

Chapter 5 Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian



Far to the Southeast of *Utqiagvik*, archeologists discovered the remains of an ancient fishing weir off the coast of *Haida Gwaii*, the homeland of the Haida in British Columbia, and later shown to be 13,700 years old. This ancient subsistence site proves that the Haida and other Northwest Coast people have inhabited the area for much longer than was once commonly supposed.¹

¹ <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/bc-researchers-may-have-found-earliest-site-of-human-habitation-in-canada/article20737278/>

*"The Haida legend of "The Raven and the First People" expresses how Raven discovered mankind and is responsible for the present order of our universe. Likewise, the Tlingit legend of "Raven and the Creation Story" tells us how the Raven created the world."*²

The Tlingit Haida and Tsimshian World

Like all Indigenous people, the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian live in a world conditioned by cooperation with animals and plants, a world complete unto itself, with unique cosmology, language, myths, social organization, culture, and customs.³

Complex societies

With their ability to utilize the abundant range of coastal resources, the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian developed complex societies with highly developed political organizations that survived the early incursions by the Russians, and the incursions by the Americans and the appropriation of their Native lands and resources. Members of all three nations live in the area that is today called Southeast Alaska but share many cultural patterns with people of what is also known as the Northwest Coast of the U.S. and Canada, separated now by modern political boundaries.

Though Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples are both distinct cultures and distinct nations, they are today often considered together. This is largely an artifact of their joining together to fight for their civil rights first in the Alaska Native Brotherhood in 1912, and then against the seizing of their land for the Tongass National Forest. To prosecute this decades long

² <http://www.ccthita.org/about/history/index.html>

³ Walter Echo Hawk, "Context for Setting Modern Congressional Indian Policy in Native Southeast Alaska" 78, published in <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/ii/ii24/20130516/100839/hhrg-113-ii24-wstate-mallottb-20130516.pdf>

battle with the Federal Government, the tribes formed the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida in the mid-twentieth century. Today the CCTH continues as a Tribal organization, while Sealaska is the ANCSA regional corporation. The Sealaska Corporation founded Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) in 1980 at the request of elders, clan leaders, and traditional scholars in order to preserve traditional knowledge and foster cultural revival. Sealaska Institute dedicated the Walter Soboleff Building in Juneau in 2015 as the culmination of decades of work.⁴

As explained in the words of the late George Davis (*Kichnáalx—Lk’aanaaw*) of Angoon:

“We don’t want what you did here to only echo in the air, how our grandfathers used to do things... Yes. You have unwrapped it for us. That is why we will open again this container of wisdom left in our care.”

As SHI explains, “These wise traditional leaders told the new leaders that their hands were growing weary of holding onto the metaphorical blanket, this “container of wisdom.” They said they were transferring this responsibility to Sealaska, the regional Native corporation serving Southeast Alaska.⁵

Tlingit-Aani, the Tlingit homelands are now wholly within present day Alaska in the United States. The Haida lands and nation have been split, with the center of *Haida Gwaii* the heart of the Haida homeland, in British Columbia, Canada. Most Haida live on the Canadian side of the border where their experience of colonialism and their political realities have been different. The Tsimshian are also frequently grouped with “Natives of Southeast Alaska” yet they too have a distinct culture and history. The Tsimshian people originated on the coast of the mainland in what is now British Columbia. Tsimshian in Alaska are the descendants of a small faction of the Tsimshian who moved from Canadian Territory to Annette Island in U.S. Territory

⁴ http://www.sealaskaheritage.org/sites/default/files/WSBBooklet_WebWithCover.pdf

⁵ <http://www.sealaskaheritage.org/about>

in 1886 when they created the community of Metlakatla, which later became the first Indian Reservation in Alaska. There are still fourteen Tsimshian First Nations in British Columbia.

Tsimshian, Haida, and Tlingit all trace their origins to the interior of British Columbia and tell stories of their ancestors moving down the Nass and Skeena rivers to the coast.

Anthropologist Sergai Kan notes that “Tlingit oral traditions emphasize the migration of the ancestors of the nineteenth century clans from the interior of Alaska and British Columbia.”⁶

Kan affirms that the development of recognizable Northwest Coast traditions began over 5,000 years ago, while the classic Tlingit culture was in place by 500 years ago.

Anthropologists and ethnographers agree with traditional stories that the Tsimshian and Haida expanded out from their traditional territories leading the Tlingit to migrate to the north. The Haida settled there into their homeland, Haida Gwaii, [formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands] while Tsimshian remained on or near the mainland. It is widely agreed that as populations in the area of the Skeena River expanded, clans moved out. “A part of the northern Haida moved north from Haida Gwaii in about 1730, into a region occupied by the Tlingit and populated the southern half of Prince of Wales Island.”⁷

The Tlingit generally continued to migrate to the North, pushing into territories once occupied by Athapaskans, and the Eyak. (The Eyak ended up further west, in the area of Cordova, on Prince William Sound.) The group of Haida that split off was called the Kaigani.

⁶ Kan, *Memory Eternal*, See also Frederica de Laguna, *Under Mount Saint Elias: The History and Culture of the Yakutat Tlingit*, Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972, 1990, 20.

