

Renewed focus on Advocacy

The Museums Alaska Board of Directors met several times during the conference proceedings in Sitka. Museums Alaska worked on its legislative priorities for 2013 based on input from members. The top three advocacy priorities for 2013 are:

- Complete funding for the State Library Archives and Museums (SLAM) capital project, estimated at an additional \$50 million.
- Increase funding to the legislative budget line item for the Alaska State Museum's Grant-in-Aid program to \$150,000 specifically to be re-granted to Alaska's museums, with an additional \$25,000 to be specifically allocated to the statewide Internship Program. (read more on page 7)
- Establish a task force for the development of a state-funded matching fund program for museum capital projects, similar to what has occurred for library capital projects.

We need YOU!

Join Museums Alaska's advocacy efforts by signing up for our Advocacy Team emails. Just send a request to:

**advocacy@
museumsalaska.org**

Museums Alaska Board Member Jane Lindsey of the Juneau Douglas City Museum is ably chairing our Museums Advocacy Team and has sent out letter templates to all our member museum directors to send to their respective legislators. If you would like a copy of the template, just email advocacy@museumsalaska.org

Hearing from your institution is one of the most powerful ways to introduce your elected officials to the contributions you make in the community and educate them on important statewide goals for our institutions. Please join us in our efforts to better promote Alaska museums to our elected officials.

THANK YOU!



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2013: We're going to Haines!

The Boards of Directors of Museums Alaska and the Alaska Historical Society have unanimously accepted an invitation from Haines to host the 2013 joint annual conference.

Conference dates will be September 25-28, 2013 and we will celebrate Museums Alaska's 30th birthday! Mark your calendars...



Director's Note



Museums Alaska
Executive Director,
Heather Beggs

I hope you enjoyed reconnecting with old friends and new colleagues in Sitka ~ I certainly did. The annual energy boost carries through this issue of *Network*, with guest articles from our 2012 scholarship recipients. The Donna Matthews Professional Development Fund provided scholarships to seven members this year to defray the costs of attending the conference. I'd like to say a special thank you to all of you who contributed and purchased silent auction

items, and to Jane Lindsey for coordinating Museums Alaska's auction effort. Thanks to you all, we raised over \$2,000 this year, which is solely designated for conference scholarships. The diverse array of quality items was made even more interesting by the added touch of XRF analysis—letting our band of curious museum people know *exactly* what our winnings were made of.

Please join me in thanking our host committee and program

committees for an excellent professional development opportunity. If you haven't taken the conference survey, please follow the link on page 11. Even if you didn't attend, you are welcome to add your suggestions for next year's conference. All members are welcome on the program committee, which will begin to meet in the new year. Please join us!

Thank you for your continued support of our statewide museum association.

"continued leadership for our community of museums and cultural centers"

Thanks for your service

This year the Board said farewell to two directors, Norm Lagasse and Holly Cusack-McVeigh. Norm recently served as President and Holly as Vice President. Their leadership provided essential stability for Museums Alaska through our Executive Director transition — thank you Norm & Holly!

Our 2012-2013 Board is energized and successfully completed a suite of business meetings at the Sitka conference. New officers were elected to one-year terms:

Angela Linn, President
Monica Shah, Vice President
Jerrie Clarke, Treasurer
Marie Acemah, Secretary

Thank you all for your past service and dedication to continued leadership for our community of museums and cultural centers. All Board members are volunteers and serve three-year terms. Any member may apply to serve on the Board through the annual nominations process. We look forward to a productive year!

More information on Board membership at www.museumsalaska.org/board-of-directors

Welcome to the Board



Amy Russell
Nome

At the annual business meeting in Sitka, the membership elected Marie Acemah to a second term and elected new Board members Amy Russell and Michele Miller to fill the seats of Norm Lagasse and Holly-

Cusack-McVeigh. We also welcomed Sorrel Goodwin this summer, who was appointed to fill a vacancy.

Marie, who formerly worked at the Baranov Museum, now runs Media Action Project, a new nonprofit devoted to empowering youth and communities to share their stories

through media production and educational opportunities. Amy is the project director for the Beringia Museum of Culture and Science in Nome, Michele is the Director of Development at the Pratt Museum in Homer, and Sorrel is a librarian at the State Library Historical Collections.

