

A Victim of Nature and Bureaucracy:
The Short, Sad History of Old Kasaan National Monument

by

Frank Norris

given at the annual meeting of
the Alaska Historical Society
Ketchikan, Alaska
October 7, 2000

A Victim of Nature and Bureaucracy: The Short, Sad History of Old Kasaan National Monument

In late June 1913 a Pacific Coast Steamship Company steamer, the S.S. *Spokane*, headed north on an excursion cruise. Soon after entering Alaskan waters, it veered into Skowl Arm, just west of Ketchikan, and visited the abandoned Haida village of Old Kasaan. The company's chief lecturer, Mary Hart, was also the president of the Alaska Cruise Club, and both she and 23 other club members were so impressed by the village's community houses, totem poles, and grave houses that they decided that the site needed to be preserved. The touring group, about half of whom hailed from California, recognized an interest in preserving "the traditions, architecture, customs, habits and records" of Alaska's "Native Clans." But they were dismayed to see that the "ancient village" was "rapidly falling into decay," so they cobbled together a petition asking that "steps be taken to form a National Monument or Park which shall include Old Kasaan, Alaska, so that in the years to come ... not only the American people but tourists and genealogical students from all over the world may have an opportunity to visit and study the relics, records and history of the life of a people who originally inhabited and dominated Alaska."¹

The tourists on the S.S. *Spokane* may or may not have been aware of it, but Old Kasaan was hardly a unique example of an abandoned Haida village. The half century preceding 1913 had witnessed a huge influx of non-Natives to Alaska. Few Native groups escaped that influx, but in southeastern Alaska, the impacts that non-Natives had on traditional lifestyles were particularly acute. The arrival of missionaries, the development of salteries, canneries, and mines, and the establishment of townsites all combined to attract Tlingits and Haidas away from their traditional villages, and between 1880 and 1915 more than 25 of these villages were either primarily or completely abandoned.² Ten or more of these village sites had once belonged to the Haida. Outsiders showed a particular interest in Haida villages because of their distinctive totem poles, community houses, and other architectural and design features.

The members of the Alaska Cruise Club were by no means the first tourists to see and appreciate one of Alaska's Native villages. Indeed, by 1913 industrial tourism to Alaska was a well-established industry. The Pacific Coast Steamship Company had begun bringing "round-trippers" to Alaska back in 1884, and a key aspect of a northern excursion was the opportunity to see Alaska Natives, take notice of their lifestyles, and purchase their handicrafts. Although the ships primarily docked in towns where non-Native populations were concentrated, many nineteenth century ship itineraries included a stop at either Killisnoo (on Admiralty Island) or one of the Chilkat villages, and early twentieth-century tourist excursions often visited one or more Native villages as well.³

It was no coincidence that Old Kasaan had been singled out by the Alaska Cruise Club membership. Before 1900, the village had been one of the largest Haida population centers; its community houses and totem poles were elegantly laid out along a scenic northern shoreline of Skowl Arm. At one time, the Haida had resided on the Queen Charlotte Islands, a hundred miles to

¹ Alaska Cruise Club petition, June 30, 1913, in "Old Kasaan National Monument" box, File 0-38, Entry 7, NARA, College Park. (Entries from this box are hereafter known as NARA CP.)

² Frederica DeLaguna, "Tlingit," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7: Northwest Coast* (Washington, GPO/Smithsonian, 1990), 204.

³ Frank Norris, *Gawking at the Midnight Sun*, Alaska Historical Commission Studies in History No. 170 (June 1985), 17-18, 113-15.

the south, but in the early eighteenth century they moved north to Prince of Wales and other nearby islands. During this same period the Haida gained their first exposure to western culture, and they used a primary trade item—iron—to tremendously expand the size and scope of their woodworking expertise. European explorers who visited this area during the 1760s and 1770s made little or no mention of totem poles; based on these observations, it is surmised that most if not all of the easily-visible totems erected in Kasaan and the other Haida villages postdated those visits. Kasaan was also distinct because it was the only Haida village during the early American period that was located on the east side of Prince of Wales Island, near a popular steamship route. The only other Haida site in the immediate vicinity was a long-abandoned village at the mouth of Cholmondoley Sound; here, the Haida had lived for a few years during their migration from the Queen Charlottes to Kasaan.⁴

The first non-Native had moved to Kasaan even before the U.S. purchased Alaska from the Russian czar. An Austrian immigrant named Charles Vincent Baronovich opened a trading post on the shores of Kasaan Bay in 1865, and by 1867 he had married the adopted daughter of Chief Skowl and staked the Copper Queen mining claim a few miles north of the village. (The Copper Queen was probably Alaska's first lode mine.) Not long afterward, Baronovich opened a salmon saltery near his trading post. Before long, the saltery was producing thousands of barrels of salmon per year, and in response, steamships began making regular visits. Because virtually everyone involved with the mine and saltery hailed from Kasaan village, the cluster of businesses on Kasaan Bay became known as New Kasaan; as a result, the name of the longtime village on Skowl Arm was gradually changed to Old Kasaan.⁵

Old Kasaan, which was just a few miles west of the main steamship route, was known to some of the early Alaskan tourists. Eliza Scidmore, who wrote the first and perhaps the best-known of the nineteenth century Alaskan guidebooks, devoted a whole chapter to “Kasa-an Bay.” During her 1883 visit to New Kasaan, she noted that the Haidas’ “permanent village was fifteen miles below the fishery, and their square whitewashed houses and the tombs and mortuary columns of Skowl, their great chief, makes quite a pretty scene in a shady green inlet.”⁶ The glories of Old Kasaan—which boasted 62 totem poles in 1885 and 60 poles a decade later—were also spread to a larger audience via occasional articles in large-circulation magazines and newspapers.⁷ But most nineteenth century excursion vessels steered clear of the area, and steamships that did visit the area were more likely to stop at New Kasaan than Old Kasaan.