⁷ Andrei Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America, 1741-1867*, Translated by Richard L. Bland and Katerina G. Solovjova, U. of Nebraska Press, 2005, citing early anthropologist Aurel Krause, (Krause 1956:206). The Russians who colonized Alaska kept voluminous records, in both business records, government reports, and in letters. Russian historian Andrei Grinev was among the first to access these records, from which he produced his book *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America 1741-1867*, first published in Russian in 1991. Translated by Richard Bland and Katerina G. Solovjova and published in English in 2005, it is an invaluable source for these detailed Russian records on their encounters with the Tlingit.

“Attesting to the fact that the Tlingit lived on this land before the Kaigani are the Tlingit names for the Kaigani villages, including *Kasaan*, ‘lovely village’ and *Sukkwáan*, ‘grassy village.’”⁸

With the movement of the Haida from the south, some Tlingit clans moved from Prince of Wales Island to the coast of the mainland, where they displaced and partly assimilated the Dené population.⁹ As the Tlingit continued to move north along the coast, they continued to mix with and displace their Dené neighbors, *Tsetsaut*, *Tahltan*, *Taku (Taku-Tine)*, *Tagish*, and *Tutchone* some of whom had attempted moves from their inland territories to the coast. For example, the Chilkat village of *Klukwan*, was, according to earlier researcher Kalervo Oberg, still an Athapaskan settlement as recently as 300 years ago.¹⁰ Tlingit migrating from the southeast as early as the second half of the 18th century began to assimilate the southern Tutchone from the Dry Bay area, and some Ahtna Athapaskans, and Eyak in the region of Yakutat Bay. Pressure from the Tlingit led to the resettlement of the Eyak to the right bank of the Copper River. As noted by well-respected Russian historian Grinev, “Linguistic analysis of the Tlingit language also corroborates that the bearers of this language moved northward, taking the language with them.”¹¹

In 1806, Russian America Company functionary Rezanov produced an estimate based on information taken by *promyshlenniki*, of Tlingit settlements known to the Russians. His list is more than 10,000 fighting men— and this did not include southern Tlingit. According to Grinev, this suggests a total population of 25,000 to 30,000. And this was after a number of disease

⁸ Grinev, *Tlingit* citing Krause and Swanton 1908:408.

⁹ Grinev, *Tlingit*, p. 4-6

¹⁰ Grinev, *Tlingit*, p. 18-20, citing Kalervo Oberg, *The Social Economy of the Tlingit Indians*, Seattle, U. Washington Press, 1973.

¹¹ Grinev. *Tlingit*, 18-20

epidemics.¹² Of course the ravages of disease before European encounters are hard to tally. However, an English explorer in 1787 noted pockmarks on Indian faces, but none of the faces of children younger than twelve, thus deducing an epidemic around the time that the first Spanish explorer reached the Alexander Archipelago in 1775. The Spanish were apparently not interested in trade, only in juridically claiming territory. A chief later told Klebnikov about the epidemic and that only one or two people from each family had survived.¹³

By the time Spanish explorer Malaspina made contact with the Tlingit in Yakutat the Tlingit were already well acquainted with English traders. They had European axes, pots, even three books and a silver spoon, as well as Spanish clothing. Malaspina's ships remained in Yakutat from May until July.¹⁴

Matrilineal Systems

Tlingit and Haida cultures and societies were and are organized around matrilineal moieties or sides, further divided into clans and houses. This organizational system both disrupts and disorganizes the model of Native Nations. The matrilineal system is complex, and central to culture and identity, conferring a special place to each individual. It has been best explained by the late Tlingit scholar Nora Dauenhauer and her husband Richard who completed an immense body of work on Tlingit history and culture. Tlingit society is first of all divided into two complementary moieties or 'sides,' Raven and Eagle (although these sometimes have different names, Crow and Wolf respectively.) Both Tlingit and Haida societies are matrilineal: all children belong to the moiety and clan of their mother. Every individual must marry someone from the opposite moiety. And moieties served to organize traditional ritual obligations such as

¹² Grinev, *Tlingit*, p 28

¹³ Grinev, *Tlingit*, p 93

¹⁴ Grinev, *Tlingit*, p 93

potlatch and burial. In particular, the members of one clan would be responsible for carrying out the burial rituals for members of the opposite clan. As the Dauenhauers note, the function of the clans is to ensure complementarity and cooperation in a structured way.¹⁵

Each moiety is in turn organized into various clans. Each clan has a Tlingit or Haida name, of course, but also a crest that is always represented in ceremonial objects and symbolic representations. The crest also sometime serves as the English name: Thunderbird, Brown Bear, Killer Whale. The clans are the basic organizing structure of political organization and power. As the Dauenhauers note there is no single leader for all Ravens or all Eagles. “Political power resides in the clans, each of which is headed by a traditional leader.”¹⁶ Legendary anthropologist Frederica de Laguna once estimated there may have been as many as 60 or 70 clans at one time, but anthropologist Sergai Kan estimated only seventeen or eighteen by the early 19th century.¹⁷ It was the overall clan which owned territory and resources, and also possessed totemic representations, as well as symbolic objects, songs, and ceremonies, collectively known as *at.oow*.

