

“Copying People”: Northwest Coast Native Response to Early Photography*

MARGARET B. BLACKMAN

[Photographs] . . . owe their existence to a loose cooperation (quasi-magical, quasi-accidental) between photographer and subject — mediated by an ever simpler and more automated machine . . . which even when capricious can produce a result that is interesting and never entirely wrong (Sontag, 1973:53).

. . . the portrait, reflecting a multi-faceted human being, must be realized in a moment, and once realized remains fixed and unchangeable. The problem becomes more complex when the photographer’s aim and the sitter’s desire go beyond recording facial features to a more penetrating portrait of the individual (Heyert, 1979:53).

Regardless of how else it might be viewed, an historical photograph must be recognized as the outcome of an interaction between photographer and subject matter. When the subject of the image is human, the interaction is, of course, all the richer and more complex. There exists a large visual archive of such historical interactions between early photographers and British Columbia native Indians. Historians and anthropologists are aware that such images are capable of providing a wealth of ethnological and cultural historical data, but to fully understand them one must know not only what the photographers bring to the act of creating images but also the ideas natives hold about the images, their creation and their functions. Although photographers have not always been explicit about what they do or why they do it, the documentation of their work is far richer than the record of native response to their activities. The cultural milieu of Victorian image-making — the photographers, the subjects of

* Several people have contributed in substantial ways to the final version of this paper. Liz Virolainen and Dan Savard of the Provincial Museum provided information on Charles Gentile and O. C. Hastings; Joan Schwartz of the National Photography Collection referred me to the Dally journal; George MacDonald of the National Museum of Man called my attention to Horetzky’s comments and to the Harlan I. Smith photographs. I have also benefited from their comments and suggestions as well as from those of Ira Jacknis of the University of Chicago and Jack Rollwagen of SUNY Brockport. Finally, I thank Florence Davidson of Masset for teaching me about the past and present culture of her people.

their cameras, the audiences to whom the images speak — has been the focus of a number of publications (e.g., Thomas, 1977; Wilks, 1980; and, especially, Heyert, 1979), but the responses of natives to the camera and the evolution of their conceptions of photographic images are virtually unknown and unexplored. Focusing primarily upon the Haida of British Columbia and southeastern Alaska, this paper is offered as an initial inquiry into the perceptions of and reactions to photography by Northwest Coast natives during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

How natives viewed the photography process and the expectations they held of imaging must be pursued largely through the documented history of native/photographer contact, a history in which the native seldom speaks for himself. Though the images of natives are revealing by themselves, native reaction to photographers and photographs is read primarily through the words of outsiders who witnessed the act of creating images of native people — most often the photographers. Unfortunately, even this documentation is sparse, and the present study provokes more questions than it answers. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this effort will lead to further exploration of a little-known but critical domain to the understanding of historical images of native peoples.

Nineteenth-Century Images of Northwest Coast Natives: The Context

In the photographer's studio, native Northwest Coast people were photographed in the cultural settings of those who made their images. They were also photographed in their own cultural settings by photographers who travelled to their villages. Later, just after the turn of the twentieth century, natives — as consumers of photographic images — were photographed in contexts of their own choosing, albeit ones that often reflected Euro-American notions of image content.

Some of the earliest photographs of Northwest Coast natives were made in Victoria studios. Frederick Dally, Charles Gentile and Hannah Maynard (and possibly her husband, Richard) photographed Northwest Coast Indians in their studios in the 1860s and 1870s. The images they made were *cartes-de-visite*, 2¼" by 3¾" head-and-shoulders or full-length poses. As the term *carte-de-visite* suggests, Victorians used the little self-portraits as calling cards; they also avidly collected *carte-de-visite* portraits of others — family, friends, celebrities — and displayed them in specially made albums. Popular between 1860 and about 1875, *cartes-de-visite* were mass-produced and for a while rivalled in sales the

popular card stereograph views. *Cartes-de-visite* of celebrities were especially popular and brought lucrative returns to photographic studios. For example, according to one source (Welling, 1976:57), 100,000 *cartes-de-visite* of Abraham Lincoln were produced and distributed during the 1860 presidential campaign, and 70,000 *cartes-de-visite* of the Prince consort were marketed in England the week following his death (Newhall, 1964:50). I suspect that the *cartes-de-visite* of B.C. natives were similarly made to be marketed to white collectors of images and were little used or collected by natives.

That Northwest Coast natives did not generally enter photography studios with the intent of commissioning self-images is suggested in the following newspaper account of a Songhees chief's visit to the studio of Charles Gentile in 1864. Gentile made *carte-de-visite* portraits of the chief and his wife.¹

His Majesty King Freezy I, and his Royal spouse the Queen of Songish, visited the city yesterday and honoured Mr. Gentile, Photographic Artist of Fort St., by sitting for their portraits. Their majesties appeared to be highly delighted with their counterparts, although in neither case could the words of the poet be applied with justice. "Love and Beauty still visage grace." Before taking his departure the wily but uxorious old King requested the artist to potlatch his better half four *bits*, which was immediately done and the *chickamen* [coins] having been safely ensconced in the folds of the Royal robes (three point blankets) their majesties stalked off with a dignity becoming their exalted station. (*The British Colonist*, 1864)

It is also unlikely that a native like "Haida Mary," described as Mrs. Maynard's "washerwoman," ordered the *carte-de-visite* photograph of herself shown in Plate I, particularly when a similar studio image of her was subsequently re-photographed against the backdrop of the abandoned Haida village of Kayang (taken from a photo by Richard Maynard) and marketed. This combined pair of images is interesting because it suggests that, for the photographer, "good" images of native people in properly "native" settings could be created by combining two very different types of photographs into a single image. The Maynards seemed to prefer Haida backdrops for their Indian subjects, regardless of the individual's tribe. In one example from the files of the B.C. Provincial Museum, a group of Kwakiutl women are shown against the background of the Haida village of Kayang.² Richard and Hannah Maynard were not unique in their practice of "creating" images of native B.C. Indians;

¹ B.C. Provincial Museum photo, # PN 6198.

