jackson College education center. The previously referenced Sea Monster Hat, repatriated from the Field Museum, was also present. All these belongings were able to take part in the ceremonies, be danced, and otherwise be presented as part of the potlatch (Jonaitis 2017, 54). Though the belongings were not repatriated, they were able to take part in the cultural lifeways of their clans and community, which Jonaitis notes is "a possibility barely imagined by some US institutions before NAGPRA" (49).

While repatriation may be the desired outcome for many Native belongings, there are many reasons why a descendant community, family, or individual may decide that something should not be returned right away or should not be returned at all. In those circumstances, if desired by the descendant community, legal agreements like Care-And-Trust Agreements, Memorandums of Understanding and Held in Trust Agreements can encode the museum's support of the community's claim and give more practical control to the community. Other documents may also be used; as has been made clear, the Western property languages built into museum functions can make adaptations difficult, and flexibility and creativity are necessary.

Lukavic and Patrello (2022) state that one of the key facets of the pole-raising ceremony is that it "created the space for future collaboration in whatever form Lee or his family see fit" (120). I do not put forward these examples as a recommendation or any speculation on what future collaborations might look like. I agree with the implicit understanding within the cited statement that Lee and his family should take the lead of whatever future collaborations may happen. I describe this practice here as it is one that I heard referred to fairly frequently, specifically surrounding different forms of clan or lineage property in the Northwest Coast. I also describe it as an area of future research, as I was not able to find existing literature describing the approach specifically. NAGPRA consultants Bernstein and Associates provide a Care-And-Trust



Agreement template on their website (<https://nagpra.info/resources>, accessed 7 May, 2023).

Many Indigenous museum collections in New Zealand, including objects and buildings, do not legally belong to museums but are loaned by or “on deposit” from their Maori owners (Clavir 2002, 219). At the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, many belongings are held “in trust,” providing specific guidance and instructions for transfer and care (Ames 2003, 176). An examination and discussion of the legal documents used in these examples would be an excellent resource for museums and communities, as well a relevant and fascinating analysis of how Western property language is adapted to serve, if not reflect, different Indigenous conceptions of ownership and respect for Indigenous sovereignty.

### **Memory and Care**

When I mentioned a museum employee describing part of the pole-raising ceremony as “soothing” the poles, and asked whether that was accurate, Lee Wallace said that it was. I connect this to Esther Shea’s singing to her family’s pole before it underwent conservation (Todd 2002). Though the form of care being implemented for the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole is a new one—being lowered and raised again, aluminum frames being installed, being raised into place by forklifts, and being raised without a potlatch—the ceremony comforted the poles during these changes. Todd (1998) makes a point about the connection of conservation to memory. He writes:

Social scientists currently are developing important new theories about memory in the area of psychological and sociological research. It is important, in a similar way, to seriously consider and study the role of conservation treatments in relation to memory and the validity of history. After all, memory is considered to be of such import because of the belief in history’s value. (Todd 1998, 403)

This thought can be extended to preventative conservation as well. Moore writes that “[t]his multidirectional view of ancestors and heritage means that totem poles serve as vessels for enduring stories and symbols that were earned by ancestors in the past, continue to inform the ways of the present, and will guide the future as well” (2018, 31). How do you care for memory and meaning? How do you care for stories? The answer may well be wholly unique for every single object, as well as change over time for the same object. How the Land Otter Pole and

Memorial Pole were cared for in the 19th century is different from how they are cared for now because the memory and meaning that they hold needs different care. In the future, it may change again.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

### Discussion

At the beginning of this thesis, I asked the following research questions:

- How have concepts of preservation surrounding the Land Otter Pole and the Memorial Pole changed over time? How are these related to the operational museology surrounding them? How are these related to shifts in critical museology?
- How are these changes related to differing understandings of ownership, scholarly privilege, cultural preservation, cultural sovereignty, and the meaning of the poles themselves?
- What is the significance of the relationship between the Wallace family and DAM beyond the collaboration with the poles?
- Can these relationships and changes to operational museology be described as decolonizing or Indigenizing? If so, how?