⁴ Marius Barbeau, *Totem Poles* (Ottawa, National Museum of Canada, 1950), 574-75, 585-91; Joyce Annabel Wike, *The Effect of the Maritime Fur Trade on Northwest Coast Indian Society* (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1951), 22, 30-36, 72-79;

⁵ Karen Hebert, “Tradition and Transformation in Southeast Alaska: the Case of Kasaan,” paper presented at the Alaska Historical Society annual meeting, October 5, 1999; Mary G. Balcom, *Ketchikan, Alaska's Totemland*, second edition (Chicago, Adams Press, 1968), 123.

⁶ Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, *Alaska: Its Southern Coast and the Sitkan Archipelago* (Boston, Lothrop & Co., 1885), 31, 35.

⁷ *New York Times*, November 19, 1893, 11; Karen Hebert, “Tradition and Transformation in Southeast Alaska: The Case of Kasaan,” paper presented at the Alaska Historical Society annual meeting, October 5, 1999, 3-4. Margaret Blackman, in her study *Window on the Past: The Photographic Ethnohistory of the Northern and Kaigani Haida* (Ottawa, National Museums of Canada, 1981), 75-92 shows that scores of photographs were taken of the site between 1885 and 1905; some of these photographs were sold as postcards to tourists. A current (October 2000) interpretive panel at Ketchikan's Totem Heritage Center states that Old Kasaan in 1900 had 69 totem poles.

During the period in which Old Kasaan was becoming well known to both tourists and the general public, the village was undergoing dramatic changes. Until the late 1870s, most residents were only tangentially involved in the various new activities at Kasaan Bay. But in 1880, Chief Saanaheit erected a dwelling (the Whale House) near the saltery, and perhaps in response, a small number of village residents abandoned Old Kasaan in favor of New Kasaan. Sources differ regarding the extent of this migration, but as late as 1900, Old Kasaan still had a large number of full-time, year-round residents. That year, however, a new shaft was sunk at the Copper Queen mine, and in 1902 the Kasaan Bay Company opened a large new fish cannery. Because the cannery needed a stable, dependable work force, company manager Louis Babcock visited Old Kasaan in 1902 and offered village residents a deal; if they would relocate, he would provide permanent, year-round employment, schooling, and assistance in laying out a new village. The Haidas, who were by no means averse to economic and educational progress, accepted the offer, and by 1904 Old Kasaan was practically if not totally abandoned.⁸

Alaska, during this period, was being demographically and economically transformed because of the Klondike rush and other large gold rushes in the Nome and Fairbanks areas. The rushes resulted in a dramatic increase in maritime commerce between Seattle and Alaska; several new carriers entered into the trade, and the ship schedules of existing carriers were modified in response to the new economic realities. Whether these larger factors played a role in encouraging tourist ships to visit Old Kasaan is unclear; a more likely reason for the village's popularity was that the village, now abandoned, was a more intriguing point of interest. For whatever reason, steamships began visiting Old Kasaan shortly after it was abandoned; as an observer noted in 1916, "Old Kasaan has been one of the objective points for tourists for a number of years ... the regular excursion steamers frequently put in at Old Kasaan as an accomodation [sic] to the tourist travel."⁹ Many of these visits included the opportunity for visitors to disembark and see the village for themselves.¹⁰

Government authorities were by no means blind to Old Kasaan and the value of its cultural remains. Alaska Governor John G. Brady, who had an obvious interest in Alaska Natives and their culture,¹¹ befriended the village's leader, Chief Saanaheit and even, at one point, expressed an interest in preserving the "village of Kasaan entire." Perhaps as a result of that friendship, Saanaheit agreed in 1901 to have the government move a totem pole and four house posts from the village to Indian River Park in Sitka.¹² And in the fall of 1903, shortly after the village's abandonment, John Baronovich (a son of Charles Baronovich and the owner of several poles)

⁸ Hebert, "Tradition and Transformation," 6-7; Blackman, 1981, 80.

⁹ J.A. Moore to Commissioner, General Land Office, January 18, 1916, NARA CP. Norris, *Gawking*, 24, 123 suggests that tourist steamers began stopping at the village in 1906 and also states that it was "the only village [with totem poles] of general interest to visitors."

¹⁰ "New National Monument in Alaska," U.S. Forest Service Press Release, c. November 6, 1916, NARA CP.

¹¹ Brady, progressive for his time, made the following quote, in January 1903, to a constituent in Klawock; "The natives are now fast giving up their old customs which I think is right for them to do; but it is well to preserve many of the old things, so that the young people who are coming on may see how their forefathers used to live." Brady to Yunnaai, January 14, 1903, in John G. Brady papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹² The totem pole and houseposts were successfully re-erected in Sitka; the remaining items were either lost or were too deteriorated to be rebuilt. Kristen Griffin, *Early Views: Historical Vignettes of Sitka National Historical Park* (Anchorage, NPS, 2000), 74-75; Andrew Patrick interview, September 18, 2000; Ted C. Hinckley, *Alaskan John G. Brady: Missionary, Businessman, Judge, and Governor, 1878-1918* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1982), 342.

agreed to the removal of one additional pole and two corner posts. These eventually arrived in Sitka too, but the route they took was hardly direct. They were first shipped to St. Louis, where they and twelve other poles were displayed at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Soon after the fair closed, thirteen of the fifteen poles were shipped to Portland, Oregon, where they were exhibited at the 1905 Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition. The totem poles did not return to Alaska until January 1906; two months after arriving in Sitka, they were erected at Indian River Park.¹³ These poles were included four years later in Sitka National Monument, Alaska's first national monument. Most can still be seen by visitors today.

