Historic Villages.

Over the centuries the Haida people have inhabited innumerable village
and camp sites. In 1900 the old informants of Newcombe and Swanton were able to
list 119 such places on the Charlottes in addition to the seven major villages on
the Alaskan side. These comprise Swanton's list of 'towns' (1905a:277-281),
although the word is a misleading one since the list includes minor campsites
and traditional places of origin as well as major winter villages. The growing
list of known archaeological sites attests that many more places were occupied in
earlier times; it would be no exaggeration to say that every suitable cove and
stream mouth was occupied by the Haida at one time or another. It is the impression
of archaeologists that few of the large totem-pole villages rest on deep meiidens
of ancient sites, attesting to a long-term pattern of frequent movement to new
sites and reoccupation of old ones.

The following list of 27 'historic' villages is somewhat arbitrary. It
includes those which left visible ruins which were photographed. All are known
from historical accounts, and most from the journals of the maritime fur traders
of the 1790s. Other known villages are remembered in the traditions, occupied
before white contact and leaving no visible remains ruins. Traditions of the more
distant past refer to 'story towns'; although most of these were at sites known
by tradition and/or archaeology to have been ancient villages, it is myth rather
than historic fact that credits them with being five-row towns occupied by all
the ancestors of the Raven or Eagle lineages.

A certain confusion exists in the literature over the composition of early
Haida villages (eg Harrison's list (1895:   ) of 39 former villages consists
mostly of lineage names TRSC 124-5). The generalization is made that each lineage

occupied its own village. It is true that in Haida traditions each lineage is usually associated with a single named place which is usually its place of origin. as a distinct group. Also, each site was owned by a single lineage, and each lineage owned and exclusively occupied seasonal sites. Yet when we examine the composition of the known villages of historic times, we find that almost all were occupied by more than one lineage, and often several, of both moieties. There seems to have been a ceaseless process of splitting and combining: lineages branching off from parent lineages and establishing independent villages, and coalitions through migration and marriage and birth forming larger units. At any given time, some winter villages would indeed be single-lineage villages, but some would have a few houses of related sub-lineages or of 'opposites', and some would be multi-lineage villages. There is no reason to suppose that the situation was very dufferent in precontact times, although the conditions of the post-contact period, with declining populations and concentrations at places of trade or Christian missions, hastened the process of coalition. By 1911 the number of Haida settlements had been reduced to three, all Christian: Skidegate, Masset, and Hydaburg.