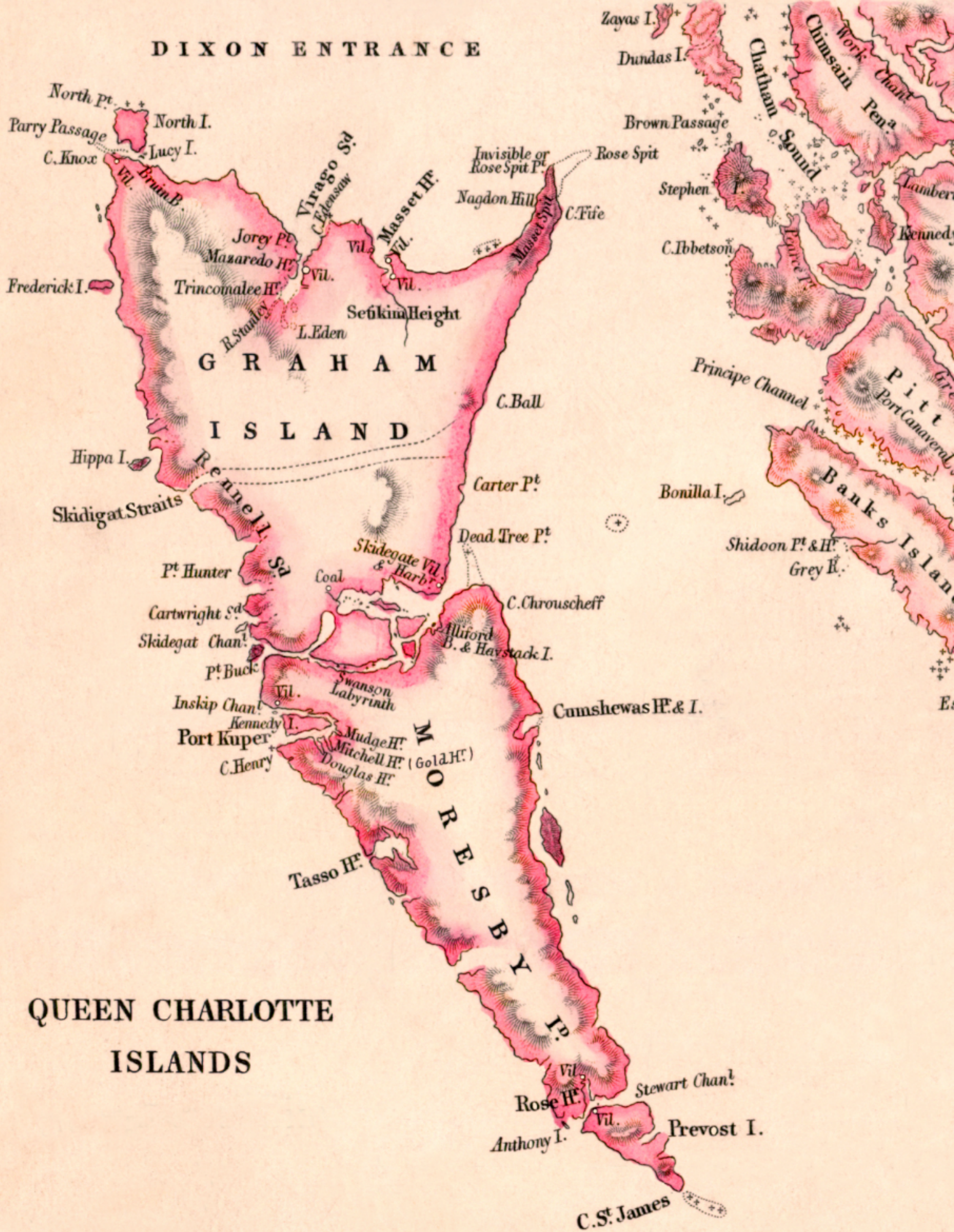


QUEEN CHARLOTTE  
ISLANDS





## 1851 QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S GOLD RUSH

Many of the first gold hunters that arrived in British Columbia were ex-49ers that had participated in the California Gold Rush. The rush began when a Haida First Nations brave sold a 27-ounce nugget in Fort Victoria for 1,500 Hudson's Bay Company blankets. Governor Richard Blanshard wrote Earl Grey, the British Secretary of War for the Colonies, on the 29 March 1851: "I have heard that fresh specimens of gold have been obtained from the Queen Charlotte Islanders. I have not seen them myself, but they are reported to be very rich. The Hudson's Bay Company's servants intend to send an expedition in the course of the summer to make proper investigations. The brigantine *Huron* was dispatched accordingly, ostensibly to trade, but really to search for gold. Failing in which, the men broke up part of a quartz ledge, and carrying pieces on board their vessel, returned in triumph to Victoria."



