

Kooteeyaa:
The Travels and Travails of a
Tlingit Totem Pole From Tuxican
(*Takjik'aan*), Prince of Wales Island
in Southeast Alaska

Presentation by

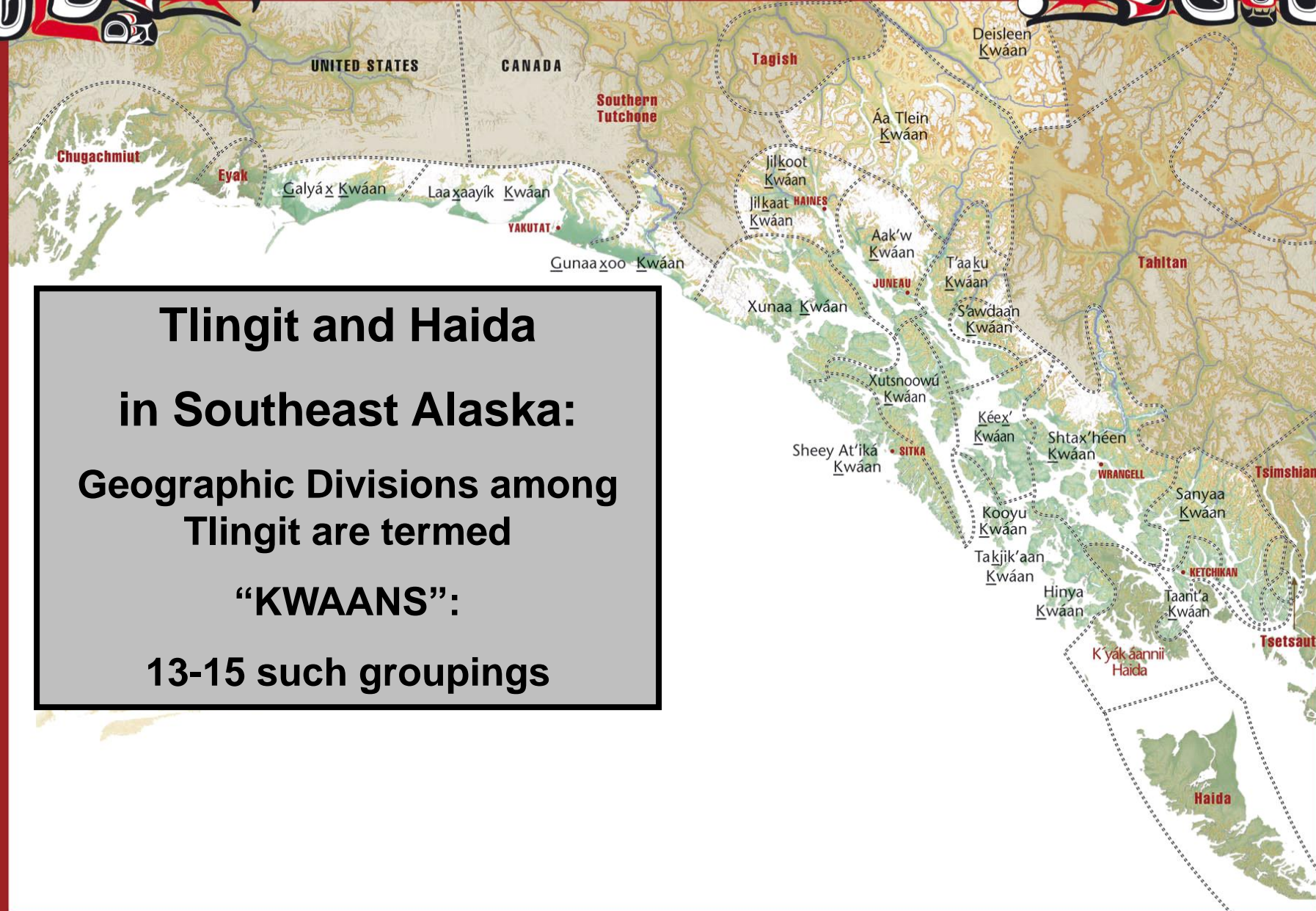
Steve J. Langdon, Ph.D.

Professor of Anthropology University of Alaska Anchorage

UAA Bookstore

March 19, 2014





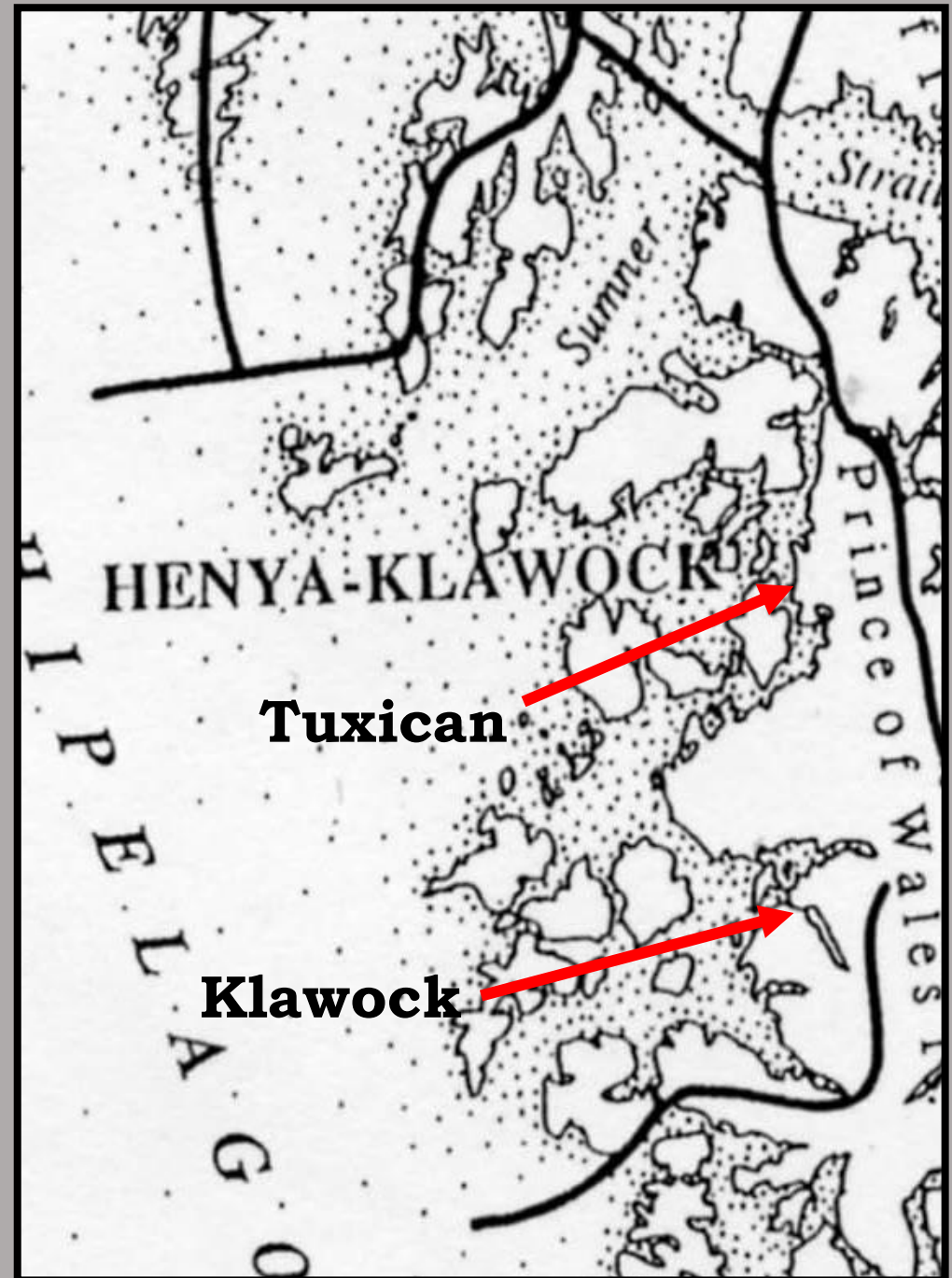
**Tlingit and Haida
in Southeast Alaska:
Geographic Divisions among
Tlingit are termed
“KWAANS”:
13-15 such groupings**

Heinyaa Tlingit:

