

**“HAA DAAT AKAWSHIXÍT, HE WROTE ABOUT US”:  
CONTEXTUALIZING ANTHROPOLOGIST JOHN R. SWANTON’S  
1904 FIELDWORK ON THE TLINGIT INDIANS**

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**ABSTRACT**

“The Tlingit evidently have a rich mythology which I shall be able to little more than touch” (Boas Papers 1904-01-13). So wrote anthropologist John Reed Swanton (1873–1958) to his mentor and fellow anthropologist Franz Boas after arriving in Sitka, Alaska in January 1904 as he began his fieldwork among the then little-studied Tlingit Indians. Swanton’s statement about being able to “little more than touch” the rich mythology—better termed oral literature<sup>1</sup>—of the Tlingit largely proved to be true. Swanton only spent three and a half months in Southeast Alaska documenting Tlingit culture, language, and oral literature. Even though his time was limited in Southeast Alaska, he produced two monographs: *Social Conditions, Beliefs, and Linguistic Relationships of the Tlingit Indians* (Swanton 1905a), which remains an early and detailed ethnography of the Tlingit, and *Tlingit Myths and Texts* (Swanton 1909), which stands as one of the largest publications of Tlingit oral literature in the Tlingit language in existence. Swanton was one of the first American anthropologists to study the Tlingit, making his publications of interest to scholars and the Tlingit who read his works today. Swanton was also a protégé of influential anthropologist Franz Boas and engaged in the then-nascent anthropological method of participant observation, making study of his work important to the history of anthropology.

The purpose of this essay is to document John R. Swanton’s work among the Tlingit Indians of Southeast Alaska, with a focus on his fieldwork among the Tlingit in 1904 at Sitka and Wrangell, Alaska. Such an examination necessitates an overview of Swanton’s academic training and the practices he applied to gain information from Tlingit informants, as well as biographical documentation about the informants Swanton largely left anonymous, a common practice during his era. Swanton’s informants are important because they influenced the final content and products of his research. In addition to his two monographs, Swanton published nine essays between 1904 and 1920. A review of all these publications is beyond the scope of this paper, which instead highlights aspects of his two monographs (i.e., Swanton 1905a, 1909). Understanding how Swanton published his monographs also merits discussion because that process affected their final form. Documenting how Swanton was

trained and conducted fieldwork provides information on Tlingit actors in history and illustrates how anthropologists and indigenous people worked together in the early twentieth century.

Below, I describe who John Swanton was as an individual, his academic training, his fieldwork, and the Tlingit individuals he worked with as informants. For each of Swanton’s informants I detail their Tlingit kinship information, such as clan, clan house (*hít*), and region (*khwáan*) of their clan or birth, as well as biographical findings. Swanton has remained largely unstudied for his work among the Tlingit and he never clearly articulated his fieldwork methods in writing. Most of his fieldnotes did not survive, he did not keep diaries, and his correspondence leaves much unsaid. However, letters written during and about his 1904 fieldwork are archived in the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution and in the Franz Boas Papers, American

Philosophical Society Library. Swanton's wife, Alice Barnard, accompanied Swanton to Alaska in 1904 and kept a detailed diary of their trip. Her diary, as well as the letters she and Swanton wrote to family, are housed at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College. The Tlingit informants that Swanton worked with left no written record themselves, but they have been identified through research in archives and discussion with Tlingit scholars such as Harold Jacobs (*Kaawóotk*) and Ishmael Hope (*Angaluuk, Khaagwáask, Shis.hán*).

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: JOHN R. SWANTON TO 1904

Swanton was born in Gardiner, Maine in 1873, a moderate-sized industrial community at the time (Fig. 1). Swanton's father died during his youth, leaving him to be raised by his mother, grandmother, and great-aunt. Upon completion of high school in the early 1890s, Swanton enrolled at Harvard and began studying ethnology. He took courses in philosophy, linguistics, archaeology, and ethnology, studying under professors Frederick Putman and C. C. Willoughby, earning a bachelor's degree around 1895 and a master's degree in 1897.

Swanton enrolled in Harvard's new Ph.D. program in anthropology in 1897 (Steward 1960:331). Harvard's program focused on archaeology, ethnology, and linguistics at that time. Initially Swanton appears to have pursued a career in archaeology and museums, but his interest in ethnology and linguistics prompted him to spend two years absentee at Columbia University studying with Franz Boas. Boas, then employed jointly as a curator at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History and as an instructor at Columbia, was educating a new generation of anthropologists, framing methodology, and challenging past theoretical approaches. He greatly influenced Swanton.



*Figure 1. Swanton around the time of his retirement from the BAE. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Photo Lot 33, NAA INV 0287-1900.*

During this time Boas sought to “examine each people in their historical specificity” (Cole 1999:267) in order to demonstrate that culture was much more complex and dynamic than biological and evolutionist theorists believed. Boas proposed that scholars examine each culture in detail through empirical field methods to document this specificity (Cole 1999:267). He also pursued the method of having indigenous people write about their own communities or regions, as in his work with Tsimshian man Henry Wellington Tate (Maud 2000). Douglas Cole (1999:265) writes that Boas' work “condemned theories of evolution based on observed homologies and supposed similarities.” Boas' ideas on cultural particularism challenged aspects of comparative and biological theory posed by past and contemporary European and American theorists like E. B. Tylor, S. R. Steinmetz, John W. Powell, and Daniel Britton (Cole 1999:265–267).

Although Boas' assertions challenged some anthropologists of the day, leading some to disagree with him, Swanton embraced many of Boas' methods and his perspective on the particular “genius of a people.” Swanton “followed Boas' admonitions that societies should be understood through intensive field research in their concreteness and particularity rather than with reference to their supposed position in a preconceived evolutionary scheme that embraced all humanity” (Steward 1960:331). He also followed Boas in his argument that historical specificity could be documented through the study of indigenous languages, a concept that found its way into Swanton's (1900) dissertation, which concerned the Northwest Coast Chinook verb.

