

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

ONE SIDED CONVERSATIONS: CHAPTERS IN THE LIFE OF
ODILLE MORISON

By

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Dedication

**This work is for: *Odille Quintal Morison* who lived the story,
Frances Haberlin who taught me that a vibrant faith requires questions,
and *Maureen Samuels* for her commitment to greater cultural understanding.**



**Odille Quintal Morison, circa 1880
Hannah Maynard Photo, Aldous Family Collection**

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An accurate and engaging history can only come from a wide base of information. I have drawn on many sources to flesh out Odille's story and I would be remiss if I did not recognize the archivists and library sources which helped me out along the way. Thanks goes out to Chris Roth for his countless emails regarding genealogical and Tsimshian lineages and to Cliff Armstrong at the diocesan archives in Prince Rupert, and to the kind archivists at the Prince Rupert City archives (Carol, Jean, Heather and Barb) whose keen sense of local history made my work a joy. Isobel Tovar, formerly at the Chicago Field Museum, took up my request for information regarding Odille's ethnographic research housed there. She also located the 'all clans pole.'

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Introduction

I was first introduced to Odille Morison in the summer of 2002 when I came across the manuscript written by her husband Charles Morison in the archives at the local community college in Terrace. Our first meeting was a casual affair as Charles, in the course of writing about himself, commented that his wife had translated portions of the Bible and Anglican prayer book into the dialect of the Tsimshian, a First Nations group of the Northwest Coast. I was intrigued. Although Charles' story of his years as a self proclaimed pioneer was a good one, I wanted to know more about this Mrs. Morison. Why was it so important to Charles to mention her achievements, yet not even give her first name?

Some people obsess over their families, spouses; some their pets, the latest water cooler gossip or even their possessions. I happen to be passionate (the glass half full version of obsession) about historical research – something I can do reasonably well. More questions began to surface as I searched for the mysterious Mrs. Morison in the vital events index in the BC Archives. These questions were not only about her, but also about how this information was transforming me. I began to see how little I knew of Northwest BC history even though I had lived in the region for nearly fifteen years. Once I had tracked down her name and later her obituary in the Prince Rupert newspapers of May 25th, 1933, I realized how extraordinary she, Odille, really was. The *Prince Rupert Daily News* article reported that she had been eulogized as “the greatest woman that Northern British Columbia has ever produced.” How is it possible that the life story of such a person could be absent from the collective memory? What social conditions would drive the erasure, or more accurately exclusion, of such an individual?

As I continued my search for primary sources I did manage to find local and regional first person narratives which made reference to Odille. Often these comments were made only in passing and usually with reference to her bicultural heritage. These references were in a coded form as with her obituary which described her birth thus: “Mrs. Morison was born July 17 1855 of *old Hudson's Bay stock at Fort Simpson* [emphasis mine] now

known as Port Simpson.”¹ She was in other words, both First Nations and white. I eventually learned that Odille’s mother was Tsimshian and her father French Canadian.

All references that I have located laud Odille Morison as a bright, articulate and powerful woman, yet her own voice was absent from not only the popular literature during her lifetime, but also from the recent scholarly literature. While I realized that she influenced many people, she remained outside the historical spotlight. My goal was to draw Odille out from the shadows and put together the pieces of her life story.

Sources

I was very fortunate in that my sources for my research project soon extended beyond the printed word. Through extensive archival research and a bit of good fortune, I made contact with living descendants of Odille and Charles Morison. The great grandsons were not aware of their First Nations heritage, but they were enthusiastic supporters of my research project. The family members have shared with me photographs, letters and personal items which had been passed to them in what is known as the “cookie tin.” These personal items - mementos saved by Odille and later by her daughter Victoria - could easily have gone astray as time created emotional distance between the articles and the individuals.

I also uncovered references to Odille in government documents and missionary reports about her role as language interpreter, then later as an ethnographer who worked with Franz Boas. The most exhilarating find, however, has been the rich detail provided by her daughter and son in a series of audio tapes from the early 1960’s. It was, and remains, the most moving and intimate experience to hear the actual voices of Odille’s children as they tell stories of their youth and childhood. Not only were their memories captured on audio tape but also their emotions as they engaged in the act of remembering then narrating their lives.

Perspectives

The longing for a reconnection to a mythical time is manifest both in the artifacts we save and in the stories we share. Odille is mentioned in a few autobiographical narratives written by residents and visitors to northern British Columbia. Their descriptions of Odille are expressed with fondness yet these same memories are also cultural constructs. As the scholar Svetlana Boym postulates, nostalgia is the social glue between “individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.”² Odille’s husband Charles Morison’s memories are not only about him, but about how he visions himself back into the larger social network and the geographical and temporal landscapes.

Jefferson Singer and Susan Bluck explain that individuals “reason about, interpret, and evaluate their memories.”³ The constructed autobiographical narratives often begin as personal anecdotes that are shared between family members reinforcing the identity and cohesiveness of this primary group. Then, as they begin to circulate, they expand into more complete life stories, often forming narratives which eventually reach a much larger audience. Each version or edition of the autobiographical narrative then not only reflects the personal values of the individual composer, but also their respective communities. How readers (or audience members) interpret and integrate this information is also an important consideration.

As a researcher whose understandings are informed by feminist critique, I consider it imperative that questions which bring forth the gaps in the narratives are explored. Valerie Smith and Marianne Hirsch argue feminist cultural critiques have “defamiliarized and thus reenvisioned traditional modes of knowing” by applying “feminist modes of questioning to the analysis of cultural recall and forgetting.”⁴ Local and regional histories including biographies must be vibrant and engaging yet reflective of the people they each represent. Voices of the individual can be drowned out by the all consuming need for a celebratory, nostalgic collective memorial to the hegemonic interests. At the same time historians must practice caution when writing biographical works so as not to elevate individuals and achievements beyond cultural and temporal contexts which (in large measure) define the individual. I do not want to create an unrealistic impression of

Odille Morison nor do I want her life story to become disconnected from the era, people and places which shaped her identity.

My story

As a researcher and reader of local histories, I become engaged in the stories, integrating these narratives into my own experience as well as that of my subject. I am a player, not simply a passive consumer trying to tease thematic threads. My own memories and experiences can cloud my judgment, and impose a set of circumstances that cannot be resolved unless I engage fully in the challenge (and thrill) of investigating the works of others. Singer and Bluck suggest that “in each of us, the stories we have crafted from life experiences infuse our thoughts with knowledge to be gleaned about the world.”⁵ The next step is to take the stories outside ourselves to reflect upon common values and identities with others.

The responsibility of this project is a constant source of exhilaration as well as anxiety. As a third generation Anglo Canadian, I have concerns about cultural expropriation. A few years ago, in the early days of the research, I was asked by my good friend Dina to speak to her first year women’s studies class about my research techniques. During the question and answer period which followed one student of Haida ancestry asked whose authority I had to recount Odille’s story. When I responded that Odille’s great grandchildren encouraged me to do so, I realized then how important the support and endorsement from her family was in order to legitimately reach a diverse audience. I have struggled with trying to impart or wedge a Tsimshian world view into Odille that may or may not have been part of her. This too I realized was a wasted venture as I cannot speak for Odille but only myself. In this sense these are one-sided conversations.

My role in this project is to reclaim some space where Odille’s voice can be heard through the few first person resources that survive as well as through the other primary sources I was able to locate in government data bases, academic writings, church archives and letters. Susan Crane urges historians to consider: “Who has history and/or memory,

who represents it, who experiences it, and how is it perpetuated? Are the collectives national, ethnic, religious, generational, or does the definition depend on the story being told?”⁶ The short answer to me is each person has history and each story has elements of good and bad. Yet it is how these stories are rendered which determine their value. At the end of the day there is always risk when researching, then writing life histories – even our own.

Methodological Approach

This research project is biographical in nature but is more: it is reconstruction as well as reclamation. Although it is grounded in the historical discipline, I draw on Odille’s life as an example of interdisciplinary studies. Odille was a Tsimshian woman who moved between cultures with varying fluidity depending on the time, place and social circumstance. She contributed to greater cultural understanding as an ethnographer and language interpreter for representatives in government, religious authorities and even academics. This was not just one way communication from the First Nations to white colonial authorities. Indeed, early in her life Odille was called upon to assist her Tsimshian friends and relations make sense of the rapidly changing social circumstances sometimes as a language intermediary but also often as one who explained ideas. For example one Tsimshian contemporary said that his father went to Odille asking for an explanation of his new name of ‘Johnson.’ “My [father] didn’t know anything-he just want to go new way, get baptized. All young people got names that afternoon-took a long time.”⁷ Odille explained to his parents the visiting missionary’s practice of baptism and giving of the new names.

Although racism had a direct impact on her life Odille creatively worked around social impediments, crossing back and forth between social boundaries, and reinventing identities along the way. Sometimes it was advantageous to be considered a white woman, while at other times there were advantages to maintaining Tsimshian familial connections. In light of feminist social critique I see Odille’s continual renegotiation of social boundaries as a means to maintain control and power in her life and create new

opportunities along the way. This is not to mean that Odille was actively seeking to manipulate situations, or to deceive people about her background. She was merely competent and influential in her abilities. Race does not seem to have been as important to her as much as social class distinctions. Her children, however, appear to have integrated the imperial values regarding racial barriers. Odille's children certainly perceived themselves as white and distanced themselves from the First Nations identity but not necessarily in their personal relationships with their Tsimshian kin.

Interdisciplinary Approach

There are elements of ethno-historical research in the following study, yet it is not the basis of the work. Given the limitations of the primary sources and the blending of cultural perspectives of the many groups of which Odille was a part, it is difficult to separate one perspective and say that it held sway for her entire life. The following eight chapters are written in recognition of these varying influences but not to the exclusion of others.

I have benefited from many influences. Over the years foundational First Nations and history courses have provided me with a broad knowledge base. Dialogue with UNBC professors Margaret Anderson, Antonia Mills, and more recently James McDonald have informed my understanding of Northwest Coast peoples, and particularly the complexities of Tsimshian society, geography, and language. Chris Roth, anthropologist and genealogist, has provided support and the necessary insight into ethical considerations of Odille's maternal lineage and cultural considerations such as inter-house group relations and crest affiliations.

I searched for an inclusive cross cultural perspective and I found the inspiration in the writings of Chicana feminist Gloria Anzalu. Her 'mestiza consciousness,' as described by Chandra Mohanty, is "a plural consciousness in that it requires understanding multiple, often opposing ideas and knowledges, and negotiating [them], not just taking a simple counterstance."⁸ I think in all her adult life Odille had her own 'mestiza

consciousness' which was as unique as her hybrid life. So it followed then that my biographical reconstruction of her life must also be multiple in its forms.

I looked to the work by historians Adele Perry for colonial British Columbia critique, Brian Hosmer for Tsimshian (Metlakatlan history) and economic development. Paige Raibmon's research provided insight into the Chicago World's Fair and anthropologist Franz Boas. Jean Barman's work on hybridity and the missionary project, (with Jan Hare) helped contextualize Odille's life, and Susan Neylan's important text *The Heaven's are Changing* (2003) illuminated Tsimshian spiritual considerations. Jean Barman's biographical work on Maria Mahoi is a wonderful example of family history, identity and the power found in respecting "the ways in which ordinary men and women have moved through time." As Jean Barman states, "Each of our stories is unique. We have a distinct set of experiences that come together to form ourselves. Instead of being cast from some common mold, we associate in our own way with people and places around us. We each balance a bit differently our various levels of belonging."⁹

A comment on language and spelling of names is important before proceeding to the body of the project. There are as many spelling variations of Odille's first name and last name as there were people writing to her or about her. Some of these variations included: Odilla Duboit, Odille Dubois, Odeal Quintall, Ahdele Morrison, Odille Morison, Odile Quintal. I have selected to use the single 'l' in her father's surname, spelling it as Quintal since it is most consistent with the multitude of primary sources. I also have used the single Morison 'r' as is in the family name – and the double l in Odille's first name (rather than Odile) as this is how she spelt it most often in government documents, census information, her marriage certificate. It is also how it appears on her death certificate.

Odille's mother is also known by several names – again with varying spellings, depending on the literacy of those who composed the primary documents. I have chosen to refer to her as Mary Quintal – then Mary Curtis as per the primary sources – and later as Mary Weah after she has married Haida chief Weah in 1879.

Odille's life was centred on the Northwest Coast of present day British Columbia although she would not necessarily have positioned herself in this type of geographic framework. I have chosen to use the term Northwest Coast rather than Northwestern BC or North Coast, when referring to the entire region which includes the Skeena and Nass River watersheds. Inland locations such as Terrace and Hazelton are also considered part of the Interior of British Columbia, yet traditionally communities in these areas were deeply connected to the cultural, language and trade networks of the Coast proper.

When it comes to the spelling of the Tsimshian *galtsa'ap* (tribe/village or community) names I have selected to follow the spelling as outlined in the reference section of *People of the Robin* by James McDonald (2003).¹⁰ All Tsimshian *galtsa'ap* were comprised of multiple family groups represented by at least two or more crests. With a few exceptions, each Tsimshian *galtsa'ap* had specific territories along the north and south sides of the Skeena River for summer resource gathering. Most would relocate to winter village sites on the coast near and around what is now the Prince Rupert harbour. The major exceptions to the winter relocations were the inland Tsimshian communities of the Kitsumkalum, and their eastern neighbours at Gits'laasu (Kitselas). Some *galtsa'ap* remained year round on salt water in villages located south of the mouth of the Skeena River. (See page1)

In the early baptismal records of the Anglican Church and the Church Missionary Society (CMS), many documents recorded the *galtsa'ap* affiliation of the new members. Sometimes the missionaries also included the 'Indian' name of the baptismal candidates as well. These references were critical when it came time to narrow down Odille's maternal extended family and their traditional home territories along the Skeena.

The four Tsimshian *pteex* (crests) names of Ghanada (Raven), Gisbutwada (Killerwhale), Laxgibuu (Wolf) and Laxsgiik (Eagle) are also referenced from *People of the Robin*. This spelling is based on the most contemporary orthography of the language and not to be confused with the much earlier versions of written language which Odille was most likely instrumental in constructing with Anglican Bishop William Ridley. In the spirit of

illuminating Odille's true voice and gifts for languages, I have not altered any of her written work – except in a few letters where noted [in parenthesis].

One final note must be made. This study is simply a starting point, and far from a definitive work on Odille Morison, or on the role of cultural intermediaries or Northwest Coast peoples in the Imperial enterprise. This project is an expression of admiration, but it remains a work in progress which I am continuing. In my interpretations or clarifications of the primary sources (letters and oral histories), I have tried to be true to the original intent with the context and meaning, and any omissions or oversights related to the work of others are solely my error. My long-term hope is that readers of this project will find some measure of understanding into the life of one woman and how she managed to move through her life in a variety of ways – often with astounding grace. If it prompts readers to begin a process of self reflection and investigation into their own family stories or how they fit into the place they call home, I will be amply rewarded.

Introduction

¹ *Prince Rupert Daily News*, May 25 1933, 4-5.

² Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 8.

³ Jefferson Singer, Susan Bluck, "New Perspectives on Autobiographical Memory: The Integration of Narrative Processing and Autobiographical Reasoning," *Review of General Psychology* 5 no. 2 (2001): 96.

⁴ Valerie Smith and Marianne Hirsch, "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no.1 (2002): 11.

⁵ Singer and Bluck, 96.

⁶ Susan Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (December 1997): 1374.

⁷ Ken Campbell's notes on Homer Barnett's Field notes, Special collections, UBC Library, Personal email to the author (Fall of 2004).

⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003): 80-81.

⁹ Jean Barman, *Maria Mahoi of the Islands*, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2004): 8.

¹⁰ See James McDonald, *People of the Robin: The Tsimshian of Kitsumkalum* (Alberta: CCI Press, 2003)

Chapter 1 *Tsimshian Beginnings*

Odille's first home was a Tsimshian big house in Fort Simpson located on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia. Odille's mother was born in about 1830, most likely up the Skeena river valley near the confluence of the Zimacord River and Skeena some twenty kilometers south of the present day city of Terrace. Her mother's extended *waap* (matrilineal house group) belonged to a Gitlaan Gisbutwada (Killerwhale) lineage. Her maternal grandmother was most likely a Gitlaan woman baptized Lydia Ryan in November of 1863 who at that time was wife to a Gitlaan Raven man named Tloom (Jacob Ryan), her second husband.

Odille's mother, Mary Quintal,¹ was the much younger second wife of French Canadian fur trade employee François Quintal (dit Dubois) of the Hudson's Bay Company (hereafter HBC). As a centre for trade since the early 1830s, Fort Simpson, owned by the HBC, was a place known for a thriving exchange of peoples as well as goods. The population of the First Nations community which grew around the fort was rarely static.

Odille's official birth date is given as July 16th in 1855 at Fort Simpson and her brother Peter or Pierre was two years older. When Odille was an infant in the mid 1850s, close to 4,000 Tsimshian people had a winter village at Fort Simpson. In the summer the majority would return to their respective territories to gather food, salmon and trade resources. Also in the early spring many Tsimshian would go to the Nass River estuary (just north of Fort Simpson) to harvest a small fish called the oolican. The oil was extracted from the oolican and was an essential trade commodity and food item.

The Gitlaan are considered coast Tsimshian due to their relocation to the salt water village sites for the winter. The Zimacord valley was their summer residence where most of the procurement of food stuffs (salmon, berries and other plants) and furs for trading took place. Ethnographic research with the Kitsumkalum, the Gitlaan's eastern neighbours, provide one explanation as to how the Gitlaan lost rights to parts of their summer territory as compensation for the death of a high ranking Kitsumkalum

nobleman. According to the Kalum ethnohistories, there remains an obligation by the Gitlaan to mark the spot where the prince met his treacherous end.² For the Gitlaan and all other Tsimshian, there were greater trade opportunities inside the fort walls with the Hudson's Bay Company. Outside the fort there were exchanges, both peaceful and violent, between other First Nations groups including Tsimshian, Haida and Tlingit. The Gitlaan, however, were not considered significant economic players (or competitors) as with other village (galtsa'ap) groups such as the Gispaxlo'ots or Gitxaaala.³

François Quintal was one of the longest serving employees of the HBC on the Northwest Coast. He was employed there from the mid 1830s until his death in 1862. Company records show that Quintal was not only a versatile employee who was at various times a middleman, a baker, and eventually a labourer, but also that he considered Fort Simpson his home. He had at least two intimate relationships with coastal First Nations women, his first being with a Tongass Tlingit woman. In the company record her name is given as Austine by then Chief Trader John Work. In 1837 Austine was actively trading blankets and other goods in her own right. Almost a year after she and Quintal separated she was embroiled in a trade dispute that led to bloodshed and most likely her own demise. The argument (which simmered for 8 to 10 months) was with another Tlingit who she contended had "cheated her out of two blankets." Austine publicly humiliated this man by cutting his face with a knife. Even though her relations had 'powerful connections' and paid the required retribution for the insult, the shame carried by the scar was too much for the Tongass man and he attempted to cut her face in the same fashion. Again her family intervened, and "a quarrel ensued in which he was shot." Chief Trader Work reported, "His friends took up the cause and this battle and the loss of so many lives have been the result." Eventually Austine was captured and "treated without mercy" for her part in the conflict.⁴

It was common for women to maintain their social position and status in their home communities even when they were wives of fort employees. Historian Jonathan Dean notes an incident in 1839 when Chief Factor John Work negotiated the release of a

chief's daughter who was captured by Kitkatlas. The women of the fort often had slaves of their own and "no effort was made to liberate them."⁵

While Austine's plight is peripheral to Odille's early years, it illustrates a certain panache which her father had in his younger years. Obviously François Quintal was not afraid to engage in relationships (assuming he had others) with strong, somewhat economically independent, powerful women. By the 1850s, Quintal was looking for less adventure and more of a settled life on the Northwest Coast. The company records show that after fourteen years as a middleman, he became the baker and steward until 1860. This shift coincides with his relationship with Mary from about 1852 until his death ten years later.

Their lengthy and presumably happy 'marriage' was certainly more typical of the times than I previously thought. The importance of these relationships was missing from the earlier histories of British Columbia but has become more visible in the past thirty years. Foundational historical work by Sylvia Van Kirk (1980), Jennifer Brown (1980) and more recently Susan Sleeper-Smith (2001) all show that these relationships were complex and often critical to the success of any trading venture. While the emphasis of this earlier historical data focused on the lives and households of company elite, it opened up the way for researchers such as myself to explore the lives of the ordinary employees and their country wives.

