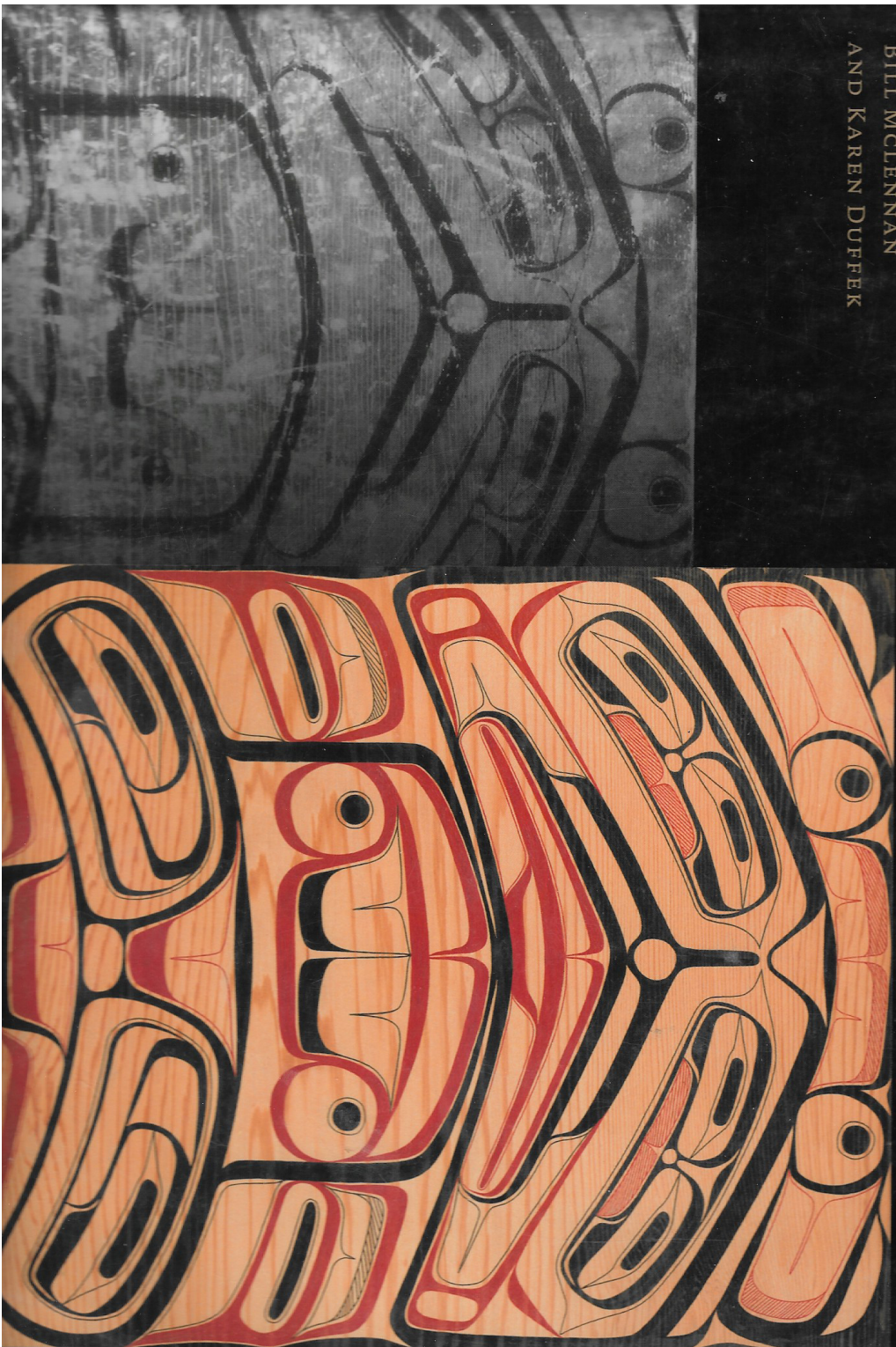


THE TRANSFORMING IMAGE

Painted Arts of Northwest Coast First Nations

BILL MCLENNAN
AND KAREN DUFFEK



Berlin), an elaborately carved chief's seat attracted his attention. 'Since it was not possible to buy the piece,' he wrote, 'I ordered a similar one from the most renowned wood-carver among the Bella Bella' (1977, 10). The magnificent seat he commissioned remains one of the best-documented examples of Heiltsuk carving and painting from the 1880s (Figure 7.10). But the name of its maker was never recorded.

Who was this anonymous artist? The search for his identity has involved the contributions of numerous individuals, the study of historical records, and the comparative analysis of carved and painted works located in collections from Victoria to Berlin. Heiltsuk curator Pam Brown (1990, 1992) generously shared her own research, drawing on published and unpublished documents as well as the recollections of Waglisla community members. Art historian Martha Black's study of missionary accounts (1997), focusing on the Royal Ontario Museum's collection of Heiltsuk artifacts assembled by Reverend R. W. Large between 1898 and 1906, was a valuable resource. The Heiltsuk Cultural Centre in Waglisla made available its extensive archives and research on Heiltsuk history. Ethnographic accounts such as Ronald Olson's (1955) study of Heiltsuk society were also consulted.

Important clues have been uncovered in the hundreds of painted images photographed for the Image Recovery Project. To date, over twenty objects from various museum and private collections have been identified as the work of the chief's seat maker, sharing similar elements of style, imagery, and pigment use. As well, a stylistic counterpart to the Berlin seat exists in the collection of the Royal British Columbia Museum (Figure 7.11). Acquired in 1900 by C. F. Newcombe, this second Heiltsuk chief's seat is undoubtedly the work of the same artist as the Berlin example, differing primarily in the arrangement of otherwise similar motifs. Perhaps this was the piece that first caught Jacobsen's eye, or it may have been modelled on the same original as the one in Berlin.

Certain intriguing details about the chief's seat acquired by Newcombe help to confirm its attribution. The piece was photographed at the Dryad Point lighthouse near Bella Bella in 1900, with an unidentified man standing behind it (Figure 7.12). The lightkeeper at that time was Captain Richard (Dick) Carpenter, an accomplished Heiltsuk artist, canoe maker, and boat builder. It was Carpenter's name that was found on the

**CAPTAIN CARPENTER,
HEILTSUK PAINTER, 1841-1931**

When Johan Adrian Jacobsen travelled to British Columbia in 1881 to collect Northwest Coast artifacts for the Royal Berlin Ethnological Museum (now the Ethnologisches Museum





7.11
 Chief's seat, Hellsuk, attributed
 to Captain Carpenter
 Pre-1900
 Yellow cedar sides and back, red
 cedar base, paint,
 76.5 × 25.0 × 112.5 cm
 Collected by C.F. Newcombe, 1900
 The elaborately carved and painted
 seat is shown completely assembled
 at right and as separate components
 in the infrared photographs above,
 including views of both sides of
 the arms.
 RBCM 1856



back of the seat when Newcombe purchased it for the museum (Macnail, Hoover, and Neary 1980, 149). It is not known whether Carpenter is the figure in the photograph, although his present-day descendants note a marked family resemblance. By compiling these pieces of evidence with the information obtained from historical records, Heiltsuk community members, and a stylistic analysis of related works, we can conclude that Captain Carpenter was the 'renowned wood-carver' whose identity has so long been obscured.