Swanton emerged from Harvard with an Ivy League education and training to examine indigenous cultures from new perspectives. He took a prestigious research post at the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) in 1900. Established in 1873, the BAE was created to study Native Americans and provide the government and public with a better understanding of their languages and cultures. Swanton joined the BAE when it was viewed as the premier research organization in the United States.

The BAE's influential director, John Wesley Powell, had recently transformed the organization into a well-funded research institution (Browman and Williams 2013:169–195). According to Julian Steward (1960:331), one of Swanton's biographers, working for the BAE was a good match “for a man of Swanton's temperament.” Steward described Swanton as “extraordinarily shy and

prone to digestive elements... of nervous origin” and the BAE kept Swanton from the “demands of a more public life” of university teaching (Steward 1960:331). Swanton almost never taught or lectured, as anxiety made him physically ill. Throughout his life, he seems to have avoided confrontation and shied away from challenging the arguments of other scholars, unlike his mentor Boas. Swanton apparently had various eccentricities, agoraphobia, regular health problems, and has been described as a “loner”; but those who worked with him considered him soft-spoken, kind, genuine, and supportive of young and emerging scholars (Browman and Williams 2013:210–211).

As an employee of the BAE, Swanton was expected to engage in research and publish about Native Americans. Although BAE director Powell “was a doctrinaire cultural evolutionist” (Browman and Williams 2013:165), he supported Swanton’s study of indigenous ethnography and languages. The BAE soon offered Swanton modest funding to travel to the Northwest Coast and study the Haida Indians. The BAE partnered with the Smithsonian Institution’s Museum of Natural History to provide Swanton and a colleague with stipends in exchange for collecting ethnographic objects, a common arrangement for scholars of the day. In the field, however, Swanton concentrated on documentation and research on the Haida, rather than object collecting, leaving most of the responsibility for that task to his BAE colleague Charles F. Newcombe (Cole 1999:202). Swanton’s time, spent on the Haida Gwaii (formerly known as the Queen Charlotte Islands) and in Haida communities of Southeast Alaska on Prince of Wales Island, was largely consumed with documenting Haida language and mythology.

As a disciple of Boas, Swanton wholeheartedly embraced the notion that important scientific and historical information could be found in language. This belief in the validity of linguistic analysis led him to meticulously document myths in the original Haida language. During Swanton’s year with the Haida, he was fortunate to find immensely knowledgeable tribal historians and informants, such as elders *Skaay* and *Ghandl* (Bringhurst 2011). Swanton transcribed approximately one thousand pages of myths in the Haida language. He felt he was capturing world literature and intended to publish what he collected in Haida.

After concluding his work with the Haida in 1901, Swanton returned to the BAE to prepare his manuscripts for publication. The process, however, took four years to complete, in part due to administrative opposition and

leadership changes at the BAE. In 1902, BAE archaeologist William Henry Holmes was promoted to chief, following the death of John Wesley Powell. Shortly thereafter Holmes also became director of the U.S. National Museum (today the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History). Boas opposed Holmes’ appointment as director because he felt Holmes was supporting archaeologists at the expense of ethnologists and anthropologists, such as Swanton (Cole 1999). Holmes, in turn, did not support or agree with Boas, including Boas’ perspectives on culture; nor did he champion the same intellectual freedoms as Powell. Boas’ interactions with Holmes deteriorated to such an extent that Boas resigned his joint-position as chief curator at the museum in favor of teaching full time at Columbia. Holmes’ installment also shifted the BAE’s practices, which impacted Swanton’s work.

Swanton encountered resistance from Holmes in his attempts to publish his collected myths in both Haida and English. According to Bringhurst (2011:189), “the Bureau’s new chief could see no reason to use his congressional appropriation typesetting hundreds of pages of Haida, which only a few Indians, linguists, and missionaries could read.” Holmes also viewed Swanton’s extensive documentation of the Haida language as excessive. Swanton’s intent to publish his collected texts in Haida was something outside of normal academic practice, even for Boas, an advocate for linguistic study.

Few scholars published indigenous oral literature or myths as bilingual texts at the time, and certainly not to the extent Swanton proposed. Standard academic documentation practices of the day for indigenous oral literature were to (1) gather and publish English-only summaries; (2) often omit the names and/or biographical information of the storytellers and informants; and (3) organize the stories by subject, thereby removing them from their original context and myth cycle. This level of documentation was intended to enable scholars to understand and study the possibly vanishing Native cultures comparatively, and to theorize about universal anthropological questions.

After debate and discussion with Swanton, Holmes only allowed the publication of fifty Haida myths in bilingual form as *Haida Myths and Texts* (Swanton 1905b). Boas wrote a personal letter (Boas Papers 1905-01-13) to a colleague that was critical of the Holmes administration because it had “declined to publish” a core portion of Swanton’s Haida texts. More than a century later, scholar Robert Bringhurst (2011) found and published Swanton’s unpublished Haida myths.

## SWANTON GOES TO TLINGIT COUNTRY: SITKA FROM JANUARY TO MARCH 1904

Amid Swanton's efforts to publish his collected Haida myths, he sought to return to the Northwest Coast and engage in further study. This time Swanton chose to study the Tlingit, who shared a border with the Haida. Holmes authorized modest funding for Swanton to return to Southeast Alaska in exchange for collecting ethnographic objects for the U.S. National Museum. Although the museum wanted Tlingit ethnographic objects, Swanton's agenda was to document Tlingit language and oral literature. According to Richard Dauenhauer (1981:361), "Swanton was working at several disadvantages; he was among the first linguists to attempt to work on Tlingit; [and] the sound system of Tlingit was not yet fully understood by any scholar." Swanton was interested in the comparative study of the Tlingit and Haida languages and mythologies in order to document cultural specificity.

