"THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM"1:
TLINGIT WOMEN AND PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONS

by

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Abstract

Using an ethnohistorical method which combines archival material with ethnographic material collected mostly by anthropologists, this thesis provides a history of Tlingit women's interaction with the Presbyterian missions. The Presbyterians, who began their work among the Tlingit of southeastern Alaska in the 1870s, were particularly concerned with the introduction of "appropriate" gender roles. Although participating in the roles and activities defined by the Presbyterians as "women's work", Tlingit women incorporated Presbyterian forms of practice into their own cultural frames of reference. The end result, unintended by the missionaries, was that Tlingit women were provided with a new power base.
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Introduction

In the late 1870s, American Presbyterian missionaries were sent to live among the Tlingit natives of southeastern Alaska for the expressed purpose of “civilizing and Christianizing”. This thesis argues that Tlingit women used women’s work, as defined by Presbyterian gender ideology, to maintain or improve their social and political significance within their communities. A heavy reliance placed by short-staffed Presbyterian mission stations on native practitioners in the missionary enterprise enabled Tlingit women to incorporate Presbyterian roles and activities into their own cultural frames of reference. This process was consistent with the Tlingit tradition of incorporating new languages, ceremonies and technologies encountered in contact with other cultural groups. The result, unforeseen by the Presbyterian missionaries, was that Tlingit women were provided with a new power base. Women assumed roles as mediators in this cultural exchange, a role previously associated with Tlingit men.

Most research concerned with the encounter between indigenous people and Christian missionaries can be grouped into one of three perspectives. Two of these presume the colonial power to be obviously dominant. The first emphasizes passive native acceptance of that dominance; for example, Fisher, a historian writing on the impact of Christian missions on native people in British Columbia, argues that “unlike those of the trader, the demands of the missionaries could not be incorporated into existing Indian society; their teaching and their example had to be either accepted or rejected, and acceptance meant virtually a total cultural change of the proselyte” (1977:125).

Influenced by Gramsci’s (1971) and Williams’s (1975) discussions of dominance and subordination, the second perspective suggests that power and resistance are inevitably intertwined, so both are inherent in the indigenous-missionary relationship (Barker, 1991; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Harkin, 1993). In their analysis of that relationship in colonial Africa, Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) argue that the cultural domination of colonized peoples is carried out through hegemony, a process in which a dominant conception of the world
becomes subtly imposed through its infusion in "all manifestations of individual and collective
life" (Gramsci, quoted in the Comaroffs, 1991:23). Still, Comaroff and Comaroff emphasize
that hegemony is never complete (1991:25, following Williams). As Williams explains, some
of the subordinate culture's meanings and practices are neglected, excluded or unsuccessfully
incorporated, and thus can be used as a basis for resistance (1977:115-116).

By contrast with those perspectives, several ethnohistorical studies of the native-
missionary encounter situate responses to Christianity in indigenous cultural beliefs and
practices (Brenner, 1982; Patterson, 1982; Bolt, 1983; Kan, 1985; Ridington, 1987; McLaren,
1996). Such studies demonstrate that native people were able, in varying degrees, to maintain
control over their relationships with missionaries by reinterpreting Christian symbols, practices
and offices so as to make them compatible with their own cultural frames of reference. For
instance, Bolt argues that, for the Tsimshian, participation in Christianity was a strategy
that Dakota natives in southern Manitoba appropriated the office of missionary and the symbols
of Christianity in a deliberate attempt to maintain Dakota autonomy.

My thesis adheres to this third perspective while introducing the factor of gender.
Certainly, there has been research concerned with changing gender roles in native communities
in the post-colonial era (Albers, 1983; Fiske, 1988; 1991; Knack, 1989; Miller, 1992; Klein
and Ackerman, 1995). But the anthropological literature for colonial Native North America is
only just beginning to explore how Christianity has been experienced in gendered ways.
Devens's (1992) study of Algonquian women and Great Lakes missions, along with the recent
Ethnohistory issue devoted to women's responses to Christianity in a number of native
communities, have opened up this topic for exploration. As these works demonstrate, native
women's interactions with missionaries often differed from those of native men.

In the anthropological literature, only Klein has touched upon the encounters of Tlingit
women with Presbyterian missions (1975; 1980). Though insightful on other aspects of
Tlingit women's experience, her earlier studies provide only a brief discussion of this topic
since they focus on contemporary Tlingit women's political participation. Even Klein's recent
article (1994) looks only at the Presbyterian mission program, giving minimal consideration to native women's responses. These omissions may be due to the scarcity of primary source material that deals specifically with Tlingit women's involvement with Presbyterian missions. Much of this material was destroyed when the Women's Home Board of Missions (responsible for Alaska), a separate agency between 1878-1923, merged with the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to form the National Board of Missions in 1923 (personal communication with K. Gleeson, archivist of the Presbyterian Historical Society Archives).

But despite the loss of archival sources, remaining archival material and published Presbyterian accounts can still be used to provide a history of Tlingit women and Presbyterian missions. My research trips to the Presbyterian Historical Society Archives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and to the Stratton Memorial Archives in Sitka, Alaska, revealed valuable sources of information: the Alaska Church Records Collection and the Sheldon Jackson Collection; the Home Mission Monthly and the Rocky Mountain Presbyterian - Presbyterian periodicals; the North Star, the Thlinget and the Verstovan - Presbyterian newspapers. This archival material contained many descriptions of Tlingit women's involvement with various Presbyterian activities. As well, the published accounts of Presbyterian missionaries (Jackson, 1880; Jones, 1914; Hall-Young, 1927) offered insights into Tlingit women's responses to Presbyterian missions. In sum, these sources drew upon information garnered from various Tlingit communities. While the amount of information from each community is small, and while communities responded in various ways to the Presbyterians, the accumulated data clearly shows common patterns of response to the missionization process.

Using missionary accounts raises methodological problems in that such accounts contain relatively few examples of Tlingit women's direct speech. However, the actions of Tlingit women provide an illuminating sub-text in the absence of their own accounts, making an ethnohistorical method particularly appropriate. By analyzing missionary accounts concomitantly with anthropological research (de Laguna, 1972; Kan, 1987, 1989; Tollefson, 1995) and oral traditions (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, 1990; 1994) that offer a different perspective on many aspects of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Tlingit
culture, it is possible to recreate the cultural context of Tlingit women's actions. The ethnographic material offers insight into Tlingit points of view. Of particular value are Klein's (1976; 1980) studies using fur trader accounts to provide information on Tlingit women's traditional gender roles. De Laguna (1972; 1983), Tollefson (1995) and Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1990; 1994) provide insights into various ceremonial practices. The Dauenhauers' work also offers access to oral traditions. In addition, Kan (1985; 1987; 1991; 1996) combines oral tradition and fieldwork in depicting Tlingit responses to another Christian denomination that missionized in southeastern Alaska, the Russian Orthodox.

The argument that Tlingit women used positions and activities, defined by Presbyterian gender ideology as women's work, to maintain or improve their social and political significance within their communities is organized into six main sections. The first section explores traditional Tlingit culture and demonstrates that gender was an important organizing factor. Although Tlingit women had access to considerable influence and a more flexible gender role definition than men, it was Tlingit men who generally acted as mediators between their communities and new sources of knowledge encountered in the outside world.

The second section examines Presbyterian gender ideology which, although defining women as "natural civilizers" capable of affecting social change, rarely allowed women to access formal political structures within the missions. The third section gives an account of the establishment of the Presbyterian church among the Tlingit, looking particularly at the attempt to impose a gender ideology which encouraged Tlingit women to participate in "women's work" while excluding them from positions of formal authority which were reserved to Tlingit men. The fourth section shows how the Tlingit, on initial contact with the Presbyterians, became active participants in what was for them a cultural exchange.

The fifth and sixth sections demonstrate how Tlingit women's involvement in Presbyterian roles and church activities ultimately provided women with a new power base. It was women who served as mediators between their communities and the Presbyterian church with its access to outside resources and power. High-ranking Tlingit women, who traditionally could acquire influence in the social and political affairs of their community,
accepted positions within the Presbyterian mission stations which facilitated the continuation of their influence both in their own and other Tlingit communities. Presbyterian church activities, with their many symbolic parallels to traditional Tlingit women’s activities, inadvertently offered Tlingit women of varying ranks an alternate means to distribute valuable resources, initiate and maintain social relationships built on reciprocal obligation, and affect the decision-making process in their communities.

While this thesis specifically addresses the issue of native women’s responses to missionization, a topic largely neglected by other researchers, I recognize that Presbyterian ideology has not been the only external influence impinging upon Tlingit gender ideologies. Some other influences are discussed by Klein (1980) and Hinckley (1994). For example, the wage economy as well as state policies have had a significant impact. However, these factors are not deemed to be within the scope of this thesis.

“Traditional” Tlingit Culture

The Coastal Tlingit, who will be the focus of this thesis, are a society composed of a number of matrilineal clans located in what is now known as southeastern Alaska. The “traditional” culture of the Tlingit presented here is based on nineteenth century Euro-American sources - the accounts of explorers, traders, and missionaries - and by anthropologists who, in the twentieth century, came into contact with Tlingit elders. Most of the earlier sources date from at least a century after the initial Russian contact; however, the Russians directed most of their attention to the maritime fur-trade and did not venture beyond the base of operations established in New Archangel, later known as Sitka.

At the time of Euro-American contact, Tlingit society consisted of two exogamous moieties. Moieties, in turn, were composed of exogamous clans. Clans were and still are “the real units of Tlingit society” (de Laguna, 1983:71). Each clan shared a common ancestry, had crests, songs and dances depicting its history, and possessed subsistence areas (de Laguna, 1972:451). Clans were made up of a number of lineages or house groups that claimed their
own inventory of ceremonial possessions and food producing areas. Tlingit society had a
loosely defined ranking system. Clans and lineages were ranked according to hereditary status
and wealth, giving their leaders differential access to privilege and power. The aristocracy was
made up of household heads and their immediate matrilineal relatives. The commoners were
younger matrilineal relatives of the aristocracy. Slaves, generally people from outside groups
captured in war, were not granted full personhood (Kan, 1989:25). In reaction to pressure
from both the Russians and the Americans, the Tlingit aristocracy discontinued the practice of
owning slaves by the middle of the 1880s (Hall-Young, 1927:128). Yet the Tlingit people
remained acutely aware of their own and others’ ancestry, and this knowledge continues to
structure social interactions (see Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, 1990). Despite an ideology of
fixed accession to high-ranking names, in reality there was some flexibility. Both Kan
(1989:25) and de Laguna (1983:75) describe ranking as an inexact procedure, open to dispute
and reevaluation. Rank was mainly tested and agreed upon at potlatch feasts. By accumulating
potlatch contributions from all lineage members, those of high rank, as well as the ambitious,
could reaffirm or enhance their social status by hosting a feast at which wealth, in the form of
food and gifts, would be distributed to members of other clans. In return for their
contributions, members of the lineage could be elevated in status.

