

Figure 1. Gitxaala ca. 1850. Reconstruction painting by Gordon Miller and George MacDonald.

## A Visual History of Nineteenth Century Lach Klan (Gitxaala)

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The fascinating story of Gitxaala is told throughout this book primarily from the perspective of oral history and written documents. I would like to present a parallel visual history drawn from photographs and maps that deal with space and time in a more concrete fashion.

For the past four decades I have been convinced that the totem villages of the Northwest Coast provide unique records in the history of mankind of monumental works of art in wood. The totems also record family histories and territorial rights stretching back many thousands of years. Only a small percentage of this art has survived in museums or in the villages, although literally thousands of monumental sculptures can be examined in great detail in the photographs taken by travellers, traders, surveyors and missionaries in the last half of the nineteenth and early into the twentieth century. During that time tens of thousands of images of the totems were recorded and are now housed in archives in Europe and America.

This large number of historic photos allows each of the totem villages to be reconstructed to some extent in virtual time and space. The painting above, by Vancouver artist Gordon Miller, was commissioned for the *Historical Atlas of Canada*, Vol. 2 (Gentilcore 1993). It was based mainly on the glass plate of Gitxaala village

taken by Edward Dossetter for the visit of Provincial Government officials to the village in 1881. At the same time, items of European introduction such as glazed windows, milled doors, trim and siding were removed to show how the original house fronts would have appeared. The scene is also in colour, based on colour slides taken of the village during my visit to Kitkatla in 1979.

The period between 1880 and 1900 marked dramatic changes in the physical nature of the village of Lach Klan (Kitkatla on today's maps) that were captured in maps, drawings and photos that have been brought together from many archival and private sources to create this reconstruction of how the village changed from an Indigenous to a Christian mission model during that critical period. Almost 1,000 photos of the village of Gitxaala have been assembled which provide a new data-base for the examination of many issues of anthropological interest.

The photos also document the disappearance of the totems that once graced the village. Their destruction was rapid in the last decades of the nineteenth century but some survived until the 1980s. It is evident that the Gitxaalans, for the most part, continued to cherish the totems for as long as they could stand against the elements. The last of the old poles was knocked over by a high tide in the early nineteen eighties.

The photos that are currently available provide sufficient evidence for a creditable composite map of the village, as well as images of the houses that stood there from early in the 1880s on. It is inevitable that more photos and drawings will be found that will clarify many details of the dynamic nature of this community during a period of four decades between the late 1870s and World War One.

The most extensive written documentation of the houses and monuments of the village were the five volumes of field notes recorded by William Beynon, a young Tsimshian from the village of Lax Kwa'alaams which lies further north in Tsimshian territory close to the Alaska border. Beynon had been trained by Marius Barbeau during the work they did together at Lax Kwa'alaams in 1915. In 1916 Barbeau contracted Beynon to record the houses and *adawx* of the people of Gitxaala over a period of several months for the National Museum of Canada.

Beynon recorded the names and titles of the chiefs and ordered them by social rank rather than by linking them to their house sites on a map. Although he did include excellent drawings of details of house structure, particularly of Chief He'l's House (Number 7 in the row) and some totem pole details, he did not undertake to map the village as he did in the 1920's when he undertook similar recording at his home village of Lax Kw'alaams.

There is also a detailed record of the lineages at Lach Klan made by Beynon in 1916 including the names of families who occupied each house, including their inventory of economic territories, personal names, crests, *adawx* and other prerogatives. There are more than fifty closely written pages of such household possessions

in the government issued field notebooks Barbeau provided to him. They are now in the archives of the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Quebec.

To judge from excavations at the Boardwalk Site (GbTo-31) in the Prince Rupert Harbour, evidence of individual house sites can be traced through successive rebuilding phases on the same lots over millennia (Ames 2008).

I had been aware, since visiting Gitxaala some 40 years ago as part of the North Coast Prehistory Project of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, that the depth of more than ten feet of shell midden deposit underlying the village indicated occupation at the Lach Klan site of more than 5,000 years.

Approaching the village of Gitxaala by boat the visitor is confronted by the north shoreline of an enormous shell midden that turns mid-way through the village to the west until it veers south. After 230 metres it crosses a creek and again turns west for another 230 metres. Some twenty five large communal houses stood along this shoreline in the mid-eighteen seventies.



*Figure 2. The author examines the deep profile on the south face of the Gitxaala midden in 1979.*

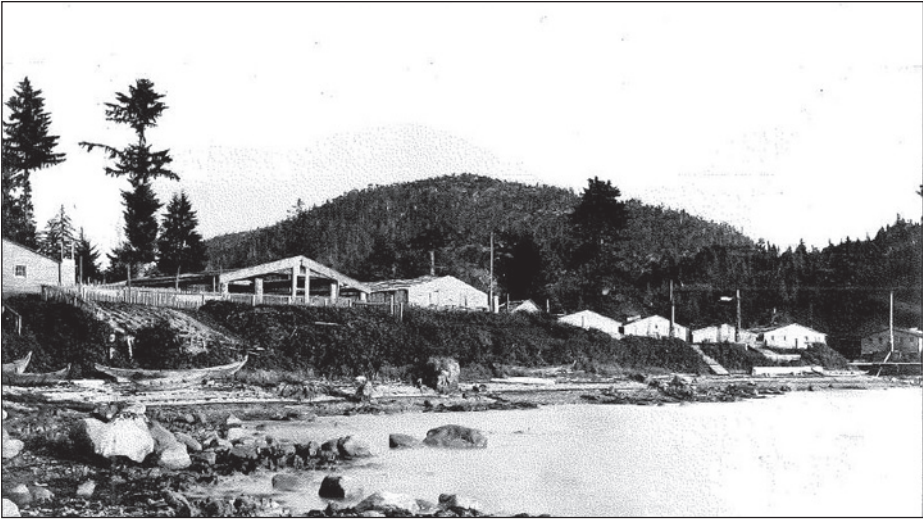


Figure 3. *Gitxaala in 1881 showing the row of traditional plank lineage houses on the north face of the midden. Edward Dossetter photo. AMNH.*

### Mapping Gitxaala in the 1880s

Edward Dossetter of Victoria was the official photographer on an Indian Commission inspection tour in 1881. He took the earliest photographs of the village in that year. Although he only took two glass plates of Gitxaala that survive, his views show the massive plank houses that stood atop the high shell midden. (See Figures 3 and 30.)

A second line of physical evidence of the size and location of structures in the village was provided when the Dominion Government surveyor Peter O'Reilly was sent to Lach Klan in 1882 as a follow up to the visit the year before of Israel W. Powell, the First Indian Commissioner of B.C. (See figure 4.)

O'Reilly measured only the width of the houses along his survey line that ran along what is today called Beach Street. He seems to have ignored the length of the houses as irrelevant to his purpose. Since the proportions of Tsimshian houses were normally one and a half times longer than their width, Figure 5 is my suggestion of the footprint of the houses in the traditional village before the missionary pressure to abandon the massive communal plank houses in favour of nuclear family houses built with sawn lumber on a stud frame.

