

Linda S. Thibodeau

Director

Division of Libraries, Archives,
& Museums

lam.alaska.gov

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Robert C. Banghart

Chief Curator

Alaska State Museums

395 Whittier St.

Juneau, Alaska 99801-1718

907.465.2901

Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: **November 25, 2011**

December Artifact of the Month: Mask from Anvik

The December Artifact of the month is a mask (II.F.1) from the Deg Xinag Athabascan village of Anvik collected by Sheldon Jackson in 1893. The face of the mask is painted white with red circular cheeks, black painted hair and eyebrows, black spectacles around the eyes, and black tattoo lines running down the chin. Three circular willow hoops are attached to the face with ten inset seagull feathers. On the back of the mask strands of human hair are tied to a leather chord used to secure the mask to the wearer's head. It is similar in style to the 'Berry Woman' and 'Dog Salmon Woman' masks collected by Frederica De Laguna from Anvik in 1936.



Each December the village of Anvik hosted multi-day masked dance festivals. These events were held in a kashim (communal house). Margaret C. Graves, a school teacher working in Anvik in 1913, recorded her impression of a masked dance. "The walls of the Kashime are ebony from smoke; and soon, when the men were all smoking and breathing, the air became dense. It was 42 degrees below, outside. We had come in with a fringe of frost on our eyebrows and lashes into a climate... On the floor sat the women in fur parkas, with the soles of their boots turned up. On a shelf above them sat the men smoking, their knees drawn up to their chins or else cross-legged. On the floor in the centre were lanterns like footlights; behind these stood the drummers and the singers."

Masks were typically made in the early winter. Before being performed in ceremonies, shamans blew on the masks to give them power and bring them to life. After a mask was performed, it remained within the kashim for at least a year and was danced by one dancer. When not in use, Athabascan masks were stored facing the doorway.

Very few Athabascan masks exist in museum collections. Along with masks with human features, some Athabascan masks have animal characteristics to represent moose, birds, mosquitoes and other creatures.

The Anvik mask can be seen at the Sheldon Jackson Museum December 1st through December 30th. An image of the mask can also be viewed on the press release on our website at http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/artifact_of_month.html.

Winter hours are from 10:00am to 4:00pm Tuesday through Saturday. Discounted winter admission is \$3. No admission is charged for those 18 and under. The Sheldon Jackson Museum is located at 104 College Drive.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Phone (907) 747-8981 Fax (907) 465-3004

www.museums.state.ak.us

[return to top](#)

[SJ Artifacts-of-the-Month](#) | [press releases](#) | [SJ home](#) | [Alaska State Museums](#)