The Haida argillite pipe carving tradition which flourished on the Queen Charlotte Islands during the nineteenth century produced a wide variety of pipe types. The best known of these are pipes with elaborately interlocked Haida style figures and ship pipes which depict Euro-American sailing ships and their crews. Another kind, which is perhaps less well-known, is based on the form of commercial clay tobacco pipes. Commercial clay pipes were mass-produced in factories in Europe and America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The most commonly found commercial clay pipes are marked with the trade mark “TD.” These were produced from Revolutionary times throughout the nineteenth century and were smoked by Euro-American seamen who traded for furs on the Northwest Coast. These commercial clay pipes became trade items as early as the late eighteenth century when these seamen introduced the custom of smoking to the northern Northwest Coast.

Soon after this custom was introduced, northern Northwest Coast Indians began making their own tobacco pipes of wood, metal and stone to replace the highly breakable white clay pipes. Some of the earliest argillite pipes are based directly on the forms of these commercial clay pipes (Fig. 1). The argillite quarry near Skidegate may have been known to the Haida people before white contact and used for items such as small charms and labrets. There are no early collection dates for these items, however, and the earliest documented argillite carving is a ship pipe (Wright 1979).

Haida argillite, well suited for the production of tobacco pipes, is a soft, black carbonaceous shale which is easily carved with knives and yet will withstand heat. It is chemically similar to other pipe-stones used by Native Americans throughout North
America. In particular, Haida argillite is remarkably similar in its chemical composition to the red Minnesota pipestone known as catlinite. The only significant difference between these two stones is in their colors, the red in catlinite produced by iron oxide and the black in argillite produced by carbon. It is interesting that the physical properties of both have been similarly misunderstood by many of the people who have written about them. Both catlinite and argillite have been said to be soft when quarried and to harden after their exposure to air. In actuality, neither stone hardens measurably after quarrying and each can be carved easily even centuries after its removal from the earth. Each stone’s natural qualities gave rise to the independent development of its use for tobacco pipes in the two widely separated areas of the Plains and the Northwest Coast.

There is evidence that all three types of Haida argillite pipes were produced at the very start of the argillite carving tradition. The earliest pipes, with large bowl holes and manageable sizes, are functional in design. Haida motif and ship pipes soon became very elaborate works of art made for sale. While highly pierced and intricate in detail, they nearly always have fully drilled stem and bowl holes, even though these may be too small for use. Clay type argillite pipes, however, though they too were made primarily as a “tourist” art, retained a more functional shape than either the Haida motif or ship pipes. They were made throughout the nineteenth century and proved to have the greatest longevity of the three. They were the last, and perhaps also the first, type of argillite pipe to be carved.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, argillite pipes were the most frequently collected argillite carvings. After 1865 Haida motif and ship pipes were abandoned as a favored form of argillite carving and were replaced by items such as model totem poles, houses, chests, platters and figural groups. Clay type argillite pipes, however, were produced in greater numbers after 1865 and were made until nearly the end of the century. By this time, however, pipes, including clay type pipes, had virtually disappeared from the repertoire of the Haida carvers. Argillite carving has been practiced continuously up to the present day, but very few argillite pipes have been produced during the twentieth century. Happily, some contemporary Haida artists are beginning to revive this tradition.

Clay type argillite pipes represent more than one fourth of a research sample of 600 Haida argillite pipes (Wright 1977). These pipes are characterized by their close adherence to the forms of commercial clay pipes with long plain stems and large bowls. They evolved from the earliest plain pipes (Figs. 1-2), some of which have spurs and floral relief carving on the bowl, to portrait pipes which have Euro-American heads which serve as the bowl (Figs. 5-7). These portrait pipes are similar to com-

1. Red argillite pipe with spur in the form of commercial clay tobacco pipes. Collected before 1853. 12 x 5.5 x 2.5 cm. National Museum, Copenhagen, Cat. No. H. c. 244. Photograph by Bill Holm, courtesy of the National Museum.

