

## Working in the Woods

*Tsimshian Resource Workers and the Forest Industry  
of British Columbia*

CHARLES R. MENZIES AND CAROLINE F. BUTLER

In the context of contemporary treaty making and recent Euro-Canadian court decisions reaffirming Aboriginal rights and title, it is more important than ever before to understand the pivotal role played by First Nations in the development of British Columbia's resource-based economy.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the dominant narratives of North America's settler states continue to ignore the role of First Nations as workers and their participation in building our contemporary economies. It is more common for these "stories"—both popular and academic—to focus instead on the pre- or early contact pasts and cultures of first peoples and, in the process, fetishize their "otherness."<sup>2</sup> But, as Littlefield and Knack point out, the involvement of indigenous people in wage labor "has often been essential for the survival of First Nation individuals and communities" for well over a century.<sup>3</sup>

The experiences of Aboriginal workers in the forest industry have largely been ignored in favor of research on either the exclusion of Aboriginal peoples from resource employment or the historical development of resource industries. With the exception of Rolf Knight's general survey, case studies by Kirk Dombrowski on the Tlingit, James McDonald on the Kitsumkalum, Brian Hosmer on the Metlakatla, and John Pritchard on the Haisla, very little research has examined the experiences of First Nations people as participants in the forest industry.<sup>4</sup> Where resource industries are examined, they have been heavily weighted toward commercial fishing and cannery work. McDonald's examination of Kitsumkalum political economy and Pritchard's account of Haisla economic activities constitute the only significant consideration of forestry work in the region. In this article we confront the perplexing lack of attention given to the pivotal role played by First Nations in the industrial history of British Columbia by turning to the work experience of Tsimshian community members in the forest industry.<sup>5</sup>

Our objective is to make clear through reference to archival and oral sources that the active participation within the industrial wage economy has been an

important feature of Tsimshian community members' lives for more than a century and a half. Despite the difficulties and challenges introduced by Euro-American industrialists and colonists, Tsimshian people were not simply passive reactors. As we will discuss below, Tsimshian community members met the challenges and disruptions actively and, especially during the early period of industrialization, were pivotal to the expansion of the resource extraction industry. To deny the agency of Tsimshian people in the colonial encounter is to deny them their humanity and to imply an underlying teleology in which Euro-American domination was a foregone and natural conclusion.

The objective of this study is met through the combination of two separate, though interconnected, approaches: a historical discussion of the emergence of the forest sector and an exploration of twentieth-century forest-related experiences of the Tsimshian. The intent of combining these different approaches is to offer a comprehensive discussion of Tsimshian involvement in the industrial forest industry that realistically reflects Tsimshian experience. Following a brief description of the geographical territories and communities of the Tsimshian, we proceed to a discussion of the historical emergence of the forest industry in the Tsimshian territories. In this historical analysis we pay particular attention to the historical and social events that inform and contextualize the nineteenth-century experience of Tsimshian involvement in the forest sector industry. The final component explores the linkage between Tsimshian community members' stories of working in the woods and the changes within the twentieth-century forest industry. Given the absence of any significant overview of Tsimshian involvement in the forest industry or wage labor in general, this article is necessarily broad in its scope. Ultimately, our underlying argument is that involvement in industrial wage labor has been (and continues to be) a significant, if not defining, experience for Tsimshian people over the past century and a half. Connected to this argument is the understanding that involvement within the industrial wage economy was not primarily a coerced involvement. Rather, Tsimshian community members actively participated in the new opportunities that presented themselves through the industrial economy.

#### THE TSIMSHIAN TERRITORY AND RESEARCH FIELD SITE

While anthropologists have historically grouped together three nations as Tsimshian based on linguistic categories (Nisga'a, Gitksan, and Tsimshian proper), we are concerned in this essay only with the Tsimshian proper.<sup>6</sup> Described at their broadest, the traditional Tsimshian territories of the northern coast of British Columbia extend from their boundary with the Nisga'a near the mouth of the Nass River south to the top end of Milbank Sound and include most of the coastal islands in between. The eastern boundary of Tsimshian territory

extends inland along the Skeena River some 150 kilometers or more to the western boundary of the Gitksan territory. Ownership of specific portions of the landscape is divided between village/tribes and house groups (matrilineal extended families) in an interlocking pattern of ownership and resource use that covers the entire landmass described above.

Interviews with Tsimshian resource workers were conducted with people from the villages of Kitkatla, Lax Kw'alaams, Metlakatla, Kitsumkalum, and Gitga'at. These village communities within the Tsimshian Nation share a common language, Sm'algayax, and cooperate politically within the Tsimshian Tribal Council. However, it is important to point out the effective level of political decision making is at the level of the house group and then the village. The tribal council level has no decision-making authority. It exists as an umbrella organization for the purposes of political intervention on behalf of house groups and villages within the wider political economy of the Canadian nation-state.

Europeans first appeared in Tsimshian territory to the Kitkatla near their village of Laxgibaaw, on the south end of Banks Island, in 1787. In the ensuing years an extensive maritime fur trade emerged, controlled by the Kitkatla house of Ts'ibasaa. The Hudson's Bay Company arrived in the region in the early 1800s and formed an alliance with Ts'ibasaa's rival, Ligeex of the Giispaxlo'oots. Ligeex controlled key points of access along the Skeena and Nass Rivers inland of Ts'ibasaa's coastal territories. In 1834 Chief Ligeex encouraged the Hudson's Bay Company to locate their trading post at what came to be called Fort Simpson (later Port Simpson), about twenty kilometers north of present-day Prince Rupert.<sup>7</sup> The Tsimshian communities living at nearby Metlakatla quickly shifted their settlements to Fort Simpson and established a year-round community, Lax Kw'alaams. The change from a mercantile to industrial economy led to the development of Prince Rupert in 1911 as the commercial capital on the North Coast. As a consequence, Lax Kw'alaams was shifted to the margins of the developing capitalist economy. Missionaries and then industrialists quickly followed fur traders onto Tsimshian lands. Bolstered first by the legal framework of the United Kingdom and then, after 1871, by that of the Dominion of Canada, the newcomers were intent on appropriating and extracting indigenous resources—including everything from “souls” to fish, timber, and minerals.

