

# The Burning of Kitsegukla, 1872

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Early in June 1872, Constable Robert Brown of the British Columbia Provincial Police left his post at Port Essington to head up the Skeena River. He intended to travel by canoe to Hazelton, then overland to Babine Lake before returning to the mouth of the Skeena: in all a round trip of nearly 500 miles. As the only representative of provincial authority in this considerable territory, Brown was making his journey "to collect Revenue etc." from the few white residents and transient miners in the area.<sup>1</sup> But Brown never completed his trip. At Kitsegukla, a Gitksan village over a hundred miles up the Skeena, his progress was halted by a group of angry natives. Their village had been destroyed by fire a few days earlier, and now they refused Brown passage up the river.

This paper is concerned with Brown's encounter at Kitsegukla and its consequences. Reconstruction of these events on the basis of contemporary records is a fairly straightforward task. It offers an account seen, primarily, through the eyes of white participants. But such a unilateral description of a clash involving people of two very different cultures has clear limitations. Native actions are diminished and, as a direct consequence, white actions decontextualized. A more balanced view calls for serious consideration of the Gitksan perception of the "burning of Kitsegukla."

This is no simple matter, raising both interpretative and empirical problems. Of the former, one rather obvious, but essential, point needs to be made at this juncture: Gitksan responses to the burning of Kitsegukla were based on the logic of their own cultural universe. In 1872, knowing little of the Euro-Canadian world, they could not have acted otherwise. The key to the empirical problem of reconstructing the Gitksan perspective is contained in the ethnographic files of Marius Barbeau. In the early 1920s, some fifty years after the events, Barbeau collected three narrative accounts of the burning of Kitsegukla and its aftermath. These narratives,

<sup>1</sup> Brown to Provincial Secretary, 26 June 1872; GR 526, box 3, file 465, PABC. A Gold Commissioner/Stipendiary Magistrate was stationed at Germansen Creek in the Omineca district; see note 48.

supplemented by judicious use of contemporary documents, provide the necessary data for outlining a Gitksan interpretation of events.<sup>2</sup>

The juxtaposition of white and Gitksan perspectives offers a fascinating glimpse of the cultural and political geography of the upper Skeena in 1872. It suggests a pattern of native-white relationships in which, ideology notwithstanding, neither side was obviously "superior." Furthermore, despite very different cultural agendas, a potentially explosive situation was resolved in a manner acceptable to both sides.

The burning of Kitsegukla and its consequences were the result of specific cultural and historic circumstances. To delineate this conjuncture a brief review of the ethnographic context and early contact process on the upper Skeena is necessary.

### *The Gitksan*

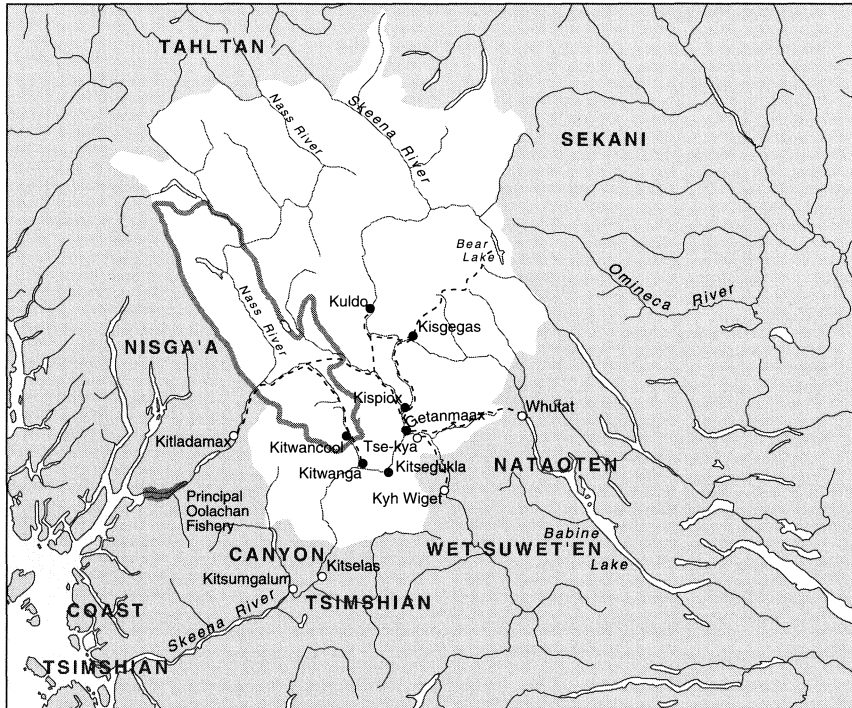
The Gitksan are Tsimshian speakers and, in terms of language and culture, closely related to their western neighbours the Coast Tsimshian, Southern Tsimshian, and the Nisga'a. Their interior location notwithstanding, the Gitksan are part of the Northwest Coast cultural realm. Despite linguistic differences, the Gitksan also had much in common with their Athapaskan-speaking neighbours to the south and east, the Wet'suwet'en.<sup>3</sup>

Gitksan territory extended from above Kitselas canyon to Bear Lake and the headwaters of the Skeena and Nass rivers (figure 1). Within this largely mountainous and forested region the principal rivers were vital geographic features. They provided not only the principal food resource, salmon, but also a network of routes traversing Gitksan territory and extending to the lands of neighbouring peoples. Control of these routes — the capacity to determine who, and under what circumstances, might use them — was an important feature of the economic landscape.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For an assessment of Barbeau's work, see Duff, W. (1964) "Contributions of Marius Barbeau to West Coast Ethnology," *Anthropologica*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 63-96. See also Cove, J. (1985) "A Detailed Inventory of the Barbeau Northwest Coast Files," Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Series, Paper no. 54, Mercury Series, National Museum of Man, Ottawa.

<sup>3</sup> For a map of the distribution of language families, see Kinkade et al, "New Caledonia and Columbia," Plate 66 in Harris and Matthews (1987): "Historical Atlas of Canada," vol. 1, U. of Toronto Press, Toronto. See also Halpin and Seguin, "Tsimshian Peoples: Southern Tsimshian, Coast Tsimshian, Nishga and Gitksan," in Suttles (1990): "Northwest Coast," *Handbook of American Indians*, vol. 7, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., pp. 267-84.

<sup>4</sup> For some purposes routes were "open to all," but for the movement of scarcer goods strict controls and tariffs prevailed." In some cases bridges were constructed to facilitate control of routes (McDonald, in Seguin M., 1984: "The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present," UBC Press, Vancouver, pp. 78-79).



- Gitksan winter village
  - Non-Gitksan winter village
  - Approximate location of Gitksan territory (see note)
  - Approximate location of Kitwanooc territory
  - TSIMSHIAN Neighbouring peoples
  - Principal Oolachan Fishery
  - Important trails
- 0      50      100km

Figure 1. The Gitksan and their neighbours, c. 1860.

Note: The location of Gitksan territory is taken from Plate 2 of Kerr and Holdsworth (1990) and Map 3 in Delgamuukw vs Attorney General of B.C. Information on the territories of the Kitwanooc chiefs, who were not parties to this action, is taken from: Duff, W. (1959) "Histories, Territories and Laws of the Kitwanooc", Anthropology in B.C., Memoir no. 4, Victoria.

Figure 1. The Gitksan and their neighbours, c. 1860.