O'Reilly's survey line can be seen on his map running in front of the houses the length of the village. Tight control is provided by the twenty-two instrument stations he has marked along the survey line. His field logs indicate where additional lines were shot at right angles from each station to the buildings along the way. They provide much more information about the actual size of

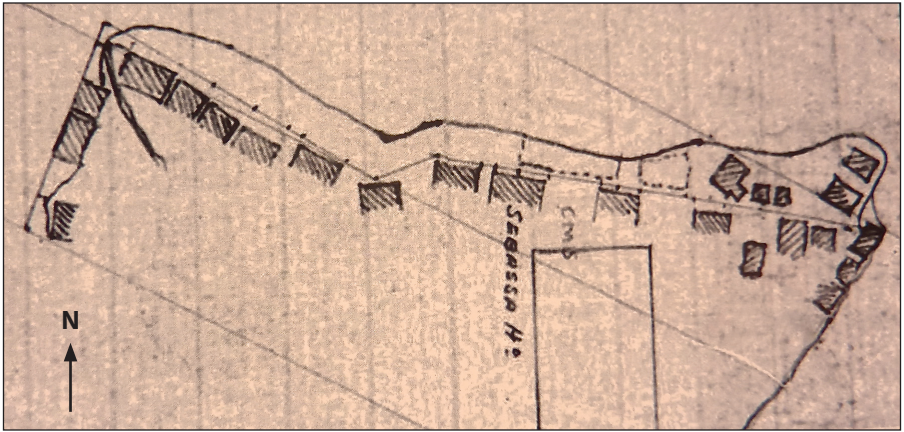


Figure 4. A map of Gitxaala village in 1882 by the government surveyor Peter O'Reilly. It identifies the large house of Chief Sebassa (Ts'ibasaa) or H'el in the middle of the settlement with the allotment of the land behind to the Church Missionary Society (marked CMS on the map). Library and Archives Canada.

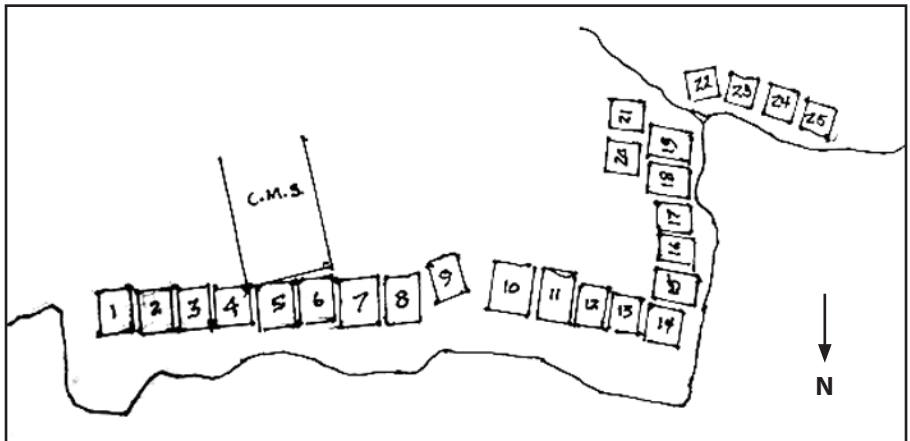


Figure 5: This sketch map shows the position of 25 large communal houses in Kitkatla about 1880 based on early photographic evidence. The first 14 are along the north shore. Around the corner from them, houses 15 to 25 on either side of the creek rely on evidence from the 1898 photo by McTavish and several drawings as well as the second Dossetter photo of 1881.

each structure than does the map he produced several years earlier of the houses at Lax Kwa'alaams.

O'Reilly does not locate any totem poles on the Gitxaala map as he did on the one of Lax Kwa'alaams, although there is photographic evidence that half a dozen poles stood along the north shore of Gitxaala at that time.

A third source is Bishop William Ridley's *Snapshots from the North Pacific*, which includes line drawings of the village from the 1890s. They illustrate a portion of the village not visible in the photographs. (See Figures 6 and 32.)

### Houses and Monuments on the North Shore (1-14)

Unfortunately, there are no photos of the east end of the village where the influence of the Church Missionary Society, which had a large block reserved, appears to be greatest. Although somewhat conjectural, I have marked the bounds of what I feel were original house sites at the east end that had previously been cleared of old house remains and had new, much smaller buildings erected on them. This may indicate pressure from the missionary to replace the communal houses with a number of smaller, nuclear family structures.

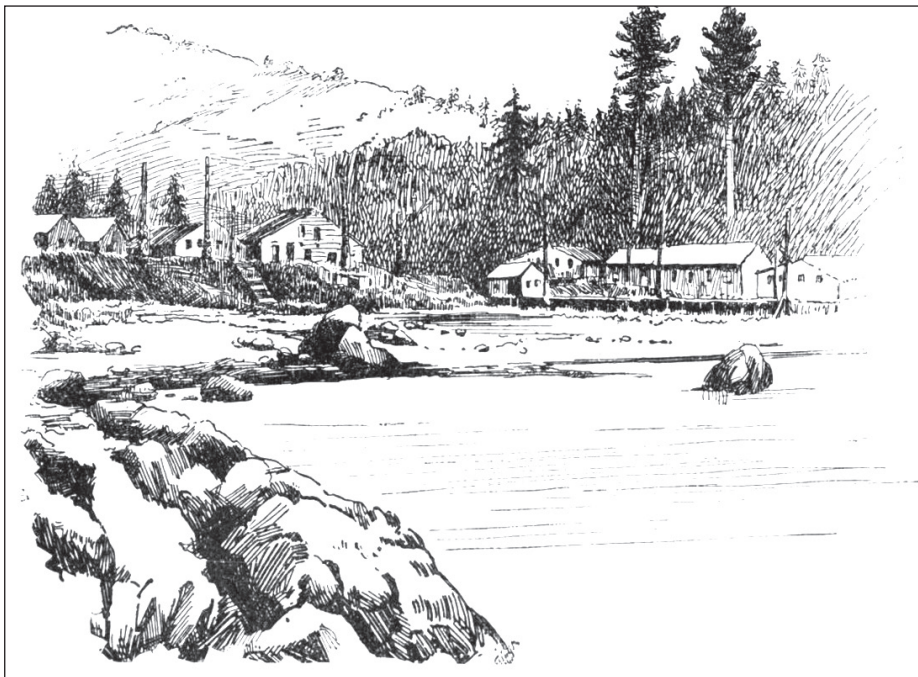


Figure 6. A drawing of houses 11 to 14 on left and others not seen on the Dossetter photo to the north and west comprising houses 22 to 25. Houses 15 to 21 are near the entrance to the creek and do not appear in this image. (Ridley 1903:140)

There are two small houses on the point of land at the east end of the village, and three more behind them along the far shore whose orientation is very different than those of the traditional communal houses in the row along what is now Beach Drive. The first three buildings from the east end of the survey line appear to occupy two old house sites, which I have numbered as 1 and 2.

### Houses 1 and 2

Major change to the traditional structures appear to have begun at this end of the village where the mission had its initial impact. Old communal houses at the beginning of the row were taken down and smaller structures of more specific function were erected. O'Reilly mapped those structures accurately, but unfortunately, did not note their function. Eleven buildings are indicated in the space I have allotted to three traditional structures simply on the basis of the average foot print of 1500 to 2,000 square feet per house.

These replacement buildings were mostly single-family dwellings of framed, milled lumber. One has an extension to the side. Four of the structures are on the west side of the survey base line along with several garden plots along the bank that are indicated by dashed lines. One of these gardens, divided from the pathway along the house row, reveals a crop of potatoes and other vegetables growing in the organic rich soil of the underlying shell midden.

