

SUSAN MARSDEN

Museum of Northern British Columbia, P.O. Box 669, Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada V8J 3S1

ROBERT GALOIS

Department of Geography, 1984 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6T 1Z2

# THE TSIMSHIAN, THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY, AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE NORTHWEST COAST FUR TRADE, 1787-1840

*The paper examines the first half-century of the fur trade on the Northwest Coast from the perspective of its First Nations participants. It focuses on the array of initiatives taken by Ligeex, a prominent Tsimshian chief, to insert non-native traders within the geopolitics of the indigenous world. The reconstruction is undertaken by linking Tsimshian oral narratives with Euro-American documentary sources.*

*L'article traite des cinquante premières années du commerce des fourrures sur la côte nord-ouest du point de vue des participants membres des Premières Nations. Il se concentre sur la série d'initiatives entreprises par Ligeex, un chef tsimshian de premier rang, afin d'incorporer les commerçants allochtones à la géopolitique du monde indigène. La reconstruction est effectuée en reliant des narrations de la tradition orale tsimshiane à des sources documentaires euro-américaines.*

In olden times only those who had trading privileges could go to the various tribes to trade.<sup>1</sup>

Geopolitical concerns implicitly and explicitly have underlain a good deal of writing about the early postcontact history of North America. In this literature,<sup>2</sup> geopolitical action, understood as the exercise of power over space,

has been the sole prerogative of European and American nations. The omission of indigenous geopolitics cannot be corrected by simply writing First Nations into the equation. In thus subsuming First Nations politics within Euro-American categories, one is left examining similarities and measuring absences, thereby ignoring indigenous systems and their inherent logic. Instead, this paper begins with a society, the Tsimshian, and seeks to analyze how its geopolitics incorporated the fur trade.

Tsimshian society, when encountered by Euro-American traders consisted of a well-defined and complex sociopolitical system, in which territories and trading privileges were owned and controlled by autonomous, yet interconnected, Houses and tribes. This paper draws on Tsimshian historical records<sup>3</sup> and Euro-American documents to examine how the Tsimshian system intersected with the early maritime fur trade. It concentrates on the processes which culminated in the establishment of a trading fort in Tsimshian territory in 1834, a process which involved the Hudson's Bay Company and Ligeex and the Gispaxlo'ots, the leading chief and tribe of the northern Tsimshian.<sup>4</sup>

## The Geopolitics of the Tsimshian

At the foundation of the geopolitical system of the Tsimshian lies the inalienable and exclusive title of each

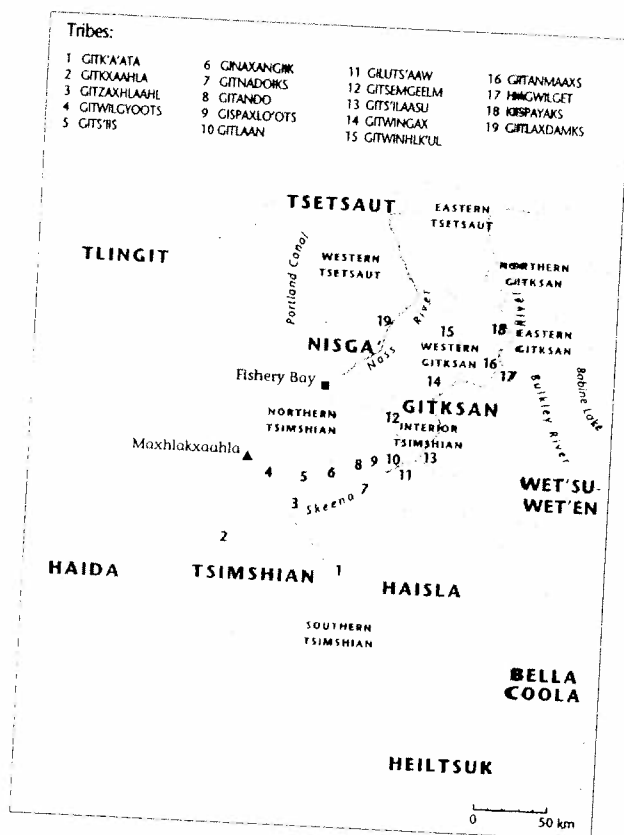


Figure 1  
The Northwest Coast

House<sup>5</sup> to its territories and their resources. This title is entrenched in a complex legal system, which regulates the rights of access of the members of the House beyond their territory – within tribe, region, and nation (Figure 1). Rights of access derive from ties between Houses tracing their origins to a common ancestor in the matrilineal line. Networks of Houses related in this way extend throughout the Northwest Coast.<sup>6</sup>

The chief of the leading House within each tribe, and his advisors, the headmen of the other Houses, manage the overall economy of the tribe and associated geopolitical relations with other tribes. Depending on the economic needs of the time, the chief and his advisors may designate the specific rights of access of an individual House to be the exclusive prerogative of the tribe. They may also arrange marriage alliances to allow for an exchange of rights of access and other economic prerogatives. Prerogatives and alliances which endure over many

generations create an intricate web of relationships linking the economies of Houses, tribes and, in some cases, regions and nations.

The system of trade among the Northwest Coast nations is an integral facet of their common geopolitical and economic institutions. It is especially defined by the strict laws concerning the ownership of territory and trade prerogatives, and the sharing of these in clan and marriage relations.<sup>7</sup> Entry into territory and access to trade partners other than one's own are acknowledged by obligatory gifts to the owners, in a prescribed protocol based on the specific nature of the exchange. Specialized goods from House territories thus move across a vast network of multifaceted relationships that cross tribal, regional, and national boundaries.

### The Gispaxlo'ots

In 1787, the Gispaxlo'ots were the leading tribe among the northern Tsimshian. Their leading chief was Ligeex, the head of the Eagle clan House of Ligeex. The trade prerogatives of the Gispaxlo'ots had made them the foremost tribe among the northern Tsimshian, as they had exclusive access to the Gitksan on the Upper Skeena River, and preferred access to trade at the mouth of the Nass River.<sup>8</sup>

The Gitksan provided the Tsimshian with interior food commodities and a number of specialized products available only in the interior. As intermediaries for the Tsetsaut and Wet'suwet'en, they were also an important source of tanned hides and groundhog skins, the established currency of the feast (potlatch). Since Ligeex's trade rights with the Gitksan were exclusive, he was able to profit from the use others made of his prerogative. An *adawx*<sup>9</sup> told by Matthew Johnson in the 1930s describes his tribe's position.<sup>10</sup>

Ligeex had supremacy on the Skeena River. No one could go up the upper Skeena River without first asking the consent of Ligeex. And only the Gispaxlo'ots, the tribe of Ligeex, were able to go up the Skeena River, and ... they had to pay tribute to the chief. ... And if any one of the other tribes who were related to any of the Gispaxlo'ots wanted to accompany his Gispaxlo'ots relations, he first had to give a gift to the chief for this privilege. And when he returned, he also had to give tribute for anything he was able to get on the Skeena River. If he did not do so, then one of Ligeex's headmen or spokesmen would collect it from him. And all the other tribes recognized this right and were very respectful of the powers and rights of the chief of the Gispaxlo'ots. Although there were many tribes living on the lower Skeena below the canyon, they never went above the canyon and no one was privileged to

trade with the Gitksan, only Ligeex (Matthew Johnson, Laans, Killerwhale Clan, Gispaxlo'ots).<sup>11</sup>

The Gispaxlo'ots' prerogative limited only those Tsimshian whose territory lay below Kitselas canyon. The Gits'ilaasu (Kitselas) tribe of the interior Tsimshian, whose territory included the canyon, also had the right to trade with the Gitksan, as another *adawx* told by Matthew Johnson explains:

Two tribes claimed the exclusive privilege of trading with the Gitksan of the Upper Skeena. These were the Gispaxlo'ots and the Gits'ilaasu; they were often united together to trade, as the Gits'ilaasu tribe, living as it did right in the canyon, were a dangerous foe, and Ligeex, in order to ally himself with them, he or others closely related to him, would marry into the Gits'ilaasu royal Houses. Often his nieces would marry there to form closer alliances. So in this way these two tribes made themselves foremost traders among the Tsimshian. They resented any interference in their trading with the Gitksan of the interior.<sup>12</sup>

The Gispaxlo'ots and the Gits'ilaasu traded with the Gitksan at Gitwingax, an important trading centre, at the junction of two major routes by which interior goods moved to the coast.

Like all Tsimshian, Ligeex and the Gispaxlo'ots also had specific trading rights at Fishery Bay at the mouth of the Nass River, where, every spring, people from the Tlingit, Nisga', Haida, and Tsimshian gathered to harvest *oolichan*<sup>13</sup> or to trade. However, the House of Ligeex also controlled access to the *oolichan* fishery, a prerogative that had been established in a feast at a seasonal village just west of Fishery Bay. During the feast, the face of Ligeex, surrounded by ten coppers<sup>14</sup> had been painted on a cliff above the village to mark the occasion and to assert Ligeex's right.<sup>15</sup>

The House of Ligeex's position at Fishery Bay was reinforced by its place in an extensive network of Eagle clan Houses, called the Gwinhuut.<sup>16</sup> Long established among the northern Haida, the Tsimshian, Nisga', and Haisla, the Gwinhuut had become a powerful force in the geopolitics of the Northwest Coast. Those Gwinhuut specifically involved at the mouth of the Nass River were the Tsimshian Houses of Ligeex of the Gispaxlo'ots and Sgagweet of the Gitando, and the Nisga' Houses of Sagawan and Gitiks<sup>17</sup> of the Gitiks.

