

## CHANGING IMAGES:

### *Photographic Collections of First Peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast Held in the Royal British Columbia Museum, 1860–1920*

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#### INTRODUCTION

**I**N A LETTER TO ETHNOGRAPHER Franz Boas in 1907, George Hunt identified the power of the camera, which would, he asserted, “show you every thing Plainer then writing it alon.”<sup>1</sup> While photographs can present a culture as the reality it is, they can also portray a culture as the photographer chooses. Through their use in print, exhibition, video, and cine film, photographs by primarily non-Native late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographers continue to influence international perceptions of First Peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast. This article examines the context and content of photography about First Peoples by Native and non-Natives over the course of six decades.<sup>2</sup>

The research for this paper focused on the rich primary source material that is housed in the First Nations Photographic Collections in the Anthropology Section of the Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM) in Victoria, British Columbia. Available to both the casual and serious researcher, these collections include some 25,000 *cartes de visite*,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The son of an English father (Robert Hunt) and Tlingit mother (Mary Ebbetts), George Hunt “was born and raised at Fort Rupert [and] reached high status among the Kwakiutl tribes” (Holm and Quimby 1980, 57). He made this observation about the power of photography in a letter to Franz Boas in 1907. Ira Jacknis (1992, 146) noted Hunt’s appreciation of both camera and phonograph in “preserving what the written word could not.”

<sup>2</sup> A number of disparate forces were at work throughout this era. Colonial and then federal “Indian” administration, commerce, tourism, scientific surveying and collecting expeditions, missionary work, World’s Fairs, and, finally, the advent of newspaper and amateur photography generated large collections of photographs that are available for researchers to interpret, view again, and reinterpret.

<sup>3</sup> The *carte de visite* consisted of a photographic print glued to a cardboard mount measuring 6.25 by 10 centimetres. The photographer’s name and studio location was usually printed or embossed on the back of the card. *Cartes* were made in both landscape and portraiture

stereographs, cabinet cards, Victoria cards, snapshots, post cards, large-format photographs, and lantern slides<sup>4</sup> that document the lifeways of the First Peoples of British Columbia and those culturally related peoples of present-day Alaska and Washington State. During the 1950s and 1960s, BC Provincial Museum anthropologist Wilson Duff culled the provincial archives collection of original prints and original and copy negatives that were of anthropological significance. These items included works by Carlo Gentile, Frederick Dally, Hannah and Richard Maynard, Oregon Hastings, Edward Dossetter, T.W.S. Parsons, Benjamin Haldane, Edward Curtis, and others. A significant addition to the collection occurred in 1961 when the Government of British Columbia purchased the Newcombe Collection of material culture, photographic prints and negatives, lantern slides, diaries, and reports assembled between 1895 and 1933 by Dr. Charles Frederic Newcombe (1851-1924)<sup>5</sup> and his son William Arnold Newcombe (1900-61).<sup>6</sup> Since then the collection has grown through generous donations made by Native and non-Native individuals and families as well as through the purchase of some 7,000 reference photographs of both Interior and Coastal peoples from museums, archives, and libraries throughout North America and Europe.

## TECHNOLOGY

Photography was still in its infancy in the mid-1860s when photographers found room for themselves and their extensive equipment on board Royal Navy gunboats and, later, private steamers that plied the sheltered marine waterways of the Northwest Coast. Most of the ethnohistoric photographs dating from before the mid-1880s were made

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format; however, the latter was by far the more popular. The convenient wallet size and inexpensive cost of the cards made them the most popular card-photographs of the 1860s in British Columbia.

<sup>4</sup> Detailed explanations of stereographs, cabinet cards, post cards, and lantern slides can be found in a series of short articles by the author published in *Discovery* (a publication of the Royal British Columbia Museum) between 1999 and 2002.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Shelagh Graham, a volunteer at the Royal BC Museum, for the correct spelling of Frederic. He signed his marriage licence on 6 May 1879 in the Parish of St. Marylebone as "Charles Frederic Newcombe."

<sup>6</sup> The collection of artifacts, as well as Newcombe's "Ethnological" and (Ethnological) "Collections" negatives and "Lantern Slides" are housed in the Royal British Columbia Museum (hereafter RBCM), Anthropological Collections Section. There are 1,059-catalogued "E" negatives, 798 "EC" negatives, and 562 glass lantern slides. Two *Registers of Negatives and Lantern Slides* provide catalogue information for this collection. In addition, the Newcombes listed other collections, such as "Maynard Ethnology Negatives" and "Harlan I. Smith Slides" in these registers. The textual records are housed in the British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA).

using a technique known as the “wet-plate” process, so named because the negative had to be exposed while still wet, otherwise the emulsion would lose its sensitivity to light. Lacking the presensitized, flexible film that is used today, a photographer had to prepare a negative just before the photograph was made.<sup>7</sup> A large wooden camera<sup>8</sup> would first have to be mounted on a heavy tripod. The next step was to set up a portable darkroom known as a dark-tent.<sup>9</sup> A clear glass plate was removed from its carrying box, coated with the image-bearing, light-sensitive emulsion, then enclosed in a plate holder and walked the few feet from the dark-tent to the camera. It was then fitted into the camera and the slide was removed from the plate holder. This readied the negative for exposure to the sun’s light when the cap was removed from the camera’s lens. After a suitable length of time the cap was replaced, the slide repositioned in the plate holder, and the negative rushed back to the dark-tent where it was developed, fixed, and washed. After the negative had dried in the sun, the side of the glass plate carrying the emulsion was coated with a protective covering of varnish and finally placed in a slotted wooden box for safe storage and transportation back to the photographer’s gallery.<sup>10</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the many technological advances in photography resulted in an exponential increase in the production of photographs. Dry glass plates containing presensitized emulsion were introduced in England in 1871. Since the negatives did not require on-site processing, it was no longer necessary to transport a darkroom or chemicals into the field. The disadvantage in using these early dry plates, however, was that they required a longer exposure time to produce an image. This shortcoming was overcome seven years later with the introduction of Bennett dry glass plates that allowed for even shorter exposure times than did wet plates.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I have intentionally used the verb “make” rather than “take” when describing the intricate and lengthy process of producing a photograph using glass plate negatives.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to a view camera, a stereoscopic camera frequently accompanied the photographer into the field. This allowed him an additional card format (the stereograph) to sell when he returned to his gallery.

<sup>9</sup> These portable darkrooms were more properly referred to as dark-tents (Coe 1978: 27). The *BCA* has a photograph (PN 1878) of Richard Maynard’s dark-tent on the beach at Yalis (Alert Bay) in September 1874. It is among the rare photographs of this genre that record wet-plate photographic equipment.

<sup>10</sup> Although their establishments contained studios, photographers in the 1860s advertised their businesses as galleries. See *BCA* photographs, catalogue nos. *HP023067* and *HP030827*, which show signboards advertising the “photographic gallery” of Carlo Gentile and Frederick Dally, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> The Bennett plates reduced the “exposure time to one tenth of that required for collodion [plates]” (Legatt 1999).

The next significant technological development was the introduction of cellulose nitrate roll film in 1889 by George Eastman (Coe and Haworth-Booth, 1983, 22). It was everything that glass negatives were not: flexible, light, compact, and non-breakable. The invention of user-friendly, hand-held box cameras whose shutter speeds of one-twentieth of a second enabled the user to capture spontaneity, and the introduction of the photo-finishing industry contributed to the increased number of photographs taken following the 1890s.<sup>12</sup> The marketing of the affordable Kodak "Brownie" box camera in 1900 completed the key advances in technology during the late nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> With sales of between 150,000 and 250,000 cameras in the first year alone, photography was no longer the purview of a relatively select few who held both the technical expertise and financial means to take photographs. It is, however, among these select few that the story of photography on the Northwest Coast begins. In all probability, Lieutenant Richard Roche of the Royal Navy made the earliest extant photographs of Natives, either in 1857 or 1859, while visiting the naval port at Esquimalt and nearby Victoria. Identified as "A group of Victoria Indians taken on board H.M.S. Satellite," this photograph can be found in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Views of the Pacific Northwest, Yale University.<sup>14</sup>

#### THOSE FROM THE LIKENESS HOUSE<sup>15</sup>

It seems reasonable that Victoria would be the site of the first documented photographs of coastal First Peoples. Initially founded as a Hudson's Bay Company fort in 1843, Victoria had, by 1866, evolved

<sup>12</sup> "You press the button - we do the rest." This 1888 Eastman Dry Plate and Film Company slogan announced a photo-finishing service to all who purchased the first Kodak box camera. The first negatives were paper film, the following year they were nitrate cellulose. Once all 100 exposures had been taken, the photographer sent the camera to the Eastman factory in Rochester, New York, where the negatives were processed and printed. The camera was then reloaded and returned to the owner.

<sup>13</sup> The Brownie camera retailed for one dollar US in 1900.

<sup>14</sup> Call no. WA MSS S-1817, box 1, fol. 1, photographic print, 10.5 x 14.6 cm. n.d. Another photograph, "Photograph of Victoria Indians: Woman, Man, and Child," may also have been taken at the same time. See WA MSS S-1817, box 1, fol. 2.

