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History of Yukon first nations art

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Chapter Eight-Art of the Potlatch & Death

Background to potlatches

Depending on the area there are different stories about the origins of the first potlatch. I will present one version told to me by Elder Irene Smith. She told me about a Fort Selkirk man who died and was buried. Maybe he was buried in a type of gravehouse that is shown in figure # 324. This gravehouse was recorded by Lt. Schwatka at Fort Selkirk during his 1883 Yukon River exploration. I will give a longer description of the gravehouse in the last section of this chapter. In the Irene Smith story the man came back to life because there was no death ceremony, or potlatch, at that time. He walked from the grave to where the people lived and everyone was amazed. He said that it was not right to just bury him, that there must be a potlatch. He explained to the people what had to be done. He described how the deceased person's clan was to host the potlatch. The deceased person's clan had to hire the opposite clan to be workers. The hosting clan would collect valuables and with that pay the workers later. Once he explained everything, the people made his potlatch and he returned to the grave. That was the first potlatch ever. Ever since then potlatches have been done that way.

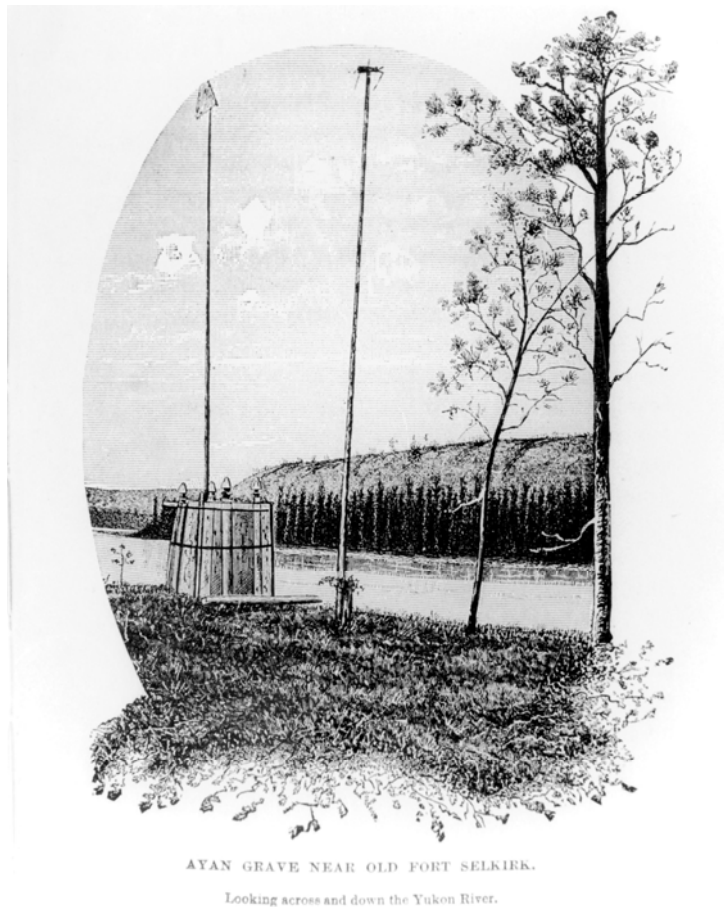


Figure # 324. Fort Selkirk gravehouse, 1883.

It is not unusual for First Nations people to believe that people die and come back to life. So the man who died in Fort Selkirk and then came back to life is not an unfamiliar concept. This death-like situation is thought of as a dream-state type of coma. When a

person, for no apparent reason, appears to have died, often in his sleep, people understand that she may be in fact on a spiritual journey and she must be left in the same spot and position. This death-like state would appear to white people as death. When white people saw someone in this state in the past they would force the burial of that person. This was very distressing to the family as they would be trying to explain that the person only appeared dead but would be coming back to life later. In the southern Yukon, a well known example of this phenomenon happened to my namesake Johnny Ned. While sleeping he entered a death-like state during which he travelled in the spiritual world and met people. One person Johnny Ned met was Jesus Christ. Jesus taught Johnny a song, told him that people should not work on Sundays, taught Johnny how to walk on water and gave him healing powers. Once Johnny emerged from the coma he began converting people to Christianity. He also healed people and did many good deeds. His efforts were quite successful to the point it caused concern with the Anglican Church as they thought Johnny Ned was creating his own style of Christianity. There is a letter in Yukon Archives dated April 25th, 1917 in which the Anglican Church expressed its concern about Johnny Ned's unique version of Christianity. In the end the church decided that he was doing more good than harm and was left to be. Still today Elders hold Johnny in high regard and state that he was a good man. Johnny Ned is one of three people in the southern Yukon that I heard of experiencing the same phenomenon and for all three it happened around the same time. They awoke from a coma type state and started to convert First Nations people to Christianity. These types of events connecting with Christianity were quite widespread over the whole Cordillera region starting in the late 1800s until the early-mid 1900s.

In Chapter One-Cultural & Environmental Background, Art Periods and Comparative Art Styles I briefly discussed the clan system. In this chapter I will show examples of art that is used in the potlatch. The potlatch is a gathering of people in a celebration, to witness an event or for a funeral. In the case of a person who passed away, that person's clan hired the opposite clan to conduct all the work. This practice still continues today, one of the few cultural practices we have been able to maintain during our transition to this modern world. The hired work may include hunting for food, cooking & serving the food, grave digging, pall bearing, etc. There would then be a feast, the last meal with the deceased person. At the feast one meal is burnt. When the meal turns to smoke it has entered the Spirit World and becomes the meal for the deceased person. In modern times, after the feast the members of the deceased person's clan collect money from their clan. This is paid to all the workers. The collection bowl is turned upside down to show that all the money gathered has been paid out. Usually after the service and before the meal, the deceased is buried and a tent is placed over the grave since the person has started a journey into the Spirit World and will be travelling. In a year there is a headstone potlatch and that is when the tent is normally exchanged for a grave house, to show the person has settled into the spirit world. The person is buried with articles that she will need in the spirit world such as extra moccasins, blankets, tea pot and cups, sometimes even rifles.

In the past the person may have been cremated. While cremation was common Yukon First Nations people are not one hundred percent sure that cremation was the only means of disposing of the body. When a person was cremated the ashes were put in a container and placed in a tree, elevated platform or grave house. I am guessing that these early containers were made out of birch bark. Shamans were not cremated but buried. After trade contact, but before the missionaries' influence, the ashes were placed in Asian tea crates. These were obtained in trade and were originally used to store the imported tea. The boxes were fancy and at later times were placed in the grave houses. See figure # 325 for a couple of Chinese tea boxes on display at the Russian Bishop's House in Sitka, Alaska. This photograph shows

two tea cases together with examples of the blocks of tea in the open box. There are also boxes on display in the Yukon, for instance at the Klukshu Museum.



Figure # 325. Chinese Tea crates. Russian Bishop's House, Sitka National Historical Park.

It is generally believed that Yukon First Nations people cremated their dead until told by missionaries that the practice was wrong. We were advised to bury our deceased people instead. However, as seen in the image in figure # 324 of the grave house taken during Lt. Schwatka's 1883 expedition, we apparently had graveyards before contact with missionaries. According to Lt. Schwatka this was a burial grave house. Whether other gravehouses contained bodies or ashes is unknown to me.

In a story that was told to members of the 1948 Andover-Harvard Expedition by Moose Jackson, a Southern Tutchone man who had been hired as a guide and packer, he explained why people switched from cremating to burial. The story goes like this:

Then Moose said that people don't burn their dead anymore: His grandfather remembered a man who, after having been dead for 4 yrs., returned to life for 4 yrs. & told of conditions in the afterworld: people there were running around only half-burned, with no cloths, with nothing to help them live on-so people should stop cremating. After 4 yrs. this man died a second time, this time for good. After that the people stopped burning their dead & began to bury them & construct the little grave houses with the lace-curtained windows. (All of the houses that I've looked at are just dressed up exteriors-the insides are barren & there is no floor, just the grave fill of the grave. I wonder what the relationship between these houses & cache burials is?) (Harp Jr. 2005: 23)

Elmer Harp Jr. had hired Moose Jackson along with a number of other Southern Tutchone men as guides and packers while Harp Jr. and his crew conducted an archaeological survey in the Southern Tutchone territory. Since Moose Jackson is talking about his grandfather's time, the transition to burial occurred in the late 1800s. That is before any missionaries were active in this part of the Yukon. Dalton had established his trading post at Dalton Post in the Southern Tutchone territory in 1895, the first white man to spend any time in the area in those years. His post would have had no influence on the First Nations people switching from cremation to burial.

McKenna gives 1870 as the time the transition from cremation to burial occurred in Upper Tanana territory:

In former times the Indians burned their dead, but this practice has long since given way to burial. I found only one man who had ever witnessed a cremation, and he had seen it when but a small boy. As he recalled it, the body was dressed in elaborately decorated clothes including mittens and cap. The fire bag with its stone and tinder was hung from the belt, and the knife in its sheath was suspended from the neck, but no other weapons appear to be included. The corpse was then placed on the pyre amidst the wailing relatives. When nothing remained but a few charred bones, two forked sticks were set up bearing a crosspiece between them, from which a few eagle feathers and beads were suspended immediately over the ashes. (...) Cremation evidently ceased to be practiced by the upper Tanana about 1870, i.e. fifteen or more years before the arrival of the first White man in the region. (McKenna 1959: 146)

Based on the grave house that Schwatka recorded and McKenna's conversion date, the transition from cremation to burial occurred rapidly over the whole region before the arrival of the white people. This is an example of how quickly Yukon First Nations people can adopt new ideas and technology. I will discuss the conversion from cremation to burial and grave houses more fully at the end of this chapter.

Concerning the articles used in the potlatch itself, the important items of the early Yukon First Nations potlatch were the drum(s) to make music, the ganhook(s) or ceremonial dance stick(s) for the dance leader to lead the dance and the robes that the people wore along with such accessories as dance feather wands, fans and headdresses. Masks were also used during potlatches, as was the potlatch spoon. This last item was large and carved out of sheep horn. It was used to serve the food. The spoons have been discussed earlier and you can see examples of them throughout this thesis, in figures # 20, 25, 26, 32, 37, 155, 174, 201, 205 and 206.

Drums

While drums were used for a number of reasons, including stick gambling and by shamans, drums took on a central role in a potlatch. The drum provided the music for a variety of songs such as the good-bye song. This was sung when the deceased person was taken for the burial. Drums also provided the music for the various dances that were conducted at the potlatch. They would furthermore be used to highlight some part of the event such as bringing attention to a person who had contributed money during the collection or when a worker was asked to dance in order to get paid for her services.

In this first image, figure # 326, is a potlatch drum owned by Johnny Fraser, a Southern Tutchone chief from the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. I have discussed this drum already and you can see the earlier image in figure # 192 on page 203. The

photograph was taken during a dance performance in the late 1940s during the Winter Carnival.



Figure # 326. Johnny Fraser's Potlatch drum. 04.30. McBride Museum.

Once again there is a wide variety of period regalia on display. Johnny Fraser is wearing a hat as well as leggings with the common crisscross design. The hat has feather plumes coming out of the top. I will be showing these dance feather plumes later in this chapter. On the left side of the photo a lady is wearing a robe that is in the style of the gopher skin robe but the pelts look too big to be gopher skins. Maybe it is made from slightly larger animals such as marmots. The person standing to her right and behind is wearing a button-blanket robe. Interestingly, that person is wearing what appears to be an octopus dance apron as a headdress. Behind Johnny Fraser is a man wearing another button-blanket style robe with what appears to be a dance feather fan, much like the examples in figure # 392 on page 364. Note the woman on the far right is wearing a common blanket as a dance robe.

Another drum used by the Tahltan seems to have only been used for providing the rhythm for dancing. Below in figure # 327 is the drum that was collected by George Emmons in 1907 and is in the collection of the Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian. The drum is painted in red with a series of semi-circles around the edge. There is a variation of the four-direction motif in the center. The museum notes referring to George Emmons *The Tahltan Indians* state:

The drum is so intimately associated with the dress, its use being for dance occasions only, that it may not be amiss to mention it here. It is made of tanned hide of mountain goat, stretched, when wet, over a circular wooden frame, and secured on the underside by cutting the skin into four strips, tapering from the circumference to the center, where they are knotted, and so serve as a handle. At present times tacks are often used around the lower edge of the frame to bring all parts taut. The head is often painted in totemic design. The drums are much smaller than those used by the Tlingit

and some are very small. The instrument may be beaten with the fist, but generally an improvised drumstick is employed. No regular drumstick was seen.



Figure # 327. Tahltan drum. 012877.000, NMAI.

Next, in the photograph in figure # 328 is a Crow painted Inland Tlingit potlatch drum. This was one of at least three drums that are shown in a series of potlatch photographs taken in Atlin in 1918. In this first photograph there is a painting of Crow, a fish and a face on the drum held by Atlin resident and Inland Tlingit Steve Williams. This may be related to the Crow and the giant fish or whale story as shown in figure # 275 on page 268. This is where Crow ends up catching and eating either a giant fish or a whale. Because there is no fish clan I am guessing that the fish and face are not related to clan images.



Figure # 328, Steve Williams holding drum with Crow, fish and human face. Courtesy Atlin Historical Society Museum and Brian Burke.

I am not sure why the face is included on the drum but if it is related to Crow it may be an image of him in human form. It could also be a portrait of the owner of the drum. The face is a simple design done in a common Inland Tlingit style. It appears to be a smiling face and has noticeable eyebrows. Similar styles of faces can be seen in figure # 179 on page 195 and # 182 on page 197. It also looks very much like the face in the tail of Crow on the large painted sheet behind Williams. The face is best seen in figure # 331. In the next photograph is a man, most likely Steve Williams again, who is holding two Crow drums in front of the large sheet with Crow on it. Since these two drums are almost alike I suspect they were painted by the same person. To reiterate, when images are this close in execution I tend to think that they were all created by one artist, given the interior tendency for individualism.



Figure # 329. Crow clan at potlatch, Atlin, BC. Circa 1918. Courtesy of Atlin Historical Society.

There is also a third drum held by a man in the back. This has the painting on the inside of the drum. The image shows Crow and two fish that seem to be joined at the tail. Also note the bird on Steve Williams' dance shirt. Since these men are obviously members of the Crow clan, the bird on Steve Williams' dance shirt has to be an image of Crow. The image on the sheet is without a doubt a depiction of Crow since it has "Crow" written on the sheet twice. Crow's wings have been painted with a series of repeating dots and lines which make up the feathers of its wings. The body of Crow has the common Inland Tlingit trait of placing lines over the chest area of the body. In addition there is a series of simple floral designs in the lower part of the sheet at the sides of Crow.

By writing Crow on the sheet, the Atlin Inland Tlingit are identifying with the Crow clan and not the Raven clan from the coast. On the left of the photograph is a crouching man who is wearing a Chilkat robe that would have been traded into the Atlin area from the coast. In the next photograph is shown another Atlin Potlatch. I am not sure if this is the same potlatch as the two above photographs but it has the caption “Atlin Indians 18/8/18” showing, which refers to a potlatch on the 18th of August, 1918. The sheet with Crow painted on it has been photographed a number of times and is seen in *Atlin: The Last Utopia* (165) as well as *Their Own Yukon* (page 134). In the photograph in figure # 330 there is 12 men in various potlatch regalia. There are three drums: two of the previous Crow drums in figure # 329 and an additional drum that has a frog painted on it. On the large sheet behind the dancers is a painted frog. The image of the frog is often painted in this basic manner as you will see in the next section on ganhooks. However, this frog is a bit more complex than the ganhook frogs in figures # 340 & 341 on page 324. This frog is done in an outlined style with a solid center part much like the moose in figure # 194 on page 205. It also has a series of dots all over of its body. There is a face with eyes, eyebrows, nose and mouth at the top. It represents the Frog clan of the Crow moiety. In the Tlingit system there are two moieties with a series of clans under each moiety. While there may be more clans or houses, there are five main clans under the two moieties. Under the Wolf moiety are the Yanyedi (Wolf) and Dakhlawedi (Eagle and Killer Whale) clans and under the Crow moiety are the Deshitan (Beaver), Ishkitan (Frog) and Kukhhittan (Raven Children) clans. Because of this system you will often see the clan and moiety shown together as is the case in the photograph below with Crow and Frog clans.



