

New Clew

There is a small, overgrown graveyard on the corner of an Indian Reserve (IR 10, New Clew) at the mouth of Mather (Church) Creek on the south shore of Cumshewa Inlet. In it are two dozen headstones (made in Vistoria) dated between 1887 and 1897. The epitaph on one of them might serve to tell the whole story of the short-lived village of New Clew: "He Tried to be a Christian". ^{Thomas} ^{Methodist} Crosby, the missionary who established the village, called it "a step in the right direction".

About 1885, as other Haida villages had done before them, the people of Tanoo asked for a missionary. As Crosby ^{wrote} said: "They said their people were all dying; they had gone so much to Victoria that they would soon have no people left.... It has been a painful sight for a number of years to observe how these Hyda women would go every summer...to and from their life of dissipation and sin in order to get money for crest poles and to give away at potlatches" (p. 270). He went to Tanoo: "Arriving at Clue, we found what had once been a large heathen village, many of the houses dilapidated and fallen down, and their former inmates dead. Other houses had beautiful, new, large totem columns only recently erected. There were about eighty people, but not more than three or four healthy-looking women in the whole village.... We realized that we were among a decaying race, almost all swept off into eternity by the white man's fire-water

and debauchery."

The Indians were unwilling to move to Skidegate. "It was arranged afterwards by the consent of the chiefs that they should move from Clue to a more sheltered place on Louisa Island. They gave liberally of their goods, chiefs' costumes, copper and blankets, towards building a Church, and by the assistance of the little ship The Glad Tidings they got over lumber to build both the Church and the new village.... Here they lived and, under a native preacher and a lay worker, did good work and seemed happy until in 1897 they were induced to move to Skidegate..." (p271)

Jimmy Jones told me in Skidegate in 1954 that he remembered moving from Tanoo to Church Creek. They built a row of fine new-style houses ("just like Victoria") with a church in the middle, and tried to live a Christian life. Later they moved the houses and the church, board by board, to Skidegate Mission. The old name of the place, he said, was Qadasgo. A few of the people had come from Skedans and Ninstints as well as Tanoo.

The first Indian Department census, in 1889, shows "Clew" with 93 inhabitants. The number declined to 66 in 1896, and in 1897 they all moved to Skidegate. In 1953 I could find no trace of the village other than the graveyard, and no signs of archaeological antiquity.