GRAND OPENING
CEREMONY
MAY 15, 2015
JUNEAU, ALASKA
WWW.SEALASKAHERITAGE.ORG   #SOBOLEFFBUILDING
This commemorative program is dedicated to past Chairs of Sealaska Heritage Institute’s Board of Trustees and Council of Traditional Scholars who have Walked Into The Forest. We are grateful for their vision and leadership in guiding Sealaska Heritage from the institute’s inception to the present day:

Judson Brown  
Former Chair, Board of Trustees

Walter Soboleff  
Former Chair, Board of Trustees and Council of Traditional Scholars

Clarence Jackson  
Former Chair, Council of Traditional Scholars
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The construction of the Walter Soboleff Building—our Box of Knowledge—has been a dream of ours for a very long time. We began raising funds for this project in earnest a few years ago and broke ground in late 2013. By the end of 2014, our staff at Sealaska Heritage Institute had moved into the second story while work on the rest of the floors continued.

I am profoundly grateful to the many donors and old friends who helped us on this journey and to the new friends we made along the way. Our project caught the attention of large foundations in Alaska and across the country and they came through in a big way. The U.S. Congress, the State of Alaska and the City and Borough of Juneau appropriated millions of dollars for this facility. Sealaska and other businesses and organizations came forward to build with us. And I will never forget the artists and art collectors who made our first Tináa Art Auction such a success last year. Because of their generosity, we raised more than $300,000 for the building.

So many individuals made donations, and we have been humbled by their support. One of the most moving donations came from a destitute man who approached me, pulled a dollar from his pocket, and said he wanted to donate it for the new building. He was the first individual to donate—what may have been his only dollar—to the facility. I can’t tell that story without tearing up.

The building has surpassed my dreams. It is more than a building. It is itself a work of art and testimony to our cultural survival. It has the state’s largest installation of Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian pieces made by some of the most important Native artists of our time. It has a hand-adzed cedar clan house modeled after traditional clan houses, complete with a “fire pit” and diminutive entry. It has a public exhibits space where Native people will tell the Native story. It has space for artists, researchers, scholars, collections, workshops, lectures, and a Native art store. From the basketry patterns in the tile work to the copper accents and curved wall that echoes an ovoid, you see pieces of Native culture rippling through. The architectural design of the building reflects our ancient culture and art, yet it demonstrates our movement into the future but fully grounded in our cultural values.

And here we are, at long last, unveiling the Walter Soboleff Building. A place where the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian cultures will come alive. A place for Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian people. It underscores our initial effort in making Juneau and Southeast Alaska the Northwest Coast art capital of the world.

It’s also a place for the public. We welcome you. We want you here. And we thank you. We are forever grateful to you for supporting the Walter Soboleff Building and for taking this journey with us.

—Rosita Kaa.háni Worl
THE ROAD TO THE WALTER SOBOLEFF BUILDING

The idea to build a Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultural and research center was conceived in the 1990s. Staff at Sealaska Heritage Institute spent years developing the concept and talking to policy makers and potential funders about the best approach to moving forward.

Prior to raising funds, we knew we had to demonstrate publicly that our cultural programs were sound and that we had a solid reputation in the field. In the late 1990s, the Board of Trustees moved to transform the institute from a focus on “preservation” of our language and culture to one of “restoration and enhancement.” The objective was to integrate our language and culture into institutions serving Native Peoples and to further promote cross cultural understanding—recognizing that our cultural survival was also dependent on people’s attitudes towards Native culture. We began to grow by leaps and bounds, sometimes having two people to a desk, and we recognized that we needed a new home to do our work. The only question left was where to build.

Then in 2004, the Skinner Building in downtown Juneau burned to the ground. Situated directly across from Sealaska Plaza and in the heart of the tourist district, the site offered an optimal location for the building. The lot sat idle for several years. Overgrown with weeds and surrounded by an unsightly fence, it was infamously known in Juneau as “The Pit.”

SHI began speaking publicly about its intentions to build a cultural center in 2005. In 2010, Sealaska, which founded the nonprofit Sealaska Heritage, purchased the lot with the intention of donating it to the institute for the new building. Sealaska first enhanced it with landscaping so it wouldn’t be an eyesore in the community during the fundraising drive.