Figure # 330, 1918 Atlin potlatch. Courtesy Atlin Historical Society Museum and Brian Burke.

I would like to bring your attention to the ganhooks or ceremonial dance sticks held by the man on the far left and by the person on the far right. While ganhooks or dance sticks have been used throughout the Yukon and Alaska I have only ever seen this style used in the Atlin Area. I will be showing better images of these ganhooks shortly. The man with the ganhook on the left is also wearing a Frog clan dance shirt. The person with the ganhook at the far right is wearing an elaborate smock. It is quite a unique garment. Note the fourth standing man from the right wearing a dance shirt that is reminiscent of the earlier hide tunics with decorated, pointed breastbands. The third man from the left is wearing a beaded cartridge belt. He has a feather plume as a headdress and is holding a canoe paddle. Canoe paddles were also used in potlatches by coastal Tlingits. There is the man with the paddle in his mouth. The Atlin Inland Tlingit have important stories involving canoeing on the Taku River so I suspect there is a connection between the man and paddle and those Taku River stories. See the detail of the photograph in figure # 331. The man with the paddle is wearing a cartridge belt and appears to have a feather plume coming out of his headdress. The paddle also appears to have art on it but the image is too blurry to verify. You can also see the image of Frog on the drum and the face above the tail feathers of Crow on the background painted sheet. It appears that the frog on the drum is in a silhouette style. There may be some inner working of the frog, like on the beaver, in figure # 209 on page 215.



Figure # 331, detail of story scene, Atlin potlatch 1918. Courtesy Atlin Historical Society.

Ganhooks

Ganhooks were used at ceremonies and potlatches by the central person of the dance in order to lead and direct the dance. The Han call this item a ganhook and they are identified as ceremonial paddles when collected from the Inland Tlingit. Mrs. Marge Jackson stated that these are called *älitu*, pronounced “aw-lee-too” in Southern Tutchone. They were used throughout the Yukon by at least the Inland Tlingit, Tagish, Southern & Northern Tutchone, and Han and Tanana people and may have been used by other groups like the Kaska (although I have not found examples). There are two main ceremonial dance paddle or dance stick patterns as well as one ‘Atlin’ dance stick pattern. The Inland Tlingit paddles have different imagery on them compared to the ganhooks and *älitus*. As in other examples of art on objects, the Inland Tlingit tended to use more figurative imagery on their ceremonial paddles while the Athapaskans used more geometric patterns. The Southern Tutchone used a combination of figurative and geometric imagery.

In *Han: People of the river*, the “ganhook” are described as follows:

The “ganhook” or “ganho” (...) is a dance stick used by the lead dancer to direct the movement of other dancers. Ganhooks today are made from flat boards about six to seven feet long and five or six inches wide that have a handle at one end and hole in the board for the thumb. They are painted various colors and decorated with ribbons, yarn, and beads. (Mishler & Simeone 2004: 133)

The Ganhook looks like a long 1”x 6” board that is about six to eight feet long. The holding end is tapered. There may be other decorations attached at the wider end such as flags, ribbons or tassels. McClellan states this about “dance paddles”:

Garbed in sartorial splendor, with faces painted red and black, silver and abalone ornaments gleaming in ears and noses, the company of Tagish or Inland Tlingit dancers dipped and rose in time with the beribboned song paddles and the beat of skin drums or, in mourning dances, with the pounding of many dance sticks. (McClellan 2001: 323)

See Figure # 332 for a photograph of a potlatch at Eagle in 1907. This may have been a potlatch for Chief Charley who died in 1907. The person in the very front, kneeling, is Edward Wood. In the front row from left to right are Paul Chancy, Henry Harper, Charley Steve, Billy Silas, Ben Harper, David Taylor, David Roberts and Peter Thompson. In the back row are Kenneth, Chief Alex, Joseph, Jonathon Johnson, Canadian Joe, Esau Harper, Andrew Silas and Chief Isaac.

The ganhook is held by Andrew Silas. Three flags are attached and they appear to have Union Jacks, indicating this may be a Canadian Han ganhook. There is a wide range of artistic shirts, hats and accessories. Most of the shirts appear to be store bought and the appearance modified for ceremonial use. The exception is the shirt worn by Peter Thompson on the far right. It appears to be a home made dance style shirt. I cannot tell if it is store bought fabric or hide. The headdress he is wearing is of special note, quite unique and stylish, as are most of the headdresses in this photograph. On the other side is Paul Chancy with a headdress that represents a Canada goose. Standing on the very right side in the back row is Chief Isaac holding a drum. The photograph is not that clear, but it may be the same drum with the image of the moose on it that I have referred to earlier. Another very interesting item is the mask worn by Edward Wood in the very front. It appears to be a mask of a wolf. There are also feather fans held by a couple of the men.



Figure # 332, 1907 potlatch at Eagle, Alaska. YA.

In another photograph of a potlatch in Carcross in 1912 we can see two different style ganhooks, the paddle-like one on the left and board-like ganhook on the right. This potlatch has Tagish, Southern Tutchone, and Inland Tlingit people on the occasion of raising a tombstone to Dawson Charlie. See figure # 333. The more board style ganhook on the right shows a series of holes in the paddle with a Union Jack attached at the top end. It is in the same basic pattern as the Han ganhook above. This paddle is held by Billy Bone, an Inland Tlingit. The principal host of this potlatch was Skookum Jim, whose house is in the background. Besides holding the ceremonial paddle, Bone is also wearing a Chilkat shirt with a Wolf crest on the front. This shirt was ordered by Skookum Jim for this potlatch from the coast. The paddle on the left appears to have a series of tassels attached and is held by Johnny Fraser, a Southern Tutchone man. Johnny Fraser is wearing what appears to be a shirt that is made of store bought material or it is a store bought shirt modified for ceremonial use. The breastband is “V” shaped which is a common design for many of these shirts from the south-central Yukon.



Figure # 333, 1912 potlatch in Carcross. Anglican Church Diocese of Yukon fonds 89/41 #423, YA.

There is a wealth of artistic expression displayed in this photograph. The third person from the left is a Tutchone man, Big Salmon Jim. He is wearing the Tutchone style dance shirt and he is also holding a rattle. The man standing in the middle is Sam Smith. He is Tagish and is wearing a shirt with a crest design on it. The person standing to the right of Sam Smith is Tagish Jim and he is wearing a shirt with a vertical panel on it. The design appears to be a series of four-petal flowers or maybe stylized crosses. Skookum Jim is also a Tagish man, third from the right. Skookum Jim is holding a small totem pole and is wearing two octopus bags, which are sometimes called dance aprons. The person standing on the far right is a Southern Tutchone man, Paddy Smith, my great grandfather and the first husband of Annie Ned. Paddy is wearing a fur skin robe and plays a drum.

This photo also has a series of feather fans and large plumes which I sometimes refer to as dusters. I will discuss these later in this chapter. Of special interest is the large mask held by Johnny Johns, a Tagish man? In the *Handbook of North American Indians* McClellan notes that this is a Tlingit mask.

In the book *Gold & Galena*, on page 15, is a photograph of a Northern Tutchone man holding a board style Ganhook during the Christmas celebrations in Mayo in 1935. See figure # 334.



Figure # 334, Christmas celebrations at the Old Village in 1935. G.A. McIntyre Collection. Mayo Historical Society.

In this photograph we can see the same style of ceremonial shirts that are either made from bought materials or bought and modified. There are also the fancy hats, the feather fans and painted faces. The ganhook has a series of ribbons and has one small hole close to the handle. There are simple geometric designs painted on the sides. Unfortunately there was a flood in 1936 and the people's costumes and ornaments used for traditional dancing were washed away and never replaced (*Gold & Galena*, page 12). On an added note of interest, Annie Smith stated that she remembers that Mr. Patsy Henderson had started a museum in Carcross a long time ago that burnt down. This must have meant a great loss of Tagish artifacts. She is not sure when it burnt down but thought it may have been before World War Two.

At the Canadian Museum of Civilization there are a number of ceremonial paddles and I examined three of them. Two appeared to be by the same maker while the other seemed to be older and made by another artist. See figure # 335 for a photograph of three of the ceremonial paddles at the CMC.



Figure # 335, Inland Tlingit ceremonial paddles. Left to right; VI-J-106, VI-J-105, VI-J-104, CMC.

It is impossible to tell whether there were any flags, tassels or other form of additional decoration added to these ceremonial paddles. As we have seen in the previous photographs, additional decoration was at times attached. Maybe it depends on the type of ceremony. From what I understand, images painted on these paddles tell stories and sometimes histories. On closer examination, we are certainly dealing with myth stories, such as when the man is spitting out the frog from his mouth in figure # 341, and maybe historical events. In all the paddles the range of colours are red and black with some blue and orange. I will examine the first paddle on the right, which appears to be the oldest of the three ceremonial paddles. This paddle in figure # 336, VI-J-104, was collected by D.D. Cairnes from the T&Ds store in Whitehorse in the summer of 1911. The information is presumably what Mr. Cairnes received from the T&Ds store when he purchased the paddle. The catalogue card states:

Totem dance paddle of the Crow tribe, Teslin Lake. Used by the central figure in dances, also showing, according to Indians, the history or part history of the tribe.



Figure # 336, Inland Tlingit face design on ceremonial paddle. VI-J-104, CMC.

This paddle is carved from a single length of wood. There is a face carved on one side of the handle. The face and the rest of the images are painted in black and red paint. The carved face appears to also have bits of blue paint on it.

In figure # 337 is a series of images running the length of the paddle on both sides. Some of the images are: a bird, most likely Crow, a face with a cross hatched area above the face and a torso with its arms outstretched to its sides. I have included my drawing of the face for clarity.



Figure # 337. VI-J-104, CMC.

In the museum note it states: “Totem dance paddle of the Crow tribe” which I would say is more like a dance paddle from the Crow moiety of the Inland Tlingit people. In *Part of the Land, Part of the Water* it states:

Moiety members never lived all together in one place, nor did they ever all act together as a single social unit. There were too many people in each moiety and they were too widespread. Moreover, neither the Wolf nor the Crow moiety has a specific history or mythology of its own like the clans and matrilineages. At a potlatch or feast, all the local and visiting Crows might squawk like real crows, or Wolves might howl like wolves, and moiety members liked to use Crow and Wolf designs on their clothing or other belongings, but these were not the same as house and clan crests. (McClellan 1987: 185)

Since this ganhook has Crow painted on it, it would belong to the Crow moiety. The image of Crow has the lines going through the breast in the typical Inland Tlingit fashion. There is a face just above the tail feathers. This face was done in profile as there is only one eye. Maybe it represents salmon which means influence from the coast where salmon heads are often placed in the available ovoid. The next image of the face is also done in typical Inland Tlingit style. It shows a smile and is similar to the face on the Crow drum in figure # 324 and the face just above the tail feathers in figure # 331 on page 315. You will notice the initials 'ES' at the bottom of the face. As stated earlier, it became popular at the end of the nineteenth century to put the owner's or the purchaser's initials on the object. I am therefore assuming that the maker put his initials on the ganhook once it was completed and at some time later sold it to the T&Ds store.

The outstretched hands have a face on them. Each hand has six fingers and claws. I am assuming that this image is not representing a human but an animal. Maybe this is an image of an animal who has taken human form. There is a series of "U" shaped motifs in the body and arms. Are these representing feathers? If so, this may be an image of Crow in human form but still covered with feathers and retaining the claws instead of hands.

The other two ceremonial paddles were collected by Lewis Clement from Teslin Lake on 19th December, 1912. Both these paddles appear to be made by the same person. The painting style is the same, as is the wood. Both appear to have old nail holes spaced along the length indicating that these were possibly planks of a structure, removed and converted into ceremonial paddles. The first paddle, VI-J-105, has a series of designs painted on both sides, with only minor differences between the two. See the following figures for details of images on one side of this ceremonial paddle. I have added a drawing of the main image for clarity as some of the paintings are faded. The design on the bottom of the paddle is a profile of a face, similar to the carved face on the previous ceremonial paddle. It has images on it that appear to represent face painting designs used by people during potlatches. There are lines coming down from the eyes similar to the invert "V" design used by women. This face also has a series of "X"s on its cheeks and what appears to be a mustache painted in blue with a red outline. Above the face is a 4-petal floral design (figure # 338).

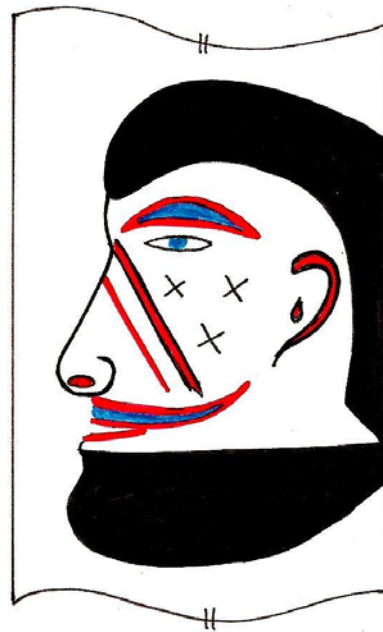


Figure # 338. VI-J-105, CMC.

In the image below is a design that appears to be like the four-direction symbol that is sometimes used. While not exact, there is a similar example of this symbol on the drum in figure # 31 on page 64. Below the four-direction symbol is a head with face-painted designs. The person also has the tongue sticking out. Below the face is a star symbol. Stars, moons and suns show up in various forms in Yukon First Nations art.

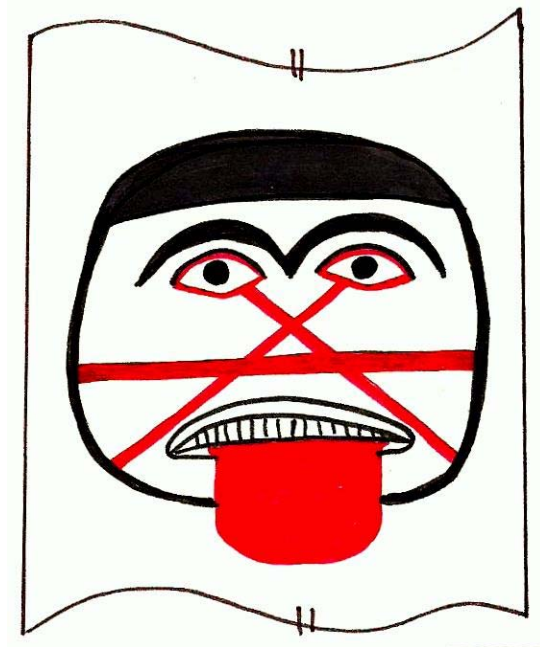
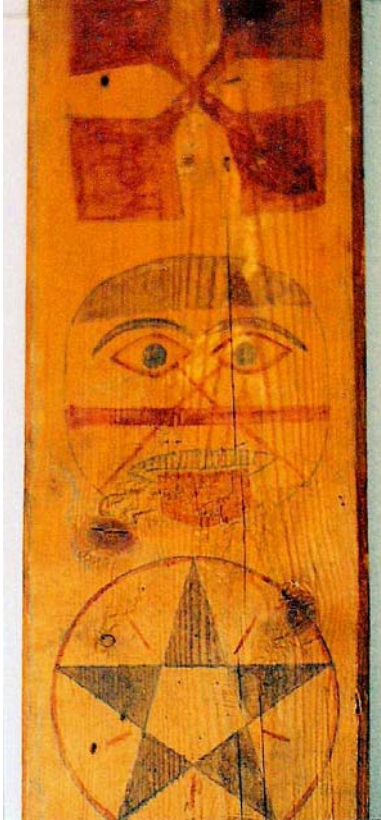


Figure # 339. VI-J-105, CMC.

