

Notes on Gitksan crests, potlatching and law

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presented by:

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22 Oct 2021

Conference on

Written Language & Literacy

University of North Carolina

Chapel Hill



John Adams
Fieldwork with the Gitksan
Mid-1960s



DSCF9276_e
ABK/JWA



Skeena River mid-1960s

DSCF9230_e
ABK/JWA

Skeena River Totem Poles

British Columbia

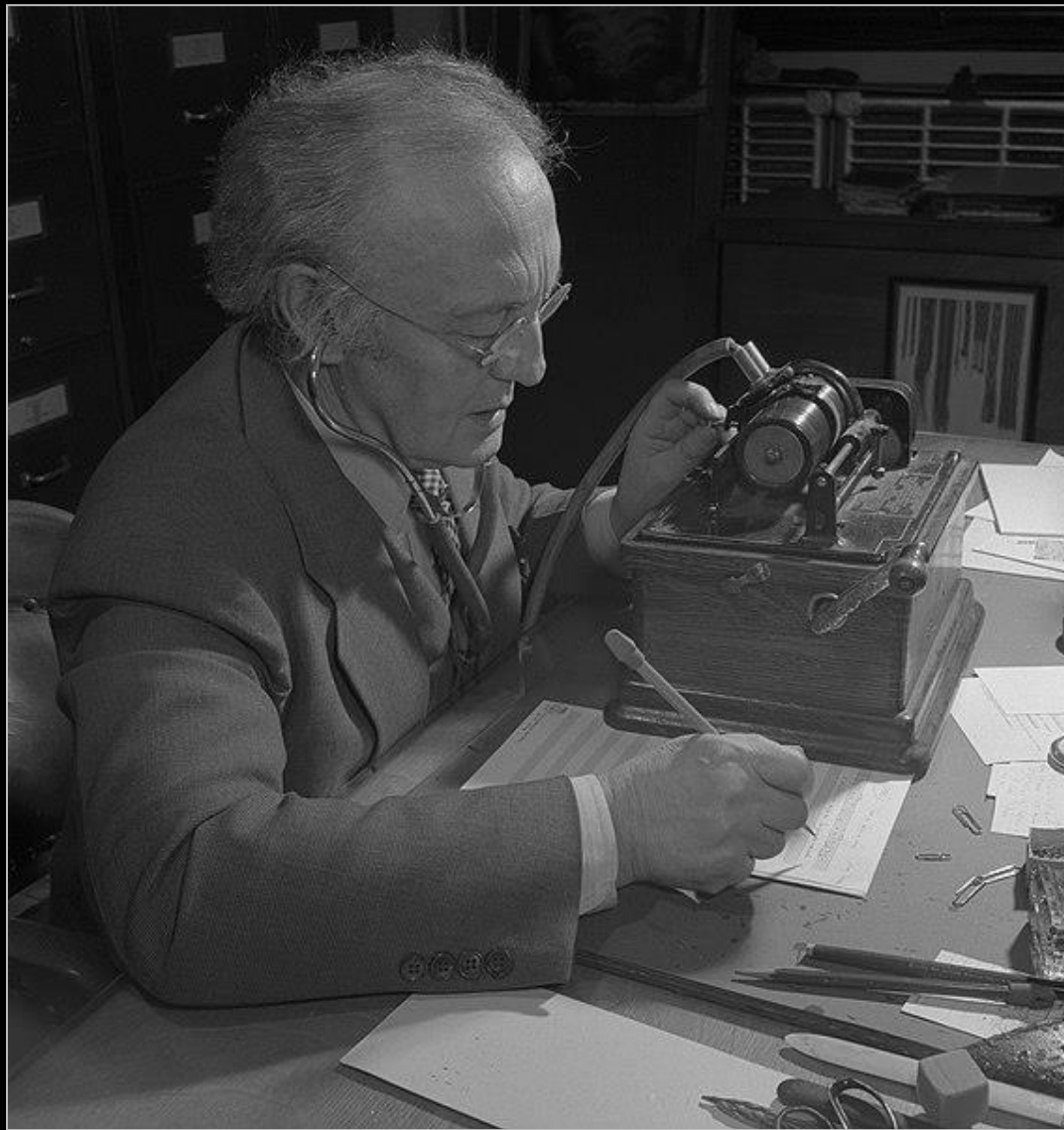




Totem poles in Kispiox, 1909

06-2-kispiox

Photo: University of Washington (Emmons)