Shortly after, the institute set a fundraising goal of $20 million to building the facility and launched a fundraising campaign. A study by the McDowell Group found strong support in Juneau for Sealaska Heritage Institute and for a new cultural center.

In 2010, SHI embarked on a three-tiered process to select an architect that involved Sealaska, the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, the Tlingit and Haida Regional Housing Authority, the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Alaska Native Sisterhood, and SHI trustees and staff. The winning designer was MRV Architects, which was tasked with designing the building based on
the objective of recognizing our past and our path into the future. The Juneau firm had done restorative work on clan houses in the past and had even donated historical photos of clan house restorations to our archives years before.

In May 2011, SHI’s longtime Board of Trustees Chair, Dr. Walter Soboleff, Walked into the Forest at the age of 102. During his memorial, the institute announced the new building would be named for him. (See “The Legacy of Dr. Walter Soboleff”)

Also in 2011, MRV Architects unveiled the design for the building, which was to be clad in yellow cedar and modeled after a traditional clan house. The design even included a clan house inside the building complete with cedar walls, tiers and a “fire pit” in the center—much as you would have seen in old cedar clan houses many years ago.

But the design led to some hitches along the way. The project site was located in Juneau’s historic district, which requires property owners to adhere to a Victorian-era design. SHI had to challenge a proposal put forth by a historical commission that would have required the institute to use Victorian-era materials, such as beadboard, on the building in lieu of yellow cedar.

Ironically, the oldest architectural style in the region was not acceptable under the rules governing the aesthetics of the historic district!

Juneau’s assembly fixed this conundrum by removing the project site from the historic district, thereby allowing the building to retain the look called for in the design.

By 2013, the institute had raised most of the $20 million needed to construct the Walter Soboleff Building. SHI hired Dawson Construction, and in August of that year we broke ground. The construction phase lasted from late 2013 to Spring of 2015, and the institute’s staff moved into the second story in December of 2014 while work on the rest of the floors continued.
THE LEGACY OF DR. WALTER SOBOLEFF

The building is named for Kaajaakwti (Dr. Walter A. Soboleff), a Tlingit of the Yéil (Raven) moiety, Leeneidi (Dog Salmon) clan. He was born in the Tlingit village of Killisnoo in 1908. In May 2011, Dr. Soboleff “Walked Into The Forest” at age 102, but his accomplishments and people whose lives he touched live on.

He was a wise man who was dear to the Sealaska family. He served as Sealaska Heritage Institute’s Chair almost as long as the institute has been around.

But his reach was much greater than that. He was a spiritual leader. An educator. A traditional scholar. A fluent Tlingit speaker who helped language students up until the last days of his life. He practiced our traditional Native values, especially Haa Shuká—honoring our past while preparing a better future for our children’s children.

He cherished his non-Native friends as well and belonged to many civic organizations. He was the first pastor in Juneau to open his church to all people—Natives and non Natives—at a time when segregation was the norm.

At his memorial in 2011, we announced the new building would be named for him. The Walter Soboleff Building is a physical manifestation of Haa Shuká and the ideals he championed. We miss him dearly, but we are forever grateful that this giant of a man walked this Earth.

Aangun Yatx’i

The dance group, Aangun Yatx’i (Angoon Children) Dancers, was invited to lead the Grand Opening Ceremony in honor of Dr. Walter Soboleff. The group is comprised of children from Angoon, Dr. Soboleff’s hometown, and many of the dancers are from his clan or children and grandchildren of the Leeneidi (Dog Salmon).
ART IN THE BUILDING

MONUMENTAL ART

At the Walter Soboleff Building, all three tribal groups of the region are represented in monumental art made by some of the best artists of our time. It is the largest installation of Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian art in the state.

The huge, 40-foot panels on the exterior were designed by Haida artist Robert Davidson, an internationally-celebrated master artist whose numerous totem poles stand in sites in Canada and the United States and whose art is in the collections of many major museums. The installation was based on his original painting “Greatest Echo,” which the artist donated to SHI’s recent Tináa Art Auction, a fund raiser for the building.

The design represents a supernatural being called the “Greatest Echo”—a theme chosen by Davidson because the building’s namesake “echoed the past to bring it to the present,” he said. The design was replicated in metal, a medium recommended by the institute’s Native Artist Committee.