² B.C. Provincial Museum photo, # PN 8514.



PLATE I. "*Haida Mary*," Hannah Maynard's washerwoman. Photo by Hannah Maynard (?), c. 1867-1870 (PN-5310).

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many years later, B. W. Leeson, a photographer from Quatsino, constructed a Kwakiutl potlatch by cutting and pasting individuals from several different photographs onto the background of a Kwakiutl house interior.³

The photography studios of Victoria provided many natives their initial encounter with the camera. Did curiosity bring them there, or were they openly solicited by photographers with promise of remuneration? I have found no historical description of natives' initial reactions to the studios, their operators and machinery. It is evident that by the mid to late 1860s, however, natives in Victoria were not only familiar with the portrait galleries, but some, like the Songhees chief Freezy, carried considerable presence into the image-making process. From early exposure to the camera in Victoria studios, Northwest Coast natives may have come to regard photography as portraiture; the Chinook jargon term for photograph, which translates as "face picture," certainly suggests so.⁴ I suspect too that this term was widely used by Victoria photographers to communicate with the natives whose images they marketed.

The camera, transplanted from the white man's studio to native cultural settings, probably caused greater stir among natives there than in Victoria. Among the Westcoast people and the Hagwilget Carrier, for example, curiosity and fright, respectively, were noted as initial responses to the camera. Victoria photographer Frederick Dally, at Ahousat in 1866, prepared to photograph the village, but "when I put my head under the focussing cloth of the camera, to my surprise on withdrawing it, I found myself surrounded by about 20 of the natives squatting on the ground watching my movements . . ." (Dally, 1866). Perhaps it was Dally who was frightened, for he packed up his camera "as quickly as possible," distributed tobacco to the natives, and headed for his dinghy. Charles Horetzky, travelling in northern B.C. in 1872, explained why an Indian he had hired to carry his camera became frightened of the "dreaded box" and took off.

A few months previous . . . the gentleman in charge of the Mission Station at the mouth of the Naas River had paid a pastoral visit to the Achwylget [Hagwilget] Indians. With his other impedimenta he had brought a small magic lantern and slides, which were duly exhibited to their wondering gaze,

³ B.C. Provincial Museum photo, #PN 10135.

⁴ Thomas (1935:157) gives the Chinook equivalent for photograph as *tzum seeowist*. *Tzum* denotes "mixed colors, spots, stripes, marks, figures, colors, printing, pictures, paint, painted" (Thomas, 1935:107). *Seeowist* refers to "the eyes, the face, forehead" (Thomas, 1935:101). Interestingly, there appears to be no Chinook jargon term for camera.

not without a certain amount of pomp and ceremony. After the reverend gentleman's departure, however, it most unfortunately happened that a species of cholera broke out among the native Hazeltonians; the origin of which they most illogically attributed to the "one-eyed devil" in the lantern and its exhibitor. . . . I was not unnaturally a little shy of parading the camera, an instrument bearing a certain family likeness to the hated lantern. (Horetzky, 1874: 108-09)

Horetzky's camera bearer became sick and, according to Charlie, the Haida cook, left "evidently in mortal terror of the box and its mysterious contents" (Horetzky, 1874: 109). Interestingly, Horetzky (1874: 109) adds, "Charlie, being a Hyder, and above such superstitious fears, shouldered the box without comment." Was Charlie above such superstitions because he was used to dealing with white people, or did he shoulder the box without comment because that was the Haida way of confronting fear?⁵ Horetzky doesn't elaborate.

Haida like Charlie the cook and Mary the washerwoman were familiar with photography several years before the earliest recorded encounter of the Haida with a photographer in their own territory.⁶ This historic interaction took place on 2 July 1875, and is noted by James G. Swan, who was present on the occasion. Swan had come to southeastern Alaska on the U.S. Revenue cutter *Wolcott* to collect ethnographic materials for the Smithsonian. While the *Wolcott* was docked at Klinkwan village, Ginouan, a high-ranking chief and silver carver, "with his wife and four children and a number of Indians came on board and their pictures were photographed by Mr. Broadbent," who was evidently the official ship's photographer (Swan, n.d. a). Swan's mention of the event is very matter of fact and, in the absence of data to the contrary, one can assume that the Klinkwan natives were neither reluctant nor fearful of being photographed. In fact, one might even read in Swan's statement a certain willingness to pose for the photographer. Unfortunately these early photographs have not been located in any archives, and my attempts to find them have been unsuccessful; only Swan's terse statement documents this historic encounter.

Three years later the Queen Charlotte Haida encountered George M. Dawson, geologist, geographer, amateur ethnographer, and the first — as far as we know — white man to photograph Haida people and villages

⁵ Natives were not unique in their distrust of photography. Heyert (1979:46), for example, notes some of the extraordinary powers which Victorians ascribed to the portrait photographer and his products.