By 1906, therefore, two different expeditions, both sponsored by the Federal government and both sanctioned by Old Kasaan's chief, had removed totem poles and other village artifacts. Despite the loss of those materials, the village still boasted some fifty totem poles, eight large community houses, and several remarkable grave houses. Congressional passage of the Antiquities Act that year, which had in large part been in response to the loss of Native artifacts in the southwestern states, spotlighted the importance of preserving Native artifacts elsewhere. Perhaps as a result of that activity, U.S. Forest Service supervisor William A. Langille recommended that Old Kasaan, along with the nearby Tlingit village of Tuxekan, be set aside as national monuments. Frederick E. Olmstead, a Washington-based official with the same agency, strongly seconded Langille's proposal. The recommendation, however, was not acted upon until 1913, when it was revived by the Alaska Cruise Club's petition.¹⁴

Perhaps because almost no one in Washington D.C. had any particular knowledge of Old Kasaan or its resources, the Alaska Cruise Club's petition encountered little if any resistance as it wound its way through the government bureaucracy. The petition was first sent to the General Land Office, who assigned a special agent from its Seattle office, J. A. Moore, to inspect the site. The GLO quickly recognized that the village site contained no private land; it was, however, being managed as part of the Tongass National Forest. It was decided, therefore, that Tongass supervisor William G. Weigle would accompany special agent Moore to the site. The two men visited Old Kasaan on January 28, 1915. Notes and photographs were taken and a survey was drawn, and both men submitted reports to their superiors. Moore found "all of the improvements ... very interesting from an historical standpoint," but he was alarmed to find that "the Indian village is decaying very rapidly and in a few years will have entirely lost its historical value unless necessary steps are taken to rebuild and protect the improvements." Moore noted that "from the standpoint of Indian relics and as illustrative of the customs and traditions of the Indian of southeastern Alaska, Old Kasaan is second only to the Indian improvements and relics situated within the Sitka National Monument." But both he and Weigle also recognized that valuable material lay in other villages as well. So the two men made three recommendations: 1) that the village be set aside as a national monument, 2) that \$5,000 be appropriated to "repair the old buildings ... and that this work be done by Natives," and 3) that "totem poles of superior quality" from "Tuxican" [sic] and two other abandoned villages be "brought to Old Kasaan and there planted in concrete bases."¹⁵

¹³ Griffin, *Early Views*, 76-78; Andrew Patrick interview, September 18, 2000. Neither of the two poles that were "lost" between the St. Louis and Lewis and Clark expositions came from Old Kasaan.

¹⁴ Lawrence W. Rakestraw, *A History of the United States Forest Service in Alaska* (Anchorage, Alaska Historical Commission, 1981), 16, 21, 29. President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed the Alexander Archipelago Forest Reserve (which included Prince of Wales Island) in August 1902; Langille was the reserve's first superintendent.

¹⁵ J.A. Moore to Commissioner, General Land Office, January 18, 1916; Weigle to District Forester, February 12, 1915; both in NARA CP. The other villages were on Marys Island and Tongass Island, both southeast of Ketchikan. A

The last of the two men's recommendations were submitted in January 1916. Their superiors found the proposal fairly non-controversial because the proposed monument was small in size, it promised tourist potential, and because Interior and Agriculture Department representatives as well as Alaska's delegate, James Wickersham, all concurred in its significance. Having cleared those hurdles, Acting Interior Secretary Alexander T. Vogelsang forwarded a draft of a proclamation to President Woodrow Wilson on October 21, 1916; four days later, Wilson signed the proclamation into law. The timing of the proclamation was notable because Old Kasaan was the first national park unit established since Congress and the president had created the National Park Service, just two months earlier.¹⁶ Wilson's proclamation, however, ordered that management of the monument be entrusted to the Forest Service, not the Park Service.

Soon after the monument was proclaimed, Assistant Forester James B. Adams suggested that a special appropriation to protect the monument be added to the 1919 budget. Only then did official Washington learn that it had become the victim of a cruel if unintentional hoax. During August 1915—seven months after the inspector's visit but more than a year before Wilson signed the monument proclamation—a fire had swept through the abandoned townsite; it had destroyed three of the eight community houses and three totem poles, and several other poles had been damaged. But no Alaskan Forest Service employees had informed Washington about the fire until well after the proclamation had been signed. Washington officials, in response, declared their refusal to push the proposed appropriation any further. They also demanded more details about the fire and darkly warned that they might recommend revoking the monument proclamation.¹⁷

To find out more, newly-appointed Alaska forestry superintendent Charles H. Flory made an inspection trip, during the winter of 1920-21, to Old Kasaan and other abandoned village sites. He was not impressed with what he saw. He freely admitted that Old Kasaan, along with Tongass and Howkan villages, had “the most extensive groups [of totem poles] remaining,” but “all groups without exception are in a state of utter neglect.” “It is true,” he noted, “that most of the finer totems are gone and most of the better ones remaining are more or less defective,” but he felt that “a very careful investigation” would reveal “several hundred poles ... worth preserving.” He rued that it was “unfortunate that the monument was not established at an earlier date when the village was still in a good state of preservation.” He confirmed that “a majority of the principal buildings and a number of the poles” were destroyed in the 1915 fire, and in addition, “the ravages of time and vandalism has [sic] completely ruined this interesting old village. The homes are all destroyed and ... all the better totem poles with the exception of a very few ... are practically worthless for any purpose.” Flory found that there were only three totem poles “that might be said to be in really first-class condition, although without exception all have more or less defect,” although three others “which could readily be repaired and put in first-class condition.” By way of a recommendation,

press release, issued shortly after the monument was proclaimed, noted that “a certain amount of vandalism by tourists and souvenir hunters renders some form of protection essential,” but the two men's recommendations, ironically, had no direct bearing on either vandalism or souvenir collecting.