Cathedral Grove

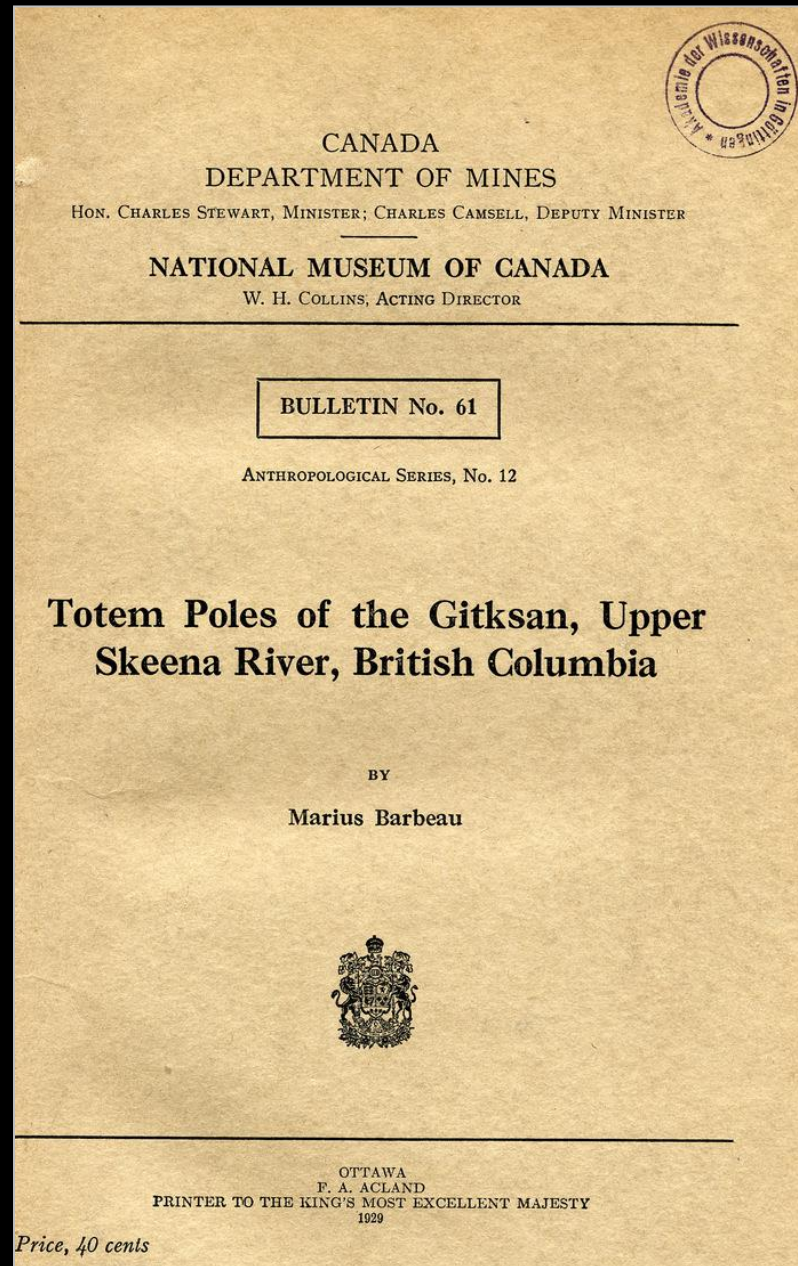


Marius Barbeau

Photo: A. Beaver

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=100235682>

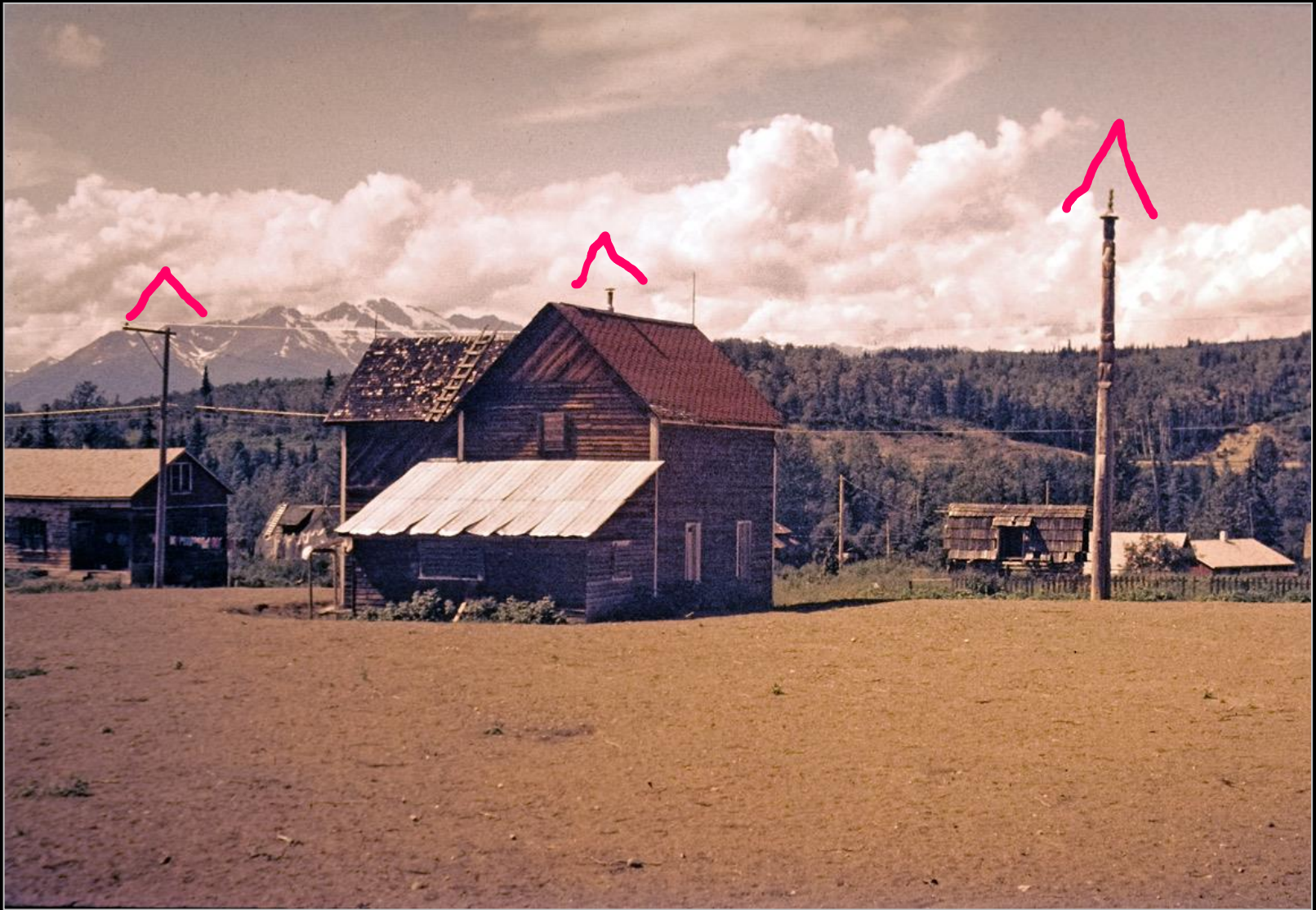
Marius Barbeau's
Monograph
about Gitksan
poles,
published 1929