While there are a number of faces on these ganhooks there are only a couple that have the identical face painting patterns on them. Is this a form of identification for individual people or are the patterns to represent something more communal, such as a clan? The tongue sticking out warrants some attention. Is this a facial expression that is part of a dance? Or is it related to a story or history of the clan? These are the only examples I have come across of faces with tongues sticking out in the Yukon. There are some examples in Northwest Coast Indian art but I could not find the reasoning behind this. Maybe the Inland Tlingit's images are related to the Inland Tlingit practice of their shamans cutting their tongues as part of their rituals, either to become shamans or to gain more shamanic power. This in turn is related to the Coastal Tlingits shaman's ritual of cutting out the tongue of the otter. The otter gives himself to the person who from that point forward is a shaman. The Northern Tutchone felt that it was very dangerous to tamper with the power of the tongue and felt that tongue cutting could lead to insanity. The relationship between shamans and tongues is further described in Carl Jung's *Symbols of Transformation* in paragraph 144 on page 94. Jung is describing the ancient Persian Mithras' cult ritual that involves clicking the tongue:

The whistling and clicking with the tongue are archaic devices for attracting the theriomorphic deity. (Jung 1990: 94)

Theriomorphic is the worshipping of beings that are represented in combined human and animal forms. This sounds very similar to Yukon shamanistic practices. The next image is of a frog which would most likely represent the Frog Clan. The Inland Tlingit depicted the frogs rather simply without lines on their chest areas and sometimes have the series of dots covering their bodies. The frog is rendered with an orange paint. Frogs in the Yukon are of green-grayish colour. Is the choice of a brighter colour used to make the frog stand out? Or is the colour arbitrarily chosen?

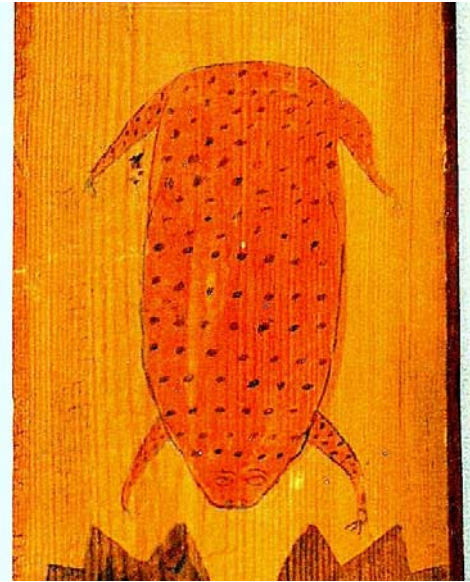
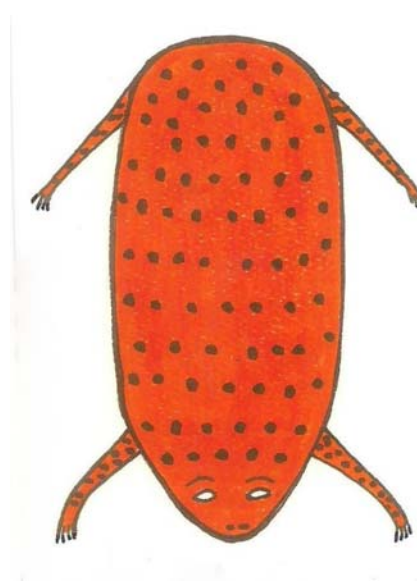


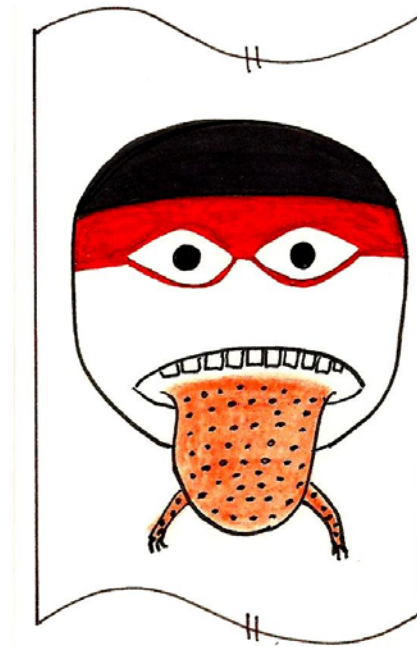
Figure # 340. VI-J-105, CMC.



The next figure, #341, also shows a frog-like animal that is coming halfway out of the person's mouth, possibly being spit out as a sign of disgust. Above the man is a killer whale. See figure # 342 for my drawing of the Killer Whale image.



Figure # 341. VI-J-105, CMC.



The frog coming out of the man's mouth may be related to a story from the Sheldon Museum in Haines, Alaska. In the publication entitled *a personal look at The Sheldon Museum & Cultural Center*, on page 21, is a description of a Ridicule Pole. This pole can hold a person or entire group of people in ridicule. The publication describes one such small pole:

This one is telling the world that the recipient is a person who didn't pay his debts. The Beaver, at the top, is spitting out the figure of a man, who happened to belong to the Frog House, represented by the bottom figure. He borrowed food for a trip and never paid it back. The Raven is ordinarily a happy bird, but appears sad on this pole. Both the Beaver and the Frog houses belong on the Raven side, so Raven also feels the disgrace. (Hakkinen 1983: 21)

Maybe a member of the Frog House is spit out on the ceremonial dance stick above. There is the earlier frog design on that same ganhook in figure # 340 which adds a bit of confusion as to the Frog Clan and the representation of the disgrace. Maybe the ganhook is like a story board and is showing a sequence of events: the member of the Frog Clan came for assistance and later was disgraced.

Below is an image of killer whale painted in ganhook VI-J-105 in blue and red colours. The water coming out of the blowhole and the circle on the dorsal fin indicate that this is a killer whale. The upper half of the whale is in a solid colour while there are the common lines running over the chest of the whale, along with the repeating dot motif. This whale is clearly an Inland Tlingit image. While the outlined image and solid colour across the top indicate an Athapaskan style, the body lines make this an Inland Tlingit image. This whale is done in a different style than the fish in the next image in figure # 343.

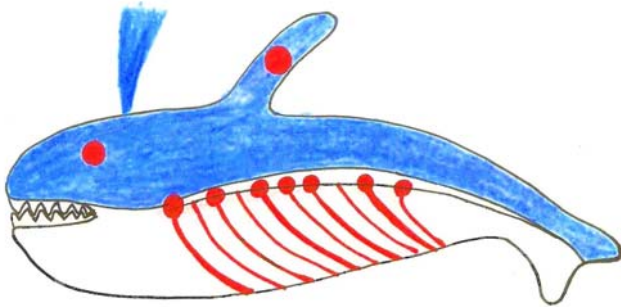


Figure # 342. VI-J-105, CMC.

In figure # 343 is Crow carrying a salmon. I am showing both sides of the ganhook. Crow is painted in black in Athapaskan silhouette style and is carrying what I am assuming to be a salmon because of the red paint on the upper half of the body. Salmon have the red colour as a result of having to journey the long distances upstream to spawn, unlike the silver coloured salmon caught in the ocean. There is a series of lines on the salmon's body to represent the scales. I am guessing that this image is of Crow carrying a salmon and it is related to the Crow and giant fish story. The images are placed at the end of the ganhook. I do not know how important the position on a ganhook is, but if it is a consideration, then this bird is likely in a dominant location. Below the salmon is a face with his tongue sticking out. It has the face-painted designs on it and is completed in the same manner as the previous two faces shown above.



Figure # 343. VI-J-105, CMC.

Below is my photograph of Tlingit Norma Shorty with her face painted in the same pattern as the painted faces in figure # 343. This is to give an idea of how the face painting would have looked a real person.



Figure # 344. Face painted design based on ganhook design in figure # 339. UvK collection.

The second ceremonial paddle, VI-J-106, is narrower than the previous one and slightly shorter. This second paddle has many motifs similar to those on the previous paddle which would indicate that it was made by the same person. The designs mirror each other except for minor variations. The list of designs starting from the bottom to the top are as follows: the face of a man that appears to have a mustache; a star in a circle (both in figure # 345); two facing killer whales with Crow in between and a black ovoid also between the two whales (figure # 346); a face that is flanked by two 4-petal floral designs; the hole through the plank is followed by another face flanked by the 4-petal floral designs. Next are two killer whales facing each other (figure # 347) followed by a full figure of a very mischievous looking person in figure # 348.

In all three paddles the primary colors used were black and red. A couple of other colors were used: orange for the frogs and some blue in the profile face of the two previous paddles as well as one killer whale. The profile face on VI-J-105 seems to be a copy of the profile face on VI-J-104; they have similar location and looks. There are differences in detail but this face may represent a person from the Teslin area that was an important figure from Inland Tlingit history or myth.



Figure # 345. VI-J-106, CMC.



Figure # 346. VI-J-106, CMC.

In figure # 346 above is a scene with two killer whales facing each other and a black dot between them. I believe that the black dot is a blemish in the wood as you can see these black spots in other areas of the ganhook, as in figure # 348. Crow is painted in black in silhouette with a red dot for an eye and is between the two killer whales. The killer whales are depicted in the same style as the killer whale in figure # 343, but this time in red. Is this simply a crest-like image or does this represent a story?

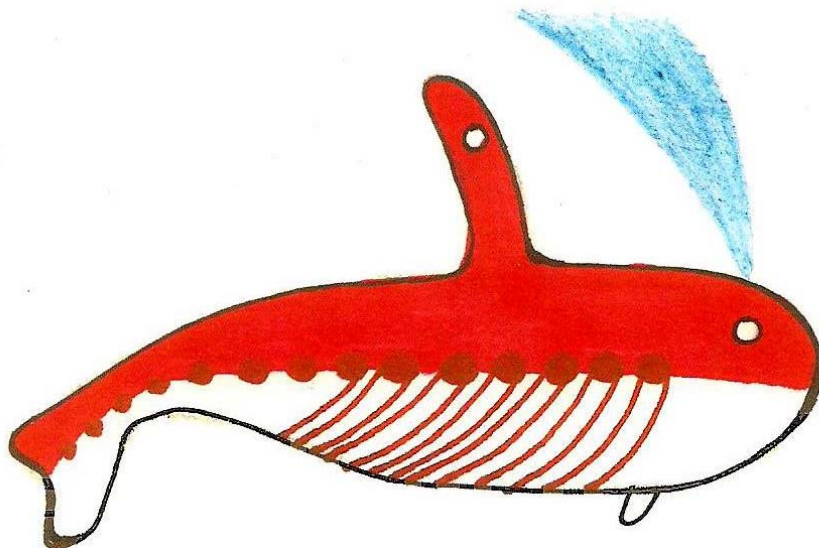
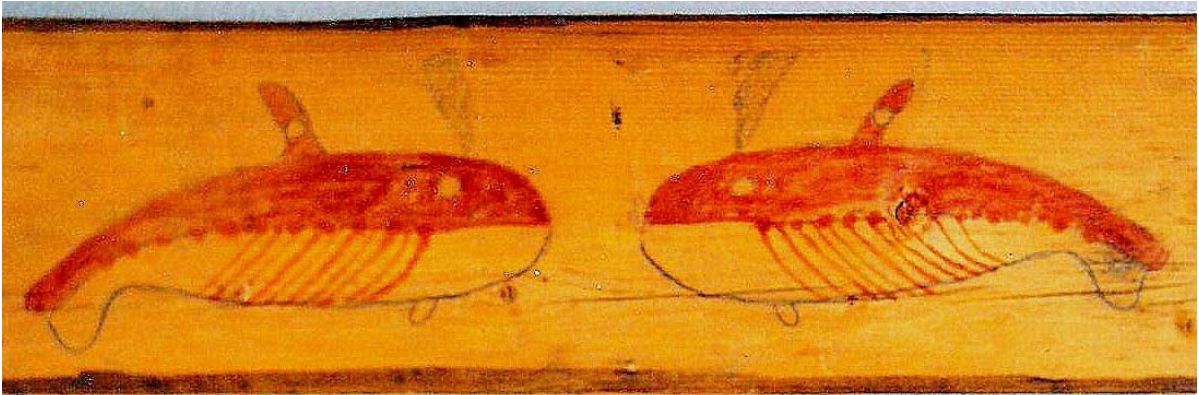


Figure # 347. VI-J-106, CMC.

In the above image are two killer whales facing each other. In this example there is no Crow between the two. I have included my drawing of one of the killer whales for clarity. These killer whales are done in the typical Inland Tlingit painting style. It is an Inland Tlingit trait to place two images facing, or away from, each other.

Based on my understanding of the Inland Tlingit moieties, clans and sibs, I believe that these killer whales represent the Daklaweidi, or, Killer Whale clan of the Inland Tlingit and are illustrating their inland links with the coastal Tlingits. The Killer Whale clan is part of the Wolf moiety of the interior or the Eagle moiety of the coast. I have written about the Inland and Tagish Killer Whale clans on pages 221-223. On that same ganhook are images of Crow and Frog, Crow being the other moiety and Frog being a clan under the Crow moiety. The images on the ganhook may be illustrating a story or history of the clans and sibs or may simply represent all the people in that band. The band of people would be made up of a number of sibs representing clans from the two moieties.

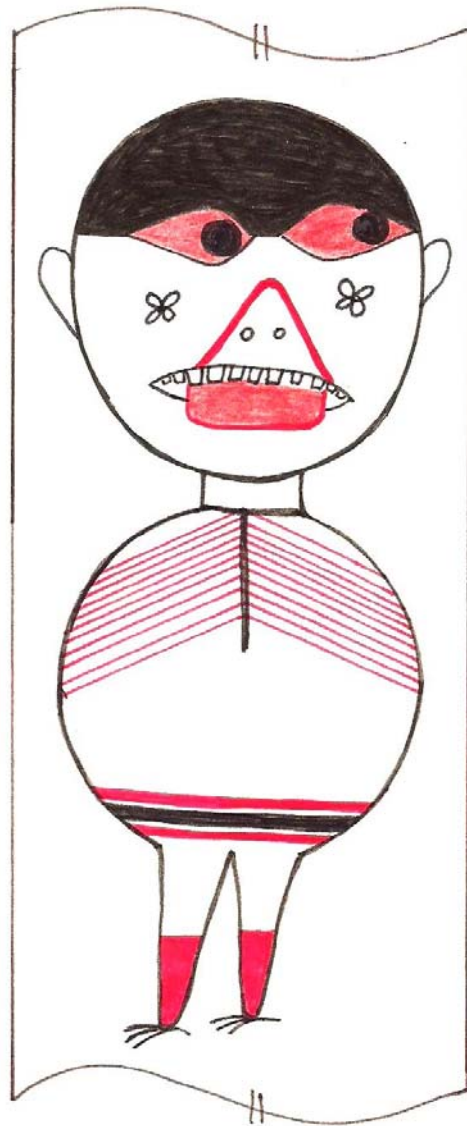
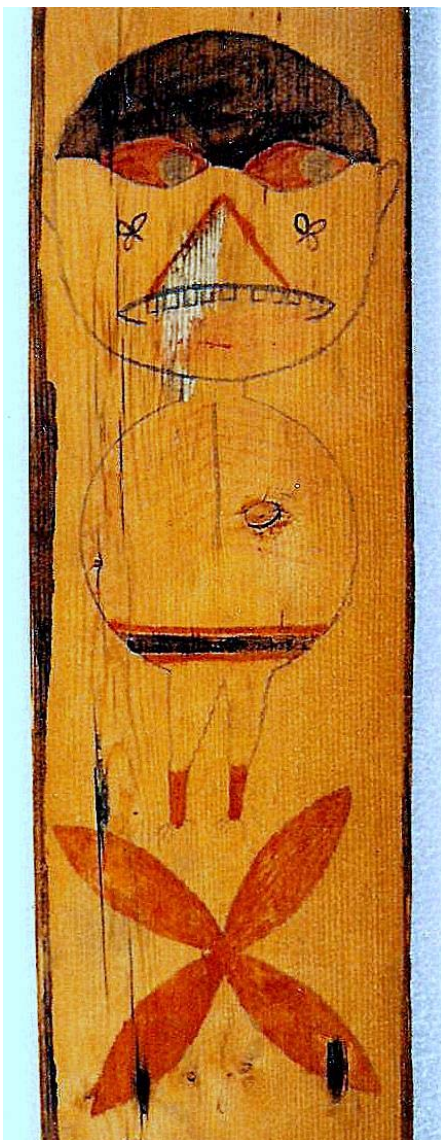


Figure # 348. VI-J-106, CMC.