Wealth, then, was one way of elevating social position. Knowledge was another.
There were two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of one’s own culture and knowledge of other
cultural and linguistic traditions. It was essential that persons of rank, especially the chiefs, be
well versed in the historical and ceremonial traditions of their own people as well as other
cultural traditions. Traditionally, the most promising young men were sent away to different
tribes to learn other traditions and languages. Upon their return, they were able to teach the
head of their own house group some of the foreign language, songs and stories that they had
learned. This knowledge was essential as it enabled the leader of the house to respond
properly to the rhetoric used in ceremonies and addressed to him by members of other groups.
The young men were also able to act as interpreters when foreign visitors were entertained (de
Laguna, 1972:466).
Tlingit Gender Relations

Tlingit culture was characterized by a division of labor by gender in which women and men had separate but interdependent roles. While men’s activities were restricted by their gender role definitions, women’s roles allowed more flexibility. If men tried to cross gender barriers, their efforts were often discouraged.

Contributions to the food supply were differentiated by gender. The men’s primary productive role was fishing and hunting, and women’s was the collection of berries, edible roots and plants, shellfish, seaweed and other vegetation. The women’s flexibility in regard to these roles was shown by Klein through examples of women who fished and hunted (Klein, 1975:166). Oberg, an anthropologist working with Tlingit elders in the 1930s, wrote that “the men, however, are loath to pick berries or gather herbs - to do, in fact, anything which is considered women’s work” (1973:80). Although men had been documented to engage in shellfish harvesting, they often denied their involvement in this activity - a denial which Moss, in her recent ethnohistorical study, attributes partially to a cultural role definition that men were expected to conform to ideal behaviour (Moss, 1993).

This division of labor by gender was also evident in the specialization of herbalist and shaman. Although the use of medicinal plants was generally known, both Emmons (1991:362) and de Laguna (1972:654) contend that gathering, preparing and administering these herbal remedies was mostly confined to older women. Herbalists had considerable knowledge of the types of plants that could effect cures and bring good luck and wealth. They were also well trained in massage, which was thought to be able to cure various illnesses. Herbalists were often consulted and were well compensated for their services (Jones, 1914:228). The position of shaman was usually filled by men and, like the herbalists, those who performed shamanic healing processes were well compensated (Emmons, 1991:376).

Women were also responsible for the preservation of food. Once the food was preserved, women were expected to manage the food supply and ensure, through careful distribution, that sufficient supplies of food were available for the winter months (de Laguna, 1972:310). Careful management of the food supply was related to another responsibility of
Tlingit women - the accumulation of gifts for potlatch ceremonies. Women were responsible for deciding what proportion of the food supply would be allocated for trade or distributed in feasts. Through an extensive women’s trading network, Tlingit women transformed surplus foods, furs or crafted goods into gifts. They traded with Athapaskan women to obtain lichens essential to make dyes for the wool used to make the highly-esteemed trade good, the Chilcat blanket (Krause, 1956:139). They also traded with Tsimshian and Haida women to acquire highly prized hair ornaments made of dentalium and beads (de Laguna, 1972:353).

Women, more so than men, were trained to manage their families’ wealth. Olson maintains that Tlingit girls, to a greater extent than boys, were taught the importance of working and saving to accumulate wealth and goods (1956:680). According to contemporary Tlingit elders, men were and still are discouraged from assuming this role, as they are viewed as being foolish with money (Klein, 1995:35). Oral tradition further supports the association between women and the management of wealth. As Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer report, there are a number of stories of how Tlingit elders (the “old folks”) managed money. In this older generation, women especially lived frugally and saved their money in order to spend it on “big things” for their families (1994:445-447).

Control over the food supply gave a Tlingit woman considerable influence in her role as wife, as she controlled both her own resources and her husband’s access to his resources. In fact, the important role that women played in managing the distribution of food supplies and wealth items offered women considerable control over their husbands’ decisions. Numerous fur traders comment that Tlingit men sought their wives’ approval about excursions as well as about the particulars of trading transactions. If the woman did not agree with her husband’s decision, she would voice her disapproval and her husband would defer to her wishes. Even if a sale had been consummated in her absence, she could revoke the transaction and demand the return of the traded items or money. For example, Wood, a fur trader, reported that “No bargain is made, no expedition set on foot, without first consulting the women. Their veto is never disregarded. I bought a silver fox skin from Tsa-tate, but his wife made him return the articles of trade and recover the skin” (Wood, 1882:333). Echoing these early fur trader
reports, Peratrovich, a Tlingit man, writes that “in almost every household the women were held in such high esteem among their people that they were the real leaders whose judgment the men willingly followed” (1959:48). As Brown (1970) indicates in the case of the Iroquois, when women control the distribution of valued resources they are also able to directly influence male activities.

Although a woman moved to her husband’s household at marriage, she did not adopt his clan or lineage affiliations. She remained a vital part of her own clan and determined her own rank by fulfilling lineage and clan obligations. If the pattern of preferential marriage was followed, all the women who married into a house would be closely related. The senior women of the household organized and supervised the labor of junior women and slaves. (Kamenskii 1906:49). As Gailey (1988) found with Tongan women, production was based on a hierarchy that allowed those of high rank to offer women of lower rank the opportunity for social elevation in exchange for their labor. Like men of their class, high ranking women elevated themselves and their children either through hosting a ceremony or by offering major contributions to assist the host of the ceremony (de Laguna, 1972:521). Given that the elevation of any lineage member reflected upon the status of the lineage or clan as a whole, it is not surprising that high-ranking women could attain considerable influence over the social and political affairs of their lineage.

Although Klein (1995) has argued that the Tlingit are an example of a society where rank not gender is the key factor in determining who assumes public political roles, gender does appear to be important in regard to those roles. It was men who traditionally mediated between the community and new knowledge encountered in contact with other cultural groups. For instance, the role of “influential house leader” was generally filled by men. If a woman assumed this title, she did so as the highest ranking member of her lineage by virtue of her age (de Laguna, 1972:463). In this case, rank and age are clearly important factors. However, these factors are part of a larger gender system in which, for example, older women are associated with the role of knowledge bearers. In her analysis of the Tlingit Raven stories, Klein notes that old women more often than men provide advice to the heroine or hero on how
to proceed in a tricky situation (1975:99). According to Davis, any Tlingit in need of sound 
advice was told to “let the old women speak” (1931:276).

As in the position of house leader, the political positions of both nau kani and shaman 
were also generally filled by men. Nau kani played an important role as mediators or 
negotiators in peace ceremonies. These positions were usually associated with men known for 
both their diplomacy and their oratorical skills, but could be assumed by a woman if she was 
specifically requested (de Laguna, 1972:494). If the position of shaman was filled by a 
woman, rank and age were often, though not exclusively, important factors in her selection. 
According to de Laguna (1972:676), if the position of shaman was occupied by a woman she 
was usually post-menopausal. Yet when a young woman at Hoonah did assume this position, 
she was considered to be particularly potent because she was still experiencing menstruation. 
According to one Tlingit woman, this young female shaman’s abilities were enhanced as “she 
still had her monthly - Its strong you know when a woman’s like that” (de Laguna, 1972:676). 
This shaman’s reputation was not confined to her community but was regional in scope as she 
was among the few shamans credited by the Tlingit for prophesying the coming of the 
Russians to Alaska (de Laguna, 1972:676; see also Kan, 1991).

To summarize, at the time of the American purchase of the Alaskan territory from 
Russia, high-ranking Tlingit women inherited family status and could call upon the resources 
and labor of relatives as could high-ranking males. This capability, built into the system of 
rank, coupled with the advantage of holding responsibility over their husband’s property, 
offered some women considerable influence over community affairs. The status and influence 
of Tlingit women was similar to that found by Miller (1994) for the Coast Salish. Tlingit 
gender role definition was such that it provided women with the means to attain considerable 
influence. Women’s gender roles, as noted, permitted considerable flexibility, enabling them 
to pursue activities associated with men if they chose. Men’s gender roles, in contrast, were 
more rigidly defined, so that men could not readily move into the domain of activities 
associated with women.
**Presbyterian Ideology**

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Presbyterians first explicitly acknowledged the dual objectives of Christianizing and civilizing Native American people. At this time, a missionary was sent out to the Cherokee population for the express purpose of "carrying the gospel and the arts of civilized life to them" (Drury, 1952:25). This dual program was encouraged by President Grant's 1868 Indian Peace policy that, attempting to bring church and state together into a close partnership, involved assigning religious denominations to Indian reservations to civilize and evangelize (Berkhofer, 1975).

The Indian Peace policy was solidified by the transfer of American Indian missions from the Presbyterian Foreign Board of Missions to the Presbyterian Home Board of Missions. This transfer of power was no mere change in perspective, but rather placed the Native American missions and therefore the native people themselves more firmly within the social dynamics of an emerging America. However, within the Presbyterian church, another agency was in operation which would help frame the discourse between missionaries and native peoples. The Women's Board of Home Missions, operating between 1878-1923, was responsible for educational and medical work carried out in several locations, including the geographical area occupied by the Tlingit. By 1898, the financially secure Women's Board of Home Missions came to the aid of its financially exhausted "parent" Board of Home Missions and assumed sole responsibility for all Alaskan work (Anon. 1900).

**Presbyterian Gender Relations**

The Presbyterians viewed women as possessing a natural ability to civilize, not only within their own households but also among "heathen" populations. Understanding gender this way meant that women's participation, including native women's, was essential to the success of the missionary enterprise of Christianizing and civilizing the native populations. This conception of women's appropriate sphere of activity allowed them to participate only in those activities which were within the sphere of "women's work" and excluded their participation in public affairs.
In response to the increased participation of women in mission activities, Presbyterian leaders gave their official sanction to "women's work" which involved the assumption of educational and medical positions in the mission field and fundraising for the church. Such work was viewed by the Presbyterians as well within the sphere of appropriate Christian women's activities (Bendroth, 1987). Referring specifically to the conservative leadership element within the Presbyterian church, Bendroth states that "(w)herever these men might have been uncomfortable with women's increasing public visibility, they were prepared to submerge criticisms for the sake of the benefits it brought to the denomination" (1987:51-52). Although reluctant to ordain women as elders and ministers and thus allow them direct access to the decision-making bodies of the church, the 1893 decision at the Presbyterian General Assembly to reinstate the role of deaconess offered women a limited status in the church hierarchy (Boyd and Brackenridge, 1987:110-111). The position of deaconess did not enable women to participate in church decisions and was limited to the ministration of those bodily and spiritual needs that fell within the appropriate woman's sphere of influence (Bendroth, 1987:52).

