Thunderbird Park

Annual Report 1941

Thunderbird Park.

During the spring months the installation of totem-poles, house fronts, and other Indian carvings in Thunderbird Park was completed and the area was officially opened to the public on May 24th. The dedicatory programme consisted of addresses by Mayor Andrew McGavin and Premier T. D. Pattullo, followed by a series of dramatized versions of ancient legends of Okanagan Indians presented by children of the Inkameep Reserve at Oliver, B.C. The plays were directed by Mr. Anthony Walsh and the presentation was arranged by Major L. Bullock-Webster, Provincial Director of School and Community Drama.

By day the exhibits arranged within the park are shown to good advantage against a natural background of native trees, and by night, when the area is lit by flood-lights, the carvings stand out in striking contrast against the dark background. The park has attracted wide attention and has received much favourable comment, particularly from tourists and other out-of-town visitors.

A booklet has been compiled and issued by the Department of Trade and Industry, giving a short account of the origin of art among the native tribes of the British Columbia coast and including notes on each exhibit to be seen in the park. This brochure is available on application at the British Columbia Government Travel Bureau or the Provincial Museum.
TOTEM-POLE RESTORATION PROGRAMME

The largest single project undertaken during the year was the launching and direction of the three-year totem-pole restoration programme in Thunderbird Park. The primary purpose of the programme is to replace the present badly decaying exhibits in the park with a permanent and more representative collection—in part new poles, in part exact replicas of old ones—so that the fine original carvings can be preserved indefinitely indoors. By employing native carvers and having its operations in the park itself, the programme accomplishes two important secondary aims: to preserve the art of totem-carving and to serve as a unique tourist and educational attraction.

The project was conceived in the knowledge that Mungo Martin, who is almost without doubt the finest totem-carver remaining, would be available as head carver. Mr. Martin, now 71, is a native of the Kwakiutl tribe of Fort Rupert. He has been carving totem-poles and other objects of native art for more than fifty years, and is an outstanding authority on all aspects of the native culture of his tribe.

During the spring and early summer a large workshop was constructed in Thunderbird Park. The generous contribution by British Columbia Forest Products Limited of the construction materials and the full co-operation given by the Parks Division, British Columbia Forest Service, and the Public Works Department resulted in the erection of a structure attractively in keeping with the park exhibits. A tremendous contribution to the project is being made by MacMillan & Bloedel Limited, who have agreed to donate and deliver to the park the cedar logs for the totem-poles.

In mid-May Mr. Martin and his family took up residence in Victoria, in a house made available by the Department of Public Works. Carving began immediately. Mungo Martin has worked steadily throughout the year. His son, David Martin, 35, already an accomplished carver, worked from mid-May to mid-July and returned to the work late in November. A granddaughter, Mildred Hunt, was employed as an apprentice from August 5th to mid-November. Attempts to find other suitable apprentice carvers have not been successful.

By the end of the year three exhibits had been completed, and a fourth was in progress. The first is a replica of a large Haida Thunderbird and Whale memorial figure (Museum No. 1393). The old Whale as it stood in the park was copied, and the Thunderbird was added, based on an old photograph of the figure taken in its original village of Tanu, Q.C.I. The second is a large and superbly carved original totem-pole by Mr. Martin to fill the vacancy in our collection of the recent Kwakiutl style of carving, and to stand as a memorial to the many branches of that tribe. The third is a replica of a very old Kwakiutl pole from Knight Inlet (Museum No. 1859). Here again, working from old photographs, it was possible to replace a section of the pole that had not been preserved when it was brought to Victoria, so that the replica is more complete than the original as it stood in the park. The fourth project, the construction of a complete Kwakiutl house, was begun, with the start of carving on the house-posts and beams, which in a sense are forms of totem-poles. It is planned to complete this house during the coming summer.

As a tourist and educational attraction, the project has proven of outstanding success. In two eight-hour days during the tourist season, for example, 2,375 persons watched the carvers at work. Nine hundred and sixty-two of them took pictures, including 196 with movie cameras.
TOTEM-POLE RESTORATION PROGRAMME

Administration of the totem-pole restoration programme in Thunderbird Park throughout its second year has been the greatest single responsibility of the Anthropologist. The main accomplishment was the construction of a full-sized and authentic Kwakiutl Indian house as the “centre-piece” of the park. The opening ceremonies marking the completion of the new house brought the year to a spectacular close.

