

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM MAY ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH



The Sheldon Jackson Museum's May Artifact of the Month is a Yup'ik wooden dish or *agaayaat* (SH.II.B.16.) The dish is oblong and cut from a single piece of wood. It has a flaring rim decorated with shells cut in a diamond-like shape. According to a handwritten inscription on the underside, it was collected by Sheldon Jackson from the Nushagak River region. The inside of the dish is saturated with oil, likely seal oil.

Men traditionally made bowls for eating, cooking, and storing food in the community house or *qasgiq* among other men. The wood used was typically spruce. Bowls were either made of once piece, like the May Artifact of the Month, or were made of two pieces with a removable bottom. The latter style was used by women except during ceremonies, when it was believed the deceased' spirits were present and that dishes with seams might break, preventing them from receiving their share of food. Although the exterior and interior of this bowl's base is plain, many had family designs in red ochre and black.

Wooden bowls were traditionally cherished by the Yupiit. Each member of a Yup'ik family would own his or her own bowl and be responsible for safeguarding and maintaining it. According to Catherine Moore in *Yup'ik Elders at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin: Fieldwork Turned on Its Head*, she and her family members always cleaned their bowls when they were done eating by licking all the food inside off its surface or using their index finger to remove any remnants of food. (Because bowls were only occasionally washed with water, the designs on the interior were often maintained. Once cleaned, the bowls were stored face down on a shelf. A wife treated her husband's bowl with great respect and would bring his bowl of food to the *qasgiq* or community house where he would eat with other men and older boys. The wife would wait until he was finished eating before bringing his bowl home and storing it in a separate section of the home. She never picked up her husband's bowl with palms facing down, because "it was said that the future catch of the man was being covered" and as a result he would lose his ability to bring home game.

The May Artifact of the Month will be exhibited until May 31st and can be seen Tuesday through Saturday until May 8th and daily beginning May 9th. Until May 8th, the museum is closed Sundays, Mondays and holidays. General admission is \$3 and free for those 18 and under or members of either the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum or Friends of the Alaska State Museum. Beginning May 9th, the museum is open daily. General admission is \$5 and free for those 18 and under or members of either the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum or Friends of the Alaska State Museum.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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