⁶ Although Horetzky visited the northern Queen Charlotte Islands in 1872, he evidently took no photographs while there.

on the Queen Charlotte Islands. Dawson found the Haida in 1878 very different from Ginouan and his group. At Langara Island on August 23, just prior to a big potlatch, he recorded in his journal: "Took photo of two chiefs [Albert Edenshaw and Weah] and of as many of the rest of the people as would come. Most, however, disliked the idea, and especially the women, not one of whom appeared" (Dawson, n.d.). Was this the first time these Haida had seen a camera? Did Dawson explain what he was about to do? Did the people have an opportunity to see any of his images? And what, in particular, did they find frightening? We do not know the answers to these questions. Nor, unfortunately, do we know the identity of the men and boys in the group shot that Dawson made (Plate II), with the exception of Weah and Edenshaw. Were they, like the latter two chiefs, high-ranking individuals who stepped boldly forward to face Dawson's strange machinery? Did Dawson encourage them with offers of payment for their posing? I rather doubt it, for he does not mention offering payment or native requests for it. The conservatism of the Haida women in 1878 is interesting, for women appear in photographs made on the Queen Charlottes the following year and routinely after that.

In the years prior to the turn of the twentieth century, several photographers came to the Queen Charlotte Islands to record Haida villages and their people. Of particular significance are the photographic records of O. C. Hastings (1879), Edward Dossetter (1881), Richard Maynard (1884), Robert Reford (1890) and E. P. Allen (1897).

The summer following Dawson's visit, O. C. Hastings arrived on the Queen Charlotte Islands as official photographer for Indian Commissioner Israel W. Powell's inspection tour of native coastal villages. Although Hastings took seven photographs at Masset, neither he nor his photography is mentioned in Powell's report (Canada, 1879). Of the Haida response to Hastings' camera, we know only that they were more amenable to being photographed than the year before. People are the focus of two Hastings photographs⁷, and both include Haida women.

On a second inspection tour which took him to the Queen Charlotte Islands two years later, Israel Powell took Victoria photographer Edward Dossetter with him. Dossetter photographed a number of Haida people in the summer of 1881: at Skidegate — two men, a halfbreed woman;

⁷ American Museum of Natural History photos, #334106 and 24426. The former comprises a group of people before the town chief's house; the latter, three basket-makers posed in front of the same house. Four other Hastings photos contain people, but the focus of these is Haida architecture.



PLATE II. *Group of Haida men and boys at Langara Island, 23 August 1878. Photo by George M. Dawson (PA-38154).*

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at Yan — a group of women and children, and two separate photographs of old women; at Masset — an old woman (Plate III), an elaborately tattooed man, and four Haida “Chiefs” posed in costume beside a house (Plate IV), one of whom is the tattooed man photographed separately. Once again Powell’s report does not mention the photographer or the images he made, so we do not know if the Haida posed willingly for Dossetter’s camera or if they were enticed by promise of payment. It is significant, however, that none of the “old Hydah” women looked at Dossetter when he took their pictures, while the four “Chiefs” of Masset and others directly faced his camera. Dossetter’s image of the four chiefs merits mention, for they are garbed in apparel of the *s’āliga*, “the possessed” or “shamans,” that collectivity of dancers who performed in the winter dance ceremony (see Curtis, 1916:140-48; Swanton, 1909:170). Perhaps they had performed a welcome dance for Powell’s party, following which their photos were made. It is more likely, however, since two are masked, and masks were not worn in welcome dance performances, that these individuals had dressed in the ceremonial paraphernalia to which their rank entitled them in order that Dossetter might photograph them. The elaborately tattooed man on the far right, Sklowe, was not only photographed individually by Dossetter, but posed for E. P. Allen in 1897, “by dint of much persuasion and a piece of silver . . .” (Dorsey, 1898:7). Did Sklowe have to be similarly persuaded sixteen years earlier to pose for Dossetter? Aside from the images themselves, we know nothing of the context of Dossetter’s photographs.

The three photographs of Sklowe exemplify a pattern in early photography of the Haida: certain individuals appear more than once and in images made by different photographers. Chief Edenshaw, for example, was photographed by Dawson in 1878, by Robert Reford in 1890 (Plate V), and by Masset missionary J. H. Keen in 1893.⁸ Chief Weah appears twice: in Dawson’s 1878 image taken at Langara Island and the following year in a Hastings photograph.⁹ Doctor Kwude, a lineage chief and Masset shaman of renown, appears with the three other chiefs in Dossetter’s photograph (Plate IV) and again in Reford’s photograph (Plate V) standing beside Edenshaw. (Kwude also appears in the background of a photograph taken sometime between 1884 and 1888 and attributed to Maynard from the latter year.¹⁰) Kaiingassa, identified as a

⁸ B.C. Provincial Museum photo, #E 962.

⁹ American Museum of Natural History photo, #334106.

¹⁰ National Museums of Canada photo, #J-21316.



PLATE III. *"Old Hydah Woman of Masset."* Photo by Edward Dossetter, 1881
(AMNH-42270). COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

