

# THE WASHINGTON ARCHAEOLOGIST

WASHINGTON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, WASHINGTON STATE MUSEUM, SEATTLE 5, WN.

NEXT MEETING: Seattle Chapter - December 13, 1961 - 8:00 P.M.

MEETING PLACE: Washington State Museum  
4037 15th Avenue N. E.  
Seattle 5, Washington

PROGRAM: A color film "INDIANS OF EARLY AMERICA" will be shown. This film was edited by Ruth Underhill and the Northwest Coast section was taken at the Tulalip Reservation in 1956.

Christmas refreshments will be served.

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## THE NOOTKAN POTLATCH FIGURE IN THE WASHINGTON STATE MUSEUM

--Del Nordquist

Abstract: The Nootkan Potlatch Figure, a larger than man-sized, carved, wooden, articulated figure, had been photographed prior to 1952 at Neah Bay on the Makah Reservation. Bruce Inverarity had seen the figure and photographed the head. The Washington State Museum was able to secure the remains of the figure after a prolonged period of negotiation but only after it had been set aside by its owners, head missing and superficial damage to the remaining portion of the figure.

The carving was brought to Neah Bay from Vancouver Island circa 1926 and was used in Hunter Hall at meetings, particularly for potlatch ceremonials. During dances and songs, the figure was manipulated from beneath the floor and platform upon which the figure stood. The accompanying drawings show the details of articulation and design of the head.



## THE NOOTKAN POTLATCH FIGURE

IN THE WASHINGTON STATE MUSEUM (Catalog No. 1-1124)

Collected in 1952 for Washington State Museum by Del Nordquist

A larger than man-sized, carved, wooden figure, had been reported and photographed prior to 1952 at Neah Bay on the Makah Reservation. Bruce Inverarity, during his studies of Northwest Coast Indian art for his book, Art of the Northwest Coast Indians, had photographed the head of the figure. Interest was shown by the Museum but nothing had been arranged with the owners for either a loan or outright procurement of the figure for the ethnological collections. After a lapse of a few years, Roger Heglar reported that he saw the figure behind the Hunter Cafe, in a state of disrepair and apparently little cared for. It seemed an opportune time to attempt to persuade the owners to part with the figure before it was destroyed. In the consequence a trip was outfitted under the auspices of the Washington State Museum to investigate. Before the actual arrangements were made three trips were made, the first two having to do with the removal of the piece, the third with gathering ethnic data about the work.

The first trip revealed that the figure had originally stood in the Hunter Cafe and Amusement Hall, at that time containing a small concession for short orders and soft drinks with a large dance or assembly room. Although the family still had strong attachment to the sculpture, it was removed to modernize the room and left behind the building. Subject to vandalism and theft, the back of the torso was removed and lost. The body was split lengthwise and various ax marks, not part of the original carving, had been inflicted over the whole of the remaining parts. Both thumbs and parts of some fingers were broken off. Most disheartening was the absence of the head which, upon inquiry, was said to have been chopped up for firewood by a "former school teacher." No further explanation was given for the condition of the heirloom. However, in order to keep abuse at a minimum the figure was stuck under the southeast corner of the building at the rear. It lay there upon the first day of this investigation.

Permission was given by the family to photograph what remained. Inquiry was made as to the likelihood of the family releasing the ownership of the figure, but Martin Hunter, through his wife who acted as agent since he was ill, was at first moved to make no commitments. It seemed that there was sufficient reason to pursue the procurement for Mrs. Hunter later intimated that if the figure were released some cash price would be expected. Nothing more was done at that time pending a report to Dr. Douglas Osborne, then curator of the Museum.