The Kwakiutl carvers, Mungo Martin and David Martin, worked steadily throughout the year. In addition, Robert J. Wallace, carpenter, was employed from May 12th to November 30th to assist in the construction of the house. Early in the year the carvers made a replica of a Bella Coola grave figure (Museum No. 2311) and, working indoors on the coldest days, carved three large masks for the Museum collection. Then they carved the four house-posts for the new house. In May the old Indian “house” was dismantled, the exhibits from it were set aside to await storage-space, and construction was started on the new house. Excavation and the construction of concrete footing for the walls and house-posts were costly and time-consuming preliminaries, but were necessary in the interests of permanence. By July the carved posts and adzed beams were in place, and the house began to take shape. Before each timber or plank was fitted into place, it was adzed by hand to give an authentic appearance, a process which consumed much time and energy. However, by the end of November the house was complete, the house-front painted, and the large original totem-pole which Mungo Martin
had carved in 1952 was ready to be erected. On November 30th this pole was raised in front of the house, and in a brief ceremony Mungo Martin announced the date for his house-opening potlatch.

It is a pleasure to report that generous donations were made by business firms and other Government departments. Flavelle Cedar Limited, of Port Moody, donated the greater part of the cedar house timbers and planks. MacMillan & Bloedel Limited continued to give the cedar logs for the carved poles. The Parks Branch of the British Columbia Forest Service co-operated by drawing up the detailed plans for the new house, and by making available the skilled services of Joseph St. Pierre to help with the adzing of the cedar planks and timbers. The Public Works Department made available another dwelling, into which David Martin and his family moved in June. The Photographic Branch, Department of Trade and Industry, did a steady and excellent job of obtaining still and movie records of the progress in the park and of the house-opening ceremonies. All this assistance from outside sources has allowed a better and more comprehensive programme than would otherwise have been possible.

Two main shortcomings have become apparent in the programme. The first is the lack of storage-space for the fine old original poles as they are taken down and for the canoes formerly on display. These are still exposed to weather and decay. There is planned a temporary storage-shed, which will serve as a stop-gap measure, but until permanent, dry indoor storage is provided, these irreplaceable specimens will continue to deteriorate. The second need is for more apprentice carvers. It is now apparent that on its present scale the programme can support only Mungo Martin and one younger apprentice. An original intention of the programme was to include a school for totem-carving to produce several skilled carvers for the future. Suitable young men are now available, but there are no funds to employ them.

THE NEW KWAKIUTL HOUSE

Kwakiutl houses of the nineteenth century were highly distinctive in construction. Often as large as 90 feet square, they had a massive central framework of carved posts and beams. The rest of the frame was of hand-hewn timbers, and to this were fitted the wide, adzed cedar wall and roof boards. Though all are basically similar, the houses differed in details. The crests carved on the house-posts, the painting (if any) on the house-front, and other details were inherited family property. No two houses were identical.

This new house is more than just an authentic Kwakiutl house. It is Mungo Martin's house, and bears on its house-posts hereditary crests of his family. It is a copy of a house built at Fort Rupert about a century ago by a chief whose position and name Mungo Martin has inherited and assumed—Naka'penkim. The house of old Chief Naka'penkim was twice as large, but its general style of construction and the carvings on the house-posts have been faithfully copied.

The house-posts bear the crests of three clans to which Naka'penkim was related by heredity or marriage. The mythical bird Ho'hoq on the back posts is the main crest of Gi'ksem clan of the Kwakiutl. The Grizzly Bear on both front and back posts is from the Wa'walibui clan of the same tribe. The Dsonoqua (mythical wild woman) on the front posts is a crest of Kw'ksutenuk tribe of Tribune Channel. Each of these creatures was prominent in the origin story of the clan concerned.