The original house 2 has disappeared from this lot and the footprint of a later, much smaller structure, is set well back from the survey line which would have been atypical in a traditional village arrangement.

It is highly likely that there were a number of totem poles standing in front of the original plank houses numbers 1 and 2, since Beynon notes in his 1916 record that villagers told him of older poles that had fallen, or were cut down before they were captured in a photograph. Their memory was detailed and specific in recording the crests on these poles and their ownership. It may be possible with future research on the Beynon files to match his pole descriptions with house ownership at this end of the village.

### House 3

There is no photo of this house or associated monuments, although on the O'Reilly map of 1882 the front of a large communal house has been drawn that appears to be about 30 ft. wide by 45 ft. long.

### House 4

This appears as an empty lot on the map but its size is right to have accommodated a typical community house. The original plank house does not show in any known photo and was replaced on its lot by the Missionary's house (Fig. 7).

According to information collected by Beynon (Barbeau 1947:350) a pole once stood outside the mission house which was on the CMS allotment, although he had not seen the pole for himself. However, the shadow of an otherwise unknown pole of the correct dimensions can be seen in a photo by G. McTavish taken from the hill east of the creek in 1898. It is marked on Figure 24 by the top white arrow on the photo and is located between the bell tower of the church and a large tree. It appears to be standing in front of house lot 4.

Barbeau calls this pole “standing Raven” and based on the Beynon field notes, claimed it belonged to Chief La’ooy of the Ganhada. Barbeau claims to have heard of three similar poles at Gitxaala during his visit in 1939 so it is difficult to know which of the three is in the McTavish photo enlargement.

The upper part of the Standing Raven pole that Barbeau illustrates (1947:pl. 213) has a long shaft, but since no photos show the top of the pole, it is assumed that it was either without a crest figure or if it had one, it had fallen off before the photos were taken. The first figure below the shaft is a Raven with wings folded diving down. It is a well-carved figure with traces of the original paint in the recessed areas.

### Church Missionary Society Reserve

There is a picket fence in front of houses 5 and 6 that coincides with the north boundary of the CMS reserve and which extends behind it. The missionary was accepted into the community in 1878 and a church, school and mission residence were soon built on this property. Early in 1884 the church was torn down and the



Mission-house at Kitkatla.

*Figure 7. Beynon records that a pole probably from house number 4 stood in front of the Mission house. The silhouettes of two poles can be seen in front of the house beside a line of shrubs. (Ridley 1903:73)*



remains burned by the people of Gitxaala over a dispute with the missionary. This was in a period when British gunboats regularly shelled First Nation villages for resisting the encroaching colonial authorities. For a period after 1884 there was fear among the villagers that a gunboat might be sent to shell their dwellings as had happened at Fort Rupert in 1864. There were no such repercussions at Lach Klan and a new church was built on the allotment which stood until it was consumed by fire near the turn of the century. A third church built early in the 1900s still stands on this property.



*Figure 8 a & b. Diving Raven pole with a diving whale at the base. This pole probably stood near house 4 and was destroyed some time after Barbeau photographed it. There is not enough detail in the photo to determine exactly which house it was associated with at the east end of the village. At the base of the pole is the figure of a diving bullhead with elaborately carved faces and other designs in the spines behind its head and pectoral fins. Beside the pole, and in front of the Bullhead House of Chief La'oooy is a black marble headstone, the inscription of which is illegible at this angle but is probably a tribute to a deceased chief who had the name La'oooy.*



*Figure 9. House lots 5 to 8. House 5, the first house to show in a photograph, is seen in part on the left in this detail of the Dosseter photo. It has a new façade of sawn lumber and a glazed window mounted high on the wall to prevent shooting inhabitants through the window during raids. Fenced gardens flank the foreshore of the midden. A square tower is under construction beside this house which is probably a bell tower for the school that was built about this time in this location.*

### **House 5**

This house is outlined in part on the O'Reilly map of 1882 and also shows clearly on the photo as a large communal house with a new façade of horizontal milled lumber. A sawmill had been constructed near the village a few years before the 1881 photo was taken and at least four houses in this part of town had been modernized with new milled lumber facades in the Euro-American style. It is clear at this village as well as Lax Kwa'alaams that the highest ranking chiefs preferred to modernize their communal houses, the base of their power it could be argued, with a new façade of milled horizontal siding, glazed windows and rectangular doors, rather than abandon them for smaller dwellings.

There is no evidence of a totem pole associated with this house although one might have stood on the left side that is not captured in this photo.

A large slab-like structure with two sawn joists emerging from each corner stands to the west of this house. It is sheeted in milled siding and unlike anything seen elsewhere. It may be the unfinished bell tower of the school that was being built on the CMS property at about this time.

### **House 6**

The structure of this house had been removed by 1881 but the width of the lot between the two adjacent house structures indicate that a large communal house once stood here. It may have been the site for the house of an earlier chief, Ts'ibasaa

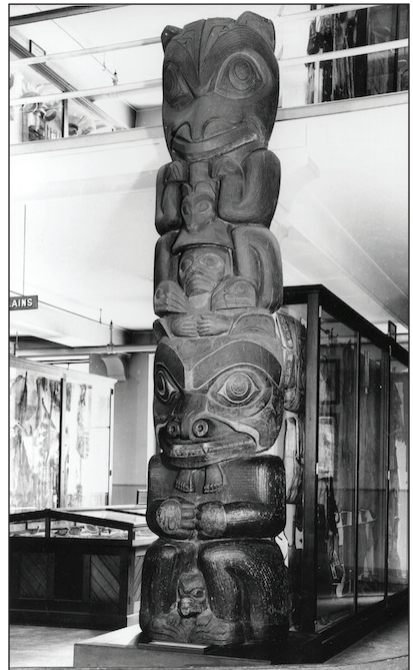
in alternate generations from the one who owned House 7 immediately next door. A description of the carvings of that earlier house were provided by William Beynon.

Barbeau (1990:469) relying on William Beynon's notes of 1916 claims that a chief by the name of He'l, possibly a predecessor to the one that built House of Light, had an earlier house either on house lot 6 or lot 7 which had elaborate carvings inside and outside of the house. Beynon did not record these on his plan for House of Light, which reinforces the idea that they belonged to an earlier structure. In this version, there was a carving of a Grizzly Bear standing on the ground as well as a large carved Grizzly Bear standing on the roof of the house looking inside through the smoke hole. Together they gave it the name "Standing-House." Inside Standing House, according to Barbeau, were elaborately carved corner posts and rafters (Barbeau 1947).

"The Hanging Grizzly" was the name of the reclining figures of bears on the four interior house posts along with Killer Whales, or Blackfish. The house beams were decorated with "The Braided Intestines" motive. The frontal pole of He'l's house had disappeared before the 1881 photo, although the name and crests on the pole were remembered and recorded by Beynon.