President's Message

Another annual joint conference has come and gone, and with it, three new Directors elected to the Museums Alaska Board of Directors as well as a whole new slate of officers. With that election, I find myself your new President for the 2012-2013 year. I am honored and humbled by those of you who have supported me and nominated me for this position and I am sure this year will be a memorable one.

Our first order of business is to once again thank the Sitka local host committee (listed on page 10) for the memorable meetings hosted again with the Alaska Historical Society. Bob Medinger, the Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Sitka colleagues helped participants find convenient and unique housing options, provided excellent conference session spaces conducive to learning and networking, arranged entertaining and educational evening and post-conference events, and ordered lots of great food and drink. Plans for our 30th anniversary as an organization are underway – we'll share the exciting news about the 2013 meetings as it develops.

I look forward to hearing from you, our Museums Alaska members, to know what the Board and organization can do to make progress on the

issues you find important. Already, Board members are moving forward on advocacy efforts that include a message for full funding for the SLAM project, an increase in funding to the vitally important ASM Grant-In-Aid program, with an additional increase specifically to fund the popular program that places interns in Alaskan museums.

As always, our website (www.museumsalaska.org) is being wonderfully maintained by our Executive Director, Heather Beggs. She continues to bring effective management tools and creative ideas that will help Museums Alaska regain momentum and provide relevant assistance and support to museum professionals in Alaska. Check back often, "Like" us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/), join our group on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), and engage in the conversation on the Alaska Museum list-serv (akmuseums@list.state.ak.us). Your Board of Directors is hoping to hear from you.

Angela Linn, Museums Alaska President

"Your Board of Directors is hoping to hear from you."

Vintage Treads and Threads

In the past year, the historic fashion collection at the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum has grown to rival our assemblage of over 80 classic automobiles. We now have more than 100 vintage outfits on display, including pieces by well-known designers such as Mariano Fortuny, Jean Patou and Callot Soeurs.

The museum's historic fashion curator, Barb Cerny, has assembled a diverse array of gowns, suits, dresses, coats, hats and accessories spanning 150 years. While the focus is on the same time periods represented by our cars (late 1800s through 1938), a few garments date back to the 1700s. Several outfits are from Alaskan pioneers, showing that the women who arrived here during our rugged frontier days were just as interested in fashion as their contemporaries in the States. We are always looking to add to our Alaska clothing exhibits, so please let us know if you have something to share.

A walk through the Fountainhead Museum vividly illustrates how fashion changed from the Victorian's tightly corseted, restrictive clothing to the looser sophistication of the Roaring 20s and glamorous 1930s--just as automobiles evolved from boxy carriage shapes to sleek, stylized works of art. Visitors will also see examples of how the automobile influenced clothing styles, and in some cases, how fashions influenced car design. This winter we will begin offering curator's tours of the clothing collection—watch our Facebook page for details!

Submitted by Nancy DeWitt, Historian
Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum





Savanna Bradley
Collections Manager
Pratt Museum

*“Perhaps others,
like me, have
struggled with such
large objects in
collections”*

*“This session could
be summed up by
the phrase:
Follow the Code!”*

Review: Think Big! Dealing with Large Artifacts

Has your museum ever struggled with the care, exhibition, or movement of an extremely large object? Though rather small in size compared to many items discussed during this session, the Pratt has a small collection of boats, and, as a result of one of our more recent projects, a rather large articulated gray whale skeleton. Perhaps others, like me, have struggled with such large objects in collections, asking ourselves what the next steps will be.

Moderated by Norm Lagasse, this session covered accessioning, maintaining, and even moving large and extra-large objects. During his introduction, Norm brought up some fantastic points concerning the actual accession process, which he had outlined in a check-list that is available upon request. The main point that I took away from that list was one of the key concepts: *Does your museum have the resources to care for a large object in perpetuity? Do you have staff with the skill set to care for such a large object?* Some museums accept large objects without thinking of the consequences, creating difficulties for future staff, and draining resources. The next few speakers addressed those consequences, and how to deal with them.

With shadows of large objects from the Pratt's collections echoing in my own head, it was almost a relief to hear Richard Beckerman, Museum Consultant, speak about the task of moving an entire collection of airplanes at Seattle's Museum of Flight. Ultra High Molecular Weight plastic, soap, oil, cranes, and forklifts are not often used to move objects in my own collection, but they were good to know about. Bob Banghart also had some good advice concerning the movement of large collections pieces from one building to the next, and the overall safety of the objects, people, and buildings involved: assume things could happen, and prevent them from happening. He also discussed how gravity can be your friend in such situations, as well as community members with resources. Terri Rofkar backed up these fantastic stories and cautionary tales, and also told of her own creation of large projects.

