

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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JANUARY ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH RECTANGULAR SPRUCE ROOT BASKET

A small rectangular spruce root basket is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for January. It was purchased by the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum and donated to the museum's permanent collection. The basket came from an antique dealer in northern California who had purchased it from the estate of an elder man who'd inherited it from his parents. It had been in his family's possession since the turn of the 19th century.

The small rectangular basket is fully covered with wrapped weft or false embroidery. The design, which appears to be a square within a square, is a style found on other rectangular spruce root containers and is identified by George Thornton Emmons as "wave design." The lid to the basket is missing its rim. The lid's design is identified by Emmons as the "tying or winding around" pattern.

Inside the basket are two small wood supports stitched to the bottom. Supports used on rectangular or oval shaped pieces prevented the edges from curling up during the weaving process and were normally removed on the completion of the basket.

The museum has a number of rectangular shaped baskets; most are made from cedar bark made by the Tsimshian. Atypical of the more common round shaped Tlingit spruce root baskets, this piece is among only two others in the museum's collection with the unique rectangular shape. The rectangular baskets emerged with the growing art market of the late 19th, early 20th century – a time when weavers were experimenting with new shapes, designs and functions.

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.

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SPRUCE ROOT BASKET



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