Considering women to have a natural affinity to civilize involved a shift from the perception that women should remain in the home and only serve as a helpmate to their husbands to the idea that women could effect changes in other homes, taking responsibility for the morals and education of other families. Presbyterian leaders maintained that women:

by their active spiritual sympathy, and by their facility for organization are capable, more than the other sex, of giving to the missionary cause the universality of Co-operation which is essential to the full rigor of its work [Anon. in Home Mission Monthly - Presbyterian Historical Society Archives 6, 1878:23].

Previous efforts at evangelizing by male missionaries, argued Presbyterian and other Protestant church leaders, had been largely a failure because only women could reach the wives and daughters of heathen cultures and, through them, the rest of the family (Welter, 1978:651).

This new understanding of native women as civilizers was based on a contradictory premise: that however degraded she might be, the "heathen" woman exerted power and influence within her family (Welter, 1978:650). Therefore, "civilization" could only be obtained by changing native women. Typical of this philosophy was a special report written
by Merial Dorchester, the wife of the Government Superintendent of Indian Schools in the United States, for the Indian Bureau in 1889 and reprinted in a number of Presbyterian church magazines. She wrote “it is a truism, that in order to reach any heathen people, the mothers and the homes must be interested first” and great efforts should be made “for bettering the physical condition of the homes, and for broadening the scope of intellectual ideas among the women” (Dorchester in the North Star - Stratton Memorial Library Archives, 1891).

**Presbyterian Mission Program in Alaska**

The first Presbyterian mission post in Alaska was established at Wrangell in 1877, approximately ten years after the United States purchased the territory. The Wrangell mission was founded by Sheldon Jackson and Amanda McFarland. Jackson returned soon after to the United States to begin an educational tour, hoping to motivate women to support the missionary venture by publicizing the “depraved” condition of Tlingit women. McFarland, meanwhile, remained at the station. The Presbyterians were not the first Christian denomination in Alaska. Prior to the United States’ purchase of Alaska from Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church had made efforts to evangelize the Tlingit population. The Russian Orthodox Church continued its efforts after the sale of Alaska; however, as a result of a lack of funds and clergy, its influence was largely confined to the Tlingit population centered around Sitka (Kan, 1987). The Presbyterians, in contrast, had an expansionist attitude and, with the financial support of the Presbyterian Women’s Board of Home Missions, went on to establish a number of mission stations in Tlingit communities. While most Tlingit people had heard of Christianity, few had experienced sustained contact with missionaries.

For the Presbyterian missionaries, an integral part of the “civilizing” program involved the introduction of appropriate gender roles. This gender ideology was subtly introduced to the Tlingit through their daily involvement in the various forms of Presbyterian education provided by the missions, which conveyed implicit messages regarding appropriate gender roles.
The Presbyterian day schools taught the same curriculum to both boys and girls - reading, writing, arithmetic and religious instruction - with the exception of one afternoon per week in which gender specific tasks were performed. Maggie Dunbar, the mission teacher at Wrangell, described this weekly instruction:

Friday afternoon we devote to knitting, plain sewing and patchwork, singing, etc., etc. The large boys saw enough wood to last the coming week [Dunbar in Jackson, 1880:287].

Initially, the schools encouraged both parents and children to attend classes; however, as more Tlingit began attending classes, missionaries restricted enrollment to children. At Sitka, for instance, missionaries had to refuse instruction to the two hundred older people who wanted to attend, as the school was filled to capacity with children (Austin in Sheldon Jackson Scrapbook Collection - PHS, Volume 11:33). However, through classes held outside of school, missionaries also provided instruction to Tlingit who were of the same sex as themselves. McFarland, for example, held a sewing class three times a week for women and girls. In fact it was through this form of instruction that McFarland thought she could be most beneficial to the Tlingit. She wrote:

As soon as there can be a person sent to take the school, then I can have the women a part of each day and then I will have time to visit them more in their houses which could accomplish oh so much for these poor women [McFarland in Anderson, 1956:95].

In the first Presbyterian mission station, additional religious instruction and schooling was provided to young native women through the establishment of a girls’ home. Expressing a view that was representative of the aims of all the Alaskan Presbyterian missions, McFarland stated that the mission home was to serve as the training ground for “future Christian teachers, wives and mothers of their children” (McFarland in Jackson, 1880:217). In the girls’ home, Tlingit girls were taught the tasks of Presbyterian womanhood. These tasks involved sewing, embroidery, cooking, cleaning, proper ways to serve food and entertain guests as well as hygiene (McNair-Wright, 1883:149). The older girls were also trained to assist the missionary with teaching duties (Dunbar in Jackson, 1880:287). Girls were also expected to aid in teaching duties at the Presbyterian homes for both girls and boys which were later established.
in other mission stations. In an article written for a mission newspaper, Carrie Willard, the minister’s wife at Juneau, described the duties which Ann, a young Tlingit woman, performed in the Juneau Home for Boys and Girls and at the Sitka mission:

She helped me first in the care and teaching of the little ones of the Home, afterward had charge of the little boys’ dormitory in Sitka, tending the little fellows with care [Willard in the North Star - SMA, 1889].

The division of labor implicit in the curriculum of the Sitka Training School, opened in 1882 and later known as the Sheldon Jackson school, also helped to convey Presbyterian gender ideology. Boys and young men learned appropriate trades such as carpentry, blacksmithing, shoemaking and boat-building in order that, upon graduating, they would have an occupation. Two years after the school’s inception, girls and young women were admitted. There they received a half-day of formal education and a half-day of instruction in skills deemed appropriate for women, including a rigorous training in every area of household industry. Mrs. Carter, the teacher in charge of the school sewing room, wrote that during 1897 the mission girls, ranging in age from ten to twenty, “helped to make 838 articles of clothing, mended 18,428 pieces, besides completing a large number of pairs of knitted stockings” (the North Star - SMA, 1898:3).

Mission teachers encouraged the young women in their care to sell the articles that they made, so that they could help support the work of the mission. A Presbyterian newspaper article reported:

The embroidery class, taught by Mrs. Henry Haydon, meets every Tuesday afternoon. The beautiful articles made will be offered for sale to tourists and others, for the benefit of the Mission [Anon. in the North Star - SMA, 1888:2].

Outside markets for Tlingit women’s handiwork were provided through advertisements in mission newspapers with an extensive readership in the eastern United States. Said Mrs. Kelsey, a teacher at the Sitka Training school:

Leaders of Children’s mission bands often write, “Can you not send us some curio or work from a Mission?” The girls in the Sitka mission are now prepared to meet this want and to fill orders with articles made entirely by themselves. The following
articles are now made: Finest linen doilies, 50 cents each. Large Needlebooks, embroidered, 50 cents each. Embroidered satchet bags, filled with pine needles; according to size the price will be $1 and upwards [Kelsey in the North Star - SMA, 1888].

Later, when native baskets began to command high prices, missionaries enthusiastically supported the inclusion of traditional skills of basket making and weaving into the school curriculum. John Brady, the governor of Alaska and a former Presbyterian missionary, wrote:

Basket weaving would bring in a large sum each year and this business the girls could keep up after they are married. This, too, is their own industry to which they take kindly [Brady in Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS, 1902].

Shortly afterward, Miss Lancaster, a teacher at the Sitka Industrial school, began to learn basket weaving. A report of the school’s activities describes her impetus for doing so:

Out of her salary she has taken lessons in basket weaving, in order that this work which pays the natives so well, may be taught the girls. She was led to do this in the hopes that if the girls could make money in this way they would not go to the canneries [Adams in Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS, 1914].

By 1912, Tlingit women themselves were being employed by the Sitka Training School to teach native girls about basket weaving and native design (Lancaster in Home Mission Monthly -PHS, 1912).

Graduates from the Presbyterian mission schools were encouraged to marry one of their fellow graduates and move into the model cottage settlements that were constructed in most Presbyterian mission areas. For the missionaries these cottages represented the foundation of civilized family life. The domestic ideal that the Presbyterians were striving for was depicted as follows:

Happy is it where the young man with his trade learned marries the bright young woman trained as a housekeeper in the same Mission home, and the two start in life in the little house prepared for them. With the fostering care of the mission still near them, they found the “home” which must be the nursery and training ground of their children [Anon. in the North Star SMA, 1892:2].

The Presbyterians also encouraged young Tlingit women to serve as interpreters and
teachers and to establish mission stations in more remote Tlingit communities, where the desire
for education was increasing. It was understood that part of the work of these Tlingit women
was to introduce other Tlingit women to the Presbyterian gender conventions. Thus, when
Fannie Willard, a young Tlingit woman, returned from five years of education in the eastern
United States, an article in a Presbyterian publication suggested that if she was to be a
successful missionary:

> It is also most essential that she now learn the art of
> housekeeping in all its departments, in order that she may be
> fully equipped for successful missionary work and for making
> her life most useful. A lady is all the more efficient in christian
> missionary work, who with other acquisitions takes pleasure in
> teaching native girls how to prepare a good dinner; how to tidy a
> room, and how to use the necessities of life with economy
> [Anon. in the North Star - SMA, 1891].

The use of young Tlingit women to teach and spread the gospel in both their own and
other Tlingit communities is continued into later years. For example, the 1924 annual report of
Sheldon Jackson School stated:

> Part of the mission work of the Sheldon Jackson School is the
> conducting of a mission Sabbath School in the native village of
> our town. The girls who help with this school are in earnest and
> take great interest in the teaching [Anon. in Sheldon Jackson
> Collection - SMA, 1924].

An earlier article from a 1920 Presbyterian periodical remarked that the Tlingit people working
at or around the fish canneries were in need of religious instruction. To fill this need, the
author proposed that “students, especially the girls, be sent out to teach the gospel in the
canneries during the months that they are not in school” (Anon. in Home Mission Monthly -
PHS, 1920). As several Tlingit communities did not have a permanent mission station, the
only contact they would have with Presbyterians would be through these young women.

Despite considerable Tlingit participation in the various forms of mission education, the
Presbyterian missionaries felt that the effectiveness of the missionary enterprise was being
hindered by Tlingit ceremonies which the Presbyterians viewed as discouraging industry and
economy. Thus the missionaries sought to replace Tlingit ceremonial activities with their own,
for example by adjusting the Presbyterian religious calendar to correspond with the times of
Tlingit ceremonies. In particular, the missionaries added competing religious events in an effort to divert attention from traditional Tlingit winter festivities. As Clark, the minister at Wrangell, noted, “extra services are always held after the Christmas celebration until after the week of prayer and sometimes these take on the nature of revival services” (Clark in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1907). To compensate for the loss of these ceremonies, Tlingit men and women were encouraged to participate in Christian activities. In a Presbyterian periodical, Waggoner, the minister at the Tlingit community of Klawock, stated:

The missionaries have been tearing down the old social life and the traditions of the people for years. The time has come when we must give them a new social life, one in harmony with Christianity. Our great need in this line is a Social Hall where helpful amusements can be indulged in, a place where suppers can be given that are free from dead feasts and kindred evils [Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1907].