The final subdivision of society is the house group. While each clan has a historic place of origin, over time, and by way of intermarriage, each clan also has houses in many different communities. “Most clans are dispersed through a number of communities, but in any given community certain clans predominate for historical reasons. For example, *Kiks.adi Kaagwaantaan* and *L’ukaax-adi* are strong in Sitka; *Deisheetaan* and *Telkweidi* in Angoon, ...

¹⁵ Nora Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, “Introduction,” *Haa Tuwunáagu Yís, for Healing Our Spirit: Tlingit Oratory*, University of Washington Press, 1990

¹⁶ Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, *Tlingit Oratory*, p7. See also, Central Council of Tlingit and Haida, Our History, <http://www.ccthita.org/about/history/>

¹⁷ Sergai Kan, *Memory Eternal, Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries*. University of Washington Press, 1999 Kan, *Memory Eternal*, Ch 1

etc. Most basically, people resided in large clan houses in each community, and the house was fundamentally a part of an individual's identity. However, many individuals might be members of one clan but reside in another. For instance, traditionally newly married couples would reside with the husband's mother's brother, a senior member of his clan. If the husband's mother belonged to the Killer Whale clan, then the couple would reside there. The wife and children, though living in a Killer Whale House, were genealogically members of an opposite clan, the clan of their own mother. Likewise, of course, an individual could be a member of a house group even if he or she did not reside in the house. So, the house group can also be understood as a kinship identity. As Kan notes, as the house group grew in numbers, the members might separate and begin a new house, still related to the old. And sometimes a house might expand in population and stature and take on the status of a clan.¹⁸ Ceremonial totems prominently displayed in front of the house marked the heritage of the clan. Extended families lived in large clan houses controlled by a clan chief or leader. When you look at the photos of the clan houses note their size and complexity as well as the art of house screens, totems, and ceremonial clothing and objects. All of the important objects belonged to the clan, not to individuals.

¹⁸ Kan, *Memory Eternal*, ch. 1.



Figure 1 "Interior of Indian House, Sitka," by Partridge, # 7812, circa 1886. The clan house was a very large open structure which might house an extended family. In this 1886 photo you can see the traditional open hearth in the middle. Richard Wood Photograph Collection

Thus, Tlingit society is very structured and highly complex. Each individual belongs specifically to a house, clan, and moiety. Yet each person is also proud to be a son or daughter of the father's clan. Most often he or she would marry a member of the father's clan. All of *Tlingit Aani* was and is related in one way or another, and any Tlingit individual would be able to find clan relatives no matter where he or she travels.¹⁹ It is also very formal, with a significance and importance placed on acknowledging structure and ancestry. Each clan and house are represented by heraldic crests displayed on totem poles, canoes, feast dishes, house posts,

¹⁹ Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer.

weavings, jewelry, and other ceremonial objects. These representations, *at'oo*w, are owned collectively by the clan, and house, not by a leader or by any individual.



Figure 2 images of the Whale House in Klukwan and some of the art inside, now displayed at the Jilkaat Kwaan Heritage Center <https://www.jilkaatkwaanheritagecenter.org/>

A central event in Northwest Coast society is the potlatch. In the simplest terms, the potlatch is a ceremonial event celebrated by the giving away of goods to the guests. Most importantly, when someone died, the members of the opposite clan would perform the death rituals. A year after a death, the relatives of the deceased were obligated to have a potlatch to thank the members of the opposite house who had helped carry out these rituals. But the potlatch was a ceremonial event that could be celebrated for any number of occasions. A great chief might invite other clans to a potlatch to impress upon them the vastness of his wealth by giving

away vast amounts of goods, including ceremonial objects, carvings, tools, food, blankets, etc. A potlatch might celebrate a coming of age, or a marriage.

Trade

The Tlingit traded extensively with other people of the Northwest Coast. They also controlled important trade routes across the coastal ranges into the Interior and guarded them to maintain a monopoly on trade in furs from the interior. The Chilkoot, controlled trails leading from current Dyea and Skagway. Meanwhile, the Chilkat of Klukwan controlled the trail now traversed by the highway from Haines to Haines Junction, into the territory of the Thaltan and on to the middle Yukon River at Fort Selkirk. Similar passes linked tidewater with the Interior through the Taku Inlet, south of Juneau, leading to the Taku River valley and the Stikine River valley, from Wrangell.

The major trade items in the indigenous trade were furs, candlefish oil, or grease, and dentalium shells. The Dené in the Interior had access to woodland furs like beaver, muskrat, wolf, and wolverine, and also to caribou and moose hides which they tanned and sometimes even manufactured into skin clothing and moccasins decorated with porcupine quills. They also manufactured birch wood bowls wrapped with porcupine gut, leather thongs and sinews, and snowshoes.²⁰ The Tlingit harvested the tremendous runs of a small fish called euchalon, or colloquially hooligan, which is also known as the candle fish because it is so rich in oil. It was the fish oil which was highly desired in the Interior for food, and for heat and light. Tlingit and Haida also had access to the long thin and hollow dentalium shells that were highly prized in the

²⁰ UW archives “Tlingit Trade” <http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/miller1.html#trade>

