Haisla Legends

By Gordon Robinson
How the Chilakoons came to Kitamaat
Numas - Old Man
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Introduction and Background
In Memory of William Gordon Robinson
1918-2000

HAISLA LEGENDS
This book “H’aiisla Legends” by Gordon Robinson of Kitamaat Village, B.C., was recorded into print for the first time in history from oral transmission through the ages. Gordon was a qualified school teacher graduating from Surpass College in Vancouver, and was a H’aiisla historian. The true authors of the legends belong to the past. The legends are children entertainment stories, and cultural folklore based on historical events, for the long cold winter nights of pre-radio and TV, usually told by grandparents around a warm fire. The H’aiisla language has a word for last year, the year before, then another for “long ago.”

Gordon was born in the year 1918, the year of the worldwide flu pandemic which claimed an estimated 25 million plus lives. His father moved his family down Douglas Channel on his gillnetter fishing boat, far away from people when he heard of the massive Native deaths occurring down south. Some 3,500 H’aiisla resided in ancient three village sites on the Kitimat River, according to his estimates resulting from discussions with his elders…the oral historians. At his birth there were less than 200 H’aiisla, only the strongest lived on and survived. The epidemics of small pox, etc, in the 1,800’s reduced his people to near extinction levels. A mysterious illness called “over night death”, claimed many lives. A person was fine one day, took ill at night and died
the next day, during the height of the plague teams of young men went from door to door collecting bodies for burial in mass graves. No services were conducted due to the large number of deaths.

As a young man Gordon realized that the few surviving old folks did not have much time left, and their oral history would be lost forever. Thus he took up the pen and proceeded to record the ancient legends.

The result is the booklet titled “Tales of Kitamaat” then renamed to this book “Haisla Legends”, legends from the lost past of a Native people who looked extinction in the face with the advent of European immigration to North America.

Gordon took great care in recording the legends in written form, so as not to embellish or alter the translation into English, accuracy was important in his work. With the recording of a legend from one elder, he would go over the details with another knowledgeable elder to ensure authenticity. Doing so was necessary due to the difficulty of translating H’aisla words and expressions into English, most elders of his youth spoke only H’aisla. There are six sounds in the H’aisla language which have no English counterpart, also intonations and accentuations that do not translate easily.

The legends truly are from the “olden days”, of a pre-contact culture overwhelmed and very nearly erased. The H’aisla historian Gordon Robinson gave us a peek into the past of a bygone culture. The legends are hundreds of years old.

Mark D Robinson, son

Weegit

In Haisla or Kitamaat legends the name of Weegit quite often appears. This mythical character had some of the attributes of a god but he was full of mischief.

He originated many things in nature and the fact that these things happened to be useful was only incidental for his main interest was to play pranks on people or things.

His favourite form was that of a raven but he could turn himself onto a man, a pine needle or any other form of life to suit his mischievous purposes.

Even his name was misleading for it meant “Great Man” and being Weegit, he was anything but a great man.

LEGENDS

Legend of the Moon

Weegit surveyed the situation and was sad. It was night time and there was no light – things looked black indeed. He thought of the fact that the sun shone during the day and there was plenty of light then who wanted light during the day? That only meant a man had to work for a living. What was necessary was some source of light for the night; something which would give just enough light so that people would think of nothing but pleasure. Ah, that was it. Something that would make that particular person think of nothing but pleasure.

But where was such an object available? Of course there was that luminous globe which was known as the Na-gwa-chi and which belonged to that old man, but whoever heard of that old goat thinking of pleasurable things? “He will never let me have the Nagwachi even by fair means. Therefore I will have to get it by other means,” thought Weegit to himself. He assumed the form of a raven and flew to a tree close by the
house of the old man and there he sat spying on the activities of the people in the house. He soon noticed that the old man’s daughter quite often went to a well close by to get pails of water. Weegit turned himself into a pine needle and sat floating on the water in the well. Very soon the girl came for another pail of water and when she dipped it up she also got Weegit in the form of a pine needle into her pail. She decided to take a drink and as she did so she unintentionally swallowed the pine needle. Weegit now found himself within the fair and unsuspecting maiden and in due course was born to her as a son. Time passed and Weegit was now a mischievous toddler, the apple of his grandfather’s eye, and forever trying to manoeuvre himself into a position where he could take possession of the Nagwachi.

One evening when the old man was dozing on his couch Weegit grabbed the Nagwachi and started rolling it out the door. The old man suddenly awakened and pursued Weegit. In and out among the trees Weegit rolled the Nagwachi trying to outdistance the old man, but the old man wanted so badly to regain the Nagwachi that he steadily closed the distance separating himself from Weegit. Just as the old man overtook him, Weegit suddenly threw the Nagwachi up into the sky, changed himself into a raven and flew away satisfied that he had at last connived to get a source of light for the night – for the Nagwachi stayed up in the night sky destined forever, it seemed, to give a soft light to mischievous Weegit.

*Weegit Discovers Halibut Hooks*

Weegit the raven, went from one person to the other asking the same question – "Do you know where Kwa-ga-noo lives?" No one seemed to be able to answer his question and Weegit was now getting quite desperate for he had nothing to eat these past few days. His only hope for getting food was to find the man named Kwa-ga-noo, for it was said that he alone knew the secret of catching halibut. “If no one can help me then I shall have to help myself”, thought Weegit to himself as he spread his black wings and started flying. “Halibut love deep water,” he reasoned, “Therefore I may expect to find Kwa-ga-noo where the water is deep and that would be far out at sea.” So he set his wings and flew higher and higher and farther out to sea. After much time had passed and he had reached the place where the sky meets the sea he saw in the distance a thin column of smoke. After more time passed and he saw that the smoke came from a little house which was built on some logs floating on the ocean. To this house he flew and sat on the logs and rested. He then opened the door and went inside and there sat a man beside an opening on the floor. The man had a rope in his hand and this rope dangled in the sea. He did not appear to notice Weegit and he sat there motionless a long time until finally something gave a strong jerk on the rope in his hand. He quickly hauled in the line and there on a hook attached to the line was a halibut. Weegit carefully noted that the hook was made of a spruce root in the shape of the letter “U” with a sharp bone tied on one prong and pointed a little inward and toward the opposite prong. A piece of bait was tied on the bone barb and it was on this bone barb the halibut was caught.

“So this is the man called Kwa-ga-noo”, thought Weegit. “And this is his secret way of catching halibut. So far – so good, but now to get the hook.”

Weegit softly cleared his throat then said: “I have come to tell you that our poor father has just died, brother Kwa-ga-noo: and that it was his last wish that you should be at his funeral.” At this point Weegit squeezed his eyes tightly together and let fall a few tears. “I don’t recall having a brother and I certainly don’t know whether or not my father is living” replied Kwa-ga-noo.
Weegit blew his nose, rubbed his eyes (or rather stuck his fingers into his eyes to bring more tears) then continued in a shaky voice, “Oh yes; many is the time that our dear departed father told me of the painful time when you were lost while still a small child and it was at his insistence that I have spent half a lifetime looking for you. But now that I have at last found you it is too late to end his grief over your loss, for at this very moment his poor, wasted body now lies cold and stiff at home awaiting only your arrival to be buried in the unfeeling ground.” And Weegit started bawling loudly and the tears which streamed out of his eyes were smarting and watering profusely due to the dirt he had introduced into them.

Touched by the sight of Weegit’s tears, Kwa-ga-noo put his arms around his long lost brother’s neck, and he too started weeping and bawling, and the louder he bawled - the louder were the laments of his newly found brother.

When they finally stopped their wailing, Kwa-ga-noo asked: “Tell me brother, how can I go quickly to our father’s house?”

“Merely climb onto my back,” replied Weegit, “and I shall take you there at once.”

So Kwa-ga-noo climbed on his back and Weegit flew away, only he flew farther out to sea. Higher and higher and higher flew Weegit, then all of a sudden he flipped himself right over and flew momentarily upside down in the characteristic raven habit.

Poor Kwa-ga-noo just managed to hang on to Weegit’s neck. “Don’t do that again brother Weegit,” pleaded Kwa-ga-noo. “You almost threw me off.”

“I could not help that, dear brother,” replied Weegit. “It’s just that I hiccoughed.”

Farther and farther Weegit flew until Kwa-ga-noo relaxed his hold on Weegit’s neck, then suddenly he again flipped over on his back and this time Kwa-ga-noo could not hold on and he fell head over heels down into the sea, where he landed with a mighty splash.

At once and with all speed Weegit returned to the house on the float there to find the halibut hook and line. “At last,” said Weegit to himself, “I have my late brother’s secret but I must try it out before taking it home.” So he lowered the hook through the opening in the floor and into the sea as Kwa-ga-noo had done, and sat waiting impatiently.

Presently he felt a tug on the line and hauled it in as quickly as he could. When he thought that the hook was close he looked down into the water to see what he had caught. Just then an arm reached up, grabbed him by the neck, pulled him into the water and held him there until poor Weegit almost drowned.

Kwa-ga-noo, for it was he, tossed poor Weegit’s limp body onto the float logs where he slowly recovered his breath.

When Weegit had recovered, Kwa-ga-noo told him to leave at once and Weegit did not need to be told twice.

He flew back home, made a copy of Kwa-ga-noo’s hook and this he loaned to his friends for he did not dare to use it himself for fear Kwa-ga-noo would surely drown him if he had another chance.

**Weegit’s Stones**

Weegit’s sister, Jawasunks, was a young woman soon to be married to the deer and this particular day Weegit and his brother-in-law to be were on the beach working. They were going to build a house and were now busy splitting a cedar log into boards.

The deer had no previous experience when it came to splitting cedar boards and he
stared goggle eyed at all the fancy movements which Weegit made as he swung the stone sledge hammer behind himself, over his head, then straight down onto the hemlock branch wedge. Relying on the deer's well known fascination for any repetitive movement, Weegit had asked his brother-in-law to hold on to the wedge while he, Weegit, pounded it with the sledge hammer. The deer stupidly followed the sledge hammer with his big brown eyes-up over Weegit’s head, then straight down to the top of the wedge. Up and down, up and down, until finally Weegit’s foot slipped and the sledge hammer landed on his brother-in-law’s head.

Loud were Weegit’s laments as he told Jawasunks of her husband’s accident, then he began digging a shallow grave on the beach and prepared to bury the deer. He carefully removed the deer’s entrails, hide, feet and head. These he placed in a separate grave. While he was performing this operation on the remains of his erstwhile brother-in-law the crows and other creatures on the beach started clamouring, “don’t be so selfish, Weegit, give us some meat, at least leave the innards for us.”

But Weegit ignored their pleas and kept on with his work. He lined the shallow grave with wet moss and seaweed, placed the body on this soft bed, covered it with more wet moss and seaweed, covered the whole thing with a light layer of sand then built a fire over the mound thus formed. With a satisfied smile on his face he sat down and as he was tired he lay down and fell asleep.

In his haste Weegit had failed to notice that he had buried his late, rather lightly lamented brother-in-law below the high water mark and as he lay sleeping and dreaming of the choice venison which he was about to enjoy, the inevitable happened - the tide came up and completely covered up the deer’s grave or, and the crows insisted, the deer’s cooking pit.

A large stump which had been sitting on the beach was floated by the tide over to the spot where Weegit had buried the deer and when the tide went out the stump came to rest directly on the top of the grave.

The clamouring of the crows woke Weegit and he sleepily realized that they were taunting him. “That should teach you. Weegit, you greedy old fool. We would have warned you if you had given us some meat.”

In dismay Weegit could only stare at the old stump sitting serenely atop his expected meal and suddenly he was overtaken by the anger which so often overtakes many pranksters when they themselves are the victim of pranks.

To vent his anger Weegit picked up some stones and angrily hurled them at the old stump. Many stones partially buried themselves on the face of the poor old stump and to this day many stumps on beaches still bear Weegit’s stones on their faces.

Why the Bullhead’s Body is Tapered

Weegit, as usual, was hungry. He could never seem to satisfy that stomach of his for any length of time and he was anxiously looking along the sea shore for something to eat. He spied a Bullhead hiding among some boulders just under the surface of the water and close to shore. Here was his opportunity to use his charm so he carefully preened his black feathers, then softly cleared his throat. “Ahem ah – good day friend Bullhead” said Weegit in his most charming voice. “My goodness, you look particularly handsome today. Your eyes sparkle like the stars and those horns on your head look so wonderfully sharp.” This unexpected compliment from such a good looking fellow appealed to the vanity of the Bullhead, and he rolled his eyes from side to side and moved a little closer to shore just as Weegit hoped he would.
“That old crab over there does not look nearly as good as you do,” continued Weegit, and as the Bullhead turned his head to look in the direction of the crab – Weegit leaped and grabbed the Bullhead; but the Bullhead fought and wiggled so hard that he finally wiggled out of Weegit’s hands and swam away, But Weegit had squeezed him so hard that the poor Bullhead found that, although his head was still the same size, his body was now tapered to almost nothing at the end of his tail.

**Weegit’s Spring**

The skies had been clear for days and this particular day was oppressively hot.

Weegit went from one stream to the other trying to find cool drinking water. There was just no good drinking water available in the Kitamaat area. Suddenly, Weegit thought of a little spring which he had seen in the Skeena Valley and without waiting he started flying north toward this spring. In time he arrived in the Skeena Valley and after finding the little spring he picked it up and flew with it back to Kitamaat.

On his arrival Weegit set the spring down at the north end of the village and charmed it saying, “Your sole reason for existence will to quench people’s thirst at all times.”

To this day Weegit’s Spring may still be found at the north end of Kitamaat Village, faithfully fulfilling its reason for existence.