In conclusion, the care and movement of a large objects can be difficult, time consuming, and quite stressful. Museums should be prepared to consider accessioning large objects, possibly even creating a policy surrounding such instances. In any case, *Think Big!* gave us all something to think about.

Review: Legal Issues in Collections Management

The session titled “Legal Issues in Collection Management” was conducted by Neil Slotkin from the Alaska State Attorney General's office. He stated that museum issues rarely arise in the AG's office, and so rather than discuss case law, he concentrated on some of the relevant Alaska statutes. Museum issues are covered in AS 14.57, Sections 200-290.

The talk centered on legal acquisition of abandoned loans and items found in collection. In both cases seven is the magic number. For loans, seven years must pass without contact between the lender and the museum since the expiration of the loan agreement, or since the loan was made if there is no expiration date. The museum must then take certain steps to notify the lender of the museum's intent to acquire title. These steps are spelled out in Section 14.57.200.

If the lender does not respond within thirty days, or if the museum does not have a current address for the lender, the museum must publish a weekly notice of intent to acquire title for four consecutive weeks in “a newspaper of general circulation” in the judicial district(s) of both the museum and the latest address of the lender.

This spurred discussion about non-print media. Does publishing a notice in an on-line museum newsletter suffice? What about an on-line newspaper, especially in areas that may not be served by a traditional newspaper? This dilemma has not been resolved as there is no relevant case law yet.

The seven-year period also applies to undocumented items found in collection, and starts with the earliest written record of the item in the museum's collection. Most of the same procedures for acquiring title to loaned property apply to these items as well.

Once legal title to an object has been acquired, another two years must elapse before the museum can take any action to dispose of the item. Alaska Statute 14.57.220 states that “... after title... is acquired by a museum ... the lender or owner of the property has two years to bring an action in court against the museum to claim the property. If an action is not brought by the end of this two-year period and if the museum has taken its action under AS 14.57.200 - 14.57.290 in good faith, a person does not have a claim to the property...”.

Jan Yaeger, Seldovia Museum
Seldovia Village Tribe

Review: Exhibits—Soup to Nuts

Tana Finnesand, Ahnna Heritage Foundation

The focus for many of this year's conference sessions was exhibits—how to design themes, how to do make-overs. In the session *Exhibits: Soup to Nuts*, presenters gave some great case studies illustrating the details of programs, projects and exhibits they created. Amy Russell from the Beringia Center in Nome gave her talk titled "Traveling Exhibits in Rural Villages". She spoke of her program where educational displays were designed and fabricated, incorporating objects and interpretive materials, which Amy then took to 15 villages in her service area. This program, she said, reflects the vibrancy of living culture, and is not so "orthodox" as traditional museums are in matters of preservation. She described successful features of her program:

- Coordinate with the tribe on interest, theme, schedule, venue and elders
- Form agreements with local experts to co-host the exhibit with you
- Advertise well via fliers, radio, word-of-mouth
- Fun crafts keep school visits lively
- The point is to promote museums
- Part of the presentations feature discussions with kids about artifacts and artifact handling
- The kids have craft tables where they make a present for the elder; often the parents get into it too!
- Have a cultural expert available to interpret objects
- Have a question card at the end, asking the question "What exhibits do you want next?"

Amy also gave the audience her best tidbits of advice for a program like this:

- "Recruit an awesome exhibit designer" to help, who needs to be flexible and creative on the spot
- Protect the valuables with good strong padded boxes/cases with locks, because no matter what, something will be out of your hands sometime during the flights and moving between locations. Amy illustrated this point with pictures of exhibit crates being loaded onto the backs of snow-machines from the plane
- Make best use of available space. There will probably be some wall space, but make sure you can make components free-standing. Different stations will keep people spread out and moving.
- Have food & drink (gasp!)
- Have activities there for all age groups to do
- Invite locals to bring their own objects
- Amy offers to scan records & photos for people while she is there
- Can bring mystery photos or objects for identification

Sarah Asper-Smith, who was Amy's "awesome exhibit designer" gave her tongue-in-cheek advice on what NOT to do, which is to develop a traveling exhibit in 1 month!