The recent histories of the Tsimshian communities of Kitkatla, Lax Kw'alaams, Metlakatla, Kitsumkalum, and Gitga'at (Hartley Bay) reflect the effects of non-Aboriginal influence in the territories. Though they share a common language and are connected through ties of house group, clan, and history, their specific histories of economic and community development diverge as a result of their place in the history of industrial expansion and development. In

particular, we can glimpse the differential impact on everyday life of the uneven transition from a kin-ordered mode of production, in which the production of everyday life was organized within the traditional family structure, to an industrial capitalist economy. For instance, one woman we interviewed currently lives in Kitsumkalum but grew up in Port Essington. She recalled for us how her family traveled along the Skeena and throughout the coast following seasonal rounds during the middle part of the twentieth century. Another woman currently living in Prince Rupert told us of her family's involvement in logging, fishing, and First Nations politics throughout the territories and detailed her relations in both Metlakatlas. Several people told us of how family members sought seasonal work away from their homes on fishing boats or in the canneries.

The family histories of the people we interviewed reflect how individuals moved spatially within the territories for many purposes—gathering resources, securing seasonal work, going to school, starting a family—and also how people moved over time as social and economic conditions changed. It is from these oral histories, when combined with the accounts of Hudson's Bay Company employees and other early sources, that it is possible to divine a sense of how Tsimshian peoples have participated in various aspects of forestry throughout the last 150 years.

#### EARLY DEVELOPMENTS:

#### THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY AND MISSIONARY MILLS

##### *Fort Simpson*

The Fort Simpson post of the Hudson's Bay Company relied on Aboriginal labor for food harvesting and forestry-related activities.<sup>8</sup> Their reliance was such that the activities of the fort were organized around the food gathering and processing cycle of the Tsimshian. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) station required firewood and building logs in steady supply. From 1834 until the late 1870s, First Nations people were increasingly employed as woodcutters by the HBC. While a few Tsimshian may have been recruited to collect wood for trading vessels during the first decades of the nineteenth century, the HBC provided the first major source of wage employment in forestry for the Aboriginal people of the North Coast.

For the first three decades Tsimshian people fit work for the HBC within their customary annual round of gathering, hunting, and fishing. During this time, Aboriginal participation in fort-initiated forestry activities was limited to the fall and winter months. During the summer months, for example, the clerk notes that only the European employees of the HBC were cutting firewood while the Tsimshian were away fishing. Similarly, the rafting expeditions normally

occurred after the Tsimshian returned from salmon fishing in the early fall. The first year logging did not stop because of the *oolichan* season was 1857.<sup>9</sup> From this year on, a growing number of Tsimshian men remained behind to work for the fort; as a consequence, logging trips became less seasonal.

During the customary Tsimshian annual round, most community members would leave their winter villages to gather along the banks of the lower Nass River or to harvest and process *oolichan* from March to May. That some community members would remain at Lax Kw'alaams during the 1857 *oolichan* season suggests the employment of Tsimshian by the HBC was becoming a regular component of household subsistence. Thus the fact that some household members would stay behind while others fished for *oolichan* points to a willingness on the part of the Tsimshian to incorporate new forms of productive entrepreneurship within their customary mode of subsistence and suggests an early development of an occupational niche for Aboriginal forestry workers.

Not all of the forestry work during the Hudson's Bay Company era was fort-initiated. There are several records of wood purchase, suggesting entrepreneurial forestry activity. During the earliest years Aboriginal entrepreneurs traded pickets and cedar bark as well as furs and fish. By 1856 several Tsimshian independently logged and offered pickets for trade to the fort (the clerk of the fort notes his pleasure at this development because the wood trade proved cheaper than paying logging wages). However, the incidental forestry conducted by the company (for building materials and firewood) was a critical early entry point for Tsimshian people into the waged economy. Subsequent forest development relied on the experience and willingness of Tsimshian who had logged for the HBC either as employees or as independent contractors.

#### *Missionary's Sawmills*

Forestry on the North Coast was commercialized primarily through Protestant missionary activity during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Some independent mills were established around the turn of the century. Prior to 1910, the majority of sawmills in the Tsimshian territories were connected to missionaries and evangelical projects.<sup>10</sup>

William Duncan's work at Metlakatla, for example, highlights the role of missionaries in the development of the logging industry in the Prince Rupert area. Duncan, a representative of the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), arrived in Fort Simpson in 1857 to work with the Tsimshian gathered around the Hudson's Bay Company post. In May 1862 Duncan left with about fifty Tsimshian for the abandoned village of Metlakatla to establish a "utopian" colony sheltered from the negative influences of the fort. Shortly after Duncan and his followers left, smallpox decimated the community at Fort Simpson,

leaving his followers relatively unaffected. The coincidence of disease and Duncan's move prompted almost six hundred more Tsimshian to join the Christian community and to move to Metlakatla.<sup>11</sup>

One of the first things built in Metlakatla was a sawmill to enable the speedy construction of "Christian" homes and to provide remunerative employment. Aspects of CMS doctrine and Duncan's missionary approach made the sawmill integral to the Christian project at Metlakatla. The CMS expected its converts to bear most of the financial burden for their own conversion, which required the mission to attempt to be self-supporting.<sup>12</sup> Jean Usher has connected Duncan's work directly to Victorian English middle-class materialist values, and Wellcome's detailed description of Duncan's life makes a direct reference to missionary literature on the "materialist cravings" of the "heathen."<sup>13</sup> Duncan's belief that it was necessary to induce conversion through evidence of material gain is, at least partially, a product of his being trained in a tradition that linked religion, industry, and education.<sup>14</sup> In crude economic terms, Duncan recognized that Christianity *cost more* than the pagan lifestyle, acknowledging

[t]heir want of capital, owing to which civilization may tend to the impoverishment of the Indians by calling for an increase in their expenses without augmenting their income. Having those facts before me, I have endeavored to help and guide the males under my influence to fresh modes of industry.<sup>15</sup>

Duncan established a sawmill, cannery, soap factory, brick factory, weaving industry, and agricultural projects and ran a trading schooner—all with the intention of providing profitable local employment that would keep the Tsimshian away from Port Simpson and Victoria, labor markets filled with vices and temptations.<sup>16</sup> The sawmill played a central role in the development of the village and the conversion of the Tsimshian. In addition to providing employment and financing community projects, the mill supplied building materials, which worked toward Duncan's "civilizing" project.