I have established that Western concepts of preservation, deterioration, and abandonment active in the CCC totem park project conflicted with Haida traditions surrounding totem poles, and that the extension of this understanding of preservation to the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole fundamentally changed their life. I have discussed how different Indigenous understandings of preservation, as based in cultural preservation and continuity, motivate different decisions regarding their belongings, including physical preservation. For some Haida people, including Lee Wallace, the importance of physically preserving totem poles continues to determine the poles' future.

I have also discussed how the poles came to the Denver Art Museum, as well as the shifts and forces that contextualize their being sold and bought, continue to affect decisions regarding

their ownership. These effects include legal ownership over inalienable property. However, the collaboration between the DAM and the Wallace family sets the stage for further collaboration that can help determine the poles' future. Additionally, through analyzing the perspectives of the DAM employees interviewed, I established that the introduction of Haida cultural protocols into the museum space, and their reintroduction into care of the poles, reflects Phillips' (2011) definition of Indigenization (10). To say whether it is a decolonizing process or not is more difficult, largely because it is debatable whether decolonizing museums and the processes within them is possible. Ultimately, as is reflected by Lee Wallace's perspectives, the poles being in and owned by a Western institution sits at odds with what is traditionally appropriate, and it is difficult to impossible to decolonize their maintenance in a colonial space. However, the ceremony also involved DAM employees within Haida protocols and worldviews and fundamentally changed their perspectives about the poles (Jonaitis 2017, 56). These perspectives, and the ways in which the poles are now exhibited, now reflect the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole's status as storytellers, statements of family history and status, and connections between the past and the future.

### **Other Poles Now**

Moore (2018) writes on what she calls the "radical recoding" of totem poles today and what has become normative for their treatment, including preserving poles physically and allowing them to remain in museum collections (186). Moore argues that, through Tlingit and Haida agency, the CCC totem parks became "sites where Tlingit and Haida nationhood could be proclaimed, where clans could continue to point to their ancestors' stories as evidence of their primacy on the land" (181). In this way, it could be seen also as a redefinition of how and to whom poles can assert the history and rights of a lineage and a people. Contemporary poles are similarly being carved for different contexts and purposes; the *Migration Home* pole, for example, was sent to Hamburg, Germany for Expo 2000 as a testament to Haida creativity, artistry, and cultural continuity, as well as an opening for talks about repatriation (Krpmotich 2014, 135). In 1998 the Skidegate band on Haida Gwaii, as part of a larger collaborative effort to build the

Kay'lnagaay (Sea Lion) Heritage Centre, sent out a call for proposals to all known pole carvers, and the winners drew straws to see which of six villages they would carve a pole for (Jonaitis and Glass 2010, 242). This departure from the traditional process of commissioning and carving poles was necessary because the poles could not be clan-centered, instead focusing on and asserting the strength and pride of the Haida as a people.

The Kadjuk Pole, also known as the Chief Johnson pole, was originally raised in 1901 as the property of the Kadjuk House of the Gaanax.ádi clan of the Taant'a Kwáan. It originally stood on the tidal flats of Ketchikan, and Montieth (1998) describes it as a symbol of the Tongass people in Ketchikan, stating that “[s]patially and politically, the pole represented how the Tongass stood prominently when encircled by the tide of outsiders” (256). The Tongass Tribe decided to commission a reproduction in 1988, and Israel Shotridge of the Taant'a Kwáan Teikweidí (opposite of the Raven) was commissioned to do the carving. The rededication and the Tongass were both acknowledged by the State of Alaska as well as the Ketchikan City Council. Elder Esther Shea, also Teikweidí, composed new Tlingit songs to dedicate the Raven pole, which, along with Shotridge's commissioning, upheld the balance of Tlingit moieties. The pole was raised in the same place as the original, continuing to symbolize both the Gaanax.ádi clan, as well as the history and continued presence of the Tongass people in Ketchikan.