Ownership of territory, like control of routes, was located at the level of the House Group (wilp), the fundamental unit of Gitksan social structure. The leading chief of a House Group determined, usually after consultation, the usage of the House territory and resources. Individuals, however, through marriage and clan membership, could obtain subsidiary rights to use the territories of other House Groups. This wider network of relationships added a significant degree of flexibility to the Gitksan system.

The cultural glue, the institution which united the major elements of Gitksan society, was the feast (potlatch).<sup>5</sup> This was a complex system of activities but, for purposes of this article, attention can be limited to the functional dimension. The following remarks, although not referring directly to the Gitksan, have the advantage of brevity and preparation in pursuit of native objectives:

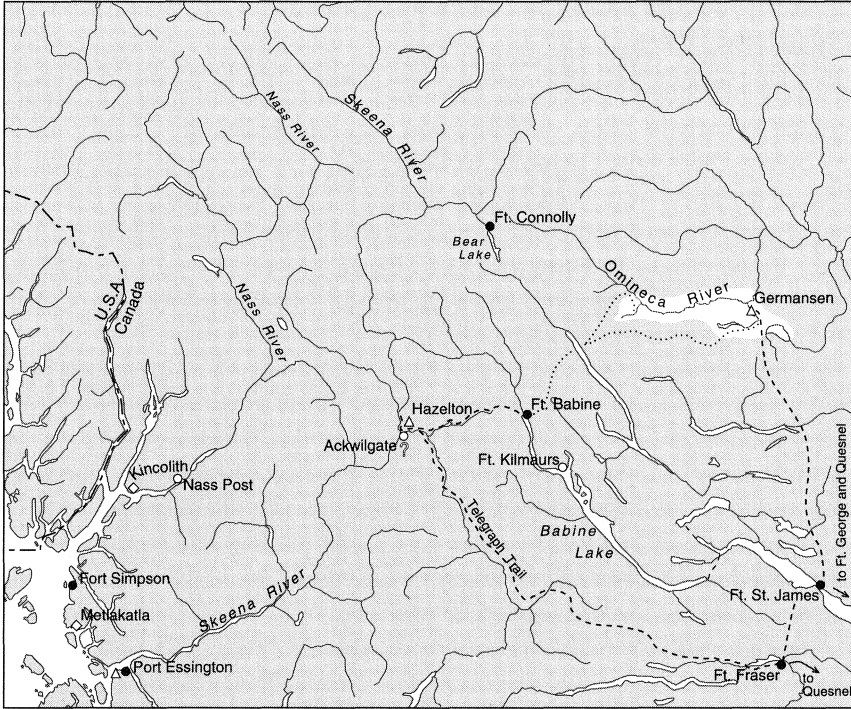
The Potlatch . . . is the institution by which Indians were bound together by individuals, families or tribes into an organized social unit and body politic. By the Potlatch were they governed and their relationship amongst themselves regulated. The function of the Potlatch was to celebrate and solemnize and record any event affecting them or changing their relationship one to another. It included any event in the life of the individual such as birth, the giving of a name, attainment of the age of puberty, marriage, divorce, adoption, expulsion, and death. It included any change of property rights: transfer of land, hunting rights in dances, crests, names or other privileges, payment of debts, settlement of disputes etc. Finally it included agreements between tribes and peace or trade treaties or settlements. The Potlatch also sat as a judicial tribunal to administer the ancient custom and the law both civil and criminal. . . . It is sometimes looked upon and spoken of as a ceremony. This is incorrect as the ceremonies attached to it are incidental — it is an institution — a system.<sup>6</sup>

In 1872 the Gitksan occupied seven winter villages: Kitwanga, Getanmaax, Kispiox, Kuldo, and Kitsegukla on the Skeena; Kitwancool and Kisgegas on tributaries (see figure 1). Kitsegukla was located at a small canyon a short distance below the site of the present village. At the time of Constable Brown's visit there were about a dozen traditional long houses and a population probably between 250 and 300 — this from a total Gitksan population of about 2,000.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The term "potlatch" is more familiar in the literature but "feast" is the preferred English language usage of the Gitksan. The Gitksan term is yukw. See, Gisday Wa and Delgam Uukw (n.d.), "The Spirit in the Land," Reflections, Gabriola, B.C.

<sup>6</sup> Brief prepared by E. K. DeBeck, 11 May 1921. RG 10, vol. 3631, file 6244-X. This document was prepared in the context of native opposition to the potlatch prohibition. See also, Gisday Wa & Delgam Uukw, pp. 30-32.

<sup>7</sup> A Map of Gitksan territories, at the "clan" level, may be found in Nicholson et al., Plate 2 in Kerr et al.: "Historical Atlas of Canada," vol. III, U. of Toronto, To-



- H.B.C. post operating in 1872
  - H.B.C. post abandoned between 1868 and 1872
  - ◇ mission settlement
  - △ other settlements
  - ? location uncertain
  - Approximate Mining, 1870 - 1872
  - - - Principal improved trails
  - ⋯ Other trails
- 0 50 100km

Figure 2. The Skeena and adjacent regions: The Euro-Canadian Imprint, 1872.

*The Early Contact Process on the Upper Skeena*

Prior to 1871 direct interaction between the Gitksan and whites was relatively infrequent. Although they were integrated into the fur trade, perhaps as early as 1800, only one post was established on Gitksan territory before 1860. Fort Connolly, at Bear Lake near the eastern margins of Gitksan territory, was built by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in 1827. Some Gitksan made occasional visits to other HBC posts at Babine Lake, Fraser Lake, and Stuart Lake (figure 2). In the main, however, the Company was obliged to leave the extraction of furs from the upper Skeena to native trading mechanisms.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1860s the effects of the "new" economy of southern British Columbia reached the upper Skeena region, albeit in an attenuated form. A few miners/prospectors traversed the area; the HBC operated a post (Ackwilgate), near the confluence of the Skeena and Bulkley, between 1866 and 1868; the Collins Overland Telegraph (COT) reached, briefly, as far as Kispiox; and missionaries had made passing overtures. Despite such developments, much of the upper Skeena remained unknown to whites and lacked permanent white residents.<sup>9</sup>

Although yielding relatively little gold, the Omineca gold rush, beginning in 1870, changed this situation. The Skeena River became a supply route, for miners and traders, to the northern interior of the province. To facilitate this process a trail was constructed, along the line of an old native route, from the "Forks of the Skeena" to Babine Lake. Permanent

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ronto, 1990. House territories, other than those of the Kitwancool, are shown in map 3 of *Delgamuukw vs Attorney General for B.C.*, "Reasons for Judgement," March 1991. On the site of Kitsegukla, see Charlotte Sampare et al. (1979): "Adawklh Gitsegukla: Gitsegukla History," Kitsegukla [?].

An 1868 estimate, including only five Gitksan villages, put the total at c. 2000; in the 1881 census 1,449 Gitksan were enumerated ("Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Made to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1869," Washington, 1870, pp. 563-64; Canada, 1881 Census, mss. nominal rolls, District 187, Sub-district D, Division 9).

<sup>8</sup> Fort Connolly was frequented by Sekani and Carrier as well as Gitksan. The principal trade route, along the Skeena river, was controlled by the Gispakloats, a Coast Tsimshian tribe. Legaic, the leading Gispakloats chief, was a key figure in the fur trade at Fort Simpson. For further details, see notes 16 and 17.

The Gitksan also made annual visits to the lower Nass River to obtain supplies of oolachan grease. For a map of trade routes in the Skeena-Nass region, see McDonald et al. "The Coast Tsimshian," Plate 13, in Harris and Matthews (1987).

