

## New Indians

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In spring of 1923, Tlingit men and women of the Chilkat Valley conducted a referendum on the deeds of their most controversial tribal member.

For seven troubled years, the man pressured Chilkat kinsmen to sell their “best and oldest” clan possessions to the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Some widows and heirs parted with their treasures for a few hundred dollars; others refused any offer. Especially resistant was Yeil.xaax, *hitsaati* of the Whale House, protector of the finest indigenous artwork on the West Coast. The Ganax.teidi houseposts, rainscreen, and feasting trough comprised the heart of old Klukwan, and the Museum’s primary objective. Their man would not be deterred from his mission, despite relatives who threatened that he remove *aat.oow* “over their dead bodies.”

Seeking to thaw icy clan tensions, northern Tlingits turned to tools borrowed from American settlers: They voted. Ballot boxes were provided in the Alaska Native Sisterhood/Brotherhood halls of Klukwan and Haines, built only six and seven years earlier. A letter dated April 22, 1923 told the outcome:

*The native population of Haines has voted against us, but the Kluckwan majority appeared in our favor, but we have decided to ignor all community interest and proseed with our plan.*

For nine more years the collector pursued the Whale House masterworks, a campaign associated with such pain that some still refuse to utter his name.

I first heard about him thirty years ago from a white man who said that lightning struck a Tlingit Judas on a roof in Haines as cosmic retribution for betraying his people. Over the years, I heard other versions of the same story, but direct questions to Tlingit elders usually crumpled into shrugs and silence. A glare might be followed by a terse warning against opening old wounds. “Just because you’re curious,” a Lukak.adi man told me, “doesn’t mean you need to know.”

Now I wonder how much anyone really knew.

Born Stoowukaa in 1882, the grandson of the great chief Koh'klux was among the first of his people to embrace and emulate the upper ranks of white society by becoming a renowned Native American anthropologist. Curator, linguist, author, opera singer, hunting guide to Teddy Roosevelt, advisor to Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Alfred Kroeber—in the opening decades of the twentieth century Louis Shotridge was perceived as one of America's most civilized Indians.

For the remainder of the century, Shotridge was often recast as a traitor to his people. Two dozen treatments by academics, journalists, and playwrights offer commentary on the bold ironies of his meteoric life and mysterious death, some veering into speculation and magical thinking. Notable exceptions include Nora and Richard Dauenhauer's articles and Maureen Milburn's 1997 dissertation, *The Politics of Possession: Louis Shotridge and the Tlingit Collections of the University of Pennsylvania Museum*. Through her work, each strand of a complex and remarkable life is exposed for its contribution to the whole tapestry. Rather than judge Shotridge's acts by modern standards, she acknowledges his front-man role in "a persuasive, well-intentioned effort" funded by East Coast progressives to "offset damaging Euro-American views of aboriginal race." The high-caste Tlingit man was drawn to do what he believed would save the best of a vanishing tradition, even if he became a pariah among his contemporaries. In a letter to his supervisor written January 27, 1923 Shotridge cast their mission as a matter of cultural life and death:

*It is clear now, that unless someone go to work, record our history in the English language, and place these old things as evidence, the noble idea of our forefathers shall be entirely lost.*

Alaska Natives were consumed with the ways of white people, Shotridge observed, leaving only a few to "affectionately hold on to the teachings of their forefathers." Mission schooling prohibited Tlingit language; churches required starch and piety; and old totems were tossed in scrap heaps behind village houses. By any means necessary Louis Shotridge intended to save the finest works of a passing age.

Years of recording Tlingit life stories for broadcast and archive in Haines and Klukwan, Alaska created for me a web of personal and historical interconnections with a

few conspicuous gaps, Shotridge foremost. A few historians and elders in Juneau and Sitka were willing to talk about him, but in his hometown—stern silence. I assembled details from scattered articles by and about the man whose ambition and intelligence vaulted him onto a precarious perch between two worlds, notoriety for which he paid dearly. The rhetorician in me traced strategies Shotridge used to convince kinsmen to sell their *aat.oow*. On the page opposite his arguments—the elders’ responses. The historian sifted through midden heaps to discern the events that define a man’s life. Eventually I needed to hear more from Shotridge himself.

A subsequent pilgrimage to University of Pennsylvania breathed life into lore. Three decades of correspondence between Penn curators and their agent in Alaska disclosed the passions that consumed Shotridge through his adult years. In the elegant handwriting of a mission education, Louis Shotridge’s earliest letters to George Byron Gordon convey the enthusiasm of a young man courting a powerful business prospect. Later reports composed by his employer on a typewriter reflect the tone of a trusted envoy on a mission for the greater good: preservation of a glorious past.