Prior to the second trip a letter from Dr. Osborne was addressed to the Hunters explaining the intentions of the Museum, wishing to preserve the items of material culture and implying that many items were given to the Museum so that they might be preserved. Stress was placed on the almost worthlessness of the figure without the back and head. No answer was received. Consequently, a follow up was planned and undertaken. The departmental station wagon was in the service of Warren Caldwell, therefore he was recruited to give time and



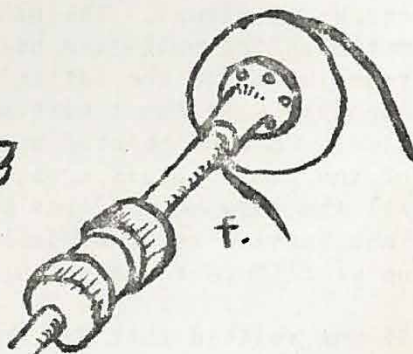
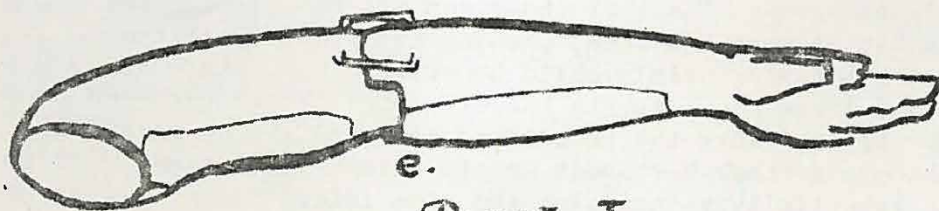
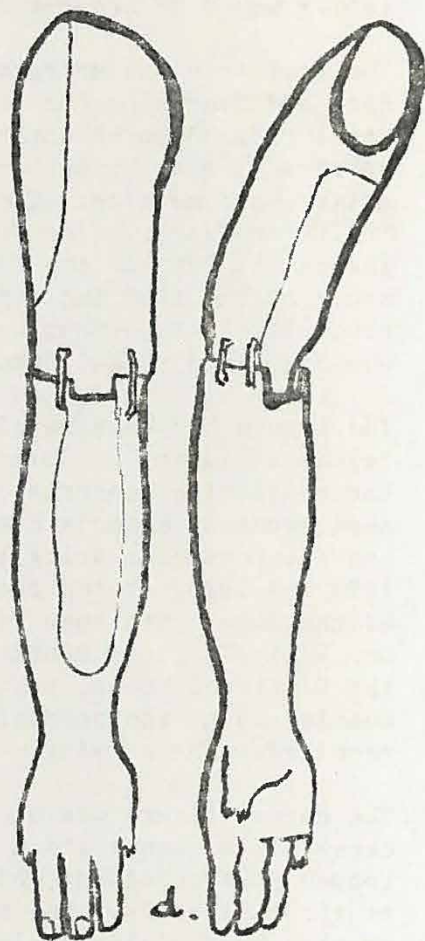
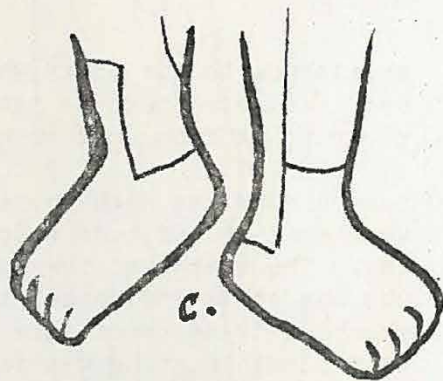
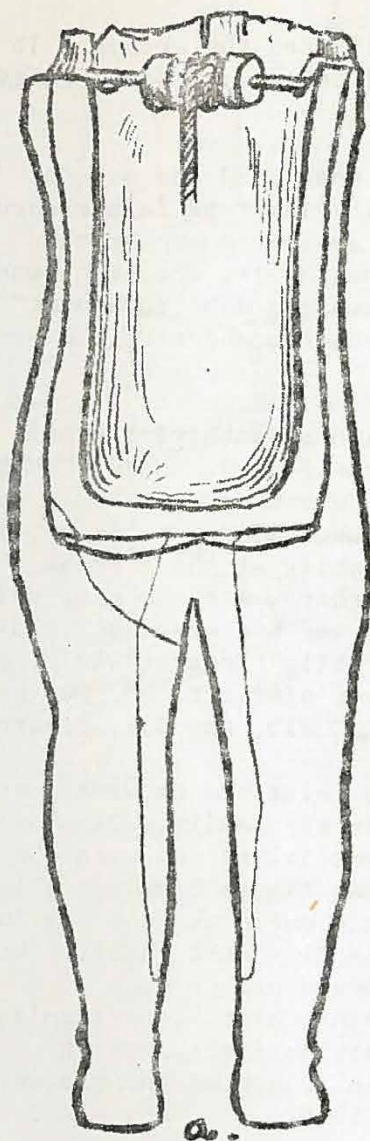