A house built by the Department of Indian Affairs, mid-1960s

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ABK/JWA



Village – Three Poles – Pole on right with Spruce Ringed Hat
mid-1960s

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ABK/JWA

Plate XXV

259

PLATE XXV



1

2

1

3



Gitksan Hereditary Chief Wallace Morgan with Alice Kasakoff mid-1960s

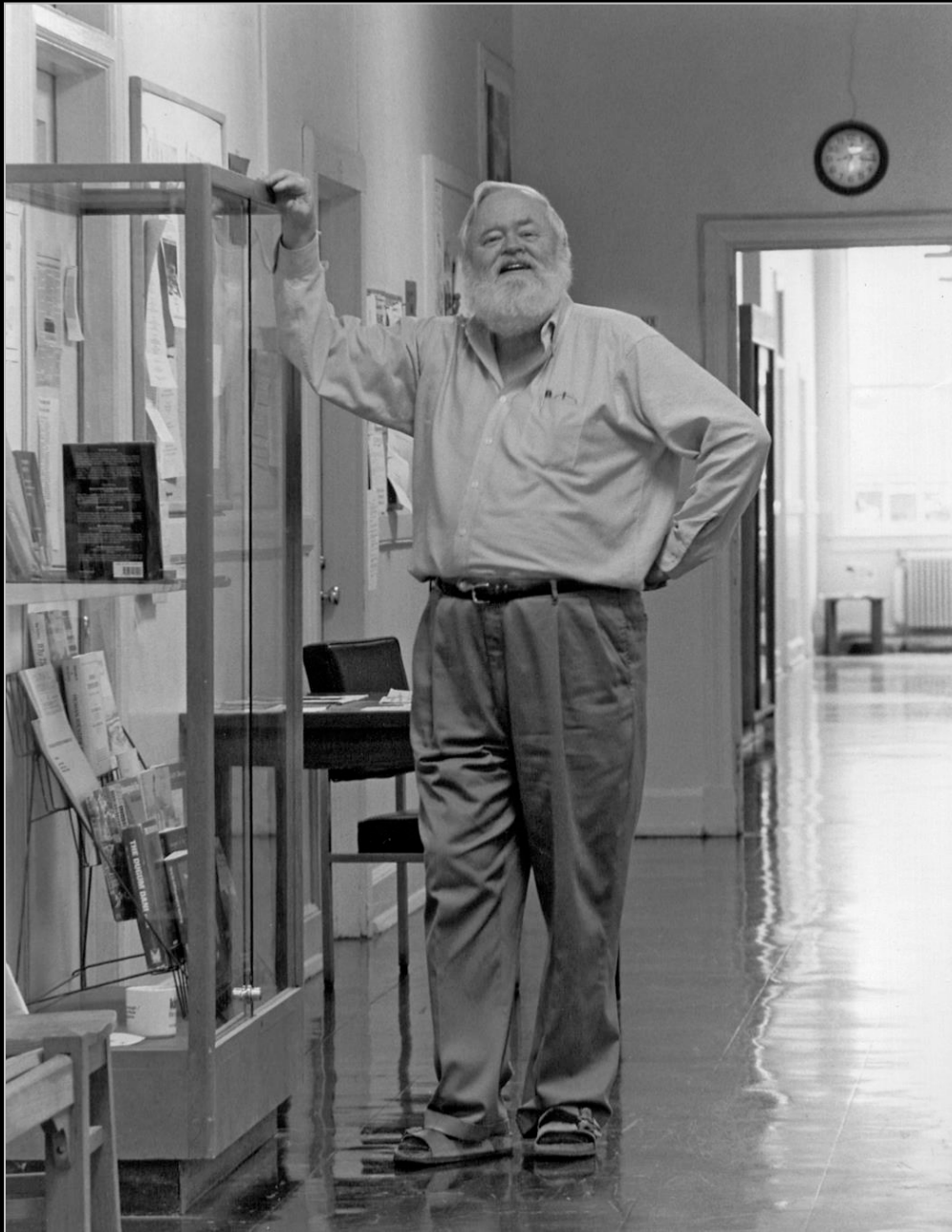
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**Gitksan
Hereditary
Chief Wallace
Morgan in
New York
City**

Late-1960s



DSCF9525_e
ABK/JWA



**John Adams in the hall outside
his office in the
Department of Anthropology,
University of South Carolina**

Gitksan
Performance
Museum of Man
Ottawa

November 1972



Photo 4_ei
ABK/JWA



Gitksan Performance Museum of Man Ottawa November 1972

Photo 3_ei
ABK/JWA

John Justeson

Segment 2



Kispiox totem poles, 2008.

Approx. 25 Kispiox totem poles stand in the grass at the edge of the community where the Kispiox and Skeena rivers meet.

