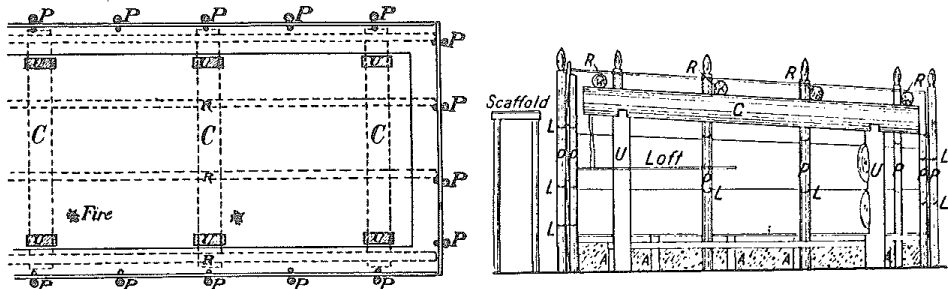
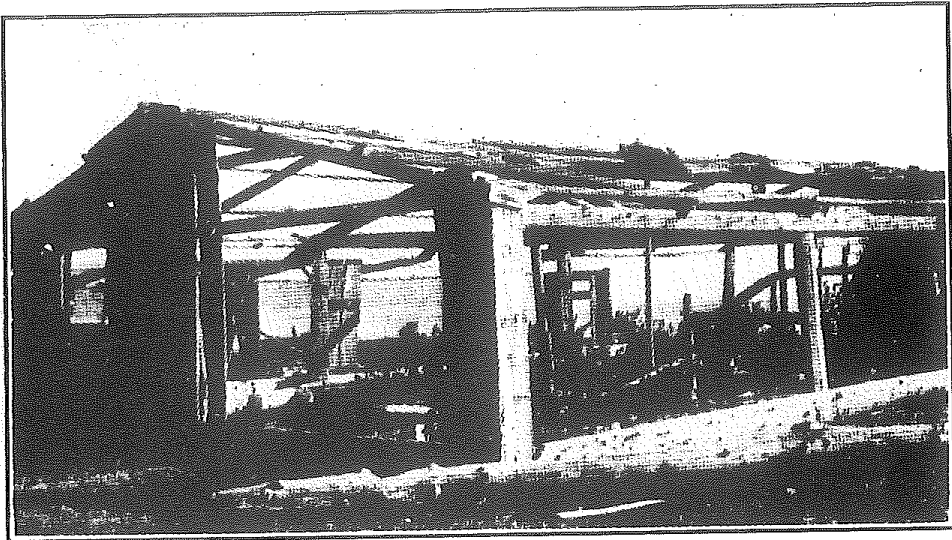


DENVER ART MUSEUM

DENVER, COLORADO

Department of Indian Art

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(a) Diagram showing the construction of a "shed" house. (b) Section of house. After Boas. (c, cross-beams; u, uprights; r, rafters; p, poles; L, ropes of cedar-branches which pass through holes in the boards and are tied around the poles).

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PUGET SOUND INDIAN HOUSES

THE PUGET SOUND INDIANS are the members of the following tribes living on or near Puget Sound; Klallam, Chemakum, Skokomish, Satsop, Nisqually, Puyallup, Muckleshoot, Duwamish, Snoqualmi, Squamish, Skykomish, Snohomish, Skagit, Swinomish and Samish. For additional information about these tribes see leaflet 32.

TIMBER. The building of the great houses described in this leaflet was only possible because of the existence in the region of great quantities of immense trees, mostly cedar and spruce. The wood of these trees is very straight and splits easily and evenly, so that the Indians were able to make wide planking with their stone, antler and later iron tools. The trees were felled by driving big antler or wood wedges into the trees, which had previously been notched.

PRESENT CONDITIONS. The last remaining native house in the Puget Sound area was destroyed near Seattle many years ago. A few roof planks are preserved in the Museum of the American Indian. The modern Indians live in small houses like those of the whites.

HOUSE TYPES

SHED ROOF. This was the most common type of house not only in the Puget Sound region but also in the whole area washed by Juan de Fuca Strait and adjoining waters. The distinguishing characteristic of these houses was their nearly flat roof sloping down from the front of the house to the rear in one pitch. These houses were built in dimensions which would seem unbelievable except for the recorded measurements of some of them. Buildings 500 to 700 feet long and from 40 to 90 feet wide are described in the literature on the subject. Such very large examples were community houses, the space within them being allotted to many different family groups. The average house was probably not over 75 feet long by 20 wide. They were built with the long sides parallel with the waterfront.

GABLE ROOF. The houses of this style are found around Puget Sound extending southwards, and stretching north from the east side of Vancouver Island. They have a two pitch roof sloping very gently in opposite directions from a central ridge pole. They are much smaller than the shed type. They are built at right angles to the shore line. Beyond the certain fact that such houses were built in the Puget Sound region but little information is available about them. They were certainly less common than the shed type and were said to be used by rich men only. Considerable is known about the type elsewhere, however, so that a reconstruction is possible.

