



# Alaska State Museums Bulletin 68

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## Interview with Curator Jackie Fernandez

Jackie Fernandez assumed the collections curator position at the Sheldon Jackson Museum on March 1, 2013. In her new capacity, she oversees 6,000 artifacts — referred to by some as “the jewel in the crown of the Alaska State Museums’ ethnographic collections” — representing each of Alaska’s Native groups.

*“You’re talking about an ethnographic collection on par with the Smithsonian,” says Fernandez, who, in addition to working with the collection, also plans to expand public dialog between the Sheldon Jackson Museum and the community. “The Sheldon Jackson Museum, the Alaska State Museum, and of course, both museums’ staff, engage the public with these artifacts in a way few other institutions do. I’m really excited to be a part of that.”*

Born and raised in Boston—with stints as a teenager both in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Vermont—Fernandez earned a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from Mount Holyoke, and a Master of Fine Arts and a Master of Arts in museum studies from Tufts University. She has interned at various museums and non-profit organizations,

both in the Lower 48 and Alaska, including a summer at the Alaska Museum of Natural History in Anchorage as part of Alaska State Museum's summer internship program, and work at the American Bald Eagle Foundation in Haines.



*Photo: Jackie Fernandez*

We caught up with Jackie a few months after she got settled in her new position at the Sheldon Jackson Museum:

***Why do you want to work in museums?***

I love working in museums for a myriad of reasons. I love that my job allows me to constantly learn and connect with people on many levels – both the visitors and researchers in the museum space and the people who made the artifacts and used them. Like most curators, I am excited about the stories artifacts communicate.

***You have had quite a few museum-related work experiences in Alaska, is Alaska a place that you have wanted to settle into more permanently?***

Most definitely. I knew I wanted to settle permanently in Alaska within the first two weeks of my coming here five years ago. If anything, that feeling has only grown stronger. I have every intention of remaining here.

***What is your favorite part of the new job?***

I enjoy that I have the opportunity to constantly do research, read, and write about all things related to Alaska Natives and Alaska Native ethnographic material. The scholarly

work and prospects of creating publications for the museum are especially exciting to me. I feel honored to have the privilege of caring for a remarkable collection of artifacts so indelibly linked to tradition, culture, memory, land, natural resources, and ways of life. I like that I get to work with Alaska Native artists and learn from them on a regular basis.

Lastly, I appreciate the opportunities I have to highlight connections between the past and present and contemporary life and artists and help people be better informed about Alaska Natives, Native Americans in general, and material culture. Although most visitors are fairly or at least somewhat well informed, some visitors who have never been here enter the museum with misconceptions about Native Americans. They may think that there are no more Native Americans living in the United States or perhaps they know Native peoples are here, but do not understand that there are contemporary **Native artists doing really amazing work. Other times visitors don't necessarily express a misconception but may be a little shortsighted.** For example, some individuals come to **the museum and express a keen interest in "only pre-contact" material, which is sometimes an indication he or she thinks art made before the arrival of Euro-Americans is somehow more "authentic" or "truly Native."** Or perhaps someone shows little interest in a piece if it was made for the curios trade because they assume not as much effort or talent was utilized or expressed when the piece was made, which is not necessarily the case.

**While I don't set out to sell ideas about Natives or Native art** to people who come to the museum with these kinds of notions, just connecting them with the collection in the right way and helping them see the connection between the past and present is often enough to have a positive impact and dispel myths or at least help them see things in another light. Talking to a visitor might help them to look at the collection and consider it in terms of Native cultural endurance, to think about how Alaska Natives adapted to challenges including the influx of Euro-Americans, trade, and colonization, and continue to adapt to changes today. Those adaptations and responses are revealed in art. Creativity has persisted and ways of life have and continue to flourish. All artists, Alaska Native or otherwise, have always been and are constantly developing new ideas, experimenting, being inspired by other sources, adapting, and growing. It is inevitable that culture responds to new stimuli and people know that, but do not always associate that reality with Natives or Native art. Finally, I like the opportunity to encourage people to think about Native American art as fine art and not something that need be relegated solely to natural history museum settings or dioramas.