**House 7**

The name of this house according to William Beynon (1916) was "House of Light" which belonged to Chief He'l. It is identified on the O'Reily map as the house of Chief Sebassa (Ts'ibasaa) a name that alternated with that of He'l. In the 1881 photo it has been stripped of its roof and wall cladding exposing the massive timber supports and rafters of a major communal house. The framing of the house is identical to numerous Coast Tsimshian houses which appear in the Charles Horetzky photos of Lax Kwa'alaams taken in 1873. According to the missionary at



*Figure 10. Interior post from Chief Ts'ibasaa's house now at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University. The lower figure appears to be a male grizzly with a human woman in a tall cedar bark hat above. It probably bears reference to the "Bear Mother" story that is widespread on the coast but the prerogative of certain families.*

Gitxaala at the time, Bishop Ridley, the foot print of Ts'ibasaa's house was roughly 3600 square feet in area. This figure is confirmed in the drawing made on site by William Beynon in 1916 (Figure 12).

A sketch map by Beynon (Figure 13) details the size and structural details of the same house that he identifies as the house of He'l. "Light House" was the dwelling of the late chief He'l (Hale) of the Gispuwudwade or Killer Whales who died in the 1870s. His uncle and predecessor was one of the first to meet European traders with whom he exchanged, or at least received, the name of He'l.

He'l's "House of Light" according to Beynon's instructors measured 40 feet wide by 65 feet long and had three descending steps below grade each of which were five feet wide running around all sides at each level. The fire pit was on the lowest level and was 30 by 45 feet. There were thus four levels inside the house, counting the ground level, that were normally used for household activities, structured by rank, but could be quickly converted to ceremonial use as required.

Beynon was able to examine the *da'ax*, or house pit of this house in 1916 and draw the location of the three flights of steps between the ground level and the bottom of the house pit, which appear only at the front end, (door end) of the house. He notes that a totem pole stood a few feet in front of the outside façade of the house. It stood before the door, but it did not form part of the doorway itself as was common in Haida houses.

The cross section drawing that Beynon provided of Chief He'l's house (Figure 13a and b) is rough but provides important details about its structure. He notes that it has three steps, or levels. Each step appears to be about 3 feet in depth for a total depth of close to ten feet. It also has two sets of four massive cedar slabs, about three feet wide and 1.5 feet thick. They carry the two enormous beams three feet in thickness and 65 ft long. The inner posts were about twenty feet high and would have been set at least another 8 feet into the ground. The outer beam support posts were about half that size.



Figure 11. House 7, "House of Light" Dosseter 1881 (detail).

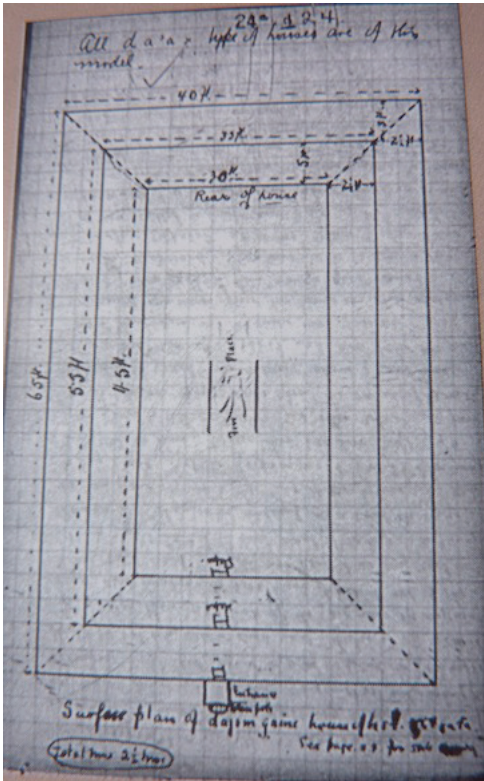


Figure 12. Floor Plan of "House of Light"

Two other sets of support slabs which held up the central pair of rafters were set on ground level on the outer wall and in the bottom of the house pit for those supporting the central beams and the cross beams that gave the structure the bracing to withstand strong winter winds. The top of the inner set of posts were almost forty feet above ground and they would have extended another 8 to 10 feet into the ground, for an overall length of close to 50 feet. All of the beams holding the roof ran the full 65 feet of the length of the house.

A clear view of the heavy structural members of house 7 is provided by an enlargement of the glass plate taken by Dossetter in 1881 (Figure 11). At that time, Ts'ibasaa was consigned from 1864 on to Mr. Duncan's supervision at Metlakatla village.

The fact that all of the cladding of the house had been carefully removed, leaving the internal structure intact, is a clear indication that the house was not being demolished, but was being put into a holding state awaiting Ts'ibasaa's return or the installation of his successor. This reduction of the house to a skeleton gives us a clear view of the rest of the timberwork within the house and the level of carpentry and joinery that went into its construction.

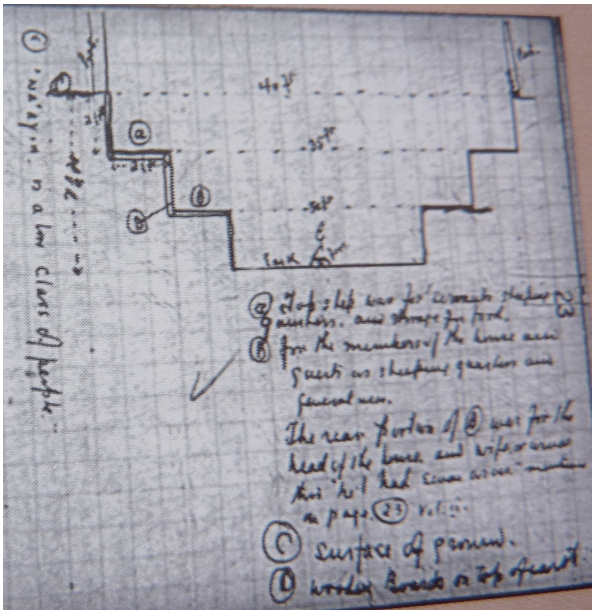
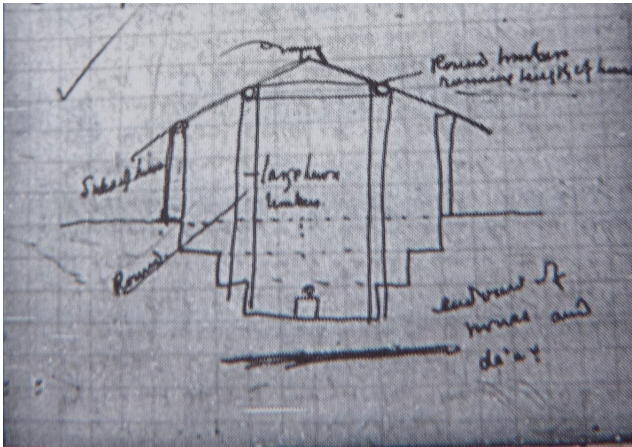


Figure 13a. Cross Section of house by Beynon  
 Figure 13b. Cross section of house pit, Beynon

Traditionally we know that throughout the North Coast, houses were denuded of their cladding, including the walls and roof when a house chief dies or the family is absent for a lengthy period. In former times, well-finished planks were scarce and were reused by their owners at other sites. The house frame itself endured for many years if not purposefully taken down, and could be restored for use quickly by re-cladding the frame.

On a symbolic level, the stripping of the outer cladding was like removing the flesh from the bones of a person, while the bones themselves, represented by the house posts and beams, endured for many years. It is also reminiscent of the cutting of a copper shield where the T-shaped ridge, or “backbone,” is never cut while the “flesh” or flat parts of the copper can be removed and distributed to others, and even restored by riveting on new plates. The message in both the house structures and the coppers is that the bones of the lineage ancestor are considered as immortal.