Research by historian Jean Barman (2004, 2006) has emphasized the importance of the children of these unions as cultural intermediaries. In many ways the children of the fur trade forts experienced a world unlike either of their parents. This is partly due to the changing cosmopolitan nature of fort life, but more importantly because of the rapid effects of disease, colonial rule and establishment of Christian missions. In the 1850s Fort Simpson was a very busy place; not only as a centre of trade but also as a vibrant and often confusing social scene as nine of the lower Skeena Tsimshian galtsa'ap had taken up permanent residence surrounding the fort walls. The Gitlaan had moved to the fort most likely during the later 1840s and we know that while some company men lived with

their families inside the fort walls, many also shared (at least part of the time) the traditional houses of Tsimshian spouses.

Company records show that François Quintal also lived for a time in the home of his wife's family: plagued with financial difficulties, he relocated his possessions to Mary's father's house in August of 1859. Mary's mother, Odille's maternal grandmother (baptized Lydia Ryan), most likely had two or more spouses. Mary Quintal, Odille's mother, is the daughter of her first husband, and the younger surviving children (baptized Elizabeth and Charles Ryan) were offspring of her second husband, Tloom whose Christian name was Jacob Ryan.

Anthropologist Viola Garfield's research of the 1930s focused on the Tsimshian crest and clan system and explains their matrilineal society. After marriage the women would join their husband's household and their children would be raised in the paternal family, yet fully aware of their maternal lineage and crest responsibilities. On initial examination it would seem that women such as Mary would be at a disadvantage by aligning themselves with 'foreign' men (thus outside the Tsimshian system). Garfield writes: "The children of a Tsimshian woman had a place in the social structure regardless of the ethnic group to which their father belonged. ...Most families along the coast have an admixture of white blood."⁶ The paternal obligations for Mary's children were carried on by her father's clan which would have been a frequent method of accommodation during the years of rapid cultural change. Odille and her brother Peter would have been able to draw on both their maternal and paternal sources for identity and material needs as they grew and reached adulthood.

In the early years of Odille's parents' relationship her father François Quintal provided limited security for not only Mary, but also her extended family. One of the advantages of being married to a Hudson's Bay company worker (especially a baker) was some access to trade goods and even food delicacies such as potatoes.

Although we do not have any record of what daily life in Odille's earliest home was like, we can assume it was not all that different from other mixed household of that period at Fort Simpson. A Tsimshian contemporary of Odille's named Matthew Johnson (1855-1945) described his paternal (and mixed) household to ethnographer Homer Barnett in the 1940. Johnson's two aunts lived with their respective French Canadian husbands in the limited quarters provided by the HBC but would often visit "in the wintertime to eat food like dried salmon and berries."⁷ The diet within the fort walls was fairly limited and so the couples and their children would often come to call - but not empty handed.

The reciprocal nature of the Tsimshian society always ensured that the Tsimshian relations provided food and sometimes shelter while the HBC employees brought trade goods. One of Matthew Johnson's HBC 'uncles' named Atwin was a carpenter for the HBC and, according to Matthew, Atwin and his father were "always trading presents." Atwin brought Matthew's father a pair of pants, and his father "made a canoe" for Atwin. Another HBC in-law provided the essential commodity when Matthew's father wanted to add glass windows to the family long house. By adding new commodities to the structure, Matthew's father increased the status of the family within the surrounding Tsimshian community. This illustrates the mutually beneficial arrangement between Fort employees and the extended families they married into.

Another important factor in the cultural mix was the variety of workers the HBC employed. While most of the management (factors and officers) were of British, Scottish descent, the workers came from different backgrounds. William Duncan a newly arrived Anglican missionary under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), recorded that on New Years Eve 1857, ten men came to pay their respects to him as the newly arrived missionary. His journal entry follows:

Ten men have been here to night – One English man – one Orkney Man – one Norwegian – three Sandwich Islanders – one Iroquois Indian and Three French Canadians. It is pleasing that the last night in the year happened to be one night for religious instruction! They sat very attentive for an hour while I endeavored to improve to these the passage in the Pilgrim's Progress concerning Christian [gains] at the cross. I endeavored to shew them what justification and sanctification meant. They seemed to comprehend it. The Lord helped me much and ---- I beseech Him to bless my feeble efforts to His Own Glory.⁸

My interest in this passage is not on Duncan's theological perspectives but rather on the varied and different nationalities of his intended audience: the Hudson's Bay Company employees. How did Duncan manage to convey such complex ideas given the multiple languages of these 'attentive' men? One of Duncan's strengths was his ability to use and learn Aboriginal languages. He had only been at the post for two months, however, and refused to preach in the Tsimshian language (Sm'algyax) until he could present his ideas clearly without relying entirely on interpreters. Perhaps the trade jargon Chinook was enough to present his basic thoughts. Presumably the men of the fort who lived with the local Aboriginal woman did learn the local dialects through full 'immersion' into the language and culture of their Tsimshian brides.

On the other hand, Chinook was adaptable enough to fit basic social, and trade circumstances. Emma Crosby, wife of the Methodist missionary Thomas Crosby, explained in an 1875 letter home from Fort Simpson how Chinook was the initial form of discourse for him as missionary some twenty years after Duncan's first efforts.

Many strangers have been here lately, trading, Hydah's [sic] from the Queen Charlotte Is. & Sitkas from the north. They most of them come up to see us and attend church and of course Thomas takes these opportunities of casting in the seed. Chinook jargon affords a means, though a poor one, of communication with all these tribes. It is understood more or less on all parts of the coast, and all seem interested in what they see & hear.⁹

A few months previous, Emma's first child was born unexpectedly and Emma wrote again to her mother explaining how Odille's mother Mary Quintal had acted as nurse and midwife for the birth. After checking on Emma's condition, Mary told Thomas Crosby "in Chinook" that he better get everything prepared. Emma revealed that she too understood the gravity of the situation.¹⁰

Odille's mother Mary is also credited as having been an early language instructor for missionary William Duncan and most certainly Chinook was the verbal exchange which helped bridge his English and her Tsimshian. Both of the Quintal children were enrolled in Duncan's school established shortly after his arrival at the fort. The elder child, Pierre (later Peter Quintal) started in "October of 1857 aged four and half, and Odille began the next January aged just two and half."¹¹

Even though Mary's relationship with Quintal provided some advantages for her children, Odille's mother was a resilient worker and capable professional in her own right. She developed her skills as a midwife – not only for the Tsimshian women of her family or the wider Gitlaan community, but more importantly as a sought after specialist. The Tsimshian protocols dictated that new mothers were assisted by the women of their husband's family. At other times, depending on circumstance births were also attended by a village specialist who was often trained and apprenticed from the time that she was a child. There is a reference to Mary's mother, Lydia Ryan, who was known as 'wise woman'¹² within her Gitlaan community and her duties would have included attending women in childbirth and during female ailments and other more general maladies. Mary was most likely trained by her mother and then perhaps acquired additional knowledge from others as they congregated at the fort.

In the spring of 1862 François Quintal died suddenly. The circumstances are not clear, but it was most likely caused by an accident rather than from a prolonged illness. Duncan's Tsimshian assistant Arthur Wellington Clah had been keeping a journal to practice his English writing skills since the late 1850s. He recorded the event thus: "And my friend Quintal, going to Die about 11 oclock on Saturday 19 of April. 1862. he is french Man. Him good Friend to all Tsimshen Indians."(sic) An unidentified HBC journalist was less detailed about Quintal's character but focused rather on what he left behind. "At 11 AM Francois Dubois dit Quintal died, he had been in the Honbl conys Service for many years, he leave a Wife a native of this place, and Two Children."¹³

François Quintal's length of service and good relationships within and outside the fort served him well during his lifetime. His financial circumstances, usual among HBC employees, left virtually nothing for Mary and the children. William Duncan wrote to the Company on behalf of Mary requesting that Quintal's account be settled and that his clothes be sold with the proceeds to be given to her.¹⁴

Missionary William Duncan was convinced the most effective way of removing the new believers from the temptations of fort life and the continual ridicule that new converts faced in the community was to relocate to a new place. The site he selected in 1862 was at Metlakatla eighteen kilometres to the south and the site of the ancient winter village of the lower Skeena Tsimshian tribes. This was a divisive time as new Tsimshian believers had to choose between remaining with their Fort Simpson households or going with William Duncan. This must have caused great anxiety for Mary who was dealing with the death of her husband as well as the internal divisions within the family and community.

Although it is quite impossible to know definitively Odille's extended kin relations, there are several references to her Aunt Elizabeth Ryan and Uncle Charles Ryan whose names are based on the first Church Missionary Society baptism records of 1861. Odille later told the story of a father, and his two sons who were the first to accept the Christian message in Fort Simpson, which is actually a reference to her own kin network. Portrayed as the life memories of another early convert Matthew Aucland, Odille's tale was actually the story of her mother's brothers and their father as well. It reveals Odille's views of the first years of missionary project, and the deep spirituality of her ancestors.

As a young boy he [Matthew Aucland] remembered the arrival at Fort Simpson of Mr. Duncan, when there were none but heathens; but even then, they had an idea that there was a Supreme Mysterious Being in heaven when they worshipped. They offered up the sacrifices to Him, putting in the best of their food in the fire. Before starting on a fighting expedition against hostile tribe, they would fast all day, until nightfall, then standing around a great fire and having made their sacrifices, the chief would look up to the sky and ask for help in their undertaking. They were not idolaters, but had great faith in fasting and prayers, so that when Mr. Duncan, having visited the houses of the principal chiefs, and learned something of a language, was able to tell the Gospel story, it was the older men who became the first converts.

The first text that Matthew remembered was, "The wages of sin is death, but the Gift of God is eternal life." He was then quite the grown-up boy, and attended the meetings (they could hardly be called services) arranged by Mr. Duncan. At one of the gatherings [Duncan] put the question who would come forward and accept this 'Gift of Eternal Life ?' and stated that he would put it down in a book the names of any such, and would prepare them for baptism. This was a real testing time, as with all eyes directed on him, an elderly man, one of the principal and most influential in his tribe, stepped forward to be the first to have his name 'it down in the book,' he was followed by his two sons, and then Matthew, although much younger, came forward, the fourth man to desire it Eternal Life.

There were all subsequently baptized the father taking the name of Jacob Ryan, and the sons Steven and Charles.¹⁵

Along with Charles and Stephen Ryan and their spouses some of the earliest baptized Christians at Fort Simpson were Odille's maternal relations. Her mother's younger sister Elizabeth Ryan was baptized in 1861, and her grandmother Lydia Ryan in 1863.

Although William Duncan had been at the fort for four years when Elizabeth Ryan was baptized, he was a lay missionary (rather than an ordained minister) and thus had to wait until clergy visited before baptisms could be performed.

Recently located baptism records for Peter and Odille reveal their father François Quintal's Catholic convictions and influences on his children, for they were baptized in a Catholic ceremony in January 1860. These preceded the other baptisms in Fort Simpson and may have helped expedite the rest of the household towards Christianity. Perhaps we will never know what occurred, but we do know that Mary along with her siblings went with William Duncan in 1862 to become part of the founding group of the mission village of Metlakatla. Duncan writes of her decision in his journal two weeks after the death of her husband, "Nose Pierr [Mother of Pierre] or Mary Quintal, widow of the late Quintal... has moved her things to my house today – as I promised her a room for her & her 2 children...she did not like to go to live in the Camp among her relatives."¹⁶

Odille was almost seven years old when this journey to the new community occurred. The hardships her family faced were softened somewhat by the presence of her mother, older brother, her young aunt and uncle and later her grandmother. A smallpox epidemic with its horrific effects on the coastal populations triggered a dramatic increase in the number of people seeking refuge and a new life at Metlakatla by the late summer of 1862.

Primary sources on Odille's earliest years in Fort Simpson are elusive beyond the basic elements of her life and that of her immediate family. The next chapter explores Odille's youth in Metlakatla, her deep relationship with her mother and Odille's sense of ownership in the mission community. Odille may have been born into a Gitlaan, Gisbutwada (Killerwhale) lineage but it was her childhood and later years at Metlakatla which had the greatest impact on her identity, spirituality and sense of self.

Chapter 1

¹ Although there is at least one reference by Matthew Johnson in conversation with Homer Barnett that Mary Quintal's Tsimshian name as 'Paiukw' or 'Pshikwa' (in Ken Campbell's notes to author), I refer to her as Mary Quintal, then Mary Curtis, as this most accurately reflects the historical record as well as the references by her descendants. The intent is for clarity rather than to perpetuate the obfuscation of her Tsimshian lineage.

² See James McDonald's, "An Historic Event in the Political Economy of the Tsimshian: Information on the ownership of the Zimacord District," *BC Studies* 57 (Spring 1983): 24-37.

³ See Jonathan Dean's article "'These Rascally Spackaloids': The Rise of the Gispaxlots Hegemony at Fort Simpson 1832-40," *BC Studies* 101(Spring 1994):41-78.

⁴ Hudson Bay Company records cited in Helen Meilleur, *A Pour of Rain: Stories from A West Coast Fort*, (Vancouver: Rain Coast Books, 2001), 304. Also thanks to Bruce Watson and his research on François Quintal's biography employment history with HBC.

⁵ Dean, 66.

⁶ Viola Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society* (Seattle: University of Washington: 1939), 231.

⁷ From, Ken Campbell's *Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts'ymshien Nation* (Prince Rupert BC: First Nations Education Council and School District #54, 2005), 117-118

⁸ William Duncan Journal, January 1, 1858,. UBC Library microfilm.(reel 12)

⁹ Jan Hare and Jean Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry: Emma Crosby and the Methodist Mission on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 87

¹⁰ Hare and Barman, 65.

¹¹ Fort Simpson school registry as noted in Hare and Barman, 49.

¹² Matthew Johnson in Homer Barnett's notes says that the mother of Elizabeth Ryan was a wise women and gave her daughter several groundhog skins when she married Robert Cunningham. Elizabeth Ryan was Mary's younger sister. This implies that Lydia Ryan, Odille's grandmother, was this same 'wise woman.'

¹³ Thanks to Robert Galois for providing both references from Clah and the HBC journal. (personal email to author, September 2003).

¹⁴ Information courtesy of Bruce Watson (email to the author, Fall 2003)

¹⁵ Odille Morison, "You Dear Old Church," *Northwest British Columbia News*, 76 (April 1929), 321.

¹⁶ Galois, 2003.

Chapter 2 Lineage Role Models

The single most important person in Odille's early life was her mother, Mary Quintal. For unknown reasons, the Quintal surname was altered during this period to 'Curtis' in the letters between HBC officials and missionaries. So far I have not been able to determine the reason for the change.

Nothing was static or predictable during the early 1860s on the Coast. While the documentation about Mary Curtis is sketchy, we have ample evidence of her skills as a birth expert and healer, and also of her independent nature, which was only strengthened by widowhood. The status that she gained as a married woman with children certainly had some bearing on her social mobility.¹ While living in the big house of her father in Fort Simpson, Mary's economic contributions would have benefited everyone. When she and her siblings joined William Duncan in the founding of Metlakatla, these intricate family and economic dynamics did not change – at least not right away.

Research by historian Brian Hosmer shows that Metlakatlans, men and women, “did not interpret conversion as separating them from older kinship ties.”² Rather than passive acceptance of missionary doctrines, there remained an undercurrent of power dynamics as families and individuals jockeyed for influence. Odille's maternal uncle Charles Ryan was an enterprising “useful and quick young man,” who was first employed by Duncan to assist with the school and help out around Duncan's cottage.³ After the 1862 move to Metlakatla, Ryan became the first Aboriginal to own a “rigged ship” on the coast when he purchased a small schooner named the *Wild Wave*.⁴ Ryan, like Arthur Wellington Clah, would try his hand at many ventures to make ends meet, but also to add prestige and wealth to his personal social standing in the wider Tsimshian society.

The missionary record first generated by William Duncan, then by others who followed, fostered the notion that the Aboriginal converts were keen to throw off the traditional values when they embraced Christianity. Historian Susan Neylan surmises that Duncan's intention was to “isolate Native Christians not only from their ‘traditional’ culture but

from the negative influences of Euro-Canadian settlements.”⁵ What Duncan considered the vices of alcohol, sexual promiscuity and the violence at Fort Simpson figured prominently in his decision. For the most part Duncan initially succeeded on focusing the Metlaktlans’ energies in the mission project. And as Hosmer points out there were financial gains to be made by the Tsimshian who stayed. “From the outset, Metlaktla’s economy promoted both community and individuality in a way that roughly recapitulated Tsimshian patterns of social integration.”⁶

Odille’s Aunt Elizabeth Ryan, the much younger sister of Mary Curtis, was also forging new ground and creating new circumstances by becoming sexually involved with Duncan’s new Irish lay assistant Robert Cunningham. In most of the existing literature, Elizabeth is portrayed as an impressionable victim of Cunningham’s advances. Popular historian Peter Murray goes so far as to say that Cunningham had raided Duncan’s “most cherished institution – the girls’ boarding school under his own roof.” The unwed Duncan had taken several girls into the Mission house arguing it was a way to protect them from the negative influences and to protect those “to whom he was bringing the Christian message.”⁷ Duncan was long to hold a grudge and Robert Cunningham always seemed to be, at least in Duncan’s view, the subject of some sort of scandal, often involving illegal liquor trade.⁸ Cunningham’s business abilities also infuriated Duncan and he used every opportunity to turn people against Cunningham. For his part, Robert Cunningham, who became a very successful business man at nearby Port Essington, may have taken some pleasure in thwarting the mission’s business ventures.

Even though Robert Cunningham was eventually fired from the Church Missionary Society, according to historian Adele Perry, both “Robert Cunningham and Elizabeth Ryan remained within the broad orbit of the mission community and Tsimshian kinship network.”⁹ Duncan tolerated the wide levels of criticism in the Anglo-missionary sphere which interpreted a single man in the company of so many impressionable girls as scandalous. Perry argues that “if the female students were what Duncan loved and cherished, they were also what he tried very hard to control” even resorting to excessive physical force.¹⁰ Duncan’s practice of flogging wayward female students put other

missionaries on edge and may have also turned many of the Metlakatla native converts, including Odille's maternal relations, against him. Odille's daughter Vicky (Morison) Aldous said in a recorded interview that "he [Duncan] would flog them for the least little thing- that was one thing they didn't like. – [It] was an unknown thing then."¹¹

Even amongst those in Metlakatla, Duncan's household of female boarders may have raised a few eyebrows, but he was always careful to explain his logic to the chiefs and village council even if it was to lead to his pre-determined position.¹² In large measure Duncan utilized existing Tsimshian concepts of power structures to gain support in the new community. From his early days at Fort Simpson Duncan distributed food and simple gifts to the people at Christmas time. While he riled against the ceremonial potlatching by household chiefs as a way of impoverishing others, Duncan undermined the chiefs' authority by demonstrating his wealth and generosity -- and by extension spiritual power. After the 1862 migration, he hosted a feast of "rice, molasses, cakes and tea for over 250 adults." A week later the converted chiefs held a feast "with the provisions donated by Duncan" and this was quickly followed by collection of taxes from new followers.¹³ Whether it was intentional or not, William Duncan had mimicked a fundamental principle of the Tsimshian social order by setting himself up as a head chief as it were. Public confrontation where head chief Legiac threatened Duncan's life¹⁴ and then the conversion and baptism of the same chief could certainly have been perceived as demonstrating Duncan's political savvy.

Increased rank for the converts themselves was also achieved by participating in critical decisions regarding the establishment and regulation of the mission village. Duncan and the village council devised boundaries for moral and civic well being, as new converts were often transient. The code of village membership was "demanding," as Brian Hosmer states, yet "one tempered by a system ... which paralleled the Tsimshian notions regarding the interplay of collective action and social hierarchy."¹⁵ Besides the spring and summer seasonal travel to various resource sites for food gathering and hunting, Tsimshian would also journey to visit relations back in Fort Simpson or other coastal

communities. The Metlakatlangs “lived parallel lives, and their ‘status’ associated with Tsimshian relationships did not just disappear following migration and conversion.”¹⁶

Mary Curtis’ expertise in midwifery would have been in demand regardless, but with the onslaught of diseases like small pox and measles, her skills were at a premium. Her profession and widowhood afforded her a certain mobility and respectability that she freely exercised. Duncan’s attempts to control the sexual lives of Tsimshian women may have met with limited success. Once they were out of sight of the mission and “Father” Duncan, some women chose for themselves on how to interact with others. As Jean Barman writes: “Aboriginal women in British Columbia not only dared to exercise agency but often did so publicly, convincing men in power that their sexuality was out of control.”¹⁷ The one thing that I can say confidently about Odille’s mother is that Mary Curtis never ceded control of her life to any outsider – not even to William Duncan.

A prominent example of Mary’s mobility and independent streak comes to us in the form of a letter dated March 1866 from former HBC official William H. McNeill to William Duncan. McNeill had left Fort Simpson by mid 1865 and retired to estates outside of Victoria, while his wife Neshaki (baptized Martha McNeill), a Nisga’a chief continued to trade and gather furs on the Nass River which flows to the Pacific Ocean north of Fort Simpson.