PLATE I



assistance to the party which consisted of Roger Heglar and the author. It was considered best to take the figure immediately if permission was granted removing it from further chance of destruction.

Upon arrival at Neah Bay the Hunter family was again contacted and asked whether they had made a decision regarding the Museum's interest in the carving. The sister of the owner, Mrs. Alva Wanderhard, consulted her brother who was still indisposed to personal contact, and through her, agreement was reached giving the figure to the Museum. Since no data could be gotten at that time a meeting was set up at a later date when other members of the family would be brought together.

The last trip was undertaken with the twofold intention of gathering ethnic data and searching for the lost head. The latter cause failed. Martin Hunter still refused to be interviewed, however other kin were contacted through the efforts of Mrs. Wanderhard. Information was sought concerning the figure, its origin, and meaning. The author met members of the family at the home of Mrs. Irene Ward. Alec Greene, an uncle of Mrs. Wanderhard, was the most valuable informant. He was the family's dance and song leader and had exercised that honor at the time the figure was still in use in the hall. Unfortunately, another likely informant was not present, namely an older sister to Mr. Hunter who had moved to California. (Mrs. Raymond Dilley, RFD #10, Box 331, Fresno).

The figure had been received as a gift from Clayoquot relatives on Vancouver Island replacing a similar sculpture which had been in the family. Jim Hunter, father of Alva Wanderhard, took his launch to Vancouver Island and with the assistance of Francis Frank (from Neah Bay) brought the figure home.

