

# SITKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Spring 2011

**CONTENTS:**

Welcome our new Curator  
 Curator Corner  
 Executive Director Update  
 SJ History Status Update  
 Robert DeArmond—Bldg 25  
 Summer Museum Intern Announced  
 Website for 2010 Conference on  
 Russian America  
 Sitka's Archaeological Past  
 A Letter From Isabelle  
 Blast From the Past  
 Membership  
 Rasmusson Award re: Russian  
 American Conference

**Sitka Historical Society**  
 Operating the  
**Sitka Historical Museum**

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**Mission:** To preserve and promote the events, stories and artifacts of the human history of the Sitka area for the inspiration, education and benefit of the public and future generations.

**PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEW CURATOR**

**Jacqueline Fernandez**



*Photo by James Poulsen*

The Sitka Historical Society and Museum is pleased to announce the hiring of Jacqueline R. Fernandez as our new Curator of Collections and Exhibits.

Pictured here, Jackie holds up a recently framed original painting done by Paulina Cohen around 1900, as the museum's former curator, Ashley Kircher, left, and Bob Medinger, the museum's director, look on at the museum.

Ms. Fernandez has an advanced museum studies degree from Tufts University in Massachusetts, and completed coursework in collections management and exhibit design. She also completed a B.A. in International Relations at Mount Holyoke College. Museum Experience includes the following locations:

- \* · Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, Massachusetts
- \* · Hingham Historical Society, Hingham, Massachusetts
- \* · Natural History Museum, American Bald Eagle Foundation, Haines, Alaska
- \* · Sheldon Museum and Cultural Center, Haines, Alaska
- \* · Alaska Museum of Natural History, Anchorage, Alaska
- \* · Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, Alaska
- \* · Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts
- \* · National Park Service African American Historic Site, Boston, Massachusetts

Away from the work at the museum, Ms. Fernandez's interests include running marathons, hiking, camping, kayaking, fishing, reading, and cooking.

## Curator Corner

My first three weeks at the Sitka Historical Society were extremely busy with five major activities, including applying to take part in the Collections Management Assessment Program, developing the Collections Management Policy, re-instituting the Board of Director's Collections Committee, moving collections and making space, and documenting and inventorying artifacts.

The majority of my time at the Society has thus far been dedicated to drafting of the new comprehensive Collections Management Policy and various forms for temporary deposits, loans, accession proposals, condition reports, and research requests. The Collections Management Policy provides a framework for decisions that determine the long-term development, care, and management of an institution's collections. The policy, in conjunction with the forms, which will be added to a soon-to-be developed Procedures Manual, will act as a toolkit for the Sitka Historical Society and play an important role in professionalizing, standardizing, and streamlining all collections management activities.

The Society will receive feedback on the Collections Management Policy later this year when a consultant will come to carry out a major stewardship assessment as we take part in the American Association of Museum's Collections Management Assessment Program. My first two weeks at the Society were focused on applying, with the assistance of former Curator, Ashley Kircher, Executive Director

Bob Medinger, to participate in this highly regarded program that provides museums and cultural institutions with an assessment of needs and concrete recommendations for better collections stewardship. Institutions that participate in the program are brought closer to museum accreditation and often gain increased opportunities for grants for collections care.

Because a curator and executive director need to work closely in concert with the Board of Directors when making decisions about collections, a second major priority was to re-institute the Board's Collections Committee. The Collections Committee is currently comprised of five individuals and will meet on a monthly basis to review the Curator and Executive Director's recommendations regarding potential accessions, deaccessions, and conservation treatments, vote upon potential accessions, deaccessions, and conservation treatments, and review and vote to approve the Collections Management Policy and any curator-recommended changes. Decisions made by the Collections Committee are presented to the Board of Directors, with whom the final authority for accessions, deaccessions, and conservation treatments rests. The first Collections Committee meeting was held in mid-March. During the meeting, the committee voted to approve the draft of Collections Management Policy, which will be voted on by the full Board in April. The next task for the Collections Committee will be to review a list of paintings and artifacts I have recommended for accessioning into our Permanent Collection.

