

"THESE RASCALLY SPACKALOIDS"

*The Rise of Gispaxlots Hegemony at Fort Simpson, 1832-40*¹

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SCHOLARS STUDYING THE ACCESSIBLE and well-documented Tsimshian peoples have constructed a model of trade and relations which revolves around the activities of the Coast Tsimshians, one division of one of the three powerful tribes of northern British Columbia and southeast Alaska: the Tlingits, Haidas, and Tsimshians. According to this view, the powerful Chief Legaic had emerged as early as 1740 (coincidentally enough one year prior to Bering's arrival in Alaska) as the Native leader whose control of the transportation and exchange of furs on the productive Skeena river formed a bulwark against Euroamerican encroachments.

The Gispaxlots chiefs Legaic have been featured in a wide variety of scholarly literature.² Franz Boas noted in 1916 that Legaic was the

¹ Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) B.201/a/5, Fort Simpson Journal, fo. 30d. "Spackaloids" is Work's rendering of Gispaxlots, or "elderberry place people" — a village of Coast Tsimshians formerly residing on the lower Skeena River of present-day British Columbia.

The Tsimshians are divided into four tribes: the Gitksans, Nisga'as, Coast Tsimshians and Southern Tsimshians; references to "Tsimshians" pertain to Coast Tsimshians unless otherwise noted. Each tribe is spatially divided into villages, which occupy traditional areas and enjoy certain localized prerogatives, while the society as a whole is divided into four exogamous clans, with the component "houses" (*walps*) each associated with one of the clans. Houses were matrilineages of persons nominally related, and were typically dispersed among dwellings or "households" (*tse walbs*). The households (which were also corporate matrilineages) in turn joined to form villages. Tsimshian society distinguishes among clan opposites, who are required to perform important functions in the ritual life of the community, and supply suitable marriage partners. For a comprehensive discussion of Tsimshian society, see Viola Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, University of Washington Publications in Anthropology, vol. 7, no. 3 (Seattle, 1939), 173-75.

The clans (*ptaax*) of the Coast Tsimshian include: Gispewudwada (Killer Whale), Laxkibu (Wolf), Laxskik (Eagle), and Ganhada (Raven).

² In addition to the works cited below, see Jean Usher, "William Duncan of Metlakatla: A Victorian Missionary in British Columbia," National Museum of Man Publications in History no. 5 (Ottawa, 1974), 36; James McDonald, "Images of the Nineteenth-Century Economy of the Tsimshian," in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present*, ed.

highest in rank among the Coast Tsimshian chiefs, and his family had exclusive title to prestigious ceremonies brought from the Kwakwaka'wakws (Kwakiutls).³ Viola Garfield observed that Legaic had monopolized the trading activities of his "tribe" (village), and had gained control over the trade up the Skeena, which was lost when the holder of the Legaic name was killed for insulting a slave; according to Garfield, the rights to trade up-river may have been transferred to the Hudson's Bay Company.⁴ Robert Grumet noted that the marriage of Legaic's daughter to post surgeon John Kennedy had created an alliance with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), and speculated that "[t]his move placed Legaic and his followers in a potentially prime economic position, that of the middleman between the Europeans and other Native groups."⁵ Eric Wolf less dramatically noted that Legaic had "engrossed" the trade of the upper Skeena River, without mentioning who controlled the lower reaches of the river, although his allusion later to a "confederation" of (Coast) Tsimshian "clusters" (villages) seems to imply that Legaic was the over-all leader.⁶ Most recently Douglas Cole and David Darling wrote that "The Gitksan

Margaret Seguin (Vancouver, 1984); and Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British-Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver, 1977).

³ Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology*, BAE, Thirty-first Annual Report (Washington DC, 1916; reprint ed. New York, 1970), 509. Boas also observed that the refugee Eagles from whom Legaic descended came among the Tsimshians only around 1740, and that his mother was a member of the Gispaxlots village. As it would have taken at least one generation for newcomers to be integrated into Tsimshian matrilineages, and the first Legaic would have had to have been the offspring of a first-generation woman, Legaic can hardly have risen to chiefly status much before 1780 if we accept Boas's statement, which he claimed "is undoubtedly correct" (*ibid.*, 510).

⁴ Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 183.

⁵ Robert S. Grumet, "Changes in Coast Tsimshian Redistributive Activities in the Fort Simpson Region of British Columbia, 1788-1862." *Ethnohistory* vol. 22, no. 4 (Fall 1975), 304. Grumet cited an unpublished B.A. essay to this effect, but the original source seems to be Boas, who claimed that Legaic loaned a camping place "on Rose Island" for a short time only (*Tsimshian Mythology*, 389). As the post was built on the mainland on Giludzau land (that village alone built on the east side of the post), one must question to what degree such an offer contributed to the HBC decision to relocate. See Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 177.

Grumet asserted that a large number of Tsimshians resided at the post from its founding, and cited Garfield to the effect that 240 houses were built at Fort Simpson in 1834-1835, with a permanent population of 3,000 people. The citation from Garfield does not refer to the nineteenth-century population, but instead gives the 1934-1935 population at Port Simpson (441 total). See Grumet, "Changes in Coast Tsimshian Redistributive Activities," 305 and Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 332.

The concept of a Tsimshian "confederation" comes in part from Philip Drucker's *Indians of the Northwest Coast* (New York, 1955; reprint ed. New York, 1963), where the latter posited the emergence of a confederacy among the Tsimshian villages moving to the post. Drucker also noted that "the individual tribes never quite gave up their old autonomy" (*ibid.*, 118), although Grumet transformed this confederacy (a process) into a confederation (a structure), headed by the autocratic Legaics.

⁶ Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, 1982), 189, 190.

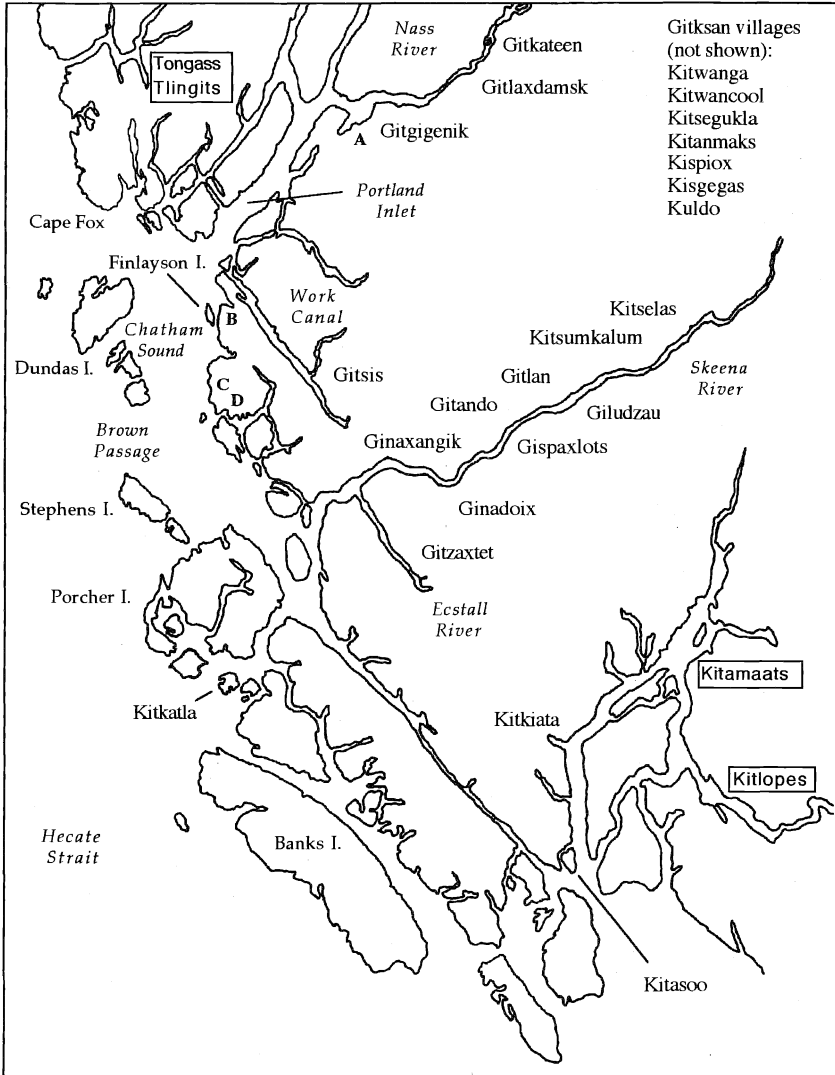


FIGURE I The location of villages and tribes with respect to the Skeena and Nass Rivers, 1831-40⁷

(Non-Tsimshian tribe names enclosed in boxes)

A. Fort Simpson 1831, B. Fort Simpson 1834, C. Pearl Harbour/Lax'ku, D. Metlakatla

⁷ This map is meant only to indicate relative locations of tribes, villages, trading posts and geographical features — it must not be taken as a definitive statement of territorial range or dominion.

of the upper Skeena were prevented *by force* from coming down-river to trade and the Haida were *forced* [my emphasis] to trade much of their potatoes through the Tsimshian” and that “[t]he enhancement of leaders was especially true of those tribes who were fortunately placed to capitalize upon the new commerce and its ramifications . . . Legaik on the Nass route [was] elevated far above the wealth and prestige of any who had preceded him.”⁸

The dominance of Legaic and the Gispaxlots in the scholarly literature of the Coast seems to have resulted from the second-hand use of *adawx* (‘true tradition’ — Tsimshian oral tradition), with little verification against the Euroamerican historical record.⁹ Native source materials often reflect an engaged point of view, rather than a generic pan-Native perspective, and should be examined with the same critical eye directed at often-suspect (but sometimes quite neutral) Euroamerican records. Oral traditions are liable to bias, commemorating the leading figures of an informant’s own village; this combined with collectors’ interests or prejudices makes them subject to some of the same problems as Euroamerican materials.¹⁰ An examination of the latter materials available indicates that the Gispaxlots village of the Coast Tsimshians rose to prominence only by 1840, and by 1862 were already in decline as traders (with the conversion of Paul Legaic by William Duncan, and the Euroamerican penetration of the Interior from the Coast).

THE ARRIVAL OF THE HBC ON THE SCENE

Soon after the union of the Hudson’s Bay Company with the Northwest Company in 1821, the management of the HBC in London became concerned about foreign incursions from the coast into the district of New Caledonia. London Committee Secretary William

⁸ Douglas Cole and David Darling, “History of the Early Period,” *The Northwest Coast*, Smithsonian Institution Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 7 (Washington, 1990), 125, 129.

⁹ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison WI, 1985), 17 ff, discusses “personal accounts” and “group accounts.” Much of the tradition recorded by Barbeau seems to fall under the former, while that published by Boas seems to fall into the latter category, which more closely corresponds to the Tsimshian concept of *adawx* in the sense of privileged information. The “personal accounts” are of greater use in reconstructing the recent pre-history of the Tsimshian, although where to draw the line between these two forms is often difficult to determine — such tales as “The Doughnut Tree” can probably be said *not* to be part of the corpus of *adawx*. Given the difficulty of making precise distinctions, however, I refer to all Tsimshian oral tradition recorded by Boas, Beynon, and Barbeau and cited in this paper as *adawx*.

¹⁰ See also Ralph Maud, *A Guide to B.C. Indian Myth and Legend* (Vancouver, 1982).