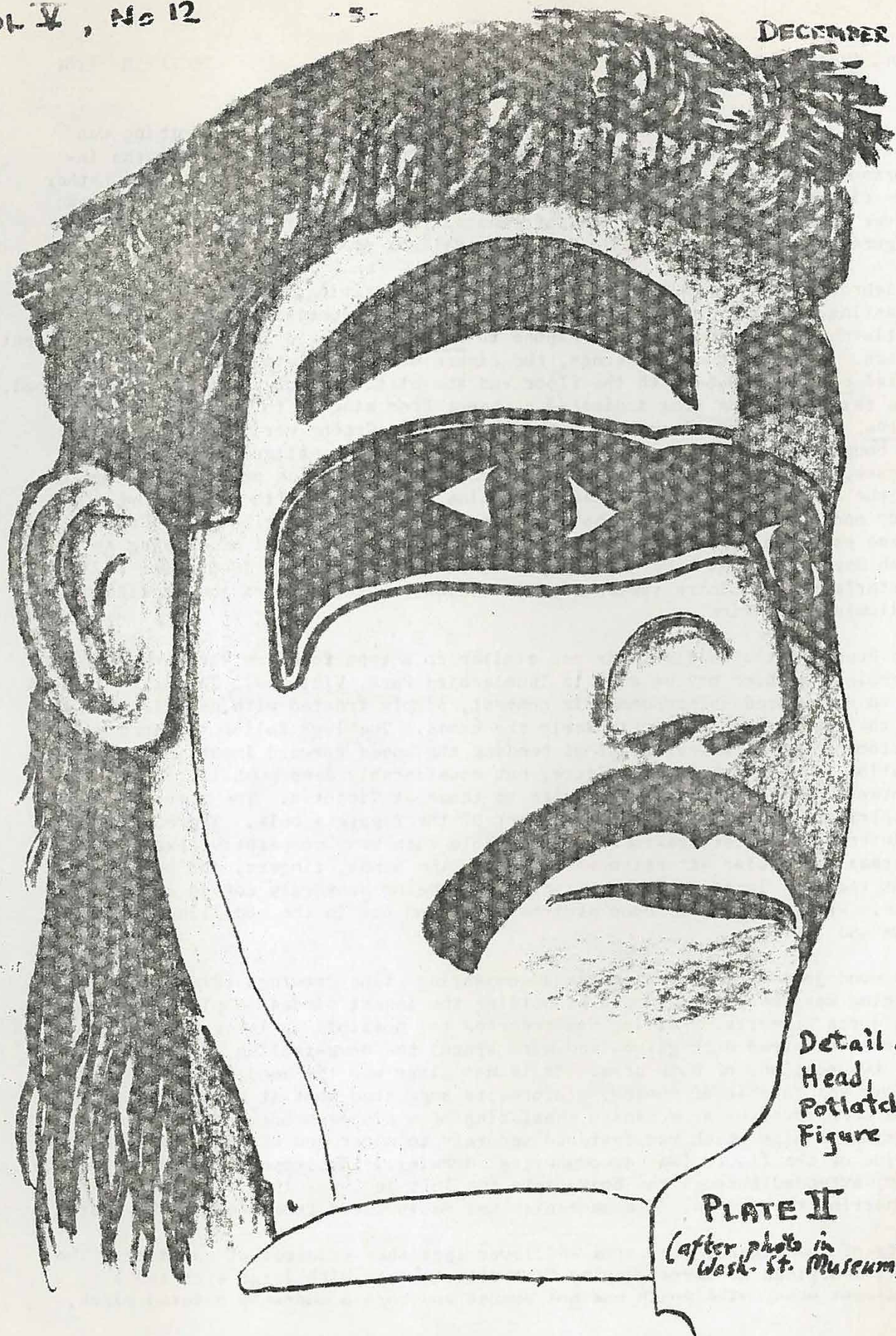
Frances Densmore, doing ethnographic studies of Nootkan music at Neah Bay in 1923 and 1926, states that Jim Hunter was the son of a Clayoquot chief.<sup>1</sup> None of the informants knew by whom, where, or when the figure was made.

Dr. Viola Garfield mentioned to the writer that certain features, particularly the flattened knees, suggested Kwakiutl workmanship stylistically. When queried as to the possibility of its being Kwakiutl in origin no answers were received. The carving was brought to Neah Bay circa 1926.

The carved figure was used in Hunter Hall at meetings, particularly potlatch ceremonies, hence its name as a "Potlatch Figure." It was flanked by two carved poles, both of which stand at either side of the exterior, front facade, of the cafe today. One of the poles represented a bear (or bear-man) surmounted by a killer whale. A raven perched upon the whale. All figures are significant parts of Nootkan mythology, figuring as frequent persons in both story and ritual. The other pole represented the Thunderbird standing upon a mythological wolf-like being called i-is'kus. Alec Greene related that the translation of the latter's name meant "He that chews gum all the time." The creature went about with a basket upon his back, chewing gum (resin) all the time. When he chanced upon a stray or unruly child he grabbed him, stuck some of the gum over his eyes, and threw him into the basket. Once he had gathered all the wayward children he retired into the forest and devoured the children. This particular bogey is known in other Northwest Coast Indian communities under different names, but essentially maintaining the same role.

It was related that Jim Hunter used the figure only at potlatches given for the Quilleute. On such occasions the carving was dressed in a gown made of





Detail of  
Head,  
Potlatch  
Figure

PLATE II  
(after photo in  
Wash. St. Museum.)



white muslin and fastened at the waist by a red belt or sash. Nothing was learned about the significance, if any, of the white gown. Because the informants described the attire "like a woman's" inquiry was made as to whether the figure represented either male or female; such a thought or question had never entered the heads of the informants. It was apparently male for the figure was referred to by Jim Hunter as Ka'kabā or "big man."