During the coldest part of winter, when every stream is frozen, Weegit’s Spring still flows. Even in the hottest summer weather this charmed spring is ever ready to quench people’s thirst with clear, cool water.

**Weegit and the Tide Woman**

On a bright summer day Weegit was idly strolling along the sea shore. His curiosity was aroused by an old woman whom he saw sitting on the sea shore. She had a long string in her hand and one end of the string extended into the sea. Weegit strolled over to her and said, “Say, Granny. What are you doing?” “I control the tide,” she replied, ”It is my duty to see that the tide comes in at the right time and to see that it goes out again.” “Would you let me try controlling the tide for a little while, dear granny?” cajoled Weegit. “Oh no. I am not allowed to let anyone touch the string.” “I bet you can’t loosen the string just to see how hard out the tide can run” continued Weegit.

“Oh, I can’t do that. The poor fish would be left stranded on the beach if I let the tide run out too far.”

That gave Weegit an idea so now he said, “You are a selfish and nasty old woman. If you won’t let me try controlling the tide for a little while I will take this sea urchin and hit you with it.”

“You wouldn’t dare,” screamed the now terrified old woman.

So Weegit grabbed the sea urchin, pushed the old woman over and carried out his threat.

In her pain the old woman let go of the string, the tide ran all the way out stranding all the fish on the beach, then Weegit ran out and gathered all the fish he could carry. He went home where he had a great feast. He had again been able to fill his stomach but at the expense of much suffering to the old woman who in her embarrassment could not report the incident.
CHILDREN'S STORIES

Porcupine and Beaver

Freeze over, freeze over
Ponds of the woods.
Freeze over, freeze over
Ponds of the woods.

Porcupine sat on the limb of a tree and sang this sad little song. He was sulking and refused to play. So now Porcupine sang his little song in the hope that the water in the pond would freeze then he would be able to walk on the ice out to Beaver's lodge and he could coax him to come out and play. As he sang, Porcupine's mind wandered back over the events which led to the present sad state of affairs. He recalled that happy time when he and Beaver had romped through the forest, along the banks of the pond, then finally into the water for a ride on Beaver's back. Ordinarily Porcupine did not like swimming, but he had trustingly jumped on Beaver's back when Beaver suggested that they go for a swim and ride. "And I did not get angry even when he stayed underwater so long that I almost drowned," said Porcupine to himself.

When he had recovered his breath after his near drowning Porcupine suggested that they now play his favourite game and Beaver readily agreed. They went to a large leaning tree and Porcupine climbed to the top most branch. He instructed Beaver to sing the necessary song, then Porcupine leaped to the ground. As instructed by Porcupine and with all his might Beaver sang:

"Papalums, papalums,
Papalums, papalums,"

and Porcupine lightly floated to the ground like a piece of papalums or moss.

"See how easy it is," said Porcupine to his playmate. "You float down gently just like papalums. Now it is your turn to leap off the tree while I sing for you."

So Beaver climbed the tree and when he reached the top he tightly closed his eyes because he felt so dizzy when he looked down and let himself fall off the tree.

Porcupine at first started singing:

"Papalums, papalums"

but as soon as Beaver started falling he quickly changed to:

"Taysum, taysum
Taysum, taysum,"

and instead of falling lightly like a piece of papalums poor Beaver fell like a taysum or stone.

Beaver struck the ground with a loud thud and was knocked completely unconscious. Slowly and with loud groans and moans he regained consciousness and as soon as he could move he went back to his pond and out to his lodge where he remained in spite of Porcupine's pleas to come out and play.

"He has no reason to get angry at me and sulk," said Porcupine to no one in particular.
“After all I did not sulk nor get angry when he almost drowned me.” And he continued singing his little song.

All this happened many summers ago but even today Porcupine is still lonely; and if you will listen carefully, during quiet evenings you may hear his high pitched voice singing his sad little song:

Freeze over, freeze over,

Ponds of the woods.

Ay-am-ot-da, ay-am-ot-da,

Cow-kwatch-at.

**Why the Bat only flies at night**

War had been declared and both sides in the coming struggle were gathering their forces. For years relations between the feathered people on one side and the people with fur on the other had been strained because of the constant attacks of some of the birds against the smaller animals. These small animals had appealed to the larger animals for help and this coming war was the result.

Both sides had gathered on a wide, sandy beach and late arrivals were still coming. One of these late arrivals were still coming. One of these late arrivals was the bat and he flew erratically over to the camp of the animals, but, to his consternation, he was told that he was not welcome because he was a bird.

In vain did the bat plead that he was an animal, for was he not covered with fur just like any other animal? And besides, he would be satisfied to act as a messenger if he was allowed to stay. Contemptuously he was told that his services were not required and to go to the camp of the miserable murderers, the birds, otherwise he would be killed for being a possible spy for his ability to fly proved that he was a bird.

The bat flew over to the camp of the birds but here again he was told that he did not belong for his fur proved that he was an animal. “You are just a flying mouse,” he was told. Then he was instructed to leave at once otherwise he would be killed.

Sadly the bat flew away and hid himself. he was so ashamed of himself for having been rejected by everyone that he came out of hiding only during the night when no one could see him. Today the poor bat is still unable to forget his embarrassment and he can be seen flying only when it is dark.

**Why the Dog chases the Deer**

The call had gone forth. All animals were called to a meeting to consider a matter of the utmost importance.

The state of confusion existing in the animal world was now to be brought to an end and every animal was to be assigned a place to live for all time to come. In the disorganized conditions existing, animals often wandered over the land, through the forests or into the sea, not knowing where they properly belonged. All this was now to be stopped and this all-important meeting had been called under the chairmanship of the wolf, assisted by the grizzly bear whose duty it would be to keep order.

Because interest was very high all animals were at the appointed meeting place at the appointed time and the meeting was called to order at once. Early in the meeting it was decided that a decision of the majority of the animals present as to the residence of an animal would be binding, regardless of the wishes of that
particular animal, and the decision would be enforced by the grizzly bear. Any animal who did not like the decision of the majority concerning himself could protest the decision and providing no other animal objected his case would be reconsidered.

The meeting then proceeded in an orderly manner with almost all animals accepting the decision of the meeting. It was decided that the goat would live on the mountains, the bear, deer, coyote would live in the forest, the whale, seal, sea lion would live in the sea. The meeting thus proceeded until only the dog’s case was left for discussion, but by this time the meeting had lasted so long that the animals were restless and wanted to rush matters so as to leave for their homes.

At once the deer moved that the dog should live with the humans, and, to the dog’s dismay, all animals present unanimously agreed to the motion. In protest the dog pleaded, “You have already assigned the cat, whom I detest, to live with the humans. How can I live in the same house with him? And besides, I wish to live side by side with my cousin, the coyote, in the forest. Would you, therefore, kindly reconsider and throw out this senseless motion?”

But the deer loudly shouted, “Let him live with the humans. Let him live with the humans. His excrement has the same odour as that of the humans. Therefore, let him live with them.

To the dog’s chagrin the wolf ruled that since the motion already had the unanimous support of the meeting the matter could not be reconsidered and reminded the dog it was his duty to respect the wishes of the majority.

The deer moved that the meeting close and all hands instantly went up in agreement.

Angrily the dog shouted at the deer, “For the ill treatment you have given me this day I will forever pursue you and never give you peace. And when I catch you I will nip at the backs of your spindly knees.”

To this day the dog carries out his threat whenever he and the deer are in the same neighbourhood.

**Why the Tail of the Deer is short**

It was freezing, it was cold. It was the middle of winter, and no one had any fire. People were so cold that they would do anything to get some fire.

Some people had heard that a monster in a distant land had some fire in his house, but he would not give any of his fire to anyone.

A meeting was called, and all the bird people and animal people were assembled to discuss ways and means of getting some of the fire. The grizzly bear, because of his strength, was chosen to go first on the dangerous mission of getting some fire for all the people and after travelling many days he managed to find the monster’s house. The doorway to his house was in the form of a great big mouth, and this door the grizzly bear decided to force open. He took hold of the jaws of the door and by using all his strength he was able to force the mouth open enough to let himself through, but just as he got part way through, the mouth snapped shut and bit him in two. So the poor old grizzly bear lost his life.

Because of his ability to sneak so quietly, the wolf was chosen to try next, and when he arrived he found that the door was open. He sneaked as quietly as he could up to the door. Then very carefully he sneaked through but he too slipped and was bitten in two as the door snapped closed.

The mallard was then chosen next and when he arrived he flew right through the open
door which snapped shut behind him. He stuck his tail feathers into the fire and as there was no other means of escape he leaped straight up and flew out of the chimney hole in the roof. His tail feathers burned to rapidly however, and the fire which he had taken with him soon went out. His tail was so badly burnt that it curled into a tight little curl and it has stayed like that even to this day. He has also ever since been able to leap straight up when starting to fly.

Although he had failed, the mallard had shown how fire could be taken from the monster. All that was needed was someone with a long tail and the deer was now chosen. He had a very handsome tail, fully as long as his body and beautifully wavy.

Without hesitating the deer bounded gracefully away toward the house of the monster.

He looked so graceful and his leaps seemed so effortless that a cheer went up from all the bird and animal people. In due time the deer arrived and as the door was open he leaped right through and the door snapped shut behind him. He bounded several times around the inside of the house, then he put the end of his tail into the fire; leaped out of the chimney hole in the roof and raced away back home.

Running with all his speed he was able to get back to the meeting place, light the large pile of wood the others had already gathered and then everyone warmed himself at the fire. But the beautiful tail of the deer was no more. All that was left was a little stub and the deer's tail has been short ever since.

**Mr. North wind**

My Teeth! My teeth! Someone has broken my teeth!” howled Mr. North Wind in agony as he sat on his couch one bright winter day. He had been enjoying a nap on his comfortable couch but now he leaped up and angrily ran out the door to see who had caused him this pain and there was his young wife knocking the icicles off the eaves of the house.

“For knocking off my teeth you can stay outside in the cold,” angrily shouted Mr. North Wind as he slammed the door shut and roared with pain. The louder he roared the harder the cold north wind blew and soon his wife was almost freezing.

She saw a little bird and told it to fly at once to her father, Mr. South East Wind, to tell him of her plight and ask him to come to her rescue.

Swiftly flew the little bird straight to Mr. South East Wind’s home and breathlessly gave him the message concerning his daughter.

“That rascal is at it again, is he,” said Mr. South East Wind. “It’s is time we taught him to control that temper of his.”

He called all his people together and instructed them to get themselves ready for an attack on Mr. North Wind. All the fishes in the sea, the animals and birds; everyone who had suffered during the winter when the cold north wind was blowing, even the old woman, girded themselves for battle and all gathered together in the south east from which point the attack was to be launched.

They enclosed themselves in a cloud and started the attack, advancing across the sky toward the north but the closer they came to the north the harder blew Mr. North Wind, who was well aware of what was in store for him should the attack against him succeed. He was a handsome brute, this Mr. North Wind. He had beautiful curly hair, light eyes and he was comfortably fat. But he had a temper which he found difficult to control and it was his temper which had put him in the bad grace of most living things. So now he blew as he had never blown, and he was able to blow the cloud which enveloped his
opponents right back to the south east.

It now appeared that the direct attack had failed, so now alternative methods of attack were discussed and the halibut volunteered to make a diversionary attack, provided everyone would come to his assistance as soon as he had succeeded in reaching Mr. North Wind’s home. This plan was approved and the halibut at once started on his mission. He swam under the water and close to the ocean floor where Mr. North Wind’s breath could not reach his destination he leaped out of the water right into the inside of the house.

This strange sight of a halibut wildly flopping itself all around his house so surprised Mr. North Wind that he momentarily forgot to blow and while his attention was thus diverted Mr. South East Wind and all his irate warriors stacked in full force. They broke down the door and started beating Mr. North Wind with sticks and any other handy weapon. When he tried to look up the old women in the form of raindrops would punch him in the eyes.

“Enough, enough. I have had enough”, roared Mr. North Wind at last. “I promise that I shall keep my temper and blow only in the mornings.”

To this day Mr. North Wind has kept his promise for in the spring of the year he always blows only in the mornings

**The Totem Bear**

A long time ago a chief had a son. One day the chief’s father found a baby bear cub. He gave it to the son as a pet. The first year the bear was a cub and the boy became fond of the baby bear. That first year he had it tied and it was just like one of the family. It didn’t eat very much food because it was a baby bear. The second year the bear grew and ate more food than the first year so the father was concerned about the bear eating too much food and he told his young son, “next year the bear will be full grown and I don’t like it if you keep the bear because he will eat three times as much food then, and we won’t be able to feed him.” So the chief told his son he had to get rid of the bear.

The young boy did not like this because he had the bear for three years and he told his grandfather that his father was planning to make him release the full grown bear. The grandfather said, “no we don’t have to release the bear, I have a plan. We will dig a hole and put the bear into it and make the bear hibernate”. So they dug a pit and put the bear into it and the bear slept all winter. The grandfather also had the boy put his pet frogs into the pit with the bear because bears and frogs hibernate.

So everything was in order until during mid-winter and it was a real bad winter and the villagers ran out of food and got hungry. The villagers went to the chief and told him they should kill the bear for food. The boy overheard his father telling the elders that in order to survive the winter they would have to kill the bear. He went to his grandfather and told him and the grandfather told the boy to go into the pit and wake the bear up and to let him go free. During the night the boy and his grandfather tried to wake up the bear but they couldn’t do it because the bear was in a very deep sleep. Now, in those days it took about a week to prepare for a feast, so the second night the grandfather told the boy to get his frogs and put them into his blanket by the bonfire. The heat of the bonfire would wake up the frogs from hibernation because they would think it was spring. The third night they took the frogs and tucked them under the bear because this is the signal to the bear that it is springtime. They put the frogs under the bear and kept moving them around and when the bear felt the frogs he woke up.
When the bear woke up, the boy and his grandfather quickly made the entrance to the pit wider and told the bear to go. The bear went out and the boy and his grandfather went back to bed, exhausted.