In the above figure is a very mischievous looking human figure without arms. He has his face painted with designs and has the common Inland Tlingit lines that span across the chest. I am not sure if these are 'X-ray' lines that are common in many other indigenous art styles or a more unique Inland Tlingit design element. This figure also has the tongue sticking out and has bird-like claw feet. Is this an image related to the theriomorphic idea? Is this a person in the process of transforming into an animal or visa versa?

All the faces on these three Teslin ceremonial paddles appear to have been painted in the same manner as people would paint their faces during times of berry picking, potlatches and other ceremonies. The Elders stated that the face-painting designs were personal.

The other type of Inland Tlingit dance stick was used by the Atlin Inland Tlingits. I have not seen this style of ganhook elsewhere and it seems to be unique to the Atlin area. See figures # 101 on page 128 and # 330 on page 314 for earlier examples of the Atlin dance sticks. When compared with the dance stick in figure # 349, on display at the Atlin Historical Society's Museum, the dance stick in figure # 101 is decorated but has flatter ends and appears to be more geometric in design. The dance sticks in figure # 330 appear to be painted solid black or a dark colour like red and have puffs of fur attached at the ends and close to the handles. The example below in figure # 349 is fashioned in the same pattern; it has a holding place in the middle of the stick and slightly tapering at the ends. However, the dance stick in figure # 349 is different from the examples shown in the two photographs indicated above. This dance stick is painted to represent Crow. It is done very much in the same style as the Crow image in figure # 330. There is a head just above the tail feathers, there are stick-like legs and claws and there is a series of lines on the body. The end of the dance stick represents the head of Crow.



Figure # 349. Atlin Inland Tlingit dance sticks. AHS.

Note the rattle in the top image. I will discuss this rattle later in this chapter. Most Athapaskans used little figurative art in their work, but Athapaskans closer to the Tlingits did create a number of works that incorporated figurative art. While the ganhook below is of a more recent time, commissioned by Solomon Charlie possibly sometime in the 1970s, it may be representative of the early southernmost Southern Tutchone ganhooks. Charlie commissioned Southern Tutchone artist Ron Chambers to create this ganhook for him. It was

used for a while in First Nations dances and is now in the possession of Solomon's son Bob Charlie. Solomon Charlie is also my first cousin twice removed. See figure # 350 of my recent photograph of this ganhook.

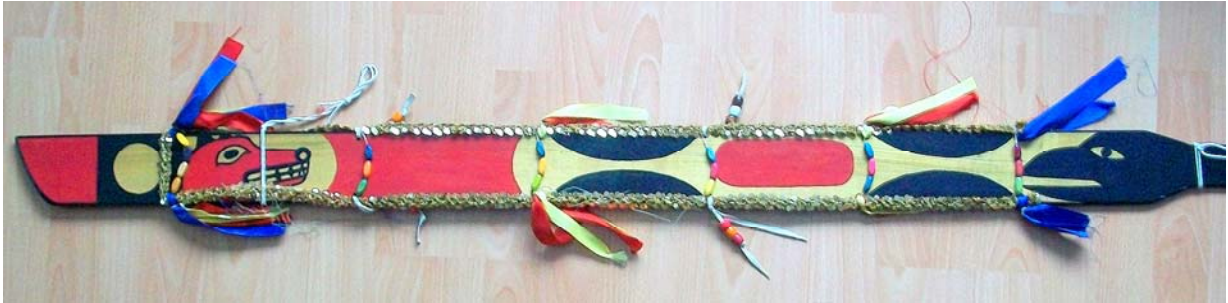


Figure # 350, Solomon Charlie's ganhook. Bob Charlie collection,

This ganhook has a wolf at one end and a crow at the other representing the two Tutchone moieties. There are some hints of the ovoid in the design which may be an influence of the coastal Tlingit art style. Red and black are the only colours used and there is a series of ribbons and other decorative objects attached to the ganhook. This is a typical example of Athapaskans using geometric decoration on their ganhooks. See below for a Tanacross geometric decorated ganhook that is in the Field Museum in Chicago. I apologize for the image but the ganhook was sealed in plastic and could not be removed for the photograph.



Figure # 351. Tanacross Ganhook. 270124. Field Museum.

There is a repeating semi-circle in bright orange and blue colours going all the way up the sides of the ganhook. There is also a series of orange dot-within-a-circle motifs that are in the same position where holes are drilled through. There is a series of what appear to be commercial made bright yellow feathers attached along the length of the ganhook. In all appearances this is a fairly recent ganhook. In the same museum is a Tanacross drum that is decorated in the same manner. See figure # 352 below. It appears to me that this drum was made by the same person around the same time as the ganhook, as the colours are the same. Unique about this drum is the decorated holding handle which the artist has integrated into the overall drum design. This is the only example of such drum handle that I have seen.



Figure # 352. Tanacross drum and drum stick. 1981.3509.270106. Field Museum.

Still another ganhook in the above fashion is on display at the Anchorage Museum, as seen in figure # 353. It is also a Tanacross ganhook and is very close in design to the Field Museum example. Instead of having a series of semi-circles going down the sides of the ganhook it has a series of zigzags. Instead of a series of dot-within-a-circle motifs in the middle it has a series of diamond shapes. The colours are the same. The didactic panel states: "Dance Staff. Julius Paul, Tanacross 1981. Wood, paint, chicken feathers. The Nalchene clan of the Tanana Athapaskans purchased the right to use such staffs from the Han tribe. 81.85." It would appear to me that Julius Paul made both ganhooks and possibly the drum.



Figure # 353. Tanacross Ganhook. Anchorage Museum.

The reference “The Nalchene clan of the Tanana Athapaskans purchased the right to use such staffs from the Han tribe” may be related to the time Chief Isaac of the Moosehide Han took the Han ganhooks and other cultural treasures to Alaska for protection against the Canadian Government. The book *Han: People of the River* by Craig Mishler and William E. Simeone, describes the situation quite well:

The *Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in*, or Klondike band of Han, came under intense pressure to change during the Klondike gold rush. One change desired by the Canadian government was abolition of the potlatch. In 1884, the government amended the Indian Act, making participation in the potlatch a misdemeanor. Although created to eradicate the potlatch along the Northwest Coast, the law also took effect in the

Yukon Territory. The government, as Catharine McClellan wrote, “thought it unchristian and they feared that a potlatch host would lose everything and become a public charge.”

Responding to this prohibition, Chief Isaac of Moosehide “took” many of the Han songs and dances associated with the potlatch and left them with descendants of relatives and friends who now live in the villages of Northway, Tetlin, Tanacross, and Dot Lake. According to stories told by residents of Tanacross, Dot Lake, Tetlin, and Dawson, Chief Isaac gave the songs, dances, and a dance stick called a “ganhook” or “ganho” to the people of the upper Tanana region. These songs have been retained in the people’s memories until today, and some of them are still actively performed.

According to Benjamin McCloud of Dawson, who learned the story from Titus David of Tetlin, Chief Isaac attended a memorial potlatch for Chief David of Tetlin about 1917. At that potlatch Chief Isaac taught the Tetlin people Han songs and gave them the Han drums and a ganhook. The “ganhook” of “ganho” is a dance stick used by the lead dancer to direct the movement of the other dancers. Ganhooks today are made from flat boards about six or seven feet long and five to six inches wide that have a handle at one end and hole in the board for the thumb. They are painted in various colors and decorated with ribbons, yarn, and beads.

Tanacross elders say that the Han from Dawson were noted dancers who taught their dances to relatives from Mansfield Village. Tanacross tradition also says that in 1912 Chief Isaac of Dawson left the ganhook at the old village of Lake Mansfield. (Mishler & Simeone 2004: 133)

Chief Isaac is a Yukon First Nations cultural hero who resisted the government’s efforts to destroy the Han, and all Canadian First Nations culture. Chief Isaac took action and the result is that today the Han from Tr’ondek Hwech’in First Nation are now working at relearning and reviving from the Alaskan Athapaskans those cultural treasures that Chief Isaac gave a century ago.

The following is an actual paddle. See figure # 354. I include this to show the patterns on paddles since they were used during potlatches as seen in figure #331 on page 315. This is a Han paddle on display at the Dawson City Museum and is also decorated with geometric chevrons and a diamond. It is painted in red, black and white. In photographs I saw of paddles, it appeared that some may have had designs on them. The poor quality of the photographs did not allow me to be sure. Like many other items I researched, most paddles were not decorated. However, when I inquired with the Elders about this, they all stated that designs were added to paddles in order to make them fancy.



Figure # 354, paddle on display at the DCM. UvK drawing.

In the Yukon ganhooks fell into disuse in the 1930s with the odd exception here and there. There may be a bit of a revival of ganhook use for some local dance groups. The painted patterns on the faces on the ganhook were common up until about 60 years ago. It seems that people stopped using the face painted designs in the 1940s. For face painting also there seems to be a slight revival in local dance groups.

Rattles

Rattles had limited use by Yukon First Nations when compared to the drum. There were locally made rattles as well just as some rattles that were traded in from the coastal Tlingits. The first rattle in figure # 355 was selected as a Yukon First Nation artifact by the Council of Yukon First Nations committee. The rattle was originally collected by the Church Missionary Society and they were active all across the north. The Church Missionary Society was part of the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia and they collected Aboriginal artifacts from the 1850s until about 1910. In 1998 the Council of Yukon First Nations repatriated a number of these artifacts which were thought to have been collected from the Yukon. There was no documentation of where and when these 'Yukon' artifacts were collected, but a Council of Yukon First Nations committee selected this rattle along with a number of other artifacts that now make up the Council of Yukon First Nations collection. It may be questioned whether this is indeed a Yukon artifact, as I have not come across other Yukon rattles made in this style. I have seen rattles made in this style from areas outside the Yukon, see figure # 356 and # 357.



Figure # 355. Athapaskan Rattle, CYFN Collection.

The rattle below is in the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC. It is listed as rattle drumstick from the Slavey people in Fort Nelson, British Columbia. The rattle was collected by Harmon Hendricks and arrived in the museum collection in 1919. The rattle has a red bird painted on it and has a number of fringes coming out of the handle. There are flat sheets of metal rolled into cones and added to the end of the fringes.



Figure # 356. Athapaskan Slavey rattle, 092486.000 NMAI.

The other rattle in this style that I have come across is also a Slavey rattle, see figure # 357. It is a rattle collected from Slave Athapaskans at Fort Rae on Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories. The photograph is from *Athapaskans: Strangers of the North* on page 157. The caption states: "Rattles were generally used by shamans in ritual practices, or were simply a children's toy." That is a wide range, from Shaman's rattle to a toy, but as you have read earlier in Chapter Six-Ritual, Shaman Art & Story Related Art, the dolls also ranged from shaman's tools to toys. The three rattles are essentially made in the same pattern: a stick that forms both the handle and then curves around to form the round part of the rattle on which the hide is put to hold the berry seeds or pebbles inside. This same rattle design can be found further east among the Cree in Ontario and Quebec, but I have not seen a rattle with this type of pattern west or north of the Slave people. The fact that there are similar patterns in many of the objects made by Athapaskans does not prove or disprove that this rattle is of Yukon origin. Yet my doubts about the Yukon origin of this rattle increases when I look at the design of a Yukon made rattle. In figure # 358 is a rattle pattern shown to me by Elder Johnny Smith, as an example of the rattles used at least in the southern Yukon.

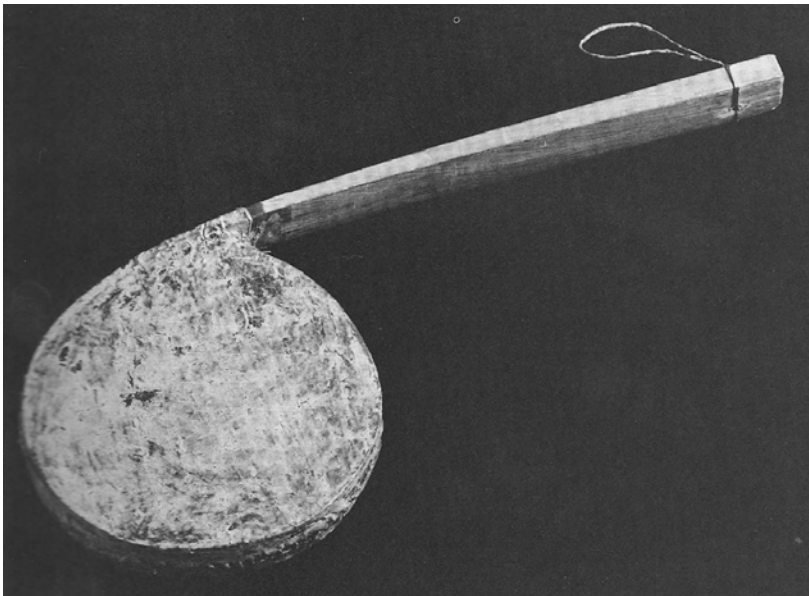


Figure # 357. Athapaskan Slave Indian Rattle, VI-N-46, CMC.

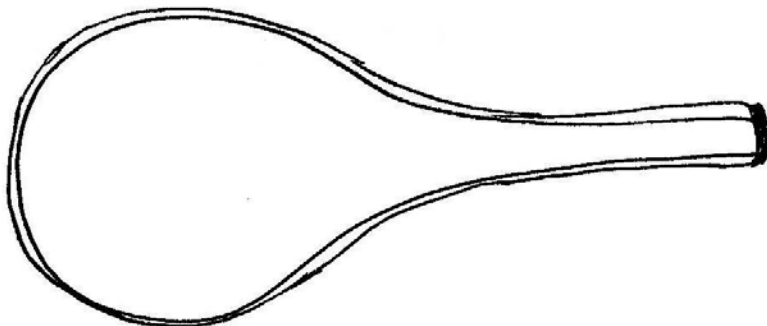


Figure # 358. Pattern of Yukon First Nation Rattle, UvK drawing.

The rattle in figure # 358 is basically made of two carved wood halves with seeds inside and then joined together. I have not seen a rattle of this type in any museums but the next rattle in figure # 359, is on display at the Atlin Historical Society Museum in Atlin,

British Columbia. The rattle is a cross between the coastal style rattles and the interior “silhouette” imagery. While not technically from the Yukon the rattle is Inland Tlingit and therefore I consider this rattle to be an example of the interior art style.



Figure # 359. Atlin Inland Tlingit rattle. AHS.

This rattle represents Crow and is painted in gloss black with red highlights on the eyes, mouth and nostrils. It appears to be carved in three sections: the head, body and tail, and then joined. This rattle is another example of the figurative images in Inland Tlingit art while the Athapaskan generally did not use this form of imagery.

These are all the Yukon rattles that I have come across, minus the rattles that were traded into the Yukon from the coast.

Gopher skin robes to button blankets

Another important item used in potlatches and other ceremonies is the robe. The first robes were made from gophers and other furs and later button blanket robes were introduced when the trade in fabrics started in the late 1800s. In the *Gathering of traditions Potlatch 2003* booklet the society writes the following history of the button blanket:

Button Blankets go way back, to a time even before buttons and blankets. Originally, Yukon First Nations people made robes from furs, skins or cedar bark, and adorned them with amulets or abalone and dentalium shells. Later, buttons and duffel replaced the older materials-but the imagery and importance remain the same.