Location – West coast of Prince of Wales Island

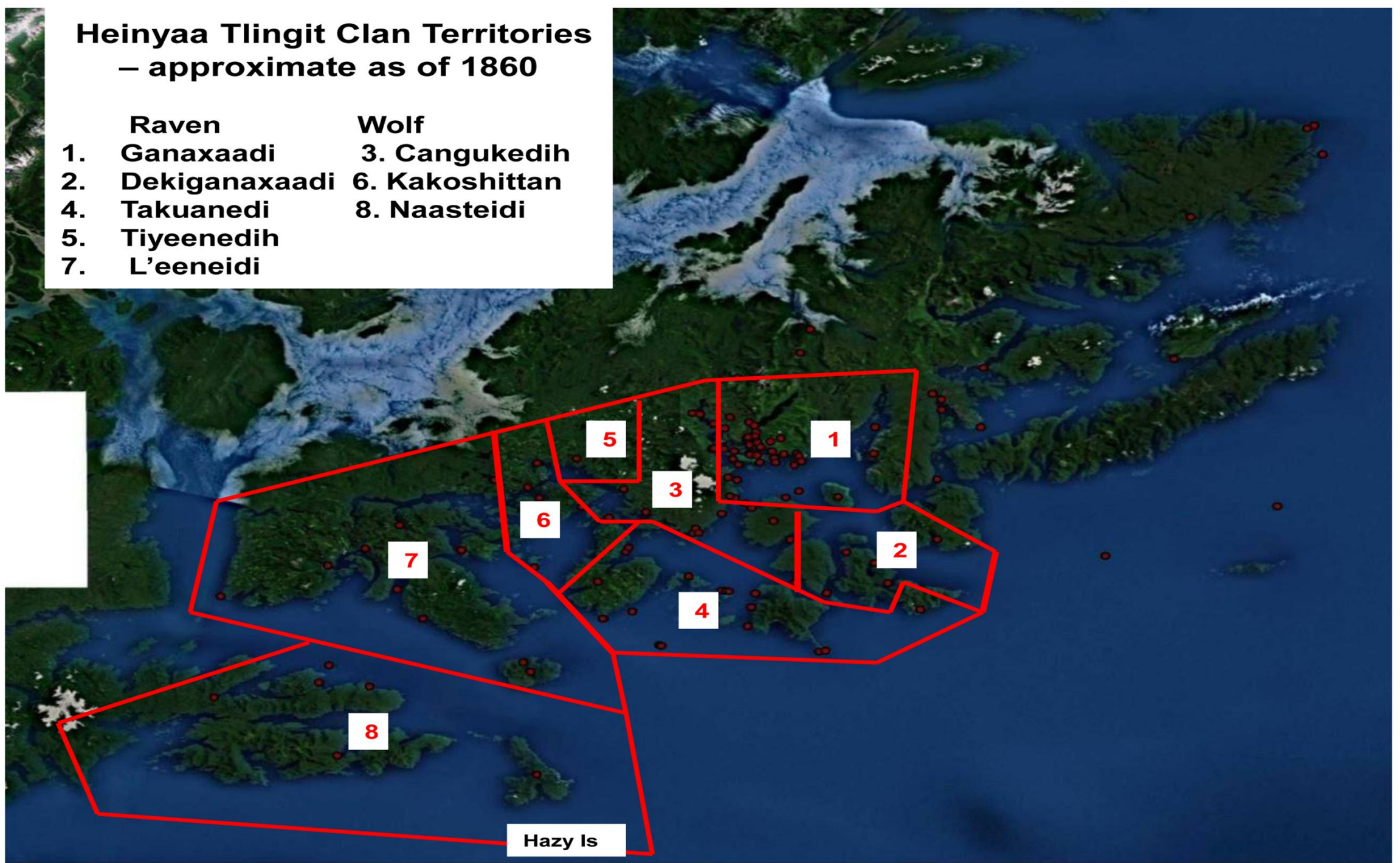
Territory – Combined traditional territories of *Klawock* and *Heinyaa kwaans*.

One translation is “people of the other side”; also known as outer coast people



Heinyaa Tlingit Clan Territories – approximate as of 1860

- | Raven | | Wolf | |
|-------|---------------|------|-------------|
| 1. | Ganaxaadi | 3. | Cangukedih |
| 2. | Dekiganaxaadi | 6. | Kakoshittan |
| 4. | Takuanedi | 8. | Naasteidi |
| 5. | Tiyeenedih | | |
| 7. | L'eeneidi | | |



Significant Tlingit Cultural Concepts

- Kwaan – space, geography
- Descent - matrilineal
- Side – Moiety
- Unit – clan, house
- Residence – houses (named and ranked)
- Personal name – return of deceased ancestor's spirit of same name
- Koo'ex – “to invite”, potlatch
- Kootteeyaa – carved wooden pole raised in remembrance of a person or occasion

Kooteeyaa – Northwest Coast Indian Representation and Western “Art”

- *Kooteeyaa* are a monumental form of Northwest Coast Indian representation that follows distinct principles of formal design. There are different manifestations of carved totems that serve different purposes.
- Early Spanish (Malaspina) and British (Cook) artists were unable to accurately reproduce the images and regarded them as grotesque and ugly.
- While appreciation for them grew in mid-20th century, it was not until the formal analysis of Bill Holm and the popularity of Haida artist Bill Reid that true appreciation of the art form emerged.
- French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss considered Northwest Coast Indian style to be one of the world’s unique traditions of representation, of equivalence to Egyptian and Greek.

HEINYAA KWAAN CLAN STRUCTURE

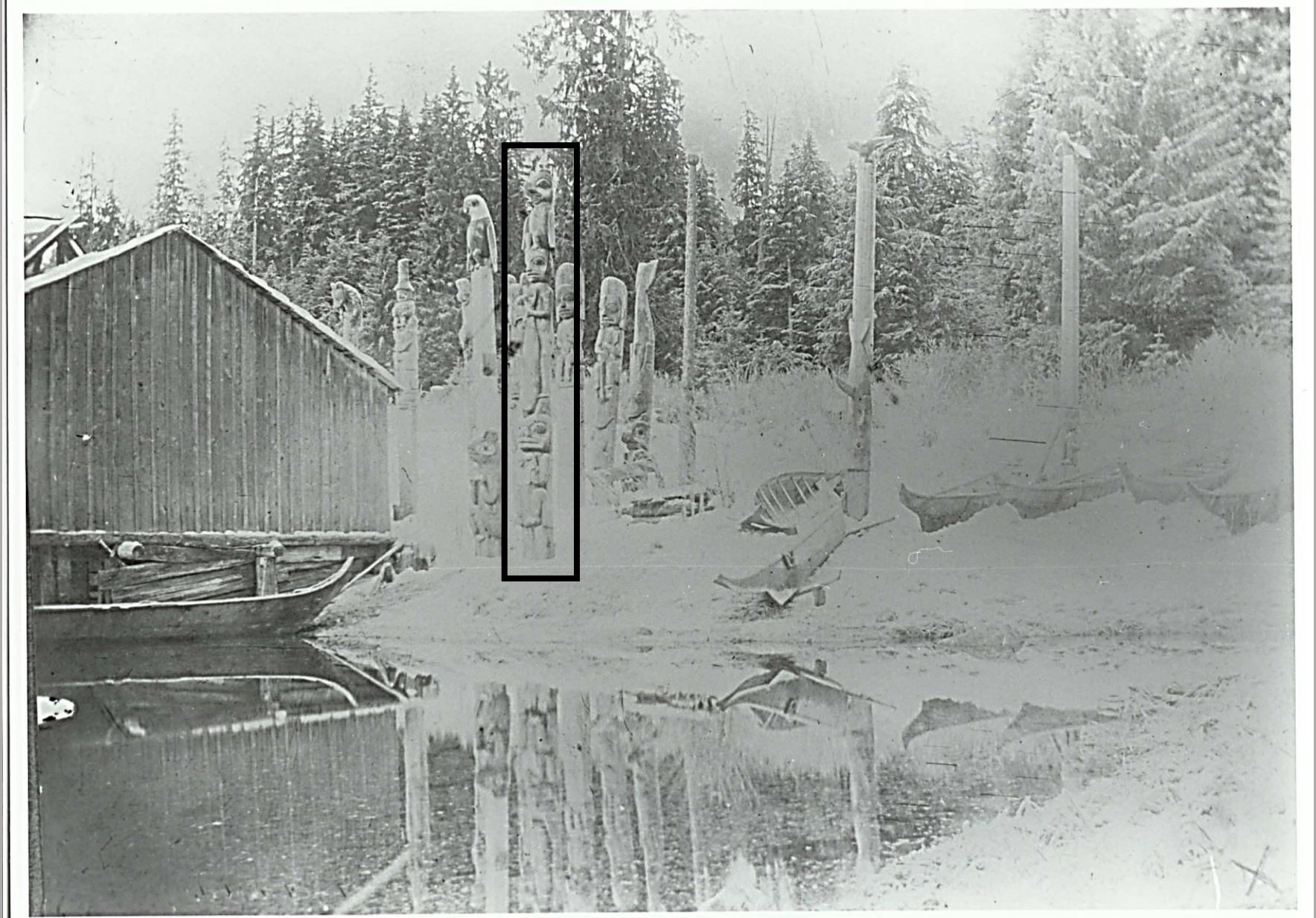
<i>RAVEN</i>	<i>WOLF/EAGLE</i>
L'EENEIDI	KAKOSHITTAN
TAKUANEIDI	SHUNKWEIDI (SHUNGUKEDI)
TIYEENEIDI	TEKWEIDI
GAANAXADI	NAASTEIDI