<sup>9</sup> An expanded version of these comments, together with full documentation, may be found in Galois (1989), "The History of the Upper Skeena Region, 1850-1927," Exhibit 1034, submitted in the trial *Delgamuukw v Attorney General for B.C.* Since preparation of that manuscript a history of the COT has been published: see Neering, R. (1989), "Continental Dash: The Russian-American Telegraph," Horsdal & Schubart, Ganges, B.C.

white settlement followed on a very modest scale, and the pattern of Gitksan/white interaction entered a new era. The burning of Kitsegukla, and the responses of both whites and Gitksan, were an integral part of this evolving pattern.

### *The Confrontation at Kitsegukla*

For his journey up the Skeena, Constable Brown took passage on one of two freight canoes carrying trade goods to the store of Cunningham and Hankin at Hazelton. After travelling for two weeks the party arrived, on 19 June, at Kitsegukla only to discover that the village had been destroyed by fire. In all, Brown reported, twelve houses and most of their contents had been destroyed "together with 12 crest poles, the latter valued at 50 pairs of blankets and upwards each." The total loss was estimated at about six thousand dollars.<sup>10</sup>

In a meeting with the Kitsegukla chiefs Brown was informed that the fire "had been caused by white men, [although] earlier they had attributed it to the malice of [a] Tsimshian named Kill-oot-sah who had an old grudge against them." It was the former explanation that Brown accepted, adding that the problem derived from a camp fire that the whites "had neglected to extinguish."

The initial response of the Kitsegukla chiefs to these events was to close the river to further canoe traffic. One chief stated that "he would be hung" before he allowed "any canoe" to pass up the Skeena "this summer." In reply, Brown suggested that nothing would be accomplished by such measures but, if they behaved well, he thought "it highly probable that the Government would recoup what they had lost by the fire."<sup>11</sup> After much discussion, agreement was reached: Brown and party could proceed

<sup>10</sup> Cunningham and Hankin were both former employees of the HBC, the latter having been in charge of the short-lived post at "Ackwilgate." In 1872 they were partners in a business, with stores at Hazelton and Port Essington, which had grown out of the Omineca gold rush. By this time Hankin was married to a Tsimshian speaking "half-breed" (see: *Victoria Daily Colonist* Apr. 10, 1905; Thomas Hankin, *vf. PABC*; Clayton, this volume).

Brown to Provincial Secretary, 26 June 1872; GR 526, box 3, file 465. Unless otherwise stated, information in this section is taken from this source. Brown was no stranger to the upper Skeena: he had worked for the COT, ascending the river as far as Mission Point in 1866 (Morison, J. W., "Memoirs," p. 28; Add. Mss. 424, PABC).

<sup>11</sup> An unattributed letter in the *Victoria Daily Standard* (10 July 1872), probably written by Thomas Hankin, stated that the closure of the river was linked to a demand for compensation by the Indians. They claimed that "they would not allow any goods to go further up unless they were indemnified for their recent losses." Hankin was not present at the meeting between Brown and the chiefs but arrived at Kitsegukla shortly thereafter.

upstream "in a canoe with blankets and provisions" but they could not take the trade goods with them. On reaching a point opposite the village, however, Brown found men

armed with muskets on both banks, some of whom gesticulated wildly while others crouched behind logs, boulders etc. with their arms presented . . . the chief ordered us to turn back and reaching out seized the bow of the canoe.

Thus rebuffed, Brown returned downstream to Kitwanga, but he was able to send a native messenger to Thomas Hankin, at Hazelton, with news of developments. On learning that his freight canoes were embargoed, Hankin hurried down to Kitsegukla by canoe "with a party of twelve armed men . . . and had a long wawa [talk] with the Indians." This concluded much as Brown's meeting had done, except that two shots were fired in the direction of Hankin's canoe. These, Hankin believed, "were aimed at him."<sup>12</sup>

As a result of this hostility, Hankin decided to continue downstream to Kitwanga and confer with Brown. While he was there, a deputation of local chiefs "volunteered to go up and try and arrange matters" at Kitsegukla. Hankin approved of this initiative but insisted that it produce results within a clearly defined time limit. At the expiration of this limit, and lacking any satisfactory resolution, Hankin commenced packing his trade goods overland to Hazelton. Just before dark, however, the party was overtaken by one of the "deputation" of Kitwanga chiefs. He advised Hankin not "to go further unless he was ready for a fight." Accepting the wisdom of this suggestion, Hankin returned to Kitwanga and "stored his goods."<sup>13</sup>

At this stage Brown decided to return to the coast. On arriving at Port Essington he wrote to the Provincial Secretary informing him of the course of events. He noted that the destruction of Kitsegukla had been preceded by another traumatic event: the drowning of "seven Indians" employed in "freight canoes." The result was a "total cessation of the traffic on the river, with the probability of more to come." In conclusion, Brown suggested, "nothing short of the presence of a magistrate supported by an armed force will be of any avail." Following receipt of his letter, Brown was summoned to Victoria to report in person. He arrived on 9 July, and the following day the events on the Skeena became public knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Victoria Daily Standard, 10 July 1872.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> See, Brown to Provincial Secretary, 9 July 1872; GR 526, box 3, file 466: and, Victoria Daily Standard, 10 July 1872.



Meanwhile, Matthew Feak, the HBC clerk at Port Essington, had also written to his superior in Victoria. Feak reported that he had forwarded 11,000 pounds of trade goods to Hazelton in the freight canoes of Thomas Curry.<sup>15</sup> On reaching Kitselas, however, the native crew refused to proceed any further, and the goods had been stored at Kitselas. Feak also provided an account of the situation at Kitsegukla that was in accord with Brown's version, including the figure of \$6000 as the estimated value of the damage. The only new information concerned the presence of Legaic, the Gispakloats chief, in the party which accompanied Hankin from Hazelton to Kitsegukla.<sup>16</sup> The presence of Legaic may have been significant, contributing to the hostility with which the party was received at Kitsegukla.<sup>17</sup> Be this as it may, Feak concluded, much as Brown had done, that "until something is done by the Government no Indian will go up the river, and consequently all business will cease."<sup>18</sup>

Hankin's experience and knowledge of the Gitksan, and perhaps the absence of Legaic, were to prove Feak wrong. By 1 July, native sources had informed Feak that the people at Kitsegukla had become "frightened of the consequences attending their conduct should a Man-of-War arrive, and sent word to Mr. Hankin at the Forks, that he might take his goods through." This explanation of the change of heart by the Kitsegukla chiefs is, at best, incomplete. As Feak's account makes clear, Hankin played an important role in reducing the tension at Kitsegukla. In addition to taking an inventory of the property "destroyed in the fire," Hankin made "certain promises which [the] Government would fulfill." Satisfied by these mea-

<sup>15</sup> The HBC had been seeking an improved route for supplying its posts in New Caledonia since at least the mid 1860s. In 1872, for the first time, part of the outfit was shipped via the Skeena (Finlayson to Ogden, 24 Nov. 1866; Ft. Victoria, Correspondence Inward, B 226/b/35, HBCA: Grahame to Armit, 16 May, 27 Jun. and 11 Jul. 1872; London, Correspondence from Ft. Victoria, A 11/87a, HBCA).