Historian Susan Neylan suggests that Neshaki’s “life as wife of a retired HBC factor in Victoria may have altered her domestic situation, but she continued to amass a personal fortune, engaged in and won a battle of wealth with her former husband and eventually assumed the leadership of the powerful Nisga’a Wolf Clan.”¹⁸

It is important to contextualize McNeill’s letter to Duncan as it can tell us much not only about Mary, Neshaki, and other self-determined females, but how McNeill tried to monitor their behavior through Duncan, and the importance McNeill placed on the opinions of his peers – the Anglo male establishment.

McNeill began by confirming Duncan's assessment of the whiskey traders, and how "shamefully" Duncan was treated by the colonial authorities in the mainland capital of New Westminster. McNeill surmised that all Duncan's "friends" on Vancouver Island felt justice had not been served, and that the rum traders would simply continue their practice. After these conciliatory words, McNeill changed tone; he almost casually remarked that he hoped "Martha is well and going on as a wife should do." Then the urgency of his concerns surfaced.

I hope that she visited you often and obtained good advice from you. You kindly said that you would have a talk with her as to how she should get on for the future. Will you kindly write and inform me as to how she has conducted herself since I left; do not hold anything. Please let me know all good, bad and indifferent. But I sincerely hope that she [goes] on as she should. She promised to mind what I said to her and do all in her power to act right in all things. She said that she knew how to go on. And now that she was married it was all that she wanted. I have written her to come down on the [steamer] Otter as I see no other chance.¹⁹

Clearly McNeill was feeling that the situation with Martha/Neshaki -- and later her friends -- could spin out of control. He asked Duncan to monitor (more accurately spy on) his wife to make sure that her behavior appropriately reflected the values of a well to do Victorian married woman. Now that she was married (perhaps because he had retired) McNeill assumed that her independent nature would mellow. However, he also assumed that she would continue her fur trade business in the same successful manner as always. In the next breath, McNeill stated he wanted Neshaki home. He claimed to feel very "lonely without her," but more likely it is because there is so much to "look after now that [McNeill] had commenced gardening."

Surely there was something of greater concern driving this letter than having her home to perform yard work. A few sentences later he reveals:

Mary Curtis goes up on the [steamship] Otter. Her rascal of a husband is in Jail for fighting and robbing. Be careful of Mary, she has the art of the Devil himself and has done anything but well down here." Teex [Deiks?] remained here two days dead drunk all the time, and then went to [New] Westminster. I hope you will advise Martha as to who she should keep company with. I am afraid that Mary Curtis will do her no good.

Remembering that François Quintal (Odille's father) died in April 1862 begs the question of the identity of this man whom William McNeill refers to as Mary Curtis' "rascal of a husband." Even though this man's identity remains a mystery, Mary Curtis' conduct is of

great interest. First off, Mary Curtis, widow of Quintal and cofounder of Metlakatla mission, is not politely sitting at home birthing babies or fulfilling some other Victorian domestic role. She is traveling around and actively participating in intimate relationships. Although McNeill refers to her 'husband', I can only assume this was because there was no other term in his personal lexicon. There is no physical evidence that Mary Curtis had a solemnized service until much later when she married Masset Haida chief Weah in 1879.

McNeill perceived Mary Curtis' friendship with Martha as a potential source of trouble for both women but more likely it is his reputation in controlling his wife which is at stake. While he did not direct Duncan to rebuke Mary, he expected Duncan to carry out the stern warnings to Martha.

Neshaki was actively maintaining her hereditary title and prerogatives and trading interests as well exercising her new identity as a recently baptized Christian. Nicholas May details Neshaki's varying roles and how it played in the Church Missionary Society's mission to the Nisga'a on the lower Nass River. Resident missionary for the CMS and Duncan's closest ally, Robert Doolan, was ambivalent at first, and then threatened by, as May concludes, Neshaki's "combining her hybridization of Christianity and indigenous ways with an authority that defied the Victorian standards of domesticity and submissiveness the churchmen thought befitting of women."²⁰

It is most likely that McNeill's letter was too little too late in terms of trying to control Neshaki's actions. Interestingly, stationed along with Doolan at the Nass mission was Robert Cunningham and his new Tsimshian wife, Elizabeth Ryan, Mary Curtis' sister. She too figures prominently in the missionary correspondence. While not the direct focus of Nicholas May's research, he notes how she acted as an interpreter for Doolan, but more importantly as a cultural broker between the Nisga'a and the missionaries. The Nisga'a (particularly the women), would often approach Ryan to clarify matters of doctrine or to question the authority of the missionaries. "Often news reached the

churchmen through her, and people interested in the mission consulted the Tsimshian woman for advice.”²¹

Although there is evidence of hardship, disagreement and even abandonment between Robert and Elizabeth Cunningham in the early years of their marriage, Elizabeth obviously was a player in the social interactions in the Nass River Mission in the mid 1860s even though she was just twenty years old. After the death of two infants, Elizabeth successfully gave birth to a son George in 1867 followed by John two years later. Like her sister Mary, and other Northwest Coast women, Elizabeth Ryan Cunningham made the best of her situation not by bowing to the conventions of missionary assumptions, but by creating a niche that only she could fill. Robert Cunningham was eventually dismissed by the Church Missionary Society in large measure over his premarital relations with Elizabeth. He went to work for the Hudson’s Bay Company and Elizabeth and her two small children were once again living at Fort Simpson but this time she was the wife of a company officer with some of the perks which this status offered.

These women were key figures in Odille’s early life. It is not likely that she traveled with her mother to Victoria in the mid 1860s, as Duncan writes later that she was in school at Metlakatla during this time period. Even if Odille remained behind with her older brother Peter, the actions and influence of her mother, Aunt Elizabeth, and Uncle Charles certainly modeled an independence, community leadership and self actualization which surfaced later in her life. In the next chapter we will focus on Odille’s early life in the mission school and her importance as community correspondent.

Chapter 2

¹ Nicholas May refers to a relationship between the Tsimshian interpreter Phillip Dundas and a young married Nisga'a woman. "Although she was young, it is likely that the woman's status as a married and therefore adult woman gave her greater freedom to determine her sexual life." In *Making Conversation: Opening Dialogues of the Nisga'a Encounter with the Church Missionary Society, 1864-67* (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2003), 108-109.

² Brian Hosmer, *American Indians in the Marketplace: Persistence and Innovation Among the Menominees and Metlakatlas, 1870-1920* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999), 156.

³ Peter Murray, *The Devil and Mr. Duncan: A History of the Two Metlakatlas* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1985), 68. Murray's work is a popular history. This is sometimes problematic as he does not cite individual primary sources although he does incorporate a large body of original Duncan files as part of a written narrative. Murray uses quotations to signify primary sources so at least researchers can distinguish between the two. For the most part Murray appears to be true to the intent and context of the primary material.

⁴ Murray, 89.

⁵ Susan Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 33.

⁶ Hosmer, 150.

⁷ Hare and Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, 8.

⁸ See Hosmer, 158.

⁹ Adele Perry, "The Autocracy of Love and the Legitimacy of Empire; Intimacy, Power and Scandal in Nineteenth-Century Metkalakahtlah," *Gender and History* 16, 2 (August 2004): 271.

¹⁰ Perry, 275.

¹¹ Vicky (Morison) Aldous-Sims, interview with Imbert Orchard, Imbert Orchard Collection, BC Archives (recorded Winter 1962), T0311:0001-4

¹² See Murray, 75.

¹³ Murray, 77.

¹⁴ See Hosmer 141-142, Murray 48-49.

¹⁵ Hosmer, 153

¹⁶ Hosmer, 156.

¹⁷ Jean Barman, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900," *BC Studies* 115/116 (Autumn/Winter 1997/98): 240.

¹⁸ Neylan, 119.

¹⁹ Letter of W.H. McNeill to William Duncan, March 14, 1866. UBC Library microfilm.

²⁰ May, 124.

²¹ May, 107.

Chapter 3 Educating Diversities

The previous chapter focused on the key individuals of Odille's family who helped shape her early experiences and became role models for her life. These individuals were part of her education (used in the broadest sense) by both directing the information she received at school and helping her integrate it into her position in the community.

One individual who had an impact on Odille's life was, of course, the missionary William Duncan. Much has been written on Duncan and his missionary zeal: his boundless energy and clever industriousness, and his autocratic dictatorial style of community rule. To the pre-adolescent Odille Quintal, Duncan was not a man to be fearful of, but more a stern fatherly figure who took active control in all situations. Unlike the archetypal Victorian ideals of fatherhood, Duncan took a hands-on approach in everything he did, which must have seemed odd to not only his missionary peers, but also to the more traditionally minded Tsimshian to whom class and social roles mattered. Gender roles were clearly laid out in Tsimshian society where children and all food preparation as well as allocation of food stuffs belonged to women. From this, as Brian Hosmer points out, "females derived considerable influence."¹

Historian Myra Rutherford writes of the arrival in 1860 of the newly-wed Church Missionary Society missionary couple Reverend and Mrs. Lewin S. Tugwell and of how ill prepared William Duncan thought the couple was for life in Fort Simpson. Rutherford suggests that Duncan "was shocked that Mrs. Tugwell was unprepared to meet the customary expectations of a gendered division of labour" by not knowing how to make bread. Duncan himself had been performing this task for years.² While Rutherford's remarks on the gendered division of labour are appropriate, Duncan freely fulfilled these domestic roles in his early days as the lone missionary at Fort Simpson. The problem with simply focusing on the missionary record once again leads to the conclusion that there were no other role models in the community worth mentioning. A peripheral character who had daily contact with the girls was Mary Rudland, Tsimshian wife to former a HBC employee and Duncan's storekeeper William Rudland.³ She was not

considered anything more than a housekeeper by missionaries but Mary Rudland was a prominent figure in the household and in the lives of the boarders.

Odille was a student for many years at Metlakatla even while her mother was in Victoria.⁴ Odille and her brother Peter likely stayed with their uncle Charles Ryan and his household, certainly in the early years between 1864 and 1868. An 1868 report lauding the successes of Metlakatla, composed by long time Anglican minister Rev. Edward Cridge, is a credible source as it provides a comprehensive (albeit missionary) backdrop of the Metlakatla mission village. Of particular interest are Cridge's explanations and justifications for the female boarders and their upstairs dormitory room in the missionary residence. He found that each girl had "her own recess, and many of them prettily ornamented" with nothing in the air to "offend the most fastidious." Of course the main purpose of the girls boarding was to protect their "usefulness and virtue" for marriage – and not to anyone other than other Native Christian men. "Such is the estimation in which this establishment is held by the Christians of the place, that a young man will scarcely look at a girl for a wife unless she has passed through it. ... It is certainly surprising how Mr. Duncan, without female assistance, *other than that of natives*, [emphasis mine] could have so successfully carried on this branch of the work."⁵

It is reasonable to assume that Duncan gave guidance for the general conduct and expectations of the girls but it would have been highly inappropriate (in either culture) if he took any part in specific instructions regarding female reproductive sexuality, particularly the onset of puberty. It was enough, in terms of the missionary purpose, that Duncan 'guarded' these young women – essentially warehousing them until they reached marriageable age when they would continue to propagate the Christian message within their own families. Scholar Susan Neylan writes, "The image of Tsimshian Christian women fashioned by Euro-Canadian missionaries had much in common with the portrayal of all women in the late Victorian period. Most especially, however, it was similar to the picture of working class women drawn by the dominant middle class."⁶ In actuality the education which these girls received was broader in both in content and depth than that of their female Victorian counterparts abroad or in larger colonial centres.

Not only were the girls studying the conventional three R's, but in the context of family or even wider Metlakatla dynamics, they were exposed to lineage stories and oral narratives and Tsimshian traditional laws (*ayaawx*).⁷ Left to the directions of their grandmothers and aunties, or even Native matrons, they would have continued (even on the quiet) some of the Tsimshian cultural practices of seclusion, prescriptive diet and even celebration at the onset of menstruation.⁸ Traditions dating back over millennia may be questioned, countered and even reviled by missionaries but as long as there is a memory of practices – in this case with the women of Metlatkatla-- they are not easily expunged either from their lives or from cultural expression. Odille's mother was both a midwife and healer. Her grandmother was considered a "wise woman" and held a position of influence in the Gitlaan community.⁹ There is little chance that they would abandon such power simply because they had accepted the principles of Christian faith and baptism.

Language skills, both written and verbal, were an important form of power at this time in Metlakatla. According to the 1868 report by Edward Cridge, the "regular technical school," exceeded his expectations. "The progress of the scholars is remarkable. They read, write, cipher and can translate easy books into their own language and *vice versa*. They have made some progress in geography and history. And I certainly think that Mr. Duncan, in view of the special relations of this people, has done well in preferring the ordinary English to the syllabic system, as the vehicle of expressing their thoughts in writing." Later Cridge comments reproachfully that the boarders refused to speak English (even when capable) preferring their Tsimshian language (Sm'algyx). "With a *shame that is peculiarly Indian* they can be rarely be brought to *speak* in it. It is the one difficulty which, with all his influence, Mr. Duncan has not yet been able to *conquer* [emphasis mine]."

The girls were expressing themselves in English in the written form, using the practical applications of what the missionaries had to offer and the power of education. Yet what

Cridge sees as shame is perhaps Tsimshian modesty ... and a culturally appropriate resistance on the part of the young women.

Odille would have been twelve years old at this time and a student in the day school. In this same document Cridge clearly singles out Odille and another student as examples of scholastic success and the rationale for teaching the student written English form.

I enclose two themes, written by girls in the mission under thirteen years of age, on a scriptural subject which I gave them, and in preparation of which they were entirely unaided, nor has a single correction been made, except of a pure inadvertency either in grammar or spelling. One of these girls (Omintal) is the daughter of a French Canadian half-breed, brought up entirely by her Indian mother from the age of seven years; the other is pure native. It is evident that such correspondence with Christian friends would be impractical under the syllabic system, and under that system the learners at Metlahkatlah would be debarred from a great stimulus and a real pleasure.

Although Rev. Cridge applauded the individual achievements of the two girls, yet he was compelled to make racial distinctions between the 'half breed' and 'full native'. He also singles out Odille as the child of a single 'Indian' woman and I am left wondering what is the significance (or implication) of these remarks. Cridge's comments reflect the Victorian social and racial stereotypes which automatically assumed these girls would only have limited success in civilized pursuits and education. Perhaps Cridge included this information simply to magnify their achievements as a way to bolster support for William Duncan and the mission school. Duncan became the beloved missionary hero and Metlakatla the model of missionary project as reports of its success circulated.

Historian Gail Edwards describes how missionary tracts, letters and reports such as Cridge's 1868 document reinforced the constructed literary figure of the missionary as cultural hero. She suggests that writers (often missionaries themselves) constructed an "'Aboriginal Other,' who could be civilized, converted, and made literate only through the unremitting toil and personal intervention of the binary opposite, the missionary hero."¹⁰ Mission education was then a top priority as well as continued (financial) support from external sources for the Metlakatla project which were designed to overcome the imperialist perceptions of the limitations inherent in the heathen races, even after conversion.

As Ken Campbell explains, Tsimshian education was “integrated into life as whole. It was not divided into separate systems. ... Children learned by actively participating in the life of the community.... Everyone had a role to play in the community and they were educated to assume those roles.”¹¹ In hindsight some may argue that Duncan’s school and the whole mission project were at odds with this tradition. But as I indicated previously (chapter 2), Tsimshian of this generation did not all necessarily see the acquisition of new forms of knowledge as competition. These new skills were actually seen with respect and those who had the abilities did claim a certain amount of new authority and power within the community. However, this does not mean that they were not continuing other educational processes at the same time through the interaction of generations.

From a Tsimshian point of view, the social expectations for Odille would have been extremely high. She was granddaughter of a recognized ‘wise woman,’ (healer) and daughter of a professional midwife. As anthropologist Jay Miller explains, trade specialists included “shamans, carpenters, musicians, composers, herbalists, midwives, and astronomers.” Each of these served as advisors to house and village chiefs.¹² It would have been a blow to her family’s status and community standing if Odille had shirked her duties in the village – including integrating and synthesizing and sharing the new information which she obtained through the mission school.

From the missionary stance, Odille was an example of the success of the mission project. From a Tsimshian cultural perspective, Odille was fulfilling her role in the community. In late May of 1869, two months before her fourteenth birthday, William Duncan drafted a letter of commendation to Odille for her years as a pupil and her conduct over that time. This appears as a first draft of a letter which he composed and most likely presented to her at the end of school.

Although Duncan’s handwriting is extremely difficult to read, this letter illustrates the personable but pious nature of the relationship between Duncan and Odille. She excelled academically, and got on well with others. He wrote that he could not find fault with Odille’s “general conduct at school” and hoped that God would “give [her] years to

follow from the good beginning.” He managed to take a small measure of credit for her success, by adding “not withstanding the little help ... I have been able to teach you.”

Duncan trusted her so much that a year later he requested that she begin teaching some of the younger students. His emphasis throughout the letter is reliance upon God rather than worldly matters. He cannot hide the personal connection and perhaps pride which he felt in her success after watching her grow over the years. She must “never forget to Thank God for his love like you [did as] a child.” She is to be “thankful & humble [never] proud” and always to look constantly “to God for help and guidance.” The reference to her childhood also suggests an intimate insight which he may not have had of other students. She had after all been one of his first students at the day school in Fort Simpson long before the move to the new mission village.¹³

Odille’s education at Metlkatla was as rich and diverse as it was significant given the time and place. When we consider all the variables, and look outside the two-dimensional missives of the missionary record, we recognize the importance of community and traditional cultural practices which were not fully abandoned. Rather, both sides adapted and integrated social rules, as much as Tsimshian and colonial world views would permit. In the next chapter we will clearly see how Odille walked in both worlds with a clarity and purpose which still astounds me given her age. It is where we see Odille, as the young woman, and as the voice of her Metlakatla community.

Chapter 3

¹ Hosmer, 119.

² Myra Rutherford, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 50.

³ Little research has been conducted on the impact of mixed race HBC couples such as the Rudlands in connection with early Anglican or Church Missionary Society (CMS) successes. There is at least one reference to a 'Rudland' presumably William in the HBC journals dated 1858. It is interesting that William was left in charge of missionary he was not an employee of the Church Missionary Society. There is a baptismal reference to Mary Rudland which gives her tribal affiliation as Gitlaan and her birth date in 1828. (BC archives vital events online) This implies a generational and tribal affiliation with Mary Curtis, Odille's mother who was reported born about 1830 and also of a Gitlaan lineage.

⁴ It is impossible to track Mary Curtis' various movements other than the few primary references in Odille's letters or the letter to Duncan by William McNeill discussed in chapter two.

⁵ Edward Cridge, *Sketch of The Rise and Progress of Metlahkatlah In The Diocese of British Columbia* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1868), 11-12.

⁶ Susan Nelan, 108.

⁷ "Ayaawx (laws) form the foundation of social organization of the Ts'msyen [Tsimshian]. Ayaawx are the ancient rules-that govern how the culture is organized and ensure its cultural continuity today. Ayaawx anchor the present to the past and ensure future generations preserve the integrity of the culture by following the laws and customs of the people." Ken Campbell, *Persistence and Change: A History of Ts'ymsyen Nation*, 35.

⁸ See Ken Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 58.

⁹ Ken Campbell's email to author (Fall 2004).

¹⁰ Gail Edwards, "The Picturesqueness of His Accent and Speech: Methodist Missionary Narratives and William Henry Pierce's Autobiography." *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home and Abroad*, eds. Alwyn Austin, Jamie Scott (Toronto: University Toronto Press, 2005), 67-68.

¹¹ Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 66.

¹² Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture: A Light through the Ages* (Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 19.

¹³ William Duncan to Odeal Quintall (sic), UBC Library microfilm. The transcription of this copy has proved to be difficult to date as many words are crossed out and impossible to accurately read. Duncan wrote this working draft and the final letter which was likely presented to Odille. The original copy of the final letter did not survive.

Chapter 4 A Year in Her Life

In earlier chapters I have referred to many primary and secondary sources that indirectly relate to Odille's early life. Given the limits of those resources there is little opportunity to fully experience her day-to-day life, or her most innermost thoughts. Unlike her husband, who wrote out his life memories, Odille left no such record. One thing we do have is a small collection of letters which she wrote to William Duncan during 1870 when she was fifteen years old. Duncan was a consummate man of business, with his earliest employment in Beverly, England, as an errand boy, clerk and later a traveling salesman for a tanner.¹ He kept every piece of paper to cross his desk including these three letters which he received while in England and Victoria on furlough. I am thankful that he did as the letters reveal a freshness and immediacy that we do not see in tailored missionary reports or later in Odille's ethnographic writings.