According to Oswald Tolmie, an elder at Gitxaala who interpreted for William Beynon in 1916, He’l’s pole was over sixty feet high with very life-like figures carved by a member of the Ganhada Phratry (Barbeau 1947:470). There is no known image of the pole but the crests were well remembered by Tolmie and others. At the top was a Liguidihl, a human like crest of He’l, which held a copper shield. Below that was a Whale whose head pointed down. At the base was a large standing Grizzly Bear. Barbeau claims (1947:470) that the totem pole that stood in front of this house was called “The Totem of Light” after the house.

The 1881 Dossetter photo (Figure 11), shows a fence closing off the house from the path through the village and in front of the path sloping down the face of the midden was a garden that is in a clear state of neglect since the owner’s death. Gardens on the face of a midden were common at the Tsimshian villages as they utilized the organic rich soil of the midden in which the shell content neutralized the acidic nature of organic rich soil.

The multi-stage pit of Chief He’l’s house was still visible when William Beynon conducted fieldwork there for Marius Barbeau and the National Museum in 1916. Beynon, who was of the Laxhibu clan of Lax Kwa’alaams and a grandson of the Tsimshian chronicler, Arthur Wellington Clah, was also related to Chief Ts’ibasaa and He’l at Gitxaala through his wife.

Joshua Tsebassa (died 1936), one of the last owners of the house, told Beynon that during potlatches the excited voices of the children resembled “the seagulls crying as they gathered together in the Nass River during the annual spring return of the oolichan fish.” Beynon reports. “This was the Da’ax of He’l and Tsiybesa.” It was called “the Da’ax of Roads. This Da’ax was so large that they had a big pathway through it that led out into [the] rear of the house from the front entrance.” (Beynon 1916, v1:2)

In Beynon’s sketch of the floor plan of this house, (Figure 12), three sets of stairs descend the three levels of house pits from the front door at ground level to the deep-



Figure 14. House Pit of House of Light, Newcombe, ca. 1905. RBCM.

of the house. Although there were likely other houses at Lach Klan that had single or double stepped house pits, they are not seen in the photos or maps of the village. It is puzzling that Beynon's sketch indicates only three steps from ground surface to the bottom of the house pit; the photo indicates four steps.

Consistent with the structural details of this house there would have been carved interior house posts and other carved architectural features.

One outstanding interior house pole from Gitxaala is now in the collection of the Peabody Museum at Harvard (Figure 10). It was a gift from the New England Fish Company of Boston that operated on the North Pacific Coast from shortly after the time of the purchase of Alaska by the United States in 1867. Correspondence between the Peabody museum and the company indicate that the pole was originally much longer and was cut up for shipment.

This raises the possibility that their pole was part of the taller pole that would have stood in front of the house. Close examination of the original in the Peabody Museum may clarify this question. Unfortunately there are no photos of the poles in situ that would resolve it.

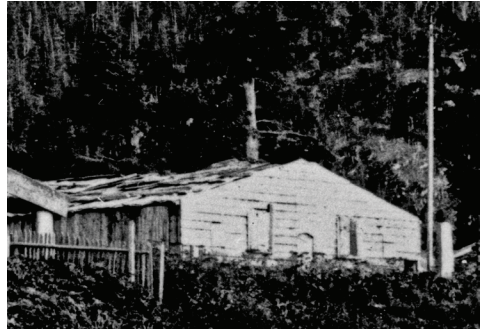
est level with the fireplace in the center of the structure. If the Road analogy applied to this structure, rather than a previous one on this spot, there would have had to be a second series of stairs leading out the back of the house but Beynon did not record them on the floor plan. Nor did he indicate the location of the interior pole which would have, by tradition, stood at the center of the back of the house.

The succession of pits Beynon drew inside of He'l's house were still visible when Charles Newcombe visited the village at the turn of the century, despite the heavy vegetation that has invaded the house pit in the photo. (Figure 14).

The massive planks of the four successive retaining walls can be clearly seen. The steps between each level are seen at the front end



Figure 15. House 8 is traditional in the style of the side walls and roof, to which a modern façade of milled siding has been added. The main entrance has a domed lintel and the windows on either side have been boarded up indicating an extended absence of the owner from the property. (Dossetter, 1881, detail).



It is also possible that the Harvard Peabody pole is the top section of the Ts'ibasaa or He'l pole since one letter does suggest it was cut from a pole that would have been too high to fit inside of a house.

The pole is similar in carving style to those at Lax Kwa'alaams in displaying figures of bears, whale and eagles that are very full bodied with small figures peeking from between the arms and legs of the larger figures. Interior poles, such as the one James Swan brought to the Philadelphia World Fair in 1876, now in the Natural History Museum, Smithsonian Institution, display two large figures 8 ft. high or so, with small figures held by the former, but in separate sections, not like the interlocking typical of Haida poles. The pole from Gitxaaxla at the Peabody Museum, Harvard, has fine parallel adzing on the bodies, reminiscent of Kwakwaka'wakw carving style.

### House 8

This is a large house that has been modernized with a façade of milled lumber that has simply been applied over the old house front of split planks. Modern sash windows have been installed. (See Figure 15.)

### House 9

This is a much smaller house with two figures of a watchman carved on each corner post. (See Figure 16.) They have tall hats with four potlatch rings, reminiscent of the watchmen so common on Haida house frontal and corner poles. It is likely that they reflect the preferred trading relationship between Ts'ibasaa and Chief Skedans of Haida village of Qona, directly across Hecate Strait on Haida Gwaii. This involved exchange of crests as well a substantial amounts of specialty food and luxury items. Food items included eulachon grease in large quantities from Gitxaalan's traditional fishing sites at the mouth of the Nass as well as types of dried berries and sea weed only available on the mainland. Luxury items included mountain goat wool, horns of mountain goats and sheep used in feast spoons, as well as varieties of woods not available on Haida Gwaii.



*Figure 16. Houses 9, 10 and 11 (left to right). Dossetter 1881, detail.*

The poles are also very similar to the two front corner posts on Chief Gaum's house at the fortified village of Gitladzok in the Kitselas Canyon, suggesting there may have been a family or trading relationship between the owner of this house and Chief Gaum who controlled all of the trade between the Upper and Lower Skeena River villages. In both instances, the watchmen suggest an exchange of privileges between the Coast Tsimshian and the Haida.

It is recorded that Chief Skedans was given the Mountain Goat crest from Chief Ts'ibasaa. He used it prominently on his mortuary post and on his coffin that is now in the Smithsonian Institute. The Haida watchmen crest may have come to Gitxaala in return.

### **House 10**

This is another large house which starts a new alignment of houses almost parallel with the first one along what is today Beach Road, but which follows the contour of the north beach through to house 14. House 10 has not been modified from the traditional form. The rafters are massive and the siding consists of vertical planks that were split from standing trees rather than sawn. There are no windows in the façade or other traces of western influence. The interior space of this house would be in the area of about 3,000 square feet. There are no totem poles associated with this house.

### **House 11**

This is a large structure with a façade of milled lumber. It has four very large sash windows arranged symmetrically around the central doorway over which is a small circular window.

**House 11 Pole**

Standing in front of house 11 was a pole about 25 feet high with a seated human figure on top of a square wood shaft about 30 inches on each side and about 15 feet high. An extra flagpole has been added at the back of the figure.