During this busy academic period, in 1903 Swanton courted and then married Alice Barnard (b. 1877), a young woman from New England. They decided to make Swanton's venture to Southeast Alaska both an anthropological undertaking and a belated honeymoon. According to Alice Swanton's diary, the journey was pleasant at times, but also uncomfortable due to Southeast Alaska's remoteness, climate, and Swanton's rigorous daily work schedule.

The Tlingit people in the early twentieth century faced a myriad of complex issues brought on by the U.S. colo-

nization of Alaska. This included dispossession of tribal lands, military attacks on the tribal population, boarding school and detribalization programs, and laws that forbade indigenous cultural and religious practices. Swanton arrived in Southeast Alaska at a time of heightened oppression of Tlingit cultural and religious freedoms.

After a long trip across the country and travel by boat up the Northwest Coast, the Swantons arrived in Sitka on January 10, 1904 (Fig. 2). After securing lodgings at the Hotel Baronoff, Swanton began his work on January 11. He started by networking with various individuals and organizations involved with the Tlingit. This included administrators of the Presbyterian boarding school, the Sheldon Jackson School, and the local Sitka Natural History and Ethnological Society. By January 13, Swanton "had an Indian up here in our room working with him all day and will probably have him here several days before they go out among the old Indians," according to his wife Alice in a letter to her mother-in-law (Swanton Family Papers 1904-01-13). The following day her diary reported how Swanton "began his work this morning with his interpreter" and labored all day.

In a letter to his friend and mentor Boas on January 13 (Boas Papers 1904-01-13), Swanton stated that he was having trouble finding a Tlingit individual willing to write out oral literature and ethnographic data for pay, a method Boas had used that allowed indigenous individuals to offer ethnographic information on their own communities and cultures (Maud 2000). Swanton did, however, tell Boas



Figure 2: View of the Sitka Indian Village, ca. 1896. Alaska State Library, Winter and Pond Collection, ASL-P87-1502.

he had met with a “young Tlingit man,” a “Chilkat,” who could serve as an “interpreter.” Though young, this individual could “be trusted as a fine authority” on Tlingit culture (Boas Papers 1904-01-13). Although Swanton provided little information about this “fine authority” in this letter, research has confirmed that it was thirty-three-year-old John Cameron (*Daalwools’ées’*) (ca. 1871–1938). A member of the Kaagwaantaan clan, he was born in 1871 in Klukwan. *Daalwools’ées’* served as a paid translator and consultant to Swanton at Sitka (Fig. 3).

*Daalwools’ées’* was a good fit for Swanton’s needs, and perhaps vice versa. The son of a Kaagwaantaan clan woman named *Sdleigwán*,<sup>2</sup> *Daalwools’ées’* was trained by his family and maternal uncles in clan history and oratory. In his youth *Daalwools’ées’* worked hauling goods, making lengthy daily trips on-foot between mining outposts at Dyea and Bennet (Olson 1967:16). He appears to have received a Western education at the Sheldon Jackson School at Sitka, where he learned to speak, read, and write English well. After his schooling, *Daalwools’ées’* took up residence in the Sitka Indian Village and married a widow nearly twenty years his senior, Amelia Sloan Cameron (*Yaandusgéi*) (1852–1947), a woman of the Kiks.ádi clan, X’aaka hit. They lived in Sitka Indian Village and had two children, Olinda Cameron Eldred (*Yaayitawdulghein*) (1890–1978) and John Cameron (*Khaalgéik’w*)<sup>3</sup> (1894–1915) (Harold Jacobs, pers. comm. 10 January 2014). *Yaandusgéi* also had children from a previous marriage. When Swanton arrived in Sitka looking for a knowledgeable bilingual Tlingit, *Daalwools’ées’* was an ideal candidate. The fact that *Daalwools’ées’* had at least two children at home, combined with Swanton’s good pay, sealed their working relationship.<sup>4</sup>

During the next few weeks Swanton worked to connect with knowledgeable Tlingit individuals in Sitka through *Daalwools’ées’*. On January 16 Alice reported that Swanton, with “his man” (a term she occasionally used to describe *Daalwools’ées’*) had “gone off to some old Indian house this afternoon” (Swanton Family Papers 1904). This indicates that *Daalwools’ées’* likely took Swanton to the Sitka Indian Village to introduce him and his research objectives. In the next few weeks *Daalwools’ées’* helped Swanton secure three additional informants, including his clan elder *Deikeenáak’w*, with whom Swanton worked extensively. *Daalwools’ées’* and *Deikeenáak’w* therefore represented the Eagle clans. The other two informants secured were Raven moiety members *Kh’alyáan* and *Kh’áadasteen*, who likely provided *wooch yax*, or balance, between moi-

