

Bulletin

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, JUNEAU • SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM, SITKA

ALASKA
STATE
MUSEUMS

Alaska State Museums Hires Curator of Museum Services

Scott Carrlee, formerly the Alaska State Museums' Conservator, has been named the museums' Curator of Museum Services.

Carrlee studied conservation at the State University of New York College at Buffalo where he earned an M.A. and a Certificate of Advanced Study in Conservation in 1992. His previous positions in conservation include Objects Conservator at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., Senior Field Conservator at a Turkish archaeological excavation for five seasons, and Assistant Conservator at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh.

"Statewide services are an important function of our museum services program, and I enjoy helping people," Carrlee said. "I believe in what we're doing for the state by helping smaller museums become better museums."

Some of the services that Carrlee will perform as part of the museums' outreach program include:

- Producing a quarterly newsletter, the *Bulletin* – an information resource for Alaska museums.
- Overseeing the Grant-In-Aid program in which grants are awarded to Alaska museums and museum-related organizations.
- Providing technical information on all areas of museum operations.
- Maintaining the museums' lending library, which contains books and videotapes on museum practices.
- Managing a listserv for use by Alaska's museum professionals. This electronic bulletin board posts messages and inquiries for museum people throughout the state.
- Conducting occasional workshops in various aspects of museum practices.



Scott Carrlee prepares a Polaroid composite photograph by Mark Daughetee for exhibition. The photograph is part of the Alaska State Museum traveling exhibition *The Best of Alaska Positive: 35 Years of Award Winning Photographs*.

For Sale! Museums, Markets and the Ethics of Collecting

The Museums Alaska and Alaska Historical Society Joint Conference will be held in Juneau October 4-7. Hands-on workshops and conference sessions are planned as well as tours and events. The conference will provide a variety of perspectives on

cultural heritage issues to a broad audience, from archaeologists to collectors, and museum curators to the general public. The problem of illegal and unethical destruction of the past continues - and in some areas of the world has worsened. Discussion on

U.S. and international laws, statements of professional ethics, and a listing of resources and organizations will be helpful in developing one's own stance on stewardship of the past. See you all there. www.museums.state.ak.us/museumsalaska/musak.htm

Ask ASM

With this issue of the ASM Bulletin we are starting a new column called “Ask ASM.” It will provide a place to share with a wider audience many of the great questions that get asked of the staff at the ASM and the museum staff’s responses. The ultimate goal is to have these exchanges and many more like them in a FAQ database on the ASM website, providing ready access to the resource.

Oil on hands

Question: *Why should I wear gloves when handling artifacts at the museum?*

ASM: This is a good question. Old-timers sometimes take it for granted that wearing gloves is good museum practice, while others new to the field sometimes need to be convinced. Where you most often see damage is to metal objects. The acids and oils will etch the surface and can only be removed by aggressive polishing. Ivory and bone are also susceptible to staining from hand oils, as are paper-based art, such as prints, drawings and photographs.

Another aspect of wearing gloves that some may not be aware of is that gloves can protect you from the object. Some objects have been treated with pesticides. Although this is no longer how we handle insect

infestations, it was once common practice to apply pesticides to museum objects. Many of these treatments have left residues that are still a danger to the people who handle them. Gloves provide a barrier that can protect you from coming into contact with the residue.

The most important aspect to consider is that as a museum we have agreed to hold the objects in trust with as little change as possible, in perpetuity. Handling objects without gloves will rarely show an immediate change. But over time and through repeated handling, change will occur.

Fading

Question: *Is there anything that can be done about a basket that has been sitting in a sunny window and is now faded?*

ASM: I am afraid there is nothing that can be done about a faded basket. Any attempt to re-dye it or paint it will just make a mess of things. That is why it is best to always be very careful about displaying baskets (or any light-sensitive artifacts) with too much light, especially sunlight. Once the damage is done, it is permanent.

