

Title: "An Analysis of the Social Organization of a  
Modern Haida Community."

Investigator: Mary Lee Stearns

Desired Starting Date: January 5, 1965. It is understood  
that funds will not be available until April 1.

Duration: Six months. This does not include the month of  
June during which I propose to return to  
Los Angeles for consultation and analysis  
of field material.

Abstract:

This proposal describes the objectives and methods of a community study which I plan to carry out in the Haida Indian village of Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia during a six month period beginning in January, 1965. This ethnographic field work is part of a comprehensive historical-structural study of the Haida which I am submitting as a doctoral dissertation in Anthropology at the University of California at Los Angeles.

I am primarily interested in the processes of change and the maintenance of continuity in relatively isolated communities. To pursue these problems I shall investigate the internal social organization of the Haida village of Masset which is the main reserve of the Masset Band of the Queen Charlotte Agency. About 670 of the 789 Band members reside in the village. The population is largely endogamous and migration in search of wage labor is usually temporary. Although dependent on the village of "white Masset" located

three miles away for administrative, police and merchandising services, Haida Masset is a discrete, clearly bounded social unit.

My previous work on this area includes a three month field trip to Masset from June 1 to Sept. 1, 1962 and one month spent in historical research at the Provincial Archives of British Columbia in July, 1963.

Problem:

In comparison with the other Canadian Haida village of Skidegate which has greater opportunities for wage labor, Masset is not well acculturated to the dominant Canadian society. Its people have adjusted to the specific demands of white administrators, missionaries, employers and teachers but only as long and as far as supervision is exercised. On the ecological level there has been no radical change in traditional settlement pattern, geographic environment or economic activities, except that gardens are no longer cultivated because of the ravages of introduced deer. Fishing and logging are now sources of wage labor in addition to subsistence. Political and social changes have occurred on the level of external relations of the community with the Indian Affairs Branch, RCMP, Anglican Church, the fishermen's union, and so on. My previous period of field work was devoted largely to a study of ecological adjustments and external social relations.

Detailed information is lacking on the extent of change on the level of internal organization of the community. In this proposed study I shall be primarily concerned with internal social relations. In my earlier field work I collected some data on household composition, marital history and genealogies, employment history and lineage affiliations for one-fourth of the population of Masset. I also compiled useful data on property ownership, health, arts and crafts, material culture and social control. I consulted Indian Agency files for the administrative history of the village and for records of vital statistics. I plan to complete the collection of data on household composition, marital histories, genealogies and lineage affiliations in order to analyse marriage patterns and family organization. This analysis will point up some changes in the kinship system where the imposition by administrative procedure of the patrilineal principle on a strongly matrilineal society has resulted in structural ambiguities which are expressed in inheritance, residence, naming, adoption and kinship obligations.

Politically the village is not well integrated. Viewed from the outside, the Band Council functions ineffectively, its mechanisms of social control are inadequate, and factionalism hinders any communal enterprise. Both whites and Haidas attribute these conditions to cultural degeneration: "The village is falling apart." However, the prestige of the hereditary chief as against the uncoveted

elective office of chief councillor, the reliance on ridicule and social ostracism rather than the police, and the contraposition of cliques recall the traditional social structure. My task shall be to observe the operation of the ranking and status systems, to study the functioning of hereditary chiefship in relation to the elected Band Council, and to discover the bases and structure of present descent groupings. When older Haida speak of "all of us from (the village of) Yan" or North Island or Rose Point, they apparently include as "us" members of both moieties. This suggests that old village ties may have replaced matrilineage bonds; it may be, however, that father's matrilineage and mother's matrilineage have been assimilated to one's cognatic kindred. The possibility that there has been a reinterpretation of the lineage principle requires investigation.

Because my first visit was made during the busy summer season when most social activities are suspended in favor of fishing and cannery employment, my observations were limited to a narrow range of activities. By returning during the winter season when the social and ceremonial calendar is at its peak, I hope to study the village network of relations more effectively. Although my projected field visit will miss the important Christmas season, it will allow me to observe the celebration of Easter which is also a major religious and festival occasion in Masset. I shall then try to participate in the gift exchange relationships

which seem to be conducted in English bone china tea cups. I will also make as many observations as possible of the various club, church, school, athletic and family activities and plan to conduct intensive interviews on ethnographic problems with several informants. I am not yet certain what kind of living arrangements I can make but will find some accommodations within the village.

Background:

This proposed study of modern Masset, although conceptually self-contained, fits into a larger study of Haida history and social organization which has three parts:

1. The reconstruction of the traditional Haida social system as it existed at the time of contact, based on logbooks of early explorers and fur traders and on myths recorded by ethnographers. This model is to be used as a base-line for the study of change.
2. A history of post contact events and their effects on the society in as far as they can be determined from accounts of 19th and early 20th century observers.
3. A structural-functional analysis of the modern Haida village of Masset to be based on a total of nine months of field work. This is the work to which the present proposal pertains.

