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The Smith Family Totem Pole

In 1907 Smith Siwid, Chief of the Tlowitsis, commissioned a totem pole carving from the renowned Kwakwaka'wakw (K^wak^waka^wak^w) artist Yakuglas (Yak^wu^las), or Charlie James. The equally famed Mungo Martin possibly also worked on the pole as an apprentice.

The Pole, shown on the right, features seven crest figures, or supernatural and historic ancestors. These beings affirm the lineage and authority of Smith Siwid, the pole's commissioner, and his family. The Tlowitsis community has long debated exactly what the bird at the top of this totem pole is; often it is thought to be Raven (ǵ^wawina). However, according to notes left by Tlowitsis elder, Emily Smith Aitken's father, Tom Smith, the bird at the top is not a Raven, but rather it is a Kingfisher (kədalawi). This is followed in order by human (bəǵ^wanəm), wolf (uligən), hump-back whale (ǵ^wəyəm), river otter (X^wəmdi) – though here again, there is some question and perhaps this is black bear (laʔi), great horned owl (textexaliʔ), and at the base is Numas, first man (ǵəlgəlis - first to walk in this world), who holds the people of the Tlowitsis Nation up. Family

history recounts that Smith Siwid dedicated the pole at a p̄sa, now referred to as a *potlatch*, to demonstrate that its crests confirmed his descendent claim as chief. A *potlatch* is a ceremonial feast given in order to commemorate significant community or life events. On these occasions the hosts distribute gifts to those invited in order to establish or reaffirm social status.

The Smith Family Totem Pole originated on Turnour Island, British Columbia, Canada when Chief Smith Sewid or Sewidanaquilla commissioned Charlie Yakuglas James. In 1941 two poles stood in the village; by the end of the year both had disappeared. Frank Hibben, an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, purchased one of the poles, but possibly not the Smith family pole. The truth is, the pole was taken illegally. When the pole disappeared from the village, members of the Tlowitsis Nation filed a crime report with the Canadian police. Hibben towed the pole to Ketchikan, Alaska and described it as Tlingit to bypass questioning at the U.S.–Canadian border. From the 1960s until April 1, 2017 the pole was displayed on the campus of the University of New Mexico without interpretation connecting the pole to the community from which it was taken, and for whom it had continuing significance.

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The upper portion of the totem pole before restoration.

Jose Rodriguez



Karen E. Price

The Director's Column

by David Phillips



Colleen Lohse

In December 2015 I took over as interim director of the Maxwell Museum, after a dozen years as the curator of archaeology. At the time I thought I'd be in charge for less than a year, then would go back to the job I loved. But due to the latest UNM budget crisis (there seem to be a lot of those), the national search for a new museum director was delayed. I'm pleased to report that the search has been completed. It's never a done deal until the hiring papers are signed, but the next director's column should be written by someone else.

Having served as interim director longer than expected, I no longer plan to go back to being the curator of archaeology. Instead, I'll retire sometime this summer. The first part of my column serves a double purpose—to thank all of you for supporting the Maxwell while I was interim director, and also for making my time as curator of archaeology a success. I still remember standing in “the warehouse” in 2003, wondering how I was going to deal with thousands of boxes of disorganized, poorly protected, and mostly undocumented archaeological materials. Many of you remember taking on some of those boxes and rehousing the contents. Some of you are still working on it!

To all of you with whom I've interacted over the years, thank you. For your time and skill, for your donations of objects and hard cash, and above all for your enthusiasm, which I always found so infectious.

Anyone starting a museum job inherits loose ends. Anyone moving on from that job leaves loose ends. In my case, the biggest loose end left behind is the museum's efforts surrounding the Smith Family Totem Pole. The first half of the project—restoring the pole and re-erecting it inside the Hibben Center—was a tremendous success. My own contributions were tiny, but I was glad to see it happen. And for the first time since the pole was removed from Turnour Island in 1941, we have a signed agreement with the Smith family. In the agreement UNM recognizes the family's ownership of the pole, and the family agrees to keep the pole on deposit at UNM for three decades.

So far, so good, but the second half of the project is just starting. The Maxwell Museum and UNM's Department of Anthropology have committed to getting the family and the Tlowitsis First Nation a replacement pole, to go outside their new tribal headquarters in British Columbia. A totem pole that tall isn't cheap! Getting the new pole carved, erected, and consecrated will be even more expensive than restoring and re-erecting the original.

So—predictably—I'm closing my final column as museum director by passing the hat. Your collective generosity made a huge difference during my decade and a half at the museum. I hope that you will similarly help the new director fulfill our promise to help fund a replacement pole for the Tlowitsis. When that new pole is in place, we can tell a story about the Smith Family pole that makes a full circle—from Turnour Island to Albuquerque and back. Sometimes the most important thing a museum can do is not to hold and display cultural treasures, but to put them in a living context. It helps cultures persist, at times it serves the interest of long-delayed justice, and helps the Maxwell serve as a crossroads between cultures.