<sup>15</sup> 9 December 1889, Arthur Wellington Clah, a Tsimshian elder, used the term "likeness house" to describe a photographic gallery he was about to visit. "Rebekah ask If I going likeness house. so I go. to give myself likeness [photograph]. Rebekah stand longside me. the man making like ness to me. ill finished. Next Friday [13 December] at \$2.50 per half a doz cars [cards]." He is probably referring to card stereographs; the photographer who made the "likeness" was probably Richard Maynard. See RBCM photograph PN 4325, Clah Diaries, microfilm, National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), reel A-1706, vol. 41, 19 November 1889 - 21 April 1890. I am indebted to Robert Galois for this reference to the Clah Diaries.

into the centre of commerce for the colony of British Columbia.<sup>16</sup> The local First Peoples, the Lekwungen-speaking Songhees,<sup>17</sup> also shared in this commerce, as did the many Native visitors from as far away as Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) who came to trade at the fort.<sup>18</sup> Among the entrepreneurs who established businesses in the city were commercial photographers Stephen Allen Spencer (in 1859) and George Robinson Fardon (in 1861),<sup>19</sup> both of whom are known or presumed to have made photographs of First Peoples (Mattison and Savard 1992, 272). Their contemporary, Carlo (Charles) Gentile,<sup>20</sup> working in and from his galleries located on Fort Street and later Government Street, produced some of the earliest *cartes de visite* to have survived. These date from 1863 to 1866, and the RBCM has at least fourteen original *cartes de visite* with Gentile's name printed on the verso of the cards.<sup>21</sup> Photographing in both landscape and portraiture format, Gentile produced *cartes* that he hoped to sell to Victoria's resident and itinerant Euro-Canadian community. He was a businessman, dependent upon producing marketable images of "exotic Indians" as collectibles that would fill his clients' *carte* albums (Illustration No. 1).<sup>22</sup> In this respect Gentile's work is similar to that of Frederick Dally, who is believed to have opened a portrait studio the same year (1866) that Gentile left Victoria. Dally may have been more prolific in his production of images of First Peoples than Gentile; certainly more examples of both his studio and fieldwork have survived. These two photographers, in concert with Hannah Maynard, who also operated a gallery in Victoria (perhaps as early as 1862), account for nearly all the extant photographs of Native Peoples made in British Columbia in the 1860s.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia (mainland) amalgamated on 19 November 1866 to form British Columbia.

<sup>17</sup> I have used the present-day spelling of First Nations names (e.g., Kwakwaka'wakw [Kwakiutl], Nuxalk [Bella Coola], and *rad raciwaaas* [Masset]).

<sup>18</sup> For a visual history of the Songhees village, see Keddie (2003).

<sup>19</sup> This paper focuses largely on photographers resident in British Columbia. Photographers such as Edward Muybridge, who took at least one view of the Tlingit at "Fort Wrangle, Alaska Territory" (PN 9202) in 1868, or those working from Washington and Alaska, have not been thoroughly researched. For a study of Alaskan photographers Lloyd Winter and Percy Pond, see Wyatt (1989).

<sup>20</sup> Gentile was sometimes spelled Gintile, as printed on the back of *carte de visite*, PN 6756.

<sup>21</sup> PN 4701 A&B, PN 4812 A&B, PN 4825, PN 5035 A&B, PN 5308, PN 6111, PN 6756, PN 9688, PN 11628, PN 11629, PN 15168. I suspect Gentile made at least another eleven photographs in the collection.

<sup>22</sup> For a study of Charles Gentile, see Marino (1998).

<sup>23</sup> A brief description of the work of photographers plying their trade in Victoria during the 1860s can be found in Mattison and Savard (1992).

Illustration No. 1:



Left: *Cartes de visite* (the earliest form of card photograph, measuring 6.25 x 10 cm) by Carlo (Charles) Gentile, 1863-1866. The unidentified man holding the musket was photographed in Gentile's Victoria studio.

Right: The photograph of the "Uke-u-let [Ucluelet] Indian, Barclay [Barkley] Sound, v.i." was made in the field.

Royal British Columbia Museum  
PN11628 & PN4812-B.



## SURVEY PHOTOGRAPHY

During the 1870s the Canadian federal government's political commitment to connect British Columbia to Canada by rail marked the beginning of a second genre of photographic collections: survey photographs.<sup>24</sup> Charles Horetzky, who was employed as a photographer with the Canadian Pacific Railway Survey, made a small collection of ethnographic views during his time in British Columbia. Working with gelatin dry plates, he produced one photograph of Hazelton blanketed with snow in December 1872 and three photographs, again in the snow, of Fort Simpson in January of the following year. The latter photographs were an attempt to make a "panoramic assemblage"<sup>25</sup> of the Coast Tsimshian village and adjacent Hudson's Bay Company fort. It may in part be a function of the weather, but none of Horetzky's photographs is completely successful as an ethnographic document. The views are too distant to distinguish either the architecture of the houses or the types of canoes that line either the bank of the 'Xsan (Skeena) River or the beach at Village Island.

Two other photographers associated with surveys, George Mercer Dawson (a field geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada [1878]) and Richard Maynard (a commercial photographer from Victoria working for the Government of British Columbia [1884]), produced photographs of villages on Haida Gwaii. Dawson also created a series of large views during his visit among the Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) in 1885. As evidenced by the number of negatives of villages, totem poles, and houses, both men seem to have been captivated by the architecture and monumental carvings they encountered. Their field photographs are documentary in nature, clear and sharply focused. Dawson's are photographs of village scenes, yet those taken on Haida Gwaii are almost devoid of people. Although many of the Haida villages he visited were either partially or completely uninhabited by 1878, this does not explain why few villagers appear in his photographs. One would expect the beaches in front of the houses at the principal villages of *hlagilda* 'illnagaay (Skidegate) and *rad raci7waas* (Massett) to have been centres

<sup>24</sup> I have chosen to focus on the work of Horetzky, Dawson, and Maynard and have not included the photographs taken by the Royal Engineers for the British Boundary Commission primarily between 1860 and 1861. For a study of these, see Monroe (1982). The collection of original albumen prints is at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A descriptive list of the photographs is available from the Royal Engineers Library, Brompton Barracks, Chatham, Kent. The Royal Engineers were still using collodion glass plate negatives to copy maps as late as 1948 (personal communication with Tony Hallas, ex-Royal Engineer darkroom technician).

<sup>25</sup> Panoramic views that consisted of two or more photographs joined together were called "segmented panoramas" or "panoramic assemblages" (Meehan 1990, 12).

of daily activity. Dawson (1880, 174B) had estimated the population of *hlagilda* 'illnagaay alone to be approximately 250 people. The reason for the absence of people may be found in the type of negatives he was using: "prepared dry plates" (MacDonald, 1983, 213). If these were early dry plates (those produced before 1878), then they would have been even less sensitive to light than were the earlier collodion negatives and, consequently, would have required a longer exposure to make the negative.<sup>26</sup> Unless people remained stationary – for example, sitting on a summer porch (a platform and back rests made of split cedar planks supported by pilings that extended from the front of a house onto the beach) at *t'anuu* 'illnagaay (Tanu) (CMC242) or posing for their portrait, as Chief Albert Edward Edenshaw and Chief Wi:ah did for Dawson at *ya.aats'* (Ya-tza) (CMC266) – they would simply have walked through the exposure and their images would not have been captured by the plate negative.<sup>27</sup>

Maynard's photographs are similar in content to Dawson's. They are views of villages, poles, and canoes, with two noteworthy exceptions: a stereo view of Chief Wi:ha's "Monster" House (PN5324) and a view of Chief Anetlas's "Star" House (PN5325).<sup>28</sup> Both were taken at *rad raci7waas* in 1884 and are the only extant photographs depicting the interior of Haida houses prior to 1897.<sup>29</sup> The view inside Chief Anetlas's house is less well known but it is one of only two nineteenth-century photographs showing people inside a house on Haida Gwaii. And it is all the more remarkable when you consider that an estimated exposure of three to five minutes was required to make the photograph of Chief Wi:ha's house (Blackman 1972, 223) – yet no one appears in this image (Illustration No. 2).

<sup>26</sup> "But these early 'dry plates' were even less light sensitive and thus slower than contemporary wet-plate negatives" (Blackman 1980, 69). Dry plates were presensitized with a gelatin emulsion that contained light-sensitive silver salts; consequently, there was no need to take a dark-tent and the ancillary chemicals necessary to coat, develop, fix, and varnish the glass plate negative.

<sup>27</sup> The length of exposure times required to make the photographs at Tanu, Skidegate, and Massett vary between 3.8 minutes and 5.25 minutes (Cole and Lockner 1989, 560-2). See Canadian Museum of Civilization photographs, negative nos. 242, 253, 254, 255, 259, 265, and 266.

<sup>28</sup> See MacDonald (1983, 144) for identification of house names and Blackman (1972) for a detailed study of Chief Wi:ha's house.

<sup>29</sup> Two photographs were taken in 1897 – an interior view of Chief Wi:ha's house taken by Edward Allen of the Columbian Museum of Chicago (negative no. 846) and an interior view of a smokehouse that was probably taken by Reverend Freeman (PN 366).



## COLONIAL AND DOMINION ADMINISTRATION

“Visits of inspection”<sup>30</sup> conducted initially by the governor of Vancouver Island, Arthur Edward Kennedy, and later by British Columbia’s first federal commissioner for Indian affairs, Dr. Israel Wood Powell, facilitated the making of many of the earliest field photographs. Whether the photographers were invited or insinuated themselves into the tours is difficult to determine. In a letter dated 25 June 1873 to “The Secretary of State for the Provinces, Indian Branch,” Powell notes, “Imbarked [embarked] on the evening of the 25th [May] in company with ... and a Photographer [Richard Maynard] who accompanied the Expedition for the purpose of taking views of Indian Camps, and photographs of different Tribes.”<sup>31</sup> The relationship between government official and commercial photographer was mutually advantageous. Some of the images supplemented the reports (Mattison and Savard 1992, 273), while the overwhelming majority added substantially to the commercial views available for purchase at Victoria’s galleries. Five visits were made between 1866 and 1881 to various First Nations villages along the coast of mainland British Columbia, Haida Gwaii, and Vancouver Island. Frederick Dally accompanied Governor Kennedy (1866), while Richard Maynard (1873 and 1874), Oregon Columbus Hastings (1879), and Edward Dossetter (1881) toured with Commissioner Powell.<sup>32</sup>