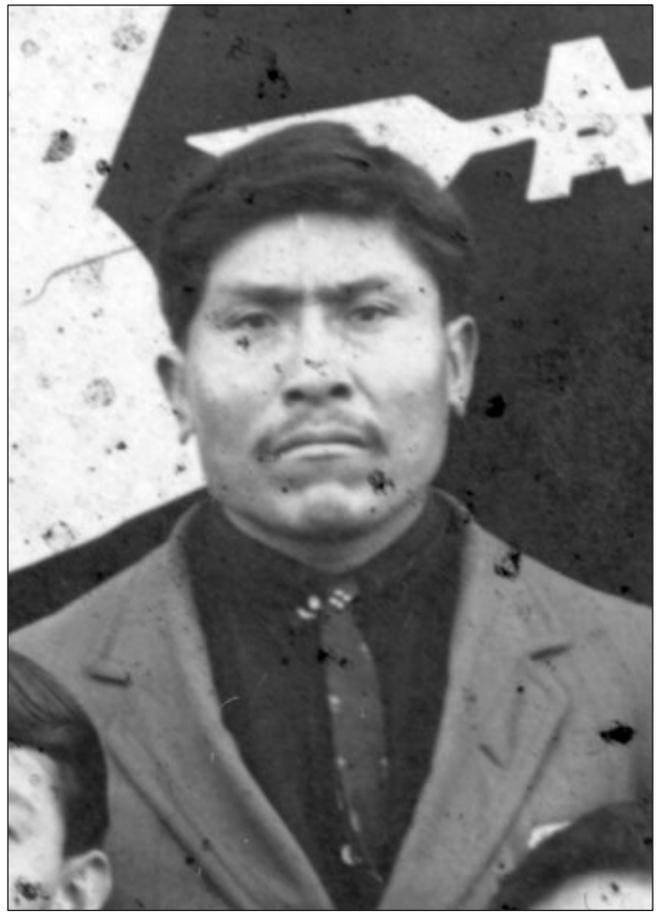


Figure 3. *Daalwools’ées’* at the Sitka Alaska Native Brotherhood convention, 1914. Alaska State Library, State Library Portrait File, ASL-P01-4570.

eties. Swanton (1905a:419) also noted that an unnamed “old woman of the T’akhdeintaan [clan] at Sitka” assisted him with sketches of Tlingit objects, but no additional information about her is known.

*Daalwools’ées’* and *Deikeenáak’w* provided Swanton with most of the content he published from his Sitka informants. *Deikeenáak’w* (circa 1828–1928) was an elder of the Kaagwaantaan clan and Khóok hit who appears to have lived in Sitka Indian Village for most or all of his life. *Deikeenáak’w*’s name means “little Haida” and he may have also gone by the name Haida Charlie, but his Haida connection or heritage is unknown. When interacting with Swanton, *Deikeenáak’w* used the English name of John Morris (BAE 1904-03-16). *Deikeenáak’w* was also an artist, and he produced a small bone mask on commission for Swanton. According to Swanton’s letters, *Deikeenáak’w* informed Swanton that he had also been commissioned by amateur ethnographer and collector U.S. Naval Lt. George T. Emmons to carve a mask, which Emmons then sold to a

museum. Swanton mentioned that *Deikeenáak'w* worked as an informant for Emmons. *Deikeenáak'w* appears to have been willing to share his knowledge of Tlingit culture, language, and history, but only to those who would appreciate it and provide adequate compensation.

In regards to Swanton's field methods and the concept of empirical observation, sources indicate Swanton invited informants to his hotel to provide cultural information. Swanton worked to transcribe and record his informants' history, language, and cultural feedback in their own words, which he hoped to publish. His wife's diary detailed aspects of how, where, and when Swanton worked. For example, Alice chronicled the hours Swanton worked in her diary, such as "John at work all day," and often listed the hours he worked, generally 8 am to 5 pm every weekday (Swanton Family Papers 1904-01-25). Alice's diary regularly noted the locations where Swanton worked as well, including that "John and his man worked upstairs" in a separate room, or when the upper room was too cold, "John and his man worked here in the room" while Alice was present (e.g., Swanton Family Papers 1904-01-21/23). Swanton also worked outside the hotel, presumably in the Sitka Indian Village, such as when Alice wrote that "John came home at quarter of five," denoting he had been at work away from the hotel (Swanton Family Papers 1904-02-04).

Swanton soon reported in a letter to his mother that "my work has settled into a regular routine" (Swanton Family Papers 1904-01-14). His steady work habits had produced a substantial product within about ten days: i.e., on January 24 Swanton reported to BAE administrator Holmes in writing that he had already penned "about a hundred pages" of fieldnotes, alluding that they were largely bilingual texts of Tlingit oral literature. Swanton also reported to Holmes that he expected to pen another two hundred pages, and afterward he would be "devoting the remainder of my time to recording stories in English and unraveling the mythology and social organization" of the Tlingit (BAE 1904-01-24). The following week Swanton informed Holmes that he had "collected between ten and fifteen [Tlingit language] texts with interlinear translations and for the present [I] shall be satisfied ... recording the remaining stories in English" (Swanton Family Papers 1904-01-31). By mid-February Swanton notified Holmes that he had "a large pile of manuscripts, partly consisting of interlinear translations, and partly of stories in English, besides which I have many notes" (Swanton Family Papers 1904-02-19).<sup>5</sup>

In addition to fieldnotes, Swanton used an early recording device, a graphophone, to document his informants' stories and songs. In late January he mentioned in a letter to his family that "I have been trying it on" informants (Swanton Family Papers 1904-01-31). This new recording technique, cutting-edge technology in 1904, afforded Swanton the ability to capture the songs sung by *Deikeenáak'w* and *Daalwools'ées'*, some of which are archived at the American Folklife Center. In early March 1904 Alice documented in her diary that "John's old Indian comes down here now and sings into the phonograph. I can hear him in my room" (Swanton Family Papers 1904-03-03). Swanton wrote to Holmes that the "old Indian," *Deikeenáak'w* (Fig. 4), was "filling the rolls [recording cylinders] with Indian songs" (BAE 1904-03-07). A few days later Swanton wrote a letter to family that he was still "taking down songs into the graphophone, from an old Indian ... [in] the hotel." In fact, the noise level from the singing in the hotel led Swanton to write that "I rather wonder [why] I haven't been turned out of the hotel for it, but so far nothing has happened" (Swanton Family Papers 1904-03-04).