2. Argillite pipe with a spur and floral relief carving. Collected by G. T. Emmons, c. 1850. 7 x 5 x 2.3 cm. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Cat. No. HN 1410. Photograph by Bill Holm, courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum.

3. Argillite ship pipe with Euro-American figures, cabin and paddle wheel motifs. c. 1850. Note the Euro-American smoking a pipe at the center of pipe and the leaf-berry motif (similar to that on Fig. 2). 25.5 x 10 x 1.5 cm. American Museum of Natural History, Cat. No. 16.1/2559. Photograph by Bill Holm, courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History.
mercial clay portrait pipes which were circulated after 1840. Next came the elaborated portrait pipes which have Euro-American figures placed on the stem behind the bowl (Fig. 9). These figures resemble those seen on ship pipes. Finally, in the late nineteenth century, Haida motif clay type pipes were developed in which the Euro-American figures are replaced by Haida motif figures similar to those in the Haida figural groups produced after 1865 (Figs. 10-11).

Ship and Haida motif argillite pipes appeared in the world’s museums by the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, but none of the clay type argillite pipes included in this study was collected before 1850. The only evidence for the early production of these plain clay type pipes is found in the results of an archaeological dig conducted by Knut Fladmark at the Richardson Ranch site on the Queen Charlotte Islands (Fladmark 1973:53-95).

Fladmark’s excavation of the house at the site revealed one complete and one fragmentary Haida motif pipe and a number of roughed out but uncarved argillite pipe blanks. In addition, four fragments of argillite pipes based on the form of clay tobacco pipes were found. Two complete clay pipes and several clay pipe fragments were found in association with the argillite pipes. One is an unmarked, unspurred clay pipe and one is a spurred “TD” pipe (Fladmark 1973:67-68). Fladmark dates the occupation of this Haida house between 1810 and 1840. If accurate, these dates provide evidence of the earliest production of clay type argillite pipes and their direct association with actual clay pipes.

More than 5000 clay pipe fragments were recovered during the archaeological excavations at the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. The pipes sold for two cents each at the company store. The number of fragments
indicates not only that clay pipes were a very common item on the Northwest Coast, but that they were more breakable than almost any other item in use at the fort (Caywood 1955:59). This would have necessitated their frequent replacement, an easy task at the trading posts, but more difficult in remote areas such as the Queen Charlotte Islands. Thus, the rise of the argillite pipe carving tradition can be seen as a logical development in replacing breakable clay pipes. One of the clay-type argillite pipes excavated at the Richardson Ranch site has a layer of carbon residue in the bowl indicating its use as a functional pipe (Fladmark 1973:75-77). There is some evidence that tobacco smoking as a mourning ritual was incorporated by both the Haida and Tlingit people in their funeral feasts (Fladmark 1973:59; Turner and Taylor 1972:252). While the carving of argillite pipes may have begun with the production of functional pipes, these pipes were soon in demand as souvenirs by the Euro-American fur traders and they became art objects produced for sale.

Plain, undecorated argillite pipes in the form of clay pipes are found, but more often these pipes display floral relief carving (Fig. 2). These seem similar to commercial clay pipes with floral reliefs but never actually duplicate the floral reliefs found on clay pipes. Rather, they take the form of the leaf-flower-berry designs frequently found on argillite ship pipes (Fig. 3). Thus, Haida artists were not merely duplicating Western forms, but were building on them to produce something uniquely Haida in style.

This is also true of argillite portrait pipes which go far beyond mere imitation. In searching for possible sources for Haida argillite portrait pipes, it was discovered that clay pipes with large portrait heads for bowls were not produced much before 1840 (Thomas and Burnett 1972). Thus, while plain and floral clay type argillite pipes could have been made

4. Clay campaign pipe of Millard Fillmore. c. 1853. 6 x 4 cm. Note name along the stem. Illustrated in Humphrey (1969: Fig. 26b).