Takjik'aan –
oldest image
1880s

courtesy
UAA
archives



Poles in
village –
Kooteeyaa
located
prominently,
approximately
1890s



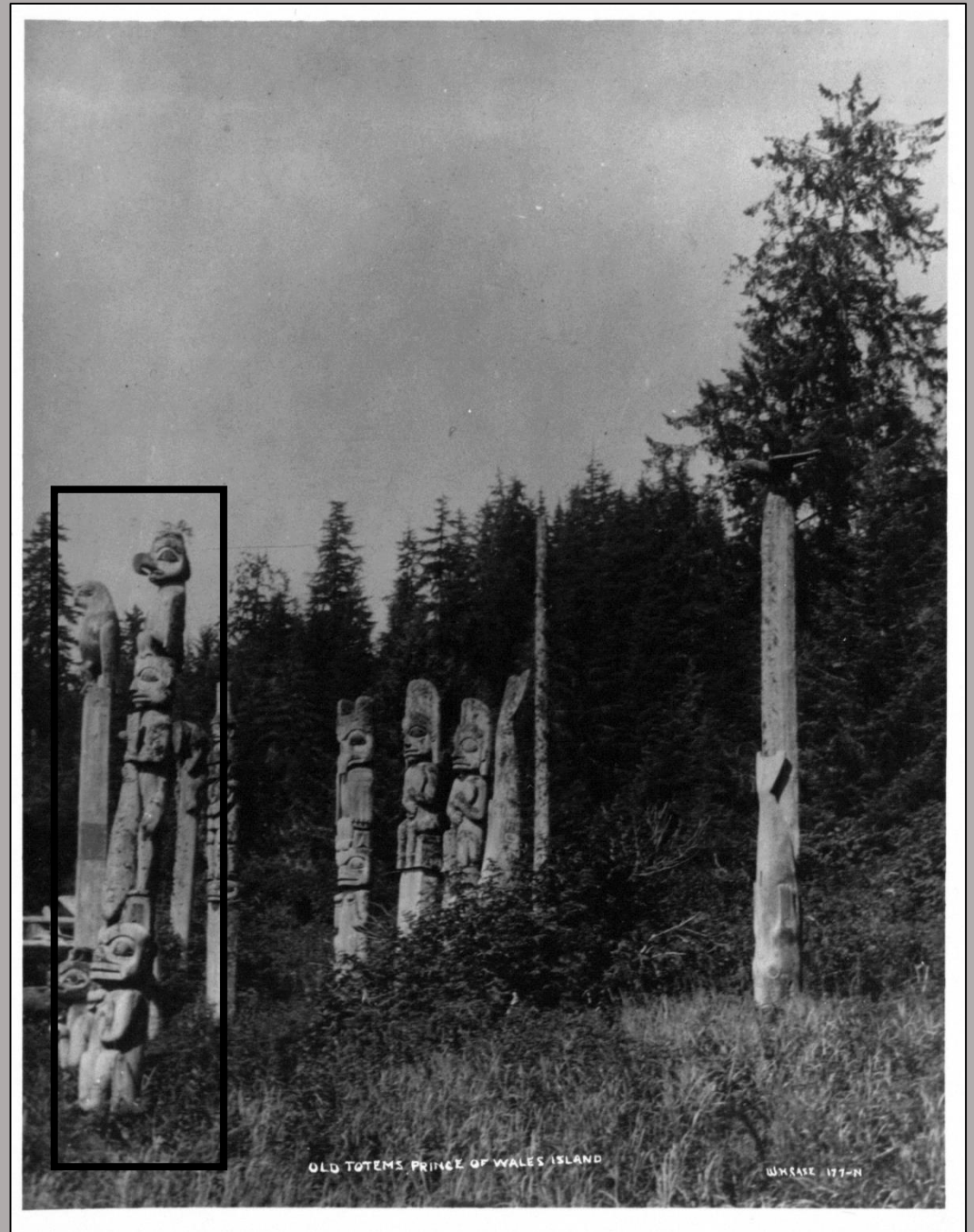
Takjik'aan –
approximately
1900.

Prior to removal
of poles by Gov.
John Brady in
1904 and major
relocation of
villagers to
Klawock and
elsewhere
around 1906.



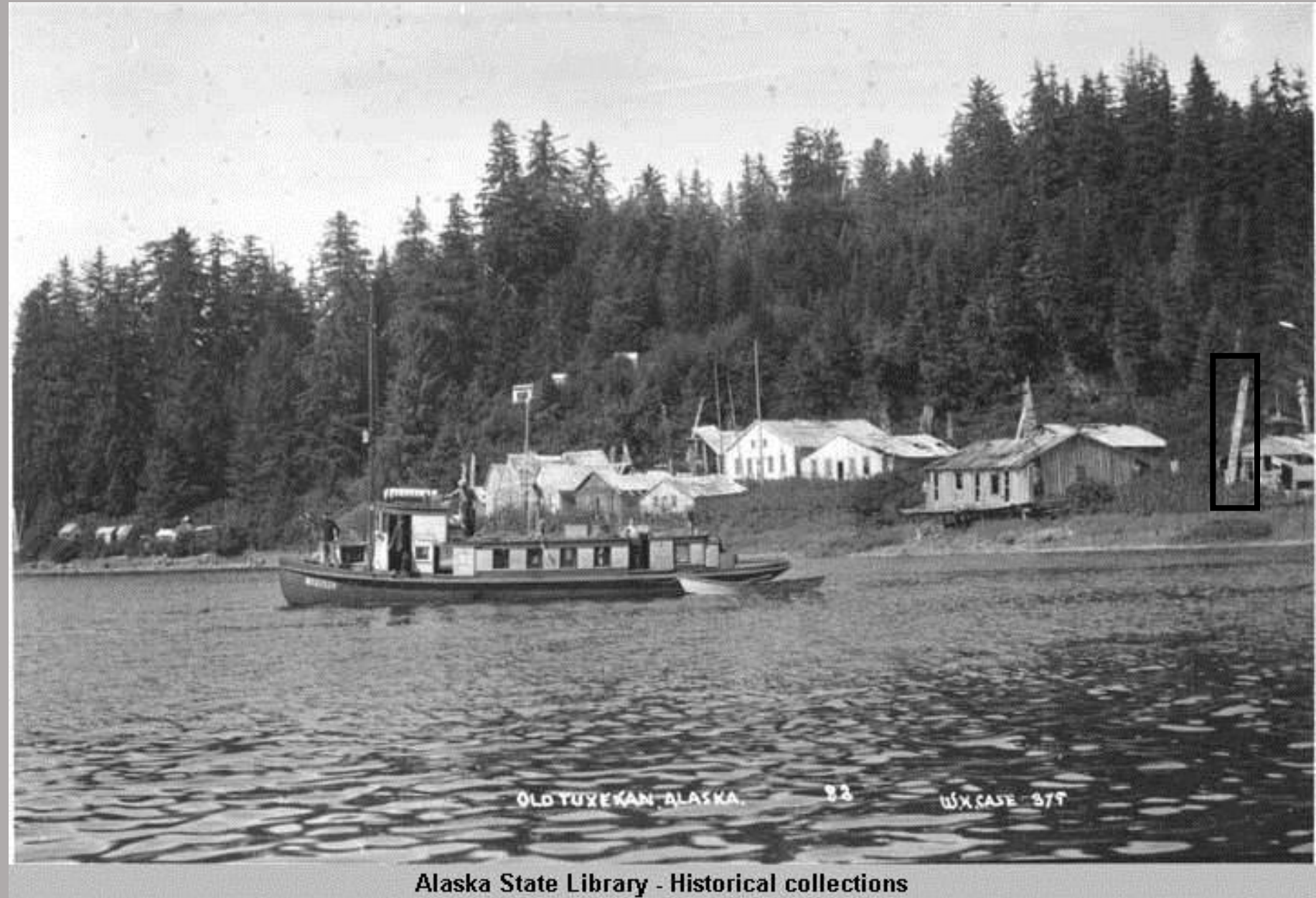
Kooteeyaa still prominent and in association with other poles.

Suggested date by James Simard of the Alaska Historical Library is 1908 based on other images from Case, the photographer dated to same period.



Takjik'aan –
about 1910.

After removal of
poles by Gov. John
Brady in 1904 and
major relocation of
villagers to Klawock
and elsewhere
around 1906.



Carved crest images at bottom
of *kooteeyaa* taken in 1921 –

Courtesy of Denver Museum of
Nature and Science (l ba21-481c, r ba21-481d)



Image of entire *kooteeyaa*
in association with other
poles and house corner.

Image taken in 1921
by Alfred Bailey.

Courtesy of Denver
Museum of Nature and Science



Ethnologist Thomas Waterman's photo of Tuxican in 1922

While *kooteeyaa* is still inferable, other nearby poles have disappeared.

