



Model Totem Pole

Date

early 20th Century

Primary Maker

Tlingit

Medium

Wood and paint

Description

Traditional totem poles depict crest figures such as animals, people, natural forms, or supernatural beings that identify a family's history or tell important stories. They were raised for many reasons: to dedicate a new house, commemorate a marriage, honor the deceased, or celebrate a special event. The person raising the pole told the carver which crests to use but the carver designed the pole and represented the crests as he wanted. Raising a totem pole affirmed the status and wealth of the person and clan who commissioned the pole. Stories pertaining to the pole were told during a potlatch held to dedicate the pole. As a result of increased wealth, the peak of totem pole carving occurred in the 1860s and then declined quickly, probably due in part to the banning of potlatches in 1884 (since repealed). The carving of house posts was abandoned in the late 19th century when Western style

houses replaced communal houses. Many of the poles from the 19th century were eventually felled, destroyed, sold or removed. For several decades the art of carving totem poles declined and appeared to be doomed. In the 1960s, an appreciation for totem poles was renewed and several Northwest Coast Native carvers revitalized the art. Most of the poles seen today are under a century old.

Dimensions

14 7/8 × 3 1/4 × 3 1/4 in. (37.8 × 8.3 × 8.3 cm)