Over the past few weeks I have had the opportunity to better familiarize myself with the Society's collection as I have responded to research requests and continued to work through the inventory process, which includes photographing all artifacts in the collection, ensuring all artifacts in Collections Storage are entered into PastPerfect, adding to any incomplete records. The entire collection will need to be documented and entered into the PastPerfect database as part of the inventory process. Among the first archival materials to be processed will be two invaluable treasures of Sitka's history, the Robert DeArmond



*Jackie and Ashley at work in the Museum*

Archives and the Photo Shop Collection.

During the cataloguing and inventorying process, it became clear that I would need to carve out a small workspace in the Collections Storage Room for processing, documenting, and photographing collections. Since my arrival to the Society, I have been processing collections in the exhibition area, but this is far from ideal. Processing collections in the exhibition area means unnecessarily moving and handling of objects from one room to another, struggling with poor lighting for photographing conditions of artifacts, increased risk for damage or theft due to the lack of security and ease of public access. This move will enable me to continue the inventory at a work table, as opposed to the historic table and desk that was previously being used, allow me to work faster and accomplish more in a timely fashion with fewer distractions, and help ensure the longevity and preservation of the Sitka Historical Society's collection. To make space for the new work table in the Collections Storage Room, I cataloged, photographed, labeled, and packed nearly fifty paintings and framed pieces and transported them to a secure location offsite. These works were previously at greater risk of damage due to their precarious location in the storage room and lack of padding.

Highlights of my time at the Sitka Historical Society thus far have included: meeting the Board and our invaluable volunteers, a tour of the Collections Storage area with Curator Sue Thorsen at Sitka National Historic Park, meetings with the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, attending the dinner for Sitka Chamber of Commerce, lunch and meetings with local community members Bill De Armond, Nancy Yaw Davis, and Marilyn Knapp, breakfasts, dinners, and boat outings with wonderful

members of the Board and my new Executive Director, Robert Medinger.






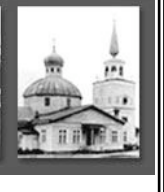





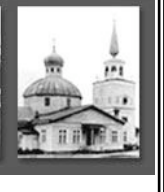





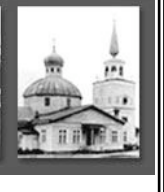
My favorite part of Sitka, apart from its



rich history, remains the individuals I have met here. Thanks again for your many warm welcomes and smiles.

Stay tuned for the next Curator's Corner, which will include updates on a free emergency preparedness and response workshop that I will be attending in late April in Anchorage. In the workshop, which will be coordinated by the Alaska State Museum and taught by Gary Menges, museum professionals will develop practical decision-making skills to apply to pre- and post-disaster action priorities for collections and learn about issues related to insurance, risk assessment/prevention, working with emergency recovery services, training staff, and testing disaster plans.

Jacqueline Fernandez

<p>Visit our Web Site: <a href="http://www.sitkahistory.org">www.sitkahistory.org</a> You will find a wealth of information plus a Membership Form online</p>	<table border="0"><tr><td><p>Sitka Historical Society &amp; Museum 330 Harbor Drive Sitka, AK 99835 Ph: 907.747.6455</p></td><td colspan="4"><p>Sitka Historical Society and Museum - Sitka, Alaska</p></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	 <p>Sitka Historical Society &amp; Museum 330 Harbor Drive Sitka, AK 99835 Ph: 907.747.6455</p>	<p>Sitka Historical Society and Museum - Sitka, Alaska</p>								
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Update by Executive  
Director  
Bob Medinger

Sitka's history and the story of its people and events not only keeps me very busy, but is a passion I'd have regardless of my position as executive director. Working with a dedicated board of directors, active membership, volunteers, staff, and partnering organizations is far beyond just work, as most of these folks also share this passion for our history. As some of the accompanying articles articulate, just one of these stories or events would be a major historical tale in most cities across Alaska and the continent. The following is an update of some of our accomplishments and initiatives from the last several months, and looking into the future.