Interior and functioned almost as currency The Tlingit and Haida also traded seaweed, dried mollusks, cedar baskets, and smoked seafood.²¹

In addition, it seems the coastal people found iron, perhaps in beach detritus from wrecked ships, and forged it into tools. Native copper was also a prized commodity and trade item. There were at least two native sources of copper, one in the White River drainage, in the Yukon Territory, and one in the territory of the Ahtna on the Copper River. Copper from these sources was traded widely.²²

The University of Washington Libraries have compiled a short explanation of traditional trade. “Goods were taken in canoes upriver as far as possible, then switched into male slaves’ backpacks made of a large basket with shoulder and forehead straps, holding 100 pounds or more. In large groups, women carried packs weighing about 65 pounds, and saddle bags on dogs held up to 25 pounds. A wise trader always included a shrewd elderly woman to act as bargainer and to keep track of exchange values.”²³

“Tlingit also traded among themselves. For example, to island peoples, men and women from mainland Tlingit villages traded rabbit or marmot skin blankets, moose hide shirts, skin trousers with feet, dressed hides, cranberries in oil, pressed strawberry cakes, candlefish oil, horn spoons, woven blankets, and spruce root baskets. In return, islanders gave sea otter pelts, dried venison, seal oil, dried fish (halibut, salmon, herring), dried seaweed, clams, mussels, sea urchins, herring spawn, cedar bark, baskets, greenstone, and yew wood for bows, boxes, and batons.”²⁴

²¹ UW archives, “Tlingit Trade”

²² H. Kory Cooper, “Arctic Archeometallurgy,” *Oxford Handbook of the Prehistoric Arctic*.

²³ UW archives “Tlingit Trade” <http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/miller1.html#trade>

²⁴ UW Archives, “Tlingit Trade”

Tlingit women wove impermeable spruce root baskets “in great demand among neighboring tribes.”²⁵ The Tlingit worked the native copper, which they acquired from the Ahtna on the Copper River, heating it, and striking it with hammers. The Yakutat Tlingit in particular, those in closest proximity to the Ahtna, created arrow, spear, and harpoon points, knife blades, needles, hooks and ornaments, and created the large copper shields called *tinnaa*, or coppers, which were an ultimate display of wealth. Abundant resources ensured large surpluses which underwrote the accumulation of wealth, and development of arts.

Northern Tlingit traded copper and copper objects to the Haida and Tsimshian for slaves, canoes, and carved items, as well as dentalium shells. They also traded mountain goat horns for buckets and spoons, and goat’s wool for weaving. The southern Tlingit obtained large war canoes from the Haida.²⁶

Eventually, Tlingit individuals intermarried with Inland peoples, in the area that is now Carcross, and Tagish Lake, while others colonized Atlin and Tetlin, B.C. The clan system spread along with the people, with the Tagish and others adopting it. The clan system facilitated marriage arrangements, trading partnerships, and ceremonial participation far to the East into Gwich’in, Ahtna, and Koyukon Athabascan territory. Did Athabascan speaking people in the Interior adopt the clans from the Tlingit? The answer to that seems to be unknown.

The Tlingit and Haida lifeways, with clan structure, matrilineal descent, large extended families living in large clan houses, were entirely outside of the normative idea of a nuclear family and individual property that was pushed on them by American missionaries. The missionaries brought western education, and then particularly in Sitka, insisted their students and

²⁵ Grinev, *Tlingit*, p. 30

²⁶ Grinev, *Tlingit*, p. 30

graduates separate themselves from the clan structure, and live in nuclear families in a specially constructed western-style village surrounding the school. In Canada, the government actually outlawed the potlatches. (I discuss missionaries, Christianization, and education, and indigenous reaction and resistance in a later chapter.)

Encounters and Engagement

The Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian all participated in warfare. They attacked to secure access to resources and to secure the boundaries of their territories, and to claim specific prestige objects. According to the Canadian Museum of History, “The Haida went to war to acquire objects of wealth, such as coppers and Chilkat blankets that were in short supply on the islands, but primarily for slaves, who enhanced their productivity or were traded to other tribes. High-

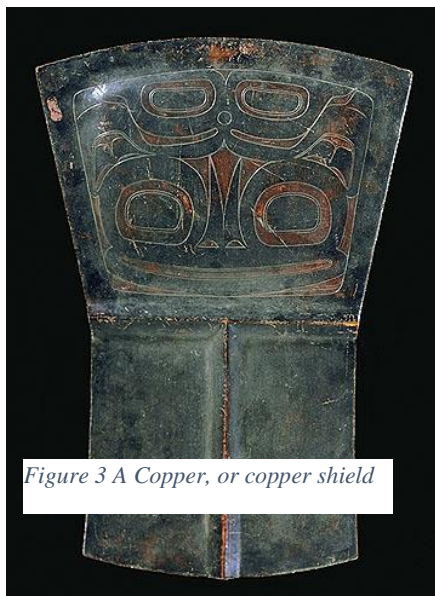


Figure 3 A Copper, or copper shield

ranking captives were also the source of other property received in ransom such as crest designs, dances and songs.”²⁷

The Haida were known for their lightning raids, “facilitated by their great skills of seamanship, their superior craft and their relative protection from retaliation in their island fortress added to the aggressive posture of the Haida towards neighboring tribes.”²⁸

The well-organized and well equipped Tlingit and Haida actively defended their resources and territory. When Russian-America company manager

²⁷ Canadian Museum of History
<http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/aborig/haida/happr01e.shtml>

²⁸ Canadian Museum of History *ibid*

Baranov arrived with perhaps 700 of his enslaved Unangan and Sugpiaq hunters in hundreds of baidarkas, the Tlingit must have known what their intent was. In fact, Baranov had already sent his hunters out from his base in Kodiak to hunt sea otters further and further east throughout Chugach territory, in Prince William Sound and Eyak territory at the mouth of the Copper River, approaching the territory of the Tlingit in Yakutat. The Tlingit were undoubtedly well aware of this.