Skin-covered objects

Question: *I have a skin-covered drum. A friend told me I should put baby oil*

on it to keep it from drying out. Will that work?

ASM: I don’t recommend putting baby oil (or any kind of oil for that matter) on an artifact.

Traditionally, skin-covered artifacts such as drums were made to be used. They had a life cycle that may have included traditional treatments that kept them in good functioning order until a replacement was needed.

Museum objects are different. Once something (like a drum) is accessioned into the museum collection it no longer is (or can be) exactly what it was before. It is more of a representation of that thing. We are trying to preserve the object and the information it contains in perpetuity. This does not usually include invasive treatments that change the object over time or replacing parts. Oils will oxidize over time and cause the skin to darken. This may even weaken the skin and cause it to split. In the long run the only thing that helps is to get it into a stable environment. At ASM we have had some success in stabilizing drums on display by putting cotton batting in the back. The cotton absorbs and gives off moisture at a faster rate than the skin and can protect it from rapid environmental changes.

A Bad Idea

According to Steve Henrikson, Curator of Collections, a 1926 letter sent by the donor to Gov. Parks regarding the gas tank from the Norge states:

“This would be a great attraction in the Alaska Museum, I believe, if you will follow my suggestion as follows: Have it set or hung so as to turn, have a neat card posted telling what it is and inviting all tourists to write their names in lead pencil on the tank. Each year when it becomes covered with

names they could be washed off and the same thing started over again.”

The governor replied “I will suggest to the Curator that he adopt the plan outlined in your letter as I believe it is most unique and will appeal to the tourists who annually visit the museum.”

Fuel Tank from the Air Ship Norge in the collection of the Alaska State Museum. The Norge crossed the North Pole with famed explorer Roald Amundson on board. The Norge landed in Teller, Alaska on May 12, 1926. ASM 92-21-31



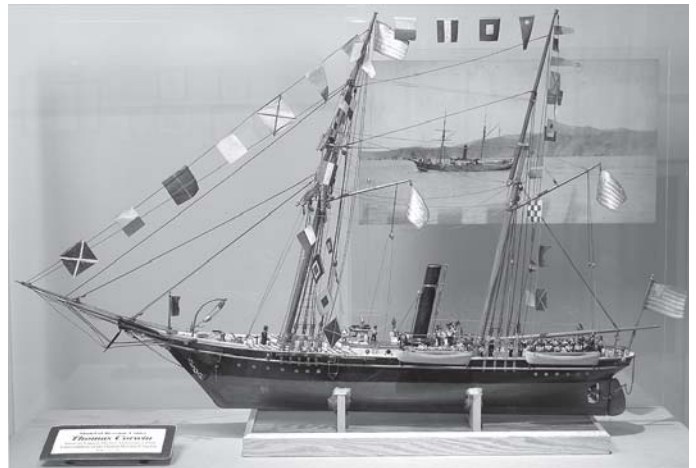
FY2006 Federal Budget

Institute for Museum and Library Services

Museum Programs	\$(thousands)
Museums for America	17,152
Museum Assessment Program	442
Museum Professionals for the 21st Century	982
Conservation Project Support	2,772
Conservation Assessment Program	807
Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services	911
Museum National Leadership Grants	7,920
Museum Grants for African American History and Culture ¹	842
Administration	4,719
Total, Museum	36,547

¹Museum Grants for African American History and Culture was authorized by PL 108-184 in December 2003.

Note: In FY 2005 the IMLS had almost 40 million dollars in congressional earmarks attached to its budget. This fiscal year the figure is zero



A century after it patrolled Alaska waters, the Revenue Cutter Thomas Corwin returns to Juneau. This time it is a detailed scale model. The model of the Thomas Corwin, a U.S. Revenue cutter active in Alaska between 1877 and 1898, is on loan from the Oregon Historical Society.

