

CONCEPTS

Autumn/Winter 2000

Reprint of Technical Paper Number 6

DR. DANIEL NEUMAN COLLECTOR EXTRAORDINARE

Lynn Ager Wallen, Ph.D.

In 1910, about four months after he arrived in Nome, Alaska, Dr. Daniel Neuman was visited by a local Inupiat Eskimo. He brought with him a particularly beautiful pipe which Neuman admired and coveted. The visitor refused to sell it, but eyeing the fine meerschaum pipe Dr. Neuman was smoking, he offered to trade pipes. The deal was concluded, and Dr. Neuman's collecting days in Alaska had begun.

A decade later, in 1920-21, the Alaska Historical Library and Museum purchased a collection of some 3,000 Yup'ik and Inupiat Eskimo artifacts from Dr. Daniel Neuman. The purchase served as the catalyst for the establishment of the first museum in Juneau, since



Dr. Daniel S. Neuman

the collection was too large to be exhibited in the Governor's office where artifacts had been displayed since the authorization of the museum in 1900.

The Neuman collection continues to be the foundation of the Eskimo collection of the Alaska State Museum, but museum files contained little information about the collector himself. There were only

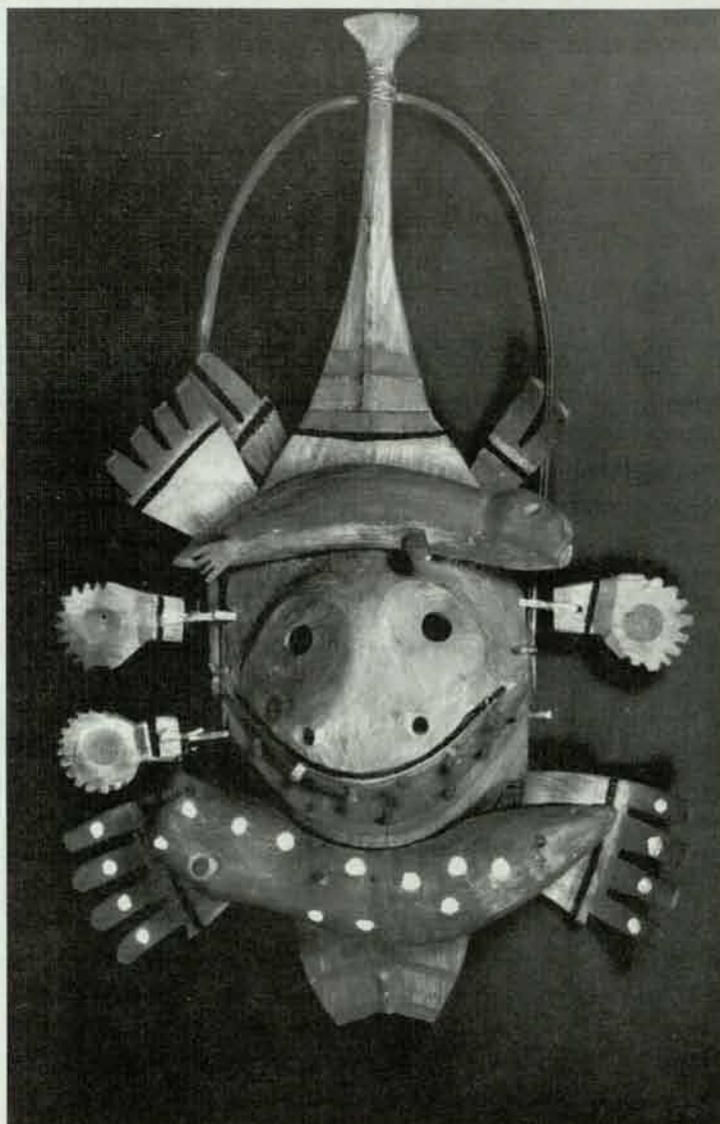
the following items: Neuman's original specimen list; a copy of a medical handbook he published; a 1927 letter from the curator to someone in Nome, describing the Neuman collection shipment; and three letters from Neuman's granddaughter, dated 1961, which contained reminiscences about him and a copy of his obituary. Museums strive to fully document their collections, and it was clear we needed more biographical information on this important collector. After lengthy and complicated detective work, I established contact with his granddaughter, Frances Wells, who provided copies of family documents and letters as well as personal information about his life. Supplemented by research into medical college records, government documents, early newspapers, and records of the Alaska Historical Association,



*Wooden Dipper—
handle representing an
eagle head. II-A-1600*

these family documents were invaluable in piecing together Dr. Neuman's biography.