The house of an important Kwakiutl family sometimes had a name, and this house has been given the name "Wa'wadiitla." This was one of two house names owned by old Naka'penkim, and Mungo Martin has chosen it for this house. It means "he orders them to come inside"—the chief in this house is so powerful that he can order anyone else to come in and be his servant.
It was customary for the tall heraldic pole in front of the house to display the crests of the clans to which the owner of the house belonged. The great pole in front of this house, however, was carved by Mungo Martin to represent all of the Kwakiutl tribes, and it shows crests of four of them—the Awa’ita, Nakoaktok, and Nimpkish, as well as the Kwakiutl proper.

The top figure is Tsono’a, the Thunderbird, a crest of the Tsoo’tsuna clan of the Awa’ita tribe of Knight Inlet. The original ancestor of this clan was the Thunderbird, who became a man. Later his son returned to the sky to control thunder and lightning. Next is Wa’libui, the Grizzly Bear ancestor of the Wa’walibui clan of the Kwakiutl, and then a man, representing the same being after he became human. Next is the Beaver, Tsaw’a, an ancestor of the Nakoaktok tribe, Blunden Harbour. One clan of the Nimpkish tribe has the mythical giantess Dsonoqua as its crest. According to the clan tradition, one of two brothers once pursued the creature, who had been stealing drying fish. He eventually married her, and their son Tsee’lahwalakami, half man, half Dsonoqua, became the founder of the clan. The bottom figure on the totem-pole represents this tradition, and shows Dsonoqua holding her son.

Mungo Martin’s huge painting on the front of the house serves to represent yet another of the two dozen Kwakiutl tribes—the Tenaktok of Knight Inlet. The design shows Tsee’akis, a supernatural sea-monster shaped like a bullhead (sculpin). This design was formerly painted on the front of the house of a chief called Kwaksistala, at the village of Kalokwis. This man was a distant “uncle” of Mungo Martin.

THE HOUSE-WARMING POTTALATCH

It was customary among the Kwakiutl to mark the completion of a new house with great ceremonies. At such house-warmings, the owner usually explained his right to the carved and painted crests he had used by relating family traditions. He usually “pot-latched” gifts to those who had helped build the house and those whom he had invited to attend. He often took the opportunity to bestow important inherited names upon members of his family, and to display the masked dances and other ceremonies which belonged to his family.

It was understood from the start that opening ceremonies along these lines, with Mungo Martin as host, would mark the completion of this house. Accordingly, plans were made for three days of ceremonies—December 14th, 15th, and 16th. Mungo Martin sent word to the Kwakiutl villages, and certain of the native singers and dancers came to assist—Daniel Cranmer, as interpreter; Tom Omhde, the tribal song-leader; George Scow, Charles Nowell, and others. Several rehearsals were held on the nights before the event.

The first day was for Indians only, so that Mungo Martin could perform his traditional ceremonies and display his masks and dances in a setting as authentic as possible. This was a completely authentic and serious affair, not a show for outsiders. It was attended by natives from most of the tribes of the Coast. The only whites allowed in were a few anthropologists from Victoria, Vancouver, and Seattle, who had been invited in accordance with Mr. Martin’s wish to have the customs, songs, and speeches recorded. The people gathered at the house in the afternoon. Mourning songs for recently deceased relatives were sung first. Then the ceremony opening the winter dance season was performed: songs were sung, red cedar-bark head-bands were passed out, and down was placed on the heads of guests. A family ceremony—the cradle ceremony—was performed in honour of David Martin’s daughter. Then feast songs were sung, and there was a break for dinner, which was provided near by in the Crystal Garden. In the evening many colourful masked dances were performed.

On the second day, in the afternoon, a special series of dances was staged for the press, movies, radio, news-reel, and television. Government photographers obtained
600 feet of colour movies. The television film was shown across Canada on C.B.C. television news telescasts. Photographs obtained by the press were published in numbers.

In the evening of the second day a two-hour programme of the ceremonies and dances was presented for an audience of over 200 local and Provincial Government officials, donors of materials, and other guests. Printed invitations and souvenir programmes were prepared for this event.

On the final day, in the afternoon and again in the evening, similar programmes were presented and the general public was invited. Public interest was intense, and although more than 300 were crowded into the house on each occasion, many had to be turned away. In the evening an estimated 1,500 were not able to get in. Because the Indian performers had to return to their homes, it was not possible to stage additional performances.