A Respected Artist and Chief

Captain Carpenter, a member of the Q̓wúq̓wáy̓aiḥw̓ tribe, was born in the Heiltsuk village of Q̓wúq̓vai in 1841 (Brown 1992; Black 1997, 110). He belonged to the Blackfish clan and had the privilege of representing his family's crests – an eagle (from his father's side) over a killer whale (from his mother's side) – on traditional ceremonial regalia and other carved and painted items (Olson 1949, 45). In accordance with Heiltsuk tradition, Carpenter would also have inherited a name derived from his crest group. Research by Pam Brown (1992) suggests a link between Carpenter and the ancestral name Du'k'wayella. Ronald Olson, for instance, mentions Du'k'wayella as the builder of a canoe now credited to Captain Carpenter (Olson 1955, 321; Black 1997, 139). This link is corroborated by information included in Franz Boas' Bella Bella fieldnotes. Boas lists the Heiltsuk village groups that moved to McLoughlin Bay to be near the Hudson's Bay Company trading post; according to the late Heiltsuk elder Andrew Wallace, one of the groups had the ancestral name of Dō'eqwazyāla and belonged to the crest group of Killer Whale (Boas 1923, 32). As Brown (1992) points out, the right to this name would have been one of Carpenter's most important possessions, indicating his status within his family and community. He later received a second name as well: Mx̓s̓áqv̓, meaning 'rainbow' (Black 1997, 130 n. 10; Walbran 1909, 152).

Carpenter would have been in his early twenties when the terrible smallpox epidemic of 1862 struck the coast (Black 1997, 111). The Heiltsuk population was decimated. Fewer than 200 people may have survived from an estimated 1,500 to 2,000.⁶ This was the beginning of a period of rapid social and economic change. By the end of the century, Heiltsuk village groups had amalgamated at the central village of Bella Bella,



7.12
Captain Richard (Dick) Carpenter, c. 1900. We can reasonably speculate that the person standing behind the chief's seat is Captain Carpenter. This photograph was taken by C.F. Newcombe at the Dryad Point Lighthouse, probably at the same

time that he purchased this magnificent work for what is now the Royal British Columbia Museum.
RBCM PN2333

the present site of Waglisla. Here and at 'Ce'le, the previous Old Town site, Carpenter spent most of his adult life. He lived to be ninety and established a reputation as a highly respected artist and chief (ibid., 110-11; Brown 1992).

It was as an adult that Carpenter took on his English name. 'What I understand is that Captain Carpenter was a descendant of a family that was totally involved with being craftsmen,' says his great-grandson, Cyril Carpenter. 'When they gave us the English name, they gave us a word that represents our apprenticeship in artwork, canoe building, boxes, and bowls' (personal communication, 1997). Black suggests that the use of 'Captain,' moreover, probably derived from Carpenter's work as a boat builder and may have connoted his high status in Heiltsuk society (1997, 111, 130 n. 7).⁷ Certainly he is listed in the census of 1881 as a 'native carpenter' and was known for his considerable skills as a carver and maker of canoes (Canada 1881). In addition, he successfully adapted this expertise to the construction of sailing vessels of various kinds (Black 1997, 111; Brown 1992; Large 1905, 822).⁸

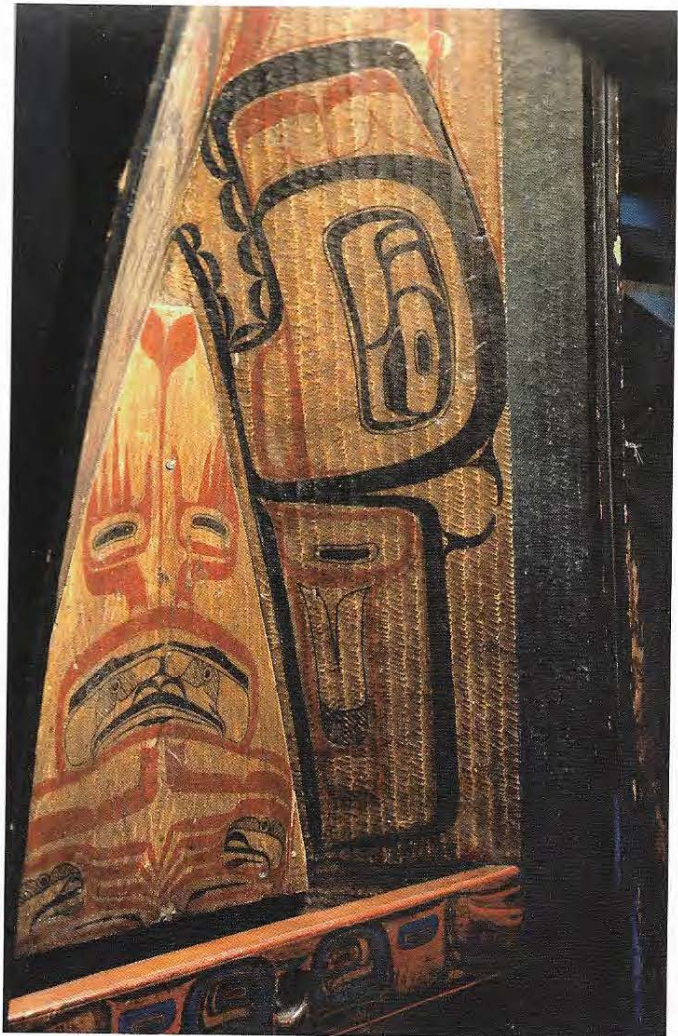
One of Carpenter's painted canoes still exists in the collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Figure 7.13). Although it was not created as a sea-going vessel, this 6.7-metre-long model reveals the quality of workmanship and the artistry for which Carpenter was acclaimed. A second canoe was purchased by J.A. Jacobsen at Bella Bella, evidently from the same renowned wood carver from whom he bought the chief's seat described earlier. This canoe (Figure 7.14), whose interior adzing and style of painting echo those of the previous example, had been confiscated as war booty by the Russians during the Second World War. The canoe was finally returned to the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin in 1991-2 along with a large part of the Jacobsen collection that had been believed lost. The rediscovery of this important work adds immeasurably to the understanding of Carpenter's artistic style and legacy. A third example, a 22.8-metre-long canoe now at the American Museum of Natural History, also shows characteristics of his carving style although it has not been clearly attributed. Intriguingly, an early identification label states that this 'Haida' canoe was made by the Bella Bella. The missionary Reverend C.M. Tate documented a fourth canoe that may yet prove to be the product of Carpenter's hand. Described as the work of a canoe maker 'whom we dubbed carpenter,'

this vessel was carved at Bella Bella in the 1880s and was later exhibited in New York City (Tate 1929, 22). Whether the canoe was taken on further journeys and where it is today remain unknown.

