LOOKING FOR BELLA BELLA: THE R.W. LARGE COLLECTION AND HEILTSUK ART HISTORY

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ABSTRACT/RESUME

The history and culture of the Heiltsuk people of Wáglísla (Bella Bella, British Columbia) has been poorly documented by ethnologists, in part because of the early Heiltsuk involvement with missionaries. An examination of one notable collection of Heiltsuk art, and the reports of the person who collected it, provides an opportunity to comprehend the position of these people in the early 20th century.

L'histoire et la culture des Heiltsuk de Wáglísla (Bella Bella, la Colombie britannique) ont été mal documentées par les ethnologues, en partie à cause du rôle des premiers Heiltsuk dans les affaires des missionnaires. Un examen d'une collection remarquable de l'art Heiltsuk, et les rapports de celui qui a rassemblé cette collection, fournissent une occasion de comprendre la position de ces gens au début de XXe siècle.

The people of Wáglísła (as Bella Bella is now known), which today is a community that cherishes its history and traditions, may be surprised to see that the title of this paper is "Looking for Bella Bella." Of course, Bella Bella was never lost. It is true, however, that the history and culture of the Heiltsuk people who live there have been poorly documented in comparison with neighboring groups such as the much-studied Kwakiutl, with whom they have often been categorized. When I began my study of the one hundred and forty-five artifacts that the medical missionary Dr. Richard Whitfield Large sent from Bella Bella to the Provincial Museum in Toronto in 1901 and 1906, I was surprised at the scarcity of written information about the Heiltsuk and their principal village, which has always been a major cultural and trading centre of the central coast. The second part of my title, "The R.W. Large Collection and Heiltsuk Art History," acknowledges an important contribution to the Heiltsuk archive.1

Dr. R.W. Large, a Methodist missionary who came from Ontario to live at Bella Bella on McLoughlin Bay, Campbell Island, in December 1898, was the only observer to document the community in the first decade of this century. His notes on the artifacts he collected (which are now in the Royal Ontario Museum's Department of Ethnology) and his letters (published in Methodist missionary journals) contain personal, specific information about the village which is not found in fragmentary and generalized ethnological accounts. This paper will survey some of the art historical issues which surround the objects collected and documented by Large: the 'authenticity' of art made in the modernized village, the possibility that some object types may be specific to the Bella Bella area, the Identification of specific, named Bella Bella artists, and the relevance of these identifications to other museum collections from Bella Bella.

That Bella Bella became a major centre of Methodist missionary activity is one of the reasons for its neglect by ethnologists. One of the first collectors of Native artifacts to record a visit to Bella Bella, Johan Adrian Jacobsen, spent only an hour there in 1881 and, although from his brief description it would seem that the community had been little affected by Euro-American culture, Jacobsen did not think the community was a "real Indian village." It was not "a heathen village," nor was it "remote from the usual line of travel and therefore not influenced by modern culture" (1977:9-10, 13). In 1897, when the Jesup North Pacific Expedition visited Bella Bella, Franz Boas stayed only briefly, preferring to work in a Rivers Inlet community which had been less affected by the Methodist church (Stocking, 1974:112). By 1928 Boas could state that "The whole culture of the Bella Bella has practically disappeared" (1928: ix).
In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anthropologists and collectors of Native artifacts carried in their heads a vision of the unspoiled, pre-modern Native community, the loss of which prevented them from fully documenting and understanding the society and culture of their subjects. Whether or not such communities may have existed, Bella Bella would never have been one of them. The village now known as Old Town grew up around the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort McLoughlin, built on Campbell Island in 1833. Although the fort was in existence for only eleven years, after its abandonment the company continued regular trade with the community. By 1880, when the first missionary arrived at Bella Bella, the remnants of five Heiltsuk-speaking groups were amalgamating there. The site proved unsuitable for the populous community that Bella Bella became and in 1897, a year before the arrival of Dr. Large, a new village was laid out at Wáglišla, about two miles to the north. By 1907, the year Large's second collection arrived at the Toronto museum, the village was the second largest on the coast, with a church, school, firehall, sawmill, wharf, warehouse, and plank street with street lights. Sixty-three houses accommodated a population of about three hundred and twenty, Native-owned trading stores stocked the latest in consumer goods, and the Methodist hospital at Bella Bella was the major medical facility between Vancouver and Port Simpson.