Smith instructed the Northern District Governor George Simpson to prevent the Russians from setting up posts as far south as 51° north: “we think it desirable to extend our trading posts as far to the west and north from Fraser’s River in Caledonia as may be practicable if there appears any reasonable prospect of doing so profitably,” and noted that the British government would probably support HBC claims to lands occupied by posts.¹¹

While constructing a post at Babine Lake (B.C.) in 1822, Chief Trader William Brown observed that “[given] the number of European utensils the Babines are possessed of, there are Russians or other Traders on the seacoast who supply them,” but later that year opined that coastal Natives came up-river to trade. Brown concluded that if this trade was not “checked in bud” the Native traders would “extend their Views and make their excursions longer so that in short time I would not be surprised to see them share the trade of not only this Lake but of Stuart’s and Fraser’s Lake also.”¹² Brown identified the Gitksans of the Skeena River as the “middlemen” who were responsible for the HBC’s sluggish trade, and explained his backward trade in terms of price and product quality, although he also made note of pre-existing trade ties:

On their arrival at a Village [the Gitksans] ascertain who have furs and the amount of them, on which they go to the persons lodge blow a parcel of swans down upon his head (which is reckoned a mark of great honor both amongst the Carriers and Atnahs [Gitksans]) and then commence dancing and singing a song in his praise, after which they make him a present and treat him with something to eat, when he according to the custom of his country makes them in return a present of his Furs, which if not equal to what he has received he adds Siffleu [marmot] robes and dressed skins to make up the value.¹³

The London committee had determined already in 1824 to take advantage of the down-river movement of furs by opening a coasting

¹¹ William Smith to George Simpson, 27 Feb. 1822, HBCA D.5/1, fo. 19.

¹² HBCA B.11/a/1, Babine Post journal, 50. “With the property [the Coast Natives] receive in this traffic they mount the River and Trade the Furs of the Indians of the Interior. By which they derive handsome Profits to themselves” (HBCA B.11/e/1, Babine Post District Report, 3-3d). While Brown observed that Coastal Natives conducted this trade, he did not indicate *which* Coastal Natives.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5d. Brown went on to note that the quality of foreign goods was improving, as three- and four-point blankets were appearing, as well as cartridge ammunition and other items, combined with forays all the way up to the upper Gitksan village, cleaning out the furs Brown hoped to get for the company.

trade, and purchased the vessel *William and Ann* for £1,500.¹⁴ Sailing in June 1825 from Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, master Henry Hanwell and clerk Alexander Mackenzie proceeded north, arriving on the twenty-fourth at Skidegate Inlet.¹⁵ The company men found the American influence pervasive, and their Haida interpreter Tom informed them that four vessels — all of New York or Boston registry — were or had been recently at the Queen Charlotte Islands.¹⁶ The omnipresent American and Russian firearms, combined with Tom's assertion that the American captains had established personal connections with the various villages with which they traded (some even having families there), convinced Mackenzie that the company had a struggle pending.¹⁷

Proceeding to Observatory Inlet, the *William and Ann* contacted the Nisga'as, who expressed surprise that the vessel had come so far up into dangerous waters possessed of neither beaver nor Natives. The Nisga'as were quick to open a trade, and "conceiving we knew nothing of the art made the most exorbitant demands for their few skins" receiving eventually three and one-half fathoms of red baize for all five beaver offered. More Nisga'as arrived over the next several days, including fifteen canoes with ninety well-armed men and women: "[We] never witnessed such a number of guns among an equal no. of indians before." European clothing was also popular, with some of the men in jackets, tartan cloaks, and caps, and the women dressed in calicoes and shifts with blankets over all, as was also the fashion at Skidegate and Kaigani according to Tom.

Over the next several days Mackenzie continued to trade with the Nisga'as, recording their trade preferences, and remarked that the Natives were better supplied with tobacco than was the ship's crew. The Nisga'as quickly noted this fact and "wished to enhance its value accordingly," attempting to trade with the crew at their own price. Such a prospect must have been galling to Mackenzie, who had come to do battle with "Jonathan" (Americans), and not haggle with a

¹⁴ William Smith to George Simpson, 3 July 1824, HBCA D.5/1, fo. 121.

¹⁵ Mackenzie died at Clallum hands three years later, which incident resulted in the largest HBC paramilitary action against Native peoples. Due to its unsatisfactory resolution, it was also the last such corporate combined-arms action undertaken.

¹⁶ HBCA B.223/a/1, Fort Vancouver journal, fo. 7. Of "Tom" Mackenzie remarked: "[He] appeared to be the most sensible communicating Indian we have hitherto met with appears to be brought up in the Yankis schools."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 9. In 1828, Captain Aemilius Simpson of the HBC marine noted connections between the Natives of Tongass and Kaigani, and the American sailors, resulting in a class of creoles who further cemented the two groups together (Aemilius Simpson to John McLoughlin, 22 Sept. 1828, HBCA B.223/c/1, fo. 19).

bunch of keen Native traders for American goods.¹⁸ While Mackenzie felt that the Nass River presented the route to the Interior sought after by the company, as evidenced by its mud plume and the trade in beaver, Hanwell had had quite enough of the narrow inlet and sailed out on 21 July.¹⁹

On the twenty-fifth Mackenzie spoke with several American captains about the beaver trade at the Nass mouth, which totalled about one thousand pelts a year (no mention was made of a Skeena trade).²⁰ While the Americans were probably concealing the complete details of their trade, the amount of wealth present at Nass bespoke a sizeable commerce there in furs, and possibly most of the land furs traded at that time by the Americans. The Nisga'as either traded up the Nass river or else engaged in trade at the Nass during the spring oolachen fishery, trading beaver, marten, and land otter for goods exchanged from the Massets, Kaiganis, and Americans.²¹

Although the Gispaxlots and the trade of the Skeena received no mention in these HBC records, Chief Legaic does appear in the log of the brig *Griffon*, in a reference to a group of Kaiganis returning from trading with the Nisga'as falling in with a party of "Lenna Coon" Natives at Clemencitty (Tlehonsiti, or Port Tongass) led by "Legaeek."²² The skirmish ended unfavourably for the Tsimshians as

¹⁸ A coup for Hanwell was the acquisition of a brass fowling piece, for which he paid ten two and a half-point blankets, a two and a half lb. copper kettle, a quart of rum, and one quarter lb. of vermilion (*ibid.*, fo. 15). The Nisga'as had attained the apex of trading, having become middlemen between two Euroamerican traders!

¹⁹ Another benefit of the *William and Ann* expedition was noted in a letter from the London Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin: §10 "The Curiosities collected during the Trip of the William and Ann along the Coast were very acceptable, and have made a considerable addition to a small Museum now forming here, and we have to desire that any interesting specimens of natural history which may be collected should be sent home especially those which will not take up much room" (Letter of 20 Sept. 1826, HBCA B.223/c/1).

²⁰ HBCA B.223/a/1, fo. 20. In the first four years of operation, the establishment at Fort Simpson averaged 2,458 beaver and land otter, although the Boston masters would have spent much less time trading at Nass. In a letter of 1828 Aemilius Simpson gave the trade of the coast at six hundred sea otter and seven thousand beaver, which would not support more than two vessels on coast, given prices in the China market as \$30 per sea otter, \$3 per beaver, and sea otter tails at \$6. The Americans told him that were it not for the trade in timber in the Sandwich Islands (\$200 per thousand board feet), the coast would not pay at all (Aemilius Simpson to John McLoughlin, 22 Sept. 1828, HBCA B.223/c/1, fo.16d).

²¹ That some Massets wintered with the Nisga'as suggests a possible feasting relationship, during the course of which the Masset may well have distributed the skins as presents, as was done with the hides at the Gitksan village at the forks.

²² Log of the brig *Griffon*, M-656-1824 G4, 25 Nov. 1826, Essex Institute. Salem, Massachusetts. Lenna Coon seems to have been a village on the Tsimshian Peninsula northeast of Brown Passage on Chatham Sound, later rendered in HBC journals as Lax'ku, and was a popular hunting resort for employees and Natives. It was identified as a winter village, and two Coast

the Kaiganis killed and scalped fifteen of the former, losing three killed and two wounded of their own — in view of subsequent events at Fort Simpson, this Kaigani rebuff to Legaic is most significant.

In the aftermath of the *William and Ann* expedition, the Northern Council in 1830 instructed Chief Factor John McLoughlin to employ the shipping in the coasting and timber trades and to establish a post on the Nass, in accordance with the governor and committee's dispatch of 28 October 1829.²³ The benefits of the Nass location had been described by Aemilius Simpson in a letter of 22 September 1828, detailing his survey of the lower river:

into which I do not feel the least doubt the Babine River Emptys itself, the American Traders visit this Port generally in the Spring, and say it is the *most productive in land skins upon this Coast*. The Indians say they Trade a number of them from other Indians higher up the River, who again say they procure them from others further in the interior whom they say have intercourse with Whites who come to them upon Horses. . . . The Americans know by the mode of Stretching the Skins, those from the interior from those of the Coast, the first are stretched rounds the latter longways.²⁴ (Italics mine.)

With regard to the river emptying into the sea at Port Essington (the Skeena), Simpson noted it was rich in salmon and visited by the Nisga'as during the autumn fishery: "They also ascend it for the purpose of traffic, and procure from the Indians situated higher up a number of Beaver, who again procure them from Interior Indians who also speak of Whites being settled on their Lands which must of course be the Honble Companys Establishments."²⁵ Noting that a slave trade was carried on at Nass as well as trade in arms and rum, Simpson then outlined some of the goods used in the local economy,

Tsimshian chiefs — Legaic and Sqagwet — were identified as residing there (for the reference to Sqagwet, see the log of the brig *Otter*, keeper Robert Kemp, 25 Nov. 1810. Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts).

²³ HBCA B.239/k/1, Hudson's Bay Company Northern Council, 3 July 1830.

²⁴ Aemilius Simpson to John McLoughlin, 22 Sept. 1828, HBCA B.223/c/1, fo. 15. This method of stretching skins lengthwise was noted by William Brown among the Sekanis, which suggests that tribe as the ultimate source of the furs. At that time Brown supposed this method of preparing furs had been *taught* to the Sekanis by the Russians — a supposition which has become reified as a Northwest Coast trivium.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 16. Simpson identified the Native people in question as the "Nass" — commonly the name given by traders to the Nisga'as. Such a suggestion is not as outlandish as it might seem, as many Skeena river people utilized oolachen fishing sites on the Nass — thus some Nisga'as may well have received in return a licence to trade up the Skeena, even though they had their own overland trading routes to the Interior.

including beads, bracelets, and “hiaquas” (dentalia) purchased from the Newitti Kwakwaka’wakws. On an 1830 voyage up the Nass to find a site for an establishment, Simpson construed that “Shelfish [*sic*] motives” led the Natives to conceal from him the details of the river trade, “as it strikes me they enjoy a monopoly of the Trade with the Indians of the River which they feel apprehensive they will be deprived of in the event of our settling there by the accounts of some.” One man did show Simpson a small leather bag which he had acquired from Natives — known as the “Nitoos” — who in turn acquired it from a country where the Whites resided.²⁶

In 1831 a post had still not been established at Nass, and Simpson once again sailed up the coast to oppose the American vessels. At Tongass, he learned of two more rivers from the Interior — the Stikine and the “Tchunach” (the Unuk) — which the Natives ascended to trade with the Interior tribes, “whom they say have intercourse with King George people [in] New Caledonia.”²⁷ A voyage to the mouth of the Stikine River (in Russian territory) indicated that the trade coming down to the coast originated with the “Quinwana,” although the company at this time did not form plans to exploit this market.²⁸

In 1831 an expedition was finally mounted from Fort Vancouver to found the first HBC coastal establishment north of the Fraser River, which had proven so unsuited as a route for the transport of outfits and returns. The company apparently reasoned that any river utilized by the Natives for large-scale trade could also serve as a highway for Euroamerican trade, as they had undertaken no reconnaissance of any of the northern rivers to determine their suitability for travel by boats or canoes. By September 1832 Fort Simpson had been established on the lower Nass and trader Donald Manson undertook the first trip up-river to examine the Native inhabitants and the upper reaches of the river. Manson found the Nisga’as friendly and inclined to trade, but to his dismay the river was blocked to navigation by falls.²⁹ Retracing his

²⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 27 d. Although Simpson had brought dentalia from Cape Flattery for commerce, the only trade he conducted on this visit was trading green blankets for beaver.

²⁷ HBCA C.1/218, log of schooner *Dryad*, 1 July 1831, fo. 92. Simpson, like Hanwell before him, found dealing with the Natives unnerving, and was certainly not up to driving the same bargains his fellow employees later did. As Simpson had earlier noted to his half-brother the Governor, “my nerves are sometimes in that state that the very thought of business distresses me if it continues to prey upon me, a change of scene and situation will become actually necessary” (Aemilius Simpson to George Simpson, 20 Mar. 1828, HBCA D.5/3, fo. 167).