Heiltsuk elders in Waglisla still refer to Captain Carpenter as Wúxvúas, a word implying 'foghorn.' This nickname probably stemmed from his occupation as a lighthouse keeper (Brown 1992). Around 1900, when he was almost sixty, Carpenter entered the wage economy by taking on the keeper's job at the Dryad Point lighthouse, just north of Waglisla (Black 1997, 111; see also Walbran 1909, 152-5). His earnings helped him to accumulate the wealth he needed to hold potlatches and maintain the reputation and status of his clan name in the community. It was here, as well, that he continued to build boats and to carve and paint items for traditional use and for sale (Brown 1992).

Carpenter fulfilled the traditional criteria that define a person of aristocratic status in Heiltsuk society (ibid.). He was a second-ranked chief of Waglisla, a position he would have inherited through family lines (Canada 1898, 480). He married twice in the old Heiltsuk way, each time to a woman of high status (Black 1997, 110; Brown 1992; Large 1905, 821).⁹ Finally, he held a number of potlatches throughout his life, presenting gifts to other high-ranking chiefs in and outside of his community (Brown 1992). One such potlatch is recorded in Olson's ethnography as having been given by 'Du'k'wayella' – presumably Captain Carpenter – and appears to have occurred before he moved to Waglisla: in a village called A'kllegus, 'there lived a chief named Du'k'wayella who built a huge canoe on Sagar Lake. The men who helped him get it to salt water were paid with a keg of rum. Later he gave a great dance and potlatch for his son and at that time gave the canoe to Chief Ce'k'c of Kitkala (Tsimshian)' (Olson 1955, 321).¹⁰

As a person of rank, Carpenter would have been educated in all aspects of the traditional knowledge required by his position (Brown 1992). That he was also educated in the formal language of Heiltsuk painting is obvious in the quality of technique and composition in much of his work. But the details of his artistic growth constitute a missing chapter in the history of Carpenter's life. No information has been uncovered that describes his training as a carver, painter, and canoe maker. The identities of teachers or senior painters who influenced his style



713

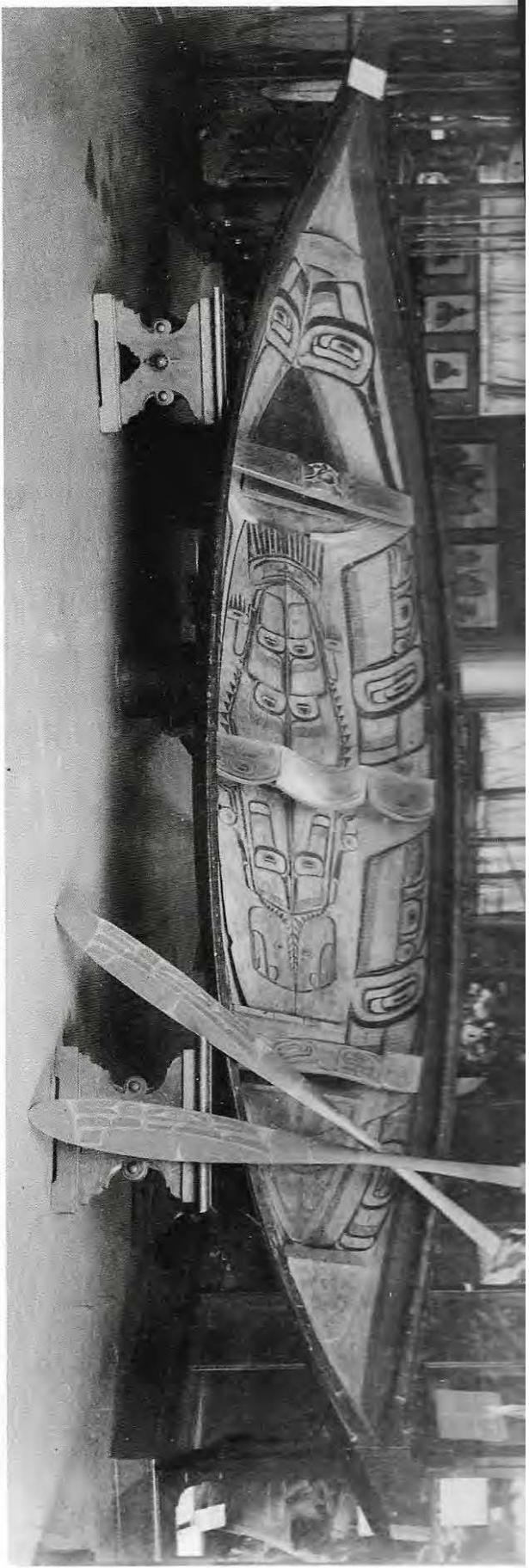
Canoe, Hellsauk, attributed to
Captain Carpenter
c. 1882

Red cedar, paint, 6.7 x 1.6 m

Shown here is a detail from inside
the bow of the canoe, with rows of
fine adzing, a killer whale painting
on the side, and an unidentified crea-
ture image painted on the bow seat.

Four painted thwarts span the canoe
at its widest points. Each thwart is
shown in colour and in a black-and-
white infrared photograph.
CMC VII-B-1192





714

Canoe, Heiltsuk, attributed to
Captain Carpenter

c. 1881

Red cedar, paint, approximately
5.7 x 0.75 x 0.3 m

Collected by J.A. Jacobsen at
Wagisla (Bella Bella), 1881

This canoe exhibits many of the stylistic attributes evident in other carved and painted works by Captain Carpenter. The quality of adzing inside the canoe is directly comparable to Figure 7.13, as are the components and arrangement of the painted compositions. The central image painted on the floorboards represents a sea creature with similar components to the creature portrayed on the base of the chief's seat, Figure 7.11. As well, this creature has claws and hand forms. The feather-like tail is typical of Carpenter's eagle images. It appears that the painted floorboards are positioned backward since the creature faces the stern of the canoe. The two paddles propped up against the canoe were almost certainly painted by Carpenter as well.

