

Linda S. Thibodeau

Director

Division of Libraries, Archives,
& Museums

lam.alaska.gov

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Robert C. Banghart

Chief Curator

Alaska State Museums

395 Whittier St.

Juneau, Alaska 99801-1718

907.465.2901

Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: **October 21, 2011**

November Artifact of the Month: Inupiat Harpoon Blade Boxes

The November artifact of the month is a set of two wooden boxes, both carved in the shape of a bowhead whale. Boxes like these were used by northern Inupiat whalers to carry extra harpoon blades while they were hunting from an umiaq (skin boat). These whales are represented as “captured whales” with their tails clipped. The lids are missing from both boxes.

Inupiat whalers used a variety of charms to ensure a successful hunt. Whale shaped amulets, seats shaped like whales, and harpoon rests decorated with whaling scenes were kept in the umiaq. Special crystals, rocks, bones and feathers were also used by whalers as personal amulets. Whaling tools and related ritual objects were kept separately from other everyday objects in a secret cache and brought out before a whale hunt.



These two boxes were presumably collected by Dr. Samuel J. Call (1858-1908) in 1891. Dr. Call came to Alaska in 1880 to work as a surgeon for the Alaska Commercial Company. In 1890 he became the company surgeon on the Revenue Cutter Service vessel, the Bear, which traveled annually between the Alaskan Arctic, Kodiak, Sitka and San Francisco. Along with providing medical assistance for the ship, he also treated the people in the villages he visited.

The two harpoon boxes can be seen at the Sheldon Jackson Museum November 1st through November 30th. An image of the blade boxes can also be viewed on the press release on our website at http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/artifact_of_month.html

Winter hours are from 10:00am to 4:00pm Tuesday through Saturday. Discounted winter admission is \$3. No admission is charged for those 18 and under. The Sheldon Jackson Museum is located at 104 College Drive.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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

www.museums.state.ak.us

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