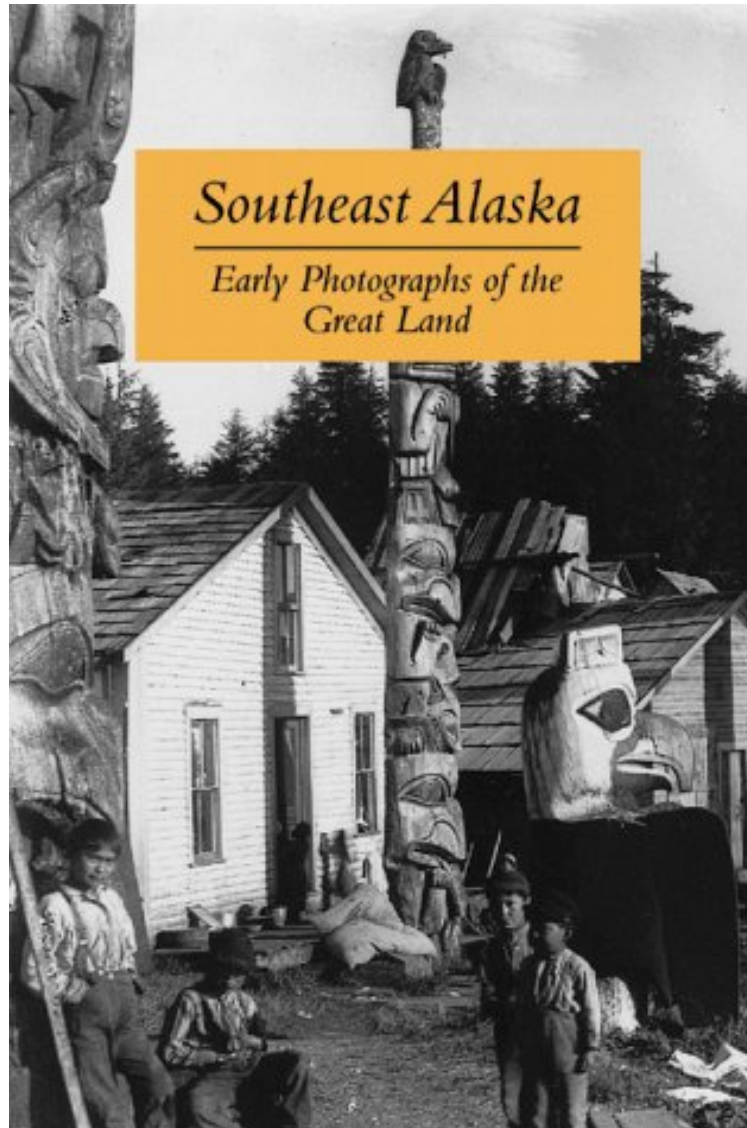


(Ebook free) Southeast Alaska: Early Photographs of the Great Land

Southeast Alaska: Early Photographs of the Great Land

Graham Wilson

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From the Back Cover Step back in time and experience historic Southeast Alaska. The story begins with early photographs of Indian communities. Russian settlement, the Klondike Gold Rush and the emerging towns and cities of Southeast Alaska are also explored. This collection of 125 archival photographs is a compelling keepsake for anyone interested in Alaska. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Chapter One: Southeast Alaska is a region of mist-shrouded islands and fjords. Snowcapped mountains sporting massive glaciers form an impressive backdrop to this rugged landscape. The dense, almost impenetrable, rainforest crowds mountains from the snowline to the edge of the Pacific. It is one of the rainiest places in the world with some areas receiving more than a hundred and fifty inches of precipitation a year. Summers tend to be relatively warm and winters, by northern standards, are mild. Indians have lived in Southeast Alaska for at least 8,000 years. The Tlingit, Tsimpsian, and more recently, Haida established sophisticated societies with unique languages, arts and cultures. Most of Southeast Alaska was inhabited by the Tlingit, a maritime people who relied on fishing, hunting and trading. While the rich annual salmon run formed the basis of their economy, they also hunted seals, whales, moose, sheep and goats as well as birds and freshwater fish. Wild berries were collected as were various herbs and vegetables. The Tlingits established permanent villages with communal houses. They also had seasonal camps such as fishing camps, to exploit the various seasons of food gathering. Totem poles and clan crests made of cedar stood along beaches and in front of buildings. These elaborate carvings indicated the social standing and material well-being of the clan. Despite having permanent villages, Tlingits were famous long-distance traders. They traveled in meticulously carved cedar canoes which were often more than sixty feet in length. The large upswept bow cut through the largest waves, and with several people paddling, these vessels were both stable and quick. Trading frequently took the Tlingits to the Puget Sound and sometimes as far south as Mexico. They also traveled north to trade with other native peoples such as the Alutiiq. Traveling inland along the great rivers such as the Taku and Stikine allowed Tlingits to gather furs from an impressively large region. To travel upstream they added large sails to their canoes which carried them hundreds of miles inland relatively effortlessly. These trade journeys were extremely important to many interior Athapascan Indian peoples as they coveted the rich oil of the coastal Eulachon fish. The adventurous lifestyle of the Tlingit is reflected in their art. They were a cosmopolitan people who valued art and culture. Tlingits created elaborate stories, songs and poems of great complexity and creativity. They also crafted bentwood boxes and ceremonial objects such as masks, rattles and bowls. Grasses and bark were crafted into woven hats, clothing and baskets. Perhaps most sought after is the Chilkat Blanket which sometimes took expert weavers years to craft from wool from the underside of mountain goats. The first contact with Europeans was likely the Russians in the 1740s. The Russians sought the highly valuable sea otter pelt and brought Alutiiq Indians to hunt for them in Southeast Alaska. The Alutiiq hunted from agile baidarkas, a type of long kayak. The sea otter population was quickly diminished by this intensive hunt. The relationship between the Russians and Tlingits was always tense. In 1802 Tlingits invaded Redoubt St. Michael, a Russian village a short distance from modern Sitka. Almost all the Russians and Alutiiq at this settlement were killed. In retaliation the Russians returned to Sitka in September 1804. Four gunships entered the harbor and demanded the Tlingit surrender. Instead the Tlingits withdrew to the safety of their fort. The Russians bombarded the fort with cannon fire for the next six days. The Tlingits had anticipated this exchange and had constructed the fort's walls from heavy timbers which were not penetrated with cannonfire. Russian and Alutiiq soldiers stormed the fort but were driven back to their ships by fierce hand-to-hand combat. The well armed and skillful Tlingit were capable soldiers and inflicted serious Russian and Alutiiq casualties. Early on the morning of the seventh day of the siege the Tlingits secretly fled the fort and disappeared into the rainforest. The siege of Sitka was over. The Russians quickly established their foothold by building a fort of their own. In 1821 the Tlingits were invited to return to their ancestral home of Sitka. The Russians wanted to end the occasional skirmishes which had plagued the "peace" and to benefit from Tlingit trading and hunting. The new Tlingit community was established outside the stockade in an area known as the "Ranche." The Tlingit could easily be monitored from the stockade and a cannon could be easily trained on them. The relationship between the Tlingit and Russians was always strained but after the Tlingits returned to Sitka, the relationship became more amiable.