

GOLD ON HAIDA GWAI:

The First Prospects, 1849-53

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INTRODUCTION

THE INTERSECTION OF the Oregon Treaty, the establishment of a settler colony on Vancouver Island, and the gold rush to California transformed the political economy of the Northwest Coast, introducing new forces and new tensions. In British territories the colony of Vancouver Island represented the beginning of a shift away from the regime of the fur trade, in which First Nations played an integral role, towards a society in which First Nations became competitors for access to land and resources. This conjuncture was advanced, in the northern portion of the coast, by the discovery of gold on Haida Gwaii. The events on Haida Gwaii have received some attention, primarily as what Fisher terms a “prelude to the main event.”¹ In other words, they are seen as a precursor to the gold rushes of 1858 and beyond, and the ensuing political and social rearrangements.

The earliest accounts are in general histories (Bancroft, Howay), which focus almost exclusively on one side of the encounters at Haida Gwaii. More recently, Rickard demonstrates the role of First Nations (including the Haida) in mineral discoveries. And in general and popular histories, as well as in more specialized studies, some attention has been paid to the role of the Haida; however the tendency has been to view them as one-dimensional – as the “Vikings of the North Pacific” – and as opposed to the advent of prospectors.² The best account of the Haida is found in Patricia Vaughan’s thesis, which remains unpublished and relies almost

¹ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 70.

² T.A. Rickard, “Indian Participation in the Gold Discoveries,” *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 1 (1938): 3-18; B. Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-90* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984), chap. 7; D. Marshall, “Claiming the Land: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to British Columbia” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2000), 41-43; S. Royle, *Company, Crown and Colony: The Hudson’s Bay Company and Territorial Endeavour in Western Canada* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2011), 112-13.

exclusively on published sources.³ In all of these accounts the discussion of Haida Gwaii forms part of larger, more general studies.

Here, I focus on the activities on Haida Gwaii with a view to establishing a more rounded interpretation of the actions of the Haida in both “discovering” gold and dealing with the consequent influx of non-Natives (which was on a scale not seen since the heyday of the Maritime fur trade of the late eighteenth century). I begin by establishing the parameters of the events on Haida Gwaii, offering a brief outline of the actions of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) and the American “Interlopers” (as they were termed by HBC officials) to locate and secure access to the gold deposits. I also address imperial interventions before turning to an examination of how Haida men and women responded to these incursions into their territory.

HBC EXPEDITIONS

John Work, in charge of the HBC post of Fort Simpson, may have initiated the search for minerals by the fort’s clientele as early as 1849. William Mouat, of the HBC’s maritime service, reported seeing a large lump of gold at Victoria in the spring of 1851, which had been in the Company’s possession for “17 months.” If accurate, this indicates that the gold was procured in the fall of 1849.⁴ Moreover, in a letter written early in January 1850, Work informed an HBC colleague that he had recently travelled up the Skeena River “in quest of Copper Mines.” Little more is known of this episode, but it suggests that either a sample or information had been brought to Fort Simpson by the Tsimshian of Lax Kw’alaams, prompting Work into action in the summer of 1849.⁵ More definite are

³ Patricia Vaughan, “Co-operation and Resistance: Indian-European Relations on the Mining Frontier in British Columbia, 1835-1858” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1978).

⁴ Miller to Foreign Office, 17 April 1851, PRO, CO 305/3: 322. Mouat sailed from Victoria on 8 March which, if his estimate was accurate, means that the sample had been in the HBC’s possession since about mid-October 1849. Miller was the British consul general at Honolulu. Robert Brown, who visited Haida Gwaii in the 1860s, reported: “As far back as 1850 or 1849 the Indians were in the habit of bringing rough gold to Fort Simpson.” See Robert Brown, “On the Physical Geography of the Queen Charlotte Islands,” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* 3 (1868-69): 385.

⁵ Work to Ross, 7 January 1850, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), Ross Papers, Add Mss 635, file 226. Work’s time at Fort Simpson in 1849 was limited: from 1 February to 2 March; 6 to 10 and 19 to 30 April; and, finally, 23 June to 31 July. His trip up the Skeena, presumably, was undertaken during the last sojourn at Fort Simpson. Specimens of copper from “the Skeena River” were forwarded to Victoria by the beginning of 1851, and in 1852 a Tsimshian chief brought some “small pieces of gold ore” from the Skeena River to Fort Simpson (Douglas to Simpson, 24 February 1851, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (hereafter HBCA), D 5/30, B 201/a/7, 8 April 1852).

reports that two samples of gold quartz from Haida Gwaii were brought to Fort Simpson by the summer of 1850. This information, together with one of the samples, was carried to Fort Victoria by John Work.⁶ Over the next two years, the HBC dispatched six expeditions in its quest to commodify the gold on Haida Gwaii (Table 1).

TABLE 1
HBC expeditions to Haida Gwaii

EXPEDITION	TRANSPORT	LEADER	TIME OF EXPEDITION
1st	Canoe	Legace	Returned to Ft. Simpson by about mid-July 1850
2nd	Canoe	Work	Left Ft. Simpson 13 May, returned 29 May, 1851
3rd	<i>Beaver</i>	McNeill	Left Ft. Simpson 13 June; Skidegate 16 June; returned to Ft. Simpson 27 June
4th	<i>Una</i>	Work	Left Ft. Simpson 16 July; returned 3 August. Spent five days at Mitchell Harbour.
5th	<i>Una</i>	McNeill	Left Victoria 6 Oct., 1851; Mitchell Harbour 20 Oct. – 5 Nov.; Ft. Simpson 12 Nov.; wrecked at Neah Bay 24 Dec.
6th	<i>Recovery</i>	Kennedy	Left Victoria 23 March 1852; Mitchell Harbour 5 Apr. – mid-Aug.; arrived at Victoria 23 Aug. ⁷

The first and third expeditions failed to reach the locale of the gold deposits, and the second was largely exploratory in nature, although some “blasting” was undertaken.⁸ Subsequent expeditions included larger numbers of participants, and the fifth and sixth included “miners” contracted on a profit-sharing basis instead of using already engaged

⁶ H. Bowsfield, ed., *Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-1851* (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1979), 109-14; Douglas to Barclay, 17 August 1850, *ibid.*, 151-59; Douglas to Barclay, 24 February 1851; Douglas to Yale, 6 August 1850, HBCA, B 226/b/3; Douglas to Ogden, 14 August 1850, HBCA, B 226/b/3.

⁷ For a summary statement covering expeditions 1 to 5, see Douglas to Eden Colville, 16 March 1852, HBCA, B 226/b/6.

⁸ John Work, *Journal of a Trip to Queen Charlotte Island* (12-26 May 1851), UBCSC, VF-146; Log of *Beaver*, 16-27 June 1851, HBCA, C 1/208; Work to Douglas, 6 August 1851, PRO, CO 305/4: 230ff.

HBC employees. Despite these escalating efforts, the yields were less than satisfactory to the Company.⁹ The returns of the fourth expedition amounted to “sixty and a half ounces of ore,” together with a few “lumps” obtained via barter. The fifth expedition yielded “Fifty eight pounds” of ore “produced by blasting” and six pounds that was “traded from the Indians.” The returns of the sixth expedition are not known, but it was reported as “showing a loss of nearly £1000.”¹⁰

AMERICAN INTERLOPERS

A report of gold discovery on Haida Gwaii reached American settlements in California, Columbia, and Puget Sound as early as October 1850 but attracted little attention.¹¹ It was not until the ensuing fall, after “specimens” had circulated beyond the inner circles of the HBC in Victoria – to Puget Sound and beyond – that any attempt was made from American settlements to locate and exploit the gold deposits.¹²

At least nine American vessels are known to have visited Haida Gwaii between November 1851 and September 1852, of which two made more than one trip (Table 2).¹³ The total number of prospectors involved cannot be determined with accuracy, but it was probably in the hundreds, although not all were there at the same time. Late in May 1852, Douglas learned from a returning HBC miner that seven American vessels had entered Gold Harbour “with from 40 to 70 Miners each on board.” Taken at face value this would give a total of between three and five hundred

⁹ Work to Douglas, 6 August 1851, PRO, CO 305/4: 23off; Kuper to Moresby, 20 July 1852, CO 305/3: 272; Bowsfield, *Fort Victoria Letters*, 32, 218–21; Douglas to Barclay, 6 October 1851; Douglas to Colvile, 16 March 1852; Douglas to Barclay, 18 March 1852, HBCA, B 226/b/6.

¹⁰ Work to Douglas, 6 August 1851, PRO, CO 305/4: 23off; Douglas to Eden Colvile, 16 March 1852, HBCA, B 226/b/6; Barclay to BoM, 7 January 1853, HBCA, B 226/c/1, f 332. It was estimated that the ore would “yield about 4¾ lbs of pure gold” (Douglas to Work, 27 December 1851, HBCA, B 226/b/4).

¹¹ Douglas to Work, 13 November 1850, HBCA, B 226/b/3; *Marysville Daily Herald*, “Gold in Oregon,” 15 October 1850. News also spread to Hawaii by April 1851 (Miller to [FO?], 17 April 1851, PRO, CO 305/3/322).