The first secretary of state pole, also known as the Seward Shame Pole, was originally carved to publicly proclaim the Secretary of State William Seward's failure to repay a lavish potlatch given for him by the Chief Ebbits of the Taant'a Kwáan Tlingits in 1869. It has been recarved two more times since, first in 1946 by Charles Staast' Brown and then again in 2017 by Jackson Polys. In the face of the refusal of the U.S. federal government to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Taant'a Kwáan people, the pole's recarving sends a distinct message. Indeed, when the CCC program was underway, the Forest Service was not interested in replicating the pole still in place on Tongass Island. It was the interest of Tlingit people in the pole and its history that led to the second version being carved, and they kept the story behind it private until after it had been completed (Moore 2020, 32). A non-Native woman tried to circumvent the carving of

the third version of the pole by reaching out to Seward's descendants to give a potlatch, but the Taant'a Kwáan Tlingits refused, as did Seward's descendants after learning the idea did not originate with the Taant'a Kwáan. Emily Moore's chapter "The Seward Shame Pole: A Tlingit Countermonument to the Alaska Purchase" in *Unsettling Native Art Histories on the Northwest Coast* (2020) describes how the raising of all three poles serves to "counter settler claims to land ownership and control of resources in Alaska and to assert Taant'a kwáan [sic] sovereignty to the American public" (27). The continued presence of the pole is a refusal to forget the past and current transgressions of the federal government Seward represented, which did not acknowledge the Taant'a Kwáan Tlingits in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and refuses them subsistence privileges (36). Even if Seward family members were to pay back the potlatch, it would not reconcile all that has happened since and what continues to happen.

Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) is in the process of commissioning ten of what it hopes will be thirty totem poles forming the Kootéeyaa Deiyí (Totem Pole Trail) on the downtown Juneau waterfront. It is part of SHI's push to make Juneau the Northwest Coast art capital of the world. SHI President Rosita Worl states, "[o]ur traditional poles historically dominated the shorelines of our ancestral homelands and told the world who we were. It's fitting that our totems will be one of the first things people see while sailing into Juneau" ("SHI Secures Funding to Launch Totem Pole Trail" 2021). The recognition of totem poles as art and the assertion of presence and identity by Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian people are intertwined. This is interesting in the context of the Seward Monument, raised in celebration of the Alaska sesquicentennial in 2017, which prompted the third version of the Seward Shame Pole. Worl stated at that time, "I don't object to that statue up on the Capitol. What I object to is that the story of Alaska Natives is not there adjacent to that statue" (quoted in Moore 2020, 37). A trail of thirty totem poles, representing many different Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian families and clans, will certainly assert the story of Alaska Natives in the Juneau landscape.

There are many other examples. The Lummi House of Tears Carvers have carved two totem poles that, at the time of writing, are traveling through multiple cities as part of calls for clean

energy use, confrontation of the fossil fuel industry, and the ecological health of salmon and orcas (Lerner 2022a; Lerner 2022b). In whatever case, the monumental nature and considerable longevity of poles is symbolic of the importance and durability of a group, lineage or nation, and they are visually capable of telling the story of families, alliances, conflicts, and rights throughout time (Krmopotich 2014, 135).

### **Ketchikan**

In the summer of 2022, I traveled to Ketchikan, Alaska for an internship with Ketchikan Museums. Ketchikan Museums includes the Tongass Historical Museum and the Totem Heritage Center, and the town of Ketchikan includes the Totem Bight Historical Park, where John Wallace's Land Otter Pole and Master Carpenter pole are. Nearby is Saxman Village, where the Saxman Village Totem Park is. The internship was run through Museums Alaska and was one of several placements in Alaskan institutions possible. I pursued the Ketchikan Museums internship because of the relevance of the place and institutions to my research and the story of the poles. I also knew that several members of the Wallace family lived in Saxman, and, while I had been in contact with Lee Wallace over email regarding my thesis prior to being offered the internship, I knew being physically close by might make it more convenient for him to participate, as opposed to zoom and phone interviews. I let him know by email when I was interviewing for the internship and when I had been offered it, and he agreed that it would be easier for him to participate if I was there.

I knew before going to Ketchikan that I was walking into a depth and complexity of history that I had no way of anticipating, and that there were many things that would be relevant to my work, but I would never be able to understand. Still, the level to which it expanded my understanding of my research is both massive and incredibly difficult to describe. At every moment, with every piece of paper I archived no matter how small, I was aware it was one thread leading into incredibly rich and complex histories that are still very relevant to the present and are part of building the future. It felt a little bit like it did seeing the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole in person for the first time; they are so much *bigger* than I imagined they would be. Or, it's not that

I imagined that they would be smaller, but that conceptualizing the size and importance of something is different than experiencing it.