Founded in 1897 to “assemble collections that will illustrate the achievements of Mankind in the field of Art,” the University Museum sent emissaries to collect great works of antiquity in Greece, Egypt, China, Palestine, Africa, Guatemala, and the Amazon. Gordon’s hand guided the campaign to “save all that is possible before it becomes too late.” The rapid industrialization of North America convinced Gordon that only a few years remained before its finest indigenous artwork was lost. Success in his 1905 collecting trip among Inupiaq Eskimos whetted the curator’s appetite for the best of southeast Alaska Indians. He chose Shotridge to head Alaska expeditions conducted in 1915-1918 and 1922-1925 to acquire the last best Northwest Coast relics. In letters both reassuring and bureaucratic, Gordon conveyed faith that Shotridge would use

*diplomacy and experience to the best advantage possible to acquire specimens for the lowest price at which they can be obtained.*

Letters between the Eastern museum administrator and his Native cohort provide an intimate account of rhetorical strategies employed to wheedle cherished artwork from

the Whale House of Klukwan. Just as important, the written exchange offers insights into the persuasive dynamics of a long-term business relationship sustained by men of two worlds. Prospects of immortalizing a proud culture in the great halls of an even more prominent people generated heat in the letters Shotridge sent to Philadelphia until his death. Prodded by Gordon's memos, the Tlingit man's intentions and struggles offer a view beyond the ballot-box judgment that still lingers since the Haines-Klukwan vote of 1923.

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Louis and Florence Shotridge had yet to venture beyond southeast Alaska until September 1905 when they traveled to the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition in Portland Oregon. Young, attractive, and English-speaking, they drew curious crowds to examine her Chilkat weaving technique or fire questions to him about Tlingit ways.

Howd'ja meet?

Our parents pledged us at birth.

Howd'ja learn to talk English?

At Haines Mission. My wife attended school four years; I went off and on. About seventeen months. A tutor comes to our house once a week so we can learn to read and write as good as white people. Everybody speaks English in Haines. We're Americans, too!

Louis' strong, brown face softens into a boyish grin. The crowd laughs its encouragement.

Are you a chief?

Yes, ma'am. In Tlingit I am Stoo-wukaa born in Klukwan into the Kaagwaantaan/Eagle clan from my mother Kudeit.saakw. On my father's side I am Ganax.teidi yadi from Gooch Hit/Wolf House, son of George Shotridge, Yeilgooxu, grandson of Koh'klux, the great *sha'dehuni* who met William Seward, George Davidson, and John Muir. My wife will speak for herself.

I am Florence Dennis Shotridge called Kaatkwaaxsnei in Tlingit, born in Chilkoot, Lukak.adi on my mother's side; Kaagwaantaan yadi, daughter of Scundoo'o, a famous medicine man from the Mountain House in Yandeistakye.

The smiles that emanate from the young couple catch the eyes of passersby. For white people shamed by the sullen glances of reservation Indians, the Shotridges offer redemption. These are Indians you can talk to. Gawkers edge closer toward the young couple adorned in a swirl of woven and beaded design. Questions leak, then gush. Photographs are orchestrated, weavings caressed.

Anticipation builds as the weaver's husband escorts a knot of dawdlers to his table in one of many "art galleries" set up around the exposition. He extracts from a crate a carved mask, an apron woven with mountain goat wool, a dancing rattle. Who wishes to take these fine items home?

A hearty man bearing waxed mustache points pushes forward, hand extended. He is George Gordon, director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, just returned from collecting in Arctic Alaska. Many Alaskans spoke to him of the Whale House collection and other art pieces hidden in closets and clan houses of the "Mother Village."

Gordon's desire to fill an empty wing of his museum energizes his pitch: Klukwan, where you're from, has the oldest and best things. They must be preserved immediately or rot away like so many other ancient treasures. Our museum would very much appreciate your help with saving the last of your tribe's beloved possessions. Once in Philadelphia the pieces will receive the honor they deserve. Are you prepared to do business?

Shotridge sells forty-nine items to Gordon, new carvings and old, along with promises of bigger, better things.

Six weeks after their rendezvous in Portland, Shotridge wrote a letter from Haines listing available "curios" such as copper daggers, smoking pipes, and women's dancing headdresses. As for the Whale House items and other prized *aat.oow*, Shotridge reported that "all of my people did not care to sell them," a snag that might require long, expensive negotiations.

*I start now getting some of the things, most of them are very hard to get. I would have to go twenty-five miles up the river to a place called Kluck-wan in Chilkat River for them because all the best things are up there...I will do my very best to make a good collection,*

*I will try to get everything as cheapest I can, but I can't get them for no less than the others is paying for.*

All hurdles aside, Gordon knew his recent acquaintance was perfect for the job. High intelligence, tribal status, and engaging interpersonal style made Louis Shotridge an ideal envoy. His alleged control of the Klukwan Whale House especially pleased the museum director. Among North American indigenous art collectors, the Whale House masterworks represented a pinnacle of achievement. The Smithsonian and other collectors also sought the beloved *aat.oow*, so Gordon applied the pressure to Shotridge. Foremost among his duties: acquire the Tlingit Grail, “art whose sensuous modeling and naturalism transcend what we term beauty.” Who better to secure it than an articulate heir, someone who knew the lay of the land?