Source: National Anthropological Archives



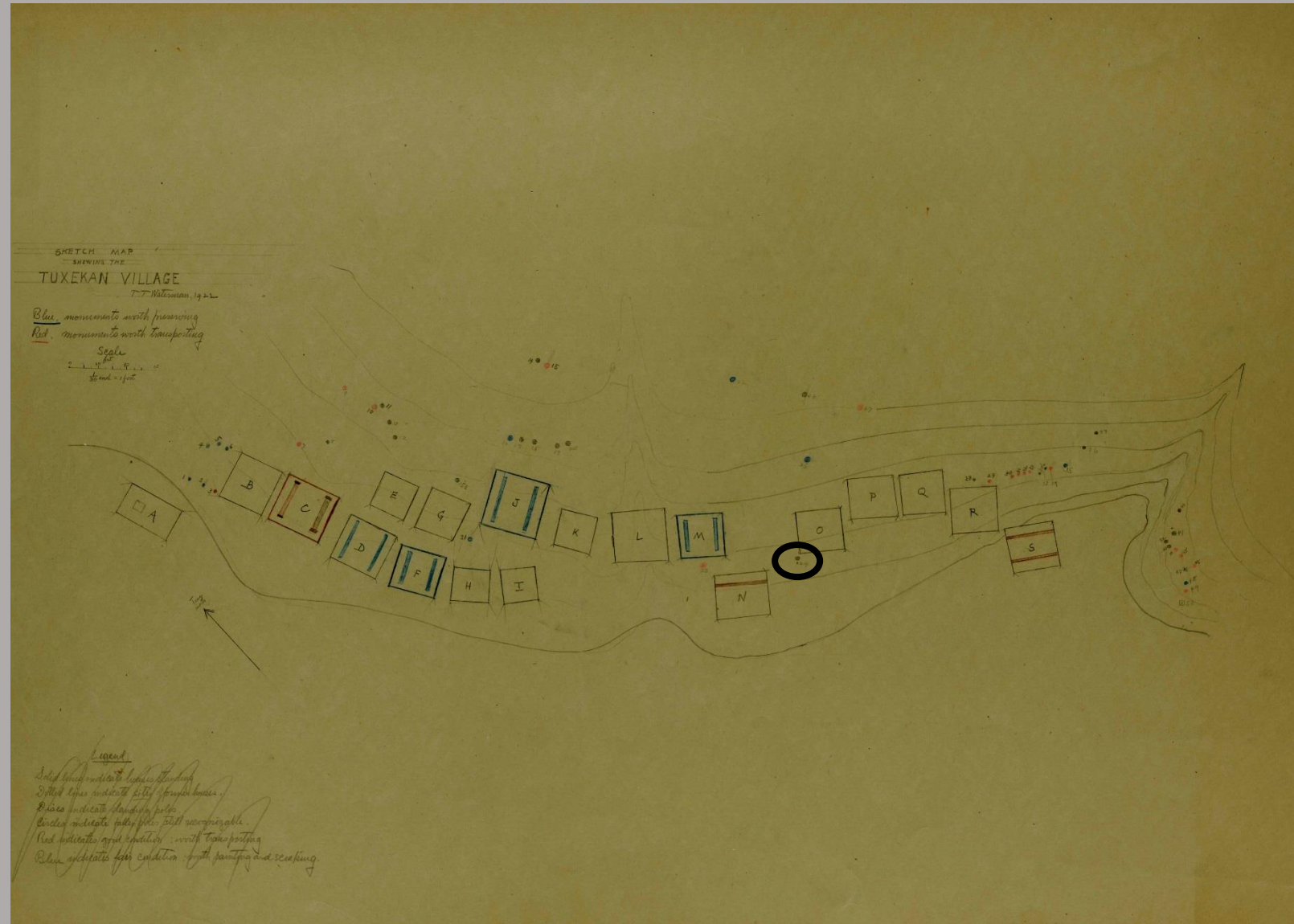
TUXEKAN

TLINGIT : S.E. ALASKA

Ethnologist Thomas Waterman's sketch map of Tuxican in 1922.

While *kooteeyaa* is still inferable (as number 24) but other nearby poles have disappeared.

Source: National Anthropological Archives



Kooteeyaa's crests - alternatives

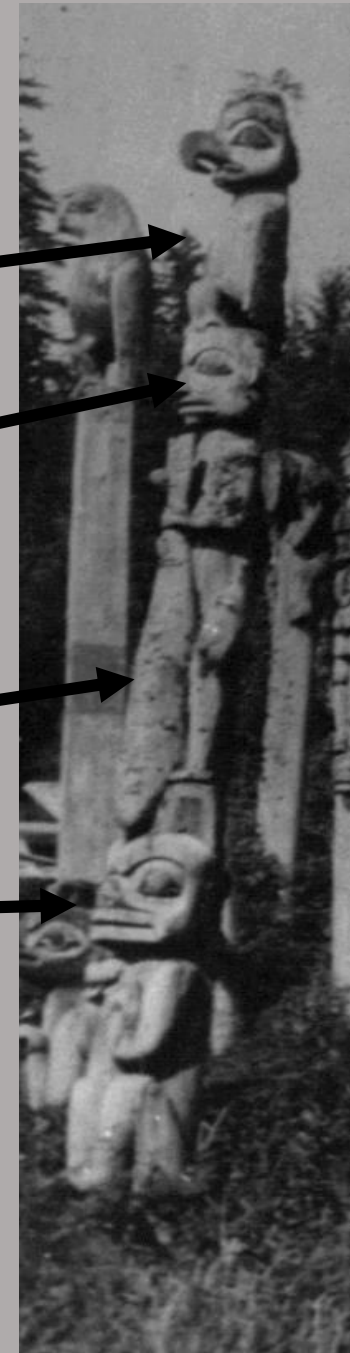
Top image – Hawk, Golden Eagle, Thunderbird

Second image – Man holding tail of sea creature

Third image – Small or female killer whale, pilot whale, shark

Fourth image - Bear

One consultant suggested that Thunderbird, Killer Whale and Bear likely align with *Shangukeidi* clan of the Eagle/Wolf moiety. This clan had four houses at *Takjik'aan* and was the primary Eagle/Wolf clan in *Heinyaa*.



John Barrymore
(1882-1942)

Pre-eminent actor of
his generation

Theatrical – Shakespearean

Movies – Silent and Sound



Multi-family lineage of three generations of Barrymore acting dynasty

John is on the bottom right.

Drew Barrymore is John
Barrymore's grandchild.

According to Greg Mank
she "identifies most with
her grandfather John."



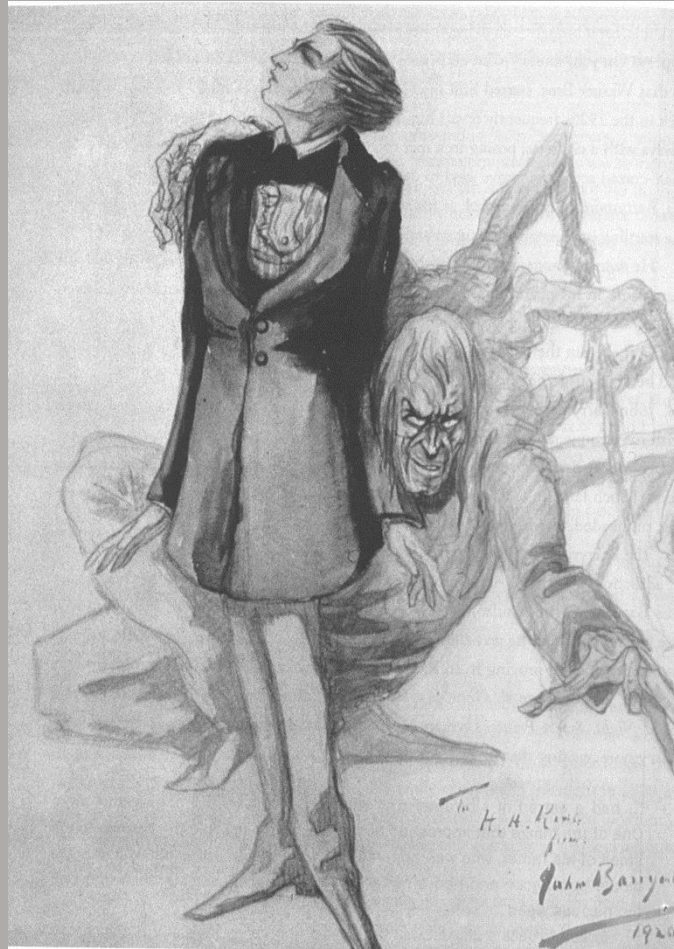
TOP ROW: Grandfather John Drew, Grandmother Louisa Lane
MIDDLE: Father Maurice Barrymore, Daughter Ethel, Mother Georgie Drew
BOTTOM: Sons Lionel and John

