

After 88 years in Greeley, a campus icon will return home

Tlingit Totem

The story of how the Bear Clan Totem, which generations of UNC students called Totem Teddy, disappeared from its home in Angoon, Alaska, is lost in the mists of time. Some say a smallpox epidemic early in the 20th century forced the Tlingit Indians to abandon their village. When they later returned, the totem was gone. Others suggest that profiteers spirited it away in the middle of the night.

This much we know is true — it arrived in Greeley on the back of a trailer shortly before Christmas in 1914. Alumnus Andrew Thompson, then superintendent of schools in the southeastern district of Alaska, shipped the totem to his alma mater as a gift, perhaps as the start of a museum collection. Contemporary reports are vague on the details of how Thompson came by it.

But after 88 years on campus, during which he went from college icon to relative obscurity, the totem formerly known as Teddy is heading home. A delegation of members of the Tlingit tribe of Alaska visited campus in March to see if a part of UNC's history was also a part of theirs. Satisfied that tribal and photographic evidence clearly shows that the totem is indeed the Bear Clan Totem, the Tlingits filed a cultural resources claim under the auspices of

the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, enacted by Congress in 1990.

The university will honor the claim, says UNC President Kay Norton, who became involved when she was the institution's general counsel.

"It's absolutely the right thing to do," Norton says. "The totem is clearly an important cultural and spiritual artifact to the Tlingits, and that is where it belongs."

Over the years, Totem Teddy has had several homes on campus. Its most recent is in the atrium in the University Center. It was a touchstone for generations of university students, who used it as a gathering place and celebrated it as a point of pride. During the early 1960s after then-President William Ross had sequestered the totem in storage due to the abuse it was getting from weather and rival schools, Michael Sheehan (BA-63) launched a petition drive to bring it out of hibernation. "I wanted to see the totem back on campus before I graduated," he says. He gathered more than 1,000 signatures and marched into Ross' office to demand Teddy's return to campus. Ross glanced at the petition and told Sheehan, "Why didn't you just ask?" It was soon reinstated, and housed in the ballroom in Gray Hall.



Photo by John Blake

No such drive was necessary for the totem's most recent repatriation. The claim clearly makes the case for Tlingit ownership.

The exact timing of its return has yet to be determined, but it is expected to be before winter. Both the Tlingit and the university are working to obtain grants or gifts to help with shipping costs. The totem will return to Angoon, its home in Alaska.

The UNC Alumni Association is looking into the possibility of making a replica of the totem that would stay on campus.

The Tlingit discovered that the totem was in Greeley when a UNC alumnus, Peter Corey, from the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, Alaska, mentioned to members of the Tlingit tribe that a totem resided at his alma mater.

Harold Jacobs, cultural resources director for the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indians of Alaska, says the totem's return will be welcome, though not all entities that have Tlingit artifacts have been so forthcoming about repatriation. A delegation from the tribe visited campus in March.

"We had a good reception when we were there," he says. "Every place should be so cooperative."

Jacobs says some museums will not acknowledge claims the tribe has made on

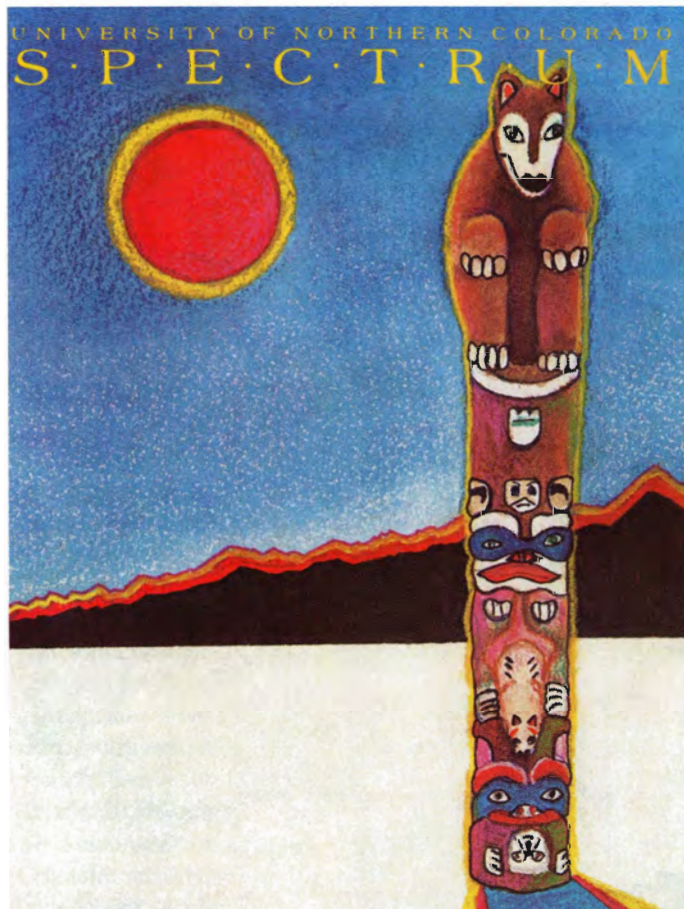
artifacts. Others, however, have been cooperative. Nearly 100 ceremonial and spiritual items have been returned in recent years, including totems, headdresses and ceremonial robes. Members of the Bear Clan

