

Sept. 7, 1966

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Prof. Wilson Duff
Department of Anthropology
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada

Dear Prof. Duff,

I should have written you from Kispiox this summer, but I'm afraid I just let my correspondence go to pot. We had a very pleasant summer in Kispiox; it was a very friendly place to work and I made a number of very good friends. I also got a tremendous amount of work done in Gitksan. I worked mostly with Johnson Williams, 72, who was born and raised in Kispiox, though his mother was from Kitwancool. You'll recognize one of his names, g'nu^w, as deriving from one of the Frog houses at Kitwancool. I also worked with Jonathan Johnson who was considerably more sophisticated in his control of English, though not as much as the two of us would have liked as he didn't have a lot of free time.

I didn't get to spend much time with John Adams and Alice Kasakoff (who are now married) as they came down with hepatitis in May and were in the hospital til July when they went to Chicago to recuperate. They were to return around Labor Day and stay in the field til the first of the year. I found them both to be personable and got on well. I think they were doing a pretty competent field job. There is also a missionary couple at Skeena Crossing, Al and Pat Braithwaite. He had some training at UW in Seattle and she a bit at the Summer Institute. I found them both to be rather boorish and tight-lipped as Hell about Gitksan linguistics. I don't believe they've really done much linguistic work there and I have serious doubts about their abilities. I didn't get acquainted with Polly and Bill Sargent til my last month there, but liked both of them. Polly let me use her Barbeau, Totem Poles of the Gitksan. She runs a very nice museum in Hazelton which isn't cluttered up with a lot of junk from the four corners of the world. She and I were mutually incensed by a German fellow who came through in late July on a Canada Council grant to study pole carving, etc.

I went down to Port Edward for four days in late July and collected materials in Coast Tsimshian and Nass. My Coast informant was a Kitkatla woman, Maude Tolmie, and my Nass informant was Anthony Adams, niys yoq, from Aiyansh. From this work and talking with informants from all three Tsimshian areas, I'm now satisfied that the Coast Tsimshian is a separate language.

2.

There are strong empirical and theoretical reasons for this split which I'll write up later. Nass and Gitksan are structurally identical and differ only in a few phonological developments and a number of lexical items.

I met George MacDonald, the archeologist from Ottawa, and his crew on their way down to the Coast. They stayed at the Inlander and surveyed and dug test-pits at Hagwilgate, Moricetown, and several other locations. On Sunday, July 10th, George and I took Simon Wright, about 74, resident in Kispiox since 1948 when he left Kisgegas, up to visit the deserted village of Kisgegas. I recorded place-names along the Skeena from Kispiox up to Kisgegas on the Babine, and we walked through several old sites. After a Hell of climb down, we visited the old site of ?anlčgčsm dč·x, near the mouth of the Babine. It seems to have once been a fairly large village and was likely deserted early in the last century. There is a newer village of the same name just off the road closer to Kisgegas which we walked over too.

John Adams had worked with Simon before and had told me that Simon wanted to learn to write his language properly. Simon was quite anxious to work with me, it turned out, as he wanted me to properly write down house names and "chiefs" names that they might be preserved for posterity. I worked with him the following two nights, recording the names of twenty-one Kisgegas houses, each with six or so "chiefs' names." Simon had written these out before sometime in a pocket spiral notebook in English script as well as he could. One thing which will interest you is that four of these houses were from nearby deserted villages whose people had moved into Kisgegas. I wish I knew more about epidemics and depopulation in this area in the last century.

One house, čm ha:st in the fireweed, a Fireweed house, was from xsinjił, an ~~old~~ small village up ~~on~~ Caribou Creek on the east bank of the Skeena above Kispiox. njił is an old word for caribou; it looks Athabaskan (as also does wiłix the present word for caribou). Simon said they had moved into Kisgegas long ago. I have the proper location in my notebooks, and there are now ġitxsinjił resident in Kispiox and Hazelton too.

Three Wolf houses, čm ^whabu?inaq in the cover of the chest, čm lax ġistahamxs, and čm g nč·qx in the cold, were houses from ?anlčgčsm dč·x whose people, Simon said, moved into Kisgegas before his grandmother's time. I felt it significant that he insisted on the different origins of these houses, and also that he had taken it upon himself to write down all this data.

My main purpose in writing this to you comes now. Late the first night and most of our second night of work, I had Simon talking about a prophet, yagaši·dč·, who evidently lived and preached in Kisgegas early in the last century. Simon said

that Y. came before bini., the Hagwilgate prophet. Simon dictated to me in English the story of Y. and his career. It's all straight Prophet Dance material and many of the prophecies of Y. concerning the coming of the Whites, the telegraph, the horse, etc. read just like Jenness' material on Bini in the Bulkley River Carrier. I suspect Simon may have worked in some of the episodes told about Bini, but the main part of the story is quite distinct. Chris Harris had never heard of Y., but Jonathan knew the name and knew that he had been a prophet like Bini. I wasn't able to dig up any further information on Y. from others in the village, and the sad thing is that Simon died ~~the following week~~ about two weeks later before we could work together again. (I was down at the Coast in the intervening week). I do have enough material to write a reasonably full account of Y. and I'm now beginning ethnohistorical reading to see what I can pick up. Spier suggested in his Prophet Dance paper that Morice and Barbeau had likely garbled the Bini materials and that there had probably been some pre-Bini Prophet Dance activity in the Carrier-Gitksan area. I think Simon's account clinches this.

