

Cumshewa

Another of the classic "totem pole villages" of the Haida abandoned in the 1880's, Cumshewa was located on the north shore of Cumshewa Inlet about four miles from its mouth (on IR 7, Cumshewa). As in other cases, the name is that of the leading chief; the place name is actually Tlkinool (łki'n'ul), the meaning of which is not known.

The origin of the name Cumshewa presents an intriguing historical puzzle. It seems to be the word which the northern Kwakiutl and coastal Tsimshian use for "white man". (The Haida generally call white men Yets-Haida "iron people"). The Haida are aware of this, and have stories to explain its origin. One version, recorded by Swanton, (p. 105) says that sailors of the first ship to appear off Kaisun mistook a Haida youth for the lost son of their captain, and addressed him "Hallo, Gomsiwa". The boy was next in line for the chieftainship, and adopted the name. Another version told at Skidegate is that early seamen noticed a resemblance between this man and the captain of a lost schooner, and tested him by offering him his choice of two overcoats, one heavy and cheap and the other lighter and more valuable. He chose the poor one, which showed that he was not a white man, but he was called Cumshewa anyway. Curtis (1916, p. 189) gives a third version, somewhat similar. If the name did originate in this way it must have been very early in the contact period, because by

1791 it was used by the leading chief of the area. Bartlett's journal of that year mentions "Comeeshier", Hoskins mentions "Comsuah", and Ingraham had much commerce with "Cummashawaa". They had few predecessors on the coast, still fewer of whom had traded on the mainland side and might know the mainland Indians' name for white men. One is tempted to suggest that the name might have been adopted as a result of meetings with Dixon in 1787. The journal of Dixon's voyage tells how he gave a cap to an old man who seemed to have some authority who came out to the ship to trade when it was proceeding down the west coast near Kaisun. Three weeks later, when Dixon had rounded the south end of the islands and come up the east side to the vicinity of Cumshewa, the same man, who now appeared to be "a person of first consequence", came aboard again. He had lost his white man's cap in a fight, and prevailed on Dixon to give him another ^{one} man. This man could well have been the chief later called Cumshewa. (Dixon, pp. 208, 217).

The journals of the early 1790's reveal a rather surprising thing: Skedans at that time was nothing more than a summer village of Cumshewa's tribe. Cumshewa at that time was using Skedans as his summer village. In July, 1791, Hoskins recorded that the village of chief "Comsuah" was "...situated on a point on each side of which from our situation there appeared to be a deep Sound..." He recorded the name as "Tooschondolth" (p. 215). The description is that of Skedans, but the name seems to be a rendering of Tlkinool (Cumshewa). On August 22 his vessel was anchored two

miles from "Tooschondolth" (Skedans), and at the same time Ingraham in the Hope was anchored in McCoy Cove near Cumshewa. The latter had been there since August 12, and did not leave until the 29th, although it was plain that the Indians wanted him to go much earlier: "The natives urged us to be gone saying they had no more skins however it seems they were about moving to their winter quarters which was near to the place we lay at anchor... (p. 147). He drew a chart of "Cummashawaas Harbour" which shows the "winter village" at the present site of Cumshewa and shows Skedans as "Summer Point". He sailed out past the village (which if it was like the recent Skedans would be facing the other way on the narrow neck of land which forms Skedans Point) and "...as we passed Cummashawaas village seeing no one stirring I fir'd a gun to wake them..." (p. 152). The chief came off and traded the rest of his furs.

In more recent times none of Cumshewa's people lived at Skedans. According to Swanton, "Gomsiwa" was the chief of an Eagle lineage called the Witch People (E5) and town chief of the village of Cumshewa, where 18 of the 21 houses were occupied by branches of this lineage (pp. 273, 285). No families of this lineage are listed as having lived at Skedans. The Eagles who later lived in Skedans were of the same lineages as those of Tanoo, and probably of the same origin.

In July, 1794 Cumshewa's people captured an American schooner, killed all but one of its ^{the 11 men of its} eleven man crew, and

burned the ship. The enslaved sailor lived an exceedingly miserable existence for a year, until he was redeemed by the crews of two other American vessels, in a bloody fight in which several Indians were killed (Bishop, pp. 122-6).

Cumshewa remained an important centre of the fur trade, partly, no doubt, because of its convenient anchorage. From Captain McNeill's sailing directions in the early 1830's, for "Comeshewass" harbour, it is evident that the village was then in its present location. ^{Census 1841 Cum-she-was 80m 286 tot 20 houses} "Skedance Point" is mentioned, but there is no mention of a village there. In 1862 Poole visited Tanoo, Skedans and "Cum-she-was", all evidently in their present locations (Poole, pp. 112, 129).

Swanton's informants remembered 21 houses of Cumshewa, all except two belonging to three branches of the Eagle lineage Witch People (E5). The two Raven houses belonged to a lineage from the west coast of the island (R 10).

Dawson's excellent photographs show the village as he found it in 1878. As he described it, "...There are now standing here twelve or fourteen houses, several of them quite ruinous, with over twenty-five carved posts. The population is quite small,..." He mentioned another old village nearby: "The decayed ruins of a few houses, representing a former village, which does not appear to have been large, stand just outside

Cumshewa Inlet, beyond the north entrance point." (p. 168B)
 Reserve Commissioner O'Reilly in 1882 found only 30 people in
 "Cum-she-was or Kinool", and said they would probably move to
 Skidegate soon. But two years later, Chittenden found 60 people
 there, and counted 18 houses and 25 poles (p. 23). When
 Jemmett, the surveyor, arrived to survey the reserve in 1887
 the place was entirely deserted.

By 1953, when I examined the ^{overgrown} village site, all that remained
 were remnants of 16 carved poles, none of which were fit for
 salvage, and one fairly recent smokehouse. ~~Archaeologically~~
 The site showed no ^{archaeological} evidence of antiquity.

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