

HAIDAS

SKIDEGATE AND SOUTHERN TRIBES

Skidegate and Southern Villages as described by George M. Dawson, in 1878 (30: 165B, 166B).

Skit-ei-get, or Skidegate village as it is ordinarily called, situated in the inlet of the same name and extending along the shore of a wide bay with sandy beach, is still one of the most populous Haida villages and has always been a place of great importance. It has suffered more than most places, however, from the habit of its people in resorting to Victoria and other towns to the south. There are many unoccupied and ruined houses, and fully one-half of those who still claim it as their residence are generally absent. The true name of the town is, I believe, *Hyo-hai-ka*, and *Skit-ei-get* is that of the hereditary chief. It is called *Kil-hai-oo* by the Tshimsians. There are now standing in this village about twenty-five houses, in some of which the beams only remain. Several are uninhabited. Of carved posts there are in all about fifty-three, making on an average two for each house, found to be about in the same proportion as in several other places. Nearly one-half of these are monumental posts or *Rhat*, it being rare to find more than a single door-post or *Ke-rhen* for each house. Mr. Work assigns forty-eight houses to this place, probably correct for the date to which he refers. There are signs that the village has formerly been much more extensive, and the Skidegate Haidas themselves never cease to dwell on the deplorable decrease of the population and ruin of the town.

On the west end of Maude Island, a few miles only from the Skidegate village, is now situated what may be called the New Gold Harbour village. This has been in existence a few years only, having been built by the Haidas formerly inhabiting Gold Harbour, or Port Kuper, on ground amicably purchased from the Skidegate Haidas for that purpose. The inlet generally known as Gold Harbour is situated on the west coast and can be reached from Skidegate by the narrow channel separating Graham from Moresby Island.

The population of the place is about equal to that of the Skidegate village, though in appearance it is much less imposing, as the houses which have been erected are comparatively few and of small size, and there are as yet few carved posts.

The village generally known as Cumshewa is situated in a small bay facing toward the open sea, but about two miles within the inlet to which the same name has been applied. The outer point of the bay is formed by a little rocky islet, which is connected with the main shore by a beach at low tide. The name Cumshewa or Kumshewa is that of the hereditary chief, the village being properly called *Tlkinool*, or by Tshimsians *Kit-ta-was*. There are now standing here twelve or fourteen houses, several of them quite ruinous, with over twenty-five carved posts.

At the entrance to Cumshewa Inlet, on the opposite or south side, is the Skedans village, so called, as in former cases, from the chief, but of which I did not learn the proper name. This is a place of more importance than the Cumshewa village proper and appears always to have been so. Many of the houses are still inhabited, but most look old and moss-grown, and the carved posts have the same aspect. Of houses there are now about sixteen, or posts forty-four. At the time of our visit, an old woman was having a new post erected in memory of a daughter who had died some years before in Victoria.

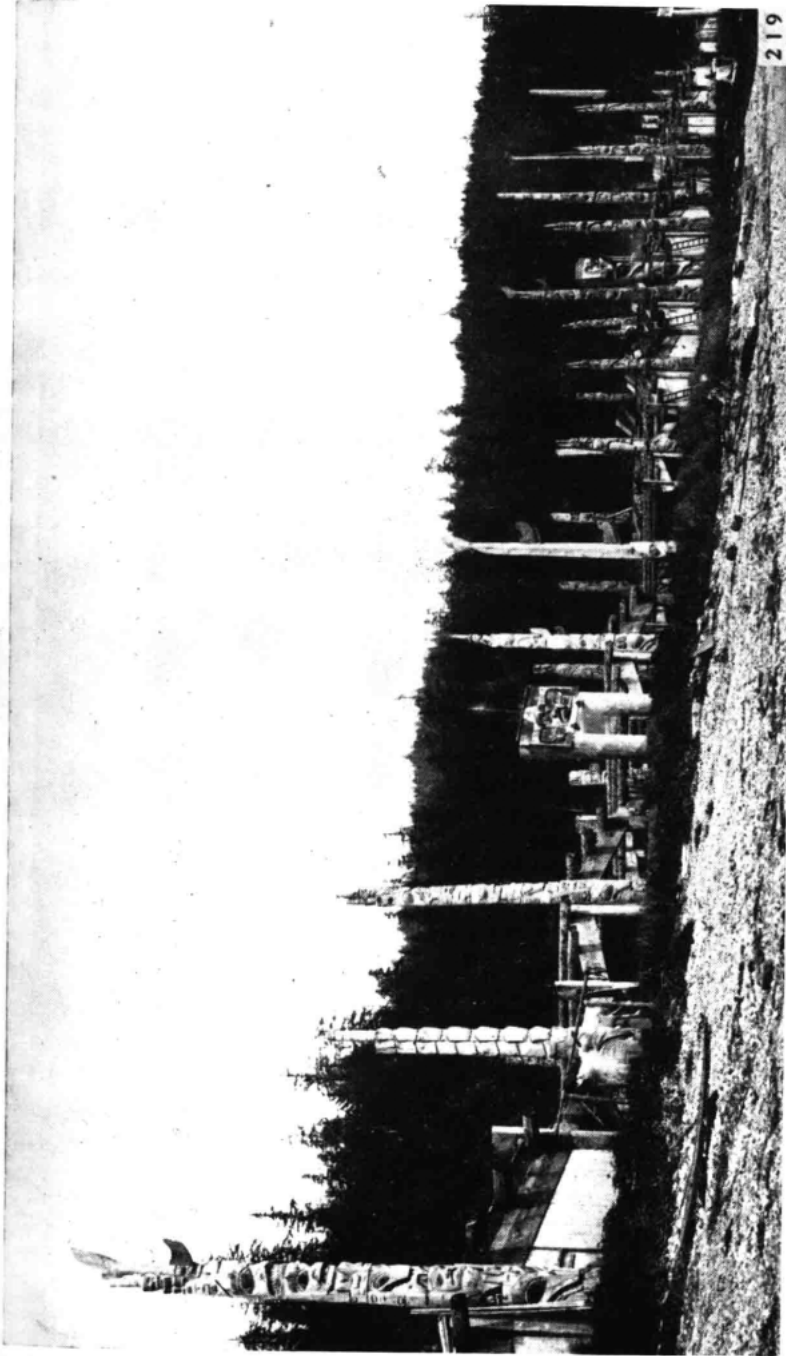
Klue's Village, properly called *Tanoo*, or by the Tshimsians *Lath-skik*, is situated 14 miles southward from the last, on the outer side of the inner of two exposed islands.