Daniel Neuman was born in St. Petersburg in 1869. His grandfather, a physician, had first gone to Russia with Napoleon's army but was wounded in battle and left behind when Napoleon retreated. He recovered and remained in Russia to work for the Imperial Government Service. Daniel's father, also a physician, was a surgeon with the Russian army in the Crimea. Later he worked at the Children's Hospital of Tsar Alexander II. When the Tsar was assassinated and suspicion was cast on the professionals in his service, Neuman's father fled the country. By fleeing, Neuman's father saved his family and property from retribution. Some time later, the family heard rumors that he was in a hospital in Cairo (probably as a staff physician), so young Daniel, who had recently earned a degree in chemistry from the University of Kiev, was sent to find him. He did find his father, and together they traveled to America. Correspondence in Russian in the possession of Neuman's heirs indicates that he



Eskimo Mask depicting a seal—Masks, such as this one, are often the work of shamans who are the primary interpreters of the spiritual world. Repainted and restored in 1954.

II-A-1454

maintained contact with his family in Russia. One letter in 1917 from his gravely ill and penniless brother begged for assistance in escaping the effects of the Revolution. (In 1917 Neuman was living in Nome, Alaska.)

In 1895, at the age of twenty-six, Daniel graduated from medical college in Denver and was licensed to practice medicine in Colorado that same year. He had a private practice and also belonged to the faculty of the medical

school at the University of Colorado until sometime between 1909 and 1910. The Colorado medical records show him listed in the 1909 directory of Denver physicians but not in the subsequent directory published in 1912.

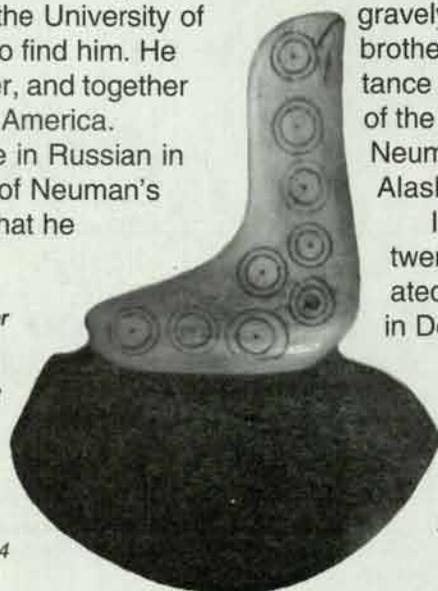
He had married Grace Bailey, an Irish nurse in the 1890s, and their daughter Elizabeth was born in 1898. About eight years later, Grace died after a long illness (probably tuberculosis), and Daniel then married her sister Frances, an arrangement suggested by Grace before her death. Neuman's granddaughter believes that Frances, also a nurse, lived with Grace and Daniel prior to Grace's death. Neuman's daughter Elizabeth was very close to her aunt Frances, and Frances took on the mothering of her young niece with loving enthusiasm.

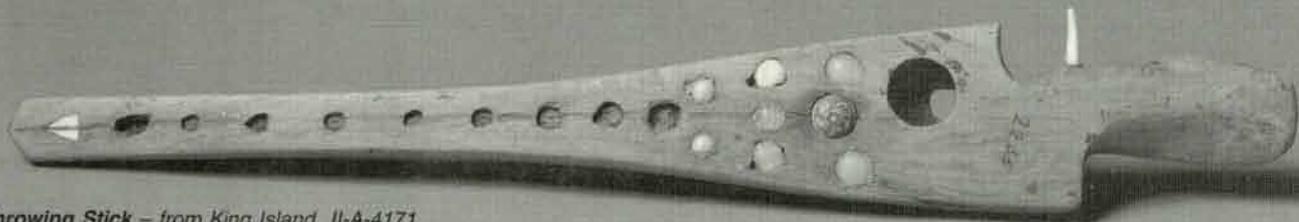
Family correspondence indicates that Elizabeth addressed her father's new wife as "Mother" for the rest of her life. As a grown woman, Elizabeth named her own daughter Frances.

Dr. Neuman's specialty in medicine was the treatment of eye disease, and in 1910, at the request of the U.S. Government, he gave up his practice in Colorado to become a physician with the U. S. Department of Health and Education in Nome, Alaska. His first major assignment was to conduct research into the cause of an eye disease prevalent among the Inupiat, the northern Eskimos. He traced the disease to a parasite

Slate Ulu with Antler Handle from Hooper Bay, decorated with double circles with dot in center and incised mouth at the upper end, creating a resemblance to a fur seal sitting up.

II-A-624





Throwing Stick – from King Island II-A-4171

common in the reindeer which formed an important part of the Inupiat diet.

Dr. Neuman seemed to love Alaska and he traveled extensively in his work. Alaska loved him too. He became a prominent member of the Nome community, and his daughter graduated from high school there in 1915. He was appointed to the Board of Medical Examiners and the Draft Exemption Board and served as Federal Physician for the Nome District.

His collecting activities began quite casually, but once the collection bug had bitten, Neuman was diligent and persistent. Throughout his travels in northern and western Alaska, he acquired objects through trade, purchase, and as payment for his services. Correspondence in the Sullivan archives at the Glenbow Museum indicates that he tried very hard to persuade Ralph and Anna Sullivan to sell him their extensive collection of objects acquired during their years as school teachers in Hooper Bay (1916-18). They refused, and the whereabouts of only ten items of their collection are known today: eight dance masks at the Glenbow Museum and two in other collections.

