



GITXAALA NATION

PO Box 149 11 Ocean Drive Kitkatla, BC V0V 1C0 Phone 250.848.2100



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – July 9th, 2025

Gitxaala Nation Returns over 23 Cultural Treasures from the Royal BC Museum

GITXAALA NATION – Gitxaala's Language and Culture Department, and its repatriation project, Ha'amwaal Łagyigyedm Gitxaala (cultural treasures of Gitxaala ancestors), has been working with the Victoria-based Royal BC Museum to return home over 23 cultural treasures to Gitxaala's community of Lax Klan.

Five staff from the Royal BC Museum (RBCM), travelled to Lax Klan on July 8th, 2025, with the 23 cultural treasures. Upon arrival, a large gathering witnessed a ceremonial blessing provided by Gitxaala hereditary chiefs and elders, working with Gitxaala's Language and Culture department, at the Community Hall in Lax Klan. The Ha'amwaal Łagyigyedm Gitxaala were cleansed using traditional medicines, as well as singing, drumming and dancing from Gitxaala's Drum and Dance Group. A feast was held at the William Shaw Memorial Gym in Lax Klan to a packed gathering, featuring feast soup and a traditional seafood smorgasbord.

One of the key Gitxaala cultural treasures discussed and presented at the feast was a hayetsk (copper shield) belonging to Chief Paul Ts'ibasaa, who was then the head chief of Gitxaala. The hayetsk is associated with colonial injustice involving charges of piracy and murder alleged against four Gitxaala hereditary leaders in 1872, including Paul Ts'ibasaa. Judge Matthew Begbie, known in those days as 'The Hanging Judge,' presided over the trial. The hayetsk ended up in the hands of a provincial police representative, whose family later sold it to the provincial museum. This was during the period of the Potlatch Ban in Canada, when many aspects of First Nations' cultural and traditional governance had been made illegal under colonial law, and when First Nations people were struggling to survive amidst colonialist genocide, such as the smallpox and tuberculosis epidemics.

During the July 8th feast, gifts were exchanged between the RBCM and Gitxaala's Language and Culture Department, including an original drawing from Gitxaala artist William Cooper. Black hoodies with a red hayetsk design were distributed to all the guests at the feast, featuring Cooper's hayetsk artwork including the Sm'algyax phrase, 'Ha'amwaal Łagyigyedm Gitxaala.'

This historical return to Gitxaala Nation was made possible with assistance from Heritage Canada's Museum Assistance Program and First People's Cultural Council grants. The provenance research provided by the RBCM helped Gitxaala's Language and Culture department staff in locating some of the cultural treasures after years of collaborative research, including several Gitxaala delegation visits to the RBCM.

The Gitxaala Nation has been working on its repatriation program since 2018, and has been working with the Royal BC Museum since 2021. This has involved research to identify Gitxaala cultural belongings that are currently in the collections of museums throughout the world. Gitxaala is working with over 20 museums to return over 100+ Gitxaala cultural belongings. The 23 Ha'amwaal Łagyigyedm Gitxaala returned home from the RBCM is displayed at the Language and Culture Office in Gitxaala's ancient community of Lax Klan.

For more information, contact Dustin Johnson at the Gitxaala Nation Language and Culture Department - culture@gitxaalanation.com & 250-848-2100.