

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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JUNE ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH INUPIAQ ESKIMO DRUM

A small 8"-diameter drum is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for June. The tambourine-style drum, collected by Sheldon Jackson at Point Hope sometime in the early 1890s, is made of wood and bone, and has a head made from sea mammal stomach membrane. The hoop is a narrow piece of wood bent into a circle. The ends of the wood overlap and are fastened with pegs and a thin strip of bone. A small groove was carved into the wood frame allowing the membrane to be tied securely to the frame with lengths of sinew wrapped around it. The bone handle, which has hand grips, also has a rudimentary face on the end where the handle attaches to the frame.

According to early naturalist John Murdoch, who spent two years at Point Barrow in the early 1880s, drums came in a variety of sizes, from small "toy size" to large drums more than 2 feet in diameter. A thin wood or baleen rod was generally held in the right hand to beat the drum. Occasionally a thick, short stick of ivory would be used as a beater. Unfortunately the beater for this drum was either never collected or has been disassociated with the drum. Nearly every household had a drum or two and used them to sing or hum along with during the course of the day as well as at ceremonies and entertainments. Whether or not this drum was used within a household or made for sale is unknown.

The drum can be seen in the museum gallery through June 30 and is viewable on the web site: <http://www.museums.state.ak.us>.

Summer hours are daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. 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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INUPIAQ ESKIMO DRUM

