

TONGASS

This was the southernmost of the coastal Tlingit tribes, and ~~the one which had the close contacts~~ with the Tsimshian and Haida. There is traditional evidence that shortly before the historic period its territory was larger, and included the areas of Dall and Prince of Wales Island which fell to the invading Kargani Haida, and also the ^{Tsimshian} coastline between the Nass and Skeena rivers or even beyond.

When it became known to the early traders and Hudson's Bay men, the tribe occupied the southern entrance of Clarence Strait. Its main village, Old Tongass, was on Cat Island, a small island off the north tip of Suke Island near Tsumgas Harbour (Annette Island), the favourite anchorage of the later trading ships, and the first of two harbours which took their name from the tribe. On this old site they left "almost a forest of totem poles" (Corcor p 9) when they moved away, in 1868. They moved on to Tongass Island, under the protection of the short-lived Fort set up by the US when it purchased Alaska. This village was their principal home until about 1900 or shortly before, when they established the new village of Saxman, just where they still reside.

Cat Is.

↓ 1868

Tongass

↓ 1900

Saxman

Traditional Times:

The history of the tribe before the first written references, that is, before 1790's, can only be reconstructed from their own traditions and those of the Haida and Tsimshian. One thing which seems clear is that they occupied areas later occupied by Kargani Haida.

Karfield tells of a tradition about the century old Grizzly Bear post of the Katz House people, which was moved from Village Island to Saxman in 1939.

"According to legend this is the fourth pole of its kind carved to commemorate the experiences of Katz. The first one was carved by Tongass people

living near Uruk River on Behm Canal. From there they moved to Cape Muzon [later the site of Kaigani], and the second post was set in front of the Kato House there. Later some of the Kato House people moved again, settling in the vicinity of Hydraburg, where the third post was carved. This was before the Haida migration to Prince of Wales Island, more than two hundred years ago. Members of the house again migrated, settling at Tongass and at Village Island, where the present post was carved." pp 35-7

Covey also mentions that part of the tribe appear to have lived on Dall Island before moving to Cat Island (p. 11)

Haida traditions confirm that it was the Tongass they drove out. Swanton recorded the story from an old man of Klukwan (Haida, p 89) as a result of wars between ~~the~~ Haida clans on Langara Island, some moved to Prince of Wales Island

"The Yadas went off first, and came to live at Teatcheenie. Then the Tanta-People (i.e., Tongass) lived around here [Klukwan]. The Tanta-People made war on the Teatcheenie-People, and they killed all of the Teatcheenie-People.

Since they thought there were very few Haida left behind, they went off to destroy them too.

These Thngit were called Da'goades." [Tequoid?]

The Haida all went to war, met the Thngit just west of Howkan and defeated them. Then they destroyed the village (then Thngit) of Sukkwan and its people. After that the Haidas moved over in ~~four~~ numbers (Swanton, Haida, p 89 and 298)

When they moved to the old ~~for~~ sites of Sukkwan, Klukwan and Howkan, the Haida retained the old names, which are Thngit names. (cf Swanton Thngit, pp 408-9)

That the Thngit, ^{formerly} occupied the main coastline south to the mouth of the Skeena and beyond as affirmed by Tsimshian traditions, but the date and length of that occupancy is by no means clear. ^{Barbeau, unpublished} One story tells of the warrior Akisk, who ventured out of the Skeena to the present site of Prince Rupert, built a log trap and lured the Thngit of Dundas Island to their death, then moving out to Metlakatla, followed by all the Tsimshian tribes. Another tells of a Gitksan man discovering the Thngit occupants of Work Channel, and of how they ^{murdered for metal tools of canoe makers, the first Tsimshian laborers.} were driven out. A third indicates that Thngit Wolves even occupied ^{Lower inlet on - stretching cedar bark rope across channel} Greenville Channel ^{Others to prevent anyone travelling} till of wars on outer islands, and driving the Thngit north. ^{When Thngit had retreated to villages on Dundas islands - fished grounds - down out by Kitkatla & Tsam}

Some Thng became Tsimshian

Dr Garfield (personal communication, 1952) expressed her "considered judgment" that in the early part of the 19th century the Thngit controlled Portland Canal and also much of the coast between the Nass and the Skeena rivers. The Tsimshian drove them out when the land fur trade became lucrative, previously, so long as the Thngit did not interfere with annual treks to the Nass erulachon fishery, the Tsimshian did not dispute their presence along the coast.

My own view would be that the Thngit were driven out ^{before} ^{when} the land fur trade became lucrative, which as I understand it would be with the decline of the sea otter about 1820. Historical records give no evidence of Thngit on Tsimshian territory at that time.

James Douglas' 1840 list of NWC tribes places the Tantsquandy at Tongass and Clemencity, with 80 fighting men. The 1853 census calls them "Tongass Indians", or "Kee-ta-hounet", located them about the south entrance of Clarence Straits, and enumerates 18 houses, 85 men, and a total population of 315. They traded at Port Simpson, and went to the Koss for eulachons each spring.

Old Tongass (Cat Island)

This old village must have been the one known as Tongass to the Hudson's Bay men. Crozier mentions it as "the home of the Tongass Indians before they moved to Port Tongass", says the island was "almost a forest of totem poles" (1940 p 9). In 1897 Dorsey visited "Old Tongass", found it "long since abandoned", with only "totem poles and old ruined houses" remaining (Dorsey). Some of the totem poles were moved from here to Saxman for restoration (Garfield p 13).

