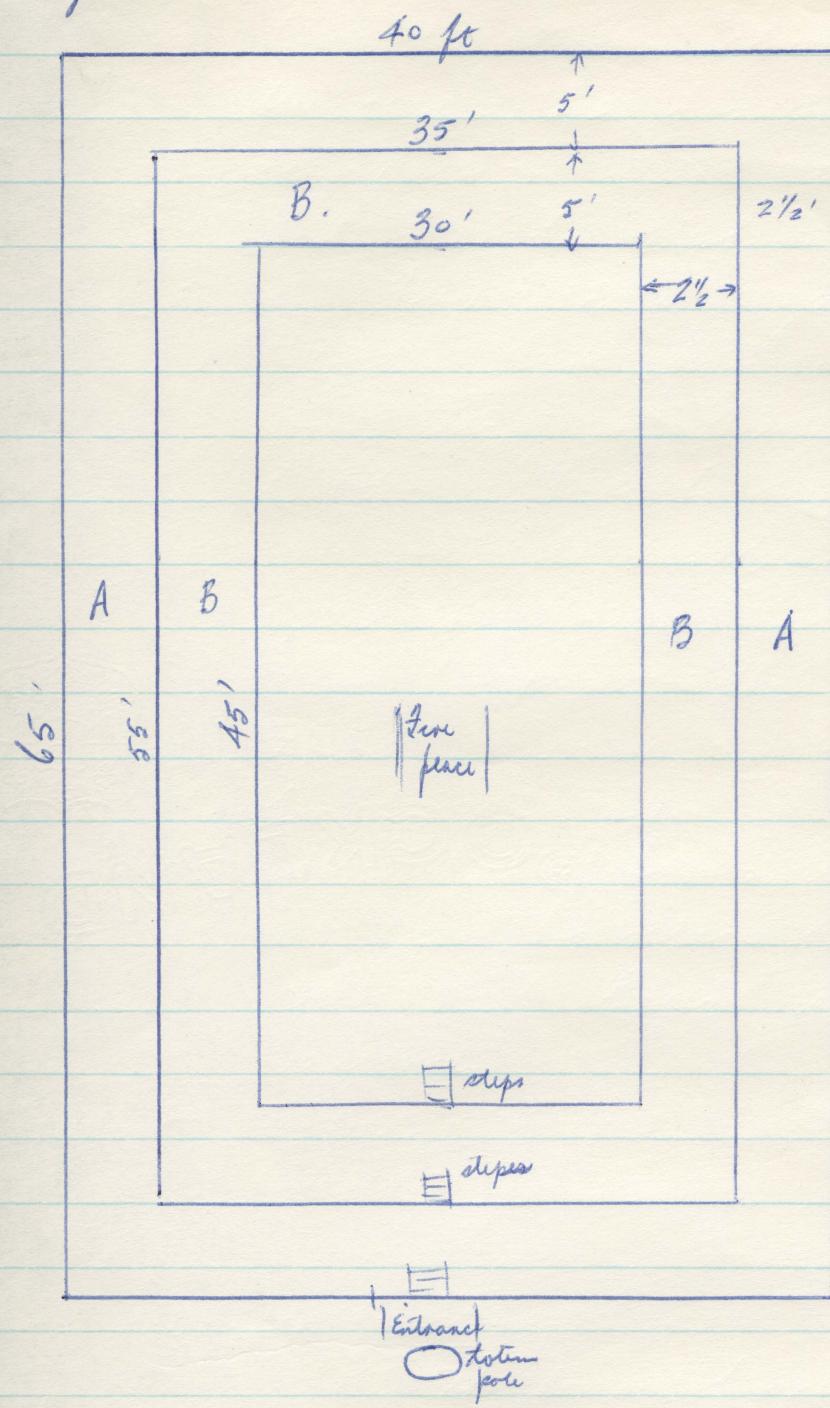


he·l's. da'ax house at gitxata

Beynon, 1916.