There are about thirty carved posts here, of all heights and styles, with sixteen houses. The village, extending round a little rocky point, faces two ways and cannot easily be wholly seen from any one point of view. This causes it to look less important than the last, though really possessing a larger population than it and being in a more flourishing state than any elsewhere seen in the islands. There were a considerable number of strangers here at the time of our visit in July, 1878, engaged in the erection of a carved post and house for the chief. The night was given to dancing, while sleep and gambling divided those parts of the day which were not used for the business in hand. Cedar planks of great size, hewn out long ago in anticipation, had been towed to the spot, and were now being dragged up the beach by the united efforts of the throng, dressed for the most part in gaily coloured blankets. They harnessed themselves in clusters to the ropes, as the Egyptians are represented to have done in their pictures, shouting and ye-hooing in strange tones to encourage themselves in the work.

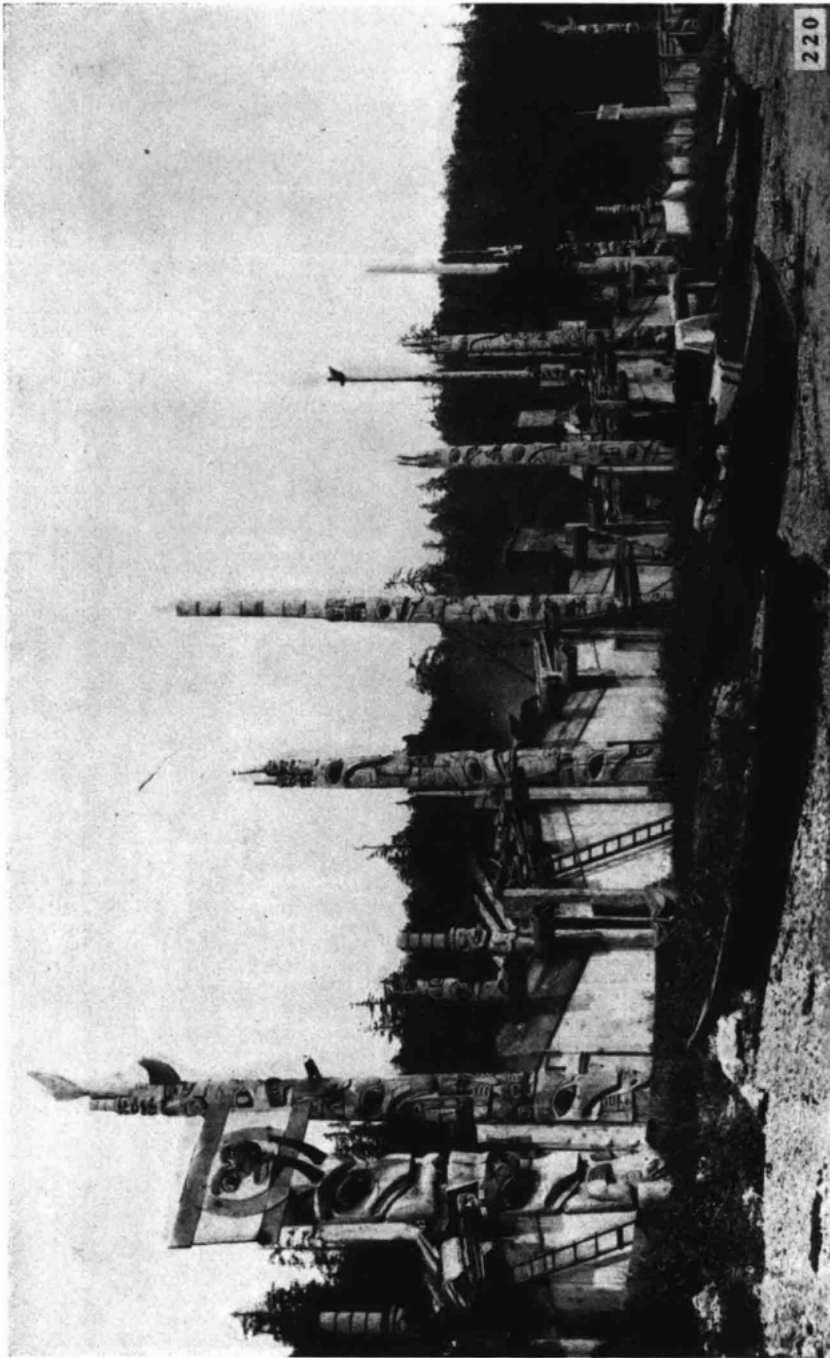
The *Kun-rhit* village is the most southern in the Queen Charlotte Islands. It is generally known as *Ninstance* or *Nin-stints*, from the name of the chief, and is situated on the inner side of Anthony Island of the Admiralty sketch of Houston Stewart Channel.