In another presentation, Julie Manning, Exhibits Curator at the Alaska State Museum in Juneau, talked about "How to Transform Space." She urged the audience to relate the design to the exhibit in order to augment the story. Through her series of slides she showed the audience examples of things she has done to create good effects quickly and relatively inexpensively:

- She hand-drew a background onto a grid on the wall, then taped it off and painted.
- Get paint chips, bring them to the gallery and check the color using the real lighting
- Use bender board – it is flexible and can be used for many different effects
- Use volunteers and interns to help paint. Use odorless paint with 0% VOB such as Benjamin Moore Natural. It's expensive but worth it.
- Made the design to match the exhibit theme. Julie gave us the example of how she copied the camouflage design from a WWII submarine onto the walls of an exhibit to tie it all together and make it interesting and cohesive. She showed how this can be achieved by using a projector.
- She gave another example where a basket design was woven with "luon", painted to imitate a basket and put up on a wall
- She quickly listed other materials she uses to transform spaces: risers; ethafoam; medium density fiberboard (MDF), which the local hardware store orders for her; fabrics such as canvas, linen (expensive), fake velvet; 3M77 adhesive spray (use it with a mask, and outside if possible); polyester felt with a peel-off adhesive backing to wrap things in, ordered from Benchmark.

In the final presentation, Toby Sullivan from the Kodiak Maritime Museum told us the story of how the Thelma C, a fishing boat, is being restored to its original condition and installed as a permanent outdoor interpretive exhibit near downtown Kodiak. Toby illustrated his story well with photographs and told it humorously. What struck me was the size of the task –where do you find a safe space to house a full-size fishing boat, and how do you move it?-- and how dedicated, skilled and motivated people came together to do the work. KMM is currently partnering with the nearby Kodiak College to help with the supply of skilled and volunteer labor to finish the project.

Overall, this session gave the attendees a good look at the "soup to nuts" of creating interesting, imaginative exhibits. Good job you guys!

“What struck me was the size of the task—where do you find a safe space to house a full-size fishing boat and how do you move it?”

News from Alaska Veterans Museum



Senator Lisa Murkowski with Rear Admiral Thomas Ostebo at the Attu Village 70th Anniversary Memorial

“Coast Guard rescues again - but in a slightly different vein: All Hail the Coasties, Who Go When Others Cannot!”

Senator Lisa Murkowski and the US Coast Guard rode to the rescue, transported and erected the bronze plaques, telling the story Of Attu Village, onto marine grade yellow cedar specially treated to withstand the harsh Aleutian climate. The

extremely talented LT Sarah Morin, US Coast Guard erected the memorial almost singlehandedly - under "other duties as assigned." Thank you LT Morin - well done!

These seven bronze plates feature a picture of the village in happier days in 1942, lists of the survivors and casualties, and a narrative stating: " On Sunday June 7, 1942, as the Attu villagers were returning from church, the hills came alive with Japanese troops, sliding down the steep snow-covered mountains, firing their weapons. the villagers gathered their families and barricaded themselves in their homes. Foster Jones, the radio operator, smashed the radio and was

later killed. His school teacher wife, Etta Jones, and the villagers were transported in the hold of a freighter, for internment to prison camps in Japan for the rest of the war. Almost half would die in captivity and none of the villagers would see Attu Village again, for upon repatriation, they were relocated to Atka."

This memorial was erected by a partnership of the Alaska Veterans Museum, the Aleut and Pribilof Island Trust, Anchorage International Rotary Club, The Aleut Corporation, and Legacy Funeral Homes. Dr. George S. Rhyneer donated the yellow cedar, finished it, pre-drilled all the holes for the plates, made a stainless steel bracket, wrote assembly instructions and assembled the tool kit. The specially designed stainless steel cage to protect the precious metal from thievery, was built by Dowland- Bach Corporation who donated their labor. The bronze plates were made by J & T Foundry of North Pole. Thanks to all our partners in this effort to ensure the Attu Villagers "Shall Not Be Forgotten."

Submitted by Suellyn Wright Novak

News from the Yupiit Piciryarait Museum

Yupiit Piciryarait Museum Presents

MINGQAAQS & QANTAQS

FALL TIME IS FOR COLLECTING RYE GRASS AND DRIFT WOOD

Exhibit
Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center, Bethel, Alaska

October - December, 2012



New WWI Resources from State Archives

State Archives has posted 3 new links to our *For Researchers* webpage. They all deal with World War I service: **World War I Alaskan Service Register Available on Alaska State Archives Website**

Shortly after the *Great War* the Territorial Government compiled a list of Alaskans who participated as military service members. The data, adapted from statistical lists by archival staff, is accessible on three spreadsheets here:

[Service Personnel Information \(PDF\)](#).