²⁸ Quinwana, or *gunana*, Tlingit for “stranger,” analogous to the Carrier word *atnah* applied to non-Carrier Natives.

²⁹ HBCA B.201/a/1, fo. 6. Manson observed that the country could not be rich in beaver, although it was “well adopted” for deer.

steps, Manson recorded that the river would be all but impassable, especially at high water in July and August, and that lining canoes up river would be impossible due to the high, steep banks — this would seriously affect the company's plans to utilize the river as a trade artery to the Interior. "However with respect to its being Babin or Simpson's River I beg leave to decline giving an opinion having never seen that Stream consequently can have no Idea of it Size but from report which states it to be a much larger River than this."³⁰

Manson accompanied Chief Factor Peter Skene Ogden to investigate the Skeena River, setting out on 19 October — en route falling in with two canoes of "Pearl Harbour Indians" (Coast Tsimshians), led by chiefs Nieshot and Tsa-qaxs, who invited the traders to visit their village and trade.³¹ On being informed of the company's determination to visit the Skeena, the chiefs "inquired if we intended to build a Fort there to which I replied that we had not yet determined on that step and that I went merely to see the country with which explanation they seem'd satisfied."³² Ascending the river on 1 November, Manson passed fishing stations the next day, and on inquiring about the Interior, was told that "if I continued to ascend for seven days more I would find a Large Village from which by crossing over land in five days more we should find Whites."³³ Returning to Fort Simpson on the fifth, Manson concluded that while the setting at Pearl Harbour was the most favourable in the immediate vicinity, it was "in other respects not superior to many other situations I have seen along the Coast."³⁴ If a well-organized trade monopoly was operating on the river, one would have expected Manson to learn of it, even if he did not witness signs of the monopoly in action.

³⁰ Ibid., fo. 6d to 7.

³¹ HBCA B.201/a/2, fo. 3d. Nieshot ("Neeshoot") is clearly the chief of the Gitzaxtets, one of the nine villages of Coast Tsimshian, and Tsa-qaxs ("Ca-cus") was subsequently identified in the journal (only in 1862!) as a chief of the Ginaxangiks. William Beynon noted that the primary chief of the Ginaxangiks was Wiseks, with Tsa-qaxs listed fifth, indicating that the latter had fallen in prestige in the intervening century, while Nieshot still retained primacy among the Gitzaxtet chiefs. William Beynon Manuscripts, Columbia University library, four volumes., typed preface *Tsimshian Chiefs and Headmen*, 1939, unpaginated.

According to HBC clerk Donald Manson, Pearl Harbour was located on the western coast of the Tsimshian Peninsula, fifteen miles northwest of Metlakatla and twenty-five miles south of Portland Inlet. (HBCA B.201/a/2, report of November 1832, fo. 4.) While the journals make frequent references to "Pearl Harbour" Natives, it is clear the site referred to is the winter village of the Coast Tsimshians at Metlakatla. The chiefs Nieshot, Tsa-qaxs, and Legaic were identified in conjunction with this village, although other Tsimshian villages wintered there as well.

³² HBCA B.201/a/2, fo. 4d.

³³ Ibid., fo. 6d.

³⁴ Ibid., fo. 8.

While the traders on the coast were consolidating the company's operations at Nass and a second new establishment at Milbank Sound, the London committee wrote Simpson in March 1834 that the best means of furthering the trade would be by employing a combination of coasting vessels and shore establishments. The assets of the company would be bolstered by the arrival of the steamship the company had commissioned in Britain, which "should give us command of the Coast, and enable us to push our American opponents so vigorously that they will find it their interest to withdraw from the contest."³⁵ The failure of the company to command the trade of New Caledonia from the Interior led to the formation of a series of coastal trading establishments, to be held in communication with the Columbia River by means of a coastal shipping department. The drive to separate the Natives of the Interior and Coast from their American and Russian partners had spurred the company to acquire new technologies, as the purchase of the steamer would allow the HBC to visit the various posts and ports without relying on the often unfavourable winds of the littoral. While the emphasis in company rhetoric centred on competition with other Euroamerican traders, it must be acknowledged that the primary challenge facing the HBC was the penetration of *Native* markets. The expense of the new infrastructure would be paralleled by higher tariffs as the HBC sought to outbid its opponents for Native produce.

The British consolidation of the coast was stymied when the Russian American Company moved in August 1833 to pre-empt further HBC incursions into its territory, prior to the expiration of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1825, and in the spring of 1834 an HBC expedition under Peter Skene Ogden was prevented by the Russian vessel *Chichagov* from entering the mouth of the Stikine to cross Russian territory to their own domains with a party to establish a new establishment. A fruitless local correspondence ensued, and the matter was settled in a private agreement between the two firms, signed in Hamburg on 6 February 1839, which ceded the seaboard and the produce traversing it to the company for an annual rent of two thousand river otters. In the meantime, the London committee recommended a change in emphasis in the trade, noting:

We do not think under present circumstances that any new access from the sea Coast to new Caledonia would be of material

³⁵ Governor Pelly and Committee to George Simpson, 5 Mar. 1834, HBCA D.5/4, fo. 71. The Committee felt that the employment of the steamer would also allow a reduction in the Columbia District marine, entailing savings and higher revenues.

advantage to our trade, which is supplied by the present route at a moderate cost, and it would be safer from opposition, and be less likely to excite any feeling on the part of the Russian company if you endeavoured to intercept the trade of furs *from the Interior* to their ten leagues on the Coast by extending your posts from the Interior rather than by establishments supplied from the Coast.³⁶ (Italics mine.)

During July 1834, Fort Simpson was removed from the Nass River mouth to McLoughlin's Harbour on the coast, and the first traders soon arrived: Chief Nieshot of the Gitzaxtets arriving from Milbank Sound and Tongass, and Chief Cognete of the Nisga'as in from Skidegate.³⁷ Later the Cumshewa Haidas arrived to trade nineteen and one-half barrels of potatoes before proceeding up the Nass, where they then traded their skins for rum.³⁸ By October 1834, the Tongass Tlingits had also paid a visit and were soon employed hunting for the fort, bringing in eleven deer on the twenty-seventh. The first Native settler at the new fort was Nieshot, who arrived on 10 November "with boards &c. for building here which we have taken every means to dissuade him from, but without effect. The fellow will be a constant pest."³⁹ By November the fort began to run short of provisions, with most of the hunters gone to their winter villages, "only one Family of the Tumgass Indians are now here on whom we principally depend for a fresh supply [of deer]."⁴⁰ Trade became organized along potentially unprofitable lines (to the company), as the journal noted on 18 November:

The Indians are determined to keep their Skins, since I have been on the coast (near three years) we never have had so few at this season

³⁶ Governor Pelly and Committee to George Simpson 4 Mar. 1835, HBCA D.5/4, fo. 104.

³⁷ HBCA B.201/a/3, fos. 4-6. These may have been pre-existing ties, however. Also Cognete brought up from the old fort a number of items, including the "flap" of the gate, the iron works etc. complete, a ladder, two water spouts, and an abandoned bitch and pups. In return for payment of one beaver skin, Cognete's wife was buried at the fort.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 6d. The HBC designations of the Haida are imprecise, and correspond roughly to the "sub-divisions" noted by Margaret Blackman in "Haida: Traditional Culture," *The Northwest Coast*, Smithsonian Institution Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 7 (Washington, 1990), 240, which include the Kaigani, Masset, Skidegate, and Kunghit Haidas. In most cases it is not possible to identify the village in question, aside from determining from which of the islands they arrived. The Cumshewa Haidas were from the village of Tilkinool, but the journal used instead the Tsimshian name for this village — Kit-ta-was.

The Southern Tsimshians were similarly aggregated into "Sabassas" (from the name of the traditional Kitkatla chief Tsi-basa), a practice which carried over from ships' logs into the HBC journals.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 8d.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 11. The last hunter withdrew from the service of the fort following a death in his family.

of the year which has hitherto always been the best season. Noshoot who is encamped beside the Fort endeavours to persuade all strangers who visit us not to trade with us as we give too little in return.⁴¹

Trade with Metlakatla and the Skeena River continued, as the Nisga'as dispatched two canoes there in early November, and the Coast Tsimshians began direct trade with the fort on 4 December, selling fifteen prime beaver for rum.

Other Coast Tsimshian chiefs visiting included Tsa-qaxs and Legaic, who brought in large numbers of beaver and marten, trading for "Indian rum" (rum diluted with water).⁴² An intertribal comparative advantage in trade became evident by January, as the Coast Tsimshians continued to bring in land furs, while the Cape Fox and Tongass Tlingits provisioned the post with deer and halibut. The arrival of large numbers of Tsimshian people on 22 January "preparatory to their going to Nass" moved Chief Trader Peter Skene Ogden to halt the trade of rum on 4 February because their chiefs had been "abusive."⁴³ Although the rum embargo was abandoned on the twelfth, when the American vessel *Lama* arrived, trade remained "indifferent," and the departure of the Natives for the Nass was "a most happy riddance for us all."⁴⁴

By early April the fishing parties began trading the first oolachens at the fort, and the company also traded for oil, accumulating thirty-five gallons by 26 April.⁴⁵ In early May major potato shipments arrived from the Skidegates and the Cumshewas, from whom the company traded some 165¹/₂ bushels: "very good & got at a moderate price."⁴⁶ The first families began returning from the Nass on 24 May,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 12. The involvement of the Gitzaxtets with the fort is further demonstrated by Nieshot's son's employment by the HBC as a hunter; when injured by a bursting trading gun while in the fort's employ, the young man was given a cloth capot of four ells "as a small compensation for the injury" (*ibid.*, fo. 14).

⁴² Drinking was common not only among the Natives, as the journal entry for 31 Dec. 1834 records that the engagés while intoxicated inadvertently set off a musket, which touched off a cannon "blowing the port to a thousand pieces and nearly half of one side of the block house off."

⁴³ HBCA B.201/a/3, fo. 20. In particular Tsa-qaxs threatened to burn the fort and take all the property, when he was not allowed to enter the fort in a state of intoxication. On 7 February, Ogden found it necessary to warn Legaic to prevent boys from throwing stones at the men on watch, who would otherwise be under the "necessity" of firing upon them.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 23d.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 27d. The entry for 4 May reports that the fort was trading oil for beaver apparently at the rate of 2 gallons [!] per skin, showing the Natives were not alone in not appreciating the "intrinsic value" of the goods they dealt with.

⁴⁶ The majority of the potatoes were carried up the Nass, along with some sea otter pelts, where they were traded either to the Nisga'as or to one of several American vessels in the inlet.

and on 18 June over 760 canoes passed en masse to the Skeena River.⁴⁷

The summer was marked by desultory trade from the Tsimshians and Tlingits, with few staying for any length of time.⁴⁸ The journal entry for 22 August noted a canoe proceeding up to Tongass with slaves for sale, and also recorded the return of chiefs Nieshot and Legaic from the Skeena with skins to trade. At the close of the salmon fisheries, the Tongass hunters also returned to supply the Fort, although a misunderstanding between the Tongass and Tsimshians threatened to escalate into a major battle, had the company not intervened. As Ogden noted, "We trust they will make up the matter to morrow, if not we shall suffer for it as the Tumgass [Tongass] Indians will not remain to hunt of the enemy's lands."⁴⁹

The beginning of October saw yet another visit by the "Potatoe people" (in this case Massets), who traded some 136 bushels for "a very moderate rate": two quarts mixed rum and twenty-four lbs. of leaf tobacco, although competitors and therefore lower prices were expected soon.⁵⁰ By 8 October the trade in potatoes halted, the fort having procured over 320 bushels — "we have sufficient to Serve us till spring and as many as we can well take care of," but the Skidegates and Cumshewas brought another 161 bushels of potatoes on 14 November (in addition to the fort's own harvest of at least fifty bushels). The year closed out quietly, with occasional visits for oil or rum, including one canoe from the Skeena River on 22 November, and the arrival of Legaic and his people on 1 December to retrieve boxes of oolachen oil stored at the fort in the spring, which suggests that the post had not yet become a residential centre for the Gispaxlots.⁵¹

Prior to the oolachen fishery of 1836, suits of clothes were distributed to chiefs Tsa-qaxs, Nieshot, and Legaic, underscoring the HBC relationship with the Coast Tsimshian chiefs. With the commencement of the Nass fishery the Skidegates again arrived, bringing potatoes to the fort before moving up to the fishery to trade, and in

⁴⁷ Ibid., fo. 32d. This figure is aggregated from several days' journal entries; presumably the number of canoes involved in the migration could give some idea of the population on the Skeena River (including the Southern Tsimshian).