The old village of Skidegate, Haida



Skidegate



Skidegate

Skidegate Indian village, by G. M. Dawson (30).

The Skidegate Indian village is nearly half a mile in length, consisting of a row of houses, with the usual carved posts, fronting on Village Bay of the chart. A second village is situated on the east end of Maude Island. This is quite new, having been formed by the Kuper Inlet (or 'Gold Harbour') Indians within a few years.

Totems of Chief Skidegate, according to Mrs. Elizabeth Jones and her husband, Albert Jones. Recorded in July, 1947, at Canoe Pass.

There were special carvers for totem poles. In the early days, the people were very particular about their work. It did not matter to what tribe (phratry, or clan) they belonged. As soon as they did good work, the chiefs hired them. Tanu totem carvers were the best for the south. The Ninstints tribe at Anthony Island engaged Tanu carvers for their totems. Skidegate carvers were the finest for the centre, and those of Massett also compared favourably with them. David Shakespeare [The Skaoskea of Swan] of Skidegate was a good carver, a Raven, the uncle of Charlie Edensaw. He was drowned at Cape Ball about fifty-five years ago.

Totem-pole carvers at Skidegate. The Grizzly Bear, Wasko, and Raven Totem of Chief Skedagits of Skidegate (Haida), described by J. R. Swanton (97: 123; Plate I, figure 3).

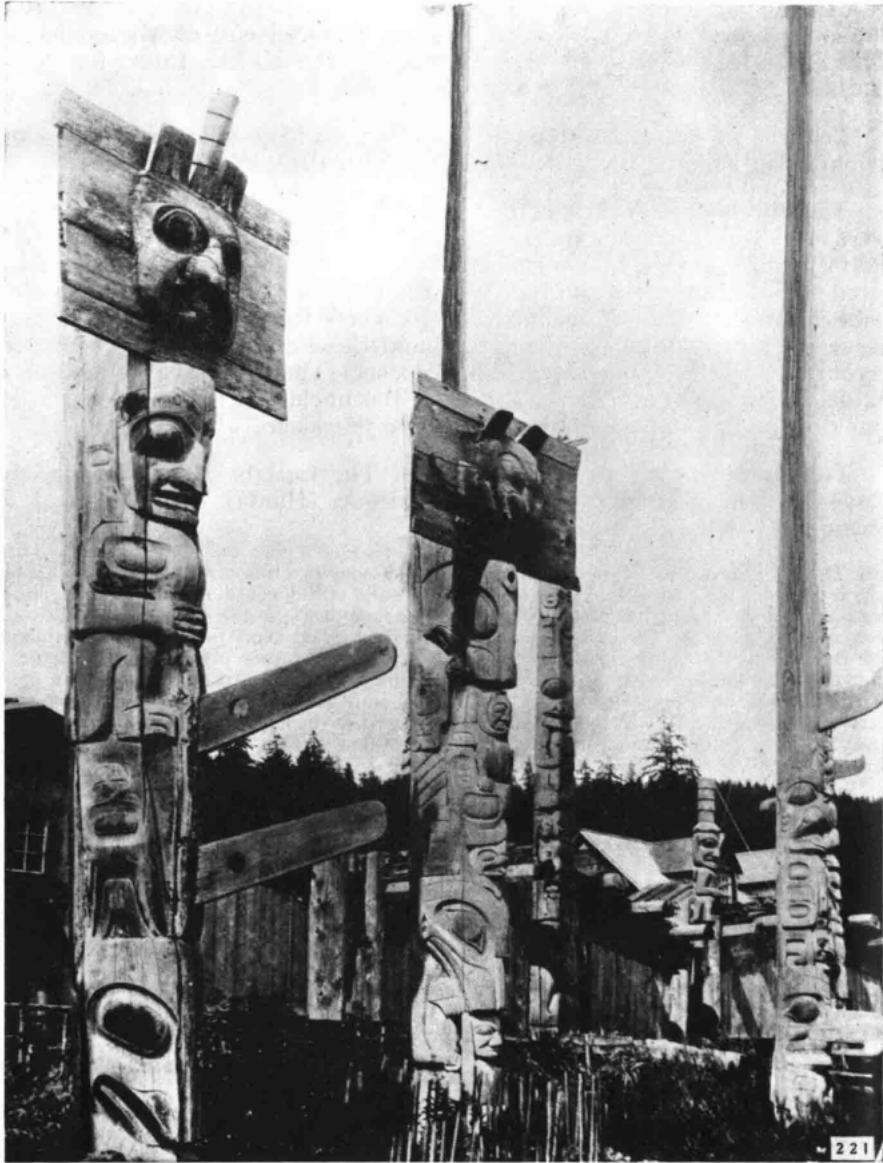
The original of Plate I, figure 3, belonged to Skedagits, chief of the Big-House-People, which was the ruling branch of the great Gitins family of Skidegate. His wife was of Those-born-at-Rose-Spit; and her crest, the grizzly bear, appears at the bottom. Grizzly bears were often represented devouring a man, because they killed many people on the mainland. [M. B. Actually this illustrates the episode in the Bear Mother myth of the capture of the young woman by a Grizzly Bear.] Above this is a raven, and surmounting that a figure of the Wasko, both crests belonging to the husband. The Wasko is a fabulous monster, part wolf, part killer whale, who hunts for black whales during the night and brings them away on its back, behind its ears, and in the curl of its tail. One whale is represented held under the tail.