cate a new clan house until the totem is returned.

The pole that has so much significance for UNC has even greater significance for the Tlingit. The story the totem tells is that Kaats, the upside-down man

which covered him and protected him. They fell in love, and had two bear cubs. Meanwhile, Kaats' human wife sent the dogs to search for him. But the dogs did not have the proper preparation (fasting and abstaining

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A painting of Totem Teddy by Carol Knapp featured on the inaugural issue of Spectrum April 1988.

have yet to determine where the totem will reside when it comes back, he says. They have delayed plans to dedi-

ate the bottom of the pole, went hunting with his two dogs for bear. He fell into the den of a female bear,

from their mates) and could not see Kaats in the bear's den. When a dog with the proper preparation found Kaats, he was returned to his wife, but was responsible for bringing the bear cubs' food and was not allowed to talk with his human wife. The arrangement worked while the cubs were small. Soon, however, Kaats' human wife insisted that he stop ignoring her.

When he did, and broke the bond with his bear wife, the cubs tore him limb from limb. The bear wife was devastated, and tried to reassemble Kaats and restore his life.

Unsuccessful, she sang a lament that the Tlingit sing to this day. It is considered the anthem of the Bear Clan, which regards bears as grandparents.

And while the bear is also highly regarded at UNC, returning it to Alaska is the right thing, says Norton.

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Totem Teddy has had a colorful history at UNC

Life at the top

By Mary Linscome

From his perch atop a 15-foot-tall totem pole, the bear that was the inspiration for UNC's athletic mascot has seen much in 88 years. He's watched soldiers head off to two world wars, seen the university cope with the Great Depression and viewed countless fads and fashions with a detached stoicism. But all the while, the bear may have longed to return home. When Totem Teddy returns to Alaska sometime in the coming months, it will close a nearly nine-decade chapter in the university's history.

The Greeley segment of the Totem Teddy saga began on graduation day 1897, when 44 students became alumni of the Colorado State Normal School. One, Andrew Thompson, went to Alaska, where from 1908-10, he was superintendent of schools in the southeastern district, headquartered in Juneau. Annual reports of the Commissioner of Education in 1910 and 1911 paint grim pictures of Indian life in Alaska. They relate how Bureau of Education personnel were

responsible for educational, sanitary and social work among the natives, with the goal of nurturing them into American ways of life. The

The first mention of the Bear Clan pole in Greeley appeared in the Christmas issue of the school's newspaper/magazine, *The Crucible*,

1914, "The Totem Pole and Totemism." Professor Edwin B. Smith, using the College's experiment in simplified spelling, writes: "Thru his residence and travel among the Alaskan Indians, Mr. Thompson was enabled to procure this fine specimen of the totems which are common among the natives of the northwest. An estimate of the value attached to such an emblem of a primitive people is indicated by the efforts of the University of Oxford, England to secure an Alaskan totem." Smith relates that students, faculty

and alumni were interested in building collections for the Greeley school's several departmental museums, perhaps explaining why

Thompson would send his old school the totem pole; how he came to possess it is still unknown.

