

Alaska State Museum Bulletin 40

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Does Your Museum Need a Docent Program?

by Mary Irvine, State Museum Protection & Visitor Services Supervisor

A What?

Docents are volunteers who have knowledge and insight about the objects on display in a museum and conduct tours to share that knowledge and insight with museum visitors.



Volunteer docent Shauna McMahon, left, wears a sea otter pelt over her shoulder as she shows a picture of an otter to visitors photo by michael penn / juneau empire

A docent program consists of a group of committed volunteers who might make your museum into the inspiring and educational experience you've always wanted it to be.

Docent programs vary from museum to museum. The docent program at some museums caters to visiting school groups only. At other museums, the docent program is aimed at providing highlights tours for adult visitors.

Who thought up that word?

The word docent is thought to have first been used in this country at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts about the year 1903, referring to a person in the role of a museum guide. The word stems from “docere,” from the Latin, meaning, “to teach.”

Training



Ann Feinup Riordan with docents during a docent training workshop. Photo Mary Irvine

Most docents need training, not only in the special subject areas of the exhibits and about Alaska’s cultures and history, but also about public speaking techniques, how to create intimacy in a museum setting with large groups of people, and how to handle a crowd of visitors. Good training is key to a successful docent program. Each spring, the State Museum welcomes back a corps of experienced docents, adding in a few new ones, for a series of workshops before the summer season begins. The end of the docent training schedule dovetails with a “welcome back brunch” for all museum volunteers. In the fall, we wrap up the season with a special event to thank the docents and other volunteers and donors.

Where can you find experts to come and train your docents? Your extraordinary community, that’s where! Amateur or professional strictures fall away when one invites in a person able to inspire an interest in interpreting the time period or material culture that they are enthusiastic about. In every community in the State of Alaska, big or small, there are experts on everything from kayak building to umiak skin sewing, from Aleut bentwood hunting hat making, to the cosmology of the Tlingit clan house. In far-flung corners of Alaska, there are archaeologists at work who might love the opportunity to come talk about the projectile points on display in your galleries. Local historians may have to be gently coaxed out of their research to take time to share with your group of forming docents, but I have never met a docent trainer who regretted their time spent conversing with a group.



Tlingit Kik.sadi clan Elder Ray Wilson offers insight into cross-cultural experiences in Russia Photo by Steve Henrikson

It is good if you can find people with a soft spot in their heart for what is on display in your galleries, so that they can impart useful things to your docents.

Having attractive, healthful food available is a great benefit to your training program. There is something wonderfully social about food and sometimes you can weave “an interpretive moment” into the mix. If, for example, your galleries display Native life ways then your snacks could reflect subsistence hunting or gathering.



Docents enjoying a snack during training. Photo Mary Irvine

"But I don't know enough!"

This is something you might hear from potential docent applicants. Interpreters of all skill levels experience those start-of-the-season qualms that are the particular occupational hazard to the

museum docent. However, if docents were to wait until they had learned everything there is to know about everything on display in your museum, there would be no docenting going on at all. If we think about a typical tour for a moment, however, this fear subsides a bit: 45 minutes of conversational interaction is hardly enough time to talk about all of the objects on display in the museum. I encourage docents to take a good look at each gallery and choose five or six objects per gallery to highlight.



Juneau School District Indian Studies instructor Goldie Barr demonstrates how to process seal intestine during a docent training workshop. Photo by Mary Irvine

The role of the docent isn't necessarily to transmit volumes of information, but to give insights into a few well-chosen objects, to work with themes, and to set the stage for the visitors to experience the museum personally. In fact, one might argue that the job of any teacher isn't to teach at all, but rather to simply put their students in the mood to learn. This is true in terms of docent trainers and true for docents too.

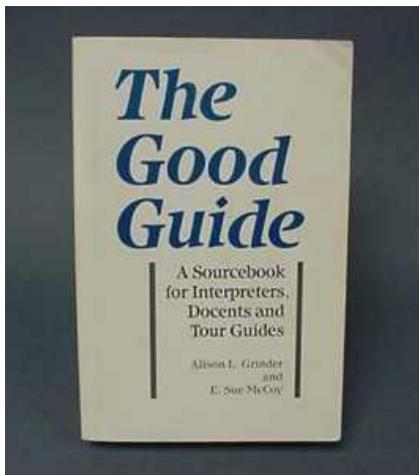


Judge Tom Stewart offers insights into the history of the Alaska Court System during a docent training workshop. Photo by Mary Irvine

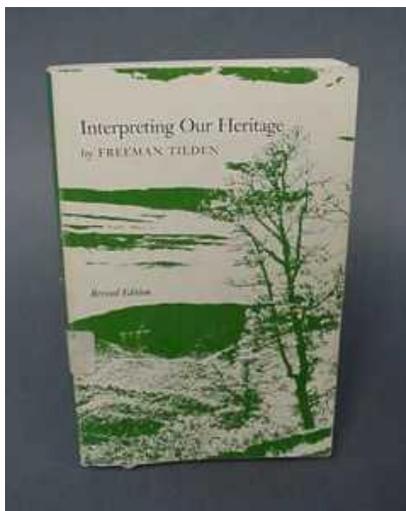
Manual and reference materials

A notebook with information about the items on display, background information on the cultures and historic timeframes exhibited, and bullet point quick answers for typical or tough questions is essential.