The seated position of the figure strongly suggests that it represents a Euro-American authority figure such as a sea captain. We know that Chief He'l claimed the image of a sea captain, namely Captain Hale, as his crest since He'l was the first Gitxaała chief to encounter a European. At the base of the pole is another figure, which appears to be Indigenous or more likely a supernatural figure holding a killer whale with a prominent dorsal fin. This marks it as a Gispuwudwade pole as is the house behind the pole.

This pole was likely cut down under missionary pressure in the 1890s. None of it is known to have survived, nor does it appear in any other photo of the village.



*Figure 17. Pole in front of House 11 has a large ancestral figure holding a killerwhale at the base and a seated figure, possibly the sea captain Hale at the top. Dossetter 1881 detail.*

**Houses 12 and 13**

There is some disagreement between the O'Reilly survey map of 1882 and the Dossetter photo of 1881. In the map there are two smaller houses which may indicate fission within the extended family. In the Dossetter photograph, there is a single house with a large totem pole with a flag in front. The later sketch of this area (Figure 6), assumed to be a few years later, also shows two small houses in this space.

**House 13 Pole**

A pole about 35 feet high standing about 10 feet in front of the house and flying a large flag in the 1881 photo by Dossetter. The main figure is that of a standing whale with



*Figure 18. Detail of house 13 and pole.*



*Figure 19. Detail of House 14, which stood on the northwest corner of the village site. It had been modernized with milled lumber siding and glazed windows by 1881.*

long pectoral fins and a series of human figures arranged in an interlocking pattern the length of its back. A plain pole rises about 8 feet above the tail of the whale. At the base is a large standing human figure with his arms raised.

#### **House 14**

This is a large house with a modern façade of milled lumber and four small windows placed high on the wall to let light into the interior but also so that people could not look directly into the house. This was a security measure since during raids on villages attackers often shot through the windows at the inhabitants of the house. House 14 does not possess a totem pole but as seen in a previous view there is a large log on the beach next to this house, which could have been intended for a totem pole but more likely a canoe like the one that lies beside it.

#### **Bear Mother Pole**

In Figure 20 the pole that Barbeau names the Bear Mother pole is very difficult to distinguish from the new house behind it since the top of the pole is level with the roofline. While it might have been an interior pole of the original house 14, it is now seen just to the left of the light and dark paneled door. It has two human figures at the top and bottom. The top one wears a conical hat and holds a single small figure between its arms. The lower large figure holds two small ones, one in each arm. Each of the small figures wears a tall conical hat.

In 1929 Barbeau had copies made of old photos from the turn of the century. The pole was standing in the village during Beynon's visit in 1916 and he and Barbeau labeled it "the Bear Mother Pole" and identified the bear mother story as a crest of chief He'l.



Figure 20. The house at the south end of the north face of the midden stands on the site of House 14. The new house has an interior post from the former house that is just to the right of the paneled door. It can be seen in detail in Figure 21. The Sea Lion pole is also indicated here.



Figure 21. Bear Mother Pole. This pole probably stood in the interior of House #14 and was left in place when the new house was built. Barbeau photo, ca. 1926.

### Sea Lion Pole

One of the finest of the later poles stood at the junction of Beach Road and Ocean Drive, behind the old House 12. It was a tall pole, about 30 feet high, erected in the late 1890s. A large figure of a sea lion was perched on the top. A ring was screwed into the jaw of the sea lion to hold the rope for a flag that would be raised on special occasions.

The round shaft of this pole is sectioned off into a series of 13 potlatch rings emerging from the head of a standing beaver at the base. The unusual thing is that the figure of a shark has been inserted between the head of the beaver and the stack of potlatch rings. Barbeau's description of this pole includes the figure of a halibut.



Figure 22. Sea Lion pole.



Figure 23a and b. Sea Lion Pole details. The three-dimensional nature of the shark is enhanced by the careful addition of cedar pieces to the sculpture itself.





Figure 24. Panorama of the western shore of the midden with houses erected during the 1890s. The old communal house marked by the arrow on the left is the last one left standing in the row toward the creek. The small house in the center, no. 17 Ocean Drive, belonged to Chief Shakes family. His marble monument stands in front of the house. A larger two story structure standing behind also probably belonged to Chief Shakes. G. McTavish photograph ca. 1898.

### The Western Shore Houses (15-21)

At this point the Gitxaała shoreline cuts back toward the south, and the houses in that section disappear from view in the 1881 photo (Figure 3). At the far right of that image we can see another house (House 25) with a tall pole that I will discuss as part of the houses on the far side. Dossetter took another view in 1881 next to the unnamed creek that flowed into the bay at this point (Figure 30). It captured a satellite part of the village, which Beynon states was called Creek Village by his advisors.

To fill in the missing houses and poles between the two Dossetter photos of the north shore and creek portions of the village, we have to refer to another panoramic photo taken a couple of decades later by G. McTavish from a high hill southeast of the village (Figure 24).

This photo of the west shore of Gitxaała was taken by McTavish about 1898. The relevant point of orientation in this photo is the church indicated by the white arrow at the top right, the arrow to the left that shows the last remaining plank house (House 17) and the lowest arrow that points to a marble monument in front of a modest modern house. Just over the roof the bell tower of the school can be seen the roofs of a row of houses (1 to 14) along Beach Road, that face seaward from the church. The old plank houses along the north shore that stood in the 1880's have been replaced by those of small single-family houses whose gabled roofs parallel the

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beach. Running diagonally through the picture is a road with houses on either side that is known today as Ocean Road.

The O'Reilly map shows the contour of the midden cutting behind houses 12 and 13 with smaller structures below the bank on the edge of the intertidal zone, which suggests they were built on pilings above the high tide zone. It is perplexing why the O'Reilly map does not indicate a row of houses that appear from a number of lines of evidence to continue along the bank of the midden south to the creek.

The view taken from the hillside in Figure 26 shows two rows of houses along the stretch of midden between house 14 and the creek that drains the small lake behind the village.

Ocean Drive was laid out when the nuclear family houses replaced the former communal houses and cut diagonally across the old house lots which followed the contour of the shoreline.

### Houses 15 and 16

Judging by O'Reilly's map, the first two houses along the western edge may have been built on pilings over the intertidal zone.

### House 17

A single communal plank house survives in the center of the McTavish photo (Figure 25). The old house faces the beach and backs onto what becomes Ocean Drive (west). The old dwelling has a traditional low-pitched gable roof with a central smoke hole covered with planks. The road in the center of the photo on the right is Ocean Drive.

This is the last surviving example of a community house at Gitxaala village. Its dimensions and form are entirely traditional, although its cladding has been modernized on all sides with horizontal milled siding. An extension has been added to the back of the building, probably as a compartment for the chief's family. The roof is still of split planks with a traditional smoke hole over the central fireplace.



*Figure 25. House 17, the last community house in Gitxaala. G. McTavish ca 1897 (detail)*





Figure 26. This photo was taken from the same location as Figure 24, probably shortly after 1900. There is no indication of who the photographer was on the print. It could have been MacTavish himself. A school house now stands on the point, and the last communal house has been replaced by the Church Army Hall. In the detail below, the marble monument to Shakes can be clearly seen.



Figure 27. Detail of figure 26.

### Houses 18 to 21

Clearly, there is a second row of houses paralleling houses 14 to 19. But it is most likely they resulted from the break up of extended families in the community houses into single, nuclear family houses favoured by the Christian missionaries.