Pole of The-Younger-Brother, Chief of Skidegate-Town-People (Haida), according to J. R. Swanton (97: 124, Plate II, figure 4).

Plate II, figure 4, is from the model of a pole belonging to The-Younger-Brother, chief of the Skidegate-Town-People. His wife was named The-Clean-One, a woman of the Rotten-House-People. By the Tsimshians this chief was called L'net. The dog-fish at the top, arranged like that in Plate I, figure 2, belonged to the wife. At the bottom are an old and a young killer whale that, with the figure above which my carver could not explain, probably contain some story. It suggests the story of Gunanasimgit, whose wife was carried away by a killer whale. At any rate, the killer whales probably stand for the chief's crests as well.

Grave-post of Chief Skidegate (Haida), described by J. R. Swanton (97: 131, Plate VIII, figure 4).

The grave-post illustrated in Plate VIII, figure 4, marks an intermediate type. It was shaped like a house-pole and could be called either *giangang* or *rhaat*; yet it stood away from the house and was, in other respects, considered as a grave-post. It was put up by Jackson, the late chief of Skedagits, for his deceased wife's uncle, who belonged to Those-born-at-Qagials, of Skedans. The crests, from top to bottom, are the mountain-goat, three-finned killer whale (?), and the grizzly bear. As was sometimes the case, the horns of the mountain-goat were left out in the original. That and the grizzly bear were crests of Those-born-at-Qagials.



Skidegate



Base of a totem pole at Skidegate. Other poles at Skidegate

Sea-Monster pole, the Hagwelawrh at Skidegate, on the Queen Charlotte Islands, according to James Deans (36: 62-64).

Long ago the scannahs could not agree amongst themselves. To preserve peace, they were willing to have a king over them. So they sent a deputation to the walrus, asking him to be their king. This he refused to be. Then they sent to the dolphin and several others with the same result. When they could not get a king they applied to Ne-kilst-lass for help. To their request he replied, 'You shall have neither one nor other of those. This I will do for you. I will take one of your number who shall be your king, and as a distinguishing mark he shall have seven dorsal fins and his name forever shall be 'auch-willo.'

In the model village at the late World's Fair at Chicago (1893) is a house with an auch-willo totem pole. The pole stands to this day in the village of Skidegate, but the house has gone. One branch of the scannah gens had for a distinguishing mark a scannah with a hole in its dorsal fin. This is represented in the miniature village as well as often shown in pictures of the totem poles.

The origin of this hole in the dorsal fin is, as follows: The scannah was always dreaded, not only by the Hidery, but by all the tribes in northern British Columbia and southern



(Right) A totem of Skidegate. At the Provincial Museum, Victoria

Alaska as well, because these whales always tried to break the canoes and drown the Indians, who then became whales. It is told that long ago two Hidery belonging to Chief Klue's village went out in a canoe in order to kill some of these whales, apparently as a daring adventure. They had not paddled far out to sea before the canoe was surrounded by a great number of these evil creatures which were about to break their canoe into pieces. One of the men, grasping his knife, said to the other that if he were drowned and became a scannah, he would still hold the knife and stab the others. The second man holding to a fragment of the canoe, floated near an island and swam ashore. The first was drowned, but his companion, who had escaped, soon heard strange and very loud noises beneath the water, like great guns being fired. Presently a vast number of fish floated up dead and with them a large scannah, which had a large wound in its side from which much blood flowed. The Skaggy or medicine man of the village said afterward that he knew, or saw, that the one so killed was the chief of the scannahs, and the one Indian who killed him had now become chief in his stead. He took for the crest of his clan this hole in the dorsal fin.

This clan at one time was very numerous and consequently powerful; they had a village of their own on the west coast of Queen Charlotte Island; its name I think was Teanen. For some reason or other, their powerful neighbours on the southern end of these islands, the Ninstints, declared war on them. After a long struggle the scannahs were vanquished by the Ninstints, a large number of them being taken prisoners of war and sold as slaves. As soon as they were left alone the remnant of the scannahs took all their belongings and left their ancient home forever and settled at the head of a bay far north from their much loved Teanen. Here they remained in peace for a number of years.

Again their relentless foes, the Ninstints, found them and chased them northward, led by a Skaggy of considerable ability. Having fled in a hurry, they had neglected to take food along with them, and were soon in a bad condition. They all begged of the Skaggy to take them to where they could get food. He replied, "Just wait a little; you will soon get plenty." After a while they came to a low, rocky shore with a level country behind. "Now," said their leader, "here is a wild looking shore; we will go into the best place we can find. The Ninstints won't trouble us here." So in they all went. They were not long on shore before they found this place afforded but little shelter and little food. The Skaggy said, "You shall all have plenty of food before long." Toward evening, after they had a temporary house put up, and feeling the pangs of hunger, all again asked the Skaggy for the promised food. He replied, "To-morrow all of you look toward yonder little island. You will see plenty of food coming toward you."

