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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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May Artifact of the Month: Tlingit drum and beater

SITKA – The May artifact of the month is a tambourine-style Tlingit drum and beater collected by the Reverend Sheldon Jackson from Yakutat in 1892 (I.A.36). The tambourine-style drum is made of rawhide stretched over and nailed to a wooden frame. It measures 17 ½ inches across and 2 ½ inches deep. The drum's rawhide handle is attached to the frame with a cord. A totemic design of a human figure, a human face, and two eye shapes are painted in red, black and blue on the inside of the drum. The front side of the drum has a single circle painted in red.



I.A.36 Tlingit Drum

Two styles of drums are prominent among the Tlingit. The tambourine-style drum or gaaw is the most common and frequently used. Tambourine drums generally measure between two to two and a half feet in diameter and are made with hard, tanned skin of a mountain goat, deer, or seal stretched over a circular frame. Frames are often poplar or maple, and like the cedar of a box drum, would be steamed, softened, and bent into shape. Strips of skin or cord are stretched across the back to allow for a handle and short sticks called strikers, often made of Devil's Club with a padded end wrapped in hide or string, are used to beat the drum.

The second kind of drum, a kóok gaaw or box drum is made of red cedar in the form of a high narrow box, open at one end. Sides are made of a single plank with corners cut. The plank is steamed until it is softened, then bent into shape, and sewed with spruce root at the fourth corner; the bottom sewed or pegged to the side. Loops of hide are attached at the top of each end to allow the drum to be handled or hung from roof beams, usually of a lineage house. Sides of box drums are usually painted in animal designs representing the clan or house crest and the drum is named according to the figure portrayed. Tones and volume are controlled and changed by hitting the inside with the fist or fingers. The box drum has traditionally been used at potlatches and is still used during funerals and at memorial ku.éex' ceremonies.

An integral and vital form of cultural expression, music has been used by Tlingit to communicate emotion, history, family traditions, origin and migration stories, and spiritual beliefs for thousands of years. French explorer Jean-François de la Pérouse described hearing the Tlingit of Lituya Bay with whom he traded, as singing in a chorus of impressive, "very exact" voices in 1799. American anthropologist Lieutenant George Thornton Emmons noted the importance of music among the Tlingit in his travels in Alaska during the 1890s. Today, Tlingit songs passed from one generation of clan members to the next are still sung at social gatherings and ceremonies and contemporary Native artists create and perform a wide variety of genres of music ranging from hip hop to folk and jazz, sometimes combining traditional Alaska Native music with contemporary styles.

This drum can be seen at the museum through May 31st. The Sheldon Jackson Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. until May 11th. Summer hours at the Sheldon Jackson Museum, beginning May 12th are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Museum admission is \$5 for adults and \$4 for seniors. Visitors 18 years of age and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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