

# Alaska State Museums Bulletin 55

August 2012

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## Portable XRF arrives at the Alaska State Museum

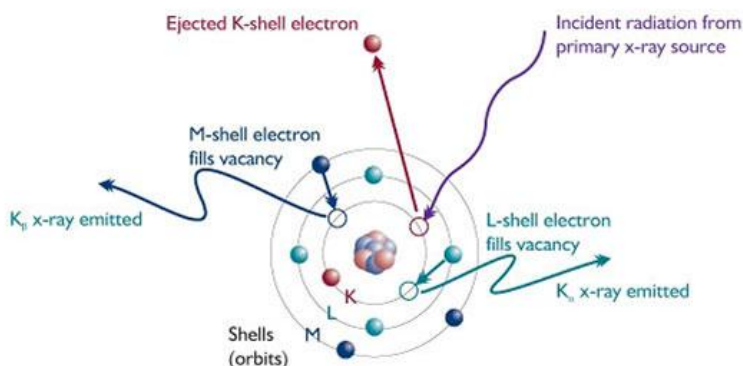
As many of you may have heard, the Alaska State Museum was able to purchase a Bruker Portable X-Ray Fluorescent Analyzer through a generous grant from the Rasmuson Foundation. For some background leading up to the purchase you may want to read Ellen Carrlee's blog posting on the subject. <http://ellencarrlee.wordpress.com/2011/11/18/xrf-why-should-we-get-one/>.



*Portable XRF Unit in Lab*

You may be wondering what this instrument can do for Alaskan museums. This unit (which is being used at more than a hundred museums worldwide) rapidly identifies elements that compose objects or materials that are on the surface of objects. This non-destructive analysis does not harm the object in any way. The results can help identify the components of natural and cultural artifacts which can lead to proper attribution, dating, interpretation of meaning, as well as understanding technological processes, deterioration, and contamination. One of its most important functions will be to identify pesticide residues on museum objects. In the past, many museums applied pesticides such as arsenic, mercury and bromine compounds in a well-meaning attempt to protect artifacts from insect damage. Although this is no longer a practice today, there is still a legacy of pesticide residue on museum objects that presents a danger for museum staff and patrons. These types of residues are difficult and time-consuming to identify with other types of analyses. This problem becomes especially acute when museum artifacts are repatriated to Alaska Native cultural centers and are used in ceremonies. Use of taxidermy specimens in public programs is another realm where past pesticide contamination has been problematic for Alaskan museums.

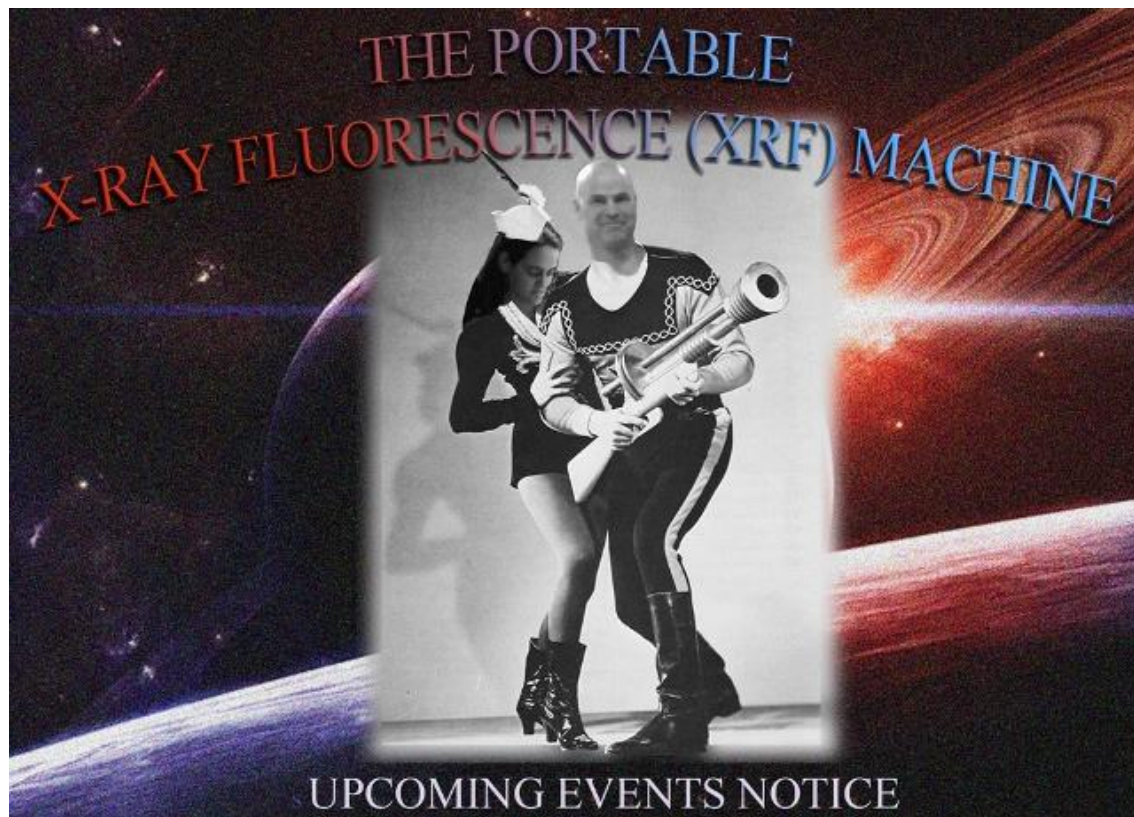
So how does it work? As with most things in physics, it's complicated. There are some good web resources that explain the science behind the technique. A great website is <http://www.learnxrf.com/>. The portable XRF shoots a small, controlled beam of x-rays at an object. The x-ray knocks an electron out of its orbital. When an electron from a higher orbital drops down to replace the missing electron it is going from a state of higher energy to a state of lower energy. By doing so it emits energy at a characteristic wavelength for that specific element.