Barrymore's most significant roles

Hamlet



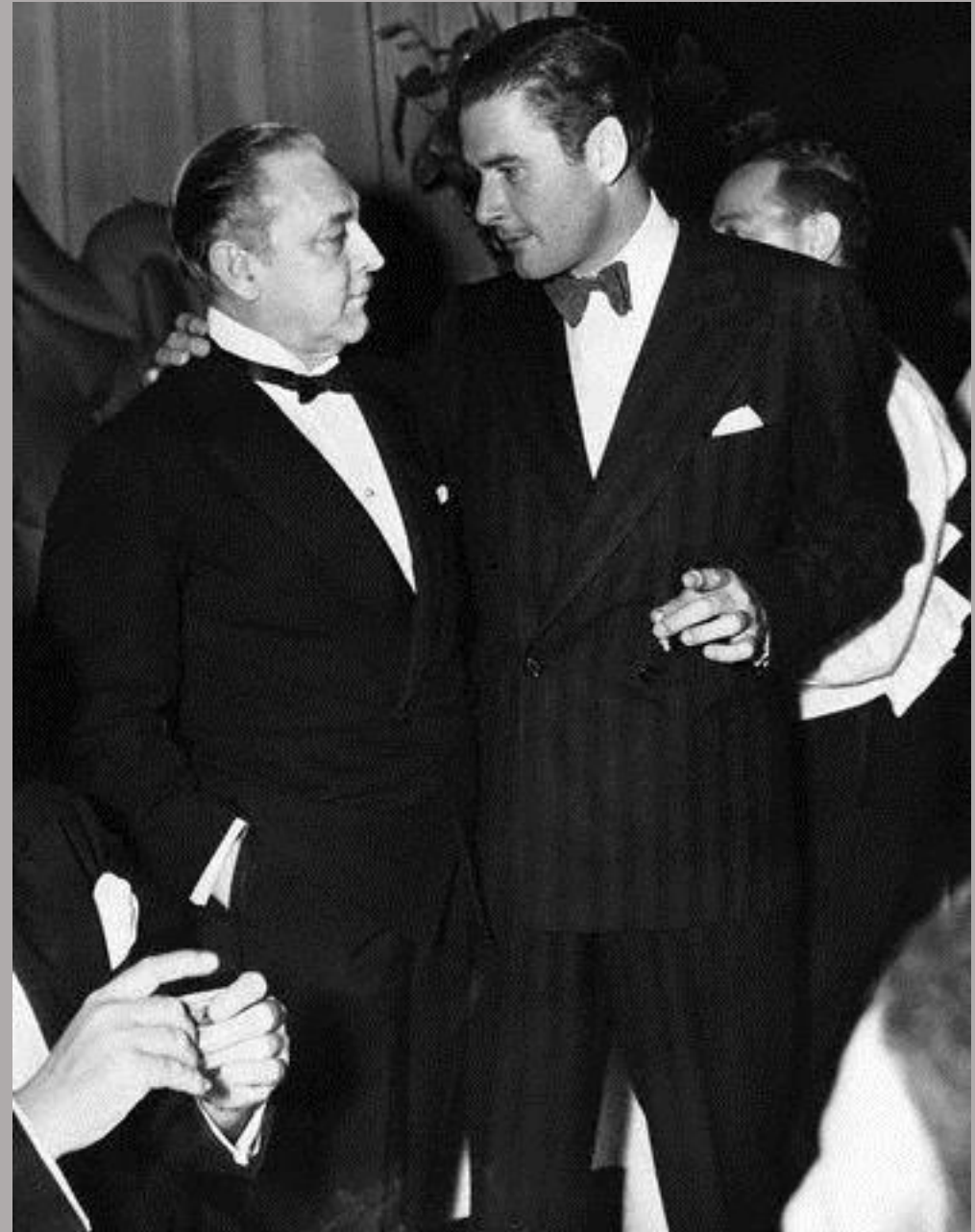
Jekyll and Hyde



Grand Hotel



John Barrymore's home, "Bella Vista", was the site of many events, both stately parties and drunken bacchanals.



Infanta – John Barrymore’s 120 foot long yacht on which he cruised from the Galapagos to Alaska.



He cruised southeast Alaska waters on several occasions – including 1931 when he acquired *kooteeya*.

Barrymore in Alaska

According to biographer Fowler, Barrymore traveled to Alaska in three different years.

In 1931, he came in May and August.

August is likely the time he took this brown bear, perhaps in Icy Strait.

This means he likely obtained *kooteeyaa* in May.



Barrymore's crew preparing to take *kooteyaa* using ropes from the yacht.

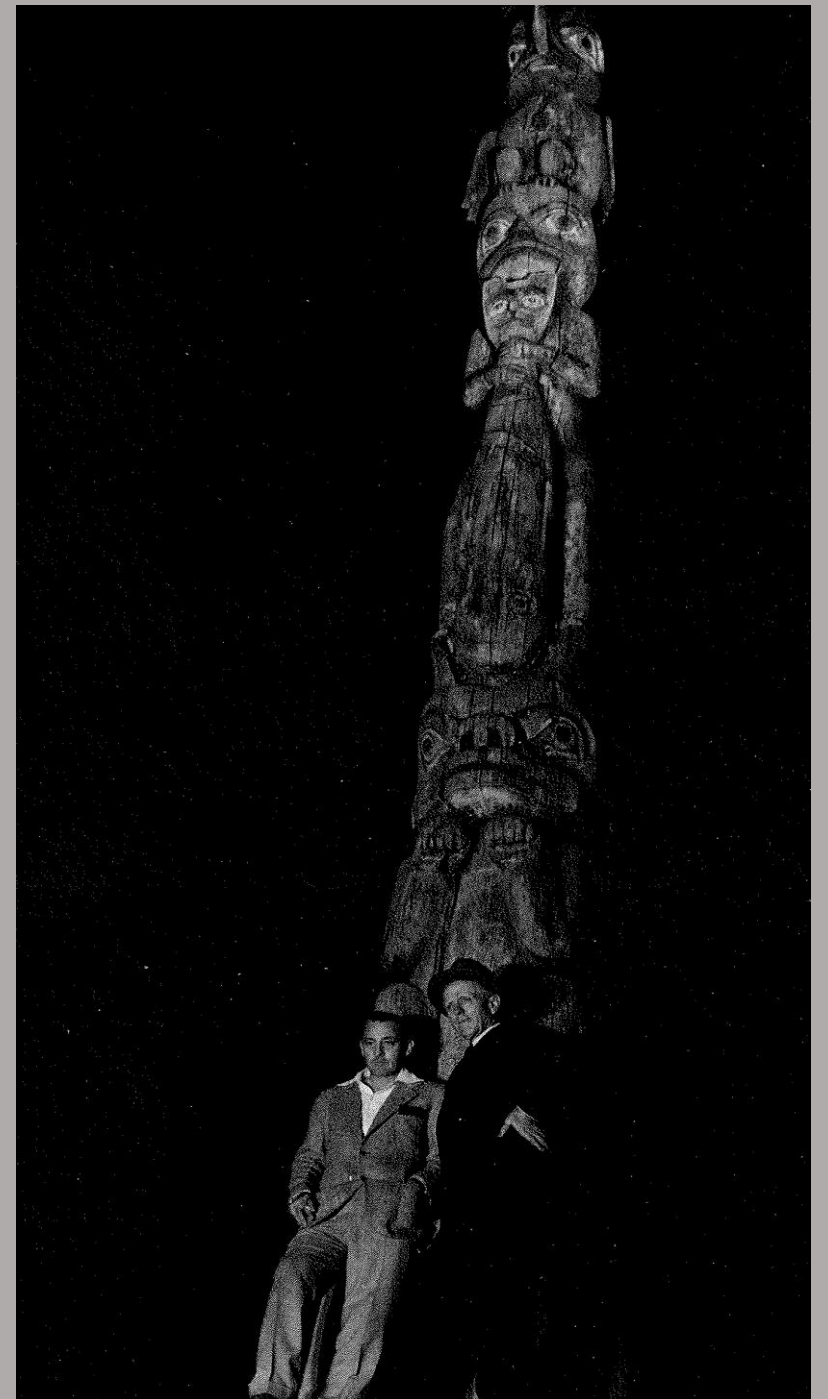
At least five men appear in the image. Four of them are wearing the characteristic scotch cap worn by maritime crewmen of the period.



Kooteeyaa in residence at “Bella Vista”, Barrymore’s Hollywood residence, in mid-1930s (Barrymore is on the left)

The pole was located in a small garden on the side of the house.

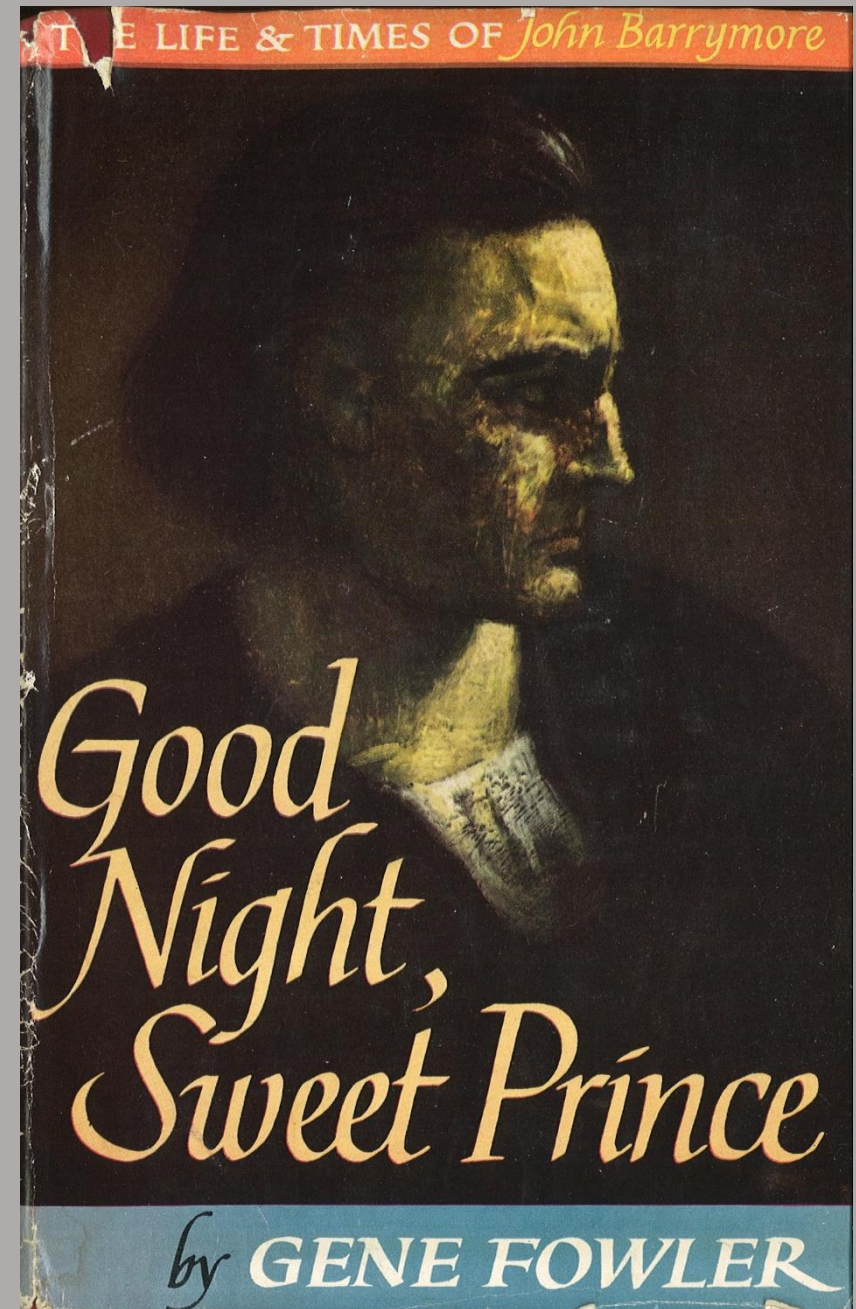
Greg Mank, lead author of “Hollywood’s Hellfire Club” commented that the pole was likely Barrymore’s “pride and joy”. In a fundamental sense it linked the “spiritual and grotesque” that Barrymore was deeply interested in.



