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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AUGUST ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH STONE PENDANT

The August Artifact of the Month at the Sheldon Jackson Museum is a recently donated stone pendant (sometimes referred to as an amulet or charm). The late Gordon Greenbank had mentioned to family and friends that he would like his collection of various objects to go to the museum in Sitka following his death. His nephew, Lance Greenback from Oregon donated the unique pendant and a stone adze blade this spring.

There are a number of amulets and pendants in the museum's collections that are carved into an animal or bird shape but none have this simple circular motif. According to George T. Emmons, a "neck stone" (té seit) was worn by both sexes suspended around the neck and used to scratch the head or body. It was considered harmful to use the fingernails for scratching. Emmons reported that this use was still in practice by some into the 1880s. However, according to author Hilary Stewart, these pendants may have been purely decorative and attached to a garment, headdress or served another function. Anthropologist Frederica de Laguna was told by her Tlingit sources in Yakutat that as well as being used as body scratchers, stone amulets might be "used for their lips ... and not talk too much"- to prevent gossip. Amulets were also used for protection and good luck. De Laguna's Yakutat source described an amulet worn by a woman from the interior: "She had a stone with a hole through it, hung around her neck and when she itched she rubbed herself with it."

The amulet can be seen in the museum gallery August 1 through August 31. Summer hours at the Sheldon Jackson Museum are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Summer admission is \$4. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge. The basket can also be viewed online at http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/artifact_of_month.html.

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