Clifford has noted that "Cultural or artistic 'authenticity' has as much to do with an inventive present as with a past, its objectification, preservation, or revival" (1988:222). This is the sense in which the concept of authentic art and culture must be used within the context of turn-of-the-century Bella Bella, one of the most rapidly transformed coastal communities. The objects which Large sent from Bella Bella are documents of its "inventive present," and they illustrate how Heiltsuk history is contained within that present.

More than half (57%) of the artifacts that Large sent to Toronto from Bella Bella were stone or bone tools, fragments of tools, fishing gear, and gaming pieces. For the missionary, these were perhaps the most authentic Indian artifacts for they illustrated the ancient tool-making techniques and stone-age technologies that had been replaced by "the 'miraculous' engines and tools of the late nineteenth century" (Killan, 1983:107-8) and symbolized the progress of the Heiltsuk from primitive to modern, from pagan child to Christian adult. The gambling paraphernalia indicated that the Heiltsuk were making moral progress (in the missionary's terms), for it was no longer in use at Bella Bella. Large stated that "Only certain tribes gamble, and I am glad to say the Port Simpsons, Kitamaats, and Bella Bella [who were all Methodist] do not do it" (The Missionary Outlook, 1900, XIX [9]:19).

The "slipper case representing frog" (Plate 18, Royal Ontario Museum [ROM] 23170/902.2.8), which is the only Bella Bella object in the collection
attributed to a woman is, from our contemporary point of view, a more 'authentic' artifact from the modernizing village which was Bella Bella at the turn of the century, in that it combines Heiltsuk materials (woven cedar bark and painted cedar) and form (a puppet-like frog, reminiscent of the articulated figures used in potlatch and winter dance performances) with European materials (printed cotton) and function (slipper container) to produce an object that is typically Heiltsuk in its inventiveness and humour. As Holm and Reid noted (1975: fig. 25), "The Bella Bella made many funny little monsters, apparently for no reason but to amaze people with the artist's imagination". It is indicative of what, in 1901, the Bella Bella people wished for: "a more complete blending of the two lives - the old and the new" (The Missionary Outlook, 1901, XX [3]:54).

This ability to accommodate Native tradition within a Methodist structure is evidenced by what the missionary called "overshadowings of the old potlatch" in his nominally Christian village. The giving of a new name, the erection of a tombstone, a marriage, were all occasions for potlatch-like feasts.

The Missionary Outlook (1901, XX [3]:54) described these as follows:

A man gives a party and calls his friends to dine with him. They come dressed in their best, and a blessing is probably asked upon the food, and all goes well till the after-dinner time. Then some one gets up, perhaps, and gives a new name to the giver of the feast, and he, in turn may distribute some small gifts, handkerchiefs, dress goods or spoons. The departing guests carry home with them food, and it may be a more generous supply is given to the head chiefs...One of their number dies and a tombstone is purchased. This must be placed in position at the grave. The firemen and the brass band are paid to do the work, and paid handsomely, and there is a feast afterwards, and perhaps gifts distributed in memory of the departed. Food, blankets, dishes and clothing will generally be burned at the grave of the deceased, not once only, but several times...A couple wish to get married. The friends come to the minister who talks the matter over with them, gives a little advice, the banns are called on three successive Sundays, and they are then married according to Discipline. But quietly, in many cases, a present of money or goods has been given by the groom or his parents to those of the bride, according to old established usage.

In the winter of 1906-7, the missionary wrote,
Plate 18: "Slipper Case representing frog."

Plate 19: Mask, purchased from Solomon, Bella Bella.
One thing that made it rather difficult to enlist the co-operation of the people in the Christmas entertainment was the fact that they were having a number of feasts. In fact, they were having one nearly every day for three weeks before Christmas and New Years." These were apparently "tomb-stone feasts...given by the friends of someone who had died the previous winter. As there had been several deaths from whooping-cough, there were necessarily many feasts (The Missionary Bulletin, 1905, IV[2]:549-50).