It does not say where the information was obtained from, but it raises concerns, since cedar does not grow in the Yukon and I have not come across any information about cedar bark or cedar bark robes being traded inland. Quite the contrary, interior clothing was in high demand on the coast and thus was traded out of the interior. The text also states that blankets were decorated with amulets, abalone and dentalium shells. I have not heard or seen amulets, abalone or dentalium shells used on blankets but I have heard of moose-hoof moose skin blankets. In *Life Lived Like a Story* on page 303 Annie Ned tells the story of Nùlatà marrying his three daughters off on the shores of Kusawa Lake. Nùlatà was her husband’s grandfather and my third great-grandfather. Annie Ned says:

Next one, *Aakegántth’at*. From that place, *Nakhu*, that narrow place at Lake Arkell, He threw moose skin in there too-big moose skin. That’s the one, moose-hoof blanket, and she goes on top of that skin when she’s going to be married. (Cruikshank 1990: 303)

Gopher skin robes were used in at least the south-central Yukon and northern British Columbia before the introduction of button blankets. The gopher skin or other animal fur robes were often seen in potlatches, such as in the photograph of the 1912 Carcross potlatch in figure # 331 on page 315 and in the dance in figure # 326 on page 311. I remember seeing gopher skin robes as a child, but today they are very rare. McClellan states:

Almost every older woman in Southern Yukon owns a “gopher-skin” robe. And almost everybody has snared or trapped, then eaten with relish hundreds of gophers. (McClellan 2001: 158)

The robes take between 80 and 100 gopher skins to make. McClellan states:

Gopher-skin robes have always been popular. These usually have seven or eight skins across and 12 or 14 skins down, before the skins are sewn together the legs are removed and they are trimmed to rectangles. Sometimes the tails are left hanging for a decorative touch, but more often they are cut off. The older robes were often lined with tanned caribou hide, and later times cloth or thin blanket served as a backing, both to cover the eye holes and to prevent the robe from slipping. (McClellan 2001: 304)

There is a lot of evidence of the use of gopher, groundhog and marten skin robes. There were also beaver, fox, lynx, swan breasts and netted rabbit skin robes. In Mary Easterson’s *Potlatch: The Southern Tutchone Way*, there is a photograph of her late grandma Sophie Watt. She appears to be wearing a groundhog robe. Groundhog, because the rectangles appear to be too big for gophers and there were ample of groundhogs in the mountains of the Kluane area where Sophie Watt lived. See figure # 360 of the photograph.



Figure # 360. Sophie Watt wearing a skin robe. CMC collection, #785, YA.

In Figure # 361 we can see another example of a gopher skin robe. This photo's caption states: "Elderly Stick Indian woman". As mentioned before some groups of people were identified by other names that are now generally accepted. The Southern Tutchone along with the Tagish and Inland Tlingit were sometimes referred to as the 'Stick Indians' while the Northern Tutchone were generally called 'Nehaunee', 'Crow People', 'Caribou', 'Mountain' and finally 'Wood Indians'. The Han were also 'Wood Indians'. Judy Thompson also noted that other Athapaskan peoples were at times identified as 'Stick' Indians such as the Tahltan people. There seemed to be no single accepted name for the people around the Fort Selkirk area. As we can see in this photograph, the elderly woman is wearing a gopher skin robe tied around her neck. Note that the robe appears to have a lining that the fur has been sewn onto. She is also wearing a nose ring and has a walking stick. She is wearing undecorated older style hide boots.



Figure # 361. Elderly 'Stick' Indian woman. Swanson fonds, 8598, YA.

This style of hide boots was common in the past but now seems to be almost unknown. There are a number of these boots in various museum collections. See figure # 362 for an image of one such set of boots. While most of these styles of boots were collected from the Gwich'in, the following example is from the Upper Taku River. They are listed as being from the Taku tribe of the Athapaskan and were collected by George Emmons in 1922. I am not exactly sure who the Upper Taku River Athapascans were but suspect they may be either the Inland Tlingit, a southern group of Tagish or northern group of Tahltan. The Inland Tlingits are not Athapaskan but the Upper Taku River is in their territory. By this time Emmons had been collecting from the Tahltan people for years so he would have known them and would have identified the boots as Tahltan. This leaves the Tagish but that seems too far south. Maybe they traveled regularly to the region. This pair of boots has the

porcupine embroidery pattern in the typical Southern Yukon style. The only difference between these boots and the Gwich'in boots is the embroidery style.



Figure # 362. Old Style hide boots. 115408.000, NMAI.

In her section on Potlatch Stories, Easterson includes stories from Elders Mrs. Rachel Dawson and Mrs. Kitty Smith about the First Potlatch. In these stories, gopher skins, button blankets and marten skin robes play significant roles. One story is about a Crow girl in Haines, Alaska. She finds a little worm and begins taking care of it, even breast feeding the worm. The worm grows and becomes dangerous and smells, and is a concern to her five brothers. The boys plan to distract the girl, and find out that their grandmother needs help with a gopher-skin robe. The girl attends to the grandmother and the boys kill the worm. The girl finds out, cries, and directs how to bury the worm, since technically the boys are the worm's uncle. She tells about the role for button blankets, how to wrap the worm up and how to bury it. From this story we learn how people were instructed at potlatches. In this story, the gopher skin robe is mentioned as well as the button blanket. This is one of the reasons that button blankets were often associated with potlatches. In a casual conversation with Ms. Frances Joe, she stated that people made their button blankets in preparation for their death. The button blanket would go with them to the spirit world and would be burned or buried with the body. This goes along with the story mentioned earlier about the girl that raised the worm. This, and the Fort Selkirk practice of tearing the button blankets in half at potlatches, may have resulted in the rarity of examples.

Annie Ned talked about all the different blankets used at her mother's grave potlatch sometime between 1890 and 1900 at Hutshi. While these may not be button blankets, they were used in this potlatch:

I let go and I looked at people dancing. Blue! Blue blankets. Coast Indians keep a big cache [of blankets], all blue! (...) Those Klukshu people wear red blankets--those

Klukshu people. Humpback fish, little red fish come to that Klukshu: that's the dance they're making. That's the story I told you one time. People are dancing just like little fish!

People come from Carcross, from Dalton Post, from Aishihik. I *know* [remember] but I don't know [understand] what is going on. People all have different dances: Klukwan dance, Hutshi dance, Ayan dance. (Cruikshank 1990: 313)

In Cruikshank's notes Annie Ned states that the Klukwan dance was a Tlingit-style dance, the Hutshi dance was her own Southern Tutchone people's dance and the Ayan were 'people downriver', that is the Northern Tutchone people's dance.

While not seen regularly, there still are a couple of gopher skin robes around today. Diane Strand is a member of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations and owns an old gopher skin robe. See figure # 363 for a picture of her robe being modeled by her daughter Shauna. Diane Strand bought this robe from an antique shop in Haines, Alaska and felt the owner had no idea of the importance of the robe.



Figure # 363. Gopher Skin Robe modeled by Shauna Strand.

There are still a few robes around but they are rarely brought out. There are some gopher skin robes in various museum collections in the Yukon and throughout North America. The Klukshu Museum and the Kluane Museum of Natural History in the Yukon both have gopher skin robes in their collections. See figure # 364 for a fancier gopher skin robe that is in the Hood Museum of Art in Hanover, New Hampshire. This robe was collected by Charles Sheldon sometime between 1904 and 1909 during his travels and hunting in the Yukon and Alaska.



Figure # 364. Gopher Skin Robe. 51.32.12863 Hood Museum of Art.

This is a very nice example of a fancy gopher skin robe. The creator of this robe spent extra time to add fringes on both the inside and outside. This would have been very noticeable when the person was dancing. The creator also lined the skin joints with red ochre. Unfortunately I have not heard of anybody making a gopher skin robe anymore. First Nations artisans rarely use gopher skin these days as it is hard work. One is also not allowed to hunt along the highways anymore. Button blankets are easier to make and have now become the choice robe to wear.

The Athapaskan button blankets were common in the past, but rarely in the form that we see in this area today. If any, the designs in the past were limited to simple geometric patterns as you will see later in this section. The Coastal Tlingits, and some Inland Tlingits, have clan and crest designs on their button blankets. In the button blanket display at the Sheldon Museum in Haines, Alaska, it says:

Button Blankets-Káa Yooka,óot' Xóow were originally made and worn by Tlingit people of lesser rank. Tlingit woman began making button blankets in the 1700's when early traders brought commercially made wool blankets to the Southeast. Blankets were made from navy blue wool blankets acquired from the Hudson Bay Company traders. A stylized animal design depicting a crest figure such as an Eagle, Raven, or Wolf was usually appliquéd to the centre of the blanket in a contrasting color of flannel and outlined with buttons or beads. Wide bands of red flannel wool bordered three sides of the blanket and trade buttons were sewn around the edges.

It was sometime after the creation of the Tlingit button blankets that they started production in the south-central Yukon. I wondered if earlier Athapaskan gopher skin robes were the first button blankets decorated with abalone buttons traded from the coast. When trade fabric arrived, gopher skins were mounted on fabric. This left a trim area of fabric around the edge where abalone buttons could be sewn on. If the “shelled trims” were done there are no references or examples of this. The Athapaskan, as well as the Inland Tlingit button blankets, may also have been originated from Hudson Bay and other trade blankets. When the Yukon Field Force was making its journey to Fort Selkirk in 1899, Edward Lester wrote in his diary about the Indians at Camp Victoria. Camp Victoria is located at the south end of Teslin Lake and I am not sure if this was an Inland Tlingit or Tahltan village:

There is also a large colony of Indians here, whose camp we duly inspected. (...) They present, however, a very picturesque appearance with their bright coloured blankets striped with all the colours of the rainbow. (Greenhous 1987: 133)

Is he referring to Hudson Bay or other trade blankets? Interesting is the striped button-blanket that Chief Isaac is wearing. See the excellent photograph of him at Moosehide in figure # 365. It was taken by Claude Tidd in Moosehide just downstream from Dawson City.



Figure # 365. Chief Isaac at Moosehide. Claude Tidd fonds, 7283, YA.

We cannot see the back of the blanket, but in the front the row of buttons is clear. There are other photographs of Chief Isaac and his button blanket, but again no examples of the back. Due to lack of design, the back of the button blanket likely never warranted a photograph.

Inland Tlingit may have also made the Athapaskan style button blankets. In *Their Own Yukon* on pages 96 there is a photograph of a burial in Atlin, BC with a coffin resting on a button blanket. I cannot tell if there is a design on the blanket or not. I presume that, if present, the design should have been partially visible from under the coffin but there is nothing showing. The design looks a bit like the button blanket in figure # 367.

The Inland Tlingit did at least sometimes have button blankets with designs on the back. In *My Old People Say* in plate XIIIb, there is a photograph of a button decorated dance blanket in the background. This photograph was taken in 1954. In *Their Own Yukon* on pages 110 and 134 there are photographs of people from Teslin and Atlin wearing button blankets. The button blanket in the photograph on page 110 has a design on the back. The photograph is not detailed enough to make out the design.

Annie Ned talks about button blankets and moose-hoof blankets at a potlatch for her grandmother's grave. She was about ten years old at the time (between 1890 and 1900) and says:

That time I saw it--old-fashioned. They danced with old-fashioned clothes, blankets, button blankets, moose-hoof blankets--I've got that kind, too; I made it myself.
(Cruikshank 1990: 312)

The Kluane Museum of Natural History in Burwash Landing has a button blanket in its collection. See figure # 366 for the backpack motif. My friend Carina Yerly is modeling the blanket. There is little information about this button blanket but when I showed a photograph of the blanket to Marge Jackson, she said she felt that she could have made it. Marge Jackson explained the simple geometric design on the back for me. She said that the square design was to represent a pack sack. A pack sack would be symbolic of an essential item for when you are on a journey. When I talked to Diane Strand about the button blanket she said that Annie Ned's button blanket had the same design.



Figure # 366, Button Blanket. 1975.6, KMNH.

Another button blanket, or should I say button robe, is in the MacBride Museum collection. See the photograph in figure # 367. This robe also has a geometric pattern on the back with the same style outline as the blanket at the Kluane Museum of Natural History, but the design is more elaborate. See figure # 368 for what appears to be the same button blanket in an undated photograph from the Jim Whyard fonds from Yukon Archives.

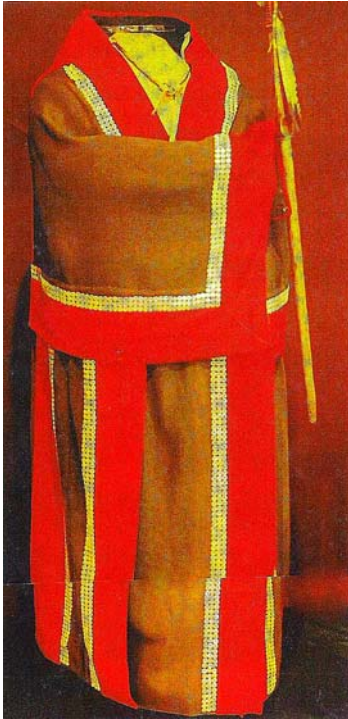


Figure # 367, Button Robe. MacBride Museum.



Figure # 368. Jim Whyard fonds from Yukon Archives

In the next photograph, figure # 369, is my great uncle Eddy Isaac and his wife Sophie Isaac. This photograph was taken in May 1963 by Catharine McClellan. Mrs. Isaac is wearing a button blanket which appears to be done in the same style as the previously discussed button blankets; a broad band leading towards the back of the blanket.



Figure # 369. Mr. & Mrs. Eddy Isaac. Catharine McClellan photograph. CMC

In all the photographs of button blankets that I have seen of Yukon potlatches, the backs were never shown. The coastal Tlingits seemed to have had a practice to show the crest on the back of the button blanket to demonstrate which clan they belonged to. In other photographs from the Yukon or Alaska, other than the two I have mentioned above, I have never seen one of the back of the blanket either. I have seen people showing at least the sides and the backs of the Chilkat blankets when they were wearing them. In one case the man is wearing the Chilkat robe over his chest in the front in order to show the back of the robe! In the next photograph of the Atlin potlatch there are at least six button blankets and not a single one is showing the back. See figure # 370 and also see figures # 101 on page 128 and # 330 on page 314, where the people wearing the button blankets are facing to the front and not showing their backs. Note that in figures # 98 and # 326 the man wearing the Chilkat robe is showing the back of the robe. Slightly off topic, in figure # 370, the child in the right front row appears to be wearing what may be a rabbit skin robe.



Figure # 370. Atlin Inland Tlingit potlatch photograph. Circa 1918. Courtesy of Atlin Historical Society.

Today making button blankets is popular and a crest is always added to the back, even for Athapaskans. This would seem to be a borrowed idea from the coastal Tlingits. The Chilkat robes shown in photographs of potlatches or ceremonies were either traded into the interior from the coast or the owner was from the coast. In figure # 371 is a Chilkat blanket from a 1949 Rolf Hougen photograph. Although Annie Ned is a Southern Tutchone and identified herself as a Yukon Indian woman, she is wearing the Chilkat blanket during a performance at Winter Carnival.



Figure # 371, Annie Ned wearing a Chilkat blanket from Klukwan, Alaska. Rolf Hougen Photograph.

When I showed this photograph to Marge Jackson she stated that her father, Little Jim, got this blanket from Haines, Alaska. She said they cost lots. Later when the blanket was folded and put in storage, squirrels got to it and chewed out sections. Those areas were repaired with the large white circles seen at the front of the blanket. The blanket was later stolen. Marge stated that other local people also had these Chilkat blankets. Annie Ned is wearing a hide jacket and a button blanket. In her headdress she is wearing the popular feather plume as is Johnny Fraser on the left.