Terrific books on docent programs and techniques for docents include Alison Grinder's excellent The Good Guide. In the "oldie but a goodie" category is original Chief of the Park Service's Interpretation branch, Freeman Tilden's, Interpreting our Heritage, in which he lays out his 5 or 6 Principles of Interpretation, just when "interpretation" was beginning to be considered a professional skill.



The Good Guide by Grinder and McCoy



Interpreting Our Heritage by Freeman Tilden

Questions



Martha Crow answering visitor's questions about growing up in Igiugig Alaska. Photo by Mary Irvine

A good docent leaves time and room enough for questions. Some docents ask for questions in every gallery in the museum, and others encourage them at the very end of their tour, or on a one-on-one basis after their tour.

At the ASM, docents tell visitors that if they can't answer a question, to ask the question of the front desk staff (who are also trained as interpreters during the spring docent training). If the front desk staff can't answer the question, or if the visitor would like a more in-depth answer, the visitor is asked to fill out a comment card, posing their particular question and leaving their name, address and e-mail. Typically these questions will be answered by a curator, and the information sent to the patron. This information is also disseminated amongst staff and docents.

However, one of the gifts of a truly skilled docent is not just to answer questions, but rather to inspire wondering in the minds and hearts of visitors about the things they are seeing and the cultures they are learning about. While some visitors may be uncomfortable with less than 100% of their questions answered, visitors will treasure the intellectual space that valuing curiosity and encouraging wonderment creates.

Inspiring Ah-Ha Moments

Another of the fascinating things about the interpretive experience for docents is learning to set the stage for the "ah-ha moments" for visitors. While it is important, or rather, imperative, that the docents have those self-same "ah-ha moments," their work as docents is to set the stage for that to occur for the visitor. Thus, during our docent training sessions, we might explore the personal interests and connections docents have to the items in the museum that fostered in them

the motivation to want to become docents. When summer – and the service component of docenting – comes around, the emphasis shifts to creating and inspiring those moments in the experience of the visitors. The docent’s work is to describe, in terms as simple and precise as possible, exactly what set of factors creates their own enthusiasm for the object. A fun exercise that helps docents discover some of the tractable and intelligible facets of their object interests is to issue a challenge to them to describe an object without using any “value” adjectives such as “beautiful,” “lovely,” or “extraordinary.”

Costs, Benefits, Commitments, and Requirements

There are no costs to the volunteers associated with the program at the State Museum, although some museums defray cost of materials by charging a nominal fee or asking that their docents buy a membership or pay dues to belong to a docent council. At the State Museum, honorary membership in the Friends group (our nonprofit corporation which supports the museum) is a perk provided to docents in thanks for their service, including the standard Friends’ 10% discount in the Museum Store.

Docent tours are included in the price of admission at most museums. The tradition is that docents are volunteers who offer their insights gratis. If visitors proffer tips, a gracious docent might point out the donation box in the lobby of the museum.

The cost to your museum is, of course, the staff person’s time in coordinating the program, and any honoraria you may wish to provide to the people you invite in to speak to the group. However, it is tough to quantify the extraordinary rewards your museum will reap by having its own docent program. Community support and esteem can be invaluable.

The benefits volunteer docents reap from participating in the program are personal to each docent. Docents learn about Alaska history, cultures and art. They usually make interesting friends with similar interests, and docents spend time with the most beautiful objects in Alaska, reflecting on our relationships with these objects and each other.

Being a docent requires a serious commitment. It is important to have the requirements in place at the outset, and to communicate this to people interested in volunteering and becoming docents. This way, they know what to expect, they also know what is expected of them, and it will make it simpler for them to either commit or opt out of the program.

At the ASM, docents sign up to do tours on the docent calendar – a blank calendar on a clipboard, kept at the front desk of the museum. Since docents pencil in their own names on the calendar, the tours reflect the docent’s availability. The cruise ship calendar showing the number of visitors in town on any given day of the summer is consulted and docents sign up on the calendar as the summer progresses. Our front desk staff and docent program coordinator periodically review the schedule to check for conflicts –empty gaps when we know it’s going to be busy and need a docent, and sometimes schedule a docent at the request of a special group or VIP.

And “Poof!” You’re a Docent!

Becoming a docent is a gradual process. Often, docent trainees will attend the training and self select out the first year, demurring that they don’t know enough or lack the confidence.