Locale, it seems, was key to Klukwan's ability to withstand the White Wave. As the only Coastal Tlingit town not built on the coast, residents never saw gunboats and managed to evade the worst of epidemics. Tucked into the northern reaches of the continent's largest fjord, access to the *kwaan* is a single sea route confined between steep walls. From Yandeistakye near the mouth of the Chilkat River the walk to Klukwan takes all day. Squeezed between a river and an ice-headed mountain range, the village faces south across the braided confluence of three rivers, a broad gravel plain called the Council Grounds. Steeped peaks guard the perimeter. Six months a year the silty veins of the glacial rivers boil with millions of salmon, a late run of which attracts four thousand bald eagles who scream and feast and fight as winter closes in.

Ample food, temperate climate, water access, and a defensible base dampened Klukwan's reliance on outsiders. Sustainable resources kept locals close to home; location and reputation held intruders at bay.

Almost a hundred years after Russians made first contact with Tlingits near today's Sitka, a survey crew led by a German navigator walked up the Chilkat River to Klukwan which, in 1838, was home to over a thousand residents. The white men probably encountered *sha'dehuni* Xet-su-wu and his entourage standing at the river bank attired in Chilkat robes, masks, and wooden hats, holding intricately carved staffs and blunderbusses. When the Europeans displayed their Russian flag, the headman likely

confirmed his allegiance by showing the double-eagle crest presented to a Chilkat chief in Yakutat fifty years earlier. Surely he prepared a large feast for the first whites to the village, including a tour of the Whale House collection, its recent creation evident in the soft glow within the wood.

Sometime between 1820 and 1835 Xet-su-wu hired a Stikine carver named Kadjisdu.axtc to create artwork worthy of a Tlingit “White House” honoring Klukwan’s founders, the Ganax.teidi. For about eighteen months the Haida-trained master worked on the last great effort of his long career. Each nine-foot corner post displays the complex histories of principal families that comprise the clan; four posts from an older house remain to tell Dog Salmon clan stories. From a rainscreen forty feet wide and fifteen feet high more than a hundred ancestors’ faces peer through a dizzying maze of ancient form. Best known is the fourteen-foot banquet trough carved in the shape of a woodworm woman, a creative feat never duplicated.

Half a century after European eyes first feasted on its fabulous contents, the Whale House stood in disrepair—windows broken, floorboards rotting. British journalist E.J. Glave reported grass and moss growing through the decomposing bottom of the Woodworm Bowl. Among the children who played amidst the *aat.oow* of a bygone era, it is likely that young Louis Shotridge was aware that the crumbling treasures might someday be placed in his care.

After a tour of the Whale House in 1885, George Thornton Emmons reported that it was “in the last stages of decay and uninhabitable.” At age three, Shotridge was photographed being held by the naval lieutenant whose regular patrols into Lynn Canal fostered a friendship with Chief Koh’klux. Access to clan houses made Emmons an ardent collector, in 1887 sending an initial shipment of 1284 items from Haines Mission to the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Some of Emmons’ most esteemed items were obtained from shaman graves in the Chilkat region, lonely outcroppings and caves avoided by locals. The next year Emmons sent over 1500 pieces to New York, adding to a Northwest Coast collection touted as the “finest one in existence in this country.”

As I study the grainy image of the officer holding Koh’klux’ grandson in his lap, I hear the speech that follows the pose: You are the one, Louis. Never forget it. You can

save these old things or let them waste away. You want to do what's right, don't you? See that your ancestors are not forgotten, lad. It's up to you to preserve the memory of a great people.

Like George Gordon twenty years later, Emmons may have positioned the future *sha'dehuni* to retain the best of his dying culture. Stuwu'kaa, or "Astute One," grew up during a dramatic transition in the history of his people. His Tlingit upbringing instilled understanding and love for the tribe's heroic past, and a sense of duty to his people. Mission schooling channeled his ambitions toward American goals so he could, as his teachers reminded him, make something of himself.

Questions still linger about the girl to whom Louis was pledged at birth. Emmons recalled a "very delicate nice girl" who he thought was "partly white." Modern scholarship refers to her father only as "a well-known medicine man" of Yandeistakye. But if Kaatkwaaxsnei was actually the daughter of Scundoo'o, as the University Museum reported, her personal transformation is emblematic of the profound changes within an entire culture. The infamous Scun'doo was nephew of Koh'klux, party to the siege at Fort Selkirk, and scourge of Presbyterian missionaries. A murder conviction sent the shaman to San Quentin prison from which he returned three years later an avowed Salvationist. U.S. census records suggest Scundoo'o and his anonymous wife had one child, a daughter listed as Mary.

When I asked Scundoo'o's last living matrilineal relative about Mary, eighty-five year-old Charlie Brouillette said he wasn't aware of any children. Scundoo'o's sister was his great-grandmother, Tsu'see. Yes, he says, it's possible she was called Susy. His mother's name was Mary. She hardly mentioned his great-uncle but "was very adamant about saying that we didn't have any relatives from him."

