



Gold Bracelet from
the Queen Charlotte Islands
collected by
George Mercer Dawson
in the 1800s

Information to assist
in attribution

Peter Geldart

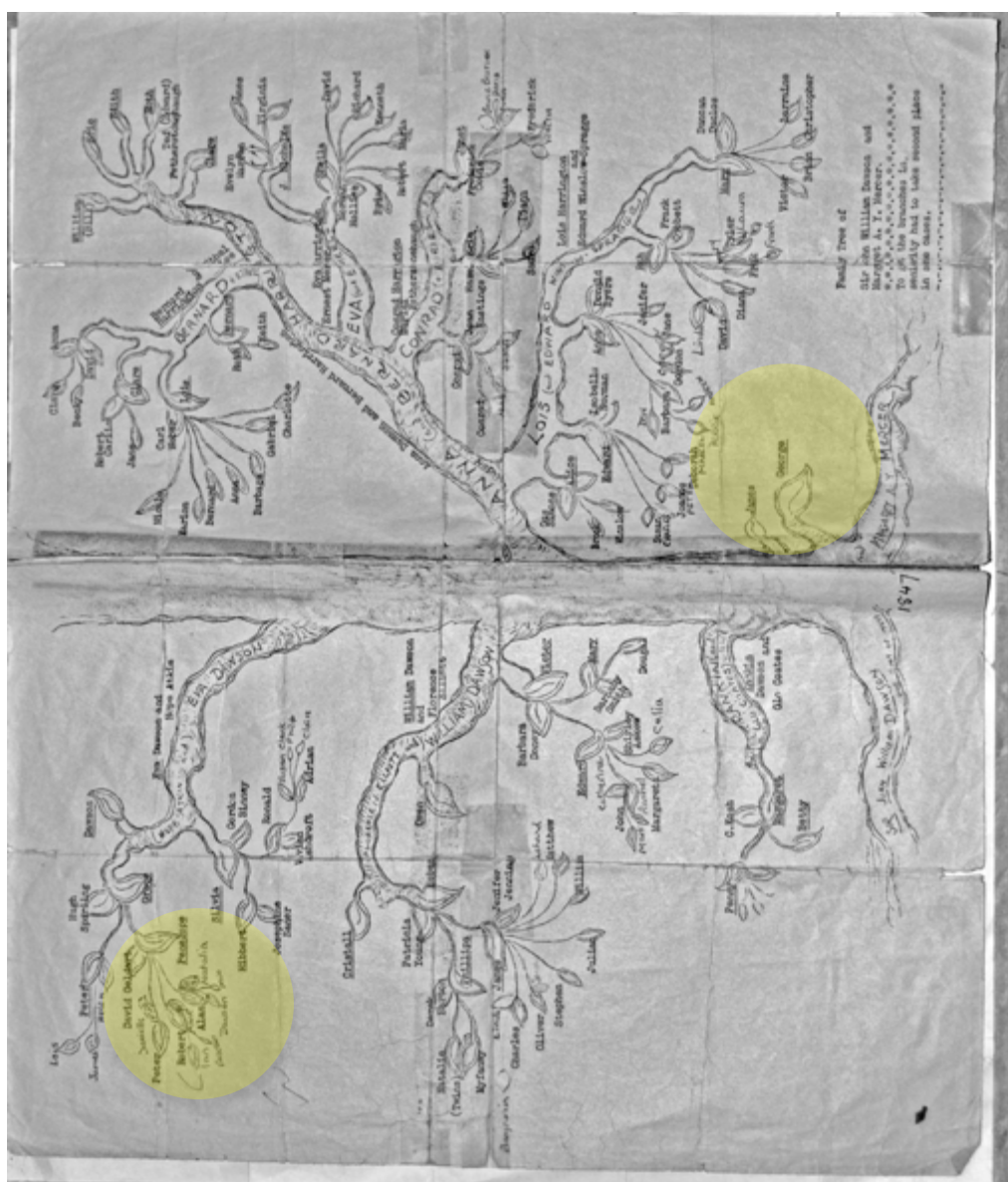
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Limited numbered print copies only.

front cover: GMD bracelet side view.
back cover: GMD bracelet front view.