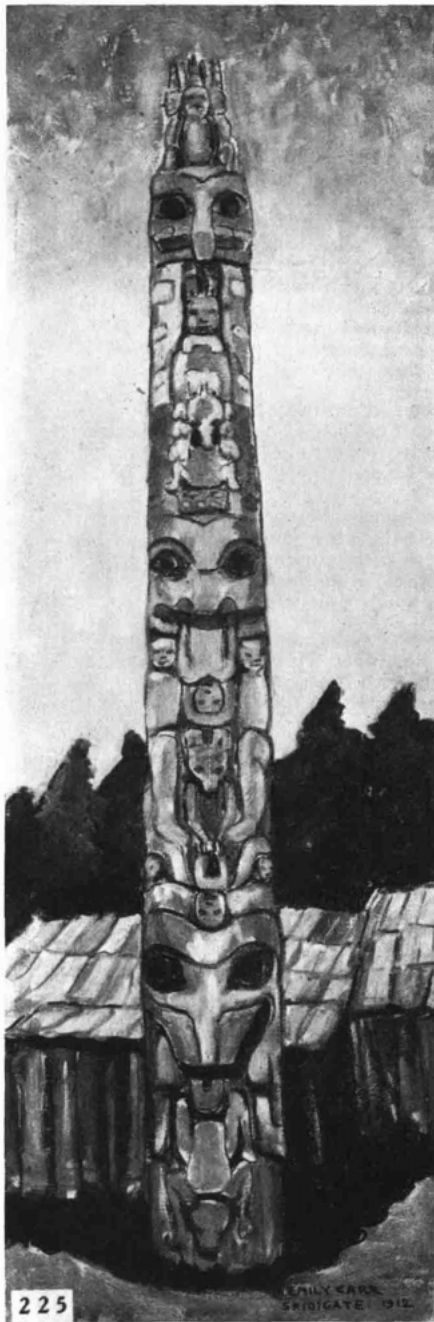
Next morning while a dark object came toward the shore, some one went to ask the Skaggy what it was, but he was nowhere to be found. After watching it, they found to their surprise that it was their Skaggy coming, riding on the back of a large whale. He had gone out towards the little island and caught a whale. As soon as he was on shore he said, "Here is the food I told you of, so now help yourselves." This they did. Still afraid of the Ninstints and the place being bleak and cheerless, without a harbour or shelter of any sort, they were ready at any time to move. This they did before their food was exhausted. Their course was still northward, until they came to the village of Kioostia, of which Edensaw was chief. Edensaw and his people, knowing well their many troubles, kindly welcomed them and gave them a large flat on the northwest point of Queen Charlotte Island, at the entrance to Perry Passage, between the mainland of British Columbia and North Island. Under the protection of Edensaw and his powerful tribe, they built their home and gave it the name of Yakh.

Totem of the Rotten-House-People, according to Dr. J. R. Swanton (97: 123. Plate I, figure 4).

The chief who set up the pole represented by Plate I, figure 4, belonged to the Rotten-House-People and his wife to Those-born-at-Rose-Spit. At the top is a grizzly bear belonging to the wife's family; below that, a dogfish, followed by a raven and an eagle, all of which



A Skidegate totem pole



A Skidegate totem pole. (Watercolour by Emily Carr in 1912)

were the husband's crests. The dog-fish is here represented as a woman with a labret, in remembrance of the woman who was carried off by the Dog-Fish-People and became one of them. The ridge around the eagle's head represents a nest in which the bird is supposed to be sitting. I do not know the significance of the small head between the dog-fish and the raven. The pole at the top, with circles cut around it, represents a chief's dance-hat, which was made in segments. In general, the more segments to a hat, the greater the honour to its wearer.

A Gitins House with Poles and Posts, described by J. R. Swanton. (97: 135. Plate XI, figure 2).

Plate XI, figure 2, shows a house at Skidegate, formerly owned, I believe, by one of the Gitins. The house door — at the side instead of through the pole — shows white influence clearly. The upper two figures on the house-pole — the raven and dog-fish — belong to the Eagle clan, and were probably those of the husband; and the figure at the bottom probably represents the killer whale, and thus was the wife's crest. I do not know the significance of the figures on the corner posts. The post with a bear on top is a memorial column.

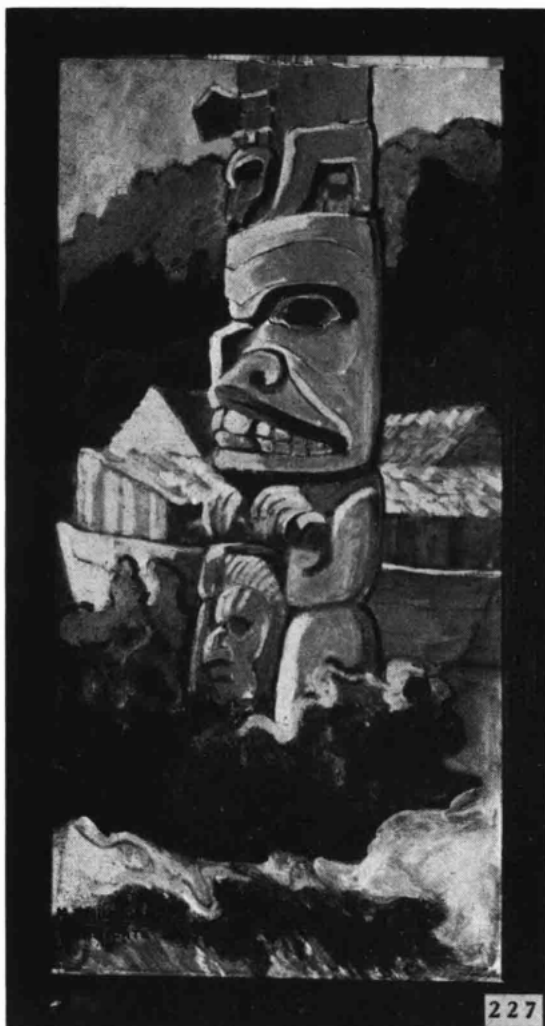
Pole and House of Cathlingscoon in Skidegate, Queen Charlotte Islands, as recorded among the Haidas by James Deans (36: 77, 78).