In her earliest years, the shaman's daughter probably stayed in a Yandeistakye clan house with aunties, cousins, and her mother, a master weaver who taught her in the old style. Given the anti-shaman policies of the Presbyterian church, Kaatkwaaxsnei's father made the little girl a prime target for reformation. As was her procedure with "priceless soul-gems," missionary Carrie Willard likely removed her, found a bed in the orphanage, and enrolled her in school as Florence. No one spoke about her father, so the



connection faded. Still, no one forgot her lineage. The 1902 wedding certificate that hangs today in the house her husband built refers to Susy Scundoo.

Although the 1900 census shows no sibling, evidence exists that Florence was the sister of Bert Dennis, a Lukaax.adi man who lived out his life working for the railroad in Skagway. In 2000 I spoke to his nephew Paul Wilson about any memories of an aunt. No one ever mentioned a Mary, Susy, or Florence, but Wilson remembered hearing about a woman who traveled back East to weave a Chilkat blanket, and came home to die. He knew well the man said to be her brother, the uncle who assumed responsibility for raising him in the old way, with “tough love.” As his nephew came of age, Dennis repeatedly tried to convince him to apply for a 160-acre land grant in the Chilkat Valley, but Wilson ignored his uncle’s advice.

“I told him I had no use for land,” Wilson chuckled. “To this very day, I don't know how that ever came out of my mouth.”

The effects of non-Natives in northern Lynn Canal triggered events that influenced young Florence and Louis. Smallpox mortality rates above fifty percent in 1838 and 1862 unhinged aspects of Tlingit society, particularly spirituality. Belief was withering in shamans who were unable to cure white-man diseases. The Russian Orthodox Church tolerated the Tlingit *Ixt*, but American Presbyterians targeted medicine men as satanic. By 1878, thirty-year-old Reverend S. Hall Young of Wrangell was waging a regional crusade against shamanism, with particular loathing for Scundoo’o. Prospects of an apocryphal confrontation likely fed Young’s fantasies as he paddled with his friend John Muir into the lion’s den.

Presbyterians cracked the Chilkat-Chilkoot stronghold over four November days in Yandeistakye, bolstered by short sermons from Muir on brotherhood. On the last night of the revival, an ancient shaman announced after Muir’s homily that for the first time “the Indian and the white man on are the same side of the river, eye to eye, heart to heart.” A mission school followed twenty months later, run by Reverend Eugene Willard and his wife Caroline. In January 1882, Koh’klux confided to Willard that they were witnessing the final shaman initiation, and his people were prepared to “live a new way.” Weeks later, Chilkoot headman Lunaat clashed with the clergyman over a ground squirrel coat purchased from an Athabaskan competitor. First of his tribe to be converted, Lunaat

renounced the missionaries he had invited to the *kwaan*. In May, a month after Stuwu'kaa's birth, Presbyterian missionaries Louis and Tillie Paul initiated church services in Klukwan. The Shotridge infant received the new preacher's English name.

After religion, industry secured Chilkat-Chilkoot ties to the mainstream. In a time of scant regulation, Lynn Canal in the 1880s was a last frontier for fish piracy and plunder. Eager to cash in on cheap Indian labor and abundant supplies, rival Columbia River fish processors built canneries in 1883 at Chilkat and Pyramid Harbor. More canneries sprung up along Chilkat Peninsula at Letnikov, Kochu, and Carr's Coves. When the first salmon run hit in June, Tlingits struck for higher wages. Two cents a fish compared poorly to higher wages elsewhere, like the fifty cents per salmon paid to white fishers on the Columbia. Natives pitted one cannery against another. That summer Carrie Willard wrote that Natives were "almost crazy to make money," earning up to fifteen cents a fish, yet striking for more.

Canneries responded to the Chilkats' refusal to work for "Indian wages" by importing their own workers—Chinese in the canneries and white men on fish traps and boats. Outside hire enflamed the Tlingits. Some worked, but resentments ran deep as fish barons drained local rivers of salmon stocks once thought limitless, and filled jobs that Natives considered theirs. Most Tlingits "refused to listen to reason" to cannery bosses who were forced to hire outsiders, wrote Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore on her first visit to Chilkat in 1883. Rather than take what they saw as substandard pay, local Natives caught fish with their own traps to use as barter elsewhere in the region.

What Mrs. Scidmore observed from the deck of one of the earliest luxury steamers in Lynn Canal was the rich, rugged homeland of residents who believed they were still in control. All of it was theirs—mountains, rivers, fish. White people stayed close to the mission and canneries, and knew little of the country. When the time came, many believed, Outsiders would go back to their homes in Sitka or Seattle. Ambassador Scidmore's wife steamed away, but returned the next summer to research further what would become the first tourist guidebook to Alaska. Published in 1885, the same year Caroline Willard's memoirs appeared in print, *Alaska: Its Southern Coast and the Sitkan Archipelago* inspired a growing number of urban Americans who sought a frontier experience with a drink in their hands.