### The Gispaxlo'ots: 1787–1805

The opening of the sea-otter trade with European and American vessels added new elements to the Tsimshian

economy, according a new economic importance to certain areas within the pre-existing geopolitical landscape. As a result, the balance of power within and between regions was disrupted and each tribe sought to reposition itself in the light of the changing economic situation. The initial period of the fur trade was especially challenging for Ligeex<sup>18</sup> and the Gispaxlo'ots, who faced both external and internal challenges from a powerful network of Killerwhale clan Houses, which dominated the early trade.

Trade first flourished in the territory of the House of Ts'ibasaa (of the Killerwhale clan) of the Gitkxahla (Kitkatla) tribe, the leading House and tribe of the southern Tsimshian. The principal early anchorages on this part of the coast were in their domain.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the Gitkxahla were renowned sea-mammal hunters, with abundant sea-otter grounds within their territory and a trade alliance with the southern Haida who were very active in the early trade. The combination of these factors resulted in a dramatic increase in Ts'ibasaa's wealth and power. Ligeex's position as leading chief of the northern Tsimshian dictated that he match Ts'ibasaa's wealth in the reciprocal feasting in which the two engaged.<sup>20</sup> However, unlike Ts'ibasaa, Ligeex did not have his own access to sea-otter grounds nor to the American and British anchorages, and he was obliged to develop alternative strategies.

Ligeex also faced an internal challenge to his position as leading chief among the northern Tsimshian. Txagaxs (or 'Wiiseeks'<sup>21</sup>), the leading chief of the Ginaxangiik, had also been strengthened by the early developments of the sea-otter trade. Ginaxangiik territory included sea-otter grounds and the only two trading harbours among the northern Tsimshian: K'igoobl (Big Bay), on the Tsimshian Peninsula, and the waters adjacent to Laxk'u (Tugwell Island),<sup>22</sup> at the entrance to Metlakatla Pass (Maxhla-kxahla). The Ginaxangiik used their position at these harbours to control and profit from the visits of other tribes to the trading ships, especially at Metlakatla Pass where the northern Tsimshian had their winter villages.

Although Ligeex's status had been weakened by the changing geopolitical landscape, his position as leading chief of the northern Tsimshian and his indigenous trade prerogatives enabled him to negotiate strategic marriages, giving him limited access to the trading privileges of other tribes (Figure 2). Two marriages<sup>23</sup> gave Ligeex alliances within the Killerwhale clan, limited rights to sea-otter grounds, and entry to two important harbours of the early trade. Ligeex married Maskgaax (Meksgaax), a woman of high rank of the House of Saxsa'axt (of the Killerwhale clan), the leading House of the Gitwilgyoots.

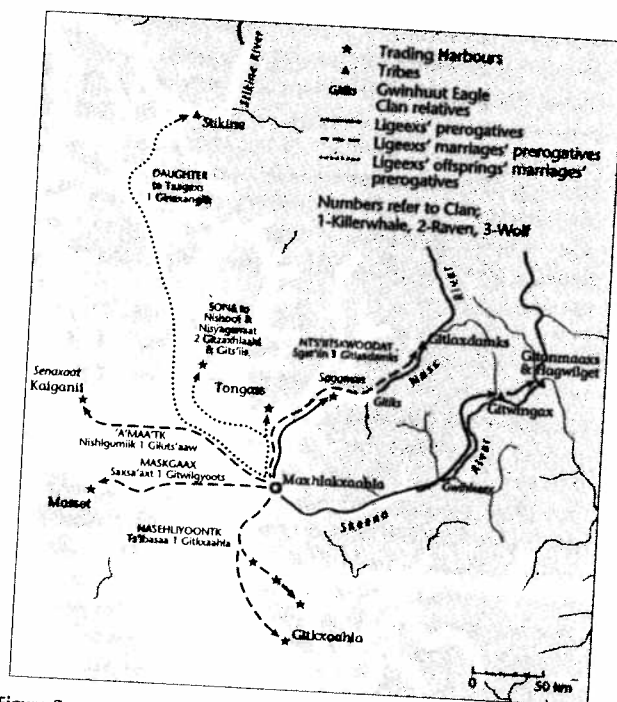


Figure 2  
Ligeex's prerogatives, 1787-1830

The Gitwilgyoots owned much of the coastal territory within the domain of the northern Tsimshian and exclusive trading rights with the Masset, a northern Haida tribe, strategically located in the early days of the sea-otter trade. Ligeex also married 'A'maa'tk, the sister of the leading chief of the Giluts'aaw, Nisnawaa, later known as Nishigumiik, and also a member of the Killerwhale clan. The Giluts'aaw had an exclusive trading relationship with the House of Senaxaat of the Kaiganii (Kasaan) Haida, one of Ligeex's Gwinhuut Eagle relatives. The Kaiganii controlled what became, in the late 1790s, the principal anchorage for trading vessels on the northern coast.

During this early period, Ligeex had continued to benefit from his Skeena River trade prerogative, a source of goods highly valued in the indigenous economy. At the same time, his marriages had assured him and his tribe a degree of direct involvement in the new fur-trade economy. As the sea-otter fur trade gave way to trade in land furs, however, Ligeex was to play a more central role.

### The Gispaxlo'ots: 1805-1825

It is difficult to determine exactly when the coastal trade began to include land furs, but the significant decline in

numbers of sea-otter probably began some time between 1805 and 1810. As sea-otter stocks dwindled and beaver and other land furs became important items of exchange, Ligeex's exclusive prerogative on the Skeena River, and his position at the mouth of the Nass, became important factors in the fur-trade economy. This change in the trade initiated a shift in the balance of power among the northern Tsimshian, and between the Houses of Ligeex and Ts'ibasaa. During the same period, however, changes were also taking place in the interior, where Ligeex was confronted with competition for the goods that traditionally flowed through his network along the Skeena River to the coast. Ligeex's competitor in the interior was the Northwest Company which, in 1805, established Fort McLeod, the first fort west of the Rockies, followed closely in 1806 by Fort St. James and Fort Fraser.

Faced with the escalating demand for interior furs on the coast and the westward expansion of the land-based trade, Ligeex moved to ensure that the goods of the Tsetsaut and Wet'suwet'en continued to reach the coast along trade routes he and his allies controlled. He secured the Skeena River trade by extending his own prerogative upriver to the eastern Gitksan villages of Kispayaks and Gitanmaaxs.<sup>24</sup> He also strengthened the Nass River trade by marrying Nts'iitskwoodat, the niece of Sgat'iin (of the Wolf clan), the leading chief of the upper Nass, thereby combining his own prerogatives at the mouth of the Nass with Sgat'iin's control, among the Nisga', of the upriver trade. Portland Canal, the third route by which interior goods reached the trading harbours on the coast, was controlled by Sagawan, Ligeex's Gwinhuut Eagle relative.<sup>25</sup> Sagawan, like Ligeex, was married to a relative of Sgat'iin, Nisakx of the House of Niskinwatk (of the Wolf clan of the upriver Nisga').<sup>26</sup> Sagawan's marriage reinforced the alliance of Ligeex and Sgat'iin and strengthened their position in the Nass River trade and at the mouth of the Nass.

Ligeex, his Gwinhuut Eagle relatives, and his Wolf clan allies thus effectively controlled three of the four main routes by which interior furs reached the coast. Chief Shakes (Saiks, Seeks) of the Stikine Tlingit dominated the fourth, the Stikine River trade with the Tahltan. Shakes' Stikine River prerogative was the route by which many interior furs reached Russian and American traders. Some of these also reached Ligeex's rival, Txagaxs, who had the Tsimshian trade prerogative with Shakes. An *adawx* told by Jasper Lewis in 1947 refers to Txagaxs' continuing prosperity during the fur trade.

'Wiiseeks [Txagaxs] ... had risen in power as a great trader and had taken many trips up to the Stikine where he had traded and visited

his Stikine brother who was called Saiks. Thus the Ginaxangiik rose not only in leadership, but also in wealth (Jas. Lewis, Gaaymtkwa, Killerwhale Clan, Gitksaahla).<sup>27</sup>

The shifting strategic importance of territories and prerogatives during the fur trade affected the economies of Houses throughout the Northwest Coast. Some Houses, like those of Txagaxs, Ts'ibasaa, and Ligeex, had benefited from the changes, while others found themselves at a considerable disadvantage. Among the latter was the House of Hliit'ux (of the Wolf clan of the lower Nass), who had been out-manoeuvred by Ligeex and Sgat'iin in the competition for control of the Nass River trade. Hliit'ux consequently formed an alliance that would enable him to compete with Ligeex for the trade on the Skeena River. He married into a Raven clan House in the Gitwinhlk'ul tribe of the Gitksan, thereby acquiring a prerogative to trade within Gitksan territory. Although Hliit'ux acknowledged Gispaxlo'ots' control over the Skeena River route, he challenged their exclusive right to trade with the upriver Gitksan by making a very successful overland trading trip to Gitwinhlk'ul, Kispayaks, and Gitanmaaxs. The quantity of goods he received in trade, however, forced him to return down the Skeena River by canoe. In relating an *adawx* concerning these incidents, Agnes Haldane told of Ligeex's response to Hliit'ux's actions.