On two of these trips, Natives were welcomed or brought on board the gunboats and posed before the camera. Although Richard Maynard was the only Victoria-based photographer to employ this practice, Margaret Blackman (1992, 137) notes that, during a visit made in 1875 to Haida Gwaii, “the official photographer on the US Revenue cutter *Wolcott* reportedly photographed several of the Haida who came on board.”<sup>33</sup> Richard Maynard took at least three views of villagers on the deck of HMS *Boxer* in June 1873 near the Kwakwaka’wakw village of Dzawadi at the head of Knight Inlet: one of a prisoner (PN4716) and two of Chief

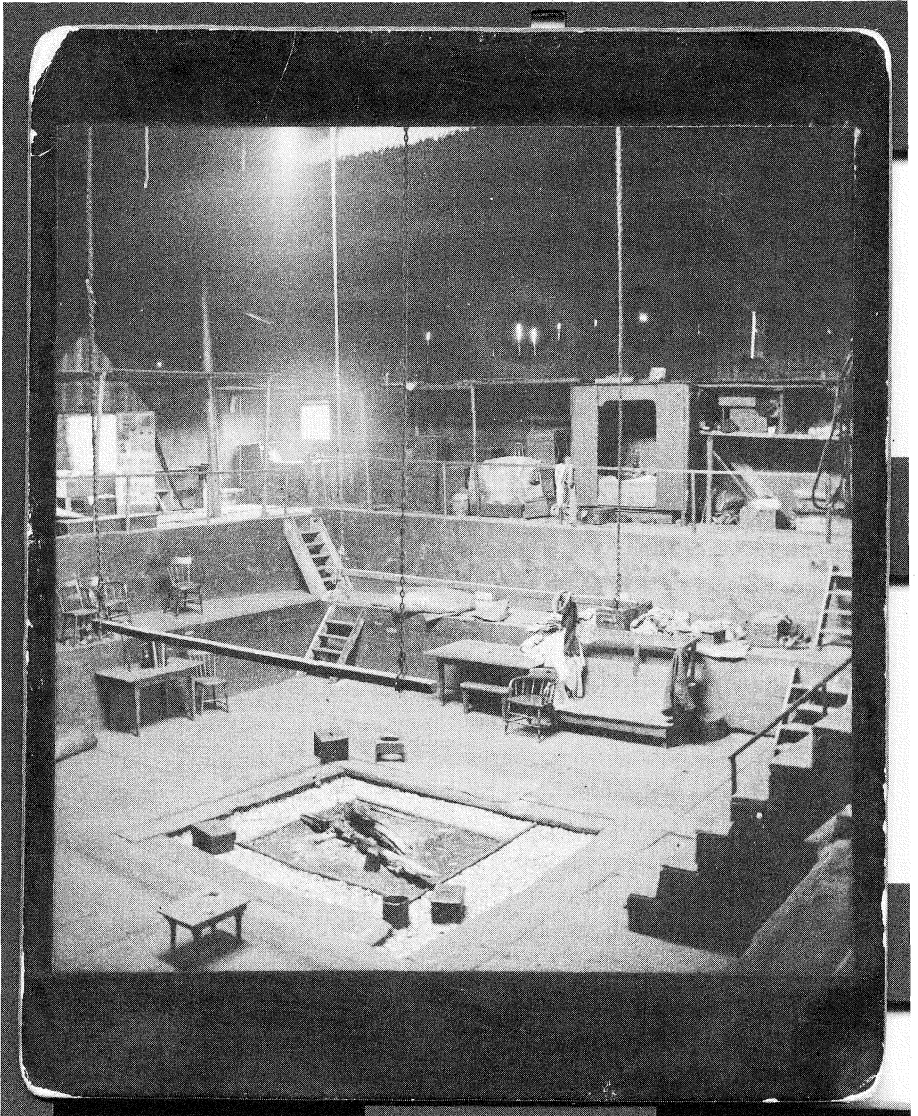
<sup>30</sup> “During the past season extensive visits of inspection have been made” (Canada, Department of Indian Affairs, 1881, 139).

<sup>31</sup> BCA, Indian Affairs, RG 10, vol. 3602, file 1794, microfilm reel B 277.

<sup>32</sup> For a survey of these five tours of inspection, see Mattison and Savard (1992).

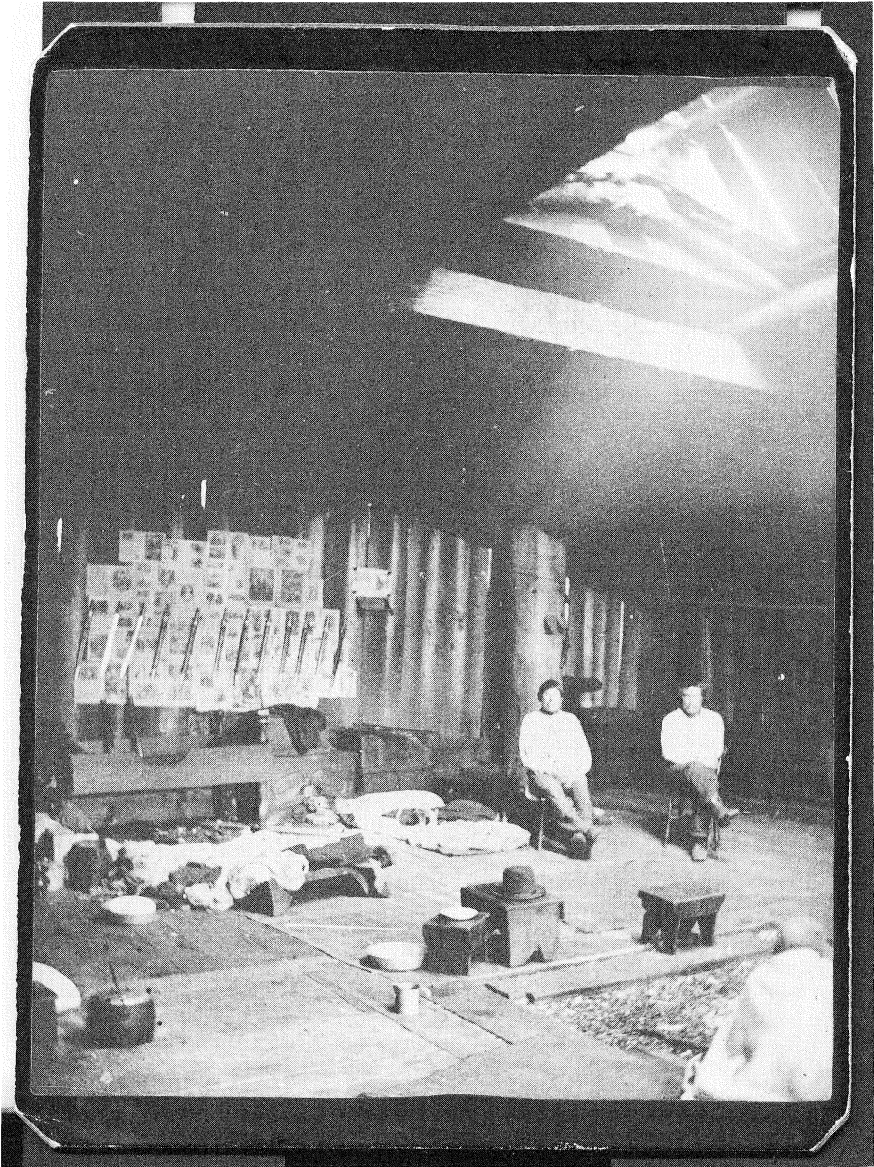
<sup>33</sup> The earliest extant photograph of this genre can be found in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Views of the Pacific Northwest, Yale University. Identified as “A group of Victoria Indians taken on board H.M.S. Satellite,” Using a white sheet as a backdrop, a family (?) was photographed by Lieutenant Richard Roche on the ship’s gun deck. The photograph was made in 1857 or 1859. See Call no. wa mss s-1817, box 1, fol. 1, photographic print, 10.5 x 14.6 cm. n.d. Another photograph, entitled “Photograph of Victoria Indians: Woman, Man, and Child,” may also have been taken at the same time. See wa mss s-1817, box 1, fol. 2.

## Illustration No. 2:



Left: Interior view of Chief Wi:ha's "Monster" House.

Richard Maynard took both photographs at the Haida village of *rad raci7waas* (Masset) in 1884. These modified Victoria cards (measuring 8.2 cm x 12.5 cm) are the earliest extant photographs that record the interior of houses on Haida Gwaii. The view inside Chief Anetlas' house is less well-known but documents three people, Chief Anetlas and another man sitting on chairs. A third man, wearing a blanket, is



Right: Interior view of Chief Anetlas' "Star" House.

squatting beside the central fire pit. The seated men are relaxed with legs crossed and arms folded and appear to be comfortable with having their photograph taken.

Royal British Columbia Museum PN5324 & PN5325.

Wawkash (PN2209 A&B).<sup>34</sup> In one view (PN2209 -B) Chief Wawkash is wearing a traditional spruce-root hat and button blanket that is draped over his shoulders and held closed at his waist.<sup>35</sup> In the second (PN2209 -A) he continues to wear his hat but he is now holding a presentation staff and the blanket is draped over his left shoulder, revealing a naval lieutenant's frock coat (Illustration No. 3). Why were two photographs taken? Had Powell required a photograph to assure his superiors in Ottawa that a prominent chief was figuratively "on board" with respect to government policy?<sup>36</sup> One cannot say with certainty what motivated the making of these photographs; however, these images contravene the conventions of studio photographs of the time that usually depicted Natives dressed and posed less formally (Blackman 1986, 69).

