

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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MAY ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH WRANGELL GARNET

The Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for May is a large section of metamorphic rock containing Wrangell garnets. The specimen is one of the earliest pieces donated to the Sheldon Jackson Museum.

William H. Millmore, one of the founders of the Alaska Society of Natural History and Ethnology - the founding organization of the Sheldon Jackson Museum - presented the Wrangell garnets to the fledgling organization. Nov. 14, 1887 minutes from the Alaska Society of Natural History and Ethnology meeting had the following notation: "Presented by William Millmore: one stone mortar and pestle; two pieces of rock interspersed with Alaskan garnets, found in the neighborhood of Wrangle {sic}; stone sinker and native halibut hook."

Millmore, originally from England, arrived in Sitka in 1884 as an officers' steward aboard the U.S. naval ship *Pinta*. When he was discharged, he elected to stay in Alaska like many sailors and ship personnel. For a time he ran a hotel in Sitka; tried his hand at mining; and then moved to Wrangell where he was a deputy Marshall and served in the Customs Service. More than likely it was during this time that he acquired the large pieces of rock containing the "Wrangell garnets." Eventually he returned to Sitka, married, and, for a time, settled down there. Along with being one of the founders of the organization, he became the first president of the Alaska Society of History and Ethnology, from 1887 until 1890.

Today the mining of the "Wrangell Garnets" near the mouth of the Stikine River is restricted in the deed granted in 1962 by the former owner of the land, Fred G. Hanford. Mr. Hanford made the garnet ledge available to the Southeastern Alaska Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. The land must be used for Scouting purposes and allow the children of Wrangell to take the garnets "in reasonable quantities." Children have free use of the garnet ledge but adults must purchase a permit to take the gemstones and turn over 10% of their take to the Wrangell Boy Scouts.

As ferry and cruise ship passengers know, this tradition of children gathering the gems and selling them to visitors is still alive and well. Large pieces such as this month's artifact are not in evidence, but instead the individual stones or small rocks with the imbedded garnets are offered for sale.

Winter hours at the museum are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Summer hours begin May 14 and are daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Winter admission is \$3 and summer 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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