¹² Staines to [Aikin?], 10 January 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 263; Staines to Boys, 6 July 1852, enclosure in Boys to Desart, 11 October 1852, 495ff, PRO, CO 305/3: 263; *Oregon Spectator*, 14 October 1851; letter of 8 September from Olympia, reprinted in *Sacramento Daily Union*, 29 October 1851. Staines reported seeing samples in Victoria in April/May 1851, and in August/September he forwarded samples to the British consul in Hawaii.

¹³ W.H. McNeill, stationed at Fort Simpson, put the number of vessels at ten but provided no further details (McNeill to BOM, 26 August 1852, BCA, A/B/20/S122). For a popular account of American vessels, see Bessie D. Haynes, “Gold on Queen Charlotte’s Island,” *Beaver* (winter, 1966): 4–10.

would-be miners, although even the lower end is probably something of an exaggeration.¹⁴

TABLE 2
American vessels visiting Haida Gwaii in 1851-52

VESSEL	TIME AND DURATION OF VOYAGE
<i>Georgianna</i>	Left PS 5 Nov. 1851; wrecked at Cumshewa 16 Nov. 1851.
<i>Damariscove</i>	3 voyages 1. Left SF to PS, n.d.; met <i>Georgianna</i> at Neah Bay Nov. 1851; MH 28 Nov. – 1 Dec.; at PS by mid-Dec., 1851 2. Left PS 16 Dec. 1851, Cumshewa 9 Jan.; PS 31 Jan. 1852 3. Left PS 27 Feb. 1852; at MH in Mar.; at VT early Apr.; Astoria end of Apr. 1852
<i>Exact</i>	Left CR 6 Nov. 1851, left MH c. 5 Mar. 1852; at VT 18 Mar. 1852
<i>Susan Sturgis</i>	3 voyages 1. Left SF 5 Apr. 1852; MH 20 Apr. – 11 May; SF 22 May 1852 2. Left SF 5 Jun. 1852; at MH 22 Jun.; at SF 4 Aug. 1852 3. Left SF 26 Aug. 1852; at Skidegate, captured off Masset 26 Sep. 1852
<i>Tepic</i>	Left SF 30 Mar. 1852; MH 21 Apr. – 15 May; SF 2 Jun. 1852
<i>Palermo</i>	Left SF 5 Apr. 1852; MH 29 Apr. – 15 May; SF 4 Jun. 1852
<i>Mexican</i>	Left SF 10 Apr. 1852; MH 28 Apr. – 8 May; PS 23 May 1852
<i>Eagle</i>	Left CR 22 Apr. 1852; MH 2 May – 7 Jun.; PS 30 May 1852
<i>Cecile</i>	Left SF 20 Apr. 1852; at MH 15 – 26 May; PS 26 May 1852

SF = San Francisco; CR = Columbia River; PS = Puget Sound; VT = Victoria; MH = Mitchell Harbour (Haida Gwaii).

Most of the vessels (and their passengers) spent a relatively short time at Mitchell Harbour: of the six vessels about which Captain Kuper, of HMS *Thetis*, gathered information for the period between 20 April and 7 June 1852, the average stay was three weeks. However, a party of seven was still living “on a small rocky island close to the Thetis anchorage” in Mitchell Harbour when the *Thetis* departed.¹⁵ Whatever their exact

¹⁴ Douglas to Barclay, 25 May 1852, HBCA A 11/73: f 462. Kuper listed only six vessels during this period, each bringing “from 40 to 50 Californian Adventurers” (Kuper to Moresby, 20 July 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 272). Information on individual vessels suggests smaller passenger lists, below forty: *Palermo* 20, *Susan Sturgis* 14, *Exact* 32, *Georgianna* 24 to 27; the largest HBC expedition, on the *Recovery*, amounted to 47, counting officers and men.

¹⁵ Kuper to Moresby, 20 July 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 272. An earlier report refers to “Some 12 or 15 men ... left here by the different vessels and have established themselves on Nutts Island”

number, the American parties were no more successful at prospecting than were the HBC expeditions; indeed, most Americans had departed Haida Gwaii by the middle of May. In part, this was because they were latecomers, finding that “the vein of gold” was occupied by the HBC sixth expedition, forcing the Americans to look “for other veins in every direction in and over the country about Gold Harbour, without discovering any.”¹⁶ Information on what the American parties took back with them in the way of gold is limited, although as much gold may have been obtained by trade as by mining.

IMPERIAL INTERVENTIONS

British responses to the advent of American “Interlopers” contributed to the thickening of the network of links between the imperial centre and the Northwest Coast. New initiatives involved political experiment – the appointment of James Douglas as lieutenant-governor of “Queen Charlotte Islands” – and his proclamation of mining regulations.¹⁷ For guidance Douglas was provided, by the Colonial Office, with a copy of regulations recently implemented in the colony of Victoria (Australia). These articulated the principle that miners required a licence issued by a representative of the Crown.¹⁸

(Kennedy to Douglas, 26 May 1852, HBCA, A 11/73 f 463b). A party of four men left Mitchell Harbour on 14 June in a small boat, arriving at Whidbey Island fourteen days later (*Columbian*, “Adventure in an Open Boat,” 18 September 1852).

¹⁶ Douglas to Barclay, 25 May 1852, HBCA, B 226/b/6.

¹⁷ The idea of the former had been mooted at the Colonial Office (and discussed with the Foreign Office and the HBC), but it was not until the end of September that the commission was forwarded (Pakington to Douglas, 27 September 1852, LAC, RG 7, G8C/1; Pelly to Desart, 28 June 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 454). The commission was dated 9 July 1852 but did not reach Douglas until 3 February 1853. The latter are found in Douglas to Newcastle, 11 April 1853, PRO, CO 305/4: 34; Douglas to Prevost, 27 April 1853, BCA, C/AA/10.4A/1: 63. Rickard, “Indian Participation,” 6–7, states that the “regalian right, or royal claim, to deposits of precious metal is traditional; it is a kingly perquisite” that had been asserted when gold was discovered in Australia in 1851.

¹⁸ Pakington to Douglas, 27 September 1852, LAC, RG 7, G8C/1. The proclamation and regulations pertaining to Haida Gwaii are copies of those sent to Douglas, with minor adjustments to reflect local circumstances. Although issued too late to have any impact on Haida Gwaii, the content, as amended for circumstances, was used by Douglas in a proclamation of 28 December 1857 and for regulations of 29 December. These were his initial attempts to regulate what became the Fraser River rush of 1858. See F.W. Howay, *British Columbia: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (Vancouver: S.J. Clarke, 1914), 2:13. In commenting upon these instruments, Trimble noted the distinction between British and American practices: “The principle on which the American miners acted was expressed by Governor Stevens ... ‘in the absence of positive law prohibiting such occupation and use, it is believed to be the natural right of every man who enters a totally unoccupied country to cut timber and wood, to consume the fruits of the earth, and gather all the products of the soil, which have not before been appropriated.’” See Trimble, William J. (1914), “The Mining Advance into the

These measures were accompanied by the return of naval vessels to the waters of Haida Gwaii. In 1852 and 1853, three naval vessels were dispatched sequentially to the waters of Haida Gwaii: HMS *Thetis*, HMS *Virago*, and HMS *Trincomalee*.¹⁹ HMS *Thetis* arrived at Esquimalt on 24 May and sailed on 5 June for Haida Gwaii. To Douglas's undoubted disappointment, he learned that Captain Kuper had been ordered to declare "the national rights of Great Britain" but not authorized "to prohibit the visits of foreign vessels to the harbours or Mines of the Islands."²⁰ HMS *Virago* and HMS *Trincomalee* reached Haida Gwaii only after the departure of the prospecting parties. Indeed, it was the visit of HMS *Virago* in the summer of 1853 that produced the conclusive verdict on the exploitation of gold on Haida Gwaii. Captain Prevost informed the British consul at Honolulu: "The Queen Charlotte gold fever is at an end for ever, I think, we have twice circumnavigated the group (for there are three different islands) visiting each time 5 different harbours, and have never seen a white man, much less a vessel."²¹

The naval influx, in addition to its surveillance objectives, increased both European knowledge about the resources of Haida Gwaii and new representations of its coastal configuration. The latter was the first significant addition since the Vancouver expedition of the 1790s, although at the cost of the further erasure of Haida toponymy.²²

HAIDA RESPONSES

As is usual for this period, our knowledge of the actions and objectives of First Nations is largely derived from the accounts of visitors, hence there is an unavoidable uncertainty about how the Haida viewed the events leading up to, and consequent upon, the discovery of gold on

Inland Empire," *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin*, No. 638, 189. Madison: University of Wisconsin. For a discussion of the evolution of BC mining law, see B. Barton, *Canadian Law of Mining* (Calgary: Canadian Institute of Resources Law, 1993), 70, 117-19.

¹⁹ On British naval activity, see B. Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of America, 1810-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1971).

²⁰ Moresby to Kuper, 22 May 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 294; Douglas to Kennedy, 4 June 1852; HBCA, B 226/b/6, Douglas to Barclay, 25 May 1852; HBCA, A 6/30, p. 10, Barclay to Simpson, 13 August 1852.

²¹ Prevost to Miller, 12 August 1853, PRO, CO 305/4: 200.

²² Admiralty Chart 2158; G.H. Inskip, "Remarks on Some Harbours of Queen Charlotte Islands," *Nautical Magazine* 24 (1855): 617-30. Robert Brown, "Physical Geography, 382," offered the following examples of the new toponymy: "Gold Harbour is generally called 'Skitou,' but the name more particularly applies to Mitchell's Harbour, a smaller anchorage off the main one. Douglas Harbour is 'Scentas,' and Mudges Harbour is called 'Howtelm.' Kuper Island is 'Skankeingwas,' and above Mudges Harbour in Port Kuper is another known as 'Naawee,' while still further up is 'Chowash.'" See also notes to Figure 1.