Many years ago a house stood in the eastern half of the village of Skidegate, named Cathlingscoon. There is a model of this house in the Field Columbian Museum, Chicago (1893). The figures on the totem post in front of it are, as follows: First and lowest, a bear eating a boy who, as the story goes, was lost in the woods and was found by a hungry bear, who ate him up. The second is a sea-otter. The third is the raven. The fourth figure is a scannah (Killer-Whale) with its tail around a woman's neck, the scannah being the wife's crest, the raven showing her phratry; her husband's crest, shown at the bottom, is a bear.

Connected with this woman is a story; she was a princess, the daughter of a great chief. She wore copper rings around her ankles. Once she and her father went to gather a certain kind of stone. They had not gone far before they lost their way. They went on until they came to a man standing in the road with a bear beside him. When they came up, the bear said to them, "This is a funny sort of a man, he has bones and



Thunderbird at Skidegate. (To right, watercolour by Emily Carr, 1912)



Beaver totem pole at Skidegate. (Watercolour by Emily Carr, 1912)

longed to the chief families of Skidegate. These agree in their explanations of the designs on the first, except that Tom Stevens gave the name of the chief who owned it as Ganrhuat, and Amos Russ as Dogansakihlas ("though youngest, must be obeyed"); but both were said to have been chiefs of the Gitins. At the top of this pole (Figure 9) is a raven, represented, as is often the case, with frogs coming out of its mouth; under this is a boy, said to be introduced merely to fill up space; and below that, a thunderbird with a common whale in its talons. Thunderbirds were supposed to feed upon whales. The raven is a valued crest of the Gitins; but the thunderbird was a Raven crest and perhaps belonged to the house-owner's wife.

The name of the chief in whose house the original of Figure 10 stood is given by Amos Russ as Minit or Kana, and by Tom Stevens as Qamoti. He belonged to the same family as the owner of the preceding. At the top of this pole is an eagle, crest of the Eagle clan; but my informants differed regarding the rest of the design. Amos Russ explained it as a representation of Gunanasimget's wife being carried off by the killer whale, the woman's face showing

hair, yet he is half stone." After looking at the man for some time the bear asked where they were going. "To gather stones," they said. "May I go with you?" asked the bear. "Yes," said both. So they three went on together, until they came to a lake with a deep hole in it. This hole was the home of an otter whom they shot with bows and arrows, but having no canoe they were unable to retrieve it. In order to do so, the old man made a canoe, in which they both set out to look for it. Sailing about looking for it the daughter's hook ran into what she believed to be the lost otter. But instead, it turned out to be a scannah, her line having dropped into the house of the scannahs, one of which came up and tried to take her down with it. After getting away from the scannah they did not care to stop any longer looking for the otter. So they started for home, leaving the bear to go where it pleased. When they arrived at the stone man, they found, where he stood, nothing but hair and bones.

Inside House Posts of Thunderbird now at Victoria, at the Provincial Museum, described by J. R. Swanton (97: 128. Figures 9, 10).

Figures 9 and 10 represent inside house-poles that formerly stood at Skidegate but are now in the vestibule of the Provincial Museum of British Columbia at Victoria. I obtained two explanations of the carvings — one from Tom Stevens, chief of Thoseborn-at-Rose-Spit, whose family has long intermarried with those of Skidegate; and a second from Amos Russ, whose parents be-



Two totem poles of Skidegate. (Watercolours by Emily Carr, 1912)

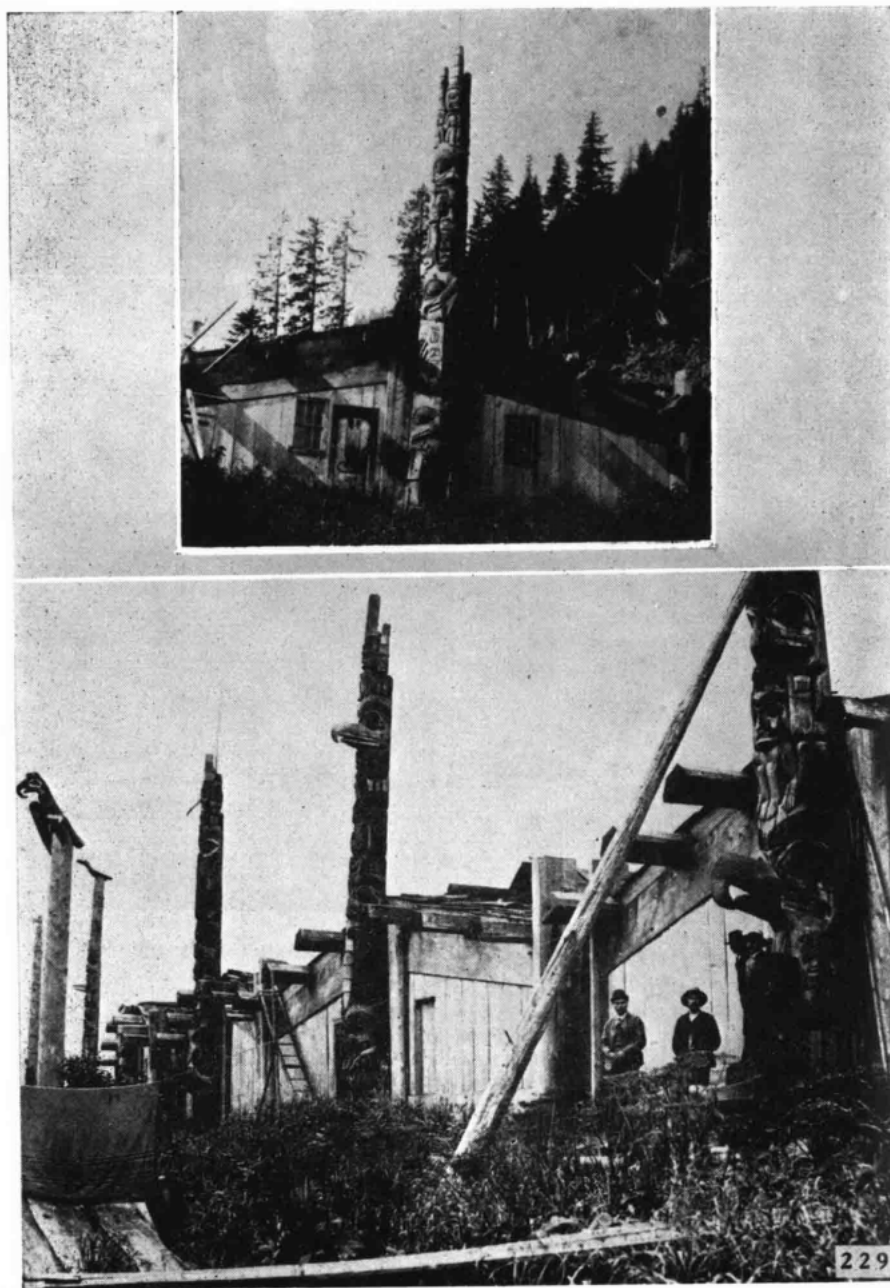
just below the eagle's beak and the whale's blow-hole being represented by a small face above the face of the killer whale. Tom Stevens, however, explained the large figure at the bottom as that of a grizzly bear, presumably meaning thereby the sea grizzly bear; and the small figure over it as the sea-ghost, which usually rides upon its back. The women's face he left unexplained; and I am inclined to think that he is in error, and that Amos Russ's explanation is the correct one. The killer whale (or grizzly bear) may have been a crest of the house-owner's wife.