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are unknown. Nevertheless, by studying such objects as the chiefs' seats and the canoes, which date to the early 1880s, we can conclude that Carpenter had acquired a complete understanding of the tradition and developed a mature style by the time he was forty.

Old ways co-existed with the new for Captain Carpenter and many other Heiltsuk who were practising Christians and who participated in the wage economy, yet who also resisted the suppression of their cultural identity. At Wagishla, he strove to maintain Heiltsuk traditions while taking an active role in the new institutions of a modernizing Methodist community (Black 1997, 106, 110). The polatch had been prohibited by law, and 'old customs' were discouraged by the church. Nevertheless, Carpenter and his contemporaries were careful to uphold their social and ceremonial responsibilities through modified forms of feasting and gift giving (ibid., 70-4, 110; Large 1905, 821-2). In his carving and painting, Carpenter continued

to create objects similar to the ones that he had made formerly for other chiefs and that had been used at feasts (Black 1997, 62, 106). Along with modern adaptations of spoons, dishes, and other items, these were now largely made for collectors and the curio market.

In museum collections today there are hundreds of Heiltsuk painted trade-style boxes that date from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1880s. We can only assume that a sizable number of painters created these works. Holm has even described their specialized production as a nineteenth-century Bella Bella box 'factory' (1983b, 42). Yet by 1906, only four wood-carvers and two silversmiths in addition to the lighthouse keeper, Captain Carpenter, were listed in a survey of Wagishla's 321 residents (Large 1907, 6). Five carvers, including Carpenter, were listed by name in the notes and collections made by the resident missionary a few years earlier (Black 1997, 106; Large 1901).¹¹ It is not improbable that toward the end of his career,



Carpenter was the only traditionally trained artist still carving and painting in the Heiltsuk style.

Carpenter's legacy as 'the most renowned wood-carver among the Bella Bella' includes not only the increasing number of works attributed to him but also his commitment to bringing Heiltsuk traditions into the twentieth century. Pieces he created in the 1880s have come to exemplify the characteristics of late-nineteenth-century Heiltsuk painting (Holm 1983b, 41-2). His personal interpretation of the Heiltsuk style is also apparent. Carpenter's compositional techniques and inventions are at once the product of a broader style and of individual creativity; they represent the artistic tradition to which he was heir and to which he brought his own experience and imagination.

Carpenter died in March 1931. A memorial dedicated to 'Captain R. Carpenter, aged 90 years' is located at Pole Island. His descendants today number approximately 120 (Brown 1990).

Characteristics of Carpenter's Style

The two chiefs' seats that Captain Carpenter created in the last decades of the nineteenth century reveal the confident hand of an artist at the height of his career. In their carved and painted images can be recognized many of the characteristics that have come to define his work. Carpenter developed his style over at least fifty years, reinterpreting and experimenting with forms and motifs in a series of boxes, chests, dishes, and other objects. All these items share a formal consistency that distinguishes his work within the larger school of Heiltsuk painting.

Carpenter chose to represent his two crests – the killer whale and the eagle – in most of his compositions. Figure 7.11, for instance, depicts the eagle in frontal and profile views on the back of the seat, while a single killer whale fills the inside surface of each arm panel. Both crest images are painted on the outside arms of the seat, and the seat bottom is painted with what appears to be a whale or other sea creature. It is as though Carpenter used these symbols to create a visual representation of himself: killer whale and eagle at the same time.

While the use of these crests is characteristic of Carpenter's art, works cannot be assigned by subject matter alone. Rather, we need to look at his interpretations of the iconography and at the stylistic conventions he developed that make his work stand apart. Carpenter created many variations on killer whales and eagles. Yet even his most abstract arrangements

reveal his consistent use of unique elements and combinations of identifying features. Carpenter's killer whales are typically distinguished by the form of the blowhole, the arrangement of teeth, and the placement of the dorsal fin. The blowhole, in particular, is easily recognized; its two linear forms curve toward each other, creating a circular space with an opening at the top (Figures 7.11, 7.13, 7.15). On some painted boxes, the two halves of the blowhole may be separated by a corner (Figure 7.16); in other compositions the blowhole is represented in an abbreviated form, where only one half of the unit meets the dorsal fin (the third panel of Figure 7.17C). A profile face may further elaborate the blowhole space, as on the top inner corner of the chief's seat in Figure 7.10, where the sides meet the back.

Most of Carpenter's killer-whale compositions feature prominent teeth, represented as a series of broad curves that line the entire length of the creature's mouth (Figures 7.10, 7.11, 7.13, 7.16, 7.17C). Occasionally a series of short, slanted lines appear in their place, as in the paintings on the outside of one chief's seat (Figure 7.11). The two styles of teeth are shown on opposite ends of Figure 7.15. Carpenter also developed a number of idiosyncratic ways of depicting the whale's dorsal fin and incorporating its elongated form into the composition. On one end of Figure 7.15, for instance, he painted a killer whale with the dorsal fin bisecting its body; on the opposite end, the whale's fin rises vertically from its back. In Figure 7.16, the fin again bisects the killer whale's body, while the same element extends horizontally along the whale's back in Figures 7.11 and 7.18. These dorsal fins share a similar compositional structure that may include a joint form or profile face, one or more broad U-forms, a circle, and several tulip-shaped, or split-U, elements.

Carpenter's eagle compositions are clearly related to one another and to his wider body of work in their combination of formal characteristics. They also feature elements specific to his interpretation of the eagle crest. The form of the eagle's head and the distinctive treatment of wing feathers can be isolated as markers of Carpenter's style. Both appear on Figure 7.11, where they are carved and painted on the seat back and painted on the outside arms. On the arms and back, the eagle's head with its strong, curved beak is shown in profile and its given added volume through the broad feather forms extending from the back. The wings are painted as rows of narrow black feathers hanging side by side from a curved point, like



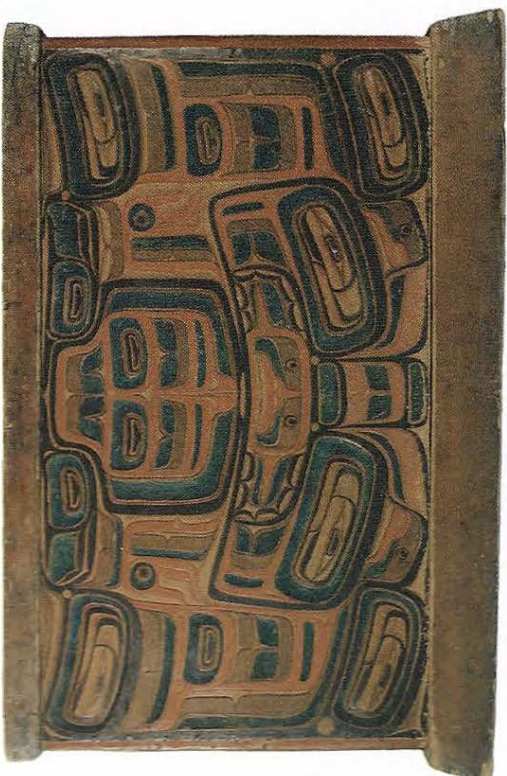
7.15

Bentwood chest, Hellsuk,
attributed to Captain Carpenter
late nineteenth century
Yellow cedar sides, red cedar base
and lid, paint.