06-2-kispiox-3
Cathedral Grove

John Adams
Fieldwork with the Gitksan
Mid-1960s



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Plate XXIV

257

PLATE XXIV



1



2

3



3

John Adams
South Carolina

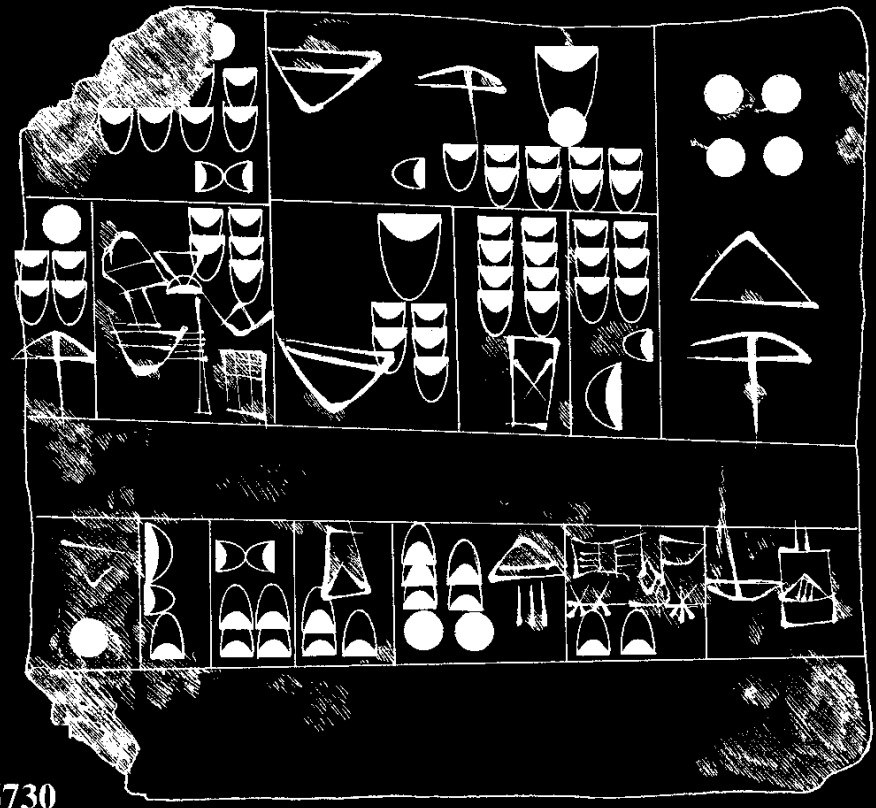
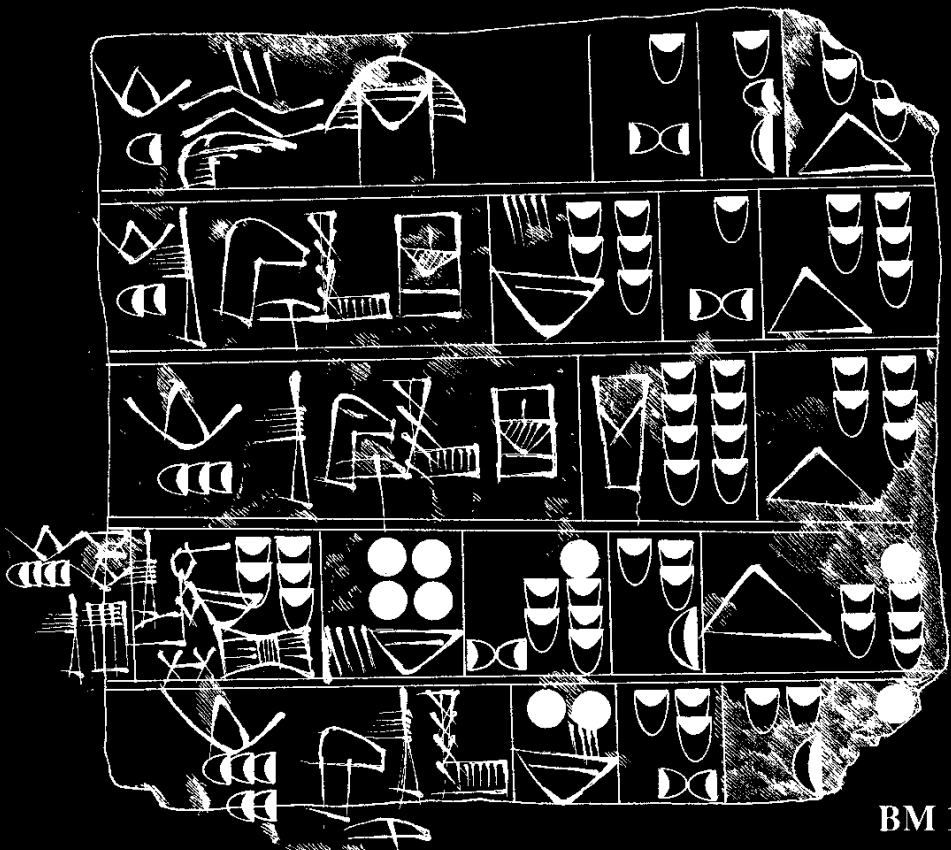


25.Jpg
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Gitksan Performance Museum of Man Ottawa November 1971