In the meantime the Gispaxlo'ots had been invited to a great *yukw* [feast] given by Gitiks, who had summoned the assistance of his phratral [clan] brother Ligeex. ... When Ligeex was at Lax'angida [on the Nass], he learned that Hliit'ux had gone to trade with the upper Skeena folk. After he went back to Metlakatla, he at once sent several canoes with one of his nephews, saying, 'Tell Gwihlxeex [at Gits'ilaasu] that the Nisga' are eating out of my food box on the upper Skeena and ask him to watch for him and punish him, as he returns, should they do so by canoe, in the spring' (Agnes Haldane, Raven Clan, Kincolith, 1950).<sup>28</sup>

Gwihlxeex, Ligeex's Gwinhuut Eagle ally, stopped Hliit'ux at Gits'ilaasu and seized his goods. Hliit'ux retaliated the following year at the *oolichan* fishery, sparking a series of attacks and counterattacks which drew other Nisga' and Tsimshian groups into the conflict and weakened the Tsimshian position at the mouth of the Nass.

Ligeex was angered also by the Gitksan's complicity in Hliit'ux's adventure, since he considered the Gitksan to have facilitated the theft from this food box. He responded by attacking Kispayaks' village, burning it to the ground and taking a number of women and children

slaves. As an *adawx* told by John Tate relates, Ligeex's plan to attack the other Gitksan villages failed when word of his actions at Kispayaks preceded him downriver.

The Gispaxlo'ots then loaded their canoes with loot and headed for the village of Gitanmaaxs. But when they got here, they found the village was deserted and all the houses had been pulled down and the boards hidden. Not a single person was to be found (John Tate, Salaban, Eagle Clan, Gispaxlo'ots, 1952).<sup>29</sup>

After these conflicts, Ligeex could no longer trade at Kispayaks. Instead, he focused his attention on Gitanmaaxs, where his efforts to trade directly with the eastern Gitksan met with greater success. Gitanmaaxs quickly became an important trade centre, later called 'the forks', channeling furs from the northern Gitksan, Tsetsaut, and Wet'suwet'en through Ligeex and the Gispaxlo'ots to the coast.

This was the situation when, in 1821, the Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) amalgamated and the new management put into effect more aggressive strategies for westward expansion. The new Company established Fort Kilmaurs at Babine Lake in 1822, and soon after began exploring areas to the north and west of the fort. The HBC quickly became aware of the extent of the competition they faced from the Tsimshian. In 1823, William Brown, Chief Trader at Fort Kilmaurs, estimated that 'three fourths of the furs procured by the Indians of Simpson's River [Wet'suwet'en] were carried below and traded with the Indians of the sea coast'.<sup>30</sup>

Ligeex's trade with the Gitksan had long drawn on goods from the Wet'suwet'en's partners in the interior. With the westward expansion of the HBC, Ligeex and his Gitksan allies moved to prevent furs from these regions going to their HBC competitors. In February of 1823, 30 Gitksan, armed with muskets and spears, arrived at Babine Lake to persuade the Babine tribes to trade among the Gitksan the following summer. An element of coercion and the reputation of the Gispaxlo'ots may well have been a factor in the success of their visit. At any rate, it had the desired effect, and the following year those invited went to trade in Gitksan territory.<sup>31</sup> Around the same time, the trading relationships at the forks were further consolidated when a number of Wet'suwet'en Houses moved there and established the village of Hagwilget on the Bulkley River near its confluence with the Skeena. It is more than likely that this move was encouraged by the Gitksan and Tsimshian to further ensure that Wet'suwet'en furs, and those of their trading partners, continued to supply the coastal trade.

Ligeex's supply of Tsetsaut furs through the northern

Gitksan was also threatened by the HBC. The HBC's interest in the northern region was first expressed in a journey by Chief Trader Samuel Black in 1824, which included a visit to Tsetsaut territory at the headwaters of the Stikine.<sup>32</sup> In the spring of 1826, William Brown also travelled north, visiting several Gitksan villages on the upper reaches of the Skeena River. After his trip, Brown reported:

[T]he traders from the coast seem as if they intended to extend their trading excursions as they seldom used to come up higher than the forks of the Babine [Skeena] and Simpson's [Bulkley] River, and very frequently not so high, but last fall they came as far as the upper Atnah [Gitksan] village and traded the whole of the furs and surplus robes and marten they had to dispose of so that when I was there in March all that I could collect among them was only martens and a little beaver coating and that at a very high rate ...<sup>33</sup>

Although convinced the traders from the coast were expanding their activities further up the Skeena River, Brown did not seem to notice the coincidence of the HBC's expressions of interest in the northern area and Ligeex's countermoves. He did conclude, however, that the traders from the coast were all too effective as competitors. Brown's comments provide testimony to the strength of Ligeex's position and reflect his own frustration at the situation.

The only effectual methods to put a stop to this traffic – to protect Western Caledonia from the inroads of these people and to secure the trade of both rivers to the concern is to form an establishment at the forks of the Babine [Skeena] and Simpson's River, by which such furs as are not procured there will be got at either Kilmaurs or Fraser's Lake. If some such measure is not adopted to check them, the evil will ere long become of serious nature for they are yearly extending their voyages and there is not a doubt but that they will continue to do so, while they can procure furs and are not opposed.<sup>34</sup>

While the HBC pursued its efforts at expansion, trade at the forks flourished. The visits there by Ligeex and the Gispaxlo'ots became a routine occurrence, and the new communities at Gitanmaaxs and Hagwilget grew in size. Offshoots of a number of Houses from the northern Gitksan villages were attracted by the new trading opportunities and established themselves at Gitanmaaxs, providing a direct link for northern furs to the forks.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the Wet'suwet'en and the Gitksan began to intermarry, resulting in a complex exchange of economic privileges and further enhancing the role of the forks as a major trading centre. One Hagwilget chief commemo-

rated the place of his House in Ligeex's extended trading network by painting a ship on his housefront, thereby formalizing as a crest his trade prerogative and his connection to the coastal trade.<sup>36</sup>

Ligeex's strategies during this period also included strengthening and expanding his coastal markets. He already had trading privileges at Kaiganii and Masset; now he formed alliances that would enable him to trade at anchorages in the territory of the southern Tlingit and further secure his position at Nass Bay. He arranged for the marriage of his son (by his marriage with 'A'maa'tk) to a woman of high status in the House of Nishoot, leading chief of the Gitzaxhlaahl, of the Raven clan. Nishoot was a close clan relative of the leading chief, of the same name, of the Tongass tribe of the southern Tlingit. Ligeex also arranged for the marriage of his son (by his marriage with Maskgaax) to a woman of high status in the Raven clan House of Nisyaganaat of the Gits'iis tribe. Nisyaganaat, like his close clan relative, Nishoot, was also related to the Tongass tribe of the southern Tlingit.

These marriage alliances also strengthened Ligeex's position at Nass Bay where, after about 1810, the Americans traded with increasing frequency. The Gitzaxhlaahl and the Gits'iis owned territory along Portland Inlet and at the mouth of Observatory Inlet, giving them, and their Raven clan relatives among the Tongass Tlingit, a strategic position at the mouth of the Nass.

During this period, Ligeex also arranged for the marriage of his daughter (by his marriage with Nts'itskwoodat) to his rival Txagaxs. Through this alliance he was able to benefit from Txagaxs' prerogatives among the Stikine Tlingit, whose powerful leader, Shakes, had direct ties to the Russian American Company (RAC) and exclusive control over the Stikine River trade.

The ultimate test of Ligeex's success as the leading chief of the northern Tsimshian was always his status in relation to Ts'ibasaa, his southern counterpart. By this standard, Ligeex had now regained his former strength. The success of the House of Ligeex was manifested when Ligeex married his fourth wife, Nasehliyoontk, the leading woman in the House of Ts'ibasaa, beginning a pattern of intermarriage that linked the economies of the Gispaxlo'ots and the Gitkxahla tribes for several generations.

### The Gispaxlo'ots and The Hudson's Bay Company

By 1825, Ligeex had restored the position of his House and that of the Gispaxlo'ots in the balance of power among the Tsimshian; but there was to be no respite from the dramatic changes taking place on the Northwest Coast. The effectiveness of Ligeex's strategies, as well as

tho  
inte  
coa  
sjar  
trac  
trac  
B  
con  
a se  
gior  
the  
the  
Corr  
and  
inter  
Al  
pany  
whei  
trade  
in 18  
doing  
place  
firme  
HBC S  
the r  
estab  
of the  
route  
in Ne  
Thi  
in the  
exam  
anch  
boats  
Nass',  
was c  
establ  
In 1  
were c  
Peter C  
Arrivir  
oolica  
mende  
village  
some c  
this tin  
this de  
downs  
pamph  
British  
Henry

those of Sgat'iin, Shakes, and others, had ensured that interior furs continued to pass through their hands to coastal markets, giving American vessels and the Russian American Company an increasing portion of the trade in land furs and drawing the HBC into the coastal trade.