Upon entering the foyer, visitors will see an enormous carved-and-painted Tsimshian clan house front by Tsimshian artist David A. Boxley, an internationally-recognized master artist. At almost 40 feet wide by 15 feet high, Boxley’s piece—which he made with his son, Tsimshian artist David R. Boxley—is thought to be the largest, carved-and-painted Tsimshian house front in the world.

The Boxleys’ design was inspired by the style and complexity of old Tsimshian house fronts. The center of the house front tells the Tsimshian story Am’āla:

Wil Mangaa da Hālidzogat (The Man Who Held up the Earth). The Man—Am’āla—is shown as a giant supernatural being who represents the land. The Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian people are represented along the top and each figure is unique. Am’āla is on his back balancing the world on a stick propped on his chest. It is said that when Am’āla coughs, an earthquake ensues. A tiny door in the belly of Am’āla leads into the clan house beyond.

The sides of the house front depict the four Tsimshian crests—Raven and Killerwhale on the left and Eagle and Wolf on the right. The secondary
crests—Frog, Grizzly Bear, Beaver, and Black Bear—are represented in the eyes of Raven, Killer Whale, Eagle and Wolf respectively. The circle design on the left side was copied from an old photo that showed the remains of a Tsimshian house front from the 1800s. The circle was the only piece of the design that remained on the old front, and the Boxleys featured it in their work to honor the old Tsimshian carvers.

The interior clan house features a spectacular glass screen flanked by two house posts made by Tlingit glass artist Preston Singletary (the house posts will be installed at a later date). Preston has become internationally celebrated for his innovative creations, which use a medium not known in pre-contact times.

Singletary’s piece is the largest glass screen in the world, measuring 17 feet wide and 12 feet high at its peak and rendered in carved, amber-and-black glass. The screen wills be flanked by two, glass seven-foot posts depicting Eagle and Raven warriors. The institute requested that warriors be incorporated into the design because they symbolize the protectors of our land and culture. Native people in the region were historically formidable in war, but they also became combatants in political, legal, and educational battles, where they fought for land claims and civil rights.

Singletary’s installation was supported in part by an ArtPlace America grant, which included funds for apprentices to help create and install the screen.

**ADZE WORK**

The building also features cedar boards that were hand-adzed by the award-winning Tlingit artist Wayne Price. Adzing produces a texture that is commonly seen in Northwest Coast art, canoes, clan houses, and ceremonial objects. But it represents more than a texture. Adzing is at the very heart of Native culture.

“Once we learned how to use an adze, we got our clan houses, our totems, our dugout canoes,” Price said. “Everything came from our ability to adze. There was no other tool. That was the chainsaw. That was the saw mill.”

Price adzed almost every day for five months despite a very blistered hand. At the end of the project he had made nearly one million adze marks on more than 3,200 square feet of wood! The staff so enjoyed the constant, rhythmic—almost hypnotic—sounds of the adzing that SHI made an audio recording, which will be played in the building on occasion.

The hand-adzed cedar is prevalent throughout the building, including on the clan house, the main staircase, and on the house front panels.
OTHER ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL ELEMENTS

In addition, the glass awnings on the exterior were engraved with formline designs made by Steve Brown, a formline expert and author who serves on the institute’s Native Artist Committee. The term “formline design” describes the unique shapes that give Northwest Coast art its distinctive look. When illuminated from above, the designs in the awnings are cast onto the beams, building, and sidewalks.

The doors to the “True Southeast” exhibit space feature large depictions of Raven and Eagle—the moieties of the Tlingit and Haida. Raven and Eagle also are two of four main crests used by the Tsimshian. The Raven and Eagle were designed by Robert Davis Hoffmann, an acclaimed Tlingit artist.

The copper accents seen throughout the building also have cultural significance, as copper—often displayed in the shape of a domed shield or tinda—was historically a symbol of wealth.