Traditional Tsimshian housing was at odds with missionary ideals of Christian living. Thomas Crosby, Methodist missionary to the Tsimshian of Fort Simpson suggested that "the old heathen house, from its very character was the hot-bed of vice."<sup>17</sup> Lockner suggests that the missionary-initiated construction of new single-family dwellings attacked Indian life at one of its most pivotal points and was crucial in undermining the clan system of social relations.<sup>18</sup> Before the autumn of 1862, Duncan had supervised the construction of thirty-five new houses.<sup>19</sup> A second wave of construction in the late 1870s, new two-story houses to "keep pace with the general moral and mental process,"<sup>20</sup> necessitated the construction of a waterpower sawmill. This new mill expanded the community's ability to provide lumber to surrounding villages and canneries.

Duncan's sawmill at Metlakatla provided a model for other missionaries in

the area. Thomas Crosby's efforts at Fort Simpson were directly responsible for the establishment of Georgetown Mill, about twenty kilometers south of Lax Kw'alaams. This mill operated for nearly a century and employed several generations of Tsimshian mill workers. George Williscroft built the mill in 1875 to provide lumber for the new houses demanded by Crosby. The missionary believed that if the Tsimshian built new homes at their own expense, it would encourage thrift and industry.<sup>21</sup> C. F. Morrison, a lay missionary at Metlakatla, provided financial backing for the mill. The impact on Fort Simpson was significant and rapid; in 1874 there was only one nontraditional home in the Indian village, and by 1880 there were 650 single-family dwellings.<sup>22</sup> Missionaries also built mills at Hartley Bay, Kincolith (a Nisga'a community), and Kispiox in Gitxsan territory to supply lumber for village housing, local canneries, and non-Aboriginal building projects at the turn of the century.

The first sawmill that was not built as part of a missionary project was built at Port Essington in 1878 by Robert Cunningham (who was, coincidentally, a former lay missionary at Metlakatla). Cunningham's mill was built to support his fishing cannery operation and became a major supplier of timber to the rapidly expanding fishing industry along the mouth of the Skeena River.

The mills of the first decade of the twentieth century, such as those at Balmoral, Seal Cove, or Port Edward, were all independent of the missionaries and were more clearly linked to the wider processes involving the expansion of industrial relations of production into the Tsimshian territories, processes propelled by fully formed industrial capitalist firms embedded in global networks of exchange, production, and finance.

#### TWENTIETH-CENTURY EXPERIENCES: THE LIFE HISTORIES OF FORESTRY WORKERS

The Hudson's Bay Company introduced the Tsimshian to wage labor in forestry work in the middle of the nineteenth century. Missionary intervention toward the end of the century established sawmills that employed Tsimshian in the provisioning of canneries and local building needs. During the first decades of the twentieth century, First Nations involvement in forestry included hand logging and beachcombing for local mills and wage labor in the mills. These activities were usually combined with commercial fishing and subsistence food-gathering activities.<sup>23</sup>

Tsimshian forestry workers have experienced significant change since the end of the 1940s. The increasing control of forest resources on the North Coast by large corporations in the post-World War II era shifted Aboriginal participation from independent harvesting enterprises to employment as wage laborers. Recently, as the forest industry has suffered decline, informal activities and



casual work have predominated, and complementary, nonharvest activities are providing new sources of employment.<sup>24</sup>

Worker experiences in the different communities reflect the historical patterns of change and transformation. Additionally, different modes of participation in the forest industry can also be associated with different communities and regions within the Tsimshian territories; thus community experiences tend to revolve around a forestry activity predominant in that village at a particular time. Kitsumkalum Tsimshian who lived at Port Essington were highly involved in hand logging and seasonal mill work during the 1940s and 1950s and then industrial logging in the 1960s and 1970s. Lax Kw'alaams (Port Simpson) has been the community most integrated into postwar industrial logging, largely due to its substantial on-reserve forests. Metlakatla band members identify themselves as a community of fishers. A trend toward greater participation in beachcombing reflects declining opportunities in commercial fishing and a current trend toward salvage harvesting in forestry. Kitkatla appears to have had minimal participation in the forestry industry in the past. However, the band's interest in silviculture and eco-tourism points to new approaches to resource use and future trends in forestry employment. Thus can one trace the development and transformation of the forestry industry in the experiences of Tsimshian forestry workers from four different communities.

#### *Hand Logging and Mill Work: Kitsumkalum*

The various independent and missionary sawmills established on the North Coast by the turn of the century had a significant impact on Tsimshian lifestyle and work patterns. The mills provided both seasonal, sedentary employment and acted as buyers for Tsimshian-harvested logs. The sawmill at Metlakatla was an early employer of Tsimshian men as loggers and sawyers; however, disagreements with the CMS and the Canadian government prompted Duncan to move the community to Alaska in 1887 and the mill was closed.<sup>25</sup> Georgetown Mill, south of Port Simpson, employed Lax Kw'alaams men, and also introduced them to industrial logging operations—contractors often recruited mill workers as loggers. Brown's Mill, on the Ecstall River fifteen kilometers from Port Essington, was built in 1903 and operated for more than fifty years, employing many Kitsumkalum band members. J. J. Donaldson, the owner of Brown's Mill, bought Georgetown in 1949, which resulted in the significant movement of workers back and forth between the two mills. When Port Essington burned down in the late 1950s, many Kitsumkalum mill workers moved to Georgetown full-time or to the mill in Port Edward.