***You come well educated for the position. Out of all the courses and internships what do you think prepared you best to do the job you are doing right now?***

I think my experience as an intern with the Alaska State Museum which first brought me to Alaska, specifically to Anchorage, and my experience at the Boston Center for the Arts were most useful. Coming to Alaska was a bit of a gamble for me when I first came because I had never been, but in a very short time, I fell in love with Alaska and was able

to learn very quickly how Alaskans in general and Alaskans who work in museums in particular, are superior (no offense to people down below) problem solvers. The challenges that come with living in some very remote areas or places without Home Depot or even a road system mean you need to be very creative to “get the job done” – that goes for working in museums and dealing with travelling exhibitions, ordering archival supplies, shipping artifacts, etc. and for any other kind of profession you could be engaged in here.

Working at the Boston Center for the Arts was helpful in preparing me for this position because part of my job there involved being the liaison between about fifty resident studio artists and the nonprofit. I was working with artists all the time and it is a big part of my job now at the Sheldon Jackson Museum.

***Do you have any advice for young professionals just starting out or who want to break into the museum profession?***

I would encourage them to take risks, be adaptive, flexible, and patient, seek out opportunities to wear as many hats as possible in museum settings, whether it be as an intern, volunteer, or part-time employee. I’d look for a mentor and connect with him or her. Carry out informational interviews with museum professionals who work in the kinds of museums you would like to work at or with the kinds of collections you in which you are interested. And have fun!!

***Last year Museums Alaska held its annual meeting in Sitka. You were involved in the planning and running of that meeting. How difficult is it to host a Museums Alaska meeting and what are the rewards?***

It is a lot of work to host a Museums Alaska meeting, but Museums Alaska’s system of committees for programming, host committees, etc. help break down the workload into manageable pieces for each group involved and that makes a huge difference. It is a challenge to be the host organization. I think if you have a very small staff, as we did, but with a lot of planning and the help of some phenomenal interns and volunteers, it can be done.

I think the rewards of hosting a conference include sharing your museum, town, and to an extent, community with people from all over the state is very exciting and fun. I have a great deal of pride in Sitka. I may not be from here, but I have been told many a time that I speak so highly of this island community, picturesque setting, dynamic people, and great arts and culture scene, I should be paid an honorarium by the Sitka Convention & Visitors Bureau.

***The State has acquired the neighboring building, the former Stratton Library, for use with the Sheldon Jackson Museum. How do you see this added space enhancing the museum's programming?***

The possibilities for the Stratton are almost limitless and very exciting. We offer lots of programming at the Sheldon Jackson Museum now, but it would be a challenge for us to have any lecture or event to accommodate more than thirty or thirty-five people. We are very challenged in terms of space for temporary exhibits, including travelling exhibits and exhibits that could potentially involve contemporary artists. We also have difficulty with offering certain hands-on workshops or programs or even educational classes due to space limitations. The Stratton opens up a lot of new options for us to better serve the people we serve now, reach new audiences, community members, partner organizations and nonprofits, and contemporary artists – both in Sitka, Southeast Alaska, and across the State. The Stratton will be an incubator and experimental space of sorts for the State Museum, a testing ground for new programs and projects.

***While you were working at the Sitka Historical Museum you initiated several community curation projects. Do you see anything like that on the horizon for the SJM?***

Yes. Nothing is set in stone and there is a lot of planning that still needs to be done and conversations to be had, but I like the idea of engaging the community and contemporary artists. I have already begun some of that work behind the scenes and am very grateful that the leadership at the Alaska State Museum is supportive of those kinds of activities. I work for and with people who are visionaries. The sky is the limit.

***Here is a philosophical question: What role do you think museums should play in society?***

I think the most important role museums should play in society is to be welcoming community spaces where people can interact and engage with and learn from each other, have important dialogues, and ask questions. Museums should stimulate ideas and creativity, inspire, and move people. They should support independent thinking - not strive to give all the answers to people but instead provide them with information to formulate some of their own opinions. In the case of museums that collect and exhibit art, I am most fond of the ones that offer at least part of their space as a platform for artists to showcase their work and make efforts to provide resources to working artists – whether it is through workforce development, educational opportunities or some other means. I am a firm believer in supporting working artists.

***What is your favorite thing to do in Sitka?***

My two favorite things to do in Sitka are work at the Sheldon Jackson Museum and spend time with friends on the big World War II era tugboat I just moved into. I have the entire upper level of the boat and because there are windows around the entire

room, it's the best view in town. It's a very inspiring place to be and relaxing place to spend time with people.

***Ok the last one is a tough one. If the US were playing Argentina in the World Cup final, who would you be cheering for?***

¿Scott, Me estas tirando el pelo?