<sup>16</sup> The holder of the name Legaic had owned the monopoly of trade between the Coast Tsimshian and the Gitksan. According to one source the monopoly was no longer operative in 1872, having been "sold" to the HBC (Boas, 1916, "Tsimshian Mythology," Bureau of American Ethnology, 31st Annual Report, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., p. 510). Nonetheless, Legaic remained an important figure in the trade along the Skeena (Beynon, W.: *The Beynon Manuscripts, Narrative #8*; microfilm UBC).

<sup>17</sup> Relations between Legaic and the Gitksan tribes were by no means always amicable. An earlier holder of the Legaic "title," for example, had been responsible for burning the village of Kitsegukla. The date of this conflict cannot be determined with precision (Beynon, *Narrative #8*). For discussions of Legaic, see: McDonald, G. "The Epic of Nekt: The Archaeology of Metaphor," in Seguin (1984), "The Tsimshian: Images of the Past; Views for the Present," UBC Press, Vancouver, pp. 65-81; and, Robinson, M. (c. 1978), "Sea Otter Chiefs," Friendly Cove Press, n. loc.

<sup>18</sup> Feak to Grahame, 27 June 1872; extract in Grahame to Lieut. Gov., 19 July 1872: GR 443, vol. 58, PABC.

tures, the Kitsegukla chiefs allowed Hankin "to take his goods pending the arrival of magistrate to settle the matter permanently."<sup>19</sup>

Later Feak came to doubt Hankin's motives, perhaps suspecting some sharp, commercial practice to eliminate competition from the HBC. Thus, early in August, Feak complained bitterly to William Duncan, a missionary at nearby Metlakatla, that the "disturbance" at Kitsegukla "might have been peaceably adjusted if Hankin had used his influence to support Mr. Brown in the execution of his duty."<sup>20</sup> In the interval between these two letters, Feak had learned that the people of Kitsegukla were again threatening to stop all freight boats from going up the river and warned that "if this Government does not do something they (the Indians) will take charge."<sup>21</sup> A party of miners, returning from Omineca via the Skeena, reported that this threat had become a reality:

They allow boats and men to ascend and descend the Skeena, but refuse to permit goods of any kind to be taken up. They demand to be recompensed for their losses by the burning of their village and the drowning of six of their tribe. Armed sentries with guns guard the Kitsenclaw [Kitsegukla] Canon, to enforce the Chief's orders.<sup>22</sup>

Whatever the precise circumstances leading to Hankin's second visit to Kitsegukla, and whatever his motives may have been, the crucial point is that he conducted negotiations with the Kitsegukla chiefs. Hankin's own account of these events is rather terse but warrants careful examination. In a letter to Lieutenant-Governor Joseph Trutch, enclosing a petition from the chiefs, Hankin stated that he had gone down to the village and, after a long talk,

promised to aid them in forwarding their petition to proper quarters, if they would behave peaceably to all freight or passenger canoes that might pass their way. In the absence of any proper authority I took it upon myself to act as I have done — *and for the time* what might have at first ended very

<sup>19</sup> Feak to Grahame, 1 July 1872; extract in Grahame to Lieut Gov., 19 July 1872: GR 443, vol. 58. The information, however, was public knowledge as the letter was published in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* of July 9. This edition also contained a letter from Moss to Rithet, which originated from Port Essington. Moss stated that the Kitsegukla Indians "went up to Hazelton in a body and asked the whites to intercede for them with the Government to procure some compensation for the great loss sustained at the late fire and petition sent to His Excellency the Lieut. Governor."

<sup>20</sup> Feak to Duncan, 5 Aug. 1872: Duncan Papers, p. 3798. At this time Cunningham and Hankin were under suspicion for selling liquor to "Indians" at Port Essington (Brown to Fitzgerald, 27 Jul. 1872; Barbeau Files, B/F 215.1. Duncan, an Anglican missionary, was also a J.P.; the latest study of his career is: Murray, P. (1985) "The Devil and Mr. Duncan," Sono Nis Press, Victoria.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell to Feak, 22 July 1872; *Victoria Daily Standard*, 8 Aug. 1872.

<sup>22</sup> *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 7 Aug. 1872.

seriously is I believe peaceably settled, the Indians pending the result of their petition. [emphasis in original]

Signed by ten Kitsegukla chiefs, the petition detailed the events which led to the burning of their village. It differs slightly from the account by Brown concerning the extent of destruction: the totals are given as eleven houses, thirteen poles and ten canoes.<sup>23</sup>

*Official Responses: The Meeting at Metlakatla*

Back in Victoria, one further piece of information about the situation on the upper Skeena came to hand: a report from F. McGrath of Alert Bay. Forwarded to the Lieutenant-Governor by stipendiary magistrate W. R. Spalding of Nanaimo, it included the startling news circulating “amongst the Indians” at Alert Bay that “all the white people at the Forks of Skeena . . . are massacred and the stores and houses plundered.”<sup>24</sup>

Alarmed by this report and a number of other incidents on the northern coast, the government acted. On 22 July Lieutenant-Governor Trutch wrote to the Senior Naval Officer at Esquimalt requesting assistance. In addition to the “disturbance” at Kitsegukla and the rumoured massacre at Hazelton, Trutch cited complaints of the “unruly conduct of Indians at several points along the N.W. Coast and Queen Charlotte’s Island.” He sought a naval vessel to convey himself and a magistrate to Port Essington, Metlakatla, Kincolith and the Queen Charlotte Islands and “such other assistance as you may think proper to furnish in composing the unsettled state of the Indian population in this district.” Recourse to the use of British gunboats was a standard response to “difficulties” with native peoples of the coast.<sup>25</sup>

According to William Duncan, who had advised Trutch, the plan for dealing with the situation at Kitsegukla was straightforward. The Lieutenant-Governor, in a ship of war, would travel to Metlakatla, from where Duncan would send some local natives “with the white constable to induce the injured Indians to come down — and lay their complaints before His Excellency.” At the same time it was “feared that the indians would refuse to come & hence the river would have to be opened by an armed force.” This plan clearly owed a good deal to the actions taken by

<sup>23</sup> Hankin to Lieut. Gov., n.d.; GR 443, vol. 58.

<sup>24</sup> Alert Bay, on Cormorant Island, was the home of the Nimpkish tribe of Kwagiulth. Spalding to Lieut. Gov., 19 July 1872; GR 443, vol. 58.

<sup>25</sup> Trutch to Capt. Cator, 22 July 1872; GR 443, vol. 22; B. Gough, *Gunboat Frontier, British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-1890* (Vancouver, 1984).

