

PRESS RELEASE

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CAPTAIN HEALY'S CONTRIBUTIONS HONORED

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Each February during Black History Month, the Sheldon Jackson Museum recognizes Capt. Michael Healy of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, the forerunner of the U.S. Coast Guard. Healy, the first African-American captain in the Cutter Service, helped the Rev. Dr. Sheldon Jackson gather a wide variety of artifacts for his growing museum.



This month, the Museum's Artifact of the Month is a walrus skull and tusks Healy collected at Barrow sometime in the early 1890s. Other items collected by Healy for the Museum include a walrus hide lariat from Kodiak; two eider duck nests, 12 teal eggs, a whalebone (baleen) net from Barrow, a horn spoon from Cape Smythe, and an "Arctic" owl. This list is from the November 1890 edition of the *North Star*, a publication of the Presbyterian Schools and Missions of Alaska. The article also listed artifacts collected by Mrs. Healy, who often traveled with her husband: "embroidered game bag, from Barrow; embroidered seal bag, St. Lawrence Island; pair of Russian shears; model Eskimo sled, Barrow."

Several of these items have already been featured in the Artifact of the Month program, but some have been removed from the collection because they were preserved with arsenic and presented a health hazard for employees. The condition of some of the artifacts was so poor that they could no longer be used for study or exhibit. The skull and ivory tusks, however, are in relatively good shape and represent a part of the Museum's collection that is rarely seen and an era of exploration and discovery that has passed.

Healy, who was born to a slave woman and plantation owner in 1839, has long been recognized for his contributions to transportation and public safety in 19th century Alaska. He served for nearly 38 years in the Cutter Service. Healy met Jackson when Cutter Service captains were ordered to transport Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary and federal Agent for Education in Alaska, and to assist in setting up schools in remote regions of Alaska. The two made a number of voyages together.