Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl)

Name
The name Kwakiutl (pronounced kwak-ee-YEW-tul) has two meanings: “smoke of the world” and “beach at the north side of the river.” In the past, the name referred to all the related tribes or groups, those who spoke the Kwakiutl language and the individual band. In the early twenty-first century, the only group to bear the name Kwakiutl is the band located at the village of Fort Rupert, British Columbia. Since the 1980s, members of the Kwakiutl First Nation have called themselves Kwakwaka’wakw (pronounced kwalk-walk-ya-walk or kwalk-walk-ya-walk-wuh), which means “those who speak the language Kwakwala.”

Location
For centuries, the Kwakwaka’wakw lived along the Northwest Coast in British Columbia, Canada. Kwakwaka’wakw communities existed at Queen Charlotte Sound on northern Vancouver Island, on various small islands around Vancouver Island, and on mainland British Columbia from Douglas Channel to Bute Inlet. Present-day Kwakwaka’wakw still reside in these areas.

Population
Prior to European contact the population numbered 19,125. In 1750, there were about 5,000 to 6,000 Kwakwaka’wakw; in 1904, that number had dropped to 2,173, and by 1924, it was 1,039. A census of the Canadian population in 1991 reported that there were 4,120 Kwakwaka’wakw living in Canada. The 1996 census indicated 5,517 resided in Canada. In 2005, that figure decreased to 4,896. The Kwakiutl Band Council showed a tribal enrollment of 510 persons in 2011.

Language family
Wakashan.

Origins and group affiliations
Scientists believe that thousands of years ago the ancestors of the Kwakwaka’wakw crossed an ancient land bridge from Asia to North America and eventually settled on the Northwest Coast near the present-day

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At one time, about thirty groups were considered part of the Kwakwaka’wakw, and they fell into four main divisions: the Kwakiutl, the Haisla, the Heiltsuk (Bella Bella), and Wuikinuxv (Owekeeno or Rivers Inlet people). The latter three groups were called the Northern Kwakiutl but were later reclassified as separate tribes. In the twenty-first century, the Kwakwaka’wakw consist of thirteen bands.

For centuries, the Kwakwaka’wakw enjoyed the natural bounty of the Pacific Ocean and the surrounding forests. Because their need for food was easily met, the people were able to devote much of their time to artistic pursuits and ceremonies such as potlatches (pronounced *POT-latch-ez*; gift exchanges). The Kwakwaka’wakw were widely known for their totem poles, elaborate wooden houses, and seaworthy log canoes, as well as for dramatizing myths and performing magic tricks.
HISTORY

Before European contact

The many groups that made up the Kwakwaka’wakw tribe stayed apart from one another for much of their history before the Europeans arrived. Those that were close neighbors were often on unfriendly terms. Most historians agree that the Kwakwaka’wakw fought with their neighbors to gain slaves, territory, goods, and even revenge. If a person within the tribe was killed, his or her relatives often retaliated by taking the life of someone of equal social rank or several people of lower rank. Major conflicts among Kwakwaka’wakw groups ceased by about 1865.

Trading with Europeans

The first known contact between the Kwakwaka’wakw and Europeans took place in 1786 when James Strange, a British trader, discovered the Queen Charlotte Strait, which separates northern Vancouver Island from mainland Canada. By 1792, American, Spanish, and British traders flocked to the area in search of sea-otter pelts that could be sold to the Chinese.

The Kwakwaka’wakw were described as “smart traders” by some of the first British people to make contact with them. The Natives exchanged furs with Europeans in return for iron and copper that they used to make tools, weapons, jewelry, and decorative items. They later bartered for European food items such as rice, tea, flour, and sugar, as well as for tools, mirrors, cloth, and cooking pots. The Kwakwaka’wakw maintained friendly relations with the European traders, but the two groups were known to cheat each other on occasion.

Forts established

Fort Langley was built as a trading center in 1827, and Fort McLoughlin followed in 1833. The Kwakwaka’wakw stationed themselves at the mouth of the Fraser River and bought furs intended for Fort Langley, 1792: Regular trading with Europeans begins.

