

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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DECEMBER ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH SIBERIAN ICE SCOOP

A Siberian ice scoop, or skimmer, is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for December.

In 1890, Sheldon Jackson sailed to the Arctic for the first time with the Revenue Cutter Service – the forerunner of the United States Coast Guard. Jackson made many trips with the Cutter Service, often visiting the coast of Siberia in search of reindeer to purchase and bring to Alaska. During these trips he collected 101 objects from Siberia ranging from clothing and utensils to tools and implements of everyday life.

The ice scoop is nearly identical to those found on the Alaska side of the Bering Strait. Made from rawhide thong woven inside a ring of bent bone or antler (materials vary from region to region) and attached to a wooden handle, it measures 21 ½ inches. Shorter than many scoops, in some areas it would be called a skimmer. All these net-like implements were important for cleaning out the slush ice around fishing or seal hunting holes. As a hole is being dug in the thick ice, small bits of ice continually fall back into the hole and in the extreme temperatures of the north quickly form a slushy film. The scoop is designed to lift the slush out and away from the hole letting the water drain through, leaving the hole open for fishing or seal hunting.

Other uses suggested by early naturalist John Murdock (in the Arctic 1881-1882) included using the implement to scrape snow and frost off clothing, or boys using them to pick up and sling snowballs. As with many Arctic tools, it was designed with a specific task in mind, but could easily be adapted for other uses.

Winter hours at the museum are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. General admission is \$3. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge. This artifact-of-the-month can also be seen on our website at www.museums.state.ak.us.



[return to top](#)

[SJ Artifacts-of-the-Month](#) | [press releases](#) | [SJ home](#) | [Alaska State Museums](#)

SIBERIAN ICE SCOOP



[return to top](#)

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