dag. am g. aine ✓

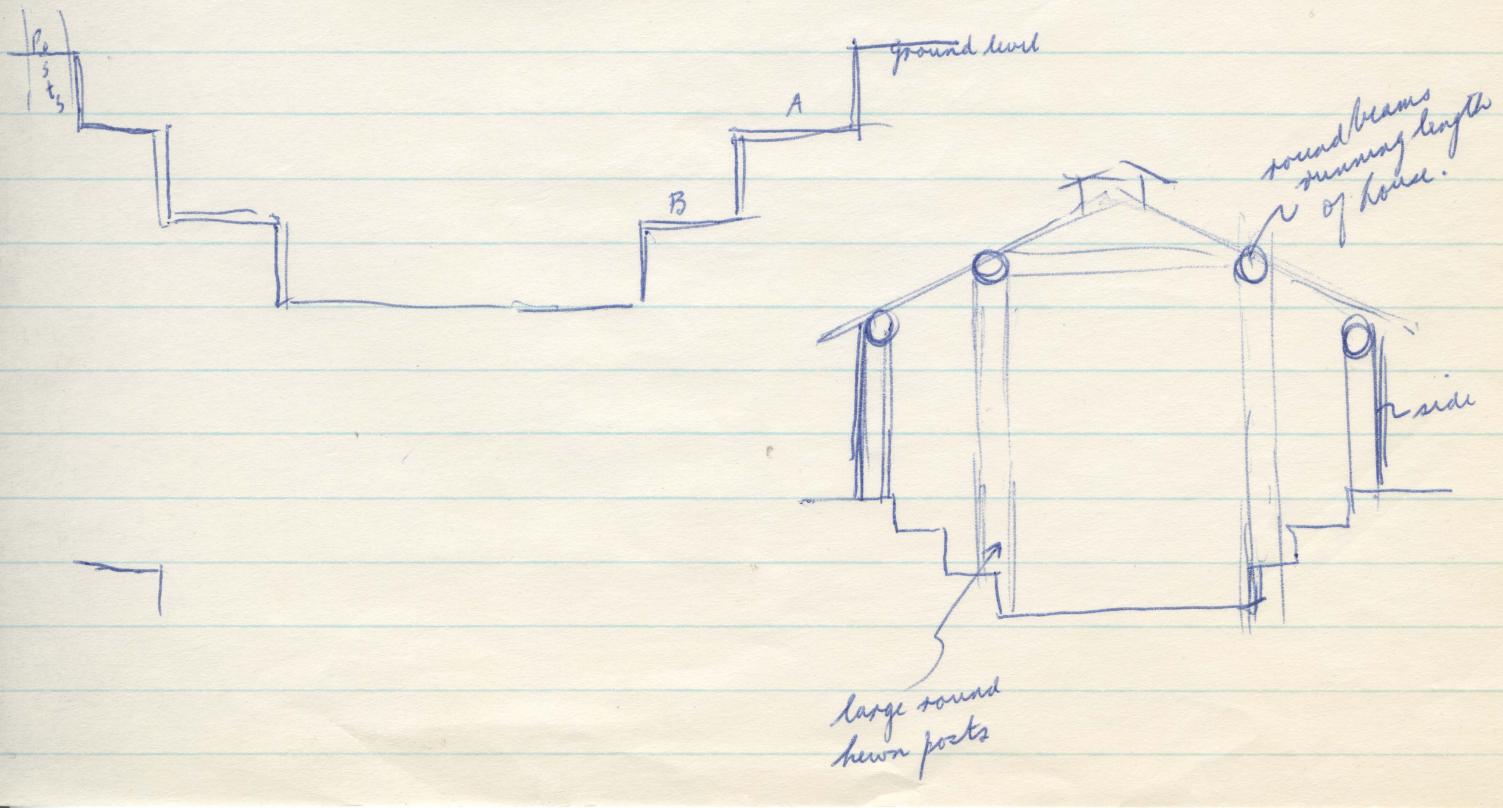


Steps have plank facings  
top and side.  
Floor is earth.

A. Top step was for servants  
sleeping quarters and  
food storage

B. For members of the house and  
guests, as sleeping quarters  
and general uses.

The rear portion of this  
step was for the head of  
the house and his wives  
(Mrs he·l had 7 wives.)



Death customs, succession  
mourning, funeral customs

Seynon, 1922. Pt Simpson (Informant Herbert Wallace)

Procedure at the death of a t'simsyan

When a person died, the head of the deceased's father's house was always sent for, and given the work of preparing the body for burial. The maternal relatives compensated (him) for expenses incurred. In cases of accidents or drownings, the person who found the body was compensated, and he usually buried it. If the family was paternally extinct, the work of preparing the body and burying generally fell to the tribal chief (if he is of a different phratry from the deceased).

Seynon takes himself as an example:-

"I am a Taxqiboo married to a qispawudwa'do. My children are qispaw of my wife's house. On the death of my child, the head of my Taxqiboo group or house is sent for and to him would be given the instructions for burial. This man would be compensated by my wife's people. Although the father (himself) is not called upon to contribute, it is customary for him to do so.

All qispaw people would also contribute, and their contribution would not be forgotten. It was like an investment or insurance; when the contributor died, this family would have to compensate. A person who contributes to many such deaths would upon his own death have many returns. The record kept of such contributions is remarkable, and anyone not returning a contribution when he should do so gets informed of his tardiness in a way that brings undesirable names into the family. Such tardiness leaves a person open for the worst taunts one can level at another.