Beginning in 1825, the HBC, with the intention of contesting the American and Russian position, undertook a series of voyages to compile information on the region.<sup>37</sup> This led to a search for a fort site that would serve the coastal trade and be near a river 'communicating with the interior'.<sup>38</sup> Potentially, such a site would allow the Company to intercept the flow of furs to the Americans and Russians and provide a cheaper supply route to interior posts.<sup>39</sup>

Almost from the beginning of these surveys, the Company's attention was focused on the mouth of the Nass, where they hoped to compete directly with the American traders. Chief Trader Alexander Mackenzie, on a voyage in 1825, learned that 'there was a greater appearance of doing more in the way of trade at Nass than in any other place we had yet touched'.<sup>40</sup> This assessment was confirmed in 1828 by Aemilius Simpson, Superintendent of HBC Shipping on the Northwest Coast. Following a visit to the northern coast, he recommended that a post be established at the Nass as it was 'the most productive part of the coast in land skins, and ... likely to afford the best route for communicating with the Company's settlements in New Caledonia'.<sup>41</sup>

This recommendation quickly gained acceptance, and in the summer of 1830, Simpson headed north again to examine the mouth of the Nass for a fort site. From an anchorage, probably at the mouth of Nass Bay, the ships boats examined as far as 'the large village of Ewen Nass',<sup>42</sup> the *oolichan* fishing villages at Fishery Bay. It was concluded this was the 'only place fit to form an establishment'.<sup>43</sup>

In 1831 the Company took the next step. Two ships were despatched with a party, headed by Chief Trader Peter Ogden, to establish a fort at the mouth of the Nass. Arriving at Nass Bay on May 10, towards the end of the *oolichan* season, the vessels proceeded to the area recommended by Simpson in 1830 and anchored 'abreast the villages'. Ogden, however, chose a site downstream, some distance from any Native settlement occupied at this time. No rationale is offered in the HBC records for this decision but Tsimshian accounts confirm that the downstream site was the Company's second choice. In a pamphlet issued in 1921 by the United Tribes of Northern British Columbia, Matthew Johnson, Sam Bennett, and Henry D. Pierce stated:

In the year 1820 [sic, 1829] when the Hudson's Bay Company first landed at Twagabaa [in Fishery Bay], on the Naas River or Bay, ... Txagaxs, who at this time lived at this place, ordered his tribesmen to drive these people off who had come to settle among them. The Hudson's Bay Company in obedience to the Chief's order moved from that place and built their post or fort and carried on the business of the Company about the period of two years at a short distance above the old Tsimpsean village known as Kincolith. ...<sup>44</sup>

Txagaxs' response is most readily understood as a defence of territory and resources, as *oolichan* fishing villages were jealously guarded territories and the *oolichan* a major resource in every tribe's economy. Permission to build a fort amidst the *oolichan* fishery would have implied a range of rights to the resource that the Ginaxangiik would never have allowed.

Once established downriver, however, Ogden reported:

[T]he natives received them in the most friendly manner, nor have they as yet displayed any symptoms of a hostile or turbulent disposition. They are nevertheless keen hands at a bargain and make the most of competition among the traders. If they cannot do business with one party they make no ceremony in trying what can be done with the other.<sup>45</sup>

Ligeex's strategies on the coast, as in the interior, included this new trading entity, and he moved quickly to establish an alliance at Fort Nass. The same year the fort was completed, Ligeex arranged the marriage of his daughter to the fort's clerk and surgeon, Dr. Kennedy. Dr. Kennedy's new wife, Sudaahl, was the second daughter of Nts'iitskwoodat, of the House of Sgat'iin. With this strategic marriage, Ligeex ensured his own preferred status among the Company traders, thereby strengthening his position at the mouth of Nass and that of his Gwinhuut Eagle and Wolf clan allies. Certainly, Sgat'iin stood to benefit from this marriage as much as Ligeex, as Kennedy's son would be his heir. It is highly unlikely that the benefits of this marriage were lost on the Company. The Tsimshian record is quite clear about the import of the marriage, as an *adawx* told by John Tate relates:

Soon after its establishment, an official of the Company married a daughter of head chief Ligeex. His name was Dr. Kennedy. Since he had taken as his mate the Tsimshian chief's daughter, Ligeex had become an ally of the Company's officials (John Tate, Salaban, Eagle Clan, Gispaxlo'ots).<sup>46</sup>

As it turned out, there were serious drawbacks to the



location of Fort Nass, and in the fall of 1831, Ogden concluded that the site was inadequate. The Company found it 'inconvenient for shipping' and decided it had 'no direct water connection with the interior – no ground about it to make a garden and very little in provisions could be procured from the natives.'<sup>47</sup> As a result, the HBC began another series of exploratory trips, which the Tsimshian seem to have monitored carefully and which culminated in a decision to move to McLoughlin's Harbour (Laxhlgu'alaams). The HBC continued, however, to underestimate the sophistication of the geopolitics of the Northwest Coast and the extent to which they were to restrict the Company.

In 1832, Donald Manson, a clerk stationed at Fort Nass, was sent to gather geographical information on the Nass and Skeena Rivers. On the first trip, Manson travelled up the Nass to Gitlaxdamks. He was well received by the chief, with whom he may have been acquainted, and who accompanied the expedition about as far as the Cranberry River. In terms of gathering information, the journey was not a great success, but Manson did conclude that the Nass River did not offer a practicable route to the Company's posts at Fort Kilmaurs and Fort Connolly. Of the Gitlaxdamks chief, Manson commented:

I have repeatedly endeavoured to draw information from the chief respecting the interior but without any success, in fact he is unacquainted with the country himself and the only motive I had in bringing him with me was that he might serve me as an interpreter should I fall in with Indians who are not in the habit of visiting Fort Simpson [Fort Nass].<sup>48</sup>

The chief was probably Sgat'iin, the leading chief on the upper Nass. He owned the territory west of the Cranberry River and may have met Manson at the fort. As was the tradition when sharing a privilege, in this case travel through his territory, he accompanied Manson. Given Ligeex and Sgat'iin's close mutual involvement with the Company, Ligeex must have known of these events.

A month after completing this journey, Manson was sent to examine the river at Port Essington, the 'Skina' as it was now known. On his way, Manson visited McLoughlin's Harbour. It is difficult to determine the extent of Ligeex's role in Manson's 'discovery' of McLoughlin's Harbour, but the Tsimshian record, in this *adawx* told by Sam Bennett, details Ligeex's offer of this site for the fort.

When the Hudson's Bay Company first established at Crabapple Point at the mouth of the Nass River, they stayed there for

three years. An officer of the company had married a daughter of the great chief Ligeex, and she lived with her husband at Hlgusgan'moolks (Small Trees of Wild Crabapple). ... After they had been there for three years they found the site unsuitable, as there was no fresh water supply there nor shelter from the north wind, during the winter. All of this the great Ligeex knew. Being anxious for the welfare of this daughter, he told his son-in-law Dr. Kennedy, 'I have a place for you and your people. Come to Laxhlgu'alaams (On Small Wild Roses). Here we can visit you frequently and help you in many ways. ...' At this time, Place of Small Wild Roses had been only a camping place used by the people en route to the Nass River for *oolichan* fishing, each tribe having their own location to camp and make fishing preparatives (Sam Bennett, Nisp'iins, Killerwhale Clan, Giluts'aaw).<sup>49</sup>

It is not unreasonable to assume that Ligeex's intent from the beginning was to encourage a move to this site and that he had discussed it with Kennedy. Whatever the preceding discussions at Fort Nass, Manson, on leaving the fort aboard the *Cadboro*, arrived at Laxhlgu'alaams on the second day, finding it an 'excellent harbour ... hitherto unknown to any of our navigators',<sup>50</sup> which he named McLoughlin's Harbour. It seems that the area was uninhabited at this point in the annual round. The only visitors recorded by Manson, during a stay of two days, were a party of Tongass hunters, led by Nishoot, on their way to visit the Tsimshian at Metlakatla Pass.

It is probably not coincidental that, when Manson continued south after a delay for weather, he encountered Nishoot, and Txagaxs, at their villages in Metlakatla Pass.<sup>51</sup> After some discussion, the two chiefs suggested their sons accompany Manson in his explorations up the Skeena River. This was not an offer that could be declined, and Manson's trip, perhaps predictably, yielded sparse results. He travelled only about 45 miles up the Skeena, passed a variety of fishing camps, and learned of a land route to the interior forts before returning to Fort Nass. Once again Manson was permitted to avail himself of the chiefs' prerogatives to travel upriver, this time in the company of the sons of the chiefs. As on the Nass, Manson's escorts did not travel beyond the limits of their territories.

The reports from this reconnaissance were only part of the information the HBC must have used in their choice of location for the new fort. Unfortunately, the Company's conclusion after these trips and the thinking that led to their decision to move the fort to McLoughlin's Harbour are not revealed in the Company records. The subsequent reports do point to practical and logistical concerns and the political importance of a situation that would allow them to undermine the trade of their opponents. Accord-



ing to Duncan Finlayson, Chief Factor at Fort Vancouver, McLoughlin's Harbour was more 'central to the trade, afforded better facilities for shipping, better resources in the way of living and better means of guarding our frontiers from the encroachments of our enterprising opponents' and 'in a good position for watching our northern and the Russian southern frontier, well adapted for opposing both the Russians and the Americans, should such at any time hereafter become necessary'.<sup>52</sup>

However lengthy the deliberations leading up to the move, there were no delays in effecting it. Preparation of the site began on July 21, 1834, and the disassembly of Fort Nass began in August. On August 23, the last of the Company personnel left the Nass.

### Fort Simpson

Once Fort Simpson was established at Laxhlgw'alaams, Ligeex had not only a marriage alliance and preferred trading status with the HBC, but also exclusive control over an important coastal market.<sup>53</sup> As it had been at the Nass, the fort was an assured outlet for the furs from his expanded trading network; however, at its new site, the fort was also an additional source of revenue for Ligeex and the Gispaxlo'ots. As with the right to travel and trade on the Upper Skeena River, Ligeex shared his new prerogative, access to Fort Simpson, with his established clan and marriage allies among the northern Tsimshian. Those bringing furs and other goods here to trade did so within the complex Tsimshian system of obligatory gifts and prescribed protocol.