Basketry patterns are inlaid into tiles on the exterior facade and interior floors and walls. In some areas, very rare, 400-million year old Aphrodite marble tiles sourced from Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska were used. The marble, first found in Alaska in 1994, has no known equivalents worldwide. It was given the name Aphrodite after the Greek goddess of love because of the creamy pink colors and fossil patterns that sometimes suggest Valentine hearts. The strain in the Walter Soboleff Building is Royal Aphrodite, which features vivid blood red and purple streaks in a gray and white matrix with fossil clams, snails, and sponges sometimes presenting. We selected marble from our homeland to demonstrate the strength and antiquity of our culture.
INSIDE THE BUILDING

CLAN HOUSE

The Walter Soboleff Building includes a clan house, which will be given the name Shuká Hít during the Grand Opening Ceremony. The space is modeled after the traditional clan houses historically seen throughout Southeast Alaska. It includes a house front with a tiny door, which historically would have put hostile intruders at a disadvantage. It includes a central “fire pit” and tiers for communal activities. A traditional clan house would have included a wooden house screen with posts on one side, but—in a nod to the modern world—we have rendered them in glass. The space is planked in cedar and the walls are hand adzed, as in a traditional clan house.

In the corner of the house is the carved hand print of Albert Kookesh with his grandchild’s hand imprinted in red. The SHI Council of Traditional Scholars wanted to pay special tribute to former state Senator Kookesh for his many contributions to the Native community and Alaska and to recognize his special relationship to Dr. Walter Soboleff. The placement of a handprint or “X” in a clan house is an ancient practice.

The space will be used for presentations, performances, and community events. Exhibit cases are installed on the back wall to feature objects from SHI’s collection.

EXHIBITS

People often learn about Native cultures through museums and the stories told there. But, however well meaning, there is something lost when people outside of a culture attempt to tell the story of a culture. This is one of the things that most excites us about the Walter Soboleff Building: It will be a place where Native people will tell the Native story. We have named the experience “True Southeast.”

The space will feature a permanent exhibit showcasing the four core cultural values of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian and how those values continue to shape the lives of these cultural groups.

The exhibit, titled Enter the World of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian Peoples, will also feature the display of highly valued clan possessions that are integral to traditional ceremonies.

These objects are known as clan at.óowu, meaning that which was paid for, usually with the life of a clan ancestor. Clan at.óowu, including regalia, ceremonial objects, crest designs, geographic sites, spirits, names, stories, and songs, are worn or ritually presented during a ku.éex’ or ceremony. At.óow embody the history of the clan and the past event by which they are claimed as clan property, as well as the spirits of clan members down through the generations that have held onto the objects and passed them on. The exhibit will present at.óowu...
belonging to several clans, and elucidate their central significance to the ceremonial life and identity of clans. These living objects will be on loan to SHI for the duration of the exhibit but may be withdrawn by clans that own them if they are needed for ceremonial purposes.

COLLECTIONS AND RESEARCH

SHI houses rare books, historical photographs, audiovisual recordings, manuscript materials, and ethnographic objects that document the history, culture, heritage, art, and language of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian. SHI makes these materials available to the public for educational and research purposes and to promote scholarship of Native cultures.

Ethnographic and archival collections are located on the lower level of the Walter Soboleff Building and housed in a large, climate-controlled space. The facility includes space for researchers to study collections, as well as room for scholars enrolled in the institute’s Visiting Scholars Program.

In 2014, the archive was named for Tlingit Native rights hero William L. Paul, Sr., who was a major force in Alaska history and is recognized as the father of Alaska Native land claims. William L. Paul was a gifted orator, Alaska’s first Native attorney, the state’s first Native legislator, and a formidable warrior who fought on the front line of many legal and political battles of his time. Yet his achievements are not as well known outside of Alaska Native circles. SHI’s Board of Trustees named the archives for him to honor his accomplishments and to publicly recognize him for his life’s work.

The William L. Paul, Sr., Archives houses 3,100 linear feet of archival and historical manuscripts and papers, photographs, and audio and visual recordings, including historical documents, manuscripts, and papers of individuals of importance to both the indigenous people of the region and Alaska history, and more than 60,000 historic photographs. The archives currently houses more than 5,000 historical and contemporary audio and audiovisual recordings documenting the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian language, culture and history. Most of these recordings are unique and cannot be found in other libraries, archives, or repositories.

ARTISTS

The main level includes a room near the exhibits area for an artist in residence. This is a dedicated area for artists studying Northwest Coast art and pieces from SHI’s ethnographic and art collection.