1849: Fort Rupert, the main Kwakwaka’wakw trading center, is established.

1850: The British destroy the village of Nahwitti.

1857: The Bella Coola destroy the village of Gwayasdums.

1865: The British navy destroys Tsahis, the largest Kwakwaka’wakw village.

1849: The Alert Bay salmon cannery is established.

1877: Missionary A.J. Hall arrives at Fort Rupert.

1881: The Kwawkewlth Agency is established to help the Natives assimilate (adopt mainstream American ways).

1884: The Canadian government bans potlatches.

1897: Franz Boas studies the tribe.
then sold them to Fort McLoughlin for a higher price. After Fort Victoria was built in 1842, it became the major trading post for all the tribes in the area, including the Kwakwaka’wakw. Seven years later, Fort Rupert was established near Kwakwaka’wakw land. The Kwakwaka’wakw and three other tribes soon moved to a new village they founded nearby, which they called Tsahis. Tsahis became the largest Kwakwaka’wakw community in the region.

Series of tragedies
The discovery of gold on Kwakwaka’wakw land in the mid-nineteenth century brought many settlers and gold miners to the area. Some of them claimed places where Native nations had fished for centuries. By the 1860s, non-Natives greatly outnumbered the Native population, and they pressured the British officials in charge of Canada into adopting legislation to take away Native lands. One 1865 law made it illegal for Native families to own more than 10 acres; on the other hand, non-Natives could own up to 640 acres.

Government agents, who were supposed to protect Native rights, failed to do so. In fact, they were often hostile toward the Native groups. In 1865, the British navy destroyed the Kwakwaka’wakw village at Fort Rupert. It was rebuilt, but by then many Natives had lost faith in the Canadian government.

The arrivals of Europeans in the region had other disastrous effects on the Native peoples. Smallpox epidemics struck in the late 1700s and again in the 1880s, and many died. Still more Kwakwaka’wakw were killed in battles with Canadian authorities, including the battles that destroyed the village of Nahwitti in 1850 and Tsahis in 1865.

Relocation to cities
When the gold rush ended in the 1860s, many prospectors and settlers stayed in British Columbia, which became a province (similar to an American state) of Canada in 1871. A large number of Kwakwaka’wakw settled in the capital city of Victoria and became fishers, hunters, loggers, or crew on whaling ships. Many poor Kwakwaka’wakw ended up in the city’s ghetto (an area of a city where poorer members of a minority group live).

The town of Alert Bay, which began as a salmon cannery in 1870, replaced Fort Rupert as the central trading post for the people of the
region by 1900. In 1881, the Canadian government established the Kwawkewlth Agency to help the Kwakwaka’wakw and other tribes assimilate (adopt the mainstream American lifestyle) at Fort Rupert, but the agency later moved to Alert Bay. In the last two decades of the 1800s, government agents opened a school, a sawmill, and an industrial school for boys at Alert Bay for the Kwakwaka’wakw and other First Nations.

Scholar studies tribe
In the late 1800s, the pioneering anthropologist (someone who studies the cultures of different peoples) Franz Boas (1858–1942) visited the Kwakwaka’wakw, whom he called the Kwakiutl, many times. He was especially interested in their art, their rituals, and their complex social system. Boas befriended members of the tribe, and they shared tribal secrets with him. He attended their potlatches and even hosted his own.

As Boas was writing about the Kwakwaka’wakw culture, the Canadian government began to take away tribal rights and sell off Native lands. In time, the First Nations peoples no longer had enough land to supply them with food, and many went to work in low-paying jobs. The government also passed laws prohibiting the Kwakwaka’wakw and other First Nations from voting or participating in potlatches.

The 1920s
In the late 1800s, the Kwakwaka’wakw started to earn high incomes by becoming professional fishers. This time of wealth and prosperity declined for the tribe when powerboats were first introduced in the 1920s. Powerboat fishers could take much larger hauls of salmon and other fish. With the number of salmon greatly reduced, salmon fishing declined rapidly, and many Kwakwaka’wakw lost their jobs in the fishing industry.