With the fort firmly established within their territory, the northern Tsimshian's trading patterns with other nations changed. Whereas previously they had travelled to the territory of their trading partners, now these groups increasingly came to them, drawn especially by the high prices and quality goods the HBC was offering in order to drive its American competitors off the coast. Since the visiting groups needed permission to trade in Tsimshian territory, protocol required that they visit their respective trade partners prior to trading at the fort. Moreover, there can be little doubt that the right of other nations to trade at the fort was controlled by Ligeex and his permission was also required. The gifts he received for his permission may well have been a fixed percentage of their furs.<sup>54</sup>

In 1838, John Work, Chief Trader at Fort Simpson, submitted a report itemizing the fur returns at Fort McLoughlin, Fort Simpson, and the HBC vessels, between 1834 and 1838. This report is unusual in that Work also records the fur returns of the American ships for 1835 and 1836, and the 'proportion [of furs] obtained from the

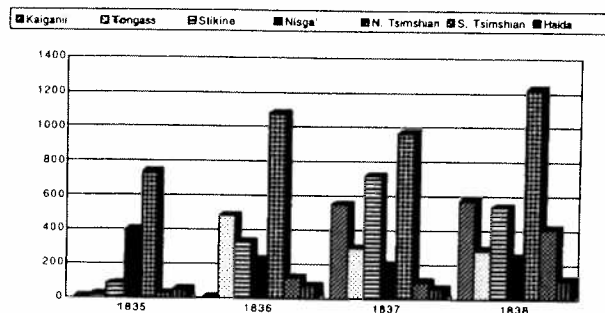


Figure 3  
Beaver returns for 1835-1838 at Fort Simpson by 'tribes of Natives'

different tribes of natives in the years 1835, 36, 37 and 38' (Figure 3).<sup>55</sup> According to this report, by 1838, the 'Kaygarney, Tongass, Stikeen, Nass [Nisga'], Chymysyans [northern Tsimshian], Sabasas [southern Tsimshian] and Queen Charlotte Isl. Inds. [Haida]' were all bringing furs to Fort Simpson.

An examination of these fur returns, and the Fort Simpson journals for the same period, reveal that Ligeex played a key role in the process by which these nations came to trade at Fort Simpson. On the coast, unlike in the interior, the strategies of the HBC coincided with those of Ligeex - both now stood to profit from drawing off the trade of the American vessels and the RAC. How far the Company understood their own role in Ligeex's strategies is unclear; they certainly appear to have realized his role in theirs, since, before these nations could trade at the fort, they first had to have an alliance with Ligeex.

From the beginning, Ligeex's pre-existing alliances brought in a steady flow of furs from the Nisga'.<sup>56</sup> The early journals refer to Dr. Kennedy's mother-in-law, Nts'iitkw'oodat, and the role she played as a trader in her own right. When she died of smallpox in 1836, the Company 'made a coffin and grave' for her and 'buried her', something they appear to have done only for persons of importance.<sup>57</sup> Other Nisga' furs that came to the HBC were probably those of the Gwinhuut Eagles at the mouth of the Nass. Approximately one-third of the furs from the Nass were still going to the American ships, however, probably as a result of the disaffection the lower river Wolf clan, and possibly other groups, felt toward Ligeex and the HBC, especially after the fort left the Nass.

The HBC especially sought the trade of the Americans' chief trading partners in the area, the Kaigani Haida and the Tongass Tlingit.<sup>58</sup> Although Ligeex had indirect relations with both these groups, he quickly moved to strengthen his ties with them and to bring them into his

sphere of influence. These efforts are recorded in part in the Fort Simpson journal, supporting the fact that Ligeex's diplomatic efforts were coincidental with the Company's intentions. Ligeex had an alliance with Senaxaat of the Gwinhuut Eagle clan of the Kaiganii Haida, but he had been involved in intermittent battles with Sq'a'ol, the Raven clan leader there. These hostilities spanned the period from 1811 to the mid-1820s, and in 1834, they were still unresolved. On February 20, 1835, the Fort Simpson journal recorded that:

A young man Son of Elgigh [Ligeex], the Ft. Simpson Chief accompanies us [on the *Lama* from Ft. Simpson] to deliver a message from his father to the Kygary Indians relative to making peace between the two tribes, which have had a misunderstanding for some time.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly Ligeex had come to see the advantage of a peace treaty with the Kaiganii, a judgment that was supported by the HBC. In 1836, Duncan Finlayson confirmed that the process of peace making had begun:

[The Kaiganii] have commenced to negotiate a treaty of peace with the natives of this place [and] will, if it be concluded, occasionally trade here; so that the objects which were anticipated by the removal of the settlement from Nass hither will thereby be gained, as all the surrounding tribes, some of which inhabit Russian territory, will give us some portion of their Furs.<sup>60</sup>

It wasn't until June of 1837, however, that a peace feast took place on Tsimshian soil when Ligeex 'gave a treat to the Kygary and Stikeen people'.<sup>61</sup> That same year the Kaiganii began trading significant numbers of furs to the fort.

The pre-existing ties between Ligeex and the Tongass Tlingit, and their Raven clan network among the Tsimshian, appear to have been weakened initially by the move of the fort beyond the latter's sphere of influence. Nishoot communicated his displeasure with the HBC at Fort Simpson when, on November 18, 1834, he 'encamped beside the Fort' and endeavoured 'to persuade all strangers who visit us not to trade with us as we give too little in return'. Nishoot appears to have been brought around, however, probably through the efforts of Ligeex, as Nishoot began visiting the fort accompanied by Ligeex in 1835, and in 1836 his Tongass relatives began trading significant numbers of furs at the fort.<sup>62</sup> Nishoot's importance to the HBC was commemorated on his death from smallpox in October of 1836, when he was buried at the fort with military honours.<sup>63</sup>

The Stikine, according to reports of the Russian Ameri-

can Company in 1835, were drawn to the HBC by the quality of the goods they offered in trade. That year, for the first time, the Stikine traded a large number of furs to the HBC vessel, the *Lama*. In 1836, however, they also traded a large number of furs at Fort Simpson. The Stikine's trade ally among the northern Tsimshian was Txagaxs, who was married to Ligeex's daughter, and through whom Ligeex enjoyed an indirect relationship with the Stikine.

Although a number of journal entries indicate that during this period Txagaxs' favoured status with the Stikine was considerably diminished, Ligeex appears to have honoured Txagaxs' prerogative until the latter's death in 1836. After this, however, Ligeex seems to have established a more direct relationship with the Stikine, as they were his guests at a feast, along with the Kaiganii in 1837. As the fur returns indicate, the Stikine were an important source of furs thereafter.

As leading chief of the southern Tsimshian, Ts'ibasaa, like Ligeex, had effected his own strategies as the balance of power shifted with the changing fur trade. He had responded to the reduced numbers of sea-otter by expanding his alliances to the south, and to the demand for land furs by developing his own inland prerogatives through the Haisla at Gitamaat (Klitmat). He also may have tried unsuccessfully to obtain interior furs from the Bella Coola, with whom he was periodically at war. Although in the Company's early years on the coast, he continued to trade the bulk of his furs to the American ships, he also traded with HBC vessels.

Between 1835 and 1838, as a result of the success of the HBC, Ts'ibasaa faced the loss of his American markets, and, although he was a close ally of Homas'iit and Wakas, the leading chiefs of the Heiltsuk who controlled access to Fort McLoughlin, there was no fort in this own domain. He may have tried to establish a degree of control over the flow of furs from the Naweetee (from Queen Charlotte Sound)<sup>64</sup> to Fort McLoughlin and met with resistance, as hostilities broke out between them in 1836. In the summer of 1837, Ts'ibasaa moved from his southern village, probably on Estevan Island, to the northern reaches of his territory, where he fortified himself 'about 50 miles from Fort Simpson'.<sup>65</sup>

The balance of power between Ligeex and Ts'ibasaa shifted somewhat as a result of these events, reversing the situation Ligeex faced during the early maritime trade. Ts'ibasaa's markets had been reduced to the HBC vessels and Fort Simpson. Given Ligeex and Ts'ibasaa's already well-established feasting and trading relationship, it is difficult to determine which events mentioned in the journals, if any, marked the beginning of Ts'ibasaa's

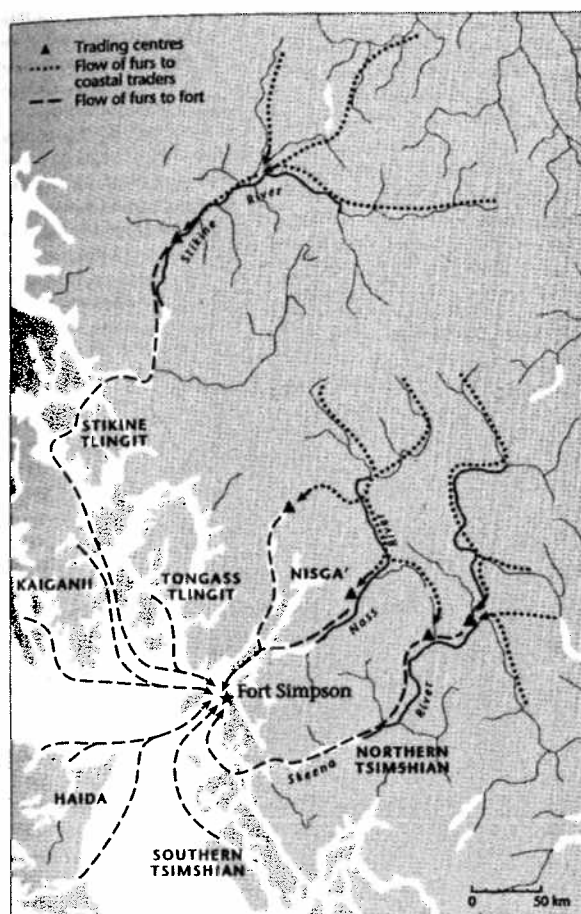


Figure 4  
HBC fur sources and routes, 1834–1838

trading rights in Ligeex's domain at Fort Simpson. It is most likely that he had access to Ligeex's prerogatives there from the beginning and that the increasing numbers of furs he traded there, for other reasons, simply strengthened their alliance.<sup>66</sup>

