

# August Jack Khatsahlano

by Jacqui Underwood

Writer, Broadcaster and Storyteller

IN 1879 A SQUAMISH BOY was baptized by missionaries in the new province of British Columbia. He was given the wrong name. When August Jack Khatsahlano became a young man of wealth, he would correct that error in a First Nations ceremony that was later documented in “Conversations with Khatsahlano.” Vancouver’s greatest oral historian began a series of interviews with the city’s first archivist, Major James Skitt Matthews, in 1931. Until his death in 1967 Chief August Jack Khatsahlano made it his mission to set the record straight about his life and the life of the Squamish people.

“When I was a little boy they call me Menatlot. But priest make mistake.” Khatsahlano told Matthews that after his father Khaytulk died, “Qwywhat, my mother, marry Jericho Charlie ...whose first wife was Menatlot.” It was about 1900, when August and his brother Willie, in their early 20s, having saved a substantial sum by working at a local sawmill, were ready to right a wrong. They held a huge potlatch in the village of Snauq, at the mouth of False Creek. In a great cedar-slab lodge, by Squamish rite, in the presence of a large assembly of Squamish and visitors from Musqueam, Nanaimo, Sechelt and Ustlawn (North Vancouver), the hereditary name of his grandfather, Khatsahlano was conferred upon August by a Squamish patriarch, and that of their father, Khaytulk, upon his brother. Men, women and children then feasted, danced and celebrated with valuable gifts, including over 100 blankets. It would be one of the last grand potlatches of the era.

August Jack Khatsahlano, son of Khaytulk, grandson of Chief Khatsahlano, was born in 1877, in a lodge directly below the present-day Burrard Bridge. Snauq was a sizable village, settled by his great-uncle Chipkaayam, the brother of Khatsahlano, when the pair came down as young men from the Squamish River in the early 1800s. The Squamish Chief Khatsahlano settled at a place called Chaythoos or “high ground” in Stanley Park, near today’s Prospect Point. His brother, who became Chief George of Snauq, chose the rich duck-hunting and fish-trapping grounds of the big sand bar on which Granville Island now stands in False Creek.



GENTLER TIMES. Khatsahlano as a young family man, with his wife Swanamia and child, posing in their dugout cedar canoe at Kitsilano Point about 1910. Behind can be seen the rustic cedar homes of Snauq on Kitsilano Reserve No. 6. Just a few years after this photograph was taken, the entire village would be razed.

August Jack’s early years were divided between the two settlements. “My father Khaytulk or ‘Supple Jack.’ That’s how I get the name August Jack; he died when I was just old enough to cut wood—about six years old. He had two houses. One at Chaythoos. And one at Snauq. We would move from one to the other. From Kitsilano to Stanley Park, and then back again, as it suited us.”

It was a lifestyle to which the Squamish were accustomed. Before “the back and forth” between the peninsula and the creek, August Jack’s grandfather and great-uncle spent years making the summer–winter migration between their homeland on the Squamish River and the Lower Mainland. The big bay, sand bars, creeks and forests were a land of plenty to the Squamish and other First Nations. Rich smelt and salmon fishing, clam digging, berry picking, duck, deer, elk and beaver were shared with the Musqueam, who tended more toward Point Grey, and the Slei-Wil-Tuth, whose traditional territory was up the Burrard Inlet. Middens told a story of an Eden that had been around for millennia. Chief Khatsahlano finally settled at Chaythoos, because there was “lots of cedar, to make canoes.”

It was those bucolic days of childhood that stayed in August Jack’s mind, the years at his grandfather’s home, with its garden by the beach. And there was the excitement of growing up with his first

The Squamish were the most adaptable and entrepreneurial of the First Nations people, quickly becoming loggers, longshoremen and even mill hands. Early innovations included incorporating European utility into their fine art of weaving cedar root.