Russian Invasions

One Russian ship wintered in Prince William Sound (which Grinev called Chugach Bay) in 1783, where the local Sugpiaq told them about the Tlingit to the east. Then in 1788 two Russian captains set out from Kodiak to explore the NW coast, with expeditions visiting Yakutat and Lituya Bays, the northwestern most settlements of the Tlingit. Relationships were apparently friendly and the Russians were able to trade for furs, and obtain two slaves -one apparently from Kodiak.²⁹ The Russian captains attempted to cement relations by giving the Yakutat chief a portrait of the Russian tsarevich. But according to de Laguna, the man they supposed was a Yakutat chief was “rather a chief of very high rank of the Chilkat *Gaanaxteidí* visiting Yakutat, probably to trade.”³⁰

“The members of the expedition and Governor-General Yakobi, as well as Shelikhov himself, assumed that the Tlingit, having accepted the national coats of arms, were now subject to the Russian Empire.”³¹ Needless to say that was not the understanding of the Tlingit.

It can be assumed that the Russian copper coat of arms was accepted by the Indians as a clan totem of the Russians or as a valuable adornment (of the rare metal copper). The Tlingit

²⁹ Grinev, p e86 [e-pages refer to electronic edition]

³⁰ Grinev e86

³¹ Grinev

may have considered the solemnly given portrait of the heir apparent Pavel as that of a god of the newcomers—*Ilkak*, in his turn, presented the Russians with an iron amulet in the form of the head of *Yel*, the Raven;”³²

In 1792 Baranov himself led an exploring expedition to Prince William Sound, with 300 enslaved Aleut hunters in 150 two-hole hole baidarkas. Yakutat Tlingit and Eyak allies attacked the Russians who were encamped on Hinchinbrook Island. The Russians retaliated with firearms but Tlingit all wore armor; Baranov was nearly killed.³³ In a classic understatement Grinev says, “this first clash with the Tlingit showed the Russians that they were dealing with a serious opponent.”

In 1793 Baranov sent a first hunting party to Yakutat, and then in 1794 a larger hunting party with about 1,000 Alutiiq in more than 500 baidarkas and directed by only ten Russians.³⁴ It’s important to note that the Russians were disregarding any property or resource rights of the Yakutat Tribes, a fact brought up by the Yakutat Chief in negotiations that was witnessed by an officer of Vancouver’s expedition who wrote: “The Chief of the Yakutat people used all his eloquence for defining the precise extent of the boundaries of their land, and indicating the injustice of the Russians who killed and carried away from there the sea otters.”³⁵ In 1796 Baranov went so far as to establish a fort at Yakutat. And Shelikov was able to send eighty Russians, including women and children to attempt to plant a colony in Yakutat.

Meanwhile, British and American traders were also trading in the Inside Passage, making their way from the south, where they had already been trading on the Columbia River mouth.

³² Grinev 86-87

³³ Grinev e87

³⁴ Grinev, e90

³⁵ Grinev, citing Vancouver 1833:5:438

Perhaps as many as fifteen Americans ships reached Northwest coast in late 1780s, while until the mid-1790s the British were the chief trading partners of the Tlingit. On his expedition in 1793-94, George Vancouver noted that the Indians were already very familiar with European goods and had rifles, carbines, and pistols. By this time, the Tlingit and Haida, had become adept at playing the English against the Americans. The British ostensibly recognized Russia's international rights to the territory, and negotiated with them for trading rights, but the Americans did not bother with those niceties, and traded on their own. Plus, the British were restricted by their own monopolistic encumbrances, with trade rights granted only to chartered trading companies. The Americans were not limited by monopolistic restrictions, and each captain traded on his own. Both the British and the Americans had a greater variety of goods than the Russians. And in point of fact, both knew that there was little to stop their activities, as the Russians were undermanned, and the tail end of an extremely long supply chain. For all these reasons, after 1795 the Americans became the chief trading partners of the Tlingit.³⁶

The Americans now supplied broadcloth, cooking utensils, kettles, knives, guns, and fatefully, alcohol. The Tlingit told the American captains that they would not trade if they did not bring guns, they would not trade even one otter. American captains even engaged in the slave trade, "buying Indian slaves at the mouth of the Columbia River, and trading them to the Tlingit and Tsimshian. Sometimes they bought and sold Hawaiians, particularly women."³⁷

Further, while the Russians, looking after their long term interests, were prohibited from trading guns, ammunition, and alcohol, the independent American captains observed no such restraints. But, while the Americans had more goods and favorable prices, they did not work at

³⁶ Grinev 114

³⁷ Grinev 115

showing the appropriate respect, they did not even try to be diplomatic: it was every man for himself. Overall, “both sides wanted to maintain mutually profitable connections.”³⁸

Nevertheless, the Indians also sometimes attacked the American traders.³⁹ However it’s important to remember that among all Indigenous people, tribes and clans were able to maintain trade with others, even when the relationships sometimes devolved into violence.