Haida Gwaii. It is also important to recognize that there was no single Haida perception. Responses varied with time (as events evolved), place (owners of the territory where the gold deposits were located and other Haida groups), and the nature of the visitors (HBC, American, naval).

For the Haida, the discovery of gold – together with the potential for other minerals – represented an expansion of the resource base that they could use for trade with outsiders. Such resources, under the regime of both maritime and land-based fur trades, had been procured by the Haida and carried by them to trading vessels or HBC posts. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the Haida regarded access to gold as being governed by the protocols employed in these earlier exchanges. It is in this context of prior Haida experiences and expectations that the accounts of attempts to procure gold from Haida Gwaii should be viewed. I begin with a discussion of accounts of the “discovery” of gold deposits before turning to Haida efforts to utilize the new resource and deal with the influx of non-Native visitors.

DISCOVERY

The fullest account of the discovery of gold was provided by Albert Edenshaw (Eda’nsa), a Haida chief originally from Gatlinskun, a village near Cape Ball, some quarter of a century after the event. According to Edenshaw, as reported by missionary W.H. Collison, he was shown a sample of gold ore at Fort Simpson and encouraged to report any occurrences of such rock on Haida Gwaii. Subsequently, during a visit to Skidegate, he learned from an old woman where such rock could be found. She accompanied Edenshaw to the location, where he procured a number of samples. These he took to Fort Simpson, after which he was involved in the HBC’s attempts to exploit the resource.²³ Parts of this narrative persist among the Haida: Kathleen Dalzell was informed by the granddaughter of Albert Edenshaw that an old woman at Skidegate was involved and that the principal actor in bringing the gold ore to the attention of the HBC was Albert Edenshaw.²⁴ Charles Harrison, who

²³ W.A. Collison, *In the Wake of the War Canoe* (London: Seeley, Service and Co. Limited, 1915), 113-14. The date of this account is uncertain. Collison was stationed at Massett between late 1876 and 1879, although he encountered some Haida at Metlakatla as early as 1874. On Albert Edenshaw, see DCB entry, online at http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/eda_nsa_12E.html.

²⁴ K. Dalzell, *The Queen Charlotte Islands, 1774-1966* (Queen Charlotte City: Bill Ellis, 1968), 59-60. The source was Mrs. Fred Nash, Edenshaw’s granddaughter. See also Robin Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2001), 159-60. Edenshaw at this time lived in the vicinity of Langara Island but frequented Skidegate. See Rooney to Edenshaw, 10 October 1852, in Charles Harrison, *Ancient Warriors of the North Pacific: The*

recorded a version of Edenshaw's "narrative," noted that his actions with respect to the gold discovery yielded him "numerous bales of blankets which afterwards assisted him in furthering his desire of becoming the most powerful chief on the islands."²⁵ For Albert Edenshaw, the discovery of gold represented an opportunity for establishing or confirming status within Haida society.

Some have questioned the historiography of the "rise" of Edenshaw, so it should be noted that there are glimmerings of an alternative discovery narrative involving other participants.²⁶ William Downie, who visited Gold Harbour in 1859, offered a sparse account, making no reference to Edenshaw: the presence of gold was revealed to the HBC "by an Indian known ever since as Captain Gold."²⁷ George Macdonald appears to accept this version, noting that the chief of Chaatl was Nankilstas and that the individual who occupied the position in 1850 "was known to the whites as Captain Gold because he and his wife made the first find of gold on these Islands." That the owners of the territory containing the gold should have a different view is not surprising as there was evidence of tension with other groups, and, as Sparrow remarks, "in Haida oral tradition there exists no single authoritative interpretation of events."²⁸

Contemporaneous documents shed some light on this question but do not resolve it. The Fort Simpson journals for the years 1844 to 1851 have not survived, but officers of HMS *Virago*, who visited Haida Gwaii and Fort Simpson in 1853, confirmed part of the story, if not the names of the participants. G.H. Inskip, the shipmaster, learned that an old Haida woman, after being shown samples of gold at Fort Simpson, "remembered having seen a large lump of the same kind of mineral when she was quite a girl. She told her husband, and they went to the spot." When shown to HBC officers, the sample "proved to be nearly all pure gold, and weighed 21 ounces." It is also likely that some kind of "reward" or agreement to

Haidas, Their Laws, Customs and Legends, with some Historical Account of the Queen Charlotte Islands (London: H.F. & G. Witherby, 1925), 173-74.

²⁵ *Queen Charlotte Islander*, 2 September 1912, article on Chief Edenshaw.

²⁶ Marianne Boelscher, *The Curtain Within: Haida Social and Mythical Discourse* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 42-44; Kathy Bedard Sparrow, "Correcting the Record: Haida Oral Tradition in Anthropological Narratives," *Anthropologica* 40, 2 (1998): 215-22.

²⁷ W. Downie, *Hunting for Gold* (San Francisco: California Publishing Co., 1893), 214.

²⁸ Sparrow, *Correcting the Record*, 221; George MacDonald, *Haida Monumental Art: Villages of the Queen Charlotte Islands* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1983), 123. He adds that the old woman was the wife of Captain Gold (*ibid.*, 55). Work noted of people of the gold district that they are "constantly committing depredations on their neighbours; they have had less intercourse with the whites, and are not to be trusted, but ought to be strictly guarded against" (Work to Douglas, 6 August 1851, PRO, CO 305/4: 23off). See note 30 below.

trade any samples brought to HBC forts was offered.²⁹ As for the role of Edenshaw and/or Captain Gold in the discovery, the documentary record sheds little light. The former first appears in May 1852, during the sixth HBC expedition, when he arrived at Fort Simpson, apparently from the gold area. The latter is described as “the chief who claims this territory, and who has received the name of the Gold Captain,” but not until 1853.³⁰

AGREEMENT, POST, TREATY

The first HBC expedition, under Pierre Legace, left Fort Simpson “under the safe conduct of a party of Natives,” suggesting some form of negotiations had taken place prior to departure. However, “Legace was not permitted to enter the El Derada,” according to Douglas, because “of the jealousy of two influential Chiefs who threw every possible difficulty in his way.”³¹ It seems likely that the “safe conduct” had been negotiated with a group who did not control either the territory of the gold deposits or the route (through Skidegate Channel) to the aforementioned territory on the west coast of Haida Gwaii.³² A further indication of internal Haida geopolitics emerged in the fall of 1850, when a “party of Natives from the Gold District, a weak tribe oppressed by all their neighbours visited Fort Simpson.” They brought no gold with them as they “were afraid of being plundered by their enemies on the way”; however, they reported that gold was “abundant,” although procurement was difficult “without the aid of proper tools.” The Haida group are not further identified, presumably the elders from Kaisun and/or Chaatl, but Douglas informed London, early in 1851, that they had “made an offer of their lands to the Company at a price to be agreed upon hereafter and begged hard that people might be sent immediately to form an establishment there.”³³ Douglas’s statement raises important questions: Who initiated these discussions – the Haida or the HBC? If the Haida, what did they

²⁹ In 1852, when a Tsimshian chief brought a few small pieces of “Gold ore” and “two large pieces of Quartz Rock with a few particles of gold” to the fort he was given “a large Canoe value 5 Elk Skins” (HBCA, B 201/a/7, 8 April 1852).

³⁰ HBCA B 201/a/7, 9 May 1852; BCA, Add Mss 805, Inskip Journal, 24 May 1853; Inskip, “Remarks,” 630; UBCL, reel 5028, Hills Journal, 24 May 1853.

³¹ Douglas to Work, 13 November 1850, HBCA, B 226/b/3. Douglas is responding to a letter from Work of 5 September, on his arrival at Fort Simpson, which has not survived. Bowsfield, *Fort Victoria Letters*, 151–59, Douglas to Barclay, 24 February 1851.

³² The fourth, fifth, and sixth HBC expeditions avoided the complications of the Skidegate route by proceeding direct to the west coast, either from Fort Simpson or Victoria.

³³ Bowsfield, *Fort Victoria Letters*, 151–59, Douglas to Barclay, 24 February 1851. Douglas refers to a party of Haida “from the Gold District.”

understand by “an offer of their lands to the Company at a price to be agreed upon”? Can we assume that there was a common understanding of these negotiations?

Douglas’s interpretation of the Haida “offer” needs to be placed in the context of the treaties negotiated on Vancouver Island between 29 April and 1 May 1850.³⁴ The HBC’s thinking on the question of “treaties” – the purchase of Aboriginal land – was spelled out in a letter to James Douglas the previous summer. Governor J.H. Pelly hoped that by “kind treatment & by entering into agreements with the chiefs for the occupation of all lands not actually required by them, all hostile feeling on their part may be removed.”³⁵ Two further treaties, covering the vicinity of Fort Rupert, were signed on 8 February 1851.³⁶ It was just two weeks later that Douglas informed the governor and committee of the aforementioned Haida “offer” regarding land and the establishment of an HBC post on Haida Gwaii. This information was part of an ongoing exchange of opinions among HBC officials in London, Montreal, and Victoria about the wisdom of establishing a post on Haida Gwaii and, as part of that process, coming to an agreement with the Haida.³⁷ In spite of disappointing results from the Company expeditions, Simpson (in Montreal) and the governor and committee (in London) remained bullish on the HBC’s prospects for Haida Gwaii. Final determination on establishing a post and its corollaries, however, was left to Chief Factor Douglas.³⁸

It is also clear that the Haida continued to express their interest in the establishment of a post and, thereby, an agreement of some kind with the HBC. When Douglas issued his instructions to John Kennedy for

³⁴ British Columbia, *Papers Connected with the Indian Land Question, 1850-1875* (Victoria: Government Printer, 1875), 5-11. Further treaties were signed at Fort Rupert, 8 February 1851, Saanich, 7-11 February 1852, and Nanaimo, 23 December 1854.

