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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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JUNE ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH YUP'IK ESKIMO CLAY POT

The June Artifact of the Month at the Sheldon Jackson Museum is a Yup'ik Eskimo clay pot. Sheldon Jackson collected it sometime in the 1890s on one of his many trips to monitor and set up schools throughout Alaska.

The small pot (about 4" high and 3½" across) has written in large letters: "Andreoffsky" [sic]. The small village of Andreafsky no longer exists under that name but became a part of present day St. Mary's in 1980.

Alaskan pottery, relatively rare, and simple in form and design, was made traditionally by Yup'ik, Inupiat and Athabascan groups. With the arrival of western cultures and metal pots, pans and various tins for cooking and storage, the skills for making these fragile clay pots and lamps slowly began to disappear.

Women were the potters, at least in the Yup'ik world. They gathered thick local clay, kneading it to a workable plasticity. To add body, marsh grass, fine beach or river sand and other materials were mixed with the clay. A flat piece for the bottom was prepared, and then long strips or coils were wound around, building on top of each other until the desired height was reached. Often a special tool was used to smooth the sides or press a design into the soft clay. This pot has a pinched rim with two rows of coils unsmoothed and dots placed around the circumference for decoration. The moist pots were placed near a fire for initial drying and then placed directly in the fire with additional burning material inside. Although low fired and comparatively delicate, a number have survived and appear in museums around the world.

Alaska pottery forms were generally an open bowl shape or like this one with curving sides with a slight flaring at the rim. Some were used for lamps, others for cooking, and still others for holding seal oil. Smaller pots sometimes had a woven grass cover to protect it. The Sheldon Jackson Museum has pots ranging from this small size to one of 4" to a large cooking pot that is 24" high and 14" diameter.

The pot can be seen in the museum gallery June 1 through 30. Summer hours at the Sheldon Jackson Museum are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Summer admission is \$4. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge. The pot can also be viewed online at http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/artifact_of_month.html.

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[return to top](#)

[SJ Artifacts-of-the-Month](#) | [press releases](#) | [SJ home](#) | [Alaska State Museums](#)

YUP'IK ESKIMO CLAY POT



[return to top](#)

[SJ Artifacts-of-the-Month](#) | [press releases](#) | [SJ home](#) | [Alaska State Museums](#)