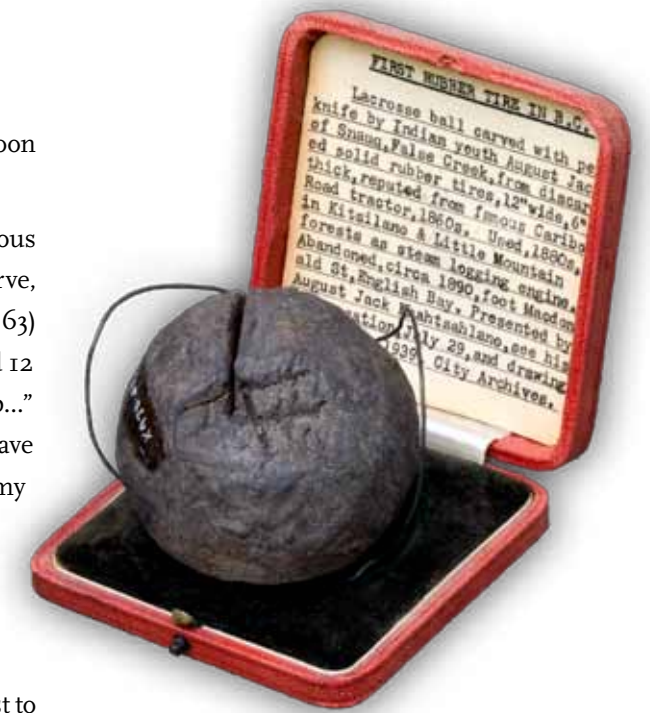
father, when Vancouver was Port Granville, a lumber-fuelled saloon village, before the coming of the railway.

Supple Jack had chosen to ignore the designation of numerous Squamish villages on the peninsula as part of a government reserve, but he did cut himself a deal with the Royal Engineers (1859-1863) for surveying work and built himself up some livestock. “We had 12 cows running around and 8 pigs, [sold meat] to the logging camp...” They had stables with two horses. “The horses always used to have a big time on Queen’s Day; race in Victoria, Westminster; ...my father made lots of money winning race.” Other times they just rode. “When we wanted to ride to town there was a trail right round the head of what is now Lost Lagoon, around by Second Beach... a trail through the forest from Chaythoos to Gastown.”

The Khatsahlano family was the only family at Chaythoos, but just to the east, 11 families occupied the ancient village of Whoi Whoi, site of today’s Lumberman’s Arch. “The big house was about 600 feet long and 60 feet wide. That was the real powwow house,” recalled Khatsahlano, “six families lived in it.” The rest of the families lived in smaller homes strung along the waterfront, according to sketches he later drew for Major Matthews. There were also the houses of the dead, native graves all along the First Narrows, those with glass panes indicating high rank. By 1883, Supple Jack was interred in one of them.

August Jack’s hard-playing, hard-working father was kicked while milking a cow and hit his head against the stall. “The grave where my father was buried had a cedar shake roof, and it was on cedar posts. It was about ten feet long and six feet wide. Lots of room for a coffin inside. And there were glass windows all around. The coffin was covered with a red blanket.”

Things got hard for the Khatsahlano family. Qwywhat had to milk the cows and deliver five gallons by canoe every morning to the region’s largest employer, the Hastings Sawmill. The young August Jack and his brother would rake herring at Coal Harbour, where the harvest was plentiful. But it was not easy for a young boy to manoeuvre a canoe in the currents around Brockton Point to Chaythoos, and the family talked about making a more permanent move to the sheltered waters of False Creek. It took a surveyor’s axe to make that happen.



When August Jack was a young man rambling along a traditional trail from Kitsilano Beach to Jericho on what is now the natural foreshore of Point Grey Road, he came across the remains of the old Cariboo Tractor. The tractor had seen its day, paid its dues building the Cariboo Road through the Interior in the 1860s, and then later served in the logging camp at Jericho as Jerry Rogers’s steam tractor. Khatsahlano’s words to Major Matthews upon donating to the City Archives this lacrosse ball that he hand-carved from its rubber tire, “I took the rubber from the old junk as was lying on the beach at the foot of MacDonald Street. They put the engine on a scow and took it away; they were through logging. After that, oxen were used, mules and skid road—it was cheaper. They took the engine to the Hastings Mill.” On display at the Old Hastings Mill Store Museum.

DRESSING UP. Chief August Jack Khatsahlano looking regal in buckskin and feathered headdress of the Prairies. Circa 1930.



Above

Lord Stanley of Preston, the sixth Governor General of Canada, is perhaps best known for having donated the Stanley Cup that was later handed down to the National Hockey League.

Right

The statue of Lord Stanley welcoming everyone to the park that bears his name. The first Governor General to visit British Columbia, the statue captures the moment in 1889 that he is said to have thrown his arms in the air and dedicated the park “to the use and enjoyment of people of all colours, creeds, and customs for all time.”

