

# A History of the Four Story Totem carved by John Wallace

*(story adapted from writings of E.L. Keithahn, curator of the former Territorial Museum)*

Hydaburg carver John Wallace placed four stories on this totem pole which he carved in 1940. It was purchased in 1962 by the Juneau Rotary Club and erected at its present location at the top of Seward Street in Juneau on June 9, 1963 at which time it was presented as a gift to the City of Juneau.

Sometime around 1820, the Haida of the Queen Charlotte Islands began carving objects of art from local black argillite which is an easily carved stone when wet. These pieces were made strictly for trading purposes and had no totemic significance although generally carved in the art style of totem poles.

A popular item was what they called a "Story Master." It looked like a totem pole but, strictly speaking, it was not one. It merely portrayed a Haida myth by a series of carved memory devices or illustrations placed one above the other. Reading from the top down, the characters in the story appeared in sequence.

John Wallace made many small story masters of argillite. It was he who designed the Four Story pole which was carved full size in red cedar about 1940. For the first time he put four stories on one pole, thus creating a story book the way Haidas would have had to do it before writing was introduced to them.

The uppermost story entitled "The Monster Frog," concerns the top four figures. They are a frog, a man, a raven and a monster frog.

The next story is called "The Man with the Fish Trap" and is represented by the Bear Chief, a vee-shaped fish trap and a bear.

The third story concerns a Shaman or "Medicine Man" and is called "Tcaawunk and the Land Otter Men." It is represented by a Shaman holding a dead otter.

At the bottom is the final story which is called "The Shaman at Island Point Town." The illustrations of this story are the Black Oyster Catcher Rattle, octopus, halibut and a halibut hook baited with a supernatural mouse and its spirit.

## *The Monster Frog*

There was once a man of the Raven Clan who lived at Cape St. James. He had once been a successful sea otter hunter. But for a long time he had experienced very bad luck and had killed no sea otters. Finally his nephews, who made up his crew and paddled for him, gave up hunting in disgust and left him alone. Without men to paddle the large dugout canoe out to sea, he could no longer hunt and consequently became very poor.

Finally, the unlucky man's wife offered to paddle the canoe for him and they set out to hunt together. The weather was calm so they paddled far out to sea, beyond the sight of land.

Presently, his wife called his attention to something lying on the water, asleep. It was huge and green colored, but neither of them had any idea what it was. When they got close enough, the man threw his harpoon and then, as the animal struggled to free itself, they saw that it was a monster frog.

While he was clubbing it, his wife asked what it was. "Do not ask me to explain what I say," he said, "but this frog is my uncle's nephews who have put themselves together."

When the hunter and his wife got back home, he pulled the monster frog up on the beach. Then all the villagers came down to see what he had brought in. Suddenly they realized that he had killed the Crest animal of their clan and they begged him not to bring it into the village.

Since the hunter had killed it, he was entitled to use it as his crest and that would have shamed the Frog Clan. So they bought it from him for a great deal of property and he was poor no longer.

## *The Man with the Fish Trap*

A man once built a fish trap in a salmon stream and caught many salmon. But one day the black bears discovered it and began to steal the fish. This made the trap owner

very angry. One day, catching the thieves in the act, he shouted such awful insults at them that they were terribly offended.

The bears decided to punish the man who insulted them and one day two of them caught him and carried him away to their village. He was held prisoner in Bear Town for a long time but was always looking for a way to escape.

One day, when the bear chief was bathing, the man ran off with his hide. Putting it on like a fur overcoat, and aided by hair combings and bear scent which he dropped behind him as he fled, the man escaped to his canoe and paddled away.

When the bear chief came out of his bath and missed his fur coat, he knew who had it and ran after the man. But when he reached the shore which the man had just left, he began to melt away and presently the man found a dead bear in his canoe.

Having lost their chief, the black bears gathered into a huge army to make war on the human beings. But the people were warned of their approach. To defend themselves, they built ten stockades, one within the other. In the war which followed, the bears threw down all of the stockades except the innermost one where the people were hiding. However, in fighting up to the last stockade, the bears had lost so many of their army that they lost the war. Then the people had more bear meat than they could eat.

## *Tcaawunk and the Land Otter Men*

While Tcaawunk was still an infant in his cradle, his parents took him along when they went after mussels. Once they forgot him on the beach and had to return for him. They found him sitting up in his cradle performing like a shaman before an interested audience of ravens.

When they heard of this incident, the villagers became suspicious of Tcaawunk and blamed him for every

death that occurred in the village thereafter. When he was old enough to go live in his uncle's house, only his youngest aunt would feed him. Finally he was run out of the village and had to live in a bark hut at the edge of town with his grandmother.

One day he saw a heron with a broken bill. When he told his grandmother about it she said he should try to repair it. So when he saw the heron again, he sharpened its beak and the grateful bird thanked him, saying, "I will help you, grandchild."