³⁵ Pelly to Douglas, 3 August 1849, HBCA, B 226/c/1, f 13. It has not been determined when this letter was received, but it clearly arrived after Douglas’s letter of 3 September 1849 in which the latter’s views were not much different (Bowsfield, *Fort Victoria Letters*, 43, Douglas to G&C, 3 September 1849). A template for the “agreements” was forwarded from London in the middle of December, but it did not reach Victoria until after the initial treaties had been signed (Barclay to Douglas, 17 December 1849, HBCA, A 6/28).

³⁶ Register of Land Purchases from Indians, BCA, Add Mss 772.

³⁷ Bowsfield, *Fort Victoria Letters*, 151-59, Douglas to Barclay, 24 February 1851; Simpson to Barclay, 21 December 1850, HBCA, A 12/5, f 279; Barclay to Simpson, 10 January 1851, HBCA, 1A 6/29, p. 47; Simpson to BoM, 11 January 1851, HBCA, D 4/42.

³⁸ For example, Simpson thought that Work had been unduly pessimistic about the prospects following the fourth expedition: “Work seems to have expected that there would be ‘gold diggings’ as in California, & that he would only have to scoop up & wash the gold sand to gather a plentiful harvest . . . he states, as if disappointed that he ‘found nothing but small specks of gold’ in the debris, whereas I think that was a very satisfactory & encouraging result” (Simpson to Douglas, 2 December 1851, HBCA, D 4/44: 75).

the sixth HBC expedition in March 1852, he stated that, upon arrival, the first step should be to reach “a friendly arrangement with the Natives for working the Mines.” The rationale, in part, was that:

The Indians of Gold Harbour having repeatedly, both to Mr. Work and yourself, agreed to surrender the District about Gold Harbour into our hands for the purpose of building a Trading Post, you will accept the surrender on those terms, in addition to a reasonable amount of compensation by way of purchase money. That being effected let a strong breast work of rough logs be thrown up round the mine, and warn the Indians that they are not to enter the enclosure without leave.³⁹

Thus the HBC regarded the establishment of a post and access to the mining area as linked, and it saw both as being dependent upon an agreement with (and purchase from) the Haida: the language of the Douglas Treaties. This, it may be argued, amounts to an implicit recognition of Aboriginal title beyond the confines of Vancouver Island.

It should be noted, however, that the Company’s constitutional position with regard to Haida Gwaii differed from that concerning Vancouver Island. Unlike on the latter, the HBC was not in a position to “conclude formal treaties” on Haida Gwaii, where it possessed a licence for exclusive trade but no proprietary rights.⁴⁰ However, the HBC could make an oral agreement with the Haida, for whom it would be a “formal” one. Some such arrangement seems to have been made: Douglas was able to report that the sixth expedition had taken “unmolested possession of the only surface vein in Gold Harbour with the consent and approbation of the natives.”⁴¹

How, then, are we to interpret these statements about the Haida of Gold Harbour desiring to “sell” or “surrender” land to the HBC? Again, the context of the Douglas Treaties is instructive. While the Company seems to have regarded these agreements on Vancouver Island as primarily real estate transactions, First Nations viewed them as agreements about how the two sides should henceforth live together. In the words

³⁹ Douglas to Kennedy, 18 March 1852, HBCA, B 226/b/4.

⁴⁰ Vaughan, “Cooperation and Resistance,” 32-36.

⁴¹ H.H. Bancroft, *History of Washington, Idaho, and Montana, 1845-1889* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), 3157 states that the *Exact*, an American vessel, spent some four months cruising Haida Gwaii, including a brief stop at Mitchell Harbour, where the “Indians ... represented that they had sold the island to the H.B.Co., and were to defend it from occupation by Americans.” However, Douglas’s instructions to Kennedy imply that the agreement had not been reached at the departure of the sixth expedition, whereas the *Exact* was at Haida Gwaii between the fifth and the sixth expeditions.

of legal historian Hamar Foster, writing of the Saanich Treaty and the accompanying oral tradition:

[They] believed that they were agreeing to peaceful relations, to share the right to harvest certain resources, and to allow a limited number of colonists to occupy some of the lands they were not themselves occupying. The oral tradition about the Treaty that has been handed down among the Twawout reflects this view.⁴²

Whether the Haida had any knowledge of these developments on Vancouver Island is not known, although the possibility cannot be dismissed. It is, however, reasonable to suggest that the HBC officers interpreted the “offers” by the Haida within the template of the Douglas Treaties: the description of a “surrender,” in this view, reflects the perceptions of the Company officers rather than what the Haida proposed.

The Haida, it may be argued, had two distinct but related objectives in their discussions with HBC officers: the establishment of a post in their territory and some form of understanding about access to the gold deposits. The Haida by this time were fully aware of the economic benefits that the Gispaxlo’ots (and the other Tsimshian tribes residing at Lax Kw’alaams) derived from having Fort Simpson located on their land: control of access to the source of trade goods. For those in whose territory the deposits lay, a post would help to address their reported “weakness” vis-à-vis other Haida groups. In his summary report on the second, third, and fourth HBC expeditions Work observed: “They were very friendly afterwards, both when the steamer [Beaver] and Una went to their country. Should a fort be established at the gold mine, not only these two tribes, but several others on the island would frequent, and probably reside at it.”⁴³ Access to the gold deposits was another matter.

ACCESS TO THE GOLD: BLASTING AND SCRAMBLES

The HBC expeditions, and later American parties, brought a more effective technology for recovering quantities of ore-bearing quartz. As early as the second HBC expedition, drills and blasting powder were

⁴² Hamar Foster, “The Saanichton Bay Marina Case: Imperial Law, Colonial History and Competing Theories of Aboriginal Title,” *UBC Law Review* 23, 1 (1989): 632; Janice Rose Knighton, “The Oral History of the 1852 Saanich Douglas Treaty: A Treaty for Peace” (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2004), 12–21. For a broader geographic view of such agreements, see S. Banner, *Possessing the Pacific: Land Settlers and Indigenous People from Australia to Alaska* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 209.

⁴³ Memorandum, Work to Douglas, 6 August 1851, PRO, CO 305/4: 230. On the weakness of the west coast groups, see note 33 above.

employed. The Haida were not opposed to these innovations, rather the opposite. Work described the Haida as “very friendly,” showing him “all about the mine”; however, they became “dissatisfied and disappointed” that the second expedition “found no gold by blasting” as it dampened “their hopes of having a fort.”⁴⁴ Blasting was repeated on the fourth expedition – but Work says little about the reactions of the Haida on this occasion. To this point the available evidence suggests that, apart from the difficulties experienced by Lagace, the Haida response to the HBC expeditions was “friendly.”

As Patricia Vaughan notes, the situation changed with the fifth expedition. Douglas, in a report to Governor Colville, indicated that the shift occurred as the expedition moved to blasting. Initially, the Haida at Gold Harbour had been

quiet and friendly, but they soon changed their behaviour. After two blasts had been made in the vein, and the Gold began to show itself, they became perfectly frantic and struggled to gain possession of the gold. Knives and fire arms were repeatedly resorted to on both sides, and Matters at length assumed so serious an aspect all the parties having become excited by these contests, that the men refused to land, or continue the work, unless measures were taken to repel the Indian by force of arms.⁴⁵

McNeill, a major source of the information conveyed by Douglas, referred to “a regular scramble” between the Haida and the HBC men following a blast. In the log of the *Una* he was more explicit about the difficulties the expedition faced in dealing with the Haida.⁴⁶

After anchoring at Gold Harbour on 21 October, blasting commenced the next day, when the Haida caused difficulties “by stealing the tools, and taking the Gold &c.” Three days later, after another round of blasting, the Haida “st[ole] half of the Gold and our men ha[d] to fight for all they obtain[ed].” For the men working on shares, this was “discouraging.” By the twenty-eighth they had had enough: “they could not work on shore without their lives being in danger from the Natives, and it was of no use or profit to themselves or any one to work blasting as the Indians got about two thirds of the Gold that was to be procured after

⁴⁴ John Work, Journal, 23 and 24 May 1851, UBCSC.

⁴⁵ Vaughan, “Cooperation and Resistance,” 32–36; Douglas to Eden Colville, 16 March 1852, HBCA, B 226/b/6.