In the breezy prose of the enthusiastic traveler, Scidmore offered observations and stories aligned with ports of call along the Inside Passage. Ketchikan, Wrangell, Sitka, and Juneau supplied cultural contrast to breath-taking landscapes of ice, rock, and impenetrable rainforest. On her visit to Pyramid Harbor, Scidmore checked off a roster of curious shoreside characters--“the handsomest man in Alaska,” an exiled French count, proud old chiefs Koh’klux and Daanaawaak, and the ubiquitous tents of Native women and children selling goods. Of all the whistle-stops, she wrote, some of the finest items were for sale here, including a reliable inventory of Chilkat blankets.

Scheduled steamer visits motivated Carrie Willard to organize mission orphans to create and sell curios to tourists. Early on, the minister’s wife saw the potential to transform her charges into “industrious people” by stimulating the production of carving and weaving. Locals looking for work turned to “Tlingit mass production” to supplement their incomes, making toys, jewelry, masks, miniature totem poles, knives, pipes and blankets. When tourists hit the beach they “made a hasty rush for the Indian tents,” dodging dogs and racks draped with salmon flesh.

At a time when Scidmore felt that the Tlingit were “almost too quick to lay aside their old ways,” visitors still bought Chilkat blankets at Haines Mission for twenty to forty dollars. Scidmore devoted almost four hundred words detailing the “fine trophies for wall decorations” that she judged “superior to Navajo and Zuni blankets.” By 1890, a German travel writer lamented that the prized blankets were hard to find, with prices reaching a hundred dollars.

Scundoo’o’s wife probably sold Chilkat blankets from her tent at Portage Cove while the little girl she called Kaatkwaxsnei or Susy or Mary or Florence sat by her side learning the complex fingering of the Chilkat weaver and listening to the language of trade. In later years, Florence may have glimpsed her mother’s tent below as she glided across the mission grounds in black skirt and white blouse. From her beach site the weaver probably heard strains of a piano through mission windows and recognized her daughter playing. Someday that girl would marry a chief.

When puberty signaled the traditional time for uncles to prepare Louis Shotridge for manhood, he left the village to work for relatives near the mission. Like other local Native boys, school and church commitments varied depending on the season. For a time

he attended Sheldon Jackson Institute in Sitka, but mostly the young Shotridge lived among clan members in the Chilkat Valley where he fished with his uncle Edward, picked berries with aunties, packed on trading trips, and attended *koo'eex*. He probably saw Florence at tribal events where they heard elders speaking a language shared by everyone in their shrinking Tlingit world. Trained first as a listener, the son of Yeilgooxu/George Shotridge was gradually allowed to dance and speak at cultural events. His bride-to-be joined in the same dances, prepared food for the same *koo'eex*, and wove mountain goat wool into Chilkat blankets. Among the last to receive instruction from the Old Ones, the young couple also yearned for the American promises beyond the *kwaan*.

The death of Koh'klux in March 1889 shifted leadership duties to George Shotridge whose status among Ganax.teidi also secured control of the Whale House. As was his prerogative, Koh'klux authorized Emmons to purchase his ceremonial robe, generating funds that likely contributed to his forty-day party and one-year memorial. Educated at an Indian school in Forest Grove, Oregon, the new *sha'dehuni* spoke English, used alcohol, and consorted with non-Natives. Despite reduced control over the *kwaan*, Shotridge asserted his power when possible, especially relating to control of fisheries on the Chilkat River. Shotridge sometimes moved his family to Pyramid Harbor in part to see that canneries did not block fish passage upriver. In 1890 Tlingit men held guards at gunpoint and destroyed a company fish trap, a protest Chief Shotridge surely supported.

George Shotridge looked like a headman. In numerous photos he is attired in the same full-length woven tunic and a large wooden ceremonial hat, staring into the camera with the same slightly defiant expression. The most well-known image of Louis Shotridge's father shows him standing in the center of the Whale House framed by high-relief house posts, wall screen, and feasting trough. The broad brims of wooden ceremonial hats hide nine clan members' faces in the 1895 picture, but Shotridge's hat is lifted enough to see the unwavering gaze of the man in charge. On his right, a large bentwood box; on the left, his son in Chilkat robes, holding his father's expression.

The one-year *koo'eex* for Koh'klux was a large and lavish affair open to Tlingit and white, Chilkat and Chilkoot. George Shotridge passed around gifts throughout the night. Hundreds jammed into Daanaawaak's great lodge as they had eleven years earlier to hear John Muir's sermon. Among the white men at the *koo'eex* was Bernard Moore,

twenty year-old son of Skagway founder William Moore. After gifts and speeches, Moore recalled episodes of wild singing and dancing before he became “immediately interested” in a girl he spied across the big room. Afterward, Moore accepted George Shotridge’s offer to share his cabin that night. The chief’s warmth toward the white man extended over months, ample time for Moore to court the fourteen year-old sister of Louis Shotridge. In October, Moore married Lingit Sai-yet in a Tlingit ceremony, then sailed in a sloop with his bride and her parents to Juneau where they were remarried by Reverend Willard. Bernard renamed his wife Minnie, like his sister.

In a time of economic and cultural uncertainty, George Shotridge’s overtures to the scion of Skagway were predictable. From a boarding school education through his negotiations with fish processors, Shotridge understood fully the dynamic between white men and power. For his daughter to marry a wealthy white man was a natural strategy to extend Chilkat strength, in the tradition of his ancestors.