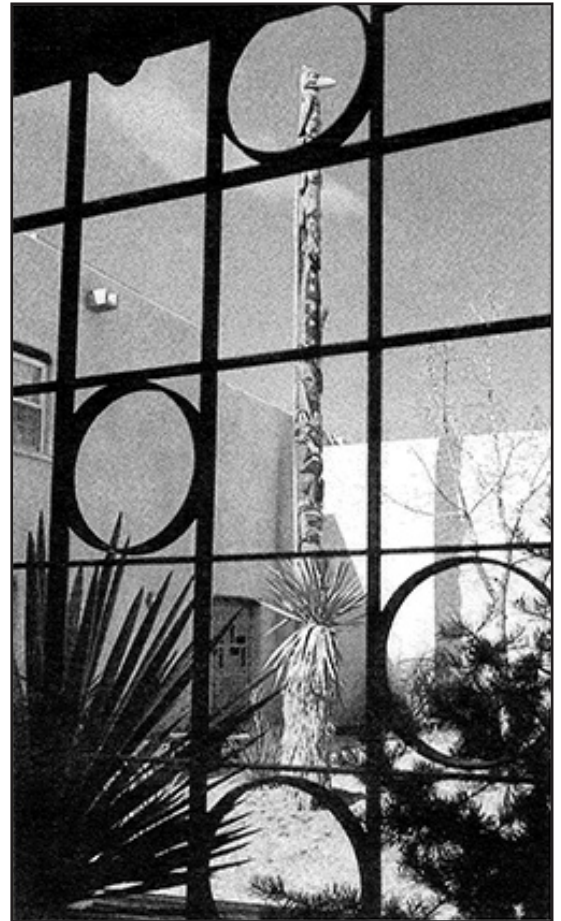
The Smith Family Totem Pole

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The totem pole was removed from its origins at a time when anthropologists visited indigenous communities internationally to collect material culture as part of *salvage ethnography*, which is the recording of the practices and folklore of cultures allegedly threatened with extinction, including as a result of modernization. (In practice, many of those cultures have survived.) Salvage ethnography is generally associated with the American anthropologist Franz Boas; he and his students aimed to record “vanishing” Native American cultures. Objects from indigenous peoples were identified as having value for research but also to begin to develop collections for museums.

In 2012, Beverly Singer, UNM Professor of Anthropology and graduate student India Rael composed a proposal to Maxwell Curator of Exhibits Devorah Romanek, to undertake research on the pole, to investigate how the museum might better care for it, and to begin research on the history of the pole in the Maxwell collection, and so this project began. As we began to dig into the origins of the totem pole in the collection, it was discovered that a small delegation from the Tlowitsis Nation, including Chief John Smith had paid a visit to the Maxwell in 2010 to inquire about the pole. No action concerning the pole had been taken at that time.

Under the directive of Maxwell Director James Dixon then David Phillips, Interim Director and Les Field, Chair of the Department of Anthropology, Curator of Ethnology Lea McChesney moved forward with contacting the Tlowitsis Nation and Chief Danial Smith.



Totem pole inside the courtyard of the Maxwell



The totem pole being placed in cold storage to remove insect infestation as part of the restoration process.

Jose Rodriguez

At the 2015 Society for Applied Anthropology meetings in Vancouver, a community meeting was held with Chief Danial Smith and Chief John Smith and representatives of the Tlowitsis Nation, Devorah Romanek, Beverly Singer, India Rael and Lea McChesney, about what the Maxwell should do about the pole. The Tlowitsis Nation requested the pole stay at the University of New Mexico, be restored, appropriately renamed for the Smith family, that contextual information be included and that the University acknowledge the wrong that was done in removing the pole.

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In December 2016 and March 2017, Chief Danial Smith visited the University of New Mexico and an understanding was reached for the relocation, restoration, re-interpretation and exchange of information regarding the Smith Family Totem Pole.

On April 1, 2017, the Smith Family Totem Pole was removed from the Maxwell courtyard, lifted by crane over the Museum and lowered and placed in a cold storage container adjacent to the Museum for two weeks in order to eliminate insect infestations. On April 15, the pole was moved into the Hibben Center atrium, where a team led by conservator Landis Smith and including conser-



Mary Beth Hermans

Conservators Landis Smith (standing), Mina Thompson and Harriet Raeburn removed debris from the totem pole in the Hibben Atrium.

vators Mina Thompson and Harriet Raeburn cleaned, brushed, removed debris and previous restoration materials.