A family tree showing the present family having inherited items (left), and George Mercer Dawson (right).

Preface

In this booklet I present the details and context of a gold bracelet collected from the British Columbia coastal area most likely in the 1870s by my great great uncle George Mercer Dawson, Canadian geologist and ethnographer. Through the family this item found its way to England probably in the 1890s, and then back to Canada in the 1950s. This booklet is intended to assist those who wish to determine the artist and when it was crafted.

To be clear, I have done this research using published resources; I have not visited museums nor seen objects physically other than this bracelet.

I have focused on a particular gold bracelet collected by George M. Dawson (1849-1901). In 1878 he surveyed the Queen Charlotte Islands, (Haida Gwaii) British Columbia, for the Geological Survey of Canada. His mission was to conduct a topographical, geological and resource survey, which he reported on. He was interested in the ethnographic study of the "vanishing" Native community, culture and language, and published important works in this area.

I have compared the "GMD" bracelet to works crafted by northwest coast artists of the time Charles Edenshaw (c. 1839-1920), Duncan Ginaawaan (c. 1830-1876), and "unknown" persons. This bracelet seems to have only traditional Native motifs, with no obvious Euro-colonial design. It may have been made for use within the Native community.

— Peter Geldart

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Specifications

diameter: approx. 65 mm

height: 13.17 tapered up to 28.24 mm

thickness: 0.42 to 0.82 mm

weight: 27.54 grams (0.97 oz.)

material: at least 22 karat gold,
from 1 oz coin

style: Haida, Northwest coast

purpose: Decorative use within Aboriginal
society; finely crafted with
aboriginal motifs, without obvious
Euro-colonial influence.

artist: Charles Edenshaw, Duncan Ginaawaan,
another or "unknown".

location: Haida Gwaii

date: est. prior 1878

provenance: acquired by George Mercer Dawson
during his survey of the Queen
Charlotte Islands in 1878