Through this period, the Russians had almost no trade, because they had no goods.. The managers of the Russian outpost depended on Russian trade goods which had to come all the way from European Russia: first transported overland across all of Siberia to the Arctic Coast, and then transferred to ships for the journey to Sitka. Many ships went down on the voyage across the North Pacific. In fact, the Russians often simply purchased goods from the Americans and the British.⁴⁰ But it’s also important to remember that the Russians did not really believe in trade, they believed in *iasuk* and bestowing gifts on the one hand, and in simply poaching the resources on the other. While Grinev says the Russians “preferred to buy furs from dependent nations at a lower cost,” that is truly an obfuscation, as the Russians did not buy furs from the Aleut, they forced them to hunt on Tlingit lands for them. The Russians were not interested in buying the sea otter furs from the Tlingit because they had set their Aleut hunters to stealing the resource. The otters were the primary item that the Tlingit traded with the Americans and British. It is no wonder that there was tremendous enmity between the Tlingit on the one hand, and the Unangan and Sugpiaq hunters on the other.

³⁸ Grinev, quoting R Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977

³⁹ Grinev, p. 115, citing Fisher, 1977:47, and Kan

⁴⁰ Grinev, p. 115-116

Battles for Sitka

Nevertheless, increasingly emboldened, in 1799, Baranov sent a flotilla of more than a thousand Aleut hunters in 550 *baidarkas* along with two ships to establish a new Russian outpost in Shee At'ka Kwaan [now Sitka.] despite apparently acknowledging that the Tlingit, were militant well-armed and dangerous. They immediately lost thirty *baidarkas*, with perhaps sixty Aleut hunters, and then thirty Russian *partovshchiki* (hunting party leaders who directed the Aleuts in the hunt.)⁴¹ On a return trip from Sitka to Yakutat, 135 Aleut hunters died from shellfish poisoning at a place they later named Peril Strait. Still they delivered 1,500 sea otter furs. [There was also an epidemic raging on Kodiak and on the Kenai Peninsula and in Yakutat.]

Baranov claimed to have actually paid the Shee At'ka Kwaan Chiefs for the parcel of land on which he began building his fort in 1799. He gave gifts especially to the chief of the Sitka *Kiks.adi* lineage. Baranov had his men build a few rudimentary buildings, and then left a garrison there with twenty-five or thirty Russians and fifty-five Unangan and Sugpiaq men and a few of their wives. Of course this large body of men had to hunt and fish to sustain themselves, in addition to continuing to poach otters. Meanwhile British and American traders were in the area, while the Russian supply ship had been lost.⁴²

Despite Baranov's claim to have paid the Tlingit for permission to establish his settlement, the Tlingit prepared, organized, and carried out a massive attack on the Russian Garrison in 1802, which drove the Russians out of Sitka. Baranov must have been furious. He went back to Kodiak, and prepared for a return.

⁴¹ Grinev 111

⁴² Lydia Black, *Russians in Alaska*, p156-157.

There were many provocations which might have induced the Tlingit to attack the Russian fort. While sea otter pelts were the primary item that the Tlingit traded with the Americans and British, the Russians had set their Aleut hunters to stealing the resource. The Russians were not only plundering the otters, but also hunting and fishing in Tlingit territory to support themselves with fish and meat. They also plundered Indian graves, and the *promyshlenniki* disrespected the Tlingit and were accused of stealing women and young girls.⁴³

Grinev says the neighboring Tlingit blamed the Sitka Tlingit for allowing the Russians to settle in their territory, accusing them of turning themselves into slaves: A Sitka Tlingit was mocked at a Chilkat potlatch, saying the Russians were disgracing his clan. But there were other provocations as well. For one thing, many sources refer to “Russians” when they mean Sugpiaq Aleut, or perhaps Unangan Aleut. Kan says that the Koniag killed several Sitka leaders to avenge the deaths of their compatriots from poisoned shellfish, which they attributed to shamanism. So in an indirect way, it was partly a revenge battle between two Indigenous groups.⁴⁴

By the time the Russians attempted to reinforce their claim by planting a colony in Sitka, they were facing a different balance of power than they faced in the Aleutians in the 1750s to 1780s. By the end of the 18th century, the Tlingit themselves already had guns, and even cannons. The Russians did not have enough arms or manpower to force the Tlingit into slavery, as they had the Unangan and Sugpiaq. And they faced the anti-Russian agitation of several American traders, who would not have been unhappy to see the Russians ousted from their fort.⁴⁵ Then there were American deserters who had jumped ship and were taken into RAC service by

⁴³ Grinev, 123

⁴⁴ Cited in Grinev, p 124.

⁴⁵ Grinev, 125.