However, there is little evidence available to describe the houses that may have stood on lots 18 to 21.

Referring again to the G. McTavish photo (ca. 1895), houses 14 to 21 form a tightly aligned row from behind the previously described north facing house-row and ends in a single old traditional communal dwelling that survived until after William Beynon's sojourn at Lach Klan in 1916. The house appears to be about 40

feet in width and sixty feet long. It has a plain, narrow pole in front of it of which little detail can be seen. The importance of this house is that it strongly suggests that the row of traditional community houses was once continuous along both the north and west faces of the ancient midden underlying the village and extended via a bridge and boardwalk on pilings to a section of town north of the small creek.

**Chief Shakes Monument**

There is a prominent marble monument in front of a small cottage in memory of Chief Shakes (Seks) who died in 1889 according to the inscription on the base. The monument was raised in front of the new house located at #17 Ocean Drive. The address is conveniently painted on the door.

The base of Chief Shakes monument records his death as 1889. The inscription on the base of the monument reads: “Mr. Shakes, Great Chief of Kitkatla, [sic] 1889.” Another view shows his successor at the monument after a subsequent Chief Shakes died in the 1930s.

Directly behind the small house is a newly completed two story dwelling fit for a chief. It was the only full two-story house in the village other than that of the Mission House. I conclude that this is the residence of the Chief Shakes who inherited his title. He also inherited the house name of Rainbow House (Beynon, 1916 Ms. Vol. IV :16), which he may have deferred to use at this time of heavy Christian influence.

Beynon collected lists of many crests owned by Chief Shakes including the “Double-Headed Blackfish of the Deep” which appear on three poles in museum collections, one in the Canadian Museum of Civilization, another in the Museum of Anthropology at U.B.C. and the last in the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford (Beynon, Kitkatla Ms. Vol. 4: 13-14). It was described as a huge double-headed



*Figure 28. Chief Shakes marble bear crest monument. The monument depicts a small bear at the top of a round shaft of marble, which rises from a seated figure of a bear. During the late 1800s marble tombstones could be ordered from Lax Kwa’alaams or Victoria based on a model carved in wood. Only the highest ranking chiefs had such monuments.*



Figure 29. One of the best known photos of the Gitxaala people of high ranking chiefs, Ts'ibasaa and Shakes, taken on the appointment of a new Chief Shakes in April 1917. Group portrait of Chief Joseph Tsebassa, 2. unknown woman, 3. Chief Shakes (Christian name was Gladstone). (bottom row) 1. Amelia Spencer, 2. Henry Collinson's mother, 3. Susan Tsebassa, 4. Unknown woman, 5. Matilda Pemberton.

blackfish of the deep that carried La'oooy a relative of Chief Shakes across a river after an unsuccessful raid on the Kitimat people. He rewarded the monster with mountain goat fat and adopted it as one of his family crests that could be used also as a house front painting.

All three examples of the double killer whale interior house posts noted above are of classic Coast Tsimshian style, and although each varies in some details, they appear to have been from the hand of a single carver, and may all have stood in the same house. Each was acquired from earlier collections that lack original site data in the catalogue record. The only recorded memory of such house posts are those collected by Beynon from Gitxaala and are presented here for that reason.

Beynon records (1916,) vol. IV:18 one of the houses of the family of Chief Shakes: "The house stood on the edge of a small creek in a portion of the Gitxatla village which was known by this name. The old remains are there yet. Beynon describes the pole for this house as "by far the best carving I have seen."

Although it cannot be seen in the photos, he reports a large frog at the base of the pole which supported a huge bullhead swallowing the frog. Four human figures

are on the head of the bullhead (presumably the two on the pectoral fins and two on the spines standing up from the head described by Barbeau). Beynon provides a sketch that helps to understand the next figure in the center of the back of the Bullhead. It is a supernatural starfish with 14 arms. This does not show in the photos taken by Barbeau in 1939 but the sketch of the neighbouring pole from Bishop Ridley's book, known as the Raven and Sea Monster Pole, shows a separate starfish affixed to the pole.

### House Front Paintings

Although William Beynon lists many house front paintings among the prerogatives of the chiefs of Gitxaala they were only displayed on ceremonial occasions and rarely captured in photographs. At non-ceremonial times they were stored as sets of painted planks in the rafters of the communal houses. Fredee Alexcee's historical paintings, done from memory of Lax Kwa'alaams village, puts a half dozen monumental house-front paintings into his scenes although they would never have been displayed simultaneously.

Another house front painting from Gitxaala, described by Beynon as a Thunderbird described the entrance as through the lower part of bird's body. His description inspired the painting of this and neighbouring houses at Gitxaala during a ceremonial occasion by museum artist Gordon Miller. All of the houses in this view have been stripped of their milled siding and windows and taken back to how they may have looked at the time of first contact with Euro-American maritime fur traders.

### Over Water, or Small Creek Village

There is a prominent boardwalk supported over the creek on pilings that appears in the 1881 and all subsequent drawings and photos. On the far side of the creek, the village path turns northwest again to the end of the house row and totem poles towards where the modern town dock is now located.

Edward Dossetter took his second glass plate negative of Gitxaala in 1881 of the area on the north side of the creek draining the small lake behind the village. It shows four communal houses each with a different orientation. The one on the right in the photo is a very ancient looking house built on pilings onto the tidal flats. It is likely that this is the house that appears in the sketch used by Bishop Ridley in his book *Snapshots of the North Pacific*.

Behind the house on pilings in the 1881 photo, on the other side of what is now Ocean Drive, is a plain house that has been modernized with horizontal milled siding but which has only a small window over the central door. In front of that house is another one perched on posts that rise several feet above the tidal zone. Yet another house is hidden behind the first one described. It has a carved pole in front



*Figure 30. The "Beyond Creek" section of the village where some of the houses were built on log piers over the intertidal zone. Dossetter, AMNH 1881*

of which only the eyes of the large human figure peer above the house gable in front of it. (Figure 31a) The head is crowned with a ring of six small men squatting and looking in all directions. Perhaps this is a variant of the Watchmen on the corner posts of the neighboring house. The hats on these watchmen are not the same as the one described earlier on house 9. Those watchmen have three rings on their hats and the one near the mouth of the creek has four rings and a small bear on top.

There are four poles standing behind the house in Figure 30, which do not appear in any other photo. The one next to the smoke hole of this house is the figure of a hawk with wings folded and a small hawk in front of it. Although they appears to be sitting on the roof of the house they undoubtedly stood on top of a pole behind the house which I would estimate from the surrounding buildings was around 20 ft in height. (Figure 31b.)

Just to the left of the doorway of the house is the top of a stout, plain pole that I would estimate at 30 feet high. It may once have had a separate figure such as a bird on top that has fallen off. To the left of that is a tall plain pole, about 45 feet high which still has the figure of a bird on top.



Figure 31 a, b, c and d. Details of Figure 30, showing evidence of otherwise undocumented poles. Dossetter, AMNH 1881.

Finally at far left in this photo is a most curious pole with at least four bands about 10 inches wide at intervals of about six feet along the round shaft of the pole. Somewhat compressed frogs peer out of each band. They manifest a trait found on several poles at Lax Kwa'alaams village in which there are figures of either humans or frogs that appear to be compressed by the weight of the sections of the pole above them. So-called "potlatch rings" are common on many Haida poles, but they never reveal live creatures struggling to get out of the joints between the rings. I am inclined to view the stacks of rings, like the spinal column of the lineage ancestor, in which each joint between the vertebrae are the locii of souls struggling to come back into the world of the living.