The ship model was made by Captain Thomas Mountain around 1900. Mountain survived the sinking of the U.S. Navy Sloop of War *Peacock* at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1841 and later served in the Mexican and Indian Wars. He presented the model to the Oregon Historical Society in 1901.

Museum Grant Awards Announced

Nineteen Alaska museums and a statewide museum association were recently awarded grants totaling \$101,405 by the Alaska State Museum. The Grants-in-Aid are to provide improved care for museum collections across the state and upgrade Alaska's museum operations and programs. There are more than 80 museum facilities in Alaska. Grant awards ranged from \$1,000 to \$10,000.

Institutions receiving grants are:

- Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak. Gallery lighting consultant.	\$2,950
- Aviation Heritage Museum, Anchorage. Storage cabinets.	\$10,000
- Alaska Museum of Natural History, Anchorage. Inventory and restore collection.	\$7,103
- Carrie McLain Museum, Nome. Projection screen.	\$1,800
- Clausen Memorial Museum, Petersburg. Display panels for special exhibits.	\$1,961
- Fairbanks Community Museum. Support for director position.	\$2,000
- Ilanka Cultural Center, Cordova. Collection management system and training.	\$6,563
- Hammer Museum, Haines. Museum labeling project.	\$2,000
- Kenai Visitors & Cultural Center. Captain Cook exhibition.	\$7,430
- Kenaitze Indian Tribe, Kenai. K'Beq' archaeology lab youth education.	\$1,000
- Kodiak Historical Society. New labels and interpretation project.	\$5,480
- Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry, Wasilla. New computer for business office.	\$1,914
- Museum of the Aleutians, Unalaska. Display case for kamleikas.	\$9,400
- Museums Alaska. Newsletter, Conference scholarships and support.	\$9,980
- Palmer Museum of History and Art. Upgrade collection management and storage.	\$7,103
- Pioneer Memorial Park Museum, Fairbanks. Translate "Big Stampede" into Japanese.	\$2,000
- Pratt Museum, Homer. Strategic planning and development officer for one year.	\$10,000
- Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Seward. Digitize photos.	\$3,000
- Sheldon Museum, Haines. Hire consultant to develop interpretive plan.	\$9,721

Grants-in-Aid are awarded annually, with a June 1st application deadline.

Alaska Museum Success Stories

The Yupiit Piciryarait Museum in Bethel is being featured in this issue of the *Bulletin* because of its ongoing efforts to improve the behind-the-scenes care of collections. The long road to this success started with a visit from the Alaska State Museum Conservator Scott Carrlee in December of 2003. During that visit the director, Joan Hamilton, said she needed help getting the collections storage room in order. More specifically she said, "I don't need to know how to do it, I need someone to come in and do it."

Joan, like many directors of small museums, wears many hats at her museum including store manager. She is a one-woman show at the museum and her position is only part-time. Needless to say, that doesn't leave a lot of time for collections care. That is where the Alaska State Museum, through its Statewide Services Program, stepped in to help. The following summer, Scott was able to find a graduate student in conservation, Dana Senge, who was interested in working with Alaskan Native collections and was adventurous enough to spend a summer in Western Alaska.

Dana brought the much-needed know-how in collections care and a cheerful can-do attitude. She rolled up her sleeves and dove right in. In the short space of a summer she was able to transform the collections storeroom into a safe, organized collections area, performing remedial conservation treatments along the way. The next step was for Joan to get some museum-quality storage cabinets for



Joan Hamilton, Director of the Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center and Museum, in Bethel, proudly shows off her new storage cabinets and her well-cared-for artifacts.

the museum's collections. But how can one order such expensive items on a tight budget? Joan wrote a successful Grant-in-Aid grant to purchase two Delta Design cabinets and have them shipped to Bethel. Now these cabinets house some of the most valued artifacts in the museum. Joan said "Before I would never show visitors the storage room; now it is the first place I take them to."

ALASKA STATE MUSEUMS **Bulletin**

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