While Minnie’s parents considered the relationship a serious matter, Bernard Moore’s marriage to a “squaw” cooled his father’s affections, adding layers of tension to an already difficult arrangement. Back in Skagway, Minnie was openly ostracized for being Tlingit and excluded from town events. Women who looked like her sold their wares to steamship passengers on the wharf while six blocks away Minnie remained cloistered in a Victorian home devoid of Native items, waiting for her three children to return from the taunts of another school day.

The Klondike gold rush of 1897-1899 brought tens of thousands of prospectors through Skagway, most of whom lugged baggage laden with prejudice and fear. Beyond hiring Tlingit packers to haul gear to the summit of Chilkoot Pass, stampederers saw Alaska Natives through the same racist lenses they used to view all Native Americans. Despite her Victorian finery, Minnie was scorned. After her mother died in 1898, Minnie Moore saw few relatives; overwintering in the Pacific Northwest increased her sense of isolation. When Bernard Moore permanently moved his wife and children to Victoria in 1906, Minnie remained close only with her brother, Louis.

As children of Yeilgooxu and Kudeit.saakw, Minnie and Louis were offered up to the White Wave so the clan might grow strong, like their Chilkat ancestors. Along with Florence, Lukaax.adi daughter of a weaver and a shaman, the three veered into the

mainstream as a way to save themselves and a few old memories. In spite of the money or prestige that certifies success in both cultures, each suffered estrangement and became Outsiders to all.



The inherent problem with tracing a life through letters is the self-censoring narrative that is sometimes mistaken for truth. Correspondence between Shotridge and Gordon is no different, each assumed a limited role played within set parameters. The curator was foremost an administrator whose aggressive style was key to building the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Brandishing a demeanor as “sharp as the points on his moustache,” Gordon shared with his Chilkat intermediary an urgency to protect the great works of a fading culture. To his demanding supervisor Shotridge projected the confidence of a trusted ally, a “go-between man” whose dogged pursuit of their quest proved his devotion, his attentions sharpened by Gordon’s demands and bankroll.

In his letter of January 9, 1906 George Gordon confirmed the Museum’s intent to purchase the best of Klukwan and the Tlingit coast. After their initial meeting in September, Shotridge continued to assure Gordon of his proximity to “some of the nicest we can get in Alaska.” The Kaagwaantaan heir wrote that he was holding off bids from other prospective buyers until he heard from Gordon, whose January letter authorized him to buy “good specimens, and the old things are always good.” The curator added that he expected Shotridge to travel East to catalog the collection and educate Philadelphians about Northwest Coast peoples.

Early correspondence to Gordon from Alaska scarcely restrained the enthusiasm of a young man on the verge of realizing his ambitions. In a Victorian script forged by his Presbyterian education, Shotridge responded on March 12 to Gordon’s offer by describing for the first time his access to the Whale House:

*It wouldn't take many months to get through collecting. We all think its better for you in all circumstances to have me collect the best and oldest of things for I would know what to get, and where to get them...I could get from Kluckwan now eight totom poles the only oldest and best there is there they belong to the inside four corners of the largest houses.*

*And then there's a large wall for the inside also and a large long dish hued out like an immense worm. All these have the best history and they are the very oldest there is. There are many other things besides, that are easy to get.*

Availability of the esteemed pieces prompted the curator to promise a future trip to Haines to “talk matters over” with his possible protégé. Shotridge urged him to come immediately. He underscored his exclusive relationships with tribal members who were ready to sell:

*I can secure the very best of everything there is, the real valuable ones they used to keep, things that they never thought of selling before, and I am the only one to get to them...*

Without a museum contract, inferred Shotridge, he had to work elsewhere. a valuable compatriot remained on a Fort William Seward carpentry crew, his wife at home with her weaving. Officially opened in 1905, the territory's first Army fort was conceived as protection for Klondike prospectors from the most “fierce and warlike” Natives in Alaska. Instead, the fort employed dozens of local Tlingits as maids, groundskeepers, launderers, and carpenters. Any aggressive behavior displayed between soldiers and indigenous residents unraveled on the basketball court.

Smitten by their first glimpses of the world beyond the icy walls of Lynn Canal, Florence and Louis felt smothered in their hometown. Shotridge prodded Gordon through the summer, complaining that Haines was “too lonesome for us.”

When Gordon postponed his trip until the following spring, the Shotridges traveled to Los Angeles in the fall to work at Antonio Apache's Indian Crafts Exhibition, where Florence completed the Chilkat blanket she started in Portland. Her husband sustained a stream of exchanges with Gordon, some alluding to other job offers and potential buyers. From Los Angeles Louis sent a box of spoons, knives, pipes, and baskets to Philadelphia. Mailing the package COD defied museum protocols, but Gordon was especially annoyed at the number of contemporary items. In earlier letters, Shotridge had described old ceremonial hats and masks, none of which were in the first shipment. Gordon's expectations were thrown:

*I was very greatly disappointed in the contents of the box, because I wished to receive only the old material as I wrote you several times before whereas nearly all the pieces that you sent are new and made quite recently. It is true that they are very nice pieces, but I got from you in Portland all the new things I want. It will therefore be quite useless for you to undertake to collect for us unless you can obtain old things.*

The peeved curator bought ten pieces and returned the rest. Shotridge apologized, explaining that his father approved of the contents “so I never thought of it.”

