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SEAL OF THE STATE
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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Press Release

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LECTURE ON ALASKA NATIVE “RAVEN’S TAIL” WEAVING: FEBRUARY 9 AT THE ALASKA STATE MUSEUM

JUNEAU – Twenty years ago, the Friends of the Alaska State Museum sponsored a group of weavers to create the first original “ravens tail” ceremonial robe to be woven in southeast Alaska since the early 1800s. Eight primary weavers—and over a dozen more in supporting roles—completed the robe after 1800 hours of volunteer labor.

Janice Criswell, Bonnie Fitzjarrald, Mary Lou King, Kay Parker, and Janet Schempf are veterans of the project, which was conceived of by Delores Churchill, the famous Haida weaver from Ketchikan. On Wednesday, February 9, from noon to 1 p.m. at the museum, the weavers will reunite to talk about their experiences weaving the robe, which they named “Hands Across Time,” reflecting upon the assistance they received from the weavers of centuries ago to enable the rebirth of an extinct form of weaving.

Unlike most objects in the museum, the robe is used periodically for traditional ceremonies. It was officially dedicated at Celebration ’92, where it was “brought out” before hundreds of Alaska Natives gathered for the event. Dr. Walter Soboleff danced with it for the first time, joining Juneau’s Yan Shu Kaa Dancers. Since that time, the robe has been used at numerous events, including graduations, naming ceremonies, weddings, and potlatches.

When the weavers started the robe in 1990, this type of weaving was reemerging after a hibernation that began one hundred and fifty years earlier. While Chilkat robes are today the most prevalent form of woven regalia from Alaska, that tradition is a relatively recent invention that replaced the earlier “ravens tail” style. In the 1700s and earlier, Native leaders and elders wore robes decorated with eye dazzling black-and-white geometric patterns of amazing complexity. Only a dozen of these robes, whole and fragmentary, exist today worldwide.

Cheryl Samuel, expert weaver, studied the old pieces and reverse engineered the technique, which she then taught to students in Alaska through classes sponsored by tribes and the University of Alaska Southeast. The “Hands Across Time” project was co sponsored by the museum and the Friends of the Alaska State Museum.

Contemporary weavings, as well as a rare fragment of an original robe, will be displayed in conjunction with the lecture.

Admission is free for the lectures in this series taking place every Wednesday noon hour through March 9. The series is an annual program of the Division of Libraries, Archives, and Museums, held in honor of the institutions’ first librarian and curator, Father Andrew P. Kashevarof, who served from 1919 until his death in 1940.

Discounted winter admission for museum visitation 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 for more information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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www.museums.state.ak.us



[return to top](#)

[press releases](#) | [Alaska State Museum](#)