¹⁶ Alexander T. Vogelsang to The President, October 21, 1916; Presidential Proclamation 1351, October 25, 1916; both in NARA CP.

¹⁷ Rakestraw, *A History of the U.S. Forest Service in Alaska*, 81; Norris, *Gawking*, 123. Federal officials were caught off guard, in part, because the fire, taking place as it did in an uninhabited town, attracted little if any initial notice. A perusal of Ketchikan newspapers issued during the summer of 1915—specifically the *Ketchikan Miner* and the *Daily Progressive-Miner*—failed to unearth any articles about the conflagration.

Flory noted that “there is still sufficient material that if it could be gathered together in one place, it would prove a lasting tribute to a rapidly disappearing race....” That place, in his opinion, was “the National Monument at Sitka.” “My suggestion,” he continued, “is that the remaining indian [sic] effects of value be gathered together and a small native village be reconstructed.” Flory estimated that such a project might be completed for \$10,000 or less. As to Old Kasaan, he noted, “I am fully convinced that the Kasaan National Monument as such does not serve any material useful purposes, and I therefore recommend that it be abandoned.”¹⁸

Flory also rued the loss of many smaller items. He noted that when the village was abandoned, the typical resident “left many of his personal belongings in his ancestral home of the native village. These belongings consisted of all kinds of finely carved or decorated articles of wood, bone, shell and sometime metal used in cookery, and other household duties, feasts and dances, religious rites, marriage and death ceremonials, war equipment, etc. [But] this failure ... to take care of their belongings resulted in an indiscriminate pillaging ... by vandals, curio hunters, and others.” An NPS official, relying on a local informant, came to the same conclusion: “when the town was deserted, ... there were also left behind much valuable Native craftsmanship such as Chilkat ceremonial blankets and carved chests. The town was gradually picked clean of its values.”¹⁹

The agency’s Chief Forester, in response, made no immediate move to abandon the monument. He did, however, dispatch an assistant to discuss, with NPS Director Stephen T. Mather, the possible transfer of totem poles from Old Kasaan to Sitka. Mather was initially worried that such a move “would mix exhibits of different tribes that should, from a scientific standpoint, be kept separate.” But recognizing that Sitka’s existing poles were themselves “from various parts of Southern Alaska,” he concluded that “there is no doubt in my mind that ... steps should be taken to save these wonderful exhibits for posterity without much delay.” The only stumbling block was money. Mather tactfully informed him that the \$10,000 price tag rivaled the budget for administering *all* of the 25 monuments under the agency’s jurisdiction. It would be necessary, he stated, to have Congress pass a new appropriation for the purpose. Alaska delegate Dan Sutherland, in response, attempted to include the expenditure as part of a larger bill, but his proposal died in committee.²⁰

During the following decade, Old Kasaan was the subject of both scientific study and agency planning. In 1922, Smithsonian Institution ethnologist T. T. Waterman visited the site. Five years later, archeologist H. W. Krieger, from the Bureau of American Ethnology (which was part of the Smithsonian), “reviewed the feasibility of restoring” the site, and did some restorative work on the

¹⁸ Flory to The Forester, Washington, D.C., January 27, 1921, in NARA CP.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; Frank T. Been, Field Notes for the Inspection of ... Old Kasaan National Monument,” July 19 to August 29, 1941, 34, in File 204, NARA SB. Flory further noted that “the curio stores of Seattle and elsewhere are filled with a hodge podge of valuable material stolen from the indians [sic] of Alaska which will probably never serve any purpose ... the grave houses and even the boxes containing the dead have been violated and their contents pilfered and sold to the curio collection.” A January 20, 1942 memorandum from Been to the NPS Director offers a similar conclusion. Speaking about Walter Water, a Wrangel curio shop owner, Been noted that he was “understood to possess one of the finest private collection of native Alaskan handiwork” and “that part of it [may have been] taken from Old Kasaan National Monument.” File 201, NARA SB. Conversations with various Ketchikan-area residents suggest that artifact collectors, even in recent years, still made occasional forays to the village.

²⁰ Mather to E. A. Sherman, March 29, 1921; W. B. Greeley to Mather, June 8, 1921 Acting Director NPS to W. B. Greeley, June 25, 1921; all in NARA CP; Rakestraw, in his *History of the U.S. Forest Service in Alaska* (p. 98) stated that Sutherland submitted a separate bill to approve the expenditure, but a perusal of the *Congressional Record* and the U.S. Serials Set failed to reveal such a bill.

poles by removing the more obvious signs of decay. The Smithsonian, along with other agencies, felt that the best way to preserve the poles was their removal to Sitka. But nothing was done, and in the meantime, several totem poles were sold to businessmen, moved to Ketchikan, and placed in front of retail outlets.²¹ Throughout this period, the main steamships serving the Alaska trade—and thus tourists themselves—ignored the village. So far as is known, no steamships visited Old Kasaan after the 1915 fire; whether their avoidance of the site was in response to the fire’s damage or because of other considerations is not known.