⁴⁸ Including the first reports in the fort journal of trade with the "Skeena" Natives.

⁴⁹ Ibid., fo. 41.

⁵⁰ Ibid., fo. 41d. The Massets proceeded down to Metlakatla with the remainder of the shipment, and Cougalt (perhaps Cognete of the Nisga'as?) travelled down to Milbank Sound to trade his eighty bushels to Mr. Manson.

⁵¹ Although the journal entry for 20 January notes no Natives stirring save a few Massets "*who are residents here.*" (Italics mine.)

late March the Tongass brought their peltry to trade. The presence of the Massets proved particularly troublesome to the company when they accosted a party of wood cutters outside the fort, forcing the curtailment of outside activities while Masset canoes were in the vicinity; the Massets also quarrelled with the Tongass and Stikines, with some shots fired.⁵²

The first American vessel of the season arrived on 18 May, with Captain Snow of the *Lagrange* bringing news of smallpox in the north “carrying off great numbers of the Natives,” although the arrival of Chief Shakes on 2 June indicated that the Stikines had as yet escaped its effects.⁵³ The Stikines traded 160 land furs on this visit, leaving the remainder in the hands of the Tsimshians, “which we hope to get in the course of time.”⁵⁴ The presence of the *Lagrange* proved disruptive to the company’s plans, with the majority of the Nisga’as and Tsimshian trade of late June going to the vessel. Ogden denounced the cupidity of the Tsimshians, “who have received from us every indulgence and kind treatment, but all our kindness has been lost on the rascals, spoke to [Tsa-qaxs], one of the chiefs who had received a Clothing this Spring from us on the subject and told him that he or none of his people need expect anything more from us for another. he told us to leave the place *the grounds were his &c. &c.*”⁵⁵ (Italics mine.)

The various Native inland trading expeditions concluded in late July when the Nisga’as returned from the Nass uplands, and Legaic returned from his second trip with “very few skins.” The Stikines were in a serious position, as they reported they had not conducted trade with their Interior partners as the latter were stricken with smallpox, although Ogden reaffirmed Shakes’ prestige in relation to the com-

⁵² Ibid., fo. 56d. Further problems with the Massets were encountered on 5 May, as one of the Massets tripped a woodcutter and took away his axe, which was “almost immediately returned by the lookers on or by the sober Indians” (fo. 59). However, the Massets were off to their summer quarters by 6 May. These people’s visits during the oolachen season suggested they did not possess fishing rights on the Nass, but had to obtain their oil by trade or ritual exchange.

⁵³ Ibid., fo. 61d. Smallpox first appeared in the Russian domains in October 1835, and struck the Sitka Tlingit particularly hard, killing four hundred (one-half) of the Natives residing at New Archangel (the colonial capital). Governor Ivan Kupreianov wrote to the main office in St. Petersburg that in Khutsnuwu (Angoon) and other Tlingit settlements, the disease “cleared a few *barabaras* of their last souls” (Russian American Company, Records of the Governors General. Correspondence Sent, United States National Archives [hereafter RAC]: (vol.) 13, no. 200 of 4 May 1836, fos. 104 ff). On the other hand, the disease supposedly had a mild effect among the Stikines.

⁵⁴ HBCA B.201/a/3, 12 June 1836, fo. 63d.

⁵⁵ Ibid., fo. 65d.

pany, giving him a “clothing” on 9 August.⁵⁶ Two days later Tsa-qaxs and Nieshot returned from the Skeena, and proceeded directly to the *Lagrange* to conduct their business. The concentration of visitors at the fort also prompted quarrels, with the Skidegates and Tsimshians firing at each other upon the latter’s arrival to trade land otter and potatoes; after peace was made a “brisk trade” ensued as if hostilities had never occurred. On 9 August the Tsimshians completed a profitable trade at the fort and departed to their winter quarters, “and those who have been encamped about the Fort started along with them.”⁵⁷

Early in October a group of young men from the Skeena brought news of the death of their Chief Nieshot from smallpox, and later that night slew Cougwell or Conquete (perhaps “Cognete” of the Nisga’as?), whom they held responsible for communicating the disease to their chief.⁵⁸ The disease appeared among the Tongass on the tenth, and broke out among the employees’ Native wives by the sixteenth, although the keeper of the journal showed little interest in inoculating the Tsimshians or imposing a quarantine. Ogden noted that “[t]he Women, Children and slaves appear to Escape, have not seen a single case occur in either, some of the women have catch it but does not appear to be so violent on them as on the men.”⁵⁹

On 2 November news came from the Skeena — the first in almost a month — of the death from smallpox of Tsa-qaxs “who was a great rascal he was concerned in the murder of Cougwells he seldom if ever brought anything for trade so that we have little cause to regret the death of such a fellow but rather be happy of being freed from such a troublesome good-for-nothing villain.” Legaic and some of his people arrived 6 November to report that a great number of Gispaxlots had died of smallpox, although the disease had run its course, and trade from the Skeena picked up over the next few days. At this point Ogden inoculated “[Legaic] & 2 of his family,” although his son died

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 Aug. 1836, fo. 68d.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8 Sept. 1836, fo. 71d. This observation suggests that there was as yet a limited “permanent” population at the fort. The frequency of gunfire incident to arrivals and departures suggests a new Native diplomatic protocol had emerged, similar to the fort and vessels firing salutes, which the Euroamericans interpreted as hostile fire on the Natives’ part. Very few casualties were recorded during these incidents, suggesting there was no intent to cause injury on either side. There are also recorded cases of chiefs firing their falconets or swivel guns to show respect to arriving nobility.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 73d. This is Ogden’s construction of a motive for the event at any rate; whether the Gitzaxtets or the Ginaxangiks were responsible for the death of “Cougwell” is not clear from the journal.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1836, fo. 75. Four of the men’s wives and their children fled to the Nass River to reside among relatives.

on the fourteenth, followed by his wife on 2 December.⁶⁰ Further inoculations appeared ineffectual, as the vaccine matter was apparently old, and the Natives reportedly made offerings to the Sun [?] to stop the disease but found that “nothing will satisfy him but the sick or human beings.” In the midst of this upheaval, the journalist noted that the Natives were reluctant to venture forth, and the trade consequently was bad.

Natives arriving from the Skeena on 29 November noted that the disease was still raging there, but reports from the returning employees’ wives indicated that the disease had not reached the upper Nass, and that only one death had occurred to date.⁶¹ On 27 December the news from the Skeena mouth indicated that the smallpox was no longer severe, and four days later six canoes arrived from the latter place, the Natives intending “to remain or encamp about us until they start for Nass in quest of small fish.”⁶² In the aftermath of the devastation wrought by the disease, the fort acted as a haven for the survivors, who may have found the afflicted villages too painful to remain in — up to this point, the Massets and Gitzaxtets had been the only people residing at the fort. The deaths of Nieshot and Tsa-qaxs rendered their villages vulnerable to incursions into their prestige and prerogatives, and their people would be pressed to gather the wealth necessary to feast their dead chiefs, elevate successors and reassert their claims to local territories. The arrival of refugees in this case seems to have been for temporary relief rather than a permanent relocation, and the journal does not identify which tribes or villages participated in the move.

In the month of January more and more Natives arrived from the Skeena River to encamp at the fort until their departure to the Nass fishery. This sudden increase in population, with little prepared housing, led some of the Tsimshians to encamp in the wood pile reserved for the use of the steamer. On the twenty-sixth Ogden ordered the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 77. The intervention of disease had removed the foremost chief Nieshot, as well as the troublesome Tsa-qaxs, leaving only Legaic. According to John McLoughlin cowpox vaccine was sent to Fort McLoughlin, although the success of a vaccination program there was unknown to the chief Factor (John McLoughlin to George Simpson, 29 Aug. 1837, HBCA D.5/1, fo. 322). It is unlikely that Ogden intentionally withheld vaccination, as some have speculated, given that a full-fledged smallpox outbreak would kill the hunters and traders upon whom the fort relied, as well as the few troublesome chiefs.

The Russians instituted a program of inoculation among the Sitka Tlingits, and treated 300 persons in 1836 (RAK: 15, no. 199 of 1 May 1838, fo. 267).

⁶¹ HBCA B.201/a/3, fo. 80. It is conceivable that the women had actually carried the virus there.

⁶² *Ibid.*, fo. 83. John Work in his report of 20 Oct. 1838 noted that losses among the Tsimshians were approximately one-third, and even higher among neighbouring tribes. HBCA B.223/c/1, fo. 113.

Natives to remove from the pile or they would be fired upon, and on the twenty-seventh an ultimatum was issued with a few die-hards holding out.⁶³

When we found that all our threats or messages were treated with contempt we found it necessary to try the effects of our Great Guns. about 4 P.M. we fired a shot over those on the Island which was immediately returned by a volley of musketry, we then fired several rounds of Grape and round shot at their houses and canoes and kept up a smart fire with our Musketry [*sic*], shortly after our 2d Round the steamer Beaver opened her fire and kept it up smartly for about half and hour. she also received after her first shot a volley of musketry but was also harmless. As we saw our shots did not do much harm we thought it prudent to cease firing about 5 lest they should depreciate our Great Guns for I must say we managed them very badly and had it not been for the able support of the Steamer Beaver, we should have cut a poor figure in the eyes of the Indians. our musketry was more regular and had the distance not been so great would have been also more effective. Very little damage was done (considering the number of shots fired) on their canoes or property and what damage was done was effected by the Steamer Beaver. [One engagé was slightly wounded but]—no other injury was received on either side. gave all hands a draw and the Indians on the mainland received 2 Galls of Mixed Rum for their good behavior on the occasion.⁶⁴

The Tsimshians were soon reconciled to the company, and were pleased that no lives had been lost. A new stock in trade was established over the next several days, as the people brought in ball and grape shot fired by the steamer (the journal does not indicate the price paid to recover the valuable munitions). While several “lodges” remained on the island, the British elected not to take further action, instead regaling the Natives with four gallons of mixed rum “to show that we were not ill-disposed towards &c. &c.”

Fewer than half the number of canoes set out for the oolachen fishery this year (340 instead of 760), returning by mid-May “in a continued stream of canoes crossing the harbour all day.”⁶⁵ Early returns from the Nass River now brought news of many smallpox

⁶³ Had the Tsimshians had a winter village already at Fort Simpson, they obviously would not have chosen this temporary expedient, but the lack of prepared house sites with posts and ridge poles forced them to improvise.

⁶⁴ HBCA B.201/a/3, fo. 86.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 102.

deaths among the Nisga'as, who had escaped the previous year's ravages, so that "there is little hope of much being obtained from them in the fur way this season." As late as 15 May, a Nisga'a — "Ross's Friend" — reported that the smallpox among the Interior people had prevented him from making his usual good trades.⁶⁶ The new year also found visitors much more cautious when arriving at the fort, as one party of Massets traded potatoes in late March keeping their weapons at the ready. On 16 April a party of fifty to sixty Skidegates arrived, and "on arrival they drew up in three canoes near the shore opposite the fort and had a dance & song before landing, they had themselves ornamented with feathers &c. and all painted for the occasion."⁶⁷ Hostilities were reported between the Stikine and Tongass, which retarded the trade from that quarter. The cumulative impact of smallpox and inter-tribal feuds was altering the Native balances of trade and power, although the journal keeper had not yet acknowledged a new *status quo*.