Fight for rights begins
Most historians agree that the Canadian government overstepped its bounds in its dealings with the Kwakwaka’wakw, intruding on the traditions and the rights of tribal members. For example, when Native groups formed in the 1930s and 1940s to fight against the illegal takeover of their lands, the Canadian government made it a crime for these groups to fund any campaign that might take the government to court. Finally, in 1951, the Canadian government reformed its Indian policy. Native voting rights were restored, and potlatches were made legal.
Throughout the twentieth century many Kwakwaka’wakw moved from small villages to cities to find a better life. Those who remained on the reserves (the term Canadians use for reservations, tracts of land...
set aside specifically for use by First Nations) faced dismal prospects for employment.

Canadian government reforms in the early 1960s provided the people with medical care, educational opportunities, and unemployment insurance. Some people were able to return to their traditional villages and take up the age-old Kwakwaka’wakw enterprise of fishing. A decline in the fishing industry in the 1990s, however, forced many Kwakwaka’wakw to seek other ways of making a living. (See “Economy.”)

RELIGION

The religion of the Kwakwa’wakw was based on a complicated system of privileges that were said to be given to certain families by supernatural powers. The Kwakwaka’wakw believed that such powers were found in all things in nature. They said daily prayers to the spirits, often asking to be granted powers. Other prayers were said in thanks to the sun, to the beaver, to a woodworking tool, to a weapon, to a plant for its curative ability, or to the wind for changing directions.

In the late nineteenth century, Christian missionaries ventured to the land of the Kwakwaka’wakw and succeeded in converting some of the people to the Christian faith. The missionaries pressured the people to give up their traditional practices, including various ceremonies, burial rites, and even the construction of totem poles. Christian converts had to live in single-family homes rather than with larger groups of relatives. Some Kwakwaka’wakw converted to Christianity so they could obtain medical care or gain access to education. Others completely changed their beliefs but continued to take part in rituals such as potlatches (see “Customs”).

LANGUAGE

The Wakashan language of the Kwakwaka’wakw is only spoken on the Northwest Coast of the North American continent. In modern times, the language is called Kwak’wala. It is a tonal language, and words can be spoken in high, middle, low, rising, or falling tones, so sentences sound musical. The language is written with markings above the vowels to indicate tone. For example, “ą” is a low tone, and “ă” is a rising tone.

Most modern-day Kwakwaka’wakw speak English as their first language, but since the 1970s, the people have taught their children traditional language, mythology, art, and culture. Language teachers are also working with adults, because they believe that it will reinforce the
children’s learning. Two tribal museums provide instruction in the Kwak’wala language.

GOVERNMENT

In earlier times, communities were led by the heads of the wealthiest families, who were known as taises, or chiefs. Some were warriors, some were medicine men, and others were in charge of trading activities with other tribes or villages.

Since 1974, a district council has governed the bands that make up the Kwakiutl First Nation. The district council oversees tribal affairs and makes its opinions known to the government agency that runs the Campbell River District, formerly the Kwawkewlth Indian Agency. The Kwakwaka’wakw maintain businesses, health-care facilities, educational facilities, and a variety of social services.

The Kwakiutl Band Council has six councilors and a chief councilor. Elections are held in March to vote on three councilors, and in November to select four. The councilors each serve two-year terms. They generally meet biweekly, unless pressing issues arise. Meetings, which are held in the Fort Rupert administration building, are open to all members of the band, except when discussions are confidential in nature.

ECONOMY

Traditionally, the Kwakwaka’wakw were fishers and gatherers. Fishing season began in spring with Chinook salmon and extended until the chum fishing season ended in the fall. In the winter, the people stayed in their winter villages and did very little food gathering. During that time, they produced such items as boxes, spoons, dishes, and canoes.