[Number of service members by community \(PDF\)](#).

157 locations in Alaska

[Death Statistics \(PDF\)](#).

Detailed information about 1,891 Alaskans who died of 9 causes in 76 locations in Alaska, California, Washington, Washington DC, France and at sea.

This information may be accessed at http://archives.alaska.gov/for_researchers/for_researchers.html. Please contact Larry

Hibpshman, Archivist III, if you have any questions.

Grant in Aid (GIA) and YOU!

For those of you that may be new to the Alaskan museum scene and to refresh the memories of those that have been around for a bit, I wanted to provide an overview of the Alaska State Museum program known as Grant-In-Aid or GIA.

A quick history is in order. The GIA was first funded in FY1981 and started out with a funding line of \$50,000. That first year is also the lowest funding level for the duration of the program. The peak funding year was in 1983 at \$126,400 (that's \$268,717 in 2009 dollars). From 1993-2001 the program was level funded at \$85,600. The program's current funding is set at \$105,600 and it has remained stagnated there since 2002. From its inception the GIA program has assisted Alaskan museums with their projects and programs to the tune of \$3.63M. Those projects have covered the full spectrum of museology from collections care to facility upgrades to exhibit development to internships all in an effort to enhance museum offerings (i.e. enhance the visitor experience) and kick Alaskan museum programs up a notch or two.

The current GIA program provides funding in three basic categories; mini-grants, grants and internships. One of the Museums Alaska advocacy goals for FY2014 is to get a direct legislative plus up to the GIA budget line item and increase the program funding to \$150,000 plus establish an additional \$25,000 increment specifically for internships (New total amount for GIA budget line item would be \$175,000). We want this to be a direct line item plus up from the legislature so that the State Museum does not have to provide a funding "offset" from within the department to fund this increase.

We have just over 80 museums, cultural centers, visitor centers, historical societies and holdings within our

great State. Those are located throughout Alaska and both visitors and Alaskans benefit from their presence and continued historical preservation efforts. The GIA program has reached out to many of those institutions and entities over the years and made a tremendous difference in those programs and projects throughout the State.

So you're sitting there asking yourself "how can I help?" It's actually pretty simple. You can start by gathering a little information about any programs and projects in your entity (see list above) that have directly benefited from GIA and assemble that into a nice, short executive summary page (should be a page or less) that you'll attach to a support letter you will send to your State legislator(s). Oh, you haven't received a GIA mini-grant, grant or any internship support yet. No worries. Compose a short executive summary of what projects and programs you currently have or need that would benefit from GIA support and attach that to your support letter. The MA advocacy committee has composed a template support letter that you can send to your representatives and help get this program funded to an appropriate level. Email advocacy@museumsalaska.org for more information.

If you haven't benefitted from a GIA opportunity yet or you're still seeking a round TUIT, let me assure you that the GIA application process is very straightforward. The forms are simple enough that even I can figure them out.

Let's get everyone behind this effort and help all of our institutions raise the level of programs within our respective institutions to that next level.

Submitted by Norm Lagasse

"So you're sitting there asking yourself, 'How can I help?' It's actually pretty simple..."

Review: X-ray Fluorescence in Alaska Museums



Jerrie Clarke
Director
Sheldon Museum and
Cultural Center

“Having the XRF analyzer available to Alaska museums will be of great advantage to our work in identifying and preserving artifacts.”

“How do we create integrated activities that lead to growth?”

I first heard about the X-ray fluorescent (XRF) analyzer just over a year ago when Scott Carrlee asked for letters of support for a grant application to the Rasmuson Foundation that would provide an analyzer for the Alaska State Museums outreach program. Alaska State Museum now has an XRF analyzer and at the recent Museums Alaska/Alaska Historical Society Conference we were able to meet one of its twin brothers face to face.

Looking very much like a Star Trek tricorder, the handheld XRF analyzer has the capability to quantify or qualify elements and thereby identify materials and pigments. The device shoots photons (or low-energy X-rays) at a sample, analyzing them non-destructively by measuring the movement of electrons. A sample can be sent to the Alaska State Museum for analysis or the XRF analyzer can be sent to the museum holding the object that needs analysis, if there is a person on staff trained to use it.