The effects of the faux faux lingered for nearly four years, a time of few letters. Undaunted, the Shotridges pursued careers as cultural brokers in exhibitions and theatre productions. The house Louis built in Haines the year they married continued to serve as a base of operations. When not traveling the Shotridges stayed active in the community, Louis sometimes acting as an intermediary in white-Native conflicts. In at least one instance he refereed a cross-cultural fishing dispute. When a mixed race girl was refused admission in 1906 to Haines public school, the Shotridges were likely sympathizers and may have been among townspeople who convinced the school board to overturn its decision.

Florence and Louis kept a studious air at home with art projects, writing letters, working with tutors in music and English. Although communication between Shotridge and Gordon was rare, tensions did not prevent the museum man from a visit to Haines on a 1907 collecting trip that included a viewing of the Whale House carvings.

Early forays to Portland and Los Angeles brought further opportunities for cultural performance and retail, and secured roles for the Shotridges in the Indian Grand Opera Company. Supported primarily by donors in New York and Philadelphia, the Indian opera movement enlisted Native performers to dramatize indigenous legends borrowed or contrived by mostly Anglo writers. Without a paper trail, we know little of the two or three-year span in which the Shotridges toured except that Louis contributed a strong tenor voice, and Florence sang soprano and was a talented pianist.

First of the Indian operas, *Poia* was based on a Blackfoot legend involving the spiritual journey of a heroic “Feather-Woman.” Authors Arthur Nevin and Walter



McClintock visited Browning, Montana in 1903 to research songs and stories on the Blackfoot Reservation, then returned to New York City where *Poia* opened at Carnegie Hall in 1907. National nostalgia about Native Americans and the chance to see real Indians onstage created a minor sensation. As another similar opera wasn't produced until 1912, the Shotridges were probably involved with *Poia*, a melodrama in which Natives appeared in the fringed buckskins of America's Indian image, closer to Blackfoot than Tlingit. A company toured sporadically, including performances at the Lewis and Clark exhibition in Portland. In 1910 Nevin and McClintock found favor in Kaiser Wilhelm's court, so took the company to Berlin. The first American opera ever produced in Europe attracted the ire of a nationalist audience whose "downright abuse and violence" erupted when the Kaiser dedicated the performance to his guest, former President Teddy Roosevelt. The show closed to scathing reviews and bankruptcy, remembered best for its spectacular crash. At least one article years later referenced the Shotridges as "famous singers" who performed in "an Indian play that failed."

Performance dates are lost, but it is not difficult to imagine the impression such experiences left on Florence and Louis. Their stage costumes became standard attire for public appearances, seen in popular photos of the day. A busy tour schedule exposed the "Alaska Chief and His Princess" to crowds clamoring for celebrity Indians. Their admirers included Roosevelt and New York department store magnate John Wanamaker, who retained Shotridge as a hunting guide. The exposure was intoxicating, the couple's confidence soared among influential white people who mostly treated them like royalty.

As he prepared for travel to New York City in 1911, Louis Shotridge wrote a letter to gauge George Gordon's interest in his wife's "Tine" blanket, the same she started when they met in Portland. Gordon responded that he wanted "very much to see" Shotridge about the blanket and "other matters." Anticipating a sale, he shipped Florence's creation to the museum. When Shotridge arrived, Gordon declined to purchase the weaving, but offered the Alaskan part-time employment to construct a miniature of Klukwan village for display with the collection. Shotridge accepted.

That summer, Florence and Louis lived in Philadelphia with anthropologist Frank Speck, then in the fall moved into a small apartment a few blocks from the museum. In the ensuing twenty years with the University Museum, Shotridge would generate a

remarkable body of Tlingit ethnographic notes and monographs, attract national publicity, and procure nearly five hundred of the most valuable Northwest Coast treasures contained in any collection.

Employing their own “show and tell” Indians boosted the credibility of the institution for which Gordon had recently been promoted to director. That a genuine “Indian Princess” accompanied his man raised their promotional value to the near-mythic. Whether giving cultural demonstrations to school children or singing for civic organizations, Florence won the hearts of her audiences. The press adored the “beautiful young woman,” an expert weaver, storyteller, and musician whom writers dubbed “Philadelphia’s Minnehaha.”

Newspaper photos featured the Chilkat blanket, a traditional item long associated with the finest Tlingit art, Florence in the foreground in fringed doeskin, Russian beads, and feathers in a headband. The blanket was part of the conversation that ensued after Frank Speck introduced Louis to renowned linguist Edward Sapir. As his employment at the University Museum was only part-time, Shotridge inquired about work in Ottawa with Sapir, who responded positively. After more discussion, Shotridge decided to stay at Penn, but in 1914 convinced Sapir to buy the blanket for the Canadian National Museum.