Sometimes reluctant new docents are willing to try doing “partner co-tours” with an experienced docent so that the experienced person can field any tough questions or lay down a tour structure and segues. But sometimes, docent candidates really do beg off. No one is expected to become an expert in all subject matters, but an adept docent manager will clue in to various docents’ areas of interest and expertise and tap them to lead short tours for the group during training, or provide a talk on a particular historical subject matter.

Tips for starting up a Program

1. Recruit enthusiastic people. Almost anything can be taught, but volunteers need to come fully equipped with that one indispensable thing: the initial spark of enthusiasm.
2. Recruit broadly. Docents are not learned experts who know everything about a collection. In fact, usually, the more similarly situated to his or her audience a docent is, the better. Visitors are comforted to hear their docent say, “Now when I first looked at this art form, I was pretty intimidated and more than a little bit confused. But when I learned a few simple things about this art style, such as X, Y and Z, I learned to focus specifically on” Visitors may be more willing to be led into learning, rather than being lectured to by someone who has spent their entire life loving and learning the fine intricacies of a particular art form
3. Have a little oversight in place as the program begins. Even though critical feedback is tough to provide, there should be some sort of mechanism in place for that feedback to occur. Make sure that your volunteers understand that their liaison staff person is there to help them, and that this role sometimes may include offering critical feedback. At the State Museum, one staff member heads up the program and goes on new docents’ tours, and periodically goes on experienced docents’ tours, and offers suggestions and feedback. At other museums, peer review may be the evaluation of choice, with a standardized form designed by docents themselves used as a helpful evaluation tool.
4. Time docent tours for the optimal use of visitors' time. For example, it is particularly not useful if a tour bus arrives 3/4 the way into a docent's tour. However, we do want to offer tours to the general museum public, and not simply for specific van or bus tours.
5. There is a happy medium regarding the perfect the size group for a docent tour. Giving a tour for two can be satisfying, but can be somewhat awkward as the visitors might like to break away to tour on their own after a while but feel reticent to interject and risk hurting the docent's feelings. Giving a tour for more than 25 visitors is either a miracle to see done well, or a flop in the making. Generally group size will depend upon the size of the galleries the docent is working in, as well as the pace and abilities of the individual docent.
6. Thank your docents. They will do far more work in your museum (and out in the community doing great PR) than you realize.

If you're thinking of starting a docent program at your museum or cultural center, or want to toss around a few ideas on making yours better, I'd love to talk with you. You can e-mail me at mary.irvine@alaska.gov.

Ask ASM

Question: I am trying to remove 4 x 6 color photographs from an old photo album. It's the kind of album that came with stiff cardboard pages coated with sticky glue on each side that were overlaid with clear cellophane. The method to put pictures in the album was to pull back the cellophane and press down the photos on the sticky surface, and then cover again with the cellophane. Now the pictures don't want to come up.

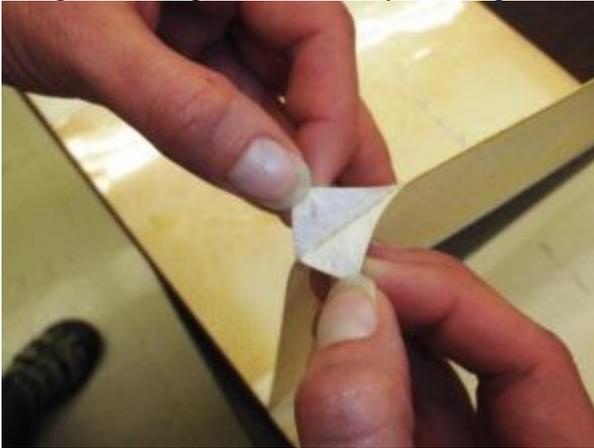
ASM: Here is the method that our conservator uses to deal with albums like this:

1. Peel off and discard cellophane.



2. Get your fingernail in the corner of the album page and peel the back and the front halves of the page apart. Usually the page is thin cardboard and you can get in between the layers of cardboard and peel the two apart. This needs to be done carefully, but after

doing a few, it gets easier and you can go faster. It is good to be slow and



cautious at the start so you know how much force to use. Sliding a finger back and forth in the separation is better than allowing the photos to curl and flex. The less flexing of the photo the better, try to keep the photos as flat as possible through the whole process. The gelatin layer that has the image is often dry and brittle and the photo emulsion layer can crack badly if flexed too much.

3. Now you have two pages where before there was one. Cut between the photos so each photo is by itself with a margin of the peeled page all around it.



4. Turn the photo face-down on a piece of smooth plastic, like Mylar, and carefully peel the rest of the cardboard off the back. It might need to come off layer by layer. Sometimes leaving a little bit on the back is safer than peeling off too much. You'll get a feel for your situation after the first few. With this method, the photo stays perfectly flat and it is the page itself that is peeled from the back.