⁴⁶ McNeill to Douglas, 20 November 1851, HBCA, B 226/c/1. Staines learned that the Haida “contested the possession of the gold with the *Una*’s people. They scrambled, struggled & fought for it” (Staines to Boys, 6 July 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 495ff).

the blast was made.” The mining party told McNeill that “they did not wish to remain &c.” Some prospecting in adjacent areas was undertaken in the following days, but on 4 November, during a meeting, the men informed McNeill “that it was of no use to remain longer as they could not work on shore without fighting, and something serious would take place if the Indians continue[d] to ill use and steal from them as heretofore.” The following day the *Una* sailed for Fort Simpson, and, in his report written at the conclusion of the expedition, McNeill summed up the response of the Haida: “they told us to be off.” On leaving, however, McNeill informed those Haida present that “we should be back in four months and they seemed to be pleased.”⁴⁷ In other words, while the Haida had asserted their control of access to the resource, they still welcomed the prospect of a further trading party (and the establishment of a post).

What, then, was different about the fifth expedition? Clearly, not the use of blasting. During the second expedition, Work reported that the Haida had been disappointed at its lack of results, not at its use. Part of the answer may lie in the perception of a shift from prospecting towards production: blasting was more extensive, and the scale of ore production expanded – amounting to approximately sixty pounds compared to fewer than four pounds on the fourth expedition. McNeill certainly thought that the increase in scale and greater success in extracting ore contributed to the Haida responses. “The natives,” he informed Douglas, “were very jealous of us when they saw that we could obtain Gold by blasting, they had no idea that so much could be found below the surface.”⁴⁸ In the log of the *Una*, McNeill elaborated on this point and voiced something of his understanding of Haida objections to the current operations: “They i.e. the Indians are very jealous of us, and say it is better for us to be off as if we remain and work the diggins [*sic*] that they will have nothing to trade with Ships when they may come here.”⁴⁹ There is also some evidence, albeit second-hand, that the Haida sought some kind of agreement to deal with the new conditions. The Reverend Staines, in Victoria, learned from a member of the expedition that “one of the chiefs proposed to McGregor [HBC miner] that after a blast was made, they should divide the proceeds, & avowed his great liberality in allowing to McGregor for the larger share; for that he wd only take the yellow metal,

⁴⁷ Log of the *Una*, BCA, A/C/20.5/Un1; McNeill to Douglas, 20 November 1851, HBCA, B 226/c/1.

⁴⁸ McNeill to Douglas, 20 November 1851, HBCA, B 226/c/1.

⁴⁹ Log of the *Una*, 28 October 1851, BCA, A/C/20.5/Un1.

while McGregor shd have all the bulk of the rock.”⁵⁰ Staines’s tone can be described as one of mild amusement at the apparent impudence of inferiors. However, if viewed in the light of Haida desires to come to an agreement with the HBC, it may embody components of what such an agreement would have included: some form of sharing.

Another possible factor is the change in personnel for the fifth expedition: the party included individuals who may have had more knowledge of mining, but they lacked experience of the First Nations of the Northwest Coast. McNeill, at one point, noted that “no one on board except myself” could speak to the Haida. The problems of communication, together with the terms of “employment,” certainly added to the disciplinary problems described by McNeill, some of which involved relations with the Haida – private trading of gold. The incentive of “shares,” as opposed to wages, may have encouraged an aggressive stance and competitiveness – the scrambles after blasting. That the Haida distinguished between the HBC officers and the “miners” is indicated by McNeill’s report that they informed him that “they [would] not allow any one to work the Gold except Mr. Work, Doctor Kennedy or myself.”⁵¹

Finally, there is McNeill himself. A contradictory and, to judge by his comments and comments about him, an acerbic character. Shortly before heading up the fifth expedition, his treatment of non-Native coal miners at Fort Rupert had ended in confrontation and official criticism. Simpson regarded McNeill’s treatment of those miners as “quite of a piece with his former mode of dealing with the Company’s Servants, which, together with his unfortunate irritability of temper, disqualifie[d] him for the command of a body of men ashore.”⁵² On the other hand, McNeill had long experience of the Northwest Coast and its inhabitants: he had spent much of his adult life navigating its waters, dating back to the mid-1820s, including visits to Haida Gwaii. In the process he had acquired a Kaigani Haida wife who had died in childbirth in November 1850 but left behind ten mixed-blood children.⁵³ But his claim to Douglas that if “[he] could

⁵⁰ Staines to Boys, 6 July 1852, enclosure in Boys to Desart, 11 October 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 495ff.

⁵¹ Log of the *Una*, 5 November 1851, BCA, A/C/20.5/UN1; McNeill to Douglas, 20 November 1851, HBCA, B 226/c/1.

⁵² Simpson to Douglas, 15 November 1850, HBCA, D 4/42.

⁵³ McNeill to Simpson, 5 March 1851, Victoria, HBCA, D 5/30. For McNeill’s career, see Watson, Bruce M. *Lives Lived West of the Divide: A Biographical Dictionary of Fur Traders Working West of the Rockies, 1793-1858* (Kelowna: Centre for Social, Spatial and Economic Justice, University of British Columbia, Okanagan, 2010), 676-77; and DCB, online at http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcneill_william_henry_10E.html.

not get on with the natives at Mitchells Harbour with a small force [he did] not know who [could]" is undermined by the management of the sixth expedition.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, Douglas, with an eye to justifying an expensive undertaking, found grounds for optimism. He referred to "the good feeling existing on both sides" and pointed to the fact that no "serious accidents took place during the excitements of the three days scramble for Gold" described by McNeill.⁵⁵ Douglas also, as described above, explicitly instructed the sixth expedition to come to an agreement with the Haida, and, subsequently, he was able to inform the Colonial Office that the party had secured "possession" of the gold deposit "with the consent and approbation of the Native Indians, who ha[d] lived on the most friendly terms with the party, ever since their arrival." With this arrangement in place, and the sixth expedition still in the field, the HBC projected it into the future: it was its intention "to maintain the footing ... already acquired on the Island and thoroughly to explore its mineral resources."⁵⁶

PROTECTING THEIR INTERESTS

Up to fifth HBC expedition, Haida men and women visited the prospecting area by canoe, returning to Kaisun or Chaatl as necessary for provisions. However, as that expedition drew to a close, a small number of canoes either remained or came "for no other purpose than to watch our movements."⁵⁷ At the conclusion of the expedition, McNeill added: "Should a fort be built or a Ship remain at the diggings 'for a length of time,' a large number of Indians would collect, and reside near at hand and give annoyance."⁵⁸ It was presumably in the 1852 season that the Haida established Sqai'-tao, a settlement located south of the vein of quartz and Una Point in Mitchell Inlet (Figure 1). Captain Kuper, of HMS *Thetis*, confirmed the presence of a considerable number of Haida in the vicinity of Gold Harbour in June 1852: at "one time" there were "upwards of 100 Canoes round the ship."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ McNeill to Douglas, 20 November 1851, BCA, A/B/20/Si22. This document is supplementary to McNeill's official report of the same date. McNeill certainly had no great opinion of gold miners, at this time or later (FSJ, 10 August 1859).

⁵⁵ Bowsfield, *Fort Victoria Letters*, 250-52, Douglas to Barclay, 28 December 1851.

⁵⁶ Douglas to Grey, 28 May 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 113; Douglas to Kennedy, Fort Victoria, 4 June 1852, HBCA, B 226/b/4.

⁵⁷ Log of the *Una*, 21, 23, 30, 31 October and 1 November 1851, BCA, A/C/20.5/Un1.

⁵⁸ McNeill to Douglas, 20 November 1851, Fort Simpson, HBCA, B 226/c/1, 218.

⁵⁹ Kuper to Moresby, 20 July 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 272.

When HMS *Virago* visited Mitchell Inlet in the summer of 1853, William Hills noted “the remains of the large Indian village where nearly the whole population of Queen Charlotte’s Islands collected during the digging” – clearly an exaggeration. However, he later suggested that the Haida had “assembled to the number of upwards of 1000 men” in the vicinity.⁶⁰ Although these numbers must be viewed with some scepticism, people certainly came to the west coast from other villages on Haida Gwaii – and some from Russian Territory.⁶¹

What was “annoyance” for McNeill, it may be argued, was the Haida “protecting their interests.” Although short-lived, the “village,” and presumably the events surrounding its construction, remained in the Haida collective memory. John Swanton’s list of Haida towns, based on information collected some forty years after the events at Gold Harbour, includes Sqai’-tao, which was “sometimes spoken of as a town, [although it] was only a Haida camp formed during the rush for gold to Gold Harbor.”⁶² Such resettlements, as McNeill’s observation implies, were part of the fabric of fur trade relations on the Northwest Coast.

BOSTON MEN AND KING GEORGE MEN

The Haida, like other Northwest Coast First Nations, had distinguished between King George men (British) and Boston men (American) since the days of the maritime fur trade.⁶³ This distinction, together with the perception that the Haida were particularly hostile towards Americans,

⁶⁰ Hills Journal, 25 May 1853, UBCL, reel 5028. At Skidegate, Hills commented on being visited by twenty-five canoes, with “at least ten persons in each male and female” (ibid., 14 May).

⁶¹ The combined population of Kaisun and Chaatl, according to Work’s undated (1836-41) census, was 890, of whom 211 were “men.” See George M. Dawson, “Report on the Queen Charlotte Islands, 1878,” *Geological Survey of Canada: Report of Progress for 1878-1879* (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1880), 173B. However, the population subsequently fell as a result of measles and perhaps smallpox. In 1851, Work reported of Kaisun and Chaatl: “I think [there] are not over from 100 to 150 men in number” (Work to Douglas, 6 August 1851, PRO, CO 305/4: 230ff). A map of Mitchell Harbour and vicinity, drawn in 1869, contains the notation “Narrow valley travelled by Indians to Cumshawa” on the east side of Mudge Harbour – indicating an overland route linking east and west coasts that could have been used in 1851-52 (Woodcock to Trutch, 1 July 1869, BCA, GR 1069, vol. 25, item 162, file 1). See note 88 below.