Those two months in Sitka passed quickly for Swanton and he soon made the decision to conclude his work there and travel to Wrangell. Unfortunately, no specific mention of how Swanton interacted with his other two Sitka informants, elders *Kh'alyáan* and *Kh'áadasteen*, exists, though his contacts with them appear to have been brief. He collected three Tlingit language historical accounts from them, two from *Kh'alyáan III*<sup>6</sup> (a Kiks.ádi elder and At.uwaxiji hit clan house leader) and one lengthy and detailed telling from *Kh'áadasteen*<sup>7</sup> (a Yaakwdáat Khwáan (Yakutat region) elder of the Kwaashk'i Khwáan clan). At the conclusion of his time in Sitka Swanton wrote Holmes with a detailed list of his ethnographic art purchases for the museum, said that his work in Sitka had filled the graphophone rolls with songs from *Deikeenáak'w* and that "there are about 550 pp. of mss., besides incidental notes. About 200 of these pp. are in Tlingit" (BAE 1904-03-15).

### SWANTON AT WRANGELL, MARCH TO MAY 1904

Swanton left Sitka for Wrangell by boat on March 20 and arrived on the evening of March 22. The day after their arrival Alice wrote her mother-in-law that John "has gone out this afternoon to see a man about the Indians here" (Swanton Family Papers 1904-03-23). Swanton's concise



*Figure 4. Deikeenáak'w circa 1900. Photo by Winter and Pond. Alaska State Library, State Library Place File, ASL-P01-0895.*



Figure 5: Khaadashaan circa 1900. Photo from Totem Lore and the Land of the Totem (1931).

entry in *Tlingit Myths and Texts* indicates he secured the services of three Tlingit informants in *Khaachxhan.áak'w* (the Tlingit village adjacent to Wrangell): i.e., Kaasxh'agweidí clan elders *Khaadashaan* and his mother *Léek*, and an “old Kake man” Swanton named in writing only as “Kasa'nk.” He most likely worked in *Khaadashaan's* home in the Kaasxh'agweidí clan houses area of *Khaachxhan.áak'w*. Swanton informed his mother early on that “my work has opened up very auspiciously and I hope it will keep us about another six weeks” (Swanton Family Papers 1904-03-27).

Swanton (1905a:419) informed Holmes that he had “an excellent interpreter and am fortunate also in having secured the services of the former speaker of the Wrangell Indians” (BAE 1904-03-27). This statement referred to his hired Tlingit interpreter Matilda Wigg, and the man who became his key informant at Wrangell, *Khaadashaan*.

*Khaadashaan* (English name John Kadashan; Fig. 5) (1834–1914) was fluent in Tlingit and English and a skilled public speaker in both languages. *Khaadashaan* was of the Kaasxh'agweidí clan, but born at or near the village of Klukwan. *Khaadashaan* was the son of *Shaadaxhicht* (a Kaagwaantaan clan and/or clan house leader at the time) and a Kaasxh'agweidí clan woman named *Léek*. During *Khaadashaan's* childhood a feud occurred between the Kaagwaantaan and Naanyaa.aayí clans, and out of duty *Léek* and *Khaadashaan* left Klukwan (without *Shaadaxhicht*) and resided thereafter in or near *Khaachxhan.áak'w* (Wrangell Genealogy Notecard #2: Louis Shorridge Digital Archives). Although this separation occurred early in his youth, *Khaadashaan* was raised as an *aanyádi* (a noble) and was trained in Tlingit oral literature, tribal history, and oratory.

By the time Swanton arrived at *Khaachxhan.áak'w*, *Khaadashaan* was approximately seventy years old and a significant figure in his community (Fig. 6). In *Khaachxhan.áak'w*, *Khaadashaan* was known as a cultural leader, tribal historian, orator, and *naakaaní* (peacemaker and clan mediator). *Khaadashaan* was also an advocate and spokesman for his community. In 1899 he served as the lead speaker to territorial Governor John G. Brady when the Tlingit met with the governor to discuss tribal sovereignty issues. Prior to Swanton's arrival, *Khaadashaan* had worked with some outsiders, and is perhaps best known for his 1880 role as a guide and translator for naturalist John Muir during his survey of Southeast Alaskan glaciers (Muir [1894] 1998). *Khaadashaan* embraced Christianity and maintained a working relationship with local missionaries and government officials. Missionary S. Hall Young, who proselytized to the Tlingit of *Khaachxhan.áak'w* for decades, wrote of *Khaadashaan*<sup>8</sup> in his 1927 memoir:

Kadashan was the shrewdest and most diplomatic of the Stikeens. His face was pockmarked, with one eyelid partly eaten away, giving him a comical appearance of executing a wink. He was a born after-dinner speaker and a master of metaphors, oily phrases and compliment. He had a never-failing fund of native legend, Indian lore, song and story. . . . By temperament, as well as position, he was our peace maker. His connection by blood on his father's side with Shathitch, the head chief of the Chilkats, and by former treaties with the Taccos, Hoochenoos, and Kakes, gave him an added advantage (Young 1927:185–186).