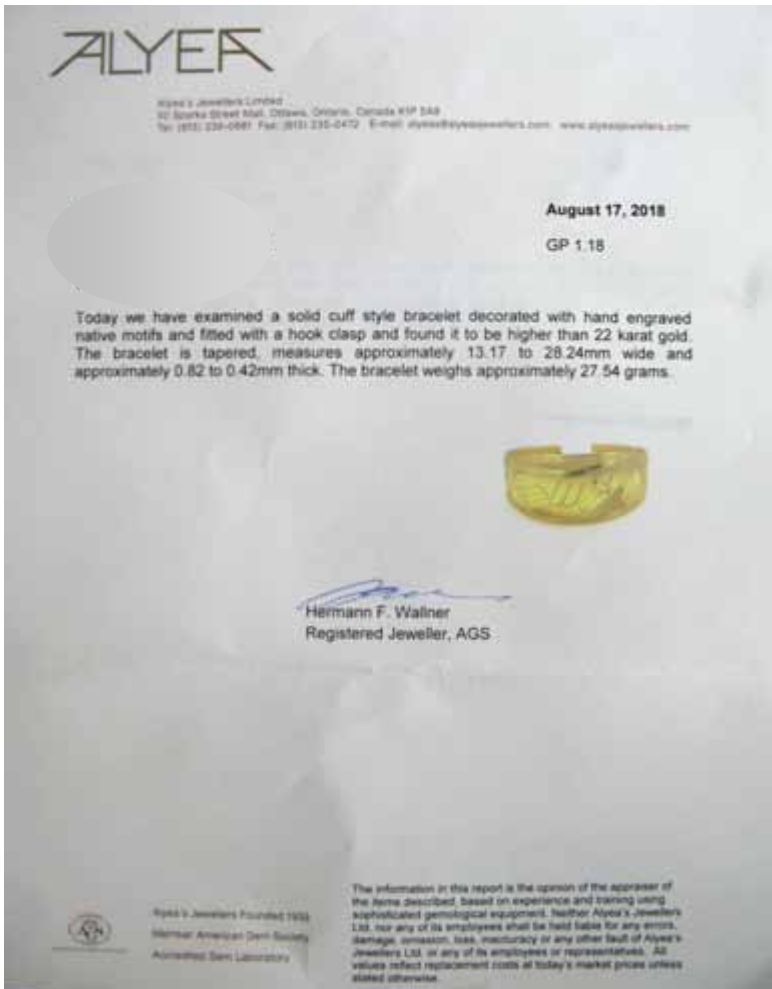
OR

through his contacts from 1875
up to his death in 1901.

ownership: family, by descent

Assay

The GMD bracelet is 27.54 grams. The standard Spanish onza coin up to 1821 was approx. 27 grams¹.



¹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Currency_of_Spanish_America

The GMD bracelet

Indisputable facts

- Collected by George M. Dawson (GMD) between 1875 - 1901.
- Aboriginal cultural artifact with traditional motifs.
- at least 22 k gold, 1 oz, from a coin.
- no obvious Euro-colonial design influence.
- tapered cuff.

Likely

- Collected by GMD from Charles Edenshaw in 1878 while surveying the Queen Charlottes.
- Artist is Charles Edenshaw, crafted prior to 1878.
- Made for use within the Haida community.

Less likely

- Artist is Duncan Ginaawaan,
- is another artist,
- is "unknown".



GMD bracelet inside, and clasp.



GMD bracelet front face.



GMD bracelet Centre creature.



GMD bracelet Left creature.



GMD bracelet Right creature.

George Mercer Dawson

1849 – 1901



Portrait of George Mercer Dawson
– *Early Canada: A Collection of historical
photographs by officers of the Geological
Survey of Canada.* comp. E. Hall. GSC Misc.
Report 14. 1967

George Mercer Dawson CMG FRS FRSC, eldest son of Sir John William Dawson, Principal of McGill University and noted scientist, and Lady Margaret Mercer Dawson.

b. 1849 Pictou, NS - d. 1901 Ottawa, ON.
Assistant Director (1877-1895) and Director (1895-1901) of the Geological Survey of Canada.

Canadian ethnographer, geologist and surveyor, GMD made special efforts to study aboriginal peoples in Western Canada, including the Haida in the Queen Charlotte Islands in an honest manner to gain insights into their culture. He studied the languages. Since he was physically deformed, aboriginals may have considered him 'of the spirit'. Many may have respected him and let him into their midst.

"Dawson may have considered his ethnography of the Haida important because his 1878 visit to the Charlottes marked the first time a Euro-Canadian, trained in science and interested in anthropology, had effectively observed and documented Haida society in situ."

— Jason Grek Martin, *Making Settler Space*, Queen's University Thesis, 2009. p 286

"To many he was affectionately called the 'The Little Giant' and, to the First Nations People of Canada, 'Skookum Tumtum' meaning 'brave, cheery man'... His report *Sketches of the Past and Present condition of the Indians of Canada*, was particularly historically and culturally important in the early development understanding and respect for Canada's First Nations Peoples."

— John Ashton, *Saltwire*, *New Glasgow News*, Nova Scotia, Sept 25, 2017.