Clearly, the preponderance of photographs made during these tours were on land. There are similarities in their composition and content. The portfolios of Maynard, Hastings, and Dossetter contain the obligatory group photograph of assembled villagers and government officials. The background is comprised of either traditional houses of split and sometimes-adzed cedar planking or, in later photographs, the village church constructed of milled lumber. All three photographers produced oblique views of villages stretching along the beach into the photographic horizon.<sup>37</sup> The conventional nature of the photographs, however, does not diminish their research value. Dally's two photographs (PN878 and PN1380), taken at the Cowichan River circa 1866, provide the first photo documentation of a fish weir, while Hastings's 1879 plate made at Ma-ate in Quatsino Sound (HP 79170) is the earliest extant field or studio photograph that records the head-binding technique applied to female infants.<sup>38</sup> Such photographs are what they appear to

<sup>34</sup> On 7 September of the following year, Richard Maynard also "took four stereo group portraits of Nuu-chan-nulth Ohiet [Ohiaht] and Uchucklesaht (Uchucklisat or Uchucklesit) visitors on board HMS *Boxer* at Alberni and Green Cove" (Mattison and Savard 1992, 277).

<sup>35</sup> Mattison identifies this man as Chief Wawkash, or Gomowe (Mattison 1985b, 113) and later as Wakash of the Kwakwaka'wakw village of Dzawadi (Mattison 1987, 1).

<sup>36</sup> Mattison notes that "at least 19 photographs were taken by Richard, and Powell sent copies to the Secretary of State, Department of the Interior" (Mattison 1985b, 114).

<sup>37</sup> Frontal views of the entire village landscape were usually impossible to obtain because the houses were too close to the water.

<sup>38</sup> An engraving captioned "Indian woman and child, the latter with head bound up" appears facing page 242 in R. C. Mayne's (1862) *Four Years in British Columbia and Vancouver Island*. This engraving was in all probability made from a photograph, which would predate the Hastings photograph by at least seventeen years. Powell remarked on the practice of head binding to his superior in Ottawa: "The Roskeemo [Koskimo] Indians of Quatseeno [Quatsino] Sound are remarkable for the long, or 'sugar loaf head.' The process of lengthening the head is begun in infancy and performed in the same way as making them flat. The photograph of the babe in the cradle shows the head bandaged for this purpose" (Canada, Department of Indian Affairs, 1879, 130).

be – truthful representations of what was before the camera’s lens. Each of these photographers produced unaltered prints from their negatives and, except for Dossetter, sold them from their galleries to an eager public – a practice that did not hold true for all photographs of this genre.

During the 1873 tour Maynard made at least seven views of Kwakwaka’wakw men and women from the village of Tak’us. He posed them on a wooden chest that he used to transport either his chemicals or his glass plates.<sup>39</sup> In six of the photographs, a Hudson’s Bay Company blanket is draped against the outside wall of a house constructed of split-cedar planks. These images are among the earliest extant photographs of a land-based field studio on the Northwest Coast.<sup>40</sup> The blanket has replaced the painted backdrop and the long grass has replaced the patterned floor in Maynard’s Victoria studio. One photograph (PN2094) is of particular interest because it was later cropped and sold as a *carte de visite* under Mrs. Maynard’s imprint. Commissioner Powell may have included the unaltered field photograph in his report to the superintendent-general, but it certainly was not marketable to the public without this attempt to remove it from the original context within which it was made (Illustration No. 4).<sup>41</sup>

#### TOURIST PHOTOGRAPHY

The increasing Euro-Canadian population of British Columbia provided great impetus to the growing opus of First Nations photographs. As early as 1866, tourist excursions provided opportunities for picture taking.<sup>42</sup> Hannah Maynard noted her photographic failures and successes<sup>43</sup> during a trip in August 1879 with her husband Richard around

<sup>39</sup> RBCM negative nos. PN 2094, PN 2210, PN 2211, PN 2213, PN 2214, PN 2409, and PN 9736.

<sup>40</sup> The BCA has two photographs that I suspect were also taken by Lieutenant Richard Roche in 1857 or 1859. These show a much less sophisticated “studio” than does Maynard’s. The set consisted of a single Hudson’s Bay Company blanket draped from the side wall of a gabled-roofed, split-cedar plank house. See BCA catalogue nos. HPO85591 and HPO85593.

<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Maynard later superimposed this Tak’us man against a photograph taken by her husband in 1884 at the Haida village of Caynaa (PN 5572-A) and sold it as a large card-mounted print (PN 2789). For a study of these composite photographs, see Savard (2001, 7).

<sup>42</sup> On 6 October 1866, on the Pier at Port Townsend, Frederick Dally took a photograph of the excursion party that had visited Puget Sound on the steamer *Enterprise* (HPO94642). The BCA has identified the date as September 1866; I think the photograph was taken early the following month. See Smith (2000, 67).

<sup>43</sup> The following excerpts from Hannah Maynard’s diary provide a sense of the labour-intensive nature of wet-plate photography: “Friday 15. [August] Up [at] 5 o'clock [o'clock] to try to take some photos before we leave [Opitsaht] but found it very foggy ... no photographs yet. Sat. 16 [at Friendly Cove] ... we took two negatives ... met with an accident, broke our bath bottle and spilled part of the bath.” See Newcombe Family Papers, Add. MSS. 1077, vol. 47, fol. 2c, BCA.

Illustration No. 3:



Chief Wawkash (Wakash) from the Kwakwaka'wakw village of Dzawadi on board HMS *Boxer*. In the photograph above, he wears a spruce root hat and button blanket fashioned from a Hudson's Bay Company wool blanket, the edges of which are outlined with mother-of-pearl buttons. In the photograph on the right he holds a presentation staff and is wearing a Royal Navy officer's uniform. Richard Maynard made both photographs in June 1873.

Royal British Columbia Museum PN2209 A&B.



Illustration No. 4:



Above: One of at least seven views of Kwakwaka'wakw men and women from the village of Tak'us made by Richard Maynard in June 1873. This series contains some of the earliest extant photographs of a field studio on the Northwest Coast.

Right: The field photograph has been cropped in this *carte de visite* as it appeared for sale at one of the Maynard photographic galleries in Victoria.

Royal British Columbia Museum  
PN2094 A&B.





Vancouver Island “on board the splendidly appointed *Princess Louise* ... with a party of 40 Ladies & gentlemen.”<sup>44</sup> Steamer stops at Alert Bay, Prince Rupert, Massett, and Tlingit villages further north were scheduled with increasing frequency over the next quarter century.

A development in photography concurrent with the growth of tourism was the evolution of the post card. In the 1890s this ubiquitous form of visual communication became a popular means of documenting one’s travels.<sup>45</sup> First Nations delegations of chiefs, basket makers, graveyards, villages, solitary or grouped totem poles, Halkomelem Sxwayxwey dancers, infants in cradle boards, and potlatches are among the varied subject matter reproduced on post cards. Benjamin Leeson, a resident of Quatsino Sound on Vancouver Island, took at least ninety photographs of Kwakwaka’wakw people in the area.<sup>46</sup> In an article written for *Camera Craft*, he noted, “I also supply most of my pictures in post card form and these last have quite a satisfactory sale where tourists call [Winter Harbour] and on such of the Coast steamers as I can get them” (Leeson 1914, 494). The introduction in 1900 of the No. 3A Folding Pocket Kodak camera, which took a post card-sized photographic print (Coe and Gates 1977, 25), in concert with the amendments of the postal regulations in 1901, resulted in the widespread popularity of the picture post card in Great Britain (Thomas 1978, 121). This format was not restricted to commercial businesses such as J. Howard Chapman or T.N. Hibben and Company of Victoria; after 1902, amateur photographers could quite easily send prints made from their own negatives as post cards.<sup>47</sup> One simply applied the negative to the card-paper, exposed it to light, removed the negative, and washed, fixed, and dried the paper. Unlike some of the commercial views, these cards were not retouched, coloured, or composed of scenes pasted together; consequently, they present for study a more candid record of daily life.

It is in post cards that one finds an overlap in content between tourism and federal bureaucracy. William Halliday, responsible for administering the Kwawkewlth Agency in the Department of Indian Affairs, took at least twelve photographs circa 1907 to document potlatches held along the street and beachfront at Yalis (Alert Bay). Presumably these

<sup>44</sup> Newcombe Family Papers, Add. MSS. 1077, vol. 47, fols. 2C and 2E, BCA.

<sup>45</sup> The evolution from an artist’s rendition of a landscape or artistic design to a photograph card was a gradual process, spanning about thirty years (1871 to 1900). See Savard (2002, 7).

<sup>46</sup> The Leeson collection is located in Special Collections, Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver, British Columbia.

<sup>47</sup> “In 1902, Eastman Kodak began to market photographic paper in the size of picture postcards, on which images could be printed directly from negatives. With this kind of paper, picture postcards could also be produced of private or local events” (Kreis 1992, 41).

were to be used as evidence in prosecuting violators of the 1884 legislation that had outlawed the potlatch.<sup>48</sup> The following decade, commercial post card makers began to photograph similar street scenes but for a quite different reason. Displays of frontlets and dance aprons draped over lines strung across house fronts; rows of enamel washbasins; stacks of spruce-root hats; split cedar stakes holding silver bracelets; business suits and work boots; and mirrored chests of drawers and steamer trunks massed for distribution at potlatches presented commercial photographers with the perfect visual experience to market as souvenirs. For the price of a post card, tourists could excite friends or family with views of an illegal and exotic “Indian Potlatch. Alert Bay” (Illustration No. 5).<sup>49</sup>

#### EDWARD SHERIFF CURTIS

In the second decade of the twentieth century, there came among the Haida, Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth, and Kwakwaka'wakw a unique and single-minded American photographer, Edward Sheriff Curtis, whose texts, still photographs, and cine film set him apart from all others who have come before and since. Volumes 9, 10, and 11 and their accompanying portfolios of the twenty-volume opus *The North American Indian* are devoted to the Pacific Northwest Coast.<sup>50</sup> Curtis's work has been thoroughly examined by Holm and Quimby (1980), Lyman (1982), Holm (1983), Davis (1985), Slemmons (1989), Gidley (1998), and (Russell 1999). His singular quest, which was to take more than thirty-three years, was to photograph all First Nations west of the Mississippi River. Curtis wrongly believed that their demise was imminent – that they were “The Vanishing Race” – and he intended to produce a photographic record of an earlier time. The challenge that he faced was how to represent Native culture before “contact.” His photographs were taken more than 135 years after “contact.”<sup>51</sup> To accomplish this he was forced to reconstruct a lifestyle that no longer existed in its traditional form. He often posed people in cedar-bark clothing (traditional garments of the previous century) even though they dressed in the fashions of the day. Curtis has been widely criticized for his attempts to reconstruct a past way of life. In the Introduction to Volume 10, however, he notes:

<sup>48</sup> For a study of the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch, see Cole (1991).

