

Alaska State Museums BULLETIN

An Information Source for Alaska's Museum Community

ASM Hires New Curator of Exhibits

Juneau resident Bob Banghart has been named the new Curator of Exhibits for the Alaska State Museum. Banghart, who earned his bachelor's degree at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, brings to the museum more than 30 years of expertise in the museum field. As Banghart and Associates, he has worked with cultural resource managers throughout Alaska

ASM: After so many years in the private sector, what made you decide to take the job at the State Museum?

Banghart: After many years of travel and individual project development I was looking for an opportunity to settle into a single facility where I could be involved with long-

Banghart: Working with the great staff of museum professionals here at the museum and being part of the team.

ASM: You seem to have really hit the ground running. What are your long-term plans once things start to settle into a routine?

Banghart: I am very interested in technology integration into exhibits programming and creating new methods and tools for our exhibits to communicate with our visitors. We also have the planning process for the new combined Museums, Archives and Library building underway. I hope to dig into that effort. We have an opportunity to create a new path of integrated information delivery for our users as well as upgrading our existing collections, exhibits and education platforms.

ASM: What will you miss most from your life as a high flying contractor?

Banghart: Travel and new facility development. They were simultaneously the best part and the hardest part of the practice. I will miss the connections one makes with a community while working with it over a period of years. There is, for me, something quite powerful about working with a group of folks that are part of those first efforts in building their cultural and historical institution from the ground up.

ASM: You have been in the museum field in Alaska as long as just about anybody in the state— what do you see as the trends and where are we headed as a profession?

Banghart: I do not claim this to be a concise history of the field, but when I started working for museums I was alongside folks that, in many instances, were the founders of the museums or historical societies in their communities. In large part they were dedi-

cated to the tasks of historical preservation through their commitment to preserve what they, their relatives or friends had experienced or accomplished over the years. Efforts surrounding the 1967 Alaska Centennial brought funding to many of the communities for new buildings to assist in telling those stories. We saw at that time working agreements between community governments and the historical societies to jointly own and operate the newly created buildings. At the same time we also started to see more museum professionals moving into these newly created facilities.

The next milestone in the profession was the founding of Museums Alaska (1978). The founders of MA recognized the need to expand training and professional development to the field and create a forum for information exchange in Alaska. The organization

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Bob Banghart, the new Curator of Exhibits, enjoys a contemplative moment on a trip to the interior. Photo: Laura Lucas

developing, improving and promoting exhibit programs and cultural facilities. We caught up with Bob after he had finished installing the All Alaska Juried High School Art show and asked him a few questions.

term programming. The opportunity to join the staff at ASM was one I could not pass up.

ASM: What is the most exciting thing about the new position for you?

Mark Your Calendar

Fall 2007 Museum Conferences

AASLH

Atlanta, September 5th to 8th

Relevance: The Bottom Line

Keynote: Cokie Roberts

www.aaslh.org/anmeeting.html

Museums Alaska

Homer, September 26th to 29th

Staying Essential! Alaska Museums & Their Communities

Keynote: Elaine Heumann Gurian

museumsalaska.org/conferences.html

Western Museums Association

Oakland, October 10th to 14th

Shake It Up: Museums Activate & Innovate

www.westmuse.org/oakland_rfp.html

Tribute to Dorothy Palmer

Dorothy was a board member and volunteer with the Friends of the Alaska State Museum for the past 10 years. Her contributions as a buyer for the Museum Store helped build relationships with artists in the bush communities that will endure for many years to come. She will be missed.



Photo: Alaska State Museum



Conservator's Corner

Along with other renovations in the Alaska State Museum basement, the conservation lab has had a makeover, with new flooring, paint, and lab tables. The spruced-up space will be used for treatments of objects, and will accommodate the conservation library, and the conservator's office area, as well as contain textile conservation supplies, study samples (fragments of ivory, skin, basketry and other materials for developing treatments) and the binocular microscope.

The new tables have chemical-resistant black resin tops typically used in college chemistry classrooms. The narrow darkroom that served as the conservation lab will be used as a chemical laboratory with its deep sinks, fume hood, and safety features such as a flammables storage cabinet and emergency eyewash station.

the first conservation project is finishing the treatment of several waterlogged archaeological baskets from southeast Alaska, including two that have received impregnation with polyethylene glycol wax to replace the excess water. Water has such strong surface tension that simple evaporation from old waterlogged wood and basketry materials causes warping and severe damage. While the treatment was successful in halting deterioration, these ancient baskets are still too fragile to be exhibited.

Two graduate students in conservation will be coming to assist in this project as well as treat other baskets in the collections. Molly Gleeson will be coming from the UCLA/Getty Museum art conservation program, and Samantha Springer will be coming from the Winterthur/University of

Delaware art conservation program. They will spend several weeks in Juneau working on the collection and learning about gathering and processing spruce root and an introduction to weaving from Tlingit/Haida weaver Janice Criswell. Then they will travel to Sitka to work on the Sheldon Jackson Museum collection and learn more about weaving from Tlingit weaver Teri Rofkar until mid-August.



Alaska State Museum conservation lab before (top) and after renovation (below). Photo: Ellen Carrlee



The interns will also share their knowledge and treatment techniques with the weavers in what promises to be an exciting and rewarding collaboration. Successful treatments will mean many important historical and archaeological baskets currently too fragile to be exhibited will be able to be studied, appreciated, and enjoyed by the public. ■

Alaska Museums Accreditation Working Group

AAM Accreditation is a widely recognized seal of approval that brings national recognition to a museum for its commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards, and continued institutional improvement. The Office of Museum Services at the Alaska State Museum has formed the Alaska Museums Accredi-

tation Working Group to help small Alaska museums who are interested in accreditation. If you are thinking about AAM accreditation for your museum and want to join the discussion of the benefits, time commitment and costs involved in the process, contact Scott Carrlee at the Alaska State Museums for more information. ■

Ask ASM: Recently we opened an exhibit case and saw a bunch of bug parts and loose hair around a fur parka. What should we do?