The twentieth century brought ups and downs to the Kwakwaka’wakw economy. The fishing industry boomed after 1945. Overfishing and overcutting of trees led to a decline in the fishing and logging industries by the 1990s, and many tribal members have had to find other employment. Some began their own small businesses in the hotel, restaurant, and laundry industries. Others took jobs as janitors, clerical workers, teacher’s aides, and homemaker assistants. Some Kwakwaka’wakw obtained college degrees and went into in professional fields. Nonetheless, a high

Kwak’wala Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kwak’wala</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bagwanam</td>
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<tr>
<td>t’sadak</td>
<td>“woman”</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘wat’si</td>
<td>“dog”</td>
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<tr>
<td>t’lisala</td>
<td>“sun”</td>
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<td>“moon”</td>
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<tr>
<td>nla</td>
<td>“sing”</td>
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<td>bau</td>
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unemployment rate exists among the Kwakwaka’wakw people, many of whom must rely on government assistance, because they cannot find jobs.

DAILY LIFE

Families
Extended families (parents, children, grandparents, and other relatives) lived together. The families shared rights to certain fishing and food gathering areas, their large houses, and the totem poles that depicted the family crest or symbol. Each family had a sacred name and its own songs and dances that told the story of its creation.

A Kwakwaka’wakw chief’s house on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, is painted with an eagle and a whale. COURTESY OF THE PENN MUSEUM, IMAGE # S4-142218.
Buildings
Traditionally, the Kwakwaka’wakw lived in large houses—sometimes up to 100 feet (30 meters) long, 40 feet (12 meters) wide, and 20 feet (6 meters) high—designed to hold several families. Villages were made up of rows of such houses, sometimes built on stilts, with a large boardwalk running the entire length of the village.

The area where the chief and his family lived was often separated from the rest of the house by an elaborately carved screen. Other families lived along the walls in areas separated by mats. Sleeping areas were assigned according to social rank: the higher a family's rank, the better their sleeping area. Slaves slept inside on blankets near the entrance of the house. Everyone used the cooking fire in the center of the house.

By the late nineteenth century, Kwakwaka’wakw houses were being built of cedar beams and milled lumber and were decorated with elaborately painted fronts and complex carvings of family crest figures. Some houses had doorways surrounded by large carved figures; an opening for the entryway was cut out between the figure’s legs.

Clothing and adornment
During warm weather, Kwakwaka’wakw men went naked or wore a breechcloth (flaps of material at the front and rear suspended from the waist), whereas women wore aprons made of bark strands. As it grew colder, the Kwakwaka’wakw wrapped themselves in blankets made of bark or animal skins, which they fastened with a belt. Most Kwakwaka’wakw went barefoot. On rainy days, they donned rain hats and coats made of bark mats. Men left their long hair loose and sported long beards. Women braided their hair and wore necklaces, bracelets, and anklets made of teeth. They also wore a tight anklet designed to keep the feet from growing. Wealthy people wore nose and ear decorations of abalone shells. Everyone painted their faces and bodies to protect against sunburn, but they did not have tattoos.

Food
Kwakwaka’wakw bands collected and ate whatever foods were available in their area. For example, those near Fort Rupert ate clams, whereas other groups ate mostly salmon. The people gathered berries, roots, sea grass, and common marine food such as smelt, cod, halibut, and sea
urchins. They also ate seal and sea lion. Some hunted elk, deer, wolf, bear, mink, marten, otter, whale, or mountain goat.

Families had their own territories for hunting, fishing, and food gathering. Some of the groups arranged to share sites, but other areas were considered the common property of all. The Kwakwaka’wakw dried and smoked the fish they caught in the warm months for use during the long winters.

Education

Kwakwaka’wakw children of the late twentieth century learned traditional Native customs from their elders, as their ancestors had. Organized efforts to educate children in the ways of the mainstream Canadian society began in 1881, when Anglican missionary A. J. Hall opened a school at Alert Bay, and his wife began teaching homemaking skills to several young Native girls in the Hall home. In 1894, the Department of Indian Affairs established an industrial school for boys in the town; by that time, Mrs. Hall’s program had become a live-in school for girls. The Department of Indian Affairs school closed in 1974.