Face painting and tattooing

Face painting was a common activity in the early Yukon. This was done during celebrations, potlatches, berry picking, etc. In fact face painting was wide spread and more common than mask use. An early reference is made by Robert Campbell when he was on his trip down the Yukon River, somewhere up the Pelly River in 1851:

These Indians are very fond of ornaments of any kind; such as ear-rings, & also decorate their dress freely with ermine or squirrel skins or tails, duck wings, long hair, &c. They also often daub their faces with red earth or ochre &c... (Wright 1967: 67)

Faces were painted for potlatches, sunburn protection, other ceremonies, or even just for the fun of it. In *My Old People Say* Catherine McClellan writes about such occasions:

Southern Tutchone women tell how in earlier days their mothers and grandmothers always stopped to play tag and run races in open sunny spaces. They sang songs appropriate for such outings. They also painted their faces with red ochre, apparently just to be in keeping with the general festive mood. (McClellan 2001: 200)

McClellan also writes:

We have seen that Southern Tutchone woman used to paint “when they were going to pick berries.” They also did it “when they went out to have a good time as a young girl,” as well as for more formal festive occasions.

The Southern Tutchone had three different kinds of red paint. The first kind, made from red ochre is available in their own country, but the other two kinds were brought by the Chilkat traders. One was a red powder which the Chilkats themselves got from whites. It was probably vermilion. The other was a kind of fungus which the Chilkat got from tall coastal trees-most likely cottonwoods-during the springtime.(...) Powered Charcoal served for black. People used to dip their fingers into the powder and then touch their finger tips all over their faces to make dots. Men used black for war party paint, and occasionally as a sign that they were angry, but black could also be used for festive face painting. For Potlatches, peace ceremonies, and the like, a person might put on either black or red or both.” (McClellan 2001: 320)

McClellan goes on to say that each moiety had a set design, but people could also create their own individual designs. I have not come across any Yukon designs that have been identified as either clan, other than in George Emmons’ *The Tlingit Indians* on pages 36 and 37 where he shows sketches of the various clan designs. Below I have copied the Wolf on the left and Crow clan face designs on the right as a reference in figure # 372. Maybe the interior people used similar designs to represent their clans.

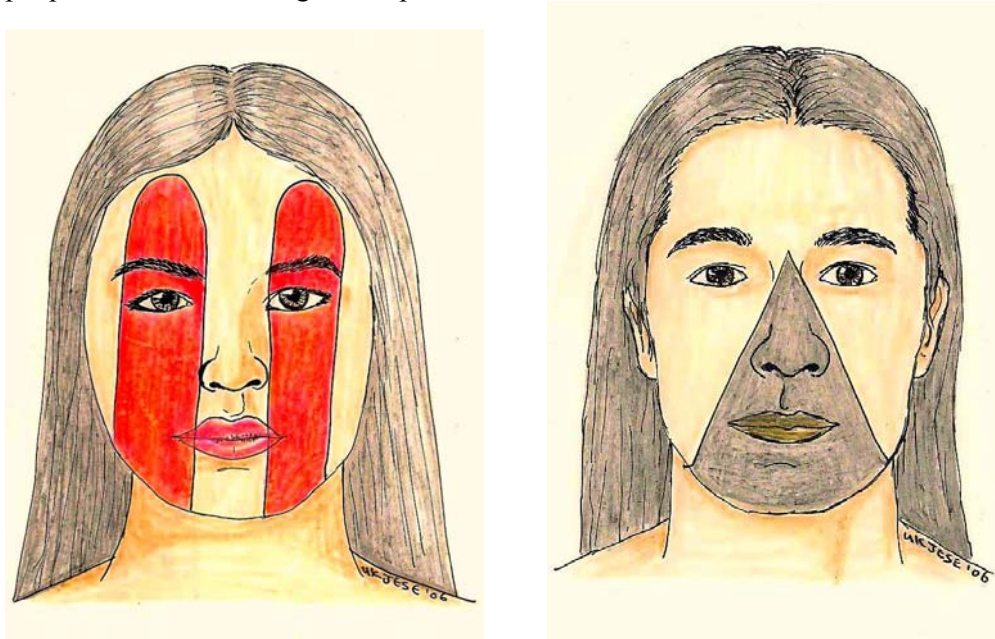


Figure # 372. Tlingit Wolf and Crow clan face designs. UvK Drawing.

McKenna states the following about Upper Tanana face painting:

On festive occasions the Upper Tanana men paint faces with charcoal and red ocher. The decoration consists of a few bars across the face and about the eye of the whole upper face may be smeared with color. Such face painting generally with red and black, is common throughout the Athapaskan areas, where it is almost always confined to the males. (McKenna 1959: 85)

McKenna's description of face painting seems a lot like the face designs that were painted on the Inland Tlingits ganhooks that have been shown in figures # 338 on page 322, # 339 on page 323 and # 348 on page 329. In addition McKenna stated that mostly men painted their faces. As you can see from the other comments and photographs in this section this is not the case, at least for the southern Yukon. It might be that McKenna only referred to the Upper Tanana people.

The late 1940s seems to have been the last time people used masks, face painting and tattooing. See figure # 373 for a photograph of Lydia Kushniruk and Stella Jim at a winter carnival in Whitehorse in the late 1940s.



Figure # 373, Lydia Kushniruk and Stella Jim's face painted designs. 1940s Yukon Winter Carnival. R. Hougan photograph.

Elder Gary Sam described a Northern Tutchone face painted design which he called "Pretty Woman" design. This design is meant to enhance the eyes. See figure # 374 for an example painted on the face of my daughter Shadunjen.



Figure # 374, Northern Tutchone “Pretty Woman’s” design. UvK Collection.

Gary Sam described the chin tattooing that was also done to be pretty. See figure # 375. This is what Catherine McClellan wrote about tattooing:

As far as I know, in all tribes the aboriginal tattooing was the facial tattooing done to higher class women. Charcoal blackened sinew was pulled under the skin. The process was evidently a painful one which caused the chin to swell up for quite a long period. The only design mentioned in all three tribes was a series of black lines radiating from the mouth to the outer edges of the chin. One Southern Tutchone said each line represented a big party, another said that “chiefs’ daughters” were tattooed, while an Inland Tlingit woman simply said that there were “always” five black lines. A Northern Tutchone woman from Selkirk has seven lines. (McClellan 2001: 319)

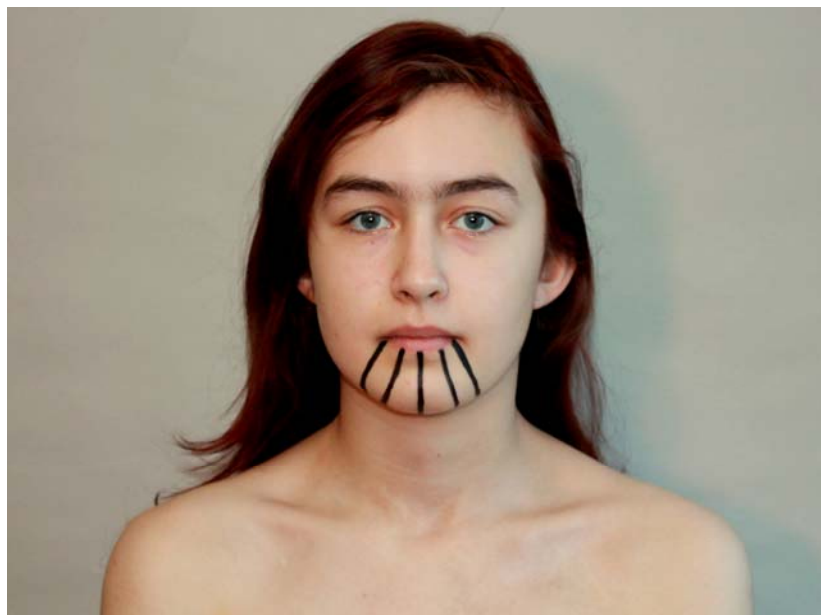


Figure # 375. Chin tattoo example. UvK Collection.

McKenna states:

Among the Upper Tanana only the women were tattooed. This decoration was largely confined to the face, the favorite design consisting of a series of vertical lines on the chin and one or two horizontal lines across the cheeks; occasionally a few bars were also put on the backs of wrists. Both the needle-and-thread and the pricking method were used, usually the latter, powered charcoal constituting the pigment. (McKenna 1959: 87)

In Alexander Murray's drawings of Gwich'in people from the late 1840s we can see the same woman's lines that McClellan described for men. The drawings show additional lines and both in red and black. These lines may have been painted instead of tattooed because of the use of both black and red. I have not heard of red tattoos. These drawings can be seen, starting on page 65 of *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*. It appears that male facial tattooing depended on which group of people the person belonged to, as the Upper Tanana males did not tattoo their faces while it seems the Gwich'in males did.

From the late 1940s to the 1980s there were no public examples of masks or face painting. It was during this time that First Nations people were in the final stages of the transition from a traditional life style to living in a modern western society. It was also a time when most of the earlier art styles vanished, leaving a cultural void in the Yukon.

Masks

Traditionally, masks in the Yukon were relatively rare. They were mainly used for two purposes: by shamans for direct contact with their animal spiritual helper and for or by an important person at potlatches and other celebrations. As a result of this scant use, I have not discovered a single physical example of an early Yukon mask. My search included over forty museums in North America and Europe. I have also looked at tens of thousands of photographs. I have located only four early Yukon photographs that have Yukon masks. These four photographs were all taken before 1920. I must add that the neighboring peoples to the Yukon First Nations, the Coastal Tlingits as well as Alaskan Athapaskans in the Lower Yukon River region did make a lot of masks. From the late 1940s until the 1980s there is a mask-making gap and no Yukon made masks are in public view. In the late 1980s, the coastal Tlingit style mask was introduced into the Yukon by Keith Wolf Smarch and became what many people consider the traditional Yukon First Nations mask. These are not traditional style Yukon First Nations masks but rather a stop gap to fill the losses in our local visual culture, much like dream catchers and the use of sweet grass. Contrary to masks, face painting and to a lesser extent face tattooing, were widespread.

In my interviews with carvers and Elders it became apparent that the most common use of masks in public was for potlatches, either for a burial or celebration. Some people still remember these masks, as there were a number of mask makers who were still alive just a few years ago. In many of the examples of early Yukon made masks, the representations are of humans. These masks were photographed at potlatches and gatherings. This suggests that they were not shaman but potlatch masks. There are examples of non-human masks also. It seems that there was only one mask maker in a given area. The mask maker's output was quite small during his lifetime. Each mask maker had a slightly different approach to the making of a mask. Catherine McClellan mentioned that the masks were limited to those areas closest to the coastal Tlingits (being the Southern Tutchone, Tagish and Inland Tlingits). This is clearly not the case since the Northern Tutchone, Han and the Kaska also made and used

masks. I will start with the early Kaska masks. This is what John Honigmann in *The Kaska Indians* writes of the Upper Liard Indians during various potlatches and feasts:

Potlatch dancers painted their faces grotesquely and costumed themselves in sheep and wolf skins, half-finished coats, absurd headgear, and sheep horns-all provoking considerable amusement for the spectators. Wolf's-head masks might be worn by members of that moiety. (Honigmann 1964: 70)

And:

When the gifts had all been allocated, a rawhide curtain was erected in the dwelling, supported from two poles held by members of the host's moiety. Members of the potlatch's group retired behind the curtain and decorated themselves with masks, feathers, and animal skins for dancing. Members of the opposite moiety painted the faces of like-sex dancers. (...) When they were ready the dancers called for the curtain to be removed and began dancing to the rhythm of drums and potlatch songs. After one moiety had performed, the guests allowed their faces to be painted and in turn danced. (Honigmann 1964: 73)

And more:

During the potlatch people performed and clowned while covered with bark masks, the features of which were outlined with charcoal. Other masks came from the head skins of black and grizzly bears, the goat, and sheep. (Honigmann 1964: 73-74)

The first mask I will examine is a Han mask shown in a photograph taken in Eagle, Alaska during a potlatch in 1907 in figure # 332 on page 317. The mask is referred to in the book *Han: People of the river* in page 188:

The Eagle Village potlatch photo from 1907 (Figure 33) illustrates yet another convergence of traditional and western-style dress. (...) The most striking objects, nevertheless, are the men's pointed tasseled caps. Han outfits of this kind have never been photographed since, so it is not known how long they stayed in fashion. Perhaps the biggest mystery of the photo is the wolf-head mask and cape worn by the young man crouched in front of the group, perhaps associated with some kind of shamanic dance. (Mishler & Simeone 2004: 188)

See figure # 376 for my sketch of the mask from the photograph. The person wearing the mask is Edward Wood. Edward Wood is listed in the "Isaac, Wood, and Simon Family Tree" in Appendix D, page 260 of *Han: People of the River*. Edward Wood is the son of Jonathon Wood from the Eagle Village area and therefore a member of the Han people.

In the photograph I can make out that the mask is a half-mask, sitting on top of the wearer's head and only covering the top half of his face. Fur attached to the back of the mask covers the wearer's back. The hide appears to be a wolf, which would seem logical. In the text above, the writer suggests that this mask may be related to a kind of shamanic dance. Other possibilities would be that the dancer is representing the wolf moiety, or that the mask represents the dancer's animal spirit guide.



Figure # 376, Han Wolf mask, from Eagle Potlatch, 1907. UvK drawing.

More about masks and potlatches is written in *The Kaska Indians*, of the Upper Liard Indians during various potlatches and feasts:

Potlatch dancers painted their faces grotesquely and costumed themselves in sheep and wolf skins, half-finished coats, absurd headgear, and sheep horns-all provoking considerable amusement for the spectators. Wolf's-head masks might be worn by members of that moiety. (Honigmann 1964: 70)

And:

When the gifts had all been allocated, a rawhide curtain was erected in the dwelling, supported from two poles held by members of the host's moiety. Members of the potlatch's group retired behind the curtain and decorated themselves with masks, feathers, and animal skins for dancing. Members of the opposite moiety painted the faces of like-sex dancers.(...) When they were ready the dancers called for the curtain to be removed and began dancing to the rhythm of drums and potlatch songs. After one moiety had performed the guest allowed their faces to be painted and in turn danced. (Honigmann 1964: 73)

And more:

During the potlatch people performed and clowned while covered with bark masks, the features of which were outlined with charcoal. Other masks came from the head skins of black and grizzly bears, the goat, and sheep. (Honigmann 1964: 73-74)

During the Kaska dances people dressed in various ways to assume animal roles, including wolves. This was a practice that happened throughout the Yukon and surrounding areas. See figure # 377 of a ceremonial Tahltan caribou head-dress mask. This artifact is in the Museum of the American Indian collection in Washington DC and was originally collected by George Emmons in 1911 from British Columbia.



Figure # 377, Tahltan Caribou headdress-mask, 010853.000, NMAI.

I would like to comment on Mishler & Simeone's statement in *Han: People of the River*: "Han outfits of this kind have never been photographed since, so it is not known how long they stayed in fashion." The shirts the men were wearing were transitional outfits, that is, using store bought or traded clothing and adding details to make them into ceremonial shirts. In older photographs you will see other examples of this trend such as in figure # 334 on page 319 where the Northern Tutchone Mayo men are wearing the same combination shirts as well as the shirt that Johnny Fraser is wearing in figure # 333 on page 318. I am estimating that by World War Two these shirts fell into disuse as I have not seen other examples of them. The photographs from the 1940s do not show this type of shirt. I would also add that the use of the beaded style 'dance shirt' was probably limited to the southern Yukon as I have not seen examples of these shirt in the north-central Yukon.

When I talked with Gordon Peter from Ross River, he remembered seeing Mr. Joe Ladue's masks years ago. Mr. Joe Ladue was an Elder from the Ross River area who passed away in the early 1970s. Mr. Joe Ladue was born around 1890-95 and was that area's mask maker. Gordon made an owl mask based on an example of one of Joe's masks that Gordon saw when he was a teenager. This mask looks a bit like a human face with owl features with pointed ears and large eyes. Gordon is one of the very few mask carvers who works in the style that is traceable to pre-1940. The only photograph of Kaska masks depicts human faces. See figure # 378 for a photograph taken in the 1920s of a group of people in Ross River. Note the close up photograph of a man holding the two face masks in figure # 379. These are fairly large masks and appear to be made out of wood.

