



Peabody Museum

of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University

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NAGPRA in the Museum Galleries

Two Poles, One Story



"A man named Kaats' from the Saanya Kwaan Neix.adi Clan was hunting in the woods and fell into a bear den. There, he encountered a she-bear who would eventually become his wife and the mother of his sons . . ."

Thus begins the story conveyed by this pole, titled Kaats' and Brown Bear Totem Pole (Kaats' Xóots Kooteeya). This pole came to the Peabody Museum directly from the studio of Master Tlingit Carver Nathan Jackson. Until 2001, another pole telling the same story stood where this pole is now. Both poles depict the brown bear, an emblematic crest that is owned by the Teikweidi Clan of the Tlingit people. Crests like this one are among the most important possessions of Tlingit clans and are manifest in both tangible and intangible forms. They are central to clan identity, because they are frequently associated with clan origin stories. Crests are recorded on clan objects, and their origins are recounted at potlatches (koo.eex),

celebratory gatherings at which gifts are bestowed on guests.

*Kaats' Xóots Kooteeya or
Kaats' and Brown Bear Totem
Pole. Nathan Jackson,
sculptor, 2001. Photo by Mark
Craig. PM 2001.26.1.*

Harriman Expedition of 1899

The original Teikweidi totem pole, a memorial totem pole representing the clan's commemoration of an individual, was taken from Gaash Village near Cape Fox, Alaska, during the Harriman Expedition around the Alaskan Coast in 1899. The Teikweidi Clan people of Gaash called themselves the

Saanya Kwaan (People of the Southeast Wind). In 1894, Samuel Saxman, a Presbyterian missionary, encouraged Gaash residents to relocate for education, Christianization, and unification with their neighbors, the Taanta Kwaan. Some of the people did move at that time. Then, because of smallpox brought in by the early settlers and the ensuing epidemic, leaders of Gaash Village moved away with the few families that survived.

Thinking that the village was abandoned, Edward Harriman and his crew took objects like totem poles, house posts, and ceremonial items and later distributed them among several museums across the continent. It was through this process that the Teikweidi memorial totem pole came to the Peabody Museum. At the time of the Harriman Expedition, it would have been considered the clan's communal property and should not have been "alienated, appropriated, or conveyed by any individual." Therefore, today it is rightly considered to be an "object of cultural patrimony" under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

Repatriation 100 Years Later

In 1999, one hundred years after the expedition, Cape Fox Corporation, on behalf of the Saanya Kwaan Teikweidi Clan, submitted a claim for repatriation of the memorial totem pole under the provisions of NAGPRA. After the Peabody Museum agreed to repatriate it, Cape Fox Corporation gave the Museum a cedar tree as a gesture of friendship and appreciation. The Museum then commissioned Nathan Jackson to carve that tree into the totem pole that you see here. This totem pole not only represents the Saanya Kwaan

Teikweidi clan and their history, but revitalizes the relationship between the Saanya Kwaan and the Peabody Museum.



Tlingit representatives at the dedication ceremony for the new Kaats' and brown bear totem pole, Harvard University, 2001

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