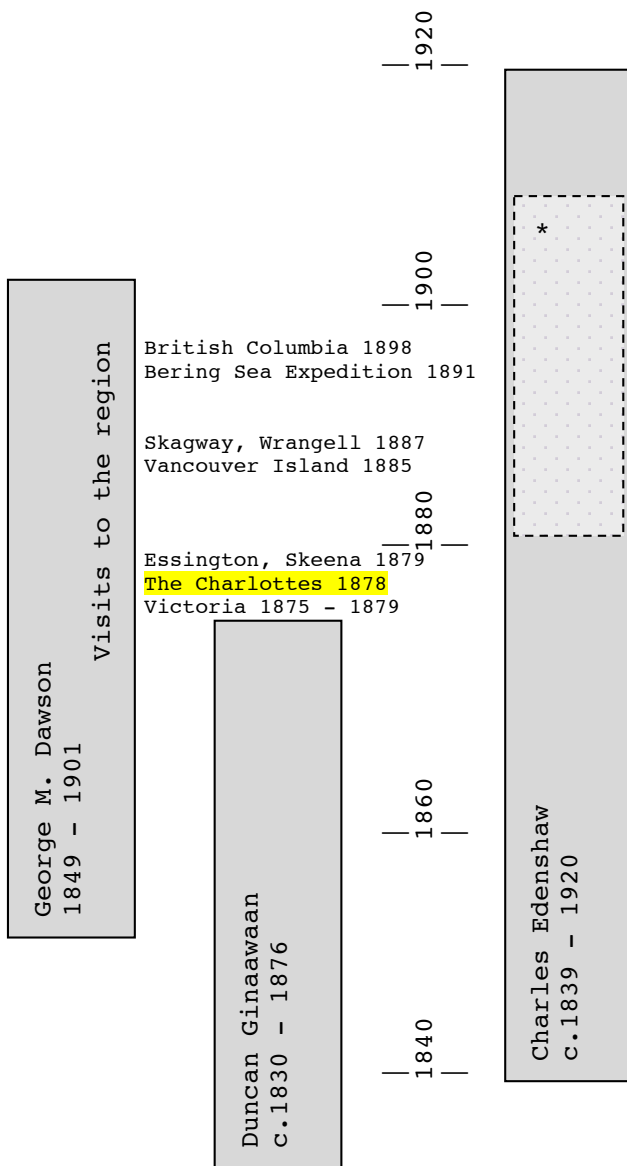
GMD reported on his 1878 survey in an 1880 report which included mapping and resource surveys plus extensive appendices on the Haida Native culture.

His interest in ethnography over his career and his senior positions at the GSC allowed him to continue to strengthen the collection of the Survey's museum when the GSC moved from Montreal to Ottawa in 1880.

"It was in British Columbia that Dawson earned his reputation as 'one of Canada's foremost contributors to ethnology' and as a 'father of Canadian anthropology'. ... As an artist and poet, he was captivated by the beauty of the Haida totem-poles and by the intelligence and skills reflected in the construction of their villages. As a Darwinian scientist, he perceived a highly evolved culture. ...

Dawson's pioneering research and dedication focused international attention on Canada's rich ethnological heritage, earning him two appointments by the British Association for the Advancement of Science: in 1884 as local director of its committee to investigate the northwest tribes of Canada and in 1897 as chair of its committee on an ethnological survey of Canada. Drawing upon the talents of American anthropologist Franz Boas, he combined support from the BAAS and the Royal Society of Canada to advance the cause of a national repository to retain artifacts in Canada at a time when museums abroad were competing for Canadian material. Dawson's emphasis on collecting over other forms of anthropological fieldwork laid the foundations of the ethnological department of the present-day Canadian Museum of Civilization [History] and deeply influenced the theoretical and institutional development of anthropology in this country."

— Suzanne Zeller and Gale Avrith-Wakeam
Dictionary of Canadian Biography



* "From the known attributions of [Edenshaw's] work, it would appear that his most productive period was from 1880 to 1910."
 — Robin K. Wright. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

Shown is the life-span of scientist George M. Dawson, and the dates of his travels in the region, as well as the life-spans of the two artists Edenshaw and Ginaawaan.

"EDENSHAW, CHARLES (also named Da•axiigang (Dah'égín, Tahayghen, Takayren), Skil'wxan jas, Nōngkwigetklałs; succeeded to the chiefly title of Eda'nsa (Itínsaw, Edensaw, Ee-din-suh, Idansu, Idinsaw)), Haida artist and chief; b. c. 1839 in Skidegate (B.C.), son of Qawkúna of the Sdast'aas Eagle lineage and her husband K'łajang-k'una of the Nikwōn qiwe Raven lineage; d. 1920, probably on 12 September in Masset, B.C."