In addition to mill work, some Kitsumkalum Tsimshian living in Port Essington also engaged in hand logging until the mid-1950s. Hand logging involved traveling along the river and falling trees by hand, dragging them down to the



shore, and towing them by boat to the mill. For families still living on the land, hand logging was usually done in the spring, between beaver trapping and fishing season, to provide money for fishing supplies or was done in the fall, before trapping mink and marten in November, to provide cash for winter provisions. Residents of Port Essington during the middle of the century often combined mill work, hand logging, and fishing—logging in the spring, fishing in the summer, and logging briefly again in the fall before returning to the mill for the early winter months.

Paula Langdon of the Kitsumkalum band remembers hand logging with her father in the 1940s and 1950s. Paula was born in 1930 into a family that continued to follow a seasonal pattern of migration through Tsimshian territories harvesting food and other resources, including trees.

My Dad had logging claims. He had three islands that I knew he could log. We used to move with him. We used to live right there where he was logging. We didn't go to school. We were lucky . . . so we moved with him wherever he needed to go, all year round. . . . His claim was in Baker's Inlet and there were two other islands, Mary Island and Gibson Island. They used to get up and leave in the morning, they leave for work, they come back and have lunch and then they leave again until dark. It was just like regular working hours. But he's his own boss, so when it's clam digging time we go clam digging . . . we'll go hunting, go fishing.

The owner of Brown's Mill held many of the hand logging claims along the Ecstall River, and many Kitsumkalum families were recruited to log those claims for the mill. Kitsumkalum loggers also harvested from their own claims in other areas; First Nation loggers applied directly to the government for hand logging licenses on their traplines—the lands to which they had rights according to Tsimshian traditions. This appears to be the only forestry activity that reflected traditional land tenure rights. Hand loggers lost these licenses as the tracts were allocated to large corporations. Paula recalls the change in forest tenure after World War II:

At the end of his logging season, he'll boom it up and take it in, get a little bit of money, pay off the winter bills, stock up on more groceries. We never worried about bank accounts. His bank account is in the woods. But then, when they brought in the big companies, that did away with the bank account. Someone else took it, so they couldn't go out. So they lost all their logging claims, all the people that had the logging claims, they lost all that. They were allowed to get a permit and beachcomb, but they never got much.

Prior to the loss of individual hand logging licenses, this activity provided a significant source of income for the Kitsumkalum. For families like Paula's, hand logging was integrated into the seasonal rounds and provided a necessary

cash supplement to their subsistence activities. For Port Essington families, hand logging was a chance for families to spend some time in the bush and provided a change of pace from mill work and fishing. Several Kitsumkalum band members suggested that time spent hand logging was a cherished opportunity to work with their fathers and to learn about traditional values through land-based activity. Indeed, it was in discussing hand logging that participants emphasized Aboriginal conservation practices and the sustainability of traditional logging activities. Paula Langdon describes these values in her description of her father's hand logging:

He did hand logging, and to the First Nation people and all the old people, First Nation and non-First Nation, having a logging claim was just like having money in the bank. They get what they need and leave the other standing. They'll be standing for years and people can all get it—they didn't log to get rich and to cut them all down, just because they are there. They say there's a purpose for trees to be standing there. They won't log one area out. They will cut some here and there and will move on to another place. Just get a boom of logs for winter and that's good enough for them.

When Paula was older, like many Kitsumkalum women she went to work at one of the canneries on the river. She started working at the North Pacific Cannery when she was twelve years old and made eighty dollars during her first summer of work. All four of her brothers worked as industrial loggers after hand logging ceased in the Kitsumkalum area; they worked for Skeena Cellulose in the Kalum Valley. Her father's generation was the last to hand log in Tsimshian territory.

#### *Industrial Logging: Lax Kw'alaams*

At least a few individuals from all of the Tsimshian communities have been involved in industrial logging at one point in their working lives. Many Kitsumkalum men worked for Columbia Cellulose in the 1960s and 1970s when the company was logging between Tsimshian and Nisga'a territories. Two young men from Metlakatla have had careers in helicopter logging during the last decade; Kitkatla and Hartley Bay band members have been involved, though minimally, in logging near or on their reserve lands. Lax Kw'alaams, or the Port Simpson band, has been the most involved in the postwar logging industry, primarily due to the considerable amount of logging conducted on Lax Kw'alaams reserve lands. Reserve forest resources have initiated the involvement of the community in both local and other logging enterprises. Band members hired by companies logging reserve land have moved on to work on projects off reserve and many have thus traveled extensively along the North Coast as loggers.

In the late 1990s Lax Kw'alaams formed a joint venture in Chambers Creek with the Nisga'a community of Kincolith, and the West Fraser Logging Company has also provided forestry employment for band members. As a consequence, there are a considerable number of men in the community who have spent at least one or two seasons in forest-related employment during their working lives.

Jake Turner and his son Bill from the Lax Kw'alaams band have made their living in the logging industry, working both on and off reserve. Jake got his start at Brown's Mill in 1958 when he was sixteen. From the mill, he was recruited as a "whistle punk" by a falling operation.<sup>26</sup> He moved between the bush and both Brown's Mill and Georgetown Mill for three years, working in the mill during the wintertime. He then moved to logging full-time, working his way through the hierarchy of jobs: whistle punk, pat-man, rigging slinger, running tower, and falling.

Georgetown Mill was a common starting place for Lax Kw'alaams forestry workers in the 1950s. By this time Georgetown and Brown's Mills were jointly owned and workers from Kitsumkalum and Lax Kw'alaams moved between the two mills regularly. Other Lax Kw'alaams loggers found work in the various mills in Prince Rupert in the 1950s and 1960s. Some men have been extremely mobile, working in the many logging camps on Vancouver Island in the 1970s, and more recently many have been traveling to Alaska for helicopter logging projects.