The exterior includes a large, secure alcove for artists to make monumental art, such as totem poles and...
dugout canoes. Artists will also do demonstrations in other areas of the building. The main level includes the Sealaska Heritage Store, which sells Native art and souvenirs. The sale of Native arts and crafts perpetuates our arts and culture and contributes to a sustainable economy in economically depressed communities that lack large commercial enterprises and employment. The revenues derived from the store are re-invested back into art, education, and cultural programming sponsored by SHI and help support the operations of the building.

**LIVING HISTORY CENTER**

In addition to SHI’s offices, the second story above the main floor includes a Living History Center for workshops, lectures, and meetings. The space is fully equipped with state-of-the art technology. Visitors will notice that the outer wall of the Living History Center curves. The curve represents the top of an ovoid, a common shape found in Northwest Coast formline design.
CEREMONY VENUES MAP

1. **WALTER SOBOLEFF BUILDING**
   105 S. Seward St.
   Main program

2. **SEALASKA PLAZA**
   On Front Street, between Main Street and Seward Street
   Dance group staging area
   Volunteers
   Press registration and passes

3. **CBJ MARINE PARK**
   FLOAT DOCK
   144 Marine Way
   Canoe arrival and welcoming ceremony

4. **MARINE PARK**
   144 Marine Way
   Dance groups welcoming canoe

RESTROOMS

WATCH GRAND OPENING LIVE @ WWW.SEALASKAHERITAGE.ORG | #SOBOLEFFBUILDING
FORMAL CEREMONY

8:30—Aangun Yatx’i (Angoon Children) Dancers

9:00—Welcome by Albert Kookesh, Master of Ceremonies

Prayer—Sasha Soboleff

Southeast Alaska Native Veteran Color Guard

Sealaska Heritage
Marlene Johnson, Chair, Board of Trustees
Rosita Worl, President

Sealaska Corporation
Joe Nelson, Chair, Board of Directors
Anthony Mallott, President & CEO

Ceremonial Spokespersons/Community Leaders
Sorrell Goodwin, Rosa Miller, Yextehittaan, Leeneidi
Al McKinley, Mike Tagaban, Wooshkeetaan
Ken Grant, T’akdeintaan
David Katzeek, Shangukeidi
Gavin Hudson, Tsimshian, Councilman,
Metlakatla
Anthony Christianson, Haida, Mayor, Hydaburg

Soboleff Family Spokesperson
Janet Burke

Aangun Yatx’i (Angoon Children) Dancers & Distribution of Gifts

William L. Paul, Sr., Archives Family Spokesperson
Ben Paul

Officials
Dan Sullivan, U.S. Senator
Bill Walker, Governor of Alaska
Byron Mallott, Lieutenant Governor
Merrill Sanford, Mayor, Juneau
Cathy Muñoz, Alaska Representative

Dennis Egan, Alaska Senator
Sam Kito III, Alaska Representative

Major Donors
Diane Kaplan, President & CEO, Rasmuson Foundation
Miranda Wright, Doyon Ltd.

Rosita Worl—Acknowledgement of Artists
Robert Davidson
David Boxley
Preston Singletary
Wayne Price
Steve Brown
Robert Davis Hoffmann
Bill Holm

Transition to Dock for Canoe Landing:
Kaagwaantaan Leads Dance Groups and Procession to Dock

Arrival of North Tide Canoe Kwáan of Chilkoot and Chilkat with leader Wayne Price and crew
James Hart, Teddy Hart, Zack James, Rob Martin,
Nels Lynch, and Rhys Williams
Paul Marks and Geisan Marks Trail Dancers
Sorrel Goodwin, Mike Tagaban, and Ben Coronell
Greet North Tide Canoe Kwáan of Chilkoot and Chilkat
Canoe Representative and People of Honor from Another Land—Haida and Tsimshian Response

Dance Group Performance—Marine Park
Tlingit Culture Language & Literacy—Jessica Chester
LdaKut Naax Sati' Yatx’i Dance Group—Vikki Soboleff
Wooshji.een—Pulling Together—Lyle James
Git Hoan Tsimshian Dancers—David Boxley

Kaagwaantaan Leads Dance Groups, Canoe, and Procession from Dock to Walter Soboleff Building
TRADITIONAL CEREMONY

