

TO CARVE TOTEM AT STRATFORD

A 22-foot totem-pole will be carved this summer at the Stratford Festival as part of an exhibit devoted to the Western Canadian Indian. Already delivered to the Shakespeare Festival city from British Columbia, by train and truck, is a huge cedar log that will, before the summer is over, be shaped into a totem-pole by Ellen Neel, of White Rock, B.C., one of the country's best-known practitioners of the old Indian art.

The pole, erected on trestles on the arena floor, where the carving will be done in full view of Festival visitors, will serve as a centre-piece of the display of Indian arts, crafts and historical treasures arranged through the co-operation of the National Museum and the Stratford Festival.

Mrs. Neel, a direct descendant of a celebrated Kwakiutl chief named Klakwagila, will be assisted in the enormous task of carving the pole into its intricate pattern by her husband. While she does the designing detail work and painting, Mr. Neel will do the heavy chopping and supervise the mechanics of the operation.

When the pole is finished, it will be shipped to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where it has been commissioned by a fraternal organization connected with the University of Michigan.

ABOUT THE CARVER

Mrs. Neel, mother of six, and a relative of Mungo Martin, one of British Columbia's most noted carvers, has been educated in Indian mythology and art since childhood, and has been responsible for some of the displays of Indian art in Vancouver's city parks.

The art of totem-pole carving is the traditional right of two tribes of the Pacific Northwest, the Kwakiutls and Haidas. It is a right that has been jealously guarded for centuries and handed down from generation to generation as an honoured heritage.

The Stratford pole will be carved to represent the legend of the Thunderbird, a great bird that assumed human shape to protect the earliest earth people and afterward returned to his home in the heavens, leaving the Grizzly Bear as protector. "As he returned to the skies," the legend goes, "he said that, in the future, whenever one of his own descendants died, the people would know it from the thunder and lightning. And to this day, the thunder rolls, the heavens weep, and the lightning flashes whenever one of Thunderbird's descendants dies."

The top figure on the pole is Thunderbird. On his chest is a man's face, to indicate that he could change into human form at will. The wings of Thunderbird are a representation of the Lightning Snake. Thunderbird used the Lightning Snake as a weapon which he threw like a spear when he was hunting. The bottom figure is Grizzly Bear.

Mrs. Neel's totem-pole, which will include five figures, will have a 20-inch finished diameter. At present it is simply a five-ton log being sheltered from the weather in the Stratford arena.

The "Panorama of the Western Canadian Indian" is one of several exhibits scheduled for this year's Stratford Festival, which opens June 27 and ends September 17. In the arena there will also be a display of paintings by British Columbia artists, including a collection by the late Emily Carr. In the nearby Exhibition Building there will be displays of Canadian arts and crafts, theatrical costumes and designs, and rare and modern books.

CANADA'S ROYAL WEDDING GIFT

Prime Minister Diefenbaker announced recently, through his office in Ottawa, that the Canadian wedding present to Princess Margaret would consist of six pieces of early Canadian pine furniture, a piece of Eskimo sculpture, two colored prints of early Canadian scenes and an engraved map of Canada dated 1755.

The Government chose these gifts in the hope that they might form the nucleus of a "Canadian room" in Princess Margaret's country home.

The pine furniture, of a style native to early French Canada, was made by Quebec artisans at various times between the years 1750 and 1800. A chest of drawers of attractive simplicity is the earliest of the six pieces. The set also includes two arrowback chairs, one Windsor chair, a corner cupboard and a desk. These pieces represent work typical of the best craftsmanship of French Canada of that period.

The Eskimo sculpture is a piece entitled "The Storyteller" and is the work of an Eskimo named Hakak, a hunter and stone-carver from Shartowetok, forty miles east of Cape Dorset on the south coast of Baffin Island. There are only three families in this remote community.

Hokak's carving depicts a woman telling a story at an Eskimo meeting or during some kind of ceremony. She is seated on the ground and holds in her right hand a sealskin mask, of the type commonly associated with shamanism, which is understood to represent the inner spirit of a person and has a broad legendary significance.

The sculpture has been worked in a hard type of green serpentine found not far from Hakak's village. It was the only piece available at the time of its purchase, but two more carvings are to be forwarded to Princess Margaret when they are received from the Arctic.

The two prints show street scenes at Prescott and Cornwall, depicting these towns as they appeared a century and a half ago. The engraved map of Canada, also colored, delineates the country in 1755.