5. Stop working when you feel like you're not being as careful. Tasks like this seem to go better if you do them in short spurts over a few days. Don't wait too long between spurts, though, as your hands forget the muscle lessons they learned if you wait too long.
6. You might want to come up with a system to note the order that the photos were in, because that is sometimes useful information later on.

Shaking the Money Tree

Grant in Aid

The deadline for Grant in Aid applications is approaching. Emailed applications with attachments should be sent to scott.carrlee@alaska.gov before 4:30 pm AKST on June 1. All mailed applications should have a postmark on or before June 1. Remember there are three programs within Grant in Aid:

Regular grant

Mini-grant

Internship Grant

You can only apply for one program each year. For more information please go to the grants page of the Alaska State Museums website. <http://www.museums.state.ak.us/grants.html> or call Scott Carrlee at 1-888-913-6873

IMLS Budget Allocations

<http://www.ims.gov/pdf/FY11BudgetAllocation.pdf>

American Association of Museums, Museum Assessment Program (MAP)

Since 1981, MAP has helped museums maintain and improve operations through a confidential, consultative process. We provide guidance in meeting priorities and goals and understanding how your museum compares to standards and best practices. Participating in MAP can help:

- prioritize goals so you can allocate resources wisely,
- document your needs so that you can make a stronger case to funders,
- provide recommendations on ways to become an even stronger institution.

In less than a year, your museum can complete a self-study, have a site visit by a peer reviewer and begin implementing recommendations.

[The next application deadline is July 1, 2011](#)

<http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm>

The following museums in Alaska were recently accepted into the MAP program:

Alaska Museum of Natural History, Anchorage, AK, Organizational MAP

Sitka Historical Society, Sitka, AK, Collections Stewardship MAP

A full list of participants can be found at www.aam-us.org/map.

New Grant Program from Bank of America

Bank of America Art Conservation Project

Works of art can provide a lasting reflection of peoples and cultures but, over time, they are subject to deterioration. This unique program provides grants to nonprofit institutions to conserve works that are significant to the cultural heritage of a country or region, or important to the history of art. Launched in 2010 in Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA), the program is expanding to the United States and Asia in 2011.

Cultural institutions are invited to apply for a grant to conserve essential works of art that are:

- Paintings; works on paper; manuscripts; photographs; sculpture; architectural or archeological pieces; and tapestries and other works of decorative or applied art

- On view to the public (or will be on view once conservation work is completed)

Proposals Museum be submitted by June 30, 2011

<http://museums.bankofamerica.com/arts/ArtConservation.aspx>

Spotlight on Grant in Aid

GIA reporting revamp.

For those who received a grant for FY2011 (last year) you will probably notice a difference in the final accounting report letter you received or are about to receive. In an effort to make the final accounting and report more user friendly, we are changing the way our final accounting gets done. The main change is to ask for a narrative report rather than answering questions and to require at least one photograph that represents the project. You will also be required to provide photocopies of receipts for the project.

ASM on the Road: Artifact Conservation in Anchorage

by Ellen Carrlee

I traveled to Anchorage in mid-April to provide training and build relationships with colleagues in various cultural heritage professions. Travel was funded by the Office of History and Archaeology thanks to State Historic Preservation Officer Judy Bittner. I visited the Office of History and Archaeology (OHA) for the first time, finally able to put faces to names I'd known for years. I had a great chat with Doug Gasek and Emily Lochart about their upcoming preservation plan for the Independence Mine and ideas for collections care priorities. Then I attended the OHA training on their new Integrated Business System, which includes the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey database. If archaeologists want to know the sites already identified in Alaska, they have to know this resource. I gave a presentation about artifact conservation to about 30 archaeologists and Cultural Resource Management professionals, emphasizing challenging artifacts such as metals and waterlogged organics and discussing the considerations involved in treatment decisions. There was a lively Q&A afterward, and I was pleased that most of my business cards disappeared.

I spent the evening with a few archaeologists discussing the ins and outs of the Alaskan archaeology world. The next day, I went to the OHA archaeology lab to look at artifacts and treatments underway.



Artifacts photo by Ellen Carrlee

Unfortunately, State Archaeologist Dave McMahan had to be out of town, but he did a good job of setting up my visit and OHA archaeologists Dan Thompson and Randy Tedor were able to meet with me and discuss various aspects of artifact labeling, adhesive choices, silicone oil treatment, waterlogged artifacts, and various curation issues. Linda Finn Yarborough brought by some waterlogged wood and we all had a long discussion about PEG treatment and the challenges of organic materials.