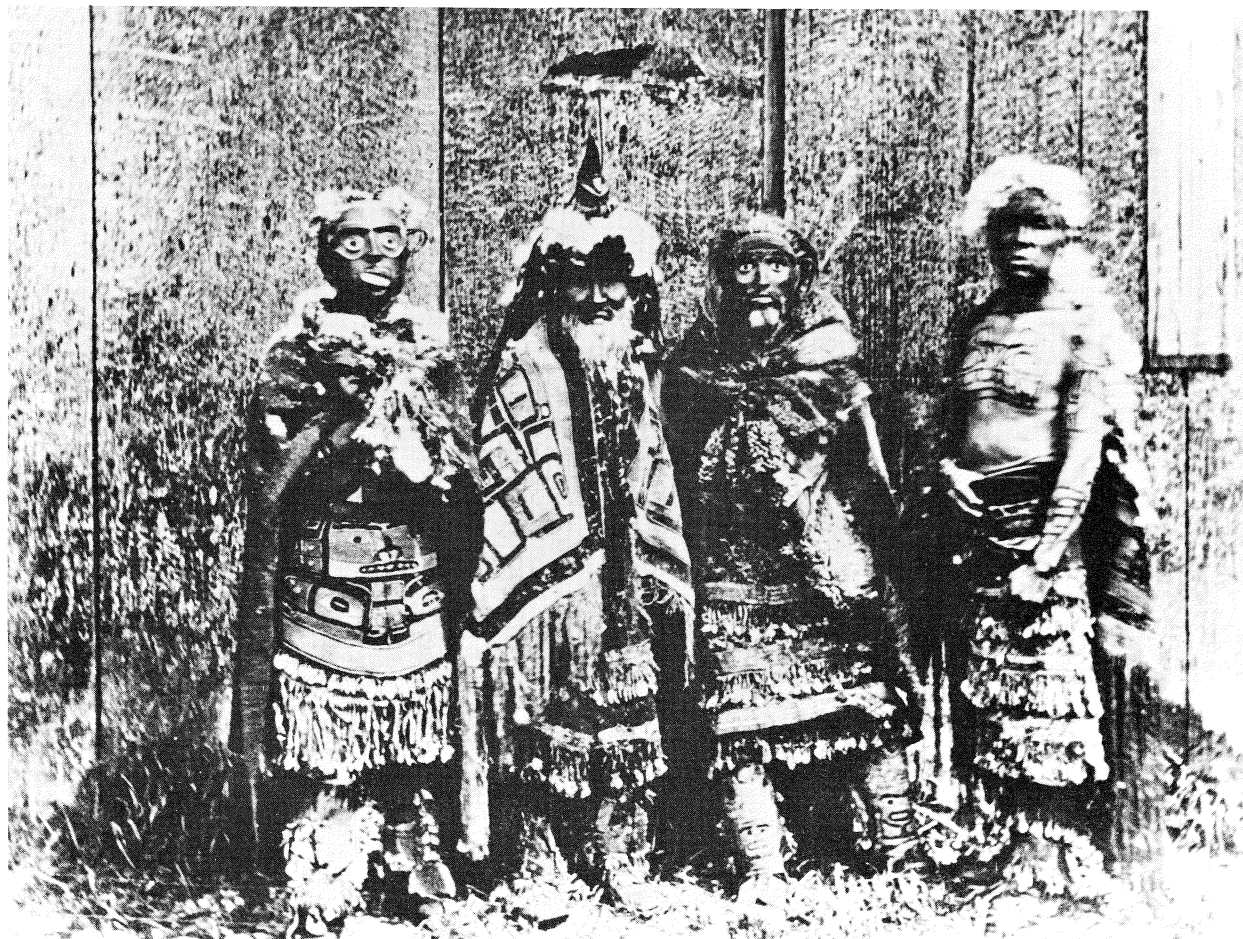


PLATE IV. "*Chiefs of Masset.*" Photo by Edward Dossetter, 1881 (33609).

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PLATE V. *Chiefs Albert Edenshaw (far right) and Kwude, with J. H. Keen (second from left) and unidentified others.*
Photo by Robert Reford, 1890 (c-60824).

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Haida chieftainess by Masset missionary Charles Harrison (1912), is one of three Haida “basketmakers” photographed by Hastings in front of Weah’s house, and appears in a stereo photo made by Richard Maynard five years later.¹¹ All of these individuals were of high rank. Kaiingassa in particular was imposing, for Harrison (1912) writes:

I once knew an old Haida chieftess named Kaiingassa, who could in appearance have shamed Macbeth’s witches. . . . Her photograph was taken by the late Mr. Maynard about 30 years ago and it is being sold at the present day in Victoria and labelled Princess Kaiingassa of Masset. Whenever she happened to be passing any house she was always importuned to enter and make herself at home. When she did condescend to enter there was always special decorum for the occasion. Even the children hushed their play and dignified quiet took the place of loud ejaculations and laughter.

Were the high ranking more amenable to submitting to the novelty of image-making, or was it the visual markers of high status (tattoos, labrets) that attracted photographers to them, or were both factors involved?

By the time Richard Maynard made the first of two trips to the Queen Charlotte Islands in the spring of 1884, the Haida had been exposed to, and photographed by, several photographers. Furthermore, there are indications that visual images had become implanted in Haida culture, a fact which Maynard’s own photographs document. The photographs which he made of Haida house interiors show newspaper pictorials displayed on the back walls of the house (Plate VI).¹² One utilitarian function of these pictorials is noted by James Swan, who, the preceding year, commented upon those displayed in Charles Edenshaw’s house: “From these pictorials Charley gets many of the designs he carves on wood or stone or ivory” (Swan, n.d. *b*).

There is some suggestion that the Haida had been introduced to another kind of visual image in the early 1880s. In June 1883 Masset missionary Charles Harrison requested of the Anglican Church Missionary Society in London “magic lantern slides.” Lantern slides were widely used by mission groups to visually reinforce the message of Christianity, and the Church Missionary Society probably willingly supplied its employees with the equipment. Unfortunately there is no more mention of

¹¹ B.C. Provincial Museum photo, # 1293.

¹² The other photo, not shown here, is of the interior of Chief Weah’s house (American Museum of Natural History photo, # 24482).