Researchers Judith Beattie and Helen Buss explain the 'power of letters' in their book *Undelivered Letters to Hudson's Bay Company Men*. Researchers often become "intensely and personally involved in [the] vivid re-creation of peoples' lives, peoples' selves." Letters are "powerful evocations of the lives of actual people in a period now distant but made close to us...out across time."² Of course Beattie and Buss draw on hundreds of letters generated by a wide range of people with varying gender, class and social backgrounds. On the other hand letters generated by one individual over a period of time can show growth and development and changes in personal attitudes as well as social circumstance. Such are the letters written by missionary wife Emma Crosby in the



collection compiled by Jan Hare and Jean Barman. Beyond my obvious interest in Emma's friendship with Odille, the letters reveal the "inherent contradictions and voids between her world and that of the Aboriginal peoples of Port Simpson. A 'reading against the grain' attests that the Tsimshian were effective agents in shaping their world in taking advantage of the conventions that the missionary enterprise offered and using these to claim and maintain status, land, and access to the newcomers' world."³

We have only three letters which Odille composed herself during this time to William Duncan, plus one additional letter written during the same time period addressed to Odille's mother Mary Curtis. It is not appropriate to make wide sweeping conclusions about Odille's faith or even relationships based solely on these few letters. Yet it can be argued that readers (when provided with the contextual information) gain insights into her personality and the busyness of her life in the Metlakatla community. There is also an undeniable cheerfulness (or at least enthusiasm) when she describes community happenings, ironically always coupled with the melancholic messages of how Duncan is missed by everyone. This recurrent theme speaks to the initial fear that Duncan would not return to Metlakatla. According to popular historian Peter Murray, Duncan's departure in winter of 1870 was an "emotional" one. "They [the Metlakatlans] had written him a letter pleading with him not leave; 'Because you are like a father to us... we know that it is very difficult for you to live amongst us, but it is more difficult for us if you leave us'."⁴

A short explanation of some of the people to whom Odille refers to in the letters is necessary for clarity. Mary Rudland, the Tsimshian wife of sometime Metlakatla store employee William Rudland, was a main source of support for the female boarders.⁵ Mary Rudland was also sent as a Native teacher (missionary) in her own right to preach to the Native women of Fort Simpson.⁶

As Duncan made his rounds in Victoria then in England, he met with Church Missionary Society officials as well as his former missionary colleague and friend, Robert Doolan. Although Doolan had left the North Coast in 1868 he remained a solid supporter of the

Metlakatla mission in England and continued for many years to be an instructive point of contact for new English recruits before they left for the missionary field.⁷ Odille would have had a friendly association with Doolan through both the school and her connections with the Cunninghams who had worked with Doolan at the Nass River Mission.⁸

Another important person to Odille (whom she mentions in the letter) is her brother Peter. Peter Quintal is an enigmatic figure. There are several direct references to him in the Emma Crosby letters, as well as other documentary sources, but to date I have not uncovered any primary source composed by Peter Quintal. Peter was two years older than Odille, and was also an early student of Duncan's at Fort Simpson and later at Metlakatla. One reference says that Peter Quintal spent a great deal of time with his maternal uncle Charles Ryan and that Peter started his own store at Fort Simpson after 1872. According to Tsimshian informant Matthew Johnson, Peter had a girl friend at Fort Simpson and did not like all the moral regulations which were enforced at Metlakatla.⁹

Another reference shows that Peter was as mobile as his mother Mary Curtis, and as eager to acquire new skills as his Uncle Peter Ryan. By 1875, at the age of twenty-two, Peter Quintal had received some "smattering in the art of photography" in Victoria and took the 'likeness' of the Crosby's first child, Jesse.¹⁰ At the time of the 1870 letters, Peter, who would have been just sixteen, was working across the Portland Canal for an American merchant, Mr. Walden, at Fort Tongass in the new territory of Alaska. The letters illustrate Peter's position and his Alaskan employer were of great interest to both Odille and her mother. While we will never know what exactly were the problems, we do see Odille's concern in the letters regarding her brother. Later Mary Quintal went to Fort Tongass and aided the Waldens in the birth of their daughter.

Another individual to whom Odille refers is Richard Cridge, son of the Victoria-based Reverend Edward and Mary Cridge. The Cridges had several children and Richard was the same age as Odille. It is not known when Odille had met the Cridge children unless she had visited them in Victoria at some point, or perhaps Richard had accompanied his

father in his visit of 1867-68.¹¹ Odille writes that she was “quite surprised” when she found out that Richard Cridge had gone with Duncan to England.

Odille also mentions Maggie Ryan and her grandmother in the letter dated March 1870. Maggie was the eldest daughter of Odille’s uncle Charles and his wife Julia Ryan. In the Tsimshian matrilineal social structure Odille and Maggie would have had the same grandmother (Lydia Ryan) but it is doubtful that they would have considered themselves cousins in the European context. Since Maggie Ryan’s house lineage and crest affiliation would have come through her mother Julia Ryan, Odille and Maggie may have had a special relationship but the term cousin would not have applied to them.¹²

The little fish Odille refers to is the oolican which played such an important role in coastal society for millennia, not only as a food source, but more importantly as a trade item and symbol of wealth and prestige among the Tsimshian. It is important to note that William Duncan did not try to dissuade the people from gathering oolican since it was a staple in the economy, even though he was cautious about the Metlakatlangs mingling with the other First Nations. He realized the resource was an opportunity for revenue and saw the annual gathering as a potential point of contact for evangelism.

Odille’s earliest letter is from March 1870:

Metlahkatlah
March 26th 1870

My Dear Mr. Duncan,

I have only but a few minutes to write you these few lines as I think the steamer Otter is starting for Victoria this afternoon. I need not say how sorry we were when you left us. I feel that we were parting with our best earthly friend. The people here missed you very much on the first Sunday you were not here. I often think how very kind you have been to me in teaching me the way to heaven, and I would thank you my dear Mr. Duncan from the bottom of my heart for all the good advice you have ever so kindly given me I cannot express the gratitude I feel towards you, but I can shew my gratitude in one way and I think you will value it. I never bend [on] my knees before the throne of grace, ever since you left us without remembering you, nor shall you ever want my poor prayers. I am very glad to know that the steamer Otter was not going till next Monday for I can write a little more. Our little school is getting on very well Some of the school girls are gone to Nass River fishery there are only twelve girls in our little school. My brother Peter is still working for Mr Walden at Tongass. I have not heard any news of him lately. Little Maggie Ryan is not here she is gone with grandmother to Nass River but her Father and Mother and the three children are here.

They are all very well. Two canoes arrived here last night they came from Nass River. They say that the small fish came on the 22 of March. I was very much please to hear about your letter to Mrs. Rudland. I was quite surprised to know that Richard Cridge was gone with you. Please tell him I send my best regards to him. We would be very glad to hear of you soon and I hope before long that you will be here. I must not forget to put this down. "you must come home soon" I do not call England your home, for Metlakalata is your own home so please do come back soon.

Give my affectionate and grateful regards to Mr. Doolan and all your kind friends that used to send things to us. Tell them that we thank them very much.

My mother sends her best love to you and accept the same from me. We are all in good health and hoping that Almighty God is keeping you in the same.

In bringing this letter to a close, might I ask you to pray for me? God bless you and keep you in prosperity. No more at present hoping you are happy. It is about 10 o'clock in the night so time warns me to conclude. I must say Good bye now.

I remain my dear Mr. Duncan

Yours truly. Odeal Quintall

There is little doubt from this letter that Odille was a very devoted young Christian. It is worth noting that she subsequently distinguishes between 'the way to Heaven' and God as 'the Almighty' and Father, from Jesus as the Saviour and Redeemer. This division between these aspects of Christian theology certainly alludes to Duncan's evangelical leanings rather than to Anglican doctrines of the Trinity (three in one of Father, Son and Holy Spirit). At the same time, many of the letters written at the same time to Duncan by other girls at the school contain similar messages of prayers of thankfulness and blessings for Duncan's safe return. The concept of a Heavenly creator (Chief of Heaven) was an important central feature in the faith of the Tsimshian. The integration of the Christian message was accessible for many of the Tsimshian, and the central values of the new faith were not generally at odds with traditional teachings.¹³

The discrepancies came when missionaries, including William Duncan, demanded an all-or-nothing type of commitment. We must keep in mind that these letters were written in 1870 before the arrival of any other missionary message by the adolescent Odille. It is unlikely that she had ever had her faith greatly tested. The other young girls at the mission school may have been sincere in their wishes their faith-filled sentiments. But their letters may simply represent a stylized form of letter writing which Duncan himself had instructed as part of their English language studies. Duncan requested that Odille

teach the younger girls their lessons, and so she very well could have been passing on this same stylized language to them.

The letters clearly reveal Odille's superior literacy skills and academic abilities. Who knows what she may have achieved if she had been given the opportunity to study in a high school or college? For Odille, of course, this would have been unlikely as a female of First Nations ancestry living on the "edge of the empire" as scholar Adele Perry terms colonial British Columbia. A question which arises however is why did Duncan not think of taking Odille with him to England as a symbol of his success? At least why did he not try and find a benefactor to support her further education?

It could be that Duncan himself received only an elementary education. In later years he did not support the educational aspirations of a younger generation of converts such as Edward Marsden who went on to college in the United States after the move to New Metlakatla in Alaska in 1887. Brian Hosmer writes: "In an 1895 letter, Duncan warned Marsden against 'indulging the idea that learning, and the spread of knowledge, are the cure-all for the world's degradation, and especially important for the uplifting of the Indian race'."¹⁴ Duncan knew that knowledge was a powerful tool, but he considered faith in Jesus a far superior method of social improvement.

Duncan's controlling nature and what has been described as his cultivation of 'emotional dependence' is also vividly illustrated in the letters by Odille.¹⁵ Although she sees Duncan as a 'father' figure there appears to be a need and attachment which borders on unhealthy. Only Duncan's return will bring back the happiness, they once felt; it is as if the Metlakatla community has lost its soul. The intimacy which was exemplified by the girls who resided in the boarding home reflected for Duncan "relationships of love and respect as well as protection."¹⁶ The girls and Duncan developed what can only be described as a codependent need for each other: the plight of the girls gave Duncan a purpose as provider/protector and the girls were afforded the necessities of life and respectability in the Metlakatla community. As Odille's letters progress, they become more newsy about community goings on. It is also interesting to note that they all seem to

be completed in the evening when Odille had time to reflect on the day or to add a few more lines as they waited for the steamship *Otter* to carry the outbound mail.

Metlakatlah June 12th 1870

My dear Mr. Duncan

I can hardly say with what pleasure I got your note unexpectedly today, and beginning to answer it tonight. We are having the Mission school when Mary Rudland came in with your letters. She gave me one and one to Louisa to read it and I cannot express the happiness I felt and at the same time I was want to [say.] The girls were very anxious to hear the News. Please accept my thanks for your kind note it makes me feel quite lively to know that you are coming back. It was my earnest desire when I prayed that the Hearer and Answer of prayers, may kindly bring you back to us and I do thank Him for having answered my petitions I trust and hope He will bring you back safely to us.

On the Queen's Birthday the people here were having all sorts of games but they were not so complete without you. We often think and missed you as I used to look on you as a father by the kindness you used to be to us. I shall never forget it til the grave closes over me. We are very anxious to see you [again]. My mother is not here she is over at Tongass with Mrs Walden. She felt sore on the 14th of May and I am with Mary Rudland now. I don't think she will soon be at home as I heard Mrs. Walden is seriously ill. she had a baby girl lately and that is the reason I think my mother is not coming over soon. She would have been very thankful to hear that you desired to be remembered to her. I often feel lonely without her.

Dear Mr Duncan, you told me in your letter that I must not be weary in well doing and I hope and trust that by the Help of Almighty God I will try and do what you wished me to do. We are keeping the school every day now. We are getting on with it very well. I am trying to teach them little things as far as I know. The Girls are all willing and obedient to do anything I want them to do in school. I need not say how delightful all the people here seemed to be when they heard that you are coming back to Metlakathla.

Nancy Pelham wants me to tell you that we are getting on with our Sunday School she sends her best love to you. Please whenever you see Mrs. Computon will you kindly give my love to her, and to Mr. Doolan tell him that I do not forget him. I often mention him in my humble prayers. Give my love to your mother, Mr and Mrs Cussons.

I need not say Mr Duncan how very often I am praying for you. I pray that Almighty God is keeping you in His Fatherly Keeping. I hope that you are doing the same to me.

It is about midnight so I must soon conclude and bid you goodbye or good night.

God and the Lord Jesus Christ bless and keep you in perfect peace and in good health

[In] the constant prayer and wish of yours ever faithfully,

Odeal Quintal

In May of 1870, Mary Curtis traveled from Metlakatla to Fort Tongass¹⁷ to assist in the birth of the Walden baby. Although Odille was 'often lonely without her,' she seems to take the absence in stride and focused her energies on teaching the younger students. The

conditions at the fort must have been lonely and a bit frightening for the American woman, although she had at least one young female companion along to assist her. My research to track down more information about the Waldens (and Alice Moody) and why they were in southeastern Alaska has so far borne little fruit. The following letter of gratitude to Mary Curtis once again illustrates how her skills as a professional midwife were in demand regardless of race, class and even nationality.

From Miss Alice Moody

Fort Tongass June 29th 1870

My dear Mary,

As you arrive at your home safely, you may put away all other anxieties as Mrs Walden is improving all the time, slowly but surely, and in a short time we hope to have her up. That dreadful headache has left her entirely, and it is only a little nervousness and weakness that keeps her in bed. Baby is growing very fast, and seems to be getting along nicely, and Mrs. Walden is going to have Mr. Walden weigh her today. Gussi manages everything very well indeed, and takes excellent care of baby. Mrs. Walden was delighted with the little pin cushion, and wishes me to express her thanks to Odeal. We thought of going down to San Francisco in the Newbern, when she came but have decided to wait til September, and as soon as Mrs. Walden is well we expect to have a great many pleasant times. Mr and Mrs. Walden wish to be remembered to you and Odeal, and you may be sure that your kind care of Mrs. Walden will not be forgotten by us.

With much love, from your little friend
Alice Moody.

This letter must have meant a great deal to Mary Curtis as it was passed down through the generations to her great-great grandchildren. It is also revealing that the Waldens chose to bring Mary from Metlatkatla rather than the other church missionary society medical practitioner Robert Tomlinson who was actually closer at the mission on the Nass River estuary at Kincolith. Tomlinson may have been away from the mission, but it is more likely that the Waldens requested Mary at the urging of her son Peter who was still working for them at the time. A careful reading of Odille's second letter indicates that Mrs. Walden 'felt sore' on May 14th which was probably when her labour began. We do not know if Mary was present for the birth, but most likely she was called upon when post partum complications put Mrs. Walden's life in jeopardy.

The 'dreadful head ache' Mrs. Walden suffered from could indicate a serious fever due to an infection or even the medical herbs which Mary prescribed.¹⁸ Mary's knowledge base

was steeped in the Tsimshian way of doing things rather than western medical models. She was the better choice given the local natural resources at hand. She would have known the medicinal herbs and perhaps unique obstetric care and may have been able to solicit the local Cape Fox Tlingit women to continue support after she left in late June. The mysterious housekeeper named Gussi (which is only a guess at the spelling) could actually have been one such Tlingit care provider.

The Waldens may have been thankful for the health and well being of their new baby, yet there was something about them and Peter's employment that Mary and Odille found unsettling. Odille was happy to report later to Duncan that Peter left his Alaskan employers but in actuality, the Waldens made plans to leave the north as Alice's letter indicates. Perhaps there was illicit liquor trade involved, or maybe it was the presence of the American military that unnerved the Quintals. A more plausible explanation could simply be that the distance and lack of communication was a source of frustration. As Odille's third letter to Duncan indicates, Peter was not willing to hang around Metlakatla after his return from Fort Tongass but was anxious to be off to Victoria. She also wrote that he wanted to go down to Victoria with the promise to return in the spring with William Duncan. Mary Quintal, however, put her foot down and insisted he remain – which he did.

In her final letter, Odille writes of the sorrow which her family felt at the death of the youngest child¹⁹ of her uncle Charles Ryan but that they took comfort in the fact that he did not have to suffer the trials of this world. Odille also writes that her Aunt Elizabeth was visiting. Her husband Robert Cunningham was then employed by the HBC and Elizabeth and her two children were living at Fort Simpson.

Another young Englishman by the name of Charles Morison had joined the HBC as a clerk the year before and was also assigned to the fort. It was through the Cunninghams that Morison met Odille Quintal. Theirs was truly a mutual attraction and perhaps even love at first sight. Their daughter Vicky Morison Aldous said: "That was how Father met Mother. He and Robert Cunningham were on a return trip from up the Skeena and called

at Metlakatla. They had called to take her [Odille] to [Fort] Simpson to spend the holidays. He [Charles Morison] said that he saw this beautiful girl looking up and ... said 'I lost my heart then.'²⁰

This meeting occurred during Duncan's absence as it is highly unlikely that Robert Cunningham ever visited Metlakatla given his acrimonious relationship with Duncan. According to Morison, Cunningham had a falling out with his employer (HBC) when his request for a pay raise was turned down. This could account for Elizabeth's visit in late November of that year.

Metlahkatlah November 29th 1870

My Dear Mr Duncan

I must commence this note by telling you that we were greatly disappointed. Everyone was in hopes of seeing you by this time on the Otter. It was on Friday last the Steamer came past as the afternoon school was commenced we saw it and then jumped about and screamed for happiness.; the people were ready to see you. When the Otter anchored there was a canoe sent to see if you were on board, and when we found out you did not come! I cannot tell you how great our disappointment was. But after all I need not say how very happy we were to know that you are at Victoria now; as we all trust by Gods goodness; if so you are near us; you will come up here and live with us your flock again but while you were in England we could not quite believe you will come back to us; and I do thank Him 'who ordereth all things' for His goodness on bringing you back to us.

We saw your likeness. I do thank you very much for your kind remembrance of me in encouraging me with the school in your Letter to William Rudland, his wife told me so. I hope dear Mr. Duncan you will trust me with my work as it is my greatest pleasure to do any thing you wish me to do. We always have school everyday except when the girls are busy doing any work; we do not have school.

My brother Peter has left Mr. Walden's three months ago, and I am glad to say that he left it for good. He wants to go to Victoria very much by this time and come back with you when you come, but my mother does not like him to go. I am sorry to tell you of the death of Uncle Charles' little child [the youngest one] ...we know that as he was so young and innocent, that the child [Matthew] has gone to heaven and in departing this early how many little griefs and struggles was he save[d] from in this world. We are all in good health and hoping that Almighty God is keeping you in the same. Oh! How I love to hear you speak about Christ our Redeemer. We are longing very much to hear your voice when you speak about God.

Aunt Elizabeth has been here spending a few days with us. She was here when the Steamer Otter came I hope you will soon be able to come and live with us. We are very sorry you could not be here on Christmas day. Mr Duncan how can you bear the hurt to leave us all alone on Christmas, for this is the first time you will not be with us. We did not think before that you would not be here on Christmas.

My Mother, Nancy Pelham, and I need not mention the names of all those who wishes to be remembered to you. And now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God ever our Father which hath loved us and hast given us everlasting salvation, and good hope through grace, comfort your heart, and establish you in every good word and work.

I remain dear Sir,
Yours most truly
Odeal Quintall

PS

Please excuse my bad writing.

I cannot have time to write better as there are so people in the house troubling me to write their letters.

Odeal

Odille's final letter again underlines the disappointment the people felt when Duncan decided to remain in Victoria for the winter rather than return to Metlakatla in time for Christmas. Of course the people were relieved that he actually had returned to British Columbia rather than stayed in England.

Odille appears to have gained significant confidence in her teaching and community work while Duncan was away. Her "greatest pleasure," as she indicates, was to do whatever he requests but obviously there is a measure of her own pride in doing a job well. The most important aspect to this letter is revealed in her final (and informal) post script. She asks for Duncan to forgive her "bad writing" as she is in a hurry and many people are in the house "troubling" her to write for them.

Obviously Odille acted as the community correspondent and was trusted with the messages of a variety of individuals. As a scribe, she would have not only translated the information into English, and back into the Native language, she also interpreted and contextualized the information for both the Tsimshian and later the newcomer societies. This vital role which began within the Tsimshian community of Metlakatla later developed into a full time career for Odille as cultural conduit of information on the local, provincial, and eventually the world stage.

Chapter 4

¹ Duncan was very close to his employer and maintained in contact with George Cussons and family even after he left for missionary work in 1857. Odille actually mentions the Cussons in her letters to Duncan.

² Judith Hudson Beattie and Helen M. Buss, *Undelivered Letters to the Hudson's Bay Company Men on the Northwest Coast of America, 1830-57* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 8

³ Hare and Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, 254.

⁴ Peter Murray, 106. The community letter to which Murray refers may have been composed by Odille but without a direct reference or a copy to compare, there is no way to verify her handwriting.