Not only did the feasts continue at Bella Bella in a modified form, but Heiltsuk chiefs participated in more elaborate ceremonies in other communities such as Bella Coola, described by the Reverend Dr. F. C. Spencer in 1906 as "a sort of rendezvous for Indians from Christian villages who really wished to attend or receive goods through the potlatch" (The Missionary Bulletin, 1906, III [3]:485). At neighboring Namu cannery, for example, an "old-time" dance was given on the occasion of the death of one of the principal chiefs in 1906, and at the Methodist village of Kitamaat in 1907 the "feasting and potlatching" started in November and continued until Christmas (The Missionary Bulletin, 1906, III[13]:796; 1907, IV[3]:673).

Although Large may have known about the perpetration of ceremonial traditions in the area, he identified three masks as "Stick, Sinash [Siwash] (or Interior Indian)," even though two of them were purchased from a Bella Bella elder named Solomon (ROM 23136-7) and the third (ROM 23135/902.2.6) was made by Bella Bella carver Daniel Houstie (Plates 19, 20 and 21). All three are typically Heiltsuk in style. His misleading documentation can be interpreted as contrasting the Christian Heiltsuk, who no longer used these symbols of the spirits, with supposedly less-enlightened, non-Christian groups. This attitude was verbalized by his fellow missionary, Rev. B.C. Freeman, who in comparing the model Christian village of Bella Bella with the "heathen" village of Nawittie, "where steamboats do not call," thought that the Natives suffered "blighted families, hopeless lives (and) death," because, unlike the Bella Bella people, they did not have "a teacher to guide them" (The Missionary Bulletin, 1905, II[3]:578).

One of the most interesting aspects of Large's collection is the number of carvings which appear to be newly-made replicas of older object types. While I believe that these reproductions of traditional objects were made for sale to the Toronto museum, I do not interpret them as nostalgic or revivalist in intent, but as illustrations of one tradition for 'the other'. They include roughly-made versions of traditional every-day objects such as a group of one-piece halibut hooks with twisted cedar lines (ROM 27850-4), and a "yew
Plate 21: Mask, Daniel Houstie, Bella Bella.

Plate 20: Mask, purchased from Solomon, Bella Bella.
wood box, old model" (ROM 27864), as well as the exotic such as a "carved stick used to keep in position the pad used to produce the flattening of infant's head" (ROM 23151) made by Daniel Houstie (Plate 22), an obvious anachronism in turn-of-the-century Bella Bella. Many of the objects which can be categorized as ceremonial, such as a "cedar dance hat" (ROM 27878/906.2.5) and a mysterious "dance drinking box" (ROM 27874/906.2.4) appear to be such replicas, and were probably also made by Houstie. Each of these examples is idiosyncratic in style and form and, as far as I know, the only one of its kind. However, they are specifically tied by form and iconography to known Heiltsuk ceremonial complexes so, although they appear to have been new when they were collected, they are not inventions or without meaningful context.

The woven cedar hat has a flat skull-like head, wrapped in red cedar bark, attached to the front of the crown, and a painted representation of a skull on the back. Large's Information that this is a "dance hat" is probably correct. Skull imagery is common in Bella Bella ritual art and would be associated with the tánís (Hamatsa) ceremonial, which originated with the Heiltsuk (Boas, 1897: 660-4). The Bella Bella Ghost dancer (lúal) wore a human skull bound to the top of his head (Drucker, 1940:210).

The skull motif is also seen on the drinking box. A skull-like head plugs a hole from which the box could be filled, and straws could be inserted through the snouts of the animals on the lid and down into the box through long sticks attached to them. As the Oowekeeno of Rivers Inlet, who shared many dance complexes with the Heiltsuk, had at least two drinking dances - one in which the dancer appeared to drink gallons and gallons of water and to urinate continuously as he circled the fire (Ha'gwagweh, the fourth ranked of the ƛuláḵa series), the other a Healing Water dance (Heilikstaxsta, of the čáiča series) - it is likely that this is, as Large described it, a Heiltsuk "dance drinking box" for a similar ceremony (Olson 1954:35; Stevenson, n.d.:72).

