



Alaska State Museums Bulletin 83

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Editor's note: Due to the demands of the SLAM project, the ASM Bulletin will go on hiatus for the summer months. Postings will resume in September.

Into the Archives

By Jackie Fernandez, Curator of Collections, Sheldon Jackson Museum



Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

During the past few weeks in between visits with researchers, grant application writing and submissions, collections-processing, artifact loan packing and paperwork, and art purchasing related work, I set out to read the entire archive of the Alaskan Society of Natural History & Ethnology meeting minutes. I had long wanted to review these notes. Spanning the time frame between October 24, 1887 and April 24, 1905 and detailing membership rolls, financials, facilities and physical plant issues, acquisitions, and important organizational milestones, they are in so many ways at the core of the Sheldon Jackson Museum’s institutional memory. The exercise revealed a variety of differences and similarities between the present day Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum and the Alaskan Society of Natural History and Ethnology and the findings were at times, amusing.



The first meeting of the Alaskan Society for Natural History and Ethnology, the precursor to the Sheldon Jackson Museum, took place on October 24th, 1897. The periodical, *The Alaskan*, published an advertisement for the meeting on October 22, 1887 that read as follows:

“Museum of Natural History and Ethnology – All interested in the formation of a society for securing a Museum of Natural History in connection with the Training School are requested to meet at Dr. Jackson’s office in Austin Hall, on Monday evening next, at 8 o’clock.”



Thus, on October 24th, the Alaskan Society of Natural History and Ethnology was officially formed, elected Professor William A. Kelly Chairman and Miss Ida M. Rodgers Secretary, and unanimously approved the organization's constitution, which stated, "1. The name of this society is the "Museum of Alaskan Natural History and Ethnology," and the Society's "purpose is to collect and preserve in connection with the Sitka Industrial Training School, specimens illustrative of the natural history and ethnology of Alaska and publications relating thereto.", etc.

The constitution signatories included Maurice E. Kenealy, Susan S. Winans, Anna R. Kelsey, Gertrude B. Harding, Ida M. Rodgers, Rhoda A. Lee, Virginia M. Pakle, Mrs. Rose M. Baker, William Millmore, F.E. Frobese, A.E. Austin, Sheldon Jackson, D.D., and William A. Kelly. At that same meeting, corresponding members, at Dr. Sheldon Jackson's motion, were elected including, U.S. Senator C.B. Farwell, D.C. Gillman, the President of Johns Hopkins University, Professor Wright of Oberlin College, Professor W.H. Libbey of Princeton University, Professor W.H. Dall of Washington, and several others residing in distant New York, N.Y., Evanston, Illinois, Portland, Oregon, San Francisco, California, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. While the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum have some generous supporters who live in other parts of the United States and world, these members do not generally submit letters or participate in organizational affairs in the same way that these 19th century individuals did.

The Society was interested in ethnological material and Alaska Native culture like the present-day Friends, but as indicated by its name, had a tremendous interest in natural history and flora and fauna – an interest relatively absent in the modern Friends. Highlighting this interest was the Society's division into committees including Taxidermy; Insects; Shells, Rocks and Fossils; Botany; Mineralogy; Capture of Fishes and Angling; Ornithology; Skeletons, Bones, and Horns. Today's Friends have committees that focus on nuts and bolts and operational issues such as marketing, grants, and a newsletter, but nothing comparable in terms of subject matter focus.

The greatest evidence of the Society's focus on natural history lies in the titles of papers and articles read aloud by membership during the meetings. Frequently, members gathered and passed an hour or more reading papers they themselves had written or publications of interest.

Titles included, but were not limited to, “Alaskan Bald Eagles”; “Trees of Alaska”; “Fresh and Salt Water Clams”; “Food of the Sea Urchin”; “Liquefied Hydrogen”; and “Coal in Alaska.”

The Society strove to have an intellectual element with Vice President William Kelly initiating a motion for all members to give “a talk on something in the collection” – an artifact or a collection related topic at each and every meeting (see the October 1890 meeting minutes). While this was an admirable goal, and while membership did discuss Alaska-related themes and peoples of Alaska, I was surprised by the sometimes seemingly irrelevant subjects members focused on. Almost nothing, geographically or culturally, seemed out of bounds for discussion and talks included “An Article on the Country and People of Nicaragua”, “Cormorant Fishing in Japan”, “The Boxer Rebellion”, “The Aztecs and other Ancient Inhabitants of America”, “Tropical Africa”, and “Italian Cities.” While curiosity is still alive and well among present-day Friends and membership, unfortunately, as is the case with most boards of directors, no papers or scholarly articles are given during regular board meetings, the exception being during the annual Friends’ meeting when a guest lecturer is usually invited to Sitka to speak. Still, it is refreshing to know that there is much greater focus on the museum’s mission and on the collecting, studying, interpreting, and celebrating of Alaska Native fine art and material culture among the contemporary supporters of the museum.