Ligeex's strategies and his diplomatic manoeuvres had strengthened both his own position and that of the Company. However, Ligeex's first and driving concern had been to protect, enhance, and entrench his Skeena River prerogative, and in this he proved eminently successful. Perhaps the greatest proof of the HBC's acceptance of an alliance on Ligeex's terms is that, once the Company was established at Fort Simpson, they no longer sought to explore the river 'communicating with the interior'. In fact, no European travelled up the Skeena, beyond the

canyon, until 1859 and, at that time, both Ligeex and the Gits'ilaasu still determined the terms of this travel.<sup>67</sup>

By 1838, the Hudson's Bay Company was firmly established within the geopolitical landscape of the Northwest Coast (Figure 4). Ligeex's diplomatic manoeuvres had inserted the HBC into his powerful network of prerogatives and alliances, adjusting it to their needs but also, in so doing, strengthening his own position enormously. The remarkable coincidence of one man's life and an immensely important historical period came to an end around 1840 when Ligeex passed away. Smallpox and war had deprived him of a chosen successor and the young man who succeeded him was inexperienced and faced a whole new set of challenges. During the ensuing era, the complexity of the relations surrounding the fort was greatly increased as each tribe established its village there in a successful effort to limit the power of the Gispaxlo'ots and to control more directly the trade between their allies and the Company. The record for this era is just as rich and also bears re-examination in the light of both European and Tsimshian history.

### Conclusion

In the half-century following initial contact, the fur trade on the Northwest Coast underwent a series of changes. In Euro-American eyes, this involved geopolitics, contests for trade, and, a logical consequence, control of territory. For the indigenous population who provided the furs and owned the territory, the issue is rather different; it was a matter of coming to terms with a series of dramatic economic changes initiated elsewhere, and the consequent disruption to the balance of power within their tribes, regions, and nations.

Ligeex's initiatives, his marriage alliances for example, can be seen as a series of strategies to restore a measure of stability and to expand his sphere of influence to incorporate the new actors. In the case of the HBC, by 1838, Ligeex's diplomatic manoeuvres had inserted the Company into his network of prerogatives. The process by which Ligeex pursued this end reveals the complexity and sophistication of the indigenous geopolitics on the Northwest Coast.

### Acknowledgments

Inasmuch as this paper reflects the voice of Northwest Coast First Nations, acknowledgment is due to the Tsimshian, Gitksan, and Nisga' who, over the years, imparted their knowledge with the express intent of ensuring its survival as their historical record and its use in their struggle for political recognition. Any failure to accurately reflect this history is wholly that of the authors. Thanks are also due to Cole Harris, Elaine Moore, and David

Archer and the reviewers for their encouragement and support, and to Eric Leinberger for the cartography.

## Notes

- 1 Robert Stewart, Talaxatk, Kincolith, 1925 in BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. nd 'Wolf-Clan Invaders from the Northern Plateaux among the Tsimshians' MS (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization) no 36.
- 2 See, for example, GALBRAITH, J.S. 1957 *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press); COOK, W.L. 1974 *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819* (New Haven: Yale University Press); COUCH, B.M. 1992 *The Northwest Coast: British Navigation and Discoveries to 1812* (Vancouver: UBC Press)
- 3 The Tsimshian, Gitksan and Nisga'a *adawx* are oral records of historical events, often concerning territory and prerogatives. The *adawx* constitute an extraordinary record, in that they are often explicitly historical and constitute hundreds of pages in their written form. They were recorded, some in English and some in the Tsimshian language - from many chiefs and elders over a 35-year period between the 1920s and 1950s - by William Beynon, a Tsimshian of the Wolf Clan of the Gitlaan tribe.
- 4 It is important to emphasize that this paper deals with an extraordinary period in the history of the Tsimshian. What may be interpreted here as a move by the Tsimshian to a more centralized system of governing was in reality a temporary situation that was followed, immediately after this period, by a return to a less centralized balance of power within both the northern and southern regions.
- 5 Northwest Coast sociopolitical institutions include the House, tribe, region, and nation, and, cross-cutting these, the *wilnaat'aahl* (network of related Houses) and the clan. The House, or Housegroup, is a matrilineal kin group, and the fundamental political and land-owning unit in Tsimshian society. The House always bears the name of its chief or headman. Within tribe, region, and nation, Houses share economic and political concerns and a common geography. Their economic and political integration is expressed in their annual round of economic activities and in intermarriage and feasting. This integration is extensive at the tribal level and increasingly less so at the regional and national level, where the ties between tribes, and between regions, are formed primarily by the leading chiefs.  
The combined territories of the Houses in a tribe (village) compose a watershed or similarly discrete geographic area. Among the Tsimshian, these tribes (villages) are the Gitando, Gitzaxlaahl, Gits'iis, Gitwilgyoots, Gitlaan, Giluts'aaw, Gitnadoiks, Ginaxangiik, and Gispaxlo'ots (the northern Tsimshian); the Gitksaahla and Gitk'a'ata (the southern Tsimshian), and the Gits'ilaasu and Gitsengeelm (the interior Tsimshian).  
The combined territories of the tribes in a region tend to have more in common geographically than those in the neighbouring regions. Among the Tsimshian there are three regions: the northern Tsimshian whose territories span the lower Skeena River and the mainland coast from the mouth of the Skeena to the mouth of the Nass River; the southern Tsimshian, whose territories include several islands south of the mouth of the Skeena and in Douglas Channel, as well as a number of watersheds along Douglas Channel; and the interior Tsimshian (also called the Canyon Tsimshian), whose territories include the Kalum River watershed and a section of the Skeena River watershed stretching east and west of the canyon at Kitselas.  
Each nation on the Northwest Coast, of which the Tsimshian is one, is characterized by a distinct geographic, linguistic, and cultural identity and, in each case, its members define themselves as the 'real people'. Before contact, each nation had unique names for their neighbouring nations - for example, the Wet'suwet'en called the Gitksan the Atnah. These nations now have names recognized throughout the Northwest Coast: Tlingit, Tahltan, Tsetsaut, Gitksan, Nisga', Tsimshian, Haisla, Heiltsuk, Haida, and Wet'suwet'en.  
Cross-cutting these sociopolitical and economic divisions of tribe, region, and nation is another order of relationships between Houses. Each House is part of a *wilnaat'aahl*, or network, of Houses sharing a common ancient heritage. The Houses in each network trace their origins through the matrilineal line to a common ancestor. They also share a common history which tells of the migrations of their ancestors and their dispersal across the Northwest Coast. An example of such a network of Houses is the Gwinhuut Eagle group referred to in this paper. Each of these *wilnaat'aahl* is part of a larger exogamous matrilineal group, the clan, within which everyone is considered kin. The four clans among northwest coast nations are the Killer whale, the Eagle, the Wolf, and the Raven.  
For an overview of northwest coast cultures, see SUTTLES, W., ed 1990 *Northwest Coast, Handbook of North American Indians*, vol 7 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution); GISDAY WA and DELGAM UUKW 1987 *The Spirit in the Land* (Gabriola, BC: Reflections); SEGUIN, M., ed 1984 *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press); MILLER, J., and EASTMAN, C., ed *The Tsimshian and Their Neighbours of the North Pacific Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press).
- 6 'Northwest Coast' is here used to refer to what is now northwest British Columbia and Alaska. See Note 4 and Figure 1 for the First Nations of the Northwest Coast.
- 7 At every point in the establishment and use of trade prerogatives, ceremonies play an essential role. Some ceremonies are as simple as the *halayt*, in which the chief scatters eagle down on his trade partner in a dance of peace before commencing the trade. Other ceremonies are as elaborate as the hosting of many tribes at a feast and the distribution of great wealth when first establishing a trade prerogative.
- 8 The term 'mouth of the Nass' refers here to the whole area from Portland Inlet to Nass Bay and Fishery Bay.
- 9 See Note 2.
- 10 The Skeena River trade had long been the prerogative of the Gispaxlo'ots. For *adawx* concerning this, see BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M., nd *The Gwenhoot of Alaska in Search of a Bounteous Land*, MS (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization) nos 87, 89b, 92; BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M., nd *Raven Clan Outlaws of the North Pacific Coast*, MS (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization) no 72; BEYNON, W., nd *Manuscripts from the Columbia University Library*, MS (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International) no 8.
- 11 BEYNON, W. *Manuscripts from the Columbia University Library*, no 47.
- 12 BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *The Gwenhoot of Alaska in Search of Bounteous Land*, no 34.
- 13 The *oolichan* (also *eulachon*) is a species of smelt that was eaten fresh or dried and made into a highly valued grease. It was an important late winter resource on the Nass River and elsewhere along the Northwest Pacific Coast.
- 14 The copper, named after the metal out of which it was made, was the most important possession of a chief and symbolized the cumulative 'feast wealth' distributed by his House.
- 15 This event may have taken place after contact, although, unlike most postcontact *adawx* there is no reference to any postcontact people, events, or technology. For accounts of the feast and the events leading up to it, see BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *The Gwenhoot of Alaska in Search of a Bounteous Land*, nos 67, 69, 68, and 112.  
The geopolitics at the mouth of the Nass are extremely complex, as

que names for their  
suwet'en called the  
names recognized  
n, Tsetsaut, Gitksan,  
Wet'suwet'en.