On August 10, 1933, the administration of Old Kasaan—and all other national monuments that had previously been managed by the Forest Service—was transferred to the National Park Service.²² The NPS, at the time, had four other units in Alaska, but the only unit that had a real staff presence was Mount McKinley National Park. As for the territory’s four national monuments, they were protected areas in name only; the nationwide budget for the agency’s national monuments was less than \$30,000. Sitka National Monument boasted a custodian, Peter Trierschild, but his presence was largely illusory; his salary was \$12 per year. Since 1922, the monument at Sitka had been managed by the Alaska Road Commission, an arm of the U.S. War Department, and Trierschild was the local foreman. Given that arrangement, the NPS asked the ARC to manage Old Kasaan National Monument as well. But the Road Commission, which was fully occupied in planning, building, and maintaining the territory’s roads and trails, had little interest in managing a national monument that was well away from any road system. So far as is known, no ARC staff visited the monument during the time of their tenure.²³

During the mid-1930s, both the Forest Service—and to a lesser extent the Park Service—continued to express a concern about Old Kasaan’s totem poles. One of the NPS’s first actions after receiving administrative authority over the monument was to secure funds for the removal of the site’s best totem poles to Sitka, much as the Forest Service’s Charles Flory had suggested twelve years earlier.²⁴ That attempt failed, however. The following year, the Forest Service pitched a new plan that would have involved totem poles from six abandoned villages. Regarding Old Kasaan, officials hoped to move the twenty most serviceable poles to either Sitka or Juneau, and they recommended that Native labor be used to rehabilitate the poles. The Park Service, in response, agreed to move four of the poles and also agreed to pay \$125 to the owner of each pole. But that plan also failed for lack of funding.²⁵ For the next few years, federal bureaucrats largely ignored the monument, and its cultural artifacts continued to decay. At least six totems, moreover, were

²¹ National Museum of Natural History website (www.nmnh.si.edu/nas/guide/k.htm); Aubrey Neasham to Regional Director, December 13, 1946, in File 201, NARA SB. Lawrence Rakestraw, in his *History of the U.S. Forest Service in Alaska* (p. 81) notes that Krieger visited the site in 1926.

²² Barry Mackintosh, *The National Parks: Shaping the System* (Washington, NPS, 1985), 24, 34-35; Harlan D. Unrau and G. Frank Williss, *Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s* (Denver, NPS, September 1983), 59-60. Unrau and Williss (pp. 66-69) noted that the transfer from the Agriculture to the Interior department was brought about by Executive Order 6166, signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 10 with an effective date of August 10. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, however, fought the order, and it was not until January 28, 1934 that the Forest Service had fully complied with the order and transferred the monuments to Interior Department control.

²³ “Report Card, Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska” for “Kasaan Nat. Mon.,” file 13-182, in Box 24, Program Planning and Research Correspondence, 1905-1959, RG 30, NARA Anchorage.

²⁴ Rakestraw, *A History of the U.S. Forest Service in Alaska*, 98.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 99; Joan M. Antonson and William S. Hanable, *Administrative History of Sitka National Historical Park* (NPS, Anchorage, 1987), 74.

removed during this period: one pole was reportedly taken to Los Angeles, while “the Skowl Totem and four house totems” were “sold in 1932 by the Young family of Ketchikan.”²⁶

In 1937, new leadership in the Forest Service combined with a revival of interest in totems by the Alaska Native Brotherhood and an infusion of new cash into park and recreation projects to spark new interest in cultural preservation. New Alaska Forest Service chief B. Frank Heintzleman quickly became enthusiastic about totem poles, and in both 1937 and 1938 he sent field examiners out to evaluate the condition of totem poles and community houses in various Southeastern villages. Acting on Wellman Holbrook’s study of the Old Kasaan poles, Heintzleman secured an agreement with the Park Service to restore six poles²⁷ from Old Kasaan, and he gained funding from the Works Progress Administration to move the poles to a site near New Kasaan, adjacent to where Chief Sonneheit had built the Whale House back in 1880. (The Indians themselves favored the New Kasaan site; as a Forest Service official noted, “there seems to be no sentiment to re-erect the poles at the Old Kasaan Monument.”) The poles were moved during the winter of 1938-39 and rehabilitated in New Kasaan before being re-erected at the Kasaan Totem Park. NPS Director Arno Cammerer, who approved the totem pole transfer, stated that in light of the Forest Service’s initiative, the Park Service’s inability to manage Old Kasaan, and the diminishing number of on-site resources, his agency would therefore recommend the introduction of legislation to abandon the monument.²⁸

In January 1940, the NPS hired its first full-time manager in southeastern Alaska when Ben C. Miller was hired as the Sitka National Monument custodian. Four months later, Miller inspected the monument, and he too concluded that it should be abandoned. Miller noted that “it is no doubt possible to make a complete restoration of Old Kasaan village but the cost of such a project [an estimated \$60,000] would be more than it is worth.” Recognizing that the Forest Service had recently expended considerable effort constructing totem parks and community houses in

²⁶ Victor H. Cahalane, “Special Report of an Inspection of Old Kasaan National Monument,” January 1941, in File 201, NARA SB. Chris Hanson of Ketchikan’s Totem Heritage Center noted, in a September 20, 2000 interview, that the Chief Skowl Totem was installed in front of Hall’s Trading Post; then, in 1936, it was moved to the Ketchikan City Park where it remained until 1964, when it was installed at the north end of the downtown tunnel. In 1978, the pole was moved to the Heritage Center. Mary Balcom, in *Ketchikan, Alaska’s Totemland*, 1968, 96, stated that poles from Old Kasaan were currently located at the Smithsonian Institution, the Metropolitan Museum of New York, and the “Chicago Museum.” No other sources have verified these statements, however, and Ms. Balcom gave no specifics as to when or how they were removed. New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, however, lists no totem poles in its collection, and the totems at Chicago’s Field Museum came from the Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia, not Old Kasaan. Marius Barbeau’s *Totem Poles* (Ottawa, National Museum of Canada, 1950, 584) noted that an Old Kasaan pole was located in the Museum of the American Indian, which is now located in New York City’s Battery Park as well as in Washington, D.C.; in addition, New York’s American Museum of Natural History (on 79th Street at Central Park West) has many totem poles, of which one or more may have come from Old Kasaan.