Photo 2_ei
ABK/JWA



BM 116730



Tlingit

Sekani

Nisga'a

Gitksan

Nass River

PRINCE RUPERT

Skeena River

Tsimshian

Wet'suwet'en

Haida

Haida Gwaii

Haisla

Nechako River

Dake

Heiltsuk

Nuxalk

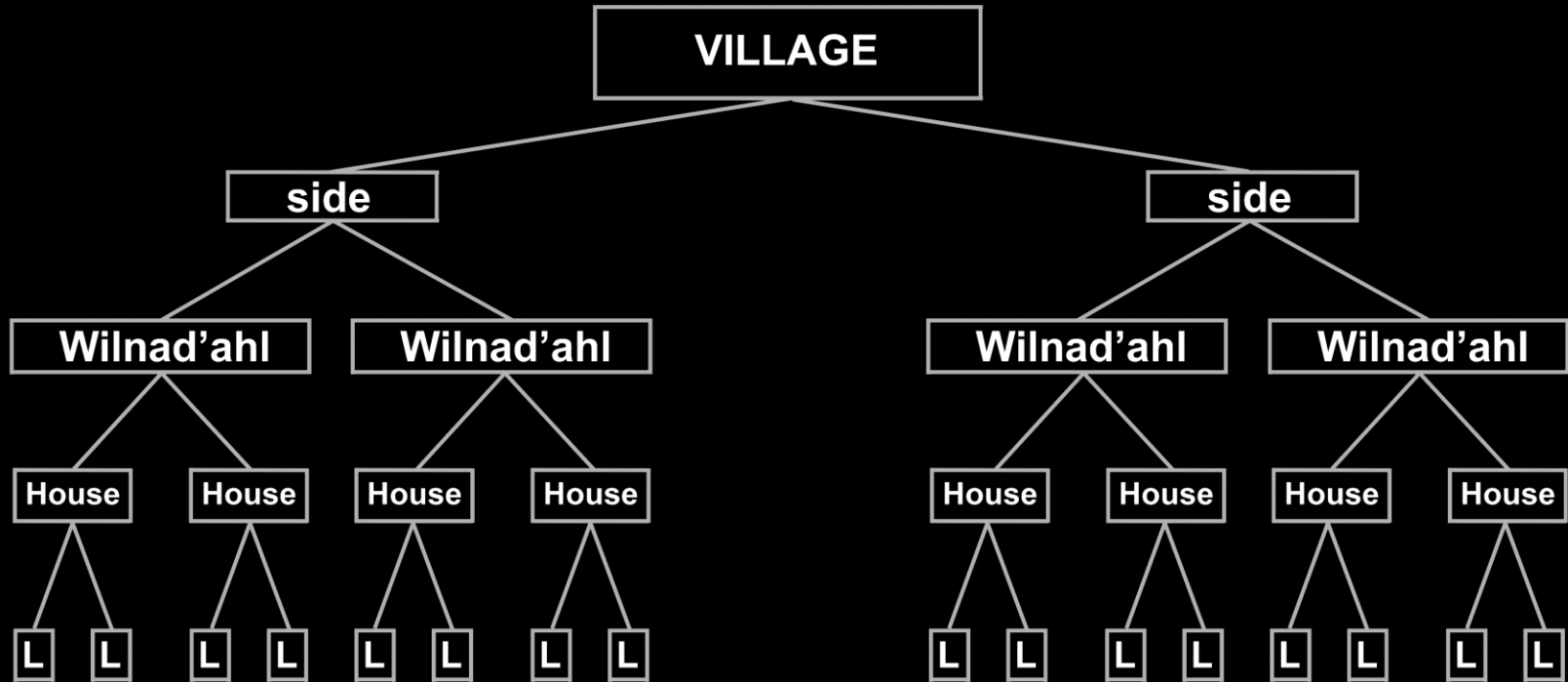
Chicoutin River

Protruding Tongue. Totem pole at Kispiox, 2008.