*Figure 6: Kaasxh'agweidi house at Wrangell, likely Khaadashaan's residence, ca. 1900. Alaska State Library, Winter and Pond Collection, ASL-P87-0123.*

In addition to working with *Khaadashaan*, Swanton interacted with *Khaadashaan's* aged mother, *Léek*, who was possibly close to ninety years old and may have lived with *Khaadashaan*. *Léek*, of the Kaasxh'agweidí clan, and a Naanyaa.aayí yádi, was an elder and master storyteller. She was the daughter of Naanyaa.aayí man *Ts'eil*, and daughter of Kaasxh'agweidí clan woman *Khindayaa* (Harold Jacobs, pers. comm. 7 Jan. 2014).<sup>9</sup> Swanton (1909:1) wrote that she had "lived for a considerable time among the whites at Victoria." In 1880, twenty-four years prior to Swanton's visit, Muir (1998:115) wrote that *Léek* was "a woman of great natural dignity and force of character," who deeply loved her son *Khaadashaan*. As previously mentioned, while in *Khaachxhan.áak'w* Swanton also interacted with an "old Kake man" named in writing only as "Kasa'nk," but offered no information about him.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, little more is known about Swanton's time in *Khaachxhan.áak'w*. Notes and letters of Swanton and his wife indicate that while in *Khaachxhan.áak'w* he relied solely on written fieldnotes while there, as no evidence exists of Swanton using his graphophone. The information he collected there, however, later played a prominent role in his publications. *Khaadashaan* clearly served as the primary informant for Swanton's (1905a) ethnography *Social Conditions, Beliefs, and Linguistic Relationships of the Tlingit Indians*, as Swanton credits him more than any of his other informants and provides ample discussion of Shtax'héen Khwáan (Wrangell region) Tlingit culture. Swanton also obtained more stories at *Khaachxhan.áak'w* from *Khaadashaan* than from his other two *Khaachxhan.áak'w* informants. The fact that *Khaadashaan's* clan, the Kaasxh'agweidí, traced its lineage of a Haida migration to Tlingit country near present-day Wrangell, may well have piqued Swanton's interest toward a comparative study of the Tlingit and Haida mythologies and languages. Swanton's brief stay in Wrangell ended on May 5, when he and his wife departed by boat, never to return to Alaska.

### PUBLISHING ON THE TLINGIT AND THE BAE

After returning to the BAE in Washington, DC, Swanton was soon engrossed in organizing his Tlingit fieldnotes and oral literature texts into manuscripts for publication. In addition to producing his Tlingit ethnography in 1905 and his collection of Tlingit stories in 1909, Swanton published five essays that offered his insights on the Tlingit.

In these publications Swanton investigated kinship, cultural practices, oral literature, and linguistics. Nearly all of these compared the Tlingit and Haida to some extent. Swanton (1905c) sought to determine whether the Tlingit and Haida languages were related or linguistic isolates, but he did not offer an argument for either position.

Swanton's concise ethnography of the Tlingit is an objective and well balanced publication for its day, reading like a collection of fieldnotes and data reproduced in written form. Some portions of the ethnography slip into first-person description as related by his informants, such as *Deikeenáak'w's* description of a *khu.éex'* (potlatch) held in Klukwan (Swanton 1905a:434-443). Swanton did not write about himself or insert himself into the narratives, and refrained from comparing indigenous society to American society. Swanton credits *Khaadashaan* by name on multiple occasions in his ethnography, more frequently than he did with his other informants, in part because the ethnography contains so much information about Shtax'héen Khwáan (Wrangell region) history and culture.

The 451-page *Tlingit Myths and Texts* was Swanton's final product from his work among the Tlingit. Swanton wished to publish the volume in the original Tlingit with English translations. However, he encountered problems similar to those he had experienced with his Haida manuscripts. In a private letter to Boas in 1907 about the problems of intellectual freedom under the Holmes BAE administration, Swanton wrote of opposition to publishing his linguistic texts:

It is well-nigh impossible to get any assistance in publishing the linguistic material here....I may be forced eventually to do it [publish] all outside [of the BAE]. I suppose the management knows what sort of output the Bureau has to supply, but it seems a pity (Boas Papers 1904-03-21).

*Tlingit Myths and Texts* (Swanton 1909) was eventually published as BAE Bulletin 39. It remains a significant academic contribution today, and is composed of eighty-seven stories (thirty stories collected at Sitka, fifty-seven at Wrangell) that are mostly concise or summarized versions in English; nineteen bilingual texts collected at Sitka and Wrangell, some of which were told in condensed form; two bilingual lectures by *Khaadashaan* about Tlingit oratory (incorrectly termed "speeches" by Swanton); and a selection of songs as sung by *Deikeenáak'w*. It is plausible that not all of Swanton's two hundred pages of Tlingit

language texts were published, but the original fieldnotes did not survive for scholarly study or verification. It is also unclear if all of the recorded songs by *Deikeendak'w* are included in the volume. Swanton offered only a one-page explanation of who his informants were (omitting the name of *Léek*, however) and how his information was gathered. However, this volume stands today, outside the contemporary cooperative work of linguist Jeff Leer and Tlingit elder Elizabeth Nyman (Nyman and Leer 1993) and scholars Richard and Nora Marks Dauenhauer (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1987, 1990), as a major Tlingit-language publication.

Co-authored with Boas, Swanton's next BAE publication (Swanton and Boas 1911) consisted of a Sioux language dictionary, wordlist, and two bilingual narratives in the "Teton" and "Winnebago" dialects. His subsequent BAE publication, a co-authored *Dictionary of the Choctaw Language* (Byington et al. 1915), offered no oral literature in the Choctaw language. Swanton continued to publish dictionaries and linguistic analyses via BAE bulletins during his career, but even after the Holmes administration ended in 1929, he provided only English-language summaries of oral literature. His original linguistic focus had been lost along the way from administrative push-back and perhaps in part due to Swanton's gentle and nonconfrontational character.

## PERSPECTIVES ON SWANTON'S WORK

Over the years since Swanton worked in Southeast Alaska the Tlingit have read his published works about them with guarded interest. Among my Tlingit colleagues and friends, Swanton's work is respected and acknowledged to an extent. However, concerns remain about young Tlingit people reading Swanton and other anthropologists' works without understanding the complexities behind how ethnographies and oral literature compilations have been generated. Other concerns include that some scholars have presented incorrect information and violated clan intellectual property rights to stories and songs. Academics, too, have weighed in on Swanton's work and legacy among the Tlingit.