Barrymore and Kooteeyaa – Ominous Conjectures: Fowler (1944)

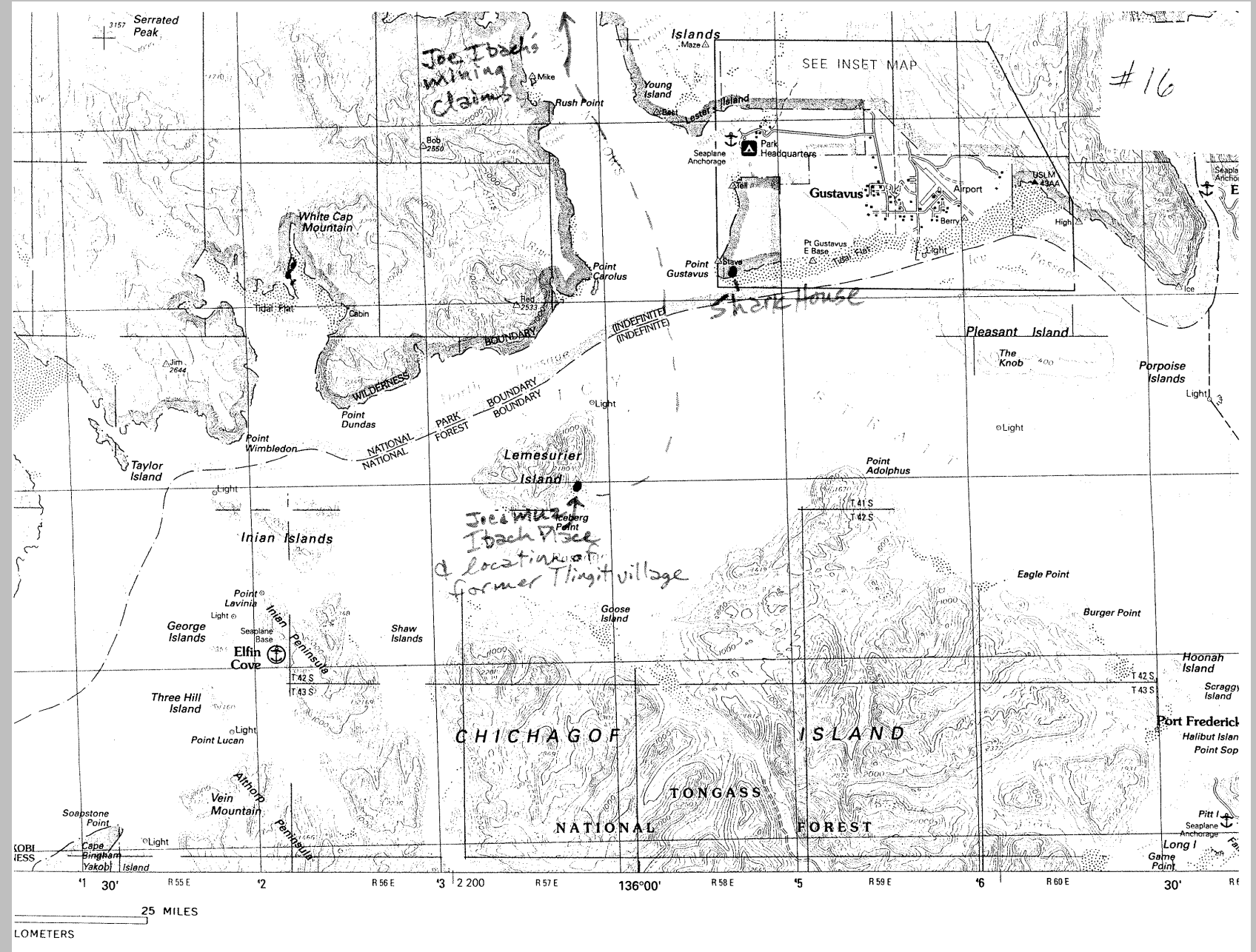
“An American settler on Lemesurier Island, **where Jack acquired a totem pole**, told Barrymore that to remove such a tribal emblem from its appointed place meant bad luck. During the voyage homeward Jack became concerned about what the settler had told him.

Barrymore said that he halfway believed that the tribal gods, in whose behalf the pole had been erected, ‘might take a notion into their whimsical noggins to wreak vengeance on the thief.’” (p. 338)



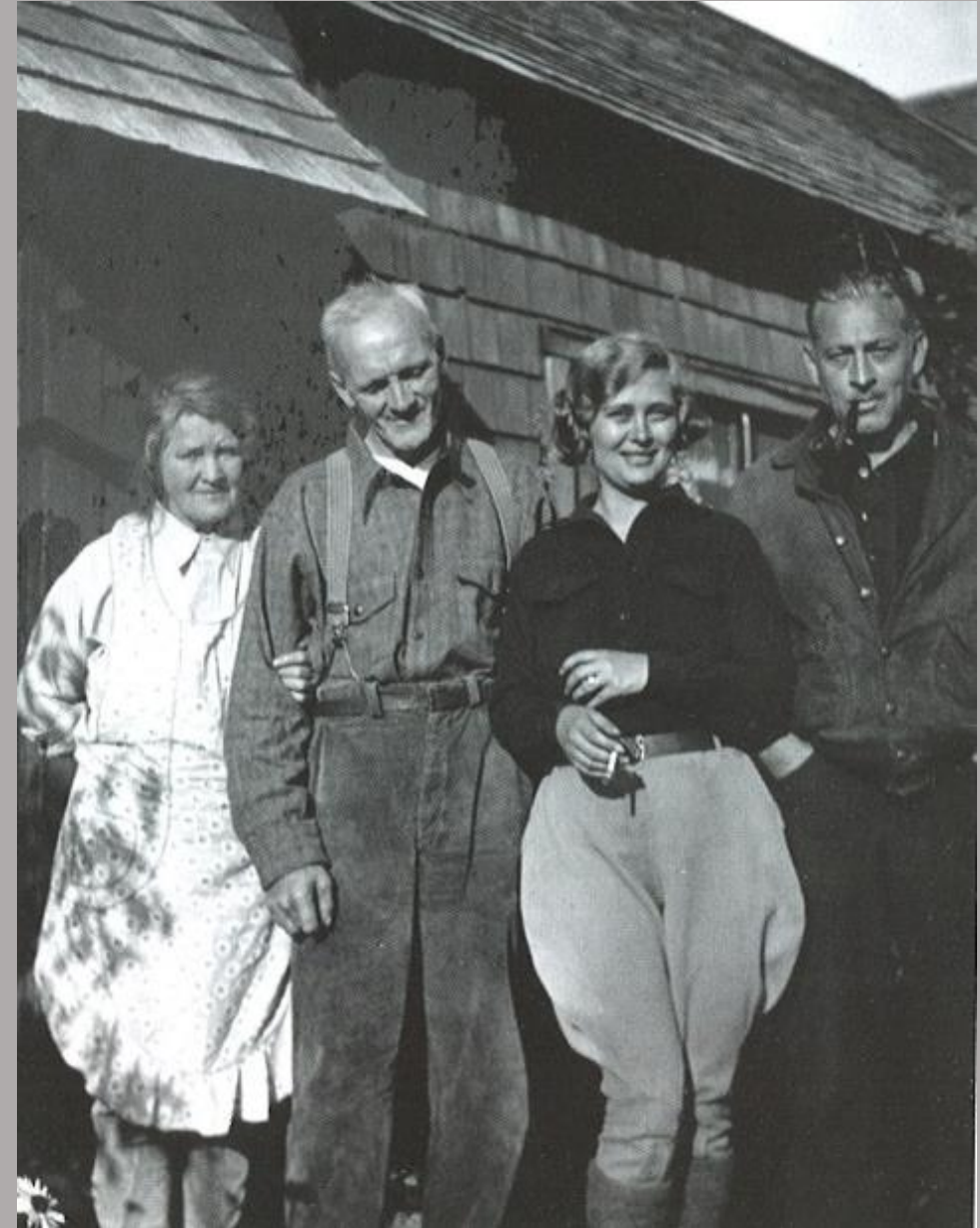
Icy Strait region – home of *Xunaa kaawu* or *kwaan*

Map from Wayne Howell of Glacier Bay National Park shows location of Ibach home and location of former *Wuckitan* tribal house. Shark is a primary crest of this clan and Howell was told by a Hoonah *Wuckitan* elder in the 1990s that a pole with the shark crest had disappeared from the area many years ago.