⁶² John R. Swanton, “Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida,” *Publications of the Jessup North Pacific Expedition 5, Memoirs of the American Museum of Civilization 8*, 1 (1905): 1-300. Swanton’s fieldwork on Haida Gwaii extended from September 1900 to August 1901.

⁶³ Captain Bishop, off Kaigani in 1795, reported that a local chief, Illtadza, who came on board the *Ruby* with “Confidence and taking me by the Hand Said ‘How do you do Sir.’ ‘Cluto (ship) be England King George Cluto.’ ‘He be Boston Cluto.’ ‘When answered it was an English ship He expressed great Satisfaction.’” See Michael Roe, ed., *The Journal and Letters of Captain Charles Bishop on the North-West Coast of America, in the Pacific and in New South Wales, 1794-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

percolated into American accounts – but not in a uniform or consistent fashion. An early report published in both Oregon and California, but emanating from the HBC's fourth expedition, stated that the Haida were "very friendly to the whites ... [and] anxious to have them come and trade and dig with them."⁶⁴ These sentiments may have been influenced by a desire to promote a further voyage to Haida Gwaii as, when the *Damariscove* reached Mitchell Harbour in November 1851, the party was "so daunted by the hostile aspect of the Natives, that the Master put to sea again without allowing any of his party to land."⁶⁵ On returning to Puget Sound in December 1851, it was reported that the Haida "were in force and made so warlike a demonstration as to compel" the members of the party, "being few in number[,] to hasten their departure."

Another report published in California, with information derived from the HBC's fifth expedition and the voyage of the *Damariscove*, represented the Haida "as very hostile towards the whites, and particularly the Americans." When the *Exact* returned to American territory before the end of March 1852, the party's experience had differed little: "We made only one blast, and ... found we should have to fight for what we got and we thought the better part of valor was to get more strength."⁶⁶ There was clearly a sense that John Bull was behind the obstructions that the Haida presented to American prospectors. According to one report, the HBC "had doubtless taught" the Haida that "all other people, especially Americans or 'Boston men,' were intruders not to be tolerated."⁶⁷ At least one vessel sought to overcome this difficulty by flying the Union Jack; others vessels employed former HBC personnel.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *Oregon Spectator*, 14 October 1851, reprinted in the *Sacramento Daily Union*, 29 October 1851. The source was William Rowland, of the *Georgianna*, who had been on the fourth HBC expedition. Another report stated that letters received at Astoria by January 1852 indicated that an expedition to Haida Gwaii had "found the natives friendly" (*Alta California*, 29 January 1852 – Shipping Intelligence).

⁶⁵ Charles Weed, "Queen Charlotte Island Expedition," UBCL, reel 10719; Bowsfield *Fort Victoria Letters*, 250–52, Douglas to Barclay, 28 December 1851.

⁶⁶ *Weekly Alta California*, 14 February 1852, news from Oregon via arrival of the *Columbia*; *Alta California*, 8 March 1852, Gold Discoveries at Queen Charlotte Islands. On the voyage of the *Exact*, see: *Oregonian* 30 March 1852; *Alta California*, 15 April 1852.

⁶⁷ William Turner, "Gold-Hunting on Queen Charlotte's Island," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 14, 2 (1875): 169. A report in San Francisco reflected the ongoing animosity: "there will soon be an attempt made on the part of John Bull, or his watchful and busy monopolizing companies on this coast to take possession of the mineral wealth in the name of the crown" (*Alta California*, 8 March 1852). See note 35 above.

⁶⁸ Turner, "Gold-Hunting," 169, states: "although sailing under false colors, [we] were quite willing to accept the protection assured by British bunting protection too frequently denied by our own flag." In addition to William Rowland of the *Georgianna*, former HBC men Herbert Jeal and William Jackson served on the *Exact* and the *Damariscove*, respectively. See

On the other hand, the antagonism of the Haida towards Americans was neither random nor unremitting. American encounters with Haida women (discussed below), a Haida man who travelled on the *Exact* to Puget Sound and was described as “a very good fellow,” and the use of Haida pilots by at least two American vessels indicate amiable encounters.⁶⁹ Even William Turner on the *Tépíc*, apprehensions notwithstanding, was pleasantly surprised: the Haida were “perfectly friendly ... We had expected the Indians to be sullen and hostile, but found them over-friendly so much so, indeed, that boarding-nettings were absolutely necessary to prevent them from crowding our decks.”⁷⁰ Moreover, as the account of the *Eagle* indicates, the Haida continued to trade gold with the second phase of visiting American parties – albeit at inflated prices.⁷¹ But Haida responses were not the same as American perceptions of them – something made clear in the case of the *Georgianna* and the *Susan Sturgis*.

THE WRECK OF THE *GEORGIANNA* AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE *SUSAN STURGIS*

Two incidents connected with the rush of Americans to Haida Gwaii shaped contemporary and subsequent perceptions of the Haida: the wreck of the *Georgianna* and the capture of the *Susan Sturgis*.⁷² The former, under force of weather, abandoned its attempt to reach Gold Harbour and sailed up the east coast of Haida Gwaii only to run aground in the vicinity of Cumsheewa. Here the local Haida exercised what may be called their “rights of salvage”: these extended to both property and persons.⁷³ The crew members were eventually “ransomed” to the HBC

Douglas to Barclay, 18 March 1852, HBCA, B 226/b/6; McNeill to Douglas, 8 January 1852, BCA, A/B/20/S122; Staines to Boys, 6 July 1852, CO 305/3: 495ff.

⁶⁹ The *Georgianna* and the *Susan Sturgis* both used Haida pilots. See Rowlands to Officer Commanding Fort Simpson, 21 November 1851, BCA, A/C/20/R79. See also note 72 below.

⁷⁰ Turner, “Gold-Hunting,” 173; *Oregonian*, 30 March 1852; *Alta California*, 15 April 1852, ‘Later from Oregon—the Queen Charlotte gold mines.’

⁷¹ *Alta California*, 14 July 1852 – letter from Oregon. An earlier report claimed that the Haida had been “spoiled by the H.B.Co. and want in barter, more than twice the value of their gold” (*Alta California*, 15 April 1852).

⁷² Drew Crooks, “Shipwreck, Captivity and Rescue: The Georgianna Expedition to the Queen Charlotte Islands,” in *Past Reflections: Essays on the Hudson’s Bay Company in the Southern Puget Sound Region*, ed. Drew Crooks, 14–24 (Tacoma: Fort Nisqually Foundation, 2002).

⁷³ Dawson described the Haida rules in 1878: “So strict are these ideas of proprietary right in the soil, that ... woe to the dishonest Indian who appropriates anything of value – as for instance a stranded shark, or seal or sea-otter which has died from its wound – that comes ashore on the stretch of coast belonging to another” (Dawson, “Report on the Queen Charlotte Islands,” 1-189B, 117-8B, and 110B).

at Fort Simpson and returned to Puget Sound, where indignation had been loud, although not entirely universal. One correspondent to the *Oregon Spectator* observed:

Five blankets were given for every American. It was only paying them for the trouble and care bestowed upon them after the shipwreck. In fact our citizens have been always well treated by the Indians. They always had plenty of salmon and potatoes for food. So has terminated that unfortunate accident which has been represented under a very sinister aspect for want of information. So much for the savage tribes of Queen Charlott's [*sic*] Island.⁷⁴

The *Susan Sturgis* was on its third trip to Haida Gwaii in September 1852, seeking to procure fish and spars rather than gold, when it was captured off Massett and destroyed. Once again the crew members were ransomed by the HBC at Fort Simpson. No satisfactory explanation has been offered for this incident: Why was this vessel attacked? Discussion has focused instead on the role (or responsibility) of Edenshaw, who was on board acting as a pilot during the events.⁷⁵ One potential explanation is that the Haida were responding to some prior action, deemed contrary to acceptable protocols, perpetrated by one of the American vessels visiting Haida Gwaii. If a Boston man had perpetrated some transgression, the response would be inflicted upon the next available vessel.⁷⁶

HAIDA WOMEN

Not surprisingly, given that the records generated by the rush to Haida Gwaii were written exclusively by non-Haida males, the presence of Haida women is not easy to discern. But whereas the people who visited

⁷⁴ *Oregon Spectator*, 24 February 1852, letter from Olympia (2 February 1852).

⁷⁵ B. Gough, "New Light on Haida Chiefship: The Case of Edenshaw, 1850-1853," *Ethnohistory* 29, 2 (1982): 131-39; B. Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-90* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984).

⁷⁶ Malloy has described the evolution of conflicts between American vessels and First Nations during the maritime fur trade: "As the trade evolved one violent episode led to another. An American captain, unable to produce the goods demanded by the Indians for their pelts would take hostages, demand furs as ransom, and then, after paying what he reckoned to be a 'reasonable' price, would leave the area. The Indians would retaliate against the next arriving ship, often killing the crew of a boat coming ashore for wood and water." See Mary Malloy, *"Boston Men" on the Northwest Coast: The American Maritime Fur Trade, 1788-1844*, Alaska History Series, no. 47 (Fairbanks: Limestone Press, 1998), 48. For an example of such a response by the Gitksan during the Omineca gold rush, see R. Galois, "The Burning of Kitsegukla, 1872," *BC Studies* 94 (1992): 59-81. See also comments by Douglas, *Victoria Gazette*, 28 July 1858; and Hamar Foster, "British Columbia Legal Institutions in the Far West, from Contact to 1871," *Manitoba Law Journal* 38 (1993): 301.