²⁷ Sources differ regarding the number of totems at New Kasaan. Rakestraw (p. 104) notes eight poles; Cahalane (1940) noted that the Forest Service had removed “6 or 7” poles from Old Kasaan in recent years, while at New Kasaan, there were “5 totems from Old Kasaan” near the Whale House, plus “three original house totems” from an unknown location; and Been (1941) noted “nine restored and duplicated totem poles,” of which “most of those ... came from Old Kasaan.”

²⁸ Rakestraw notes that Holbrook reported “a scene of desolation” at Old Kasaan; he considered the six poles—all house totems, according to the report following Cahalane’s 1940 inspection—the only ones capable of restoration. Rakestraw, *A History of the U.S. Forest Service in Alaska*, 100, 103-04; C. L. Forsling to Arno Cammerer, October 25, 1938; Cammerer to F. A. Silcox, December 14, 1938; both in File 600, Box 333, Entry 7, RG 79, NARA SB. Ben Miller (memo to Regional Director, July 28, 1945, in File 201, NARA SB) stated that the poles were erected at New Kasaan “during 1940 and 1941.”

Ketchikan, Wrangell, Hydaburg, Klawock, and Saxman, Miller added that “In as much as there are other villages very similar and in better state of preservation as well as being more accessible, it would seem unreasonable to restore [it].” Frank T. Been, the Superintendent at Mount McKinley National Park and the agency’s highest-ranking Alaska official, seconded Miller’s recommendation and passed it on to his superiors.²⁹

Another federal official who visited Old Kasaan that year was Victor Cahalane, who inspected the site on October 21. Cahalane, a U.S. Biological Survey employee who visited several Alaska park units that year, stated that the village, as seen from Skowl Arm, “was a dismal picture ... where a dozen rotting totem poles leaned dejectedly at all angles.” He found “two ruined grave houses,” and only one of the town’s eight community houses “still had all four roof supports standing.” The totems, which were “once an impressive array,” are “now sadly overgrown and battered by the elements.” Cahalane concluded that “the monument ... is not serving and never has served any useful purpose”; furthermore, it “certainly does not merit the belated protection of a caretaker.” Noting that “the tremendous cost would be a serious drawback to reconstruction” and that “Old Kasaan is far from the tourist route,” he noted that “certain ethnological values remain ... and these should be protected, at least until permanent record can be made.” But “as soon as this can be assured, the national monument [should] be abolished.”³⁰

Leaders in the agency’s regional and national offices, however, were not yet ready to abandon the monument. In December 1939, officials at the Smithsonian Institution, asked to comment on the totem poles at Sitka National Monument, had concluded that poles not appropriate to Sitka should be relocated to Old Kasaan. In response, Acting Director A. E. Demaray conveyed that conclusion to Forest Service officials. Demaray, aware that the site had its drawbacks, was “compelled to recognize the comparative inaccessibility of Old Kasaan to visitors and students.” But perhaps because he had not yet been apprised of conditions at Old Kasaan, he concluded that “what is needed is a [multiagency, coordinated] plan whereby all such remaining structures and art objects can be concentrated at a place where preservation, restoration, and educational display can be carried out under expert ethnological supervision.” A year later, NPS Director Newton Drury, who had just reviewed Cahalane’s report, wrote that “it has been decided for the present to make no move to disturb the status of [the monument].” And during the spring of 1941, acting Regional Director Herbert Maier questioned the “wisdom of relinquishing Old Kasaan ... until considerable further study is possible.”³¹

That May, Mount McKinley superintendent Frank Been moved to change the monument’s administration. For the past eight years, the Alaska Road Commission in Sitka had managed the site. Been, however, had assumed responsibility for Sitka National Monument in January 1940, and felt that in his self-described role as Coordinating Superintendent he should be in charge of Old

²⁹ Frank T. Been to Regional Director, December 23, 1940, in File 600, Box 333, Entry 7, RG 79, NARA SB. A description of the Forest Service’s totem pole and community house work is included in Rakestraw, pp. 101-06.

³⁰ Victor H. Cahalane, “Special Report of an Inspection,” January 1941.

³¹ Demaray to Regional Forester, Juneau, January 19, 1940, in File 600; Drury to Supt. MOMC, January 31, 1941, in File 201; and Maier to Director, May 22, 1941, in File 201; all in NARA SB; Antonson and Hanable, *Administrative History of Sitka National Historical Park*, 82.

Kasaan as well. On June 18, 1941, Assistant Director Hillory Tolson wired Been and stated that both he and ARC had agreed to Been's request.³²

Shortly after his new appointment was confirmed, Been took a six-week inspection trip to areas in which the agency had an interest, and on August 6 he spent the day at Old Kasaan. Like Miller and Cahalane before him, he was unimpressed; "suffice to say the village is almost completely decayed and buried in brambles," he noted. Attempting to be optimistic, he noted that "I am impressed with [its] historical value," and he was also "strongly impressed with the archeological value that the village could have had if it had been preserved in the condition it was when vacated. There may still remain that possibility if work can be done at once." He estimated that "to restore Old Kasaan, at least \$50,000 will be required." "If funds can be procured," he added, "I believe that Old Kasaan should be restored." But if "the large sum required cannot be obtained, the area should be abandoned because its retention might reflect unfavorably as an illustration of neglect."³³

Just two months after visiting Old Kasaan, Been wrote to the National Resources Planning Board—whose duties included the survey of cultural materials possessed by the Federal government—and submitted a bold proposal to restore the old village. "Its restoration," he wrote, will be on a par with the reviving of old civilizations in other parts of the world. The enjoyment and edification of travelers will be beyond measure." "The project," he added, "will be especially important for [the Native] segment of our population." The \$215,000 called for the restoration of community houses and totem poles along with the construction of a custodian's residence, museum and dock.³⁴ But World War II began just a few weeks after he submitted his proposal, and perhaps as a result, his superiors poured cold water on his proposal. Joseph Dixon, in the agency's regional office, felt that "I think that any work beyond measuring and recording data is not advisable at this time," and the Washington office recommended further study in conjunction with the Smithsonian Institution.³⁵ Because of severe wartime reductions to the NPS budget, any plans related to Old Kasaan were put on hold for the next several years.