That morning the chief came to wake up all the villagers as it was the day for the feast and they would kill the bear. The chief hired some braves to enter the pit and kill the bear. But they found there was no bear. The chief immediately got mad and accused his neighbour who was lower in rank than that the chief and told him he was in better health than the rest of them because he had stolen their bear and eaten him. The chief was so mad he ordered the next door family killed. Then he was satisfied and went back to his own longhouse.

The chief's father had overslept and when the chief went to wake him up he found mud and sand on his father's boots and then found sand on his own son's hands and fingernails and knew that they had let the bear go. The chief was so mad he told them he was going to punish them and tie them to a post and give them no food until they die.

Then it came the third day again and the grandfather heard rustling noises outside the longhouse. The grandfather called to his son the chief and told him, "wake up you fool and see what the noises are outside. The bear has come back and brought us food, I know it. Wake up you fool". Sure enough, it was the bear and he carried something in his mouth. The chief and the bear stood face to face for awhile and finally the bear dropped the beaver he was carrying and the chief picked it up. The bear was so happy that the chief didn't kill him that on the second day he brought back more food, and it was a raven, and the third day he came again with food and it was a fish.

The moral of this story tells us not to accuse our neighbour until we know the truth, and it tells us that we do not always have to kill all the time for food, but that sometimes we should let things go free and they will come back again and double our reward.

KITAMAAT HEROES

Founding of Kitamaat

In the early days a group of braves from what is now Port Simpson near Prince Rupert were on a hunting trip and in their wanderings they went into the Kitamaat Arm and became lost. A search party made up of their relatives came up to the arm looking for them but while still a few miles from the head of the inlet, the river, which they could see from a long distance, suddenly opened what looked like, to their imaginative minds, a huge mouth then slowly closed it again. The search party fled and went home where they told of the monster which must have, they believed, killed their comrades. During the following years the news of the monster spread up and down the coast and there was not one hunter brave enough to go near the Kitamaat arm.

In a large village called Soo-ma-halt near the head of Oweekeeno lake (Rivers Inlet, B.C.) there lived a young man named Waa-mis, he married into Nacgils, a village farther down the lake, and with all his relatives moved there where he lived happily several years.

One evening Waa-mis and his wife were sitting on the opposite side of the fire arguing. He picked up a small stone and in a playful manner tossed it at her but it struck her on the temple and killed her. The chief of the village called a meeting of his braves and in the meeting decided to punish Waa-mis by putting him and all his relatives to death. One of the braves, who was from Waa-mis' own village, told him about the plan and
advised him to flee.

That same night Waa-mis, with his relatives, left the village and started on a journey about which no one outside his own group was aware.

The next morning when the chief and his men went to punish him, Waa-mis was already far from the village and the chief not knowing Waa-mis' route or destination realized the uselessness of pursuit.

Waa-mis had heard of the monster of Kitamaat and decided that the only safe place for him to go was to that country to which not even the bravest hunter dared venture. Many were the dangers which Waa-mis and his small party overcame and at last he pitched camp at the mouth of what is now called Kildala Arm.

Leaving almost all his things and the two women of his party at the camp, he and his two men started to investigate the monster of which they had heard. While still some distance from the river they saw the sight for which they had come – the river opened a huge, gaping, white mouth then slowly closed it again. Terror came to his men's hearts but he, being the leader, was determined to see just what the thing was and in spite of their fear they kept paddling on until the thing opened its mouth again. It was then that they saw that what had been believed to be a mouth was, in reality, a flock of countless millions of seagulls feeding on small fish in the river. The gulls, at times, would all sit on sand bars and then all of a sudden the whole flock would fly up. This was when the mouth was believed to open.

When the party had taken enough of the small fish, now called eulachan or oolachan, they returned to their camp at Kildala where the oldest woman cooked and ate the fish to see if it was good. Shortly afterwards she fell into a deep sleep for the fish were so fat that they had made her drowsy. When she awoke she pronounced the fish very good and Waa-mis the moved his camp to the Kitamaat River Valley and pitched his new camp at the mouth of what is now called Anderson Creek for that was then the mouth of the Kitamaat River.

At the time when Waa-mis first settled there the Kitamaat valley was all gravel banks along the river which was visible far up the valley. There were no giant six to eight foot spruce trees such as are commonly found there now. Noting the nature of the valley, Waa-mis named it Kak-la-lee-sala meaning gravel banks.

Some time after his camp was well established Waa-mis was walking along the river and noticed a small wooden tool which had been washed ashore by the river. He decided to see where the tool had come from and after traveling several days up the river he found a group of Tsimpsian people who had come over land from the Skeena Valley and who were camped beside the river. He invited these people to his camp and they had such a wonderful time together that the visitors just never left. They were happy to become part of Waa-mis’ people.

Fish, game and wild berries were very plentiful in the Kitamaat Valley and Waa-mis made sure that news of this fact reached people who heard the good news came to join his people. In a few years he had a fair sized village and he then called his people to feast and change his name to Hunclee-quals in order that his last connection with his old village in Rivers Inlet might be severed. His new name meant the Archer and he lived to a ripe old age honoured among his people as Kitamaat’s first settler.

**Jasee - (Tsasee)**

Jasee lived is a village called Cloonthk, in what is now known as Alaska. His Family had lived in Cloonthk for many generations and, because he was the eldest of five brothers
and five sisters who helped him in tribal matters, he was the chief of the beaver clan - the strongest clan in the village of Cloonthk.

Jasee had been given his name by his father, a member of the eagle clan, and the name meant eagle's claws.

The large family of ten brothers and sisters loved their aged parents – and each other – devotedly, and the death of both parents within a short space of time caused the young people so much grief that they felt they would never again be happy if they continued to live in the place which reminded them continuously of their grief.

This overwhelming sense of loss caused Jasee and all his brother and sister to decide to uproot themselves completely and leave Cloonthk to seek a new land where they could forget their bereavement.

Shortly after the funeral the family left their village and paddled their canoes southward with no particular destination in mind. At night they would camp in some sheltered bay or beach and on one bright shiny day they camped on a wide, sandy beach and when the tide was low they started digging for clams and cockles. While the others were digging clams Sta-owsk, one of the brothers, went wading where the water was shallow. He saw a small octopus enters its lair under a large boulder and he reached under the boulder to capture the octopus but he accidentally stuck his hand into a giant scallop, a clam like creature, securely attached to the rock. In spite of all his and his and his brothers efforts Sta-owsk could not remove his hand and the tide came up and he was drowned.

When the tide had receded Jasee cut off Sto-owsk’s arm, cremated the remains and kept the ashes in a small box.

After this added tragedy Jasee and his party continued their journey and after some time arrived at the Nishga village of Kincolith on the Nass River. They were welcomed at the village and stayed there possibly a few weeks. Gudahayks, one of the brothers, married a Nishga woman during their stay in Kincolith. The Stuart family in the present day village of Kincolith are the descendants of Gudahayks.

After leaving Kincolith, Jasee presently arrived at the Tsimpsian village of Port Simpson. Here he was again welcomed and made a short stay. This time Insipdeegs, a sister, married a Tsimpsian and left the party. Today Alfred Dudoward of Port Simpson traces his ancestry to Insipdeegs.

Leaving Port Simpson, Jasee entered the Skeena and followed this river until he came to the village of Kitsalas. Welcome again was extended to the travelers and Jinjansh, another sister, felt so welcome that she married and stayed. During their stay in Kitsalas there occurred one of those apparently insignificant occurrences which often strongly influence destiny. Jasee captured a little squirrel which often strongly influence destiny. He attached a string to the squirrel and it would precede him when he walked. Having heard of a lake where fresh water mussels were available, Jasee decided to visit this lake so he and all his party struck out overland with the pet squirrel in the lead. The squirrel led them straight to the lake, now known as Lakelse Lake, and there Jasee pitched camp.

It was a clear, warm day when Jasee and his relatives went to gather mussels at Lakelse Lake but the fair weather and the shores of the lake reminded him of that other day and that other beach where his brother had drowned. He took the wooden container of Sta-owsk’s ashes, set it on a log on the beach, sat down and wept.
While they were weeping even the sun and supernatural forces or being seemed to feel compassion for them, for the whole world darkened as the sun went into an eclipse. When the sun came out of the eclipse, and for no apparent reason, the container of Stawisk’s ashes rolled off the log, scattering its contents on the beach.

This unexplained phenomenon was only the forerunner of many others for there appeared on the surface of the lake a gigantic beaver, or Kwuth-heck, amidst a large patch of foam. A halibut of unusual size also appeared in this fresh water lake.

A Kwa-Kwalk, or large, whole man-like being was seen in the lake. The upper portion of a man’s body (Cha-meen) holding an otter was the last object which Jasee’s relatives saw on the lake.

When these unnatural objects had all disappeared, Jasee decided to leave the lake at once and with all his relatives followed the pet squirrel which led them overland to the Kitamaat River. They followed this river down stream until they came to the village of the Haisla, situated at the time near the mouth of Kitamaat River. Here a very warm welcome was extended to the travelers and after they had told the story of their journey they were invited to join the Haisla tribe. When Jasee accepted this invitation, he was presented on behalf of himself and all his brothers and sisters with a large community house, called the Kelp House by the Blackfish Clan, as a welcome gift.

Jasee and the remainder of his brothers and sisters soon settled down in their new home and married Haisla people. His ability as a leader was so apparent that he was soon chosen as the chief of the Haisla. He kept his name, Jasee but in addition he also called himself Legaik, meaning overland traveller.

To his brothers he gave the names Kwuth-heck (giant beaver), Kwa-Kwalk (whole man) and Cha-meen – the names of some of the things which appeared on Lakelse Lake. All the objects he had seen on the lake he adopted as family crests and used these crests on a totem pole which he had built for himself. This totem pole had two beaver on the bottom one above the other, then a Kwa-Kwalk (whole man), then a halibut, a figure of the sun which seemed to sympathize with him during his grief, and on the top of the pole he honoured the pet squirrel which led him to his new home and happiness.

### The Escape of Ups Wa-cla-ka

Ups Wa-cla-ka, the slave, awaited the return of his master with mixed feelings. In the fifth year of his captivity his master, Gaynow, the Haida Chief had again gone to Ups Wa-cla-ka's home village, at what is now called Kitamaat, to capture more slaves.

Ups Wa-cla-ka dreaded to see who the new captives would be for he remembered well the terrible hardships which he had endured during his long captivity. Yet he was anxious to hear news from home and hoped that if anyone were captured that he would be an adult so that he could bring news from home. Especially news of his wife and Waclaka, his son, from whom he had been separated for so long. His mind went off in a tangent, a habit he had acquired while performing the many tedious tasks required of him in his slavery, and he thought of the fact that even the Haida’s called him “Ups Wa-cla-ka” meaning Father of Wa-cla-ka. No one ever called him by his correct name of Mamacowa but of course this was a common practice among British Columbia Coastal Tribes to refer to a person indirectly as "father of...", in the case of a man, or "mother of...", in the case of a woman.

The return of Gaynow brought Ups Wa-cla-Ka's mind back to the realities of the moment and it was with relief that he saw that there was only one captive. But it was with apprehension the he recognized the new slave as Weenchix, the wife of his close
friend Chawa-Gee-Las. It was not until the second day that he was able to speak to Weenchix, and get the welcome news that his wife and son were both well. He also heard the story of the capture of Weenchix which she told in a firm voice.

Weenchix had gone with her husband on a hunting trip. Using a canoe they left the Haisla camp near the mouth of the Kitamaat River for it was April – the oolachan season. They had paddled down to the tide flats where her husband killed a seal. Weenchix suggested that they return home but because it was still early and the day was so beautiful her husband decided to keep on to Bish creek, some five miles down the inlet. "We may be able to shoot a grizzly bear", he said and he loaded his muzzle loading gun with extra power and extra shot.

It was high tide when they reached Bish Creek and as they slowly paddled up the Creek keeping close to the small trees along the bank they heard low mumbling noises. Fear took hold of Weenchix and she wanted to turn back but her husband assured her that it was a grizzly bear that they heard and that he would shoot it as soon as it came into view.

A shot rang out among the trees and Weenchix's husband was struck on the chest by bullets which knocked him flat on his back in the canoe. At once twelve Haida came running out of the forest towards Weenchix each of them anxious to claim her as a captive. "Shoot, shoot" Weenchix yelled at her dying husband, "Retaliate, kill at least one of our attackers", the dying man apparently heard his wife. Using his feet he aimed his gun, which was loaded for grizzly bear, and fired point blank at the Haida killing two of them. The remainder of the Haida soon reached their victim, decapitated him, destroyed his canoe, and carried his wife, Weenchix, away into captivity.

The story of the murder of his friend Chawa-Gee-Las strengthened Ups Wa-cla-ka’s resolve to escape but he now further resolved to kill his master, Gaynow, in reprisal for the death of his friend. This decision was further strengthened by a conversation which he had with one of the Haida who advised him in the following manner, “Kill Gaynow, Ups Wa-cla-ka. No harm will come to you from any of the Haida if you do this for he is a beast who uses our own people for live targets whenever he wishes to amuse himself. He now plans to sell you and the new woman captive in Githaywas, which is a place to the north of us, and if that happens you may be certain that you will not live long for the people who live there are as brutal as Gaynow. Protect your life and regain your freedom by ridding us of this brute who is your master.”