2:00—Phil Campbell, Northern Light United Church Minister

Opening Comments Ceremonial Spokespersons
Sorrel Goodwin, Rosa Miller, Yextehittaan, Leeneidi
Ed Gambell, Leeneidi, Angoon
Ken Grant, T'akdeintaan
Al McKinley, Mike Tagaban, Wooshkeetaan
David Katzeek, Shangukeidi

Thanking and Feeding the Spirits of the Trees
Ken Grant Address to Spirits of the Trees

Gan ka'six'i — Fire Bowl “Feeding the Ancestors”
David Katzeek—Kaajaaktu
Paul Marks—Asx'áak, Daa naawú, Tá Gooch, and Shaa Xe Xe

Yees Ku Oo Dance Group Performs as Ceremonial Group Moves Into the Clan House

Inside Clan House
Unveiling of Screen: Sarah Dybdahl, Jasmine James, Katrina Hotch, Kathy Dye
Joe Zuboff, Deisheetaan
Preston Singlelary, Kaagwaantaan
Paul Marks, Lukaax.ádi
Albert Kookesh's Grandchild’s Handprint in Corner of Clan House
Yéik “Spirit” Song: Raven: T’akdeintaan
Yéik “Spirit” Song: Eagle: Shangukeidi

Ceremonial Group Moves to Front of Clan House in Lobby
Unveiling of House Front: Carmaleeda Estrada, Donald Gregory, Paul Marks II, Elijah Marks

Tsimshian Comments and Dance: David Boxley, Laxsgiik
Raven: Kaach.ádi Song
Eagle: Kaagwaantaan Song

Ceremonial Group Moves to Outside Stage

Shuká Hít Clan House Naming Ceremony
Ken Grant, Raven: T’akdeintaan
David Katzeek, Eagle: Shangukeidi
Yéik utee “Imitating the Spirit”: Raven: Deisheetaan
Yéik utee “Imitating the Spirit”: Eagle: Dakl'aweidi
Haida Comments and Songs: Robert Davidson, Eagle

Ceremonial Transfer of Clan Hats to SHI
Rosita Worl, SHI
Bill Thomas, Gaanaxteidi
Byron Mallott, Kwaashki kwáan
Albert Kookesh, On Behalf of Leeneidi
Ed Thomas, Sukteeneidi
Ron Williams, T’akdeintaan
David Katzeek, Eagle Response

Closing Comments
Paul White, Eagle, Kaagwaantaan
Ishmael Hope, Raven, Kiks.ádi

Aangun Yatx'i (Angoon Children) Dancers

Dance Groups Closing Dance

Note: Because it’s customary to open a new building only after the opening ceremony has concluded, and the traditional ceremony is expected to go long into the day, the exhibit and other spaces in the building won't open until May 16.
INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL VALUES INTO THE CEREMONY

BY ROSITA KAA.HÁNI WORL

The Sealaska Heritage Institute Council of Traditional Scholars (CTS) began meeting with the SHI executive team in mid-2014 to plan for the Grand Opening Celebration of the Walter Soboleff Building. Very early in the discussions, it became apparent that a separate ceremony would need to be held for the public acknowledgment of organizations, officials, and donors who contributed to the building's construction and for those who played a major role in its success. A distinction between what became known as the “formal” and “traditional” ceremony emerged. Yet the team was very emphatic that the traditional protocols surrounding the welcoming of visitors needed to be included in the formal ceremony and then repeated again in the traditional ceremony.

As the Scholars began its deliberation to identify the rites that are held their clan house dedication ceremonies, they were silent about the fact that they would be conducting spiritual ceremonies that are held only within the Native community. The Elders and clan leaders have been insistent that ceremonial practices should not be conducted in the biennial Celebrations that are sponsored by the SHI. The concern was not that they are public events, but that Celebration should not take the place of traditional ceremonies that are hosted by clans. The Grand Opening Traditional Ceremony was viewed differently in that it is a celebration of the completion of a significant building owned by Native Peoples. The Scholars begrudging came to the realization that it would not be possible to include all elements of a traditional house dedication, held to celebrate the completion of the construction of a clan house, in a single-day event. They also recognized that their planning would have to consider the space limitations of the building and clan house. It was evident that all the participants and visitors would not be able to witness the ceremonial rites that would take place inside the building. Finally, because of the time constraints, the Scholars had to prioritize the ceremonial activities in which the singing and dancing could be done.

