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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: July 25, 2011

August Artifact of the Month: Wooden Batten from King Island



The August artifact of the month at the Sheldon Jackson Museum is a small decorated wooden batten from King Island. It was "regularly beaten to aid the drum accompaniment during dancing," according to *The Eskimo About the Bering Sea*, by Edward William Nelson. The batten is the only example in the museum collection. The stick is carved at one end with the head of a seal and has blue bead inset for eyes, and fine white hair for whiskers. The Reverend Dr. Sheldon Jackson stopped at King Island in 1890, 1893, and 1894. It is not known when he collected this piece. There are 143 artifacts in the Sheldon Jackson Museum collection from this remote island including a kayak (suspended from the museum ceiling), fifty wood masks (in the Eskimo mask case) plus artifacts used in hunting, fishing and food preparation.

King Island is located 40 miles west of Cape Douglas in the Bering Sea, south of Wales. King Island is primarily precipitous rock, 700 feet high and approximately one mile long. The island was historically occupied by Eskimos who called themselves "Aseuluk." It was named by Captain Cook in 1778 for Lt. James King, a member of his party. In 1900, the Eskimo name was reported to be "Ukiwuk." The village was occupied during the winter by approximately 200 people who achieved fame as hunters and ivory carvers, and who lived in walrus-skin dwellings lashed to the face of the cliff. The Islanders subsisted on walrus, seal, birds, berries and green plants. According to Dorothy Jean Ray, in *Eskimos of the Bering Strait*: "The Bering Strait was one of the richest areas of the Eskimo world in fish, sea and land mammals, plant foods, fowl and eggs."

The last residents of King Island left in early 1960 to move to Nome. For more information on King Island visit: <http://www.kingislandplacename.com>.

The batten will be on exhibit at Sheldon Jackson Museum from August 1 through August 31. An image of the batten can also be viewed on our website at:

http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/artifact_of_month.html.

Summer hours are from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm daily except holidays. Summer admission is \$4. No admission is charged for those 18 and under. The Sheldon Jackson Museum is located at 104 College Drive, adjacent to the Sheldon Jackson Fine Arts Campus.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Phone (907) 747-8981 Fax (907) 465-3004

www.museums.state.ak.us

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