Among the most amusing findings I had was that the Society meetings frequently included demonstrations; not artist demonstrations - taxidermy demonstrations. The first official curator of the Society, Frederic E. Frobese had a profound love of taxidermy and he was notable for giving lengthy talks on certain animals or birds during meetings only to arrive at the next gathering with a gift for the Society – a stuffed version of whatever he had been expounding upon during the previous month’s assembly. Reading the minutes, it is almost as if you can prepare yourself for Frobese’s pending gift be it a stuffed crow or sea snake, Jake snipe, Bullfinch, Dipper bird, Hen hawk, or Mud gull. While every museum has members who can at times be a tad overly enthusiastic about a specific kind of object and may be prone to donating a significant amount of material reflecting their own interest in a particular subject, I am, no offense to Frobese, grateful the Friends have not, during my tenure, ever had to cope with an excitable, amateur taxidermist and a consequential abundance of stuffed king fishers, albatross, porpoise, flying fish, blue jays or other specimen.



Perhaps the most fun part of reading the Society Minutes was reading a reference to a specific object given to the Society and being able to envision the specific object in my head on its shelf in collections storage or in its case in the gallery. The first grouping of artifacts presented to the museum was a “very choice collection of black slate carvings from Queen Charlotte’s Island.” The majority of these twenty-two argillite carvings are on exhibit along the right hand side wall of the gallery.



I read about a cane with a bone hand carved on the handle, the staff made of cedar, said to “be the work done by a Hydah Alaskan” which I identified as I.B.36, a cane with an elaborately carved finial in the shape of a hand. The piece, according to Northwest Coast scholar and carver,

Steve Brown, may have been done by Charles Edenshaw. I saw reference to a grappling iron or old Russian anchor, which may have been V.A.90, a piece I recently packed in preparation for shipment to headquarters in Juneau.



There was mention of a point of a bomb used in whaling at Killisnoo presented by John M. Vanderbilt, V.C.2, which I also recently packed for transport.



Also described was an elaborately carved cane made of bone, very visible in my mind upon reading the minutes.

Although some of the topics discussed during Society meetings were a bit too off course and although some of the committees and incoming acquisitions today strike us as odd, there were some Society practices and notions that the contemporary Friends might do well to embrace. William Kelly's proposal that members devote themselves to research and writing about one particular artifact or subset of the collection and present upon it at regular board meetings, for example, is a refreshing idea and one that would better connect supporters of the museum with its holdings and encourage scholarship and inquiry too often lost in the shuffle of papers and day to day logistics that board meetings so often entail.

The Society in the late 19th century had great interest in expanding the museum's collection. While today's Friends raise funds to assist the museum in making acquisitions or in some cases, purchase auction house items based on the curator's recommendation, there was an even stronger notion in the days of Sheldon Jackson that the Society should support "someone to go to Indian villages rarely visited...where fine specimens could be obtained..." What a wonderful opportunity it would be for the museum to have financial and logistical support to send a Friends' designee or museum staff person to some of the more remote areas of Alaska to learn more about what artwork is available and then, if desired, purchase it. There are probably many talented artists whose work might be appropriate for the museum's collection but whom are currently unknown to the Friends and museum staff.

When I first took up this minutes reading exercise, I suspected a close reading would reveal a plethora of differences in the nature and function of the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum and the Alaskan Society of Natural History and Ethnology, and that proved to be true, but I was also surprised, at times, how in some ways, so little had changed between the two entities that support the mission of the Museum. Both the Alaska Society of Natural History and Ethnology and the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum still have some of the same preoccupations. Both groups, for example, discuss the importance of marketing the museum and having adequate pamphlets and photographs of the collections and/or interior in circulation and strategically placed throughout town and near arriving cruise ships so as to draw the maximum number of visitors. The very first week I picked up a copy of the minutes to read, we held a marketing meeting focused on reworking the current Sheldon Jackson Museum brochure. Both entities discuss income, membership dues, revenue streams, and the cost of admission. Both groups also occasionally have public discussion about events happening locally in town and partner with other groups. It seems in some ways, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Ask ASM

Question: I was hoping you might have some insight with asbestos removal and collection items. We have a copper wall mounted sterilizer that has a lining of asbestos on the back of the

unit. We would like to see about getting the asbestos removed or possibly sealed? Do you have any suggestions or sources of conservators that do this type of work?