⁵ See chapter 3.

⁶ See Murray, 112.

⁷ Murray, 124.

⁸ See chapter 2.

⁹ Ken Campbell's note to author (Fall 2004)

¹⁰ Hare and Barman, 78.

¹¹ See chapter 3. Edward Cridge's visit took place in 1867 and the report was published the following year by the Church Missionary society.

¹² The way Odille refers to her Ryan relations reveals the undercurrent of Tsimshian social structures at play. Later it is evident that when it came to looking after her Aunt Elizabeth Cunningham and her children (1880-1890), the matrilineal kinship bonds remained very important. In the matrilineal system, Odille's mother shared the same crest as her siblings Elizabeth and Charles from their mother Lydia. However only Elizabeth passed on this crest onto her children just as Mary passed this same crest to Odille and her brother Peter.

¹³ See Neylan, 75-76, 111-118.

¹⁴ Hosmer, 214.

¹⁵ Jean Barman, email to author, November 2007.

¹⁶ Perry, 273.

¹⁷ Fort Tongass was a short lived military outpost located on a small island at the southern most tip of Alaska.

¹⁸ Thanks to Dr. Antonia Mills for this suggestion in November of 2004.

¹⁹ Matthew Ryan was born and baptized at Metlatkatla in 1869 according to the online vital events database of the BC archives. He would have been the youngest child at the time of writing of the letters yet Charles and Julia Ryan had at least three more children.

²⁰ Vicky (Morison) Aldous Sims, interview (1962)

Chapter 5 Mrs. Morison of Fort Simpson

Charles and Odille Morison were best friends – they must have been to be happily married for over sixty years. According to Morison’s manuscript, Odille was his “true wife and helpmate” and they were engaged sometime between 1870 and 1871. They were married at Metlakatla on August 10th in 1872 by the chaplain of the *HMS Scout* after Mr. Tomlinson, the CMS missionary at Kincolith, was asked by Morison but refused to perform the marriage. It is not clear why, but it could be that Tomlinson did not support mixed race marriages, or that he did not want to perform such a ceremony without Duncan’s knowledge or consent.

The return trip to Fort Simpson was a happy one, certainly for Morison who had lamented the loneliness of “that big house at night.”¹ The Morison home soon began to fill with Odille’s mother Mary and sometimes her brother Peter, and then the first of their seven children. Olive Odille (nicknamed Dolly) Morison was born in late April of 1873, almost nine months after their wedding.

With Charles Morison as the HBC manager at Fort Simpson came certain responsibilities that went along with Odille’s new title of Mrs. Morison. Perhaps it was her early experiences as the child of a fort employee in combination with the formative education in Metlakatla, for Odille appears to have made the transition quite handily. No matter how hard Duncan tried to eradicate Tsimshian class distinctions (even if only philosophically) at Metlakatla, there remained a strong need to know one’s place in the community and social standing. Even during these later days of the Hudson’s Bay Company on the North Coast as a fur trading entity, social and class distinctions were important.

Like the generation of women before her, Odille had some prestige as a mixed blood daughter of long time employee François Quintal. It is important to note, however, that Quintal was never an officer of the company.

On the other hand, Odille's Aunt Elizabeth Ryan Cunningham stepped into new social strata when the man she married, Robert Cunningham, was a new (albeit short-lived) Church Missionary Society worker. The marriage between Elizabeth and Robert Cunningham was less than ideal. He, like most other enterprising men, would spend weeks and even months away at a time; whether or not this is evidence of abandonment is not known. Although Charles Morison had nothing but good things to say about the Cunninghams and their family at Fort Simpson (1866-69) there was unhappiness in their marriage. Even ten years after Robert and Elizabeth Cunningham exchanged hurried vows, Elizabeth still turned to her family and William Duncan for moral support. According to Peter Murray who wrote extensively of the history of Metlatkatla, William Duncan even corresponded on the issue with Governor Seymour and Attorney General Crease. Duncan wrote strongly that divorce should be possible on the grounds that mixed race marriages were unfair to First Nations women, whom, he reasoned, did not fully understand the repercussions of their unions with white men.² Historian Adele Perry records that in his letter of September 1867, William Duncan portrayed Robert Cunningham to the Attorney General as "a foul sensualist" who was "notoriously, and, by his own confession, guilty of the grossest unfaithfulness to his wife, under the most aggravating circumstances."³

The substance of Duncan's complaints is confirmed in a letter dated July 24th 1873 from Elizabeth Cunningham to William Duncan written in Odille's handwriting. In the letter she thanks Duncan for his ongoing assistance and patience. Once again we see the repetitious theme of the wayward child returning to thank the kind loving parent, which is consistent with the way the girls of the boarding school clung to William Duncan. It is hard for me to read the words without feeling anger that Elizabeth (even if only on the surface) is groveling before the missionary. Perhaps there was a bit of cultish worship of William Duncan – or perhaps it is part of the Tsimshian form of penitent expression and self-effacement. Another, more plausible explanation could be that Elizabeth Cunningham was playing the "prodigal daughter" to solidify a place in the Metlatkatla community in case Cunningham left her permanently.⁴

It is recorded that Elizabeth Cunningham had her last child, baptized Charles Valentine Cunningham, on February 14th 1872. The prolonged illness to which she refers in a letter of a year later may have claimed her infant son's life as well.

Metlakatla
July 24th 1873

My dear Mr Duncan

Permit me to send you this short note to thank you for the great kindness you have shewed us in taking care of me. I cannot express the gratitude I feel towards you for it. Little did I expect before that you would be so kind to me as you are as I thought you would have looked to me as a stranger for I have left your place for such a long time. I feel as though I am a child that has left its kind father and went its own way, but as soon as she is in trouble she comes back to her father and the father is so kind, good, and forgiving he take to him his penitent child again. I feel myself, and you are the kind father for I have left your place for such a long time, and I never expected you would be so kind to me as you are and I heartily thank you for it.

I now [firmly] believe what you used to say, when I used to be in trouble, that if it wasn't my husband that troubles me, you would stick up for me but as he is my husband, you cannot say or do anything and I hardly believed it, but now I have seen all you said is true for I was in trouble now at least in being sick, and you had the great trouble to take care of me although you have much to do. I think my husband or any of my friends would not take so much trouble to take care of me, as much as I have given you. I cannot tell you how very thankful my mother and all feel for you. I hope you will never think that I will never forget your great kindness. I have always thought of it ever since I was here [Metlakatla]. If I could do anything for you as much as you have done for me , I would do it, but I cannot! Your kindness is too great. And although I am unable to return you anything for all your kindness, yet I can shew my gratitude in one way. I will never fail to pray for you , that God Almighty would bless you abundantly with the Blessings of this life and of that which is to come.

Yours most Truly
Elizabeth Cunningham⁵

Nothing would have satisfied Duncan more than to see his former boarder return to the protection of the Metlakatla flock – not solely for her sake, or that of her children but out of spite against Robert Cunningham, one of the few missionary workers to cross Duncan in the early years. What exacerbated this situation was the fact that Cunningham's business ventures and fledgling community of Port Essington were beginning to bear real fruit – and Cunningham's influence and wealth grew.

Unlike her Aunt Elizabeth's, Odille's marriage was based on affectionate friendship and mutual respect. Morison, a long time member of the Church of England, later became a lay minister as well as, after 1885, a senior manager for Robert Cunningham's business ventures. While Morison was in charge of the fort, Odille was comfortable and competent

in her role as HBC wife. Sometimes, depending on the duties required she was a diplomat, a dignitary and a language interpreter. She did all these tasks with apparent ease and grace at the modest age of seventeen years.

The list of all the ‘visitors’ the couple received at the Morisons’ home at Fort Simpson is long. In the winter of their first year of marriage, they were surprised by the arrival of surveyor and photographer Charles Horetzky. He had traveled across the northern part of British Columbia from Edmonton on one of the earliest western explorations for the proposed transcontinental railway. Morison recounts that shortly before breakfast on a morning in late January of 1873 there was a knock at the door. “Thinking it was one of my cosmopolitan garrison wanting something, I shouted come in, when to my surprise a stranger entered.” Horetzky had left Fort Garry (Winnipeg) the previous summer and Morison was impressed that he had made the journey in less than six months on foot. “He came via Hazelton and Naas (sic) River and stayed with us for some time waiting for the [steamer] Otter to take him south.”⁶ Horetzky wrote that he would always remember the “most cordial welcome ... from that gentleman and his wife, whose kindness and attention I shall never forget.”⁷

Ocean-going trade and business vessels naturally stopped at Fort Simpson as it was the most direct access route across the Hecate Strait. The first missionaries to the Haida on Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) were married couple William Henry and Marion Collison. They arrived at the Metlakatla mission in November of 1873 where they immediately began language classes and to orientate themselves to North Coast mission life. After almost three years of teaching and preaching at Metlakatla, and surrounding villages (including Fort Simpson), the Collisons, with their two small boys, were sent to open a mission to the Haida.

Over the course of their first winter, and what William Collison describes as “a most trying time,” one of the children as well as William had suffered from typhoid. His wife Marion suffered from an undisclosed, “painful ailment.” They decided it was best to

return to the mainland to have it attended to. They travelled with Haida Masset Eagle chief Weah, and some of his family members.

Weah had formed a cordial relationship with the missionary couple after William Collison had, as he described, “attended [Weah’s] aged mother, who could not have been far short of one hundred years old when she died.”⁸ After a rough crossing they stopped at Fort Simpson and “finding no surgical aid available,...[Collison] was compelled to perform a small operation, under which [his] wife fell away in a faint, but instant relief was afforded and a good night’s rest regained. Mr. and Mrs. Charles F. Morrison, who were then in charge of the fort, showed us every kindness, and under the care of this lady my wife rapidly regained strength and spirits.”⁹

Once again we have the confirmation of not only hospitality but also medical assistance provided by Odille and most likely her mother as well. Another interesting fact about this meeting was the budding relationship between Odille’s mother Mary Curtis and Masset chief Weah, for in July of 1879 they married in the Anglican church in Metlakatla. Her age was given as 50 and he was 55, and the minister who presided over the service was William Henry Collison who had been ordained the previous winter. The Collisons became lifelong friends of the Morisons and, according to the baptismal records,¹⁰ Odille was godmother to one of their children. When the Collisons were on furlough in 1894 the Morisons filled in at the mission at Kincolith.

In 1876 more significant visitors came to Fort Simpson. The Canadian Governor General and his wife, Lord and Lady Dufferin, stopped by after spending a few days at Metlakatla. While Fort Simpson may have paled by comparison, Charles Morison, who was away on business, recounts how Odille as “the Lady of the Fort” stepped up to task as both hostess and interpreter. Odille “did the honors decorating the old fort very prettily for the occasion, Lord Dufferin expressed much pleasure at his reception and repeatedly expressed his thanks to the writer’s wife for her attentions.”¹¹ Oddly enough Morison does not include Emma Crosby’s contribution to the success of this venture, but Lord

Dufferin wrote in his journal, “All the men officials absent, but we were received by Mrs. Morrison, of the HBCo. and Mrs. Crosby, the wife of the Methodist minister.”¹²

The most insightful collection of primary sources regarding the Morisons’ household in those early days is the letters written by Methodist missionary wife Emma Crosby who was married to Thomas Crosby. Although Morison was raised in the Anglican Church in Britain and Odille was raised in the mission village of Metlakatla, we cannot assume that they only supported the Church of England. Charles wrote that he felt the “large village of Fort Simpson was entirely neglected by the Anglicans.”¹³

When a Tsimishian woman known as Diex requested the Methodists send missionaries to Fort Simpson in the early 1870s, the Morisons were also enthusiastic. They helped raise money for the church and provided accommodation in their own home for first the missionary teacher Mr. Tate, and later for Emma and Thomas Crosby who arrived in the summer of 1874. Thanks to the detailed and vivid letters Emma Crosby sent to her family in Ontario, researchers have wealth of insight into the life of a missionary wife. A large part of her early years at Fort Simpson feature her neighbours and then close friends, Charles and Odille Morison.

In her first letter home to her mother dated July 1st 1874, Emma Crosby described her first impressions of the Fort in general – and the Morisons in particular. “This Mr.[Charles] Morrison is very agreeable and gentlemanly, and very friendly to our mission. His wife is a half-breed, but a sweet pretty little woman, very quiet. She was educated to some extent at that English Church Mission near by [at Metlakatla] and is really a nice ladylike woman.” Emma’s first impression is defined in racial terms. Odille was a “half-breed” which was of course a negative. Emma then qualified the negative with a “but” when she added Odille was also “pretty and sweet.” Emma commented on their accommodations and the interesting hybrid existence of the Morison household. Their way of living was “half aristocratic, half uncivilized, everything seems to be left to the Indian servants who are not very methodical.”¹⁴

Within a month Emma Crosby was socializing with the “kind” Mrs. Morison who supplied them with fresh milk as well as other garden goodies. They were good neighbours, “as kind and as friendly as can be. They often run in the evening and sit a while with us & we always enjoy their visits. They were here for tea the other evening and also Mrs. M’s mother a fine intelligent Indian woman who is quite a celebrated nurse about here.”¹⁵ In all their visits, and all their evening tea time chats, I wonder what they actually talked about. No doubt the comings and goings at the fort may have interested both women, as well as well being of their children. Emma’s multitude of projects (particularly the school) and the continuous need for financial support must have preoccupied her thoughts. We will likely never know if Emma Crosby shared these things with Odille Morison.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Odille’s mother Mary acted as midwife for Emma Crosby in the birth of at least her first three babies. She also assisted Thomas Crosby’s early visits to Metlakatla by providing him with a place to stay. “Thomas [Crosby] had to be away a night & stayed in the house of Mrs. Morrison’s mother – of course the hospitalities of the Mission house were not offered.”¹⁶ William Duncan must have been incensed by Mary Curtis’ hospitality, as much as he would have been upset by Odille’s marriage to Charles Morison.

There is actually no evidence, that despite her long affiliation and even leadership in the Metlakatla community, Mary Curtis ever converted through Duncan’s efforts alone. There is a church register dated January 13th of 1878 which indicates that both Odille and Mary were “accepted in to the church” by visiting Bishop William Bompas. The note beside their respective entries states they were “previously baptized by [the] Catholic priest in Victoria.” This is certainly true for Odille and her brother Peter, who were baptized in January of 1860, but a baptism record for Mary cannot be verified given the paucity of the Catholic records since First Nations names were often not included. Mary had a much wider understanding of mission (or at least Anglican) hierarchy and politics and was drawn to the symbolic and authoritative structures (as with the Catholic faith) rather than to Duncan’s autocratic style and dogmatic evangelical presentation.

As time progressed Odille and Emma appear to have established a relationship which was friendly, but not extremely close. We cannot know what Odille thought of Emma – essentially the first white woman she had spent any significant time with. Early on Emma relies on Odille’s personal connection and language abilities, but at times dismisses her efforts as insufficient to the task. In November of 1874 Emma (at seven months pregnant) had huge plans to make their first Christmas at Fort Simpson one which everyone would remember. She wrote to her mother “there is so much work I want to do... If I can only get the time – a great part of the work & all the direction I shall have to do myself. Mrs. Morrison will help me though, but then she has no idea at all of such work.”¹⁷ This statement is ironic as “all the work” which Emma complains she will do by herself was actually carried out by others, since two days before Christmas, Emma went into early labour. Mary Curtis was the midwife and Odille assisted in the delivery of Emma’s first child.

Odille had a total of three children during her years at Fort Simpson. None survived past the age of six. Five year old Dolly died in the fall of 1878 and the two others, Irene aged two and a newborn named Eleanor, died in April of 1879 within a few weeks of each other. The following October, the *Colonist* newspaper based in Victoria ran the following notice: “Within a brief space of time Mr CF Morison, of Fort Simpson, has lost all his children, three in number, who died of that dread disease diphtheria.” The loss must have been devastating to Odille and Charles and their respective extended families.

Although Emma Crosby does not mention the death of the Morison children in her letters she does explain that Charles was relocated to a more isolated HBC post in the spring of 1877 and that Odille, her mother and brother were to remain in Fort Simpson. “We are sorry to find that a change is to be made in the management of the H.B. Company store here, Mr. Morrison is to be removed to an out of the way place down the coast ... Mr. and Mrs. Morrison have been a real help to us and have had, I think, a very good influence on the Indians. Mrs. M. has improved wonderfully. Her house is kept as nicely as anyone’s needs to be and they live like people of refinement and good taste.” She

concluded that was to be a temporary arrangement until Morison would return to “carry on [in] business for himself.”¹⁸

About this time Charles Morison had invested in a business venture with George Williscroft and another man named Ebberts. They started the Georgetown sawmill, one of the first sawmills on the North Coast, just eight kilometres south of Fort Simpson. Even though demand for lumber was strong at the fort and in the construction of the burgeoning fish processing industries, daughter Vicky (Morison) Aldous-Sims stated the business did not do well.

All of these factors - death of children, marriage of Mary Curtis to Haida Chief Weah and business strife - may have motivated the Morisons to pack up and leave the North Coast behind. Perhaps they thought making a new start in the larger urban setting would diminish the recent emotional and financial setbacks of the late 1870s. Their move to Victoria which was based on optimism must have been met with disappointment, as the town had changed radically in a few short years. Where once mixed race couples were the norm, the Morisons found a new set of social circumstances which required adaptation and tolerance – little of which was forthcoming from the white Victorian elite.

Chapter 5

¹ Charles Morison, *Reminiscences*, p.70.

² Murray, 96,-97.

³ Adele Perry, "The Autocracy of Love," 269

⁴ Thanks to Charlynn Toews for this suggestion (January 2008)

⁵ Duncan Papers, UBC microfilm.

⁶ Morison, 75-76

⁷ Charles Horetzky, *Canada on the Pacific: Being An Account of A Journey from Edmonton to the Pacific by The Peace River Valley and of A Winter Voyage Along the Western Coast of the Dominion*. (Montreal: Dawson Brothers Publishers, 1874),147.

⁸ William Henry Collison, (ed. C.Lillard) *In the Wake of the War Canoe*, 94-95

⁹ Collison, 96.

¹⁰ Diocesan Archives of New Caledonia

¹¹ Morison, 76

¹² Hare and Barman, 115.

¹³ Morison, 75.

¹⁴ Hare and Barman, 46-47.

¹⁵ 52.

¹⁶ 72.

¹⁷ 60.

¹⁸ 126

Chapter 6 Transitions and Translations

The life which Odille had enjoyed on the North Coast was certainly diminished by the loss of her three little daughters. There must have been even more adjustments to life in the capital city of Victoria. Even though they most surely had traveled to Victoria over the years, the social position which they had established and maintained at Fort Simpson (now Port Simpson) was no longer a viable financial reality as Morison was had resigned from the Hudson's Bay Company.

In the early days of Fort Victoria, several of the mixed race 'ruling' families such as the Douglasses, Works, Todds and McNeills were considered the social elite. As Adele Perry discusses, during the late 1850s and 1860s there was a definite social shift in colonial British Columbia away from the fur trade bourgeoisie. "Their right to rule was constantly contested by a self-styled 'reform' group'...who had ties to the gold and merchant economy and firm belief in the colony's potential as an agricultural, white settler society."¹ Much of Anglo and American immigrant populations (including the various church and missionary factions) tried to realign the colonial structures in the newly established province to regulate Aboriginal populations and even the families with mixed race.

While living in Fort Simpson the Morisons had been moderately insulated from the overt racism which had become part of the mainstream society as it struggled to redefine itself as a colonial and civilized (thus superior) social entity. Geographer Cole Harris writes about the colonial process which not only isolated Aboriginal people, but created segregated communities of various kinds, including those of Chinese and Asian descent and whites themselves. "Boundaries became exceedingly important: the boundary of a colony (later of Canada) could be used to exclude immigrants, and, internally, boundaries could be used to separate those who were welcome because they were civilized, and those who had to be put up with because they were not. In drawing these latter boundaries, it could easily seem a moral duty, from the perspective of the civilized, to be as parsimonious as possible with the uncivilized."² In the earlier times of Odille's

childhood these boundaries were much more fluid in the varied ethnic makeup and languages of Fort Simpson.³

It is not clear where, on this constructed and arbitrary civilization scale, the Morisons positioned themselves. There were some major adjustments in their domestic arrangements and perhaps even with whom they socialized. Given Odille's and Charles' religious convictions, I assume they would have been active members of a church community in Victoria.

Emma Crosby commented that the Morisons had servants while they lived at Fort Simpson – at least a cook and a 'house boy.'⁴ According to the 1881 census, the "Morrison" household in Victoria consisted of Charles Morison, aged 36, Odille aged 25, her brother Peter Quintal aged 28, and their cousin John Cunningham (son of Elizabeth and Robert Cunningham) aged 12. The only wage earner was Charles Morison and there were not other lodgers or domestic servants listed.