Jake has thirty-nine years of experience as a logger. Off and on he has combined logging with gillnetting in the summer and has worked in the village cannery for a few seasons. According to Jake, it is often hard to successfully combine fishing and logging: "If you don't get back in time to put in your name with the logging, you lose out."

Although many loggers have fished casually during the "fire season" in the middle of the summer when there is no logging activity, it is difficult for career loggers to maintain their own fishing boat. They can only fish the earlier runs of salmon, and therefore the majority of loggers that fish do so as deckhands and not skippers.

Bill Turner's father helped him get his first logging job when he was fifteen. Nineteen years later, he speaks with pride about his career as a logger:

I started off with just strapping, working on a dry-land sort, and moved onto bucking, then on to tower, tower logging, then did a little bit of chasing and running machinery, loaders. Then I worked in the bush as a chokerman and pulled rig a couple of times. I have been on the tower for, I don't know how many years now, must be twelve years. The route that I went through, I went through machinery—my dad was the one that got me into running machines.

Bill has worked in the Lax Kw'alaams cannery for short periods between logging jobs. However, he has generally been able to secure near year-round employment as a logger. His current job is with Chambers Creek Logging.

Both Jake and Bill have based their careers on reserve logging because it is closer to home and their on-reserve incomes are not taxed. However, the tax advantage of working on reserve is generally not as significant as they feel it should be. When logging on reserve with mixed First Nations and non-Aboriginal crews, some logging companies have paid the status Indian loggers lower wages than their non-Aboriginal coworkers. According to the logging companies, this functions to even out the net pay of the crews. It also allows logging companies a considerable savings in labor costs. According to Jake: "Fallers get \$380 a day. They turn around and give me \$235 a day. So that's the difference. They claim that you are not paying income tax so that is why they are cutting you down. You squawk too much and they give you two days notice, your pink slip." Both Jake and Bill have experienced this wage differential on reserve, as have all the loggers interviewed from Lax Kw'alaams. In the late 1970s, Jake and three other First Nations fallers tried to join a union in an attempt to secure equal wages. They were immediately fired for their efforts.

Jake and Bill Turner's logging experience is echoed in many of the other interviews with Tsimshian industrial loggers. Jake got his start at the Georgetown Mill, which provided Lax Kw'alaams men with a wage alternative or supplement to fishing in the 1950s. He moved from the mill to the bush and has worked for a variety of companies on short contracts in various areas. As Lax Kw'alaams land began to be logged, he became a key player as an experienced logger and has worked on most of the reserve projects. The majority of Bill's employment has been secured through band council recruitment for external companies logging on reserve land since the 1970s. Both he and his father have worked with predominantly mixed crews, 50 percent Tsimshian and 50 percent non-Aboriginal, and explain that they have never fully enjoyed the tax benefit of reserve work due to the institutionalization of a wage differential based on being status Indian under Canadian law. Both Jake and Bill have casually fished during logging breaks and have, on occasion, worked at the local cannery when a logging job wasn't immediately available.

### *Beachcombing: Metlakatla*

Beachcombing—searching out cut logs that have escaped from booming grounds and logging sites—is an activity that has developed in Tsimshian territories in the post-World War II era as a by-product of industrial logging. Families from Kitsumkalum, Lax Kw'alaams, and Metlakatla have all participated in the harvesting of logs that have broken loose from booms in the river

and on the coast. During the 1940s and 1950s, Kitsumkalum hand loggers often spent the early spring before fishing season beachcombing on the Skeena as far as the tidal boundary. They sold the wood to Brown's Mill, and the activity was conducted very similarly to hand logging. As riverside claims were bought up by large logging companies, beachcombers became restricted to their own hand logging tracts, and the activity became less and less economically viable as access was increasingly limited. Lax Kw'alaams fishers have casually beachcombed in the late fall and early winter for several decades, selling their logs to companies based in Prince Rupert. Beachcombing in this community remains limited, with fishing, cannery employment and reserve logging activities providing the primary source of employment.

There have been very few loggers in Metlakatla since Duncan moved with most of the community to Alaska and the Metlakatla sawmill was abandoned in 1887. According to Metlakatla elder Herb McConnell, "When Duncan left, the mill just . . . went down. There was nobody here. . . . All the guys that knew about how it worked were gone." The majority of Metlakatla people during the twentieth century have found employment in fishing, net mending, or boatbuilding. However, many Metlakatla families have at one time or another turned to beachcombing to increase their income. For Herb McConnell, beachcombing is what one does when all else fails; it is an occupation of last resort: "That's just for tough times—it is tough work. Just for folks who didn't have anything to do. But all the people here *are* fishermen." According to Herb, Metlakatla's involvement in the forest industry appears to be centered in beachcombing, which has been becoming increasingly important in the context of the economic decline of the fishing industry in recent years.

Ken Poynter, a Metlakatla band member in his early thirties, began beachcombing in the early 1990s when he started a family. He explained that beachcombing was intended to supplement his fishing income. Ken's prior employment had included construction work through band council housing projects. However, he still identifies himself primarily as a fisherman. "I went from the carpentry; I jumped on a fish boat. I made good money doing that so I stuck with it. . . . I was into halibut, herring. When there were halibut jobs around. I did crab fishing and black cod. Twelve years and counting. I'm still fishing." Ken has worked as a deckhand on a gill-netter and for the last two years has leased his own boat and license from the Northern First Nation Fishing Corporation. The increasingly short fishing season has left him with the time and the economic motivation to beachcomb. In 1993 he went into partnership with a non-First Nation friend from Prince Rupert who had logging experience. They used Ken's skiff to comb the Skeena from the coast to the Ecstall River. "We were up there pretty well all summer, from the floods right through. Worked all summer, spring flood starts April. Worked right through till now,

November, when the river starts freezing up. We rented a cabin up there . . . below Kasiks.” Ken sold both pulp and saw logs to West Fraser, receiving 80 dollars and 150 dollars per meter respectively. In the first year he made 60,000 dollars beachcombing, which was considerably more than his fishing income. Prices have dropped since then and for several seasons he has not been able to find a buyer for pulpwood. Nonetheless, he continues to make more money salvaging logs than catching fish.