5. Argillite portrait pipe. 1855. 6.5 x 4.5 x 2.8 cm. Peabody Museum, Salem, Cat. No. E 28,465. Photograph courtesy of the Peabody Museum.


7. Argillite portrait pipe with forehead band and collar similar to those on Fig. 8. Note the shoulder knobs behind collar. 19 x 5 x 2.5 cm. c. 1860. Museum of Mankind, British Museum, London, Cat. No. 1573. Photograph by Bill Holm, courtesy of the British Museum.

8. Commercial clay tobacco pipe produced at a pottery in Point Pleasant, Ohio between 1838 and 1890. 5 x 4 cm. Illustrated in Thomas and Burnett (1972: Fig. 8a AN6).
9. Elaborated portrait pipe with a horse and rider on stem, c. 1865. 11.5 x 7 x 2.2 cm. The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton, Cat. No. R 2100/b. Photograph by Bill Holm, courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums.

10. Elaborated portrait pipe in the Haida motif style with bowl developed as bird head. Note elaborate scene with octopus pulling canoe full of people under the water. c. 1880. 29.5 x 8.3 x 2.5 cm. Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum, Cat. No. 1/10752. Photograph by author, courtesy of the Washington State Museum.


as early as 1810, those with human-headed bowls probably date only from after 1840.

The earliest commercial clay pipes found with human-headed bowls are those manufactured by Gottfried Aust at Bethabara, North Carolina, between 1755 and 1771, and by his apprentices in Salem from 1771 into the nineteenth century (South 1965, 1967). The Gottfried Aust pipes seem quite different in style from Haida portrait pipes in their having small human heads that are restricted to the base of the bowl, with the upper portions of the bowl elaborated with fluting and floral motifs. Haida portrait pipes generally have large human heads taking up the full size of the bowl (Fig. 6). One exception to this is a pipe in the Bern Historical Museum in Switzerland which has a small human head at the base, with a Griffin-like bird wearing a crown on one side and a Haida formline bird on the other.

Other common features of Haida portrait pipes are the portrait-like quality of the face which displays the typical Haida version of a Euro-American face; a band around the forehead which sets off the lip of the bowl from the face and collar representations at the base of the bowl. All of these features can also be seen on the type of clay portrait pipes which became popular in America after 1840. Many of these portrait pipes were used as campaign pipes by American politicians.

A common campaign pipe is that of Millard Fillmore (Fig. 4). His campaign pipe could have been produced any time between 1850 and 1856 as Fillmore was Vice President under Zachary Taylor and succeeded to the presidency after Taylor’s death in 1850 (Humphrey 1969:24). The features of the Fillmore pipe, portrait quality of the face, laurel wreath around the head, collar-like break around the neck and sharp angle between bowl and stem are remarkably similar to one Haida portrait pipe (Fig. 5). The Haida pipe is not a direct copy, since the forehead band is handled like a rope, the hair
is scroll-like and a mustache is included. Thus, while the Millard Fillmore pipe cannot be proved to be the source of this Haida pipe, it seems probable that this type of pipe was known to Haida artists.

In fact, a variety of portrait pipes became available in America after 1840, any one of which may have been owned by the Haida people. These include portrait pipes of Abraham Lincoln and General Grant as well as of nonpolitical celebrities such as Tom Sayers, an American prizefighter (Calver 1931:Plates 4,5,7; Wilson 1971:79).

Perhaps the most common clay portrait pipes available during the nineteenth century were those manufactured between 1838 and 1890 in a pottery in Point Pleasant, Ohio (Thomas and Burnett 1972:12). Sixty-seven varieties of short stem pipes were produced at this pottery, ranging from plain to geometrically designed with circles and dots, to anthropomorphic (Fig. 8). These pipes were mass-produced and show poor quality workmanship. The mold marks were rarely removed and the finished product was quite crude (Thomas and Burnett 1972:3). Nevertheless, the facial characteristics of these anthropomorphic pipes show considerable variety and seem similar to Haida argillite portrait pipes, in particular in their forehead bands, collar depictions and treatment of hair and facial features. In one case, a triangular motif within the forehead band of a Haida pipe seems particularly similar to the treatment found on the Point Pleasant pipes (Fig. 7). So far, I have been unable to find clay portrait pipes with shoulder projections of the type found on argillite pipes such as this. The frequency with which they are found on argillite portrait pipes (22/160), however, may indicate that their source is also clay pipes.

