

Human Figure House Post with Slaves



Quatsino artist Siwis (George Nelson) carved this ancestor figure and slaves around 1906.

BC Totem Pole Preservation Committee purchase, 1956
A50009 d-f

Part of interior house frame. The large wooden human figure (part d) is carved in high relief in a seated position. It is painted with a killer whale on its chest and broken coppers on both arms. In between his hands and below the killer whale is a small white face. The head is large, has a protruding nose and mouth, large carved eyes and is heavily decorated with yellow, white and black Northwest Coast stylised designs. Before the figure stands a wooden platform or seat supported by two kneeling slave figures (parts e-f), with unusual grimacing faces. Both figures have their outside arm rested on the ground while the other is turned backwards as if to support the seat that rests on their backs. Their eyes and bared teeth are carved in shallow relief while the rest of their face is carved in high relief. Their arms and upper body are painted green with black rings around the wrist and forearm. Their faces are painted green, white and black with Northwest Coast stylised designs.

The beams and figures stood as part of a house frame, and acted as structural supports. Figures represented on house frames were supernatural beings which the family living in the house had the right, through their history and origins, to represent.

Slaves were captured members of other Northwest Coast groups.

Part d, the large human figure, was repainted by Bill Holm in Seattle for the World's Fair of 1958. Gerry Marks did restoration work on the slave figures in 1976 - the replacement arm of one figure is signed 'G. Marks (1/76)'. This may have been the house photographed by E. Curtis in 1910 shortly after completion, according to [Hawthorn \(1979\)](#).

Made by George Nelson (Maker), Bill Holm (Technician) and Gerry Marks (Technician) in Quatsino, British Columbia, Canada and Xwatis, British Columbia, Canada during 1906

Collected by Helen Codere, Wilson Duff, Wayne Suttles and Michael Kew during 1956

Owned by Chief Johnny, Charley Clair

Received from British Columbia Totem Pole Preservation Committee (Transferring institution) during 1956

Material: cedar wood, iron metal, adhesive and paint

Part d: height 4.0 m, depth 1.1 m

Part e, f: height 90 cm, width 145 cm, depth 118cm

Made in: Quatsino, British Columbia, Canada and Xwatis, British Columbia, Canada

Condition: fair

Accession number: 2112/4 d-f

Culture: Kwakwaka'wakw : Gusgimukw

Creator: George Nelson (Maker), Bill Holm (Technician) and Gerry Marks (Technician) Creation Date: during 1906

Photo: Don Hitchcock 2012

Source: Display, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia

Ancestor figure with slaves

With copper shields painted on its arms, pieces of copper (now missing, but shown in the old photo) attached to its chin, and a sea-lion or whale head emerging from its chest, this imposing ancestor figure makes visible the Kwakwaka'wakw concept of the house as a sacred entity: an embodiment of the lineage and its supernatural origins.



Slaves are portrayed holding up the ceremonial bench. Although capturing slaves through intertribal warfare had been abandoned on the Northwest Coast by 1900, these figures symbolise the wealth uplifting Tza'kyius and his lineage.

On the left, the photo shows the ancestor figure and the slaves as they were in 1955.



On the right, the photo shows the Quatsino artist Siwis (George Nelson) who carved the ancestor figure and slaves around 1906. He also carved a series of interior posts that supported the lateral beams of the house. The sea-lion house posts and crossbeam displayed in the photo further down this page were carved by Quatsino Hansen.

Photo (left): Wilson Duff, 1955. Royal BC Museum PN 2000
Photo (right): V. Cawston, 1956. Royal BC Museum PN 8468
Source: Display, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia



This photo shows a ceremonial feast inside the Klix'ken Bighouse, ca 1910. The ancestor figure stands against the rear wall, behind which was a smaller room for private use.

Sometime around 1906, the Klix'ken, or Sea Lion House, was built in Xwatis village, deep inside Quatsino Sound on northern Vancouver Island. By this time, Aboriginal peoples along the coast had largely replaced their traditional cedar lineage houses with Victorian framed houses of milled lumber. Klix'ken House was the last old-style dwelling erected in Xwatis. Although it featured a modern exterior with milled-lumber front and three windows around the door, its interior revealed a monumental post-and-beam structure with carved symbols of the family's history and wealth.

Tza'kyilus was the owner of this great house and of the sea-lion crest after which it was named. Two large sea-lion house posts carved by Quatsino Hansen stood inside the front door, supporting a crossbeam said to represent a double-headed sea lion. The other end of the ridge beam spanning the length of the house was held up by the head of a figure, carved by George Nelson, that depicts a powerful transformer being - a founder of the lineage. With copper shields painted on his arms, pieces of copper (now missing) attached to his chin, a sea-lion or whale head emerging from his chest and two slaves holding up the ceremonial bench before him, this imposing ancestor figure makes visible the Kwakwaka'wakw concept of a house as a sacred entity: an embodiment of the lineage and its supernatural origins (KD)

Photo: B.W. Leeson, ca 1910. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Text: [Mayer et al \(2010\)](#)

Source: Display, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia



Klix'ken Gukwdzi (Sea-Lion House)

Gusgimukw (Kwakwaka'wakw)

Xwatis (Quatsino, BC)

Red cedar, paint; ca 1906

BC Totem Pole Preservation Committee purchase, 1956
A50009 a-c

These carved posts and figures once stood inside a Gukwdzi, or Bighouse, at Quatsino Sound on northern Vancouver Island. Tza'kyilus was the owner of this great house and of the sea-lion crest after which it was named.

Photo: Don Hitchcock 2012

Source: Display, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia



The two sea-lion posts with crossbeam formed part of the house frame just inside the front door. The crossbeam, said to represent a double-headed sea lion, originally supported one end of an 18 metre long ridge beam spanning the length of the house. Its opposite end was held up by the carved human figure portraying a supernatural ancestor, shown above.

Photo: Edward Curtis, 1915, UBC Special Collections

Source: Display, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia



**Human Figure House Post with Slaves,
and Sea-Lion House posts**

This photo shows the close relationship between the two major elements of the Klix'ken Bighouse, which had these two massive sculptures holding up the main 18 metre long ridgepole of the house. They have been placed in a similar position to that of their original placement.

Photo: Maria Hitchcock 2012
Source: Display, Museum of Anthropology,
University of British Columbia

<http://www.donsmaps.com/pacificnorthwest.html>