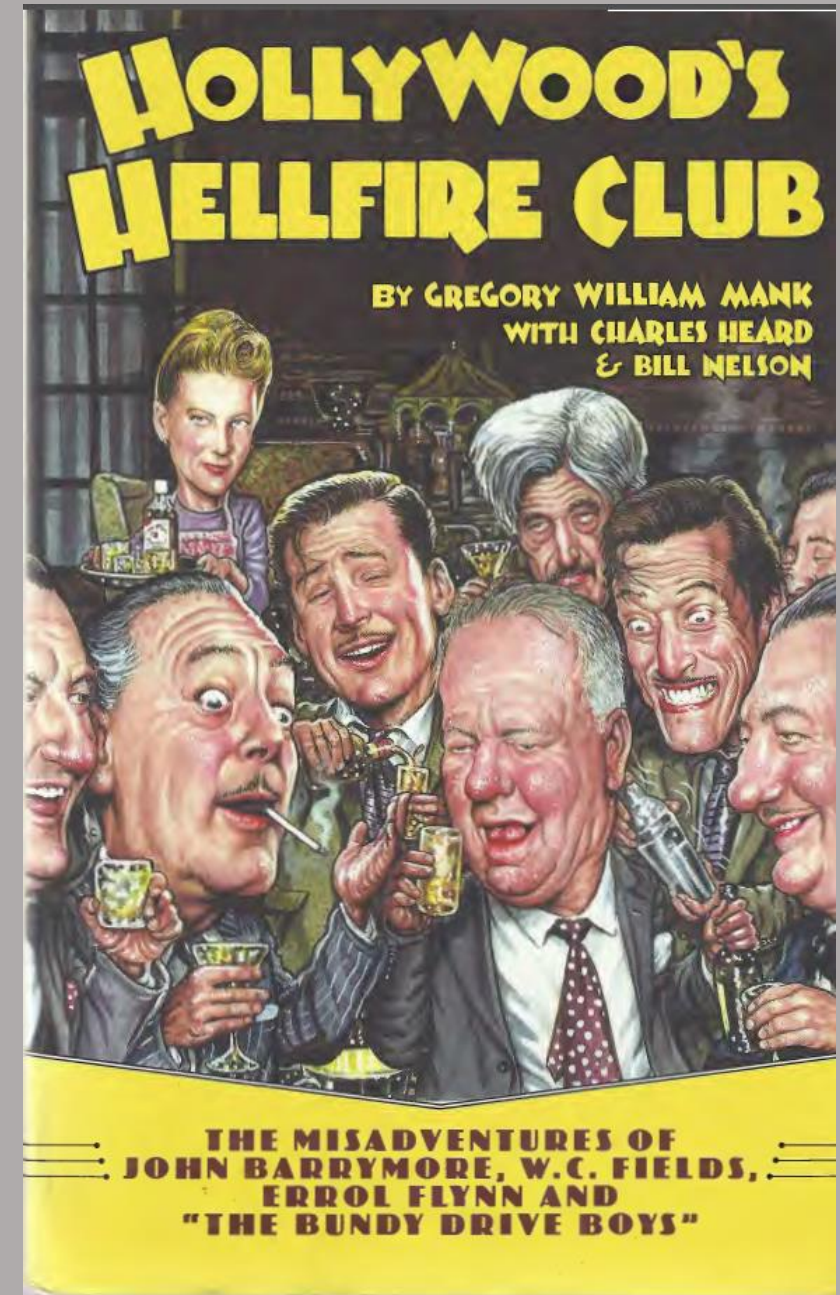
Joe and Muz Ibach – at their cabin on Lemesurier Island in Icy Strait – were friends with Barrymore, pictured here with wife Dolores Costello, who visited them in his yacht on several occasions.

Barrymore commented that the couple were the only “real people” he ever met and the only ones who made him feel like a regular guy, a normal human being. They play an interesting supporting role in the saga of *kooteeyaa*.



Barrymore and *Kooteeyaa* –
Ominous Conjectures:
Mank et al (2007)

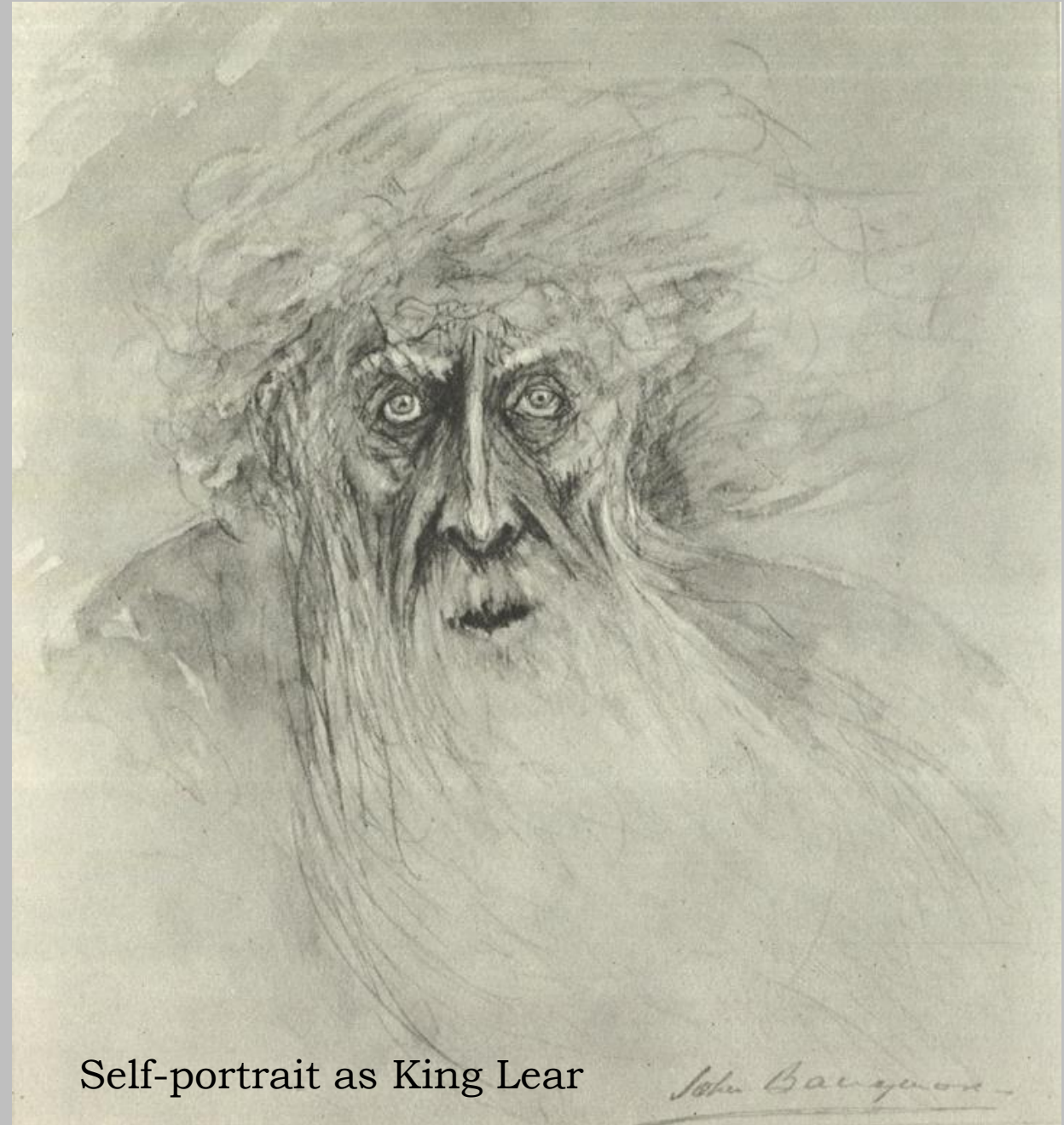
“After a sailing adventure to Alaska in 1931, Barrymore brought home a new acquisition, a towering totem pole, and he erected it to loom over Bella Vista, its painted, **grotesque faces leering** at anyone visiting the No. 6 Tower Road estate. Lionel his brother was concerned. There was, John had learned, bodies of Alaskan natives entombed in the totem pole and Lionel Barrymore feared the curse that it threatened to cast down upon the unbowed head of his brother. Years later, still blamed his brother’s spectacular downfall on the Totem Pole.” (p. 97)



Barrymore's Fate –

At the end of his life, Barrymore's excesses, his alimony and his loss of memory contributed to a downfall from the heights of a decade previous. He died in 1942, dissolute and penniless despite selling off his acquisitions.

Was the curse real?



Self-portrait as King Lear

Vincent Price (1911-1993)

Price obtained a degree in fine arts and developed an interest in “primitive art.” He went on to a career as the best known horror actor of his generation in movies and TV. He was acquainted with Barrymore.



Kooteeyaa in
residence on the
estate of Vincent
and Mary Price in
Hollywood,
pictured about
1959



“Some night, or some dewy dawn,
come over to our house. We’ll give
you a cup of coffee, and after we’ve
worn you to a frazzle with the whys
and wherefores of what we like, we’ll
let you out by the side door. We
don’t have to point it out to you...it’s
hard to miss a totem pole, twenty-
five feet tall...but there it stands in
our back yard for all the world to
see. A totem in your back yard, Mr.
Price?...Of course! Doesn’t everybody
have one?”