Conference Review

Alaska Native Libraries, Archives and Museums Summit

Anchorage AK April 27-30 2011



Registration Desk photo by Scott Carrlee

The theme of the conference was "Northern Light: Keeping Our Stories Alive." This apt motto was referred to often and taken to heart by many of the presenters and attendees. There was a palpable feeling that something big was going on and that we were all working together on something good. For many of the participants, the majority of whom were Alaska Native, this was their first professional conference. For everyone, it was the first conference to specifically address the needs of people working at libraries archives and museums that support Alaska Native Communities.



Dancers at the Native Heritage Center Photo by Scott Carrlee

The sessions, designed to be informative and inspiring, often blurred the institutional boundaries between libraries, archives and museums. Attendees who do not necessarily identify as working with or in only one kind of institution were able to learn and benefit from information and networking in all areas. The take-away was that we were all working towards the same goals, promoting the cultures of Alaska Natives in Alaska. People realized that what unites us is stronger than what makes us different as institutions and that what we were all really trying to do was to keep the stories alive.

The museum track sessions were as follows:

Museums 101 Q & A

Panel of Museum Professionals

This session introduced the various professions within the museum world and gave an opportunity for discussion and questions on museum issues.

Introduction to Museum Curatorship

Steve Henrikson, Alaska State Museum, Juneau

This session provided an introduction to the field, and basic information on such topics as museum ethics, the importance of trust, working with communities to develop exhibits, relationships with the public, repatriation, and dealing with sensitive topics. Also, the presentation covered many “nuts and bolts” of curating a collection: collections development, authenticating and documenting the history of the objects, basic research skills, analyzing collections, developing “wish lists” and how to handle donations and loans.

Community Based Curatorial Practices in an Integrated Facility

Brian Meissner, ECI/Hyer Architecture & Interiors, Anchorage

Bob Banghart, Chief Curator, Alaska State Museums



Bob and Brian discussing the finer points of Community Curation Photo by Scott Carrlee

This session illustrated how an ‘open-source’ approach to community-based curatorial practices can lead to unexpected results and a deeper understanding of who we are. The concept of an exhibit ‘notebook’ was presented and discussed.

Past Perfect Q&A

Marnie Leist, Alutiiq Museum & Scott Neel, Alaska Native Heritage Center

This session provided information about the software PastPerfect, a relatively inexpensive software to store collection data. Marnie Leist discussed basic use of the program, and Scott Neel shared his experience with a recent conversion to a new version of the program, with reminders for back-ups!

Shu Sit’aa Dm Lukil Amani’its’a Malask: A New Start for the Care of Our History at the Duncan Cottage Museum

Mique’l Askren, Director, Duncan Cottage Museum, Metlakatla

This session focused on the efforts to recover and transform the Duncan Cottage Museum, which was once considered the center of Native cultural oppression, into a place of healing and growth that is truly a home for our culture.



Mique'l Askren describing the rebirth of her museum Photo by Scott Carrlee

Introduction to Museum Registration

Ryan Kenny and Julie Farnham, Anchorage Museum

This program described basic procedures and techniques for documenting new objects entering a collection or objects borrowed for loan from another individual or institution. Examples of useful registration forms, methods, and a brief introduction to condition reporting and photography were discussed. A list of useful references was also provided.

Discovering Opportunities for Professional Development

Jill Norwood, National Museum of the American Indian

Various opportunities available to tribal museum professionals at the National Museum of the American Indian and other organizations were presented. Additionally, there was a discussion of the resources for emerging museum professionals and mid-career museum professionals as well as a general introduction to the history and program at the NMAI.

NAGPRA in Alaska

Panelists: Jim Pepper Henry, Anchorage Museum; Judy Ramos, Yakutat Tlingit Tribal Council; and Steve Henrikson, Alaska State Museum

A panel of museum professionals who have worked on both sides of a repatriation claim offered their insights into the process.



From left to right Judy Ramos Yakutat Tlingit Tribe, Jim Pepper Henry, Anchorage Museum, Steve Henrikson, Alaska State Museum Photo by Scott Carrlee

Caring for Regalia

Scott Carrlee and Sorrel Goodwin, Alaska State Museum

This session covered the basics of caring for clan regalia both at home and in transport. Simple suggestions were made that will make a big difference when it comes to protecting valued cultural objects. The talk also discussed how museums care for artifacts and how to strike a balance between the ideal with the reality of how regalia is used.



Sorrel Goodwin discusses caring for regalia Photo by Scott Carrlee

Collecting Contemporary Alaska Native Art

Michael Hawfield, UAA Homer Campus

The Art Acquisition Fund administrator presented and discussed funding and collecting opportunities. He answered questions regarding how to collect contemporary Alaska Native art, what to collect and why collect.



Michael Hawfield discuss the Rasmuson Art Acquisition Fund Photo by Scott Carrlee

Keynote Speakers

The Keynote speakers were very inspiring and they gave speeches that came straight from the heart.



Photo by Scott Carrlee

Sven Haakanson talked about building trust between cultural institutions and how such partnerships can reverse the flow of knowledge so that it is returned to the communities. This has helped Alutiiq people rediscover and bring to life long quiet aspects of their culture.