<sup>49</sup> Caption on face of post card, RBCM photograph, PN 9689.

<sup>50</sup> There are 331 photographs reproduced as photogravure plates in these three volumes and accompanying portfolios.

<sup>51</sup> I am using the voyage of Juan Perez Hernandez in 1774 and his contact among the Nuu-chah-nulth, Tlingit, and Haida as the beginning of “contact” (Suttles 1990,70).

“The primitive garments shown in the illustrations were prepared by Kwakiutl [Kwakwaka’wakw] men and women for the author, and are correct in all respects. Such costumes, of course, are not now used” (Curtis 1915, xii). Curtis’s good fortune was that enough material culture remained on the Northwest Coast during his fieldwork to evoke the past in his photographs; but, more important, he had access to and the cooperation of knowledgeable consultants in the Native communities he visited (Illustration No. 6).

#### ROYAL COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS, 1913-16

In an attempt to resolve outstanding differences between themselves concerning reserve allocations,<sup>52</sup> the Dominion and provincial governments established what is popularly known as the McKenna-McBride Commission.<sup>53</sup> Each government appointed two commissioners who, in turn, selected a fifth as chairman. The commissioners were charged with resolving “all differences between the governments ... respecting Indian lands” and were granted the power to “adjust the acreage of Indian Reserves in British Columbia.”<sup>54</sup> Fieldwork began in 1913 and was conducted in each of the successive three years, during which time the commission travelled throughout the province, charged with the responsibility of determining the amount of land that was “reasonably required for the use of Indians of that tribe or locality.”<sup>55</sup> The size of the reserves could be either reduced “with the consent of the Indians, as required by the Indian Act” or increased, or land could be “set aside ... for any Band of Indians for whom land [had] not already been reserved.”<sup>56</sup> The commission submitted a four-volume report on 30 June 1916 to the secretary of state in Ottawa and to the provincial secretary in Victoria. The RBCM has one souvenir album containing 372 photographs made for J.A.J. McKenna.<sup>57</sup> The album is composed

<sup>52</sup> For a comprehensive study of “Native land policy” in British Columbia, see Harris (2002).

<sup>53</sup> The popular name is derived from the surnames of James McKenna, one of the commissioners representing the Dominion government, and Richard McBride, premier of British Columbia.

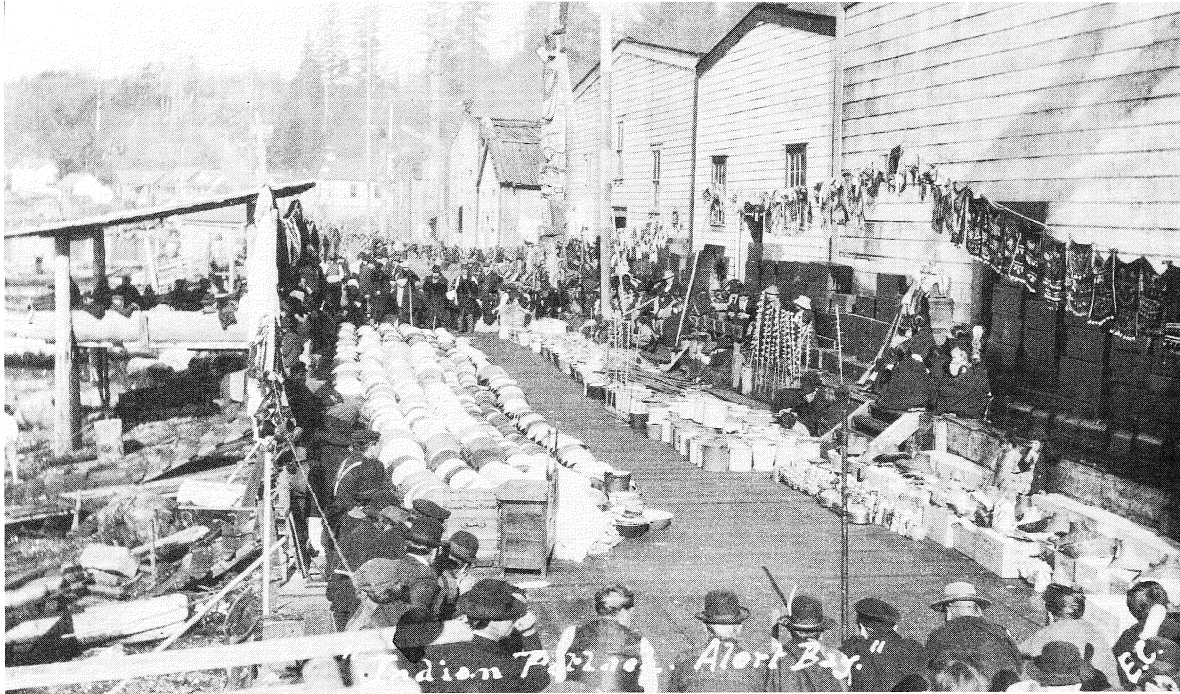
<sup>54</sup> McKenna-McBride Commission (1916, 1:10).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> The RBCM album is accession no. 198970:01-15. The BCA has one album – “Album 40 Indian Reserve Commission 1913-1916” (accession no. 198904-2). I suspect that both albums were made for senior members of the commission. In addition, the archives has another album, “Indian Commission activities” (accession no. 198904-3).

Illustration No. 5:



Left: This post card photograph of Bob Harris' potlatch at 'Yalis (Alert Bay) circa 1910 was taken by a photographer identified only as "E.C."

Right: William Halliday took this photograph of a flour potlatch on the same street circa 1907. Royal British Columbia Museum PN9689 & PN10083.



## Illustration No. 6:



Kwakwaka'wakw actors dressed as Wasp, Thunderbird and Grizzly Bear perform on the prows of three Northern canoes. Edward Curtis took this still photograph in the spring or summer of 1914 in the waters near the Kwakwaka'wakw village of Tsaxis (Fort Rupert) during the filming of *In the Land of the Head-Hunters*. The paddlers are wearing old style cedar-bark clothing to evoke the life way of an earlier era. Royal British Columbia Museum PN16920.

entirely of snapshots,<sup>58</sup> except for the one commercial post card taken at Cowichan.<sup>59</sup> In addition to documenting the commission's activities, this album provides a photographic survey of the people and human geography of many of the Coastal and Interior reserves at a known date. I have not been successful in discovering either the name or names of the photographers who accompanied the commission, or whether the original negatives exist. Neither government appears to have assumed the responsibility of archiving the photographic records (Illustration No. 7).

<sup>58</sup> Snapshot was "A 19th century hunting term meaning to shoot a gun without careful aim. Snapshot was applied to photographs in 1869, but became popular with the introduction of the handheld Kodak box camera." From the Web site: The Brownie Camera @ 100: A Celebration, <http://www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/features/brownieCam/>. Owners of the first Kodak camera did not have the benefit of a viewfinder; instead the photographer had to rely on "sighting lines [that] were impressed into the camera top to indicate the field of view" (Coe 1976, 53). In effect, the camera did not allow for careful aim and one could not be certain that the intended view would be recorded on the negative.

<sup>59</sup> The visits by the commission presented commercial photographers with the opportunity to make and market post cards as souvenirs of the event. See PN 13258, "Indian Commission. Cowichan. 356. Thompson, Duncan."

Illustration No. 7:



“The Picture of the King.” “At the Commission’s First Meeting with Indians.” Both quotes come from the same page in a souvenir album made for J.A.J. McKenna, a commissioner for the Dominion Government, Royal Commission on Indian Affairs. This snapshot was taken at Cowichan May – June 1913; the photographer is unidentified. Perhaps the elder holding the framed photograph of Edward VII was one of three Coast Salish chiefs who petitioned the King on aboriginal title in London in 1906. Royal British Columbia Museum PN12349.

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Expeditions or individual fieldwork sponsored by institutions generated yet more collections of research photography. The Royal Museums of Berlin; the British Association for the Advancement of Science; University Museum, University of Pennsylvania; the American Museum of Natural History; The US National Museum; the Columbian Museum of Chicago; the Milwaukee Public Museum; the Geological Survey of Canada for the Victoria Memorial Museum, and other less well known local scientific undertakings (such as the Laing Expedition of 1896) were associated with the creation of expedition photography. Douglas Cole (1982, 118–19) notes that the 1886 Berlin performances of the nine Nuxalk men brought to Germany by the Jacobsen brothers the previous year were the catalyst in directing Franz Boas's research interest towards the peoples of the Pacific Northwest.<sup>60</sup> Boas, Harlan Smith, Marius Barbeau, Samuel Barrett, George Emmons, and Albert Niblack visited the Northwest Coast and produced photographs themselves, while Boas also hired two Victoria photographers to work with him – a “Mr. Brooks” (Jacknis 1984, 6) in 1888 and O.C. Hastings probably in the same year and again in 1894. Smith used Hastings in 1898 at Fort Rupert, while Dorsey brought E.P. Allen, the Columbian Museum of Chicago's photographer, with him when he visited the Coast in 1897.<sup>61</sup>

Arguably the most important ethnographer/photographer/collector of this era was Dr. Charles Frederic Newcombe. An English medical doctor by training and a Renaissance man by nature, Charles Newcombe settled in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1889. Beginning in the early 1890s and continuing until his death in 1924, Newcombe, with camera, documented the Coastal peoples, their material culture, and their ceremonies. His collections of lantern slides, dry glass plates, and nitrate negatives

<sup>60</sup> Although this effort to include peoples from the Northwest Coast in “ethnic exhibitions” (Cole 1982, 115) was not formally part of a museum-sponsored expedition, it had its roots in an earlier collecting expedition undertaken by the Jacobsens on behalf of the Royal Museums of Berlin.

