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New Indians

(Draft: 08/10)

Daniel Lee Henry

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

The Chilkat man had pressured kinsmen for seven troubled years 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, *hitsuati* of the Whale House, protector of the finest indigenous artwork on the continent. 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 newcomers who espoused democratic principles. 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 revealed 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, and my direct questions to 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. Of the twenty or so ensuing treatments by academics, journalists, and playwrights, the bold ironies of his meteoric life and mysterious death tempted some to moral judgment. Notable exceptions include Nora and Richard Dauenhauer’s writings 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, Milburn 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 carved things 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, print, and archive in Haines and Klukwan, Alaska spun a web of personal and historical interconnections with a few conspicuous gaps, Shotridge foremost. A few historians and elders in Juneau and Sitka spoke of him, but my inquiries in his hometown were met with 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 sketched strategies Shotridge may have employed to convince kinsmen to sell their *aat.oow*. Into the same notebook I conceived the elders’ responses. The historian sifted through scattered evidence to discern the events that define a man’s life. As I puzzled through his story, it became apparent after attending to voices interpreting Shotridge, I needed to hear more Shotridge.

That changed when I traveled to the University of Pennsylvania to read three decades of correspondence between Penn curators and their man in Alaska.

In the elegant handwriting of a mission education, Louis Shotridge’s earliest letters to George Byron Gordon conveyed a persuasive pitch that the Tlingit man sustained for thirty years. Subsequent letters composed on a typewriter purchased by Gordon evinced a sharpened sophistication toward convincing his clansmen to surrender their valuables. A January 1923 letter described verbatim rhetorical strategies employed by Shotridge at a “summit” meeting with Whale House heirs. His narrative gives an rare glimpse into Tlingit negotiations conducted behind closed doors, relayed as a trusted envoy on a mission “for the good of the whole world.” In this and other letters, Shotridge held firm that only Gordon really understood Tlingit people, and would make every effort to preserve their glorious memories in his museum.

Founded in 1897 to “assemble collections that will illustrate the achievements of Mankind in the field of Art,” the University Museum sent emissaries and expeditions to Greece, Egypt, China, Palestine, Africa, Guatemala, and the Amazon. Gordon’s hand touched most of it, as he tried 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 the treasures of antiquity was lost. Success in his 1905 collecting trip to 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 interpersonal 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 provide a view beyond the outcome of the Haines-Klukwan vote of 1923, lingering still.

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Louis and Florence Shotridge had yet to experience the world 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 rattle 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 for four full years; I went off and on. About seventeen months altogether. We hired a tutor who 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 to their 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 prompts statements like these: 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?

Gordon purchases forty-nine items from Shotridge, new carvings and old, with prospects for 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 then the others is paying for.

Anticipated obstacles 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. Gordon also knew enough about the Klukwan Whale House to understand the implications of his Chilkat connection. Among North American indigenous art collectors, the Whale House masterworks represented a pinnacle of achievement. Gordon also knew that other collectors were already bidding on the beloved *aat.oow*, and that he must maintain a local presence. With patience, his Museum could

gain possession of 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 was essential to Klukwan's ability to withstand the White Wave. As the only Coastal Tlingit town built inland, residents never saw gunboats and managed to evade the worst of some 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 is a full day away. 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. Resources and access to markets kept residents close to home, remote location and a warlike reputation kept white people out.

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 perhaps a thousand residents. The white men probably encountered *sha'dehuni* Xet-su-wu and his entourage on 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, which he commissioned only a few years prior.

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 ancestors said to have founded Klukwan, the Ganax.teidi. For about eighteen months the Haida-

trained master worked on the last great effort of his long career. Each twelve-foot corner post displays the complex histories of principal families that comprise the clan; four posts from an older house remain 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 the press labeled 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. Harder to believe is that they said

nothing. No doubt exists, however, that Shotridge accepted the task of preserving his culture as a true believer, with fervor that rivaled his illustrious forbears. Stuwu'kaa, meaning “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 wife pledged to Louis 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 never mentioned her 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 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 she had done with other “priceless soul-gems,” missionary Carrie Willard likely removed her, found a bed in the orphanage, and enrolled her in school as Florence. Missionaries likely obscured his daughter’s background and forbade others to speak about him. Still, no one forgot her lineage. The

1902 wedding certificate that hangs in the house her husband built in Haines refers to the bride as 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.”

Native reactions to non-Native settlement in northern Lynn Canal triggered events that left profound effects on young Florence and Louis. Mortality rates above fifty percent from smallpox epidemics 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 the United State’s purchase of Russian America in 1867 brought Presbyterians who targeted medicine men as disruptive and evil. By 1878, Reverend S. Hall Young of Wrangell was waging a regional crusade against shamanism, with particular loathing for Scundoo’o. A confrontation with the renegade shaman likely contributed to Young’s six-week canoe voyage in 1879 accompanied by four Tlingit men and his friend, John Muir.

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 woeful underregulation, 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. The two cents a fish they made compared poorly to fifty cents per salmon paid to white fishers in Columbia River. Natives learned to pit 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.

At issue was local hire. The 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. Tlingits were hired, too, but resentments ran deep as fish barons drained local rivers of salmon stocks once thought limitless, and filled jobs that Natives considered their due. 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 colorful contrasts 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. The ships supplied that purpose. 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 they hit the beach tourists dodged drying racks hung heavy with sockeye as they "made a hasty rush for the Indian tents."