Celebrations at Hunter's Hall consisted of gift giving, dancing, singing, and feasting, lasting from four to ten days. This is consistent with typical potlatches. It tended to correspond to Makah Days, held in late August in recent years. During dances and songs, the figure was manipulated by George Young (died circa 1940) beneath the floor and the platform upon which the figure stood. The raising of the arms indicated a change from singing to humming, or vice versa. Characteristic dances described by Alec Greene were groups, arranged by couples with the women immediately behind the men, aligned facing the figure. In singing the men bowed toward the floor at the point of transition in the songs. The women danced with palms upward, first to one side of the body and then to the other, holding them at about shoulder height. Some of these postures are illustrated in Densmore<sup>2</sup> and are typical of dancing at Neah Bay. The last time the figure was used at a dance in 1946 prior to Jim Hunter's death. There seemed little inclination to carry on the traditions following that time.

The Hunter potlatch figure is one similar to a type found on Vancouver Island, examples of which may be seen in Thunderbird Park, Victoria. The style is that of an attenuated anthropomorphic concept, simply treated with details accented on the face, arms and particularly the hands. The legs follow the more general custom on the Northwest Coast of bending the knees forward imparting a suggestion of a crouch to the figure, but considerably less emphatic in the Hunter figure than on smaller types or those at Victoria. The torso commands, proportionally, the most imposing part of the figure's bulk. There is a thicker and heavier treatment to the whole than many comparative examples. Whereas particular attention was given to the hands, fingers, and nails, the feet receive almost no elaboration at all, being summarily carved and block-like. Wrists and ankle bone protrusions stand out in the modelling of lower arms and legs.

The wood joinery is shown in the accompanying line drawings (Plate I). Pegging was the primary means of holding the insert pieces in place and joining parts to parts. Nailing was resorted to, possibly in later repair. The elbows are wired with galvanized wire around the dove-tailing joint between the two sections of both arms. It is not clear how the head fitted into place, but it was capable of moving. Informants suggested that it could turn. The arms were moved by a mechanism consisting of a simple wooden drum around a section of pipe which was fastened securely to upper end of each arm within the inside of the figure (See accompanying drawing.) The rope, wrapped around the drum, extended through the body, into the left leg, and into the platform supporting the figure. The mechanism was manipulated from beneath the floor.

Parts of the figure, i.e. arms and lower legs show evidence of painting. The head, described as large, having features of a man with large eyes and a prominent nose. The mouth was not opened and bore a mustache painted black.



Ears were appended to the head and a long train of black hair extended down its back. A band of red extended across the nose. The eyes were accented by a band of black that was carried back from each eye to the side of the head. Usually, in ceremonies, the head was outfitted with a cedar bark headdress tied in front. (See Plate II)

Addenda: The tall pole with a carved bird figure standing across the street from the Hunter Cafe figured into the potlatches given by the family. It was a lookout for guests, or even strangers passing Neah Bay and called them in so that they could be fed and entertained by the Hunter family. It is interesting that it might just as well serve present passersby and call them as customers to the cafe.

Fred Anderson and Ralph LaChester both carve miniature poles for tourist sale. One purchased by the author was copied from one of those standing at the cafe, i.e. that with the Thunderbird and Iiskus.

Alex Greene offered to record songs sung in the ceremonies at the cafe during Jim Hunter's day and when the figure was a center of activities.

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1 Densmore, Frances: Nootka & Quileute Music. BAE Bulletin 124, p. 136.

2 Densmore, Frances: op cit. Plates 20 & 21.

Del Nordquist

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BOOK REVIEW: The Old Cordilleran Culture in the Pacific Northwest.  
B. Robert Butler. Occasional Papers of the Idaho State  
College Museum, Number 5, Pocatello, Idaho, 1961.