Christian church organizations were also established in the hope of providing the Tlingit with alternative activities that would fill their time and discourage backsliding.

Explaining why such an organization was established among the Tlingit at the Juneau mission, Carrie Willard, wrote:

They needed meetings frequent enough to keep the bond alive, and of such a character as would promote sympathy and mutual helpfulness, add to their knowledge of what a true home is and how to make one, and afford them such social pleasures as might compensate for the loss of their old-time feasts and friends [Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1883].

Carrie Willard described the organization’s meetings as follows:

Our meetings themselves are full of interest. They are always opened with the reading of some portion of the Scripture which bears on the building of Christian homes and characters. This is followed by prayer. We then have a familiar talk on such practical subjects as: “Hygiene in the Home: food, bath, dress, sinks: cans in the cupboard”. “Love and marriage: What are they? What should they be?” [ibid.].

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, a number of these church affiliated societies were in operation, including societies composed of native women. Under the guiding hand of the missionary, these women’s societies were used to fill the time of native
women with activities that were judged to be appropriate for women - with considerable emphasis placed on raising funds for support of the mission or church-related projects. Reporting from Klawock, Waggoner described the purpose behind a newly established women’s society:

The object of the Ladies Aid Society is an opportunity for Bible study for women alone. During odd moments at their homes the women make native trinkets to be sold for the benefit of the church [Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1907].

The Cottage Settlement Society, organized among Tlingit women at Sitka in 1905, was viewed by the missionaries as a credit to the missionary cause as it sent both dues and freewill offerings collected from its members to the North Pacific Presbyterian Board of Missions for support of its mission projects (Anon. in The Thlinget, 1909).

While Tlingit women were encouraged by the Presbyterians to assume teacher-interpreter positions at mission stations and to participate in church activities appropriate for women, they were nevertheless excluded from formal positions of authority within the Presbyterian church hierarchy. The position of elder, a position with access to the formal decision making apparatus of the Presbyterian church, was only open to Tlingit men. Presbyterian missionaries generally discouraged the continuation of the Tlingit system of rank; however, for strategic purposes, they encouraged traditional clan leaders to assume these positions in the church. As McClelland reported in 1901:

A missionary cannot make much headway in a village until he secures the support of some of the high caste. But this very high caste class, this “upper ten”, cling most closely to the old customs, because they get the lion’s share of the honors and the gifts [McClelland in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1901].

In his historical account of the early Presbyterian missionization of Alaska, Bettridge confirms that the elders of the Hoonah congregation, like those elders of other native Presbyterian congregations, “were most always the natural tribal leaders of the community” (1979:204). By 1903, these Tlingit elders were active participants in the Alaskan Presbytery meetings, which included representatives of all the churches in Alaska; at these meetings, decisions regarding the direction of church policy in Alaska were discussed and implemented.
Evidence for the authority of the office of elder can be found in the 1906 successful petitioning by the Sitka-Tlingit congregation for the removal of William Bannerman, a minister who apparently lacked the ability to stir their souls to embrace Christian commitment (Alaskan Presbytery Minutes - SMA, Volume 1, 1906:249). In later years, evidence from several Tlingit communities indicates that those elders who formed part of the decision making apparatus of the Presbyterian church also composed the membership of village councils. For instance, Beck reported that in the village of Kake, “the elders are all members of the town council” (Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS, 1921). De Laguna (1960) also reports that elders in the Presbyterian church in the Tlingit village of Angoon went on to assume positions in the town councils. Thus, by encouraging Tlingit men who were traditional clan leaders to assume the position of elder, the Presbyterian church attempted to use Tlingit traditions in an effort to legitimate church authority; in doing so, however, the church was also attempting to transform Tlingit “custom” to legitimate male authority only.

To summarize, the various forms of Presbyterian education in which the Tlingit participated all carried implicit messages which attempted to naturalize a gender-based division of labor; Tlingit women were only encouraged to participate in roles and activities considered to be appropriate women’s work, whereas men were incorporated into roles of authority in the formal decision-making apparatus of the church. In their study of missionization among the Tswana in southern Africa, Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) demonstrate that the mission stations were the places where a subtle colonization occurred. There, a dominant conception of the world that was manifest in the everyday practices of both the mission and the larger colonial system was gradually inculcated in the Tswana. The Tlingit encounter with the Presbyterian missionaries, a topic that I will explore in the following sections, was to have very different results.

Initial Tlingit Responses to Presbyterian Missions

To an extent, the Tlingit viewed the Presbyterians as offering new opportunities to
acquire power. Traditionally, Tlingit culture valued the incorporation of knowledge, as a form of power, from outside sources. This cultural practice was likely a key element in the Tlingit acceptance of Presbyterian beliefs. Presbyterian beliefs were understood as another form of esoteric knowledge. Harkin (1993) reports a similar response from the Heiltsuk (another Northwest Coast group) to the Methodist missions. The Heiltsuk perceived Christianity and the written word as similar to powers received by people during long periods of isolation, fasting and physical and mental discipline (Harkin, 1993:4).

Like the Heiltsuk, the Tlingit perceived the missionaries as powerful because of their ability to read and write. Remembering her first encounter with the Presbyterian missions, a Tlingit woman emphasized the excitement she felt when a Presbyterian mission began operating in the area where she lived:

Our family soon left the village and went up the Stickeen River. There I saw my friends and told them of the new teacher that had arrived to teach us how to read and write. Minnie and Kate said they would attend school, and we were all so happy over it [Paul in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1913:191].

Power was thought to be contained in Christian books and religious icons. There are numerous examples illustrating how the Tlingit regarded the powerful function of the outward symbols of Christianity, particularly books. Many attempts were made to harness the power. Simply possessing a book was enough to make at least one Tlingit woman believe she was in possession of power. For instance, Kelsey, a teacher at the Sitka Training School, was approached by a Tlingit woman who could barely read, and asked for a book which she could take home with her. Kelsey reported that:

I looked among the books and found one, which I gave to her. It had a picture of the crucifixion, which I showed and explained to her. She was delighted and afterward told me about the places where she had taken the book and the sermons she had preached from it. Sometimes when the natives had trouble with one another she would try to make peace among them [Kelsey in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1889:180].

In other attempts to appropriate the power, Bibles were added to other healing agents and were found tied to sticks and hung close to the beds of the sick (Hall-Young, 1927:112).
Similarly, other religious icons distributed among the Tlingit were used as amulets. The first missionary teacher at the Sitka Training School, Olinda Austin, reported that the picture cards depicting religious scenes which she had distributed to her pupils were later found in small calico bags that hung about their necks (Austin in Rocky Mountain Presbyterian - PHS, 1881:279).  

The education provided by Presbyterian mission stations offered the opportunity to access the missionary power. It is not surprising, then, that Tlingit responded by attending church, participating in Presbyterian activities and allowing their children to stay at the mission homes. The Tlingit understood their relationship with the missionaries as reciprocal. For instance, although they allowed their children to live in the Presbyterian homes, they asked for payment for their consent (Hall-Young, 1927:111). These children were valued by their families because of their ability to read and write, and were often seen teaching their parents and grandparents their own school lessons (Austin in Sheldon Jackson Collection - PHS, Volume 11). The Tlingit were pragmatic in their response to Presbyterian beliefs. Using traditional ways of incorporating outside knowledge, they appropriated those elements which could enhance their prestige.

**Tlingit Women’s Roles in the Presbyterian Missions**

Most Presbyterian missions relied on Native interpreters for church activities. That reliance lasted until the beginning of the 1920s and was an important part of the Presbyterian church’s success. This is best illustrated by a petition sent by Ketchikan natives to the Alaska Presbytery—a formal organization responsible for policies affecting all churches in Alaska and composed of representatives from these churches. The petition requested that a Presbyterian church be started in Ketchikan. The natives indicated that a denomination that used their language was preferable to those denominations that relied on other languages in their services (Alaska Presbytery Minutes - SMA, Volume 2, 1912: 97). Yet it was generally insufficient for missionaries, Willard for example, to present sermons in Tlingit; his wife reported that his
Tlingit congregation often laughed inappropriately during sermons he thought were extremely serious (Willard, n.d.:184). Their response was undoubtedly due to Willard’s inability to grasp the nuances of the Tlingit language.

Dependence on native interpreters enabled Tlingit women to participate in a significant way in the presentation of Presbyterian tenets. Tlingit women, more frequently than Tlingit men, assumed interpreter and teaching roles within the church (Hall-Young, 1927:98). Part of the reason for this might have been that Tlingit men, if they wanted to devote their lives to the church, had the opportunity of becoming elders. These gender specific roles encouraged male participation in the formal political apparatus of the Presbyterian missions whereas women, initially, had access only to interpreter-teaching roles, though some, as will be discussed later, eventually became deaconesses.

Tlingit interpreters often offered explanations of Presbyterian concepts by drawing on traditional Tlingit metaphors, thus allowing for the reinterpretation of Christianity by the congregation.11 Klein describes an incident involving one of her Tlingit woman informants:

One Sunday she decided to sit on the side of the Presbyterian church where the non-speakers of English sat to listen to the translation of a sermon. She thought she could test her English against that of the translator’s. To her surprise, as the minister told his Bible tale the translator told a traditional Raven story. The natives believed that the minister was telling Raven tales while the minister believed that the Tlingits were being enlightened by the gospel [Klein, 1980:99].

Other examples also illustrate how interpreters offered their own versions of sermons in the course of their translation. For example, Tillie Paul, a Tlingit interpreter, when asked by Hall-Young what she thought of his sermon of the Great Flood, told him it was not believable because it often rained for forty days and forty nights without bringing about those types of consequences. Thus she apparently interpreted the sermon in a different way, so that it would make more sense to the congregation (Paul in Ricketts, 1988:45). Another example suggests that if interpreters did not understand the Christian sermon, they gave their own. A relative of one of the first Tlingit interpreters described such a situation. He wrote:

[Rev.] Lindsley preached them a sermon on the subject of predestination, a subject that was in vogue then. My father’s
aunt was his interpreter. Her name was Mrs. Sarah Dickinson and she had learned her English from her trader husband. The next day the local pastor, Rev. Hall-Young, asked her “Sarah did you understand that sermon” to this she answered, “No, but I preached them a good sermon” [Paul in Paul-Tamaree, Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA].