Most commentary has been reserved for Swanton's *Tlingit Myths and Texts*, and has revolved around how the oral literature was presented therein. Summarizing Swanton's work on Tlingit oral literature, scholar Robert Bringhurst (Nyman and Leer 1993:xiv) wrote that:

"Swanton knew what oral literature was, and he knew how complex and sophisticated the structure and usage of Native American languages tended to be. Swanton had little time among the Tlingit, and most of the stories he recorded, unfortunately, are merely summaries" of longer, more detailed stories. Swanton may or may not have been forced by the BAE administration to condense some of the Tlingit oral literature he collected in order to publish it.

The practice of condensing and summarizing Native American stories ranks as among the most detrimental and disingenuous actions ever undertaken by scholars of oral literature. The equivalent action would be to take myths collected by the Greek poet Homer in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* and omit Homer's name, remove the names of characters, places, and place names, condense the text, and reframe it simplistically through a cultural filter of Euro-Americanism. The problem with Tlingit oral literature being published as reframed summaries has been a long standing concern in the Tlingit community, as in many other indigenous communities. Richard Dauenhauer (1981:363) has argued that "there is a real danger of reshaping traditional Native American literature... [and] There is an even greater danger that younger generations of Native Americans will unknowingly be drawn to accept these" versions as legitimate.

For years scholars have published condensed textual summaries as ethnographic anthologies, robbing the myths of their value, authenticity, and artistic value. Since most scholars lacked training in the basics of poetic and literary structures, they also overlooked the importance and intellectual complexity of Tlingit myth cycles. Some treated the stories as unconnected and rearranged them topically into anthologies. Speaking of both Swanton and Boas, Bringhurst (2011:27) argues that "though Swanton's mentor, Franz Boas, took a lifetime interest in these texts, he never learned to read the Cycle as a whole." The stories Boas, Swanton, and many other scholars collected and published were often told by storytellers in a specific order for a specific reason. Only after one had heard and understood the whole literary epic could one comprehend the intricate connections and roles of stories, events, characters, and places. Scholars' work of summarizing and rearranging the stories destroyed content and meaning.

More accurate documentation of Northwest Coast oral literature began in the 1970s by poetry and literature scholars such as Dell H. Hymes (2004), Robert Bringhurst, and Nora and Richard Dauenhauer. Today,

Robert Bringhurst's (2011) *A Story as Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World* is arguably one of the best available studies on Native American oral literature. Bringhurst and other scholars have since documented the poetic and literary patterns, structures, and core aspects of oral literature. Bringhurst (2011:51–64) has argued that to understand oral literature, scholars should compare Northwest Coast oral literature to Northwest Coast art, because oral poems are as balanced and elaborately interwoven as great works of Northwest Coast art. Nora and Richard Dauenhauer (1987:ix) have argued that Tlingit oral literature is “adult literature that addresses the ambiguities of the human condition.” Going further, these pieces of oral literature address the complex realities that all individuals must come to grips with, including “coming of age as adults, alienation, identity and self-concept, conflict of loyalty, pride and arrogance, separation and loss” (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1987:ix).

Although Richard Dauenhauer (1981:363) has called some of Swanton's translation work “fragmentary and not satisfactory (and in fact quite dangerous to work with),” he has also argued that “it is possible for an advanced student or native speaker of Tlingit with some linguistic training to reconstruct” the songs and texts originally collected by Swanton. In recent times scholars and speakers of the Tlingit language have engaged in transliteration of Swanton's Tlingit texts, a process of correcting Swanton's published Tlingit texts. This has been undertaken by Roby Littlefield and Ethel Makinen, who transliterated *Deikeenáak'w's* telling of *Shanyaak'ulaaxh* (Moldy End) (also known as *Aak'wtaaseen*). This transliteration has been used for educational purposes, including for Tlingit language study and use by anthropologist Thomas Thornton (2012:79–106) in documenting Tlingit place names near Sitka. The fact that Swanton published his collected stories in the Tlingit language allows the Tlingit today to work on these texts. Individuals such as Ishmael Hope are actively working towards—and hoping to see—transliterations of Swanton's Tlingit language texts materialize in a corrected edition.

## CONCLUSION

We can learn a great deal about the history of anthropology and Tlingit history by studying individuals like John Reed Swanton and those he worked with. Swanton's work in Southeast Alaska lays bare the trappings of early twentieth-century anthropological practices and hopefully

allows contemporary anthropologists and ethnohistorians to reflect on past and present methods. This study shows that Swanton's original intentions—to publish the narratives he collected in their original forms—were inhibited by institutional politics and the publication process. Yet, studying Swanton's process helps us better understand early anthropological practice and the master storytellers whose work he documented.

Swanton's work demonstrates that the master storytellers he met in Southeast Alaska were artists, and their stories speak to aspects of human existence drawn from ancient oral literature. Robert Bringhurst (2011) has argued that scholars need to open their minds to new approaches in understanding the nature of oral literature, culture, and language. Nora Marks and Richard Dauenhauer have set a benchmark for quality work on Tlingit oral literature and language, which facilitates the redress of past scholarly inaccuracies in Tlingit and other oral literature studies. Today we have the challenge and privilege of working to understand the Tlingit world through the Tlingit storytellers Swanton met, in part—as Ishmael Hope (pers. comm. 1 April 2014) has said—because “*haa daat akawshixít*,” he wrote about us.

