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## Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: **December 31, 2010**

### **January Artifact of the Month:**

### **[Painting of "Horse Creek Mary" By Jules Bernard Dahlager](#)**

One of Alaska's most popular artists, Jules Dahlager was born in Brookings, Dakota Territory in 1884. He was a contemporary of Eustace P. Ziegler and Sydney Lawrence but never gained the fame of these two artists. He was personally encouraged, however, by both men to continue his painting. His paintings are treasured by many.

When Dahlager and his wife moved to Cordova, Alaska in 1921, the majestic beauty of the Alaskan mountains and forest around him gave him the inspiration to paint. He painted numerous landscape paintings and portraits, using his trademark style of palette knife work – never using a brush. In addition to his many portrait paintings, Dahlager painted several portraits of the well-known Copper River Native woman, "Horse Creek Mary." "Mary has paid a lot of bills," Dahlager once told a reporter. Dahlager loved to paint and was glad to see others enjoying his paintings. "I want people who enjoy pictures to have them," was Dahlager's philosophy of art. To that end he did two things: he painted what people liked, and he kept his prices down. "Pictures are a luxury so I try to keep the price down to a point where ordinary folks can afford them."

Horse Creek Mary was born around 1838, of a Native mother of the Copper River Valley, and a Russian father. She was one of the colorful characters of early pioneer days in Alaska. With fierce pride, she concealed with her grizzled locks the side of her face that was missing an eye, said to have once been the badge of slavery. Mary lived on Horse Creek most of her life. She was predeceased by all of her four children.

Living apart from her tribe in a lonely cabin on the Copper River trail, she gave food and shelter to many starving and exhausted mushers. Her Native remedies cured many prospectors ill with scurvy. It is said that she once saved the lives of white settlers by warning them of an attack by the Copper River Indians, who resented the taking of their lands by the white man.

Mary was a woman of amazing physical strength. In the early days before the arrival of the railroad she often mushed 150 miles to Valdez to obtain her supplies. She journeyed alone with the exception of a small sled dog who traveled along with her for company, since Mary herself was usually the one in the harness.

Independent, shrewd, and living by her wits, Horse Creek Mary asked help of no one although she lived to be very old. She died in Eklutna, Alaska in the early 1920s. By estimation she lived to be about 85 years old. As her strength failed her in her later years, she was watched after by the town's people, a Native family, and a government teacher. The government teacher performed the final service for her. "One snow, me die" she had said to him and it was so. Her last wish was that she be buried at a place of her own choosing near the Copper River trail. Afterwards, people found cached in her hut, a few provisions and \$20 hoarded to pay the cost of her burial.

The painting can be seen at the Sheldon Jackson Museum January 2 through January 31. The image can also be viewed on our website at

[http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon\\_jackson/artifact\\_of\\_month.html](http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/artifact_of_month.html)

Winter hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10a.m to 4 p.m. Discounted winter admission is \$3 for adults; age 18 and younger are admitted free.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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

[www.museums.state.ak.us](http://www.museums.state.ak.us)

**Painting of “Horse Creek Mary” By Jules Bernard Dahlager**



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