I worked primarily on a project for the Totem Heritage Center (THC). The THC was built to house totem poles retrieved in the 1970s. The original poles came from Tlingit villages on Tongass Island and Village Island, and from the Haida village of Old Kasaan. The Native Elders who guided the project were concerned with the vandalism and looting that was happening at village sites. The Alaska State Museum and Alaskan Native Brotherhood worked to remove the poles, with assistance from the Smithsonian Institution and the U.S. Forest Service (<http://www.ketchikanmuseums.org/exhibits/totem-heritage-exhibits>, accessed 5 March, 2023).

When I worked on my project for the THC, the constant discussion was of which clan or lineage each pole belonged to. The owners of some poles are known, while others are not. When the clan that owns a pole is unknown, it is part of a very large loss of cultural knowledge and lifeways that is very closely felt by Alaskan Native communities. When the poles were first removed, those who ran the project were very careful to maintain that the poles will continue to belong, legally, to their clan or lineage, even if that clan or lineage is currently unknown. Who the individual poles belong to is therefore of great consequence in a myriad of ways, as some poles are legally owned by an unknown entity, so those entities cannot be consulted for their wishes regarding care, where the poles are housed, how they should be viewed and interpreted, and so on. Part of my research project was to try to get all of the information in the museum's archive in one place for easy reference, so that other community members with more knowledge of family and community relationships could use that information to further their own efforts. I also accessed the Viola Edmunson Garfield papers at the University of Washington Library, Special Collections, which contain a wealth of information relevant to the poles at the THC and the community as a whole. I helped the museum attain digital copies of documents with relevant information, and I identified relevant documents for access in the future.

There are also poles all around Ketchikan and Saxman, as well as in the totem parks. I passed them as I walked to and from the bus stop, and often ate lunch on a park bench near the



Chief Johnson pole. When I traveled further outside of my usual radius than usual, I ran into ones I recognized; the Sun Raven pole, raised on Tongass Island in 1900, has a 2003 replica carved by Israel Shotridge standing outside of the University of Alaska Southeast Ketchikan Campus, as well as the earlier 1939 replica still standing in Saxman Totem Park. I had studied totem poles before coming to Ketchikan but had seen very few in person. As I adjusted to passing them casually on the street, to seeing crowds of tourists around their bases, to hearing stories of people finding older poles in their backyards, to seeing fallen totem poles being allowed to return to the earth at the edges of a parking lot, I thought of the point made by Krmpotich (2014) that totem poles' size and placement makes them points of collective memory, often in the background of everyday life, determining its flow like a house or a landscape (137). As poles continue to be carved and raised across the Northwest Coast, they maintain that station. I saw two poles, one by Nathan Jackson and one by Jackson Polys, being carved in the Saxman Totem Park carving shed, destined to be a part of the Kootéeyaa Deiyí shaping the Juneau waterfront.

When I went out to Totem Bight Totem Park, I saw John Wallace's Land Otter Pole where it had been laid down on the ground. I was particularly interested to see it after reading in Moore (2018) that it was being allowed to return to the earth, while simultaneously serving as a "nursery log" for young cedar and spruce trees (186). I had been interested since the beginning in the different ways that preservation of totem poles is viewed, discussed, and implemented. When I saw it in person, I saw that there were indeed small, bright green cedar and spruce saplings growing out of the splits in the wood. The different forms of care being provided for the different Land Otter Poles seemed, and still seems, poignant to me. What I have learned is that, in the shifting contexts of survivance in Alaska Native communities, there is no one right approach to caring for totem poles. Though they still hold and represent memory, it is in vastly different contexts that they do so, and so the way in which they are cared for responds to that context. In some cases, they should be allowed to return to the earth. In others, they should be restored by appropriate carvers so that their story can still be viewed. In others, they should be preserved, indoors and in a controlled environment, so that they can continue on as highly valued clan

property and connections between the past, present, and future. What is consistent, and important, is that the appropriate people make those decisions; those who own a pole, have always owned it, and will continue to own it.