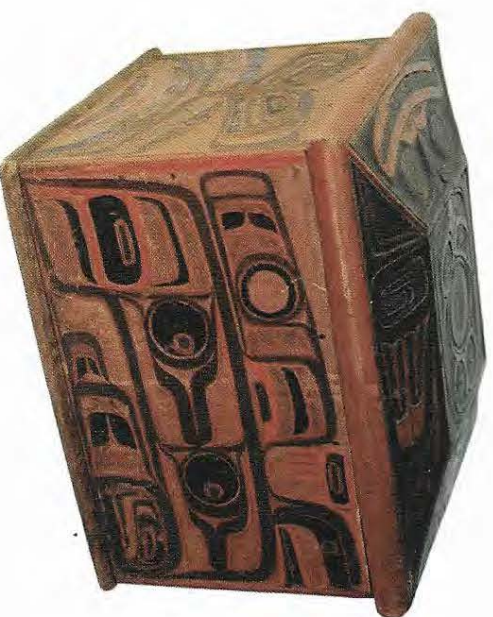
70.0 × 109.0 × 67.5 cm

The killer whale compositions painted on the ends of this storage chest feature Carpenter's unique conventions, including the form of the blowhole and the form and placement of the dorsal fin. Carpenter typically used a variety of pigments in his painted work, including a deep blue. Although this chest is in almost new condition – it was probably a commissioned work – the infrared photographs are useful for clarifying the composition and enhancing the black primary lines.

MMCH ACC1838



7.18
Bentwood chest, Heiltsuk,
attributed to Captain Carpenter
Late nineteenth century
Yellow cedar sides and lid, red cedar
base, paint, 32.5 × 44.5 × 35.0 cm
NMAI 15.8974



7.19
Bentwood chest, Heiltsuk,
attributed to Captain Carpenter
c. 1900
Red cedar, paint,
34.6 × 47.8 × 30.8 cm

This chest is probably the only painted
object directly attributed to Captain
Carpenter, since the maker was iden-
tified in the collecting notes of the
Rev. R. W. Large (Black 1997, 165-6).
ROM NS23113



leaves from a branch. Tail feathers are portrayed in a similar way, although each is attached to the body by two points.

Several of Carpenter's eagle compositions differ only subtly; in the secondary elements that make up their head feathers, or in the proportions of solid and hatched areas defining their wing and tail feathers. We can see consistencies of style between the two chiefs' seats, for instance, and the painted chest lid in Figure 7.16. Figures 7.17A and B each feature a similar profile eagle's head on one wide panel, while the first panel shown in the sequence for each box, including C, displays a creature with vertical, split-U-shaped feathers rising from its head. It is uncertain whether eagles are represented in these three intriguing, humanoid images. Figure 7.19 offers a simpler eagle composition on its ends and was created later in Carpenter's career. Here, the feathers of the head, wing, and tail are shown as a series of short, slanted lines. A particularly dramatic example of Carpenter's eagle imagery is a painted leather cape, or trailer, created as part of a chief's regalia (Figure 7.20). Here, numerous attributes of his style are combined in a representation of an eagle's wings, body, and tail; long, parallel-hatched feathers define the bird's back.

Captain Carpenter was a carver as well as a painter. He often chose to enhance his painted work with shallow carving and occasionally incorporated sculptural elements into a painted composition. Both chiefs' seats are carved and painted on their inner surfaces, and both have as their focal point a three-dimensional eagle face at the centre back. The bentwood dish in Figure 7.21 is similarly painted and sculpted, and blends the images of eagle and whale. The mask-like face of a killer whale, carved out of alder or maple, is attached to the front of the dish with dowels; its dorsal fin is shown on the whale's brow. The opposite end of the dish features elements that may be interpreted both as the tail flukes of a whale and as an eagle with feathers rising above its head. An arrangement of feather forms, a fin, and other components on each side of the dish gives further clues to the dual presence of a whale's body and an eagle's wings.

The more we examine the range of Carpenter's art, the more we find common elements of style that unite individual works. A profile eagle head painted inside the bentwood dish just mentioned, for example, repeats the formal arrangement of his other eagle compositions (Figure 7.21). Even the two tiny

black feathers that protrude from the back of the eagle's larger head feathers can also be found in the eagle profiles on the back of Figure 7.11 and the lid of Figure 7.16. On the front and back of a large chest, a small profile face peers out from within each of the creature's ears (Figure 7.15); the same being occupies the folded dorsal fins of the whales painted on the inner sides of Figure 7.11. Finally, Carpenter developed a distinctive Y-shaped unit – a long U-form or pointed extension connecting one or more joint forms – used to represent a body component in several painted works. He often painted these in a series, as in the red forms inside each killer whale's body in Figure 7.10, or the two black forms side by side on Figure 7.18.

Certain elements within Carpenter's compositions typify the 'classic' Heiltsuk style of painting with only slight modifications. The weight and volume of his compositional lines, for instance, match those of many mid- to late-nineteenth-century boxes and chests known to be of Heiltsuk origin. Similarly, his eye forms and inner eyes follow the conventional format. Pupils tend to be narrow and lozenge shaped, enclosed by compressed

eyelid lines that stretch from one edge of the eye to the other. Other eye and joint forms incorporate an inner ovoid or pupil that is narrow or round and is attached to the surrounding form. Carpenter also made use of typically Heiltsuk patterns of parallel hatching within the enclosed elements of his paintings.

