

Alaska State Museums BULLETIN

An Information Source for Alaska's Museum Community

2007 Spruce Root Basketry Conservation Internship

By Ellen Carrlee

The Alaska State Museum conservation program hosted two interns for a basketry conservation project this summer. Both interns were graduate conservation students finishing their second year of studies – Molly Gleeson from the UCLA/Getty Museum program and Samantha (Sam) Springer from the University of Delaware/Winterthur Museum program. These programs and the interns themselves provided the funding to come to Alaska.

Alaska State museum collections curator, Steve Henrikson, assigned each intern two horrifically damaged baskets. Molly worked on two Haida baskets collected by Lt. George Thornton Emmons in the late 1800s. The baskets had severe deformation, losses, tears, and old repairs of painted tape. Sam's Tlingit basketry projects also had intense tears, losses, and deformation as well as



Intern Molly Gleeson works on basket repair. Photo: Ellen Carrlee

old insect infestation and surface soiling.

Treatments included overall re-shaping in a humidity chamber, localized humidification with Gore-tex and blotter paper to align tears for repair with tiny splints of Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste, and innovative loss compensation with

cotton gauze and sculpted paper pulp bulked with adhesive.

The interns were also able to examine baskets in the collection with Steve Henrikson and Tlingit-Haida weaver Janice Criswell. Janice and weaver Mary Lou King twice took the interns "rooting."

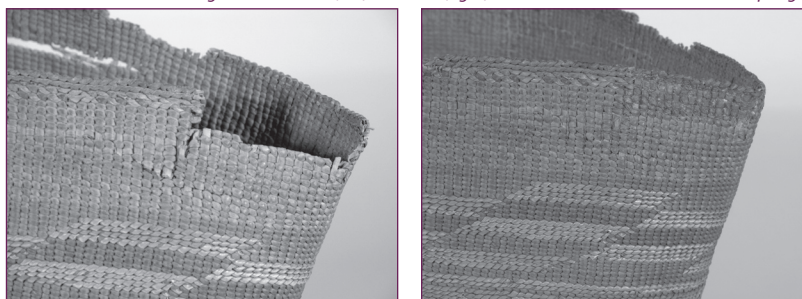
They dug spruce roots, processed them, and each wove a basket under the tutelage of Janice and Mary Lou.

The interns worked on several baskets at the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka and learned additional basket making techniques from Tlingit weaver, Teri Refkar.

In an exciting development, the interns are working with Teri and Janice to co-author a paper for an important international museum conference. If accepted, this will be one of the very few professional conservation papers that will include a first-person Native voice, instead of the Native perspective interpreted through a conservator.

Alaskan museum internships can provide up-and-coming conservation professionals an opportunity to work with Native artists and museum professionals in their respective environments. This means not only in a museum, where objects are kept and conserved, but also in communities where the objects have been created for hundreds of years. This allows for multiple perspectives and a deeper understanding of the conservator's sensitive role in preservation.

Tlingit basket before (left) and after (right) after treatment. Photo: Samantha Springer



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ALASKA MUSEUM SUCCESS STORIES

The Hammer Museum

This summer the Hammer Museum in Haines had its very first intern and Museum Director, Dave Pahl, called it a 100% success. When asked how his intern, Cathy McCardwell, an anthropology major from Shelbyville, KY helped, Dave wasn't sure where to



Dave with his giant hammer.
Photo: Steve Vick

begin. He has been so overwhelmed with too much to do that he didn't know if he could keep his operation open. But there were too many coincidences involved with the museum to give up – starting with the 800 year old Tlingit hammer he found when hand digging in the basement of the museum, to the Smithsonian giving Dave three mannequins in positions using hammers.

With the guidance of ASM, Dave advertised for a summer intern and to his

surprise, 28 people applied! Dave's plan for the intern was to produce an end of season newsletter to promote the museum, but he got much more. Cathy put together a docent training manual and came up with ideas to reach young visitors. She was exposed to everything a young museum does: accounting, bill paying, cleaning, working the gift shop, research and interacting with the general public. Cathy mainly cataloged, an unending job according to Dave, and got 500 objects recorded with bar code ID labels and customized a Past Perfect instructional guide for future interns. She helped in downloading over 3,000 patent documents for existing hammers in the collection.

Cathy became involved in the community by participating in the community clean-up, the 4th of July parade and float, and volunteering four hours per week at the Sheldon Museum. The community embraced her as well by providing a great Alaskan experience with complimentary nature walks, rafting trips, jet boating and various other activities.

With Cathy at the museum full time, Dave was freed up to continue other projects, one of which is a 19-foot giant hammer with the handle carved from a spruce log to put in front of the museum (a giant calling card if you will) which couldn't have been completed otherwise. Cathy just finished up her three

month internship and will be starting graduate school in the fall. Matt Maehler, a history major from California, will be taking Cathy's place for the next 6 weeks. He was one of the initial 28 applicants and jumped at the chance to finish up the season. Dave was again very surprised and thrilled.



Cathy in the 4th of July parade.
Photo: Dave Pahl

Most recently, the internship has been bolstered by \$1,000 from a private donation with the promise of continuation into next year.