ASM: This type of asbestos looks like long fibers and might be the mineral called serpentine asbestos. It is the least dangerous because of the long fibers. But that might be like saying the rattlesnake is the least dangerous of the vipers. Anyway, the best thing to do is get it tested so you know for sure what it is. The tests are not expensive and if there is no one where you are that does it, you can have it done down south. In the mean time you should label it as a PACM (presumed asbestos containing material) with a warning label not to handle it. After you have determined exactly what it is, then it will be easier to decide what to do with it. Asbestos becomes a health hazard when you disturb it and it becomes airborne so that you can breathe it or it gets on something and you ingest it. It might be possible to seal whole artifact in a Plexi cube so that it won't be disturbed. If you can't seal it up in some fashion then you might have to explore having it mitigated. But that may end up ruining the artifact for any potential future display.

Shaking the Money Tree

NEH

Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions

Deadline: May 5, 2015

Preservation Assistance Grants help small and mid-sized institutions—such as libraries, museums, historical societies, archival repositories, cultural organizations, town and county records offices, and colleges and universities—improve their ability to preserve and care for their significant humanities collections. These may include special collections of books and journals, archives and manuscripts, prints and photographs, moving images, sound recordings, architectural and cartographic records, decorative and fine art objects, textiles, archaeological and ethnographic artifacts, furniture, historical objects, and digital materials.

Website: <http://www.neh.gov/grants/preservation/preservation-assistance-grants-smaller-institutions>

Free recorded webinar <https://vimeo.com/120836685>

State of Alaska

Grant in Aid

Deadline: June 1, 2015

The Alaska State Museum awards grants to Alaska museums and museum-related organizations, such as historical societies or support groups, for projects that improve the quality of museum services and operations within the state. The grants are awarded on a competitive basis once a year. For more information visit the website <http://museums.alaska.gov/grants.html>

The Friends of the Alaska State Libraries, Archives & Museum have announced the availability of the Ethel Montgomery Scholarship application. Applicants for the \$2,000 scholarship must be enrolled in an Alaskan federally-recognized tribe and pursuing an undergraduate or graduate degree in museum studies.

Friends of the Alaska State Libraries, Archives & Museum

Ethel Montgomery Scholarship

Applications must be completed and mailed by August 31.

The Friends of the Alaska State Libraries, Archives & Museum have announced the availability of the Ethel Montgomery Scholarship application. Applicants for the \$2,000 scholarship must be

enrolled in an Alaskan federally-recognized tribe and pursuing an undergraduate or graduate degree in museum studies.

The Ethel Montgomery Scholarship Fund was established in the 1990s to assist university-level Alaska Native students majoring in museum studies. Ethel Montgomery was one of the first docents at the Alaska State Museum. She was adopted into the Kaagwaantann Wolf Clan and became a very active member of the Alaska Native Sisterhood. One of her dreams was to help young Alaska Natives become curators and directors of museums that celebrate their cultures. The combination of her love for museums and for the Native people, contributed to her establishment of this scholarship.

Applications may be obtained by emailing Jackie Schoppert, Chair, Ethel Montgomery Scholarship Committee at kaageesaak@aol.com (907-321-5652) or Marjorie Menzi, marjoriemenzi@msn.com (907-723-9156).

Spotlight on Grant in Aid

Top Ten Tips for a GIA Application (except for the first one they could apply to any museum grant)

1. **Mini-Grants and Internship Grants.** If you are applying for one of these you must contact the Curator of Museum Services to okay your project. This is the tradeoff for having a shorter application for these grants
2. **Your narrative and your budget should agree.** Every expense in your budget should be mentioned in the narrative. Every expense in your narrative should be mentioned in your budget.
3. **Write Clearly.** Your project plan should make sense to someone upon first reading, even if they are not a museum person.
4. **Do not add extraneous materials.** Any attachments should be directly related to something in your narrative. Also, don't make the reviewer plow through a lot of material looking for the relevant section you mention in your narrative.
5. **Proof read, proof read, then have someone else proofread.** Be especially careful when cutting and pasting to make sure that the flow of the text still makes sense. Make sure that when you "borrow" from a previous grant you make the appropriate changes to all the titles and labels.
6. **The narrative should answer questions not raise them.** Try not to create questions in the reviewer's mind or leave things in doubt. You obviously can't anticipate confusion on the part of the reviewer but major aspects of the grant should be clear with no unanswered questions.