Village Island →

Clemencity

This place was on the narrow passage between Sitklan and Kanagumet Islands, the very southeastern tip of Alaska. A recent American map shows "Ruins" on Sitklan Island a third of the way down the passage, and another map shows this place as Port Tongass. Tongass Island, where the ^{military} port and more recent village was located, is about two miles north.

The place was well known to the maritime fur traders of the 1820's and later, who came here to meet the Tongass Indians. It was apparently occupied mostly in spring, when the Tongass were on their way to the Koss for eulachons. Jonathan Green, in April, 1829, recorded "This evening we cast anchor at a place called Clement City. Here we found the Tom-Garse Indians, a small tribe..." (p 61) The two principal chiefs were Le kooté and Jones.

In March¹² of 1835 John Work was commanding a Hudson's Bay Co. ship, recorded in his diary "

Village Island

Another old village from which ~~any~~ people moved to Fort Tongass when the army garrison was established ^{there} in 1868 was Village Island. The exact location of this old village is not entirely clear. The Geographical Dictionary of Alaska (p 660) lists "Village islet, (peninsula at low water)", in Felice Strait near the north end of Duke Island, where an Indian village of 15 houses was seen in 1882. Dr. Garfield informs me that Cat and Village Islands are near enough to each other to be seen one from the other, and refers to an article by Kroeber (1927) mentioning "Village Island, da-sa-kok (sand beach around), a small island less than a mile in length, located just south of Cat Island"

The island was a ^{fortified} refuge site, but was occupied long enough so that about 40 totem poles and carvings were set up. The occupants were "Tongass Ravens" (Garfield, p 54), "probably the Tegeedi" (Kroeber), and moved to Fort Tongass in 1868.

Some of the old totem poles have been moved from the village to Saxman. Garfield mentions a post 100 years old brought from this place in 1939 (p. 35), and also posts carved about 1827 on Village Island and installed in a house on Kanagunut Island [presumably at Clemencity], later moved to Tongass Island and from there to Pennock Island (p 20).

The name of the village, "da-sa-kok, (sand beach all around) (Kroeber), "Tas^ex^ek^w, sand beach all around" (Waterman via Garfield) may be the origin of the name Tongass.

It was my intention to put into Tongass Hbr [this would be the other Tongass Hbr, near Cat Island village, on Annette Island]. but understanding that the Indians about this season are generally off on their way to the Ross... the only likely place to find them would be Clemencetty." (Work, p 27)
On March 26 he did find the Tongass tribe there, and records that they were fighting amongst themselves.

Captain McNeill, who knew the coast very well recorded in his journal about 1832, with regard to Clemencetty harbour, that "This is sometimes the winter residence of the Cockaine tribe". Presumably they were the Tongass. But it is evident that the place was sometimes used also by Cape Fox Indians, for Work records in his journal of 1835 that Tongass and Cape Fox people had the previous year brought plenty of fish to Fort Simpson from Clemencetty where there is good fishing, both for salmon and halibut (p 69)

The origin of the name is obscure. Acc to the Geog Dictionary of Alaska, the Russians used the form Tlehonsteti (p 633).

Village Island

Another old Tongass village from which totem poles were removed to Saxman was Village Island. Garfield mentions a post 100 years old brought from this place in 1939 (p 35), and also posts carved about 1827 on Village Island and installed in a house on Kanaguput Island [presumably at Clemencetty], later moved to Tongass Island and from there to Kennock Island (p 20)

The location of this village is not ^{entirely} clear. Garfield says that just before 1868 the Tongass Ravens were entrenched in a log fortress on Village Island, a low, sandy island in Clarence Strait." (p 54) from which they moved to Fort Tongass. The Geographical Dictionary of Alaska (p 660) lists Village islet, (peninsula at low water), in Felice Strait near the

north end of Sukk Island, where an Indian village of 15 houses was seen in 1882.

Tongass

This village, on the west side of the southern lobe tip of Tongass Island, in Nakat Bay almost on the Boundary, was occupied as the principal village of the tribe between 1868 and about 1900. In June, 1868 following on the purchase of Alaska the year before, the Americans established a customs house and fort on the island (the fort was abandoned again in September 1870). The Tongass moved from Village Island and settled on the beach adjoining the parade ground, which forced their enemies to make peace (Garfield, p 54).

The village became one of the best known totem pole villages of the coast. Here were the poles representing Lincoln and Seward. In 1897 Dorsey found "New Tongass" completely deserted, as all the people were away to the canneries. Or so ^{he} thought perhaps they had moved to Saxman, though Corser says they deserted the village in 1900 ()

Some of the poles were moved and restored.

Saxman

Saxman is a Tlingit settlement, north of Tongass, just south of the mixed settlement of Ketchikan. According to Corser (1940 p 10) the Tongass moved here in 1900 with the hope of establishing a model christian village after the manner of New Metlakatla.

The Totem Park in Saxman was the major restoration project and poles were brought from Tongass, Cat, Village, Pennock, Islands and Cape Fox village. See Garfield p 13.