Dave owes much of the success with his budding internship program to The Alaska State Museum for all their networking and guidance. The mini grants he received helped him make labels for a self-guided tour throughout the museum and address a security issue. Right now all of his hammers are hanging on just a nail (and three have disappeared from the wall) but, with the new mini grant, Dave is putting up panels where he can attach the hammers to the wall with secured wiring. This will also help with a future project of a traveling exhibit, moving the panels instead of the individual hammers. ■



Grant-In-Aid Awards

This year, the Grant-In-Aid program expanded to include an additional 11 small grant awards. The Alaska State Museum has been able to award a record number of grants totaling \$105,600 to Alaskan museums. This year, 31 museums received grants, almost three times as many as in previous years. The annual Grant-in-Aid awards are funded by an appropriation from the Alaska Legislature to fund improvements in collections storage, upgrades to computer and media equipment, and exhibitions.

Carrie McLain Memorial Museum	Nome	Digital projector for exhibitions	\$1,900
FNSB Native Museum	Fairbanks	Oral history project equipment	\$1,990
Pioneer Park Museum	Fairbanks	Digitize and reframe photos	\$2,000
Valdez Museum	Valdez	Large format scanner	\$2,000
Soldotna Historical Society	Soldotna	Exhibit display equipment	\$1,001
Museum of the Aleutians	Dutch Harbor	Document and image scanner	\$2,000
Talkeetna Museum	Talkeetna	Collections management computer	\$1,400
TYHS Wickersham House Museum	Fairbanks	Exhibit panel/room barriers	\$2,000
Sam Fox Museum	Dillingham	Computer for collections cataloging	\$2,000
Russian Orthodox Museum	Anchorage	Storage upgrades	\$2,000
St. Nicholas Church Museum	Juneau	Storage and exhibit upgrades	\$2,000
Hyder Community Assoc. Museum	Hyder	Building repairs	\$2,000
Sitka Historical Museum	Sitka	Computers upgrades	\$1,993
Hammer Museum	Haines	Exhibit panels	\$2,000
Port Alexander Museum	Sitka	Window replacement	\$1,983
Kasilof Historical Association	Kasilof	Docent program	\$2,000
George Ashby Memorial Museum	Copper Center	Collections record keeping	\$2,000
K'beq Interpretive site	Kenai	Interpretive panels	\$1,920
Cordova Historical Museum	Cordova	Disaster plan development	\$1,475
Alpine Historical Park	Palmer	Exhibit case construction	\$2,000
Ilanka Cultural Center	Cordova	Collections cart	\$437
Anchorage Museum	Anchorage	Conservation microscope	\$2,000
Hope Sunrise Historical Society	Hope	Toyo heating stove	\$2,000
Alutiiq Museum	Kodiak	Exhibit case construction	\$10,000
Baranov Museum	Kodiak	Baidarka conservation	\$8,410
RBHS Museum	Seward	Computer and collections software	\$3,956
Juneau Douglas City Museum	Juneau	Totem Pole Restoration	\$8,613
Pratt Museum	Homer	Collections media preservation	\$10,000
Museums Alaska	Homer	Statewide conference	\$9,970
Museum of Natural History	Anchorage	Collections storage upgrades	\$6,275
Alaska Native Heritage Center	Anchorage	Exhibit case construction	\$6,275

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Jan Criswell and Samantha Springer preparing spruce roots. Photo: Molly Gleason

These are lessons that can be carried on throughout their careers. In return, interns take on difficult treatments and share the latest techniques and theories in conservation that they learned in school.

Today's interns are tomorrow's professionals, linking us to museums in the lower 48 and creating a network of colleagues. The long-range plan for

the ASM conservation program includes dividing the collection into material groupings for systematic surveys and identifying priorities for conservation treatment, providing ideal internships for future conservation students. Next summer's project targets the museum's natural history collection. ■

Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918

Following close on the heels of the Lacey Act and the Weeks-McLean Law, the framers of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act sought to put an end to the trade in birds and feathers that, by the early 20th century, had wreaked havoc on many native bird species.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act decreed that all migratory birds and their parts (including eggs, nests, and feathers) were fully protected.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act is the domestic law that affirms, or implements, the United States' commitment to four international conventions with Canada, Japan, Mexico, and Russia for the protection of a shared migratory bird resource. Each of the conventions protect selected species of birds that commonly occur in both countries at some point during their annual life cycle.

Ask ASM:

I would like to display a piece of artwork belonging to a local artist that has bird feathers on it. I know they are not eagle but they may be some type of hawk. Is it ok to display it in the museum?

According to Meg Laws of the Permit Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it is lawful for museums to display artifacts with migratory bird feathers as long as they were obtained legally and the museum has the proper permits. In this case since the museum does not own the artwork in question it becomes the responsibility of the person who does (the artist) to ensure that the proper permits are obtained.

If the artist does not have the proper permits to possess the feathers of migratory birds (and basically all birds that are not domestic like chickens and turkeys are considered migratory) then the museum would be in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act if it displayed the artwork.

For more information on this subject contact Meg Laws of the USF&WS at (907) 786-3693. ■

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