A few days later Gaynow ordered Ups Wa-Cla-Ka to get the canoe ready for a long trip. “We are going to Githaywas to buy seagull eggs,” Gaynow remarked.

Preparations for the trip were soon completed and the party left their village in the afternoon. The traveling party included Gaynow and Geeneeda, his wife; two braves who were Gaynow’s bodyguards; Ups Wa-Cla-Ka and Weenchix. The reason they left their village in the afternoon was that Gaynow planned to camp near the north end of Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands) that evening. This would enable them to cross the usually stormy Dixon entrance at the first break of day, before the wind blew to strongly.

I was late evening when they arrived at the camping place, which was a sandy beach, and the two slaves began preparing the camp. Weenchix fetched water while Ups Wa-Cla-Ka chopped firewood. As she passed him Ups Wa-Cla-Ka spoke to Weenchix in the Haisla language, “Keep this axe under your pillow tonight. The time has come for me to kill or be killed.” Gaynow heard Ups Wa-Cla-Ka be being unable to understand the language used he demanded in Haida, “What did you say to Weenchix, Ups Wa-
Cla-Ka?” Nonchalantly, Ups Wa-Cla-Ka replied, “I merely told her to hurry with her work.”

Ups Wa-Cla-Ka was very solicitous of his master’s comfort when he prepared the beds. Because the evening was beautiful with a clear sky, there was no need for shelter and he made the beds in a straight row facing the fire. He partly buried a small log in the sand under the pillows for added comfort and spent much effort to make the bed as comfortable as possible. He repeated these careful preparations when he made the bed for the two braves who were his master’s bodyguards. Weenchix rolled herself in a blanket a short distance from the others; Gaynow and Geeneeda lay down in their bed and the braves covered Ups Wa-Cla-Ka with a blanket then they laid down on each end of the blanket on either side of Ups Wa-Cla-Ka so that he was completely entrapped between them.

All though the night Ups Wa-Cla-Ka kept tossing and turning and pushing the braves away from himself without awakening them. So comfortable were the braves in their bed that they continued snoring loudly in spite of Ups Wa-Cla-Ka’s violent movements.

At the break of dawn he slipped out of the bed and went quickly to Weenchix who was already sitting up in bed with the axe in her outstretched hands.

One swing and he killed the first brave; another swing and he killed the second brave; but the axe became lodged so hard in the skull of the brave that he made some noise in his efforts to remove it. Gaynow awakened and called out, “Ups Wa-Cla-Ka who are our attackers?”

“It is me,” replied Ups Wa-Cla-Ka, “I am now repaying you for your cruelties.”

He dislodged the axe from the skull of the brave, took a swing at Gaynow but almost missed him—chopping off only part of his head including one ear. Another swing of the axe and Gaynow’s skull was split wide open.

Ups Wa-Cla-Ka heard a noise behind him and when he looked around – there was Geeneeda wildly trying to get a gun out of it’s case. One swing of the axe dispatched Geeneeda and when he examined the gun she was holding, Ups Wa-Cla-Ka found that it was fully loaded and could have been fired through it’s cloth covering—if only Geeneeda had a bit more presence of mind.

Both Ups Wa-Cla-Ka and Weenchix had regained their freedom but were now faced with the problem of keeping that freedom, for there was the danger of being captured by other Haida. They quickly loaded all Gaynow’s possessions onto the canoe including a case of six highly prized guns; pushed the canoe out on the ocean; then set two sails on the large canoe and steered eastward toward the mainland.

It was full daylight by the time they got underway and they passed close to a canoe with one man aboard. He was fishing for halibut. This man was the same Haida who had earlier advised Ups Wa-Cla-Ka to kill Gaynow and he hailed them saying. “Well done, Ups Wa-Cla-Ka. I see you have disposed of your master. Farewell.”

A fresh west wind started blowing and sped them eastward toward Ka-Kus, now known as mount Pender on Campania Island and which is the first mountain seen when approaching this part of the coast. It was evening when they arrived at Ka-Kus so they unloaded their cargo; turned the canoe upside down and camouflaged it by covering it with seaweed. They slept on shore hidden among some trees. At daybreak the next morning when Ups Wa-Cla-Ka looked at his canoe there beside it was another canoe holding a hunting party of three Kitkatla men. The escaping man’s craft was so well disguised that these men did not notice it and they paddled slowly away.
After sailing steadily up the Douglas Channel for a whole day, Ups Wa-Cla-Ka and Weenchix arrived at the Kitamaat River where the Haisla were encamped. After being identified they were joyously welcomed by their people who feasted with them and otherwise celebrated their escape from captivity. Ups Wa-Cla-Ka told the story of his capture and of his life as a slave, the destruction of his master, and finally of the trip home.

His first wife had remarried, for it had been believed that he was dead so he married Weenchix and they lived to a ripe old age.

**Gitwun’s Peace Mission**

On a bright summer day the Haisla sentinel on Sentinel Hill shouted the warning “Canoe on the River!” At once a canoe full of men was dispatched to determine if the visitors were friendly or otherwise. The men soon returned with the electrifying news that the visitors were Haida and that they were on a peaceful visit.

The visitors were instructed to beach their canoes on the opposite bank of the river from the village while the Haisla met to hear the full report of the messengers and to decide their line of action. A peaceful visit by the Haida was so unusual that treachery was suspected even though there were some women among the visitors.

“Chief Gitwun of the Haida Eagle Clan is their leader,” reported the messengers. “He wishes to meet with his brother Eagle, Chief Sunahead, of the Haisla Eagle Clan. The purpose of his visit is to establish peace between ourselves and his people. To bring an end the warring raids to which we have been so long subjected. To this end he requests permission to be allowed to enter the house of his brother Eagle, Sunahead, peacefully.”

Pandemonium broke loose in the meeting place with half of the people siding with Sunahead in wanting to accept the peace offered by Gitwun. But the other half of the people, who had lost loved ones in past raids staged by the Haida, saw an opportunity for reprisal against Gitwun. Chief Jasee of the Beaver Clan, who held equal rank with Sunahead in tribal matters, headed the opposing group.

“Let us destroy Gitwun,” cried Jasee at the top of his voice, “for he, as well as every Haida, has the blood of many of our people on his hands. Haida are raiders, murderers, and as such they deserve the same kind of treatment they mete out to us whenever they come here. How can we be sure that this supposedly peaceful visit is not a ruse? Does anyone here believe that Gitwun would not enslave us if we were so foolish as to place ourselves at his mercy as he has done? If that is your belief, then you will probably lose your heads. We are wasting time, let us dispose of these murders before they subject us to yet another one of their raids.”

Very slowly, and emphatically Sunahead announced, “I will not have any blood spilt this day. My brother Eagle has come on a peaceful mission. I will now send my servants to invite him into my house and let no one here dare to violate our traditional guarantee of safety to any stranger within our home. You people are now dismissed from this meeting to go to your homes to prepare to accept our visitors.”

Amid much grumbling among the Beaver Clan under Jasee, the crowd dispersed and Eagle Clan messengers at once sped to Gitwun with an invitation to proceed to Sunahead’s house. Great was the relief among the Haida for they were sure that they would be annihilated and had made preparations for defending themselves. Led by the Haisla messengers the Haida proceeded across the river and were met on the opposite bank by Sunahead’s Eagle clansmen. The Haisla did not permit Gitwun to walk, they
asked him to mount a large split cedar plank on the shoulders of the Haisla, Gitwun apparently had a premonition of a possible prank. He, therefore, took two large swords from his canoe and struck them solidly near each end of the plank. He used the handles of the swords as hand holds so that he was able to remain standing on the plank all the way to Sunahed’s house in spite of the attempt, on the part of the Haisla, to embarrass him by toppling him from the plank.

When they reached the house, Sunahed seated Gitwun right beside himself, he then gave a feast for Gitwun inviting all the Haida and all the Haisla as well. Sunahed’s ceremonial peace dances and songs were danced and sung and the merry-making lasted far into the night.

The following day Jasee and the Beaver Clan invited all the Haida and all the Haisla to another feast. Jasee’s ceremonial peace dances were danced, his peace songs sung as a sign that he had reversed his stand and was now willing to accept the peace offered by Gitwun.

On the third and final day, Gitwun took his turn at celebrating the newly established peaceful relations between the Haida and the Haisla. The proper ceremonials were performed by Gitwun’s tribesmen and then to conclude all these proceedings Gitwun made the following speech:

“My brother Sunahed, Chief Jasee and all you Haisla. These past three days mark the beginning of a new and better relationship between us. I extend to you my heartfelt appreciation of your willingness to accept my offer of friendship, and your willingness to forget the many past wrongs committed against you by my people. Let me assure you that my desire for peace is genuine and as a symbol of my sincerity in this matter I give the right to sing my ceremonial songs; to dance my ceremonial dance. I will share with him my hereditary right to use my Chilakoons totem. And, finally, I give him the right to share with me the title Gitwun. I assure you that it is an honored title and my brother may use it as he sees fit; either use it himself, for his nephews or for his successors.”

Gitwun then took a handful of eagle down, the universal symbol of peace, and buried the eagle down in the earthen floor of Sunahed’s house. He concluded is speech by stating. “So long as this peace symbol is planted in my brother’s house, so long will there be peace between our people.”

Gitwun and his group left the Haisla village the following morning. His canoes were fully laden with food and other presents given to him by the Haisla as parting gifts. It is perhaps significant that he got as much as if had raided the Haisla Village, only this time the Haisla helped him load his canoes.

The Haisla and the Haida have ever since lived in peace.

_Clee-Sala_

Clee-sala was a real life Shaman according to Haisla oral history. He live about 200 to 300 years ago, and was blessed with supernatural power from the time of his birth.

Due to his powers he was appointed to the position of guardian and principal advisor to the chief of the beaver clan, “Jasee”. Clee-sala being clairvoyant and clairaudient, he was able to tell Jasee that a party of people were coming to the village a full day prior to their arrival. Advising the chief of the approaching party, the rest of the people would laugh and ridicule Clee-sala as being a fool and madman. This being due to the fact that no one could see any vessel approaching from down the channel.

Sure enough the next day a party of canoes from the neighbouring villages down the
Douglas Channel would arrive, exactly as Clee-sala had foreseen.

Clee-sala had the power to predict solar eclipses, as well as to perform a feat referred to as “mak’ha”. This feat meant that he could grasp an object and propel it into the brain stem of an enemy, thereby bringing about the slow death of the foe. The literal translation of the term mak’ha is to “propel from a distance” or “toss from a distance”. It did not matter where the foe was, the projectile would materialize at the base of his skull, and could only be removed by the sender upon penalty of death. Usually the recipient would know the sender and pay a large ransom to have the object removed in order to spare his life.

The term mak’ha means to toss. The projectile used was the ‘soul of the salmon which is the small and very hard bone located near the brain of a spring salmon. We do not know the purpose of this bone serves for the salmon but it is about half an inch long; is narrow; and it has the appearance of porcelain. Only persons possessed of preternatural powers could use this bone as a projectile.

Abooks Clalumkwaks

Abooks Clalumkwaks was an elderly widow. Well liked and respected by her neighbours she lived alone in a little hut in the Haisla village because she had no children or other close relations.

During one particularly severe winter the Haisla were faced with disaster. Fishing had been poor the previous summer; berries and other foods had been scarce and now during mid-winter they were faced with starvation. The people decided that the only solution to their problem was to temporarily abandon their village at what is now the site of the Kitimat River bridge near Goose Creek. They loaded all their belongings on their canoes then proceeded to the Fish Trap Bay area, about thirty miles down channel where shell fish and other sea foods were readily available at all times. When all the canoes were fully loaded it was found that there was no room for the old woman. Regretfully the others left her in a little hut to what appeared to be certain death through starvation.

Abooks Clalumkwaks kept the fire going in her hut so that she might keep warm as long as possible. To do this she gathered scrap lumber from the abandoned houses and also broken and fallen branches from nearby trees. While she was sitting by the fire one evening she heard a whimpering sound outside her hut. It sounded like a dog in pain. A little later she heard something brushing against the side of her hut, then when she heard pawing on her door she realized that all these sounds were being made by a wolf.

As her father had belonged to the wolf clan she addressed the wolf outside in a loud voice saying, “Father, do not frighten me. I am alone and in trouble.” The wolf continued its whimpering.

She opened the door and saw a huge wolf standing outside with its tail between its legs, its ears lowered like a dog begging for sympathy. She cautiously approached the wolf, then noticed that all the fur had been rubbed off one side of its jaw. She reached out to touch the wolf and it slowly opened its mouth exposing the knee cap of a deer wedged tightly between its teeth. This bone apparently caused the wolf so much pain that it had rubbed off all the fur on its jaw in its futile efforts to remove the bone.

The old woman took a stick and pried the bone out. She then said to the wolf, “I want you to help me just as I have helped you. I have nothing to eat. Bring me food.”

The wolf turned and loped off into the forest.
Late that night Abooks Clalumkwaks heard the distant howl of a wolf and when she awoke the next morning she found a dead deer outside her door. The following morning a porcupine had been left at her door. On each successive morning she found mountain goat or some other game deposited at her door so that in time she had so much meat that she smoked and dried it all, then stored it away for future use.

With the coming of spring, the people returned to their village and great was their rejoicing when they found the old woman alive and well fed. They marvelled at the story of her good fortune which confirmed to them their belief that all wild animals understand and sympathize if one implores them for assistance in time of trouble or need.