The uncertain state of affairs was underscored by John Work on 21 May, when he reported that "[t]here are a great many Indians of different tribes now assembled about the place, If some serious rowe does not take place among them it will be a wonder."⁶⁸ That wonder vanished the next day as a *melée* erupted between the Skidegates and Tsimshians, who pelted each other with sticks and stones. Work called out to them from the gallery to desist and ran the guns out the blockhouse ports, and finally the principal men on each side restored calm.⁶⁹ Another row took place the next day between the Tongass and Skidegates, and Work recorded the departure of the latter on 25 May with some relief, not the least because the employees could resume their duties outside the fort walls without fear of "revenge" being taken on them.

Three days later the arrival of a party of Kaiganis led to another affray, as the Tsimshian (Gispaxlots) "brutes" ran down to the water

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 100d. The severest consequences would have been felt by those tribes whose inland partners — the primary producers — had been stricken. The journal explicitly noted smallpox among the tribes inland of the Stikine Tlingits (Tahltans) and the Nisga'as (Tsetsauts); while the Tsimshians along the Skeena had been stricken, there was no mention made of disease in the Interior (Wet'suwet'ens and Babines). Deaths either on the coast or in the village entrepôts would have disrupted established trade ties, which were often based on fictive (or real) kinship relations. Some villages or houses would have been displaced, and others would have had to re-establish trade prerogatives.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 95d. This conciliating approach would have appeased the Tsimshians, had they been ill-disposed toward the Skidegates, and was not a common practice at the fort.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 102d.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 103d. Work observed that the Skidegate chiefs, who were trading in the fort at the time, were loath to intervene in the hostilities.

“like a band of Wolves,” seized the visitors’ canoes, and ran off with their property in all directions. Work again ran out the guns and called the men to arms, to which the Tsimshians protested that they were only honouring their visitors according to their custom, whereupon “we allowed them to proceed and carry all the things up to the chief [Legaic’s] house.” The Kaiganis subsequently came to the fort, bringing their baggage and taking shelter in the sawpit (often a refuge for visitors during hostilities) “where we will be able to protect them.” In the evening the Gispaxlots came to the pit to treat the strangers, and “dabbed them all over with feathers as a mark of peace and friendship.” Work observed that the two groups had been on ill terms for years in consequence of the Kaiganis killing some Tsimshians in a “fracas,” which had never been thoroughly resolved, and speculated that had Legaic not been absent on a trading expedition, the visitors would have been “better received.”⁷⁰ On his return at the end of the month, the chief proposed that a large party of Kaiganis come to the fort so that the two tribes could “dance together and make friends” to which the Kaiganis agreed.

Mid-July found the Tsimshians holding a mortuary rum feast for one of the chiefs dead from smallpox (the journal does not specify for whom) with each guest taking a “mandatory” “bumper” from an earthenware jug filled with diluted grog, the “consequence was that in a short time many of them were roaring drunk and had to be carried home to their huts.” Although there was some noise and quarrelling, the feast passed without serious incident.⁷¹ This was one of the first such commemorative events held at the fort, although *yaakws* (feasts) and *haley*t (‘secret society’) inductions were still held at Pearl Harbour, Metlakatla, or other locations.⁷² July also saw the continuation of a

⁷⁰ Ibid., fo. 106d. This state of affairs with the Natives was complicated by recent problems among sailors aboard the *Beaver*, who refused to do what they considered stokers’ work, and one, “a great forecandle lawyer,” was put in irons at the fort (fo. 108).

⁷¹ Ibid., 9 July 1837, fo. 112d.

⁷² That the fort journal does not comment on the secret societies prior to 1840 would seem to indicate that the Tsimshian were not wintering at the fort prior to the winter of 1840–1841. The journal that year notes both *xgedombaley*t (‘cannibal’) and *nulim* (‘dog-eater’) inductions, but does not distinguish the *mit’la* (‘dancers’) or *ludzista* (destroyer?) societies. *Haley*t generically refers to personal powers obtained through initiation into a society or occasionally by voluntary acts, and also includes lineage prerogatives. According to informants interviewed by C. Marius Barbeau and William Beynon, the four *haley*ts above derived from the Heiltsuks (Bella Bella) or Haislas (Kitimats), evidently in the recent past, and are marked by initiations taking place from November through February; presumably such *haley*ts as the *swensk haley*t (‘blowing shaman’) pre-date this importation. (See C. Marius Barbeau, *Northwest Coast Indian Collection*, files B-F-7.1 to 7.14. BCARS.) Although most village chiefs and headmen were possessed of *haley*t, it was apparently not prerequisite for secular power; Legaic for

common practice at the fort, as “young scamps” of both sexes raided the fort garden to steal potatoes — it was found necessary to give warning that future violators would be shot.⁷³

On 1 January 1838 the Kitkatlas and Chief Nieslaganos (Gitlan village) traded furs for rum, to take to a feast being given at Metlakatla; underscoring that the winter quarters and ceremonial life of the Tsimshians were still focused on the mouth of the Skeena, with trading excursions staged to the post at intervals.⁷⁴ The pattern of the previous year repeated itself, and the end of January saw “swarms of Chymcyan Indians,” arriving with relatively few furs to trade. This influx disrupted the routine of fort life once again, leading Work to note “so many of them are living about the place they are a pest and continually getting into quarrels so that the people cannot be sent with safety any distance from the fort.”⁷⁵ Unlike the year before, the Tsimshians continued on to the Nass without disposing of their furs; Work found the returns up from last year, but noted that the *increase* had been less than expected due to the effect of the smallpox, combined with the weather which disrupted the winter trade — which had a particularly noticeable effect on the deliveries from the Tongass, Stikine, and Kaiganis.

Figure 2 shows that in the aftermath of the smallpox epidemic, the share of trade at the fort brought by “Russian Natives” increased

example did not “belong” to either the prestigious *xgedombaleyt* or the *ludzista*. Some *haleyt*s were expressly open to the *loka-giget* (‘other people’ — essentially the middle class, and possessed of lineage names) — in particular the *nulim* and *mit’la* societies, as well as the *dolhaleyt*, who acted as assistants to the *xgedombaleyt*.

Just what the relationship of spiritual “leadership” was to the secular order is unclear. Recognition of *haleyt* seems therefore to have served as a validation of existing personal qualities, rather than as a route to prestige (See Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 293–98).

⁷³ In the aftermath of the “Battle of the Wood-pile,” the HBC continued to issue threats of violence in an attempt to compel Native compliance. Continued pilfering at the garden and skirmishes around the fort showed that these threats made little impression on the Native population, and far from controlling the coast, the HBC could not even exert effective control over its own small reserve of land. Some have characterized the thefts as a “potato war,” but after some initial bluster, the HBC management came to accept a degree of pilfering from the garden as inevitable.

⁷⁴ HBCA B.201/a/3, fo. 163, 1 Jan. 1838. Rum also contributed to problems among the HBC employees, as two sailors unloading the steamer partook of part of the cargo, became “loquacious” and were given a good caning by trader William McNeill. On 5 May, Work noted the men of the fort leaving their fish “to rot and stink about their houses and raising a stench enough to create a pest. They require as much looking after to make them keep themselves clean as a band of the filthiest Indians would do” (HBCA B.201/a/4, fo. 11d).

⁷⁵ HBCA B.201/a/3, fo. 171. Work also noted the arrival of a previously unknown tribe on 1 February, as the “Chatseeny people a tribe of Kygarney Indians” arrived with an indeterminate quantity of furs.

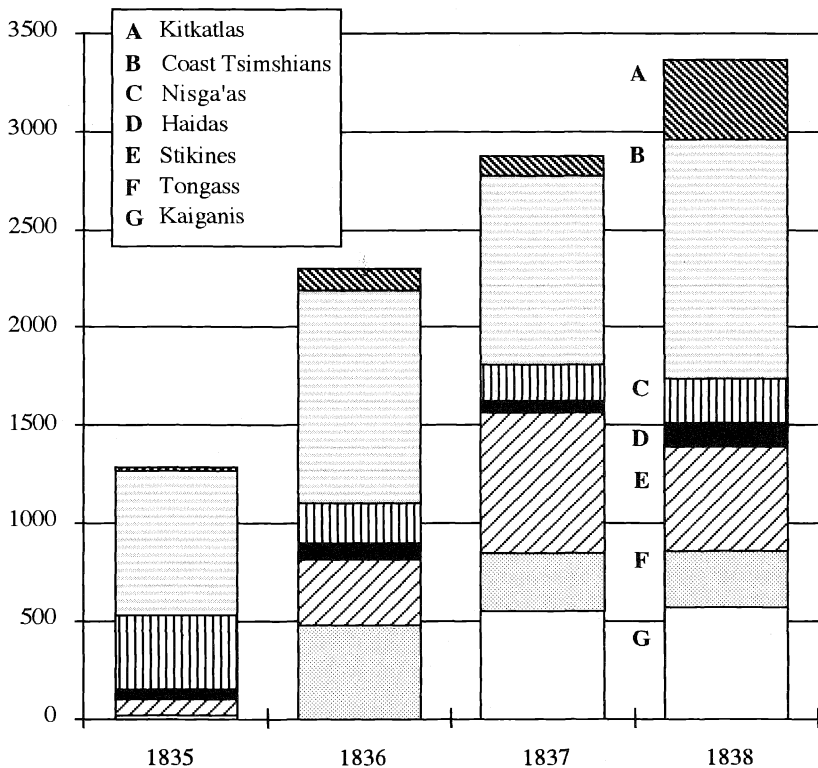


FIGURE 2 Fort Simpson land fur returns by tribe, 1835-38

Source: HBCA B.223/c/1, report of John Work, fos. 115 d.-119.

significantly, and that correspondingly the trade of the Coast Tsimshian decreased in proportion, although absolute numbers of pelts traded continued to rise.⁷⁶ Had the latter acted as “middlemen” intercepting incoming trade and passing it on to the fort, one should see both a relative and an absolute rise in their returns; this was clearly *not* the case however.

In April the Kaiganis brought reports of a large river called “Clough hai eck” — twice the volume of the Stikine — falling into Yakutat Bay, and also reported that they and the Tongass procured most of their furs from the River Taqua, “about 18 miles to the Northward of

⁷⁶ The degree of “foreign trade” argues strongly against the notion of a Coast Tsimshian confederation controlling the trade of the fort. It is remarkable that in the wake of the epidemic, the net returns in furs continued to rise above pre-smallpox levels.

the Stikine," which was ascended in ten days.⁷⁷ (The Kaiganis may have been trying to draw the company into their trading sphere, in an attempt to gain more direct access to imported wealth and return to the position in the trade which they had enjoyed under the Americans.) The Kaiganis left Fort Simpson late in the month with a final enticement, trading their furs quickly to return home to plant potatoes and embark on trade up the Taku. On the next day, Legaic and a party of his people passed through from the Nass on their way to the Skeena. The Fort Simpson hinterland was progressively being carved up into a series of spheres of trade, as each coastal tribe sought to preserve, adjust, or establish a trading domain on a route to the Interior, and then represent that route to the HBC as the most desirable location for a trading post. The company could not afford an establishment at the mouth of every river, and was gradually moving toward closing most of the posts, save one *dépôt*, and conducting most of the trade from vessels navigating the channels and passes on a regular basis.⁷⁸

The early return of the Tsimshians from the Nass River, compounded by their reluctance to trade until the Americans had arrived, again put the fort under the necessity of operating under "siege" conditions. The Native trade was retarded by high waters, and Legaic reported that the Natives at the Skeena mouth had many furs (as did the upriver Natives), but *intended bringing them to the fort themselves*. The canoe traffic from the Nass to the Skeena commenced, with more than 180 canoes passing from 9 to 16 May, followed by almost 200 on the twentieth. "There are a great number of Natives now about the place and two large bands still to come. They are very quiet and conduct themselves well except occasionally stealing some of our potatoes, biting, and throwing stones and sticks."⁷⁹ On the thirtieth one of the now commonplace Fort Simpson quarrels broke out as a party of Tongass were accosted on landing by a party of Tsimshians, at which the former drew their knives. A second party of Tsimshians

⁷⁷ HBCA B.201/a/4, fo. 6d, 25 Apr. 1838. Work speculated that the Taku River could be a valuable route to the Interior, "represented to be rich in beaver and other furs," and were it navigable to ten leagues (about thirty miles — the inland limit of Russian territory), it would be a prime site for a new establishment. The trader was sanguine if cautious: "Were there no opposition the Steamer could not be better employed than in examining these rivers and any others that might be found between Stikeen and Mount St. Elias." "Clough hai eck" is his rendering of Laxayik, the Tlingit name for Yakutat Bay.