Perhaps the most exemplary of Carpenter's painted works, in addition to his chiefs' seats, are his carved and painted canoes. The 6.7-metre-long model canoe he created around 1882 was exhibited in 1883 at the International Fisheries Exposition in London, England (Figure 7.13). It was shown again in the 1927 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern* at the National Gallery of Canada, this time as an anonymous example of a 'Haida dug-out canoe' (National Gallery of Canada 1927, 5). Reverend C.M. Tate, the first permanent missionary at Bella Bella, described the piece in a published report: 'Three years ago we watched the manufacture and decoration of a beautiful model canoe, a few yards from the Mission house. We understood it was for a gentleman in Victoria; but when visiting the Fisheries exhibition in

London about two years ago, almost the first thing that met our gaze was our Bella-Bella canoe' (Tate 1888, 21).

The outside of the canoe is smoothly finished and painted black. Inside, row upon row of fine adzing crosses the width of the canoe, changing in direction to longitudinal rows at bow and stern. This interior surface is fully painted with a series of bilateral compositions in the Heiltsuk style. Representations of killer whales, the sea bear or sea wolf, bird-like creatures, and several unidentified beings reveal many of the distinctive attributes that we now recognize as evidence of Carpenter's hand.

Beginning at the bow of the canoe, we can identify a killer whale painted on each side, displaying its characteristic rounded teeth and blowhole. A triangular bow seat is fitted between the two halves of this image. Painted on this seat is an enigmatic creature composed of a head, hands, and clawed feet. Its face shares the features of that painted within the tail feathers of Carpenter's eagle regalia (Figure 7.20). We may speculate that this creature represents a spirit being because it is painted red, as are those encountered in other northern compositions.

The next major figure, located in the centre of the canoe, combines the characteristics of a land animal – either bear or wolf – and a killer whale. It most likely represents either a sea bear or a sea wolf, both of which reside in the oral traditions of the northern and central coast tribes. Recognizable features include the row of rounded teeth lining the mouth and the series of pointed extensions joining components of the creature's body and tail. Within the clawed feet and central body are profile faces echoing those carved on the upper front corners of Figure 7.10. Between body and tail are two black, feather-like flares that may represent a small tail but follow the same pattern as the wing feathers in other compositions.

Painted on two triangular platforms at the stern of the canoe are the components of an unidentified split image. Two sets of red clawed feet with feather-like flares extend onto the adjacent sides. Additional compositions decorate the four thwarts spanning the canoe at its widest points. Three of these are difficult to interpret, yet all are painted in black, red, and blue and share similar attributes of Carpenter's style.

Moving in order from bow to stern, the first thwart displays a symmetrical composition that includes a profile head, hand, and other units. A circular hole for a sailing mast is cut through the centre. The second thwart features a large,

toothed creature whose face resembles that of the sea creature occupying the base of the chief's seat (Figure 7.11) but whose long body includes wings and tail feathers. A killer whale is clearly represented on the third thwart. Its toothed mouth and blowhole are typical of Carpenter's compositions, as is the dorsal fin bisecting the whale's body. An eagle-like head, claws, and tail component are recognizable on the fourth thwart. Other traits common to Carpenter's eagle images – broad feather forms on the head and rows of wing feathers – are not present here.

The canoe holds a wealth of images and themes within its painted forms. It not only illustrates an assemblage of creatures from the natural and mythological worlds but also reveals the broad range of characteristics that mark Carpenter's style: his formal tendencies and their subtle nuances, his understanding of composition and line, and the self-conscious choices he made in the interpretation of Heiltsuk motifs. It is a pivotal piece in the ongoing attribution of painted works to Carpenter's hand.

Numerous other carved and painted objects hint at a possible Carpenter attribution yet display fewer consistent features of his style. Among these are six containers whose compositions conform closely to the conventionalized structures of northern chest and box motifs (Figures 7.22, 7.23A–C, 7.24, and 7.25). In many ways they appear indistinguishable from similar Heiltsuk, Haida, and Tsimshian examples. A closer look, however, reveals several qualities shared by Carpenter's known works. His distinctive use of certain materials, woodworking techniques, and trade pigments, along with similarities in compositional detail, are all evident here.

Following the practice established by other nineteenth-century carvers of the northern coast, Captain Carpenter seems to have preferred yellow cedar over the more common red cedar for his boxes, chests, and chiefs' seats. He used the fine grain of yellow cedar to full advantage in areas of detailed relief carving. Numerous containers attributed to him have yellow cedar sides and a red cedar base and lid. In addition, both the chest and lid in Figure 7.22 are constructed of four separate sides nailed together rather than bent from one piece of wood, while the long chest in Figure 7.24 is dovetailed at each corner. These techniques are rarely seen in late-nineteenth-century northern chests and probably reflect the artist's experience as a carpenter and boat builder.

7.24

Storage chest, Hellsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter

Late nineteenth century

Yellow cedar, paint,

25.0 × 140.0 × 26.0 cm

The unique shape of this chest suggests that it may have been used to store guns. The corners are nailed and dovetailed rather than kerfed – techniques used by Carpenter in his boat-building work.

UBCMOA Nb3.1444



7.25

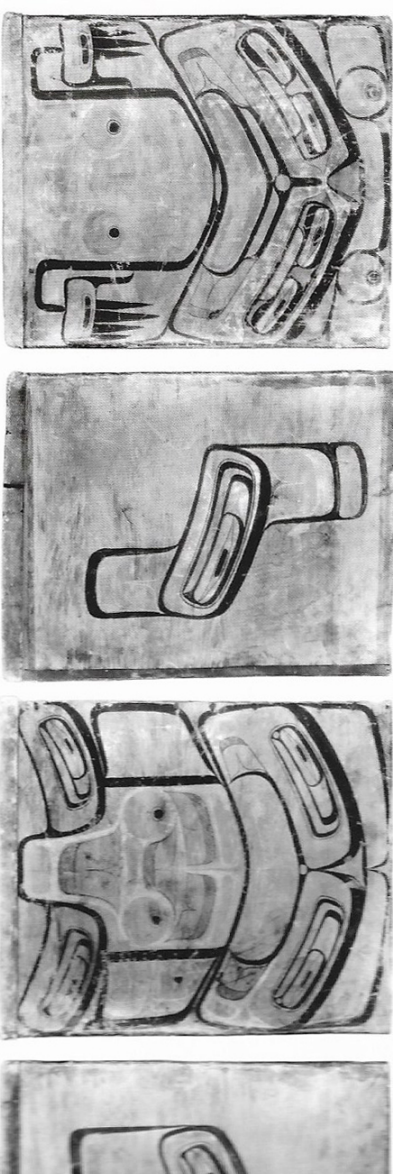
Bentwood box, Hellsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter

Late nineteenth century

Yellow cedar sides, red cedar base, paint, 47.0 × 40.5 × 36.0 cm

The compositions on the box ends, the use of a variety of pigments, and the distinctive shape of the hands and of the tulip-like shape below each hand are among the characteristics that point to a Carpenter attribution. The primary lines of the composition are clarified in the infrared photographs.