Morison's occupation is listed as "office clerk" and his employer is not given. He had left the Hudson's Bay Company employment sometime in 1879. It is interesting that Odille's brother was living with them, yet no occupation is given. It is hard to imagine the vibrant and entrepreneurial nature which Peter Quintal exemplified was not contributing to the family income. Peter Quintal, as it turns out, did not report a wage because he was terminally ill. The notice in the Victoria newspaper read, "Died at Victoria, British Columbia Nov. 12th 1881, after a long illness, Peter Quintall, native of Fort Simpson, aged 28. Funeral from later residence, Princess St."⁵

Twelve year old John Cunningham was living with the Morisons while attending school in Victoria. Although we know very little of John Cunningham, he must have added some measure of cheerfulness to an otherwise dreary household. Charles Morison expressed great sadness that John Cunningham died before the age of twenty. John was "a most amiable lad [who] was lost in a schooner shipwreck off the Queen Charlotte Islands."⁶

The census of 1881 included ethnic identity as a category. The paternal ‘race’ of the father was obviously the determining factor as Charles Morison was listed as British: Odille and her brother Peter were considered ‘French’ and John Cunningham was Irish – like his father before him. Of course researchers must be cautious when using census material as censuses themselves are “constructions of the national population created by individuals and groups within the state” and a particular point in history. Many other factors can also dictate the census outcomes, including language barriers and how the questions are asked and interpreted.⁷ While the Morison’s 1881 census responses were ‘true,’ the census information did not accurately reflect the all variables of mixed race families where the mother was of a differing ethnic or racial background than the father.

In the summer of 1882, Odille was pregnant with her fourth child and with Peter’s death the Morisons were motivated to return to the North Coast. The intervening years had not been easy ones at the mission at Metlakatla. William Duncan and the Anglican bishop William Ridley fought over everything from church property to theology but mostly over support from followers. This naturally caused extreme friction and strife within the community and was a ready-made campaign for Charles and Odille. Their daughter Vicky later described her parents as “great warriors for the Church of England” who decidedly supported the Bishop’s position over “all the distortions” which she attributed to Duncan and his supporters.⁸ Another important factor was that, unlike William Duncan, Bishop William Ridley had a female partner in the missionary venture: his wife Jane Ridley. She was extremely well regarded in the community and was a very compassionate and competent woman.

In March of 1883 the Morison family began to grow again as they welcomed baby Helen Miranda who was born at Metlakatla. Odille’s mother Mary, who had married the Eagle Haida chief from Masset in 1879, also returned to Metlakatla later in 1883 after the death of her husband.⁹

The strife and animosity which had simmered for years between not only between the factions at Metlakatla but also with the Methodists at Port Simpson were most potent in the mid 1880s. Politics and religion were constant points of frustration for the Tsimshian as the provincial and federal governments ignored their claim to lands and title. It was at this time that Odille was most productive with renewed confidence and purpose as there was a significant demand for her skills as a cultural intermediary by religious establishments, government officials and later visiting scholars. This role of intermediary may have ingratiated her into the new missionary establishment, but in some ways separated her from the larger Tsimshian community.

Odille's marriage to a white man certainly did not help the situation, although this was not evident when Morison was in charge of the fort in the 1870s. There was no middle ground to be found for anyone in the Metlakatla community between Duncan and Ridley but there were also new religious factions appearing at Port Simpson. It is naive and ethnocentric to view the Tsimshian community as a cohesive group pre- and post contact. Tribal alliances and family lineage connections still played a huge part in the social makeup despite all missionary attempts to impose the Victorian quasi-democratic principles in the highly stratified society.

Odille once again became a high profile member of the Metlakatla community for her language expertise. One of her first assignments as a translator, and the work of which she was most proud, was a series of translations of several books from the New Testament, as well as the Anglican prayer book from English to the language of the Coast Tsimshian. Bishop Ridley may have instigated the project, but it is obvious from most sources that the actual work was conducted by Odille alone. I do not know if this was work that she was contracted to do or if it was expected that she would volunteer her services. Regardless, Ridley did not recognize her efforts publicly and this proved to be a sore spot for both Odille and Charles. Charles wrote:

It was during his [Ridley's] tenure that the great translation of the Anglican Prayer Book was made into the Tsimpsean dialect, all the services excepting the Psalms being translated, also the Gospels, Epistles and Collects. This work was done by Mrs. Charles F. Morison, [Odille] long a school teacher for the C.M.S., and residing at the time in Metlakatla, it was a wonderful work and could

have been accomplished by no other person, the lady in question having a perfect knowledge of both languages. She also translated a number of the hymns and short stories into the vernacular. These translations are used to this day but not in her name. It is only doing justice that it should be known who made the translations.¹⁰

Years later Odille herself would write on the back of a photograph of diocesan staff that she “was due credit for the translations of the prayer book much of the bible & many hymns into the Tsimpshean language.”¹¹ It was obviously an important matter to the Morison family, so why did the Bishop not recognize, or in the very least identify her by name, regarding the published work? From what I have read of Ridley it simply did not cross his mind that a public ‘thank you’ would ever have been required. In many cases Ridley omitted information from his letters home to England regarding all the work done by others in the diocese. As representative head of the Anglican Church in northern BC Ridley simply took credit for all work done within it. Even Rev. William Henry Collison felt compelled to mention that Ridley did not recognize Collison’s role in setting up the first Anglican mission in Hazelton.¹² This exchange shows that Ridley’s negligence was not just reserved for women or based solely on imperial notations of race and ability. He was simply a “snobbish”,¹³ self indulgent man who assumed that his title, class, and education trumped the work of others.

Odille did not just translate, she was called upon several times to act as an interpreter during judicial and governmental hearings. One early occasion was during the deputation of Church Mission Society officials as they investigated the allegations which Bishop Ridley had made against William Duncan. General J.G. Touch and Rev. Blakett stayed at Metlakatla for six weeks. “We obtained the services of Mrs. Odill Morrison, a lady in full sympathy with the Society, and very competent to perform the duty, being in the habit of performing in judicial proceedings. She has assisted the Bishop in the translation of the Gospels and the Prayer-Book, and we have great pleasure in here acknowledging the readiness with which she very kindly placed her services at our disposal throughout our stay in Metlakatla.”¹⁴ It is interesting that they not only recognized her efforts on their behalf as interpreter, but also acknowledged her work with the biblical and prayer book translations.

When discussing the role of translators and interpreters, it is important to note the difference between them: translation most often deals with written word and sources, while interpreters are required to communicate languages most often in real time. Both translating and interpreting require a bilingual fluency and the ability to articulate specific languages as well. An interpreter, however, does not often have the luxury of time to resolve potential communication barriers whereas translators may be able to refer to other sources to verify meaning and context of a particular phrase or word.

Interpreters were considered an integral part of the Tsimshian communities in pre-contact times. Anthropologist Jim McDonald indicates special “foreign” language training was required as the Tsimshian did not readily understand the neighbouring First Nations languages which often belonged to an entirely different language family. In the last one hundred and fifty years, “new language skills were acquired to interact with the new nationalities encountered in the colonial period, but the need for foreign languages fit into the older pattern.”¹⁵

The language of Coast Tsimshian people is Sm’algyax and, as with all First Nations languages in what is now British Columbia, there was not a written form prior to contact. While carved symbols, images, artwork and even geographic formations held significance and cultural meaning, a written form of the oral language did not exist. Obviously then the role of the translator (or one who transposes the written word) did not exist prior to arrival of the missionaries. From the 1860s onward, interpreters who could also read and write in the language of the colonizers were an added feature.

Historian Susan Neylan has suggested that native intermediaries wielded great power, sometimes at the expense of the missionary, as they translated complex theological and moral issues through the filters of their cultural experience. Words, gestures and tone were important but from the congregation’s perspective, the role of the language expert as described above by Jim McDonald was equally significant as these individuals often were seen as endowed with special abilities. “Missionaries might have been oblivious to just how much control their assistants had over the form and content of their

proselytizing. ... This interpreting of both the Word and the missionary for Native peoples enable an indigenous expression of Christianity rarely acknowledged in the historical literature.”¹⁶

Odille was one such individual who from early in her life was both writing and conversing in English and acting as the voice of the community. It seems, however, that in the ten intervening years, while she was living in Fort Simpson and then Victoria, the demand for language skills had changed in the Metlakatla community as more people could read and write English. Under the Bishop’s terms all missionaries on the North Coast had to be proficient in the language of the people before they were sent to preach. Perhaps Ridley was concerned about the Native converts getting away from what was perceived as Anglican doctrine because of the use of language interpreters. In fact, Odille, former school teacher, became the language instructor for missionary newcomers as described by Helen Dallain, niece of the Indian agent stationed at Metlakatla.

When the Missionaries came out first they were usually single men, most of them engaged to someone in the old land and the Bishop made it a rule that they must be able to preach in Tsimpshean before they could send for their bride-to-be. It was a very clever idea and a great incentive to study and Mrs. Morison was their teacher and did a lot of translating for them as she understood and spoke one language as well as the other and was always the interpreter chosen for important proceedings for both the Church and State[.] In fact I don’t know how either party could have got on without her and Mr. Morison was always on hand to help out with church services.¹⁷

Odille facilitated the language requirements of the Anglican missionaries, and was even paid for her services, but it is not known to what degree she may have instructed them in cultural protocols. Even if she had passed on this information, it does not mean that the newcomers with an energized, evangelizing Victorian agenda would have heeded the subtleties of language let alone important Tsimshian information about crests, hereditary title and matrilineal descent and inheritance.

The Bishop and his supporters could not resolve their differences with William Duncan, who had appealed to the United States after finding no solace from the provincial or federal Canadian governments. Former missionary William Duncan and over 700 Tsimshian made the move in early fall of 1887 to their new community, ‘New

Metlakatla' located on Annette Island in Alaska. We cannot know how Odille felt about this, but surely her exposure to different theological perspectives in Fort Simpson and in Victoria would have radically altered her adolescent reliance on William Duncan. Odille was a grown woman who had enough power in her own right to make up her own mind on faith matters.

The strong Anglican presence and the burgeoning white bureaucracy centred at Metlakatla, with its schools, hospital and Indian Agent's office, all owed their existence to William Duncan's efforts to create the model English town. Metlakatla truly was, now, representative of late Victorian England, but minus a large part of its Tsimshian population. All of Odille's extended family remained, including her mother Mary Weah and her Uncle Charles Ryan and his family.

It appears that Odille's affiliation with the Metlakatla community put her on the outside of the Methodists at Port Simpson, a congregation in which she once took an active part. In the late 1880s Thomas Crosby came under fire from various levels of government for his support of First Nations land claims. In response, the Methodist Missionary Society held an inquiry with proceedings in Port Simpson. The Morisons were now members of Metlakatla, the regional Anglican and government headquarters. The Methodist Tsimshian assumed that the surveyors were biased when they hired Odille as an interpreter and that the surveyors would cheat the Port Simpson Methodists out of a large portion of the proposed reserve.

In an affidavit sworn by Tsimshian Lewis Gosnell, it was reported how the people now perceived Odille Morison as an outsider. A few years earlier, the Government commissioners Cornwall and Planta also "called at Metlakahtla [sic] for an interpreter, and brought her up the coast, and to all the places to which they went. They would not change her when our people protested against it. Our people wished to have our own Interpreter, but because Mrs. Morison was of the Church of England, she was kept in employ. Thus we see they prefer one Church to another."¹⁸ The interpreter who acted on Gosnell's behalf was none other than Methodist missionary and former friend of the

Morisons, Thomas Crosby. In another part of the letter Crosby refers to Odille Morison as the “Bishop’s *paid* interpreter,” which was meant as no less than an insult to Odille. The implication is of course that the Anglicans had means to buy the support of the Metlakatla converts. This of course does not dismiss the concerns raised by the Port Simpson people, but it amply illustrates how religious denomination expressed the political factions of the coast Tsimshian.

It is impossible to tell how Odille was affected by this reception at Port Simpson. For someone who valued honesty and integrity, this questioning of her allegiances must have upset her a great deal. There are few records of her acting as official interpreter after this, and none in Simpson. As we will see in the next chapter, Odille found a new and invigorating outlet for her cultural knowledge as an early language teacher and Tsmishian contact for young anthropologist Franz Boas. It is Odille’s work for Boas and the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893 which remains her greatest cultural legacy.

Chapter 6

¹ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender Race and the Making of British Columbia 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 16.

² Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia, Essays on Colonialism and Geographic Change in British Columbia*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 268

³ See chapter 1

⁴ See chapter 5

⁵ *The Colonist*, Nov.26, 1881.

⁶ Morison, '48A'

⁷ Eric Sager and Peter Baskerville, "Introduction" in *Household Counts: Canadian Households and Families in 1901* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 4.

⁸ Vicky (Morison) Aldous-Sims, interview

⁹ A detailed description of the Weah's (sic) death and the missionary responses to it appear in A.E. Harrison's *The Hydah Mission Queen Charlotte Island: An Account of the Mission and the People With a Descriptive Letter from Rev. Charles Harrison* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1885). Harrison describes how his wife was recovering from the birth to a baby girl and how none of the women would see attend her while they were looking after, then mourning Weah in October of 1883. Given Mary Weah's profession as a midwife it is interesting to see how First Nations protocols (as Weah's spouse), took precedence over the birth of a white child. The newborn girl also died, much to the anger and grief of missionary Harrison.

¹⁰ Morison, 78.

¹¹ Photograph courtesy of Archives of the Diocese of Caledonia (p-994-018-19-166)

¹² Collison, 208, n88.

¹³ Vicky Morison was very careful not to say anything negative about the Riddleys but did mention her brother had called Bishop Ridley a "snob." Vicky (Morison) Aldous-Sims interview (winter 1962).

¹⁴ General Touch and Rev. W.R. Blackett, *Report of the Deputation to Metlakatla*, (London: Church Missionary Society, 1886), 3.

¹⁵ James McDonald, *People of the Robin*, 14-15

¹⁶ Susan Neylan, 142-43.

¹⁷ Helen Dallain, *What I Remember*. The BC Centennial Anthology Committee 1958 (fonds), BC Archives, CR-2080

¹⁸ "Affidavit of Lewis Gosnell," in *Letter From the Methodist Missionary Society to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs respecting the British Columbia Troubles* (Toronto: Methodist Church Missionary Society, 1889) 50.

Chapter 7 *Odille the Ethnographer*

Odille Morison was the first woman of Tsimshian background to make significant ethnographic contributions to the new academic study of anthropology. She had played a minor role in an early collecting effort of the 1870s in conjunction with her husband Charles and Methodist missionary Thomas Crosby. This first commission was made by American Thomas Swan, who was, according to historian Douglas Cole, “the first [salaried] such collector to operate on the Northwest Coast.”¹ Cole’s research does not enlighten or speculate as to why the Morisons took an active role in collecting activities. It is hard, as we look back at these practices, not to feel unease with the morals, values and motivations, because of the current trends to see all collecting efforts as manifest imperialism.

There is an assumption that only white male colonizers (whether Indian Agents, missionaries or entrepreneurs) took an active part in wheeling and dealing of ceremonial and cultural objects. Even the title of Cole’s book *Captured Heritage* implies the outright conquest of the First Nations material culture and a ‘black and white’ evaluation of that activity. Odille’s active role in ethnographic work and the material culture show that these activities, like the missionary agenda, are built on a multitude of variables and cannot be simply reduced to a ‘good/bad,’ ‘black/white’ argument. Odille’s reputation as an established cultural expert and as a language translator and interpreter sets her apart from the majority of other collectors of artifacts. She was sought out by the young German-American anthropologist Franz Boas, first for her language skills but, as Boas soon found out, her cultural contacts and knowledge were of even greater significance.

Boas made his first trip to the North Coast of British Columbia in the summer of 1886. As anthropologist Ronald Rohner writes; “Most nineteenth-century ethnographers obtained their information regarding Indian customs through the employment of selected informants who spoke both English and their native languages. Informants were often recruited by the resident missionary or government official.”²

According to his letter diary, Franz Boas met Bishop William Ridley from Metlakatla in October of 1886 as they were onboard the steamer *Boskowitz*. Later that month Boas described meeting William Duncan for the first time and the strained conditions at Metlakatla.

He [Duncan] is the strangest missionary I have ever met. Besides being a missionary, he owns a large salmon fishery and makes a great deal of money. He is very animated and talks without stopping, more about business matters than anything else. Originally he was a member of the English church, but when Bishop Ridley came to Mextlaqatla [Metlakatla]. . . . Apparently [Duncan's] pride suffered because he was no longer first in the settlement. Since then bitter enmity exists on both sides.

Most Indians follow their old teacher, Duncan. Apparently conditions up there are very unpleasant at present. Instigated by Duncan, the Indians show great opposition to the surveyor who has been sent there to survey the land. People who understand the situation are opposed to Duncan and consider him a great humbug, but he has many friends here in Victoria.³

Given his first impressions of William Duncan, Boas was less likely to seek him out as a source of cultural information. Ridley the scholar would be a more likely candidate and Boas did ask for a “sketch” of the Tsimshian from him.⁴ Despite his early reliance on missionary contacts, Boas did not think much of the missionary project, first because Christian informants refused to work on Sunday, and secondly because he saw the new religion as a barrier to his success in that it tainted the authenticity of traditional stories. He reported one village where “the people have been Christians for a long time, and this stands very much in my way. I hear little about olden times.”⁵

Boas' first recorded contact with Odille Morrison was in June of 1888 upon arrival in Port Essington. Here he was introduced to Robert Cunningham who put him “up in a cabin first,” but later invited him to stay at his residence. “Tsimshian is about the only language spoken in this house, and Mrs Morrison, the interpreter whom I wanted, is also here. I have never had a better opportunity to learn a language; I learned more yesterday than in a week elsewhere. Today I shall try to find out something of the old customs.”⁶

Why was Odille living in Port Essington rather than Metlakatla? Four months previous a tragic canoe accident claimed the life of her Aunt Elizabeth Cunningham, an Anglican minister, Reverend Sheldon, and two Tsimshian. One survivor made it to shore to report

the story. Various missionary reports indicate that the group had traveled by canoe to Port Simpson and other communities, paying pastoral visits along the way. On the return trip, as they neared Essington a sudden gust of wind violently caught the canoe's sail and pried a large crack in the bottom. As water rapidly flowed in, Elizabeth Cunningham apparently stood up, causing weight to shift and capsized the dugout.⁷ One not so flattering account reported years later by Constance Cox suggests that alcohol may have also been a factor as the survivor reported to her that all of the travelers had been drinking in excess.⁸

Elizabeth Cunningham was a point of contact at Port Essington for both the Methodist (and Tsimshian) minister William Henry Pierce and the Anglican clergy. Just as Odille and Charles had looked after John Cunningham while he lived with them in Victoria, naturally Odille (and her children and perhaps her mother Mary) would have remained at Port Essington for as long as necessary after the accident as a support to the Cunninghams.

Boas stayed for close to ten days, and during that time Odille must have made quite an impression. Within the year Odille's first ethnographic composition, a series of Tsimshian proverbs, was published in the fledgling publication, the *Journal of American Folklore*. This was the first such work to be produced by a Tsimshian woman – and she received full credit with her name and the date given as January 1889.⁹ We do not know exactly what Odille thought about the publication, but there is correspondence to suggest that she did not feel the project was complete.

A brief note from Odille to Boas dated December of 1888 is written in Charles Morison's handwriting. "I am sorry to say that I have not been able to get them done yet on account of sickness in my family but will get at them as soon as possible, which will be before long."¹⁰ At that time the term 'sickness' was often used by women when discussing childbirth or pregnancy. Odille's next child John was born in 1890, so perhaps she was ill or there was sickness in the extended family. What is most interesting is that Odille felt obliged to reassure Boas, even though infirmed to write the letter herself. She is also

letting him know that her family life is her major priority but is committed to balancing the two. Her husband Charles Morison is acting as her secretary and writing these letters on her behalf – although she does sign the document. Truly their marriage was a partnership, each recognizing the strengths and abilities of the other without feeling threatened by it.

The next letter, written in Odille's own handwriting, was dated April 22, 1889, four months after the reported illness.

I enclose what you wanted me to do in Zimpshean, a sheet of it (No. 16) I have not done as I think you must have sent it accidentally if not please return it and it shall be done. With kind regards, as usual in haste, Yours truly O. Morison

PS, Boat just coming in and only stays a few minutes, OM.

It is impossible to figure out exactly what happened without a complete copy of all the correspondence, but brief as this note is, it suggests that Odille felt something was lacking in her work. She obviously felt time pressures. With the boat departing it was imperative to send off what she had.