— Robin K. Wright, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

Charles Edenshaw

c. 1839 – 1920



Edenshaw (possibly Albert Edward Edenshaw) [left] and Hoo-yâ. Chiefs at Ya-tza and Masset, Graham Island, Queen Charlotte Islands, 1878. Photo by George M. Dawson. Library and Archives Canada.

When GMD met Edenshaw in 1878 it would have been when Edenshaw was 39, and he was 29. *Allowing a glass-plate photograph to be taken implied respect of the photographer.*

Charles Edenshaw

"According to Charles' daughter Florence Edenshaw Davidson, her father started carving argillite when he was fourteen [1853] and had to stay in bed sick."

— Canadian Museum of History

"...whilst all the women wore silver bracelets, those of rank having several pairs, all carved with the peculiar devices of their respective crests."

— William Henry Collison

In the Wake of the War Canoe [1915]

"The works [Edenshaw] produced for Aboriginal people display crest figures. ... None of the work produced for Native clients displays any hint of narrative structure. ... The beginning of a narrative structure in Edenshaw's work can be dated to 1897..."

— Alan Hoover,

Charles Edenshaw, Black Dog Publishing, 2013.

(Published in conjunction with an exhibition organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Robin K. Wright and Daina Augaitis.)
p 69

"Edenshaw would have begun his career making jewelery primarily for Haida people... carrying symbols that identified the names and crests of the commissioning individuals who had the rights to display them."

— *ibid.*,

Bill McLennan & Karen Duffek, p 127

"No item of jewelry was as important for historic Northwest Coast people as the bracelet. Viewed as a sign of rank for both men and women, wealthy people wore as many as five or more on each arm. Hammered from gold and silver coins brought in after contact, the bracelet became the favored adornment. It may have been intended to replace tattooing, an important Northwest form of body art discouraged by the missionaries. ... the distribution of bracelets was also tied to gift-giving rituals.

Bracelets became a favored, visible means of continuing indigenous customs, such as clan designations. They allowed the artist to record in smaller scale totemic aspects of clan design. Bracelets extended tattooing as portable art; however, whereas the tattoo was permanent, the bracelet was temporal. Bracelets would also appear to reinforce joint-marking concepts ... while emphasizing the importance of the hand in oration, dance and as a tool of creation and centre of power..."

— Dubin, Lois Sherr.
*North American Indian Jewelry and Adornment:
From Prehistory to the Present*
(Harry N. Abrams 1999) p 410

"According to the Anglican priest Charles Harrison, who ministered at Masset in the 1880s, 'Chief Edenshaw' was the first Haida artist to attempt to manipulate silver and gold. ...

There is no evidence that silver and gold jewellery was made by Edenshaw for outsiders, and it is probable that such objects were carved exclusively for Haida people to display their family crest."

— Robin K. Wright,
Dictionary of Canadian Biography.

Edenshaw examples

These attributions are by collectors and scholars as found in the literature.



Charles Edenshaw (attr) Bird bracelet.
Pre-1879, silver. Canadian Museum of History
VII-B-103b. (in *Charles Edenshaw*, Black Dog
Publishing, 2013 fig 60, p 78).
Photography credit Canadian Museum of
Civilization [History].



Top: Charles Edenshaw (attr) Bracelet c. 1885, silver. Portland Art Museum. Gift of Mrs. Earle F. Whitney. 56.13.

Bottom: Charles Edenshaw (attr) Cartouche Bracelet. late 19th century, silver, Private Collection. (in *Charles Edenshaw*, Black Dog Publishing, 2013 fig 206, p 181). Photography credit Nancy Harris. (Burke Museum, Ethnology Archives, University of Washington).



Charles Edenshaw (attr) Cartouche bracelet
late 19th century, silver. Private collection,
Vancouver. (in *Charles Edenshaw*, Black Dog
Publishing, 2013 fig 190, p 171, detail).
Photography credit Trevor Mills,
Vancouver Art Gallery.