<sup>61</sup> Extensive collections of photographs were made as a result of Boas's fieldwork among the Kwakwaka'wakw in 1886, 1888, and 1894; Smith's work with the Jesup North Pacific Expedition between 1897 and 1902; the American Museum of Natural History in 1909; the Geological Survey of Canada in 1915 and between 1918 and 1920; Niblack for the US National Museum between 1885 and 1887; Emmons's Tlingit photographs taken between 1882 and 1885, and his Tsimshian photographs taken between 1909 and 1910; the over 350 photographs taken by Barrett in the winter and spring of 1915 among the Kwakwaka'wakw for the Milwaukee Public Museum; Louis Shotridge's Tlingit and Tsimshian views made for the Wanamaker Expedition between 1915 and 1920; and Edgar Fleming's eighty negatives exposed during the 1896 Laing Expedition. The Fleming photographs are part of the RBCM's and the BCA's collection of ethnohistoric photographs.



comprise the most inclusive photographic survey of Pacific Northwest Coast peoples made by one man. The photographs are clear and sharply focused. Newcombe's interests varied: women weaving hats, mats, tump-lines, baskets, and blankets; village views; a photograph taken in 1900 at Kalugwis "showing house where G. Hunt assisted in Hamatsa dance, after which he was arrested"; a detailed close-up of the inside of a canoe at 'Yalis in 1913 that shows the traditional means of repairing a crack; "stakes for nets ... oolachan [eulachon] nets set in river" at Bella Coola; a river canoe at Yale; two fully loaded northern canoes in open water being towed by a gas boat; and many more (Illustration No. 8).

In addition to his "Ethnological" field photographs, Newcombe also photographed many of the artifacts he collected in situ or at his residence in Victoria. The American Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum, the Geological Survey of Canada, the Columbian Museum of Chicago, and the Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology<sup>62</sup> were among his clients. Designated "Collections" in his *Register of Negatives and Lantern Slides*, these photographs document the physical condition of museum pieces at the time they were collected and are invaluable to conservators in providing appropriate treatment.

## EXPOSITIONS

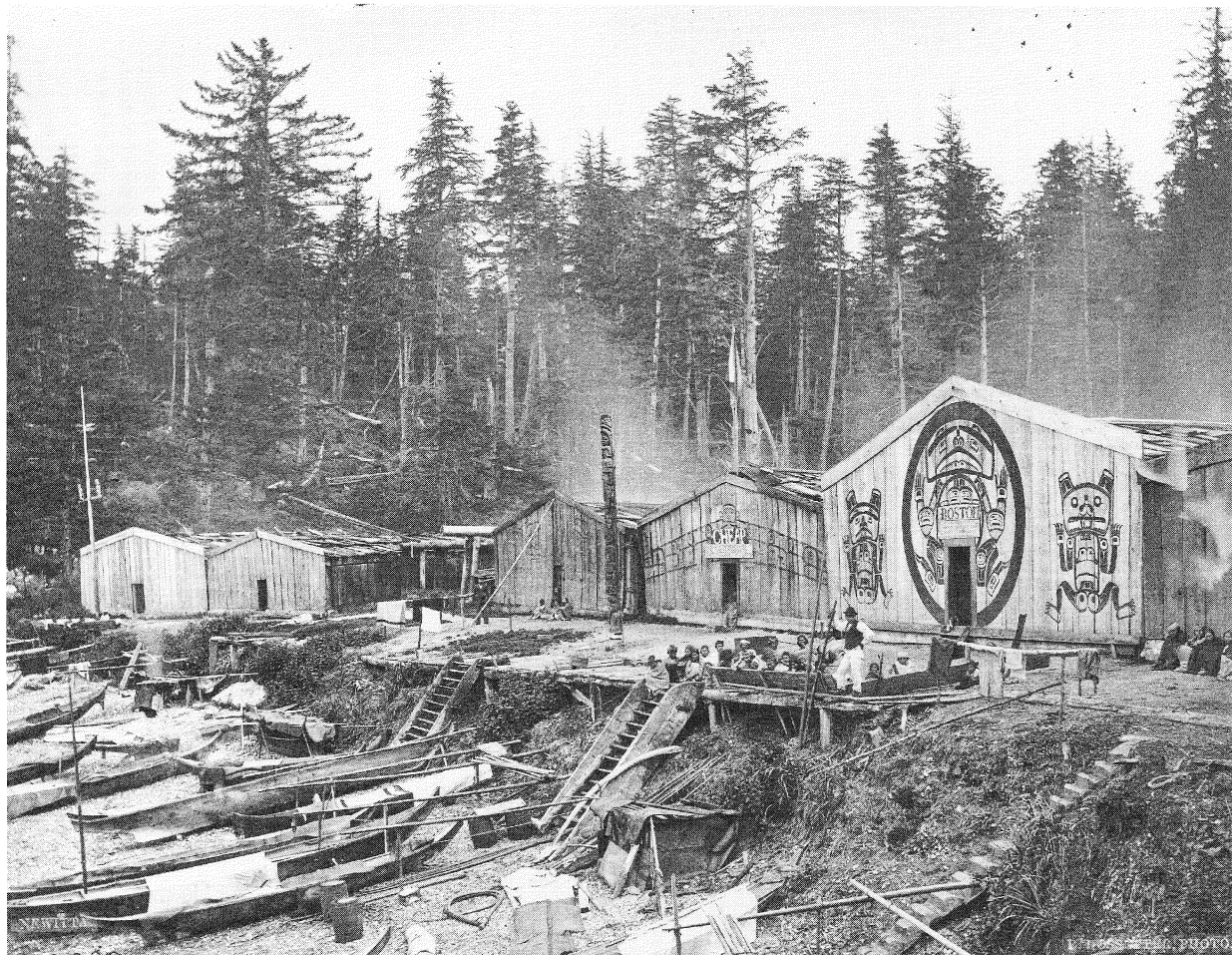
Expositions such as the World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago 1893), the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (St. Louis 1904), and the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition (Portland 1905) provided the venues for photographing exhibits of totem poles, house types, Native crafts, and dance performances. Among a collection of snapshot photographs held at the RBCM are four that record "Klakoglas" (Bob Harris), a Kwakwaka'wakw artist and dancer, performing as a hamatsa (cannibal dancer)<sup>63</sup> on a large elevated wooden stage.<sup>64</sup> The images (Illustration No. 9) are not well focused, and the dancer's movement is captured clearly in

<sup>62</sup> I have used the names of the institutions as they were known during the time that photographs were taken; therefore, the Field Museum is referred to as the Columbian Museum of Chicago since it did not change its name to the Field Museum of Natural History until 1905. The Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology, later the British Columbia Provincial Museum, is currently the Royal British Columbia Museum.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Macnair (1982, 5-6) gives a concise description and explanation of the cannibal dance and references a performance given by Bob Harris, Charlie Nowell, and their Nuu-chah-nulth associates in St. Louis.

<sup>64</sup> The four photographs are: PN 2616 through PN 2619. At least one other photograph was taken at this time. It shows Chief Atliu, Charlie Nowell, Bob Harris, and Jasper Turner standing in a line on the elevated stage and is part of the American Museum of Natural History Photographic Collection, negative no. 333573. Four additional photographs taken at

Illustration No. 8:



Left: Edward Dossetter photograph taken at the Kwakwaka'wakw village of Xwamdasbe' on Hope Island in 1881. Painted signs over the entrances to two of the Big Houses proclaim the high social status of their owners. American Museum of Natural History Negative No. 42298.

Right: Charles Frederic Newcombe photograph of a potlatch held at Xwamdasbe' in 1899. One of the strengths of the collections available for research at the Royal British Columbia Museum is the opportunity to do comparative analysis of changes in Northwest Coast architecture.

Royal British Columbia Museum PN238.

