

# Tlingit conference spotlights traditional clans

**By Lani Hotch**

*Chilkat Valley News*

Adorned in Native regalia, singing welcoming songs and embracing relatives, Tlingits from Southeast and the Yukon arrived in

Haines aboard the ferry Matanuska in a colorful clamor to kick off the Conference of Tlingit Tribes and Clans.

The four-day conference documented customs and traditions of

Tlingit tribes and clans by bringing together clan representatives from the region and closely associated tribes of the Northwest. Scholars generally agree there are 18 Tlingit tribes and some 70 clans.

According to conference organizer Andy Hope, Tlingit clan structure and tribal affiliations aren't widely understood, and most documentation was done by white ethnographers and anthropologists a century ago. Gaining a Native understanding of Tlingit social organization is one of the conference's main goals.

It's important that clans meet,

rather than any of the other numerous Native organizations, because "the clan structure is the basis of traditional Tlingit society," Hope said. Clan relationships are still observed by contemporary Natives and play an important role in everything from potlatches, to names and social relationships.

One of the long-term goals of the conference is to compile a comprehensive census by Tlingit clan and clan house affiliation.

Besides Tlingits from Southeast, guests at the conference included the Tagish, Tahltan,

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Kwakwaka'wakw-Tlingit and Nishga of British Columbia, the Tutchone of the Yukon, and the Tsimshian of Metlakatla and the Alaska Haida.

Clan leaders were invited to present in-depth genealogical records and to confirm, update or correct the existing documentation of Tlingit social organization. Scholars made formal presentations on subjects including Tlingit genealogies, toponyms, linguistic challenges, documentation of traditions and clan ownership rights.

The motivation for the conference grew out of the realization that many Tlingits don't know their history, said Klukwan village

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president Joe Hotch. Said Gerry Hope of Ketchikan: "Our traditions are slipping away."

More than 350 participants registered from the conference.



Native Alaskans debarking the ferry at the clan's onset were met with songs and dances by local Tlingits.

*Photo By Lani Hotch*