## Ask ASM

**Question:** We are in the early stages of putting a whole bunch of paper based materials into archival boxes etc. We found a couple of old scrapbooks and were wondering what the best way to handle these is. The albums have paper pages and photographs and newspaper clippings are taped to the pages. Some of the tape no longer sticks so a lot of the images / clippings are just wedged between pages.



There is also another album with the adhesive-backed pages that are starting to turn. We were planning on taking the photos out of this album, but I'm wondering if we should keep the other paper-paged ones intact.

Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

**ASM:** Scrapbooks are a can of worms! Often they have deteriorating elements, like poor quality paper, but the whole of the scrapbook is sometimes an item unto itself, especially if the paper has been written on or decorated. The experience of flipping

through a scrapbook as the creator intended is sometimes lost if it is dismantled. It is important to gauge if there is intent to create a book-like experience for the reader, with writing on the pages/ decorations etc., or if a scrapbook was simply a format to gather stuff in one place without some greater artistic intent. If the intent was just to gather the stuff in a handy place, then taking it all apart and putting it in better housing seems reasonable. The big thing is to be careful about maintaining the original order. If it is determined that the creator intended for it to be a book then you will need to preserve it as such with all its inherent flaws.

## Shaking the Money Tree

Congratulations to the following Alaskan institutions that recently received federal grants.

### **Ahtna Incorporated - Anchorage, AK**

Award Amount: \$50,000

Contact: Ms. Katherine McConkey  
Cultural Center Director  
(907)822-3535; [ahtnaheritage.kathy@gmail.com](mailto:ahtnaheritage.kathy@gmail.com)

Ahtna, Incorporated, together with Ahtna Heritage Foundation, will use its grant to hire a consultant to produce a plan of exhibits and interpretation for C'ek'aedi Hwnax Cultural Center to portray the history, culture, and language of the Ahtna Athabascan people. The consultant will use concepts and themes developed by the community, and **exhibit content will be drawn from C'ek'aedi Hwnax collections and through interviews** with Ahtna elders. The plan will guide Ahtna in improving its current exhibits, or fabricating new ones, and in developing interpretive text to help tell the stories that Ahtna people themselves have identified as important.

### **Chilkat Indian Village - Haines, AK**

Award Amount: \$48,477

Contact: Ms. Lani Hotch  
Project Director/Collection Development Planner  
(907)767-5581; [lanihotch@aptalaska.net](mailto:lanihotch@aptalaska.net)

The Chilkat Indian Village will use its grant to protect clan treasures while work on the new Jilkaat Kwaan Cultural Heritage Center is completed. Working with partners, tribal and clan representatives will examine tribally owned objects and other clan collections

to identify those with the most immediate storage needs. The project will help tribal members acquire the museum skills necessary for the successful operation of the heritage center.

**Koniag, Inc. - Kodiak, AK**

Award Amount: \$49,673

Contact: Ms. Marnie Leist

Registrar

(907)486-7004; [marnie@alutiiqmuseum.org](mailto:marnie@alutiiqmuseum.org)

Koniag, Inc. will use its grant to enable the Alutiiq Museum to enhance the care and interpretation of the Old Karluk collection, recording Alutiiq lifeways over a 6,000-year period. Currently, the Old Karluk collection lacks a full and accurate inventory, is poorly stored and organized, and has few summary documents to assist in its interpretation.

**Excavators' field notes have never been turned into maps of site features, and the site's contents are largely unpublished.** This project will generate an accurate, complete inventory; rehouse collections; expand an Alutiiq artifact nomenclature to encompass Old Karluk objects; create resources to aid in site interpretation, and promote public awareness of the collection.

**Museum of the North, University of Alaska - Fairbanks, AK**

Award Amount: \$149,999; Matching Amount: \$150,052

Grant Program: Museums for America

Program Category: Collections Stewardship

Contact: Ms. Angela Linn

Senior Collections Manager

(907)474-1828; [ajlinn@alaska.edu](mailto:ajlinn@alaska.edu)

The University of Alaska Museum of the North will move data on its cultural collections (anthropological and historical cultural) from **outdated databases to the museum's** online, multi-disciplinary collection management system, Arctos, already used by six other museum departments. The Arctos programmer will design a user interface for cataloging cultural collections, map and prepare data in the existing databases, and transfer 800,000 accession and catalog records into Arctos. Several user groups will help evaluate and fine-tune the interface and data entry process. The museum will promote new access to its collections data, and will share project results through professional publications and conference presentations. A wide range of professional, university, and public audiences will gain searchable access to the collections, and other humanities-based collections will learn about the potential to use Arctos.