CMNH 3178-112



In all his painted work, Carpenter revealed a willingness to innovate and experiment with colour. He made use of the wide range of contemporary pigments available to him: vermilion, Reckitt's Blue, and other blue, red, and green commercial preparations. The deep blue created by Reckitt's Blue is typical of much Heiltsuk painting. Carpenter applied it in areas of low relief and also created unusual effects by alternating blue and red lines of parallel hatching and outlining solid and hatched elements in red (Figures 7.16, 7.18, 7.24, and 7.25). The killer-whale compositions he created on the front and back of the bentwood chest in Figure 7.15 are dramatic variations on the standardized image, the effect of which is heightened through the bold use of blue and red.

Carpenter's range of pigments and his tendency to apply paint lavishly are similarly apparent in Figures 7.22 and 7.23. While Figure 7.23C features areas of cross-hatching on its ends that are not typical of this artist's work, both the form of relief carving in the single-eye sockets and the character of face components show stylistic affinities. Carpenter's experimental

approach may also be evident in the images carved and painted on the lid in Figure 7.22. Lids are generally left unadorned, whereas this example – shaped like a steamer-trunk lid – extends the chest's compositions beyond their usual boundaries.

One of the works Captain Carpenter created in the early twentieth century still hangs over an entrance to the R. W. Large Memorial Hospital in Waglisla. Although we can recognize Carpenter's compositional techniques and details, the piece lacks the firm handling of curves and lines characteristic of his earlier work. Items he produced in later years show a gradual deterioration in quality. Painted serving dishes, trays, paddles, and models often exhibit the familiar images of killer whale and eagle, but the wavy lines on some examples reveal the hand of an artist in declining health (Figure 7.26). The artist's descendants now believe that he suffered from a condition similar to Parkinson's disease toward the end of his long career and speculate that his almost exclusive use of early European trade pigments – particularly vermilion (mercuric oxide) – may have proved toxic to his health.¹²

7.26

Captain Carpenter created a wide array of articles for sale to non-Native collectors, particularly in the early decades of the twentieth century. Although he never signed these works, even the more simplified compositions continued to display the recognizable characteristics of his personal style.

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>A
Paddle, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Late nineteenth or early twentieth century
Yellow cedar, paint, 157.0 × 14.0 cm
UBCMOA A1492</p> | <p>D
Paddle, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Late nineteenth or early twentieth century
Yellow cedar, paint, 115.0 × 12.5 cm
VM A1053a</p> | <p>G
Bentwood dish, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Early twentieth century
Yellow cedar sides, red cedar base, paint, opercula, 14.0 × 33.0 × 36.0 cm
UBCMOA A2654</p> | <p>J
Spoon, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Early twentieth century
Hemlock, paint, 17.0 × 6.0 cm
VM A4791</p> |
| <p>B
Paddle, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Late nineteenth or early twentieth century
Yellow cedar, paint, 140.0 × 13.0 cm
VM A1052a</p> | <p>E
Tray, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Early twentieth century
Yellow cedar, paint, 12.0 × 33.0 × 33.0 cm
UBCMOA A134</p> | <p>H
Model canoe, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Early twentieth century
Yellow cedar, paint, 17.0 × 19.0 × 63.0 cm
UBCMOA A1545a</p> | <p>K
Spoon, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Early twentieth century
Hemlock, paint, 28.0 × 6.5 cm
VM A4772</p> |
| <p>C
Paddle, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Late nineteenth or early twentieth century
Yellow cedar, paint, 137.5 × 12.0 cm
GM A4445</p> | <p>F
Bentwood dish, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Early twentieth century
Yellow cedar sides, red cedar base, paint, opercula, 15.5 × 30.0 × 33.0 cm
VM A473</p> | <p>I
Mask, Heiltsuk, attributed to Captain Carpenter
Early twentieth century
Alder, paint, 32.0 × 26.0 × 10.0 cm
VM A466</p> | |



7.29

Bentwood box, Heiltsuk,
attributed to Captain Carpenter
Late nineteenth century
Yellow cedar, paint, metal,
59.5 × 44.0 × 38.0 cm

More compositions are being uncovered that may be the work of Captain Carpenter. This bentwood box, for instance, shares characteristics with other box paintings attributed to him. Particularly intriguing is the sailing vessel painted in red on one side of the box, between the black arrow or bird-track markings.

Perhaps the vessel represents the *Rainbow* (inset photograph, Large [1968], 53), one of the schooners built by Carpenter and his son, Fred.

MMCH UA120



LEARNING TO identify the work of an individual Northwest Coast artist is like putting together the pieces of a puzzle: inevitably there are missing parts, and the resulting picture may never be complete. Each work that can be firmly attributed to an artist, however, contributes to our understanding of individual creativity and artistic development within the broader style. Each painting that can be positively identified by its interpretive qualities confirms that both continuity and change define the northern tradition. Research on individual artists' styles is ongoing. More compositions may prove to be the work of Captain Carpenter (Figures 7.27, 7.28, and 7.29), and others may eventually be attributed to an individual hand even if the identity of the artist remains obscured. It is only by recognizing the creative achievements of such individuals that a fuller picture of Northwest Coast painting will come into view.

BELLA BELLA

A SEASON OF HEILTSUK ART



MARTHA BLACK

Spencer, the Bella Coola were invited by the Bella Bella in 1904 "to celebrate the death of a chief." The feast, which involved people from China Hat, Kitamaat, and Kimsquit, lasted two weeks.⁵ The Bella Coola chiefs reciprocated by inviting some of the celebrants to their village where they gave away "with much ado, about 400 pounds of biscuits and a large amount of tea and jam" (*MB* 2, no. 3[1905]:595).

Bell held important positions in both traditional and Europeanized Bella Bella society. He had made rapid transitions—from old customs to Christianity, from a somewhat traditional village to a new, modern one, and from chief to business man. Adjustment to all these changes seems to have been difficult for Chief Bell. It must have been so for many of the Heiltsuk.

CAPTAIN CARPENTER (1841–1931)

A man called Carpenter was recorded in the 1881 Canada Census as living at Bella Bella with his family (most of whom did not use English names). Captain Carpenter was, like Chief Bell, 'Qvúqva'áitxv. He was a second-ranked chief at Bella Bella (*DIA* 1888:480).