Photo by Scott Carrlee

Willy Hensley spoke eloquently about growing up on Kotzebue Sound and how he kept waiting for the History of Alaska Natives to be taught in school only to find out that it was not coming. His experience of the dichotomy between the two worlds he lived in led him to a lifelong commitment to sharing the history of Alaska's indigenous people.



Photo by Sven Haakanson

Paul Ongtogook gave a very personal talk about his experiences growing up and how it was only outside of Alaska that he discovered the immense resources about the Alaska Native records, histories, essays and other documents.



Photo by John Wynne

Sheryl Metoyer gave an inspirational speech about how we all must think of ourselves as artists in our work. Even if it seems that we are only caring for the work of others, in reality, we are creating opportunities for people to see those works in a different way.

Review: Bob Banghart, Chief Curator, Alaska State Museums

The ANLAM Conference held the week of April 25, 2011, in Anchorage, in my opinion heralds the beginning of a new era of development for community created small museum, archive, library and cultural facilities. Besides being an impressive array of participants and presenters, the event brought old and new friends and colleagues together for four days of discussion, exploration and sharing. Topics were varied but centered on the state of material and cultural preservation, programming and purpose in Alaska, how it is being successfully supported and what resources are available to strengthen the collective mission in communities across the state.

I participated in a couple of sessions: Museums 101 and Community Curatorial Process. The first session was a round table discussion with a variety of museum professionals sharing about their backgrounds and what brought them to the field. We each put forward the core elements of museum work; what we find fulfilling and what we find frustrating. Responses to questions from the audience ranged from anecdotes to advice for folks interested in or just starting out in the business. The second session focus was demonstrating the opportunity for a community to drive their interpretive programming from the inside, as contrasted to hiring an “out-of-house” design/interpretive firm. We shared a methodology on “community curated exhibits” complete with a notebook formatting tool that walked the participants through the cycle of exhibit development. The response was very encouraging and indicated folks are ready to define for themselves their stories, life ways and histories.

My overall assessment of the event outstripped my expectations by a large margin. If we, as established institutions, can nurture this effort for a few years I foresee a dynamic shift in how

communities within Alaska will view themselves, their relationships to the obligation of preservation, collection, and interpretation of material culture and the sharing of their collective stories.

Review: Sorrel Goodwin, Registrar, Alaska State Museums

The conference for me was wonderful; as an Alaska Native museum professional working in a non-native institution, having the opportunity to receive the type of cultural and spiritual reinforcement that I encountered at this conference was a much needed dose of medicine. It is often a challenge working in non-Native institutions, as a clash of worldviews and values is often the norm. It was nice to be around other native professionals who encounter the same challenges and the mutual support and affirmation has re-energized me! Although it has become a cliché, as Alaska Native professionals, we really do walk a fine line between two very different worlds, and without this type of support, it is easy to forget the Life ways that have kept us grounded for millennia.

One of the top sessions for me was the Duncan Cottage Museum project by Mique'l Askren in Metlakatla. This project personifies the re-claiming of space and “Cultural Aikido” that has been at the heart of our people’s ability to endure and survive 200 years of colonialism. The sessions by David George-Shongo were also at the top of my list. David is from the Seneca Nation in Upstate New York and is the Archivist for his Nation. As I have come to expect from our Six Nation’s relatives, the Seneca Nation Archives are firmly grounded in the Seneca-Haudenosaunee worldview, culture, and languages. The Haudenosaunee, in my experience, do not use words like “sovereignty” and “self-determination” lightly, and the Seneca Nation Archives and its Archivist personify how they walk the talk.

Review: Scott Carrlee, Curator of Museum Services, Alaska State Museums

What inspired me most was Mique'l Askren's session describing the rebirth of the Duncan Cottage Museum. This moving description of how a building and a museum can be both a source of pain and an opportunity for community healing was truly inspiring. Father Duncan who lived in the house is (in the words of Mique'l) still a divisive figure in the community. As the museum director she had to navigate a mine field of community emotions related to this historical figure. The first thing Mique'l did was probably unheard of in the annals of museology for a new director: she closed the museum. The museum was a shell of what it had been under the first curator who ran it with a good knowledge of museum practices. For 10 years it had been mostly used as an occasional stop for tourist at best or for vandalism at its worst. Mique'l realized, to her credit, that there was no sense bringing people into a broken facility. She spent her time otherwise and more wisely. She wrote grants, got the museum assessed, and hosted interns and part time workers. To her tremendous credit, she managed to get a budget for the museum. It is nothing short of amazing that she was able to present a new exhibit, start doing museum programming and reopen the museum in the short span of three years working seasonally.