The Scholars were insistent that the original clan owners of the land on which the Soboleff building was constructed—that included the Auke Raven L’eeneidi and the Eagle Wooshkeetaan—were recognized. They also recognized the Yaxhíittaan’s assertion that they had emerged as a separate and distinct clan from the L’eeneidi, and thus a spokesperson from this group should also be present. Two of the members of the CTS, who also serve as the Raven and Eagle ceremonial leaders in Sealaska and SHI events such as the biennial Celebration, were also to be included in the “traditional welcome.” Additionally, in recognition of Dr. Walter Soboleff, for whom the building is named, the Scholars felt it was important that a representative of his clan should be included and thus the clan leader of the Angoon L’eeneidi was invited to participate. The team also recognized that a broad representation of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian whose histories and circumstances had bound them together was necessary.
Guiding every ceremonial rite is the necessity to ensure social and spiritual balance and harmony. This protocol requires the participation of a representative from an Eagle clan as well as a Raven clan in each rite or ceremonial activity. The Scholars had to be certain that if a Raven spoke, the comments had to be followed immediately by comments from an Eagle. If an Eagle sang or danced, a Raven must immediately follow with a song and dance. Violating this cultural principle could lead to social or physical illness within the group.

NATIVE SPIRITUALITY

A fundamental belief of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian is that everything within the world and universe has a spirit. In one of the CTS meetings chaired by Dr. Soboleff several years ago, we were reminded of this tenet when he knocked on the table saying, “Everything has a spirit, including this table.” Native Peoples have spiritual and kin relationship with animals, many of which serve as crests of clans; and places on the land are regarded as alive with spiritual life.

THANKING AND FEEDING THE SPIRITS OF THE TREES

One of the first rites identified by the Scholars was the need to thank and feed the spirits of the trees since cedar had been used to construct the building. The building is cloaked in 40-foot-high panels of yellow cedar. They wanted to be certain that they acknowledged and thanked the spirits of the cedar for allowing their use in the construction of the building. During the ceremony, food will be transferred to the tree spirits through fire.

GANKA S’ÍX’I (FEEDING THE ANCESTORS)

Another important rite in house building ceremonies is the Ganka s’íx’i (Feeding the Ancestors). The ceremonial leaders hold up a bowl filled with food and other goods and call out the names of ancestors, which are then repeated by all participants. The Fire Bowls are then given to individuals of the opposite moiety from that of the deceased. For example, if the name of the deceased was of a Raven clan, the Fire Bowl would be given to an Eagle who had a special relationship or friendship with the deceased. Through this rite the spirits of the deceased are called to participate in the ceremony. They enjoy the foods in the Fire Bowls when consumed by someone from the opposite moiety. On some occasions, rather than using the Fire Bowl, the food may be burned in a fire to transfer the food to the spirit world.

YÉIK (SPIRIT) SONGS AND YÉIK UTEE (IMITATING THE SPIRITS)

Clans have special relationships with the spirits represented in their crests. They also have special spirits that are often called on to provide protection. Spirits are called through clan songs and through dances in which dancers imitate the animal represented in a shakee.at while dancing behind a blanket. Through
these activities the spirits participate in the ceremony and the dancers become one with the spirit.

THE CLAN HOUSE

While the building is named after Dr. Soboleff, the Scholars felt that it was necessary for the clan house to have its own name. They were unanimous in their decision that it should be named *Shuká Hit*, reflecting the bonds with our ancestors and with future generations. *Shuká Hit* is often simply translated as “Ancestors House.”

The Scholars had a longer discussion about whether an “X” or handprint should be left as a “marker” in the clan house. The use of a “marker” is an ancient practice, and they are often found throughout Southeast Alaska on rocks or other natural features to signify clan ownership of land. The mark is placed in the corner of the clan house. In some communities an “X” is used while in others, a handprint is used. Further, in some communities the mark is put in all four corners of the clan house while in others the mark may be put in only one corner. Over a period of two meetings, the team decided that a single handprint would be put into one corner of the clan house, in part because of the time limitations.

