

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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MAMMOTH JAWBONE FEATURED AS FEBRUARY ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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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 mammoth's lower jawbone with two teeth that Healy collected, probably in the summer of 1893, at Kotzebue Sound.

People in Alaska held Healy in high regard for his efforts "in contributing articles of great ethnological value to the Museum and furthering its objects in several ways." The Alaska Society of Natural History held a reception in his honor in May of 1894. The local newspaper, "The Alaskan," also reported, "Many of the guests took advantage of the opportunity to view the most valuable collection of ethnological and natural historical objects...we especially noticed two mastodon teeths (sic) encased in their respective jaws.

Since that article was written the jawbone and teeth have been correctly identified as mammoth and not mastodon. Mammoth teeth were used in grinding coarse vegetation like grass causing the tooth to develop a flat top with short enamel ridges where the plates are. A mastodon's teeth were blunt and cone shaped. Most likely they browsed on softer plants, such as herbs and leaves found mostly in forested and brushy areas.

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. He met Sheldon Jackson when Cutter Service captains were ordered to transport Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary and General Agent of Education for Alaska, to assist in setting up schools in remote regions of Alaska. The two made a number of voyages together.

The Artifact of the Month series at the Sheldon Jackson Museum offers visitors an opportunity to view various pieces that aren't on exhibition or are new to the collection.

The jawbone may be viewed in the museum gallery during February. 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.

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