other
crest

Frog
crest



L = *lineage*



Gitksan Performance Museum of Man Ottawa November 1971

Photo 3_ei
ABK/JWA



rattle, depicting Nekt, mid-1960s

DSCF9497_e
ABK/JWA



Gitksan Performance Museum of Man Ottawa November 1971

Photo 2_ei
ABK/JWA

Gitksan
Performance
Museum of Man
Ottawa

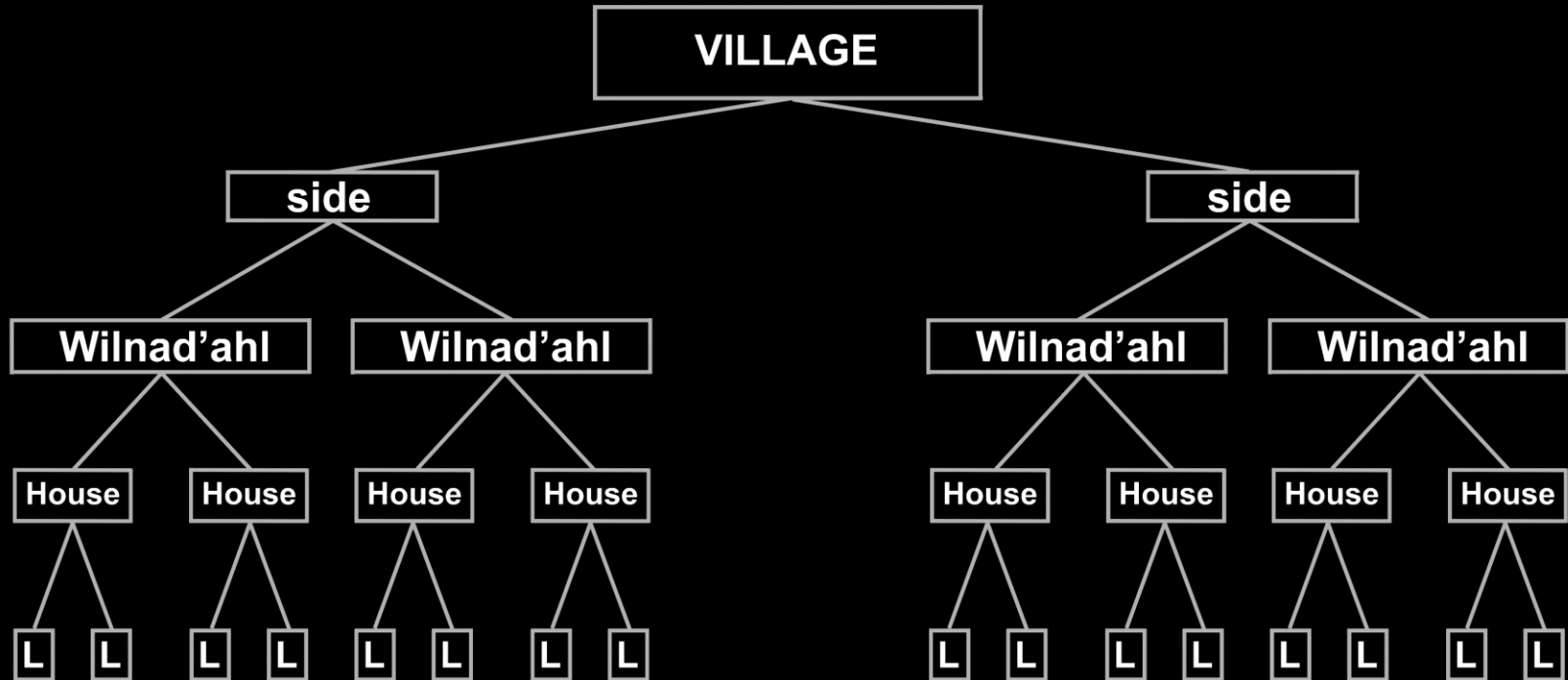
November 1971



Photo 4_ei
ABK/JWA

other
crest

Frog
crest



L = *lineage*

Gitksan
performance
Museum of Man
Ottawa

November 1971



Grizzly-bear-of-the-Sea, Medeegem-dzawey'aks



Barbeau Plate XVII Platform Figure 3a



Totem poles in Kispiox, 1909

06-2-kispiox
Photo: University of Washington (Emmons)
Cathedral Grove

Nekt Pole, mid-1960s



top of pole	bottom of pole
permanent	temporary
women	men
matriline	by marriage

J. Justeson, 2021.

Gitksan or Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chief in button blanket, headdress mid-1960s



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The man with the spruce ring hat worn when chiefs distributed gifts. From a pencil drawing by Langdon Kihn, 1924.

Barbeau Plate XVII Man with 4-Ring Hat Figure 5.png

**Marius Barbeau
(1929):
*Totem Poles of
the Gitksan,
Upper Skeena River,
British Columbia*
Plate XVIII, fig_3**



Gitksan doorway poles





British
Columbia
Dept of
Education

Gitksan doorway poles



Grizzly-bear-of-the-Sea, Medeegem-dzawey'aks



Barbeau Plate XVII Platform Figure 3a



Kispiox totem poles, 2008.

Approx. 25 Kispiox totem poles stand in the grass at the edge of the community where the Kispiox and Skeena rivers meet.

06-2-kispiox-3
Cathedral Grove

Totem pole in
Kispiox, 2007.



06-2-kispiox-4-b
Photo: Jahiah
Cathedral Grove

BP speaking



22 October 2021

JW Adams 'Some Notes on Gitksan ...'

10.Jpg
ABK/JWA



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Gitksan or Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chief in button blanket, headdress mid-1960s

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JW Adams 'Some Notes on Gitksan ...'

“Grave House”
Painting by
Bernard Hindle

mid-1960s



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ABK/JWA



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JW Adams 'Some Notes on Gitksan ...'

Photo 1_ei
ABK/JWA

5

Painting by Bernard
Hindle

House, Two Poles
One pole carved at
bottom then bare
One pole carved 2/3
up then bare
2 Platform figures
One Killer Whale
One Grizzly Bear