In the 1960s, many Kwakwaka’wakw moved from smaller communities to larger villages that had Indian schools. Some people who believed their children were not well served by the public schools began their own schools with programs in fishing, forestry, and carpentry in addition to standardized classes in reading, mathematics, history, and the sciences. Since the 1970s, children are also being taught their language, ceremonial dancing, mythology, and the traditional arts.

Healing practices

Kwakwaka’wakw healers were either witches or shamans (pronounced SHAH-munz or SHAY-munz; traditional religious healers). Witches harmed people by casting spells using the hair or bodily wastes of their...

How to Cure a Fish, Kwakwaka’wakw Style

The Kwakwaka’wakw were masters at preserving fish so that it could be consumed all year long. Here is a description of one method they used:

To ready a fish for curing (preserving), the fish is opened at one side of the backbone, which is then detached from the head and placed aside. The roe (eggs) are put on another pile, the innards and gills are disposed of, and the fish is rubbed inside and out with a handful of green leaves. The strip running along each side of the back is cut off and sliced into a very thin sheet. The fish, now of uniform thickness at the belly, is held open by skewers and hung up to dry. It is first placed in the sun and later put in the smoke of the house’s cook fire. The thin sheets are hung on poles and partially dried in the sun, with skewers inserted so they won’t curl up as they dry. Five tiers of racks are hung above the fire, and each group of salmon meat spends a day on each of the first four tiers, beginning with the lowest. After lying on the topmost shelf for five more days, the cured flesh is placed in large baskets or cedar chests. The containers are kept in dry places until it is time to eat the fish.
victims. If victims also knew how to cast spells, they could cancel the effects of the spells cast on them.

The people used herbs to cure diseases and injuries, but they turned to shamans when traditional methods failed. Shamans drew their power from relationships with animal spirits, who taught special dances, songs, and magic tricks that were useful in curing the sick or in healing injuries. Some shamans also had the power to cause diseases. They used these abilities to protect the chief and kill his enemies.

**ARTS**

**Woodworking**

The Kwakwaka’wakw were gifted woodworkers. They used simple tools to make remarkable canoes, large food bowls, and everyday utensils. They were also known for their superb baskets and chests made from split cedar roots, spruce roots, and grasses. Both baskets and chests were so finely made that they were watertight.

The people also carved elaborate masks, often adding feathers and hair, and used them in ceremonies and dances. One unusual feature of many masks was that they could transform from one character to another. For example, a mask of a human face had a cord on each side. If the wearer pulled the cord, wings popped out on each side of the face, and a heron’s head on top stretched out its neck and opened its beak. The human face then looked as if it were part of the heron’s body. Pulling on the other cord made the heron wings disappear. In addition to a variety of transformation masks, carvers also created masks with moveable parts: jaws snapped, tails spread and folded, spines fanned out, and wings flapped.

Kwakwaka’wakw artworks, with their realistic and geometric patterns, had their golden age between 1890 and 1921. Art critics call the works exceptional. Artwork could be found everywhere: on house fronts, on furnishings, on tools, and on totem poles. The American Museum of Natural History in New York sponsored a traveling exhibit of Kwakwaka’wakw art and culture called “Chiefly Feasts” that toured the country from 1992 to 1994.
Totem poles
Master Kwakwaka’wakw craftspeople were in charge of carving totem poles (large wooden poles depicting the animals and family symbols believed to link a family to the spirit world). Other figures on the pole represented important incidents in the family’s history. Another type of totem pole, the memorial pole, stood from 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 meters) high and honored a chief who had died. Smaller totem poles, carved from large timbers, supported the roofs of houses. The Kwakwaka’wakw sometimes placed food in front of the poles as an offering to the spirits.