Baranov: But also, some of the American sailors joined the Tlingit in attacking the fort.⁴⁶

The number of Tlingit who attacked was no fewer than 1,000, and perhaps as many as 1,500. The Tlingit chiefs had met the previous winter and planned the joint attack. Something like the Pueblo revolt.⁴⁷

Baranov returned to his potential Sitka Colony in 1804 with 120 Russians, and 900 Aleut hunters, in 400 *baidarkas*. The unstable union of the *Kwaan* which had pushed out the Russians had not fallen apart, but was riven with interclan and intercommunity enmity. Some of the clans closer to Yakutat made a truce with the Russians. Russians took the son of one of the chiefs as *Amanat*- voluntary hostage. This is very middle ages stuff. It is also in game of thrones.⁴⁸

Eventually, some of the Tlingit came back to settle around the fort, to take advantage of trade opportunities.

Grinev has a quote from Klebnikov:

*"They repeat that we occupied the place where their ancestors lived, deprived them of their gains from hunting animals, and use the best places to catch fish. We, on the other hand, think that we brought them opportunity to sell their products for a profit, provide them with necessary things, and demonstrate cultivation and the use of potatoes and other things."*⁴⁹

Tlingit adaptation and continuing resistance

Even after Baranov re-established their trading station at *Novo-Arkhangel'sk*, New Archangel, or Sitka, Russians continued living uneasily in Tlingit territory. They were forced to operate the post as a garrison, behind a wall, with guards, and towers with cannons. They lived in fear. The Tlingit prevented their hunting of sea otters. Even when the Russians stopped sending

⁴⁶ Grinev, 127-128

⁴⁷ Grinev, 127-8

⁴⁸ Grinev, p. 132 [e 119]

⁴⁹ Grinev, p. 151 citing Khlebnikov 1985:185

Unangan and *Sugpiaq* men out to hunt otters in Tlingit territory, the newcomers were still hunting and fishing for their own sustenance, and to maintain the new settlement.⁵⁰ In retaliation, the Tlingit continued what might be termed micro-aggressions. As Grinev says, “According to Kan’s sources, the theft of firewood that belonged to the RAC was, from the Tlingit point of view, a distinct form of revenge and compensation for the various offenses and insults that the Russians had committed earlier, especially those regarding Indian women.”⁵¹

Despite efforts to broaden their economy, the Russians never developed a true source of support for their colony. And they continued to struggle to even supply the colony. Wheat, which the Russians depended on, could not be grown in Alaska and they continued to ship it across Siberia from European Russia. Even efforts to grow enough to supply Sitka at their Fort Ross outpost in California established in 1812 were unsuccessful.⁵² Thus, it seems that the only point to the colony was maintaining Russian claims to colonial territory. This was complicated by their need to obtain food and supplies from American and British traders.

Tsimshian

While the Russians moved into Tlingit territory in Alaska, the British were cementing their hold and their influence on coastal British Columbia. Victoria was growing into a major city, and the British established a system of trading posts and forts including the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Simpson in 1834 at the Tsimshian village now once again called *Lax Kw'alaams* in territory that Tsimshian First Nations had claimed and occupied for thousands of years.

⁵⁰ Grinev p. e167

⁵¹ Kan 1999:142

⁵² For more about Fort Ross <https://www.fortross.org/alaska-natives.htm>

A charismatic Anglican lay missionary named William Duncan arrived there in 1857 to preach to and convert the local Tsimshian. However, he soon got into conflicts with the authorities at the Fort and relocated with 800 followers to a site at Metlakatla Pass. But religion in Fort Simpson and the rival village of Metlakatla was highly politicized. Duncan represented Anglican authoritarianism, prohibiting Tsimshian traditions, and urging his followers to discard and burn their regalia. Arthur Wellington Clah, a Tsimshian man and student of Duncan was himself preaching a non-denominational Christianity, and another Tsimshian man Alfred Dudoward and his wife had converted to Methodism with promises that followers could continue to participate in Tsimshian ceremonies. Dudoward invited the Methodist Church to establish a mission and in due course they sent Thomas Crosby. Duncan considered the move hostile, and resented their move into what he considered his territory.⁵³

But it was not the contest between Crosby and the Methodists and Duncan which drove Duncan from Old Metlakatla. Instead, it was the approbation of the Church of England authorities towards Duncan's individualistic and unorthodox preaching. Eager to distance himself and his followers from the Canadian authorities, Duncan's travelled to Washington and asked the U.S. government to give his group land in Alaska.

In due course, the U.S. authorities allowed them to settle on Annette Island, after a Tsimshian search committee in seagoing canoes discovered its calm bay, accessible beaches, nearby waterfall, and abundant fish.⁵⁴ 823 Tsimshian followers of Duncan moved to the New Metlakatla in 1887 and the island was later declared an Indian reservation. It was probably the determination of Duncan to establish a Christian community that accounts for the very different

⁵³ Peggy Brock, *The Many Voyages of Arthur Wellington Clah*, UBC Press, p. 137

⁵⁴ http://www.sitnews.us/Kiffer/Metlakatla/080706_metlakatla_alaska.html

treatment of the Metlakatla community at a time when the Native Tsimshian and Haida still had no title to their ancestral lands.