ic divisions of tribe,  
ps between Houses.  
of Houses sharing a  
network trace their  
ancestor. They also  
ns of their ancestors  
example of such a  
referred to in this  
larger exogamous  
e is considered kin.  
he Killerwhale, the

SUTTLES, W., ed 1990  
dians, vol 7 (Wash-  
AMUUKW 1987 The  
4, M., ed 1984 The  
esent (Vancouver:  
EASTMAN, C., ed The  
ific Coast (Seattle:

/ northwest British  
ne First Nations of

ade prerogatives,  
s are as simple as  
his trade partner  
Other ceremonies  
a feast and the  
ade prerogative.  
whole area from

rogative of the  
W., and BARBEAU,  
nteous Land, MS  
lization) nos 87,  
Outlaws of the  
adian Museum  
n the Columbia  
s International)

Library, no 47  
a in Search of

was eaten fresh  
important late  
ing the North

nade, was the  
ie cumulative

, unlike most  
ntact people,  
vents leading  
of Alaska in

complex, as

the interests of several nations in the oolichan fishery and of others in the oolichan trade overlay the ownership of territories in the area. The Tsimshian have always claimed ownership of the mouth of the Nass to tidewater and the Nisga' also claim to own Nass Bay and Fishery Bay and an area in Portland Inlet. Among those Nisga' and Tsimshian Houses claiming certain territories within the area were the Gwinhuut Eagle Clan, whose clan solidarity provided a limited solution to the conflicting interests of the Nisga' and Tsimshian. At the same time, the network of Raven Clan Houses that linked the Tsimshian and the Tlingit in the Portland Inlet area was also a factor in the region. Ligeex's prerogative encoded in the pictograph probably refers only to the fact that other tribes, within the Tsimshian and other Northwest Coast nations, had to obtain Ligeex's permission and to compensate him in some way before gaining entry to Fishery Bay.

- 16 The word *Gwinhuut* means 'fugitive' and refers to their ancestors who escaped from the northern coast where they were at war with the Wolf clan. They migrated south along the coast and dispersed, establishing Houses among the various Northwest Coast nations.
- 17 This chief had taken the unusual step of naming himself after his village to indicate his leading status.
- 18 There was probably only one person who held the name Ligeex during the entire period dealt with here. Ligeex was 'an old man' in 1835 according to the Fort Simpson journals, making him, probably, between 15 and 20 years of age in 1790. Although many chiefs took their names at a young age, there may have been another man holding the position at the turn of the century. It is highly unlikely, however, that there was a change of leader after 1810.
- 19 Among traders, the area around Banks and Pitt Islands became known as 'Sebasas'.
- 20 'It was with him [Ts'ibasaa] that he [Ligeex] competed in potlatches and they always really tried to outdo each other in everything' BEYNON, W. *Manuscripts from the Columbia University Library*, no 120.
- 21 The leading lineage in the House uses their most powerful name as the name of the House. As the leading lineages change, so does the name of the House. Although the leadership of a House may change and hence the name, the identity of the House itself remains unchanged.
- 22 Called Pearl Harbour and Lenna Coon by early traders.
- 23 The genealogical information concerning Ligeex's four wives and their children is contained in BARBEAU, M. and BEYNON, W. nd *The Marius Barbeau and William Beynon Fieldnotes* (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization), BF 30.2-30.4. The detailed information concerning their Houses and tribes can be found in the various fieldnotes concerning those tribes (Ibid.) and in DUFF, W. nd *Tsimshian File* (Vancouver: Museum of Anthropology). The trading rights of all the tribes are listed in BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *The Gwenhoot of Alaska in Search of Bounteous Land*, nos 121, 104; BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *Raven Clan Outlaws of the North Pacific Coast*, nos 89, 90; BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. nd *Temlarham: The Land of Plenty on the North Pacific Coast*, MS (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization) nos 63, 65, 70, 71; BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *Wolf-Clan Invaders from the Northern Plateaux among the Tsimshians*, no 24; BEYNON, W. *Manuscripts from the Columbia University Library*, no 161.
- 24 It was probably also in this period, or somewhat earlier, that the Gitanmaaxs established their village closer to the Tsimshian's river route, at the confluence of the Bulkley and Skeena rivers. Kispayaks was at the confluence of the Kispiox and Skeena rivers. Both these villages were at strategic locations in the interior trade. Ligeex extended his prerogative in the sense that he traded further upriver, not that he was expanding his supply area. This move was to ensure that the trading partners of the Gitksan continued to trade with them and not the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC).

- 25 For information concerning Sagawan's trading privileges, see BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *The Gwenhoot of Alaska in Search of Bounteous Land*, nos 37, 38, 122.
- 26 Nisakx later became Martha Neshakigh when, after terminating her marriage with Sagawan, she married Capt. W.H. McNiell, the captain of the HBC vessels the *Lama*, and later the *Beaver*, in the early 1850s.
- 27 BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *Temlarham: The Land of Plenty on the North Pacific Coast*, no 42.
- 28 BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *The Gwenhoot of Alaska in Search of Bounteous Land*, no 87. See also BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *Raven Clan Outlaws of the North Pacific Coast*, no 72, and BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *Wolf-Clan Invaders from the Northern Plateaux among the Tsimshians*, nos 34, 35, 36, 43.
- 29 BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *The Gwenhoot of Alaska in Search of Bounteous Land*, no 89b. See also Ibid., nos 88a, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98a, 117; BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *Temlarham: The Land of Plenty on the North Pacific Coast*, nos 95 and 97; and BEYNON, no 8.
- 30 Brown was uncertain about the identity of these traders, but there can be little doubt that they were the Gispaxlo'ots. Significantly, however, one account stated that 'there is only one nation called the Kees pal lates who extend all the way along the Banks of the [Skeena] River to the Coast'. BROWN, W. *Report of the Establishment of Fort Kilmaurs, Babine Country, 1822-1823*, B 11 / e / 1, HBCA.
- 31 BROWN, W. 1822-23 B 11 / e / 1 fol 5, 97 and BROWN, W. *Report of the Babine Country and Countries to the Westward, April 1826*, B 11 / e / 2, fol 12, HBCA.
- 32 In 1824 Samuel Black was a Chief Trader appointed to the Rocky Mountain Expedition. RICH, E.E., ed 1955 *A Journal of a Voyage from Rocky Mountain Portage on Peace River to the Sources of Finlays Branch and North West Ward in Summer 1824*, vol 18 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society).
- 33 BROWN, W. 1826, B 11 / e / 2, fol 12, HBCA.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 DUFF, W., nd *Tsimshian File*, specifically those files referring to Gitanmaaxs, Kisgagas and Galdo'o.
- 36 MCGILLIVRAY, S. *Journal of Voyage to Simpson's River by land, Summer 1833*, Simpson's Correspondence Inward D4 / 126 HBCA.
- 37 The move of the HBC into the northern Northwest Coast took place within a framework defined by treaties involving Russia, America, and Britain. On the treaties and Ukases outlining British, American and Russian claims, see CALBRAITH, J.S. 1957, chs 5 and 6.
- 38 MACKENZIE, A. *Remarks on Board the Brig William and Ann, Henry Hanwell Master, from Fort George, Columbia River to Observatory Inlet, 1825*, B223 / a / 1, HBCA.
- 39 On the HBC's strategies and the context of the steps leading to the establishment of the Nass post, see MACKIE, R.S. 1993 *The Hudson's Bay Company on the Pacific, 1821-1843*, PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, chs 4 and 5.
- 40 MACKENZIE, A. 1825, B223 / a / 1, HBCA.
- 41 A. Simpson to McLoughlin, 22 September 1828, in Fort Vancouver Correspondence Inward, 1828-1840, B 223 / c / 1, HBCA. Specifically, he noted: 'The Indians say they Trade a number of them [land furs] from other Indians higher up the River, who again say they procure them from others further in the interior, whom they say have intercourse with Whites who come to them upon Horses; in speaking on the subject to the Americans they say the interior Indians are fools as they dispose of their furs to those whites for little or nothing. The Americans know by the Mode of Stitching the Skins those from the interior from those of the coast - the first are stitched round the latter longways'. This probably describes the trade along the Nass River from the Sekani, who were crossing the Rockies at that time, through the Tsetsaut to the Nisga'. He also remarked: 'I may here add that another River of some conse-

