

Masset

The name Masset was not the name of any one village, but was the general name applied to the entrance of Masset Sound, where three villages formerly stood. These were Ettawas and Kayang on the east side of the entrance, and Yan on the west side. By about 1880, the people of these and the other northern villages had assembled ~~in~~ at Ettawas, where the Hudson's Bay post and the mission were established, and this combined settlement was called Masset or Old Masset, to distinguish it from the White community of ~~Masset~~ or New Masset, which grew up a couple of miles farther up the inlet.

The origin of the name is not entirely clear. Its similarity to "Mynhasset", a place supposedly visited by De Fonte in 1640 has often been pointed out, but that cannot be proved one way or the other. It has also been suggested that the name derives from "Puerto de Mazzaredo", which was the name Caamano gave to Virago Sound as he coasted by in 1792 (he called Masset Sound "Puerto de Estrada"). This is obviously not the case, because the name was known in the ^{already} previous year. In 1791 Captain Crowell of the brig Hancock anchored ^{close to the island} inside the entrance of the sound and gave it the name "Hancock's River". The Columbia anchored there the same summer, and both Haswell and Hoskins recorded the Indian name as "Masheet". Hoskins (in Howay, p. 228), wrote "This river...

is called by the natives Masheet". Dawson, almost a century later, questioned the Indians, and found that "Maast" was their name for the small island up the channel from the villages, (now officially named Maast Island), and the name was extended by the whites to cover the whole inlet (Dawson, p. 164B).

The people of the cluster of villages at the mouth of this sound formed one of the largest concentrations of population on the entire coast; on a par, perhaps, with the concentration of the Tsimshian in their winter villages at Metlakatla. One does not think of the Haida as river people, but this large sound though salt water, is in some respects similar to a large river system, and the cluster of winter villages at its mouth is somewhat similar to the clusters at the mouth of the Nass and other coastal rivers. In summer, the upper reaches of the inlet and the salmon streams tributary to it were utilized. The Haida called the inlet Gao, and the people who used it "Gao-Haida" meaning Inlet-People, and this name came to be extended to include all the people of the northern parts of Graham Island (Swanton, 1905 Myths and Texts, p. 307 n). The Tsimshian also called these people Gitgao "people of Gao".

The earliest historical references to the area seem to be in 1791, when the Hancock and the Columbia anchored near Maast Island in "Masheet or Hancock's River" (Hoskins, 233) to trade. In August of that year most of the Indians were away: Hoskins wrote:

Morby

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"The tribe which inhabits this river I am informed is large though we saw but few natives their Chief is named Cuddah... they are moved up the river for the benefit of fishing" (p. 228).

Haswell wrote at the same time:

"There were several small scattering villages, but there were visible traces of numerous tribes residing here at some season of the year, but those that came on board us made us understand their village was removed two days' journey up the river.. (p. 294)

Haswell gave "Cattar" as the name of "the Chief of the port" (p.324)

Joseph Ingraham visited the port and made a rough chart of it in 1792. He shows ^{three} villages at what would appear to be Old Masset, Rooney Point, and SKaga Point. He thought the area "by far the most eligible for a new settlement of any place I have seen on the coast".

This port was not, evidently, visited very frequently by the early traders; the next mention of it seems to be 25 years later September in 1817 by Roquefeuil:

"Early on the 26th we entered the port, or rather arm of the sea, at Masset, under the guidance of an Indian named Tayan ...at eight o'clock we passed the southeast point, and soon after, being opposite to a large village, we were surrounded by canoes..."

He was impressed by the houses and totem poles; and saw a fort on the hill at the south end of the village:

"As far as we could judge, the huts composing the four villages on the two sides of the entrance, are better built, and in better order, than those of the north. There is something picturesque in the whole appearance of this large village; it is particularly remarkable for the monstrous and colossal figures which decorate the houses of the principal inhabitants, and the wide gaping mouths of which serve as a door", (p.88)

"Ascending the arm of the sea, there is, on the north side, above the largest village, a fort, the parapet of which is covered with beautiful turf, and surmounted by a palisade surrounded in good condition..." (p. 88).

It is rather strange, in light of our other knowledge, to find that the chief of Masset at that time was Edenshaw:

"Itemtchou the head chief of Masset came in a handsome canoe, accompanied by his three wives. His face is long, a little morose and savage, and has something of the Swiss character.... He thought I wanted to change names with him.... the exchange was made, notwithstanding the difficulty the chief found in pronouncing his new name, which, to oblige him, I softened into Roki." (p. 89)

This chief gave the ship assistance and protection when it went aground.

In 1829 Jonathon Green met "Eadinshu, chief of the Masset tribe" (p. 70) at Kaigani. He said the Masset Indians now inhabit North Island, formerly the territory of the Kaigani. During these decades Masset seems to have been seldom visited, the Indians going in flotillas of canoes to Port Simpson to trade.

The 1841 census did not give a breakdown for the three villages, and the figures for "Massette" are 160 houses, 630 men, and a total figure of 2473 (about 37 percent of the total for the Queen Charlottes).

