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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

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MARCH ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH HAIDA SPRUCE ROOT BASKET

March is National Women's History Month, so in celebration of women, the Sheldon Jackson Museum chose an artifact made and used by women for the Artifact of the Month.

Women gathered the roots, prepared them, wove the baskets and were probably the principal users. Baskets were made traditionally for gathering, storing, and some even for cooking. In the mid to late 1800s, woven baskets for utilitarian purposes were gradually being replaced by containers made of other materials. However, the baskets had caught the eye of the newcomers to Alaska and weavers soon began producing the baskets for sale first to the Russian occupiers and later to visitors arriving on US steamships. Baskets became a "must buy" for early Alaska tourists.

The Sheldon Jackson's Artifact of the Month for March is an open cylindrical spruce root basket most likely meant for that tourist trade. This Haida made basket was purchased by former Curator Peter Corey in 1977 and later sold to the Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum who in turn donated it to the Museum. The information given to Corey by the Hydaburg resident he purchased it from said the basket was made in the Haida village of Masset, B.C. in the late 1800s and taken to Hydaburg shortly after.

The basket has three weft bands dyed dark brown/black on the lower portion of the basket. Above the bands there is a 2 1/8" wide band of "self-weave" or "skip stitch" done in the Haida pattern called "snails trail." Except for 2 small breaks in the walls, a small amount of adhesive with paper stuck to it, and some discoloration, the basket is in good condition considering its advanced age.

Winter hours at the museum are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. General admission is \$3. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge. This artifact-of-the-month can also be seen on our website at www.museums.state.ak.us.

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