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**FOLKLORE**

**Chilakoons**

In a Haida Gwaii village on what are today known as the Queen Charlotte Islands there lived long ago three young men. The youngest of the three teen-aged boys was the Chief’s son and the other two were his bosom friends.

A favourite pastime of the boys was fishing and on a beautiful spring day they had caught some trout. These trout the boys cleaned, split open, impaled on some green twigs and roasted over a camp fire.

While the trout were roasting a large frog hopped out of the bushes close by and hopped right up to the trout. Not wishing to have the trout touched by the frog, one of the boys grabbed the frog and tossed it back toward the bush. The frog, however, soon came hopping back toward the trout only to be tossed back into the bush.

The third time this happened the boy took the frog and angrily threw it into the fire. At once the frog began to bloat up, then it exploded, extinguished the fire and scattered ashes all over the trout.

Disgusted because of the loss of their trout the boys got into their canoe but just as they started paddling away they heard a woman wailing and singing a dirge. When they looked back they saw and old woman who had a tall, cylindrical hat on her head poking a staff into the ashes left by the fire. The gist of the dirge was the question, “Oh what hast thou done with my son?”

Terror-stricken, the youths could only sit motionless until finally the old woman turned to them and in a loud, evil voice said, “For this grief which you have caused me you will be punished. On your return home you will see two points of land and as you pass the first point one of you will die. The third one will die as soon as you have told your people the things which have happened and will happen today. Then your village and your people will be destroyed by fire.”

As if released from a spell the youths began paddling madly back to their village but as they passed the first point the boy on the front seat collapsed and died.

Upon reaching the second point the boy on the second seat also collapsed and died. When he reached the village the last youth was met by many people who demanded that he explain why his companions were dead.

Haltingly, he related all the tragic things which had so far happened, concluding with the awful prediction that the village and its occupants would all be destroyed by fire.

As he reached the end of his story he died. At once fire broke out on all sides of the...
village. The very mountains seemed to be burning and all means of escape were sealed off, even the canoes were burned.

The Chief had an adolescent daughter and this girl he put into a pit which he had dug in the floor of his house. Along with the girl he put in food and water and instructed her to stay in the pit in spite of any noise that she might hear and until she was certain that the fire had died down. He covered the pit with his prized copper shields leaving only a small opening for air.

Terrible were the noises of destruction heard by the girl as she crouched in the dark pit for two days.

In the silence which followed after everything had been burned she heard someone singing a dirge. She slowly pushed aside one of the copper shields covering her retreat and there among the ruins she saw the same old woman reported earlier by the boys who had caused all this tragedy. The old woman still wore the tall, cylindrical hat and she was still singing the same lament. She was poking among the ruins, with a staff which drew the interest of the young girl. The staff was carved with three figures one below the other. Near the bottom was the figure of a frog, immediately above this was the figure of a halibut and the whole staff was surmounted by the figure of a man with a hat like that of the old woman. Some time later the old woman went away and a few days later the young girl was rescued by a passing hunting party who took her to their village and adopted her. The man who rescued her was named Gitwun and he also adopted for his own the dirge which had been sung by the old woman and he adopted as his totem the staff which she had carried. He named his totem the Chilakoons.

*How the Chilakoons came to Kitamaat*

The Chilakoons totem originated among the Haida of Skidegate on Haida Gwaii. (Queen Charlotte Islands) It was the totem of Chief Gitwun of the Haida Eagle Clan.

At the time when peace between the Haida and the Haisla (Kitamaat people) was established the privilege of using this totem was one of many peace offerings given to Sunahead, Chief of the Haisla Eagle Clan, by Gitwun as a symbol of the end of enmity between the Haida and the Haisla.

The last Chilakoons totem pole in the Kitamaat Village was carved by these men:

- Noah, who carved the frog,
- Laadac, who carved the little halibut, and
- Gups Nagwil, who carved the little man on top.

This totem pole was raised approximately 80 years ago in honour of the then current Sunahead who was a son of the Sunahead who had been given the privilege of using the Chilakoons totem by Gitwun.

It is perhaps significant that just as the totem originated in a disastrous fire on the Queen Charlotte Islands, so the last carving of the totem was destroyed in another disastrous fire in Kitamaat Village on May 13th, 1955.

*Numas - Old Man*

Numas was blind. He had been a great hunter but tragedy had struck and he was now helpless. He lived with his wife and four sons at Altenas Lake near the British Columbia coast. Three of his sons were full grown men but his fourth son was still a small boy, the only member of his family who still loved him devotedly in spite of his handicap.
The three grown sons would hunt mountain goat at Kutze Inlet, then when they returned they would cook fish livers and give this to Numas instead of goat liver which was his favourite food. After tasting the liver Numas would say, “Bitter indeed are the livers of Kutze Inlet Coho.”

One day when his three sons were on a hunting trip Numas’ wife said to him, “It’s a pity that you are now blind and useless, Numas. There is a grizzly bear right across the creek from us. An easy target for a hunter who has not allowed himself to become blind.”

“Yes, I am blind,” replied Numas, “but not quite so useless.” He took his bow, which he had not used for years, put on its bow string then said to his wife, “Take me to the creek opposite the grizzly bear.” Arriving at the creek he again said, “Aim the arrow at the spot where his elbow rubs against his chest for it is there that the arrow will pierce his heart. Now raise the arrow two hand breaths to allow for the distance across the creek.” This done he let fly his arrow and said, “He is hit! My shoulder gave its old familiar sign!”

“You missed him,” lied his wife. “He ran into the forest. You are blind, useless and only a burden.”

When his sons returned his wife told them about the grizzly bear which Numas had killed and told them not to give Numas and of its meat for she had told him that he missed when he shot it. The sons butchered the grizzly, barbecued the meat then smoked and dried it for future use.

Late that evening his little son slipped Numas a piece of meat and told him that it was a piece of the grizzly bear which he had killed.

Numas, on hearing this, wept.

The following day Numas said to his youngest son, “Take me to the lake. I wish to walk along its shore.” The boy led him and while they were still some distance from the lake they heard the cry of the loon. Numas then sent the boy back home and by listening to the cry of the loon he was able to reach the Lake.

Just as he arrived at the lake a strange man met him and asked, “What are you looking for?”

“I am looking for you,” answered Numas. “I am in trouble and need your help. I am blind and want to be able to see again.

“I can give you back your sight,” said the stranger. “Get on my back and when you are out of breath tap my back and I will let you breathe some air.”

When he was on the stranger’s back Numas was taken into the lake and the stranger swam under the surface of the water until Numas was out of breath; then he tapped the stranger’s back and was taken to the surface. When he had taken a few breaths of air the stranger again dove into the water and swam around the lake.

Four times around the lake they swam, always under the surface of the water, except to take a few breaths of air, then the stranger returned him to the shore, took out a piece of cloth and carefully wiped Numas’ eyes. The stranger then wrung out much blood from the cloth and to Numas he said, “That was what caused your blindness. Now that it is removed you can again see. You will now repay those who have mistreated you. On your way home you will come to a little steam. Carve some fish out of wood and put them into the river, then go home and pretend that you are still blind. When you go, do not look back until you hear me call.”

Numas thanked the stranger and to show his gratitude he gave him a string of mother-
of peal beads.

Just as he entered the forest, Numas heard a loud call and looking back he saw swimming on the water a loon with a string of beads around its neck. These beads the loon still wears today as a band of white feathers around its neck.

When Numas came to the stream he carved some fish out of yellow cedar, but these proved no good for when deposited in the creek they merely floated down stream. He then carved more fish out of spruce, decayed wood, hemlock but all were no good. When he had tried nearly every kind of wood he finally tried alder and when he put the fish into the stream they started swimming and turned into coho salmon. Since alder wood turns red on the outside when exposed to air or water, the fish soon turned red. Coho salmon, when it is in rivers, has ever since had red skin.

Numas, having finished making the fish, went home, but just before going into the house he started feeling his way with his cane just as he had done while he was still blind. When he was inside the house he said, “There must be a lot of fish in the little creek back in the woods. I heard them splashing in the water!” The three brothers at once went to the creek to get some fish and soon returned with all they could carry. They cleaned the fish, cooked and then ate some. They, of course, did not give Numas any fish to eat and he warned his little boy not eat any of it.

Several days later the three brothers sighted some goats on a mountain close by and at once began preparations to hunt the goats. They told their mother to keep them informed, by signs, of their direction from the goats then they began their climb.

When they had gone some distance up the mountain side they lost sight of the goats and stopped to look at their mother’s direction sign.

Just then Numas jumped up from his bed and shouted to the hunters, “You are the victims of the alder tree.”

At these words the three young men and their three dogs were turned into stones and they can still be seen to this day – six stone figures standing on a mountain side at the lake at Altenas.

Numas loaded all his possessions on his canoe, took his young son, left his wife behind and left his home on the lake. He followed the river to its mouth, where he built a new home for himself. He lived many years in his new home, always reminded his son of the old saying – treat others well. For as you treat them, so shall you be treated.

Katsilanoo Meets Captain Vancouver

Katsilanoo, the clown, had the rest of the day off from work – if you could give his occupation some dignity and refer to it as work. The plain truth was that he lived off the good graces of the chief and in return for the free meals and lodgings thus scrounged he entertained the chief and the rest of his household with games, stunts and stories; usually his own stories and not always contaminated with the truth.

This particular day was just to good to spend indoors so Katsilanoo was idly paddling his canoe around the promontory now known as Stanley Park in the present city of Vancouver.

Since there was no monkey house in Stanley Park in those days there was no point in looking in that direction for some inspiration for the monkey business that he knew he had to put on for the coming evening.

As he slowly paddled around a point, Katsilanoo’s idle thoughts were suddenly scattered by the sight which he beheld in what is now called English Bay, for there in
the bay was a new island. Not a very big island, to be sure, but certainly one which did not look very much like other islands which Katsilanoo had seen.

Carefully keeping his distance he observes certain things about the island then he hastily padded back to the village to announce his discovery.

“T tell you it’s a new island,” pleaded Katsilanoo, “I saw it with my own two eyes.” Your two eyes often see things that are not there,” replied the chief; “And listen, you have been after me with that foolish story of yours a whole afternoon, and if you don’t stop it I’ll have your two worthless ears cut off.” “That is a deal, chiefie old boy,” said Katsilanoo. “If I am not telling you the truth this time I will cut off my own two ears for you myself. Maybe you will be able to hear the truth if you had four ears.”

“Get into your canoe and start paddling,” said the chief. “The crabs will appreciate a meal of trash if your island is not there.”

So Katsilanoo launched his canoe, the chief went aboard and Katsilanoo paddled as quickly as he could for now that he had mortgaged his ears he was no longer sure that his eyes had not deceived him.

Rounding the last point all doubt as to the truth of Katsilanoo’s report vanished for there in the bay was the island.

It was not like other islands, for it appeared to move with the tide, and although there were a few trees on it these trees were not normal, for the roots extended from the tops of the trees to the round some distance from the trunks.

Small clouds seemed to be entangled among these roots, and the queer thing was that these clouds flapped in the breeze. Although it was summer there were no leaves or needles on the trees.

While they were gasping at these strange things there appeared among the trees moving objects, and when they paddled closer they could see that these objects were apparently human beings, but the objects seemed colourless. “They are ghosts,” gasped Katsilanoo. “See that one over there is the ghost of my poor brother who has been dead these last two years.”

“Nonsense,” said the chief, “ghost are not around during the day and look at the one standing on the edge there. He is beckoning to us.”

They paddled right up to the island, than saw that it was made of wood.

“A canoe!” gasped the Katsilanoo in amazement. “What a giant tree these canoe must have been carved from!”

Alright Katsilanoo said the chief, “you got us into this situation, now you climb up that ladder and see what that man wants.”

Seeing that the being waiting for him was in fact a man and in fact no other than Captain Vancouver, though Katsilanoo had no inkling of the man’s identity, Katsilanoo managed to gather up enough courage to climb the ladder. When he got to the top – there waiting for him was a man who had his hand extended in greeting but poor Katsilanoo did not know anything about the strange custom of the shaking of hands in greeting. He did know of a game though. A test of strength where two opponents faces each other, hooked middle fingers around each other and by pulling with all one’s strength throwing the opponent over one’s shoulder.

So Katsilanoo said aloud, “Oh, ho- So you want to play that game, do you stranger? I’ll have you know that no man, much less a ghost, has ever thrown Katsilanoo.”
Of course the good Captain Vancouver could not understand Katsilanoo’s language, and he merely stood waiting with his hand extended.

Katsilanoo spat on his own hands, reached out and hooked his middle finger around that of the unsuspecting Captain’s and heaving with all his strength sent the poor Captain sprawling spread eagled on his stomach down the deck, finally stopping in a definitely undignified heap some ten feet down the well scrubbed deck.

Any anger which the Captain might have had was quickly dissipated by the sight which met his eyes as he slowly got back on his feet, for there stood this apparent merry savage guffawing loudly and holding his sides, tears streaming down his face in his enjoyment of his easy victory over this challenger to his claim as the champion Gatlab player in the district.

It appears that Captain Vancouver did not particularly enjoyed the experience, however, for he seems to have forgotten the incident completely by the time he came to write in his log book, for no mention of it is made therein.

Katsilanoo and the chief were taken on an inspection of the ship, and in the course of events became separated, each being shown different, and to their eyes, wondrous parts of the ship. One sight in particular caught Katsilanoo’s fancy. This was the sight of a sailor who had a small bundle of weeds in his mouth taking a small silver of wood and rubbing the end of the stick against the seat of his pants, with drawing fire there from. “I must have those magical pants,” thought Katsilanoo. “What a performance I can put on tonight for the old chief if I had those pants.” So he proceeded to remove the pants in spite of the wildest protest on the part of the unfortunate sailor.