GAMBREL, HIP, OR LEAN-TO ROOF. Houses built in this style were peculiar to the region. Information as to the reason of this development is not available. These buildings were nearer square in shape than the other types. From the top of the wall line, on one or more sides, a rather short, steep roof sloped up to a center section which was almost flat, sloping only a very little. These houses varied greatly in size.

POTLATCH HOUSES. Every village had at least one or two buildings which were reserved for the great gift-giving ceremonies known as

potlatches. There was no special model for these houses, but they were usually large.

TEMPORARY DISMANTLING. It was the custom of these tribes to temporarily dismantle the large houses in the seasons when they were not in use to the extent of removing the great planks from the walls and roof. In the community houses the planks covering the section assigned to each man belonged to him. In the summer season, when the people were wandering about on food gathering expeditions, the planks were very useful in making temporary shelters, or platforms across two canoes for the transportation of large quantities of material of various kinds. The making of these planks was an extremely difficult and arduous proceeding and a few of them were worth a fortune to an Indian.

HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

FRAMEWORK. Two rows of upright planks, 2 to 3 feet wide and 6 to 8 inches thick, were set in the ground 25 to 50 feet apart, according to the width of the house. The uprights were 12 to 14 feet from each other and the rear ones were the shorter. One family group lived in the space between each pair of posts, which were often carved with the spirit helper of the owner. (See eighth heading, leaflet 32.) Great beams were then lifted into place, on top of the uprights and connecting pairs of them. In the gabled houses there were center uprights and a ridge pole on which the beams rested. These beams were often over 50 feet long and two feet in diameter. Three or more rows of smaller logs were next placed lengthwise of the house, at right angles to the main beams.

ROOF PLANKS about three feet wide were laid in a double layer on the rows of small logs. Troughs were cut in the planks, the lower layer having deep gouges facing upward and the upper layer having shallow troughs facing downward. The planks were laid much like modern tile. The planks were bound to the beams with cedar withes. Cracks, knot-holes and other defects were carefully filled with clay, pitch, or clam-shell patches.

WALL PLANKS ran both vertically and horizontally. In the former case the planks were stood as closely together as possible. Battens were placed over the cracks and all were held in place by long strips running horizontally and lashed to the inside. Wedges held loose planks in place. Where the planks were used horizontally a row of extra poles was set up around the outside of the house. The planks were suspended in overlapping rows by slings fastened to the house posts and the outer poles.

DOORS. It is suggested that before the introduction of iron tools there were no true doors, the Indians entering the building through spaces left between the planks, mats being hung to close the openings. But most of the houses described had openings framed with heavy posts and lintels. Others were entered through holes cut in the planks. Later houses had heavy plank doors swung on iron hinges. The big houses had several doors. Back doors were provided to allow a quick escape into the forest if the building was attacked.

INTERIOR ARRANGEMENTS. A prominent feature of many of the houses was the central pit or trench, from 1 to 5 feet deep and entered by steps or a ramp. Houses for more than one family had a number of fires placed along the sides of the building, the center being left open for a passageway. Two to four families used one fire. Smoke escaped through holes in the roof made by pushing aside some of the planks with long poles. Bark was the principal fuel. The houses were sometimes divided into rooms by partitions running the full width of the building. Bed platforms, 1 to 2 feet high and 3 to 4 feet wide, ran around the walls of each family section. In front of these were low platforms for seats and beds for the slaves. Above the beds were storage shelves, sometimes reached by ladders. Every house had a central rack built to the height of the walls on which fish were dried. Cattail mats lined the walls, lay on the floor, served as bedding and were hung up as partitions. The houses were very smoky and always smelled very strongly of fish. Because of their loose construction they were rather drafty. Houses passed from father to son and were burned or given away if the owner died in them.

SUMMER HOUSES. In the summer the people left the permanent villages of plank houses and wandered far afield in search of food. While on these expeditions they lived in small temporary houses, one family to a house, though sometimes communal houses were made. There were two main types of summer houses, the difference being in the shape of the pole framework. Some tribes had a conical framework like a tipi while others favored a square structure with a gable roof. Both types were covered with overlapping layers of reed matting.

Compiled from the following sources by F. H. Douglas:

MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, HEYE FOUNDATION, NEW YORK.

1. Indian Houses of Puget Sound—Waterman and Greiner. Indian Notes and Monographs, Misc. No. 9, 1921.

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2. The Indians of Puget Sound—Haeberlin and Gunther. Publications in Anthropology. Vol 4, No. 1, 1930.
3. Klallam Ethnography—Gunther. Publications in Anthropology. Vol. 1, No. 5, 1927.

Pictures of houses, 1; information on tribal variations, 1, 2, 3.