In an effort to address the problem of the accessibility of the Bible, one missionary requested the help of a Presbyterian Tlingit organization to make translations of the Bible into Tlingit. He reported:

The Christian Endeavor Society has helped me in their meetings to make real translations of the Bible the way that they talk colloquially, so that I feel that it can be understood by the older people, who will never learn any English [Beck in the Presbyterian Church in the USA - PHS, 1912: 43-44].

On the other hand, Tlingit reinterpretations of doctrine were sometimes unknowingly encouraged by missionaries. According to a Presbyterian newsletter article written by Carrie Willard, the minister’s wife at Juneau, a Tlingit woman was asked to teach Sunday school but refused, apparently protesting that she did not possess enough knowledge. In an effort to convince this woman to assume the position, the missionary stated that:

She was told to remember how stories are told to the children, of the Raven and of how he made the earth. Well tell the children in the same way the story of the creator God [Willard in the North Star - SMA, 1888].

In the Raven stories, women have a considerable amount of power and authority. As women were generally more often the teachers and interpreters, they presumably passed this information along to their listeners.

In their response to the Presbyterian role of interpreter-teacher, Tlingit women appear to have understood the access to this role in terms of their position in the traditional system of rank. This system encouraged high-ranking people to know their own cultural traditions as well as to acquaint themselves with new ideas and ceremonies encountered in contact with other cultural groups. Possession of both types of knowledge enabled high-ranking people to maintain or enhance their status. By analyzing the background of those interpreters for whom information is available, it becomes apparent that those interpreters who were successful were
all members of the Tlingit aristocracy. Sarah Dickinson, the first Tlingit interpreter, was the aunt of Louis Paul, who was from a high-ranking family. Edward Marsden, a Tsimshian chief's son educated in the Sitka Training school, was the first native Presbyterian priest. He married his interpreter, who was a high-ranking Tlingit woman, a daughter of a Tlingit chief (Beattie, 1955:119-121). The marriage of Tillie Kenyon-Paul and Louis Paul, both of whom were members of the Tlingit aristocracy and had received a full Christian upbringing, was often cited as an ideal Presbyterian marriage (Hall-Young in Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA, 1927b:3). Their marriage was also traditionally sanctioned, as it was accompanied by traditional gift-giving from the groom’s family to the bride’s family (Ricketts, 1988). These findings are consistent with events in neighbouring Nishga and Tsimshian communities, where aristocratic women were among the first to seek Christian instruction and assume positions in Christian missions (Cooper, 1993).

Initially, Presbyterian missionaries, with their Christian ethic of equality before God, tried to discourage the alignment of traditional rank and roles in the church, emphasizing the equality of all in the church. Children from both the aristocracy and the lower class often attended mission homes and schools together. However, even in this closely controlled context, missionaries were only partially successful in discouraging the particularistic status integral to the Tlingit social structure. Moreover, once removed from this context, Tlingit graduates who assumed missionary roles in other Tlingit communities found that they were accepted or rejected by the Tlingit community on the basis of their position in the traditional hierarchy. For instance, a Presbyterian missionary described the hindrance caused by a “low class” interpreter who was terrified to approach “high class” Chilkats. She wrote:

We had secured a little native girl from the McFarland home in Wrangell to bring with us and her ability to speak the language was a great comfort when she chose to serve us with it. She was of low class and stood in awe, not to say terror of the high class Chilkats, who did not hesitate to call her a slave from the mission slave prison [Willard in Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS, n.d.:184].

This missionary then described the relief she felt upon hearing that friends of the interpreter’s family would be in the area, so that the young Tlingit girl could be sent back to her
family with them and relieved of her interpreter duties (Willard, n.d.:184). Livingstone Jones, the minister of the Tlingit congregation at Juneau, noticed that the use of one native interpreter caused the Tlingit congregation to be unresponsive to Presbyterian teachings. When he asked for an explanation from a member of his church, he was told that the instructor was of “slave ancestry” and that they refused to take instruction through such a medium; he immediately made a change and noticed a more favorable response (Jones, 1914:60). The use of native interpreters who were members of the Tlingit aristocracy appears to have enhanced church attendance. Mr. Warne, the missionary at Chilkat, remarked on the success that followed the commissioning of Fannie Willard, a high-ranking Tlingit woman, as teacher and interpreter at the Chilkat mission. He stated:

God has poured out rich blessings upon us ever since Miss Willard came. I can see it and feel it every day...[T]here has been unabated interest ever since Miss Willard commenced interpreting a year and a half ago [Warne in Anon. Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS, 1905].

Thus the Presbyterians were forced to adapt to the local situation or risk not having their teachings heard.

High-ranking interpreters were clearly seen by the Tlingit community as possessing the necessary knowledge and skills to preside over church ceremonies which involved treating clan leaders with respect. Consequently, such interpreters were undoubtedly able to enhance their own status in light of the great emphasis the Tlingit placed on proper public conduct and dignity (de Laguna, 1972:467-468). In a missionary’s description of a prayer meeting, the interpreter deferred to the high rank of a chief and allowed him to announce a prayer meeting. Instead of going directly to the home where the prayer meeting was to be held, the missionary was led by the interpreter to the chief’s home. The missionary stated:

we first went into the house of Katlian, the chief of one of the clans....[w]e started out, walking to the end of the street where we stopped, and sang a hymn. Katlian then in his own language told the people we would have a meeting at a certain house and invited them to come, we walked on singing as we went until we reached the house [Hays in Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA, 1904].
One interpreter appears to have confirmed the importance of respecting this traditional protocol as she was reported to have stated:

there was no disrespect for elders, in the “old custom”. If you teach us to ridicule and to look down on all that our fathers reverenced, then you teach us to show disreverence [sic] to our fathers. How can I teach the loving fatherhood of God, the blessed sonmanship of Man, and with the same word preach a disrespect for all our human fathers mean to us [Paul in Davis, 1931:268].

By paying respect to the rank of the chief, interpreters were strengthening and preserving the Tlingit system of rank. In doing so, they were able to maintain their own status by demonstrating their knowledge and appreciation of both the diplomacy and protocol of traditional Tlingit culture. In addition, the interpreters were able to enhance their own status by offering new skills and knowledge acquired from the Presbyterians.

By providing Tlingit women with church positions considered as appropriate women’s work, the Presbyterian missions unknowingly presented a select group of Tlingit women with an opportunity to wield considerable influence within their communities. As cultural brokers, these women often served as intermediaries between the native community and the missionary or church that had access to outside resources and power. After moving to a remote Tlingit community whose residents had never come into direct contact with the Presbyterians, a Tlingit interpreter, Sarah Dickinson, was the medium through whom important external knowledge was introduced to several chiefs as well as the rest of the community. In a letter reprinted in the Rocky Mountain Presbyterian, a church periodical, Sarah Dickinson wrote:

I have had 80 scholars, but now only 64. They are learning words of three letters, and can sing some of our beautiful hymns. They are improving fast. I have taught them to pray in their own language, and also a portion of the hymns. And all their spelling I translate for them so that they may know the meaning. I never saw a people so anxious to learn as they are. From 80-100 attend my meetings on a Sunday. ....The head chief of this lower village, by the name of Dan a-wauk, says when a minister comes he will be the first to become a Christian, that his tribe may follow after. The upper Chilcat is about 15 miles up the river. Those Indians come down daily to trade their furs, which they traffic for the interior Indians. Shot-witch is the name of their chief. He and his son say when a minister
comes they will all come down here and build their houses. They attend my meetings when they are down here [Dickinson in Rocky Mountain Presbyterian - PHS, 1881:287].

In a similar situation, Tillie and Louis Paul, who had both received a proper Presbyterian schooling at the Wrangell mission, were sent out to teach the gospel and school subjects to the remote Tlingit community of Klukwan and afterwards to the Tongas. Yet, it was Tillie Paul who assumed the role of teacher and introduced new knowledge. Hall-Young reported that:

Tillie taught school, preached to the natives, and did the general work of pastor and teacher. Louie, having less education, provided wood for the family, fish and meat and other food and was Tillie’s assistant [Hall-Young in Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA, 1927b:2].

Due to a lack of clergy, the Presbyterian missions were often plagued by vacant ministerial positions. During prolonged periods in which members of the clergy were absent, an interpreter often assumed complete control. One Tlingit interpreter described the role she played in the absence of a pastor. She stated:

I conduct the native church doing of course both the preaching and interpreting; services are held on Sunday and mid-week. I buy the wood with my own money or thru [sic] money that I have raised myself and more often than not I am obliged to pack the wood into the church myself; I do the visiting and other missionary work which more frequently than not requires the expenditure of money, for food and medicine when needed [Paul-Tamaree in Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA, 1920].

Confirming, the important role that this interpreter played in her community, her son reported that:

During the entire period of her direct connection with the Board by virtue of her commission, she interpreted for the pastor in charge, she visited the sick by nursing them or feeding them or by taking them into her home, and freely shared her small salary in order that the work might prosper [Paul in Paul-Tamaree, Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA, 1921].

By using her own salary to provision food and medicine to other families, traditionally the prerogative of the aristocracy, this interpreter was provided with an additional avenue to
social esteem. Indeed, one of her own letters illustrated this interpreter’s influence within her community. She wrote:

I am told that someone might be able to get here in May, 1921, but I will still be obliged to do the work I am now doing for the Natives especially turn to me and do not go to the pastor. This has been true under the following pastors Rev. Miller, Rev. Kirk, and Rev. Clark [Paul-Tamaree in Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA, 1920].

As Albers has suggested in regard to contemporary Sioux women, women’s influence in mobilizing support for their decisions is inseparable from their distribution of valuable resources among households (Albers, 1983).

The high esteem that Tlingit people held for this interpreter was also evident by her assumption of the important role of mediator in a number of conflicts arising between the church and the native congregation as well as between clans. For instance, one letter described her role in the resolution of a conflict in which all the Tlingit left the church:

She was sent here to Wrangell on account of schism which took all the natives from our church. She was personally responsible for bringing back practically all the natives for no one else had the power to explain the true facts concerning the trouble with the pastor, Rev. Corser and our church, and also had the influence to bring back the natives who had been otherwise committed by Mr. Corser [Paul in Paul-Tamaree, Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA, 1921].

Another letter described the interpreter’s role in the maintenance of peace among the native congregation. Just as naa kani functioned in the traditional role of settling disputes between individuals, families and clans, the interpreter repeatedly assumed the mediator role in order to heal schisms between clans. These schisms could be devastating to the Presbyterian congregation, as they often involved a number of related families discontinuing their participation in church activities. The negotiating role was described by a relative of Tillie Paul. She noted:

Tillie tried to negotiate a settlement between the clans, to one of which she was related, but she seemed to be making no headway, when an elder of the other clan told her that way, way back she was also related to his clan, and because of this, the
A letter written by Louis Paul, the interpreter’s son, makes it clear that the Presbyterian church administration recognized the influence of the female interpreters. He remarked that his mother wanted to resign as interpreter and leave the village as it was a well known fact that all the “families left the villages for the fish camps during the summer” (Paul in Paul-Tamaree, Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA, 1921). However, the church offered to continue to pay her during her absence, in an effort to persuade her to return to her position at the end of summer. The letter stated:

As her family duties would require her to go out of town during the summer, mother wrote to the Board that she had better resign. The Board answered that they preferred that she retain her commission with the understanding that she was free to come and go as her family duties required, and to accept a salary of twenty dollars a month more for the sake of continuing her connection with the Board [ibid.].