Once the conservators had completed their work, restoration was directed by Kwakwaka'wakw artist and lead carver Tom Hunt, Jr. with ap-



Jose Rodriguez

Kwakwaka'wakw artist and lead carver Tom Hunt, Jr. whitewashes the totem pole in preparation for repainting.

prentice Bertram Smith, descendants of the original carvers and commissioners. They followed the style established by Charlie James, Mungo Martin, and others in in the early 1900s and restored portions of the pole, re-created missing pieces, primed and repainted the pole. The pair worked long hours over a three-week period. On May 20, the restored Smith Family Totem Pole was raised in the Hibben Center.



Jose Rodriguez

Bertram Smith reproduces the original design over the whitewashed pole.

Tlowitsis Nation delegation at the Maxwell, September 16, 2017



Chief John Smith opens the Blessing Ceremony, September 16, 2017.

In September, Chief John Smith, Chief Danial Smith and members of the Smith family and Tlowitsis Nation travelled to the University of New Mexico to host a celebration and blessing of the Smith Family Totem Pole. Chief John Smith opened the ceremony, welcoming all in the Tlowitsis native language. David Phillips, Interim Director of the Maxwell and Les Field, Chair of the Department of Anthropology also welcomed attendees. University of New Mexico President Chaouki Abdallah apologized to the Smith family for the troubling history of the totem pole at UNM. The Smith family delegation performed traditional dance and song to honor the pole and their ancestors. The final dance was a community dance and all attending were invited to participate.



Chief Danial Smith dances at the Blessing Ceremony



Willam Wasden, Jr. and Harold Nelson sing traditional Tlowitsis songs.

The Smith family and the Tlowitsis Nation are the true owners of the pole. The Maxwell Museum claims only to serve as a repository and caretaker; if the family wishes to have the pole returned they have the authority to do that.

The collaboration will continue with fundraising to erect a replica of the pole in the Tlowitsis Nation, Campbell River British Columbia where future generations of Kwakwaka'wakw artists can learn about Charlie Yakuglas James' carving style and access the pole's history and cultural legacy.



Tlowitsis & Smith family, right to left: Emily Aitken, Aysha Smith, Andrea Alfred- Smith, Sherry Thomas & Shana Smith, honor the Smith Family Totem Pole and their ancestors.

Images: Colleen Lohse

Reparation, respect, gratitude



From Chief Danial Smith

My heart is full, and you can tell from the look on my family's face that there is a lot of joy, and we are able to put something to rest and to open up a new chapter with a connection to not only all the people that we've met but to the Maxwell Museum and recognize what they've done, they've corrected something and stand with honor that we're feel very blessed and happy.

Thank you for the hard work, the dedication, that has been put in to make this day happen, to peacefully correct what had happened in the past, and thank you from the bottom of our hearts. This is from me and my family.

From UNM President Chaouki Abdallah

I'm Chaouki Abdallah, Interim President of the University of New Mexico. It is my honor to be addressing you this afternoon.

It is important to acknowledge past mistakes before moving forward. Today I acknowledge the University's involvement in the appropriation of the beautiful and culturally important totem pole belonging to Chief Smith Sewid's family of the aboriginal village of Kalagwis on Turnor Island in British Columbia. The totem pole was presented to UNM in the 1940's by one of its faculty and the University at that time failed to carry out due diligence regarding its ownership or examine the propriety of its removal. No attempt was made to present the indigenous social-cultural context and meaning and this was a missed opportunity for the UNM community.

The treatment of the pole between then and now is something we should have handled also much differently and we regret. While we cannot erase this record, we can acknowledge our past failures and express our sincere regrets to you, your family in atonation of these actions. Please accept our formal and sincere apology and know that we will work with you to insure the care and interpretation of the Smith family's pole according to the family's wishes.



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MUSEUM HOURS:

Tuesday - Saturday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

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The Tlowitsis Nation

The Tlowitsis are one of the thirteen Kwakwaka'wakw (K^wak^wakaw'ak^w) nations, who live in coastal British Columbia, at the north end of Vancouver Island and on the adjacent islands and mainland. Currently the nation has 400 members. This pole was originally raised in the Tlowitsis winter village of Kalagwees (Qaloğ^wis curved beach), on Turnour Island. During the mid-twentieth century, the British Columbia government closed the school and stopped the monthly hospital ship to the island. A diaspora resulted, displacing the community from their traditional home. Today, the Tlowitsis lease a plot of land for their administrative office from Homalco First Nation who were relocated to Campbell River.

For more information please visit www.tlowitsisnation.ca or <http://maxwellmuseum.unm.edu>



The Tlowitsis village of Kalagwees on Turnour Island.

Photo courtesy of the Tlowitsis Nation

Increasing knowledge and understanding of the human cultural experience.