The other session that I attended that really excited me was the one on the Community Curatorial Process. Brian Meissner and Bob Banghart presented a great session on how small community museums can remain in control of the process by which they present their story to visitors and their community. I was excited by this session because it not only presented great information and an inspiring message (three people came up to me afterwards and said it was the best session they attended) but also because the format was very new and interesting. Brian presented the information using a new presentation method called “Prezi” which allows for a non-linear presentation style. Watching this session made me want to try this out as a presentation tool.

Alaska Museums in the News

Museum Day in Juneau

<http://juneauempire.com/art/2011-05-11/museum-day-be-celebrated-saturday-all-over-town>

Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities visits Alaska

http://www.anchoragepress.com/news/article_bb770f1a-7c27-11e0-99b5-001cc4c002e0.html

Sitka Assembly supports Historical Museum

http://kcaw.org/modules/local_news/index.php?op=centerBlock&ID=1226

Yankee trader influenced Alaska art, science, business

<http://www.adn.com/2011/04/16/1813727/yankee-trader-influenced-alaska.html>

Bill Kills Off Program on Whaling Industry

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704547604576263312147864034.html>

Professional Development/Training Opportunities

National Native Museum Training Program

Establishing a Tribal Museum

Location: online at www.museumclasses.org

Instructor: Stacey Halfmoon

Stacey Halfmoon is a member of the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma. She has been the Director of Community Outreach and Public Programs for the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum in Oklahoma City, OK since 2007. She graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a Bachelor of Arts and Sciences Degree in Anthropology and began working for the Caddo Nation's Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) program shortly thereafter (2004) where she continued to serve in many cultural capacities until 2004. Stacey was instrumental in the tribe's first repatriation of ancestral remains and constructing the tribe's first repatriation cemetery. Stacey has since served as Senior Tribal Liaison for the U.S. Department of Defense, where she managed a \$10 million dollar Indian lands cleanup program. In 2005, Stacey was appointed Interim Director of the Caddo Heritage Museum. She has served on the Caddo Nation Heritage Museum Board of Trustees since 2004. Stacey also serves on the Oklahoma Museums Association Board of Directors.

Claudia Nicholson Claudia Nicholson is Executive Director of the North Star Museum of Boy Scouting and Girl Scouting in North St. Paul, MN. Claudia began her career in museums at the National Archives in Washington, DC. After earning her Master's Degree in History Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program, she became Curator of Collections for the South Dakota State Historical Society in Pierre. While there, she worked with a Native American advisory committee to create a groundbreaking exhibit on Sioux life in South Dakota. After seven years, she moved to St. Paul to become a curator at the Minnesota Historical Society. She has 32 years experience in museums and historical organizations.

Description: Establishing a Tribal museum – or even just expanding or enhancing one – can be quite daunting. It is a job that demands a clear community vision and an organized approach, which make a tremendous difference for the museum's future. Establishing a Tribal Museum will provide the facts and comprehensive advice you need to undertake this endeavor. This includes considering how your Tribe's museum can get the community and financial support it needs. The course walks students through specific steps and considerations to clarify the process of establishing and maintaining a successful Tribal museum. These steps include writing a mission statement, understanding community expectations, and establishing a collections policy. Students will explore the potential role of the museum within their Native community and key considerations when establishing a tribal museum. Topics include collections care, community expectations and benefit, registration, the role of traditional culture and language within the museum setting, exhibitions, conservation, staffing and financial management.

Outline

1. First Steps: Community Input – What will our museum do/be? Develop Purpose, Incorporation, Bylaws
2. Organizing: Forming Your Group What is the role of the museum in the community? Structure? Governance: Mission Statement, Policies, Procedures, Leadership Structure (Board of Directors, etc)
3. Financial Management: Budgets, Fundraising, Endowments, Cash Flow
4. Location: Buildings, Grounds, Accessibility

5. Collection: Obtaining, Classifying, Registering, Accessioning; No collection
6. Staffing: Volunteers, Employees, Docents
7. Storage: Methods, Integrity, Security, Traditional methods
8. Exhibits: Planning, Spaces, Viewer Dynamics, Security, Use of Native Language & Concepts
9. Museum Programming: Exploring opportunities to work with Elders, Community involvement, Using artifacts, Being of benefit to the community, Being of benefit to the non-native community (education)

Required Textbook: Starting Right: A Basic Guide to Museum Planning (American Association for State and Local History Book Series) by Gerald George and Cindy Sherrell-Leo, Altamira Press 1986

Course Dates: May 31 - Jun 25, 2011

Application Deadline: May 20, 2011

Registration Fee: \$150

AASLH Board Development Webinars

There is still time to sign up for the second one of these Board Development webinar through AASLH

Are you working on making your board more effective? Then, register now for the AASLH Board Development Webinar Series.