These may be examples of masks that were created in the Yukon after the Gold Rush era, when First Nations people became more settled and adopted a more western lifestyle. Larger wooden masks could now be made, since people built more permanent dwellings to return to and store the masks. In this photograph it appears that everybody is dressed in their best clothes which would indicate that there was some function or event happening. The masks appear to be of elder men with white beards. They look to be of a size that would fit

comfortably over a man's face. Are these faces of people who have passed away and these are their potlatch death masks? Or are they masks to represent past important people in Kaska or Northern Tutchone history? There were many Northern Tutchone living in the Ross River area at that time. The original Pelly River people were all killed by the Liard River people and the resulting void was filled by Francis Lake Kaska and Northern Tutchone. Sometime in the mid-twentieth century the Northern Tutchone moved to the Little and Big Salmon areas. Around the same time period the Mountain Dene moved into the Ross River area.



Figure # 378. Group of people in their best clothes in Ross River around the 1920s, Bill Hare fonds, 6951, Yukon Archives.



Figure # 379. Detail of a man holding two masks in Ross River around the 1920s, Bill Hare fonds, 6951, Yukon Archives.

Northern Tutchone Elder Mr. Gary Sam remembers seeing those types of face masks along with other masks such as Bear, Wolf and Crow. At the time he was a child attending potlatches in the Carmacks area in the 1940s. See figure # 380 of a drawing of the face mask that Mr. Gary Sam remembers seeing. Mr. Sam says that he remembers seeing ten masks at a large potlatch when people came from all over the Yukon to participate. He also said that the masks were ugly looking faces with hair, mustaches and beards made of horse hair. His description of masks is exactly like the masks in the Ross River photograph above. The masks were made out of poplar tree. Mr. Sam states that there are no examples of these masks left, because they were placed in the grave houses of the persons who owned the masks. Later, tourists stole the contents of those gravehouses.



Figure # 380. Ukjese van Kampen's drawing of face mask as described by Carmacks Elder Mr. Gary Sam.

In the Whitehorse area Mr. Bill Scurvey was a mask maker. This deceased Elder only made four masks in his lifetime. He taught his son Gordon Scurvey, also known as Gwada, the skills of mask making and Gwada has told me about how Mr. Bill Scurvey made his masks. The masks that Mr. Bill Scurvey made were only for funeral potlatches. Gwada stated that the carver would find a large protruding knot in a tree and carved the face mask right on the knot. Once the face was done, the carver used an adz to chop the mask out of the tree. Once the mask was free of the tree the back of the mask would be hollowed out and prepared for use. If the people were sad to see the person pass away, the mask was made sad. If the people were glad to see the person gone from this world, the face was made happy! The hair for the mask was obtained from the deceased person. The mask was used until the tree died at which point the mask also lost its spirit and at that time the mask was burned. This is another reason why there are no early Yukon First Nations masks to be examined. See figure # 381 of my sketch of the carving process. Gwada noted that these masks were more basic in design and rougher in finish than the present-day Tlingit style masks now being made in the Yukon.

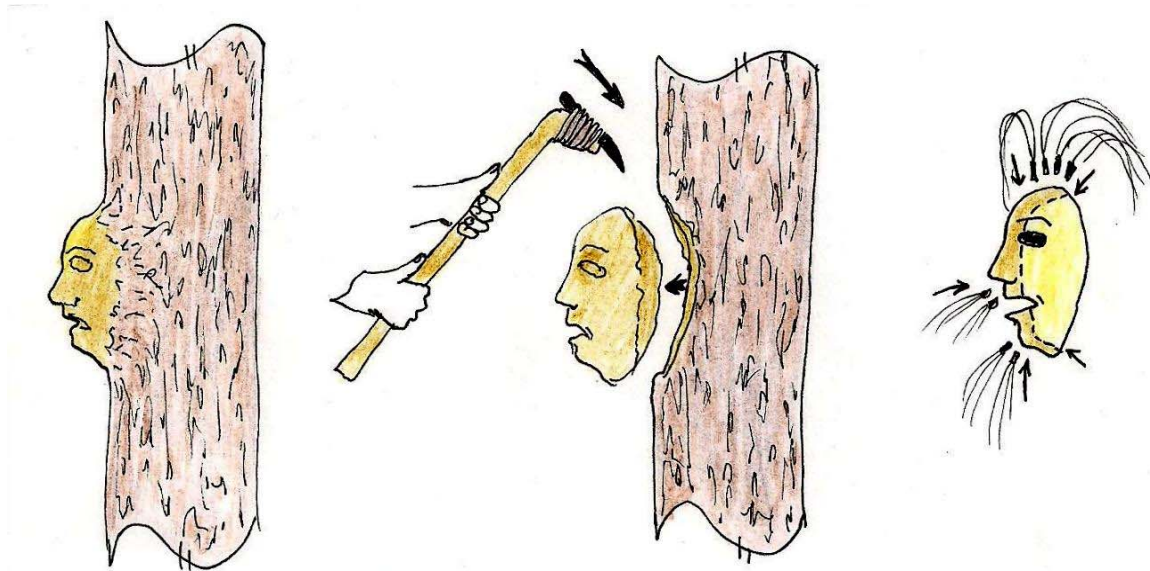


Figure # 381. Ukjese van Kampen's drawing of the face mask making procedure as described by Mr. Gordon Scurvey.

Here is an additional note on the use of hair on masks. Southern Yukon First Nations people believe that the person's essence remains in the hair, nails clipping and so on. If an evil person gets a hold of someone's hair, he or she can cause harm to the owner of the hair. So these items were burned in order to protect the owner. This leads me to think that human hair of a living person would not be used on a mask unless the mask was intended to be cremated or buried with the body.

The Inland Tlingit people also made this style of human faced masks as we can see in the 1915 photograph of a Potlatch in Teslin. See figure # 382 of a photograph of the group of people at Teslin Lake. Note that there are at least four masks in this photograph. Two women on the right are wearing human face masks while two men on the left are wearing masks, one a human face and the other appears to be an animal mask of some type. The masks worn by the women appear to be human females while the mask on the man appears to be a male face mask. This photograph proves that females did wear masks and from the positioning in the photograph, in front of everybody in the group, they seem to be women of power and prestige. The animal type mask worn by the man has some bird characteristics to it, maybe Crow. This man has an image on his dance shirt that looks like Crow, so maybe the mask is also Crow, thus representing his clan. Also note that there are at least two ganhooks in the photograph as well as two button blankets and what appears to be a hide cape. Two of the people are wearing dance shirts and there are also a couple of duster-style feather dance and hat pieces. This photograph is a good example of a people who have adopted the western material culture but still retain the symbols of their own culture. They are using western society's materials such as manufactured clothing as well as cloth and wool. They have rendered this material into their own cultural identity in the form of dance shirts and button blankets. See figure # 383 for a close up of the two women with masks.



Figure # 382. Mask wearers at Teslin Potlatch, 1915. Glenbow Museum Archives, NA-1663-38.



Figure # 383. Women Mask wearers at Teslin Potlatch, 1915. Glenbow Museum Archives, NA-1663-38.

As we can see from the photographs above the early Inland Tlingit masks were almost identical to Athapaskan masks. Likewise, the other art images have the same style and feel as the images from the rest of the Yukon. It appears that any of the early masks that were in the coastal Tlingit style were imported from the coast. The ties between the coastal Tlingits and the Inland Tlingit and Tagish were very strong and if a person wanted something for a special occasion, he or she could order it from the coast. We will see an example of this happening in the 1912 Carcross potlatch photograph in figure # 333 on page 318, where the mask is shown slightly right of center and is imported from the coast.

The differences in wood had an effect on the carving capabilities of the interior people. This is what Catherine McClellan says about this subject in *My Old People Say*:

The magnificent woodworking of the coastal tribes makes the efforts of their interior neighbors appear rather slight. However, most interior woods are crooked grained and the timber relatively small. Nor did the semi-nomadic existence of the interior people foster the kinds of massive construction which interested the coastal people. (McClellan 2001: 253)

The Coastal Tlingit style masks made their way into the Yukon through trade with the interior people, mainly the Inland Tlingits and Tagish. The photograph above was of the 1912 Carcross potlatch put on by Mr. Skookum Jim for the tombstone of Mr. Dawson Charlie. For this potlatch Mr. Skookum Jim ordered a number of items from the coast that may have included the mask. McClellan comments on this photograph and refers to the coastal Tlingits as Tlingits:

Although nobody now seems to have one, a few Tlingit-style masks or mask headdresses were also part of recent southern Yukon ceremonial paraphernalia. In the postcard of a big Tagish potlatch held in 1912 one man holds a large wooden mask of otter (?), while a second wears a feather headdress with a small mask on the foreground. (McClellan 2001: 323)

McClellan identifies a second smaller mask in the group which is not visible in this photograph. I do not believe that this second 'mask' is a mask since it is held like a rattle. I think it is a rattle with a face carved on it.

I would like to note that while the faces that were carved in the Yukon are described by McClellan as 'rather slight' when compared to the coastal Tlingit masks, this was not always the case. Look at the fine workmanship in various carved artifacts I have examined already, such as the carved pipes shown in figure # 252 on page 246 and # 253 on page 247. The earlier Yukon First Nations masks were rare and McClellan may not have seen many, or any, Yukon interior style masks during her research. I have not seen a single Yukon made mask from before the 1980s.

As mentioned earlier, while Yukon First Nations did not make a great deal of masks, the Athapaskans from the lower, and parts of the middle, Yukon River in present day Alaska made many masks. It is said that they were influenced by the Alaskan Eskimos and some of their masks reflect this. At the same time many of their masks look just like the human face masks that were made in the Yukon. It seems that mask making was at least wide spread with the people in Alaska and while less common, was also widespread in at least the south-central Yukon.

Headdresses

There are too many hat and headdress styles to catalogue in this paper and I have already shown different examples throughout this thesis. Here I include a sampling of hats and headdresses that Yukon First Nations people used. At the time the hide tunics were made the hide hood was the most common type of headdress. The pattern was pretty well the same over the whole region, with variation in embroidered or beaded patterns. See figure # 384 for two examples of the hoods that were part of the person's everyday clothing. The hood on the left is from the Royal Ontario Museum while the hood on the right is from the Peabody Museum in Boston. Another example can be seen on display in the Anchorage Museum in figure # 59 on page 86 and in the Alaska State Museum in Juneau Alaska in figure # 385. It appears that the whole outfit was made at the same time: the hood, tunic and pants.



Figure # 384. Hood style headdresses. Left: Han 953.160.3, ROM. Right Athapaskan hood. Peabody Museum.

The left hood was collected in 1908 from the Yukon Territory and is listed as probably Han. It has colourful porcupine embroidery around the opening that is similar to Gwich'in embroidery. Being neighbours to each other this would not be surprising. The hood on the right has Tanaina style embroidery and has the additional fur strips attached. The hood shown in the display below is listed as Tanaina.



Figure # 385. Hood style headdresses. Alaska State Museum.

For ceremonies there were other headdresses used made out of feathers, furs and bear claws. The bear claw headdresses were used from at least the central Northwest Territories in the east to the interior and coast of Alaska. The bear claw headdresses were generally made in the same fashion: a series of claws attached to a hide band. These headdresses are reported to have been worn by shamans. There are many examples of these bear claw headdresses in museum collections. This makes me suspect they were also worn by other important people. In figure # 386 is an example from the Burke Museum collection. This headdress was collected by George Emmons in the Upper Stikine River from the Tahltans in 1909. It is made from the fore claw of a grizzly bear and the museum information states that this headdress was worn during dance and ceremonial occasions.



Figure # 386. Bear claw headdresses. 2674, Burke Museum.

Once beads and cloth arrived in the area there was an explosion in various hat designs. Each hat was unique. In figures # 387 and 388 are animal related hats in the Kluane Museum of Natural History and the MacBride Museum.

In the Kluane Museum of Natural History is a Lynx hat on display. It has the fur head of a lynx mounted on top of a hide cap and was made by Ms. Maggie Jim.



Figure # 387, Lynx hat. 1975.57, KMNH.

Another hat of the same style is on display at the MacBride Museum. This hat is an animal fur head mounted on a cap. The cap has Inland Tlingit or Tagish style beadwork on the sides. While I have not seen other examples, these two would suggest that this may have been a common style in the past and may be related in use to the animal head mask and headdress shown in figures # 376 page 353 and # 377 on page 354. In the same photograph is a beaded cap that is fashioned like the military style wedge with Southern Tutchone-Tagish style beadwork on it.



Figure # 388, hats at the MacBride Museum.

Another 'wedge' style hat is a Tahltan hat from the Glenbow Museum (figure # 389). This hat was purchased from Mr. William Helmer in 1965. The hat is originally from a village close to Telegraph Creek, BC. It is made of wolf fur and cloth and has the common zigzag motif running along the bottom. Another wedge type hide headdress can be seen being worn by Patsy Henderson in figure # 177 on page 193.



Figure # 389, Tahltan hat. AC 50, Glenbow Museum.

There are headdresses shown on old postcards which give an example of the range of headdress styles. See figures # 85 on page 115 of Patsy Henderson wearing a unique headdress: a bishop style headdress and holding two rattles. There are other places in northwestern North America where these pointed hats were used, but this is the only example I have seen from the Yukon. Henderson is wearing his well known hide outfit. Because of the designs on the rattles I am inclined to think they were traded in from the coast.

In the postcard below in figure # 390 Henderson is wearing a headdress that appears to be made from feathers and fur. He is also wearing the Chilkat Tlingit shirt that Skookum Jim ordered for the famous 1912 Carcross potlatch. This shirt was worn by Billy Bone in the 1912 photograph.



Figure # 390, Patsy Henderson with fancy hat. Undated postcard.

The last two I will show are feather type headdresses. These specimens are in the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin. They are listed as Thayonik which seems to be another name for the Gwich'in. The type of feathers used is unknown. I am assuming that these headdresses would only be used during celebrations and potlatches as they would have been somewhat fragile.



Figure # 391, Thayonik (Gwich'in) feather headdresses. Left: IVA 6107, right: IVA 6106. Ethnologisches Museum Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Feather plumes & wanes

As seen in the 1912 Carcross potlatch- as well as in other photographs dance feather fans were used during potlatches and celebrations. In figure # 392 is an example of two Tahltan feather fans. On the left is an eagle feather fan and on the right what appears to be a swan feather fan.



Figure # 392, Tahltan dance feather fans. Left: 248450, swan (?) feather fan. Right: Eagle feather fan. NMNH.

While these are dance fans of bigger birds, smaller feather fans were also used. Even today grouse tail feather dance fans are made. They are used in the southern Yukon in the 'Grouse Dance' in which the male dances the way a male grouse would act when trying to attract the female.

Over the course of this book there have been a number of images of feather plumes used either in hats or as dance wanes. In some of the photographs the plumes appear to be store bought dusters. I think that the dusters simply replaced the previous ornaments made from bird feathers or animal tails. In the Canadian Museum of Civilization there is a grave ornament that was collected by C.H.D. Clarke in August 1944 from a grave near Snag, Yukon. See figure # 393. The artifact catalogue card states:

“Stick decorated with feathers (some dyed with aniline dyes) including probably woodpecker tails. Placed above grave, on a long pole, in one corner of picket fence around the grave of Tutchone Indians of Osgoode, on White River, near town of Snag, Yukon Territory, about 25 miles east of Alaska-Yukon Boundary. Dr. Clarke collected the specimen on Aug. 17, 1944 and says these Indians are related to Burwash Landing, Kloo Lake, Kluane Village, Coffee Creek, Welseley Lake, Carmacks and Selkirk people. They speak almost the same language as those of Great Slave Lake.”