⁷⁸ The 67th Resolution of the 1842 meeting of the Northern Council, called for the closing of Forts McLoughlin and Tako in 1843, Fort Stikine in 1844, and for fitting the Beaver to conduct the trade normally conducted by these establishments (HBCA B.239/k/2, minutes of the Northern Council, 8 June 1842).

⁷⁹ HBCA B.201/a/4, 20 May 1838, fo. 15.

began firing on the Tlingits and Tsimshians, the latter withdrawing under fire while the people on shore began firing on each other: "It is a wonder how they missed they were so thick—All appears now quiet but the different parties are keeping a good watch upon each other."⁸⁰

The end of May saw the succession of the new Tsa-qaxs, who arrived from the South to trade for rum for his feast to legitimize his position in his village and among the other chiefs. "The great feast and ball which they are going to view and which has been so long talked of is to take place shortly the liquor traded today is intended for it, It is said it will be a grand concern of the kind, Cacax wished to set himself up as a man of great consequence, to effect which giving these feasts is generally one of the means employed."⁸¹ On 2 June Chief Tsibasa of the Kitkatlas arrived to trade for liquor for the feast, and some of the Tsimshians from the fort went as well, but returned that evening. "It appears it did not turn out such a grand affair as was expected. There was a lack of both food and drink for the number of guests invited."⁸² Rather than elevating himself in the estimation of his tribesmen and neighbours, the new Tsa-qaxs had been humiliated, and would have to redress this disgrace before feasting his new name. It was a blow from which the new chief and his village would not soon recover. A week later Tsa-qaxs embarked on a "wooing expedition" to the daughter of Chief "Neisilcancas" (Nieslaganos of Gitlan village), but the chief and his daughter were both opposed to the match, perhaps due in part to Tsa-qaxs's recent apparent failure to validate his title.⁸³

The arrival of Stikine Chief Quatkie in late June also re-opened the market for slaves, "which are the articles most in demand with the Inland Indians, But as they are pretty well supplied with Russian goods what they say about giving the russians only a few furs as well as their prices not being higher than ours is likely not true." Quatkie promised to come to trade after his August trading expedition, and purchased a few slaves from the Tsimshians before leaving for the North.⁸⁴ On his visit last spring Quatkie had insulted Legaic by

⁸⁰ Ibid., fo. 18. Work later noted that "According to their usual custom making peace may occupy some time" (fo. 19).

⁸¹ Ibid., fo. 19.

⁸² Ibid., fo. 20.

⁸³ Ibid., 8 June, fo. 21d.

⁸⁴ Ibid., fo. 27d. Work observed the Chief had in his possession a certificate from the Russians commending him for setting free his slaves, rather than killing them as was customary. Work noted that given the scarcity of furs the Natives were too poor to destroy such commodities — "I should not think much persuasion necessary to deter them from killing them." The trader

“throwing away” a valuable copper, for which act the Gispaxlots were threatening retribution, but the latter chief’s intervention prevented any violence, and showed him to be something of a statesman — one possessed of enough largess to ignore small rebuffs (— or else showed there was not yet a firm Gispaxlots consensus supporting Legaic).

The Kaiganis found their position undermined by circumstances, as their last trip to the “Taqua” resulted in a fight with the Taku Tlingits, and necessitated the former’s temporary withdrawal from the area. Given this insecure position to the north, the Kaiganis were more receptive to resolving an affray of years past with the Tsimshians, and engaged in a hostage exchange in early July. (Work attributed the proximate cause of this reconciliation to his own diplomacy.) The tenth found the hostages attended to, given new blankets, their faces painted and down sprinkled on them “in the best stile of Indian fashion,” and by the twelfth the hostages were returned and the tribes “passed most of the day dancing.”⁸⁵

The return of the Stikines on 7 August brought the news that they had met a party of five HBC men coming out from the Interior, who were preparing to build an establishment ten days’ travel up the river. The Stikines departed again with furs held back to trade for slaves at Tongass, which led Work to observe: “It behooves us to use every means in our power to please these people in order to draw them here so that we may get a part of their furs and not let them all fall into the hands of our Russian opponents, who from what we can learn from the Indians get a very considerable quantity.”⁸⁶ By the end of the month, Legaic brought a few furs to trade, and a group of Natives from the Skeena visited the establishment to trade for the first time. The autumn arrival of the Skidegates, Henyas, and Massets to trade potatoes was not accompanied by violence, however, as Legaic feasted his former adversaries.⁸⁷

further added that he knew of no cases of such killing among the Tsimshian during his time at the Fort.

In February 1838, RAK Governor Kupreianov awarded Kuatkhe (Quatkie) a certificate and a silver medallion inscribed “Soiuznyia Rossii” (Allies of Russia) for heeding the Christian advice of the Russians and setting free a four-year-old slave “which clearly demonstrated his friendship and esteem for the Russians” (RAK: 15, no. 18 of 6 Feb. 1838, fo. 135).

⁸⁵ HBCA B.201/a/4, fos. 32-33. Work commented on current events: “This falling off [of Kaigani trade] together with the failure of the Stikeen Indians and the War existing between the Tongass and Port Stuart Indians, it is to be feared will cause a very considerable diminution in our returns this season” (fo. 33d). However, the recent patching up of relations seemed to restore a regime of peaceful coexistence between the two tribes, which benefited the company by encouraging trade.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 41d.

⁸⁷ Work had reduced the potato tariff, but found the local Natives buying out the Haida, and so was obliged to raise his price (fo. 52d).

Intra-tribal hostilities continued, as on 21 September the Massets at the fort were on the verge of killing a boy slave to settle a dispute. When Work intervened, again threatening to fire upon them, the people instead "tore in pieces blankets other articles and a large copper to the value of ten blankets on each side and gave them away, or as they call it threw it away." As the trader observed, it was a matter of pride to destroy valuable things and slaves being the most prized commodities, the killing of a slave was held to be "a grand thing." The Tsimshians had also opposed the killing of the slave, as Work noted "no doubt expecting to come in for some share of the fragments."⁸⁸ The trader also took the opportunity of ransoming a Kwakwaka'wakw woman — the daughter of Killum, a Nahwitti chief — from the Tsimshians for twenty blankets, anticipating a good effect on the Queen Charlotte Sound Natives.⁸⁹

Trade in November included more traffic in slaves with Tongass Chief Ebbets — hoping to dispose of a copper for six or seven slaves — travelling south to the Kitkatlas, although the chief returned by the fourteenth still in possession of his copper. The Kaiganis also arrived to trade "all they had" for oil, and a dozen canoes of Natives from the Skeena arrived with "Bag & Baggage" to take up winter residence at the fort.⁹⁰ The feasting season commenced on 11 November with a "drinking match" at the Skeena River, followed in December by a feast among the Kitkatlas. Trade during this period consisted of few skins with little improvement until the new year, when the Tongass brought word that the Stikines were at Tlehonsiti with a large amount to trade. As the journal on 20 January 1839 noted: "The trade in furs has been very slack even for this season of the year. The returns are short something of what they were this time last year."⁹¹

The Tsimshians also began arriving in preparation for the Nass fishery, as Skeena people arrived the twenty-second, and Legaic and his people came on the twenty-ninth. On the thirty-first from "250 to 300 canoes of Chimsyans arrived from Skeena and encamped here,

⁸⁸ As John Kennedy noted, "The Indians in making presents and giving away things always do so with the understanding of some time or other getting an equivalent in return" (*ibid.*, fo. 80d).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, fos. 53-53d. This was also seen as a humanitarian step, as the woman — one of 20 taken by the Kitkatlas — "pleaded most pitifully not to be allowed to fall into the hands of the Stikeen men." A Kaigani slave woman was ransomed from the Tsimshians on 2 Dec. 1839, by Dr. John Kennedy to prevent her falling into Stikine hands. The latter had already paid for her "but on my interfering the articles were given back and she returned" (*ibid.*, fo. 149d). At the same time, a number of slaves were resident at the establishment — owned by the fort wives — although no effort was made to liberate them.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, fos. 62-62d.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 74.

There are now a great many Natives assembled about the place." This also led to problems, as Wass attempted to force his way in the gate, and engaged in a scuffle with the gatekeeper Kayrio. Work observed that the Natives

look upon the men particularly the Kanakas [Sandwich Islanders] as slaves tho' they are frequently told that such is not the case and that the men do nothing but what we tell them and that it is our orders for them not to allow themselves to be imposed upon, and that any injury done to any of the men will be looked upon the same as if done to any of ourselves and punished the same.⁹²

The Tongass and Tsimshians arrived for more slaves, acquiring two from the Tsimshians already at the fort, and many of the latter began leaving for the Nass by 13 February (almost one month ahead of schedule). The Kaiganis and Gispaxlots also resumed hostilities when Legaic attempted to seize a slave of the former, although the intervention of surgeon John Kennedy averted further troubles. With most of the Tsimshians off to the Nass, things soon quieted down, with the Kaiganis bringing little to trade, although the news began to circulate that Kaigani sea otter hunters had mutinied on a California cruise under Captain Bancroft.⁹³ Over the next few days, sea otters from the ill-fated cruise arrived for trade, giving Work qualms which he resolved by reasoning that if he did not trade for the furs, the Russians would almost certainly get the Natives' otters "for years to come."⁹⁴

Local quarrels also continued, as Hansen (Giludzau) was robbed while visiting his Tongass wife's friends, in return for which he kidnapped a little girl; this affair was settled when he was given a blanket and other items in compensation. Work observed that the company had to become involved in these incidents in order to guarantee the security of strangers and ensure continued visits for trade. "The Indians have frequently been told to settle their disputes or right themselves if they have been wronged elsewhere than at the fort and that we will not interfere as it is *no affair of ours* but we will not suffer anything of the kind to take place at the fort which is our

⁹² Ibid., fo. 75.

⁹³ Ibid., fo. 89. On 16 April Captain William McNeill's sister-in-law arrived from Kaigani to confirm the story of Bancroft's demise. According to her report, Bancroft had given the Natives short provisions, bad powder, and inadequate sleeping quarters, and a quarrel with the Captain resulted in two deaths among the Whites (including Bancroft). The crew sailed back to Kaigani, and on going ashore the Native hunters left one-half of the catch, plus one otter each, to the vessel which sailed on to Oahu (ibid., fo. 89).

⁹⁴ Ibid., fo. 91. Certainly a rationalization which could have endangered other ship's parties.

ground.”⁹⁵ (*Italics mine.*) This statement explicitly recognized Tsimshian sovereignty on their own lands, to resolve their affairs according to their own laws, while the HBC ground was to be an enclave which all might visit in peace. Thus the agent of a monopoly, under charter to establish plantations and given the authority to administer the territory of Rupert’s Land, enunciated a policy of non-intervention in the Native political sphere, bifurcating the pre-Colonial territory into two polities. In May this policy was put to the test as news arrived of the murder of the woman Chief Scutsay of the Kaiganis, leading to internecine strife and increased purchases of ammunition at the fort.⁹⁶ During earlier tension on the coast, Chief Factor McLoughlin had ordered a reduction of ammunition sales, but in cases involving quarrels between Natives, it would appear that this policy of non-interference did not include a stay of trade with belligerents, as the company sold munitions to both sides in the dispute, subject to the proviso that armed actions were conducted elsewhere.