Haida Gwaii – seamen, prospectors, fur traders – were all male, the society they encountered was demographically balanced. Although Haida women probably took no part in actual mining, there were a variety of attendant, or related, activities that were not so gender bound. It is also noteworthy that the original discovery was the result of the acute observation and memory (environmental knowledge) of an “old” woman – if Inskip is to be believed the initial observation was made when she was “quite a girl.” Perhaps she had visited Mitchell Harbour as part of the round of resource procurement (maybe for clams, skil [black cod], birds’ eggs, or even bark).⁷⁷

Once Euro-Americans began to arrive at Haida Gwaii, Haida women were important in sustaining those who moved, albeit on a temporary basis, to the vicinity of Mitchell Harbour. The settlement at Sqai’-tao, even if not on the scale suggested by Hills, still required adaptations to provide the sustenance required for that population – some adjustments in the annual round and the regimen of procurement and processing. As Kuper remarked, from the first arrival of the *Thetis* at Mitchell Harbour in June 1852, the vessel was “daily surrounded by numbers of large canoes full of men, women, and children.” Other evidence indicates that people from villages other than Kaisun and Chaatl visited the Mitchell harbour area during this period.⁷⁸

Haida women were probably involved in the preparation and trade of supplies to visitors. At Gold Harbour, one prospector reported that “the wives of some of their chiefs were on board” the *Una*, though without specifying their purpose. McNeill, of the same expedition, reported that, when the vessel arrived at Gold Harbour, about fifteen canoes came alongside the vessel with “mostly women in them.” He offers no further information as to the reason for their presence, but at the end of his stay he noted: “we get no fish from the natives, but dry ‘Skill’” – black cod. He added that a “few Turnips were traded from them ... [and] Potatoes were offered.”⁷⁹ Processing of fish, and probably the cultivation of vegetables, were female roles, and visitors from the days of the maritime fur

⁷⁷ Swanton, “Contributions,” 19; Log of the *Una*, 22 and 31 October 1851, BCA, A/C/20.5/Un1; Work Journal, 23 May 1851, UBCSC. Inskip, “Remarks,” 630. An early report stated that the gold came from an island that the Haida “frequent for the eggs of sea birds.” See Bowsfield, *Fort Victoria Letters*, 109–14, Douglas to Barclay, 17 August 1850.

⁷⁸ Kuper to Moresby, 20 July 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 272; McNeill to BOM, 26 August 1852, BCA, A/B/20/S122. The HBC also complained that interest in the gold deposits disrupted hunting and trapping. See Work to Barclay, 8 January 1853, HBCA, A 11/74: 31.

⁷⁹ Log of the *Una*, 22 and 31 October, 1 November 1851, BCA, A/C/20.5/Un1; Staines to Boys, 6 July 1852, enclosure in Boys to Desart, 11 October 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 495ff.

trade had remarked on the prominent role of Haida women in trading.⁸⁰ William Hills, of HMS *Virago*, also noted that the women of Skidegate were “busy making cedar ... intended for barter with us” – as they may have done for visitors the previous summer.⁸¹

Haida women also engaged in sexual encounters with prospectors. Information on the topic is limited, but it was not a new development. Such exchanges were part and parcel of the fur trade.⁸² McNeill, now stationed at Fort Simpson, informed the Board of Management that the American vessels that had visited Haida Gwaii in 1852 “have had from 50 to 100 men onboard [and] they expended large quantities of property on women.”⁸³ The numbers are exaggerated but the interactions were confirmed by naval visitors the following summer. In May, William Hills at Skidegate reported that several “very small babies looking very white and fresh were shown us by their mothers, who explained to us that they owed them to the white men’s visit to that harbour.” One girl “had a letter from the Captain of an American Schooner, requesting all white people to be kind to her and his child whether boy or girl. However, he had reckoned his chickens before they were hatched for the girl told us, evidently with regret that she had no baby.”

HAIDA MINING

The Haida were familiar with probing “in the ground for pieces” of argillite, but their efforts to procure gold ore were initially hampered by their lack of “proper tools.” According to William Rowland, it was dug “without any thing like a pick or shovel – having nothing but such tools

⁸⁰ John Hoskins, after visiting the Kunghit Haida on the *Columbia* in 1791, observed: “the women in trade, as well as in every thing else, which came within our knowledge, appeared to govern the men; as no one dare to conclude a bargain without first asking his wife’s consent; if he did, the moment he went into his canoe, he was sure to get a beating.” See F.W. Howay, ed., *Voyages of the Columbia to the Northwest Coast, 1787-1790 & 1790-1793*, Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 79 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1941), 208. A decade later, at Skidegate, Ralph Haskins complained that: “a dozen or twenty prime skins were carried on Shore because the women would not allow their husbands to part with them for any other articles [than small-size wire].” See Ralph Haskins, “Journal of a Fur Trading Voyage from Boston to the Northwest Coast of America in the Ship *Atahualpa* 1800-1803,” Yale University Library, Western Americana, Ms. S-126, 25 March 1801.

⁸¹ UBCL, reel 5028, entry of 16 May 1853.

⁸² *Missionary Herald*, 27 February 1831, “Extracts from the Report of an Exploring Tour on the Northwest Coast of America in 1829” (2 May 1829). Work refers to “four Haidai half-breed lads” as part of the second HBC expedition. See Work to Douglas, 6 August 1851, PRO, CO 305/4: 230ff.

⁸³ McNeill to BOM, 26 August 1852, BCA, A/B/20/S122.

as they can make themselves.”⁸⁴ One alternative was to take – “steal” or “pilfer,” according to HBC sources – from Company expeditions; this seems to have contributed to the deterioration of relations during the fifth expedition.⁸⁵

However, the Haida also adapted their existing technology (possibly from the manufacture of canoes, boxes) to the circumstances of extracting quartz ore. In 1853, while at Mitchell Harbour, William Hills learned that the Haida employed “a species of mining; by lighting immense fires on the surface of rocks and then pouring water on it whilst red hot, which causes it to crack and loosen.” A growing familiarity with gold deposits is suggested by William Downie’s observation, following a visit in 1859, that “the Indians here understand gold very well and can see a speck of gold in the rock quicker than I can.”⁸⁶ This is corroborated by the report of an unidentified Haida chief arriving at Fort Simpson in 1857 with “two large pieces of Gold ore in his possession” and a request for “tools &c to work the Gold &c.”⁸⁷

OTHER MINERALS

The Haida interest in minerals, as potential items for trade, was not restricted to gold. As the sixth expedition returned to Victoria, McNeill, now stationed at Fort Simpson, reported receiving a specimen of “Copper ... discovered on the north end of Q.C.I. or rather a little South of North [Langara] Island.”⁸⁸ Douglas informed the colonial secretary that specimens of “lead and copper ore” had been procured on Haida Gwaii, which, “in a commercial view, [gave] it additional value.” A year later, Douglas added that he had received “a specimen of a massive ore, which

⁸⁴ Bowsfield, *Fort Victoria Letters*, 151–59, Douglas to Barclay, 24 February 1851; *Oregon Spectator*, 14 October 1851, letter by A.M. Poe, 8 September 1851. Rowland had been on the fourth HBC expedition, returning with “some beautiful specimens of virgin gold and gold bearing quartz.” At the time of writing the letter he was captain of the *Georgianna*, prior to its expedition to Haida Gwaii. On the procurement of argillite, see Deasy to Scott, 2 March 1918, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7918, file 41203-1.

⁸⁵ Log of the *Una*, 22 and 27 October 1851, BCA, A/C/20.5/Un1; Douglas to Grey, 29 January 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 84.

⁸⁶ Hills, 25 May 1853, UBCL, reel 5028; Downie to Douglas, 10 October 1859, BCA, GR 1372, file 487/4a. C.A. Bayley conveys similar information about Haida mining (see “Early Life on Vancouver Island,” UCBL, reel, 107.16), as does Brown, “Physical Geography, 385.”

⁸⁷ HBCA, B 201/a/8, 21 April 1857. An expedition that visited the Mitchell Harbour area in 1859 found that a “few of them [Kaisun people] have small specimens of gold, which they all say were obtained from the veins that were blasted by the white men” (*Victoria Gazette*, 30 August 1859).