This ornament has been quite weathered, indicating it was on its pole for a long time before it was removed by Dr. Clarke. While this would be an unethical act today, it did preserve the ornament for research. In this ornament a series of feathers were banded together in rows along the length of the approximately 20 inch stick.



Figure # 393, feather grave ornament. VI-Q-43, CMC.

The above grave ornament was made by the Tutchone but this style of ornament was quite popular over the whole region. Grave ornaments were common in many Southern and Northern Tutchone graveyards but no other early examples have survived that I know of. I will be examining some early grave yards in the last section of this chapter. In the Klukshu Museum there are a number of these plumes, or in reality, dusters. These items were often placed in the headdresses of dancers. In the past dancers also used feather fans and these may have been thought of as the same thing. See two examples of Klukshu Museum dance wane-dusters in figure # 394.



Figure # 394, dance wane-duster used to make dance outfits fancy. Klukshu Museum.

To illustrate the use of dance wanes, see the photograph in figure # 395. This is a Northern Tutchone celebration showing a group of men using the duster type dance wanes.



Figure # 395, Northern Tutchone celebration using dance wanes. Anglican Church Diocese of Yukon fonds. 89/41 #1020. YA.

Other examples of these duster type ornaments were can be seen in earlier figures: # 89 on page 118 on Jim Fox's hat, on Johnny Fraser's frontlet in figure # 94 on page 122 and again in figure # 192 on page 203. There is another view of the duster on the headdress of the man from Atlin holding the ganhook in figure # 101 on page 128. They were quite common in the first half of the twentieth century. This is another example of a rapid adoption of a new item, the duster, into Yukon First Nations culture.

Grave art

The final journey of the deceased person in this world is the burial. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that we cremated but also buried. One of the earliest images of Yukon First Nations graves comes from Lt. Schwatka's 1883 Yukon exploration as seen in figure # 324 on page 307. Lt. Schwatka wrote the following about the Fort Selkirk graves in his book *Along Alaska's Great River*:

A grave or burial place of the Ayan (or Iyan) Indians probably some three months old, planted on the very edge of the river bank near the site of old Fort Selkirk, was a type of the many we afterward saw at intervals from this point for about two-thirds of the distance to old Fort Yukon, (...) Before burial the body is bent with the knees up to the breast, so as to occupy as little longitudinal space as possible, and is inclosed in a very rough box of hewn boards two and three inches thick, cut by means of rude native axes, and is then buried in the ground, the lid of the coffin, if it can be called such, seldom being over a foot or a half below the surface of the pile. The grave's inclosure or fence is constructed of roughly-hewn boards, standing upright and closely joined edge to edge, four corner-posts being prolonged above, and somewhat neatly rounded into a bed-post design represented in the figure, from which they seldom depart. It was lasted at the top by a wattling of willow withes, the lower ends of the boards being driven a short way into the ground, while one or two intermediate stripes of red paint resemble other bands when viewed at a distance. From the grave itself is erected a long, light pole twenty or twenty-five feet in height, having usually a piece of colored cloth flaunting from its top; although in this particular instance the cloth itself was of a dirty white. Not far away, and always close enough to show that it is some superstitions adjunct of the grave itself, stands another pole of about equal height, to the top of which there is fastened a poorly carved wooden figure of a fish, duck, goose, bear, or some other animal or bird, this being, I believe, a sort of savage *totem* designating the family or sub-clan of the tribe which to the deceased belonged. (...) My own Indians (Chilkats) told me that they formerly placed the bodies of their dead on pole scaffoldings in the branches of trees near the river bank, somewhat after the manner of the Sioux and other Indian tribes of our great plains; and in one instance a very old, rotten and dilapidated scaffold in a tree was pointed out to me as having once served that purpose, although there were no indications to confirm the story; but these might have easily been obliterated. (Schwatka 1885: 215-220)

Schwatka's name for the Northern Tutchone people was Ayan. The descriptions of the Upper Tanana graves by McKennan in *The Upper Tanana Indians* are also very close to Schwatka's description above:

Surmounting either the grave or the fence is a long pole to which are attached pennants or streamers. Sometimes a wooden cross, which is frequently of the Russian form, is also attached to the house of the fence. A few graves lack the cross and

instead have a pole to which wooden figures are attached. (...) The Upper Tanana figures have geometric shapes, the diamond, chevron, and triangle occurring most frequently. The Indians deny any clan significance to them and insist that they make them simply because they look attractive. The only figure I saw that was even slightly realistic was crown-shaped. Its maker said it represented the sun, and its function was solely decorative. (McKenna 1959: 147)

It can be debated if the geometric and other shapes were more significant than just decoration. In my own research I have been told many times that decorations were added to make the item 'fancy'. This was always a safe answer to give and not necessarily wrong, but if the person did not know what the creator of the object intended you can only answer that you don't know or that it was to make it fancy. At first I wondered if the Upper Tanana people were totally truthful with McKenna about the poles having no meaning or maybe the meaning behind or purpose of the decorated poles were lost in time. When I researched the grave poles in Fort Selkirk I came across a similar situation. In reading the *Fort Selkirk Oral History* of 1984 and *Fort Selkirk Elders Oral History* of 1985, produced by the Yukon Government's Heritage Branch, I was surprised to read the interviews with Yukon First Nations Elders all stating that they did not know the meaning of the poles. All the people interviewed were born in the early twentieth century. Were the purpose and meaning of the poles and carvings not passed on to them? Tommy McGinty explained in the interview that young people did not attend the burial because of the danger of the ghost of the deceased person. The ghost may take over the young person's body. So from the time of the last traditional burials and creation of the poles to the time the Elders became old enough to attend the burials, knowledge about the poles vanished.

See the next photograph taken at Fort Selkirk with the grave poles. Also present are the various carvings on top of the poles as well as painted geometric designs painted on the gravehouses.

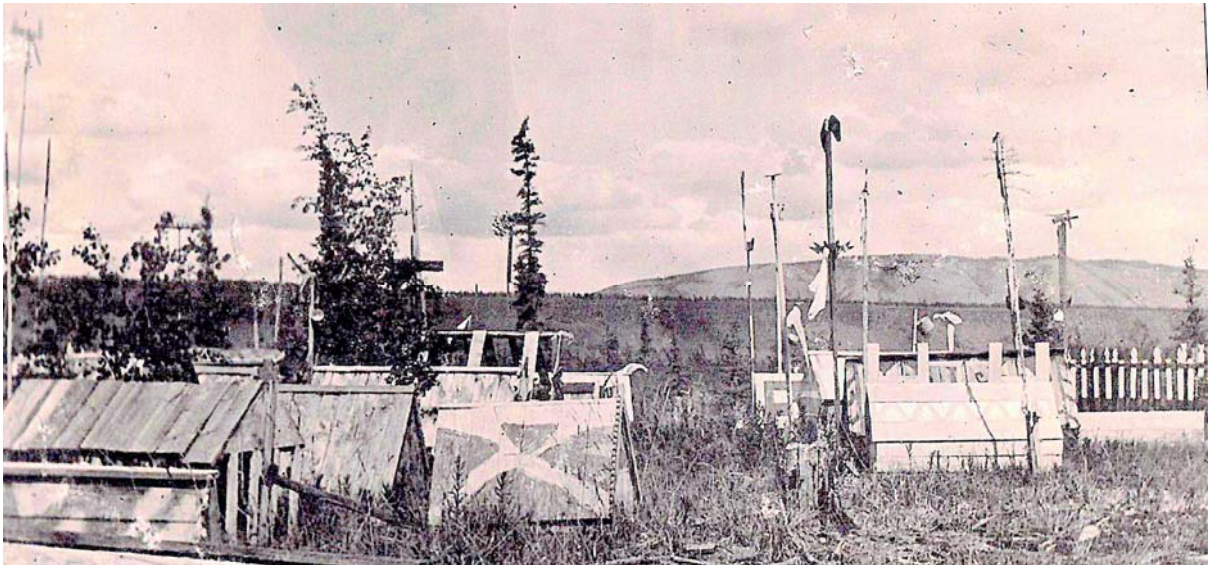


Figure # 396, First Nations graveyard Fort Selkirk. Swanson fonds 8571, YA.

The next photograph, also from Fort Selkirk, also shows the use of poles at the graves.

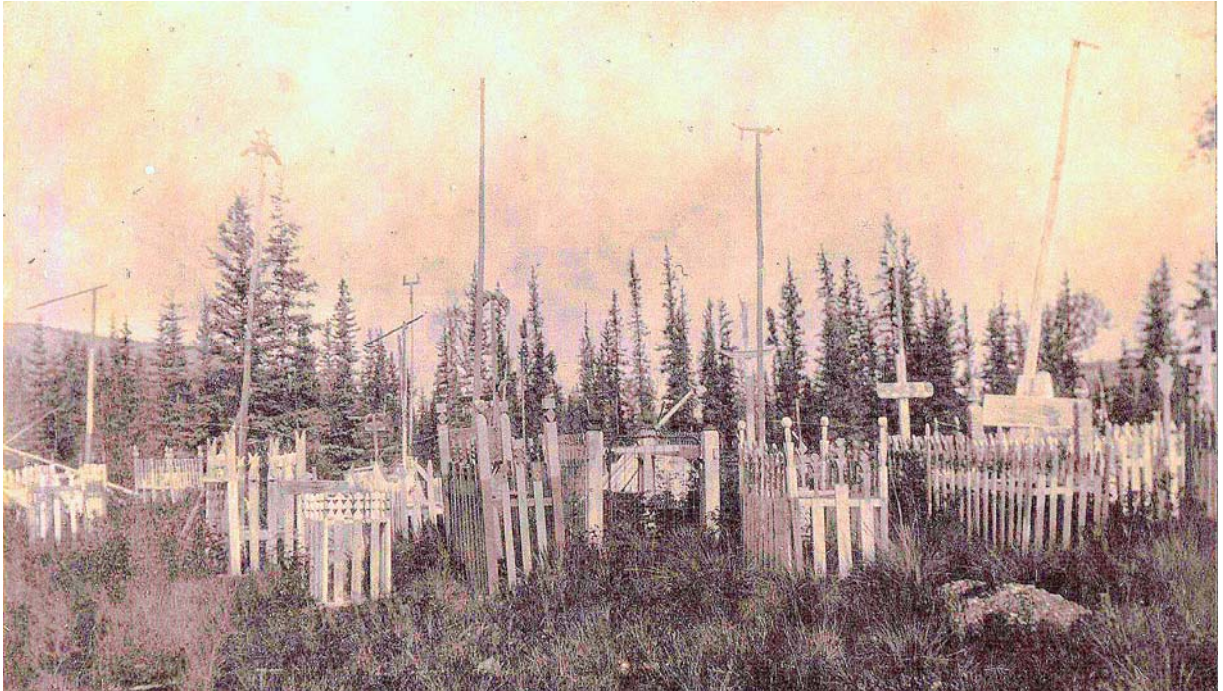


Figure # 397, First Nations graveyard Fort Selkirk. May Menzies fonds 8613, YA.

The two photographs in figure # 398 show examples of the geometric designs that are added to grave fences. These are in the form of a series of circles, triangles and diamonds at the top of the fence boards as well as the geometric shapes at the top of the grave poles. Both photographs are from Fort Selkirk and were taken in the early 1970s.



Figure # 398, First Nations graveyard Fort Selkirk. Left:85/25 Harrington Collection, Vol. 7, YA.

In the next photograph is a grave yard in Hutshi which was an important Southern Tutchone settlement. It was later abandoned because it was not located along any rivers or highways in post World War Two Yukon and thus became isolated.



Figure # 399, First Nations graveyard at Hutshi. MacBride Museum collection Vol. 2, 3861, YA.

There are poles in this photograph but note that the gravehouses are on stilts. Is this reminiscent of the days when we placed the deceased on pole scaffoldings in the branches of trees?

As usual, early Athapaskans used a lot of geometric designs in the graveyards while the Inland Tlingit sometimes depicted various figures. In the next photograph in figure # 400 is an image of birds that was painted on a grave marker. The scene is obscured in the photograph since below the bird are two baby birds in a nest. This image was painted in the same manner as the birds painted on the canvases shown in figure # 330 on page 314. They are both presented crest-like with the head in profile. What makes this image interesting is that Leechman, when he took the photograph in 1948 at the Teslin graveyard, identified the bird as an eagle. Yet Catharine McClellan identifies this bird as Crow with its young. If Leechman is correct, this may be one of the rarely painted eagles. I also tend to think that this bird is an eagle. The deceased person may have belonged to the Eagle clan (Wolf moiety) and it would make sense to have the eagle on his grave marker. There is also a line on the neck which would indicate a bald headed eagle. It is a bit puzzling that the whole head, except the eyes, is painted in solid with a dark colour, presumably black. The photograph is in black and white so the image could be rendered in a dark colour like red. There is another twist as to the identity of this bird. In the Yukon, the Crow is male. On the Coast, the Eagle moiety is also male while Raven is female. Both birds feed the young as parents but I have not come across a story of Crow tending to its young. I have however come across stories of eagles and their young in the nest. The only way to find out for sure if this is an Eagle or Crow is to find out the clan the deceased person was a member of. On the grave marker is written "Mr(s) TOM KOKLAW DEAD Oct. 4. 192_ AGE 80 YRS". See figure # 400 for the photograph of the eagle on the left and my drawing of the bird on the right for clarity. Note that the bird has ovoid shapes in the wings and tail which I am assuming is a reference to the coastal Tlingit use of ovoid shapes in their art.



Figure # 400. Eagle on grave marker. Teslin 1948. D. Leechman's photograph, J2377, CMC & UvK drawing.

The next bird image is on a grave of Lake Laberge area hereditary chief Mundessa, who was born in 1825 or 1826 and died in either 1921, as shown on the grave marker, or in 1925, as is listed in *Whitehorse Area Chiefs 1989 to 1998*. On his stone grave marker, which is located at the Whitehorse Indian Cemetery, is a bird presumably representing Crow and therefore he would have belonged to the Crow clan. The bird is painted in typical Athapaskan style, which is in flight and only in silhouette. The bird is in purple instead of the expected black but the paint may have discoloured over the years. See figure # 401.



Figure # 401. Bird painted on Mundessa's grave marker, Whitehorse, Yukon.

While I have not discovered any carving of wolves in any form I have seen statues of wolves in First Nations cemeteries that were purchased and placed on the graves to represent the deceased person's clan. There seems to have been a tradition in the early twentieth century of purchasing stone statues of wolves as grave markers. Below I show two examples. At the Whitehorse Indian cemetery is a wolf figure on a grave marker. Under it is written "John Sydney died August 2, 1921" It appears to be made of stone and was possibly purchased. See figure # 402.



Figure # 402. Wolf figure at First Nations graveyard. Yukon.

In figure # 403 is another example of an earlier stone wolf. This photograph was taken by Rolf Hougen in 1947 and the Hougen Historical website states: “The wolf statue was located at the Indian grave site on the hill across the Yukon River in Whitehorse. It was vandalized. Rolf Hougen worked with Jim Boss and George Dawson to have another one sculptured but it proved too costly.” Interestingly enough the same Indian grave site was again vandalized in 2004 and all the grave houses, fences and markers were tipped over.



Figure # 403. Wolf figure at First Nations graveyard in Whitehorse, Yukon. Now destroyed. Rolf Hougen photograph.

Closing comments

In this chapter I have looked at various aspects of art used in potlatches and on grave sites. Much of the potlatch and death related art is connected to the clans the people belong to. It is from these ceremonies that we find the strongest examples of early Yukon First Nations visual culture-our art. It was during the potlatches that we showed off our art in a big way, not only visually, such as in the large painted sheets from the Atlin potlatch, but also in music, dance and feasting. Storytelling concludes this package. There was art on our spoons, drums, ganhooks, dance shirts, robes, rattles, masks and other items that made up the complete potlatch. Lastly, the potlatch is that cultural practice of my people that has survived most strongly and persistently to this day.