Finding Good Board Members, Building Strong Boards

Date: May 17, 2011 (Registration Now Open)

Time/Duration: 2-3:30 pm eastern

Day-to-Day and Long-Term Board Operations to Ensure Success

Date: May 24, 2011 (Registration Now Open)

Time/Duration: 2-3:30 pm eastern

Cost: \$50 per webinar member/\$110 per webinar nonmember **or** register for both for \$85 members/\$155 nonmember. *Price is per connection, not per person. Registration Deadline is May 13!*

After completing these live webinars, you will:

- Understand the characteristics of a good board

- Understand how boards evolve and mature into a good working board
- Understand the characteristics of a good board member and be able to use that knowledge to select the best candidates for their organization's board;
- Know the best ways to invite a community member to sit on their board
- Be Able to write a job description for board members
- Understand how to use the board committee structure to develop a good working board
- Understand the relationship between board members and the organization's director or CEO
- Understand the legal, ethical, and financial responsibilities of a non-profit board member
- Build a board training manual that equips each board member to be prepared to enter in to board discussions
- Know how to deal with difficult board members and situations
- Be able to provide board members with appropriate appreciation for their service to the organization.

You can also learn more about the course through this special audio message from Carolyn Brackett with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, who will be leading the webinar. To hear the Audio Postcard, turn up your speakers, and click on this link: <http://audiopostcard-007.com/X.asp?7055433X4611>

Book Report

by Jennifer Brown, Museum Intern

In continuing the review of the resources on the [Institute of Museum and Library Services Connecting to Collections Bookshelf](#) (commonly referred to as the IMLS Bookshelf for short), let's take a look at the Heritage Foundation's *Caring for Your Family's Treasures*.

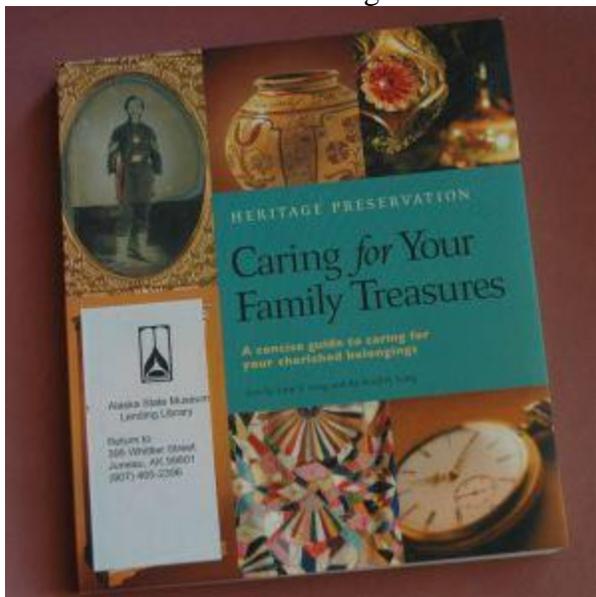


Photo by Jennifer Brown

The Heritage Foundation's publications "provide information from top professionals on caring for photographs, historic documents, books, works of art, buildings, natural science specimens, and family heirlooms." This book is no exception, as its pages contain a wide array of very practical solutions centered on caring for a collection. It would be not only handy for a family historian, but for managing a small museum collection as well. The book is a very basic and straightforward read, made interesting by all of the sample images and examples for reference (not to mention the nice array of friendly quotes interspersed throughout).

One of the things that I appreciated about this read was that it included a starting point for dealing with many different types of heirlooms: from musical instruments to a variety of photograph types and fabric pieces such as wedding dresses. The chapters are broken down accordingly and sectioned off by different types of heirlooms. What I found particularly helpful was the easily found checklist included at the end of each chapter, which was highly customized for the subject at hand. One might need a more detailed text for conquering major damage, but there is definitely enough information in this book to give a good sense of direction for basic care and handling. The final chapters include information on what to do in case of disaster, as well as invaluable references on where to search for help.

You can borrow any of the IMLS Collections Bookshelf texts, including *Caring for Your Family's Treasures*, from the Alaska State Museum Lending Library. For a listing of the collection and more details go to http://www.museums.state.ak.us/lending_library.html

Standards and Excellence Program (StEPs)

AASLH is pleased to announce the new date for the webinar, "Hope is Not a Strategy: Fundraising in Tough Times," that many of you registered for earlier this year. This free 90-minute webinar will be presented on Tuesday, June 21st beginning at 2 p.m. Eastern (10 am AKST) and concluding at 3:30 Eastern (11:30 AKST).

Although there's no need to re-register for the webinar, if you would like to read more about the agenda and guest speakers, please visit <http://www.aaslhnetwork.org/steps2011/#3>.

Professional Time Wasting on the Web

AAM Report on the status of US museums during the recession

<http://www.aam-us.org/upload/ACME11-report-FINAL.pdf>

A film of JFK's last parade in Dallas has an Alaska connection.

<http://www.history.com/videos/jfks-last-parade#jfks-last-parade>