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 in the 1880s, while the little girl she called Kaatkwaaxsnei 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 the next decade, 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 relocated to Deishu/Haines Mission to drift between his extended family and the mission orphanage. 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. In these important ways, both young people belonged to the last generation to receive instruction from the Old Ones.

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. As his father had done, Shotridge sometimes moved his family to Pyramid Harbor in part to see that canneries did not block fish passage upriver. In 1890 four Tlingit men held guards at gunpoint while they destroyed a company fish trap, a protest that Shotridge surely supported.

Judging by the photographic record, George Shotridge knew the weight of his traditional leadership role, including that of Whale House *hitsaati*. 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. Perhaps the most well-known image of Louis Shotridge's father was taken in the Whale House by Juneau photographers Winter and Pond in 1895. Unlike nine other clan members in the picture, the brim of Shotridge's hat is lifted enough to see his entire face. On his right, a large bentwood box; on the left, his son in Chilkat robes, holding his father's expression.

George Shotridge passed around gifts for hours at the one-year *koo'eex* for his father, a large and lavish affair open to Tlingit and white, Chilkat and Chilkoot. 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 married 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, her three half-breed children enduring the taunts of classmates.

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, stampeders 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 perhaps a few old memories. In spite of the money or prestige that certifies success in their adopted and original cultures, each suffered estrangement from both worlds, Outsiders to all.

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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. Passions in common fostered an honesty sharpened by Gordon’s demands and the cash he fronted to realize them.

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, a valuable compatriot remained on a carpentry crew finishing Fort William H. Seward, his wife at home with her loom.

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. Natives supplied troops with fresh fish and produce. Any aggressive behavior displayed between soldiers and indigenous residents played out on the basketball court. Klukwan old-timers Jim Brouillette and Richard King told me stories about Klukwan teams walking the twenty-two miles for a game at the Fort, beating the soldiers, and walking back to arrive at the village in time for a victory breakfast.

Smitten by glimpses of the world beyond the icy walls of Lynn Canal, Florence and Louis strained against the torpor of a backwater hometown. Shotridge prodded Gordon through the summer, complaining that Haines was "to 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 and others approved of the work “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 to Haines public school in 1906, the Shotridges were likely sympathizers and may have been among those who spoke against the decision, which was overturned.

Florence and Louis kept a studious air at home, weaving, 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 summoned further venues 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 primarily 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 baritone 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 Blackfeet 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 Blackfeet 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 that erupted with "downright abuse and violence" when the Kaiser dedicated the performance to his guest, former President Theodore Roosevelt. The show closed to scathing reviews and bankruptcy, its spectacular crash recounted in the *New York Times*. At least one article years later referenced the Shotridges as "famous singers" who performed in "an Indian play that failed." Time devoured the playbills and memories, but popular photographs of the time supply a few images. Stills from the Berlin show feature dozens of skin-clad Indians on a woodland set scanning the horizon for signs of strangers. Standard attire for public appearances thereafter were costumes made for the opera—Tlingits in full fringe and feather.

A busy tour schedule exposed the "Alaska Chief and His Princess" to crowds clamoring for celebrity Indians. Eastern powerbrokers arranged private dinners and events with the Shotridges. The Chilkat man's biggest backer, department store magnate John Wanamaker, retained Shotridge as a hunting guide for one or more outings with former President Roosevelt. The exposure was intoxicating, the couple's confidence soared among influential white people who 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. That summer, Florence and Louis lived in Philadelphia with anthropologist Frank Speck, then moved into a small apartment a few blocks from the museum. In his twenty years with the University Museum, Shotridge

generated a remarkable body of Tlingit ethnographic notes and monographs, attracted national publicity, and procured 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 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 often featured her 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 position at the University Museum was only part-time, Shotridge inquired about work in Ottawa with Sapir, who responded positively. Shotridge ultimately 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. I have yet to stumble onto her letters or journals, so can know Florence only through scant writings and the few extant comments of others. Few Haines residents today have ever heard of her, practically none claim blood ties. But in the expository prose of “History of the Tina’

Blanket,” I hear the calm, clear voice of a woman steeped in an older time and tradition with the confidence to speak to another.

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.

Discovery that she lived with brown bears made the princess more determined to adapt to their different ways, but one day grieving kinsmen located them and slew her husband. They took the woman back to their village, but left her two sons behind with the bears. 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 expository 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. Fascinated by an apparent Indian princess, crowds of bemused interlopers paused to ask questions or simply stare at the intricate movements of 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; schoolchildren loved their Princess museum guide. 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 occasionally foment clash. In his relationship with the Shotridges, however, high mutual interest sustained a parity founded on shared visions. 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 him 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, Shotridge maintained the energetic pace that fostered his image as a “New Indian.” In the spring, the Society of American Indians held a conference in Philadelphia that Shotridge surely attended. Brainchild of a white

sociologist, the organization reflected the “progressive” view that Indians could assimilate the best of Anglo-American 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.”

Acceptance of Gordon’s offer to lead the museum’s 1915 Alaska expedition made Louis Shotridge one of the first academically-trained Native American anthropologists to take on such duties. For \$1200 a year he became a full-time assistant curator with Florence as his unpaid “co-leader.” The couple returned to Haines where they settled into their old home, now “expedition field headquarters,” and proceeded with a mission that eventually turned the town against its most famous resident.