The XRF analyzer records this energy and displays it on a computer graph. The XRF works especially well at identifying heavier elements with more electrons. These materials include metals, minerals, and glass.

Having the power to identify materials not only reveals new data for interpretation, but opens new possibilities for questions to ask. It provides museums and cultural centers with a fresh way to connect science to history, culture, and collections. The XRF unit is part of the outreach services provided by Alaska State Museum to all non-profit museums and cultural centers in the state. This robust, durable portable XRF unit is designed for use in the field and fits into a small case for easy travel. Three mechanisms for delivery include: (1) Part of the frequent on-site consultation services performed by Scott Carrlee, the ASM Curator of Museum Services (2) Samples could be sent to the Alaska State Museum for analysis (3) The unit could be loaned to institutions where staff have the appropriate training. One Alaskan cultural entity has already taken advantage of a professional site visit to incorporate the XRF into a public program. This was reported on in the previous ASM

Bulletin <http://museumbulletin.wordpress.com/2012/07/18/alaska-state-museums-bulletin-54/#4>



There will be two sessions at the Museums Alaska conference in Sitka in October that will be dedicated to learning about the XRF. Bruce Kaiser, the Bruker chief scientist for museums and universities, will present a full day workshop on October 10<sup>th</sup> and on Friday October 12<sup>th</sup> there will be a session that examines how the XRF is being used in Alaskan Museums today. If you are interested you should be sure to sign up for one or both sessions. You can find out more about them at the conference website. <http://museumsalaska.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/ma-session-preview.pdf>

## Ask ASM



*Question:* We have caught a few mice in our museum. What are your thoughts on a resident cat? Do any other institutions you know of utilize such methodology?



*ASM:* There are occasionally institutions that have cats and defend their use against the professional majority who say they are inappropriate. Typically these are semi-outdoor institutions like historic farms or railroad museums. Occasionally a historic house museum will have one, but it is in violation of museum best practices. A museum that had a resident cat, for example, would not be likely to achieve accreditation. Our museum would not likely approve loans to a museum that had a resident cat. Every few years the topic comes up on a listserv I subscribe to, and the arguments against cats usually include:

- allergies, including residual allergens after the cat left
- urination/ territory marking/ spraying

- scratching
- illness
- hairballs
- fur and dander pollutants
- fleas, fur, dander as food source for bad bugs
- tripping hazard
- aggression/ biting humans
- phobias
- liability
- unprofessional environs
- interacting negatively with legal service animals
- leaving dead mice and birds
- food and water needed for cat attract bugs and pests
- no guarantee cat will be an effective mouser



So on the whole I would say that the negatives outweigh any possible benefits of having a cat on the premises. You are better off using mousetraps to get rid of the problem.

## **Shaking the Money Tree**

Applications for the 2013 Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) will be available October 1, 2012. The postmark deadline for applications is Monday, December 3, 2012. To be added to the CAP application mailing list or for more information, email the CAP staff or call 202-233-0800. Learn more about CAP here:

[http://www.heritagepreservation.org/CAP/index.html?utm\\_source=Update+e-Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=d51b29301c-Update+Summer+2012&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.heritagepreservation.org/CAP/index.html?utm_source=Update+e-Newsletter&utm_campaign=d51b29301c-Update+Summer+2012&utm_medium=email)

### **Legislative updates:**

In draft legislation, the House Appropriations Subcommittee recommends a \$227.317 million budget for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for the 2013

fiscal year. If enacted, it would represent an approximate 2% reduction from IMLS's FY 2012 appropriation. The House of Representatives report that accompanies recommended legislation is not yet available.