Initially, the interpreter-teacher position was the only one open to Tlingit women in the Presbyterian church that provided them with the means to maintain social and political influence within their communities. In later years, Tlingit women assumed the position of deaconess, in which they were called on to advise in various matters and also to minister to the spiritual and physical needs of the congregation by visiting and caring for the sick and providing aid to the poor. In the absence of the minister at the Juneau church, the deaconess (reported to be a chief’s daughter) preached to the congregation. Hibben reported that:

The last home we visited was the home of the deaconess of the native church. She was the daughter of a chieftain and was a very picturesque figure in a sort of purple robe, with heavy gold earrings, gold bracelets and gold ornaments in her fine dark hair. She had a splendid serene face and a fine dignified manner. When the missionaries are away she conducts the services herself in the little church [Hibben in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1923:270].

While there is no doubt of the power this position held within the community, there is scant evidence in the archives on how many women filled it. But evidence suggests that Tlingit
women understood access to this position in terms of their traditional system of rank, as with the interpreter’s position.

In summary, the interpreter-teacher and deaconess positions, which the Presbyterians understood as operating within the “appropriate woman’s sphere of activity”, in fact provided a select group of high-ranking Tlingit women with the means to maintain or bolster their social influence. Through their assumption of these church offices, Tlingit women served as intermediaries between Tlingit communities and the Presbyterian church, with its access to outside resources and power. These women were the medium through which valuable outside knowledge was introduced. In addition, these women had control over the distribution of valued outside goods. By provisioning food and medicine (valued resources) to less fortunate community members, high-ranking women maintained the traditional prerogative in which the aristocracy aided members of the community less fortunate than themselves; this tradition undoubtedly contributed to their ability to mobilize support for the decisions they made in the capacity of mediator. Their role as mediators in the resolution of disputes gave these interpreters considerable influence, as their decisions affected not only their community but also other communities.

Tlingit Women and Presbyterian Collective Activities

Both Moore (1988), in her overview of women and development projects, and VanEecke (1989), referring specifically to indigenous women and missionization in Africa, point out that when a small number of women assume an intermediate position between the community and outside institutions, the effect is frequently to empower only those elite individuals rather than improving women’s overall access to decision-making power. This argument is applicable to Tlingit women in the limited sense that the roles of interpreter and deaconess were available only to a few high-ranking Tlingit women. However, this does not mean that Tlingit women in general were left without the means to attain influence. On the contrary, evidence strongly suggests that by allowing Presbyterian women’s activities with
their symbolic parallels to traditional Tlingit women's activities, missionaries unknowingly provided Tlingit women of all ranks with the means to maintain or improve their social and political influence. In the following three sub-sections, Tlingit women's participation in Presbyterian ceremonies, fundraising and prayer meetings will be discussed. Presbyterian ceremonies enabled Tlingit women to distribute wealth in ways that were strikingly similar to traditional Tlingit feasts. Fund-raising activities on behalf of the church as well as for community projects, gave women's organizations considerable influence over the decision-making process within their communities. Finally, prayer meetings gave Tlingit women an opportunity to discuss and influence community problems much as they would have done at traditional councils. Intercommunity prayer meetings provided Tlingit women with an important role in the discussion and the solving of larger problems between communities, a role similar to that played by the naa kani in the resolution of conflicts in traditional potlatch ceremonies.

Ceremonies

Many Tlingit, both men and women, appear to have combined their own traditional ceremonies with Presbyterian celebrations. This is very clear in Austin's description of a Tlingit Presbyterian Christmas celebration, as the celebration coincides with the completion of a chief's house, traditionally a reason for a Tlingit feast to be held. As the missionary explained,

some of our church people at the rancherie [a name given by the Presbyterians to the native village] gave a very large dinner at the house of one of the Chiefs, which he had just completed. They had three tables, each fifteen or twenty feet long and they filled these tables three times- once with very poor people and children. They had three Christmas trees, laden with gifts for the poor children [Austin in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1893:113].

It is easy to see how the elaborate Presbyterian Christmas celebration would appeal to the Tlingit. In one description of a Christmas celebration, the missionary describes the copious amount of gifts distributed among members of the Tlingit community, including the giving of gifts which explicitly took into account the rank of the receiver:

we received 75 bandanas,...among these there were three with
pictures of [Presidents] Garfield and Arthur. These were presented to our three principal chiefs - Dick, Anahoots and Katlian and they were told these were from the great chiefs in the United States [Lyons in Rocky Mountain Presbyterian - PHS, 1880].

Presbyterian Christmas celebrations also included the use of coniferous tree branches, "draped from the center to the corners and sides of the church" for decoration (Hays, 1904:108) as well as numerous forms of entertainment. In his journal, Wilbur, the medical missionary at Sitka, describes a Presbyterian Christmas program for the whole community, which involved a giant orating stocking. As it spoke, presents overflowed out of the top, causing some Tlingit to comment that it was bewitched (Wilbur, n.d.:466).

Later missionary reports suggest this integration of Presbyterian and Tlingit ceremonial elements was common. One missionary comments that "our natives are deceptive...some will have potlatches in the form of Christmas tree celebrations" (Davis in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1911:191). Indeed, judging from Presbyterian descriptions of Christmas celebrations, it is easy to see how the structure of the celebration resembled traditional Tlingit winter festivities. Both involved gift-giving, the use of coniferous tree "trimmings", feasting and entertainment (see Harkin for a similar occurrence among the Heiltsuk, 1993).

Tlingit women played an active role in the reinterpretation of Christian holidays and other church events. Several Presbyterian newspaper accounts describe Thanksgiving banquets in which one Tlingit women’s organization from the model Presbyterian village at Sitka (The Cottage Settlement Missionary Society) played a central role by providing food and entertainment for both church members and the larger community. Oral histories, recently collected from former residents of the model village, make it clear that living there was understood as a means of enhancing prestige, not as an abandonment of traditional Tlingit practices as the Presbyterians understood it to be (Bettridge, 1979:213; Young in the Dauenhauers, 1994:691). The banquets hosted by Cottage Society members would also be an opportunity to enhance prestige. For example, one article reported that the Thanksgiving banquet, hosted by the Cottage Women’s Missionary Society, was served in "a large hall,
cheerfully decorated, with tables spread to seat two hundred people" (Anon. in the Verstovian -SMA, 1914). After prayers and hymns were sung, the food was brought out. According to
the report, the food provided by these women:

was of superior quality and may not be minutely described. 
Venison from the near-by forest, in prodigal abundance and
prepared as only the skilled native housewife could prepare it;
pies, cakes, and bread in quantities sufficient to have fed twice
the number, and all prepared by the Cottage Native Housewife-
to say nothing of butters, jellies and jams galore [ibid.].

Despite the Christian nature of the Thanksgiving banquets emphasized by the
missionary, giving these feasts offered Tlingit women considerable prestige as they played a
central role in feeding and entertaining the guests and this validated their status in front of the
whole native community.

That these Christian holidays were structured like traditional Tlingit feasts is evident in the
sharing of responsibility for hosting the banquet. As another report in a Presbyterian
newspaper indicates, the expense of the banquet had usually been borne by the members of the
Cottage Settlement. The writer points out that, in the previous year, the Thanksgiving banquet
was funded by the members of the church who lived in the native village (Anon. in The
Thlinget, 1908).

While the archival data examined contains few descriptions of these ceremonies, the
available information does suggest that Tlingit women’s organizations assumed a central role in
the hosting of feasts on numerous church occasions. This is illustrated by Swogger’s 1935
missionary report, reprinted in a church periodical, that detailed the year’s accomplishments of
one women’s group:

Five family dinners, each time for about 125, is part of the
record of one native women’s society. It means a lot of work,
and the women give generously from the foodstuffs they have
put up (Swogger in Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS,
1935).

An earlier description of one of these church dinners, in this case hosted by men,
shows commonalities with traditional Tlingit feasts in which a great quantity of food was
distributed among the guests:
A holiday supper was given by two of our ex-mission boys. All of the mission workers were invited and all of the Cottage boys, their wives and families. Covers were laid for a least one hundred. The older natives ate quietly and carried away large packages of the fragments [Anon. in the North Star - SMA, 1898].

While women were not always the hosts of the church banquets, the elaborateness and prestige of these affairs, like traditional feasts, were largely dependent on women’s preparation and contribution of food. There can be little question that Tlingit women maintained or gained influence through these Presbyterian ceremonies.

**Fund-raising Activities**

In keeping with their traditional role as skillful managers of wealth, Tlingit women played an active role in raising funds for the support of church and community needs. Fundraising was mostly carried out by women’s church organizations. Before the formation of Tlingit women’s organizations, when missionaries recorded support it had often been from Tlingit women. For instance, Carle (1900) reported that the first time the Presbyterian church at Hoonah asked for money from its native congregation, no one responded until a woman under suspension for polygamy - so presumably she was high-ranking - made an offering to the church. He stated that:

I gave the call, “Bring your offerings to lay before Jesus”, pointing to his name above the table. A long pause. No one moved. Mrs. McFarland stepped up and laid down a dollar. My brother added a piece. Again a long pause....Then a young boy walked forward and laid down a nickel. Another long pause. Then a woman, who is under suspension for polygamy, moved up and laid down a wall pocket of baby seal skin. The movement was begun, and the offerings began to come till [sic] the table was quite full. Some gifts of money but mostly things they had made [Carle in Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS, 1900].

By publicly contributing to the support of the mission, this high-ranking woman’s act was one that evidently carried considerable prestige within her community. According to Carle, in the next few days an influential family who had previously scorned his requests for
offerings to the church made a substantial contribution. He noted:

A man and his wife came here with another offering for this collection. It was the man who had recently done the worst talking about me in connection with the matter of regular Sunday offerings. And to our surprise they discovered one piece after another until five separate articles lay before us, the most valuable offering from any one family [ibid.].