- The highlight of course, is the arrival of our new curator, Jacqueline Fernandez. In the short time she has been here, she is already taking us down the professional path of high museum standards for collection care, organization, and policy development. In order to meet the mission of the Society, the continuation of the curator position is the number one priority of the board.
- In an associated mission driven decision, the board of directors has moved forward with the approval of a 1/2-time archivist to supplement the work of the curator. Depending on funding we hope to fill this position later in 2011.
- Lisa Huntsha is our ten-week summer intern for this year and will be teaming with Jackie by the end of May. (see attached article)
- A museum expansion and upgrade has been a board priority since the late 1980's, and several initiatives are in the works. We currently have our artifacts and documents spread over five different locations in Sitka, including the old admin building at the mill site.
- ◊ The City is currently contracted with MRV Architects to look at pre- planning and options at Centennial Hall. with \$2,000,000 already allocated via grants, the museum should be a part of the effort. We are working now with the planning team. Kettleton Library is also in the midst of a Pre-Development effort via Rasmuson/ Foraker, and as in the past, there has been

some preliminary discussion related to the museum.

- ◊ The Society, via strong encouragement from Rasmuson & Foraker, has our own independent application pending for selection for this program. There is a chance these various efforts could coordinate.
- We are in the middle of a two-year \$60,000 Organizational Effectiveness grant award with Rasmuson.
- The Society has been working hard to support efforts to protect the history of SJ. (see attached article)
- The Society recently hosted a presentation and book signing for Jim Davis and his new book "The Raven and the Double Eagle".
- The Society has had involvement with the totem square project and the projected renovation completion is due late in April. The Baranof Pole had a professional assessment done, and although showing some aging, is solid at the base- a key finding. The state of Alaska is planning some local meetings soon to take input for further determinations and action.
- The Society helped coordinate a special "Native American Heritage Month" event.
- The DeArmond Archives and "Photo Shop" photo collection has been getting extensive effort from our curator, and will be a focus of our summer intern, and museum volunteers.
- The Society is working with the ANB & ANS in preparation for the 100-year anniversary of the ANB founding in 1912/2012. We hope to develop high quality new exhibits and panels, along with exhibiting rare artifacts from this very important era of Native history.
- The theme for the **2011 Alaska Day/Week** celebration is **Aviation in Alaska**.

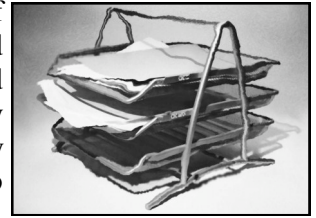
The Society and Museum will be partnering again with the coordination of our annual meeting in October and a special presentation on Sitka's Aviation History. Watch for the date of this event as we invite you to attend.

Sincerely,  
Bob Medinger



## Sheldon Jackson: History Status Update

Since the closure of SJ in 2007, the Society has been engaged with the SJ Board of Trustees and whoever was acting CEO/Caretaker for the complex. Our focus was and is to assist in the preservation of the historical artifacts, documents and photos related to the rich human history of the school and college. The original Stratton library “Archives & Photos” of SJ were packed up and shipped to Juneau for safe-keeping by Museums/Library and Archives, but there was a deadline for the storage that was due to expire in two and a half years. However, there were many more existing documents, artifacts and photographs that were still within campus buildings. As the ownership of the buildings was transferred to the Fine Arts Camp, Sitka Summer Music Festival, and others, the final items were all consolidated via John Holst at Sweetland Hall.