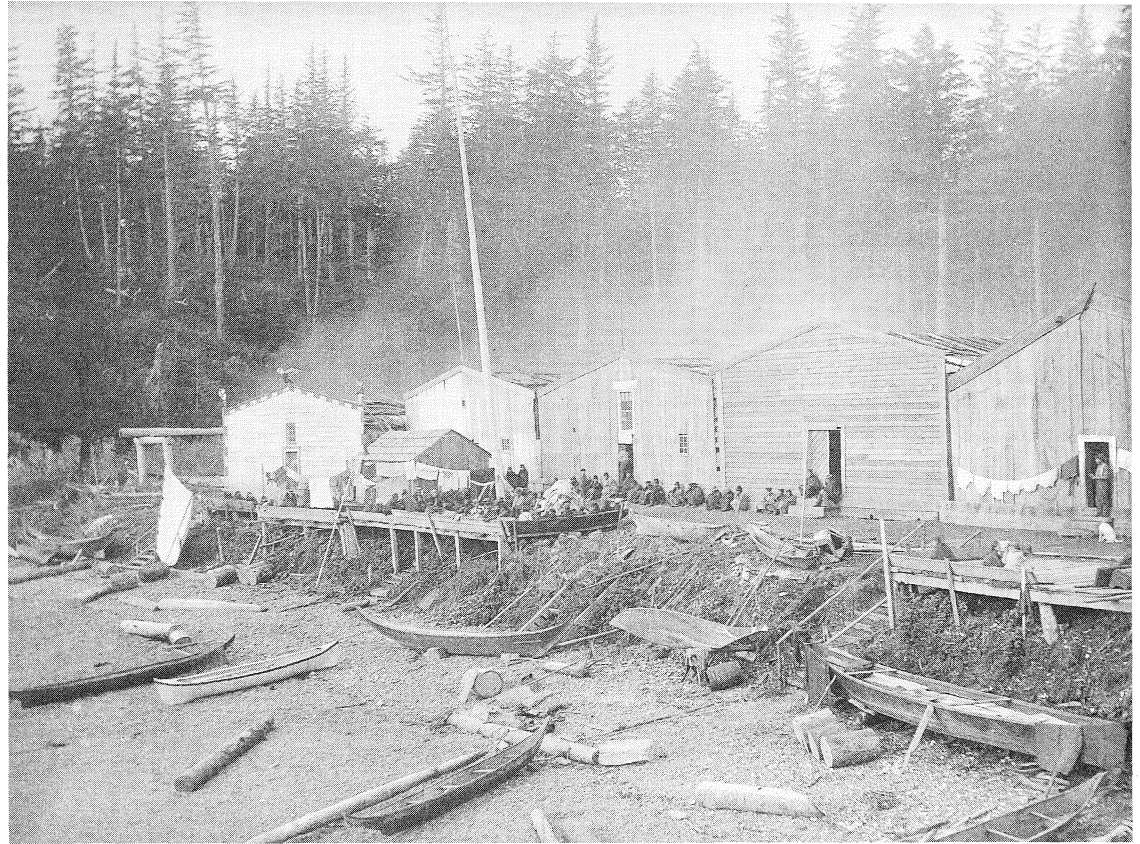
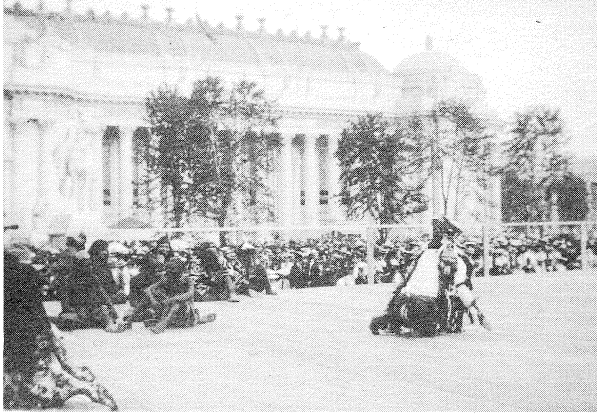


Illustration No. 9:



Klakoglas, (Bob Harris) performing as hamat'sa on an elevated wooden stage at The Louisiana Purchase Exposition held in St. Louis in 1904. In his biography, *Smoke from Their Fires*, Charles Nowell, who was also one of the performers noted: "People come with their kodaks taking pictures..." (Ford 1941, 188). Chief Henry Seaweed determined the correct sequence of these four snapshots (clockwise starting upper left). Royal British Columbia Museum PN2616-PN2619.

only one photograph (PN2618). Although the dancing is shown outside the traditional context of a big house and the Winter Ceremonials, these are significant images as they are the earliest extant sequenced photographs that record a live Northwest Coast dance performance.<sup>65</sup> They are refreshing and spontaneous when compared to the staged studio views taken at the same exposition by Columbian Museum of Chicago photographer Charles Carpenter. Carpenter's photographs show Bob Harris "carving" a bent bowl that has already been painted.<sup>66</sup> They are even more refreshing when compared to John Grabill's 1893 posed, static photograph of David Hunt "dancing as a hamatsa" at the World's Columbian Exposition (Jacknis 1984, 38).

#### MISSIONARY PHOTOGRAPHY

The RBCM has at least seven collections of photographs taken during this period by another source of ethnographic images: missionaries and members of their families.<sup>67</sup> In these, one finds the "expected" photographs – a women's sewing circle, church interiors, students at study in mission school classrooms, building bees, church bands, and Reverend McCullagh at his office desk – all taken to provide visual confirmation of industry and performance of duties.<sup>68</sup> It is within the "unexpected" photographs that the most revealing and informative ethnographic pictures are found, as is evidenced by Methodist minister Reverend William J. Stone's Nuu-chah-nulth views between circa 1894

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the exposition show the male performers in front of a Nuu-chah-nulth canoe: these are PN 2615 and PN 2620, and two photographs in the collection of the Missouri Historical Society (negative nos. not assigned).

<sup>65</sup> I am indebted to Chief Henry Seaweed and his knowledge of Kwakwaka'wakw Winter Ceremonials for placing the photographs in the correct sequence: PN 2619, PN 2618, PN 2616, and PN 2617.

<sup>66</sup> Carved and painted cedar bent bowls were carved before the painting was applied. See Field Museum negative nos. 13572 and 13574.

<sup>67</sup> Six collections known or thought to have been taken by missionaries or their family members are: the Macdonald Collection (photographs taken by Reverend W.H. Collison's daughter) PN 9659 and PN 11424 – PN 11435; a small number of photographs from album Aa–1973 that are associated with Reverend J.B. McCullagh; the Reverend W. Stone Collection, PN 17745 – PN 17805; the Margaret Booth Collection (photographs taken by Reverend Victor Harold Sansum), PN 23502 – PN 23611; the Reverend C. Proctor Collection (many of these photographs were taken by professional photographers) PN 11952 – PN 12113; a small collection of photographs by Reverend A.W. Corker; and a collection of twenty-five photographs found in a post card-size booklet entitled *Souvenir of Bella Bella, BC* associated with Reverend R.W. Large, PN 16450 – PN 16473.

<sup>68</sup> Kim Greenwell (2002, 5) offers an insightful discourse on how missionaries such as Reverend Thomas Crosby used photographs and the "framing devices" of captions in their narratives "to naturalize both their own authority and the intersecting hierarchies they laboured to uphold."

and 1914.<sup>69</sup> Stone's photograph (PNI7768) of Chief Atliu taken at Opitsaht is remarkable in that it shows the chief using a straight-bladed knife to either mark or highlight the design on a carving. Unlike the previously mentioned series of staged photographs taken by Carpenter at St. Louis, Stone's photograph shows a work in progress. Ironically, it is a Carpenter photograph that shows Chief Atliu standing beside the finished work that Stone had earlier photographed.<sup>70</sup> The most intriguing of Stone's photographs, PNI7754, was taken inside a big house at Clo-oose. It shows Chief Atliu, three other men, and a woman behind a painted cloth screen during a council meeting. A framed large-format, cropped photograph of the celebrated warrior Seta Canim, Chief of the Tla-o-qui-aht, has been placed in front of the screen.<sup>71</sup> This practice of displaying photographs of the deceased at public functions such as potlatches was a common occurrence. In reference to this photograph, Carol Williams (2003, 155) notes, "The conspicuous display of Set-Kanim's framed portrait ... secured [his] continued place of honor and respect in the public history of the Clayoquot people."

#### NATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

Perhaps the most interesting images created during this period are those produced by Native photographers. The stories told by most of the photographs taken during this period are to some extent removed from the people who appear in them. What, why, when, where, and, most important, who was selected to be photographed were decisions that, for the most part, were made by someone other than those whose portraits, material culture, and ceremonies appear in these photographs.<sup>72</sup> Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, Native photographers began to record their cultures on either glass or film. This late arrival to the art, practice, or occupation may be due in part to the great expense of operating a photographic gallery. I am aware of only one First Nations photographer who owned a studio – Benjamin Haldane.<sup>73</sup> Because they came from within the culture, First Nations photographers tend to reflect a more relaxed and candid perspective of

<sup>69</sup> Rev. W.J. Stone is listed as the Methodist missionary at Clo-oose (Henderson 1905, 74).

<sup>70</sup> Columbian Museum of Chicago (negative no. 13569).

<sup>71</sup> Carlo Gentile probably took the original non-cropped photograph (PN 1441) between 1863 and 1866. Initially sold as a *carte-de-visite* in the 1860s, it was later published as a post card in the early 1900s. Native history and culture are skewed by these inaccurate, dated images.

<sup>72</sup> Carol Williams (2003) discusses Native uses of photography in the final chapter of *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and the Photographic Frontier in the Pacific Northwest*.

<sup>73</sup> To view photograph of Haldane's New Metlakahtla studio, see Parham (1996, 39).

life – one often denied non-Natives. George Hunt and Louis Shotridge are the best known of these photographers, perhaps because they both took photographs directly or indirectly for institutions (Hunt for the American Museum of Natural History, Shotridge for the Museum at the University of Pennsylvania). Others, such as Daniel Quedessa, Shobid Hunter, and Benjamin Haldane, are less well known. Ira Jacknis (1984; 1992) has researched and published articles on Hunt; Maureen Milburn (1986) on Shotridge; and Carolyn Marr (in Marr, Colfax, and Monroe 1987; and Marr 1989) has referenced Quedessa and Hunter.

Haldane was the lone professional among this group, yet he warrants only half of one paragraph in George Davis's (1904, 123) *Metlakahtla: A True Narrative of the Red Man*: "The village photographer, Benjamin A. Haldane, does not hesitate to work in the cannery when it is running and looks after his picture-making and developing after or before working hours. Mr. Haldane is a versatile and talented young man. In addition to being an excellent photographer, he is leader of the village band, and plays the pipe organ in the church." The back of a Promenade (?) card in the RBCM collection, PN16970, is stamped "Haldane & Bro. Alaskan Photographers. 7 West Street. Metlakahtla, Alaska." Parham (1996, 37) suggests that Henry Haldane, Benjamin's cousin, taught him photography. Five, possibly seven, photographs at the RBCM are by Haldane.<sup>74</sup> All were taken at the Nisga'a village of Gitlakdamix, except for the view of the eulachon fishing camp at Fishery Bay on the Nass River. Perhaps Haldane was Nisga'a.<sup>75</sup> "Group of Chiefs in Costume 1903" (PN4330) is of a particular style of photograph – one that Martha Black refers to as "contents displays,"<sup>76</sup> and is similar to William Halliday's photograph taken eleven years later at the Kwakwaka'wakw village of 'Yalis (Illustration No. 10). Although the content and composition is similar, the context and intent differ. Haldane was probably invited by the chiefs to photograph their ceremonial regalia and property display. His other photograph – which was taken at the same time (PN4329) and is of Chief James Stiaowax in profile dressed in Chilkat blanket, headdress, dance apron and leggings, and holding two raven rattles – suggests that this photograph may also have been commissioned. Halliday's photograph, on the other hand, was made during the visit of

<sup>74</sup> RBCM photographs PN 4110, PN 4279, PN 4329, PN 4330, PN 16970, and possibly PN 4401 and PN 4402.