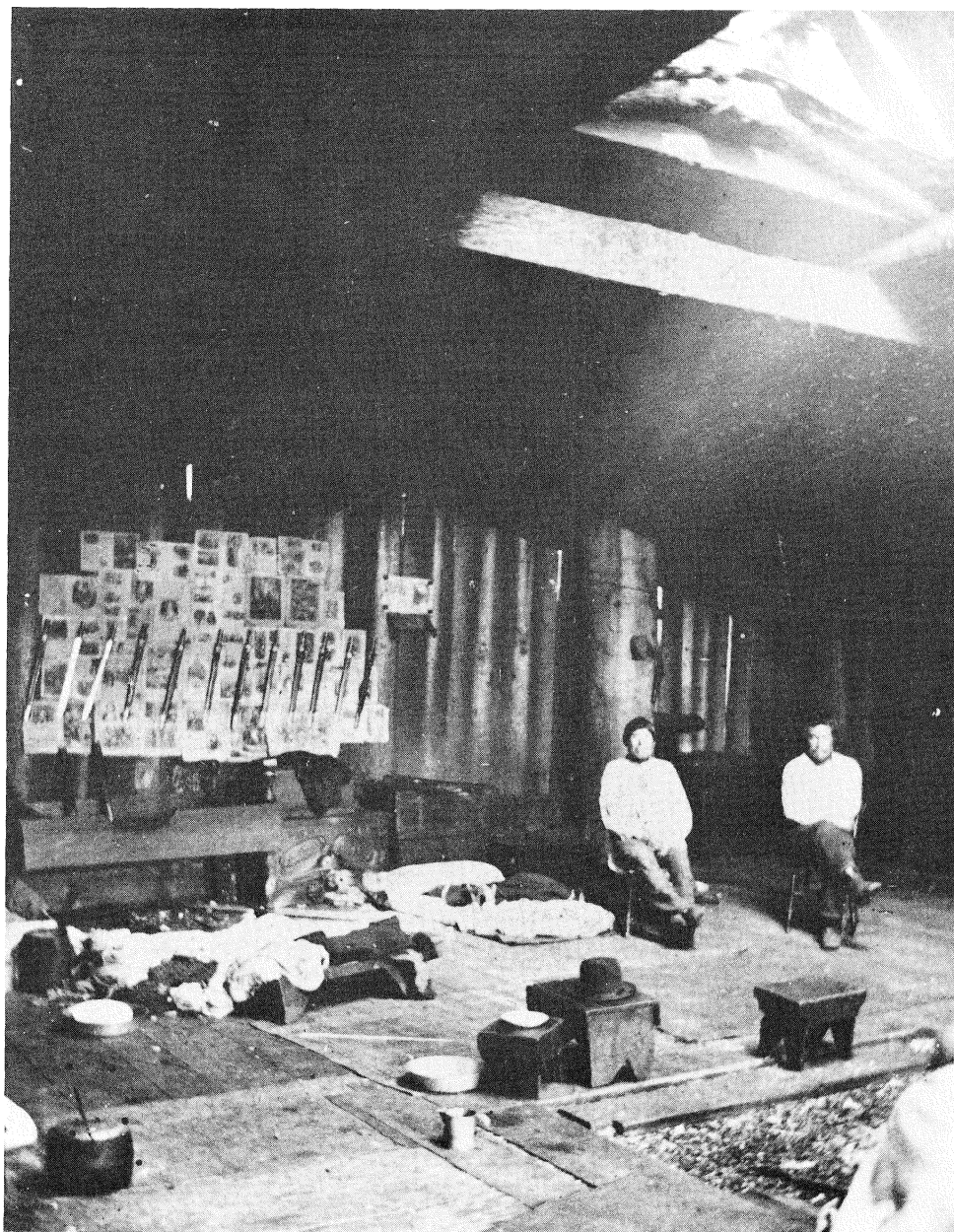


PLATE VI. *Interior of Chief Anetkas' house at Masset.* (Note newspaper pictorials on the rear wall.) Photo by Richard Maynard, 1884 (54040).

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lantern slides in any of the late nineteenth-century missionary correspondence or publications of Masset missionaries.¹³

Maynard photographed only a few people during his stay on the Queen Charlottes. At Masset, for example, he made a stereo of Kaiingassa, as noted above; he included two men in his stereo photograph of the interior of *Anetkas*' house shown in Plate VI, and finally he made a photo of a "group Kloutchmen" (women). This last photograph, mentioned in Maynard's diary, has unfortunately not survived in any archives. The problem of remuneration doubtless affected Maynard's eagerness and ability to photograph natives. In the one instance he recorded, Maynard noted that the Masset Hudson's Bay Company factor wanted photographs of two short totem poles with a native in the centre for scale. The native, requesting pay, refused the offer of a Hudson's Bay blanket, and an irritated Maynard wrote, "so we find some other things around and got the photo" (Maynard, n.d.). No photographs of Masset Haida people have been located from Maynard's second trip to the Queen Charlottes in 1888.

Robert Reford, scion of a shipping magnate from Montreal, came to the northern Queen Charlotte Islands in the fall of 1890 and took some twenty-two photographs with two cameras, one of which was George Eastman's new Kodak No. 2 (Koltun, n.d.). Reford appeared in Masset at a time when many people were likely to have been present (late October), and the content of his photographs suggests that he and his cameras were the subject of much attention, interest and discussion. Reford's images include several with people (Plate V, for example), in groups and individually. The most revealing of his photographs are three which portray native response to camera and photographer. In one Kodak snapshot (Plate VII), an old woman has turned quickly to look at the camera. Her mouth is open in mid-sentence and she appears to be speaking to the photographer. Entitled by Reford, "lady using bad language," one needn't speculate long on her reaction to the camera. In another Kodak snapshot, a woman has turned her back to the camera just as the photographer attempted to take her picture. The juxtaposition of his subject and Reford's other camera in the image suggests that the lady might have been looking through the ground glass back of the camera before turning away to avoid having her photograph taken.