Inside Posts of Thunderbird at the Provincial Museum, Victoria, British Columbia (W. A. Newcombe—76: C10. Plate III).

One of the inside poles supporting the main beam of the gable-roof in the second house from the left in a photograph of Skidegate taken by Dr. G. H. Dawson in 1878.

Beaver, Raven, Sun, and Grizzly Pole of the Haidas, presumably at Skidegate. Described by James Deans (33, 34: 344).

The next [pole] is one painted in bright colours — red, yellow, and dark green. The figure at the base of this one is the Tsing (beaver) who, as is usual, is carved in a sitting posture, with a stick in his hands. Exceptionally in this case is a figure of a full moon on its belly, immediately above the oval doorway. Above, and sitting on the head of the Tsing is



(Top) House frontal pole of Skidegate. (Bottom) Gold Harbour, central Haida

the typical woman of the Haidas. In her arms she holds the young crow (*Keet-kie*). On her head is seated the raven (*Choo-cah*), having a new moon in his beak, called by the Haidas *Kuny-hi-halla*, or crescent moon. On the raven's head is the hat of distinction, or Tadn Skeel, showing that he is a most important person, or Great Chief. On top of the Tadn



Gold Harbour

Skeel is seated the grizzly bear (*Hoo-its*). This column symbolizes the changes of the moon. First, the beaver has eaten up the moon, which is, as shown above, carved over the doorway. In order to show he has done it, the carver has placed it as if it shone out of his stomach. The old woman holding the young raven means that she has sent the raven away to hunt for a new moon, to take the place of the old one. In his absence she nurses the young one (raven). Having found a new moon, he has been carved as returning with it in his beak. Above all, the bear, which is the crest of the person who raised this column, is also shown, as if he were watching the restoration of the moon.



Gold Harbour

Grave Poles of Skidegate and Old Gold Harbour. By J. R. Swanton (97: 130. Plate VII, figures 1 and 2).

Figures 1 and 2, Plate VII, illustrate this type, the former being the model of a post that formerly stood at Skidegate; the latter, of one that probably stood at Old Gold Harbour. The first is especially interesting as having been erected for the last representative of the Sea-Otter family, the wife of one of the Skidegate chiefs. On the shaft of this post is carved the two-finned killer whale, with a human figure of uncertain significance grasping its tail. On the cross-piece at the top is a face intended to represent the Tsamaos. Both were crests of the Sea-Otters. At the lower end of figure 2 is a grizzly bear, the tracks of the animal being visible above and below; and on the cross-bar is the moon. Both were crests of He-whose-Voice-is-obeyed, chief of the Pebble-Town-People, for whom this pole was



Gold Harbour

put up. The human figure in the moon, holding a bucket in one hand and the fragment of a salal-berry bush in the other, is explained by a story of the Massett series. [M.B. An episode in the Skawa myth of the Gitksans.]

Totem Poles at New Gold Harbour (Jacobsen) (Haida, West Coast of Queen Charlotte Islands) (A. Woldt—109: 27).

One of the poles, standing by itself, is a grave-post, with a flat cross-board at the top, the Thunderbird with wings spread out. On the shaft of the post is the double-finned whale or Wasko, head down. The smaller man holding onto the tail of the monster is the Strong-Man (Su'san).



Gold Harbour

A large house with a tall pole standing beside the oval doorway, and two corner posts, all carved. The tall central pole shows the Raven at the top holding a copper shield in his beak. The other figures are not drawn clearly enough on the reproduction for their identification. Two human beings with conical hats surmounted by cylinders (*skils*) stand on the upper part of the corner posts. A large tree lies on the ground in the process of being carved, canoe-like, as a hollow-back totem pole.

