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THE RICHARDSON RANCH SITE: A 19th CENTURY HAIDA HOUSE

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In the summers of 1969 and 1970 archaeological investigations were conducted on the Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia in an effort to develop a prehistoric cultural sequence of the area.¹ In 1970 my attention was directed to a historic Haida house-pit site, notable for its lack of heavy vegetational cover and ease of access. Since the definition of a historic Haida artifact assemblage was considered advantageous to the study of prehistoric components, and because the site logically represented a unique opportunity for the investigation of a historic Haida house, 3 weeks were spent at the locality. This paper presents the results of the test excavation and discusses its significance to the ethnohistory of early post-contact Haida culture.

BACKGROUND

Isolated from the northern mainland coast of British Columbia by Hecate Strait, the 150 mist-enshrouded islands and islets of the Queen Charlotte group are the ancestral home of the Haida Indians. Since the first definite contact by Europeans in 1774, when the Spanish navigator Juan Perez² briefly visited the northwestern tip of the islands, Haida culture has excited the curiosity and invoked the admiration of all who encountered it. Of particular interest to the early traders and explorers were the large villages of massive, well-designed houses, surrounded by tall heraldic and mortuary totem poles.

Ethnographically recorded Haida houses were designed around a square to rectangular floor-plan with vertically planked walls and a gabled roof, supported on a massive framework of upright posts and longitudinal beams. The houses faced the beach with the door in the front wall, sometimes through a house-frontal pole. The interiors were often excavated in one or more terraced steps, and the floor and sides of the excavation lined with heavy planks.

To the Haida, their great solidly built houses were more than mere habitations. A house, its size and ornamentations, and the amount of property distributed in the potlach commemorating its erection, were symbols of the owner's social position in a rigidly ranked and stratified society. The names associated with the house and the crests used to adorn its frontal pole were reminders of the proud traditions of the owner's clan.² In the long rainy months of winter the houses resounded to intense oratory and served as theaters for flamboyant drama, as noblemen displayed their prerogatives and distributed wealth in reinforcement of claims to hereditary positions of high rank. The members of individual households functioned as the basic self-contained economic unit in the gathering and preparation of subsistence staples, and the prominent houses of town-chiefs served as a focal point of village political cohesiveness and a symbol of the wealth and power of the community.

encircling wreath, is crudely impressed about halfway above the stem. The remaining 3 cm. length of stem shows a marked downward curvature.

This specimen is nearly identical to the bowl forms illustrated by Hume (1970: 303), dating between 1820 and 1860, and that illustrated by Oswalt (1959: 203) dating between 1820 and 1850. "TD" pipes with encircling wreaths or cartouches around the letters were found at Fort George, Alberta, which was occupied between 1792 and 1800 (R. Kidd 1970: 151); at Fort Okanogan, occupied between 1811 and ca. 1830 (Grabert 1968: 34); and at Buckingham House, Alberta, occupied between 1792 and 1800 (Nicks 1969: 228). This type of "manufacturer's mark" lasted at least to 1845 as similar wreathed "TD" pipes also occur at "Union Company" Fort George, (there were many posts of this name; this one being located in North Dakota) occupied between 1843 and 1845 (Smith 1968: 91).

- b. **Un-spurred, Un-marked Pipe** (Fig. 9i): This pipe lacks a basal spur, manufacturer's insignia, or decoration of any sort. The rim of the bowl is nearly parallel to the plane of the stem, and both proximal and distal profiles slant forward at an angle of about 20° from the vertical. This pipe is similar to the style illustrated by Hume (1970: 303) dating between 1720 and 1820.
- c. **Spurred "I F" Pipe**: This specimen retains only the base of the stem and a small fragment of the bowl. A basal spur, 0.6 cm. in length and oval in cross-section, carries a capital letter "F", lying on its side, on the right hand side and a capital letter "I", also on its side, on the left. The broken stump of the stem has been whittled in an apparent effort to reduce its taper, probably to facilitate insertion into a handmade wooden stem.

"I F" pipes are not common forms and appear to have had only a limited distribution. A pipemaker named John Ford of London was known to be manufacturing pipes with "I F" marking by 1832, and a specimen with "I F" stamped on the spur was found on the surface of Fort Wedderburn (a H.B.Co. post on Lake Athabaska) which was occupied between 1815 and 1821 (John Nicks: written comm., Feb. 15, 1972).

The other pipe fragments lack diagnostic characteristics, and no attempt was made to apply the Harrington/Binford bore diameter dating method due to the small size of the sample.

5. GLASS TRADE BEADS (N= 37)

- a. **Robin's-egg Blue, Opaque, Spherical, Wire-spun** (N= 27) (Fig. 9g): (K. Kidd 1970 classifications: W1b11-12): These form a gradational size progression between 1.4 and 0.1 cm. in diameter, and may have been part of a single strand or necklace.
- b. **Robin's-egg Blue, Opaque, Ovate, Wire-spun** (N= 5) (Kidd classification W1c 8): These have an average length of 1.0 cm. and an average

diameter of 0.6 cm.

- c. **Dark Blue, Translucent, Facetted Tube Type** (N= 2) (Kidd classification: not included, but would be similar to his lc13 type with additional facets): Diameter: 0.6 cm.
- d. **Emerald Green, Translucent, Molded, Facetted** (Fig. 9f) (N= 2) (Kidd classification: unknown): These beads have been formed in two-pieces molds, with 12 facets. They have a length of 1.65 cm. and a diameter of 0.9 cm.
- e. **Dark Blue, Translucent, Flattened Sphere, Tumbled Tube Type** (N= 1) (Kidd classification: 11a56): This falls into the category of a "seed" bead with a length between holes of 0.3 cm. and a diameter of 0.4 cm.

Blue wire-spun and facetted tube type trade beads occur in virtually all historic sites in the Northwest and their histories are not well enough known to permit their use in dating. Molded facetted beads, on the other hand, are apparently unknown for the area. Somewhat similar types of beads, with pressed facets, occur in the eastern portions of the continent in contexts dating between 1670 and 1760 (Quimby 1966: 86-7), but exact duplicates of the two-piece molded specimens from the Richardson Ranch Site have so far not been located.

6. GLASS BUTTONS (N= 6)

These are circular four-holed buttons of milk-glass with depressed center panels, ranging in diameter between 1.1 and 0.9 cm. One specimen carries a number of printed blue asterisks or stars on its outer face.

The precise history of glass buttons is difficult to determine. They appear to be primarily a 19th and 20th century phenomenon, although metal-backed glass buttons made in imitation cut gem stones date to at least the early half of the 18th century (Hume 1970: 90-1). Four-holed glass buttons similar to the Richardson Ranch specimens were recovered from the Union Fur Company Fort George (North Dakota) (Smith 1968: 89), but none were found at the Northwest Company Fort George (Alberta) (R. Kidd 1970). A single example of a spherical milk-glass button with a metal eye was discovered at Fort Okanogan, but no four-holed discoid varieties were found (Grabert 1968: 42). Finally, the Encyclopedia Britannica (1969): "Buttons" indicates that glass buttons with printed surface decorations, such as stars, are of early 19th century French origin. Thus, on a scattering of rather inconclusive evidence, it is suggested that four-holed discoid glass buttons first appeared in the west in the early half of the 19th century, probably between 1830 and 1840.

7. GUNFLINTS (N= 8)

These are all English-style gunflints manufactured on blade segments of Brandon flint. They exhibit heavy attrition on all edges and were probably discarded as expired. Most of the pieces seem best suited for use on types of heavy muskets or rifles common between about 1800 and 1880 (Steven White: *pers. comm.*), but there is little possibility of refining their