The violence among the Kaiganis was paralleled at the fort when the Tsimshians began to return — over 750 canoes, according to Kennedy — simultaneous with trading visits by the Skidegates and Massets. A dispute between the former and one of Legaic’s sons led to gunfire with two Massets and one Tsimshian wounded, as well as a Tsimshian man who reportedly died from fright as a consequence of the firing.⁹⁷ The next morning two large canoes of armed Tsimshians arrived from Tsa-qaxs’s village, and were joined by some Gitwalgots, which enabled a Masset canoe to leave under their protection. Neeselcamah’s people (Chief Nieslkumik of Giludzau village?), however, took the opportunity of attacking a party of Skidegates leaving under Tsimshian protection. Fourteen canoes with the most valuable property got off under fire, but forty of Chief Bear Skin’s people took refuge inside the fort, suffering two dead (including the chief’s wife) in the process. Work took no action, as he explained: “we might have killed those who were endeavouring to make peace as well as the aggressors and thus got ourselves into difficulties with the

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 93d. The Russian American Company formulated a similar policy in 1834, when Governor Ferdinand Wrangell wrote to the manager of the St. Dionysius redoubt at the Stikine River mouth: “on the matter of your relations with the [Tlingits], you need not involve yourself in their quarrels and feuds and take no part if two different tribes battle, as they would like to entice you to one side or the other” (RAK: 11, no. 313 of 16 May 1834, fo. 318).

⁹⁶ HBCA B.201/a/4, fo. 97.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 100d.

whole of them and on this account we were deterred from firing upon them.”⁹⁸

Eventually the hostages were ransomed from the Tsimshians, and some local persons brought provisions to the fort in sympathy for the unfortunate Skidegates, and with the parolees taking refuge in the fort, their numbers soon swelled to sixty-eight, disrupting the fort schedule in the process. In accordance with his non-interference policy, Work refused to aid in paying the ransom as “[w]ere we to give the least thing it would likely be an inducement for them to seize any strangers they might again get in their power for the same purpose.” Work considered the action of Bear Skin in ransoming his people ill-advised, as the HBC had alarmed the Tsimshian chiefs “a good deal” by threatening no longer to protect them from Haida raids. The threat to bring in other Natives to redress a dispute not of their own making hardly seems credible, and certainly contrary to HBC interests.⁹⁹

The Skidegates slipped off at one o’clock on the morning of 29 May having suffered at least five dead, and left the Tsimshians unnerved by Work’s threat of Haida retribution — by the end of June only four lodges were still in the vicinity of the fort, with fifteen men and a number of women and children. The trader noted that the Natives’ hunts would suffer, as they would probably make few trading excursions, but would spend the summer on their guard. Soon reports came in that Tsa-qaxs’s people had attacked a canoe of other Tsimshians, and on 7 June word was received of the first Haida attack, which had resulted in three dead and thirteen taken prisoner, as well as a quantity of property lost. “This is a just judgment on the Chimsyans for their conduct here short ago, but unfortunately the punishment has not fallen upon the guilty,” as the people slain had been friendly toward the Haida at the time of the troubles at the fort.¹⁰⁰ The Nisga’as also were circumspect about travelling with Haida war parties abroad, and reports of fighting among the Kaiganis and Tongass with several dead

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* While the traders repeatedly made threats to intervene with force, they failed to present a credible deterrent to intertribal hostilities — in all probability, the HBC was watching to see if one house or village would emerge to control the vicinity of the fort. While the earlier rhetoric promised order around the establishment, Work did not specify whether this would come about through the agency of the company or some Native hegemon. At this point in time, no such figure had yet emerged.

⁹⁹ An earlier dispute in New Caledonia had led the management of the district to consider employing a party of Beaver Indians to track down and kill the murderer of an HBC employee. However, it was felt that the employment of Native mercenaries would be an acknowledgment of the Company’s inability to extract justice in the situation. Of course Work was not threatening to utilize the Haida as agents or employees, but the framing of such a threat to the Tsimshian might well have made such an impression.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 105.

in each case underscored the violence unleashed by the figurative sanction Work had given to Haida raiding. While not acknowledging any culpability in the matter, Work wrote: "All this fighting among the Indians will be ruinous to our Returns. The Natives will not dare to stir about either to hunt or trade."¹⁰¹

The Stikines made a visit in mid-June for slaves, and together with the Kaiganis traded more than one hundred beaver — a total less than expected. By mid-July some Tsimshian traders had ventured to the fort, one reporting Haida "inroads" at Milbank Sound, with Chief Yellow's son taken captive, and a later report came in of Haidas skulking about Finlayson's Island, "looking out for a chance to carry off any straggling canoes of Chimsyans,"¹⁰² and berrying parties from the fort confirmed the presence of some roving parties. The end of July saw renewed trade with the Nisga'as in marten, but on 30 July a party of Haida (later determined to have been Tsimshians) attacked "good old" Ishateen's (Nisga'a) party, killing all but the chief.¹⁰³ The violence along the coast continued into August as well, with reports of a Masset attack on the Tongass at Tlehonsiti:

Should these Queen Charlotte Islands Indians continue their marauding, which seems to be promiscuous, on all the Indians of the Main, means, even at a sacrifice and inconvenience, should be taken to punish them and put a stop to it, While they keep prowling about this way ready to fall upon every defenceless party they meet, the natives on the Main here will be afraid to stir either to hunt or trade and all the furs or anything else we get from Queen Charlotte's Islands in 7 years would not recompense us for the loss of the Indians on the Main not hunting or trading one year.¹⁰⁴

The arrival of the *Thomas Perkins* out of New York opened another bidding war for the Native custom, with Work raising the price for sea otter to £ 9.2.4, and other furs accordingly. As the trader noted: "The Indians are in their glory when an opposition is going on and are chuckling at these high prices but are well aware that they will cease as

¹⁰¹ Ibid., fo. 106d.

¹⁰² Ibid., fo. 112d., 8 July 1839.

¹⁰³ Ibid., fo. 117d., 30 July. It was reported 31 July that the Haida had exerted themselves less in hunting and trading, employing their time instead singing and dancing "to keep off some sickness which is said to prevail among the Natives farther to the southward" (fo. 118).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., fo. 122.

soon as our opponents are gone.”¹⁰⁵ By the fifteenth trade was still slow, Work noting that despite the high prices being offered, the Stikine were loath to part with all their furs, holding some as usual for slaves “who sell very high where they go to trade and yield a much higher profit than any other articles they take.” By the seventeenth the Americans had tired of the trade, and engaged a party of twenty-four Tongass hunters to take on a cruise to California, although the trader thought the Natives would prove too troublesome aboard ship. The presence of the American vessel also briefly disrupted the trade in provisions, as the Tongass took much of their venison to the American vessel first: “it is upon these people we chiefly depend for our fall supply of venison to salt and have to keep on good terms with them and encourage them.”¹⁰⁶

In the immediate aftermath of the American visit, the Stikine — led by Chief Quatkie’s wife — continued to press for opposition prices, and Work considered meeting their request, although other tribes had accepted pre-opposition prices. A dampening of the trade resulted, but it was seen as inevitable that the Natives would come to the company’s terms after a time. The arrival of more Stikines under Shakes’s son on 23 August — along with Tsimshian traders — promised trouble, although as Work noted there was no danger of the furs going “elsewhere.” The Nisga’as and Kitkatlas also declined to trade at the low prices (one blanket and four yards cotton for a large beaver), and the market became totally glutted when fourteen canoes of Legaic’s people arrived from the Skeena with the report that they had lots of furs, “that they were never so lucky in any of their trading excursions to the interior as on this occasion.”¹⁰⁷

The increased population at the fort brought renewed tensions, as well as potato theft. On 27 August the detention of one thief led Tsaxax to suggest that the company kill the man, “as much as to say that they would revenge his death, they also observed that the white men would be going out of the fort bye and bye.” Work responded that the Natives could attack any time, that the fort was prepared for them, at which point the chief reportedly took a more conciliatory attitude, offering to ransom the detainée and upbraiding his men for stealing

¹⁰⁵ The Americans offered a blanket and five gallons of rum for beaver, to which Work immediately raised the price to two three-point blankets, one gallon mixed rum, three quarter lb. leaf tobacco (about twenty-six shillings nine pence) and for a large sea otter ten three-point blankets, one gun, one shirt, and all the “Saumon Tauskins [small gifts]” (*ibid.*, 5 Aug. 1839, fo. 121).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 125.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 Aug. 1839, fo. 131.

potatoes when they could be obtained so cheaply from the Massets. As Work observed, "this was our ground now and—we would not be imposed upon and that if any more were caught stealing they would be shot, This changed their threats into supplication and finally the fellow was let go on a promise not to be guilty of the like again. If avoidable it is not our interest to get into small quarrels with them."¹⁰⁸

In late September the company encountered more difficulty as Barker (a Stikine) annoyed the gatekeeper Lagace by calling all the white men slaves, for which opinion he was knocked down. Barker went off "sulky" and sent word enquiring what payment he was to get for his injury, to which Dr. Kennedy replied that "he ought to have been shot and that all he got was no more than he deserved." While Barker took steps to prepare for revenge, Lagace sent him word to come any time as he was prepared for trouble. Kennedy concluded, "There is no doing with some of these scamps without rough treatment occasionally" when they became too aggressive at the gate.¹⁰⁹ Work and Kennedy must have been concerned to notice the degree to which trade had fallen and defiance toward the British increased, although they continued their policy of putting trade on a basis more favourable to the company, at the same time maintaining the integrity of the fort territory.

Through September trade remained dull, with few of the resident Tsimshians and Tongass going out to hunt, and the low tariffs still depressing the trade.¹¹⁰ October saw a change in the state of affairs, with provisions brought to trade, as well as some furs; at the same time the Kitkatlas were trading (herring?) spawn to the Kaiganis and Tongass. Nevertheless, Kennedy continued to complain about "lazy" Natives who showed little interest in hunting the abundant deer. On 3 November, however, trade became "brisk" as several canoes from the Skeena arrived take up winter quarters.¹¹¹ Inter-tribal trade also rebounded, with the Nisga'as venturing down to the Skeena with lots of oil for the Tsimshians "who are it appears badly off for this luxury"; on the following day, a large party of Tsimshians passed en route to the Nass carrying berries to trade for oil. While much traffic between

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 27 Aug. 1839, fo. 131d.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 Sept. 1839, fo. 140.

¹¹⁰ Some Tsimshians attempted to try oil from a dead whale on Dundas Island, spoiling the oil in the process of using hot stones to boil the oil. The loan of kettles from the fort promised better results, although the oil turned thick and black, and was of no use for burning — an unfortunate development as the fort was running short of oil (fos. 136-136d.).

¹¹¹ The trade was interrupted briefly as the Natives travelled down to the Kitkatlas for a feast, the Stikine Quatkie taking his coppers along in another attempt to purchase slaves with them (fo. 146d).

the two river systems was noted, Kennedy observed that little trade was being conducted at the fort, with reports on the third of a large number of Nisga'as off to the Skeena to trade oolachen oil. Apparently with the Haida threat diminished, the intertribal commerce of the summer was being resumed.