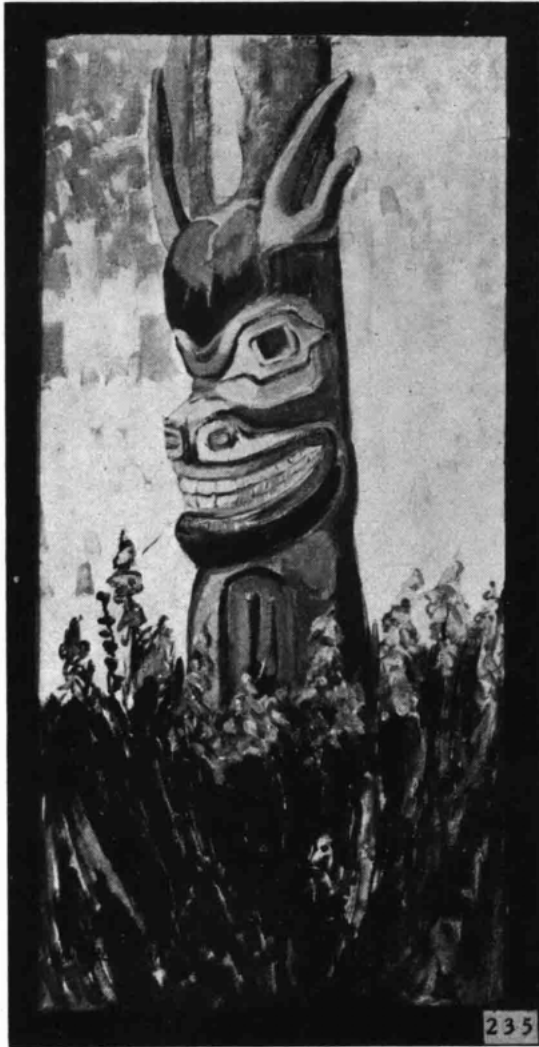
Totem Poles of Tsahtli, at the western end of the Skidegate Channel, on the Queen Charlotte Islands. According to Mr. Fairbairn, long employed by the Department of Fisheries of the Dominion Government, there were



Gold Harbour

nine or ten totem poles standing on Tsahl. Some of them, 35 feet or 40 feet high, were among the finest. They were carved the whole way up. Mr. Fairbairn took photographs, but his negatives were lent and lost. He still has one of these negatives at his home in Skidegate.

Migration of Hippa Island families (Haida) in opposite directions to Alaska, where they became Kaiganis, and to Old Xaina on the eastern end of Maude Island, and finally to Skidegate, described by J. R. Swanton (97: 84).



At Maude Island, near Skidegate. (Emily Carr, 1912)

(*kahlaai*), was the head-chief, "like a major." He looked nearly like a white man and was bald-headed in middle age. (Luke Watson, the informant,

Children-of-Nastow

(*nastogikanaai*) from Hippah Island at Skidegate (Haida), according to Luke Watson of Skidegate, in 1947.

George Smith, the Haida wood-carver of Skidegate, was the informant's uncle. He belonged to the generation of totem carvers that came to an end about 1910. (He died very old, about 1937.) His crests were the Thunderbird, the Finback Whale, and the Snag (*tsem'aus*), all of which appeared together on the poles of the family.

On his mother's side, he was originally from Hippah Island (*nastow*), on the northwestern side of Graham Island, and was called, like the informant himself who succeeded him, Child-of-Nastow. From Nastow these people long ago moved south to Tsahl, at the western end of Canoe Pass (Skidegate Channel). This tribe had carvings on house fronts. For a time they increased in number there. By and by, after the white people had come in sailing ships, the Children-of-Nastow moved again, this time eastwards to Maude Island (*rhaine*), where George Watson, the informant's father



Maude Island, near Skidegate

is a white man; as a child he was adopted into the tribe.) Eventually about 60 years ago, the various southern villages of the Haidas gathered together at Skidegate, where a smaller village had existed for some time.

CUMSHEWA

The Pole of Kohlans on the Queen Charlotte Islands, seen at the Field Museum in Chicago in 1916. Collected by Dr. C. F. Newcombe. (No. 19017). Height, 44½ feet.

The label read: "A Raven represented that is believed to live in the ocean." Below the Raven is a Killer-Whale (*S'kana*) — "the blow-hole of which is represented below the Dorsal-fin by the reversed head." "Of these crests, the lower ones were inherited by Kohlans from his mother; the upper one he adopted in rivalry with a chief of Skidegate, and the 'copper' in the Raven's beak was put there to show that he prevailed against his rival in a competitive distribution of property."

The Pole of Gitkagyas now at the American Museum of Natural History, described by J. R. Swanton (97: 127. figure 7).

Figure 7 represents a pole obtained for the American Museum of Natural History by Dr. C. F. Newcombe, from Abraham Moss (or Gitkagyas), one of the Cumshewa people. He gives the following explanation of it. The two figures at the top represent the horned owl. Next comes the figure of a chief, undoubtedly the one who erected this pole. Below him is the Thunderbird, and at the bottom the Black Whale. The horned owl was used as a crest by the Witch-people of Cumshewa and probably belonged to the house-owner. The Black Whale was used as a crest by some Eagle families and may also have been his; but the Thunderbird was a Raven crest and probably belonged to his wife's family. It is more likely, however, that the Whale and Thunderbird were put one under the other, because Thunderbirds were supposed to live upon whales, and the figures often occur in the same relative position (See figure 9).

Raven and Thunderbird Pole from Cumshewa, now in a municipal park in Prince Rupert. Identified by William Beynon in 1939.