

May 30, 2019

Two Thunderbird Park totem poles to be repatriated to communities in BC

VICTORIA, BC—To safeguard visitors, and in the spirit of repatriation, two poles that have reached the end of their lifespans in Thunderbird Park will be taken down this week and next, travelling to the communities that inspired their creation.

On Friday, May 31 a **Kwakwaka'wakw house post replica** will be taken down; during the week of June 3-7, a Haida mortuary pole replica will also be taken down.

“As some of these monumental poles near the end of their life cycle, we propose to return them to their source communities, for whom they have the greatest cultural significance,” **said Prof. Jack Lohman** CBE, CEO of the **Royal BC Museum**. “We are transferring their ownership and guardianship in the spirit of reconciliation.”

Mungo Martin, assisted by his son David Martin and Henry Hunt, carved the **Kwakwaka'wakw house post replica** in 1954 and the Haida mortuary pole replica in 1955.

The poles, exposed to the elements for decades, recently underwent seismic and structural assessments that recommended they be taken down as soon as possible: engineers determined that both had suffered internal damage through exposure to the elements and were at a high risk of falling.

Royal BC Museum staff consulted widely with stakeholders in the community to ensure the appropriate protocols and processes were followed to honour the **poles' departure from the site**.

Once in Fort Rupert, Chief David Mungo Knox of the Kwakiutl First Nation, the great-grandson of Mungo Martin and the hereditary title holder of **Wawaditla** (Mungo Martin House) will facilitate **the next stage in the poles' journeys**, as soon as next week.

Currently, the plan for the Haida mortuary pole is for it to stay in Fort Rupert, where it can serve as a reference for carvers while Chief Knox continues discussions with the descendants of the Haida clan from which this pole originates. The **Kwakwaka'wakw house post** will travel to Quatsino, where members of the Quatsino First Nation will decide how to lay the pole to rest.

Members of the public are welcome to witness the ceremony to commemorate the **Kwakwaka'wakw house post** replica being taken down on Friday, May 31 at approximately 9:00 am. The Haida mortuary pole replica will be taken down some time in the week of June 3-7, pending final confirmation from the



communities involved; please check Royal BC Museum social media channels for updates.

As outdoor totem poles reach the end of their lifespans, the Royal BC Museum anticipates that their return to Indigenous communities in BC will become more and more commonplace. Working with Indigenous experts, the museum plans to develop recommended protocols and processes that may serve as a template for other museums around the world with poles in their custody.

About the Royal BC Museum

The Royal BC Museum explores the province's human history and natural history, advances new knowledge and understanding of BC, and provides a dynamic forum for discussion and a place for reflection. The museum and archives celebrate culture and history, telling the stories of BC in ways that enlighten, stimulate and inspire. Located in Victoria on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen (Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations), we are a hub of community connections in BC—onsite, offsite and online—taking pride in our collective histories.

- 30 -

Media contact:

Royal BC Museum Media Inquiries
250-387-5051

news@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca

 @RoyalBCMuseum  royalbcmuseum  RoyalBCMuseum

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Replica House Post (RBCM 20120)

KWAKWAKA'WAKW

Mungo Martin, David Martin and Henry Hunt, 1954.

Thunderbird Park, Victoria

This replica is based on a house post that was raised about 1870 in the Gusgimukw village of Xwat̓is in Quatsino Sound. When Charles F. Newcombe collected the post at Xwat̓is in 1913, the wings and beak of the top figure were missing. The original **post was erected on the grounds of Government House, the Lieutenant Governor's residence in Victoria, where it stood for many years before being transferred to Thunderbird Park in 1941. At some point new wings and beak were added.**

Mungo Martin, assisted by his son David Martin and Henry Hunt, made this replica for Thunderbird Park in 1954. The original post was moved to inside storage, where it remains (RBCM 1845). The replica post still stands in Thunderbird Park, now once again missing its wings, which had deteriorated and were removed. These physical losses and additions are reminders that totem poles exposed to the elements naturally deteriorate over time. Traditionally, they would have been allowed to return to the earth and new poles would be raised.

The figure at the top of the house post is Huxwhukw, a Cannibal Bird, a crest **obtained by the post's owner through marriage to a woman from Kingcome Inlet.** The middle figure represents K'umugwe', the **Chief of the Undersea World, who lives in a wealth-filled house under the sea.** At the bottom is Grizzly Bear with a Copper in his mouth. It is eating or breaking the Copper, a symbol of wealth. A chief may break

or even destroy a valuable Copper at a potlatch to demonstrate his great wealth and challenge his rivals.

Replica Mortuary Pole (RBCM 20131)

HAIDA / KWAKWAKA'WAKW

Mungo Martin, David Martin and Henry Hunt, 1955

Thunderbird Park, Victoria

The original pole on which this replica is based commemorated a high-ranking Haida woman who was shot while travelling through the San Juan Islands in the 19th century. **Her cremated remains were returned to T'anuu Llnagaay and, as was customary, placed in the cavity behind the pole's frontal board. Charles F. Newcombe, a Victoria physician and botanist who collected Northwest Coast art and cultural objects for museums around the world, acquired the original pole at T'anuu in 1911 (RBCM 1392).** Photographs show a carved Eagle at the top with a Copper (a copper plaque that is a unit of wealth) leaning against it, but these were not on the pole when it was installed, poorly repainted, in Thunderbird Park in 1941.

The figures on the pole are crests of the deceased. The frontal board portrays Mountain Hawk. Whale is below, with three cylinders, called skills, between its flukes. Such cylinders, often part of hats, denote wealth earned through potlatching and refer to the human face below, which may represent the deceased or an ancestor. The face appears between the ears of a Beaver with its characteristic incisors and cross-hatched tail.

The original mortuary pole was removed from Thunderbird Park and in 1955 replaced by this replica carved by Mungo Martin, assisted by his son David Martin, **and Henry Hunt, who was married to Martin's adopted daughter Helen. There is an Eagle at the top of the new pole, indicating that the carvers consulted photographs of the pole at T'anuu as well as the original.**