Governor Seymour and Duncan in 1869 when seeking to resolve a Nisga'a/Coast Tsimshian dispute. On that occasion the official party had travelled, by HMS *Sparrowhawk*, to the mouth of the Nass to meet the respective chiefs.<sup>26</sup>

The official party, on board HMS *Scout*, accompanied by HMS *Boxer*, left Esquimalt on 24 July. Arriving at Metlakatla a week later they learned that the Kitsegukla chiefs were not expected for another week. With other matters to attend to, Trutch decided to continue the voyage and return at a later date. On 9 August, when HMS *Scout* again anchored at Metlakatla, "about twenty of the principal men" from Kitsegukla were waiting.<sup>27</sup> As planned, Constable Brown had ascended the Skeena, in a canoe manned by natives from Metlakatla, "to invite the Chiefs" to come down to the coast to meet the Lieutenant-Governor. Fortunately, perhaps, Brown's party included a native of Kitsegukla. Identified only as Hans, and described as a brother and/or a son of one of the chiefs, he had approached Brown at Port Essington with a request to "go up with [them] . . . to try and accommodate matters." Brown acceded to the request, in part "lest they should think he was detained . . . [at Port Essington] as a hostage." At Kitsegukla Brown delivered the Lieutenant-Governor's message and the "three head chiefs" agreed to return with him to the proposed meeting at Metlakatla.<sup>28</sup>

Those present at the meeting, held on board HMS *Scout*, included Lieutenant-Governor Trutch; J. F. McCreight, Attorney-General of British Columbia; W. R. Spalding; William Duncan (acting as interpreter); two naval officers; Constable Brown; and five Kitsegukla chiefs. "Everything," Duncan observed,

was done to make the occasion a solemn one and [as] imposing as possible. All the officers were in full uniform and whether it was the sight of their dresses or the sighting of the ship in general I cannot tell but the stranger [i.e., Kitsegukla] Indians seemed to lose themselves [illegible] and half forgot all they intended to say.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Trutch had been a member of the party on HMS *Sparrowhawk* in 1869. Duncan to Church Missionary Society, 3 Feb. 1873; Duncan Papers, p. 8882/146ff: Trutch, Report on a visit of HMS *Sparrowhawk*; C/AB/30.7M/4A/C2, PABC.

<sup>27</sup> Duncan to Church Missionary Society, 3 Feb. 1873; Duncan Papers, p. 8882/146ff: Victoria Daily Standard, 20 Aug. 1872.

<sup>28</sup> See, Brown to Duncan, 27 July 1872; Duncan Papers, p. 3789: Brown to Fitzgerald, 27 July 1872; Barbeau Files B/F 215.1. The name "Hans" is used in Trutch, Speeches at Metlakatla, evidence of Constable Brown; A/E/Or3/T771.95, PABC.

<sup>29</sup> The Attorney General was J. F. McCreight (Duncan to Church Missionary Society, 3 Feb. 1873; Duncan Papers, p. 8882/146ff: Victoria Daily Standard, 20 Aug. 1872).

After the chiefs and Brown had made brief statements, Trutch addressed the chiefs. In a rather discursive speech, he made three essential points. First, the crimes committed by the Indians in blocking passage up the Skeena would be “forgiven” on this occasion. Such leniency was a product of the fact the Indians were only “children” and unfamiliar with white laws and customs. Secondly, he viewed the Kitsegukla fire as an accident, there being no evidence that the whites had intended to burn the village. The government, therefore, could accept no responsibility for such an occurrence. Instead, out of charity, the people of Kitsegukla were to receive a “present . . . as an act of grace to you and not a payment of debt.” Finally, Trutch was at some pains to insist that, in the event of subsequent transgressions, the “Indians” would be punished. On the other hand, should the Kitsegukla chiefs have any complaints “against any one” they would “always find I am ready to hear you.”<sup>30</sup>

The “present” mentioned by Trutch amounted to a sum of \$600.00, which was distributed among the Kitsegukla chiefs. Duncan, however, regarded the present as “part compensation” for the losses suffered; there was also an understanding that a further provision would be made “should they behave themselves.” The Kitsegukla chiefs, he added, “all appeared greatly delighted both by their reception and its results.”<sup>31</sup>

The distribution of the moneys was delayed until 12 August, two days after the initial meeting, and was accompanied by elements of display from both sides. A newspaper account reported that the chiefs

fired off their muskets and sang songs expressing their love for whites. A number of big guns of the Scout were fired off at targets, the shot and shell as they crashed through the trees or ricocheted through the water seeming to impress the savages very forcibly with an idea of the power of the whites.<sup>32</sup>

### *Gitksan Perspectives*

The foregoing description of events, derived from contemporary documents, represents a white, and largely “official,” interpretation of the burning of Kitsegukla. To make this point is to raise a more difficult

<sup>30</sup> Trutch, *Speeches at Metlakatla: Duncan to Church Missionary Society*, 3 Feb. 1873; *Duncan Papers*, p. 8882/146 ff.

<sup>31</sup> *Duncan to Church Missionary Society*, 3 Feb. 1873; *Duncan Papers*, p. 8882/146 ff.

<sup>32</sup> See, *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 20 Aug. 1872. There was a postscript to this sequence of events at Kitsegukla and Metlakatla. Later in 1872 “the inhabitants of the Town of Hazelton” forwarded a petition to the Attorney-General requesting the “appointment of a person in authority to prevent disturbances amongst the Indians.” The petition was forwarded to the Executive Council, which decided that “when the estimates are being prepared” the petition would be considered (Executive Council, *Statebook, Meeting*, 18 Nov. 1872, Item #191; GR 444, vol. 32, p. 141, PABC).

question: what were the Gitksan perceptions of these events? Two sets of sources, neither unproblematic, can be used to this end: contemporary documents which contain translations or paraphrases of Gitksan statements; and oral testimony collected by Marius Barbeau and William Beynon in the early 1920s.<sup>33</sup> The picture that emerges from these sources — internal variations notwithstanding — conforms with the main outline of events described above. On some points, however, there are both differences and important supplementary information. The ensuing discussion focuses upon details about the fire and its origin, the impact of the fire on the people of Kitsegukla, the circumstances surrounding the chief's decision to attend the meeting at Metlakatla, and the content and consequences of that meeting.

The burning of Kitsegukla was remembered within the context of a new and expanded white presence on the upper Skeena that produced an increase in canoe traffic, both white and native.<sup>34</sup> At the time of the fire, however, most of the Kitsegukla population was away from the village, at fishing stations or visiting the Nass valley.<sup>35</sup> As a result, there is uncertainty about the causes of the fire, with a number of different explanations put forward. On one point, however, there is agreement: the fire began as a result of a "party" camping at a fishing site adjacent to Kitsegukla. The "party" consisted of two canoes, including whites and native canoemen.<sup>36</sup> It was the failure of this party to extinguish fully their camp fire which led to the destruction of Kitsegukla.

From both contemporary Gitksan statements and later oral testimony it is evident that the destruction of Kitsegukla had a significant economic and psychological impact on the people of the village. The fullest statement on this issue was provided by "First Chief Ahask [Haaskw?]"<sup>37</sup> during the meeting at Metlakatla. Ahask stressed both the antiquity and the value of Kitsegukla: the village, he stated, had

<sup>33</sup> The relevant oral narratives in the Barbeau Files are: Mark Wiget (1924, B/F/63.1); Dan Guxsan (1924, B/F/63.2); and Charles Mark (n.d., B/F/63.3). William Beynon acted as interpreter for Guxsan and Wiget; no interpreter is listed for the Mark narrative. It is not clear if any of these sources were direct witnesses of the events they describe. Dan Guxsan was born about 1878; Mark Wiget either in 1835 or 1860 (B/F/63.14, 63.23 & 66.2). No information is available on Charles Mark.

<sup>34</sup> In this section I have identified the material from the Barbeau Files by the name of the source: thus, for the comments on the context of the burning of Kitsegukla, see Mark, p. 1 and Guxsan, p. 1. For full citations of these sources, see note 33.

<sup>35</sup> Guxsan, p. 1 and Wiget, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> See, Trutch, *Speeches at Metlakatla*; and, Guxsan, p. 1. The canoemen were Coast Tsimshian and may have included Legaic in their number.