The crest figure on top of the pole is a bird-like figure with the head and legs of a bear but the wings and tail of a bird. A very similar creature sits on top of a pole drawn in 1854 in the Gitsees section of Lax Kw'alaams village (Barbeau 1947:pl.202).

### House 22

There is another traditional community house on the far side of the boardwalk over the creek, which I would judge to be house lot no. 22. The Ridley sketch shows a high, carved pole standing in front of it but no details can be discerned.

Picking up the house count from there, the drawing shows a shed roofed, non-indigenous structure on the right side of the creek with a wide boardwalk area over the creek and along the shore in front of the next three houses.

### Houses 23 and 24

These are European style shed roofed structures with sawn vertical siding. Both have poles in front of them whose bases are buried deep in the inter tidal zone. There is not sufficient detail in the drawing to distinguish the crests on the poles.

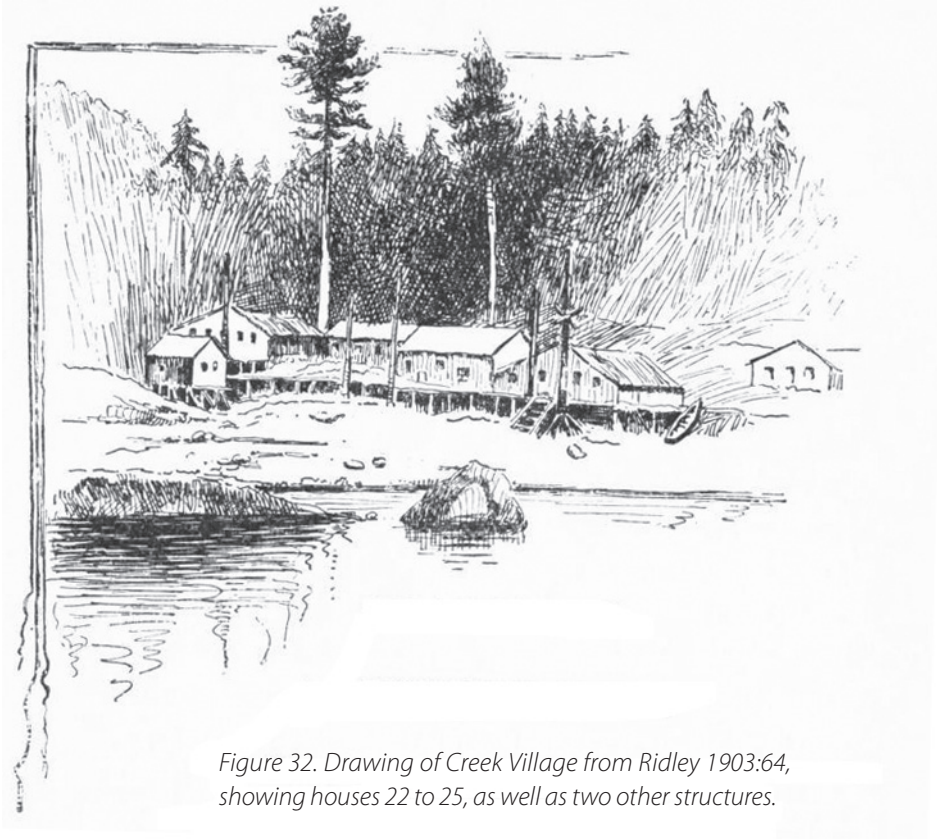
One of the poles in front of houses 22, 23, or 24 is probably the Thunderbird and Whale pole that is the last of the old poles still standing in the village. (Figure 33)

### House 25

House 25 is the last of the old communal houses in the row in the drawing published by Bishop Ridley as well as the last in the Dossetter 1881 photograph. It has a very long set of stairs leading to the beach. The house façade has been sheeted over with milled horizontal siding and a large and a small window have been added to either side of the central door.

In the sketch, two poles stand on either side of a stairway down to the beach. The one on the right was actually raised on the mud flat in the 1880s (after the Dossetter photo).

The photograph (Figure 34) shows a tall pole centered on the house front, on a



*Figure 32. Drawing of Creek Village from Ridley 1903:64, showing houses 22 to 25, as well as two other structures.*

small porch. It is a long, plain pole about 30 ft. in height, with a bear and a human figure at the base. The figures on the pole were remarkably well carved. It was cut down early in the twentieth century and the carving of the human head is preserved in the collection of the Royal British Columbia Museum.

Barbeau does not describe this pole although he does refer to another pole of which certain carvings were saved when the pole was cut down which suggests that the owners preferred to save key features of favorite poles that the missionaries insisted be cut down. (1990: 351).

The second pole, from the beginning, was propped up with half a dozen timbers that were dug into the beach. It is the only one of the two poles that survived into the late 20th century. It fell during a storm surge about 1980 but was later dragged up onto the vegetation on shore where it is rapidly deteriorating.

Barbeau identifies this pole as the sea-monster Paxlekpeel with a series of human figures carved in a row standing on each others shoulders. According to him they were the crests of a Ganhada chief.





Figure 33a and b. Thunderbird and whale pole (left, Barbeau photo 1926, on right, de Menil, 1968).

At the base of the Raven and Sea Monster Pole is a creature that looks like a sculpin beneath a raven that in this photo has lost its beak. Above the Raven are the interlocked human figures noted above.

Further up the pole is a six-armed sun or starfish the arms of which have been carved separately and nailed to the pole, except the arms in the center which are carved into the pole and can still be seen there. All of the pieces that had been added to the pole, including the bird on top, the starfish arms (or suns rays) and the beak of the Raven had fallen off by 1950.

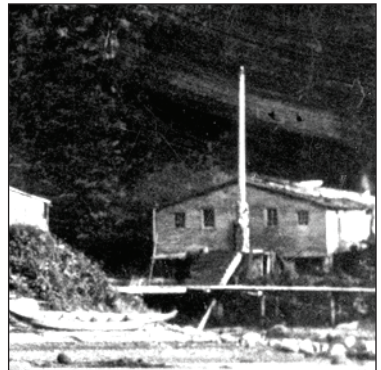


Figure 34. House 25. Dosseter 1881 (detail).

## Conclusion

The reconstructed map of Gitxaatla village in Figure 6 is an attempt to match the precise images on photographs of the period with the physical space that exists there today. It will be refined as new evidence in the way of photos and maps are discovered in archives and private collections.

I fervently hope that the map, particularly the location of house locations will be refined by discussions within the community. Clearly, much knowledge of past phases of the community are still within the memory of current elders and this expanded version of the village map can serve as an armature on which new information can be positioned and integrated into the whole.

Since there is strong archaeological evidence that Gitxaala has remained occupied without major interruption for more than 5000 years in the same location it is one of the most enduring and rooted communities in the New World. Clearly it is worthy of much more scholarly attention.



*Figure 35. Bear and a human figure from the base of the older pole from House 25.*



*Figure 36. House 25 pole. Photo Adelaide de Menil, 1968.*

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*Figure 37. House 25 pole. Photo Adelaide de Menil, 1968.*

*Figure 37a. Detail of figure on pole.*