Preface

In 1966 the National Museum of Man launched a major programme of prehistoric research on the northern coast of British Columbia. An important part of that programme was the mapping and recording of the major villages of the Haida of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Mapping began at the village of Kiusta in Cloak Bay in 1966, and during each successive field season until 1970, and intermittently throughout the next decade, the remaining villages were recorded. In the intervals between field seasons extensive files on each village were compiled, including references to village histories, house ownership, and the identification of the figures on the carved columns commonly known as totem poles. Over ten thousand historical photographs, assembled from museum and archive collections in North America and Europe, proved invaluable in checking the authenticity of the site maps. Careful records of the date and location of the photographs kept by the photographers, most of whom were attached to government survey parties, establish dates for the houses and monuments.

The documentary photographs that survive are among the few remaining records which illustrate the richness and variety of Haida monumental art. Of the more than five hundred carved poles which appear in the plates, only about fifty were removed to museums for safekeeping. The remainder have perished entirely or survive at the village sites as decayed fragments overgrown with the lush vegetation of the Islands. This rich photographic inheritance is important to numerous areas of study, including the definition of regional styles of Haida monumental sculpture and architecture and the broader problem of settlement patterns and social organization of the Haida. To my knowledge, this is one of the few areas of North America where the complete transition from a native pattern of architecture and village organization to one based on Western tradition was photographically recorded at frequent intervals.

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George F. MacDonald