<sup>37</sup> The names in square brackets [] indicate the probable identity and current orthography of Gitksan participants.

stood for generations, a very great number of years, and was the honor of our forefathers, we therefore take much to heart at our loss, not only as a heritage from our forefathers but the labor in rebuilding and expense of calling together many tribes — I cannot say how many hundreds this has cost us — when a great man dies we lose our concern for everything else and only think of rebuilding the house in which he died, and we rear a large pole in memory of him and call the tribes together to put it up, and this costs us much. We are not the only tribe that does this — we give away on these occasions blankets, pans, axes etc. etc. and this property is given away to show the worth of our Chief who is lost.<sup>38</sup>

This statement is of considerable interest, describing the key elements of the funeral feast and suggesting its importance in Gitksan culture. Moreover, by indicating the process through which houses and poles were made embodiments of substantial economic value and cultural meaning, it offers a better understanding of the losses sustained by the people of Kitsegukla. Replacement of these artifacts would be a complex cultural process, reaching beyond Kitsegukla to incorporate people of other Gitksan villages.<sup>39</sup>

Other statements support the view that the losses suffered by the people of Kitsegukla were more than economic. Chief Uksahn [Guksan], on his way back to Kitsegukla when he heard of the destruction caused by the fire, stated “I was so much affected that I stayed a month, near Mr Hankin [at Hazelton?] for want of courage to visit the scene of my home.” Chief Shahoigham added that his people were “very poor and miserable.” Charles Mark, although describing these events fifty years later, still commented on the sadness which afflicted the people of Kitsegukla:

What made them feel so bad it was the burning of the totem poles. And so they were feeling very bad about the loss of their village.<sup>40</sup>

Constable Brown’s second visit to Kitsegukla, and his success in “persuading” the chiefs to return to the coast for a meeting with the Lieutenant-

<sup>38</sup> Trutch, *Speeches at Metlakatla*.

<sup>39</sup> Ahask’s description may be compared with a subsequent account, by the missionary W. H. Pierce, of a feast and pole raising at Kitsegukla in 1886:

During the last month [January] we had over three hundred people here. One of the chiefs invited the other tribes to join him in the potlatch, and they had a great time in raising the big stick in front of this house, as the white people for the grave-stone. The stick is 80 feet high. Hundreds of blankets and much flour and sugar of all kinds of other food spent. (*Missionary Outlook*, June/July 1886, p. 110).

The issue of the replacement value of poles resurfaced during the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway in the early twentieth century (see Galois, 1989).

<sup>40</sup> Trutch, *Speeches at Metlakatla*; Mark, p. 2.

Governor, is described in some detail by Charles Mark. As these events are poorly reported in the white record, the account is worth quoting at length.

Two canoes, filled with soldiers, left Metlakatla, landing

below Wiget's house at Gitsegukla. And the soldiers got out of the canoe and they went to Wiget's house. And they said to Wiget who was in his fish house: come on, change your clothes put on your chief's clothes and [he] put on a beaten [button?] blanket and his chief's hat. They took Wiget down and put him in a canoe.<sup>41</sup>

The whites, however, made no attempt "to arrest everybody they just took the heads of the house." Thus Hagasu [Haakasxw], Ksagml and Haxpagwotu'st' [Hax Bagwootkw] were treated in essentially the same manner as Wiget. In the case of Haxpagwotu'st', a description of his attire is included:

He put on the old fishing pants (long sponge pants sold by the H.B.). It looked like a pair of chaps no seat to it, long leggings. With a broad ridge of bead about four inches on each side of the leg. And he put on a big skin coat covered with beadwork and fringe. It was a very beautiful coat much admired by the rest of the Indians. He wore on his head a hat representing a finback whale. It had a beaten fin worked with beads.

Suitably attired, the chiefs were taken down to the coast by canoe.

When these events took place, most of the Kitsegukla people were at berry grounds and fish houses some distance from the village. Thus "runners" were sent out

to tell them what happened to tell of who had come away and who had taken away their chiefs. And they did not stop to wait for daylight but returned to the village all the men returned that night to Kitsegukla.

They got four canoes loaded them with men and left the women behind and followed these two canoes.

This description raises important questions which are central to an adequate interpretation of the events following the burning of Kitsegukla: did the Kitsegukla chiefs "agree" to go down to the coast, and, if so, why? Alternatively, if agreement was lacking, why was there no obvious resistance?

Charles Mark's reference to the presence of soldiers and use of the term "arrest" suggests that the chiefs were forced to make the trip to Metlakatla. The testimony that Brown brought the chiefs "to trial" lends support

<sup>41</sup> This and the following quotations are taken from Charles Mark, pp. 4-5.



to such an interpretation and the lack of resistance could be accounted for by the absence of most people at the berry grounds and fish houses.<sup>42</sup>

The validity of this interpretation can be assessed by comparison with an alternative reading which attempts to view the events at Kitsegukla from a "Gitksan perspective." Starting from the premise that the Gitksan behaved according to the imperatives of their own cultures, one might ask how a dispute, such as that engendered by the burning of Kitsegukla, would be resolved.

Two points need to be made. First, responsibility for a transgression was not limited to the individual perpetrator but extended to other members of the House or tribe. From this view, any passing whites, such as Brown and his party, could be regarded as responsible for the destruction of Kitsegukla.<sup>43</sup> Second, the minimal requirement for the settlement of a dispute involved holding a feast. This would encompass a public meeting between the contending parties, leading to an agreement and some form of compensation for the aggrieved party.<sup>44</sup> If the chiefs viewed the visit to the coast as part of a process leading towards a settlement, coercion would be not only unnecessary but irrelevant. The evidence to support such an interpretation pertains to the events leading up to and including Brown's second visit to Kitsegukla, and to the circumstances and behaviour of the participants in the meeting at Metlakatla.

There is disagreement in the Narratives about the composition of Brown's party. Charles Mark describes its members as "soldiers," whereas Guxsan records a "detachment" of white people accompanied by five Coast Tsimshian. The latter description is closer to the contemporary white evidence, which indicates that a canoe of Metlakatla (i.e., Coast Tsimshian) Indians took Brown up to Kitsegukla. Also included in the party was "Hans" the son/brother of a Kitsegukla chief. Hans's role in subsequent events is unrecorded but, as a person of some status with experience of the situation on the coast, he may have provided reassurance to the three chiefs who agreed to accompany Brown to Metlakatla.

<sup>42</sup> Wiget, p. 3; Guxsan, p. 3. Trutch also claimed to have "summoned" the chiefs to appear before him (Trutch, *Speeches at Metlakatla*).

<sup>43</sup> For an excellent documentary example of this process, see: Duncan to Farron, 27 Apr. 1873; Duncan Papers, p. 8882/185.

<sup>44</sup> For a brief, generalized description of the functions of the feast, see DeBeck (note 6). Barbeau gives a dramatized account of a Gitksan peace "ceremonial" (Barbeau, M., 1973, "The Downfall of Tmlaham," Hurtig, Edmonton, pp. 93-101. Jenness also provides an account of how a dispute, between the Nisga'a and the Wet'suwet'en, was settled in the 1860s. See: Jenness, D., "The Carrier Indians of the Bulkley River: Their Social and Religious Life," Bureau of American Anthropology, Bulletin 133, Washington, 1943, pp. 479-80.

