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SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM OCTOBER ARTIFACTS OF THE MONTH



SITKA – The October Artifacts of the Month are three pairs of snow goggles and a visor (SJ.II .E 81, SJ.II .Y.49, SJ.II.P.63 and SJ.II.Y.54). All four pieces of eyewear were collected by Sheldon Jackson between 1890 and 1891, are made of driftwood, and illustrate ingenuity, craftsmanship, and the great variety of designs.

Snow goggles protect the eyes from harmful rays of the sun and were especially important to people of the Alaskan and Canadian Arctic in the late winter and spring when the amount of sunshine increased. That time of year potent ultraviolet rays reflect on the snow and ice resulting in greater potential for burned retinas

and snow blindness, a painful, debilitating condition. Snow goggles' narrow slits reduce the amount of glare that can reach the wearer's eyes yet provide a great range of vision.

Snow goggles have traditionally been made in a variety of styles and usually differ according to locality of origin. The greatest differentiation among the goggles lied in the shape of the framework, the shape and size of the eyeholes, inclusion or exclusion of a visor, and shape of the inner notch or groove for the nose. Some goggles were more concave or convex on the outside and some more or less crescentric in form on the inside. Some were more spectacle-like with rounded components while others were more visor like in shape or were made with visor-like projections extending out beyond above and beyond the eyeholes. Some goggles had slits instead or rounded holes and some had common window glass inserted while others were open. The interior of the goggles also differed in the depth of the notch or groove inside them for the nose. Goggles are often unornamented and plain, but are sometimes painted black or red, like two of the pairs featured among the October Artifacts of the month. A cord made of fabric or sinew and sometimes with or without beads would extend from one side of the goggles to the other for securing across the back of the head.

These snow goggles and visor may be seen at the Sheldon Jackson Museum until October 31st. The museum's winter hours are 10am to 4pm Tuesday through Saturday. General admission is \$3 and free for those 18 and under and Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum or Friends of the Alaska State Museum.

In his monograph, *The Eskimo Among Bering Strait*, Edward William Nelson describes variations in snow goggles he collected during the late 19th century in the lower Yukon, Norton Sound, Norton Bay, Cape Darby, Kushunuk, Point Hope, Port Clarence, Dimoede Islands, and St. Lawrence Islands.