During the summer of 1945, the agency began to prepare for postwar activities at the various Alaska units, and on July 9 of that year, Sitka Custodian Ben Miller and San Francisco-based architect Alfred C. Kuehl spent the day at Old Kasaan. Miller noted that "the area has the general appearance as it had in 1940 ... the old grave houses are much more delapidated [sic] than they were five years ago. I ... am still of the opinion that the area should be returned to the Forest Service and the monument eliminated." Kuehl apparently shared a similar opinion of the monument's importance; "it hain't much," he noted.³⁶

³² Been to Regional Director, May 15, 1941; Tolson to Supt. MOMC, June 18, 1941; both in File 201, NARA SB; Antonson and Hanable, *Administrative History of Sitka National Historical Park*, 84.

³³ Frank T. Been, "Field Notes for the Inspection of ... Old Kasaan National Monument," July 19 to August 29, 1941, 34, in File 204, NARA SB. See National Archives and Records Administration, *Guide to the National Archives of the United States* (Washington, the author, 1987), 123 for a description of the NRPB's role.

³⁴ Frank T. Been to James C. Rettie, October 16, 1941, in File 600, NARA SB.

³⁵ Joseph S. Dixon to the Regional Director, February 16, 1942, in File 201, NARA SB; Ronald F. Lee to the Director, February 28, 1942, in File 204, NARA SB.

³⁶ Al Kuehl to "Major" [Owen Tomlinson], July 12, 1945; Ben Miller to Regional Director, July 28, 1945; both in File 201, NARA SB.

In July 1946, administrative control over Old Kasaan changed once again. Owen Tomlinson, director of the agency's Region IV (San Francisco) office, wrote a memo directing that management responsibilities be changed from the Mount McKinley superintendent to Sitka National Monument custodian Ben Miller. Inasmuch as Miller was a regional office employee, Tomlinson's action effectively moved control of the monument from Alaska to San Francisco. The move, which was approved by Washington effective August 1, followed similar actions relative to Sitka and Glacier Bay national monuments.³⁷

In 1946, NPS officials again weighed the idea of abolishing the monument. Regional Historian Aubrey Neasham, asked to comment, vigorously opposed the move. Although he fully recognized the site's shortcomings, he noted that "its archeological values may be supreme" and that "the most important values may be underground." "This may be one of the key sites of Alaska and the Pacific Northwest," but because "no qualified expert in the field of archeology has ever visited the site to ascertain its national significance, ... we don't know whether it is [significant] or not." Neasham concluded that "no hasty action should be taken towards its abolishment as a national monument." Virtually everyone else, however, was convinced that it was time to jettison the monument and transfer the acreage back to the Forest Service. Director Newton Drury agreed with Neasham that the area "should be very carefully studied ... before action is taken here. In this case, however, the request by the Department to take action was urgent." Besides, "we anticipate that any scientific values that may be unearthed on the area will be protected by the U.S. Forest Service."³⁸

The only remaining question, therefore, was how the abolishment would take place. During the fall of 1946, agency officials were hopeful that the recently-passed Reorganization Act would provide them the authority to abolish this and other monuments; if not, separate legislation would be necessary. The agency, apparently concerned that using the Reorganization Act might provide a mechanism for the abolishment of too many units, held off for the time being.³⁹ The agency, however, recognized that Old Kasaan was one of a handful of units that were "no longer suitable for retention in the National Park System," and beginning in 1949, these units were transferred to other land management jurisdictions. By the fall of 1953, the Secretary of the Interior had approved a draft bill abolishing the monument and forwarded it to the House of Representatives.⁴⁰ The bill, initially submitted in February 1954, generated little controversy and passed both houses of Congress on a voice vote. On July 26, 1955, President Eisenhower signed the bill removing Old Kasaan from the ranks of National Park System units, and the number of Alaska units shrank from five to four.⁴¹

³⁷ Tomlinson to Maier, July 2, 1946; Tomlinson to the Director, July 8, 1946; Hillary Tolson to Director's Office and All Field Offices, August 2, 1946; all in File 201, NARA SB.

³⁸ Neasham to Regional Director, December 13, 1946, in File 201, NARA SB.

³⁹ A. E. Demaray to Director, October 25, 1946; Hillary Tolson to Mr. Demaray, November 18, 1946; Demaray to Director, November 22, 1946; all in File 201, NARA SB.

⁴⁰ Secretary of the Interior to "My Dear Mr. Speaker," October 20, 1953, in File 901, Box 349, Entry 7, NARA SB; Alan K. Hogenauer, "Gone, But Not Forgotten: America's Delisted National Park Service Sites," unpub. mss. presented at the Tourism and Travel Research Association conference, June 1983, 47-48, in AKSO files; Hogenauer, "Gone, But Not Forgotten: The Delisted Units of the U.S. National Park System," *The George Wright Forum* 7:4 (1991), 7-18.

⁴¹ The bill, H. R. 7912, was introduced by Rep. Arthur L. Miller (R-Nebr.) on February 16, 1954; Miller, the chairman of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, submitted the bill on behalf of the Interior Committee. The bill passed the House on July 19 but stalled in a Senate Committee. On February 16, 1955, at the beginning of the 84th

Soon after the site was returned to Forest Service jurisdiction, that agency moved to protect the site's remaining "historical relics," and on April 4, 1957—less than two years after it reassumed management authority over the property—the Acting Interior Secretary established the 38-acre Old Kasaan Village Historical Area.⁴² This designation has remained to the present day.