### **Conclusion**

At the time of his interview, Lee Wallace was considering accepting a commission to do a duplicate of the Chief Ebbits Pole for the Kootéeyaa Deiyí, the original of which is resting on its side in the Saxman Village Totem Park (Personal Interview, July 28, 2022). He caveats, however, that if he accepts the commission, he will be carving in his garage rather than the carving shed at the totem park; after years of carving in the carving shed, he's unwilling to subject himself to the gazes of tourists, the questions asked, and overhearing the repeated presentations of the tour guides. Lee Wallace talked about the tendency of people to focus on the artist whenever it comes to totem pole carving, when really, the focus should be on the story being told. He explains:

I think the real importance is, what's the message of that story? ...As an individual, that's my preference.... The value is the message that it's telling you. And those messages are old messages, but they're still pertaining to today's time. One thing I did---this is personal to me. I took those Haida stories, and those messages, and I had to know the story and see what actually the story is and what that story is trying to tell us, tell me. And what I do with those is that I correlate it to what I've read in the Bible. To me that tells me that a lot of times you look at differences of different nations, different religions, and really it tells us we're really the same. (Lee Wallace, Personal Interview, July 28, 2022)

For Lee Wallace, while totem poles are exquisite forms of art, the importance is on the story that the art tells, and the ongoing importance of the lessons the stories hold. That Wallace incorporates the messages he interprets from the Bible into his carving is especially resonant when considering how vehemently Christian missionaries used scripture to fight against totem pole carving. Even though John Wallace partook in the destruction of totem poles in his lifetime, he was able to bring his beliefs into coexistence with totem pole carving and served an important

role of teaching skills and stories to a new generation of carvers in Southeast Alaska. For Lee Wallace, the scriptures are a direct inspiration for the stories in his poles.

I asked Lee Wallace during his interview if he could clarify something I had heard multiple places: that totem poles are alive or have some sort of life in them. I was not sure if there was a way to explain that life that I had not come across or not. He said that he would not be able to answer that for me, and that it would be better to ask another carver. I have asked other knowledgeable people outside of the context of this thesis as well, and those I have asked have not had an answer for me. However, I return to the Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama (2013) statement that “[I]n the end, the social relationships between artifacts and humans are important, not the question of whether animacy is a fact or a metaphor” (268). At this time and for this thesis, then, I will consider it more important to know that totem poles are socially active in the relationships that they hold, than to know exactly how and in what way they are “alive.” I also am of the belief that there are plenty of things it might not be my right to know, or important for me to understand. In the context of settler colonialism, both historic and contemporary totem poles assert Native histories in and stewardship over the land. They are both social and political actors, as well as background monuments in everyday life. They assert, in monumental form, the history of a group in a place. They are storytellers and keepers of memory.

Though the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole have long been viewed differently than this meaning, and there is still room for that context to be acknowledged and honored more fully in the future, the pole-raising ceremony made public the connection between the poles and the Wallace family, and laid groundwork for collaborative decisions to be made. Though it is yet unknown and undecided what will happen next in the journey of the poles, the number of their potential futures and the possibilities within those futures have hopefully expanded.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions – the Denver Art Museum and Museum Professional Participants

General (Can be asked first or last)

- What is your position at your museum or cultural institution and how does that connect with either: the collaborative stewardship of the Land Otter Pole and memorial pole in particular, or; the collaborative stewardship of Indigenous cultural belongings?
- What are the biggest challenges of collaborative relationships with descendant communities, from your perspective? Do you have thoughts on how these challenges should be addressed?
- What role does conservation and collections management play in decolonization and Indigenization of museums, from your perspective?
- Do you think that it's possible to decolonize or Indigenize museums? Do you think that it's a worthwhile thing to strive for, or should something else be the goal?
- What do you think is the biggest thing that museums, in general or specifically, need to address or improve on when it comes to stewardship of Indigenous cultural belongings?