The most recent activity and follow-up has been via a number of meetings via the “Sheldon Jackson Historic Preservation Working Group” coordinated by Karen Lucas. This group included administrators from the State Museum, Library, and Archives, Sitka National Historical Park, SJ Trustees (John Holst), the Society, and a large number of interested community members. The focus is finding a home in Sitka for the archives stored in Juneau, historical material compiled on campus, and the Merrill glass plates negatives (900) and photos. Via these meetings and further discussions with the Board of Trustees, the following is the current status:

- The state museum timeline for storage of the Archives in Juneau has been lifted such that the state will protect the materials until such time as a final home/owner is found.
- The state museum will house the large number of “on campus” materials at the Stratton Library with no deadline, but until a formal owner is found. They will also provide a summer intern to “inventory” the materials.
- The SJ Trustees are getting an appraisal done on the Merrill Plates, the Historical Society will submit grants for their purchase, and Sitka National Historical Park has committed to their permanent care and storage.
- The Sitka Historical Society presented the following to the SJ Board of Trustees:
  - Following the state museum intern inventory and trustee approved screening of the remaining on-campus historic documents, photos and artifacts, the SHS will accept the ownership and stewardship of the mutually agreed upon materials at the end of the state museum storage agreement in approximately two and a half years. SHS has committed to provide quality housing for the state museum intern who will be inventorying the above referenced materials.
  - The SHS will accept the ownership and stewardship of the “SJ Archives” currently being held in Juneau, also at the end of the state museum storage period.
  - The SHS will accept the Merrill print collection and provide for their care, exhibition, and loans, but will also ask that it be held under the state museum agreement for the duration of the two and a half years, or via the temporary stewardship of Sitka High School.
  - The SHS, in partnership with Sitka National Historical Park (SNHP), will commit to a grant writing effort via our non-profit status, to secure the SJ Merrill plates for stewardship care and/or ownership via SNHP. In order for this to occur, the trustees will need to attain a valid appraisal and determine their desired price.
- Kettleson Library offered to house the archives held in Juneau, but not the remaining campus archival/photo material.
- The Sitka Historical Society and Kettleson Library directors and board presidents met to work together and coordinate efforts on the SJ materials.
- The SJ Board of Trustees is considering all options for ownership and care of campus items, and will not be disbanding until all business and items are decided upon.
- The SJ Trustees appointed the following persons to the SJ Advisory Group, who will be working with the State Archivist regarding the items stored in Stratton: Jim Simard, Mike Trainor, Helen Mercado, Nancy Ricketts, Bob Medinger, Lori Cropley, John Holst
- An 'SJ Oral History Coordinating Group' is newly forming and led by Bill Davis.



*Building No. 25, long known as the Old Russian Trading Post, stood on the site now occupied by the Conway Building, the Sitka Hotel and part of the building occupied by Vi's Apparel. The over-the-sidewalk sign was for Julia Haley's curio shop, the Old Russian Trading Post. (Photo by Photo Shop from the Sitka Historical Society collection)*

Robert N. DeArmond, **Annals of Lincoln Street**,  
Around and About Alaska

Originally Published in the Daily Sitka Sentinel, 4/21/1994,  
and Republished by the Sitka Historical Society in the  
260 page book "From Sitka's Past", 1995  
From the DeArmond Archives of the  
Sitka Historical Society & Museum

**Annals of Lincoln Street** – On the 1867 inventory of Sitka buildings it was listed as No. 25 but for many years before it was torn down about 1920 it was known to Sitkans as the Old Trading Post. That name had two sources: the Sitka Trading Company occupied the east end of the building for many years, and Julia Haley's Old Russian Trading Post occupied the other end for several years. It was a long one-story log building with a high attic that had a peaked dormer window on the street side. In Russian times it had housed a

bakery, a joinery or carpenter shop and perhaps other workshops of the Russian American Company. The building remained there for more than 50 years after the transfer; today the site is occupied by the Conway Building and the Sitka Hotel.

For many years the building was the subject of an ownership controversy. It was asserted by at least two officials that although the building was in private hands, it was actually government property. The controversy may have been touched off by the failure of the second owner of the building to record his deed to the property.

After the formal transfer of the territory in October 1867, the two commissioners, General Rousseau and Captain Peshchurov, had the task of deciding which buildings should become the property of the American government and which were in private ownership. First the commissioners had a map drawn showing the buildings in the town, and they assigned a number to each one.