As the boy grew up, his grandmother showed him how to make deadfalls in which to catch bears. He made ten and caught so many bears that he filled his grandmother's house with hides, fat and smoked meat.

When Tcaawunk became a young man, his grandmother would catch him at night performing like a shaman. Questioned about this activity, he confessed that he had gotten the power after he had sharpened the heron's bill.

Convinced that her grandson was now a genuine shaman, the old woman made him a shaman's apron out of a mat and fringed it with puffins beaks. She also made him a soul catcher and Tcaawunk completed the outfit by making himself a drum and a rattle.

At first the other shamans thought Tcaawunk was a fraud and made fun of him. But as time went on, his fame spread and the people came to regard him as the greatest shaman of them all.

One day while in a trance, he learned that the Land Otter People were coming to get him. He asked his nephews to go with him to beat the drums but the Land Otters put them all to sleep except the youngest one. At midnight they came in, and putting the shaman and his nephew in the bottom of their canoe, face down, they took off. Actually the land otters were taking them through the kelp beds of the sea to the entrance of their hidden underground village.

When they arrived at the town, sparks were flying from the smokehole of a large community house and a crowd of people were standing before it. But Tcaawunk put his bird rattle on the ground. It walked up to a different house and Tcaawunk and his nephew followed. Inside the house the shaman saw great many Land Otter Shamans gathered around a sick man who was groaning. A

bone spear was sticking in the man's side but they could not remove it. The Land Otter People had purposely stood before the wrong house to test Tcaawunk's magic. When he went straight to the right house, they knew he was genuine.

Tcaawunk recognized the wounded man as a white land otter that someone in his village had speared a few days earlier, but had escaped. Now he knew why he had been carried away.

When Tcaawunk was ready, he danced around the fire while his nephew drummed. Suddenly he stopped and pulled out the spear and the man stopped groaning. Then he started dancing again. Suddenly he stopped again and stuck the spear back in the wounded man's side causing him to groan again.

A great crowd of people were watching. One of the jealous shamans pushed the nephew away from his drum but the boy kept on beating. Then the jealous ones cried, "Tcaawunk! Great Shaman! Tcaawunk!" That night Tcaawunk awoke in cramped quarters. He tried to stretch out but found he was tucked among the roots of a great tree. When daylight came he found himself in a house again. Two carved wooden halibut hooks were hanging from the rafters. One on which a halibut was carved had a real halibut on it. A fresh cod hung from the other hook on which a land otter was carved. Tcaawunk was given the fish for his breakfast.

On the second night he performed again. Repeatedly he withdrew the spear and then thrust it in again. Now they began to offer him property. They gave him many elk hides and boxes of grease but he wanted more. So he made strong medicine and threw it on the shamans. They nearly choked from the stench. Then large clams and small clams spurted water on him. The jealous shamans had made everything hostile to him.

Finally Tcaawunk thought, "If they will give me those magic halibut hooks, I will save the chief's son." The Land Otter shamans read his mind and the magic hooks were given to him. Satisfied, he pulled out the spear for the last time and the Land Otter Prince was saved.

The next night the Land Otter men took Tcaawunk and his nephew back to their village. They launched a big canoe and loaded the elk skins and boxes of grease in it. Tcaawunk got in holding the precious magic halibut hooks in his hands. When they got to Tcaawunk's village the Land

Otter men left the goods the shaman had demanded for his pay, including the canoe, and hurried away in the night.

When daylight came, Tcaawunk went out to take a look at his loot. But to his great dismay, where the elk hides had been stacked, there was now only a pile of seaweed. The boxes of grease were nothing but giant kelp heads filled with sea water. And during the night, the fine dugout canoe had turned into a rotten log. Even the magic halibut hooks had disappeared completely.

"You can trust no man," said Tcaawunk in disgust.

### *The Shaman at Island Point Town*

Many years ago a starving time came to the people at Island Point Town who lived on halibut. The weather had been so stormy that nobody could go fishing and all the dried halibut in the village had been used up. But, worse than that, all the octopus that they had always used for halibut bait had disappeared. Without bait, they could not catch any fish even if the storm let up.

One day when hope was nearly gone, they noticed one of the men acting strangely. They thought he had lost his mind. Then they realized that he was becoming a shaman or medicine man. He put on an apron such as the shamans wear and carved a rattle in the form of a black oyster catcher. Then, as he shook the rattle and sang a strange song, a supernatural mouse began to speak through him. In order to save people from starvation, the mouse offered to change himself into an octopus so the people could use it for bait to catch halibut.

When the shaman came out of his trance he went down to the rocks and caught the octopus and gave it to the people for bait. This he did a number of times, knowing that it was actually a mouse with which the hooks were baited.

This benevolent shaman never died but eventually turned into a large rock which stands in front of town. Whenever it is too stormy to fish, the people put their halibut lines around this rock as he had directed, and paint its face. This brings fair weather so the people can go fishing and since that time there has never been another starving time.