When Mrs. Carpenter died in the winter of 1904/5, Large commented that the chiefs "would get her tombstone," and in return the chiefs received a sloop and a sealing boat made by Carpenter and his son. Large was told that Mrs. Carpenter asked that her possessions not be burned on the grave, but be distributed to her "friends," the chiefs (*MB* 2, no. 4[1905]:821–22). This implies that the arrangements were more Western than they actually were. Rather than mementos to friends, such settlements were likely a continuation of Heiltsuk potlatch traditions in a form that the missionary did not oppose.

Carpenter's wife, who was a woman of high rank and a descendant of Chief 'Qa'áit (see p. 19), was buried in the grave house built for Chief Bell and was probably related to him. When Carpenter wished to remarry, Large suggested that he court the widow of the chief (*MB* 2, no. 4[1905]:821). A marriage to a relative of one's deceased wife would have been an appropriate Heiltsuk arrangement. That Large's suggestion was in line with Heiltsuk traditions of dynastic marriage may have been coincidence. On the other hand, it may indicate an attempt to accommodate selected indigenous social institutions. Perhaps it is Chief Bell's widow and her son who were photographed by the missionary with Carpenter at the Dryad Point lighthouse (*MB* 6, no. 1[1909]:10; Large n.d.).⁶

The chiefs of the northern tribes employed someone to make and repair canoes,

masks, and other ritual objects, and "this man they call the Carpenter," according to Dunn (1844:291). Captain Carpenter's English name denotes his occupation of carver and canoe and boat maker.⁷ Carpenter built a large canoe that was exhibited at the Fisheries Exhibition in London, England (Olson 1935, 1949:10; Tate n.d., p. 29), and, according to Reverend Tate, he also built a twenty-three-metre-long canoe that is now in the AMNH (MO 8, no. 2[1888]:2). He successfully adapted his considerable canoe-making skills to build sailing boats, which were much admired for their craftsmanship (MB 6, no. 1[1909]:13-14).

After 1900, Carpenter entered the wage economy as the keeper of the Dryad Point lighthouse just north of Bella Bella. The job paid one dollar a day (MB 2, no. 4[1905]:821). He looked upon Large as a fellow government man and colleague,⁸ and considered seeking a white wife (MB 6, no. 1[1909]:13-14).

Carpenter would have been about twenty years old at the time of the great smallpox epidemic and so had seen the Heiltsuk population fall from about twenty thousand to about two hundred people. (Men of his generation recalled a period when all they did was dig graves for those who had died.)⁹ He seems to have been very successful in adapting to the changes that took place during his lifetime.

Captain Carpenter was Richard (Dick) Carpenter, Du'k|wayella.¹⁰ He died at the age of ninety in March 1931 (Streich 1983; Beavis n.d.).

Large's collection included two paint stones that Carpenter used to mix his pigments (NS 23119, 23164), a painted kerfed chest with a lid (No. 34), and a feast bowl in the shape of a beaver (No. 42). These traditional objects may have been made for Heiltsuk use. They follow Heiltsuk artistic conventions. Huge bowls such as No. 42 were used in feasts and came in sets of four to represent "the divisions of the supernatural beings of the undersea, sky, land, and forest," according to Hawthorn (1967:178). Two animal-shaped feast bowls from Bella Bella that are now in the CMC (CMC VII-EE-37-38) were used by Chief Moody (Humchitt; see p. 73) at the feast marking his becoming head chief. The chest made by Carpenter (No. 34) is approximately the same size as Kwakwaka'wakw boxes that were used to store "bits of costume and other paraphernalia employed in all the dances owned by the individuals, and hence theoretically the dances themselves with their appurtenant names" (Curtis 1915:130).¹¹

Large's note that these objects are the work of Carpenter is useful for the attribution of other Heiltsuk works of the same period. Holm commented that

Captain Carpenter's chest is another of those very significant pieces which help make sense out of the attribution of Northwest Coast painting. . . . His work bears such close resemblances in style and detail to other . . . examples . . . that we feel fairly confident in isolating a "Bella Bella" painting style for the last half of the nineteenth century.¹²

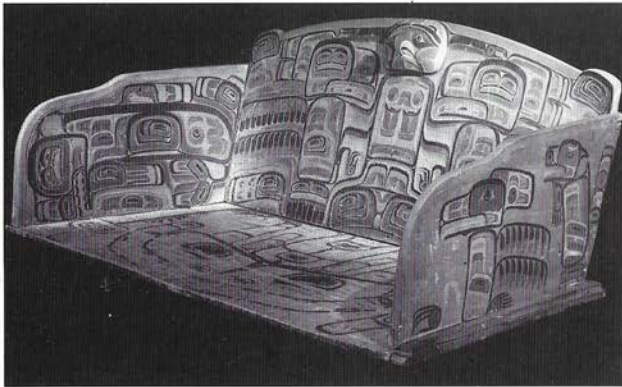


FIG. 26. This chief's settee was seen at the Bella Bella lighthouse in 1900. Captain Carpenter's name was written on it. Courtesy Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria. CPN 1856.

A number of artifacts can be tentatively assigned to Carpenter because of their association with the keeper of the Dryad Point lighthouse: two paddles obtained from the lighthouse keeper at Dryad Point (RBCM 15832–15833), and a chief's settee (Fig. 26) photographed in 1900 at the Bella Bella lighthouse which had Carpenter's name on it when it was collected (RBCM 1856). As mentioned previously (p. 43), a similar settee, or chief's seat, was commissioned from "the most renowned wood carver among the Bella Bella" by J. Adrian Jacobsen when he was collecting for the Berlin museum in 1881 (MFV IVA 2475–2477; Macnair, Hoover, and Neary

1980:149). This carver is thought to have been Carpenter and both settees have been attributed to him. Both, however, are much more elaborately carved and painted than the painted chest (No. 34) and a plaque in the R. W. Large Memorial Hospital at Waglisla, both known to be Carpenter's work. Simple boxes such as a child's coffin collected at Bella Bella by F. Jacobsen in 1893 (RBCM 221) and the wooden spoons that are common in collections from Bella Bella (e.g., RBCM 16336–16337) are closer to Carpenter's known style, which is characterized by loosely drawn, freehand elements—thin, sinuous formlines, tulip-shaped U-forms, irregular single hatching—evenly distributed over an open field.

Carpenter's style, then, appears to become less complex and less structured toward the end of his life. This may indicate a changing aesthetic or it may be the result of practical considerations. An increased production of works for sale to an undemanding public, for example, could mean less time was spent on each piece. A different style might also indicate another hand. Carpenter's son, Fred, worked at boat building with his father and may have helped him with art works as well. The artist's great-grandson said that Carpenter suffered in later life from an inherited illness and speculated that the illness may have affected some of his technical abilities, resulting in looser and simpler compositions.¹³



Kerfed Chest with Lid. See Catalogue, No. 34.