⁸⁸ McNeill to BOM, 26 August 1852, BCA, A/B/20/S122. Likely the same deposit reported by Captain Prevost the following summer. See Prevost to Miller, 12 August 1853, PRO, CO 305/4: 200.

contain[ed] Manganese, Antimony and a small portion of silver” and that Captain Prevost, of HMS *Virago*, had obtained samples of “Arsenic and Antimony.”⁸⁹

The Haida also produced specimens of coal, a critical resource in the context of the growing economy of the west coast, and the HBC’s efforts to secure a workable deposit on Vancouver Island. The details of this discovery are not known, but a sample had reached Victoria by the spring of 1852. In his supplementary instructions to the sixth HBC expedition, Douglas ordered Kennedy to “make particular enquiries about Coal ... [as] very favourable indications of that mineral” had been found on Haida Gwaii.⁹⁰ There is no record of Kennedy following these instructions, but the officers of HMS *Virago* made up for the omission in 1853. While at Skidegate “specimens” of coal were “brought alongside” the vessel by “Chief Bear Skin” and his son. As a result, Captain Prevost, the “Chief Engineer,” and Charles Stuart of the HBC, with a Haida guide, spent a day “visiting the coal.” Prevost later described the location as about “ten miles from the anchorage of Skidegate.” He procured “2 Casks” of the coal for the vessel, noting that “it appears to be of good quality, but at present difficult to work.” The information was also conveyed to the British consul in Honolulu.⁹¹

The foregoing actions by the Haida to expand their resource base for trading purposes did not have immediate results, but the minerals of Haida Gwaii attracted intermittent attention during the colonial era. Such activities are beyond the scope of this article, but it will suffice to note that the final round of interest in the gold-quartz ore of Haida Gwaii during the colonial period occurred in 1869. In March of that year a party under W.H. Woodcock left Victoria for Gold Harbour to “search for gold bearing quartz.” Woodcock reported that he saw “specimens of silver ore that would assay \$800 to the ton” in the hands of the Haida,

⁸⁹ Douglas to Pakington, 27 August 1852, PRO, CO, 305/3: 131; Douglas to Newcastle, 8 June 1853, PRO, CO 305/4: 45; Prevost to Miller, 12 August 1853, PRO, CO 305/4: 200. Reverend Staines, in Victoria, learned of the discoveries of copper and antimony. See Staines to Boys, 6 July 1852, enclosure in Boys to Desart, 11 October 1852, PRO, CO 305/3: 495ff.

⁹⁰ Douglas to Kennedy, 4 June 1852, HBCA, B 226/b/4. Kennedy was at Mitchell Harbour by this time, and Douglas added that the “discovery of a workable seam of Coal would be far more valuable even than Gold, as it would be a lasting resource of wealth. In the present extension of Steam navigation in the Pacific, there is scarcely a limit to the demand, in fact I could at this moment dispose of 10,000 Tons a week, while unfortunately we have not a single bushel on hand.”

⁹¹ Prevost to Douglas, 29 May 1853, PRO, CO 305/4: 53; Prevost to Miller, 12 August 1853, PRO, CO 305/4: 200; Prevost to Moresby, 7 June 1853, Adm 1/5630; Inskip Journal, 14 May 1853, BCA, Add Mss 805; Hills Log of *Virago*, 16 May 1853, UBCL, reel 5028. Indications of coal were also found in the vicinity of Massett. See Prevost to Douglas, 23 July 1853, PRO, CO 305/4: 167; Prevost to Moresby, 23 July 1853, Adm 1/5360.

indicating their continued interest in mineral resources. Woodcock filed an application for a lease of land between “Mudge & Mitchell Harbours” that was filed and approved.⁹²

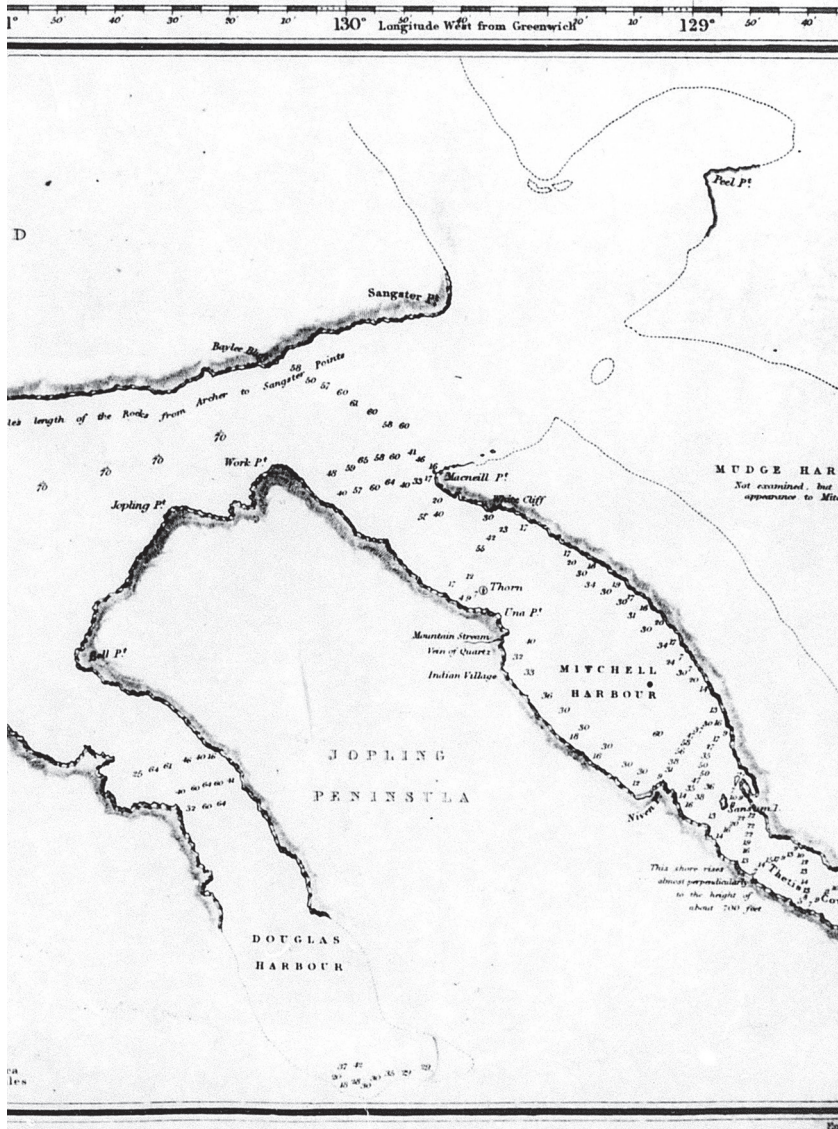
CONCLUSION

Settler society, well established south of the forty-ninth parallel, was to a considerable extent the result of gold discoveries in California. The extension of settler society to the north was slower but was encouraged by the discoveries on Haida Gwaii. The population became, in Rickard’s words, “gold conscious,” with consequences that would become apparent in the build-up to the Fraser River rush. Prospectors and mining parties visiting Haida Gwaii operated on different premises than had fur traders on the Northwest Coast. The latter had relied upon the Haida to procure the furs, which were obtained by trade. Prospectors and miners assumed that they would have direct access to the resource; they regarded the Haida not as partners but as a potential obstacle to the fulfilment of their objectives. Prospecting, in other words, represented a paradigm shift among non-Natives; henceforth, they would seek to procure, by their own endeavours, access to, and use of, the resources of Haida Gwaii.

The HBC occupied an intermediary position: a fur trading company, but increasingly interested in the commercial exploitation of other resources. The Company – albeit inconsistently – recognized that it would have to negotiate with the Haida to secure access to the gold deposits of Haida Gwaii; it was also aware of the formal process of acquiring First Nations territory. These developments contributed to thickening of imperial networks that can be seen as foreshadowing what would become the colony of British Columbia. The underlying principles of regulating gold mining were in place well before the rush to the Fraser River.

For the Haida the rush for gold represented a short-term disruption and the beginning of a longer-term transition in their relations with non-Natives. Haida responses to the immediate situation varied, but they were shaped initially by the protocols of the fur trade era. As in that era Haida women played an integral role in these new encounters. Some Haida also saw the influx of HBC and American vessels as an opportunity to improve their trading position – other minerals, provisions (fish, potatoes, berries), and artifacts (hats and argillite carvings). Some adapted to the new opportunities (trade, labour), sources of wealth, and, hence, status that the growth of settler society offered – both on Haida Gwaii and beyond.

⁹² *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 15 and 16 March, 31 May 1869; Woodcock to Trutch, 1 and 9 July 1869, BCA, GR 1069, box 25, item 162, file 1.



The Haida of the west coast, in whose territory the gold was found, sought to assert Indigenous patterns of ownership and to control the terms by which external agents gained access to Haida Gwaii and its resources. Given the attitudes of the prospecting parties some friction was inevitable, although geography and the balance of power gave the advantage to the Haida. The brevity of the rush meant that this situation

was not disturbed, although the advent of naval vessels may be seen as a symbol of the expanding colonial encounter.

Figure 1. Port Kuper, including Mitchell and Douglas harbours, 1853. Admiralty Chart 2168 (Extract).

NOTES TO FIGURE 1

The Admiralty Chart produced following the visit of HMS *Thetis* in 1852 shows the area adjacent to the “Vein of Quartz” that was the focus of attention, with the adjacent “Indian village.” The toponymy, based on recording naval and HBC figures, illustrates one aspect of the process of symbolic appropriation and erasure: no Haida names are included.

Naval

Mudge Harbour
 Thetis Cove
 Port Kuper
 Jopling Peninsula – should be Josling
 Peel Point
 Baylee Bay

HBC

Douglas Harbour
 Mitchell harbour
 Macneill Point
 Una Point
 Thorn Island
 Sansum Island
 Work Point
 Sangster Point
 Niven Point

For information on these locations and the honorifics, see Andrew Scott, *The Encyclopedia of Raincoast Place Names: A Complete Reference to Coastal British Columbia* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2009).