John Work, the Hudson's Bay Company's Chief Factor at Fort Simpson, loaned Chief Albert Edward Edenshaw (Christian name) of the Haida First Nations some gold specimens with promises of huge rewards if he could direct him to the newly reported gold discoveries on Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands). As a result Edenshaw returned home and an old lady guided his wife, their 4-year old son Cowhoe and him to an outcropping of rich gold. Leaving the boy in the canoe, the 3 adults started chipping the rich gold ore from a quartz vein and placing it in a basket. Leaving the place of discovery, Edenshaw's wife walked back to the canoe and emptied the basket of gold samples into the bottom of the canoe and then returned to help her husband collect more gold. At dusk the 3 gold pickers returned to the canoe only to discover that

**TOP LEFT:**

Haida Artist Bill Reid's gold box.

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OF ANTHROPOLOGY OBJECT #NB1.717A-B

**ABOVE:**

Watercolor landscape painting of Fort Simpson or Lax Kw'alaams surrounded by Dene First Nations homes.

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COLLECTIONS RBSC-FRAMED-LANDSCAPE-017 FRERICK ALEXCEE

young Cowhoe had thrown all of the gold samples into the ocean. Chief Edenshaw had no choice but to show Work the few samples that they did collect from that outing.

On 13 May 1851 Work made a trip by canoe from his fort to the Queen Charlotte Islands to investigate the gold discoveries for himself. He travelled in a 48-foot cedar canoe that was 5-feet wide

and only 2.5-feet deep that was manned with First Nations paddlers. The task of paddling the ten large canoes was made easier by sails. The 700-mile journey down the Laird River and then the 50-mile open-sea crossing to the Queen Charlottes and back took less than two weeks. On the 20 May his canoe almost swamped in ocean waters. He wrote in his diary about a couple of smaller craft manned by First Nations braves: "We are afraid the Indians before us are lost."

Work's fleet of canoes reached Gold Harbour on the 23 May and immediately commenced blasting the rock some 14-inches deep but found no gold. His men and First Nations braves searched among the stones and gravel and found a few pieces containing quartz with gold. The following day Work's men made two more blasts but found no gold except for a few small specks in a quartz seam of rock. Work wrote: "What gold the Indians found was all a distance of 16 yards along the shore and about 6 yards from above the high water mark to low water mark among the loose stones and in the cracks or seams of a clayey slate rock that dips to the southeast. All the larger pieces were found among the loose stones and a little at the

end of the seam of quartz."

Work concluded by writing: "It is my opinion that all the gold found is travelled or has been brought there and that where it came from plenty more may be found...The Indians are dissatisfied and disappointed that we have found no gold by blasting as it dampens their hopes of having a fort. We can blast no more as our borers are so broken in the head that they are too short. This I regret as I intended to have bored deep."



