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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: **November 30, 2010**

December Artifact of the Month

[Tlingit bone armor](#) collected by first museum curator [Frederic E. Frobese](#)

The Sheldon Jackson Museum artifact of the month for December is focusing on contributions made by Frederic Frobese (1855-1931), the Museum's first curator. Frobese had wide ranging interests and donated several pieces to the Museum collection including Tlingit bone armor. The armor is on display for the month of December.

Frobese first came to Alaska in 1884 as a coxswain on the USS Pinta which was stationed in Sitka. Like other members of the crew, he was drawn back, after his enlistment, to settle in Sitka. He found work as a carpenter, paper hanger, taxidermist, and painter. In 1888 he married Miss Ophelia Baronovich, the daughter of Vincent and Mary Baronovich. Mary's father was Kaigani Haida Chief Skowl (various spellings) a wealthy and influential clan elder from the village of Old Kasaan.

Frobese was actively involved with the start of the museum as one of the founding members of the Alaskan Society of Natural History and Ethnology started by Dr. Jackson in 1889. He later joined the staff of the Alaska Industrial Training School and became an instructor in house painting and wallpaper hanging. In 1894 he became the first curator of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, serving until 1898 when he left for the gold rush in Nome. As the first curator, Frobese oversaw the collections in both the original wood structure and transferred the contents to the new concrete structure still standing today. He was also responsible for devising the first numbering system for the artifacts.

As a taxidermist, Frobese made certain the new museum included a wide range of animal, fish, and bird mounts. These stuffed animals were discarded in the 1960s when the museum was reorganized by Dr. Erna Gunther to focus on the ethnographic collection.

Objects that Frobese donated that remain in the collection include a bear mask, a Russian print of "Redoubtsky" and body armor. The armor piece is made from plates of mastodon or mammoth ivory. Information from the artifact card states that "it is Tlingit and unusual in that it is more Eskimo than the typical wood slate armor of the Tlingit. It could have been an Aleut influence or from an Aleut." The card for the object says "a Tlingit rib armor used in battle with the Russians at Sitka in 1804, kept by a Sitka family until Dec 22, 1895."

This past summer the Curator received two photographs of Frobese from his great granddaughter. The photographs are on exhibit with the bone armor.

The artifacts can also be viewed on our website at

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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

www.museums.state.ak.us

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Tlingit bone armor collected by first museum curator Frederic E. Frobese



Frederic Frobese , Seattle, late 1920s



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