As contributions to the missions were often made during public ceremonies, it served to validate the status of the person in a way that was comparable to the distribution of wealth at potlatch ceremonies.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, Tlingit women’s organizations were established to aid the church financially and to help the less fortunate members of the community through fundraising activities. These organizations raised funds in a variety of ways. There are numerous references to Tlingit women, both individually and collectively, contributing the proceeds from their basket sales to the support of the church (Anon. in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1907). Social programs were put on for the entertainment of the whole community and admission was charged. Winnard, a Tlingit woman, explained that the women’s group at Sitka put on plays which recounted traditional themes from the Raven stories. These dramatizations were performed using traditional native costumes and offered the audience a chance to see costumes that were rarely seen (Winnard in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1916:190). These church programs as well as the continuation of the traditional woman’s art of basket making provided Tlingit women with the opportunity to be actively involved in preserving and transmitting at least part of their cultural knowledge.16

Through their fundraising activities, women’s organizations began to make substantial contributions to the Presbyterian church. For instance, Waggoner, reporting on the work of the Ladies Aid Society, stated that:

Last year our women made fifty dollars by their work. This year they have not yet received their returns from the articles sent away. During the past year the Society has purchased an individual Communion set, font, and carpet for the pulpit and choir platforms [Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1907].

This missionary’s report was followed by a steady stream of other missionary reports,
all praising the financial contributions made by Tlingit women’s organizations in support of the
church. For instance, the Sitka church, in its business report, stated that:

Each department is in a prosperous condition, the native people
having given liberally in spite of their limited incomes. The
work of the Women’s Missionary Society has been especially
strong [Anon. in The Verstovian - SMA, 1915].

In 1919, a Ladies Aid society was organized at Juneau. It was reported that:

An ambitious program was undertaken by this group of women.
At their regular Friday meetings they engaged in sewing for
needed church projects. They planned for hospital visitation.
They immediately gave money for the interpreter’s salary and to
the general support of the church [Anon. in Alaska Presbytery
General, Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA].

Another missionary report stated that;

The women’s society has continued to do good work at least in
the way of raising money and they have pledged $300 on the
new church building [Buchanan in Alaska Church Records
Collection - PHS, 1921].

Thus, the establishment of these women’s organizations coincided with a considerable
increase in Tlingit contributions to the Presbyterian church. These large contributions to the
church were particularly significant during a time when many Tlingit understood active
participation in church activities as an additional form of prestige (Kan, 1987).

Not only did Tlingit women’s organizations aid the church, they also provided support
for a number of community needs. In a Presbyterian newspaper, Swogger, a missionary,
described the activities of the Metlakatla women’s organization:17

The women...did sewing for Sheldon Jackson and contributed
food for Haines House. They have also attended to many local
needs, making clothes for poor children, help for the sick,
sympathy extended to those who are bereaved, lunches for the
men who are cutting wood for the church, special cleaning of the
church, and $40 toward the painting of the church [Swogger in
Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS, 1935].

Women’s organizations provided valuable assistance, both financial and spiritual, to
families of the bereaved. Marsden, the minister at Saxman, reported that when a Tlingit
woman died, the two church societies, men’s and women’s, spoke with her family and took
charge of all matters connected with the funeral. He stated that:

the woman's association raised a small amount of money and
bought all that was needed for the dress and the covering for the
coffin. The men's association subscribed for and built the coffin
and took charge of all the other funeral arrangements. Then, the
members of both groups carried the coffin to its final resting
place [Marsden in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1905:176].

By playing a central role in the organization and the funding of funerals, the women who
comprised these organizations were provided with an important opportunity to enhance their
prestige in the eyes of their own community members. The mourners of the dead must
demonstrate reciprocity to those members of the community who helped and comforted them
(see Kan, 1987; 1989). Evidence from various communities indicates that the family of the
bereaved continued this traditional obligation by expressing their gratitude through distributing
gifts of money to those members of church organizations who had helped their family. For
example, Davis, a Presbyterian missionary, wrote that:

At one time a child died whose parents belonged to the Christian
Endeavor Society. I said we would make the little coffin
ourselves and help the parents out. Six of our Christian
Endeavor members came and helped. I learned later that there
was a feast for the dead child, and that these six members who
helped me in making the coffin received five dollars apiece at the
feast for making the coffin [Davis in Home Mission Monthly -
PHS, 1911:191].

Clearly, Tlingit women's organizations played an important role on occasions such as
funerals, a role that would undoubtedly have been crucial during a time of devastating
tuberculosis epidemics. They were rewarded financially for their increasingly busy role as
comforters. More importantly, though, by participating in Presbyterian organizations that
cross-cut clan ties and attended to a variety of local needs, Tlingit women had a new forum for
initiating and maintaining a network of social relationships based on reciprocal obligations.

Besides attaining prestige through aiding the church financially as well as helping
members of the community by means of other religious activities which attended to local needs,
Tlingit Presbyterian women's societies were also active in raising funds for community
projects, which further increased their influence. A Presbyterian newspaper described an
incident in which the entire community of Kake followed a decision made by a women’s organization:

For sometime the people of Kake have been planning to build a second street but lack of lumber and other difficulties have held up the work. The men had planned to postpone the work until fall but the women in their Village Improvement Society meeting decided that they wanted it this spring. Accordingly the men set to work with volunteer labor cutting the logs, sawing the lumber in the local mill recently installed and built the walk. The women, to do their part, prepared dinner everyday in the town theater and served all the workmen [Anon. in The Verstovian - SMA, 1920].

Another account describes how this Village Improvement Society also raised the $400 to pay for the materials and the sawing of lumber for a boardwalk, as well as $90 for food to serve all the men who worked on the project (Drucker, 1958:20). As Brown (1970) pointed out, when women control essential provisions, they are able to exert influence over male activities. In this particular case, women were able to influence the decision-making process within their communities, partly because of their ability to dispense the money required for the successful completion of community projects.

Evidence from the mission station at Wrangell confirms the influence of women’s organizations within the native community. The mission society at Wrangell was established by Tillie Paul, a Tlingit interpreter, who was in charge of a remote mission post without a minister. Tillie Paul taught the group, which consisted of ten women, to read and write. This society had “progressive ideas” in the eyes of the church, as the husbands were viewed as auxiliary rather than vice versa. This conclusion was derived from “the fact that the husbands had been made honorary members. The men promised to do all they could to support the society” (editor’s notes in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1923). This organization of women was so influential that when the Board of Home Missions attempted to pay only half of the salary previously agreed upon for Tillie Paul, a letter signed by several ministers advised that this action would cause serious disruption within the native congregation. The letter stated:

The amount of $50 per month was fixed upon after careful consideration with the three elders of the church and Mr. Diven [the new Minister], and anything less than this amount would disappoint Mrs. Paul-Tameree and her friends and discourage
the native church. We hold the situation there in delicate tenure and any niggardliness now would make Mr. Diven's difficult task still more difficult [Hall-Young in Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS].

To summarize, fundraising was an essential feature of the Presbyterian women's appropriate sphere of activity and was also compatible with traditional Tlingit associations between women and wealth management. By raising funds for the support of the church through profits obtained by the sale of their baskets and admission charged for community events, Tlingit women were provided with an important avenue to increase their influence. Fund-raising which aided both the church and members of the women's own communities provided women with an important forum for initiating and maintaining social relationships based on reciprocity. This advantage, coupled with their access to a valuable resource, money, provided Tlingit women with the means to directly influence the formal decision-making process within their communities.

Presbyterian Prayer Meetings

Although most Tlingit women were excluded from the formal decision-making processes of the Presbyterian church, the predominantly female congregations were able to use Presbyterian prayer meetings or church services to express their opinions on various family and local concerns.

A large portion of the time allotted for Presbyterian prayer meetings was turned over to the Tlingit congregation. Most missionaries described how the congregation took full advantage of the open forum. It was not uncommon for three or four participants to stand up and wait for the opportunity to sing, pray or give a testimonial. Testimonials, which involved standing up in front of the congregation and declaring one's sins and making promises to lead a Christian life, were extremely popular among the Tlingit. Hall-Young wrote:

no urging was needed to get natives to testify, pray and exhort. Instead, we constantly had to put on the brakes. Had we allowed it the prayer meet would have continued for three to four hours [1927:165].

However, instead of sticking to "Christian themes" in their testimonials, Tlingit participants
often stood up and complained about another individual’s or family’s behaviour or took the
opportunity to berate one another (Hall-Young, 1927:165). Testimonials also served as an
occasion to criticize missionary efforts. In his missionary report, Jones stated:

There is one experience which we missionaries have that our
ministerial brethren in the states, who preach to white
congregations, scarcely or never meet; and that is that after the
sermon is over to have some member of the congregation get up
and commence to praise or blame what has been said. Natives
are very frank, freely express their thoughts and frequently take
this liberty. So it is not an uncommon thing for the missionary
in this part of the world to have his efforts criticized in the
presence of the congregation [Jones in the Presbyterian Church
in the USA, 1906:57].

The missionary concluded that this could be “somewhat embarrassing for the newcomer”
(ibid.).

Presbyterian prayer meetings proved to be especially fruitful for Tlingit women’s verbal
expression. Hall-Young explicitly states that “women had more to say at prayer meetings than
men” (Hall-Young, 1927: 98). Other missionaries also mention women’s active participation.

Hays, a missionary at Sitka wrote:

Several were on their feet at the same time, and two women on
opposite sides of the room began to pray in soft, earnest tones,
and both continued to the end of their petitions. Such
earnestness and enthusiasm, even though one cannot understand
the words, cannot fail to lift the hearer up from the selfishness of
the carnal nature into the abiding presence of our Lord [Hays in
Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1904:108].

Often the length of the prayer meetings and church services could not accommodate the
large number of Tlingit women who wanted to participate. For instance, Austin reported:

One evening after holding our meeting for an hour and a half,
not a minute wasted, one of the women after it was closed came
to me and said “Why don’t you keep the meeting longer so we
can all pray“. She was hardly satisfied when I told her, to do
that we should have to stay all night [Austin in the North Star -
SMA, 1888].

In response to the popularity of the prayer meetings and church services, the length of the
services was often extended. Hall-Young, for example, complains of four to five hour
services (Hall-Young, 1927:165).
There are two reasons for the more ardent participation of Tlingit women than men in prayer meetings. First, Tlingit women constituted the majority of the Presbyterian congregations and their presence may be noted more often (Hall-Young, 1927:98). Beck, for example, reported that his congregation in the village of Kake consisted of 59 women and 27 men, in which case the heavy participation by women would hardly be surprising (Beck in Alaska Church Records Collection -PHS, 1920). Second, prayer meetings offered Tlingit women an opportunity to express their opinions and influence decisions. In her recent discussion of contemporary Southern Paiute women, Knack (1989) suggests that participation in public meetings provided these native women with the opportunity to influence those in formal decision-making offices which were predominantly occupied by Southern Paiute men. As discussed earlier, those Tlingit men who assumed the position of elder in the Presbyterian church, a role only open to men, were most often traditional clan leaders. As one contemporary Tlingit man explains, use of the Tlingit peer system served to integrate Christianity with village life (Soboleff in Bettridge, 1979:204).