**JOHN WORK (1792 - 1861)**

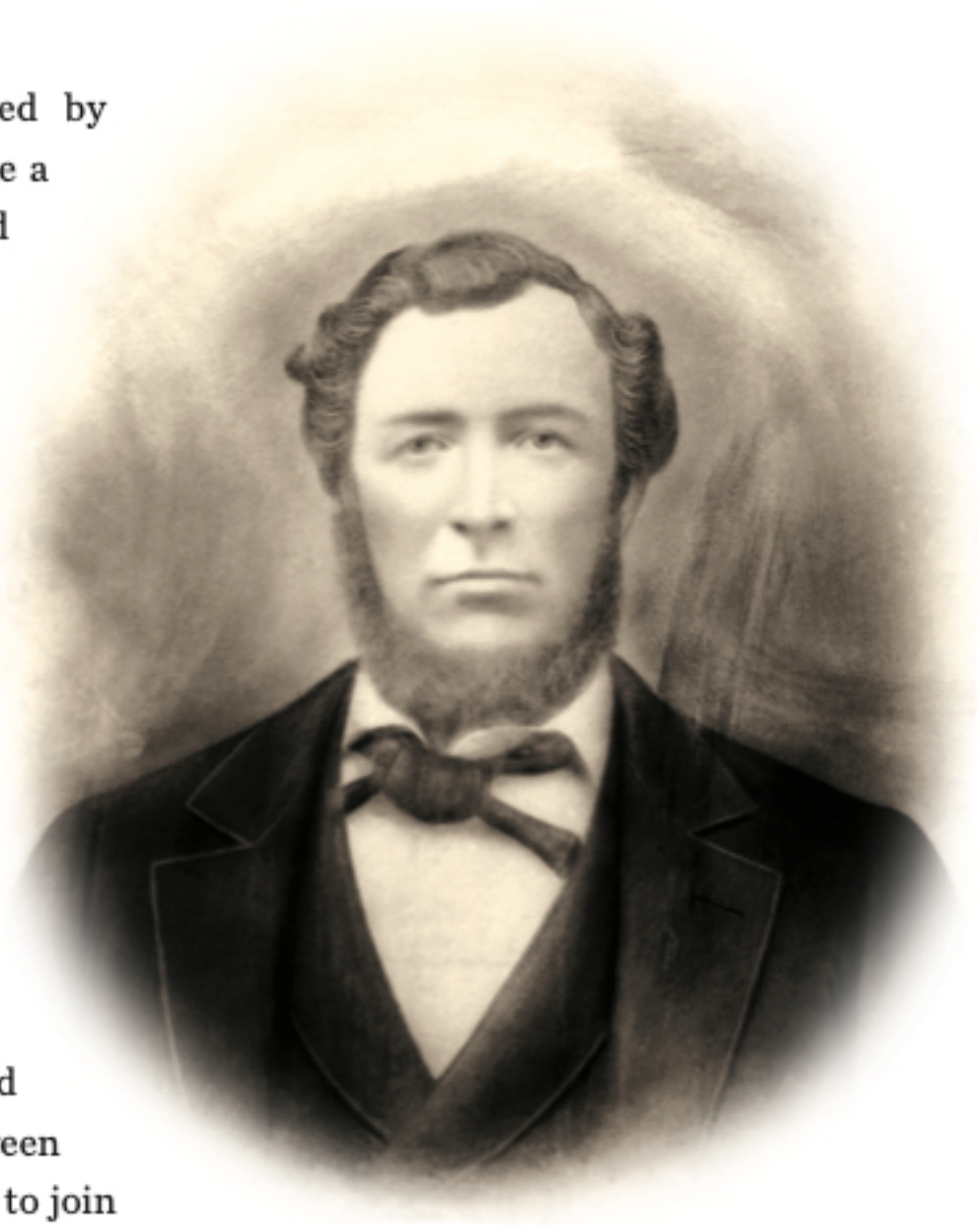
The Hudson's Bay Company Chief Factor in charge of Fort Simpson, Work made a 1,500 mile return journey by canoe to the Queen Charlotte Islands to check out the reports of gold discoveries.

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It would appear that the Indians salted the vicinity in which Work conducted his search for gold hoping for a fort to be built. Before departing the Queen Charlotte Islands, Work visited Skidegate and managed to trade: "We got about [blank from diary] ounces of ore from them in lumps and grains; they had a lump of over a pound nearly pure and one about 6 ounces..." These Work passed on purchasing because the Indians placed on them too great a value. Work returned to Fort Simpson having been away slightly less than two weeks.

The Hudson's Bay Company's vessel *Una*, captained by William Mitchell, was the first to carry a crew to mine a vein 6.5 inches wide and some 80-feet long with 25 % gold content. Immediately after a dynamite blast, the Haida braves would rush to the exposed gold and attempt to gather it up before the *Una*'s crew. According to the ship's logbook, the natives grabbed the white men by the legs to prevent them from reaching the gold. Fearing bloodshed, Captain Mitchell pulled up anchor and departed for Victoria but the ship was wrecked off Neah Bay and the small amount of gold that had been recovered was lost.

