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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: **September 28, 2012**

Artifact of the Month: Alutiiq Mask

SITKA – An Alutiiq mask, on loan from the Alaska State Museum in Juneau, is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for October/ November. The mask was collected from a cave near the village of Old Savonoski on the Alaska Peninsula in 1926 and presented to the museum by a local schoolteacher.

The wooden mask is characterized by an elongated forehead, small eye holes, and a bulbous nose. The mask measures 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ " height x 9" width x 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " depth. Masks were sometimes disposed of after ceremonial use. In this case, the mask may have been hidden from Russian Orthodox missionaries who disapproved of traditional practices.

The Alutiiq people are Native to the Alaska Peninsula, Kodiak island, and Prince William Sound. Their art includes some of the most elaborate and beautiful work produced in the region, and includes sculpture in wood and ivory, animal and bird skin garments, and fine basketry. The production of this work was interrupted by the Russian occupation of Alaska beginning in the 18th century, and most surviving examples of the art reside in European museums. Today, knowledge of the art is being repatriated to the Alutiiq, and fine masks are once again being made and used in ceremonial dances.

In June 1912, the eruption of Novarupta (also known as Mount Katmai) occurred 21 miles from the village of Old Savonoski. Darkness and ash covered 44 square miles causing the villagers to abandon the village and evacuate in kayaks. Many of the villagers moved 93 miles downriver, while others were relocated to the present village of Perryville. Four years later, in 1916, a National Geographic expedition led by Robert Griggs surveyed the aftermath of the Katmai eruption and named this area, "The Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes." Today this region is known as Katmai National Park and Preserve.

A panel discussion, entitled "Remembering Katmai," is a part of the Museums Alaska / Alaska Historical Society conference, Thurs., Oct. 11th from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Historic and current photos, scientific studies, and historic documents will be featured. Conference registration is required.

The mask can be seen at the Sheldon Jackson Museum Oct. 10 – Nov. 30. Winter hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. with \$3 admission. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge. For more information, contact the museum at 747-8981.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Phone (907) 747-8981 Fax (907) 465-3004

www.museums.state.ak.us

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