

# ALASKA STATE MUSEUMS

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, JUNEAU ❖ SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM, SITKA

## Sheldon Jackson Museum

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### ESKIMO PADDLE BLADE

#### APRIL ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

SCOTT MCADAMS, 747-8981

An Eskimo spare paddle blade is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for April.

The Rev. Sheldon Jackson collected the blade in 1890 on his first trip to the Arctic regions of Alaska. As General Agent of Education for the U.S. Bureau of Education, he traveled with the Revenue Cutter Service surveying villages for school sites.

The blade is 19-inches long but fashioned in a manner to accept the shaft of a spear if a whole paddle was lost, or the handle of a paddle if only the blade was missing. This is the only example of a spare blade in the museum's collection. It can be viewed at the museum through April 30.

The blade had been missing from the museum for almost 60 years until it was returned last summer by Louise Weeks of Anchorage. Her late husband, Ralph, had collected numerous artifacts over the years. She was in the process of donating some of these to the Anchorage Museum of History and Art when Curator of Collections Walter Van Horn noticed an inscription on the blade that said "Eskimo Paddle Blade, Arctic Ocean, 1890, Presented by Sheldon Jackson."

In discussing the issue with Louise Weeks, Van Horn discovered the couple taught at Sheldon Jackson School in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Ralph Weeks had a strong interest in history and cultures and often assisted at the museum. At some point the faculty, who cared for the museum during those years, decided to dispose of certain objects considered, at the time, unnecessary. The school's superintendent told Weeks to take some of the pieces for himself.

Recognizing the paddle blade as unique, Ralph Weeks kept it in his private collection for many years. Eventually Louise Weeks, upon dividing up her late husband's collection among their children and making donations to the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, decided the paddle blade should return to the Sheldon Jackson Museum as per Van Horn's suggestion.

Winter hours at the museum are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Admission is \$3; youth 18 and younger are free. Annual passes and membership in the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, allowing entry at no charge, are available.

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