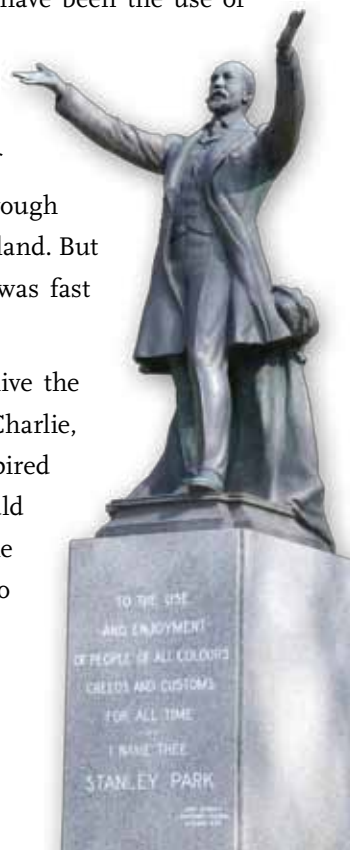
“When they make Stanley Park Road we [were] eating breakfast in our house. Someone make noise outside. Chop our house! ...chop the corner of our house. We all get up, go out see what was the matter. The man says, ‘We’re surveying the road.’ My sister asks... ‘Whose road? Is it Whiteman’s?’ Of course, Whiteman did not say park ... The man said ‘When the road goes by here, you’re going to have lots of money’... But, they have not paid yet!”

The roadway cut right through the house, and to add insult to injury, at an official ceremony in 1889 when Lord Stanley, the Governor General of Canada, formally dedicated the Park named in his honour, it was on a site described as “an old Indian clearing.” It was actually the gravesite of Supple Jack, whose remains the family had had the foresight to remove as they retreated to Snauq.

“It was from [Snauq] that I saw Vancouver burn in June 1886,” remembered August Jack. “Afterwards, as a boy, I used to go over and search the ruins for nails. When we went to Gastown we went by canoe ...to the south end of Carrall Street and across over to the Burrard Inlet on a sort of wagon trail. What would have been the use of struggling through the

bush when it was so easy to paddle?” At high tide, in the 1800s, another spirited canoe circumnavigation could be made of Stanley Park, via a creek at Second Beach through Lost Lagoon, which made the peninsula an island. But the wilderness August Jack knew as a boy was fast disappearing. So was the memory of it.

It was his new extended family that kept alive the old stories, especially his stepfather Jericho Charlie, whom he described as “a good man” who inspired him in his youth. “He had a big canoe, would carry a ton or more ... He used to go from the Old Hastings Mill Store on the Burrard Inlet to



## The Great Name and Land Grab

The family name of Khatsahlano was appropriated by the Canadian Pacific Railway to enhance real estate development in the early 1900s. Pioneer Vancouver postmaster Jonathan Miller had already proposed it as a sub-post office for Greer’s Beach, but it took streetcar signage as a promotion of the “new suburb” on Dominion Day in 1905 to get the momentum going. Local archaeologist Professor Charles Hill-Tout claims to have modified the spelling from the original name and indeed to have chosen the name himself. “Mr. Miller referred the request to me and I chose the hereditary name of one of the chiefs of the Squamish.” Whoever chose the name, it had the right historic ring to it that sells real estate. At the turn of the century, the village of Snauq was surrounded by CPR landowners and developers like David Oppenheimer and Robert G. Tatlow. The Province had already granted CP land in 1886 and 1902 for the railway. Subsequently the land north of the CPR right-of-way was placed on sale and the first lot sold in 1909. But a bigger land deal was about to come. By 1913, when the BC government pushed through an arrangement to buy the 72 acres known as Kitsilano Reserve No. 6, without federal authority, for \$218,750, it came as no surprise. Khatsahlano and his people were loaded on to scows and moved to the North Shore and Squamish Valley. Their homes at Snauq were burned, wiping out any trace of the village save a few hops and apple trees.

