

## Sheldon Jackson Museum

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### **JUNE ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH**

#### **INUPIAQ IVORY BOW DRILL**

A bow drill with engraved scenes of village and ceremonial life and stories from mythology is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for June.

The extensively engraved bow came from a group of materials collected at Point Barrow between 1899 and 1908 by the Reverend Samuel Spriggs, a Presbyterian missionary. In 1989, the Reverend Spriggs' great niece, Ellen Harrington of Blairsville, Ga., who had inherited the collection of objects, photographs and lantern slides, contacted the museum about selling some of the pieces to the museum. At that time the museum purchased nearly 100 objects. In 1995, Mrs. Harrington donated additional items, bringing the number of objects from the Spriggs collection to 200. This was an important acquisition as the time frame in which the objects were collected overlapped and extended the time period in which Sheldon Jackson was collecting – he made his final trip to Alaska in 1902.

A bow drill is one part of a set that was customarily found in every man's tool kit. It was used to drill holes into wood or ivory, or to create enough heat to start a fire.

Although bone was the preferred material for bow drills, the smooth surfaces of ivory were excellent for adding illustrations of adventures, events and mythology or to keep track of the number of animals successfully hunted in a season. Figures, no larger than a centimeter, were carved into the ivory and filled in with a mixture of graphite or ashes and oil to produce a striking scene. More contemporary carvers used India ink to fill in the engravings. This bow drill is engraved with hunting and whaling scenes, a ceremonial setting with dancers and drummers, wildlife activity, sailing ships, and a village.

The bow drill will be on exhibit June 1-30 and can also be viewed on our website at [www.museums.state.ak.us](http://www.museums.state.ak.us).

Summer hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. General admission is \$4. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge.

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