¹³ The statement regarding Harrison's request comes from a Church Missionary Society summary of Harrison's letter; the actual letter has been lost. Lantern slides seem to have been in wide usage on the coast. Horetzky (1874: 108) mentions their use by a Nass missionary, and James G. Swan introduced the Makah of Neah Bay to lantern slides in the early 1860s (see Doig, 1980: 53).



PLATE VII. "*Lady using bad language.*" Photo by Robert Reford, 1890 (c-60794).
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Perhaps Reford, his travelling companions, and the two cameras which he set up at various locations along the village frontage were too much of an intrusion. Reford was, after all, one of the very few photographers to appear in a Haida village at a time when many people were resident; most photographers came during the summer months when numbers of people were away fishing or engaged in other subsistence pursuits. The third noteworthy Reford photograph, entitled by the photographer "town council taking it in" (Plate VIII), shows a cluster of men and little boys, but no women, around one of Reford's cameras. He, with his Kodak, has photographed them. Three peer through the ground glass back underneath the black cloth while others wait their turn for a look. Franz Boas' comment on the Fort Rupert Kwakiutl of 1894 applies equally to the Haida: "The people," he said, "are curious to see the pictures from the back of the camera" (Rohner, 1969:189). Did the Haida find the view and the technology as baffling as a Fort Rupert Kwakiutl who, upon looking through Boas' camera at a woman the latter was about to photograph, "noticed that the picture [ground glass image] was upside down, and ran away telling everybody that her clothes had fallen over her head" (Rohner, 1969:189)?

By the time J. H. Keen (n.d.), missionary at Masset, took "two or three portraits of characteristic Hydah" in 1893, the Masset people were becoming accustomed to the presence of a camera. Keen was the only one of the missionaries to use a camera, and as late as 1970-71 several elderly Haida remembered having seen the cleric taking photographs in the village.

Haida portraiture, for different purposes, was also undertaken in 1897 by photographer E. P. Allen from the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Allen accompanied George Dorsey on an excursion of Haida and Tlingit villages, and while at Masset took for Dorsey at least five head-and-shoulders portraits of Haida men (1) and women (4).¹⁴ In the same year Franz Boas made portraits of Haida at Port Essington; though their portrait photographs were similar and motivated by interest in racial types, Boas and Dorsey disagreed vehemently on the meaning of racial differences.¹⁵ How the Haida felt about having their heads measured and then subjected to the scrutiny of the camera lens was not recorded.¹⁶

¹⁴ Field Museum of Natural History photos, #8541, 849, 2435, 2375, 2384.

¹⁵ This information is from Ira Jacknis, who is preparing a manuscript on Dorsey's expedition of 1897.

¹⁶ Anthropometric photographs of the Haida were still being taken more than twenty years later when Harlan I. Smith visited the Queen Charlottes and took full face, left quartering, and right profile views of five Masset Haida people.



PLATE VIII. *"Town Council taking it in."* Photo by Robert Reford, 1890 (c-60834).
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As noted earlier, in addition to these anthropometric photographs Allen persuaded Sklowe to pose so that Dorsey might “carry away the photograph of his totem which was tattooed on his breast” (Dorsey, 1898:7). The remaining Allen photographs of Haida people include a basketmaker posed beside Chief Weah’s house, a group of people on the front steps of a home (Plate IX), an old man sitting on the beach, and a group of people processing cedar bark.¹⁷ I suspect that Allen had to pay at least those individuals who posed for anthropometric photographs, though Sklowe is the only subject given specific mention in Dorsey’s account.

Although they were well accustomed to cameras and photographers by 1915, one wonders what the Haida must have thought when Edward S. Curtis appeared in their midst to reconstruct their images as they might have appeared 100, even 200, years before. I suspect that progressive leader Alfred Adams, for one (Plate X), was amused at having to cover his short haircut with Curtis’ wig. By the time of Curtis’ visit, professional photographers no longer journeyed to the Queen Charlotte Islands to record Haida villages. The houses were conventional white man’s style cottages, the people dressed in European-style clothing, and the majority of totem poles had been cut down. The camera had been accepted in Haida culture, but professional photographers found little saleable material to record in Haida villages.

From Photo Curios to Photographic Images for Native Use

I wonder if the Haida, in naming the camera *k’laaga nijangwe* — “copying people” — didn’t see in it and its images the same mimetic arts that we do (see Sontag, 1973). The Haida equated camera with mask which they also called *nijangu* — “copying.” Although cameras of visiting photographers recorded far more architectural than human forms, the magical qualities of the instrument were evidently most vividly expressed in its ability to replicate the human form. Portrait masks, with their humanoid faces, were most like the photograph, for they too copied people. Although some portrait masks are quite stylized, the Haida artist’s ability to render realistic copies of individuals was acknowledged. Two Haida portrait masks shown in J. C. H. King’s book (1979: figs. 51, 68), for example, are remarked upon by their collectors as exact likenesses of the women they portray. Native artists could render carved wood replicas of spirits, ancestors and even living individuals. The photographer, with his mysterious machinery, could also do the latter. Given the

¹⁷ Both photos not shown here are from the Field Museum (#854, 2857, respectively).



PLATE IX. *Masset people on front porch steps.* Standing: Fanny Wilson, George Hill, Martha Edenshaw. Seated: Mary Ridley and Mary Ann Hill (children not identified). Photo by E. P. Allen, 1897 (PN-5302).
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PLATE X. "*A Haida of Masset*" (Alfred Adams). Photo by Edward S. Curtis, 1915 (78394).

