

ALASKA STATE MUSEUMS

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, JUNEAU ❖ SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM, SITKA

Sheldon Jackson Museum

104 College Drive, Sitka, AK 99835
Phone (907)747-8981 Fax (907)747-3004

FISH SKIN PARKA

JANUARY ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

FOR MORE INFORMATION

SCOTT MCADAMS, 747-8981

A child's parka made from fish skin is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for January.

This small parka was collected by the Rev. Sheldon Jackson at the village of Andreofsky (sic) sometime in the 1890s. Unlike many of the pieces collected by Jackson, the parka does not have the year in which he collected it written on the object.

The parka would fit a 2 -or 3-year-old and has stiffened into a position with the arms sticking out to the sides. Unlike other fish skin garments in the collection, this one does not have fish scales on it; however, the pattern they left is still clearly visible. The bottom and edges are trimmed with a dark brown material, possibly strips of sea mammal hide.

According to Yup'ik Elder Rita Pitka Blumenstein in the exhibits catalog *Inner Skins Outer Skins, Gut and Fishskins*: "Fishskins were used for mukluks, mittens and rain coats. Fishskins were used especially by the river mainland people (Yukon-Kuskokwim). They also used the skins as bags for water containers. The fishskins come in different colors. It depends upon what kind of fish—if it's a king salmon, if it's a silver salmon, if it's a trout or if it's a pike. Some fish you have to scale; some fish you don't. Like pike, you have to scale it, also the white fish."

Fish skins had other uses as well. They were formed into bags to hold water and fish eggs, and were cut in strips to incorporate into grass baskets. Waterproof clothing made from fish skins or animal gut kept the wearer both dry and clean. A number of artifacts made from fish skin are on permanent display in the museum.

The parka will be on display January 6-31. Winter hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Admission is \$3; youth 18 and younger are admitted free. Annual passes and membership in the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum allowing entry at no charge may be purchased at the Museum.

Assistance is available for visitors with special needs. Please contact Visitor Services at 747-8981 before the visit.

FISH SKIN PARKA



[return to top](#)