The year ended with renewed tension between the HBC and Tsa-qaxs, who had been assaulted by a fort employee, with his prestige injured accordingly. After making an initial demand for twenty blankets, rum, and tobacco, which was refused by Kennedy, Tsa-qaxs attempted to cut off a small party of men outside the fort, causing Kennedy to fire the cannon in warning and dispatch a party of armed men. By mid-January 1840, Tsa-qaxs indicated a willingness to parley, but Kennedy instead offered an amnesty and a return to the status quo, resumed when Tsa-qaxs' "brother" came to trade sea otter at the fort. While the chief threatened to have his revenge, Kennedy defiantly challenged him to attack whenever ready.¹¹²

Following the conclusion of the agreement between the Russian American Company and the Hudson's Bay Company of 6 February 1839, the HBC made preparations to take control of the Russian American seaboard north to Cape Spencer.¹¹³ Operations at Fort Simpson continued with the customary spring altercation between the Kaiganis and Tsimshians, resulting in the latter seizing a slave from the former, who was subsequently returned. The potato trade also continued, with the Haidas bringing in over eleven hundred bushels, and with the end of the oolachen fishery in May, the journal began noting the employment of numbers of Tsimshians cutting wood, grinding wheat, hoeing potatoes, and gathering charcoal. With the departure of the *Beaver* and *Vancouver* to the north to take possession of Fort Stikine, the tariff with the northern Natives — in this case the

¹¹² *Ibid.*, fo. 154d. This continual game of "chicken" played by the traders at Fort Simpson was rarely tested by the Natives, although one should not conclude thereby that they were in awe of the establishment or the HBC men. In fact, if the Natives had any countervailing strategy, it would have been to choose the place and time of their response, and not to respond directly to the HBC challenge. The company, while sometimes employing conciliation (although avoiding situations it considered capitulation to exorbitant demands) had identified Tsa-qaxs as an inconsequential threat to the security of the fort or the trade, and treated him with little regard for his prestige. The sort of brinkmanship typical of these situations seems to have been employed by pretenders who sought to enhance their credibility at the expense of the Euroamericans — the application of a traditional means of social reproduction to actors from an outside group. Such a policy might be employed with success with foreign Natives, but bore little fruit when applied to the company.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, fo. 162. Chief Quatkie resolved the matter almost two months later, bringing a letter from Captain Lindenberg of the Russian American Company, which stated that the attack had been launched by the "Quinanas" [gunana] of the Interior; Robert Campbell subsequently denied the complicity of the "Nahani" Natives in the assault.

Tongass — was dropped to a coast-wide standard. While trade with the Nisga'as was reported very good (although the marten harvests were down), the Tongass circulated a false report of the wreck of the *Beaver*, causing little consternation at the fort.¹¹⁴ In July trade with the Kitkatlas and Kaiganis had still not reached a satisfactory tariff, and the Stikine began showing up at the fort, hoping to receive more ammunition in trade than factor William Rae at Fort Stikine was prepared to give them.¹¹⁵ The Kaiganis withdrew from the market, taking two sea otter pelts along, and even the fort women suffered from the new tariff, receiving only five fathoms of "Regatta cloth" per beaver, instead of the usual six.

With the potatoes nearing harvest, the autumnal thefts recommenced, with a man of the Gitando village caught and placed in irons — this agitated his village-people, who threatened to burn the fort down. Work claimed to take little notice of this, but then turned the man "about his business." Further thefts from the fort garden were attributed instead to the Nisga'as, who "made some havoc" in the patch. The occasion of the Massets arriving to trade also gave Work the opportunity to record the operation of a parallel economy at the fort, noting that the Massets, having traded none of their potatoes to the fort, disposed of them to the Tsimshians for oolachen oil, blankets, and baize. The Tsimshians in turn traded these same potatoes to the fort for rum, "a strong proof of how much these miserable beings are addicted to liquor."¹¹⁶ Other provisions were short this year, as the Tongass brought in only four deer on 5 October, although the company tariff in that commodity had not fallen, the Tongass claiming fear of the Tsimshians having retarded their hunts, and appealing for a party from the fort to escort them on their hunts. This Work interpreted as either a bit of "humbug," or a polite refusal.

In late October Work noted the arrival of "a canoe of [Legaic's] Gang (no other gang of the Chymysyan tribe being allowed to trade there) arrived from Skenna River, traded 3 Beaver & 8 Martin Skins from them & .have still about 20 Beaver &c," while a party of

¹¹⁴ HBCA B.201/a/5, fos. 12d-13. Rumours of wars closer to home also emerged, with a report of an impending attack on the fort Natives by the Ginaxangiks in alliance with the Haidas.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 19d. "Traded 38 Beaver from Stikine Indians but did not allow them the one tenth of what ammunition they wanted, knowing that if Mr. Rae thought proper they should have it without coming this far, particularly when their Tariff is higher than ours here."

¹¹⁶ Of course Work's concern for the "miserable beings" did not extend so far as to cease the use of liquor in trade. One senses rather some chagrin on his part at being forced to trade from the Tsimshian what he could have obtained more cheaply from the Massets (*ibid.*, fo. 22d). Subsequent shipments of Haida potatoes were purchased by the fort to the amount of 766 bushels.

Tsimshians returned from the Nass River "but without a single skin."¹¹⁷ Thus more than one "gang" was involved in trading to the Interior — and apparently the Nisga'as were now ceding the transportation of their furs to others — and the Skeena route was now proving more lucrative. The movement of peoples also continued, when a group of Tsimshians "stationary" since the summer broke camp for the Skeena on 3 November, while on the twelfth "no less than 10 canoes of Chumsyans arrived today come for the purpose of taking up their winter quarters at this place — anything but desirable as there are more than enough here already."¹¹⁸ On the fourteenth Work sounded a note of desperation as he wrote "more of these rascally spackaloids arrived here to day to take up their winter Quarters here, in fact almost the whole gang is at this place now."

DISCUSSION

Current scholarship is basically correct in identifying the impact of some of the disruptive forces on the coast: the recent arrival of White traders, new technologies and diseases. Given this new correlation of forces on the coast, there was a period of time during which Native societies strove to adapt themselves to the new realities. The *means* with which coastal peoples attempted to adjust the social and political regime, however, remains open to examination.

When the company initiated contact with the Tsimshian people there were three major chiefs at Metlakatla, although the primary among them, Nieshot of the Gitzaxtets, was eliminated by the smallpox epidemic of 1836, as was Tsa-qaxs of the Ginaxangiks. The latter name resurfaced almost immediately as a successor was raised to resume the position of his uncle, but the Fort Simpson journal showed that the pretender was not completely successful in claiming the prerogatives due him, failing in his first name feast, and being rejected in his attempt to establish a political marriage. Nieshot, on the other hand, fell from view for several years, although eventually a successor was raised; in the meantime, however, the company had established an exclusive relationship with Chief Legaic of the Gispaxlots. Scholars of the Tsimshians have tended to view this as Legaic extending his historical or "traditional" trading domains to include the fort, but given the pre-smallpox record, and the company relief at the deaths of Nieshot and Tsa-qaxs, it appears that Legaic

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 29 and 18 Oct. 1840, fos. 28d., 27.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 12 Nov. 1840, fo. 30d.

was elevated to this monopoly as the most *pliant* of the three Coast Tsimshian chiefs — certainly the fact of his *surviving* the epidemic contributed to his being the first on the scene when the HBC sought to reopen the trade with the Interior. While the Coast Tsimshians did relocate to the vicinity of the fort, by 1840 there was no sign of a confederation of the villages under an autocratic Legaic; rather the villages continued to exert autonomy in matters of trade and “foreign” relations.

One story in the Barbeau collection recounted the trade dominance of Nies’arhwaets or Gemk, a Ginaxangik *lokagiget* who traded among the Tsimshians, Nisga’as, and even the Chilkat Tlingits in Lynn Canal, and it was remembered of him: “many of these blankets found among the Tsimshian and Nisg[a] and other tribes were through the trading channels of this man.”¹¹⁹ The story of the purchase of the Nahuhulk, a particularly valuable copper, explicitly cited a Ginaxangik trade monopoly with the Chilkat Tlingits (suppliers of copper and dancing blankets), noting a relationship between Wiseks (later the chief of the village) and Stikine Tlingit Chief Shakes. This would have placed the Ginaxangiks in control of some of the most lucrative trade of the coast prior to the arrival of the Russian and American traders, the construction of St. Dionysius redoubt by the Russians, and the smallpox epidemic of 1836.¹²⁰ An even stronger case to challenge the Gispaxlots claims to the control of the Aboriginal trade of the region can be made for Tsibasa of the Kitkatlas, who ranged from Milbank Sound to Fort Simpson and beyond, and was traditionally the first chief on the coast to receive guns in trade from the Boston captains.¹²¹ It is conceivable that the Kitkatlas were the first Tsimshians to meet Euroamericans, as recounted in the narrative of the man Saebaena’s encounter with the “ghost people,” who arrived off the halibut grounds travelling in their “huge monster.” As a result of this meeting, the Kitkatlas acquired new foods and implements (including guns), and threw a

¹¹⁹ Barbeau files B-F-28.16 Ginaxangik. “Account of raid on Ginarengik gispawudwada, house of nies’arhnaets,” informant Mrs. Ethel Musgrave, Port Simpson, 1929.

¹²⁰ George F. MacDonald and John J. Cove, eds. *Trade and Warfare. Tsimshian Narratives 2* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987), 38-52. Recorded by William Benyon, n.d., informant James Lewis (or Gai’mtkwa, Kitkatla *Gispawudwada*).

¹²¹ Barbeau files B-F-131.79 “story of Ktsam’nlagen” (place of split rock), informant James Lewis. As part of this exchange, Tsibasa took the name of the Captain [James?] Hale, although this name fell almost immediately into disrepute. Frederic Howay places Hale on the coast between 1818 and 1821. Thus if this was one of the earliest visits to the Tsimshian [and the first importation of guns] this would place the early trade of the coast almost coterminous with the approach of the HBC from the Interior.

great feast to honour the ghost chief. After this the Kitkatlas “were much dreaded by all the other tribes.”¹²²

Furthermore, the number of armed incidents recorded in the Fort Simpson journals indicate an on-going struggle between the Haidas and Tsimshians to control the access of the Euroamericans to the Nass and Skeena Rivers. While the former had generally been isolated on their off-shore entrepôts, they nevertheless sought to employ product substitution (potatoes for sea otters) and armed conflict to regain their former position of predominance in the trade. The story “Revenge of Legaix upon the Haida” also suggests that the Gispaxlots had a long-running feud with the Haidas, while the coastal traders including the Ginaxangiks and Gitwalgots enjoyed good relations with the islanders, with the possible result that the Gispaxlots were quick to take advantage of the temporary decline of Tsa-qaxs to seize some Ginaxangik prerogatives and revenge themselves upon the Haida.¹²³

Although the increasing number of feasts reflected the reinforcement of chiefly trading prerogatives, the relatively small number of these held (or recorded at any rate) prior to 1840 suggest that no one chief had a firm enough hold on the trade routes to the Interior to validate a claim to a *monopoly* of access. The voluminous and almost continuous feasting such as Grumet discussed was not recorded by the company until the 1850s. However, even these observations in the HBC journals must be taken with a grain of salt, as despite the rapid rate of feasts, coastal societies continued to pursue their seasonal occupations, making the major visits to oolachen and salmon fisheries, and conducting trips to the Interior for trade.

While Legaix reportedly enjoyed a monopoly in this time, this cannot be understood in Western terms, as a complete shut-down of all but Gispaxlots commerce, but *might* have consisted of titular control. Even after the rise of Legaix in 1840, “strangers” from the Interior continued to bring trade down the Skeena to the fort, and the Nass River valley also continued to be a very important venue. Beginning in the 1850s, the managers at Fort Simpson employed Neshaki — a Nisga’a noblewoman and wife of HBC Chief Trader William McNeill — to conduct trade and transport furs from her village at Caxatan, and she continued to freight for the company on the Nass

¹²² Ibid., B-F-131.8r “story of Laxgibu” (Wolf Point at So. end of Banks Island, B.C.), informant James Lewis. The ghost people were obviously Whites, an allusion to their pale skins. The description of the ghost vessel is remarkable for its details of a first contact situation, and the interpretation of people, foods, objects and practices.

¹²³ MacDonald and Cove, *Trade and Warfare*, 66-68. Recorded by William Benyon, 1927, informants Joseph Morrison and Mrs. McKay, Nishga.

after Legaic left the fort to join William Duncan at Metlakatla in 1862. By the middle 1860s Neshaki was even operating on the Skeena River, in Legaic's "backyard."

In projecting the deeds and triumphs of Chief Legaic, those using the *adawx* as a primary source should consider the possibility that the "true traditions" reveal a *Gispaxlots* truth, which is only one dimension of a multi-faceted contact situation. Perhaps one day we can expect a period of historical *perestroika* and re-discovery of the other Coast Tsimshian chiefs, to parallel the rediscovery of Natives as more than political naïfs.

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