In Ken’s extended family, three of his uncles and three of his male cousins beachcomb to supplement their fishing incomes. There is at least one other Metlakatla family currently involved in beachcombing. Ken suggests that this level of participation has been constant for two decades. However, the failing economy has led more people from Prince Rupert to start beachcombing, and Ken faces more competition on the water as well as falling wood prices. Nonetheless, Ken says that he will continue to beachcomb indefinitely: “If they are still buying, I’ll keep going.”

Although beachcombing has been more profitable than fishing, it continues to be considered a subsidiary activity. Elder Herb McConnell was rather derisive of beachcombing, suggesting that one must be quite hard up to bother with such intense labor. Metlakatla residents continue to identify themselves as fishers although that industry is contributing less and less to their income. Ken Poynter interrupts his lucrative beachcombing activities for only a few months of the summer to fish, but he considers himself a fisher. For many, beachcombing is still not considered a career but is instead understood as a temporary side venture.

#### *Silviculture: Kitkatla*

Silviculture, the practice of growing and tending trees, is becoming a “million-dollar industry,” according to Jeff Ladner, a forestry technician student. It is essential to sustainable forestry. And, given the nature of the forest industry, silviculture is itself a “sustainable industry.” As one interviewee put it: “there is a considerable amount of cleared land that now requires silvicultural treatment, and as logging continues, this area grows.” Silviculture opportunities are an important potential source of employment and business opportunities for First Nations. According to the Task Force on First Nation Forestry’s final report: “Silviculture can play an important role in job creation and economic development in First Nation communities. This is one area in which First Nation participation can be rapidly enhanced.”<sup>27</sup>

In the Tsimshian territories there are substantial areas that have been logged in the past that currently require silvicultural management. A forestry student

from Lax Kw'alaams suggests: "Silviculture is a big industry. If you look around, for the Tsimshians it's Work Channel, all the way to Porcher [Island] to Scotia Creek to Chameleon. All of those ones there, there is lots of silviculture work there." These are areas logged during the last few decades in the region, some of which, such as Porcher Island, are now being cultured. Similarly, the capital projects officer for the Metlakatla band downplays the potential for logging on Metlakatla land in the near future but emphasizes possible silviculture opportunities. Terry Finlan suggests that there is need for spacing and culturing activities in the areas logged at the turn of the century for William Duncan's mill.

You take a look around the surroundings and you will see a lot of old cuts logged years and years ago. People logged it. The growth has really not been thinned out or anything so you get these trees that are choking one another. I am not too familiar with the culturing of trees, but what I see is that they can improve on what we already have here for future use. You see some good timber around here, it is just that it hasn't been cultured.

The extensive logging of Lax Kw'alaams reserves during the last two decades has also established a need for silviculture on this land in the future.

Two brothers from Kitkatla, Hal and Steve Kingsley, have been involved in various silviculture projects during the last twenty years. Their work histories reveal both the opportunities for silviculture training and the restrictions on First Nations involvement in the growing industry. They are the first in a family of fishers and cannery workers to find employment in the forestry industry. In Kitkatla marine resources have always been the primary economic focus. The involvement of the Kingsleys and the training of other Kitkatla band members in silviculture points to a potential new employment and development opportunity for the community.

Hal Kingsley, born in 1954, left school at seventeen to stack lumber at Skeena Forest Sawmill in Prince Rupert. In his twenties Hal found contract work in silviculture spacing trees near Terrace and Prince George. Later he spent some time in Alberta working at the oil refineries. He has also worked as a deckhand on fishing boats. At the age of thirty he established his own business training other First Nations workers in silviculture. "I tried to start my own company but things didn't work out. Because I had no idea about this kind of contract . . . how to go about getting the grants. . . . The problem was I couldn't find any kind of sponsor, someone to help me work that out." After his company collapsed Hal applied his skills as a supervisor in government-sponsored forestry training programs. Throughout the 1990s Hal has traveled between Prince Rupert and Terrace to work on a variety of silviculture contracts.

Hal emphasizes the importance of training programs on the North Coast:



I know there are a lot of people out there that would like to learn. And it is expensive for the contractors to come to this town. They used to have contractors coming here from down south. They usually brought part of the crew from down south, sometimes they hired people from here, which is really little. . . . They don't have any companies in town. That is where it is really bad. I have seen people who are trained and they wish they could get back to work here.

Hal is interested in seeing Kitkatla become more involved in forestry and silviculture, suggesting that the industry could provide a significant economic focus for the band if adequate training was provided; "I know there are a lot of young fellows out there that would like to learn it, but it is just the idea of getting some kind of a setup."

Steve Kingsley is taking advantage of one of the few training opportunities available on the North Coast; he is a student in the forestry technician program at the First Nation College in Prince Rupert. The course is an extension of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology program and offers two-year instruction in a variety of forestry skills. Steve is one of three Kitkatla band members enrolled in the course.

Steve got his first silviculture experience during several years he was unemployed after some construction work in his early twenties, in the preemployment training projects that Hal supervised for the Ministry of Social Services. He later worked on a spacing project on Porcher Island for a contractor from Victoria. Unable to find further silviculture work, he has been employed at BC Packers fish plant for the last ten years. He started to consider other opportunities about five years ago when the fishing industry began to fail: "I was looking at the fishing trend and looking at my paychecks; over six years they were getting smaller and smaller." Steve anticipates that his forestry training will lead him into the treaty process, and he has committed himself to working for the Kitkatla band after gaining the necessary experience.

Kitkatla has no forestry program, but they are going to be forced into it. People are logging on our territory because no one from Kitkatla knows how. . . . As a technician, I will have to fight for specific tree areas. It will bring Kitkatla from a marine point of view, which is all they have. I don't want to have one thing in the basket.