Oral literature
Kwakwaka’wakw families told creation stories about larger-than-life supernatural ancestors who came to the people from the sky, the sea, or the earth. One such figure was Thunderbird, who took on a human form and created his relatives, who then became the Thunderbird family.
CUSTOMS

Social classes

Each Kwakwaka’wakw family was made up of three or more groups. Each group, in turn, held property in its village—usually at least one house and various hunting, fishing, and food gathering areas. Families marked their property with special decorations, especially posts and poles that featured family crests. The family unit organized and controlled village life and directed economic activities (hunting, fishing, and so on), social relations, and ceremonial events on a daily basis.

Traditionally, a person’s social rank was determined by the family into which he or she was born. People from high ranks did not perform physical labor. Instead, people called michimis, who cut down cedar trees, built houses, hunted game, and repaired fish traps, did such work. People with artistic skills, such as carvers, were sometimes permitted to join the upper class, but this was rare. This type of social organization began to disappear around 1875 when diseases reduced the Kwakwaka’wakw population and people moved away from their historic villages to live and work elsewhere.

Secret societies

The identity of a person’s guardian spirit was revealed through prayer and fasting. Some guardian spirits were animals, such as Grizzly Bear, whereas others were figures such as Cannibal or Warrior. Those who shared the same guardian spirit formed secret societies, including the Hamatsa or Shaman Society and the Bear Society.

To gain membership in the Hamatsa Society, certain chosen children took part in the Hamatsa Dance. As part of the ritual, adults of the tribe abducted the children and took them to a spot in the forest. There, covered only by a few hemlock boughs and in a frenzy of hunger, the youths appeared to be trying to “eat” bystanders. (Europeans who observed these ceremonies thought the participants were cannibals. In fact, the children pretended to consume pieces of flesh donated by volunteers. Later the flesh was returned to the “victim,” along with an apology and a small gift.) The elder members of the tribe would then seize the youngsters and force them to control themselves. Once the children became peaceful, they took part in public and private ceremonies involving magic and became members of the Hamatsa Society.
Potlatches

The Kwakwaka’wakw held potlatches, or gift-giving ceremonies, to mark births, marriages, deaths, and acceptance into secret societies. Potlatches were usually held in winter and could be simple or elaborate.

The greatest of all potlatches was called max’wa, meaning “doing a great thing.” Visitors were invited to hear speeches, eat, dance, and marvel at their host’s display of wealth. Guests received gifts of blankets, animal furs, carved boxes, shell necklaces, fish oil, weapons, and those of greatest value—engraved metal slabs called “coppers.” The more lavish the potlatch, the more honor it reflected on its host. Sometimes a chief hosting a potlatch gave away all his possessions, burned down his house, and killed his slaves. These actions were considered honorable and right.

The Winter Ceremony

One of the most significant religious events in Kwakwaka’wakw society was the annual Winter Ceremony. This event involved the entire tribe and often many visiting tribes and lasted for up to twenty days. The Kwakwaka’wakw believed that powerful spirits came and visited them during this time and granted special powers to young people. While under the spell of the spirit, the young people acted insane, and the purpose of the ceremony was to “tame” them. A potlatch followed.

Head flattening

The Kwakwaka’wakw used special boards that forced the heads of their infants to take on particular shapes as they grew; these head shapes showed the person’s rank in society. For example, the rather cone-shaped heads of the women of Vancouver Island showed their high social rank. People from a lower class were identified by their flatter and broader heads.

Potlatches Reach the Extreme

A person who ended up poverty-stricken after hosting a potlatch knew the condition would not last long. It was customary for a person who had received a gift of four dugout canoes at a potlatch to repay the giver eight dugout canoes at the next potlatch. By the early twentieth century, when the Kwakwaka’wakw were enjoying a fair amount of wealth, potlatches became very elaborate. Family members sometimes worked year-round at several jobs to pay for the ceremony, even pooling their life savings just to hold a single potlatch. Modern products such as sewing machines, musical instruments, boat motors, furniture, and pool tables were freely given. Families would compete to show their superiority by setting fire to large mounds of valuable goods.