The discussion of whose handprint should be put in the corner extended over two meetings. The Scholars identified a number of prominent and worthy individuals who had contributed not only to the construction of the building but who had worked tirelessly on behalf of the Native community.

After a long discussion, the team selected Albert Kookesh, who had served as the Chair of the Board of Directors of Sealaska when the decision was made to construct the building; who was formerly a State Senator; and who had a long and illustrious history of service to the Native community through the Alaska Native Brotherhood and the Alaska Federation of Natives. They also thought it was appropriate because of Albert’s close relationship with Dr. Soboleff.

The Scholars went further and proposed a new innovation based on the ancient cultural value of *Haa Shuká* that unites current generations with our ancestors and ties us to younger and future generations.

They decided that within Albert’s carved handprint, a “grandchild” who would also be a great grandchild of Dr. Soboleff, should also put his or her print. Albert later reported that he put the names of all his grandchildren on slips of paper and placed them in a hat, from which he blindly pulled out one name.

CLOSING SPEECH

The cultural values of *Haa Shuká* and *Haa Latseen* played into the decision to select a young man to be the final speaker in the traditional ceremony. He had already demonstrated the qualities of an emerging leader through his work, education, and commitment to his family and community. The Scholars were also greatly influenced by Ishmael Hope’s ability and progress in learning to speak the Tlingit language.

NATIVE PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES IN THE INAUGURAL EXHIBIT

The Council of Traditional Scholars also served as advisor in the development of the inaugural exhibition in the building. Discussion of the Grand Opening Ceremony and the exhibition often overlapped. One hallmark of the exhibit is the display of clan hats and other *atôowu* that have been loaned by clans for the exhibit. During the planning stages for the
exhibit, SHI issued a public call to clans inviting them to put their clan hats in the inaugural exhibit. In discussing the opening ceremony, the team elected to have a period in the Ceremony during which individuals would transfer their clan hats to SHI for the exhibit. Initially, it was thought that the transfer could occur in the exhibit area itself, but the scholars had to again deal with space and time limitations, and considered that not all of the public would be able to witness the event.

Significant in this event is the recognition that not all ceremonial regalia are clan-owned. The Tlingit have a highly developed legal system of property ownership and have complex rules governing clan ownership of clan at.óowu. However, in the more recent period, the concept and practice of individual ownership of ceremonial regalia has emerged. Individual ownership of ceremonial regalia and objects are made more complex by the indisputable fact that the crests that are depicted on individually-owned ceremonial regalia continue to be owned by clans. The crests continue to be considered clan at.óowu despite that the actual object (regalia or clan hat) may be owned by an individual. In this ceremonial activity, both clan and individual hats will be loaned for the exhibit. In conformance with cultural protocols, a response or acknowledgment by someone of the opposite moiety from those loaning their hats will be made.

In another instance, ceremonial service was involved in the (temporary) transfer of clan a.óowu to SHI. Ceremonial service, performed to assist one moiety by members of the opposite moiety, is a common practice that is seen primarily in the round of memorial rites. Formerly, it was practice that pervaded all aspects of life even to the point of retaining someone from the opposite moiety to put eye glasses on an individual when it was the first time that the individual would use eye glasses.

In preparing to loan clan at.óowu to SHI for the exhibit, the Shangukeidí clan leader retained three Ravens to provide ceremonial service. They were paid to unpack the clan collection, witness the signing of the loan document, and then re-pack those items that were not selected for use in the exhibit. The ceremonial service was accompanied by oratory and singing from both the Eagles and Ravens to ensure social and spiritual balance.

CONCLUSION

The integration of both traditional and modern architectural design into the Walter Soboleff Building was seemingly an easy task in contrast to the infusion of traditional practices into a new and public activity. The development of the Traditional Grand Opening Ceremony demonstrates that the ancient culture of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian is continuing to evolve.

In the Grand Opening Ceremony, Native Peoples are consciously grappling with ways to integrate their traditional cultural protocols and practices into contemporary, public events and institutions that traditionally were dominated by other than Native Peoples. The ultimate outcome of their efforts is unknown as of this writing, but no one can dispute that the planning and organization of this event reflect the survival of their traditional values, and their will and determination to bring their culture into the 21st Century.
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