

ALASKA STATE MUSEUMS

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, JUNEAU ❖ SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM, SITKA

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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WOVEN GRASS BASKET MARCH ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

FOR MORE INFORMATION

SCOTT MCADAMS, 747-8981

The Sheldon Jackson Museum's March Artifact of the Month is an Aleut grass basket from Chernofski on Unalaska Island. The basket will be on display March 2-31.

Aleut weavers are well known for their finely woven grass objects. This large, open-weave basket was often referred to as a "fish basket." Such baskets were used to store dried fish, roots and other foods. The basket has a firm, heavy bottom with an open weave starting after an inch or two of solid weaving. Unlike many of the late 19th century Aleut baskets, this one has no decorative embroidery or other added materials. A heavy, braided rim reinforces the edge--a distinctive feature of this grass basket.

Women and girls had the responsibility of weaving baskets, mats, hats, socks and mittens from rye grass. The museum features this basket in celebration of National Women's History Month in March. The weaving skills of the Aleut women provided their families with a means to gather and store food, as well as clothe themselves. In addition, woven mats were used on walls and roofs in the semi-subterranean homes of the Aleut people, and hunters used the mats in their baidarkas, or kayaks.

This particular basket came into the collection in 1992 when a large group of baskets was offered for sale through Skinner Auction House in Bolton, Mass. The Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum purchased this collection of baskets, then donated them to the museum.

The baskets originally were collected by an officer of the United States Revenue Cutter Service, Chief Engineer Denis F.X. Bowen, while on duty with the Bering Sea Patrol from 1904-1905. It is not known if the baskets passed on to his family at the time of his death in 1935 or if they were sold to another party.

Winter hours at the museum are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Admission is \$3; youth 18 and younger are free. Annual passes and membership in the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, allowing entry at no charge, are available.

Assistance is available for visitors with special needs. Please contact Visitor Services at 747-8981 before the visit.

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