The Senate Subcommittee has recommended the same amount requested by IMLS for Fiscal Year 2013. It approved IMLS's consolidation of the Conservation Project Support program with the Museums for America program. For more, including a possible January 15, 2013 deadline see [Heritage Hotline](#).

The House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee recommended a \$132 million budget for both the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Endowments for the Arts (NEA) for the 2013 fiscal year. This is a 9.6% cut from 2012. No funds were allocated for Save America's Treasures. More information is also available at [Heritage Hotline](#)

## Spotlight on Grant in Aid

### Seward Museum Moves Forward with Move

Immediately, upon receiving news that their grant request for professional assistance with planning and preparing their collection to move to a new facility had been granted, the Seward Museum began coordinating with Angela Demma, cultural resources consultant. Angela went to Seward in October 2011 to become familiar with the museum collection and make plans for the volunteer training.



The week of February 27–March 2 was chosen as the week to configure the packing area, train staff and volunteers, and initiate the program. Library museum staff began ordering supplies, materials and equipment as listed in the grant application. In preparing the grant request, staff had developed a list of volunteers willing to become trained in packing techniques. Although the original plan called for a week-long training for all, cooler heads prevailed. They identified "experts" (staff and local hard core

volunteers) and "crew" those who were new recruits and/or unfamiliar with the collection. Once the training was completed the crew would be assigned to work with at least one expert, thus insuring that someone was familiar with the museum and there would be continuity in the process. Angela spent 1 1/2 days with the experts configuring work space and becoming familiar with the equipment and procedures. Everyone participated in Angela's training session, entitled "Seward Museum: Handling, Packing and Moving Resources," after the training schedules were set and the work began.



As of June 30 there have been 437 items packed and ready for the journey to their new home. The grant funds paid for the materials and equipment to prepare the collection for the move. However, the greatest benefit to the community has come from the number of people who are now involved with the museum. Eighteen people have been trained to handle the collection, and almost 400 hours of volunteer time has been put in for packing. The opportunity to help with the move has enabled them to learn about the collection and the rich and exciting local history. Most importantly, these people have developed a relationship with the museum that will be nurtured.



## ASM on the Road

### Houston We have a Problem!

Ellen Carrlee goes to the Johnson Space Center

In July, I had the opportunity to visit NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. Generally, school groups and the public visit Space Center Houston, but I had the opportunity to join a VIP tour (similar to their "Level 9 Tour" mentioned on the website) given to foreign dignitaries, politicians and celebrities. For the sake of those colleagues whose passion for space exploration dwarfs mine, I diligently documented the experience. To see the images go here: <http://museumbulletin.wordpress.com/?p=1153#5>

## Alaska Museums in the News

Alaska philanthropist Mary Louise Rasmuson dies at age 101

Besides the foundation, Rasmuson extended her personal philanthropy to institutions like the Anchorage Museum and the Alaska Native Heritage Center, an educational and cultural center in Anchorage

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/alaska-philanthropist-mary-louise-rasmuson-dies-at-age-101/2012/07/31/gJQAqmWtNX\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/alaska-philanthropist-mary-louise-rasmuson-dies-at-age-101/2012/07/31/gJQAqmWtNX_story.html)

A new short film – Tsimshian Ceremony and Celebration – from the *Living Our Cultures* exhibition, of the Arctic Studies Center

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKeWHBrCNto&feature=plcp>

The Kodiak Maritime Museum to Use Guide by Cell's Audio Tour Service for "When Crab Was King: Faces" Exhibit.

[http://www.melodika.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=335219&Itemid=54](http://www.melodika.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=335219&Itemid=54)

University of Alaska Museum of the North's curator wanted to create an exhibit where museum visitors can learn about what goes into the process of making the works on display, as well as seeing the finished products.

[http://www.newsminer.com/view/full\\_story/18545526/article-Making-art--University-of-Alaska-Museum-exhibit-focuses-on-the-creative-process?instance=home](http://www.newsminer.com/view/full_story/18545526/article-Making-art--University-of-Alaska-Museum-exhibit-focuses-on-the-creative-process?instance=home) features lead story1



Amos Wallace collection donated to Walter Soboleff Center

<http://juneauempire.com/art/2012-07-12/amos-wallace-collection-donated-walter-soboleff-center>

## **Professional Development/Training Opportunities**

### **NEDCC**

The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) is offering a number of inexpensive webinars this fall. Topics such as care of photographs and prints or digital curation may be of interest to Alaskan museums. To find out more go to their website here: <http://www.nedcc.org/education/training.calendar.php#group>

### **Museumwise**

Museumwise is pleased to offer a slate of Collections Care and Preservation Online courses that provide basic, practical training at a low fee (starting at only \$65!) Our 4-week mini courses are designed for staff, volunteers, board members, and interns at small to mid-sized museums. Courses can be taken at your own pace, with 2-3 hours of work time per week to be completed at your convenience. The courses also offer interaction with qualified instructors and assignments are based on your own collections.