In no time, the federal government protested the deal for the Vanier Park area, and Ottawa bought out the province’s acquisition. But it wasn’t until June 2000 that the Squamish Band reached a \$92.5-million out-of-court settlement with the feds to settle claims to former reserves in Kitsilano, North Vancouver, Squamish and more than a dozen other parcels of land. A few years later the BC Court of Appeal would uphold a decision restoring about 10 acres of Kitsilano land to the Squamish Band, 116 years after it was expropriated for use by the CPR. That land, part of the ancestral home of the Squamish people (and the birthplace of August Jack) can be found under the shadow of the Burrard Street Bridge and adjacent to the Molson Brewery. In May 2010, the Band, composed of 3,600 members, declared plans to build an “eight-acre commercial and residential development” on what remains of the original site, bordered by blackberry bushes and swampy woodland to the west, condos to the east, and the bridge above.



William Cornelius Van Horne, the unstoppable president of the Canadian Pacific Railway, oversaw the building of the transcontinental railway, assuring his company benefitted all along the track to the terminus, with major real estate acquisition in Vancouver. Also credited with launching CPR’s sea transport division, Empress luxury liners and the company’s luxury hotel business.



CHILDHOOD MEMORIES. Squamish village of Whoi-Who as it appeared in 1886, just prior to the creation of Stanley Park. Vancouver City Archivist Major Matthews commissioned the oil painting by August Jack Khatsahlano in 1936. The name of the ancient village, updated as Xwayxway, (pronounced “kwhy-kway”) was put forward by the Squamish Nation, in 2010, as a possible new name for the park.

Jericho, loaded with hay and oats for the horses and oxen working at Jerry Rogers logging camp.” August’s mother also regaled him with tales of the old days, like when the first white man came up the Squamish on the “floating island with the three dead trees.” Even his wife, Swanamia, seemed of another time, known as the only remaining Squamish woman in Vancouver who continued to wear the traditional shawl.

Over the years Khatsahlano often reminded people that he could not read or write, yet as he grew older his memory seemed to grow more acute. In his life, he went from logging contractor, hunter and trapper to prospector, guide and medicine man, adding dance performer and carver along the way, but he is best known for his storytelling and preserving the original Squamish language and place names of Vancouver. One of his last projects, “Squamish Legends...The First People” (1966), was a collaborative work with his half-brother, Domanic Charlie. Yet, in spite of all his recognition, he was never without struggle. In 1913, again he was forced to move, along with all his people, this time from Snauq, when “the government of the day made an unsavoury deal for an industrial venture.” He finally retired to Squamish but not without being forced to move at least one more time to make room for the Pacific Great Eastern Railway.

August Jack Khatsahlano would eventually have the last word. Among many of the Squamish in the logging camps of his youth, he became recognized as a man of good judgement and knowledge,

and so, with time, he was made Chief of the Tribal Council. Also, during his youth August had been initiated into the Society of Power Dancers of the Squamish, after finding his “power” after long hours of solitude in the wilderness. In his elder years, he sought more solitude in the mountains and his image grew larger than life. He became the iconic “last great Squamish medicine man,” who knew the curative power of local plants and “whose sensitive fingers were said to hold the ancient power of healing,” and was also said to have healed his own blindness. Even his grandfather’s name, Khatsahlano, for which he had to work to own in his youth, was elevated to baronial-style status with its translation into a fanciful English meaning, “Lord of the Lakes,” in reference to the long-gone muskrat ponds by his home village of Snauq. The village is long gone, as is the old graveyard, the apple orchard, the sand bars of False Creek, the fish traps, the multitudes of duck and the swish-swish of a sea thick with smelt. But in a tree near the shore, a stone’s throw from the original site near the Burrard Street Bridge, a pair of eagles returns to nest, year after year. August Jack would have liked that.

Pioneer Victoria photographer Frederick Dally captured this picture on his way up to the Cariboo Gold Fields in 1868. On the photo he wrote: “When I was taking this photograph the boy [in front of the small cabin] imitated all my movements with an empty beer bottle and a coat over his head as if he was doing the same thing.” The photo shows a Hudson’s Bay Company blanket drying out in the afternoon sun at what Dally termed an “Indian rancherie” on Lost Lagoon. It was located not far from where miners camped at Second Beach near the First Nations village of Staitwouk on the peninsula that became Stanley Park. The lodges were made of thick cedar slabs, split with deer’s horn wedges, and built with stone hammers and chisels. According to early Squamish belief, the Great Spirit bestowed upon the first man three things that he could not do without: a wife, a salmon trap and a chisel.