Katsilanoo and the chief at last got back to their canoe and before they left the ship were given many presents. Among these were bags of white powder. Just as they left the ship all the men in the ship suddenly disappeared. “Where did they all go?” asked the chief. “They must have all fallen through the boards,” replied Katsilanoo. “They are Cumsheawa, people who can fall through boards.” Thus Katsilanoo gave the strange new, pale face people a name which is still used by all coastal British Columbia Tribes when referring to them.

Slowly paddling homeward, Katsilanoo observed, “These bags containing this white powder, don’t you think they will make a wonderful sail?” “So they would,” answered the chief. So they slit the bags open, threw the contents overboard, tied the material thus obtained into a makeshift mast and went merrily sailing home not knowing that the white powder they had tossed overboard was worth far more than the sail the now possessed, for it was a valuable food called flour.

It was evening when they arrived home and the chief immediately called all the villagers to his house there to relate the happenings and his findings during the day. Not to be outdone, Katsilanoo had gathered a pile of small sticks and loudly announced he would mystify the audience by rubbing the sticks against the seat of his magical pants thereby causing them to burst into flame.

Rub as hard as he could the sticks somehow refused to burst into flames and as Katsilanoo slowly came to the conclusion that his pants had lost their magic the unsympathetic chief announced, “Brother Katsilanoo will do exactly as he has promised and will stay here until he has made every one of the little sticks burst into flame.”

Poor Katsilanoo spent the rest of the evening and night futilely rubbing the little sticks against the seat of his pants, which seemed to have lost their magical powers, possibly, miserably mused Katsilanoo, because they had been forcibly removed from that poor, terrified sailor.
Haisla Taboos and Sayings

Mistreat not the frog, toads, birds, fishes, or any small animal for as you treat them - so shall you be treated.

It is possible to retaliate against an enemy, but impossible to retaliate against storms.

He who works when there is plenty, shall eat when there is scarcity.

Mimic a lame, blind, palsied or otherwise unfortunate person and you will in time acquire the affliction yourself.

He who loves sleep - sleep away his life.

The Mystery of the Missing Corpses

When the Haisla had their village site at head of Minette Bay a very strange thing happened. All dead bodies mysteriously disappeared from their burial platforms. At that time corpses were left in boxes on platforms built about six feet off the ground in the forest behind the village. The disappearance of dead bodies from these burial platforms caused considerable concern among the Elders of the village and finally one brave young man volunteered to investigate the mystery. He told the people to announce that he was dead and then after a proper interval he was taken to and left on one of the burial platforms. All day and all night he stayed in his coffin alert to all sounds but remaining still as if he were actually dead. Finally, near dawn when he had almost gone to sleep, he heard a soft, low and hollow sounding whistle somewhere close by. This whistle was periodically repeated and sounded closer and closer. After some time he felt someone touch the coffin, then the lid was removed and a hand reached into the coffin and dragged him out. He was able to get a good look at the face of the grave robber and recognized him as Kachee the most feared sorcerer among the members of the Hyleekila secret society.

Kachee took what he assumed to be another corpse and carried the young man on his back. Kachee went into the forest and began walking northward, meanwhile occasionally whistling in the same deep, hollow sounding whistle. At times the young man would take hold of a tree branch as they passed along and whenever he did this Kachee would say in a loud voice, “Kwa-jam-a-laga” or, in English, “Lighten yourself, corpse.”

At length Kachee and his burden arrived at a large cave on the side of a hill and there arranged side by side in sitting positions along the walls of the cave were all the dead bodies which had been removed from their coffins. Long planks raised off the floor on wooden blocks were placed in front of the row of corpses and each corpse had a stick in its hand. Kachee placed the young man among the corpses, put a stick in his hand and then began singing a Hyleekila song. He used the corpses as a macabre rhythm group instructing them to keep time by beating the planks with their sticks.

The corpses began enthusiastically beating the planks in unison but then quickly slowed down, then stopped. Kachee rebuked them saying, “You have always done better than this. Let us try again”. The young man believed that the corpses were not performing well because of his living presence and while Kachee was busy exhorting his dead the young man suddenly shouted at him and Kachee fell in a dead faint from fright.

While Kachee was in the fainting spell the young man made his escape from the cave and with its grisly occupants and went back to his home.

The young man knew that Kachee would do everything possible to preserve his secret even including murder so he began keeping Kachee under surveillance. One night
when he as trailing Kachee, the young man saw that Kachee was being accompanied by a little child. This child was about five or six years old and had died a short time previous to this particular night. By some mysterious power Kachee had brought the child back to life and was using it as a companion. At short intervals Kachee called, “Amay-jie,” and the child whistled in reply. The word “amay-jie” means little one. The child came within reach of the young man and he held it to restrain it from following Kachee. As soon as he missed the child Kachee became frantic calling, “Amay-jie, Amay-jie” in a loud voice and searching everywhere for the child but the young man kept his hand over the child’s mouth. When Kachee came close to him the young man called, “Is this what you are looking for?” He pushed the child toward Kachee who was so startled that he was temporarily speechless. He approached the young man and said, “Keep all these things which you have seen and heard to yourself. Let no whisper escape from you concerning my activities and no harm will ever come to you. All your relatives will also be free from harm if you keep my secret.” Then he took the child and went away.

The young man went home more determined than ever to watch every move that Kachee made for he did not trust him.

One night the young man suddenly awakened and heard a slight noise near his bed. He slowly opened his eyes and saw Kachee standing a short distance away. Kachee had a long stick in his hands and on the end of this stick there was of fluffy, beaten cedar bark. Kachee held this wad over the young man’s mouth, apparently to get some of the young man’s breath entrapped in the wad. After some time Kachee turned and quietly went out of the door followed by the young man who trailed him to his own house. Kachee hid the wad of cedar bark under the eaves of the roof, then went inside his house where he went to bed and soon began to snore. The young man went to the place where the cedar bark was hidden, removed it and then went to his own home where he got some fresh cedar bark. He went back to Kachee’s house and held this wad of cedar bark over Kachee’s mouth. He imitated all of Kachee’s actions closely then replaced the cedar bark in the same place where Kachee had hidden the first cedar bark. He then went home but did not sleep for he knew that Kachee would try to bring about his death using the cedar bark containing a sample of his breath in some kind of sorcery. He no longer slept at night but kept a nightly watch over the activities of Kachee. For this purpose he climbed to the ridge of his roof for he could watch Kachee’s house as well as a large area from this vantage point.

Three nights the young man continued his vigil. Then at dawn on the forth day Kachee came out of his house carrying his house pail. He went down to the seashore and began what appeared to be a sorcerer’s rite. He undressed himself, doused himself with the contents of his pail then waded out into the water and ducked into the sea until he was completely submerged. While submerged he turned himself around completely and surfaced facing the rising sun. He repeated this performance four times but on the fourth time, when he submerged himself he stayed submerged for some time, then very slowly he floated upward and was carried away by the tide.

So died Kachee a victim of his own nefarious deed for he had treated the cedar bark containing his own breath so that the owner of that breath would drown.

**Death and Dying**

Funeral rituals, belief rituals, and the afterlife.

When dying or near death, a member of the family, a spirit, comes to escort your spirit into the spirit world. This spirit can be seen and spoken to by the dying person. Their
form is entirely like that of the loving, except that they lack substance or solid form.

Upon death the individual is escorted by another spirit, or group of spirits, into the spirits world. Nothing is know about the physical features of that world, it is entirely unknown. It is separated from our reality by a “veil” or dimension, that prevents observation. A spirit can materialize in mid-air without any prior warning, or inclination of such a happening.

It was believed that the spirit of a deceased person will reincarnate back in the family. Family ties are very strong, from the immediate family through to other relatives. The reincarnating spirit reenters into the larger family. When this happens, a special skill is brought back, which may be anything from a master carver to a master hunter.

When death occurs the very first thing done is the hiring of two trusted friends, to handle the body. Their job is to bathe the corpse and to dress it with new clothes. The body is then set upright in a fetal position with the legs drawn up to the chest, with the arms wrapped around the shins, enabling the body to be set into a square coffin just large enough to hold the body. The air space around the body were then filled in with pounded yellow cedar bark, specifically the cambium layer. The bark was pounded in tightly to ensure a tight fit.

The body laid in state in the deceased persons home for three days and three nights, during which death songs were sung by appointed persons, usually professional wailers. The death songs expressed profound grief and sorrow of the family. The wailers put tremendous emotion into their efforts, weeping and wailing in deep grief at their loss. This usually set the whole family into sorrowful weeping. These death songs were not changed to suit the personality of the deceased, the songs were set and specifically worded with no alterations, and were sung only for prominent persons.

On the first day of laying in state, the immediate family members were not allowed to be alone. They are accompanied by the presence of family relatives or close friends. These companions take care of all family matters and the household functions. During the night, one or two stay over and sleep, this pattern holds for the three days. These three days are the days of a customary wake. The family members stay up all night with the deceased, to ensure that a shaman would not slip into the house and cause the death of another family member, by dropping an article of clothing of that person into the coffin. Such an act was thought to ensure the death of the person to whom the article belonged.

On the second day, the chief of another clan put up a feast, inviting the whole family of the deceased. At no time was the body left unattended, there were always at least two persons close by. This was to prevent “witchcraft” by a shaman who would use the deceased to gain power for evil purposes. On the second night the grave diggers and pallbearers were named and appointed. The pallbearers were also responsible for the covering of the grave after internment.

On the third day, someone was entrusted to cook breakfast for the family, and to be with the body while the family was invited out to dinner by a prominent person. There was always a group of people to sit with the grieving family for the duration of the night. They brought food to help out, and to comfort the family. This day is not as hectic as the previous days.

Day four, burial was usually mid-morning. The whole community would gather, except for the young children. The casket would lead the procession, in front of the casket would be an appointed person to say the prayers. Behind was the immediate family, then the chiefs of the clans. After the internment, the family would stay and express their grief and sorrow around the grave.
A year of mourning followed the burial of a husband, wife, mother or father, special clothes were worn. For a child the mourning period depended on the age of the child. The elderly or respected members of the community had their family invited out by other clans for dinner, when death came to the family. Ordinary persons and children did not qualify for such an invitation.

Chiefs and persons of high rank did not handle their own dead. They hired a prominent person to bathe the body, another to dig the grave, and others still to act as pallbearers who also did the burying of the body. At the preference of the family the body was buried in the ground, or place on an elevated platform, or in a tree. The whole community attended the funeral, no merry making or celebrations were allowed during the funeral period. Children were not allowed to play. This quiet respect was for all deceased.

Directly after the funeral the grieving family put on a feast for all those who assisted in the funeral. This was a feast only, and not a potlatch. The memorial feast was not held until one year later.

After the burial, on that day, the deceased’s clothing and favorite tools and belongings were burned in a special fire specifically lit for that purpose. It was believed that the burned belongings went to the deceased in the spirit world, the afterlife. The clothing was not simply dumped into the fire, each article was carefully put into the flames individually and when completely consumed by flames the next article followed. They were placed into the flames folded in a nice presentable manner. Clothing to be kept for a Keepsake was passed over the flames several times with the person doing the burning ritual speaking out loud to the deceased telling them that the article was being kept and to whom it was being given to. Failure to do so would result in the spirit not knowing the whereabouts of the article. The immediate family members did the burning ritual, and if a family member or friend wanted a keepsake he had to be present to receive it immediately after going over the fire. The departed’s spirit was told that the item would be well cared for.

The burning of prepared food was also done, but only after the clothing and other belongings had gone over the fire. The food was set off to the edge of the fire to burn and wasn’t entered directly. It was believed that a small amount of food would multiply and feed many people in the spirit world. The burner of the food always spoke aloud to the deceased to encourage the sharing of the food. No weeping was allowed during the burning ritual. Doing so would prevent the spirits from receiving the offerings, because the tears would cause a flood in their world washing away everything in their reach.

The deceased received the offering the way it was placed into the flames. If the food was dumped onto the flames, it would be received in a big mess. The food was placed on a dish as it would if being served.

When all the offerings were completely consumed by the flames, water was added to quench their thirst, and again a special way was followed. The clean water was splashed around the perimeter of the fire and not directly in it. This was done at the very last. If splashed directly into the flames, the spirits would be soaked by a tidal wave or flood.

Not all belongings were burned in the ritual. Tools and other equipment thought to be needed in the spirit world were left at the grave site. For women, their cooking utensils and implements were left on the grave.

It was believed that ritual had to be strictly followed and adhered to without exception.
Sometime after the rituals, several months later, a final potlatch was given if an important person passed...called a “jeek’se la” or “finalizing of the dead.” The assistants who bathed and dressed the body, made the coffin, dug the grave, raised the mortuary pole, were all paid. This potlatch was given by the deceased ones’ successor in the case of a prominent person such as a chief. For example, a nephew assumed the uncles title, which was qualified by a specific name. The nephew then inherited the uncles position in society, this signified the formal recognition of the deceased ones business concerns.

When a number of months had passed and a family member became pregnant, it was believed that the deceased persons spirit was resurrected and had reincarnated into human form again. The newborn was recognized as the reincarnated persons spirit by a relative having a dream, or by characteristics which the deceased one had such as manner of speaking or a special talent. Also certain physical markings such as birth marks or moles, identified the newborn as the spirit of the deceased relative.