Although some Tlingit women had traditionally contributed to the decision-making process, they were not provided with a comparable outlet for the expression and discussion of their suggestions in post-contact communities. Thus, through their active participation in prayer meetings which often involved the attendance of the whole community, Tlingit women could advance their opinions on community problems and abhorrent behaviour. They could acquire a greater voice in church affairs and community life by coalescing public opinion and even exerting pressure on those men who dominated the formal decision-making offices of the Presbyterian church.

Tlingit church members often accompanied the minister in conducting prayer meetings in other Tlingit communities. These inter-community prayer meetings were structured much like the traditional potlatch ceremony, in which problems were addressed that could not be solved at the local community level (Tollefson, 1995). Tlingit women as well as Tlingit men appear to have combined the Christian message of brotherly love with the traditional mediating role of naa kani.
Inter-community Presbyterian prayer sessions were conducted between native communities that were traditionally connected by ties of kinship and friendship. A description of the Sitka congregation’s prayer visit to the Tlingit village of Angoon indicated that these visits were social gatherings that often involved the participation of the whole community, regardless of denominational affiliation:

When this company of native Christians arrived in Angoon, accompanied by their minister, Rev. Robert J. Diven, they found the Angoon people eagerly awaiting them. One of the largest houses in the village had been freshly painted and papered within, just for the occasion, and the entire village turned out to the meetings [Anon. in the Verstovian - SMA, 1916].

While detailed information on the earlier prayer meetings is lacking, Whiteside’s 1941 missionary reports provide a wealth of information on what these meetings entailed. He noted that four men and four women, including “a woman who was one of the strongest speakers of the Tlinget tribe” (Whiteside in Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS, 1941a), were chosen from the Presbyterian Klawock church to lead prayer meetings in another village. Furthermore, Whiteside reported that:

The Klawock visitors were received and entertained like visiting royalty. Every night before the church service a banquet was given by some organization of the town. On the final evening a great demonstration was planned the people of Kake all came to the town hall in the largest crowd in the town’s history. A formal farewell program was given. At its conclusion a big drum was brought out to the center of the hall. Each person grateful for the work we had done while with them, laid his or her contribution of money on the drum head. The people of the town contributed seventy-eight dollars toward the expenses of the trip. They felt that this was not enough and twelve cases of oranges and apples were given to us. We were told to take them home and to have a big party for all the people of Klawock, and tell them of the love that we carried back as representatives of Kake [Whiteside in Alaska Church Records Collection - PHS, 1941a].

In a subsequent report, Whiteside explained that Klawock returned this community’s generosity by hosting and entertaining thirty members of Kake for a week. During this series of prayer meetings, he noted “that a feud between two influential families was put to rest and resulted in 64 new members for the Presbyterian church” (Whiteside in Alaska Church Records
Collection - PHS, 1941b). In appreciation of the work of the members of the visiting church community, Whiteside reported:

Our people here, in addition to entertaining for one week more than 30 persons, gave them more than $200 in gifts and money, to take home with them. On the night the collection was taken, more than $165 was given in cash and eleven boxes of fruit for the visitors [ibid.].

These prayer meetings were structured along the lines of traditional Tlingit methods of problem solving. Traditionally, political problems unable to be settled within the local context such as disputes between families were dealt with in a secondary political arena - the potlatch (Tollefson, 1995). Although the missionaries discouraged the Tlingit from participating in potlatch ceremonies, the theme of brotherly love implicit in Christianity provided the Tlingit with an alternate means to solve political problems. For example, in speaking about the beginning of a 1925 land claims suit, Daisy Jones, a contemporary Tlingit elder, states:

So in order to get together we had to make peace with Wrangell. And all the Kogwanton men went there....One of my grandfathers was blind and my grandmother had to go with him and take him by the hand. She didn’t want to go. She thought she would be massacred....But lo and behold it didn’t get that way. They accepted them and gave them a big peace party, and, and for days and giving each other, adopting each other under Christianity and the new ANB [Jones in Alaskan Native Review Commission, 1984].

Thus, within the context of inter-community Presbyterian prayer service visits, Tlingit women and men assumed influential roles in solving larger political problems that could not be dealt with in the local context. These roles were much like the traditional mediating role of naa kani who brought two opposing clans into formal contact. Tlingit women, whose participation in this role had been limited, were now participating in this role in an equal capacity to men.

To summarize, despite being excluded from the formal authority structures of the Presbyterian church, with positions open only to Tlingit men, Tlingit women utilized church activities defined by the Presbyterians as appropriate for women as a means to enhance their social and political influence. Presbyterian religious ceremonies were elaborated to correlate with traditional Tlingit feasts; Tlingit women’s traditional role of wealth management, which
enabled women to influence the decision making process, was fully compatible with Presbyterian fundraising; finally Presbyterian prayer meetings provided women with the opportunity to voice their opinions and to assume important mediator roles that influenced political decisions. Due to the similarities between the activities that were channeled to Tlingit women as the result of Presbyterian gender conventions and Tlingit women’s traditional roles, it was with very little effort that Tlingit women’s traditional roles were redirected into the Presbyterian context - an unintended consequence, but one which provided Tlingit women with an alternate means to acquire social and political significance and, in so doing, subvert the Presbyterian gender conventions. Miller (1992), researching contemporary Coast Salish communities, points out that the incorporation of new activities into the domain of women’s roles often serves to establish links between women and political life. This association between Tlingit women and political involvement became still more apparent by the middle of the twentieth-century and continues into contemporary times. Both Drucker (1958:50) and Klein (1980:177) report that the support of Tlingit Presbyterian women’s organizations, the majority of which had fused with the Alaskan Native Sisterhood, were important to the Alaskan Native Brotherhood because women were better fund-raisers.

**Conclusion**

Ethnohistorical studies of specific native-missionary encounters are important in that they demonstrate the considerable variation that exists with regards to the degree that natives were able to maintain control over their relationship with missionaries.

This thesis shows that Tlingit women successfully adapted the roles and activities of Presbyterian “women’s work” to traditional Tlingit frames of reference. Implicit in the educational forms of the Presbyterian mission stations was a gender-based division of labor that excluded Tlingit women from decision-making roles. Yet, as we have seen, the short staffed Presbyterian mission stations relied on native practitioners to participate in the missionary enterprise. By reshaping the Presbyterian roles and activities to coincide with
Tlingit traditions, women were able to acquire considerable social influence. By assuming the church positions of interpreter and deaconess, some high-ranking Tlingit women were not only able to retain but also expand their involvement in the social and political affairs of the community, as these new church roles allowed them to mediate between the church and the Tlingit communities. These women introduced valuable outside knowledge and distributed resources such as food and medicine to the Tlingit congregations. Moreover, the Presbyterian activities considered appropriate for women - especially fundraising - were for the most part congruent with traditional Tlingit women's activities. This continuity facilitated the redirection of traditional women's roles into the Presbyterian context; Tlingit women of varying rank were provided with an alternate means to distribute valuable resources, initiate and maintain social relationships built on reciprocal obligation, and affect the decision-making process in their communities. Thus, the Presbyterians unwittingly provided women with a new powerbase, perhaps even at the expense of roles previously associated with Tlingit men.

This thesis points to the importance of considering gender in further anthropological studies concerning native responses to missionization. An examination of gender would yield a more complete understanding of how Christianity was experienced, and would, more broadly, enrich our knowledge of the colonial encounter. Although this thesis, of necessity, has largely drawn upon archival materials, incorporating the oral histories of the Tlingit people themselves could provide future researchers with further insight into the experience of Tlingit women following contact with the Presbyterians.
Notes

1 This phrase refers to the commonly held Presbyterian belief that if missionaries performed good works, they would be rewarded in the afterlife. The phrase takes on new meaning, however, when it is considered in reference to the encounter between Tlingit women and Presbyterian missionaries. As we shall see, the “good works” performed by Tlingit women had other rewards.

2 This special issue of Ethnohistory is edited by Sergei Kan and Michael Harkin. It contains five articles that explore specific situations of native women’s interaction with Christian missions as well as a critical review of feminist approaches to the study of Christianity in Native North America (Strong, 1996).

3 The Tlingit myth of Lenaxxidaq, Property Woman, also supports the association between women and wealth as Property Woman has the power to bestow wealth to people (de Laguna, 1972:821).

4 De Laguna (1972), Klein (1975; 1976; 1980) and Emmons (1991) cite various examples of Tlingit women vetoing their husbands' trading transactions.

5 When describing the position of naa kani, several scholars, Tollefson (1995) for example, have translated this word as “brothers-in-law” instead of “siblings-in-law”.

6 Hereafter the Presbyterian Historical Society Archives will be abbreviated to PHS.

7 Hereafter the Stratton Memorial Library Archives will be abbreviated to SMA.

8 See Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) for a similar case in Africa.

9 Presbyterian picture cards usually depicted Jesus performing unusual feats such as walking on water or raising Lazarus from the dead.

10 During the early 1920s, there appears to be a growing support within the native community for using English in church services, making the position of interpreter unnecessary; however, Bromley, the missionary at Klawock, reported: "My interpreter has stayed on in spite of no salary. The using of English in the evening service has trebled the attendance at that service" (Bromley in Alaska Presbytery Minutes - SMA, 1922:184).

11 Similar occurrences were reported by Kan (1985) for nineteenth century Tlingit interpreters in the Russian Orthodox church.

12 Missionaries frequently complained about the continuation of the Tlingit ranking system. In 1920, Hays acknowledged that one small girl was driven to run away from the school because other children were taunting her regarding her father's slave ancestry (Hays, Folder 2, 804.1, Sheldon Jackson Collection - SMA). In a later incident, a missionary complained of two children who, having a claim to superior caste, were overbearing with others (Jackson in Home Mission Monthly - PHS, 1922).

13 In a letter to Sheldon Jackson, Rev. Warne also describes how the employment of Fannie Willard had culminated in "a great revival" with an estimated "hundred people" making a commitment to the church (Warne quoted in Hinckley, 1996:286).
It was customary for the Alaskan mission stations to receive mission barrels and boxes containing medicine, material, clothing, bedding, seeds, needles and books from patron churches in the lower United States. Undoubtedly the interpreter, in the absence of the missionary, would also assume responsibility for the distribution of these goods among the Tlingit congregation.

Kan (1996) reports that Russian Orthodox Tlingit women were able to increase their prestige by providing food for church events.

A similar occurrence is reported by Blackman (1990) among Haida women.

In 1920, a Presbyterian congregation, composed of both Tsimshian and Tlingit, was established at the Metlakatla community on Annette Island, Alaska (Murray, 1985:319-320).
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