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importance of masks and other visual forms created by the artist, the sudden appearance of an exotic visual medium which reproduced the human form surely had a significant impact upon the Haida. The camera not only produced two-dimensional copies, but on its ground glass back, “copies” of people appeared, moved about, and then disappeared, not unlike the masked dancer.

I wonder, too, if by the 1880s and 1890s the equation of photograph and mask didn't have yet another and perhaps ironic meaning for the Haida. For many whites who took them and probably for many natives as well, photographs of natives were curios, collected like the masks, baskets and boxes, sold to curio hunters and displayed like museum artifacts. Long years of trading experience with EuroAmericans taught the Haida to drive sharp bargains, so it is not surprising that during an era of intensive curio collecting they would part with both their artifacts and their images for a price. Photographers, like curio hunters, sought the old, the traditional. B. W. Leeson, for example, lamented the Kwakiutl who wanted to dress like white people for his cameras,¹⁸ and, for successful images, photographers of the Haida turned to old Haida women wearing labrets.

As human curios, the Haida are missing part of their identity. Although women posed for Hastings, Dossetter and Allen as basketmakers (there is some doubt that all three women who sat for Hastings were basketmakers), and four men presented themselves as chiefs, there is little in the remaining photographs which gives the viewer a sense of *who* these people really were. Posed individually by totem poles or as a group before a great house, the people are stiff, out of context even, not unlike curios and artifacts on museum display shelves. One old woman with a labret is substitutable for any other.

However, when the Haida began to use images of themselves for their own purposes, the image content changed. One has only to study the photograph of Chief Sonihat (Plate XI) of New Kasaan, Alaska, to understand what was important to *him* in his presentation of self to the camera: his badge, his western style clothing, his chilkat dancing blanket and his speaker's staff.

After the turn of the twentieth century the family photo album had become established among the Haida, as had the native photographer.

¹⁸ Leeson photographed Ne-no-le-o (# 55 in his catalogue of photographs; see Leeson, n.d.), “one of the last elongated heads of the Kwakiutl tribes . . .”, picking salmonberries. He notes, “She insisted in putting on this whiteman's dress before having her picture taken.”

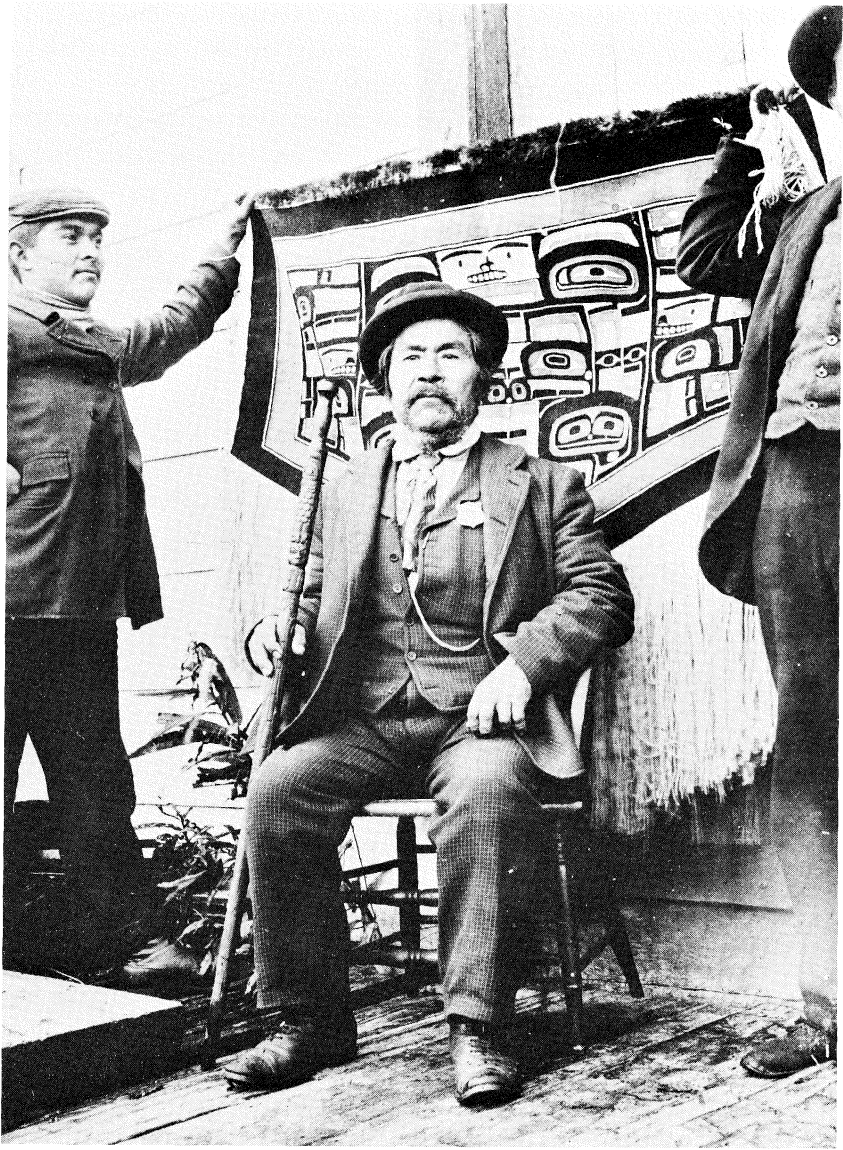


PLATE XI. *Chief Sonihat of New Kasaan, Alaska.* Photographer unknown (NMC-36106). COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF CANADA