By June of 1891, Franz Boas was working on the ethnography exhibits for the Chicago World's Fair. Boas was developing a reputation for detailed professionalism but also as a bit of a trouble maker. He was critical of curatorial practice of organizing cultural artifacts by use and purpose rather than by geography, and more preferably by language and national context.¹¹ Boas was arguably more holistic in his approach – encouraging a wider series of questions about not only the use of objects but also how they worked in conjunction with philosophical and mythical context of any given group of peoples.

The prevailing attitude held by most non-native individuals was that coast First Nations, as with all indigenous peoples, were a 'dying race.' As missionaries were saving souls, it was reasoned that primitive societies would be steamrolled by more advanced civilizations through the grand Victorian dream of "progress." Progress, in fact, was the theme of the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893, so naturally the design of ethnographic exhibits and cultural displays reflected this.

Franz Boas sent a letter to Odille Morison requesting her expertise once again in June of 1891. First he wrote that he was “very anxious to obtain a series of traditions from the Tsimshian in the original language with translations... All traditions referring to ancient beliefs ... most welcome.” The best news of course was that Boas actually had the financial resources and would pay her one hundred dollars for “a good collection of this kind.”¹²

Boas’s second request was a much larger undertaking. He wanted “a good collection of implements formerly used by the Tsimshian” and would “place 200\$ at [her] disposal for obtaining specimens all of which however ought to be accompanied by their full explanation as to their use and meaning.” Both tasks required a huge commitment and, given that Odille had had another child (John in 1890) and was soon to be pregnant one last time, her contributions are nothing short of amazing.

With assistance from Charles and her extended family (including Robert Cunningham) Odille procured “implements,” many of which were sacred and ceremonial objects. Besides the ancient sacred artifacts such as the masks, medicine bags, rattles, and items used in puberty rites, she also commissioned unique objects, such as four miniatures each representing a big house belonging to the four major crests of the Tsimshian. Each model was painted with the designs of the crest and a few even had carved totem poles and house fronts.

Boas’s wish list also included a “totem post with detailed explanation of the meaning of each figure on the same.” He indicated that again he was “willing to pay a good price for it” and Odille took him at his word. We do not know who carved the large pole, but we do know that it was unique amongst all the poles sent to the Chicago. Odille was astute enough to know that all poles are the property of the chief and a particular family lineage. It would have been a major breach of Tsimshian protocol for her to ‘sell’ property that did not belong to her family. Odille must have interpreted the importance of her collection in terms of representativeness of all Tsimshian rather than simply of one

family or even village, and therefore had a pole carved to reflect this. Sixty years later Canadian ethnologist Marius Barbeau wrote that this ‘all clans’ pole should not be considered “genuine” since it had all Tsimshian crests carved on it.¹³

The Tsimshian display at the 1893 Fair was a small part of a much larger project. Another Aboriginal group, the wakwaka’waka had close ties with Boas for many years and actually sent several people to Chicago World’s Fair as performers. These ‘live performers’ reconstructed a model village onsite on the exhibition grounds. Totem poles were transported from the North Coast and set up in front of the houses facing the water. As historian Paige Raibmon clearly articulates although “Boas hoped the exhibit would foster greater public understanding of a noble, albeit vanishing, Aboriginal culture, government agents and missionaries hoped it would illustrate the need to control, civilize, and Christianize.”¹⁴

There are two separate aspects to Odille’s ethnographic commission: there is the detailed cultural description of all material objects she collected (close to 120 separate items), and the detailed explanation of “ancient traditions.”¹⁵ Although the material reveals much about Odille’s cultural knowledge, the tone and phrasing also resonate with Odille’s Christian faith. At times Odille distances herself from Aboriginal identity with third person perspective, (i.e.) “the Tzimshians” and she interjects personal perspective – as a witness to certain events and opinions. “Though some of the Indians are nearly civilized they still keep the crest up: although in some rare instances, to which I have been an eye witness, it has been broken, causing the utmost consternation among the Indians.” And again when describing the chiefs and secret societies she slips in her own personal opinion.

Each trumpet belonging to one society has its own particular sound and is known by everybody. Of course the outsiders never dreamt that they were trumpets, all implicitly believed that they were voices from Heaven, and when they once joined they vowed never to reveal the secret... Therefore, the chiefs I think were the greatest deceivers.

The material Odille produced is informative apart from this present discussion which focuses on Odille’s life story rather than the Tsimshian people. Her cultural renderings

were coloured by her experiences, and what she valued most of the culture namely traditions of hospitality, social organization, matrilineal and familial obligation and the well-being of individuals through the crest system. She made an effort to honour these in her own life with her family as we will see in the final chapter.

Chapter 7

¹ Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1985), 23.

² Ronald P. Rohner, *The Ethnography of Franz Boas: Letters and Diaries of Franz Boas Written on the Northwest Coast from 1886 to 1931* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), xxviii.

³ Rohner, 48.

⁴ 70.

⁵ 100.

⁶ 93.

⁷ See Collison, 205.

⁸ Constance Cox interview, Imbert Orchard Collection, (1958) BC Archives, T313:0004

⁹ Original *Proverbs* document is attached as appendix A, another version appears in Ken Campbell's *Persistence and Change*, 66-69. Please note this version includes revisions and further suggestions made by William Beynon in consultation with elders after Odille's death in 1933.

¹⁰ Letter of Odille Morrison to Franz Boas, December 8, 1888, Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia P.A.

¹¹ Douglas Cole, 114-16.

¹² Letter Franz Boas to Mrs. O. Morison, June 27, 1891. Aldous Family Collection. Only one page of this document survives.

¹³ Marius Barbeau, *Totem Poles According to Location*, Vol. 2 (Ottawa: Department of Resource Development, National Museum of Civilization, 1950), 460-1.

¹⁴ Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter From the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 45

¹⁵ After a detailed search, I contacted the Chicago Field Museum in 2004 to see if they had any documentary material available. Thanks in large part to the researcher Isobel Tovar (now in Denver) these documents are included as appendix B.



**Odille Morison and her children (Vicky and Helen) Circa 1890
BC Archives (photo G-05588)**

Chapter 8 Odille's Heart

While we gain much insight into Odille's cultural and spiritual world views from her ethnographic work for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, her greatest legacy may have come from her role as a wife, mother and friend to others. The following childhood memory of E.A. Harris is illustrative: "When my school days began in 1914, I occasionally dropped in to see Mrs. Morison, who would give me a large piece of cake and tell me interesting stories from the many native legends she remembered."¹ Odille was approachable and engaging regardless of the age or circumstance of others.

Between 1895 and 1915 Odille, Charles and their children, Helen, Vicky, John and George lived primarily in Hazelton and Port Essington, but also spent a great deal of time in Metlakatla for the children's schooling and to visit Odille's aging Tsimshian relations. Oral histories of her children John and Vicky, recorded by Imbert Orchard in the early 1960s, provide us with family stories. Personal letters sent to Odille during this period show that she was certainly able to bridge cultural divisions. Letters from her in-laws in England as well as the female missionary friends speak of a close relationship over many years.

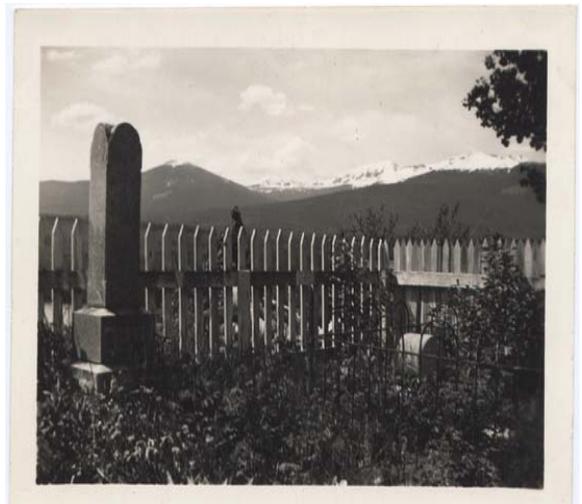
Vicky's earliest memories were of the first trip up the Skeena in September of 1894. The children and Odille traveled up by canoe; Charles Morison had gone up ahead. Vicky said that the canoes, with a crew were mostly Tsimshian men, and were hired at Port Essington by Robert Cunningham. Not only did the crew members paddle, pole and pull the canoe, (with tow lines) but they also took great care in the comfort of their passengers, and set up a canvas cover to keep out the wind and rain. After the crew paddled all day then "pitched the tent, built the fire then cooked" all the meals for passengers. Vicky said she burst into tears the first time she saw these men jump into the cold Skeena River to tow the canoe through the shallow water. "I had never seen anything like it, you know. I thought they would drown in that icy cold water, but that was how they pulled the canoe." The crew members would sing as they paddled and then knock the sides of the canoe with their paddles to keep time. "They had their own songs... and paddled in rhythm... It was absolutely beautiful to listen and watch them."

Vicky also remembered how much fun the children had on the return trip when they “ran the rapids.” It was a constant worry for Odille. The children “would all laugh, ‘Oh Mother’s face is turning white.’ And she would say ‘You just wait until you are responsible and have a family – your faces will turn white too’ – but we thought it was great fun.”

During the Klondike gold rush of 1898, fifteen year old Helen Morison, Vicky’s elder sister, came up with the idea to sell bread to the overland gold seekers passing through Hazelton. Even though Charles and Odille did not support the idea, Helen was “all about business” and the girls managed to get a sack of flour from Mr. Sargent, a local store keeper, and a lesson in making bread from the wife of local Anglican missionary, Mrs. Field. The sisters would get up at “five A.M. before the Chinese cook” to make the bread for that day and charged 25 cents a loaf. Fresh-baked bread was a real treat for some of these travelers and the girls “couldn’t bake bread fast enough.” By the end of the summer the girls had a nice profit, and bought small gifts for Mr. Sargent and Mrs. Field for their help. Vicky added that her parents received nothing since they did not encourage the girls in any way.

Vicky remembered the winter sleigh rides and skating parties, huckleberry picking and all the wonderful personalities: the miners who baked cookies for the children, and Chinese servants and miners who gave extravagant gifts during New Year’s celebrations and also the ‘working’ women from Two Mile, which was considered the ‘red light district’ – only without lights.

During this period, the youngest son, affectionately known as Charlie, died suddenly in September 1904 at the age of twelve of what was later described as a form of food poisoning although the official death certificate states cause of death as



**“Final resting place” of Charlie Morison. (1904) and Helen (Morison) Sealy (1912)
Aldous Family Collection**

“gastric fever-- two weeks duration.”² Medical missionary Dr. H.C. Wrinch had begun to practice in Hazelton as a Methodist missionary medical doctor, but it appears that he was unable to get to Charlie in time.

On another occasion, Vicky volunteered to look after a newborn infant whose mother had died during childbirth. The baby’s relations lived in Vancouver and when physician Dr. Wrinch asked Odille if she would tend to the child she replied, “No” because she did not want anything to go wrong when the baby was in her care. Vicky, however, volunteered to take care of it, and reported that “everyone in the town” rallied to look after the baby. Even one of the ‘professional’ ladies took a keen interest and stopped by one afternoon. She came to the Morison’s door asking to see the infant. She was welcomed in and was invited to hold the child. The woman declined but put two silver dollars in the baby’s “tiny fist” when she left.

Regarding the issue of social boundaries, the Morisons were very class conscious when it came to the ‘white’ community in Hazelton and viewed the local First Nations (Gitksan and Wets’wet’en in nearby Hagwilget) as being less “civilized than the coast people.” Vicky expressed the view that her family was considered “big toads in a small puddle,” and as children they would sneak out and watch the shamans and chiefs perform their ceremonies through the cracks in boards of the longhouse walls. Vicky said that her parents were very strict, but the children seemed to have a lot of freedom to roam. The Morison children would have been in trouble from their parents if they had been caught even though Odille most surely witnessed similar sacred ceremonies as a child in Fort Simpson.

While we do not have any direct written record of Odille’s relationship with her Tsimshian extended family, it appears that was a main support mechanism throughout her life. One source indicates that her grandmother Lydia Ryan actually lived to be 100 years old³ and her own mother Mary Weah lived until her late 80s. Mary was considered a woman of property as she tops the list of Indian property owners on a map of residential lots in Metlakatla created by Indian Agent Charles Todd in 1895. When Mary died in

December of 1917, a detailed report was printed in a local Prince Rupert newspaper celebrating her importance as a midwife and early supporter of William Duncan as well as mentioning her daughter and family. Tsimshian grandmothers and matriarchs must have had great influence on the Morison children, even if they did not talk about it openly, which is consistent with the attitudes of the time.

Odille made choices about cultural affiliations throughout her life and moved between both worlds with some fluidity. She took an energetic role in supporting the local Anglican missionaries Reverend and Mrs. Field and Charles stepped in as lay reader whenever the missionaries were away. Odille was an active player in the missionary project not only as language teacher and translator but also as a chaperone to the children who traveled to Metlakatla to attend school.⁴ Between 1890 and 1905, most of these children boarded at the Ridley home, which was the creation of Jane Ridley the tireless wife of Bishop William Ridley.

Jane Ridley was more popular than her pompous husband as she was “beloved by both whites and Indians.” Charles Morison remembered her as a “lady of rare accomplishments fitted to fill and shine in any sphere in which her lot might be cast, of a charming personality and winning manner she conquered by kindness to who approached her.”⁵ Historian Myra Rutherford characterizes the missionary references to Jane Ridley (particularly of her death in 1896) as “the reconstructed heroine.” It is also unfortunate that, as Rutherford states, “few of her own written records survived.”⁶ No doubt some of the records were lost in the 1901 fire which destroyed the church and rectory at Metlatkatla.

One document, however, which did survive was a personal letter sent from Jane Ridley to Odille in April of an unspecified year, most likely between 1891 and 1894.⁷ The letter was sent from Victoria and includes references to many of the missionaries who were active along the coast and in the diocese. Jane began her letter by reporting that her husband, “the Bishop,” was suffering from a severe case of pneumonia and “not able to attend to business.” She had “a great deal on [her] hands.” Jane Ridley indicated that her

friend, and co-missionary Miss Margaret West, was also in Victoria undergoing medical treatment for her eyes. Jane wrote that she had bought small gifts for the Morison children which Miss West was to take back with her when she returned to Metlatkatla. One of these gifts was a copy of the children's publication "Chatterbox" which Jane Ridley hoped "Nellie" (the eldest daughter Helen) would like. She concluded the letter with "very kind regards and kisses for the children" which certainly indicates a very close friendship.

Odille developed these friendships and maintained important relationships with both her maternal Tsimshian relations and her British Morison in-laws in England. Although she never actually traveled to England, Odille was able to connect with her husband's youngest brother, Whiston, and his wife, as well as with elder sister Olive who never married.

Two letters from the Morison family in England survive. Each sheds light on the changes in social standing of a once prosperous middle class family, and also provide a glimpse of the domestic life of the Morison family in Hazelton. In October of 1905, Odille received a letter from her sister-in law Olive Morison. Olive recounted her "difficulties" to find new accommodations in London, and how their youngest brother "Whissie" visited often even though he had his own troubles in finding steady employment as a civil engineer.⁸

I was expecting every week to have a new address to send to you. It became a perfect worry and anxiety to me, what to do. ...I began to think I should have to stay for the winter where I was and except that it gave Whissie so much trouble and expense to come and see me.... I [have] no one but Whissie. He has been very good in coming round the three Sundays I have been here, (I have not been here quite three weeks), on his way back to evening church. I go to the same church only in the morning; but, I cannot expect him to always come every week. He has been too busy to come any week day to do anything for me having had some work for the County Council on which he may finish about this week. ...

He has been wonderfully fortunate for getting the work he has had; when so many firms are without business; it shews that he is very competent at bridge work.

I am more up near the common then they [Whiston and his wife] are about 15 or 20 minutes walk, but as I declined to going to live with them, I did not feel inclined to settle in a street close by. I regret to pay strangers when it might be helpful to them and it was a great worry to me to think what I should do.

Olive was troubled by the economic woes of her younger brother and yet took comfort in the "kind letters" she received from her relations from northern British Columbia. After

Olive's death in the spring of 1908, Odille received a letter from brother-in-law Whiston Morison in response to her "kind and sympathetic letter with reference to the sad loss of our dear sister Olive." He added that he felt "glad that you were all so fond of her although you never saw her and learnt to appreciate her by your correspondence." He also explained that even though he had invited Olive to live with he and his wife, Olive's "solitary life" (as a spinster) was clearly her "own deliberate choice."

Whiston also let Odille know that their situation had gone from bad to worse and that being unemployed was a constant source of worry. "Unfortunately it is a very bad time for employment, and I have not yet got any work. I hope it will not be much longer before I do. I feel such a 'waster' and our means [savings] keep on leaking away." Times were obviously tough for this once prosperous English family and efforts to keep up appearances must have been an emotional grind – particularly in the face of the more prosperous Morisons in British Columbia.

Olive's 1905 letter also reveals some interesting 'vexations' which were causing Odille and Charles strife in their domestic life. Odille and the children were still at Metlatkatla, and Charles was upriver minding the Cunningham store in Hazelton. Most winter seasons Odille and the children would join him. In 1905 however it appears that eldest daughter Helen (who was twenty-two at the time) had attracted the attentions of a certain 'young man.' And although Olive does not elaborate, she does say "it is sad" that circumstances should keep Odille "from Charlie when you must more than ever want to be by his side."

It is hard to speculate what exactly was going on in Hazelton or if the businessman, rancher and entrepreneur John Sealy was the 'young man' in hot pursuit. Within six weeks of Olive's letter Helen Morison and J.C.K. Sealy were married in late November of 1905.

Helen died at Hazelton in February of 1912. The cause is given as complications (infection) after surgery following an ectopic pregnancy on Helen's official death

certificate. Her sister Vicky recalled that Helen died in “child birth,” which was not accurate as Helen was only in her first trimester. Perhaps it is more indicative of how anticipated (and longed for) a child really was. While the government vital events documents provide us with the facts in black and white, the letters and recorded stories flesh out the emotional fallout experienced by the family.

In autumn 1912 there was reason to celebrate as Vicky was engaged, then married a local surveyor turned real estate broker A.C. (Pat) Aldous. Like many young men in the province Pat Aldous had moved into the area during the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. Aldous was raised in Manitoba, but his parents originated in Prince Edward Island. A notice in the Hazelton newspaper announced “A.C. Aldous is to forsake the ranks of the bachelors. On Oct. 11 ... he will be joined in wedlock to Miss Victoria Morison... The bride-to-be was popular in social and church circles during the long residence of her family in Hazelton and the popular ‘Pat’ is receiving many congratulations on the approaching event.”⁹

The Morisons moved to Port Essington that year and retired to Metlakatla by 1916. Daughter Vicky had two sons by then, Monty and Alan, and shortly afterwards both her brother John and her husband enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces. John was wounded in the winter of 1916-1917 and he wrote to his mother on YMCA letterhead about his treatment, recovery and impressions of England.

Dear Mama,

Jan 16th 1917

A few lines to say how I am. You will notice by the heading that I am now at Epsom and at present am undergoing massage treatment. I can move my arm around quite freely now, I have met several of our boys here so have had a fairly good time, we also have a great deal more freedom here than at the hospital. The weather has been awful since our arrival, slush and mud everywhere. We rise at 6:30 no fires and ice cold water to wash and shave with at a few minutes past seven we go to breakfast, still no fires, parade at 8:30 where we stand in the slush for an hour, the massage cases are then dismissed from parade and it is left to us to keep our appointment with the nurse in charge of our case. My time is 2:30 P.M. so you can see at present I have most of the day to myself.

We are not allowed of camp till 4 P.M. and must be in by 10 o'clock. Epsom the town is about two miles from here, we have been down there two or three times. I expected to see a large town but was disappointed, [to see Prince] Rupert is larger. From our hut we can see the great stand at the finish of the race course, this as you know is where the famous “Derby” is run.

We have either a picture show or concert every night, which we may attend upon payment of 1-2 cents, last night there was a concert party from London, they were splendid. I received your letters where in you say Capt. Trousdale added congratulations. He was our commanding officer in the scout and sniper section; he has since been badly wounded by machine gun fire. I also got very nice letters from Mrs. Field and Mrs. W.H. Pierce.

Thanks for Tracker's address, I am writing to him today. I close for now and will write soon again. With love to all.
Your affectionate son,
JW Morison

During this period, all of the Anglican diocesan amenities once housed at Metlakatla were now centred at Prince Rupert which was the terminus for the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. In his 1919 memoir, Charles Morison lamented the loss of people and influence of the Metlakatla community. Morison, who was over seventy years old by then, wrote "Prince Rupert has done infinite harm to the old historic Mission of Metlatkatla. Some of the older people stand firm, but the rising generation are drifting, drifting, drifting. ... It is most sad to an old timer who has known them for years."¹⁰

The Ridley Home, like everything else, had relocated to Prince Rupert, and it was from there that Margaret West, who lived with another long time missionary worker named Rose Davies, wrote a letter to Odille in the summer of 1918. The tone of the correspondence is light and written with fondness; it is a note of thanks rather than a weighty letter on missionary business.