Courses to be offered starting September 2012 include:

4-week NEW Care and Handling of Costumes and Textiles

6-week Collections Management 101

Courses to be offered starting February 2013 are:

Introduction to Reformatting

Climate Control for Small Institutions

Conservation and Preservation of Photographs and Albums

Basic Preservation, Care & Handling of Paper Based Materials

For more information or to register for these courses

visit: <http://www.museumwise.org/services/online-courses>

Questions? Email me ([stephanie@museumwise.org](mailto:stephanie@museumwise.org)) or call 800.895.1648

## Intern Report

*Sarah Cloutier who is working on her Masters in Art History with a concentration in Museum Studies at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, interned at the American Bald Eagle Foundation in Haines AK. Below is her report.*



During the 8 weeks I have spent in Haines at the American Bald Eagle Foundation and Natural History Museum I have become very familiar with the collection and the problems that needed to be taken care of so that they could work toward their goals of becoming an accredited museum. I had a lot of fun in the 8 weeks I spent there. Cheryl, Dave, and Dan were very helpful and supplied me with everything I needed in order to do my job.

I was able to enter all the taxidermy specimens, the sea life exhibition, and all the educational objects that are in view of the public into Past Perfect, as well as the geological exhibition. I was also able to write up a disaster preparedness plan which is located with the collections management plan.

I re-organized the geological display by numbering them and creating a guide for visitors to follow in order to identify all the rocks in the museum's collection. In addition, I wrote up some more specimen labels that were missing and created a family exploration guide that I hope they will continue to use. I also went on two fieldtrips, to

the Haines Ferry Terminal and the Malaspina to check on the specimens housed there. I was able to clean the specimens on the Malaspina and write up new labels for the display. The specimens at the Haines Ferry Terminal were inside a sealed display case and there was no available access to it.

Cleaning the specimens was very interesting and I have to say it was kind of fun. I have learned a lot about working in natural history museums and about the animals that are at the American Bald Eagle Foundation and found throughout the Chilkat Valley. This was a very rewarding experience and I truly enjoyed the work environment and I hope I was able to help them meet their goals. On Saturday I showed Cheryl how to use Past Perfect and she felt comfortable with it in order to keep up with the collection as new specimens come in. She knows that she can contact me if anything comes up that she needs assistance with.

I kept track of all my hours and I worked on average 40 hours a week with 320 hours completed. I hope this is what you were looking for and that it helps you to understand everything that I did while at the American Bald Eagle Foundation. If you have any further questions please let me know!

## **Professional Time Wasting on the Web**

An Artifact or a Payday?

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/sports/baseball/donors-seeking-to-monetize-memorabilia-put-museums-on-guard.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/sports/baseball/donors-seeking-to-monetize-memorabilia-put-museums-on-guard.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)

Museums Are Already Social Enterprises

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/jul/23/museums-social-enterprises-finance-development?newsfeed=true>

A Little Loved Statue to be Exiled to a Brooklyn Cemetery

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/nyregion/civic-virtue-much-maligned-statue-may-be-moving-to-brooklyn-graveyard.html>

At Getty Museum, Revelations of Art Via Tech

[http://news.cnet.com/8301-13576\\_3-57481129-315/at-getty-museum-revelations-of-art-via-tech/](http://news.cnet.com/8301-13576_3-57481129-315/at-getty-museum-revelations-of-art-via-tech/)

Native Americans Work to Revitalize California's Indigenous Languages

<http://oaklandnorth.net/2012/07/23/native-americans-work-to-revitalize-californias-indigenous-languages/>

PEZ Museum Will Make You Flip Your Lid

<http://www.californiareport.org/archive/R201207271630/c>

Blog posting on interesting relationship between a museum and a family of dentists

<http://collectionsconversations.wordpress.com/2012/07/31/cementing-relationships/>

How the State House's cultural treasures have vanished, piece by piece

<http://thephoenix.com/boston/arts/141880-how-the-state-houses-cultural-treasures-have-vani/#ixzz22L3h90EG>

Puget Sound orcas: Pollution, noise and loss of salmon leave their future uncertain

<http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20090809/NEWS01/708099834/1005/BIZ>

Lost, damaged: Questions remain about what happened to artworks donated to WSU

[http://www.winonadailynews.com/news/local/article\\_9a383eaa-d3b5-11e1-9aa0-0019bb2963f4.html](http://www.winonadailynews.com/news/local/article_9a383eaa-d3b5-11e1-9aa0-0019bb2963f4.html)

The Curse of the Outcast Artifact

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/arts/design/antiquity-market-grapples-with-stricter-guidelines-for-gifts.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/arts/design/antiquity-market-grapples-with-stricter-guidelines-for-gifts.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)