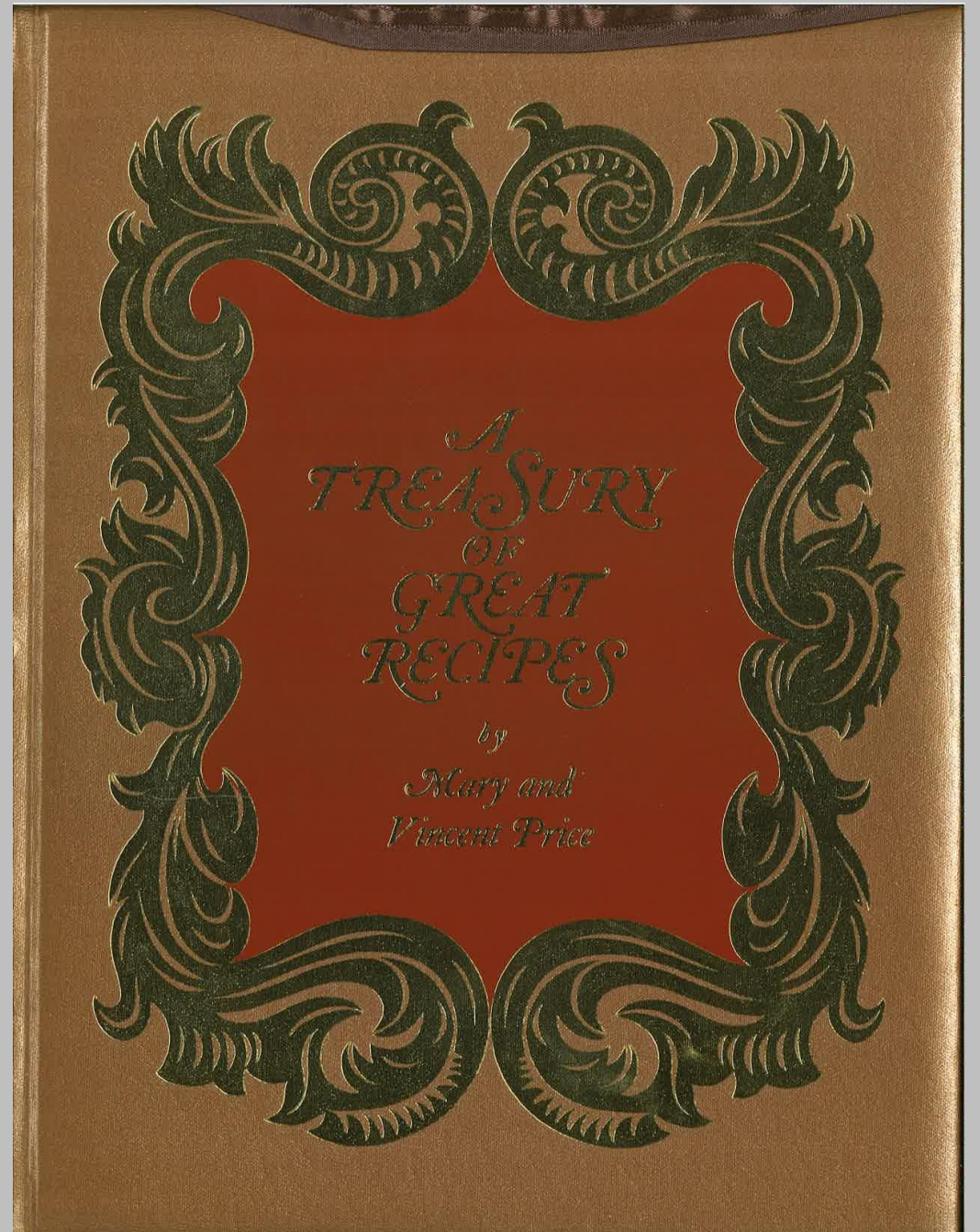
Source: Price, “I Like What I Know” p. 176 (1959)



“A Treasury of Great Recipes” by Vincent and Mary Price

In addition to their art collecting, the Prices were gourmands and purveyors of stylish living to their friends.

Courtesy of Joe Cooper



Kooteeyaa –
luncheon atmosphere for
the Prices:

“We lunch in our garden. Mary has some favorite props. A wondrous scalloped shell heaped with cracked crab, a bronze art nouveau head filled with sourdough rolls and a towering totem pole from Barrymore’s hillside, all glorious aids to happy eating.”



Mary Price was a patron of the arts. After divorce from Vincent she deeded and transferred *kooteyaa* to the Honolulu Academy (later Museum) of Art. *Kooteeyaa* arrived in Honolulu in 1981 and has resided in the basement for the past 30 years.



Expert Report
and valuation by
Harmer Johnson
submitted to
museum at time of
acquisition –
knew it was from
Tuxican and noted
that painted
coloration was
apparent.

HARMER JOHNSON

122 EAST 82ND STREET NEW YORK CITY 10028

(212) 535-4463

September 30th, 1961

This is to certify that I, Harmer Johnson, have examined carefully the Tlingit wood totem pole, the property of Vincent and Mary Grant Price, 10146 Baywood Court, Los Angeles, California 90024.

I further state that I do not have presently, or expect to have, any personal interest in this property other than my fee for arriving at a fair market value. My examination discloses that, as described below, the item is authentic, and of the culture and region ascribed.

The criteria for establishing a fair market value are in accordance with the principles and ethical practices of the Appraisers Association of America and the American Society of Appraisers, and I state that this appraisal report and fair market value have been made in my best judgement and opinion.

AMERICAN INDIAN ART

TLINGIT WOOD TOTEM POLE

Tuxican, Northwest coast of Prince
of Wales Island, Alaska

Fine and important pole carved with seated figure of a bear with raised paws and tall ears, surmounted by a standing figure holding a shark to the front, and the figure of a hawk; with traces of painted decoration. Height 27 feet.

Note: Tuxican was formerly the chief town of the Henya, a Tlingit tribe. Their population in 1900 was about 262.

VALUE: \$90,000.00

Harmer Johnson
Harmer Johnson

Conservator's report at time of museum's acquisition

MAKER: unknown, from Tuxican, the chief town of the Henya, a Tlingit tribe, X
DESCRIPTION: N.W. Coast of PRINCE OF WALES ISLAND, Alaska, circa 1900
TOTEM POLE
carved redwood with traces of polychrome

From top to bottom, the totemic figures appear to be: a hawk mounted on the shoulders of a standing anthropomorphic figure who holds a killer whale or fish form (itself having an anthropomorphic head mask on its tail) in front of him; these are astride a seated bear characterized by long erect ears and front paws displayed against his chest. There are traces of the original coloration, in the bird especially, which indicate that it had blue eyes, bright yellow ochre body, red beak and white embellishments and PERIOD: the whole pole must have had a strong pattern of primary colors in its SIGNATURE OR MARK: original state.

MEASUREMENTS: H. 24-3/4 feet (755 cm.), greatest W. 29" (74 cm.)
greatest D. 28" (71 cm.)

GIFT OF: Vincent and Mary Price, 1981

December, 1981

BOUGHT FROM:

GRANT

DATE:

PRICE: Appraisal made by Harmer
Johnson, N.Y., Sept. 30, 1981,
\$22,000.00

LOCATION:

LABEL:

HISTORY: (COLL.) Was part of the Price Collection housed in a garden for many years.

CONDITION: The piece arrived in three parts. Outdoor exposure resulted in dry rot losses, deep fissures throughout and general surface erosion with loss of polychrome. Extensive damage ^{also} from insects and birds, including woodpeckers, who nested in core.

PRCC has undertaken restoration and removal of previous successive remedial treatments which filled the piece with crudely poured rough aggregates of concrete, rusting nails and bolts and old boards.

1982: PCCR painstakingly removed old repairs and inner support system and new consolidation PUBLISHED: took place. The entire piece was cleaned, revealing more of the original polychroming than was thought to be present.

Top portion of
koooteeyaa on
display at the
Honolulu
Museum
of Art



Kooteeyaa and visitor in April of 2013 –
kooteeyaa's sectioning into thirds for transport resulted in two
decapitations – the bear and human crests. Done by Barrymore or Price.



*Kooteeyaa's treatments –
cement, bolts and iron*



Kooteeyaa
carving
details
important
in
identifying
the probable
crest of the
sea image



Kooteeyaa in the eyes and lives of Barrymore and Price

- Barrymore – extravagant display, grotesque and ghoulish figures to his Western trained eye for art representing spiritual powers unknown. His taking is an example of the arrogance of the age – no attempt was ever made that is apparent to contact relevant parties or acquire information.
- Price – trained in art and was on the leading edge of encountering “primitive art”; he acquired an admirable collection but always viewed it through the lenses of “art” and had no sense of origination and purpose, no curiosity.
- Neither owner made any effort to understand its cultural origins or role in the culture of the creators.
- Museum thought the piece was from British Columbia during NAGPRA even though had been identified as Tlingit from Tuxican in their own records.

Kooteeyaa's Future?

- A number of possibilities are being examined from return to recarving
- Honolulu Museum of Art is willing to listen to proposals
- Klawock Cooperative Association is aware of its existence and considering what to do
- Tlingit people do want kooteeyaa to return.