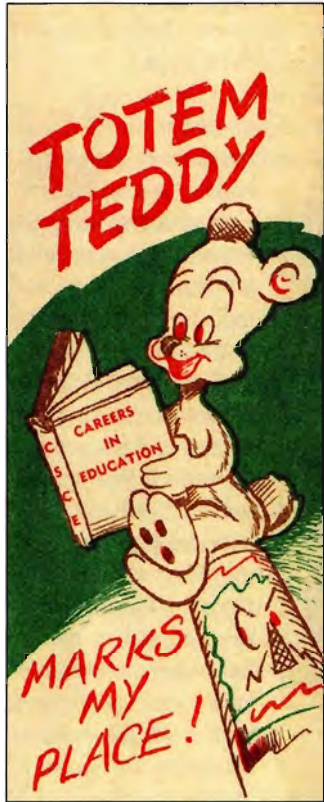
Thus, as the *Mirror* of Nov. 11, 1923, relates, the "Teachers" became the "Bears" when in 1923 the lettermen of the college formed a club to advance athletics on campus. The group's first action was to decide upon a name more "indicative of the fighting spirit." The totem became the visible rallying point for school spirit from that time forth. No record exists of how Totem Teddy got his name, but the "Teddy Bear" phenomenon was certainly a part of American culture from 1902, when President Theodore Roosevelt spared the life of an orphaned bear cub while hunting in Mississippi, an event depicted in a famous cartoon that began the "Teddy Bear" phase of American history.

Over the years, the *Mirror* has carried a steady stream of news about Totem Teddy. As early as 1927, woodpecker damage to his back was reported, and students adorned him with a metal vest to protect against this vicious predator. In 1947, after having just had a new, and for the first time, technical paint job, Teddy was kidnapped and not recovered until he was found almost a month later on the oval at Colorado State University, 35 miles away. The next year the original bear, severely



Photo courtesy of UNC Archives

educators spent as much or more time with adult and family groups outside of school as they did with children in the classroom.



he remained there for over three years, lost to an entire generation of students, but saved for many more. In 1962, Michael Sheehan led a student drive to return Teddy to campus. 1,252 of the institution's 4,479 stu-



The Bear Clan totem, Angoon, Alaska, circa 1890.

the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska came to Greeley to determine if the totem belonged to the tribe. They noticed several things. First and most important, it is the same totem that left Alaska

so many years ago. They expected the pole to be taller than it is. An 1890 photograph of the pole as it stood in Angoon shows several bear tracks just below the bear seated on top. A 1914 photograph in UNC Archives clearly shows only one bear track. The representatives also mentioned the current colors on the

stuff of family history and were published in a 1987 book entitled "Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives" by Nora and Richard Dauenhauer.

UNC is not alone in returning sacred objects to the Tlingits. Chicago's Field Museum returned a 26-foot pole with an eagle theme; Harvard University's Peabody Museum returned a 20-foot pole depicting a bear emerging from its den; Cornell University returned a 25-foot pole with eagle, bear and halibut figures. The Smithsonian Institution returned a 45-foot pole, a wooden bear grave marker and several other objects. In Colorado, the Denver Museum of Science and Nature and the Colorado

pecked in spite of his armor, was moved into a glass case in the Carter Hall library. Outside, a 600-pound cement replica supported in part by a steel rod embedded in the pole occupied Teddy's position on top of the pole. By 1953, Teddy had been moved from his original position in front of Cranford to a new place of honor outside of Bru-Inn, the popular student cafeteria in Gray Hall. While there he was sawed in half, toppled, set afire, tarred and feathered and generally vandalized by school rivals.

President William Ross had seen enough. Teddy was removed to a campus warehouse for repair and storage;

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dents petitioned the president for Teddy's release. The totem was moved into the Student Union until the new University Center with a centerpiece atrium designed especially for Teddy was completed. Indoors, he led a safe and secure life.

During spring vacation, 2002, four representatives of

pole are not Tlingit colors. The group sang songs and told stories about the figures on the pole, the Tlingit way of proving ownership of ancestral objects. The totem's story is of a man who marries a she-bear. Through the children of this marriage, all members of the Bear Clan are related. The details of the story are the

Springs Fine Arts Center have returned, or are in the process of returning materials. For many years, students in Greeley have enjoyed the world-class company of Totem Teddy. He will be missed. ■

Mary Linscome is archivist in the James A. Michener Library at UNC.