The missionary's documentation situates his collection within the "inventive present" of turn-of-the-century Bella Bella, and exposes his own relationship to it. I have mentioned the names of Solomon and Daniel Houstie. Many Bella Bella people are acknowledged by Large as sources for his 1901 collection. He also noted the finding spot and maker of many of the objects in that group. Not only is this information vital to the contextualizing of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Heiltsuk artifacts, but it makes the Large collection the major one from which attributions - to the area and to specific artists - can be developed.
Plate 22: Carved stick, *Daniel Houstie, Bella Bella.*

Plate 23: Skull/ladle.

Plate 24: Skull/ladle.
Identification Of Regional Object Types

An undocumented artifact in the ROM, a skull/ladle (ROM 956X145.5/954X35), is so similar in form, pigment, condition, and style to objects in the large collection that I believe it must have been collected at Bella Bella about 1900, probably by Large (Plate 23). This assumption is supported by two other skull ladles from Bella Bella: a smaller version in the Denver Art Museum (DAM QBB-3-6), collected by a lady missionary at Bella Bella about 1896 or 1897 (Plate 24), and a larger and more complete example in the Brooklyn Museum (BM 05.588.7297), collected at Bella Bella by a museum expedition in 1905. This type of object may have been a solely Heiltsuk prerogative, and for any undocumented objects of this type, a Heiltsuk origin must be considered.

Not all of Large's artifacts came from Bella Bella. A "carved eagle" plaque (ROM 23139/902.2.7) came from Paul George of Kimsquit (Kimsquit), a mixed Heiltsuk - Bella Coola village at the head of Dean Channel (Plate 25). The only non-Native visitor known to have been there in the 1860s described the inhabitants as "the most uncivilized Natives he had ever met." (They later continued to resist "civilization," which came to them in such unpleasant forms as the British gunboat which bombed the village in 1877 [Gough, 1984: 199-204]).

The Kimsquit plaque is an adzed cedar disc about twenty-four inches in diameter, representing an eagle. There is another like it, an octagonal plaque in the collection of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology that was collected at Bella Bella by Dr. George Darby (University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology [UBCMOA] A1363) after 1914 (cover illustration of this issue). According to the UBCMOA catalogue, Darby's "shield" is "possibly a model of a crest, mounted on a house front." Is it a copy of a memorial painting that was attached to a grave house on Dean Channel at, or near, Kimsquit? A comparison of the two motifs suggests that it is. Although the painting is rectangular and fills the area under the eaves of the house, all the elements of the design are found on the eight-sided shield.

On the Dean Channel Memorial, the head of the eagle was carved separately and projects upward from the top of the board. The body of the bird is a painted oval which contains a central stylized face. The legs end in stylized talons, the tail is indicated by three feather forms and the arched wings have two rows of U forms connected with wavy lines and long knife-shaped feathers with black tips. A heavy black line runs along the top of the wings and under the eagle's head.

Kimsquit was a mixed Bella Coola and 'Yisdáitx̱v village with Heiltsuk cultural characteristics, such as grave houses, which were not used by the
Plate 25: Plaque, Paul George, Kimsquit.

Plate 26: Cradle, Enoch, Bella Bella.
Bella Coola (Mcllwraith, 1948 [1]: 18, 453). A comparison of the plaque from Kimsquit with the UBCMOA shield and its prototype, the Kimsquit grave house painting, suggests that it represents a regional artifact type from the territory of the Heiltsuk-speaking 'Yisdátxv, between Bella Bella and Bella Coola.

**Indentification Of Artists**

Five of the individuals named by Large are identified by him as artists: Enoch, General Dick, Chief Robert Bell, Captain Carpenter, and Daniel Houstie. Because of this specific information, unusual for collections of Native art, turn-of-the-century Bella Bella objects can be seen as the production of individual artists rather than the product of anonymous Native craftspersons.

