

ALASKA STATE MUSEUMS

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, JUNEAU ❖ SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM, SITKA

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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ESKIMO GRASS BASKET FEATURED FOR DECEMBER ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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A large coiled Eskimo grass basket is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for December.

The well-formed Eskimo grass basket has been in the museum's collection since 1972. It was presented to the museum along with 14 other basketry pieces through anthropologist Dr. Erna Gunther, who was reorganizing the collection. Mrs. Boris Glazonow gave the baskets to Gunther to be placed in the museum in memory of her father Almer Rydeen, who lived in Nome for many years after the turn of the century. Mrs. Glazonow thought the baskets were collected between 1900-1915.

Coiled grass baskets in the form commonly seen today are relatively new to Alaska. According to researchers Molly Lee and Dorothy Jean Ray, coiled basketry may have been introduced to Alaska by basket makers from Siberia who in turn may have learned it from the Chinese. Only a few archeological sites have produced any sort of coiled basketry and those sites have been questioned as to age. The earliest coiled baskets were collected around 1878. These were small and had no decoration. Researchers explain that the coiling method was adopted since it provides a sturdier container than the traditional twined grass baskets. From the time those first coiled baskets were collected, the Yup'ik and Inupiaq women had honed their artistic skills considerably. Increasingly complex patterns and precise, evenly coiled baskets of all sizes began to appear. The Artifact of the Month is an outstanding example of the size and designs achieved by the basketmakers. The basket is 23" high with a maximum diameter of 11" with floral and geometric designs.

At the time of the Nome gold rush, around 1900, coiled baskets had become an important part of the growing art market. Baskets imported to Nome came from far-reaching areas of Alaska's coast—the Yukon Kuskokwim delta and for a time, from north of the Seward Peninsula.

The basket may be viewed in the Museum gallery during the month of December. Winter hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Admission is \$3. Visitors 18 and younger and those with passes are admitted free of charge.

ESKIMO GRASS BASKET



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