The remaining artifacts from Old Kasaan and other nearby villages, meanwhile, continued to slowly deteriorate. But in the fall of 1966, an article in a nationally prominent magazine spotlighted the importance of those artifacts and decried their impending loss to the elements.⁴³ In response, federal and state authorities organized a two-day Conference on Southeast Alaska Native Artifacts and Monuments in July 1967; four months later, they held a second conference on the subject. In 1968, the State of Alaska applied for, and received, a Smithsonian Institution grant to inventory salvageable resources. One observer during this period noted that Old Kasaan contained "about two dozen [totem poles] left in various stages of deterioration," but another, less optimistic report stated that "most all of [the village's] poles have rotted away and fallen down, so they are not visible from the water." In 1970 and 1971 the state, assisted by the Forest Service, moved about forty totems from Old Kasaan and other villages to Ketchikan. For the next several years, the totems slowly dried in a recently vacated cannery.⁴⁴ They were then brought to the municipally operated Totem Heritage Center, which opened in 1976. The Center's collection now numbers 33 poles—all carved prior to 1910—of which fourteen came from Old Kasaan.⁴⁵

In summary, it can be seen that most of Old Kasaan's cultural resources, large and small, have been lost by either removal or natural deterioration during the ninety-odd years since the village was abandoned. Since 1900, public authorities have removed totem poles from the village on at least four occasions, and at least three private collectors have removed totem poles as well. Natural deterioration has caused the loss of many additional resources, and depredations from both tourists and professional collectors have resulted in even more losses. But despite those losses, Old Kasaan

Congress, Delegate E. L. "Bob" Bartlett (D-Alaska) resubmitted the bill, now known as H. R. 4046. The House of Representatives passed the bill on March 15 and the Senate followed suit on July 11. The final bill became known as Public Law 179 and entered the statute books as 69 Stat. 380. In a nationwide system that currently contains 380 park units, Old Kasaan was one of only 24 units ever to be delisted. *Congressional Record* 100 (1954), 1861 and 10914; *Congressional Record* 101 (1955), 1628, 2936, 10159, and 12723.

⁴² Donald J. Orth, *Dictionary of Alaska Place Names*, U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 567 (Washington, GPO, 1967), 720; Public Land Order 1406, April 4, 1957; *Federal Register* 22 (April 11, 1957), 2429. The site is no longer in public ownership; because of changes brought about by the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Old Kasaan is now owned by Kavalco (Kasaan Village Corporation), the ANCSA corporation based in New Kasaan.

⁴³ Katharine Kuh, "Alaska's Vanishing Art," *Saturday Review* 49 (October 22, 1966), 25-31.

⁴⁴ Joyce M. Beck, "The Totems of Old Kasaan," and Laurie McNicholas, "Totem Rescue," *Alaska* 37 (February 1971), 8-11; C.T. Brown, "Memorandum of Forest Service Accomplishments in the Restoration of Totem Poles in Southeast Alaska," July 12, 1967, 3, in *Conference on Southeast Alaska Native Artifacts and Monuments, July 13-14, 1967* (typescript), George Hall Collection; Greater Ketchikan Chamber of Commerce, *The Story of Ketchikan, Gateway to Alaska*, 1973, 40. The now-demolished Sunny Point Cannery, where the totems were placed for several years, was located two miles north of downtown Ketchikan, at the site of today's post office.

⁴⁵ Pat Roppel, "Southeast, Alaska's Panhandle," *Alaska Geographic* 5:2 (1978), 74; Balcom, *Ketchikan, Alaska's Totemland*, 96, 102, 121, 124-27. No totems originally from Old Kasaan are now in either the Ketchikan City Park, Saxman totem park, or Totem Bight State Historical Park. One of the fourteen Old Kasaan poles in the Totem Heritage Center, the Chief Skowl totem, was moved to the Center in 1978 from another Ketchikan site. It was repaired in 1978, in 1981, and during the 1990s. Chris Hanson interview, September 20, 2000; Jim Marmon interview, October 8, 2000.

is still a remarkable sight, and New Kasaan residents return to the village of their forebears on a fairly regular basis.

In light of what has taken place at Old Kasaan since the village's abandonment, and the government's obvious failure to preserve the remarkable assemblage of artifacts to which it was entrusted, the question might be reasonably asked: What could, or should, federal agencies have done differently? Some might easily conclude that government authorities planned rather than acted and that they thoughtlessly allowed the resource to deteriorate. Cultural resource professionals also generally recognize that both structures and artifacts, in most circumstances, should not be removed their original sites. But the realities of early twentieth-century preservation gave the federal government few appealing options. Several major factors operated against on-site preservations: the changing demographics of southeastern Alaska, non-Natives' hunger for Native artifacts, the site's longtime remoteness from the main tourist route, the damage caused by the 1915 fire, site deterioration caused by southeastern Alaska's climate, and the lack of money for restoration projects. Given those realities, the construction of off-site totem parks and reconstructed community houses in both Native and non-Native communities was fully justified because it assured the preservation of many artifacts that a many Alaskans deem important.

One is tempted to conclude that the designation of Old Kasaan as a national monument was myopic because it commemorated of the site's importance but failed to properly plan for its preservation. Given the realities of the situation, perhaps the most poignant lesson to be gained from the Old Kasaan experience is not that the National Park Service failed in its mission to protect monument resources, but that it was sheer folly to think, simply by designating a national monument, that the federal government could realistically have been expected to protect this remote, abandoned town under such trying circumstances.