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Native Tribal History Recalled In Death Of Kitsumkalum Chief; Forbears Dwelt On Kaien Island

By WILL ROBINSON

Early on the morning of November 18 Chief Samuel Kennedy of the Kalum Indians passed away at the Kitse-las Reserve. His passing marked the loss of one of the few remaining Native links with the time when white men were few on the Skeena River. Eighty years old at the time of his passing the Chief, whose native name was Skoom Guis, had seen the decadence of many of the old customs of his people and the disturbances brought to the native folk by the impact of white civilization.

Chief of the Flying Eagle totem, his name Skoom Guis—"Early Daylight"—was a remembrance of the origins of his clan that several centuries ago migrated from Na-A. (Known now as Loring Alaska) and on a series of rafts made of canoes lashed together moved down the coast to re-establish themselves on Kaien Island across the steamship channel from Digby Island.

At Na-A they had lived side by side with the folk of the Wolf Totem. A dispute arose and the Eagle people moved south. At Na-A their totems had been of stone. The Large Flying Eagle had stood on the edge of a cliff. The Small Flying Eagle had been the symbol used in many ceremonies.

When they moved they found the Large Eagle too heavy to carry away. Lest it fall into the hands of unauthorized people the big carving was thrown from the cliff and lies in deep water at its base.

The Small Flying Eagle was carried south. Since then the custodianship of the ancient relic has rested with the ranking chief of each generation. They stayed at Kaien Island for many generations. They became established and strong and, once more, disputes arose between themselves and other people and again they moved. This time they travelled north to find a home on the lower reaches of the Naas River. Here, for generations they lived in prosperity until, again, the pressure of another clan led them to seek quieter hunting grounds.

Young men scouting for new territory climbed the mountain range that flanks the south bank of the Naas. Across the divide they came to the headwaters of the Beaver River. They followed downstream and came to where the South Fork joined the stream. South along this valley they travelled, following the river upstream. Well towards the headwaters they turned east, crossed another range and came to the Kalum River where it pours through a canyon.

Here they found the people of another Eagle Totem. Here they were made welcome. They were invited to bring their people and assume supreme rulership of the area. So, after centuries of wandering, the people of the Flying Eagle found a permanent home at Kit-sum Aalam—"The Dwellers on the Edge of the Canyon."

Stage by stage in these wanderings the Small Flying Eagle moved with the people. It came to the canyon banks and since then has been jealously guarded by the chiefs. In each generation only two men have known where it reposed—the Chief, and the Chief's nephew, who, in due course would come to the chieftainship.

So it came to pass that years ago Skoom Guis undertook to keep safely the ancient emblem of his people's history and traditions. So, until his death soon after that Sunday morning started and the Chief entered into his last sleep, he has kept his trust.

Now it passes to his successor to his nephew, George Wright, who, in due course will take a "Name" that will signify his accession to "The Power" of his people.

Skoom Guis was born at Kalum on the Indian Reserve in the days when white men were few along the Skeena. Most of his life was spent beside its fast flowing waters. For a while, during his early manhood, he lived at Ketchikan, close by his

ancestral home of Na-a. He has told how, from a boat, he has looked down at low tide and seen the Big Stone Eagle resting on the bottom of the salt chuck.

Traditions Invoked

Now he has gone and his passing was marked with all due ceremony. Ancient traditions were invoked. His nephew, who will take his place, did his part. Skoom Guis had said to George Wright: "When anything happens I want you to stand over me." At the funeral feast this nephew was able to say: "I have done my first duty." George, in keeping with the ancient ritual of his people, had seen to all arrangements for the funeral.

Chiefs from up-river had gathered to pay their respects to their lost brother. From Kitwanga came OOH Oar'd, Chief Matthias Bright, and GIL-A-Wau, Chief Robert Harris.

He was borne to his last resting place by men of rank. Chief Matthias Bright, Joseph Hudson of the Wolf Totem, George Turner and Samuel Turner of the Grizzly Bear folk, Solomon Bevan of the Wolves, and John Sebasta who came from Maurietown. So in the pallbearers was carried out the tradition of the amity of the phratries living in close fellowship.

Formal precedence marked all steps of the proceedings.

The honor of opening the grave was given to Gordon Nelson of the Kalum People and Ben Seymour of the people of MDeek, the Grizzly Bear.

And when the aged chief had been given his last resting place the chiefs and the people gathered at the house of Chief Walter Wright. Here at the house of Neas-D-Hoc, ranking chief of the MDeek people the funeral feast was given by Mrs. George Turner, daughter of Neas-D-Hoc, and sister of George Wright.

The funeral had been conducted by another chief, Adjutant Mark McKay, ranking chief of the Kiteelas Eagle folk, who centuries ago came from the Haida lands, committed his brother to the ground.

And in the feast that followed the ancient symbolism and law of succession was marked by the giver. Mrs. Turner, sister of the chief-to-be, gave the feast and, in so doing marked the next stage of the people of the Flying Eagle. For a son of a sister of George will, in years that he ahead, when his turn comes, assume the rank of chief of this people and, in turn, become the guardian of the stone of antiquity—the small stone eagle that has its wings outspread for flight.

Flowers mark the grave of the chief who has passed. A mingling of ancient custom and that of the

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white man was seen in the tribes that came from Kitwanga. Flowers from the Women's Auxiliary of St. Paul's Church lay side by side with those sent by Mrs. Flora Sampare who is of the "house" of Chief Legaic of Port Simpson. Chief Charles Smith of Kitwanga sent his remembrance. So did Mrs. Sarah Benson and Joseph Williams.

The chief has passed. A new chief will rise to his place. But sorrow still remains. Mrs. Kennedy, of the royal blood of Chief McKay's totem, mourns the loss of her husband and their son, Percy, grieves for the father who guided him from infancy to manhood.

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