7. **Contractors or Temporary hires.** If your grant is for a project that will use a contractor or a temporary hire, you need a letter of commitment from the contractor or a position description for the hire.
8. **Collections.** If your project involves collections, describe those collections well, give numbers and types and examples. If your project includes some aspect of processing collections, you need to put it in some sort of time frame so the reviewer can determine if it is feasible in the time allotted (i.e. 15 minutes per object/photo and there are 1000 objects/photos).
9. **Professional Assessments.** The best way to get a grant is to have an outside professional evaluate your institution and work from their recommendations or priority list.
10. **A human being will read your grant!** They are also reading many grants, not just yours. Keep your narrative as short as possible without leaving anything out. Use bullet items or other ways to relieve that “block of text” look that can tire a reader out. Make your points early and give the reviewer something to fall in love with.

Alaska Museums in the News

We will miss you Rie!

<http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/alaska-watercolor-artist-rie-munoz-dies-at-93/>

Pioneer Air Museum helps keep Aviation History Alive

http://www.newsminer.com/news/kris_capps/pioneer-air-museum-helps-keep-aviation-history-alive/article_b8b998aa-e7f9-11e4-a41c-7bf303ca6999.html

Anchorage Museum Hack

http://news.museumhack.com/post/115749175643/museum-hack-interviews-the-anchorage-museum-about?utm_source=Museum+Professionals+via+Twitter&utm_campaign=374b7f2952-2015_03_26_Polar_Lab3_26_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_08af5cfaa9-374b7f2952-124893697

Professional Development/Training Opportunities

Connecting to Collections

After Disasters: Salvage and Recovery in Small to Mid-Sized Museums and Libraries

May 1, 2015, 2:00 – 3:30, EDT, with Susan Duhl.

Understanding the components of disaster response is key in successful recovery of collections of any type, size, and budget. This webinar will show professionals and volunteers the steps needed to effectively save collections, including:

- + What happens to collections after fires, floods, mechanical failures, and other events
- + Recovery logistics, team building, and securing supplies
- + Safety and health practices
- + Working with first responders, engineers, contractors and conservators, and local resources
- + Collections triage, handling practices, drying options, soot and mud cleaning techniques, and mold control
- + Long-term recovery: conservation treatment and funding

<http://www.connectingtocollections.org/after-disasters/>

George Washington University

The George Washington University's Distance Education Graduate Certificate Program in Museum Collections Management and Care will complete an **UPDATE** and **REVISION** this fall. New topics added to the program include digitization, sustainability, and collections care in archives.

The graduate certificate consists of 4 classes in legal and ethical issues, collections management, and preventive conservation. The certificate is earned completely online and there is never a time that you are required to login for a class so you work when it suits you!

The classes are taught by faculty with extensive experience at the Smithsonian Institution, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Department of State. There are also guest lectures from leaders in the field on topics such as fire protection and integrated pest management.

We are accepting applications for the incoming fall class until **August 1, 2015**. Admission is on a rolling basis.

For more information, please contact Mary Coughlin at musede@gwu.edu

or visit our website: <http://ccas.gwu.edu/museum>

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Professional Time Wasting on the Web

And the good news is ... we are in the story telling business and business is booming

http://blog.hubspot.com/opinion/why-storytelling-will-be-the-biggest-business-skill-of-the-next-5-years?utm_source=Museum+Professionals+via+Twitter&utm_campaign=2d68134b8e-2015_04_14_14_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_08af5cfaa9-2d68134b8e-129099657

See three new short videos about programs at the Alaska office of the Arctic Studies Center online at:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL33278BF298794573>

Rest for the King, No Rest for Native Americans

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/american-anthropological-association/rest-for-the-king-no-rest-for-native-americans_b_6946396.html?utm_hp_ref=tw

Smithsonian goes high tech

<http://engagingplaces.net/2015/03/26/video-smithsonians-museum-goes-high-tech/>