Bruce Kaiser of Bruker Elemental, one of the inventors of the analyzer, began the session with an elementary version of the science of X-ray fluorescence. He began the demonstration by telling us that a copper plate from the fundraising silent auction was analyzed prior to the session and found to be pure copper. A silver spoon was also analyzed and found to be only silver plated. During the session Kaiser borrowed a white gold wedding ring set from a participant and placed them one at a time on top of the analyzer as it rested in its mount. A graph appeared on the computer screen showing peaks of a variety of heights and widths verifying the material as white gold.

Then Moderator Angela Linn introduced the other presenters. Scott Carrlee spoke briefly about using the XRF in a public program to help participants learn more about the items they brought with them. Pratt Museum Collections Manager Savanna Bradley told us that when Kaiser visited the Pratt for a training session, they found the white substance on some of their bird mounts and a few other natural history taxidermy pieces to be arsenic. However, they were happy to discover that a lot of the 'white powders' were actually corn meal. There is also an ongoing mystery of some type of not yet identified pesticide. Monica Shah, Director of Collections/Conservator at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center talked about identifying the composition of objects, and of poisons placed on the objects to preserve them. State Archaeologist Dave McMahan talked about the work he has done with Russian chemists on the analysis of glass from the Laxman-Baranov glass factory. Archaeologist John Cook talked about using the XRF as he studied obsidian. Having the XRF analyzer available to Alaska museums will be of great advantage to our work in identifying and preserving artifacts.

For more information about how the XRF came to Alaska, information about the XRF analyzers, and the science of X-ray fluorescence use the links below.

<http://ellencarrlee.wordpress.com/2011/11/18/xrf-why-should-we-get-one/>

<http://www.bruker.com>

<http://www.learnxrf.com/BasicXRFTheory.htm>

Review: Filling the Gaps—Educational Programming in Museums

Leslie Fried, Alaska Jewish Historical Museum and Culture Center

This wonderful session moderated by Monica Garcia, Director of Education and Public Programs at the Anchorage Museum (with presentations by Ryjil Christianson, Marie Acemah and Lisa Golisak), elucidated the essential components to creating museum programming that is compelling, relevant and inspiring to the community. A key question that was posed was “how do we create integrated activities that lead to growth?”

Programming ought to echo and expand upon the experience of the visitor to the museum. For example, in the same way that exhibit narratives tell stories and provide information that can awaken curiosity or empathy, programming activities can enhance and connect with viewers' own stories; they can provide experiences that make the exhibit content come alive, that reach the viewer in a deeper experiential way. They can also broaden the visitor's knowledge base with practical applications to ideas presented in the exhibit: for example a class on bookbinding that follows an exhibit on the history of mechanical and pop-up books.

(continued on page 9)

(continued from page 8)

How can programming achieve these goals of deepening audience involvement? There were several suggestions made during the session for an overall way to think about this.

First is the issue of reaching out to all ages. Initially museums must understand the demographics of the community. Who comes to the museum? Who is likely to come if programming were designed differently with certain user groups in mind? Of course, proper assessment methods are crucial to creating new exhibits as well as new programming. Secondly, it has been shown that classes or events that offer a family experience are a big draw: good for the family, good for attendance. Third, it is important to offer the community a selection of choices. Some museums offer film programs in addition to art classes, journaling classes, and even a person-

al artifact identification day. Combining education with entertainment, or "edutainment" is a definite must, especially for children. Visits to the Boeing Museum of Flight or the Pacific Science Center (both in Seattle) offer numerous possibilities.

Finally, giving visitors access to primary sources is invaluable where the experience of learning through discovery is the goal. Seeing a real Apollo Command Module up close is a different kind of experience than reading about it. Learning about what life was like for the Russian Orthodox bishop in 1842 Sitka becomes a real seeing and feeling experience when visiting his actual house and seeing the bed he slept in or the dishes upon which he ate his supper. The Russian Bishop's House is part of the Sitka National Historical Park.

Review: A story about storytelling

Marnie A. Leist, Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository

Why should museums tell stories? This was the question posed at a sessions on interpretation at the recent Museums Alaska conference held in Sitka. "Someone has to!" a participant exclaimed. This is quite true for museums - we are in the business of telling the story of our mission, the objects in our care, and the community we represent. Scott Carrlee of the Alaska State Museum led the group through a careful review of storytelling techniques.

Scott's session, titled *Strengthening Interpretation through Compelling Stories* focused not only on why we tell stories, but the differences between sharing information and weaving an instructive tale. The group began by examining the ins and outs of storytelling with a video that encapsulated the art. We learned that presenting a shared history, with developed personable characters, elements of surprise, and attuned timing, can create an emotional connection with an audience. Simply listing facts or providing a historic description are ways to share information. Through storytelling, however, you can humor, enthrall, rouse, and even inspire museum visitors.

After viewing the short video, groups picked an object and took two minutes to create a story for the item. For example, one of the objects was a classic spring-loaded mousetrap. To interpret this object you could talk about history of these types of traps, how they were invented in Illinois in 1894 and how they became a common household item available in every hardware store in the country. Alternatively, you could write an object biography, telling the story of the object from

the object's perspective, charting its manufacture, use and ultimate disposition in a museum collection. Or, you could tell the story of the mousetrap from a mouse's perspective!

To further challenge us, Scott asked groups to pick a controversial topic or a divisive issue that our own organizations were not addressing or having trouble addressing. He asked us to consider what or whose stories we were not telling? Then we were charged with coming up with five ways of presenting the topic. By thinking about different perspectives, we could identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and problems in presenting a touchy subject.

Overall we learned that stories are memorable, and they have the ability to inspire action. A story may prompt to visitor to change an attitude, to make a donation, visit the museum again, or research a topic of interest in greater detail. Engaging your audience through compelling stories builds relationships. It connects people with your treasured collections, with an exhibit, or even to your museum as a whole. In turn, this connection builds the foundation of stakeholders that will support your organization. Storytelling is indeed a powerful tool.

"Through storytelling you can humor, enthrall, rouse and even inspire museum visitors."

THANK YOU, SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS,

FOR YOUR EXCELLENT ARTICLES!



Bob Medinger

Thank you, Sitka conference hosts!

Thanks to the excellent crew on the ground in Sitka for delivering a memorable conference!

Host Committee

Bob Medinger, Director, Sitka Historical Society & Museum
 Jacqueline Fernandez, Curator, Sitka Historical Society & Museum
 Beverly Dexter, Visitor Services Manager, Sitka Historical Society & Museum
 Philip Rupell, Sitka Convention & Visitors Bureau
 Marilyn Knapp, Volunteer
 Rosemary Carlton, Volunteer

Museums Alaska could not provide this annual professional development opportunity without the support of many volunteers and donors.

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TAKE THE CONFERENCE SURVEY!

We want to hear from you! It's short, simple, and easy to fill out online. Just visit:

<https://docs.google.com/a/museumsalaska.org/spreadsheet/viewform?fromEmail=true&formkey=dEV0UkdaTVpxTzBjY3I2aFRpdXZMQXc6MQ>

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Nuta'at Mingqusqa: The New Sewer's Club

In February 2013, Alutiiq Museum Executive Director Sven Haakanson and five Kodiak skin sewers will fly to Helsinki, Finland to explore Alutiiq sewing. Why travel half way around the world to study this Alaska Native art? In the 1840s, Finish seafarer Arvid Adolf Etholén collected an impressive array of traditional items from the Native societies of the Alaska Gulf Coast. His collections are now part of the National Museum of Finland, and contain an extensive, well-preserved set of Alutiiq clothing. Led by Master skin sewer Susan Malutin, the sewers will study the clothing to deepen their knowledge of design, manufacture, and decoration techniques.

Following the research trip, Malutin and the sewers will share their knowledge in workshops in Alutiiq village schools, helping students to develop sections of a caribou skin par-

ka. The pieces will then be assembled into a garment for the museum's collection at weekly gatherings of a sewing circle in Kodiak. Local youth will be invited to participate as project interns. The entire process will be video taped to create a DVD about Alutiiq skin sewing practices and the cultural value of historic collections.

"This project is a way to help the growing number of skin sewers advance their skills," said Haakanson. "It will also build ties between a group of developing artists and create a sense of unity among our communities. Exploring our culture is a great way to consider the bonds that unite us."

Funds for the New Sewer's club will be provided by Koniag, Inc. and a \$49,988 grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services.



Collar detail, Alutiiq Caribou Skin Coat, Etholen Collection, National Museum of Finland, Helsinki. Photo by Sven Haakanson, Jr.