An enormous potlatch took place near Alert Bay in 1921. Eighty of the three hundred guests were arrested. Without regard for the traditional significance of the ceremony, the Canadian government concluded that large-scale potlatches were bringing economic ruin to the people and decided to ban them. The authorities took many ceremonial items, such as masks and costumes, from Alert Bay and did not return them until the 1960s.
War and hunting rituals

The Kwakwaka’wakw believed that each living thing, whether plant or animal, had its own spirit. Animals did not mind being caught and eaten, because they could return to the spirit world and take on a new body. Hunters showed great respect for the animal spirits. For example, when they caught salmon, they thanked it and put its bones back into the water, believing that the bones would float back to the house of the Salmon People in the world of the spirits.

Marriage

Marriage was an opportunity to gain property and other rights and privileges, so the arrangement of a child’s marriage was taken very seriously. Kwakwaka’wakw marriages might occur between two children of the same father but of different mothers, or between a man and his younger brother’s daughter.

Most modern-day marriages are performed in Christian churches. They are followed by a potlatch celebration that features traditional practices such as a mock competition for the bride, a gift exchange between the families of the bride and groom, and the couple’s departure to start their new life together in the groom’s village (unless job demands necessitate other arrangements).

Funerals

Kwakwaka’wakw groups had different burial customs. Those of the north cremated their dead, while those to the south buried their dead in trees or caves. Important chiefs were sometimes buried in their canoes.

CURRENT TRIBAL ISSUES

In April 1997, the government of Canada and the Kwakiutl First Nation, also known as the Fort Rupert Band, reached a final settlement in a land claim filed back in 1992. The Kwakwaka’wakw claimed that Deer Island and Eagle Island should have been made Kwakwaka’wakw reserves. In exchange for the land, Canada agreed to pay the Kwakiutl First Nation $500,000 for final settlement of the claim.

Since the late 1990s, the members of the Kwakiutl Band have been pursuing treaty negotiations with the Canadian government. In 2003, they began to work on issues concerning the Kwakiutl Douglas Treaty from the
late 1800s. As the first step in the treaty process, the Kwakiutl prepared a map of their territories, identified issues to be discussed, and completed background research. Although the process tends to be lengthy, the band hoped to receive a fair and equitable settlement for agreements made long ago.

By 2011, after the Canadian government continued to ignore their requests, the Kwakwaka’wakw began civil protests. The people, in war canoes or on the ground, peacefully blocked the passage of a British Columbia ferry in August of that year. The Kwakwaka’wakw protestors then went to the Forestry Office with a letter indicating they wanted to meet with government officials to discuss stopping the commercial forestry in their territory. They also wanted their rights affirmed to their traditional territory. Along with other First Nations, the Kwakwaka’wakw threatened to continue protests and civil disobedience until the British Columbia (BC) provincial government negotiated with the tribe and recognized their rights. To halt the protests, the BC government agreed to a meeting to discuss forestry revenue sharing.

NOTABLE PEOPLE

Mungo Martin (Naka’penkim; c. 1881–1962) was a chief, a sculptor, a master carver, and a leader in the campaign to preserve and restore Kwakwaka’wakw totem poles. He also carved his own totem poles, including the world’s largest, which stands more than 127 feet (39 meters) high. Martin drowned in 1962 while fishing.

James Sewid (1913–1988) was the chief of the Kwakwaka’wakw at Alert Bay when the ancient system of inheriting leadership positions was replaced by an election process. He began work for the fishing industry at age ten, married at thirteen, and wrote of his life in a remote village in his autobiography entitled Guests Never Leave Hungry. Sewid spent his later years helping to revive Kwakwaka’wakw customs. In 1955, he was selected by the National Film Board of Canada to portray his achievements in a movie called No Longer Vanishing. In 1971, he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada.

BOOKS


Thira, Darien Troy. *And I Live It: From Suicidal Crisis to Activism among Members of the Kwakwaka’wakw and Coast Salish Nations.* New York: ProQuest, 2011.


**WEB SITES**


*Kwakiutl Indian Band.* http://www.kwakiutl.bc.ca/ (accessed on November 2, 2011).


