

PRESS RELEASE

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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MUSEUM SPOTLIGHTS YUP'IK CARIBOU HIDE MUKLUKS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A pair of Yup'ik Eskimo caribou-leg mukluks from Nushagak is the featured artifact for June at the Sheldon Jackson Museum.

Barbara Meek of Cle Elem, Washington, donated the mukluks to the Museum. Her father, George Benton, taught school and her mother, Anna Benton, was a government nurse in Nushagak around 1915-1918. In 1978 Ms. Meek donated a beaded wedding cap, a duck skin cap, a woman's fancy parka, a fur blanket, a bird skin mat, and an intestine bag to the Museum. In 1991 she gave the mukluks to the Museum. A photo of Ms. Meek's mother and her friend, Georgia Graham, shows the mukluks, the fancy parka, and the beaded headdress when the Bentons lived in Nushagak. The parka and the headdress are now on permanent exhibit in the Museum gallery.

In May of 2000, a group of Yup'ik elders doing research at the Museum examined the mukluks. Julia Apalayak from Manokotak identified them as women's boots because of an attached strap. Mary Ishnook from Nunacuaq felt that if they had been from her area, they would have been men's boots because they "had no designs on them." It is not uncommon to have regional variations in styles and designs in clothing. Anna Benton probably chose them for their warmth and durability. The mukluks consist of four strips of white caribou or reindeer hide taken from the legs of the animal. Welts of dark fur in the front leg seams are probably muskrat skin. The hard soles were identified as bearded seal hide by Julia Apalayak. Sinew stitches hold the mukluks together.

