



We are continuing regular newsletter updates to share exciting history from the Archives with the communities. Some of you know these stories but others do not, so it is a pleasure to present our second ‘Did-you-know’ segment as the tenth edition of **Tales from the Vault**:

Liḡwɪłdax̣w Groups

Long ago, after the great flood, our ancestors in Tə́ka (Topaze Harbour) flourished, growing strong and expanding into new territories. From there, they spread out and formed settlements across the land. They settled in Xaxə́m (Port Neville), Komenox (Loughborough Inlet), Xʷəsam (Salmon River), Maʔcēnox (Phillips Arm), Kanis (Kanish Bay), Tatapoʔwəs (Surge Narrows/White Rock Passage and meaning “by boulders going dry”), and Čaʔyukʷ (Vancouver Bay). As our people grew and moved into these new lands, we began to organize into extended family groups - possibly after moving to Tatapoʔwəs - ensuring we had a presence across our larger territory. It was during this time that the We Wai Kai came to settle at Čakʷolutən and Wei Wai Kum traveled to Campbell River, coming from Matlaten, on their journey. Meanwhile, the Walitsama people moved to the mouth of the Salmon River and, by around 1914, had traveled south to live with the We Wai Kai and Wei Wai Kum in what is now Cape Mudge and Campbell River. In the 1940s, they officially merged with the Comox Band under the Department of Indian Affairs policies.

When the Spanish and British first encountered our people in 1792, the Liḡwɪłdax̣w had grown into many groups. The picture is not entirely clear, but by the early 19th century, at least six divisions were recognized: We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, Kwiakah, Tlaaluis, Walitsama, and Komenox. These divisions reflected the strength and diversity of our people.

In the late 1800s, anthropologist Franz Boas recognized the Liḡwɪłdax̣w as one group with five distinct subgroups: “Wiʔweqee, XaʔxamatsʔEs, Kweʔxa, ŁaaʔlEwis, and Q!oʔmænoxu.” Later, in the early 20th century, Edward Curtis also noted the Hatsumenoh and Walitsama as part of our people. Some believed these were the same or closely related to the Hahamatsees, who Boas referred to as XaʔxamatsʔEs. But by the end of the 19th century, the Komenox, Tlaaluis, and Hahamatsees had ceased to exist as distinct groups, likely merging with other Liḡwɪłdax̣w divisions or, in the case of Hahamatsees, changing their name to Walitsama.



In 1885, George Dawson identified five Lig^wíłdax^w groups: Wa-lit-sum, Wi-wi-eke, Kwi-ha, Wi-wi-ikum, and Awahoo but noted that Awahoo had joined with the Wi-wi-ikum. A year later, Indian Reserve Commissioner Peter O'Reilly reported on four “bands” within our people: the Kah-kah-mat-sis, We way a kum, Kwe-ah-kah, and We way a ay. These reports reveal the relative fluidity of the Lig^wíłdax^w groups at the time as well as reorganization following disease epidemics and the changes brought by the arrival of settlers after the gold rush.

The story of the Komenox people shows the complexity of our history. Some historians suggest the Komenox were originally a Salish group from Loughborough Inlet who had joined with the Wei Wai Kum by the early 19th century. And although there is little known about them, some speculate—based on their name—that the Komenox were of Comox origin (e.g. Galois). This assumption is flawed, as the suffix 'enoxw' is a Kwak'wala/Lik^wala term meaning "person of a certain place.” The name "Komenox" could have been a name given by the Lig^wíłdax^w to the people of Loughborough Inlet, or it might have been their original name, suggesting they were then Liḡwíłdax̣w.

Boas recognized the Komenox (he writes Q!o'mænoxu) as one of the five Lig^wíłdax^w subgroups, connecting them to Loughborough Inlet—territory long claimed by the Lig^wíłdax^w. James Smith described the “Komenook” as a Kwakewlth people who nearly faced destruction in a war with the Salish. He noted they took refuge on the southern shore of Loughborough Inlet and eventually joined the Wei Wai Kum. Billy Assu described the Komenox as being akin to slaves, speaking both Salish and Lik^wala, and ultimately became part of the Wei Wai Kum. In 1841, James Douglas wrote that the Komenox were still a separate group, with six houses and 70 men.

Through alliances, friendship and intermarriage, the groups that comprised the Liḡwíłdax̣w changed, adapting to pressures like conflict and war, disease and its devastating consequences and expanded territory. Our collective history is one of survival, adaptation, and unity in the face of change and challenges. As Lig^wíłdax^w, we carry this legacy forward, honouring the land, the people, and the spirit of those who came before us.