The Wharf and warehouses, buildings of the shipyard, chief manager's house, barracks and some other buildings, 11 or 12 in all, became government property. General Jefferson C. Davis, commanding the American troops, thought more of the buildings should have been turned over to the government and it is probable that one of the buildings he would have liked for Army purposes was No. 25.

Perhaps in order to avoid ownership quarrels, the commissioners had a second map drawn, showing the town's major buildings. The ones assigned to the government were shown in blue; those in private ownership were colored pink.

A copy of that map - or perhaps it is the original - is in the office of the Sitka District Recorder. It should have prevented the later controversy but it did not. Building No. 25 is shown in pink and the Russian American Company sold it to William S. Dodge on October 23, 1868, for \$1,000. The property extended for 166 feet along Lincoln Street, according to the deed.

Dodge was the first U. S. Customs officer stationed at Sitka and the town's first mayor. He had deep pockets and bought a number of pieces of real estate from the company and from individuals.

In 1870 No. 25 had three occupants according to Sophia Cracroft, who kept a journal during a visit here. One was Amos T. Whitford who in time would become Sitka's leading merchant. He had been born in Brooklyn, New York, according to one source, and was about 37 years old when he landed in Sitka after an adventurous career. He left home at about 16 and shipped out on a whaler. Tired of that life, he jumped ship and reached Nicaragua where he operated a boat on Lake Nicaragua. His next move was to California with the early part of the gold rush and for a time ran a butcher shop at Dutch Flat, one of the more prosperous gold camps.

Gold was discovered on the Fraser River in British Columbia in 1857 and Whitford moved up the coast to operate a boat between Victoria and New Westminster on the Fraser. He carried freight and passengers and apparently did some smuggling both between the two colonies - the mainland and Vancouver Island had separate governments then - and across the border to or from Washington Territory. In September 1859 when he was operating the sloop FRANKLIN SHERMAN he was arrested and fined for selling whiskey to an Indian.

Later he owned the 34-ton schooner NOR'WESTER which was registered at Port Angeles. That may have been his base of operations. He married and was the father of a daughter named Emily, but he did not bring his family to Alaska when he came north. An 1881 census lists him as a widower; his daughter in time married a man named Gage and settled at Mount Vernon, Washington.

*Continued on Pg 7*

After the purchase of Alaska from Russia was announced, Whitford made plans to move north and he arrived in Sitka in July 1867, some three months before the formal transfer. The NOR'WESTER was said to have been loaded with lumber, trade goods and whiskey. He evidently liked Sitka's prospects because he made two trips back to Port Townsend for more merchandise, then settled down here.

He leased the eastern end of Building No.25 from William S. Dodge and opened for business. On June 2, 1868, he had the NOR'WESTER redocumented from Port Angeles to Sitka. There is some indication of his business in a shipment he made to San Francisco on the steamer George S. Wright in July 1868.

In it were three bales of deer skins, two packages of seal skins, a box of furs, a package of elk skins (where did they come from?), five bear skins, a beef hide and a package of sheep skins.

In the May 21 issue of Sitka's weekly newspaper, The Alaska Times, there was this advertisement: "SECOND HAND FURNITURE STORE - Lincoln Street next to Kinkead and Louthan. Always on hand a large assortment of Second Hand Furniture. Also an endless variety of Fancy Articles suitable for this market. A. T. Whitford."

The Army's assessment of his business was less charitable when it made a census in 1870. It listed him as "a trader in trash and Indian curiosities." Either Whitford was a shrewder businessman than most of the nearly two dozen men who established themselves here in 1867-68 or he merely had more tenacity. All except Whitford and two others were gone within five years. Whitford stayed in business at No. 25 until 1893 when he sold out and retired to Washington State.