The spirit world is thought to be the reverse of our world. Their day is our night, and our night is their day. When we sleep they are awake, and when we are awake they sleep. When someone dies they become a ghost.

**Nooth Gee Sta**

This name means “Crazy mans dance”. In the old days, there was the Hamatsa or secret society. This group was composed of the Chiefs of the various clans in the village of Haisla, or what is now known as Kitamaat Village. During certain times of the year the Hamatsa would perform ritual ceremonies which would terrorize the peasant population or common people with staged supernatural powers and events.

The events were by no means supernatural, and in order to convince the populace that the events were real the Hamatsa would distract the observers to the staged event with a sudden occurrence, the Nooth Gee Sta. The Nooth Gee Sta would act in a most crazy manner such that the attendant people would be “spooked”. He would create havoc with his actions.

This would allow the villagers to believe that the normal way was that of the supernatural way, the chiefs would perform their deeds while the distraction was carried out. As suddenly as Nooth Gee Sta appeared he would vanish into the background. Then the chiefs would have performed their so called magic tricks, leaving the people to believe that some kind of power was used. In which case it was acceptable that the so called “Chiefs” had power over the populace.

**Do Gwirth La**

Do Gwirth La literally means “observers of the setting sun”, this was a group of men who had ruling power in the village. Their standing in the community meant that they would observe the course of the sun as it tracked across the range of mountains opposite the village during the year. The most important part of the year was when the sun reached its’ most westerly and easterly points on the mountain range, this corresponded to the summer and winter solstice. The tracking of the seasons was very important to the Haisla, doing so enabled them to plan for the harvest of the resources of the sea, a major source of dietary sustenance.
Life in old Kitamaat prior to 1876 may be described quite briefly – entirely satisfying. Satisfying that is, when viewed through the eyes of the inhabitants at that time. Wants were few and there was an abundance of materials, readily available in season to satisfy people’s needs for housing, clothing, food and an easy means of transport.

A social order, the so-called “potlatch” system, which touched every phase of life and completely suited to the times was in vogue. This system emphasized social position secured by the acquisition then distribution to every person in the neighbourhood of material wealth – large amounts of material wealth. The object was not only to “do as the Jones’ do” but completely outdo them in the business of giving away wealth so that one’s social position might be maintained or improved. The “potlatch” system required so much material that family groups or clans were forced to work as a unit to produce or gather the desired material wealth. The most desirable material, as far as the Haisla were concerned, was oolachan oil or grease, because it could be traded or bartered to other Tribes. The production of grease, entailed month of concerted work by both men and women. The women made the funnel shaped nets used for fishing oolachans from which the oil was extracted. Making the nets began with the picking of stinging nettles, the drying, then separating the fibre from the bark, spinning the fibre into twine, then finally came the laborious and intricate knitting of the net. A well made net was twenty four feet wide at its mouth tapering to two feet at the small end, was fifty feet long, took three months to knit and with care, lasted ten years. A poor knitted net was worthless.

While the women were busy making the nets the men were just as busy building canoes for fishing and for general transportation. First a suitable cedar tree had to be selected – a process which sometimes took days for the tree had to be absolutely sound (about 90% of cedar trees in this area are either decayed or cracked in the centre). The cedar was then felled using an adze with a stone head; a large tree could be felled in about three days. A canoe was usually thirty to thirty-five feet long and the log was cut to this length by burning off the ends. Fires were then built on the log to hollow it out. The fires were controlled by using damp sand. A skillful man needed only to so little more than remove the charcoal from his canoe; if he was not skillful the log often burned completely. After hollowing out, the canoe. The sides could then be pushed out to the proper width and shape. Seats were attached and the canoe was ready for use. The owner of a canoe was just as proud of it as the present day owner of a yacht.

Gathering and Preserving Food

A highlight of the year was the annual trip to Giltoyees Inlet or Foch Lagoon for the purpose of picking berries for winter use. These inlets are about twenty miles down Douglas Channel and the salmon berries and huckleberries grew there by the acres and tons. The berries usually ripened during that two week period of sunshiny weather is September which is also the mountain goat hunting season. Groups of families would camp together and while the women picked berries the men would be up on the mountains hunting goat. Berries were preserved by drying or by processing in to a thick jam. Goat meat was barbecued then smoked and packed into air-tight containers. In the evenings everyone gathered around a large central fire and there was feasting, singing, dancing and a merry old time. When sufficient berries and meat had been preserved everyone returned to the village where there was more merry making to celebrate the harvest.
Clothing
Some cloths were made from hides of animals, the wool of mountain goat, or the bark of red cedar. The best clothes were made from the inner bark – the cambium layer - of the yellow cedar. During late spring women would climb Kwa-Kwana-Las Dums (Yellow cedar mountain) which means that small mountain between Moore and Anderson Creeks. They would strip the bark off the yellow cedar trees, tie the long strips of bark into bundles then steep the bundles in one of the sloughs on the mud flats for about a month. The useful inner bark was then easily separated from the rough outer bark which was discarded. The inner bark was beaten into a soft woolly mass which was carded, spun into yarn and hand woven into clothing as warm as any woolen clothes of today.

First Missionary
Life changed quite abruptly after 1876 for during the year a man named Wahux-gumalayoo, later baptized Charles Amos went to Victoria by canoe on a trading trip. He heard the preaching's of Rev. William Pollard and was converted to Christianity. Charles Amos returned to Kitamaat with a bible to convert the rest of the people but the village shamans and secret society members recognized the new way of life as described by Amos as a threat to the social order of the time and resisted Amos and his few followers by persecution. However, Charles Amos would not be intimidated and in time his following grew to include practically all the villagers. The old shamans had been correct, however. Christianity did change the social order so drastically that the old, almost carefree days were no more.

The Coming of Christianity to Kitamaat
Prior to the coming of the missionaries to the B.C. coast there was no real religion among the Tribes. The assumption by many people of European descent that the totem poles were the objects of worship is incorrect. Totems were merely symbols of prestige and served the same purpose as the present day big, expensive car parked in front of one's house. The closest the Tribes, at least the Haisla's, came to actual worship took place when they set out on a hunting trip. One of the group of hunters would address a supernatural being in the following manner;

“Aye-ah-ka-wa, help us. Make our trip a success.”

The word “Aye-ah-ka-wa” meant “the Good One” or “the Pure One”.

The hunters did not appear to have complete faith in the Aye-ah-ka-wa, however, for prior to the trip they all had engaged in very severe purification rites to ensure the success of the hunting trip.

The earliest contact which the Haisla had with Christianity was when two Catholic priests, Fathers Fouquet and Lejacq, paid the village a brief two day visit in a canoe on March 19th, 1864. They were apparently on an exploratory trip and did no more than baptize a few children. They spoke in a foreign language so that the significance of their actions was lost.

In the Haisla village lived a young man named Wahux-gamalayou. He was the youngest of three brothers and lived with his oldest brother, Noah, who was one of the leaders of the strong secret society known as the Hyleekeeni. Wahux-gamalayou was just another young man in his mid-twenties. He was not interested in any activity other than trying to make a living. In the spring of 1874 he went with some friends to Victoria to look for employment and went to work in a sawmill. He soon became acquainted with his fellow workers, some of whom were Christian Tsimpsians. One day he
accompanied the Tsimpsians to church and they introduced him to the minister, Mr. William Pollard. He became very interested in Mr. Pollard’s preaching and was converted to Christianity. Wahux-gamalayou was baptized Charles Amos and Mr. Pollard gave him the duty of ringing the bell for church services. He was so faithful in the performance of this duty that Mr. Pollard began teaching him to read and to write. He stayed two years in Victoria and became quite proficient in reading the Bible and also a very firm believer.

Another Haisla who was in Victoria at the time was a relative of Charles Amos, a woman named Nalagamalish, who was married to a Cumshewa or white man. This woman wanted to visit her old parents in Kitamaat Village so her husband, who was a carpenter, built a large skiff equipped with a sail for her. Charles Amos and three other young men volunteered to act as crew members so that after an absence of two years they returned home in 1876.

Amos periodically called the other young people who had returned with him from Victoria to prayer meetings at his brother Noah’s house. In time other young people from the village joined his group so that his following grew. He told them the story of Christ as taught to him by Mr. Pollard, read the Bible to them and told them that they should follow Jesus rather than the Hyleekeeni as practiced by the secret societies.

This challenge was quickly accepted by the Hay-lee-kila, secret society members, who recognized the new way of life as described by Amos as a threat to the social order of that time of which they were the leaders. They resisted Amos and his followers by persecution. During one prayer meeting, when Amos and his followers were gathered around the fire in prayer in Noah’s house, a secret society member named Ya-yak-sala tried to disburse Amos’ group by suddenly entering the house, then performing the ceremonial dance called the noon-thl-jeesta or insane man’s dance. In the course of this dance Ya-yak-sala went to the fire, took the glowing embers in his bare hands and started throwing the embers at Amos and his group. Fortunately the group included a very big and strong Tsimpsian named Lagasan who was married to a Haisla woman. Lagasan took hold of Ya-yak-sala by the shoulders, lifted him bodily off the floor, deposited him outside the door and warned him that if he returned he would not be treated so gently. Needless to say, neither Ya-yak-sala nor any of the other Hay-lee-kila dared to go near the meeting place of Amos’ group while Lagasan was there.

Soon after this incident Amos received a surprise and secret visit from Chief Jasee of the Beaver clan. Jasee encouraged Amos and assured him of personal support if an open clash with the Hyleekeeni took place. Thus assured of powerful support, Amos then built the first church building in Kitimat, a small log house situated at the old oolachan fishing camp near the mouth of the Kitamaat River. Amos persuaded Chief Jasee to be converted and shortly afterwards most of the other people accepted Christianity. With so many new members it was necessary to have a building in which to hold their services so some canoes were sent to buy some lumber from a sawmill at Georgetown near Prince Rupert. The little church built out of this lumber was the physical sign that Christianity was firmly established in the Haisla village.

Charles Amos married Gwunta-laks, and they had two children. Alfred, the younger of the two children, died while still a child. Margaret, the other child, married David Shaw.

Amos’ wife died suddenly during late summer and he was unable to recover from the shock of her death. A month afterwards this man, who had the courage to oppose the established order of that time in order to bring Christianity to his people, died apparently of a heart attack at an age of about forty-eight years, after accomplishing his objective. His tombstone bears the following inscription:
Monsters of Kitamaat

The Scotsman had his Lock Ness monster; the Okanagan had its Ogopogo; Victorians claim that they occasionally see a serpent in the sea and that this serpent appears in pastel hues on Saturday nights. When it comes to monsters Kitamaat had its share of these fearsome creatures.

The Sahnis, water grizzly, usually seen in the Kitamaat River at the Clay Banks (Junction of the Kitamaat and Big Wadeen Rivers) was a fearsome beast, the mere sight of which was a signal that a terrible storm was approaching. The Sahnis looked exactly like the land variety of grizzly gear but it lived entirely in the water. Its roar vibrates both the water and the land.

The Jasee Lake monster was a real monstrosity. It looked like a giant cottonwood tree complete with branches and roots. When a boat or canoe entered Jasee Lake this monster would suddenly appear out of the water, rear itself to its full height, then crash down on its luckless victims. Because of the monster Jasee Lake was avoided by everyone except the foolhardy.

The monster of Sue Passage (Soo-wee Passage) was a gigantic octopus. As large as a steamboat it appeared to the few survivors among the people unfortunate enough to encounter this beast.

Many years have now passed since any of these monstrosities were last seen and it is suspected that they have either all died of old age or the rum supply is not as potent as in the past.

Determining the Weather

Hunting, fishing and the gathering of plant food supplies was so vitally affected by the seasons of the year, and the daily weather conditions, that the Haisla were forced to study the seasons and the weather.

It was found that the likely condition of the weather could be determined by observing the direction of the movements of the clouds. It was further found that there were usually two separate layers of clouds often moving in different directions. Kitamaat Valley and Douglas Channel (with high mountains in either side) lies in a north-south direction and surface winds, and therefore clouds, can only move in either a north or south direction. Weather can not be determined from low clouds which are being blown by local winds but it can be quite reliably foretold by observing the higher level clouds and the following is a chart showing how this was done;

(a) Clouds moving from the south-east bring rainy and stormy weather in all seasons.
(b) Clouds from the south-west signify squally weather. Sudden, strong squalls with rain are followed by short period of sunshine then more rain and strong winds. This type of weather usually means a change from bad to good weathered or in
other words from south-east to weather or in other words from south-east to west wind.

(c) During spring, summer and early fall clouds from the west mean clear skies – very good weather. During late fall and all winter, clouds from the west bring snow.

(d) North-west wind clouds are danger signs. Rain usually accompanies this wind and often only a slight breeze blows from the north-west, then very quickly the wind reverses direction and blows from the south-east with gale force.

(e) Clouds moving from both the east and the north-east mean clear skies. In winter these are mistakenly called north winds and they bring strong, cold winds which often blow for days or weeks.

(f) - (1) If, while an east or north-east wind is blowing, the clouds begin moving from the true south then you may be certain that east or north-east wind will increase in strength to almost gale force and the temperature of the air will drop below zero, for clouds from this direction are said to be defying the east or north-east wind.

- (2) No matter how strongly an east or north-east wind is blowing during winter, if the clouds start moving slowly from the true north than it is certain that the east or north-east wind will stop blowing within a day and the weather will change from clear, cold weather to milder, rainy weather.

All the foregoing types of weather are determined on a day basis and there is no foundation for the belief held by so many strangers that a Haisla or any other Tribesman can do any long term weather forecasting.