By the time the rigors of a decade in the Arctic forced him to move south in 1920, Neuman had collected over three thousand objects of Eskimo manufacture. His collecting, however, was not limited to objects. He compiled a collection of folk tales, which has not been located. His stories were adapted

and published, however, by Mrs. Renee Riggs in 1923. Neuman published a number of articles in the Nome monthly magazine including, "Stone Age Religion," "Tattooing on St. Lawrence Island," "Eskimo

Music and Poetry of the Stone Age," "The Social Life of the Stone Age," and "Mating in the Stone Age." His beliefs about the origins of the Alaskan Eskimos help explain his use of the "Stone Age" label: he subscribed to the theory that Alaskan Eskimos were direct descendants of Paleolithic northern Europeans who made their way west from Greenland rather than east from Siberia.

Neuman's scholarly investigations were not limited to amateur anthropology. He wrote a highly acclaimed medical handbook for use by teachers in remote villages, and he wrote articles on subjects such as influenza and infantile paralysis.

With his health broken by the ardors of arctic life, he and his family moved to Juneau in 1920. There he quickly became involved in the activities of the newly-formed Alaska Historical Association. He was appointed Secretary-Treasurer and served on two committees, one to revise the by-laws, the other to design a seal for the Association. The following year he was elected Vice-President and given an honorary membership. Fellow honorary members were such notables as Wiljalmar Steffannsen, Edward W. Nelson, Roald Amundson and Governor Thomas Riggs. It was Governor Riggs who directed efforts to secure a special appropriation that led to the purchase of the Neuman Collection by the Territory in 1921.

Neuman was recorded as absent from the November 1923



Box –Western Eskimo craftsmen have delighted in playing with box forms and have created pieces which show their skill and creativity. This box out of a single piece of wood from Little Diomedea has a well-modeled face that actually serves as a lid attached to the box by thongs. II-A-1599

meeting of the Association, and his name never reappeared in the minutes after that date. Ill health had driven him to warmer climates, and he took up residence on a twenty-acre ranch near Napa, California, where he grew grapes and experimented in growing tobacco. His products were never commercially successful; his tobacco was too strong for American tastes. Technically retired and in ill health, Dr. Neuman nevertheless lived a very active life. His daughter Elizabeth described him as a Renaissance man, interested in many pursuits. In 1935, twelve years after he left Alaska, Dr. Neuman died in California at the age of 67. His beloved second wife Frances had died the year before. He was survived by his only child Elizabeth, and her only child, Frances.

Neuman's collection remains a significant contribution to the Alaska State Museum. It consists of the functional, homey items of everyday life in northern Alaska as well as the spectacular works of art created in conjunction with traditional religious ceremonies. His collection of approximately seventy masks from both Inupiat and Yup'ik Eskimos is

especially important. The masks are identified as to place collected, and their range of styles is broad.

Neuman's original specimen lists record the location where most objects were collected, information critical to any serious research project. The museum preserves the lists and other documentation as carefully as the

artifacts themselves. Dr. Neuman's foresight in making the collection and his diligent gathering of information about the artifacts have earned him a prominent place as a founding father of the Alaska State Museum.

EPILOGUE

The two-year correspondence (1985-1987) between Neuman's granddaughter, Frances Wells, and then-Curator of Collections Lynn Wallen led to the donation of Neuman photographs and documents to the Alaska Historical Library. It also led to several important acquisitions to the collection of the Alaska State Museum, pieces which had been in the Neuman family since their collection. Premier among these new acquisitions was a ritual bucket used during whaling ceremonies, one of the best of its kind in any museum. Subsequent contact with Ms. Wells has resulted in additional acquisitions by the Alaska State Museum of special pieces Dr. Neuman chose to retain when he sold the bulk of his collection in 1921.

Lynn Ager Wallen is the former Curator of Collections at the Alaska State Museum.



Ceremonial Whaling Bucket—Used in Inupiat whaling ceremonies; as the whale is brought to shore the wife of whaling crew leader brings fresh water to it. Purchase from Neuman's granddaughter in 1988 by the Friends of the Alaska State Museum and Chevron USA.

ADDITIONAL READING

Wallen, Lynn Ager. *The Face of Dance: Yup'ik Eskimo Masks from Alaska*. Glenbow Museum, Calgary, 1990

"The Sullivan Mask Collection," in *Glenbow Magazine*, Winter, 1991.

The Concepts series publishes information on the preservation of Alaska's material heritage and recent research on the collections of the Alaska State Museum, Juneau and Sheldon Jackson Museum, Sitka.

Alaska State Museums
Division of Libraries, Archives
and Museums
395 Whittier Street, Juneau, AK 99801
www.museums.state.ak.us