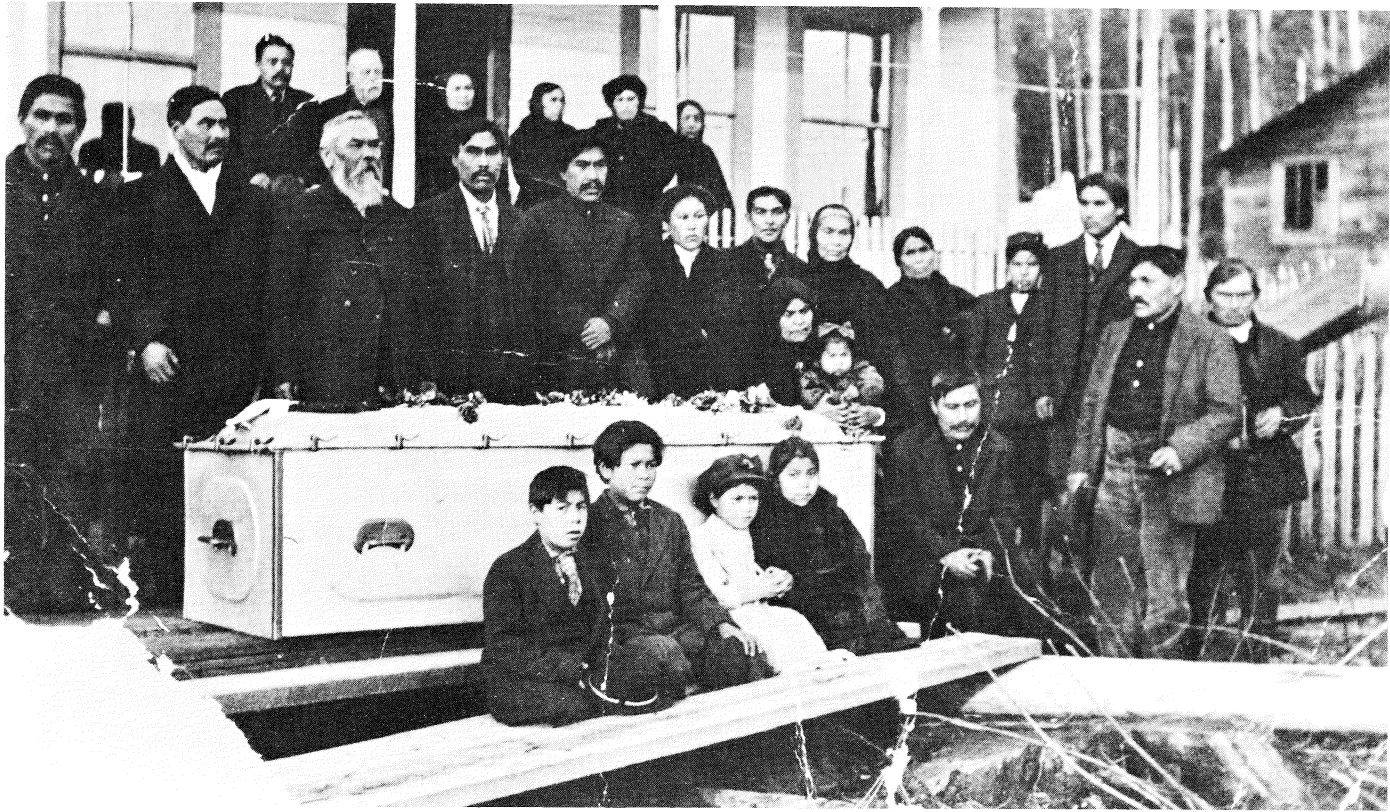


PLATE XII. *Chief Sonihat's funeral, New Kasaan, Alaska.* Photographer unknown (72-513).

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Now the Haida recorded many of the same things families elsewhere recorded in photo album images: formal portraits in Sunday dress, a bride and groom and their wedding party. Family photos also document funerals (Plate XII): the casket, the deceased, the funeral procession, the family posed beside the tombstone. Though funeral photographs and even funeral albums were common in Victorian culture, their appearance among the Haida likely relates to the traditional importance of mortuary rituals in native culture.

Although the content of the later images shown here (Plates XI and XII) was controlled by the Haida, the images were made by outsiders. Unfortunately I have seen few images of Haida people and places made by Haida photographers. Masset Haida elders recalled a villager named *Xinaw* (William Harding) who had a camera with a black cloth and a tripod. *Xinaw* was the most active of several amateur Haida photographers (all men) who took photographs after about 1910. In a sense *Xinaw* was the village photographer, recording weddings, funerals and family portraits. I wonder though if he wasn't as much fascinated by the ground glass image as by the final product, for I was told that he often purposely took "photographs" of family groups without any film in the camera, reporting later that his images had not turned out. Perhaps, like the masked dance performances, it was the ritual of "copying people" that was ultimately important and enjoyable in the early years of Haida photography.

During the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century, the Haida witnessed the making of well over a thousand images of their houses, totem poles and people. Though they may have actually seen very few of the final products, they understood the camera as an effective imitator of human behaviour. I have argued too that they saw the photographers who carried off their images much as the collectors who carried off their material past; they parted with their images as they parted with their totem poles and masks — for a price. Eventually photographic imaging became part of Haida culture and they turned it to their own purposes, recording themselves as they wished to be seen. The earlier photographs, the curio images, record the archival Indian; they render the form but not the self. It is the later images, the Haida images, which truly "copy people."

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