

# The Centennial Totem Pole

Three figures are depicted on the totem pole:

A thunderbird with a bear on its belly

A raven with a salmon in its beak

A killer whale (orca) with a man on its back



## HISTORY

In 1967, to commemorate Canada's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Columbian Newspaper initiated the Centennial Totem Pole project. The paper commissioned four totem poles, one for each community in their newspaper distribution area: Burnaby, Coquitlam, New Westminister and Surrey. To raise funds for the project, the paper sold shares for \$1.00 per inch of carved totem pole. As one ad stated, "You can own shares of this authentic hand carved totem pole that will be a permanent centennial memorial as well as a lasting tourist attraction (Columbian Newspaper, 1967)".

A certificate was issued to commemorate the purchased shares. This fundraising effort resulted in \$4,610 being raised towards the project. Surrey residents bought the most with 1805 shares, followed by New Westminister with 1378 shares, Coquitlam with 752 shares and Burnaby with 675 shares.

Originally, the poles were meant to be 100 feet tall, but due to the lack of sizable timbers and on the advice of the carvers, a more reasonable height of 25 feet was chosen.

Three carvers, known for their carving skills, were hired for the project. Coquitlam's totem pole was the work of John Edward (Ted) Neel, Lloyd Wadhams and Robert (Bob) Whonnock.



Source: Don Cunnings collection, City of Coquitlam Archives

## 1. COQUITLAM

POIRIER COMMUNITY CENTRE, 630 POIRIER STREET

Originally located south of its present location, it was moved during the construction of the Dogwood Pavilion and Poirier Community Center expansion.

## 2. NEW WESTMINSTER

CENTENNIAL LODGE, QUEENS PARK, 238 FIRST STREET

Located at Centennial Lodge in Queens Park, New Westminister's totem pole was carved by Lloyd Wadhams and Bob Whonnock.

## 3. SURREY

MUNICIPAL CENTRE, 14245 56 AVENUE

The totem pole is located at the old Surrey City Hall and was carved at Guildford Shopping Centre by Ted Neel.

## 4. BURNABY

NO CURRENT LOCATION

Originally erected on Burnaby Mountain, Burnaby's totem pole is now in storage. It was carved by Lloyd Wadhams and Godfrey Hunt at the Simpsons Sears store.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

### LLOYD WADHAMS SENIOR | 1938 – 1992

Lloyd Wadhams Senior was the eldest child born to Don and Mary (nee: Dawson) Wadhams. Lloyd learned to carve on the beaches of Alert Bay. Sitting in Charlie James' carving shed, Mungo Martin and James Sewid taught him the traditional art form. As a child he used to watch them carve with his uncle Don Dawson and his cousin Amos Dawson. Every day they would carve little canoes and totem poles to sell to tourists.

Lloyd carried on the tradition of teaching carving to his cousins, nieces and nephews of the Shaunessy and Sewid families. Lloyd sold most of his work to galleries. As a commercial artist he was constantly experimenting with tools and methods to produce his art. He worked mostly with wood, silver, gold and print media.

At one time Wadhams lived in Maillardville, a neighbourhood within the City of Coquitlam known for its French heritage.

### JOHN EDWARD NEEL JUNIOR | 1939 – 1971

John Edward (Ted) Neel Junior was born on January 4, 1939 in Vancouver, BC. Born to Ellen Kakasolas (Newman) and Edward Lyle Neel, he was the second oldest of seven children.

John began designing, painting and carving around the age of 10, as part of his family's Totem Art Studio business. His mother, Ellen Kakasolas Neel, taught her children the artistic traditions of their Kwakwaka'wakw lineage. Working alongside his older brother, Dave Neel, and younger brother, Bob Neel, John quickly mastered the basics of formline design, and quickly started work on larger commissions such as masks, plaques, welcome figures and totem poles. Throughout the mid 1940's to late 1950's, John also worked alongside his parents, brothers, and younger sisters in producing thousands of 'model totem poles' and other hand-carved pieces for the Vancouver tourism and souvenir market.

### ROBERT WHONNOCK | DATES UNKNOWN

Robert (Bob) Whonnock is a Kwakwaka'wakw carver whose fine art is sold around the world. Very little is known of Whonnock's personal life.



Dedication ceremony at Poirier Community Centre

Source: Don Cunnings collection, City of Coquitlam Archives

## REFERENCES

- » The Columbian Newspaper clippings, 1966 – 1967.  
Source: Centennial Scrapbook, Don Cunnings collection, City of Coquitlam Archives.  
Source: The New Westminster Museum.

*Special thanks to Cheryl Wadhams and Lou Ann Neel for sharing their stories and personal histories, giving much needed context to this project.*