Two of the five artists are identified as makers of single objects in Large's collection. Enoch, who died in 1904, was the maker of a traditional, and probably functional, cradle (Plate 26). The cradle would have been particularly interesting to Large whose first child, Richard Geddes, was born at Bella Bella in 1901. The open structure and attenuated formlines of the design are typical of much Bella Bella painting, and stylistic analysis may in the future identify other works by Enoch in museum collections.

Like Enoch, General Dick has no recorded surname, or Heiltsuk name, and is identified by Large as the maker of only one object, a painted paddle (ROM 23140). It is possible that he was more active as a carver than this incomplete documentation indicates, for similar paddles in the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (collected by Rev. Raley of Kitamaat (UBCMOA A1598) and the Canadian Museum of Civilization (collected in 1899 at Bella Bella (NMM VII-EE-16-7) may also be his work. I found no record of General Dick in the archives and published literature, but a man called Old Dick, who died in 1904, was a "noted wood carver" and "carver of curios" at Bella Bella (The Missionary Outlook, 1909, VI [1]:17). It is likely that a turn-of-the-century collection from the village would contain work by this carver, and General Dick may have been Old Dick, and the maker, as well as the source, of five carved figures (ROM 23125, ROM 23190-3) collected from him (Plate 27).

The carvings which Large obtained from Chief Robert Bell display a disintegration of craftsmanship which is often associated with extreme and rapid cultural change. A wooden club (ROM 23144) (Plate 28), of the type carried by the War Dancer, is finely carved with traditional motifs, but a bent box (ROM 23114) is crudely made. Deterioration in workmanship may also reflect a change in the artist's health or personal situation, and both social and personal factors would explain the inconsistency in the work made by
Plate 27: Carved figure, Old Dick, Bella Bella.

Plate 28: Wooden Club, Chief Robert Bell, Bella Bella.
Chief Bell, who held positions in both traditional and Europeanized Bella Bella society, and seems to have made a rapid and unhappy transition from old customs to Christianity, from a traditional to a modern village.

Originally from the community of 'Qvúqvái, Bell became head chief at Bella Bella between 1897 and 1901. Although he must have been active in the traditional life of the 'Qvúqvái and the amalgamated Heiltsuk at Bella Bella when he became head chief, Bell apparently supported the missionary’s efforts to curtail traditional ceremonies. Large was amused and pleased by a notice "printed in large type on a sheet of cotton and posted on the main street when the head chief and band president (Robert Bell) was to be married" in 1902, which announced that although "the officer of the B.B.C.B. will give a real good time," "No old fashioned doing will be given." According to Large, the occasion was, as promised, "free from all old customs" (The Missionary Bulletin, 1905, III [1]:113). In 1904 Bell died, dogged by trouble, possibly debts, associated with his business, the Robert Bell and Co. General Store. He was forty-five years old.

The other two artists identified by Large, Captain Carpenter and Daniel Houstie, appear to have been more prolific carvers. Their work defines a distinctive turn-of-the-century Bella Bella style.

Captain Carpenter was, like Chief Bell, 'Qvúqvái, and a Chief at Bella Bella. His English name denotes his occupation of carver and canoe and boat maker. It was Carpenter who built the big canoe which was exhibited at the Fisheries Exhibition in London, England, and according to Rev. Tate, the seventy-five foot long canoe that is now in the American Museum of Natural History (The Missionary Outlook, 1888, VIII [2]:2). He successfully adapted his considerable skills to the construction of European boats which were much admired for their craftsmanship. After 1900, Carpenter entered the wage economy as the keeper of the Dryad Point light just north of Bella Bella. He died at the age of ninety in 1931.

Large got a painted box (ROM 23113) and a large food bowl in the shape of a beaver (ROM 23147) from Captain Carpenter. A number of artifacts in other collections might be tentatively assigned to him because of their association with the keeper of the Dryad Point light: two paddles were obtained from the lighthouse keeper at Dryad Point (British Columbia Provincial Museum [BCPM] 5832-3), and a chief’s settee (BCPM 1856) was photographed in 1900 at the Bella Bella lighthouse and had Carpenter’s name on it when it was collected (Macnair, Hoover, and Neary, 1980:149). However, this seat is more elaborately carved and painted than other work, such as Large’s box, which is known to be by Carpenter. Simple boxes and bowls such as a child’s coffin collected at Bella Bella in 1893 (BCPM 221) and the wooden spoons which are common in collections from Bella Bella
(for example, BCPM 16336-7) are closer to Carpenter's known style. This discrepancy may be explained by a disease from which the artist is thought to have suffered in later life which affected his technical abilities.