Butler has brought together a body of material relating to the occurrence and distribution of leaf-shaped projectile points in the Pacific Northwest. The five sub-areas treated on an individual basis are the Northern Great Basin of south central Oregon, the Upper Klamath Lake region (Oregon), the Dalles region, the Columbia Basin of eastern Washington and Oregon and the Puget Lowland of Northern Washington west of the Cascades. The leaf-shaped projectile points are called the Cascade Type. These points are said to be the chief diagnostic implement of an unspecialized hunting-gathering culture which appeared on the scene in the Pacific Northwest at or near the end of the Late Pleistocene. This culture is named the Old Cordilleran Culture. This culture ranges from the maritime province of Puget Sound southward to the Northern Great Basin and east into the Columbia Basin and possibly into eastern Idaho. The range of time is from 7,000 to 12,000 B.P. The paper contains discussions of specific sites with supporting illustrations, i.e. maps, profiles, and photographs of artifacts.

In the appendix, The Old Cordilleran Culture Hypothesis: A Problem in Environmental Archaeology, Earl Swanson states the problem concisely: the hypothesis requires substantiation in several ways. Those of us who have first hand knowledge of the sites Butler discusses know that the evidence is great enough to postulate such an hypothesis. Certainly all sites in the Pacific Northwest with early horizons will have to be considered in this frame of reference.

-- C. G. Nelson



ELECTION OF 1962 OFFICERS

Del Nordquist, Executive Secretary and Chairman of the Nominating Committee, presented the slate of proposed officers at the October meeting. There were no further nominations from the floor and the candidates submitted by the committee were unanimously elected to serve as officers for the year 1962.

President	Jack Thomson
Vice-President	Charles Heller
Treasurer	Mrs. Mona Beddall
Recording Secretary	Mrs. Willi Weld
Board Member II 1962 thru 1964	Ted Weld
Board Member III 1960 thru 1962	Richard Gent
Board Member I 1961 thru 1963	C. G. Nelson

By way of review a tabulation of the persons serving in the various elective offices is shown. The executive secretary is in effect elected by this group and is therefore listed.

<u>Year</u>	<u>President</u>	<u>Vice-President</u>	<u>Treasurer</u>	<u>Recording Secretary</u>
1956*	C. G. Nelson	Richard Gent	J. H. Lindquist	Mrs. Mona Beddall
1957	C. G. Nelson	Richard Gent	J. H. Lindquist	Mrs. Mona Beddall
1958	C. G. Nelson	Lee Tracy	Tom Beddall	Mrs. Mona Beddall
1959	C. G. Nelson	Lee Tracy	Tom Beddall	Mrs. Mona Beddall
1960	C. G. Nelson	Lee Tracy	Ted Weld	Mrs. Willi Weld
1961	Ted Weld	Jack Thomson	Gifford Nickerson	Mrs. Gif. Nickerson
1962	Jack Thomson	Charles Heller	Mrs. Mona Beddall	Mrs. Willi Weld

\* First term of office from July 19, 1956, to December 31, 1957.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Board Member I</u>	<u>Board Member II</u>	<u>Board Member III</u>	<u>Executive Sec'y</u>
1956*	Ted Weld	Mrs. Betsy Ann Trick	Charles Heller	Dr. D. Osborne
1957	Ted Weld	Mrs. Betsy Ann Trick	Charles Heller	Dr. D. Osborne
1958	Richard Gent	Mrs. Betsy Ann Trick	Charles Heller	Dr. Wm. Massey
1959	Richard Gent	James Garner	Charles Heller	Del Nordquist
1960	Richard Gent	James Garner	Charles Heller	Del Nordqvist
1961	C. G. Nelson	James Garner**	Charles Heller	Del Nordquist
1962	C. G. Nelson	Ted Weld	Richard Gent***	Del Nordquist

\*\* Richard Gent served as alternate

\*\*\* Serving unexpired term by election