The majority of argillite portrait pipes are of elaborated form; plain portrait pipes are relatively few in number and became a standard form to which a variety of figural types was added on the stem behind the bowl. The earliest elaborated portrait pipes show a preference for the Euro-American figures also used on ship pipes, displaying the same tailored clothing, hair, facial features and poses (Fig. 3). Often, as on ship pipes, ivory or whalebone was carved for the heads and faces of these figures as further indication of their white identity. The Euro-American figures on the early elaborated portrait pipes seem to be thin with the more chubby figural type appearing later. Figures are shown lying or seated behind the bowl on the stem of the pipe, grasping each other's hands or relating to each other in a variety of ways. Sometimes ship-like features such as scrolled billethead-like elements are also included on the stem.

The human figure is frequently seen in the early elaborated portrait pipes. A variety of figural types, especially birds, appears and various combinations of Euro-Americans and birds are common. These early birds are European in character, displaying none of the Haida formline conventions and seeming more swan- or dove-like than eagle-, raven- or hawk-like. The horse and rider motif, also frequently seen on ship pipes, occurs occasionally on this type of pipe as well (Fig. 9). Haida motif figures also appear with greater frequency through time on the stems and bowls of elaborated portrait pipes. Toward the end of the tradition, these Haida motifs become dominant.

It is significant that during the period of the pipe's disappearance from the repertoire of the Haida carver, the elaborated portrait pipe with Haida motif figures was the most common type of pipe carved. Elaborate ship and Haida motif pipes were not carved in great numbers after 1870, but the elaborated portrait pipe as well as its stylistic descendant, the Haida motif clay type pipe, were made throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century and represent the last types of pipes made.

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As the figures on the stems of elaborated portrait pipes became more Haida in character, the human-headed bowl became less European in character (Fig. 10); sometimes the bowl was developed as a bird rather than human head. In Haida motif clay type pipes, the human or animal-headed bowl disappears as a distinctive feature, and the bowl is incorporated into the figural groups on the stem and disguised in much the same manner as on other Haida motif pipes (Fig. 11). Unlike the early Haida motif pipes, however, the figures on these late clay type pipes are not elaborately interlocked. Rather, they seem to be placed on the stem of the pipe much like actors on a stage. Indeed, these figures often depict mythical scenes similar to those being carved at the same time in argillite figural groups. Favorite characters are the bear mother and wasco or sea wolf. The character of these pipes, while displaying traditional Haida motifs complete with forms, is distinctly different from earlier Haida motif pipes and more closely related to contemporary argillite figural groups. The dramatic change after 1865 in favored forms of Haida carving accompanies and is no doubt related to the drastic social changes which occurred in Haida society at this time, one of which was the death by smallpox of about ninety percent of the Haida population.

These later pipes are quite large in size and often have flattened bases which allow the pipes to sit upright on their own. Earlier pipes would not stand up securely on their own. The development of this flattened base reflects the evolution away from functional pipes and toward non-functional carvings designed for display. This tendency eventually led to the disappearance of the pipe as a favored form of argillite carving.

Clay type argillite pipes deserve recognition not only for their longevity and ability to reflect contemporary developments in Haida art, but for their originality in design. Argillite pipes are not imitations of whalers’ scrimshaw as Marius Barbeau (1953:viii) wanted us to believe. Non-Indian whalers were not even present on the Northwest Coast when the first argillite pipes were carved. Even those pipes based most directly on Western forms, clay type argillite pipes, are not mere imitations. They are objects of art that have come a long way from two cent commercial clay pipes.

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