Charles Edenshaw (attr) c. 1880
National Museum of the American Indian.
15/1351 (e-humanity.org)

"Duncan Ginaawaan was a Haida of the Raven clan and a well-known early resident of Klinkwan, in Alaska. His mother was from the Middle Town People and his father was said to have been a white sea captain, from whom he received his name. His family was entwined with that of Albert Edward Edenshaw - whose descendant was the famous artist Charles Edenshaw."

— heffel.com

Duncan Ginaawaan

c. 1830 - 1876

"Martha Edenshaw's Haida name was dlagwa t'aawaa. She married gyaawhlank (Henry Edenshaw, 1868-1935). Henry was a cousin of artist Charles Edenshaw. Martha was the daughter of Duncan Ginaawaan (d. 1876), an Alaskan Haida carver and bracelet maker and possibly a teacher of Charles Edenshaw."

—University of British Columbia,
Museum of Anthropology.

Ginaawaan examples

These attributions are by collectors and scholars as found in the literature.



Duncan Ginaawaan (attr) Floral bracelet, 19th century, silver Private Collection.
(in *Charles Edenshaw*, Black Dog Publishing, 2013 fig 207, p 182).
Photography credit Trevor Mills,
Vancouver Art Gallery.

Note Euro-colonial scrollwork.



Duncan Ginaawaan (attr) 19th century
Haida Silver Napkin Ring with Incised Otter
Design – icollector.com

Note Euro-colonial scrollwork.



Duncan Ginaawaan (attr) 19th century.
 "An exceptional Haida engraved silver bracelet.
 The engraving Iconography is a Sea Lion."
 – Curtright & Son, Olympia, WA, USA.

Note Euro-colonial scrollwork.



Duncan Ginaawaan (attr) 19th century.
A15S-E12783-001-02.
University of British Columbia,
Museum of Anthropology.

Note Euro-colonial scrollwork.

Examples of 19th
century Haida metal
bracelets attributed to
“unknown” artists



Ralph T. Coe Center for the Arts, Santa Fe,
NM, USA. Haida double-clasp silver bracelet,
late 19th century, artist unknown.



Unknown, Haida. Napkin Ring. View (a)
Collected by James Swan 1875.
(attributed, however, to Charles Edenshaw by
Peter MacNair, B.C. Provincial Museum, in
1979). National Museum of Natural History.
Dept. Anthropology. Smithsonian Institution.
E20259

Note Euro-colonial scrollwork.



Unknown, Haida. Napkin Ring. View (b)
Collected by James Swan 1875.
(attributed, however, to Charles Edenshaw by
Peter MacNair, B.C. Provincial Museum, in
1979). National Museum of Natural History.
Dept. Anthropology. Smithsonian Institution.
E20259



Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA, USA - silver
Haida bracelet; artist unknown.
Top: back with clasp; bottom: front.



Early Tlingit. Top: front; bottom: side

— heffel.com A13F-E11075-001-01

Comments

- GMD's field work in Western Canada was between 1875-1887, continuing as assistant director and then director of the Geological Survey of Canada based in Ottawa. He served on two BAAS committees studying Northwest Native culture. His work involved interaction with Boas, Newcombe, Mackenzie and others to build up anthropology collections on Northwest coast Native culture. He would have had many opportunities to collect favoured artifacts between 1875 and his death in 1901.
- Given his predisposition to acquire items from what he believed was the "vanishing" Native culture, GMD would likely have selected traditional items which did not appear to have Euro-colonial influence.
- If the piece came from Edenshaw in 1878, would it have been one of his early works?
- Would Edenshaw have provided GMD with a work by Ginaawaan? (a family relative who had died just two years previously in 1876)

- In the 19th century in Haida Gwaii and the Northwest coast:
 - how many tapered bracelets were made?
 - how many in gold?
 - by whom?
- Do the crests imply that it was made for a specific person within Aboriginal society?
- Is it possible that Edenshaw used Euro-colonial design motifs only occasionally and only after 1878?
- Did Ginaawaan almost always use Euro-colonial design motifs?

~



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collected by
George Mercer Dawson
in the 1800s

Information to assist
in attribution.

Limited numbered copies.

Prepared for
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front cover: side view.
back cover: front view.