June 27, 1918

My Dear Mrs. Morison,

Thank you so very much for the lovely bunch of flowers you sent over [from Metlakatla] by Miss Davies. It was such a kind thought and they were so fresh and nice and look lovely in the vases today. Directly after getting Miss Davies some supper, I arrange them in fives vases. The lilac and some of the Canterbury Bells in the sitting room. The peonies and flags in the dining room, the other bells in our bedroom and the beautiful lilies in the hall are nestling in the maple green leave. So everywhere I am greeted by my old friend's kind thought. I do love flowers. Having so much to do, such stiff knees, our flower garden has not had much attention this spring, and just now we only have some small daisies out. Our other things are far behind yours.

It was so pleasant seeing Vicky and Mr. Morison during Synod week. They both looked well. Just now I have the two girls from next door staying with me. Mr. and Mrs. Collison have been to Victoria we expect them back tomorrow. It has been a nice change for her and she really needed it badly. She works hard. Little Joyce went too. I shall be glad to see her back I miss her coming in and out anytime of the day as she does.

I expect you are very glad to have Vicky and the children [Monty and Alan] again. She was telling me that Monty thinks as much of you as of his mother and I expect you return the compliments.

Well I must away and get supper. Wouldn't it be nice if we could live without eating? But possibly having to cook keeps many women out of mischief, so we mustn't complain must we?
With kind regards to Mr. Morison and Love to Vicky and yourself. Also to Johnnie when you write.

Yours affectionately
M. West

While the letter may reveal certain personality traits of Margaret West, two comments are



Charles, Odille, daughter Vicky and her children (circa 1917)
Aldous Family Collection

most significant regarding Odille. First, Margaret referred to her as an old friend and is obviously touched by Odille's "kind thought." Secondly Margaret West stated that Odille's grandson Monty Aldous was attached to Odille as he was his mother Vicky. He and his brother Alan were quite small at this time, aged two and four respectively, and without a doubt Odille was equally bonded to her only grandchildren.

After their son John and son-in-law Pat Aldous returned from the war in Europe, life changed once again for the Morisons. Economic times were not kind to the Aldouses and Alan Aldous took a financial hit after the bankruptcy of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. The small family then moved to Vancouver where A.C. Aldous was killed in the mid 1920's while working as a longshoreman. Vicky and her sons

remained in Vancouver, but spent a great deal of time visiting the Morison grandparents. The Morisons were active in the community of Metlakatla for the rest of their lives. Odille was known to visit the sick and infirm on a daily basis and Charles conducted the church services for the remaining Tsimshian population.

The Morisons celebrated over sixty years of marriage. A clipping from local Prince Rupert newspaper expressed it best: “Few indeed, can look back over sixty years of married life, yet this is true of Mr. and Mrs. Morison of Metlakatla, who[se] anniversary was observed, last Wednesday. Practically all of that time, they have dwelt on this north coast. The record of their years together spans the history of the Skeena, from unbroken wilderness, to the day of modern miracles, now accepted as a matter of course.”¹¹

Clearly Odille and Charles were mates for life. Both served the First Nations and newcomer societies with grace and commitment, but essentially it was their bond together which encouraged their individual pursuits. They both possessed a strong Christian faith even as younger folks left Metlakatla. One of the last pieces which Odille wrote appeared in the April 1929 edition of the regional Anglican church magazine the *Northern British Columbia News*. While the story was mainly about the memories of Matthew Aucland, in many ways it was also an expression of Odille’s own faith and her feelings towards Metlakatla which had been so prominent in her life.

Thus began the dawn of Christianity among the Zimpsheans [sic]. The natives are very fond of their homes, and a stern ordeal awaited the new converts when Mr. Duncan suggested their removal from Fort Simpson to Metlakatla. Hacking and pulling down those old tribal homes, so dear to them all, they constructed each huge rafts. Before putting out to sea, Mr. Duncan asked them to all kneel down on the open beach, whilst he prayed for God's blessing on this new venture, this exodus and that as He had led Moses of old, so He would bless and lead them in their present enterprise. This prayer on the beach came as a surprise to them all, he had never before prayed in the open air, but only in the church, or their own homes.

The new settlement at Metlakatla prospered, and although troublous times have been endured, it is still a place the Zimpsheans love, and any stranger entering the beautiful church could well believe they were at home in old England. The orderly and reverent service, church wardens and sidesmen always ready to hand the visitor a hymn book, the choir ran during the musical portions with wonderful effect, all tell out the praises of our Father's love, and shew the all sufficing of His Grace for all peoples. Services are conducted by native lay-readers and occasionally by the Bishop, but for some years there has been no resident clergyman. The prayer book has been translated into the Zimpshean language, and is always used at morning service, whilst English is the rule in the evening.

Matthew Aucland (previously mentioned as one of Duncan's first converts), in later years, owing to some differences with his comrades, left the church and started the Salvation Army in the village, but towards the end he regretted having done so. One day he had a fainting fit, on recovering he went out to obtain a little fresh air, but not being able to walk very far, he rested on the grass in front of the church, and began to sing ‘Rock of Ages’ in his native tongue (a hymn very dear to all old converts), he. then got up to walk home, and gazing at the church, spoke to get in the following affectionate words: ‘You dear old Church, *you* taught me this hymn and was the first to open my own eyes.’ He told me this himself, so that the seed sown in his heart never failed.

Both Charles and Odille both passed away in the spring of 1933. He had just turned 89 and she was 78. After sixty years of love, hardships, triumphs and faith the Morisons were laid to rest in the cemetery in Prince Rupert across the harbour from their beloved community of Metlakatla.

Seventy-five years have gone by since Odille and Charles Morison passed away. In many ways their lives remained in the shadows until now. I have chosen – or perhaps was compelled -- to tell the story as I have come to understand it. This search and story have been with me for a very long time – and my relationship with Odille continues even though she has long passed out of this world. Our relationship is not over, just entering a new phase.

Odille has taught me many things on this journey as I tried to understand the decisions she made and the way she lived her life. She worked around the obstructions of race, gender and class as much as she could and I see now that she lived her life to the fullest despite the restrictions of her time. Odille was unique and her story and voice are now part of the ever changing narrative of the Northwest Coast.

Chapter 8

¹ E.A. Harris, *Spokeshute: A Skeena River Memory* (Victoria: Orca Book Publishing, 1990), 197.

² Vicky (Morison) Aldous-Sims (interview) and Death certificate, BC vital statistics.04-09- Vol 17, GR2951 #6346.

³ Chris Roth (personal email to author 2006).

⁴ Vicky (Morison) Aldous Sims interview.

⁵ Morison, 77.

⁶ Rutherforddale, 55.

⁷ Letter Jane Ridley to Odille Morison, April 12 (1891-1893?), Aldous Family Collection

⁸ Born 1849 Whiston Powell Morison was the youngest member of the Morison family in Britain. The 1881 census records indicate he was unmarried and his occupation was listed as merchant. By the 1901 census, however, Whiston Morison's occupation was listed as civil engineer, and he was married to a woman seven years his senior. There is no record of any surviving children from this union but his wife may have had children from a previous marriage.

⁹ *Omineca Herald*, September 21, 1912.

¹⁰ Charles Morison, 79.

¹¹ An unidentified Prince Rupert newspaper clipping, August 1932. (Aldous family collection)

Appendices

Appendix A -

'Tsimshian Proverbs' - *Journal of American Folklore*, 1889 compiled by Odille Morison

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Tsimshian Proverbs.

TSIMSHIAN PROVERBS.

The character of a people reflects itself in its proverbs and sayings. They contain the gist of philosophy; they reveal the feelings inspired by the aspect of nature; they prove which historical or legendary events have been most impressive; they show what is considered good, what bad, what is deemed venerable, what ridiculous.

I have collected a few Tsimshian sayings of this description, which are given here with explanations. The Tsimshian call these sayings Shim nahouth nba houit (which means "as the saying is"):

1. It is not good to be too covetous; or, translated more literally, it is not good to have too much one's own way (Whati amth wagulaba wátk).¹ The Taimshian, who highly esteem wealth and prowess, still advise man not to regard solely his own interest, nor to rely solely on his own power and resources.

2. He is punished for leaving because he could not get the crab's claws (Tin wiláiwish da whatúuk halinagou da). The claws are considered the best part of the crab. The saying means: If you are not content with what fate assigns you, and impatiently try to improve your conditions, you will, instead of gaining, lose what you have.

3. A deer, although toothless, may accomplish something (Am-biklith wun da wha wán); i. e. Don't judge a man by his outward appearance.

4. You are not the only one whom Témshim gave intelligence (literally, into whom Témshim put a mind). (Albega kshat runglth nba shagauásh Témshim). Témshim, in Tsimshian mythology, is the creator of man and animals, of sun, water, and fire. He is the grandson of the Deity in heaven, and appears generally as the raven. He corresponds exactly to Yétl of the Tingit of Alaska, and to Oméat of the Kwakiut of Vancouver Island. In general character the raven legend bears a striking similarity to the Lox legends of the Algonquin.

5. Heaven looks down on him (Tikimáizilth Lósh); said of a poor man who is suddenly favored by good fortune. Heaven is considered the Deity, and the man upon whom he casts his eyes is successful in all his undertakings. Therefore it is a common prayer of the Taimshian: O Heaven, look down upon us, your children!

¹ Bishop Ridley's alphabet for the Tsimshian language has been applied in the present paper. The vowels have their conventional sounds, except *w*, which is pronounced as *ia cur*; and *ou*, pronounced as in *rough*; *g* is a deep guttural; *k*, the German *ch* in *Bach*; *lh*, an explosive *l*; *h*, when initial, is equal to *sh*, when terminal, to *h*.

Journal of American Folk-Lore.

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THE GREAT MOSQUITO.

One of the old legends of the Iroquois related to a monster whose diminutive descendants are a torment yet, — the Great Mosquito. The story is very simply told in David Cusick's "History of the Six Nations," and is here quoted verbatim: —

"About this time a great mosquito invaded the fort Onondaga; the mosquito was mischievous to the people, it flew about the fort with a long stinger, and sucked the blood a number of lives; the warriors made several oppositions to expel the monster, but failed; the country was invaded until the Holder of the Heavens was pleased to visit the people; while he was visiting the king at the fort Onondaga, the mosquito made appearance as usual and flew about the fort, the Holder of the Heavens attacked the monster, it flew so rapidly that he could hardly keep in sight of it, but after a few days chase the monster began to fail; he chased on the borders of the great lakes towards the sun-setting, and round the great country; at last he overtook the monster and kill it near the salt lake Onondaga, and the blood became small mosquitoes."

In Clark's "Onondaga," two monsters stood on opposite banks of the Seneca River, destroying the passing Indians. Hiawatha soon killed one, but the other was pursued until slain by Onondaga lake. He threw up sand-balls in his dying struggles, and the small mosquitoes, rose in clouds from his decaying body. Another version differs from this only in bringing all the Cayugas and Onondagas against the monsters, and destroying them after heavy loss.

As Mr. Higatio Hale has well observed, there has been a confusion of H-a-wat-ha with Ts-oun-ya-wat-ha, the Holder of the Heavens, and the Onondagas certainly now identify their deliverer with the latter. Places connected with the story are still pointed out. On the Tuscarora reservation is a large stone where the Holder of the Heavens rested during the long pursuit. Two depictions appear; one where his body reclined, and another where he leaned upon his elbow. Chief Abram Hill told me he had seen the tracks of the pursuer and pursued, a little south of Syracuse, where the Onondagas kept them fresh not long since. He said those of the monster were twenty inches long, bird-like, and could be traced for twenty rods.

W. M. Brauchamp.

6. He is just sleeping on a deer-skin (Lam kham wuunt) ; literally, letting him sleep on a deer-skin : i. e. he is just now enjoying a comfortable rest, but soon he will have to endure hardships and privations.
7. He is just enjoying the water lilies for a short time (Lam gra omulth). The meaning is the same as that of the foregoing saying. It relates to a hunter, aiming at a bear, who is feeding on water lilies — a parable of the transiency of the pleasures of life.
8. He wants to die with all his teeth in his head (Shagum dum bakka wank). He acts so foolishly that he will not live to be an old (toothless) man.
9. Is this war, father? (Hawulthá whidegadi abi?) Said when an extraordinary series of misfortunes has befallen a man. The saying is taken from a legend.
10. It seems you think that Naas River is always calm! (Walumash gup ihawáik giith Kulshishish ; literally, As though Naas River were always calm!). The estuary of Naas River is very rough, strong winds prevailing throughout the year, and making the passage of canoes dangerous. The saying is used for characterizing foolishness of men who assume that all circumstances must be favorable to them.
11. You think you are as handsome as the sun's (moon's) child (Wudi na ihgothik ga gemuagá ; literally, as handsome as the sun's (moon's) child). Used to signify a vain person. Sun and moon have the same name.
12. As awkward as Ushgaduquah (Guprum ugh-éish Ushgaduquah). Ushgaduquah is a character to an Indian tale.
13. (You act) as if you were rich (Walumash gup gainumuksh) ; said to signify an extravagant person.
14. You mistake the corner of the house for the door (Itha gun lugou ran amoshshel), to signify a gross mistake.
15. Go where your ears will be full of grubbs (Gau dum wihú ashana zimont), said to a man who goes foolishly to his own destruction. The saying means : Your head will be full of grubbs like that of a salmon which has been thrown away by wasteful people without having served any good purpose (not having been eaten).
16. What will you eat when the snow is on the north side of the tree? (Gaulth dum gabuna zida Itha shra manushth nashlath gan?) The saying refers to the end of winter, when food is scarce. It is a reproach to the careless and wasteful.

Mrs. O. Morton.

MSTIKAVERTIA, D. C., *Zinnary*, 1886.

LEGENDS OF IOWA.

Legends will originate wherever men and women may happen to congregate. It is, however, somewhat startling to learn that legends exist in countless numbers among the people of the Western States. Portions of Illinois and Iowa, which fifty years ago were a wilderness or a prairie waste, to-day teem with romantic stories, and scores of objects with which are connected strange adventures or incidents are pointed out to the traveler who has the fortune of coming across one of those most indispensable members of Western society, an old settler.

It has been said that legends reflect the character of a people, and if such is the case, the early Western settlers must have been sturdy men who saw good in everything, and opposed all strictly vulgar superstition ; for the great majority of their legendary stories contain morals and poetic inspirations of the highest order. They are free from the dross of superstition found in the tales of England, Germany, and France ; they do not breathe the romantic but misleading spirit of occultness which pervades the fables of the Orient ; nor do they in any way resemble the weird, uninspired sagas of the Norse peasantry.

The legends of the West are as sturdy, as independent, and as forcible as the men who created them, and for this reason, if no other, deserve more than passing mention.

What could, for instance, be more poetic than the story of the "Lone Tree," which was related to the writer not long ago by one of the oldest settlers of Eastern Iowa? The tale — or, to speak more properly, the legend — is based on an oak tree, for many years the only one standing within a radius of eight or nine miles. How did the tree come there? That the unsophisticated pioneers could not explain ; so they resorted to invention, and gave currency to a story which will live long after they have been forgotten. Early in the year 1840, the report goes, soon after the so-called Blackhawk Purchase had been consummated, a young couple emigrated from New York State to the West. The man (Bill Brewster was his name) was open-hearted, hospitable, and courageous, and his wife was a representative American woman of the middle class, industrious, kind, and faithful. After their arrival in Iowa the two young people went out "prospecting" (looking for suitable land) every day, and finally reached a tract of fat prairie land which promised to yield rich crops. Here they decided to take up their abode ; and the woman, relieved of all anxiety and worry then and there gave birth to a son, and at the same moment — to commemorate the event — an

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Legends and Traditions of the Origin of the Zimshian tribes of Indians. N. W. Coast. British Columbia

I have already described the form great clans and the meanings of their different crests and insignia. The creatures described in their different crests are only regarded as the ancient genii appertaining to the mythology of the Indian race, they were merely the visible representatives of powerful and mystical beings. And as all of one group are said to be of the same kindred so are the members of the same class whose symbols or crests are the same are counted as blood relations, although perhaps belonging to entirely different tribes; intermarriage between Indians of the same crest even if the contracting parties were Haida and the other a Zimshian are strictly forbidden, if a marriage of this kind was contracted it was regarded as simply horrible; and if the parties were killed nothing would be thought of it, but only two or three cases of this kind have ever been known to take place amongst the old people.

Clans subdivided tribes into small clans and a union of crests is stronger than a tribal union. All the children take the mother's crest, and are members of the mother's family, and do not even regard the father's people as their relations, therefore an Indian's heir is not his own son but his sister's son, and in the case of a woman marrying into a distant tribe her offspring will desert that tribe and go to their mother's people.

The crest business has much to do with promoting hospitality amongst Indians. A strange Indian visiting a strange village must be at no loss for shelter or food, as he goes at once to members of his own crest which he can easily find out by inspecting the various Totem Poles in front of

the different houses; there he will receive a warm welcome and be treated as a relation.

They also take their names from their Father's crest viz - *Wineak*, (Whale) I ^{have} counted over a hundred names derived from this whale alone according to the attributes of the whale, its form habits food ect. *Shagait gagai* (eagle) (Whiteness of wings)
Douzgumli (Raven). *Ljagum gagouk* (Wolf) (Black feathers) (Howling sound)

These crest relations tend to keep peace amongst Indians, though some of the Indians are nearly civilized they still keep the crest up; although in some rare instances to which I have been an eye witness, it has been broken, causing the utmost consternation amongst the Indians.

Tradition of the origin of the Jimshian race
The Indians all have the tradition of the great flood amongst them.

The Jimshians say that before the great flood came their ancestors lived up the Skeena River, their very name signifying "a people living up that river"; when the deluge came they were of course scattered the majority being destroyed, those who fortunately were in canoes at this time, being saved and stranded on the mountain tops, where to this day they declare that the petrified remains of canoes with ropes etc, attached to them can be found. After this event some still resided on the Skeena, when hearing of Polachans on the Nats, they came to the coast to fight returning to their former residence.

On their coming to the coast a general intermixtion of tribes seems to have taken place; Southern India warring amongst themselves, the defeated ones fled North in the same manner the Northern Indians war in a manner

sequence their skins were only hard as concerns the nails on the human body, and having thus been born through the instrumentality of Satan thwarting the Divine will they became subject to death, and when they do die are buried an Elder Berry bush springs up from the grave. Even now when they look at their nails they say, "Heaven intended that we should not die"; and in their hearts curse the Elder Berry bush. They used to keep their finger nails dirty to remind them that they are of the earth, and some day will return to it.

The Indians have a belief in a Supreme Being which they called a "chief" who dwelt above and ordered all things for their good. When speaking of Him they always said "Heaven". They also believed in an evil spirit which they called "Thémshum", who went about showing people to do all things. The chief in heaven being a Passive Being. Thémshum continually urging people to do things contrary to the will of the "Heavenly Chief". There is a legend, too long for insertion here as to the origin of Thémshum.

Indian Currency

Their currency was of three kinds.
Copper shields, which represented, as it were, their gold coin, and were very expensive, large numbers of elkskins and even slaves, boxes of Colachan grease etc were given in exchange for them.
Tanned Elkskins - less in value than the coppers and representing as it were silver coin. Say of the value of 40 marmot skins.
Marmot skins, which were of very small value, and somewhat like our copper money.

Sometimes it would take a tribe two or three years gathering elkskins and marmots. Slaves set to buy a copper; and the more ancient the copper the more valuable it was. A chief representing his tribe was regarded as owner of the copper. So valuable were they that the form breasts took their names from them, as they do from their own insignia belonging to their crests this naming from coppers was universal - Some names taken from coppers - "Shimhagezki" (Real copper) "Shabitamhagezki" (Sitting on coppers) Indian name for copper is "Hagezki".

== " ==

Tradition of the origin of the Gimskians in their language

Phila akapwalth gaga Lauz ga dilti Shgun-lanz ga
 Both in labour the Rock (mountain) and Elderberry Bush
 ashga gupt wilagwut ga Laka ga, ashga herhakt
 by the power of Heaven wishing he
 ga dum aigigiatsaga dum kltzquint ga, gu
 to be everlasting coming children the, which
 dum wha dn'ut ga. Ada wil gik di whate ainsh
 wil never die they. And then usual always there
 Shemshum ga ashga gik luzaksh ga gaud ga
 Shemshum (Laka) being envious heart his
 gun sha kshgaugum shgoltthk gishga Shgun-
 caused he first bring forth the elder-
 Lanz ga ada ninit ga da Naganga Gimskiant.
 berry Bush and it was the Ancestors of Gimskians
 Laka nishit ga Lauz ga ada alwil sha dilti dilti
 When saw the Rock it and got disgusted
 shga gaud ga ada wil gilant ga. Amst. 1850.

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