**To be continued .....**

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The Sitka Historical Society and Museum is presently processing the donation of the Robert N. DeArmond archives that were donated to us by Robert and his son Bill DeArmond in 2010. The collection includes over 300 file folders and boxes within ten file drawers. An inventory has been completed with the next step being action by the society's collection committee, board approval, and accessioning into our collections via our Past Perfect museum database. This will allow the wealth of research, documents, photos, writings and columns to be more readily available to researchers and the public. As curator Jackie Fernandez and I completed the inventory over a period of two days, what was significant was the finding of the actual research documents, hand-written notes, and correspondences that Robert compiled from various sources that ultimately became his publications. Besides the twenty some books he is credited with either editing, writing, or partnering on, it is my belief that his huge number of newspaper columns that he wrote over the years may in fact be the most valuable. Many of the columns were multi-part columns running for many weeks.

The preceding column was part of his series on the "Annals of Lincoln Street", and another series of over twenty columns focused on Peril Strait. Some of these columns were the source of his 1995 Sitka Historical Society publication, "From Sitka's Past". The book is still in print and available at the Museum store, but the lion's share of his columns have not been compiled into separate publications. Many are available via the Sitka Sentinel's archived subscription service, but it is the plan of the Society to work to provide easy, and searchable access to this amazing series on Sitka and our region.

Sincerely, Bob Medinger, Executive Director

### **Summer Museum Intern Announced**

Lisa Huntsha will be joining the Sitka Historical Society and Museum as our ten-week summer intern. Lisa will arrive in late May and be supervised by our new Curator Jackie Fernandez.

Ms. Huntsha is working on her Master's Degree in Museum Studies at Syracuse University in New York, and attained her undergraduate degree from Augustana College in Illinois. With experience in archives and inputting photographic materials into digital libraries, we hope to make progress getting our photo-collections into our museum database and photo's scanned.

Scott Carrlee of the Alaska State Museum coordinates the program of recruiting and screening summer interns for placement across Alaska. In fact, both our current curator Jackie Fernandez, and past curator Ashley Kircher had a variety of Alaska intern placements through the program. The Historical Society provides a stipend for travel and food, and is able to provide quality housing at the Geodetic-White House via our partnership with Sitka Ranger District of the US Forest Service.

## Website for 2010 International Conference on Russian America

By John (Dusty) Kidd, National Park Service

Sometimes you intend jump on a plane, flying off to a meeting or conference, stick around for three days, and then go home, and that's that. But sometimes you sit in on a conference, and it continues to live and grow with you - even after the doors are shut and the microphones and PowerPoints are all tucked away.

Thanks to the Sitka Historical Society, the board, the membership and your executive director, the 2010 International Conference on Russian America continues to convene and reach out six months later – through a special website hosted by the Society and created by your webmaster, Mim McConnell.

It is a cliché to say that “we could not have done it without you.” But it is absolutely true that the Conference would not have happened without the support of the Society. And it is equally true that there would not be a Conference website had the Society not stepped in to support it. Please by all means turn on the computer, dial up the URL ([www.2010RAC.com](http://www.2010RAC.com)), and give the site a whirl: abstracts of 70+ papers, and 48 full texts, plus a slide show, the agenda and information on the Conference sponsors.

Anyone with even the slightest interest in the Russian era in North America has to tap into this rich trove of original research.

- How did famed explorer Vitus Bering live, and die? What did he look like? What was his daily state of mind? Forget *Forensic Files* on TV. The answers can be found in Dr. Victor Zvyagin's paper on the forensic sciences applied to history.
- How does a museum staff determine if old paintings unearthed recently are authentically pieces from the Wrangell family collection? Look closely at the paintings pre- and post-restoration that are the core of the story from Anchorage Museum curator (and former Sitkan) Marilyn Knapp – a fascinating detective story in its own right.
- Which part of the Southeast Alaskan coast swallowed the crew of not one, but two, longboats from Alexei Chirikov's *St. Paul*, the first European ship to sight and make a landing in Alaska, in 1741? Was it at Surge Bay, on the Chichagof Island's rugged northwest coast? The men were never seen or heard from again. Three different researchers from Russia and the

United States offer their theories and navigation waypoints. Nothing from the boats has ever been found.