## NOTES

1. I most often use the term “oral literature” to discuss Tlingit stories due to the research of Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1987) and my experience working for Sealaska Heritage Institute (2007–2014). Past scholars have referred to Native American oral literature as folklore, stories, and mythology, but in some cases these terms can be disingenuous to a respective Native American community's oral literature (Bringhurst 2011).
2. According to Harold Jacobs (pers. comm. 10 January 2014), *Sdleigwán's* Kiks.ádi father was named *Kaajeeyaxsakuk*, and “his father was L'uknaxh.ádi, a man named *Kaasgékch*, whose mother had a brother named *Daanawáakh*. The father of *Kaasgékch* was a Daghisdinaa man named *Téeghaa*. He had siblings named *Kháaghooch*, *Ghoochk'I*, *Kaasixweit*, and *Shaawaát Xhook*.”
3. After the accidental drowning of their son *Khaalgéik'w* around 1915 on a fishing trip, a Tlingit family gave them a son to raise, which they gave the English name of John but also gave him the name of *Khaalgéik'w*, whom they believed was the reincarnation of their

- lost child. This son, John Cameron, later took the last name of Hope, being John Hope (Olson 1967:15).
4. In addition to serving as a translator and informant for Swanton, *Daalwools'ées'* (and his wife) also served as informants for George T. Emmons and anthropologist Ronald Olson. Although Emmons fails to credit *Daalwools'ées'*, an unpublished manuscript written by *Daalwools'ées'* exists in Emmons's papers. *Daalwools'ées'* is credited as being a major informant for Olson in his *Social Structure and Social Life of the Tlingit Indians*. This publication contains bits of biographical and family history about Cameron. Sources indicate he possessed detailed Tlingit knowledge, he was bilingual, and trained his clan nephews in the traditional manner by taking them to the forest, having them stand on a stump, and practice speaking. He was also very active in the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB), being ANB Camp 1's first president, and is featured in early ANB photographs. Historical ANB records capture his work as an ANB member, such as how in 1931 he and twenty-three other ANB members dispatched a petition to the U.S. Senate and Congress requesting the abolition of fish traps which were destroying salmon populations. *Daalwools'ées'* was also a member of the Presbyterian Church. Territorial records document that *Daalwools'ées'* took the path of obtaining American citizenship through the naturalization process in 1919. See AS 29465, 62-19297, Naturalization Petitions and Declarations, Juneau, 1916–1922, Indian Citizenship Naturalization Case Files, Alaska State Archives, Juneau. He is buried in the Sitka ANB cemetery.
  5. Although sources provide some information about the fieldwork process, not every question is answered. Not all of Swanton's fieldnotes survived and are present in archives for study. Swanton's surviving and incomplete fieldnotes consist of a Tlingit word list amounting to twenty pages at the American Philosophical Society Library, and a sizeable collection of approximately 150 pages of ethnographic notes on Tlingit culture and transcriptions of Tlingit songs at the Smithsonian Institution. His transcriptions of Tlingit oral literature appear to have been destroyed. See John Swanton, Tlingit and Haida Word List manuscript, American Philosophical Society Library; and John R. Swanton, Materials Relating to the Tlingit (manuscript), call no. NAA MS 4118-a, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
  6. *Kh'alyáan III* (circa 1823–1924), whose Russian Orthodox name was Pavel, was of the Kiks.ádi clan, At.uwaxiji hit, and is known to have been a clan house leader and involved in the Russian Orthodox faith and Russian Orthodox Brotherhood. *Kh'alyáan III* should not be confused with *Kh'alyáan II* (Stepan), as both were Kiks.ádi men with the same name that lived in Sitka at the same time. Aspects of *Kh'alyáan III's* life have been documented by Sergei Kan (1999). In 1912, when the Alaska Native Brotherhood asked for land to build the first ANB hall, *Kh'alyáan III*, clan leader and caretaker of the At.uwaxiji hit, offered the land of his clan house, where the Sitka ANB Hall stands today. Source: words of his granddaughter Esther Littlefield, see interview of Esther Littlefield on KTOO Southeast Native Radio, April 1988, MC 14, Item 118, SNR 241, Southeast Native Radio Recordings Collection, Sealaska Heritage Archives, Juneau.
  7. *Kh'áadasteen*, also known as Sitka Jake, was of the Kwaashk'i Khwáan clan and was likely born within the Yaakwdáat Khwáan (Yakutat region). He had moved to Sitka Indian Village by at least the 1880s and married one of the thirteen daughters of Sitka Jack (*Khaltseixh*) (1836–1916), L'uknaxh.ádi clan house leader and Indian policeman, and Martha Jack (*Xhóotk*), Kaagwaantaan clan, Ch'áak' Kúdi hit. Sources indicate that *Kh'áadasteen* was of a ranking lineage and at the Sitka Indian Village he is remembered as being a potlatch giver, an overall man of wealth, knowledge, and status. Records also recall his relations and placement of power on account of his sister, *Gadji'nt*, whose English name was Emmeline Baker but also known as Mrs. Thom/Tom or Princess Thom/Tom. A source for information about *Kh'áadasteen* is Frederica de Laguna (1972).
  8. *Khaadashaan* is known to have married a woman listed on documents as “Kwanken.” The 1900 federal census does not document a wife living in *Khaadashaan's* household, but the 1910 census does list his Tlingit wife named Jennie (b. 1854), attributed as being from Sitka. Little is known about their marriage, but they did have a daughter named Elizabeth Kadashan James (1886–1939).
  9. Harold Jacobs (pers. comm., 7 Jan. 2014) also informed the author that *T'seil's* father was named *Waatsdaa* and his mother *Koodeilgé*. *Koodeilgé's* mother's name was *Aanshaawasnook*.

10. It has remained difficult to document this informant with certainty. The name *Khaasáank'* is a Kaagwaantaan clan name, and Swanton could have been referencing an individual by their Tlingit name. It's plausible that Swanton referred to Johnny Kassunk, a Tlingit silversmith jeweler who, as shown on the 1900 census, lived directly next door to *Khaadashaan*.

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