<sup>75</sup> "In 1899, Haldane spent the entire winter at Nass River, British Columbia, teaching the local band and taking photographs" (Parham 1996, 37).

<sup>76</sup> "A contents display shows the interior of a house with its associated ritual property" (Black 1992, 70).



Left: Nisga'a chiefs in regalia pose in front of their ceremonial wealth. Using a white sheet as a backdrop, Benjamin Haldane took this photograph in 1903 inside a house at Gitlakdamix. This is one in a series of five photographs at the Royal British Columbia Museum attributed to Haldane. Royal British Columbia Museum PN4330.



Light: Chief Naka-  
ankam, Mungo Martin,  
and other Kwakwaka'wakw  
men pose with cer-  
emonial regalia inside  
a big house at 'Yalis  
Alert Bay). This Wil-  
iam Halliday photo-  
graph was taken during  
the visit of the Royal  
British Commission  
on Indian Affairs, May  
June 1914.

Royal British Columbia  
Museum PN2777.



the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs eleven years later. The people who appear in this photograph are dressed in the casual clothing of the time, and their facial expressions, especially that of Chief Nakapankam, Mungo Martin (PN2777), seem to suggest that they were apprehensive and unsure of why the photograph was being made.

Staff at the British Columbia Provincial Museum (now the RBCM) collected approximately sixty negatives in 1967 from the Cadwallader store in Tsaxis (Fort Rupert).<sup>77</sup> Franz Boas gave these to George Hunt for his use.<sup>78</sup> The documentation that accompanies the photographs is minimal. They are primarily group portraits taken outside that show people dressed either in Western clothing or ceremonial regalia. Almost half of them record some aspect of potlatching. Three were taken the same day as was C.F. Newcombe's series of eight photographs, which were made in 1900 at 'Yalis during a potlatch given by Tom and Clalas Nowell.<sup>79</sup> They are significant not only because of their ethnographic content but also because they predate George Hunt's earliest known photographs by one year.<sup>80</sup> They are the earliest published photographs by a Northwest Coast First Nations photographer, five having been reproduced in J. Gordon Smith's article, which appeared in the October 1902 edition of *The Wide World Magazine* (Illustration No. 11).<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> These negatives constitute the Cadwallader Collection and were initially catalogued as PN 1069 – PN 1128. Most were taken at 'Yalis or Tsaxis, although several were taken at the village of Kalugwis (Turnour Island).

<sup>78</sup> Personal communication between Dusty Cadwallader (who gave the negatives to the British Columbia Provincial Museum) and Peter Macnair, museum anthropologist from 1965 to 1997. These may have been taken with the Kodak camera that Hunt refers to in a letter to Boas dated 1901 (Jacknis 1992, 144).

<sup>79</sup> Although the entries in Newcombes' Register of Negatives and Lantern Slides for E 138 to E 142 read "1v, 1901," this is the date that Newcombe catalogued the negatives. The potlatch, held in 1900, has been identified as Tom and Clalas Nowell's potlatch. (Newcombe Papers, BCA, Add. mss. 1077, vol. 43, file 19).

<sup>80</sup> "From the summer of 1901, when he took his first pictures, to the summer of 1905, when Boas left the Museum [American Museum of Natural History], Hunt sent in about ninety photographs" (Jacknis 1992, 144).

<sup>81</sup> Initially I thought that J. Howard Chapman, a commercial photographer who operated a business in Victoria at 904 Government Street, might have taken six of the eleven photographs that were published in Smith's article. I am now convinced that George Hunt took all of the photographs and that he either gave prints to Smith or loaned him the negatives for the publication. Smith, who also lived in Victoria, possibly had Chapman print the negatives who then imprinted some of these with his business stamp.

Illustration No. 11:



Three canoes carrying visitors to a potlatch approach the shore at 'Yalis (Alert Bay) in 1900. This is the earliest published photograph by George Hunt and was reproduced in the October 1902 edition of *The Wide World Magazine*. Unlike the staged Curtis photograph, (Illustration No. 6), the potlatch guests are dressed in the fashions of the day. The original nitrate negative from which this print was made has been torn and is curling at the lower left corner. Royal British Columbia Museum P11084.

#### CINE FILM

The visual imagery of this period was clearly dominated by the still photograph. However, at least two extant cine films contain footage of Pacific Northwest Coast cultures. The first such moving images were made more by happenstance than by design. In the summer of 1910, a crew from the Edison Manufacturing Company, while working on behalf of the Canadian Pacific Railway, produced a documentary entitled *The Life of a Salmon*.<sup>82</sup> The motive for including a Native canoe

<sup>82</sup> I am indebted to Dennis Duffy, Archivist, BCA, for making me aware of the existence of this film.

race in a documentary on salmon is unclear. Appropriately, the race begins in front of the Canadian Pacific Railway's Empress Hotel located in Victoria's Inner Harbour and continues along the inland Gorge Waterway. Lasting just over ninety seconds, the footage shows: three eleven-man canoes whose crews were probably drawn from the Salish villages located on southern Vancouver Island; actors posing as excited racing enthusiasts; the obligatory starting pistol scene; and, finally, the awarding of a cash prize to the captain of the winning canoe.

In the same year, Edward Sheriff Curtis began formulating plans to produce a motion picture that would feature the theatrics of the Kwakwaka'wakw of northeastern Vancouver Island. Originally entitled *In The Land of the Head-Hunters*, it was the "first full-length documentary motion picture of aboriginal North Americans" (Holm and Quimby 1980, 5). A story of love and revenge, Catherine Russell (1999, 90) has described it as "a particular combination of anthropology and Hollywood melodrama." Travelling to Alert Bay in the summer of 1913, Curtis began preparations for making the film, which was shot in the spring and summer of the following year.

Although Curtis produced and directed the film, the storyline (Unknown 1915, 109) and text (Holm and Quimby 1980, 57) were written with the help of the Kwakwaka'wakw. He did not have a free hand in its making. In an interview published in the August 1915 American edition of *Strand Magazine*, Curtis noted that "it was utterly impossible ... to get any Indian to wear a mask to which by birth and tribal custom he was not entitled. Other little difficulties, too numerous to mention – in themselves trivial, but requiring marvelous tact to handle – cropped up every day" (Unknown 1915, 108). In the same interview he acknowledged George Hunt's contribution to the making of the film: "This man gave me a great deal of help and assisted me in overcoming scruples which every 'actor' and 'actress' raised a dozen times a day. Before we settled upon any performer we had to establish the fact that that particular person was entitled to perform the part according to tribal rules and customs" (Ibid.).

*In The Land of the Head-Hunters* opened in New York and then Seattle in 1914. However, the film's anticipated financial success was not realized and it closed within months of opening. In January 1924 Pliny Earle Goddard (curator of Ethnology at the American Museum of Natural History), in consultation with Franz Boas (professor of Anthropology at Columbia), requested from Curtis "a negative of about 1,000 or 1,500 feet of the film covering in particular the dances and boat scenes" (Davis

1985, 72). Curtis sold both the master print and negative to the American Museum of Natural History that October. The film was retitled and released in 1973 as *In the Land of the War Canoes*. Unlike the original, it has a soundtrack featuring a number of Kwakwaka'wakw elders, three of whom acted in the original film. The songs and dialogue were added in 1972 in the Newcombe auditorium at the British Columbia Provincial Museum. Other changes involved making new intertitles and reducing their numbers; increasing the film speed to twenty-four frames per second from the silent speed of sixteen frames per second; and inserting a scene remembered by Kwakwaka'wakw elders as having been shot but not included in the original film (Holm and Quimby 1980, 126).

The following decade saw an increase in the production of films with First Nations content. Pliny Earle Goddard filmed Mrs. George Hunt at Fort Rupert in July 1922. However, according to Ira Jacknis, "there is no evidence that he ever edited the footage into a finished film" (personal communication, 4 May 2000). Sometime between 1920 and 1923, Pathescope of Canada produced *Traveltour of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, which includes some footage shot at the Nuw-chah-nulth villages of Yuquot and Ahousat. Harlan I. Smith made at least nine and possibly fifteen short films between 1923 and 1929 of Coastal and Interior First Peoples while working in British Columbia for the Victoria Memorial Museum, Ottawa (Zimmerly 1974, 21). Seven of these films are housed at the National Archives of Canada, and video copies are also available to view at the British Columbia Archives.<sup>83</sup>

In conclusion, the photographic narrative that exists both in still and cine film during this era is somewhat distant from the people whose cultures they document. Outsiders clearly produced the overwhelming majority of visual imagery. This paper itself is an outsiders' interpretation of the interplay between photography and the First Nations cultures of the Pacific Northwest. Richard West contends that "Cultural 'truths'... are created by those telling the story" (Johnson 1998, xiii). Is this the photographic record that the First Peoples would have chosen to leave of themselves? Further research by Native scholars is required to bring an insiders' perspective to the existing corpus of ethnohistoric archival photographs and film.

<sup>83</sup> See as well (Jacknis 2000, 99-146) and an unpublished paper by Dan Savard (2003) "To Do a Moving Picture Thing: Cine Film and the Northwest Coast, 1910-1930," which was given at the Association of Moving Image Archivists Conference. A copy of this paper and excerpts from nine films are available at BCA, file v2003:04.

## PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

Negative Numbers prefaced with PN are from the RBCM.

Negative Numbers prefaced with CMC are from the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Negative Numbers prefaced with AMNH are from the American Museum of Natural History.

Catalogue Numbers prefaced with HP are from the BCA.

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