Steve emphasizes the benefits of the "First Nation point of view" in forestry and silviculture and describes his role as something of a bridge between the two approaches to the forest:

If I am doing a silviculture classification, I will go and ask people about traplines. The other is a more quantitative and money point of view. What I want

in my life is a symbiotic relationship. We have something over the other college courses and over the Ministry of Forests because we know our tradition and culture. We can talk to the trapline owners AND we can talk to companies.

Hal and Steve were both introduced to silviculture through social programs. Such programs have been sporadic and have failed to train an adequate First Nations workforce. Both brothers suggest the need for locally based silviculture enterprises, further training of prospective workers, and the securing of grants and contracts to initiate projects. Management skills appear to be a key to the development of community based silviculture projects, and it is hoped that the forestry technician course will produce trained individuals able to establish such projects in Kitkatla and the other communities.

Both Hal and Steve emphasize their community's focus on marine resources, and their family work history reveals that their generation is the first to participate in the forestry industry. Two of their brothers have found casual work in the industry but continue to rely primarily on fishing and cannery work for employment. Steve and Hal consider themselves part of a very small group of Kitkatla band members who are forestry workers and emphasize the need for the community to train more of the male youth in the industry. Silviculture is considered the most viable option because of the minimal training and equipment required.

#### COMPLETING THE CIRCLE: TSIMSHIAN RESOURCE USE

Much has changed since the first Europeans arrived on the Tsimshian territories in the late 1700s. At the level of the economic, the most fundamental change has been the extension of industrial relations of production, particularly in the form of resource extraction industries, into the lands of the Tsimshian people. The increasing alienation of Aboriginal land by the colonial state and industrial capitalist firms disrupted and changed utterly the economic basis of Tsimshian society.

Recent court decisions (combined with decreasing profitability in the forest sector in general) have begun to redefine and clarify Canadian law as it relates to Aboriginal rights and title. In the process, Tsimshian community members are witnessing the emergence of new opportunities in the forests, not just as workers but also as owners and partners in development.<sup>28</sup> However, these new opportunities are occurring in the midst of an intense crisis of profitability within the global forest industry.<sup>29</sup> Individual Tsimshian have responded to this crisis by turning to salvage harvesting and beachcombing. Others (at the both the community and individual level) have entered the expanding silviculture industry. This represents a new direction in forest husbandry that has

been propelled by changing public attitudes concerning ecological health of the forests.

Different communities have been more intensely involved in the various aspects of the forest industry. As we have described above, Kitsumkalum band members were highly involved in hand logging and seasonal mill work during the first half of the twentieth century. They worked as independent suppliers of timber, as contracted harvesters, and as wage laborers. In the postwar period, many Kitsumkalum men worked as industrial loggers for multinational corporations logging in their traditional territories. Lax Kw'alaams band members have also been involved as loggers in the post-World War II logging industry (most, if not all, participants were men).<sup>30</sup> During the last three decades of the twentieth century, logging contracts on reserve lands encouraged local employment, and several men from the community have spent their careers logging tribal land. The expansion of beachcombing activities in Metlakatla reflects the decline of the resource economy in the North Coast region. Metlakatla band members identify themselves as a community of fishers, but shrinking catches have led many to use their boats to beachcomb. Lax Kw'alaams fishers and loggers have also turned to beachcombing as a result of declining fishing incomes and the loss of logging jobs. Finally, the residents of Kitkatla have not participated in the forestry industry in the past. However, it is unlikely that recourse to a strategy of industrial logging will be able to meet the village's economic needs. This is part of the explanation for why Kitkatla community members have identified industries such as silviculture as one potential development strategy.<sup>31</sup>

The changes in the industry have, in a sense, brought Tsimshian participation full circle. First Nations participants in the forestry industry started out as independent suppliers and contractors hand logging. Now, after more than a century of participation within an industrial forest industry as wage laborers, there has been a shift back toward autonomy, self-determination, and independent contracting. While the different communities' involvement in forestry has varied over time, the current treaty process and court decisions have sparked new interest in the forestry potential of their lands and the employment needs of their members.

The Tsimshian have used the forests of the North Coast since time immemorial and have used them commercially since the middle of the nineteenth century. The nature of how the forests have been used has been and remains intimately tied to daily livelihood and subsistence practices of the Tsimshian people. Prior to the expansion of a capitalist form of production, trees were modified, used, and respected as part of a living world within which humans and other entities maintained reciprocal relations. However, the extension of capitalist relations of production, most clearly manifest in the rise of industrial

forestry and commercial fishing, altered the material connection between Aboriginal peoples and the forest resources.

The rise of the industrial economy was not a passive process in which Aboriginal peoples simply acquiesced to a dominant power. Rather, it involved compromises, accommodations, and resistances. Now, nearly a century and a half after the intrusion of the industrial economy, Aboriginal people are finally envisioning a present in which they are again in control of their territories and, more importantly, are able to make their own decisions regarding how forest resources will be used.

#### NOTES

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This essay is one piece of a larger body of work that includes a detailed resource package deposited with the Tsimshian Tribal Council in Prince Rupert. Menzies, Butler, and Todd Tubutis presented an earlier version of this work at the 1998 Canadian Anthropological Society meeting in Toronto.

1. The province of British Columbia made a historic turnaround in the early 1990s and accepted the existence of Aboriginal rights and entered into treaty negotiations

with First Nations in BC for the first time since Governor James Douglas completed fourteen small treaties in the mid-1800s. Since the Calder case of 1973 (see Douglas Sanders, "The Nisga Case," *BC Studies* 19 [1973]: 3–20), a string of court cases, most of them originating in British Columbia, has progressively forced the recognition of Aboriginal right and title. The most important of these are the 1991 *Sparrow* decision, which affirmed the priority of Aboriginal fisheries and the *Delgamuukw* Supreme Court of Canada decision in 1998.

2. We are using "stories" not in the sense of false or untrue but in the sense that all narratives are constructed and thus consciously include and exclude according to whom is telling the story, for what purpose the story is being told, and to whom it is being told.

3. Alice Littlefield and Martha C. Knack, introduction to *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives*, ed. Littlefield and Knack (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 3; see also pp. 36–44.

4. Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1996); Kirk Dombrowski, "Against Culture: Contemporary Pentecostalism in Native American Villages along Alaska's Southeast Coast" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1998); James McDonald, "Trying to Make a Life: The Historical Political Economy of Kitsumkalum" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1985); Brian C. Hosmer, *American Indians in the Marketplace: Persistence and Innovation among the Menominees and Metlakatans, 1870–1920* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); and John Pritchard, "Economic Development and the Disintegration of Traditional Culture among the Haisla" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1977).

5. On the exclusion of Aboriginal peoples from the resource economy, see Dianne Newall, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); and James McDonald, "Social Change and the Creation of Underdevelopment: A Northwest Coast Case," *American Ethnologist* 21:1 (1994): 152–75. For the development of the resource industry, see Patricia Marchak, Neil Guppy, and John McMullan, *Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish Processing Industry in British Columbia* (Toronto: Methuen, 1986); or Wallace Clement, *The Struggle to Organize: Resistance in Canada's Fishery* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986).

6. Euro-American scholars have tended to categorize and group together the indigenous peoples of North America according to externally imposed linguistic and technological categories with little regard to locally relevant categories or social divisions. For the Tsimshian people the key levels of organization are the village and the house group. The Tsimshian recognize their common history and social linkages with their cousins the Nisga'a and the Gitksan, but they also know that they are not the same people.

7. Susan Marsden and Robert Galois, "The Tsimshian, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the Geopolitics of the Northwest Coast Fur Trade, 1787–1840" *Canadian Geographer* 39:2 (1995): 169–83.

8. This information is derived from the Hudson's Bay Company journals for Fort Simpson, 1834–64, 201a:1–9, Provincial Archives Manitoba, Winnipeg.

9. *Oolichan* are an oily, smelt-like fish. They are an important food source that is eaten fresh or dried and made into grease. *Oolichan* continue to be an important cultural item. One can trace social webs within the Tsimshian Nation and across the province by simply following the path that fresh *oolichan* take from the moment they are caught in either the Nass, Skeena, or Kemanan Rivers to their final point of consumption in homes around the province.

10. This statement derives from a variety of archival sources housed in the British Columbia Archives in Victoria, BC. Additional evidence has been gleaned from oral histories and ethnographic field research conducted in 1997 and subsequently.

11. First Nations Education Services, "Persistence and Change," draft resource book, school district 52, 2000, British Columbia Provincial Archives, Prince Rupert.

12. Madeline McIvor, "Science and Technology Education in a Civilizing Mission" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1987), 37.

13. Jean Usher, "A Victorian Heritage and the Metlakatla Social System" (unpublished essay, University of British Columbia, 1965); Henry S. Wellcome, *The Story of Metlakatla* (London: Saxon, 1887), 16.

14. Wellcome, *Story of Metlakatla*, 115.

15. Church Missionary Society, "Metlakatla and the North Pacific Mission of the CMS," 1881, 67, British Columbia Provincial Archives.

16. Church Missionary Society, *Metlakatla and the North Pacific Mission*, 42.

17. Thomas Crosby, *Up and Down the North Pacific Coast by Canoe and Mission Ship* (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms, 1907), 49.

18. Bradley Lockner, "Nineteenth Century British Columbia Methodism" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1975), 119.

19. John W. Artander, *Apostle of Alaska: The Story of William Duncan* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), 156.

20. Wellcome, *Story of Metlakatla*, 34.

21. Clarence Bolt, *Thomas Crosby and the Tsimshian: Small Shoes for Feet Too Large* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 66.

22. Paul Sims, "Georgetown Mills: A Historic Geography of a Hydro-Mechanical Sawmill," 1968, Reference, Add Mss 2330:4, 6, British Columbia Provincial Archives.

23. British Columbia Provincial Archives. For secondary sources, see McDonald, "Trying to Make a Life" and "Social Change and the Creation of Underdevelopment"; Knight, *Indians at Work*; and Dombrowski, "Against Culture." This conclusion is also supported by oral interviews and field notes in Menzies's possession.

24. The solidification of large, multinational logging and processing companies in the post-World War II period also created new opportunities for Kitsumkalum loggers who either had remained upriver living near Terrace or returned there after Port Essington burned down. The steady growth of multinational corporations from the 1950s to the mid-1970s made career logging a reliable occupation for many young men from

Kitsumkalum during this period. However, changes in the organization of logging combined with new labor-saving technologies in the late 1970s and early 1980s resulted in fewer logging jobs being available for the generation of young men in the 1980s. See Menzies, “Shutting Out the Indians: The Unintended Consequence of Technological Change and Flexible Forms of Production in the BC Forest Industry” (forthcoming) for a more expanded discussion.

25. See Artander, *Apostle of Alaska*.

26. Whistle punks facilitate communication between the engineer and the rigging slinger through short whistle blasts.

27. Task Force on First Nation Forestry, *First Nation Forestry in British Columbia: A New Approach—Final Report* (Vancouver: Task Force on First Nation Forestry, 1991), 3.

28. Elsewhere, Menzies has discussed the potential pitfalls involved in the developing partnership arrangements now cropping up between First Nations and non-Aboriginal firms. While the issue lies outside the scope of this article, suffice it to say that joint ventures contain within themselves the potential for increased exploitation of Aboriginal labor and in some cases lay the foundation for increasing social inequalities within the First Nation communities themselves (see Menzies, “The Greening of the First Nations Claims Movement,” in *In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Civil Society, and the Environment*, ed. Harvey Feit et al. (n.d.)).

29. See Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter, eds., *Trouble in the Rain Forest: British Columbia’s Forest Industry in Transition* (Victoria BC: Western Geographical Press, 1997).

30. For a discussion of Tsimshian women in the forest sector, see Caroline F. Butler and Charles R. Menzies, “Out of the Woods: Tsimshian Women and Forestry Work” *Anthropology of Work Review* 21:2 (summer 2000): 12–17.

31. Kitkatla has also been exploring the possibilities of joint-venture activities in fish farming.