With this historical approach it will be possible to trace changes and persistences in Haida society from contact (1787) down to the present. This time span includes three marked phases: the period of the maritime fur trade from 1787 to the 1830s; the period from the 1830s to the 1870s when Haida encounters with whites focussed on trade, wage

labor and mischief at Hudson Bay Company forts and other settlements; the phase beginning in the 1870s when the Canadian government extended political sovereignty and legal jurisdiction over the Haidas.

The primary sources include accounts by fur traders and explorers (Dixon, Bishop, Ingraham and others not yet examined), Hudson Bay Company employees (McNeill, Deans, Work), missionaries (Green, Collison, Harrison, Crosby). Valuable first hand observations were recorded also by the geologist Dawson and U.S. Navy officer Niblack. These sources are augmented by church files, official government records, private correspondence and newspaper files. Earlier anthropological studies include Swanton's research conducted in 1902, Murdock's work in 1932 and Drucker's trait lists.

On the structural plane, it is possible to elucidate principles of social organization on three time levels: 1790, 1875, 1960. This is accomplished by an examination of the corporate groups, or basic units of the society, and their interrelations. The analysis consists in isolating the significant corporations, which in Haida society include the autonomous matrilineages, and in studying their internal organization and external relations with other Haida units, with other Indian tribes, and with the representatives of white society. Family organization, property holding, inheritance and subsistence activity are

aspects of the internal organization while chiefship, marriage alliance, potlatching, councils, feud and warfare are aspects of lineage external relations. In the Haida case it will be seen that lineages underwent drastic changes in modes of external relationships without substantial modification in internal organization between 1790 and 1875.

At the time of contact the lineages were scattered in villages of one or two and up to twenty or more houses along the entire coastline of the Queen Charlotte Islands. The population, estimated by Work at about 6600 in 1834, probably exceeded 7,000 in 1790. The earliest published account of the Haida describes small trading parties of heavily armed warriors under the authority of a chief who conducted trade for the group. The narrator, observing the fortifications on shore and the armament of the natives, concluded that relations between villages were frequently hostile. (Dixon, 1789, pp. 205, 206, 209, passim.)

Less than a century later, in 1875, the population was reduced by disease and migration to about 1,000 persons most of whom congregated in the two nucleating settlements of Masset on northern Graham Island and Skidegate in the south. Contrasted with the earlier villages occupied by one or a few lineages, Swanton's village surveys and house lists (1909) attribute 15 lineages with a population of about 400 to Masset in this later period. Intervillage feud has by then given way to intravillage ranking of lineages

and to the potlatch. The "town chief" is assisted by an informal council of lineage heads or "subchiefs" who defer to his authority. With the establishment of a trading post in the 1850s and the arrival of a missionary in 1876, an irreversible consolidation of population occurred. Seasonal dispersion to fish camps persisted until recent decades but withdrawal of households from a permanent village to found an independent village was no longer practicable. It was the closing of this option to migrate that transposed political competition from a military to a ceremonial mode.

By 1960 the politically significant corporations no longer include the lineage. It has been replaced by the Band and intravillage groups which I have yet to identify. When I analyse the contemporary Haida I shall approach the complex interrelations of modern structures from the same perspective of internal organization and external relations. This will yield a set of models of the social structure at different time levels on the same cultural continuum. By intensive analysis of each model I will be able to determine the functions discharged by each type of corporation. The way in which functions are affected by changes in structural relations and, conversely, the way in which changes in functions affect structures are problems of general theoretical importance in the study of social and cultural change.

The Haida study illustrates both types of change. One of the most significant structural changes reflected by the



models is the aggregation of formerly dispersed lineage groups in large villages. The implications for lineage functions appear in the elaboration of the potlatching complex and in the manner of ranking lineages, with a concomitant decrease of feuding and warfare. As long as Haida society was an autonomous, internally self-regulating system, the lineage effectively structured social relations. But with the encapsulation of the Haida within Canadian society, new structures were institutionalized by political action of the Canadian government. The most important such structure was the Band. The village composed of heterogeneous, autonomous lineages was henceforth considered by administrators as an undifferentiated community. With loss of political, social and economic functions, the corporate quality of lineages lapsed. However, my tentative model of modern Masset shows that while the village operates as a unit in its external relations, internally it is composed of factions, associations and "family" groups whose nature, interrelations and activities have not yet been studied. Certain institutions such as ranking, gift exchange and feasting which were significant in the traditional society continue to structure social relations. Functional analysis of these institutions will illuminate problems of general interest for the Northwest Coast culture area and may, hopefully, stimulate comparative research in other societies.