**Alaska State Museum - Juneau, AK**

Award Amount: \$78,439; Matching Amount: \$117,724



Grant Program: Museums for America  
Program Category: Collections Stewardship

Contact: Mr. Scott Carrlee  
Curator of Museum Services  
(907)465-4806; [scott.carrlee@alaska.gov](mailto:scott.carrlee@alaska.gov)

The Alaska State Museum will provide hands-on professional development for 27 staff at 12 Alaskan museums and cultural centers during the move of its 32,000-object collection. The museum will **use the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Incident Command System** to manage a complex move to a new storage facility. The museum will provide a one-hour project orientation and half-day training sessions for three project phases: move preparation; the move; and unpacking and rehousing. The project will prepare participants for future collection moves, while enabling the museum to safely move collections in a tight timeframe. Project updates and results will be shared through social media, online museum **chats, and the museum’s website and bulletin.**

## Spotlight on Grant in Aid

The summer of 2012 saw a blending of talent and history at the Sealaska Heritage Institute. Local Juneau resident and Ph. D. candidate Kelsey Potdevin (Athabascan) was hosted by the Institute and spent her summer semester working on collection accessioning, registration and collection preservation.



Photo: Kelsey Potdevin photo by Zach Jones

**When asked about her work at SHI Kelsey stated, “I’m grateful for the opportunity to work as an SHI intern this summer. After spending the winter learning valuable collections care skills at the Indian Arts Research Center in Santa Fe, NM I was ready to put my new skills to use within my home community. Here at SHI, my projects have included recording new objects in the accession registry, working within the museum database, rehusing objects in archival storage boxes and constructing mounts. Recently, I carved a foam mount designed to support the delicate elements of a copper trimmed sheep’s horn ladle, an object that was probably carved over 150 years ago. I**

also had the opportunity to examine the condition of some recently acquired works of the celebrated Jim Schoppert. The latest project that has come my way has been to adapt costume boxes to house the Raven Dance Regalia of the recently passed Nancy **Jackson. I'm thankful for the chance to contribute to the safekeeping of Jackson's** cherished performance piece until it can again be shared publicly in the newly erected **Walter Soboleff Center**".

With help from the Grant in Aid Fund, Sealaska Heritage Institute was able to meet its mission objective of improving quality care for its historic artifacts by utilizing the many skills and talents Kelsey brought to SHI.

## **Alaska Museums in the News**

Excavation reveals largest trove of ancient Alaskan artifacts

[http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2021724279\\_yupikartifactsxml.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2021724279_yupikartifactsxml.html)

State museum receives grant to pack up collection

<http://www.adn.com/2013/09/10/3067451/state-museum-receives-grant-to.html>

FNBA donates \$10K to Yupiit Piciryarait Museum

<http://www.deltadiscovery.com/story/2013/08/28/business/fnba-donates-10k-to-yupiit-piciryarait-museum/1499.html>

Tamamta Katurlluta combines native Traditions

**<http://homernews.com/homer-features/backyard/2013-08-28/tamamta-katurlluta-combines-native-traditions>**

Seward celebrates 110<sup>th</sup> Founder's Day with special guests

# Professional Development/Training Opportunities

## AASLH

Join AASLH staff for these upcoming free webinars to hear how your organization can get started in two valuable AASLH programs:

### “What is StEPs?” Free Webinar

Time. People. Funding. We all want more of these elusive resources. While the StEPs **program can’t** provide more money, more hours in the day, or more workers, it can help everyone within your organization work efficiently, focus on common goals, and **communicate your organization’s success to build credibility and support**. StEPs is designed for small- and mid-size organizations including all-volunteer ones. Join us on **October 9** from 2 to 3 pm EST to hear how your organization can get started in StEPs. [Register here](#).

### “What is Visitors Count?” Free Webinar

It’s not enough to base your museum’s definition of success on visitation totals, budget reports or staff goals and objectives. Successful organizations understand what people **expect, need and want when visiting—and what will bring them back again**. *Visitors Count!* helps you collect the feedback and data only visitors can provide. And we deliver professional and confidential analysis of your survey results. *Visitors Count!* is designed for mid- and large-sized organizations but open to all. Join us on **October 22** from 2 to 3 pm EST to determine if the time is right for your museum, historic site or house to use *Visitors Count!* to learn more about the people who matter most to your organization’s future. [Register here](#).