Ettawas

The largest of the three Masset villages was Ettawas, on the east side of the entrance closest to its mouth, and it was here that the Hudson's Bay post was established, the mission, and where the people of the other villages converged. The name 'atai' was p86 'ate' was is said by Swanton to mean "White slope", and the town formerly belonged to the Raven lineage of Chief Sigai (R 16) but was recently given to the Eagle lineage of Chief Weeha (E 14).

The great excavated house of Weeha or Weah is well known from photos taken in the 1880's. Swanton's informants named 33 houses (including 4 Raven lineages and 5 Eagle lineages). They extended in a single row along the beach. The last six at the south end were formerly considered a separate Raven village called Gidjao 'i'djao, which is the name of the little hill. It is said that at that time the sea came in over the place where Masset now stands, and these houses were built on high land farther back. (Swanton, pp. 281, 291). One house was built on the hill, was stockaded, and used as a fort (loc.cit), which reminds of Roquefeuil's observation in 1817.

*Origins - generally
have split both
Raven and Eagle
but some forms
place up
inlet.*

The trading post was opened in 1853, and the mission established by the Rev. WH Collison in 1876. Collison's account of this is detailed and interesting (pp. 98ff). Collison and his successor Harrison were literate men, and have both recorded their experiences in books. It is not clear when the people moved in

(Chittenden says 1855, with Alex McKenzie since 1876)

*see
Andjell*

*Charles
and accounts of Haida life in highly interesting books*

1. *1. Last Wake of the War Canoe*

Ancient Warriors of the North Pacific Charles Harrison, London, 1925

from Yan and Kayang. In 1878 Dawson described "Ut-te-was":

The Ut-te-was village is now the most populous, and there are in it about twenty houses ~~new-and-old~~, counting both large and small, with some from which the split cedar planks have been carried away, leaving only the massive frames standing. Of carved posts there are over forty in all,.... At the south end of the Ut-te-was Village is a little hill, the houses on and beyond which appear to be considered as properly forming a distinct village, though generally included in the former.
(p. 163B)

In 1882, Reserve Commissioner O'Reilly laid out the reserve (IR 1, Massett) to include both villages of Ut-te-was and Kayung, the latter 1 1/2 miles away and almost deserted. The chief was Wee-ah. Swan, the next year, said Uttewas was a village of 65 houses old and new (p. 140). In 1884 Chittenden spent some time at "Utte-was" the "principal village of the Hyda nation." He estimated its population at 350, and counted 40 occupied houses, 50 carved poles, and the ruins of many ancient lodges. The house of Chief Weeah was 55 feet square.

This is the abode of the aristocracy of Hyda land- of Head Chief Edensaw, and of Weeah, Stilta, Kinaskilas, Kiltslouia, Spencer and Cootay....Chief Edensaw and most of his people were away at North Island and other points hunting fur seal ... (pp. 23, 57).

In 1882, O'Reilly estimated a total of 400 for all of the villages of northern Graham Island; the first real census, in 1889 lists them all under Massett with a total of 405. The number declined to 350 in 1915, and has since increased, to

The principal chief of this vicinity is named We-he; he is an old man, rather stout, and with nearly white hair and beard...

507 in 1939, to 789 (139 not living on the reserve) in 1960.

The Indian Department regards them as the MassettTribe. They have 22 reserves. The Reserve Commission was impressed by its visit in 1913. They said that these people were

Prosperous and comfortable, highly advanced in civilization, with an excellent form of municipal government, brass band, orchestra, choir, etc.

Their chief occupations were:

Fishing and working for the canneries, carpenters, blacksmith, gasoline engineers, boat builders, goldsmiths, silver-smiths, traders, and storekeepers. 1916, v. III p. 733.

Kayang

The second Masset village, a mile or so along the shore from Ettawas, was Kayang qayā'ŋ. Swanton's informants remembered 15 houses which had existed there, 7 belonging to the Eagle lineage which owned the site, and 8 belonging to three branches of the Point Town People (R 14), a Raven lineage (p. 291). Dawson did not bother to examine it closely in 1878 (p. 164B), O'Reilly said it was almost deserted in 1882; Chittenden in 1884 called it "only the ruins of a few houses and carved poles" (p. 23). Photographs of the 1880's and 90's show the ruins of the village.

Traditions of both the Eagles and Ravens here derive them from Rose Spit.

First settled by Up-Islet Eskimo. Later, Pt. Town People joined to use 1/2 of town

Yan

The third Masset village was across the harbour on the west side and in a more exposed position closer to the open sea (IR 7, Yan). The name means "to go straight line to a thing", and was in reference to a rock just below the village (Swanton, p. 281). It was a Raven village, belonging to the Rear Town People (R 15) who traditionally came from Rose Spit, settled first at Masset until a fight with its Raven owners (R 16) and then moving over to found Yan. Twelve of the 20 houses listed by Swanton in this village belonged to branches of this lineage. The Eagles were of two lineages which had moved out of Masset Inlet to points on the coast, and joined the Raven lineage at Yan (P. 102)

Yan was still occupied in 1878 when Dawson visited it and wrote that it "shows about twenty houses new and old, with thirty carved posts" (p. 163B). O'Reilly, in 1882, characterized it as "the second village of importance on the northern part of these islands" and "presided over by a sub-chief named "Na-thlung" (p. 104). But Chittenden, in 1884, found it abandoned. He counted 20 houses and 25 poles (p. 23).