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WORTHY HAIDA CHIEF

Notable Career of a Chief Who Did Much to Promote Good Feeling Toward Whites.

He Influenced His Tribe to Adopt Civilization and Respect the Laws.

There died at Massett, on the Queen Charlotte Islands, in 1894, an Indian chief whose career seems worthy of brief notice. This was Albert Edward Edenshaw, chief of the Haidas.

Until he became chief he bore the name Gwai-gu-un-lthin, or "The man who rests his head on an island." To spare our vocal chords, however, we will anticipate, and call him Edenshaw, though we may notice in passing how suggestive his Haida name was of the influence he was afterwards destined to wield over his countrymen. He was born at a village called Althins Kwun, which stood on the promontory now known as Cape Ball, on the eastern coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands, not far from Skidegate. The date of his birth is uncertain, but may probably be placed somewhere between 1810 and 1815. His youth was passed in stirring times, for the Haidas were then a very warlike race and terrorized the entire coast from Sitka to Vancouver Island. In the slave-capturing raids they were in the habit of making, the Skidegate and Clue Haidas, under a warrior named Shkug-ga, took a prominent part, and young Edenshaw and his two brothers are said to have distinguished themselves by their energy and daring in many a fierce encounter. As early as 1842, when the ship Canada, of New Bedford, visited Skidegate, her first officer considered Edenshaw of sufficient importance to write for him a commendatory certificate.

About this time Edenshaw removed to North Island, at the north west corner of the Queen Charlotte group. Here his uncle, bearing the hereditary name of Edenshaw, was already established as a powerful chief. According to Haida custom the chieftainship descends, not to the chief's son, but to his sister's son, who is supposed to marry the chief's daughter. In the present case the chief had no daughter, and young Edenshaw, who was his uncle's legal heir, married the daughter of an Alaskan Haida. On his uncle's death, Edenshaw succeeded him, inherited all his property, and took his name. The property included six slaves, and as his wife brought with her a dowry of ten slaves, young Edenshaw's domestic establishment was liberally supplied with attendants.

Being now his own master, he had full scope for the energy and capacity he possessed, and soon added considerably to the prestige he had inherited. Knowing that the man who could make the most potlatches—i.e., the largest distributions of property—was unanimously accorded the supremacy, he set himself to acquire wealth, which in those days consisted chiefly of slaves, blankets, furs and coppers. The "coppers" were flat sheets of metal about 2 by 1½ feet in size, on which a device was etched. In olden times they acquired a fictitious value, one copper being considered worth ten slaves. Edenshaw's friends say he never captured slaves himself, though he constantly bought and sold them. He obtained them chiefly from Skidegate and often went as far as Sitka to sell them. He used to travel in state in a dug-out canoe twelve fathoms long, elaborately painted at both ends, manned by a large number of slaves and dependents. By means of constant trading he accumulated a large quantity of property, and in the course of his life made no less than seven large potlatches.

He had not long been chief when he had a narrow escape of his life in an encounter with some Tsimshians on the river Naas. He had gone over with a large party of Haidas to sell a slave and a large copper. The Naas people recognized the slave as one of themselves and claimed him. This led to an angry dispute during which Edenshaw and a Tsimshian chief engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle. A bystander raised his gun to shoot Edenshaw, who adroitly swung his opponent round and made him receive the charge, which instantly killed him. Edenshaw then rushed towards his canoe. On the way several shots were fired after him and two bullets struck him, but he managed to reach his canoe and escape, though he carried the bullets, embedded in his flesh, all his life.

In 1852, Captain Rooney of the schooner Susan Sturges called at Massett on a trading expedition. The Massett Haidas swarmed on board and took possession of the vessel, the white crew taking refuge in the cabin, where they would doubtless have been murdered had not Edenshaw, who happened to be on board, interfered on their behalf. He stood with his back against the cabin door, and dared anyone to injure them. As it was, the white men were

secured and taken to the village, and the schooner pillaged and burnt. Edenshaw, however, contrived afterwards to obtain the white men's release, and took them in his canoe to Fort Simpson. The original document which Captain Rooney gave Edenshaw on that occasion is still in the possession of the family, and is worth transcribing:

"FORT SIMPSON, Oct. 10, 1852.

"The bearer of this, Edenshaw, is chief of the tribe of Indians residing on North Island. I have reason to know that he is a good man, for he has been the means of saving the lives of me and my crew, who were attacked and taken prisoners by the Massett Indians off the harbor of that name. He and his wife and child were on board the vessel, coming from Skiddigat harbor round to North Island, when on the 26th of September, 1852, we were surprised by some canoes alongside. We were so overpowered by numbers, and so sudden the attack, that all resistance on our part was quite impossible; but after gaining the cabin this man and his wife and two or three of his men who happened to come off in a small canoe, protected us for seven hours until he made some terms with them for our safety. He saved my chronometer and several other things which he brought to Fort Simpson and gave to me without ever asking for any remuneration. I hope if this should be shown to any master of a ship, that he will treat him well for he deserves well at the hand of every white man.

"MATTHEW ROONEY,
"Former Master of Schooner
"Susan Sturges."

In 1853 two government boats visited Edenshaw's territory, and their commanders interviewed him. One of these was Captain W. Houstoun of H.M.S. Trincomalee, who states that he found Edenshaw a man of great influence in the neighborhood, and advises his being treated with great consideration. The other was Commander J. C. Prevost, of H.B.M. steam sloop Virago, who engaged Edenshaw as his pilot, and was able to say that he considered him "the best pilot on the coast, not only knowing the different anchorages, but understanding more of the capabilities of a

large ship than any other Indian" he had "yet met with."

During the next few years Edenshaw appears to have several times visited the various town on Vancouver Island. A justice of the peace at Nanaimo writes ominously, in 1860, that Edenshaw was "very well disposed towards the whites, but was dangerous if thwarted when in a state of intoxication, and therefore required gentle treatment."

When at the invitation of the Rev. W. H. Collison the various small tribes on the north shore of Queen Charlotte Islands gathered to form one settlement at Massett, Edenshaw came with them and henceforth made Massett his home. Here he lived an uneventful life for many years, and the only other occasion when he at all attracted public notice was at the wreck of the steamer Sardonix in 1890. The captain of that unfortunate vessel speaks highly of the "kindness and hospitality shown by Edenshaw and his people" to the shipwrecked crew. The interview between the captain and Edenshaw was not altogether devoid of sentiment, for the captain adds: "As I could not speak his language, nor he mine, I laid the gun which I held in my hand at his feet, as a token of honor and respect."

Edenshaw died at Massett on November 16th, 1894. In addition to a stone over his grave, a monument has been erected to him in the village street with an inscription commemorating the above-mentioned rescue of the crew of the Susan Sturges.

He had two children, one, George, died before him; the other, Henry, still survives, and is now teacher of the Massett Indian school. He was succeeded in the chieftainship by his nephew, Charles Edenshaw.

Thus ends the career of a man who certainly did something to bring about a good understanding between natives and whites in Northern British Columbia, and it is doubtless partly owing to his influence and example that the Haidas have taken so readily to civilized ways and become one of the most law abiding tribes on the Coast.

AEF
Obit

Monument at Massett says born 1822
died 18--

died
Nov 16, 1894

1842

- but he wasn't 'Edenshaw' then

12x6 = 72