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## Press Release

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **HISTORIC FIREARMS ON VIEW AT STATE MUSEUM**

Historic firearms that once belonged to such colorful characters from Alaska's past as "Soapy" Smith, Jack Dalton and Lt. Fredrick Schwatka, will be on view in a temporary exhibit at the Alaska State Museum for the next two months. Approximately two dozen rifles, pistols, muskets, a cannon, and other related materials will be on display from the museum's collection as well as other museums and private collections. The exhibit opens Friday, March 7, with a free reception from 4:30 to 7 p.m. sponsored by the Friends of the Alaska State Museum. The reception will also feature a live firing of a flintlock musket at 5:30 p.m. and 6:15 p.m. on the museum grounds (weather permitting). The firearms display will last through October 10.

The smallest gun is a Colt derringer that once belonged to Jefferson "Soapy" Smith, the most notorious figure from the Klondike Gold Rush, who was killed in a shoot-out in Skagway in 1898. Smith's .41-caliber Colt revolver will also be shown. The largest piece in the show is a Japanese anti-tank gun on wheels, captured in the Aleutians during World War II. Other WWII items include a Japanese machine gun and rifle.

An eighteenth-century Russian cannon is the earliest armament. It once stood duty in a Russian blockhouse at St. Michael. Other early firearms include trade muskets and pistols, both flintlock and percussion type, guns that were often used in barter with Native groups along the Northwest Coast.

Jack Dalton, an early Alaska entrepreneur and woodsman, who established the Dalton Trail from the Haines area to the Interior during the 1890s, is represented by his sawed-off shotgun. Dalton was known for his quick temper and was tried and acquitted in Juneau for murder.

A lever-action Winchester rifle that once belonged to Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka is also in the show. Schwatka was the first non-Native to ascend the Chilkoot Pass and travel down the Yukon River, in 1883, on an exploring expedition for the U.S. Army. He later wrote a popular account of his travels. Numerous guns went over the Chilkoot Pass during the gold rush, and this show will feature a pistol and cartridge belt that belonged to a stamper, along with his handwritten diary.

## Continued – Historic Firearms Exhibition

A Native Alaskan aspect of the exhibit features a carved metal hair ornament made from the barrel of a trade gun, and a rare, hand-carved gun stock with Tlingit crests, on a rifle that once belonged to a U.S. marshal in Sitka.

Lenders to the exhibition include: The Sheldon Museum in Haines, Skagway City Museum, Juneau Douglas City Museum, Sheldon Jackson Museum, Sitka, Maxine Selmer from Skagway.

Winter hours at the museum are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Admission is \$3. Visitors 18 and under are admitted free of charge. An annual pass that allows unlimited visits to the Alaska State Museum and the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka is available for \$15. Assistance is available for visitors with special needs. Please contact Visitor Services at 465-2901 before the visit.

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