Mid-1960s

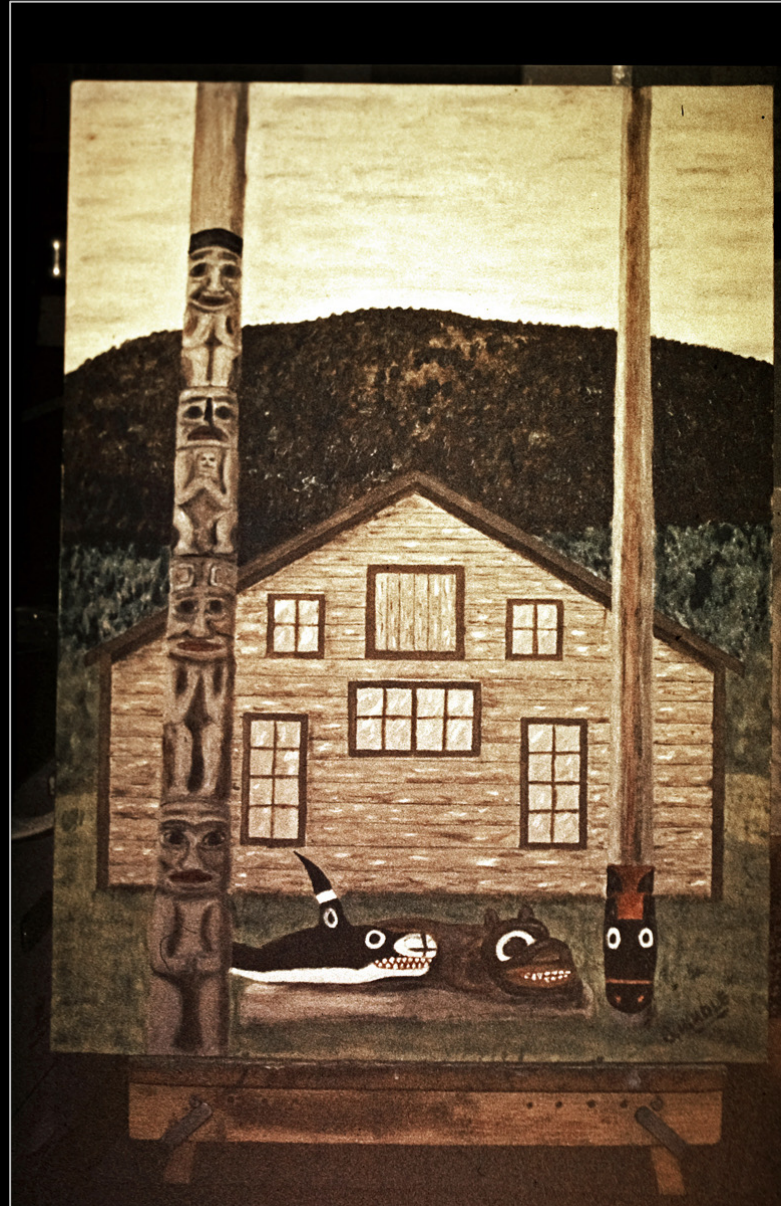






Plate XXIV_full_Barbeau_1929
22 October 2021



Gitksan Performance Museum of Man Ottawa November 1971

22 October 2021

JW Adams 'Some Notes on Gitksan ...'

Hello Bill,

Sorry about the delay in getting back to you. I circulated your email to our Chiefs in our Wilp [House]. I was expecting the other four chiefs to respond but I got feed back from two.

Here's the consensus:

- 1. The interpretation of crest law is the writer's view.*
- 2. The oral tradition is very important to us.*
- 3. The base figure of our totem poles are important and comes from the Wilp of your father.*
- 4. The bloodline and the training of those bloodlines are very important so that when the Wilp makes decisions for the chiefly lines are done properly.*
- 5. The chiefs in the Wilp represent the different lineages in the Wilp. The totem pole is done when there is transition of a chiefly line. It's a strategy to keep the oral histories current.*

6. Our crests reflect our worldview, history and our interconnectedness to the land and spirit world.

7. The Delgamuukw Title Case was about our pre-existing notions of title and rights and the Crown has made light of our crests and laws.

8. Feasting is a public forum of accountability. There are at least five feasts to complete the cycle of a Wilp totem pole.

9. Laws are known and the severity of consequences keeps us from acting contrary to them or our worldview.

Please read The Spirt in the Land The Opening Statement of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs in the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

I trust you take the time to read. I worked hard to get this published because of the prohibition period imposed on us by the Crown. The Crown has deliberately ignored our pre-existing title and rights since 1793.

Hello Bill,

Here's another book for you to read – Potlatch at Gitsegukla William Beynon's 1945 Field Notebooks Edited by Margaret Anderson and Marjorie Halpin.

I trust you take the time to read. I worked hard to get this published because of the prohibition period imposed on us by the Crown. The Crown has deliberately ignored our pre-existing title and rights since 1793.



Gitsegukla Platform figure Grizzley-out-of-water mid-1960s

22 October 2021

JW Adams 'Some Notes on Gitksan ...'

Grizzly-bear-of-the-
Sea, Medeegem-
dzawey'aks
(Kweeyaihl,
Fireweed,
Kispayaksl).



Thank-you