

PRESS RELEASE

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM DISPLAYS PLAINS INDIAN ORNAMENT

Although the Sheldon Jackson Museum now gathers artifacts only from Alaska Native cultures, a few Native American objects from the Lower 48 were added to the collection until the 1970s. Each November the Museum exhibits one of these pieces to recognize the many and diverse Native cultures of North American during National Native American Heritage Awareness Month.

This November, the Museum spotlights an ornament made and worn by members of the Plains cultures of the western United States. The ornament came to the Museum in 1970 from the McLean family. John J. McLean of the U.S. Signal Corps was stationed in Sitka from 1881 to 1887. While in Sitka he purchased local artifacts for himself as well as for the Smithsonian Institution. McLean and his family were transferred several times and lived in Western states including California and Nebraska, where he most likely collected this ornament. He continued to gather artifacts and eventually passed his collection on to his children.

In 1970, those children, Philip (born in Sitka in 1887) and Alice, traveled to Sitka and donated 25 objects to the Museum. Among them were Tlingit grease bowls, a model canoe, a bentwood box, a few Eskimo pieces, paintings by their mother, Amelia, and a half-dozen Plains Indian artifacts. This ornament incorporates long strips of leather that are wrapped with porcupine quills and decorated with some beading. Small bundles of horse hair dyed red with metal cones dangling from one end attach at the bottom of the leather strips.