Metlakatla was subsequently widely touted as a Christian utopia, and “an economically self-sufficient Christian Native community.” In turn, the missionary community promoted Metlakatla as “typifying the colonial agenda of missionization of Indigenous people.” Tsimshian scholar Mique’l Icsis Askren Dangeli concludes, “this colonial narrative, which depicts our conversion to Christianity as a complete rejection of our Tsimshian traditions and so-called assimilation into Euro-American culture has overshadowed the stories of resistance and cultural continuity that persist in our community.”⁵⁵

Tlingit and Haida after 1867

When the U.S. purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, it was buying something that Russia never owned. Only under the tenants of the colonial Doctrine of Discovery did European nations recognize each other’s colonial hegemony over ‘discovered’ or conquered Indigenous lands. In point of fact, Russia had never even conquered the Tlingit, let alone the rest of Alaska.

Nevertheless, the U.S. established a limited governance structure for the new territory, consisting of a military garrison in Sitka, and patrol ships. Now the Tlingit Haida had to a new colonial power with continuing cultural misunderstandings which led to provocations and violent responses.

The US had very little real interest in Alaska, and put it under the jurisdiction of the military. The army sent troops to establish forts at Sitka, Wrangell, Tongass Island, Kenai,

⁵⁵ Mique’l Icsis Askren Dangeli “Bringing to light a counternarrative of our history: B.A. Haldane, nineteenth Century Tsimshian Photographer,” in *Sharing our Knowledge*, Sergai Kan, ed. 2015

Kodiak, and the Pribilof Islands. But with little to do, they soon scaled back. By 1870, the only army garrison left in Alaska was at Sitka.

After two white men were killed in the village of Kake, General Davis burned the entire village.

As the story was told in 2007 in the Sitka News:

“In January of 1869, a party of Natives from Kake decided to leave Sitka and return home. For reasons that were not recorded, the military authorities forbade them to leave and ordered the sentries to detain them. A scuffle broke out and one of the Natives was killed. Then the group of Tlingits was then allowed to return to Kake. But on their way back, the group came across two miners, Ludwig Madger and William Walker, camped in a small cove (later named Murder Cove) near Point Gardiner on Admiralty Island. The miners were killed and their remains mutilated.

When word of the killings got back to Sitka, the armed vessel Saginaw under the command of Lt. Commander Meade was sent to Kake. It proceeded to shell Kake, destroying most of the buildings. It also shelled two smaller villages nearby.”⁵⁶

This event was followed sometime later by the bombing of Angoon. As explained by Tlingit scholar Rosita Worl, “this case exemplifies the attempts by the Tlingit to extend their law to the non-Tlingit. Two separate but interrelated events occurred in which Tlingit laws were broken, and the Tlingit fully expected compensation for the damages.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶Dave Kiffer, Sitka News, 2007. http://www.sitnews.us/Kiffer/Angoon/102907_angoon_bombed.html

⁵⁷ Rosita Worl, “Excerpt from Speech by SHI President Rosita Worl Titled ‘Tlingit Law, American Justice and the Destruction of Tlingit Villages’”
<https://www.sealaskaheritage.org/sites/default/files/ExcerptRositaWorlSpeech.pdf>

“The destruction of Angoon was precipitated by the accidental death of a prominent shaman, Teel’ Tlein (Big Dog Salmon), of the Deisheetaan Clan and Goon Hit (Spring Water House) on October 22, 1882. His death, according to the Tlingit law, required compensation by the party which was responsible for his death.

Fish, timber, and gold

The US government and military saw their mission as opening up Alaska for development. The Tlingit found themselves in the same position as Indian tribes in the U.S. West, with the U.S. government all too willing to nullify Indian claims to their resources in fish, timber, and gold. At the same time, the US was turning to Protestant missionaries to basically ‘take care of’ or take charge of – the “Indian problem.”

Indian rights to their own resources would be sacrificed, and their resulting poverty ameliorated by through Protestant Christianizing.

Thus, the Tlingit watched nearly helplessly as their salmon streams were allocated to outside companies who erected fish traps at the mouths of streams. Tlingit were then able to make a living only by working for the canneries. Men and women either worked in the canneries directly or operated boats selling fish to the canneries. Meanwhile, of course, Protestant missionaries and other observers decried Tlingit poverty and poor living conditions.

Meanwhile, Protestant Presbyterian missionary Sheldon Jackson set up a new boarding school in Sitka on the model of the Carlisle Indian School. The school recruited students from all over Southeast Alaska but insisted on a strict policy requiring students to give up all tribal practice and affiliations in favor of total assimilation.

The path from assimilationist education to resistance to again claiming autonomy and hegemony is almost always a long one. By 1912, there was an educated cadre of Tlingit and

Haida who started the first Native civil rights organization in Alaska: the Alaska Native Brotherhood and then the Alaska Native Sisterhood. At first under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church, and following the models of lay brotherhoods and outlawing tribal affiliation, the organizations soon subverted that mission and began to work on Native rights. The adoption of Christianity by Native Alaskans is the subject of Chapter 9. The story of the ANB-ANS will be told in Chapter 11: Fighting Back- Native Rights before Statehood.