

The Indian totem pole in Centennial Park at the corner of Fourth and Holmes Streets in Livermore is the work of Native American Adam Nordwall, who later took the name of Adam Fortunate Eagle. He was born on the Red Lake Native American Reservation in northwest Minnesota in 1929; his father was Swedish and his mother was Chippewa (Ojibwa). His father died when Adam was five years old, and his mother had to send Adam to an Indian boarding school. After graduation, he attended Haskell Institute in Kansas, where he met his future wife, Bobbie Graham, who is a Shoshone.

Adam and Bobbie moved to San Francisco in 1951 after their marriage. Adam Nordwall worked as a licensed termite inspector and eventually by the late 1960s had his own company called the First American Termite Company. By 1961, the Nordwalls were living in San Leandro and had three children. The Nordwalls decided to learn more about their Native American heritage. They became involved in local Indian groups. Adam Nordwall was elected the chairman of the United Bay Area Council of Indian Affairs.

For 19 months, from 20 November 1969 to 11 June 1971, Native Americans of different tribes occupied the small island of Alcatraz. Adam Nordwall was one of the main organizers and supporters of the occupation on the mainland. He helped to write their Proclamation to the Great White Father and all his people. During this time, Adam began to let his hair grow; today, he wears it in two long braids. The occupation was unsuccessful, but the publicity around the event called the country's attention to the problems of American Indians. In September 1973 Nordwall journeyed to Rome, Italy, where he exited the plane in full Objibwa regalia and claimed the land of Italy for the American Indians: "What right did Columbus have to discover America when it had already been inhabited for thousands of years? The same right I now have to come to Italy and proclaim the discovery of your country."

A newly developing shopping center in Livermore, the Livermore Valley Square, had commissioned a redwood totem pole from Adam Nordwall in 1969. He worked on the project for about two years, but when he was finished, the shopping center could

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan
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Adam Fortunate Eagle (Adam Nordwall)

not afford to pay him the \$2,000 agreed upon. So he decided to give it to the City of Livermore. In the movie, *Livermore*, Dan Lee, the city public works director, commented on Nordwall's offer: "In a moment of weakness, I said, okay, I'll have my crew pick it up." The men took the totem pole to the city corporation yard, where it stayed for about two years until the City Beautification Committee decided in the last week of November 1971 to approve of the gift. The top figure of the pole is an eagle holding Robert Livermore in its wings; the eagle is the protector of the city. A farmer holding grapes is the second figure, representing the agricultural interests of the city. The third figure is a beaver holding an atom energy symbol, representing the city's scientific interests. Below these three figures, Nordwall carved ten rings,



Totem Pole (Anne Homan 2005)

each ring representing 10 years of Livermore's history.

When Nordwall came to see it after its installation at Centennial Park, he was very upset. He came to a City Council meeting and explained the problem. He had purposefully put the rings at the bottom in order to put the three figures high above any graffiti or

other work by vandals. The city crew who installed it had cut off some of the rings, making the 1.5 ton statue four feet shorter than he had envisioned. He threatened to take back the carving if the city did not reinstall it correctly. An impatient Dan Lee said, "Then you would be an Indian giver?" Nordwall resented the remark and threatened to put a curse on the city sewer system if the totem pole were not installed correctly and if he did not receive an apology. Fortunately, the workmen had kept the bottom of the pole they had cut off, so they were able to restore the pole. It was removed from its concrete base, a new base was made, and the carving was restored to its original height of 18 feet. The city celebrated an Indian Week in mid-May 1974. It culminated in the dedication of the totem pole on May 18. Nordwall was there with his dance troop, including singers and drummers, and participated in the ceremony. Vice-mayor Archer Futch apologized to Nordwall. The Independent suggested that the city should have such a celebration annually. "Not only can Indian Week give Indians an opportunity to display their culture to non-Indians, but it can help

Americans gain touch with the native heritage of their homeland."

An Indian Center was established in Livermore in 1973; it is now housed at Rancho Las Positas Elementary School. It is open to the public and has many Native American artifacts as well as information about local events. Cultural classes offered by the center include beadwork, cooking, dance, and drumming. A Native American Dance Group performs traditional dances at schools. Mary Puthoff is in charge of the center.

Adam Nordwall received the name of Fortunate Eagle from leaders of the Crow Nation in Montana. He and his family moved to the Paiute-Shoshone reservation of his wife, Bobbie, in 1976. They live in Fallon, Nevada, where Adam has an art gallery and creates beautifully made pipes. He has also written two books, one about the Alcatraz occupation (2008) and one about his years at Pipestone, an Indian boarding school (2010). Like American Indian elders through the ages, he tells stories about his life to his grandchildren.

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