**Determining the Seasons**

The season of the year could be determined by observing the positions of the setting sun against the range of mountains along the western shore of the Kitamaat Arm of Douglas Channel. The centre of the village was the recognized place for making observations of the sun and from this spot the western mountains had the appearance of a flat wall with an uneven top edge.

On or about June 21st, the summer solstice, the sun sets behind the mountains immediately west of the Alcan smelter and the exact spot where it disappeared was marked by a prominent tree. On the other end of its journey, the winter solstice, the sun sets behind the almost flat topped mountain just south of Jasee Lake and here again the southern limit of the sun's travel was marked by another prominent tree. The distance separating these two points was divided according to the season when certain foods could be obtained. For instance, above Frog Falls – a mile south of the temporary wharf – there are the outlines of two canoes along the mountain tops. When the sun reached the first of these canoe outlines, known as the herring canoe, on its northward journey, the herring invariably started spawning and as the herring spawn is good food, the approach of the sun to this outline in the mountains was eagerly awaited.

When the sun approached the second canoe-the oolachan canoe-everyone rejoiced for the oolachans could be expected in the Kitamaat River and preparations for catching these were rushed to completion prior to the entry of the sun to the oolachan canoe.

The salmon season, hunting season, etc. could all be determined by observing the Haisla calendar - the setting of the sun behind the curtain formed by the western mountains. One part of the year which aroused a considerable amount of controversy
among the sun gazers was the winter solstice for one group maintained that the sun reached the southern limit of its travel on the seventeenth of December. Arguments concerning this matter caused much private study among the sun gazers and one man in particular – a man named Clee-sala - seems to have had some knowledge of the orbits of heavenly bodies for at one time he predicted an eclipse of the sun. To convince his sceptical colleagues – among whom was Chief Jasee – he announced: “Tomorrow, when the sun has reached the center of the sky, it will disappear and will not reappear unless everyone goes down the beach and dances.” The opportunity of jeering at Clee-sala brought the other sun gazers to the beach the next day, then as the sun approached the zenith the earth started to darken, the stars appeared and in the eerie darkness fear of the unknown took hold of the people. A single, loud command of “Dance” from Clee-sala sent every person in a dither of frenzied dancing all over the beach. As the sun slowly came out of the eclipse Clee-sala loudly called, “Jasee, please spare me the sight of even you making a fool of yourself for the sun merely passed through a shadow and would have come back even without your silly antics.” Needless to say Clee-sala’s popularity was not improved through his ability as a sun gazer was no longer questioned.

Making of Oolachan Grease

In the old days there was a lot of trading or bartering among the Tribes. In the case of the Tribes in British Columbia one of the most desirable trade items was oolachan oil or oolachan grease as it was popularly called.

Oolachan grease was used as a cooking oil; as a condiment; as a preservative for wild fruit; or as a medicine or anti-dote in cases of food poisoning.

The production of oolachan grease in large quantities required a lot of specialized equipment; a large amount of wood for fuel; knowledge of the correct recipe; and a tremendous amount of hard physical work. So much work was required that two or even three family groups combined forces in order to provide the necessary work force. The women as well as the men worked from dawn to dusk during the height of the oolachan season in April.

The whole process actually began during the previous summer when the women bundled themselves in many layers of protective clothing and then picked large bundles of stinging nettles.

The nettles were hung up to dry and when they were dry they were beaten on a flat surface until the inner fibers were separated from the rough outer bark which was discarded.

The fibers were carded; spun into very strong twine; and then knitted into large funnel shaped nets which were fifty two feet long. The large upstream opening of the net was twenty four feet wide and the net tapered down to two feet diameter at the downstream end of the net. Each family group needed at least two of these nets. To knit each net required three months of steady, painstaking work and only one or two women in the tribe had the required skill for making these specialized nets. Handled with much care a well made oolachan net lasted a life time. A poorly made oolachan net was useless for it could not catch and hold any oolachans.

While the nets were being made other women would go into the forest to dig up spruce roots. These roots had to be about one inch in diameter and six to eight feet long. The roots were split lengthwise into long thin strips and then these strips of roots were woven into very strong pressing bags which were about the same sized as today’s
gunny sacks. These pressing bags were used in the second stage extraction of grease from the cooked oolachan mash and this second stage extraction process will be described later.

While the women were busy knitting the nets and weaving the pressing bags – some of the men were just as busy building the canoes; making the heavy wooden pile drivers; the wooden piles which would be driven into the river bed to hold the nets in place; and all the other tools and equipment used in the oolachan fishing operation.

At the same time other men were whittling the doms or drying sticks which would be used to hang up part of the oolachan catch so that the oolachans would be smoked. These sticks were made from straight grained red cedar. They were forty inches long and three quarters of an inch in diameter. A large family needed a hundred or more of these doms to ensure that there would be enough smoked oolachans for the family for the entire year and also some available for trade with people from other tribes.

On large oolachan boiler and a similar sized pressing tank were also built. The sides and ends of both of these vessels were made from thirty inch wide spruce planks. Spruce was the preferred wood for this purpose because spruce did not impart any undesirable taste to the oolachan grease produced by the boiling process.

Both vessels were seven feet long, thirty inches wide, and thirty inches deep. The bottom of each vessel was a single sheet of eighteen gauge galvanized sheet iron.

The oolachan boiler was placed over a stone lined fire pit (which was the same length and width as the boiler) which was dug into the ground. The pressing tank was placed on the ground alongside of the boiler with only a walking space separating the two vessels. The pressing tank was covered with a grate made of strong, hemlock saplings about two inches in diameter each.

With all the tools and equipment ready and in place the family was now eager to go fishing for the small fish which were the object of all this preparation.

The oolachan is a variety of smelt and when it’s spawning season arrives in April it enters the Kitamaat River (as well as several other major rivers on the B.C. Coast) in one large massive school.

The school of oolachan mysteriously arrives in the river all at once. The school stays in the river for about ten days then just as mysteriously disappears until the next April. No one knows were they come from and no one knows the part of the ocean to which they go after leaving the river. Once the oolachans arrive – canoes with three or four men aboard go out on the river and the men drive piles into the river bed in places where the current is right. Converging currents are the most favourable locations for catching oolachans.

The piles are made from hemlock trees and they are peeled. They are four inches in diameter and may be up to eight feet long. The piles are placed twenty feet apart and the oolachan nets are attached to the piles with wooden hoops tied to the bottom ends of long poles called jee-gans-jee-gan-cha (immersion poles to those people who unfortunately cannot speak Haisla).

The oolachan nets were left in the river over night. By morning there might be one or more tons of oolachans in each net. A family with two nets might, therefore, catch two or more tons of oolachans each night during the run.

The first part of the oolachan run was composed almost exclusively of females and this part of the catch was valued because of the very high oil content.
The last part of the catch was composed of all males. Although the males did not have as much oil or grease as the females this part of the catch was, nevertheless, valued because the males were better for smoking, salting in large barrels for future use, or just plain cooking. The catch of oolachans was stored in large wooden bins. These bins were covered to provide shade from the sun. Good drainage had to be provided so that excess blood from the oolachans, which might taint the grease, could drain away.

The raw oolachans were allowed to ripen in the storage bins for a period of four to five days before being boiled.

This ripening period allowed the cell structure in the oolachans to break down so that the grease could be extracted. An attempt to boil fresh oolachans will result in very little grease being extracted. When everything was ready – the recipe and process for making good oolachan grease was as follows;

1. Put enough water into the oolanchan boilers until the depth of water reaches the wrist bone.
2. Bring the water to a rolling boil by lighting a fire in the fire pit under the boiler.
3. Now put ten wash tub full of ripened oolachans into the boiler and bring the mixture to a frothing boil.
4. Mix and mash the oolachans with paddles until each oolachan is thoroughly mashed.
5. Bring the mash to a second boil.
6. Now remove the fire from the fire pit.
7. Quickly cool the mixture with thirty two gallons (eight buckets of four gallons each) of cold water. The amount of cold water must be exact. If insufficient cold water was used then the mixture would continue to boil and brownish tinted grease would result. If too much cold water was used then the grease would emulsify into a milky white mess.
8. The mixture was then allowed to set for ten minutes or so to permit the grease to rise to the surface.
9. A flexible piece of wood six inches wide and long enough to extend from one side of the boiler to the other was then used to scrape the grease along the surface of the mixture. This action concentrated the grease into a deep pool near the end of the boiler and the grease was then skimmed off into large containers.
10. Half of the oil content of the oolachan mash was recovered up to this part of the process. The second half of the oil content must be pressed out of the mash by the secondary process of transferring the mash into the spruce root pressing bags previously mentioned. When the pressing bags were full of mash they were put onto the grating on top of the pressing tank. Pressure was then applied by means of a large wooden lever. The lever was a wooden pole then feet long and six inches in diameter. Two short boards were nailed crosswise on the under side of the lever and these boards were pressed down upon the pressing bags by putting weight on the top end of the lever. Every last drop of grease was thus extracted from the oolachan mash before the mash was discarded or used as fertilizer for the family vegetable garden. The grease recovered from the pressing tank was in an emulsified state. It had to be returned to the boiler with the next batch of oolachans and boiled before the grease became separated from the water with which it was emulsified.
11. The oolachan grease, as it came off the boiler was not really thoroughly cooked. If left in this state it would, in time, become discolored and it would turn rancid. To prevent this from happening the grease was further cooked by immersing three or four red hot baseball sized rocks into each container full of grease. The hot rocks refined the grease by cooking out any impurities suspended in it. These impurities rose to the surface as scum and was skimmed off and discarded.

12. When the refined grease had sufficiently cooled it was then strained through several layers of cheese cloth and was then poured into clean wooden barrels.

13. Freshly made oolachan grease was not used or eaten by the Haisla people. The reason for this was the fact that fresh grease was difficult to digest. To overcome this problem the wooden twelve gallon sized barrels containing the grease were stored in large pits which were dug into the earth. Cedar planks protected the tops of the barrels then the storage pits were covered with about two feet of earth.

Like good whiskey – good oolachan grease mellowed and improved with age provided that it was kept in an evenly cooled storage area. The grease was allowed to age at least one year before it was considered suitable for table use.

The article is written in the past tense for the reason that some parts of grease production procedure have now been discontinued. The secondary process of extracting the second half of the oil content of the oolachan mash in the pressing tank has now been discontinued. The mash is merely discharged out of the boiler after the grease has been skimmed into containers. This, of course, means that only half of the oil content of the oolachan mash is now being extracted. The mellowing process of storing the product in earth pits has also been discontinued.

Faced with the necessity of seeking full time employment in modern industry in order to meet today’s rapidly escalating living costs – few families can now afford to spend all the time and effort required to make oolachan grease. Within a very few years this interesting and, formerly, very necessary part of Haisla life will have passed into history.

Sample of written Haisla

Yawč – Hello
sas wela? – How are you?
baba’u – Grandfather
mama’u – Grandmother
čimoća – Douglas Channel
zaxo’n – Oolichan or Oolachan
’iksduq’ya – Eagle
’Aiksōwelas – Good Bye

In the video of Gordon telling the story of Clee-sala he mentions that Clee-sala had a toolbox that he used to keep records of events on the inside top cover. The toolbox had marks that only Clee-sala could understand and this indicated that the Haisla had a form of written language in that age of long ago.
The Story of Monkey Beach

Remembered by Dale Robinson. When I was a kid my dad John Robinson and his late brother Gordon Robinson my uncle took me clam digging at Monkey Beach. On the way he told story after story about different places and certain people. Many of the stories went in one ear and out the other. However two stories stuck in my mind, one was the story of Red Valley. The valley was about 15 miles long and at the end of the valley was some sort of red rock. The women of that time used it as rouge for makeup. When a man wanted to court a woman he had to paddle down to the valley via the Douglas Channel, hike to the end, get the rocks and come back to the village. He had to do this to prove his love for her. At that time I thought to myself ‘Crazy fools! All that just for love’.

Then when we were anchored out waiting for the tide to drop we fished for crabs. I asked why they called this place Monkey Beach. He told me that long ago monkeys escaped from a boat probably a sailing ship who knows for sure. As time went on the population of monkeys grew, as the food supply was plentiful there. The villagers grew afraid that the monkeys would wipe out their food supply and they decided to kill them all off. An interested scientist from a New York museum wanted to study them so he hired a villager to take him there before all them were killed. They went down to Monkey Beach and captured one and took it back to New York.

Those were the two stories I remembered most clearly. Another that I’m trying to remember is the one about the Sasquatch Village and the Goat Hunter.

There are different versions from different storytellers, but I enjoyed hearing them anyway. By the way we caught some giant crabs and cooked some right on the boat...mmm.... we also got about 4 sacks of clams and a small bucket of cockles.... mmm mmm....

Notes

Chilakoons was changed to replace sepulchral with evil.
The Haida prefer to call their home Haida Gwaii meaning “Islands of the People.”
Tribes, Tribe or Tribesmen was substituted for Indian(s).

Although the Haisla had no long term weather forecasting per se, the Haisla calendar, a series of well known features of where the sun set on the mountains across the village on the other side of Douglas Channel had a curious phenomenon.

Where the sun set on the mountains was carefully observed and noted, during the winter months it was observed that the travel of the sun corresponded to a prominent tree.

What was noticed however was that during certain years the sun would be slightly on one side or the other. They also noticed that if it was on one side the winter weather would be mild. And if on the other side then the winter weather would be harsh. It was by this careful observation that the elders could predict the coming winter weather. What the Haisla had discovered was the elliptical orbit of the earth, during the orbit when the earth was closer to the sun it would be a warmer winter; and during the orbit when the earth was farther away from the sun it would be a colder winter.