Nuuchaanulth poles represent crest figures of the families that own the poles. The poles refer to the traditions, possessions, rights, and privileges of the families, which own them. As well, Nuuchaanulth poles illustrate a larger political reality, confederation. Our people know and express our connections with each other constantly in many ways. In our way, the two most important questions that one can ask a person are: Who are you? (meaning: What is your name?) and Where are you from? (meaning: Who are your mother, father, grandparents; who are your relatives?). We trace our family trees backward for each other with the hope that we will get to a place where we reach a common root, a family connection, a blood tie. Then we can say “Uuwaatsasa,” “We are relatives.” This is the basis for a deeper, respectful relationship. These are powerful questions. Who are you? Where are you from? Nuuchaanulth poles speak powerfully to these questions.

We do not know when the earliest Nuuchaanulth poles were carved, however, when the Maatmalthnii first came ashore at Yuukwaat [Yuquot], in 1778, the artist John Webber drew house poles inside a Muu-ach’at-h chief’s house. In the late 1700s, Meares wrote rather flamboyant descriptions of Wikananish’s house-entrance pole at Huupitsat. Meares entered the bighouse through the monstrous mouth of the bottom figure on the house post. Aahuusat-h, Chiiktlisat-h, Kaa’yuuukw’at-h, Muu-ach’at-h, and Yuulthuu-ilhat-h house posts show up in historic photographs, too. Pre-World War I photographs of freestanding nonarchitectural poles at half a dozen other Nuuchaanulth villages also exist.

There was a woman of royal standing called Chamaatuk, known at the time of her death, around 1916, as Hakumaatkw. She was the eldest sister of Mukwina [Maquinna] the Fifth, and a member of the Yaalthuu-ashtakamithat-h Clan of lihatisat-h. She had a lot of relatives at Huukh, but no offspring. When Queen Hakumaatkw died, the lihatisat-h branches of her Mukwina family hosted...