I've found a reference from John McLean's Notes in both Spier's Prophet Dance and Jenness' Bulkley River Carrier which mentions, in an obscure manner, a name, Yagasita- the "Man of Heaven," which seems identical to the name of the Kisgegas prophet. Though the phonetics are good Gitksan, the name is meaningless; Simon said that Y. had received it from God, šmʔó.ğit lax há. I haven't yet read McLean myself and must do so soon. I suspect that Barbeau didn't hear of this man during his work but I must read through his and Father Morice's work. I'm curious to learn if you have ever heard about this prophet Y. I would be very glad to have any comments from you, especially suggestions on nineteenth-century source materials for the area.

I've started work on my initial report for the National Museum. It will contain comparative vocabularies from Coast Tsishian, Nass, and Gitksan for about 400 English glosses and a short sketch of Nass-Gitksan phonology. My transcriptions in this letter have all been phonetic. I'll send you a copy when I get it all typed up.

I hope your summer went well and you got a lot done on your B. C. prehistory volume you wrote about. I'm sorry we didn't get to meet this summer; Vancouver was out of my way as I stopped off at Nespelem and Toppenish in Washington state. If you think I might have anything of further interest to you in my notebooks, let me know. I have a good number of Gitksan place-names, etc. I spent some time over in Kitwancool

4.

with Fred Good checking out place-names, etc.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Bruce

Bruce J. Rigsby
Asst. Professor

University of Toronto

TORONTO 5, CANADA

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

September 10, 1965

Prof. Wilson Duff
Department of Anthropology
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, British Columbia

Dear Prof. Duff,

The Gitksan tape arrived some weeks ago, in July, if I remember correctly. I played it through then, and again, a second time at home. Your fears that it might have been done too hastily were unnecessary as it turned out. Almost everything comes through as clear as possible on tape, even the glottalized continuants which I had worried about. So, thanks very much for taking the time to record the wordlist for me.

here in Toronto
In June, I met a priest, an Anglican, Father John Blyth, who is stationed at Christ the King Mission in Port Edward, I believe. He seemed to be a nice fellow and we spent about four hours talking about the area and I gave him instructions in articulatory phonetics relevant to Tsimshian. He had taken a course in Spoken Cree from Douglas Ellis here at Toronto several years ago, so he had some knowledge of linguistics. His trouble seemed to be that he was trying to work on the grammar without having worked out and internalized the phonology. However, he was pronouncing glottalized stops correctly most of the time (We went over a Niska wordlist Wayne Suttles sent me some time ago). Hopefully, he now is distinguishing k's and q's.

I should learn by the first part of November whether the National Museum will give me a contract. I'm pretty sanguine, the final approval is essentially a budgetary matter, as I understand it. At any rate, I plan also to submit to a second source as a sort of insurance.

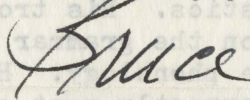
I stayed busy all summer. I finished my dissertation in July, and went to Oregon in August to defend it and receive my doctorate. I'm glad that it's all over now. My dissertation treated linguistic relations in the Southern Plateau and was an attempt to demonstrate that the four language families of the Southern Plateau, Sahaptian, Cayuse, Molala, and Klamath are not genetically relatable. They may in fact be related, but if so, the common connection is so far in the past that our available historical linguistic techniques cannot recover acceptable evidence for their common connection. In other words, there is no good evidence for Plateau Penutian, just as there is no good evidence that Molala and Cayuse are related languages (the so-called Waiilatpuan). After I left Eugene, I went up to Pullman to see Bill Elmendorf (after spending four days in Pendleton with my old informant for Umatilla Sahaptin). He told me that he had dropped you a

letter about me, as I had asked him to do. He and I have much the same interests in ethnography-ethnology and linguistic anthropology. We are both primarily concerned with mobilizing linguistic evidence for culture historical reconstruction- things like the relations between Salishan speech, the burning over of upland slopes, and the distribution of Douglas fir on the Coast- and vice versa.

Hopefully, by now you've completed your move to UBC and have gotten settled in for the coming year. Peter Carstens just returned from Vancouver and he said that he had met you. I've been busy working on my slip files and Sahaptin notebooks for my grad linguistics course this year. I want to complete as much of my analysis and statement as possible this year. I'm very much afraid of going to Tsimshian with a backlog of work, and will work hard this year to avoid it. I'm not through working in Sahaptin, I hope to go back in a few years, but I want to get what I have now worked up. Similarly, I plan on a longterm commitment to Tsimshian. I'm rather sceptical of linguists who claim to cover a language completely in a few months time; it just can't be done.

I will be reading a paper in Denver this November at the AAA meetings. Perhaps we will have an opportunity to meet one another then.

Sincerely yours,



Bruce J. Rigsby
Asst. Professor