William Henry Emptage was a casualty of these skirmishes. Emptage had been born in Margate, Kent, England; his father having been a captain on the life saving boats in the Straits of Dover. When Emptage grew to manhood, he joined the East India Company and was an Able Bodied Seaman on their ships plying between India and England. On a return to England, he decided to join on with a HBC vessel bound for the Pacific West Coast. After a long sea voyage his ship reached Victoria where it was reported that gold had been discovered on the Queen Charlotte Island. It was while the ship's crew was blasting a rock at Gold Harbour, the name given to the discovery location, that a premature blast injured his left hand. He was brought back to Victoria for treatment and since there was no chloroform the doctor gave him whiskey, placed a rock in his mouth to clamp down on to endure the pain, and then proceeded to amputate the hand above the wrist. After the original amputation, the doctor peeled the skin back from the bone and cut the bone a second time an inch shorter. After his recovery, Emptage was sent to Fort Langley to work on the HBC dairy farm. Despite the loss of the one arm, he



**WILLIAM HENRY EMTAGE (1837 - 1904)**

An employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, Emptage lost a hand when a premature dynamite blast exploded while attempting to collect gold specimens in the Queen Charlotte Islands.

FORT LANGLEY NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

# DIXON ENTRANCE



was able to carry a milk pail in the crook of his arm.

Several American ships visited the Queen Charlotte Islands during this period. The first, the *Georgiana*, was wrecked on the east coast of the Charlottes and her crew taken captive by the Haida braves before the ship was set ablaze by the First Nations. The crew's freedom was paid by the next American ship to pull into Mitchell Harbour. This safe haven was named in honour of Mitchell, the captain of the *Una* and later the *Recovery*.

In the fall of 1851 ten American ships visited the Queen Charlotte Islands in search of gold but hostilities with the Haida curtailed any actual mining. Most of these ships had professional miners who had participated in the 1849 California gold rush. One of these vessels, the *Susan Sturgis*, captained by Matthew Rooney, befriended Chief Edenshaw, who, with his own braves, agreed to join the ship's crew and act as guide and interpreter. When the ship pulled into Masset Inlet to trade, she was mass boarded by Masset Haida who fought with Chief Edenshaw and his men. The Americans on the ship were taken captive with the result that Chief Trader Work had to travel to the Queen Charlottes to negotiate a release of the *Susan Sturgis*' crew.

It was during this period that the crew of one of the American ships cut down several of the massive trees growing on the Queen Charlotte Islands to be used as spars on their sailing ships. Governor Douglas, convinced that the Americans might be planning to annex the islands to the United States, appealed to the British Government to bring the islands under the British flag and early in 1853 he was appointed Lieutenant Governor of the Queen Charlotte Islands. His only real power was for the issuing of licences to search for gold. Later that same year, Douglas issued a proclamation of the British crown's ownership of the precious metals on the Queen Charlotte Islands requiring that all miners pay a monthly fee to mine.

Early in 1859 Governor Douglas dispatched a schooner to the Queen Charlotte Islands with a party of 27 professional gold hunters. The miners spent several months exploring the islands and carefully examined

the spot where the large quantities of gold had been taken out. William Downie, after whom Downieville in California and Downieville in the Cariboo were named, wrote in his book 'Hunting for Gold': "The general nature of the gold was trap and hornblend, and, at the head of Douglas Inlet, we found granite, as well as slate, talcose rock and coal, but not gold; and I concluded, that the large amount of this metal, which had been found previously in those parts with so little difficulty, existed merely in what the miners call an off-shoot or blow-out, which can only be explained as one of those freaks of nature, so often found in mining country." The men did not have the necessary tools to do any serious quartz-mining operations yet they did manage to bring back about half a ton of specimens. The first gold was obtained from a little harbor of the west coast of Moresby Island. It came to be known afterwards as Gold Harbor.

#### OPPOSITE

A portion of a map of the Provinces of British Columbia & Vancouver Island with portions of the United States and Hudson's Bay Company Territories compiled from original documents by John Arrowsmith, 1864.

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MAP#G-3510-1864-A7-QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS