

# History of Haines Alaska

**The Haines area was originally settled by Native Alaskans of the Tlingit culture who traveled along the Northwest Coast upwards behind the receding glaciers or came down the mountain valleys from the Interior. The area was valued for its mild climate and abundance of food. The original Native name for Haines was Deishu, meaning "end of the trail". With an oral tradition, and no written history, details of Tlingit Native migrations are largely undocumented.**

Many Tlingits of the Chilkat Valley can trace their families back generations to residents of local villages. There are Tlingit sites in Southeast Alaska where fish traps and basketry date from 5,000 to 10,000 years ago. Local archeological evidence shows fish traps in the Chilkoot River 2,100 years ago and remnants of houses at the Chilkoot village site date to over 800 years ago. Oral history also reflects a long tradition of Tlingit habitation in the Chilkat valley.

The Chilkats were well known as the largest and most powerful of all the Tlingit tribes. They had exclusive control of many trade routes into the interior through which they maintained their position as middleman in the fur trade and amassed great wealth.

Historically, the Chilkat valley had many village sites but only two are still occupied today. A village was located along the banks of the Chilkoot River and was occupied by three clans:

- **Lukaax.adi (raven/sockeye)**
- **Kaagwaantaan (bear)**
- **Shangukeidi (thunderbird)**

**There were 30 houses on the West bank of the Chilkoot in the 1860's, and more on the East bank. The site on the East bank was destroyed between 1881-1890 by a landslide and many lives were lost. It was called Akaxwoo.ee (earth/mud slide over it). More lives were lost to Western diseases so that by 1882 only 8 houses and 127 inhabitants were reported at the village site. By 1895, four named tribal houses and nine smaller houses remained.**

A road was constructed in the late 1950's directly through the village site to Chilkoot Lake and gradually over the years became a park wayside. Native use continues on a seasonal basis for subsistence food gathering and the Lukaaxadi have erected a cultural camp within the old village site. Additional village sites of the Lukaaxadi were Tan.aani on Lutak Inlet, Deishu at Haines, and on the Chilkat River, Yandeist'akye' at 4 mile, and Kaatxawultu' at 19 mile. Kaatxawultu' was destroyed by a landslide after 1895, and some of the villagers moved to

Yandeist'akye'.

Located near the Haines airport, Yandeist'akye' was an important village site to the local Tlingit. In 1880, Yandeist'akye' had 16 houses and 171 people, but by 1900 only 7 houses remained. Both Tan.aani and Yandeist'akye' were decimated by disease so that by 1895 Tan.aani was deserted and the last residents of Yandeist'akye' died in the 1930's. Many residents who did not succumb to disease moved to Deishu, where their descendants still survive today.

**Many areas in the valley have a long history of use by the Tlingit. Duk Point "Little Cottonwood Point" at 7 mile on the Chilkat and 4 mile point are important sites to fish for eulachon and Jones Point was important for early king salmon. South of Jones Point was a large Chilkat Village and a Cemetery before a cannery was built in the same area in 1882.**

**European explorers began arriving in the late 1700's. During the Vancouver expedition in July 1794, Lieutenant Joseph Whidbey led a small exploration party up the Lynn Canal (named after Vancouver's birthplace) to the shores of the Chilkat Inlet. It was during that visit that the Whidbey party greeted local Natives and first charted the local physical environment.**

During the following decades, explorers and traders became more frequent visitors to the Upper Lynn Canal region. Most notably, Captain Richard Jeffrey Cleveland sailed to the end of Taiya Inlet in 1799 and John D'Wolfs trading excursion of 1805. The first white man to settle here was George Dickinson, who came as an agent for the Northwest Trading Company.

**The location of Klukwan or "Eternal Village" more than 20 miles up-river, offered protection from the well-armed sailing vessels of the Russians, Americans, British, and others. The village had many large clan houses and a population of a few thousand, but by 1882, only 65 houses and about 600 people remained.**

**Chief Kohklux of Klukwan was known as the most powerful warrior and greatest diplomat on the Northwest Coast. By the mid 19th century, traders were attempting to access the interior to trade for valuable furs. Hudson Bay Company built Fort Selkirk on the Pelly River but Chilkat warriors led by Kohklux were responsible for its destruction on August 21, 1852. Historically many defensive forts were constructed by the Tlingit in the area; one on a point in Portage Cove, one on a hill at the mouth of the Chilkoot River, and on the Chilkat River: one at 7 mile, one at 9 mile, and one at 13 mile above the current road. The Russians built "Willow Fort" near Pyramid Harbor about 1838 while surveying the Chilkat River.**

**The Chilkats became aware of the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States, when Kohklux was presented with a U.S. flag on October 17, 1867 by Capt. Howard on the ship Lincoln. Kohklux displayed the flag mounted on his canoe, one day before the US flag was raised at Sitka.**

**In 1869, William Henry Seward, his son Frederick and surveyor George Davidson visited Klukwan to view a total eclipse. While there, Seward became friends with Kohklux and was well respected as a man of peace as he negotiated a treaty between the Sitka Tlingits and the Chilkats. Seward realized the importance of the Chilkat Valley to the United States. Starting in 1903 the US Government began construction of Fort William H. Seward to help settle the boundary dispute between the United States and Canada.**

In 1879 when John Muir and Presbyterian missionary, S. Hall Young visited Yandeist'akye', Kohklux wore a robe that was a gift from Seward and showed a tattoo of "Seward" on his arm. At this time, at the request of Chiefs Kohklux and Daanawaak, permission was given to the Presbyterians to build a mission school at Deishu to educate local Native children. The site

chosen was on the narrow portage between the Chilkat River and Lynn Canal. By 1881, with the financial help from Sheldon Jackson, the mission was established. The town was named for Mrs. F. E. Haines, secretary of the Presbyterian National Committee of Home Missions, which raised funds for the new mission.

Leaving Sitka on May 20th, 1880, the "Edmund Bean Party" was the first group of miners allowed into the interior with permission of Chief Kohklux. As pressure was brought to bear on the Chilkat Tlingit to open trade access to the interior, their position as middleman in trade was threatened. Lunaat, 38 years old and the second chief at Yandeist'akye' was killed in Dyea in 1888 during a dispute over rights to pack on the trail. Kohklux died in 1889 at the age of 70 and Chief Daanawaak of Yandeist'akye' was very old by then. Many changes were coming fast. During the 1890's their income derived from the "fur trade" was shrinking, as others began to haul freight over the passes. As the gold rush began, mounting pressures due to economics and Native rights issues caused the government to exert more pressure on Native peoples through the courts. Often Tlingits lost their cabins, hunting, fishing and berry picking sites to encroachment by new "owners". As Native rights issues were developed, the ANB and ANS were formed to fight for the rights of Natives to vote and own land.

Many of the founders of the Haines ANB/ANS went on as leaders to influence the development of Native Rights issues statewide. Elizabeth Peratrovich was from the Lukaaxadi of Yandeist'akye'. Mildred Sparks and Victor Hotch of the Klukwan Gaanaxteidi', Austin Hammond of the Chilkoot Lukaaxadi and others were active on issues and received statewide recognition for their efforts and dedication.

Today Tlingits still maintain a strong cultural presence in the community and the Elders are influential in the region protecting Native rights and subsistence issues.

**In the 1880's a post office was established at Chilkat. The town of Haines developed around the Mission School. The town then became an important outlet for the Porcupine Mining District, producing thousands of dollars worth of placer gold at the turn of the century. Haines also marked the beginning of the Dalton Trail, which crossed the Chilkat mountain pass to the Klondike goldfields in the Yukon during the great Klondike gold rush of 1896-99. The Dalton Trail now roughly follows the route of the Haines Highway.**

The discovery of gold in the Porcupine district triggered action to finally resolve the lingering boundary dispute between Alaska and Canada. Skagway was garrisoned with federal troops in 1898. In 1903, construction was begun on a permanent military post near Haines. Garrisoned in 1904, it was named Fort William H. Seward, in honor of the Secretary of State who negotiated the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. In 1903, the federal boundary treaty was signed in support of the United States' claim.

By 1910, Haines had approximately 400 residents, 19 stores, and four canneries. In its first special election, residents voted to incorporate as a city for the purposes of maintaining order and improving the school system. As the growth of Haines and Fort Seward continued through

the years, Fort Seward was renamed "Chilkoot Barracks" to honor the gold seekers who struggled over the Chilkoot Trail. The name changed again at the end of World War II when the Barracks were decommissioned and sold to a group of veterans who incorporated it as the City of Port Chilkoot In 1956. In 1970, Port Chilkoot merged with Haines to become a single municipality, the City of Haines. In 1978, Fort Seward became a designated National Historic Landmark. Presently, the old fort and stately buildings serve as homes, hotels and cultural attractions.

In the 1940's and 1950's Haines became an important transportation link with the completion of the Haines Highway and the initiation of the Alaska Marine Highway System. The first ferry in the Upper Lynn Canal was operated by Steve Homer and Ray Gelotte, two of the veterans who purchased Fort Seward and docked in Portage Cove. In the early 1950's a military fuel storage pumping facility was constructed at Tanani Point, and an 8 inch pipeline ran over 600 miles to Fort Wainwright near Fairbanks. This pipeline operated for 20 years before becoming obsolete.

After statehood in 1959, the Alaska Legislature began urging various occupied areas of the state to become more organized. They passed the Mandatory Borough Act in 1963 which required certain sections of the state to form boroughs. The intent was to provide a degree of tax equity between those residents living within the incorporated communities and those residing without where both groups shared the same school system. Though the Haines area was not specifically cited in the law, it was evident that some governmental system would have to be adopted to make the school system legal. In 1968, the Haines Borough became the only third class borough in the state, and its only mandated power was taxation for education. The original boundaries encompassed approximately 2,200 square miles. In 1975, the Borough annexed an additional 420 square miles with the inclusion of the commercial fish processing facility at Excursion Inlet, thereby increasing the Borough's income base.

In 2002 Borough residents voted to consolidate the first-class City of Haines and the third-class Haines Borough into a home rule Borough. This action combined two separate governmental entities into one and mandated adding area wide planning, platting, and land use regulation to the responsibilities of the local government. Areas of the Borough that already had planning and zoning powers, the former City of Haines, Mud Bay and Lutak, retained their respective zoning regulations. The remainder of the Borough has been zoned General Use as described in the Haines Borough Charter and accompanying Transition Plan of 2002.