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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: February 25, 2008

MARCH ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH TLINGIT SPRUCE ROOT BASKET

A lidded Tlingit spruce root basket is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month. March is National Women's History Month, so in celebration of women, the Sheldon Jackson Museum chose an artifact made and used by women for the Artifact of the Month.

Unlike many of the baskets in the museum's collections, the weaver of this basket is known. In fact, she is a very well known weaver: the late Jennie Thlunaut. In the summer of 2007 this small lidded basket, along with a cylindrical shaped basket with eye-hole weave, was donated to the museum by Dr. David Sparling in memory of his late wife, Florence. Dr. Sparling worked for the Public Health Service at Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital (SEARHC) in the 1950s and Mrs. Sparling worked at Mt. Edgecumbe High School.

Although the cutoff date for the creation of objects the museum collects is the early 1930s, the museum was able to accept the baskets since another of Mrs. Thlunaut's work was already in collection. A small child-sized Chilkat robe which she wove has been in the museum for many years.

Both baskets still had the original sale tags attached to them. The tags were the official designation of the Alaska Native Arts and Crafts Clearing House. On the tag of the lidded basket are handwritten notes listing the materials used to make the basket: spruce root and "black fern root" is written on the front, and on the back is, "Mrs. Jennie Thlunaut, Klukwan" and "Design: Going to the Mountain." The design is also identified by authors George T. Emmons and Frances Lackey Paul as "Shaman's Hat." Paul however, also explains "the design is characterized by a step-like formation which is explained to represent the mountain range as it descends to the water." (*Spruce Root Basketry of the Alaska Tlingit*, p.64.) Weavers are encouraged to come by the museum to take a closer look at the two baskets by Mrs. Thlunaut and share any information they might have on the basket styles and designs.

The basket will be on display March 1 through 31. Winter hours at the Sheldon Jackson Museum are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Winter admission is \$3. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge. The basket can also be views on our website at http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/artifact_of_month.html.

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