Along with the purchase, the Shotridges sent an unpublished paper Florence had written for the Lewis and Clark Exhibition. Popular articles about “Katkwatsnea” tended to be romantic and idealized, but her own writing was uncluttered. The story about the woman who married the brown bear is one of the best-known pieces of Tlingit lore.

By devoting a year to weave the powerful Kaagwaantaan symbols, Florence chose to honor her Eagle opposites, the people of her husband and father. Interpreting it with a fourteen-hundred-word essay showed her desire to communicate real meaning to others. Few other Native artists of the time described their process on paper. We know Florence only from her scant writings and a few memories. Few Haines residents today remember the Indian Princess but in the clean prose of “History of the Tina` Blanket,” I hear the calm voice of a woman steeped in an older time, with confidence to write it down.

As Florence told it, a princess was berrypicking with friends when she slipped on a pile of bear scat and loosed a hasty complaint. Moments later she met a handsome stranger who she hoped was a prince. He took her to the edge of his village where he

announced to his father that he had found a wife. They were married in a big celebration. Soon she noticed strange things about her in-laws. For example, when the men returned from fishing trips and shook their wet coats by the fire the flames grew as from drops of oil. She wished to please her husband when he came home so the

*girl gathered the driest wood she could find. The other women she noticed were gathering water-soaked logs and sticks. After making a large pile she made her fire in the way she knew her people made it. It was burning nicely until her husband came from fishing when he shook his big wet coat by it the drops of water put it right out. The girl was ashamed of not knowing how to do her part, and she was even more so when she saw how the other women's fires blazed up when their husbands shook their coats by it. Her humiliation was more than she could bear. She knew now that there was some mystery about the people among whom she was thrown.*

Just as the princess determined to adapt her ways to the bears', grieving kinsmen located the furry clan and slew her husband. They took the woman back to their village, but left her two sons behind. To commemorate the origins of the Kaagwaantaan clan, "cubs with half-human faces" appear on the blanket in tineh, representations of the copper crests that signify Tlingit wealth. Also woven into the blanket are figures of "head of salmon-trout," halibut half-heads, and the full body of a shark.

Re-reading her prose, I wonder how Florence thought of herself in the context of the story. Like the woman waking up among bears, it seems she endeavored to live well despite unexpected circumstances. From the first demonstration in Portland, Florence and her weaving were one in the eyes of the public. Crowds of bemused interlopers watched the beautiful woman engaged in an ancient process. As much a cross-cultural bridge as its creator, the blanket evinced an artistic sophistication that startled those numbed by generic portrayals of Native Americans. After its completion Florence brought her creation to lectures and special events where it lent strength and authority. Draped over her slender shoulders, fibers of cedar and mountain goat gave comfort with whomever "she was thrown," a reminder of the Eagles who balanced her Raven identity.

Portions of Florence's paper were used in an article she co-wrote with Louis in a 1913 *Museum Journal*, called "Indians of the Northwest." A more personal account of Tlingit culture, "Life of a Chilkat Indian Girl," also appeared in the issue. Her writings and appearances drew the admiration of adults, but the entranced schoolchildren of Philadelphia loved their museum guide, the Princess. At a time when Buffalo Bill still aroused circus crowds with Custer's ghosts, genteel Florence Shotridge fed into the perception of a noble Indian woman victorious beyond the battlefield.

Counterbalanced by a charming Raven wife, Louis invested his passions into an accelerated academic regime steered by museum director George Gordon. Raised in Canada and fascinated by all things British, Gordon administered his operation with a brusque, Anglophilic tone known to foment clash. In his relationship with the Shotridges, however, the director sustained a parity founded on a shared vision. Income from a part-time museum salary and speaking engagements paid living expenses as well as tuition at the Wharton School of Finance and Economics from 1912-1914. Gordon sent Shotridge to New York in the winter of 1914 to prepare a Tlingit grammar with Columbia professor and former curator of the American Museum of Natural History, Franz Boas. Mornings, the two worked on their manuscript; afternoons, Shotridge attended Boas' anthropology classes.

Back in Philadelphia in spring, it is likely Shotridge attended a conference of the Society of American Indians, which further publicized his ambitions. Brainchild of a white sociologist, the organization reflected the "progressive" view that Indians could assimilate the best of non-Native culture and still honor the Old Ways. One nurtured the other. The "Chief of the Chilkats" was featured in an ensuing issue of the Society's magazine, *Journal of American Indians*. A companion photo depicted the earnest young man in jacket and tie, groomed to embrace "civilization" so that he may "carry wisdom and developed ability back to Chilcat land and govern his people well."

Shotridge became a full-time assistant curator for Gordon in spring 1915, making him one of the first academically-trained Native American anthropologists. For \$1200 a year Louis and Florence were appointed "co-leaders" of the Museum's Alaska Expedition. The couple steamed back to Haines where they settled into their old home,

now the expedition “field headquarters,” and proceeded with a mission that eventually turned the town against its celebrated son.