## Connecting to Collections

### Caring for Audiovisual Material

Audiovisual collections can run the gamut of formats, from analog audio, film, and video to digital audio, film, video, and optical media. This five-part course will examine the various formats and explore the major issues and challenges in preserving them. A team of national experts will help you navigate the mind-boggling array of AV materials and provide practical advice on identifying, caring for, handling, storing, and accessing them.

Registration for this course is now open. Click [here](#) to register. Please note: registration will close on Wednesday, October 9, 2013, one week before the start of the course.

#### Webinar 1: Basic Concepts and Principles of Audiovisual Preservation

Wednesday, October 16, 2013, 2:00–3:30 p.m. (EDT)

Instructor: [Karen F. Gracy](#)

In this introductory session to the topic of audiovisual preservation, Karen F. Gracy will address the major challenges of caring for analog audio, film, and video collections. Participants will learn about the physical composition and vulnerability of audiovisual formats, find out how best to limit deterioration through appropriate storage environments, and become familiar with recommended techniques and approaches for care and handling of these fragile materials.

#### Webinar 2: Audio Recording Identification and Preservation

Monday, October 21, 2013, 2:00–3:30 p.m. (EDT)

Instructor: [Sarah Stauderman](#)

In this webinar, participants will learn about the history of audio recordings from 1877 to the present, some of the deterioration issues of different formats, and the challenges of preserving these materials. The class will cover the basics of mechanical sound reproduction including cylinder recordings and discs, electronic sound reproduction such as magnetic tape, and digital sound formats on CD and in file format. For each of these materials, the instructor will provide common sense techniques and resources to preserve original media. Understanding the principles of capturing audio will help participants understand the issues of reproduction authenticity when reformatting issues are explored in subsequent presentations.

#### Webinar 3: Videotape and Optical Media Identification and Preservation

Wednesday, October 23, 2013, 2:00–3:30 p.m. (EDT)

Instructor: [Linda Tadic](#)

Since videotape was introduced in 1956, dozens of videotape formats have been introduced. Most are now obsolete. Information presented in this webinar will help participants identify common formats that may be found in their collections, **understand the formats' relationship to the equipment required to play the tapes, as well** as learn about videotape deterioration and how to prevent it. Preservation concerns with recordable optical media (CD, DVD, BluRay) will also be discussed.

#### Webinar 4: Introduction to Film Preservation

Monday, October 28, 2013, 2:00–3:30 p.m. (EDT)

Instructor: [Jeff Martin](#)

This webinar will instruct participants in the fundamental principles of film preservation that are essential to the care of archival film materials. We will review the physical properties of motion picture film, both historic and current; the processes by which films are shot, edited, and duplicated; and current best practices for long-term storage of film material. This webinar will also explain how to carry out and document a basic film inspection.

Webinar 5: Understanding Reformatting Options and Providing Access  
Wednesday, October 30, 2013, 2:00–3:30 p.m. (EDT)  
Instructor: [Stephanie Renne](#)

In this webinar, Stephanie Renne will address concepts in digital preservation, from migration of digital assets to issues associated with providing long-term access to digitized and born-digital material. Technical aspects of audiovisual preservation will also be discussed, including the management of a digital archival set comprising preservation master files, web-accessible copies, and user and access copies; challenges faced in the continual obsolescence of media formats; current standards used in file automation of audiovisual material; and playback equipment. Reformatting options and user needs will also be considered to help guide policies, strategies, and actions to ensure access to digital content over time.

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

**Art Insurer Suing Christie's Storage Over Sandy**

Damage <http://appraiserworkshops.blogspot.com/2013/08/art-insurer-suing-christies-storage.html>

The top 3 reasons people volunteer

[http://info.museumstoreassociation.org/MSAblog/bid/96291/the-top-3-reasons-people-volunteer?source=Blog\\_Email\\_\[The%20top%203%20reasons%20pe\]](http://info.museumstoreassociation.org/MSAblog/bid/96291/the-top-3-reasons-people-volunteer?source=Blog_Email_[The%20top%203%20reasons%20pe])

National Shelf Appreciation Day

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYT8aD9KImA>

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