### A death custom

cedar bark strip  
from coffin

Beynon saw a strange thing happen in 1922. A woman had died, the second death in her family in two months. As the coffin was being covered, he noticed a strip of cedar bark extending from the end of it. When it was covered, the eldest of the maternal relatives of the deceased cut off this strip of bark, saying "Let death come in no more". This led Beynon to enquire about burial customs.

Mrs Emma Musgrave:

In the old days I used to see them place the dead persons in boxes like food boxes (g.alan'ax). Before they placed the body in the box, they asked its assistance to stop sickness and death. To ensure that no more deaths occurred in the family they would "tie death up to the corpse" with a rope of fireweed and nettle fibres, leaving the ends of the rope hanging out of the box.

When the time came to take the remains to the burial ground, the oldest maternal relative of the deceased would take one end of the rope, the spouse of the deceased would take the other (if unmarried, only one end was left out), and they would cut them off from the box, saying "Do not come again, death". If they ~~did~~ failed to sever it with one blow, it was a sign that death would pay another visit shortly. If the ropes were cut cleanly, it meant that the deceased person would use his influence to ensure that death did not come again.

Mrs Abel Johnson added:

The cedar bark strip was placed in the hand of the deceased person before the box

Funeral  
customs

Mourning  
and funeral  
customs

was closed. The entire family of the deceased would walk around the box four times, each time pausing to form a circle around the box to weep and mourn, while all the people of the household sang the dirge songs of the house. The family wore square cedar bark mourning mats about a yard square. Their hair was cropped close and their faces blackened with ashes and charcoal. After <sup>they had completed</sup> completing this last circle around the box, the head of the house would say "let there be no more deaths, as we have tied up death (the spirit of death) with the departed one". Then the mourners would take off their cedar bark mats and throw them on top of the box.

When there ~~was~~ occurred a death in the house, all members of that house would fast until the burial or cremation had taken place. They gave themselves up to weeping and singing of dirge songs. It was important that all members of the family cut their hair close; this was supposed to "separate the influence of the death spirit from them". Food was burned for the deceased.

On the day of the burial, other people in the village who had deceased relatives would send food, clothing, or ceremonial implements to them by burning them in the fire and at the same time saying "This (food) is for so-and-so; I am sending it by so-and-so (the dead person)."

Duties of the dead chief's successor.

The successor is either a brother or a maternal nephew, whichever is the older. If the nephew is older than the brother then the nephew is next in line. For a year this person goes into seclusion, with his hair cut short and his face painted black with charcoal, and does much fasting.

At the time of the burial of the brother or uncle, he is announced as the successor and also assumes the name, and gifts are given to all. When the year is up (the anniversary of the death is reached), the successor, ready to assume the position among the people, would announce his period of mourning was over, discontinue fasting, and prepare to give a great feast. At this feast, called

w i l x m e s  
where was red ochre  
red

paint on his face and body, and would then announce he was entering into the councils of the tribes. During the mourning period he would not attend any social functions, nor would any member of his house. The reason was that they did not want to anger the departed, but show respect for his memory, so as to keep death away from the house.

Burial places  
of shamans

Great halais or sorcerers would be buried in some isolated place known only to ~~the~~ the immediate family, because of the fear that another halait would go to the place and usurp the powers of the dead halait. Many such burial places were known, both among the Tsimshian and the Hingit. Beynon found one in the hills  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from shore and about 6 miles from the old Hingit village of t'agwan on Annette Island. The bones were in a carved box about 2 feet square and

2 feet high, in a cavern. He found by enquiry that it was the remains of a famous Hupt medicine man. "The same manner of burial was used by the Tsimshian."

### Signs of death:

plant  
A certain plant that grows with low flat leaves was used as an ingredient in a native tonic. Its gatherers would be on the lookout for one with leaves turned up at the edges. This foretold the death of the patient.

animals  
Hunters unable to trap any game regarded it as a sign of an approaching death in the family.

owl  
The hooting of the owl was a sure sign of death.

The owl was dreaded by the Tsimshian; they thought it had the power to talk as a human being in reply to questions. A person seeing an owl would shout "What is the name of your child, Oh owl?" If death were near the family of the person the owl would answer "So-and-so (the person asking) is the name of my child."

Then to overcome the evil powers of the owl, the person would have to continue asking the ~~name~~ <sup>owl</sup> of the same question, and getting the same answer until the owl tired and fell over dead.

If the person tired first he would not live long.

A humorous story is told of a man named t'it g. s'x who got into such a dialogue with an owl. The owl was unable to pronounce his name; it could only say ~~t'it~~ tit- and then gave up; so the man was saved ~~from~~ the evil influence of the bird.

The small horned owl is the most dreaded kind. If it came to the village and landed on a house, it was a sign of "death in the house."