- quence (tho' of much less importance than Nass) Emptys itself into Port Essington in Latitude 54°1'4N. Longd. 129°50'W. This river is also the residence of the Nass tribe at certain seasons (the fall) as it abounds in Salmon which the Indians cure for their Winters Stock of Provisions. They also ascend it for the purposes of traffic, and procure from the Indians situated higher up a number of Beaver, who again procure them from interior Indians, who also speak of Whites being settled on their Lands which must of course be the Honbe. Company's Establishments'. Here the trade along the Skeena, in which furs pass from the Babine to the Gitksan and then to the Tsimshian, is described.
- 42 'Ewen Nass' was the name the traders in the Alaska panhandle used to refer to the mouth of the Nass, especially Fishery Bay, where the ships anchored for trading near the springoolichan fishery of the Tsimshian. WALBRAN, J.T. 1971 *British Columbia Coast Names, 1592-1906: Their Origin and History* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas Ltd.) 395
- 43 The words are those of Captain Graves. He commanded the *Eagle*, the consort of the *Cadboro* under A. Simpson (WALBRAN, J.T. 1971, 394-95). For Simpson's account, see A. Simpson to McLoughlin, 23 September 1830 in RICH, E.E., ed 1941 *The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-1838*, vol 4 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society)
- 44 This was directed to the Government of Canada, AGBC 1461. See also Beynon, W. and Barbeau, M. *Temlarham: The Land of Plenty on the North Pacific Coast* #66: 'At first the Company had wanted to establish its post at a point farther up the river. But this happened to be in Ginaxangik [oolachan fishing] territory, and this tribe drove them off.'
- 45 The comments are by Douglas, but the source of the information was probably Ogden. Douglas to McLeod, 12 March 1832 in MCLEOD, J. *Papers A/B* / M22K, BCARS
- 46 BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *The Gwenhoot of Alaska in Search of Bounteous Land*, no 107. See also BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *Temlarham: The Land of Plenty on the North Pacific Coast*, nos 66, 67.
- 47 Ogden to McLoughlin, 20 October 1831 in BARKER, B. 1948 *Letters to John McLoughlin, Written at Fort Vancouver, 1829-1832* (Portland: Binforde & Mort) 214-16
- 48 MANSON, D. 1832 *Journal of a Trip up the Nass River*, B201 / a / 1, HBCA
- 49 BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. *Temlarham: The Land of Plenty on the North Pacific Coast*, no 66
- 50 MANSON, D. 1832 *Journal of a Trip up the Skeena River*, B201 / a / 2, HBCA
- 51 Described as 'situated about 15 miles to the S.E. of Pearl Harbour', MANSON, D. 1832 *Journal of a Trip Up the Skeena River*, B201 / a / 2, HBCA
- 52 Finlayson to McLoughlin, 29 September 1836, B 223 / b / 12, f 16-24; in RICH 1941, 323-35.
- 53 Some oral histories state that the fort was built on Ligeex's camping site, called Sagawan (Deer All Around); however, there is some dispute over this, some saying it was built on another tribe's site and some that the fort overlaps two tribal sites.
- 54 The following Journal entries may be referring to Ligeex's 'gift': May 2, 1834 - 'Illayauch arrived in the morning with 4 beaver skins and shortly afterwards 2 large canoes of Nass Indians made their appearance and trade about 40 beaver ... and above 100 marten (prime)'; 2 June 1836 - 'The Stikines traded 160 land furs leaving the remainder in the hands of the Tsimshian which we hope to get in the course of time'. Fort Simpson Journal, 1834-40, B201 / a / 3, HBCA
- 55 John Work to James Douglas, 20 October 1838, B 223 / c / 1, HBCA
- 56 Ligeex's pre-existing alliances also brought in a small number of furs from the Haida, but more importantly an apparently steady supply of potatoes for the fort.
- 57 Fort Simpson Journal, 1834-40, B201 / a / 3, HBCA, 2 December 1836
- 58 TOLMIE, W.F. 1963 *Physician and Fur Trader: The Journals of William Fraser Tolmie* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press) 288
- 59 DEE, H.D. 1944 / 45 *The Journal of John Work*, British Columbia Historical Quarterly, vol 8, 139
- 60 Finlayson to McLoughlin, 29 September 1836, B223 / b / 12 fol 16-24, in RICH 1941, 323-35
- 61 Elgish (Ligeex), the Chimsyan chief expressed a wish that a large party of the Kygarney people would come here so that they might dance together and make friends, the Kygarney men promised to do so'. B201 / a / 3, HBCA, 3 June 1837
- 62 The Tongass also supplied the fort with deer, often from Tsimshian lands, probably from those of their Raven Clan relatives.
- 63 B201 / a / 3, HBCA
- 64 Nawetee is a term whose meaning changes with the context. Here it probably refers to the Nahwitti tribes and some of the Kwakiutl tribes. See TOLMIE 1963, 299-316.
- 65 John Work to James Douglas, 20 October 1838, B 223 / c / 1, HBCA
- 66 It is perhaps significant that, in December of 1837, the Gitksaahla invited Ligeex to a great feast, and the HBC journals noted: '[A] party of Chimsyans headed by Elgish the chief arrived with a few furs. They are going by special invitation to a great feast at Sebasas that has been talked of for the last two months, it is expected to be a grand affair' (4 December 1837). The purpose of this feast is not stated, but the fur returns from the 'Sebasas' in 1838 were approximately four times those of the previous year.
- 67 This was Major Downie. See LARGE, R.G. 1957 *Skeena River of Destiny* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press) ch 6.

## References

- BARBEAU, M., and BEYNON, W. nd *The Marius Barbeau and William Beynon Fieldnotes* (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization)
- BARKER, B. 1948 *Letters to John McLoughlin, Written at Fort Vancouver, 1829-1832* (Portland: Binforde & Mort)
- BEYNON, W. nd *Manuscripts from the Columbia University Library*, ms (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International)
- BEYNON, W., and BARBEAU, M. nd *The Gwenhoot of Alaska in Search of Bounteous Land*, ms (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization)
- nd *Raven Clan Outlaws of the North Pacific Coast*, ms (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization)
- nd *Temlarham: The Land of Plenty on the North Pacific Coast*, ms (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization)
- nd *Wolf-Clan Invaders from the Northern Plateaux among the Tsimshians*, ms (Ottawa: Folklore Division, Canadian Museum of Civilization)
- BROWN, W. *Report of the Babine Country and Countries to the Westward, April 1826*, B 11 / e / 2, fol 12, HBCA
- *Report of the Establishment of Fort Kilmaurs, Babine Country, 1822-1823*, B 11 / e / 1 HBCA
- DEE, H.D. 1944-45 *The Journal of John Work*, British Columbia Historical Quarterly, vol 8
- DUFF, W. nd *Tsimshian File* (Vancouver: Museum of Anthropology)
- FISHER, R. 1977 *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press)
- Fort Simpson Journal, 1834-40, B201 / a / 3, HBCA
- Fort Vancouver Correspondence Inward, 1828-1840, B223 / c / 1, HBCA
- Fort Vancouver Correspondence Outward, B 223 / b / 12, HBCA
- GALBRAITH, J.S. 1957 *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press)
- GISDAY WA and DELGAM UUKW 1987 *The Spirit in the Land* (Gabriola, BC: Reflections)

- Work, British Columbia  
36, B223/b/12 fol 16-24,  
ed a wish that a large party  
so that they might dance  
'n promised to do so'. B201
- er, often from Tsimshian  
lan relatives.
- s with the context. Here it  
me of the Kwakiutl tribes.
- B38, B 223 / c / 1, HBCA  
of 1837, the Gitksaahla  
urnals noted: '[A] party of  
d with a few furs. They are  
it Sebassas that has been  
ed to be a grand affair' (4  
is not stated, but the fur  
pproximately four times
- 'Skeena River of Destiny
- au and William Beynon  
ian Museum of Civiliza-
- ten at Fort Vancouver,
- iversity Library, MS (Ann
- of Alaska in Search of  
i, Canadian Museum of
- ist, MS (Ottawa: Folklore
- lorth Pacific Coast, MS  
of Civilization)  
eaux among the Tsim-  
useum of Civilization)  
tries to the Westward,
- abine Country, 1822-
- Columbia Historical
- Anthropology)  
an Relations in British
- 10, B223 / c / 1, HBCA  
b / 12, HBCA  
s an Imperial Factor,  
s)  
Land (Gabriola, BC:
- GOUGH, B.M. 1992 *The Northwest Coast: British Navigation and Discoveries to 1812* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press)
- COOK, W.L. 1974 *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819* (New Haven: Yale University Press)
- LARGE, R.G. 1957 *Skeena River of Destiny* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press)
- MACKENZIE, A. *Remarks on Board the Brig William and Ann, Henry Hanwell Master, from Fort George, Columbia River to Observatory Inlet, 1825*, B223 / a / 1, HBCA
- MACKIE, R.S. 1993 *The Hudson's Bay Company on the Pacific, 1821-1843*, PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver
- MANSON, D. 1832 *Journal of a Trip Up the Skeena River*, B 201 / a / 2, HBCA
- MCGILLIVRAY, S. *Journal of Voyage to Simpson's River by Land, Summer 1833* in Simpson's Correspondence Inward D 4 / 126 HBCA
- MCLEOD, J. *Papers A / B / M22k BCARS*
- MENEILL, W.H. *Directions for Entering the Principal Harbours on the North West Coast of America by Different Commanders in Log of the Brig Convoy A / B / 20.5 / c56, BCARS*
- MILLER, J., and EASTMAN, C., ed *The Tsimshian and Their Neighbours of the North Pacific Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press)
- RICH, E.E., ed 1941 *The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-1838*, vol 4 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society)
- 1955 *A Journal of a Voyage From Rocky Mountain Portage in Peace River to the Sources of Finlays Branch and North West Ward in Summer 1824*, vol 18 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society)
- SEGUIN, M., ed 1984 *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press)
- SIMPSON, G. 1847 *Narrative of a Journey Round the World during the Years 1841 and 1842*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn)
- SUTTLES, W., ed 1990 *Northwest Coast, Handbook of North American Indians*, vol 7 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution)
- TOLMIE, W.F. 1963 *Physician and Fur Trader: The Journals of William Fraser Tolmie* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press)
- WALBRAN, J.T. 1971 *British Columbia Coast Names, 1592-1906; Their Origin and History* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas Ltd.)