The poles

- Please describe your relationship to the poles and their place in the collection at the DAM.
- What are your thoughts on the poles being at the DAM?
- What are your thoughts on Indigenous cultural belongings in museums in general?
- What are your thoughts on conservation and preservation guidelines, for the poles and other cultural belongings, and how they have changed over time?
- The ceremony
- How did you (and all other parties, museum and the Wallace family included) come to the conclusion that a ceremony was the appropriate plan? What discussions went into that decision?
- Logistically speaking, what were things like on your side when planning the ceremony at the DAM?
- What were the biggest challenges of preparing the ceremony and raising, from your perspective?
- What goals were most important to you when the ceremony and raising at the DAM was being planned? What is most important to you in retrospect?
- The ongoing relationship
- What is the significance of the relationship between the DAM and the Wallace family, from your perspective?
- (If relevant) do you have any hopes for the collaborative relationship with the Wallaces going forward? If so, do you mind sharing them?

Do you have any thoughts, feelings, or stories about any topics that have not been addressed here?

### Interview Questions – Lee Wallace

- A note before we begin: there is a large amount of vocabulary in museum and academic contexts that is imperfect or misleading. I may use some words that are not

themselves fully representative of what they indicate; for example, the word “replica” to describe a pole that was carved in likeness of another for the purpose of replacing or duplicating it elsewhere. If there are any words that you feel may be better substituted by another term, including any term that is not in English, please let me know and I will use that instead going forward.

- Would you prefer me to use the term totem pole, crest pole, or *gyaa'ang*? If the latter, would you mind pronouncing it for me so I can be sure to get it right?
- Would you like me to refer to the carver of the Land Otter Pole and memorial pole as Dwight Wallace or his Haida name? If the second, would you mind pronouncing it for me so I can be sure to get it right? (*gid k'wáajuss*)?
- Is it alright for me to call them the Land Otter Pole and Memorial Pole, or are there better names I should use?
- To someone without a cultural understanding, how would you explain what Haida carved poles are and their significance in Haida lifeways?
- To someone without a cultural understanding, how would you explain the potlatch?

#### The poles at the museum

- What do you think of when you think about your family's connection to the Land Otter Pole and memorial pole? What do you think of when you think about your connection to them?
- What did you think when the Denver Art Museum reached out to you about the poles?
- Logistically speaking, what were things like on your side when planning the ceremony at the DAM?
- What was the experience of the ceremony like, from your perspective?
- What was most important to you when you the ceremony at the DAM was being planned? What is most important to you in retrospect?
- What is the significance of any ongoing relationship between your family and the DAM, from your perspective?
- Do you have any specific hopes for the collaboration with the DAM going forward? If so, do you mind sharing them?
- Do you have any specific hopes for the way that the poles will be viewed and cared for? If so, would you mind sharing them?

#### On preservation, conservation, and carving

- If you would like, could you share your thoughts on your practice as a carver? The experience of being a carver in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- What are your thoughts, if any, about the changes that occurred within the practice of carving and raising totem poles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, through projects like the CCC totem parks?
- What do you hope for the future generations of Haida carvers? The poles that are carved, and the way the poles are cared for?

#### Carving new versions of older poles

- What are your thoughts, if any, on the practice of carving copies/replicas/newer versions of older poles?
- When replicas, copies, versions, etcetera of Haida poles are carved by Haida carvers, what do you think is important? What do you think is unimportant?



- From your perspective, is there a relationship between the Land Otter Pole that Dwight Wallace carved, and the version that John Wallace carved, and the version that Nathan Jackson +carved? Or are they disconnected apart from the fact that they were commissioned?
- What thoughts do you have, if any, about how some of Dwight and John Wallace's poles are being preserved and other ones are being allowed to return to the earth?
- What do you think is important about each practice? Is there one that you think is better, or that you feel better about?

#### Poles in Museums

- What are your thoughts, if any, about those practices of conserving and preserving poles in museums and cultural centers?
- What are your thoughts, if any, about poles that get repatriated?
- What are your thoughts, if any, about how those decisions get made and who they get made by?

#### Broader Questions about Museums

- Do you think that it's possible to decolonize or Indigenize museums? Do you think that it's a worthwhile thing to strive for, or should something else be the goal?
- What are the biggest challenges of collaborative relationships with museums and cultural centers, from your perspective? Do you have thoughts on how these challenges should be addressed?
- This question is broad and, like all others, entirely optional: What do you think is the biggest thing that museums, in general or specifically, need to address or improve on when it comes to stewardship of Indigenous cultural belongings?

Do you have any thoughts, feelings, or stories about any topics that have not been addressed here?