At a final ceremony in the presence of the Indians, the Anthropologist formally thanked Mungo Martin for building his house here in Thunderbird Park, and promised him that it would be well cared for in the future. He also thanked Mr. Martin for performing his family dances and ceremonies and allowing them to be recorded. Thanks were given also to the dancers who had come long distances to assist.

The ceremonies as a whole aroused tremendous interest in native culture and the preservation of native art and ceremonies. At the year's end several groups were attempting to promote an extension of Thunderbird Park and the construction of a new museum. The latter is long overdue, and it is to be hoped that these efforts are successful.
TOTEM-POLE RESTORATION PROGRAMME

The carving programme in Thunderbird Park continued in operation through its third year. Mungo Martin and David Martin worked steadily throughout the year, and, in addition, donated funds allowed the employment of Henry Hunt for the period April 9th to June 12th.

Replicas of two Haida, two Tsimshian, one Kwakiutl, and one Bella Coola totem-pole were carved. The Haida poles are large house frontal poles collected by Dr. C. F. Newcombe in 1911 (Museum No. 1307 from Cumshewa and No. 1391 from Tanoo). The Tsimshian poles are tall memorial columns, collected from the Upper Skeena village of Kitsegukla in 1952. These are the pole of Tipesu (see Barbeau, C. M.: Totem Poles of the Gitksan, page 69 and Plate XI, Figure 7), and the second pole of Wistis (ibid., page 36 and Plate V, Figure 2). The Kwakiutl pole is Museum No. 1854, a large Quatsino house-post, and the Bella Coola pole is a grave-marker, No. 2310. At year’s end, preparations were under way to erect these poles and others in the park.

The problem of storage was eased somewhat when part of a corrugated-iron shed on Superior Street was made available for totem-pole storage.

It is again a pleasure to acknowledge a good deal of public support for the programme. In the spring Mr. Paul Arsen, of Victoria, staged a two-week “potlatch” in his two restaurants, during which funds were raised for the Thunderbird Park Fund. Mr. Arsen donated one day’s proceeds of his restaurants to the Fund. With this Fund, Henry Hunt was hired as an apprentice carver for over two months. MacMillan & Bloedel Limited continued to donate the logs being carved into totem-poles.
TOTEM-POLE RESTORATION PROGRAMME

Carving operations were continued in Thunderbird Park. Mungo Martin and David Martin worked steadily from January 1st to December 15th, and Henry Hunt was employed from April 1st to December 15th. During the summer thirteen poles and other exhibits were erected in the park. This was a major undertaking and more costly than had been foreseen, as excavations for the bases required the use of power machinery and, in some cases, blasting.

Painting and preparation of the exhibits took much of the carvers' time. In addition, four Haida poles and one Kwakiutl pole were carved. Two of the Haida poles were corner posts for the house-front framework erected in the park. These were copied from photographs of an old house in Skidegate. A third was a copy of the massive mortuary pole collected from Tanoo in 1911 (No. 1392). The original was removed to storage after being copied. The separate bird figure on the top of this pole was copied from the original, which has been in storage since it was collected. The fourth Haida pole carved was a copy of the Tanoo Beaver frontal pole salvaged in 1954. Since the park is now full, this pole was stored, awaiting assignment to a suitable place elsewhere in the Province.

The Kwakiutl pole carved was a copy of one of three houseposts collected at Knight Inlet in 1914. It was copied and stored at this time because the original was too badly decayed even to move to storage.

New descriptive labels were printed and ensheathed in plastic, and attached to the exhibits in the park.

At the beginning of the year the possibility seemed good that extra carving contracts could be obtained to pay the carvers' way for part of the year, and it was decided to employ three carvers instead of just two so that Henry Hunt might obtain a year of training. Such outside work did not materialize, and, as mentioned above, other expenses were greater than had been foreseen, and it was necessary to lay the carvers off on December 15th until the beginning of the next fiscal year. It is heartening to report that a community project was organized by the Victoria Daily Times to employ the carvers during that three months in the carving of the world's tallest totem-pole. The pole is to be given to the City of Victoria when completed. Public support in the form of purchase of shares in the pole has been heavy, and much good publicity for the carving programme has resulted.

We are pleased to acknowledge once again the donation of logs by MacMillan & Bloedel Limited and British Columbia Forest Products Limited.