More significant were the earlier statements and actions of Thomas Hankin in securing passage for his freight through Kitsegukla. A variety of sources indicate that the negotiations between Hankin and the Kitsegukla chiefs included the promise that some form of compensation would be forthcoming. The petition from the chiefs to the Lieutenant-Governor, drafted by Hankin, includes the statement that "it may please your Honor to cause some remuneration to be made for the loss we have sustained." In his covering letter, Hankin noted that "in the absence of any proper authority" he had acted to achieve a peaceful settlement. The settlement, however, was temporary, "pending the result of their petition." This was a warning which makes sense only if the chiefs expected, or had been led to expect, that the petition would produce an acceptable response. From this perspective, the later reports that the river had been closed to freight traffic, for a second time, are quite logical. They may be seen as a product of the delay between the promises issued by Hankin and the official response, a period of approximately six weeks.<sup>45</sup> Finally, Matthew Feak, who relied partly on native sources of information, twice reported that Hankin had made "promises" to the Kitsegukla chiefs.<sup>46</sup>

Further ambiguities arise from Brown's apparent insistence that the chiefs be suitably "dressed up" for the trip to the coast. Such behaviour, on both sides, would appear incongruous if the chiefs were, in fact, under arrest. On the other hand, if the chiefs thought that they would be attending a feast, with a view towards reaching a settlement of the dispute, then wearing chiefly regalia would be not merely appropriate, but essential. Contemporary ethnographic information is in accord with this contention.<sup>47</sup>

The testimony of W. H. Fitzgerald offers another view of the Gitksan responses. Based at Germansen Creek, some ten days' journey east of Hazelton, Fitzgerald was stipendiary magistrate for the mining district of Omineca. On learning of the events at Kitsegukla he decided that, as the nearest magistrate, his presence was required in order to "investigate the matter and treat with the Indians."<sup>48</sup> In terms of influencing events at

<sup>45</sup> Hankin's successful visit to Kitsegukla took place on or about 21 June; Constable Brown began his second trip to Kitsegukla on 28 July, probably arriving about a week later, say 4 August (*Victoria Daily Colonist*, 8 Aug. 1872).

<sup>46</sup> See above pp. 67-68 and note 19. Feak repeated the point to another correspondent: "[Hankin] succeeded in getting his own goods through by holding out promises to the Indians on behalf of the Government" (Feak to Duncan, 5 Aug. 1872; Duncan Papers, p. 3798).

<sup>47</sup> On the importance of ceremonial robes, see, Jensen and Sargent (1986), "Robes of Power: Totem Poles on Cloth," UBC Press, Vancouver, pp. 71-76.

<sup>48</sup> Fitzgerald to Provincial Secretary, 19 July 1872; GR 526, box 3, file 517. He reached Hazelton on 3 Aug, having intended to leave on 24 July.

Kitsegukla, Fitzgerald's journey proved fruitless: his initiative was rendered irrelevant by the actions of Trutch. Nonetheless, Fitzgerald's report does provide a glimpse of the situation at Kitsegukla immediately after Brown and the chiefs had departed for Metlakatla. Arriving early in August, Fitzgerald was informed that

Constable R. A. Brown had returned from Skeenamouth with a message from His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, inviting the chiefs of the Kit-sagook-lah tribe to meet him at the mouth of the river and that the Indians had accepted the invitation and had gone down with the Constable a few hours before we arrived.

One Chief named Skookum-la-hah [Xsgogimlaha] remained with the remnant of the tribe, they explained the nature of the losses to me . . . I informed them, that I could not enter into the merits of the case for compensation, as that matter would be inquired into and arranged by His Excellency.<sup>49</sup>

The response at Kitsegukla to this unexpected visit by another government official is instructive. Following a meeting, at which both Fitzgerald and Xsgogimlaha spoke, the chief went through a ceremony of making peace and expressed regret for what had occurred. Fitzgerald was uncertain how long this "state of mind" would endure, but its existence at the time of the departure of the party to Metlakatla is the important point. The situation at Kitsegukla, and Fitzgerald's reception there, affirms the view that the meeting at Metlakatla was seen by the chiefs as the means by which a peaceful and mutually agreeable resolution of matters would be attained.<sup>50</sup>

If this interpretation is to be sustained, it must incorporate the events at Metlakatla. A reading of documentary sources indicates that the proceedings that took place between 10 and 12 August had three basic components: a formal meeting; a settlement; and an entertainment. Nothing in this sequence of events, it should be noted, is incompatible with the structure of a Gitskan feast. Moreover, the Gitskan narratives of the events at Metlakatla, though not uniform, do contain these three elements — if not always in the order stated.

The accounts by Guxsan and Wiget differ in detail but are structurally similar. Both described the formal meeting on board HMS *Scout* as an opportunity for the chiefs to give their version of the events at Kitsegukla. Legaic, according to Guxsan, also acted as a witness, and the Kitsegukla people admitted their role. At the conclusion of the "trial" came the settlement which, in turn, consisted of three elements.

<sup>49</sup> Fitzgerald to Provincial Secretary, 31 Aug 1872; GR 526, box 4, file 621.

<sup>50</sup> Fitzgerald to Provincial Secretary, 31 Aug 1872; GR 526, box 4, file 621.

First, the Kitsegukla chiefs received payments as compensation for their losses. In Guxsan's version, the officers of the Man-of-War adopted a compensation of \$50.00 for each house. Mark gives the same figure, plus "a large saw to each house and an axe to each house . . . to be used on the building of new houses[;] and the four canoe loads[,] each man got \$5.00 a piece." Wiget, however, stated that the officers distributed moneys in the following amounts:

The foremost chief got \$90.00. Some got \$80.00. Four got \$90.00 and some \$70.00 and \$60.00. This was to assist the people to purchase nails and tools.<sup>51</sup>

As Duncan noted, the Kitsegukla chiefs were also promised a further payment if they continued to "behave themselves." This condition was fulfilled, and Constable Brown, following a journey up the Skeena to Hazelton in 1874, recommended payment. He informed the Provincial Secretary that it

would be well to redeem a half promise held out to the Kitze-geutles . . . [in 1872] that in case of good behaviour for a year they most probably would receive a further proof of the Government's bounty.<sup>52</sup>

The agreement to "behave themselves" was the second element of the settlement. This is recounted by Wiget in the form of a statement by the "government man" that

you must stop this now, you must not do this anymore. If the [white?] people take advantage of you anymore, I want you to tell me and I will help you out.<sup>53</sup>

Significantly, this agreement was written down, the third element of the settlement, and copies were given to each of the three leading chiefs.<sup>54</sup>

The third feature of the proceedings at Metlakatla consisted of what may be termed "entertainment," including elements of both hospitality and spectacle. Thus Wiget recounted that, at the conclusion of the formal meeting on HMS *Scout*, food, tobacco and clay pipes were distributed to the people from Kitsegukla. Even more impressive was the firing of the ship's guns, which was viewed as an attempt by white officials to demonstrate their power. But Duncan had forewarned the chiefs, and they were

<sup>51</sup> See: Guxsan, p. 4; Mark, p. 9; Wiget, p. 5. These accounts are not necessarily incompatible. The version by Guxsan appears to reflect the payments on the basis of white calculation, i.e. a payment of \$50.00 for each of the houses destroyed in the fire — to a total of \$600.00. Wiget's version may refer to the way in which this total was subsequently redistributed among the chiefs, reflecting the status of each of the chiefs within the community.

<sup>52</sup> Brown to Provincial Secretary, 31 Aug. 1874; GR 526, vol. 11, file 693.

