

Chinookans Bring Traditional Plankhouse To Life



ence for future plankhouse construction."

About 250 cedar logs helped bring the plankhouse to life. After three years and 3,500 volunteer hours, the vision of the plankhouse became a reality.

"It is important that people have something tangible to better understand that these people (Chinook) are very talented."

**~ Adam McIsaac
Carver**

The \$575,000 project was paid for by grants and contributions.

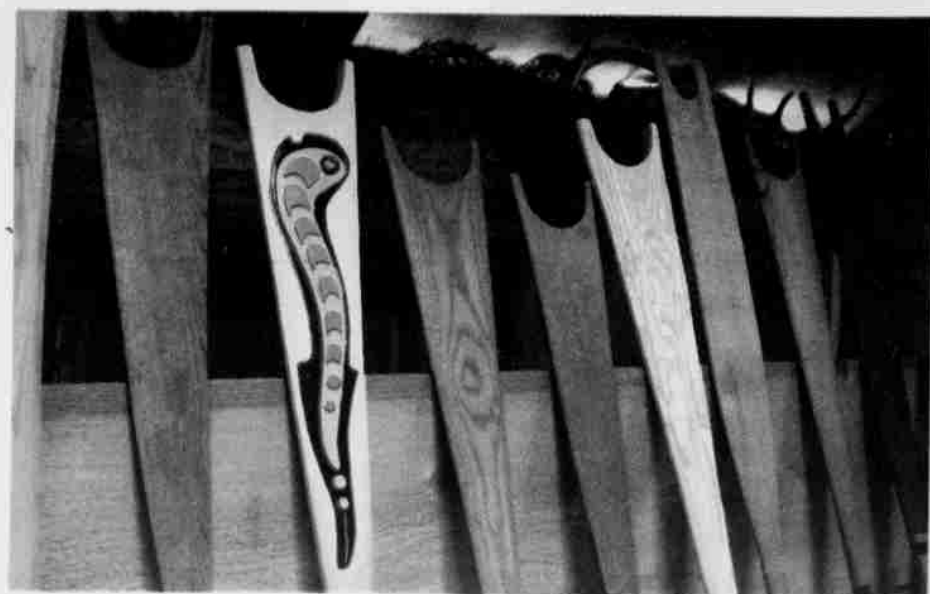
Members from the Chinook Tribe along with some drummers from Eagle Beak drummed and sang Chinook honor songs to open the ceremony.

"Hopefully, due to the plankhouse, people will see that the Natives from this land are still here," said Yakama Tribal member

and member of Eagle Beak drum Richard (Bubba) Sohappy, who was in attendance for the opening ceremony.

About 150 people then gathered outside as members of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service spoke about the

Display — Above is the entrance of the Chinookan plankhouse. Chinook Tribal member Tony Johnson (right) did the design of the artwork for the plankhouse. The site took about three years to complete and cost \$575,000. Below, a row of traditional canoe paddles were on display for the opening ceremony as well as baskets and other Chinookan tools.



After the speech, the Elders in attendance were honored by being the first to crouch through the four foot tall, oval shaped doorway as they were led in by the beats of the ceremonial songs.

Once inside, all of the people that played significant roles in the construction of the plankhouse were honored and recognized.

Tony Johnson did the design of the plankhouse, the artwork inside and helped Carver Adam McIsaac, 32, with the cedar carvings that stand tall inside of the house.

These traditional Chinookan sculptures stand about 18 feet and took six months to complete.

"It is important that people have something tangible to better understand that these people (Chinook) are very talented," said McIsaac. "I would sure hope that this project helps them to become federally recognized."

Chinook Tribal Chairman Gary Johnson finished the ceremony with an explanation of what the plankhouse means to the Chinookan Natives.



Keeper Of The Fire — The handmade drum of Chinook Tribal member Tony Johnson sits next to the fire in between honor songs. The painting on the drum, designed and painted by Johnson, eventually became a 16 foot mural that is painted above the four foot doorway on the east end of the plankhouse. The plankhouse used about 250 cedar logs and 3,500 volunteer hours.

"It is important in terms of all of the Tribal activities," said Johnson. "It is really important in showing what the Tribe is doing. It adds to our Tribal history and it helps show the path of our Tribe's survival."

Chinook Tribal member, council member and member of the Chinook Culture Committee Greg Robinson was the Project Manager for the plankhouse project.

Plans for a second plankhouse are already being discussed.

"If we can build a second house, it will be a much more inward focus on our cultural revitalization,"

said Tony Johnson. "We feel the need to have a house built right in the heart of our territory, so we can practice our winter dance religion."

Radio-carbon dating has determined that the site if the plankhouse has been occupied by the Chinooks for longer than 2,000 years. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, stratified sites of this age are very rare in the active floodplain of the Columbia River.

In 1806, Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark trekked for thousands of

miles before crossing paths with the Chinook people. On the verge of starvation, Lewis and Clark were befriended by the Chinook, who taught them, fed them and gave them shelter. Lewis and Clark recorded in their journals that there were 14 houses and an estimated population of 900 people.

Today, the Chinook Tribe is fighting for federal recognition.

"It is very frustrating because our Tribal history says that we have always been recognized," said Gary Johnson. "Our situation, although similar to others, is quite different."