The fifth artist identified by Large is Daniel Houstie. Like many Bella Bella people, the artist's family appear to have moved to the village about 1880 when the mission was established, and to have supported new institutions such as the school and sawmill while continuing Native traditions. With the exception of a carved walking stick (ROM 23143), the objects made by Houstie are defined by Large as things that were no longer in use at Bella Bella at the turn of the century. In addition to a dance mask which Large thought was used by Interior Indians (ROM 902.2.6) and the carved stick illustrating the technique of head-flattening (ROM 23151), Houstie carved two old time halibut hooks made from the scapula of a mountain sheep (ROM 23145, 956X16.1), and a whaling paddle (Plate 29, ROM 23153).

Large's 1906 collection, unlike the one he made in 1901, identifies neither sources nor makers of the objects. The most distinctive objects in this undocumented collection are the replicas of ceremonial objects such as the dance hat and drinking box, and a group of brown and black painted cedar boxes (Plate 30, ROM 27848, 27862, 27881). I believe that all of these may have been made by Daniel Houstie because of their stylistic and iconographic similarity to those objects which Large documented as his production, and if this is the case, Houstie must have been an accomplished and productive artist. However, there seem to be few, if any, works by Houstie in other Bella Bella collections. His death in 1912, at the age of 32, may account for the apparently brief florescence of his art.

Conclusion

I would like to close with another quotation from James Clifford: "The concrete, inventive existence of tribal cultures and artists is suppressed in the process of either constituting authentic 'traditional' worlds or appreciating their products in the timeless category of art" (1988: 200). In their search for an ideal "authentic 'traditional' world" on the Northwest Coast, late nineteenth and early twentieth century ethnographers shunned Bella Bella because of its espousal of Methodism and adoption of Euro-American conventions and consumer goods. The lack of ethnological and collection data for Heiltsuk art and culture which resulted from this anti-historical bias can in part be compensated for by the records of a missionary, who, although he had definite biases of his own, did live in the community and was interested in documenting the 'progress' and change within 'his' village. The Reverend Dr. R. W. Large lived at Bella Bella for eleven years, and his documentation makes the Royal Ontario Museum collection the most im-
Plate 29: Whaling paddle, Daniel Houstie

Plate 30: Painted cedar boxes, Bella Bella
important record of Bella Bella at the beginning of this century. My study of that collection is an attempt to (re)place the objects Large collected within a meaningful historical framework, the "concrete, Inventive existence" of Bella Bella.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Native American Art Studies Association in Vancouver, British Columbia, August 1989.

2. The five Heiltsuk-speaking tribes are: Ųix̣ís, Qvúqvayáitx̣, Wúíítx̣, Wúyalitx̣, and Yísdaítx̣.

3. The Methodist periodical, The Missionary Outlook, instructed that "In regard to the duties and responsibilities of civilization, the Indians are children, and for a time, have to be treated as such...The object of schools, Indian institutions, etc. is to train them up to be men and women."

4. Although these were catalogued as separate objects (ROM 954X35 and ROM 956X145.5), they fit together to form a single artifact. A wooden peg in the bottom of the skull fits exactly into a hole in the bottom of the ladle.

5. The missionary collector of the Denver ladle (DAM QBB-3-G), who was probably Miss Reinhardt, a school teacher who stayed alone at the Bella Bella mission house through the winter of 1895-6, was told that "It was used in a feast in which the skull had to be fed first." The skull-eating symbolism suggests that these ladles are connected in some way with the Hamatsa (Tánis) ceremonial.

6. A similar settee in the Berlin Museum (MfV IVA2475-6-7) was commissioned from "the most renowned wood carver among the Bella Bella" by Adrian Jacobsen in 1881 (1977:10).

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