The answer to this question is threefold. First you should take the parka off exhibit and put it through a cold treatment to eradicate the live insects and eggs. Then you should clean up the exhibit case and seal it so that new insects can't get back in. Finally you should implement an Integrated Pest Management Program or IPM at your museum.

1. For the cold treatment of the parka you need a chest-style freezer. A regular freezer will work but the colder the better and chest-style freezers can usually reach colder temperatures. Turn the freezer on its highest setting and put the parka in a well-sealed plastic bag. Try to get most of the air out of the package and

make it as flat as possible without stressing the parka. Freeze it for seven days. Take it out of the freezer (but not the bag... this way, condensation will form on the outside of the bag and not the parka!) and let it warm up for a day. Return it to the freezer for another seven days. This method is usually successful for all types of insects that attack museum artifacts, including those that are cold-hardy and their eggs. You may want to vacuum the bug debris from the parka after the cold treatment. Be careful not to touch the vacuum hose to the parka. Use a soft brush to push the debris into the vacuum nozzle instead. Removing debris will also help you notice if a new infestation occurs.

2. Remove and inspect all other artifacts from that exhibit case. Other artifacts made of animal or plant materials (including your exhibit props) should be given a cold treatment like the parka, as they could have insects or eggs as well. Take the exhibit case apart as much as possible and vacuum all surfaces and crevices well. If possible, hot steam cleaning should be done.

3. An Integrated Pest Management Program (IPM) is something all museums, big and small, should implement. There is a lot of information available in books from the ASM lending library or on the internet. The main points are:

- *Monitor for pests with sticky traps checked at least quarterly*
- *Stop insect infiltration into your building where possible (seal foundation gaps and around windows and doors)*
- *Isolate incoming collections and storage materials to inspect them for insects before they go into the main storage areas.*
- *Eliminate food, drink and plants from areas that have collections in them*
- *Remove clutter from storage areas and keep them clean*
- *Examine collections regularly for infestation evidence (casings, frass, webbing, loose hair, holes, and bald patches)*
- *Use the cold treatment process to eradicate any infestation on artifacts.*

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continues to provide those valuable networking opportunities and has strengthened Alaska's institutions' ties to their counterparts world wide.

Repatriation (NAGPRA was passed in 1990) has brought a strong interest in cultural center development for Native communities. I look forward to the new curatorial and educational operatives these budding facilities will bring to the table. I hope their efforts to create new ways for their institutions to play a role in community will have broad application for the profession.

There seems now to be a "new wave" of university trained professionals reaching deeper into our smaller community's cultural and historical institutions and this should hasten the growth of the profession. My only caution is for us not to overlook individual and community emotion in the equation as we strive for higher professional standards. The strongest sense of ownership comes from the heart.

ASM: Over the years you developed a great reputation for creating exhibits at many institutions around the state. Will people still be able to tap into your cre-

ativity for help with exhibits now that you work for the State Museum?

Banghart: Part of my obligation with the position is to serve as a resource to anyone in the museum or cultural center field that may find my skill set useful. I have already been assisting five institutions in efforts ranging from not-for-profit board training to interior building programming.

ASM: You play music in your spare time. Tell us something else you like to do when you aren't working on exhibits or fiddling a tune.

Banghart: My wife Laura Lucas and I both are engaged by the vast geography of the North. We have traveled throughout Southeast Alaska by kayak for years and in the last decade ventured onto the rivers of the Alaskan and Canadian Arctic. We have floated the length of the Colville, from head waters to the Beaufort, among other rivers in the Brooks Range and last summer we walked from the Dalton Hwy to Anaktuvuk Pass. More of those types of trips are definitely on the list of things to do. ■

Alaska Museum Success Stories: Carrie McClain Memorial Museum



ASM curator Scott Carrlee and Carrie McClain Museum staff guide a Plexiglas cover over Fritz in his custom exhibit case. Photo: Peggy Fagerstrom



The Carrie McClain Memorial Museum is going to the dogs—Fritz the dog that is. Fritz is just about as important as a sled dog could be for the City of Nome. Not only was he born there in 1915 and raced in many of the All Alaska Sweepstakes sled dog races but he also helped save the children of Nome from a diphtheria epidemic by bringing the life-saving serum to town on the famous run that is basis for the Iditarod race today.

When Fritz died of old age at 17 in Lake Placid New York, his owners had him mounted for display. Now he has come back to Nome for his final resting place in the museum.

So how does a museum protect such a valuable artifact? Laura Samuelson, the director of the museum, conferred, with ASM's Scott Carrlee, Curator of Museum Services and Paul Gardinier, exhibits designer on the best way to put Fritz on display. The solution was

a custom-built microclimate case built to specification by the Pacific Design Studios of Seattle. This case puts Fritz in a sealed environment that keeps dust and insects out and, more importantly, a stable climate in.

The specifications for this case are very strict. Because there will be very few air exchanges all the materials on the insides of the case must have low VOC's or Volatile Organic Compounds which could harm the mount. There is also a chamber in the bottom of the case where a special form of silica gel can be placed to temper the climate inside the case. The Plexiglas cover rests on a silicone gasket that prevents air exchanges. Building such a case is time consuming and expensive but well worth the effort. As Laura says "He is the most important dog we've got; we want him to last forever." ■

THE BULLETIN

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