<sup>53</sup> Wiget, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Guxsan, p. 4.

not intimidated. Instead, after one of them had detonated a “cannon,” they responded with a demonstration of some of their own “powers” in the form of a song and a dance.<sup>55</sup>

Although it contains most of the same elements, the narrative of Charles Mark differs structurally from those of Guksan and Wiget. The entertainment components assume a different location and a greater importance. Emphasis is placed upon the attempts at intimidation — use of the ship’s guns and fierce dogs — which took place before the formal meeting. Moreover, the response of the Kitsegukla chiefs to this tactic, their lack of fear and use of song and dance, so impressed white officials that the need for a formal meeting was waived. However, the elements of the settlement — payment, promise of good behaviour, and written agreement — were the same. The net effect of this re-ordering of events at Metlakatla, in the Mark narrative, is to portray the Kitsegukla chiefs in a more heroic light. Nonetheless, it clearly reflects the same events.

### *Concluding Remarks*

For white British Columbians, it might be argued, the events surrounding the “Burning of Kitsegukla” were of passing interest, a minor incident in the heroic saga of settling the province. At most these events illustrated the wit and wisdom of white officials in extending the benefits of British/Canadian civilization to “utter savages.” Under rather trying circumstances, the Gitksan had been introduced to the power of the state and the workings of the “Law.” Moreover, these moral lessons had been administered without overt recourse to force. In short, the events following the burning of Kitsegukla represented an object lesson for the Gitksan in the ways of their new masters.<sup>56</sup>

Such views were part and parcel of what may be termed the ideology of “settler colonies,” performing an obvious political and psychological role. Inevitably, the fit between such ideological constructs and the reality they purported to describe and explain was less than perfect. Moreover, in the British Columbia of the 1870s, there was a clear geographic pattern to these discordances. For example, the asymmetry of power between white and native, so obvious in Victoria (and in theory), was much less apparent

<sup>55</sup> Wiget, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Even Gough deals with the burning of Kitsegukla in one sentence. See Gough, p. 205. The phrase “utter savages” was used by Trutch in a letter to Macdonald written shortly after his visit to Metlakatla (Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons appointed to inquire into the claims of the Allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia, as set forth in their petition to Parliament in June 1926, Journals of the Senate of Canada, Appendix, King’s Printer, 1927, p. 6).

on the upper Skeena. In such regions the gulf between industrial civilization and indigenous peoples shrank significantly. Although it was possible to reach the mouth of the Skeena by steam-driven vessels, thereafter travel was by canoe or on foot. Whites were few and vulnerable in the upper Skeena area; the writ of the state ran weakly and, perhaps more significantly, it ran slowly. The Gitksan, on the other hand, were relatively numerous and well armed. While generally welcoming whites, they continued to operate according to the imperatives of their own culture.<sup>57</sup>

Thomas Hankin, one of the few permanent white residents of the region, was under no illusions about the necessity of maintaining cordial relations with the Gitksan. Thus, according to one source, Hankin accepted responsibility for the death of seven Gitksan canoemen while in his employ. This necessitated "payment for the death[s], that being the law of the tribe."<sup>58</sup> His negotiations at Kitsegukla in 1872 must be viewed in the light of such actions. Even Joseph Trutch, symbol and standard bearer of settler society, was obliged to make accommodations. Although imbued with the ideology of white superiority, his actions were tempered by a degree of realism. Before responding to the Gitksan, Trutch sought the advice of William Duncan, the best available source of information on the native peoples of the northern coast.

It seems clear that the burning of Kitsegukla was resolved in a manner which conformed reasonably well with Gitksan practices and expectations. The behaviour of the "white tribe" may have appeared as rather eccentric but, in some key features, it was acceptable. Trutch, as chief of the white tribe, made a considerable journey to meet with the Kitsegukla chiefs and seek a peaceful resolution. The subsequent "feast-like" events at Metlakatla embraced important features of Gitksan culture, including the crucial role of relevant chiefs. Given Duncan's advice and Trutch's own experience on HMS *Sparrowhawk* in 1869, it is highly unlikely such congruence was accidental.

<sup>57</sup> The steamer *Mumford*, in connection with the construction of the COT, had ascended the Skeena to a point below Kitselas canyon in 1866. No further attempts at steam navigation of the Skeena were made until 1891, when the HBC operated *Caledonia* between Port Essington and Hazelton.

<sup>58</sup> W. H. Chase (c. 1947): "Reminiscences of Captain Billie Moore," Burton Publishing Co., Kansas City, Missouri, p. 50. This account, not always reliable as to dates, places the events in 1871. Contemporary sources record the death of the seven canoemen but not Hankin's response. See note 14.

The need for such a response was demonstrated in 1884. A. C. Youmans, also a merchant at Hazelton, declined to make a payment under similar circumstances: he was murdered by an angry relative of the deceased.

Trutch, with the benefit of Duncan's advice, was aware of the elements necessary for a satisfactory resolution to the conflict begun at Kitsegukla. A public, ceremonial meeting with the Kitsegukla chiefs was essential. The use of HMS *Scout* as the stage for these formal meetings, to Gitksan eyes, surely added to the pomp and circumstance of the occasion. Payment of compensation — the second necessary ingredient in a traditional settlement — was met by the distribution of tools and money. Trutch's claims to the contrary, there is no reason to believe that the Kitsegukla chiefs viewed these payments as "an act of grace." From within Gitksan culture, such payments were essential for a just and amicable resolution of the dispute. In sum, for the Kitsegukla chiefs, the events at Metlakatla conformed, in general outline, with familiar and acceptable procedures.

In addition to compensation for their losses, the chiefs also secured some form of "agreement," expressed in a "paper," in case of future disputes. It is not known if this "paper" was prepared at the chief's insistence, but writing, and the paper on which it was inscribed, are known to have been viewed as embodiments of considerable power by non-literate peoples.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps the Kitsegukla chiefs thought they had established some form of an alliance with the white chief. In any event, the power of this particular "paper," and the agreement that it represented, endured at Kitsegukla. More than a decade later it influenced the actions of the Kitsegukla chiefs during another conflict, the Skeena "Uprising" of 1888.<sup>60</sup>

The extent to which the events at Kitsegukla were representative of the contact process in British Columbia is a matter for further research. What the foregoing analysis suggests is that in extensive portions of the province the balance of power between native and non-native was more even, for a longer period, than hitherto recognized.

<sup>59</sup> Seymour's visit to the Nass in 1869, which concluded with both a traditional peace ceremony and a written agreement, may have served as a precedent (Trutch, J. W. "Report on visit of HMS Sparrowhawk to Nass Harbor in 1869 in connection with Indian troubles," C/AB/30.7M/4A/C2, PABC). Brown also comments on the custom of giving "papers" to native people at this time (Brown, R., 1871, "At Home among the Koskeemo Indians," *Field Quarterly Magazine and Review*, no. 3, p. 184).

<sup>60</sup> See Green to Robson, 14 Mar. 1888; GR 677, #F 711, PABC. Much of Barbeau (1973) is a dramatized account of the 1888 conflict. For other versions, see: Clark, C. (1971), "Tales of the British Columbia Provincial Police," Gray's Publishing, Sidney, chapter 3; Campbell, K. (1989), "The Skeena War," *The Beaver*, vol. 69, no. 4, pp. 34-40; Gough, B. (1984), chapter 13; Johnson, I. V. A. (n.d.), "The Skeena Uprising, 1888," unpublished Mss, Box 259, F 22, Ethnology Department, Museum of Civilization, Ottawa.