- Was Russian America truly a “small colony with a large drinking problem”? How did alcohol play into the lives and fortunes of the men and women who lived here? Jenya Anichenko offers some fascinating and original research on alcohol in Russian America.
- How did the “creoles” live in Russian America? This topic was explored by some of the foremost historians of this period. Dr. Andrei Grinev from St. Petersburg looks carefully at the structure of the *creole* social and economic status. Dr. Gordon Pullar of the University of Alaska Fairbanks offers his perspective on the *creoles* of one tribe, the denizens of Woody Island. The renowned Sergei Kan of Dartmouth College looks closely at one *creole*, George Kostromitinof, who floated between Native and Russian society.
- What happens when archaeologists dig in the dirt in not one, not two, but three different sites in Sitka? State Archeologist Dave McMahan has the answers. (See page 9)

The story hopefully does not end here. Bob Medinger has applied for funding to have a Conference Proceedings published in paper form to reach a wider audience and provide more permanence to the scholarship which all of you supported. Let's hope it gets the support it deserves.

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### St. Michaels Bell Project



Our involvement in coordinating the return of the ringing of the bells at St Michael's Cathedral in 2010 is finalized. The bells are installed and being used. Photos are by Rebecca Osborne West taken at the September 23, 2010 open house.

Thanks to all who helped with this worthy project.



## Sitka's Archaeological Past: Exploratory Testing of Three Russian- American Sites in August 2010



*Testing at Geomagnetic House, August 15, 2010*

In conjunction with the International Conference on Russian America in August, a team of archaeologists conducted exploratory testing at three Russian-American sites in the Sitka area. These were: (1) the grounds of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Seismological and Geomagnetic House; (2) the grounds of the Poulson House; and (3) Old Sitka. While the tests produced varied results, they generally demonstrated the potential of the sites to yield important information. More importantly, the work provided an opportunity for Sitka's public to become engaged in this aspect of Alaska's history. An open house hosted by the Sitka Historical Society at the Geomagnetic House was well-attended, thanks to an unusually sunny day. The archaeologists included Dave McMahan (Alaska Office of History and Archaeology), Ty Dilliplane (Massachusetts Maritime Academy), Jay Kinsman (Tongass National Forest), Sue Thorsen (Sitka National Historical Park), Julia Farmer (a high school student from California), Vladimir Tikhonov (Talcu Museum, Irkutsk, Russia), and Artur Kharinsky (Irkutsk State Technical University).

The Geomagnetic House grounds are said to have been the site of a former Russian tea house and garden. Here, three 1x1 meter units were opened on two sides of the building. While one of the tests was terminated at a shallow depth due to bedrock, the other tests yielded promising results. One test, excavated about a meter deep, produced Russian era artifacts (19<sup>th</sup> century porcelain and earthenware, fragments of dark olive bottle glass and thin window glass, and square-cut iron and copper nails). The third test unit, in a slight depression, also yielded artifacts that are likely of Russian origin in an ashy matrix. Among the items were two small carved bi-pointed sticks of unknown function.

The Poulson home, a waterfront landmark, was of particular interest to the team due to lack of prior archaeological work on the property. The 1916 home rests partially on an earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian foundation. We know from early maps and illustrations that a windmill operated on the site during the 1820s, but was replaced in 1832 by a fish storage warehouse. The Poulsons enthusiastically gave permission for archaeological testing and assisted in selecting locations for two test units. The first was in a courtyard on the east side of the house, just inside the Russian foundation. Immediately below the surface, the team began to uncover Russian era artifacts in a dark organic soil. These included a copper nail, window glass, porcelain and transfer-print earthenware, brick fragments, cut and wrought iron nails, and sherds of dark olive bottle glass. The second test unit, located outside the perimeter of the Russian foundation, also produced materials consistent with a Russian occupation, but is most notable in that the lowest level consisted of a midden (trash) deposit with scattered bones of dog, bear, eagle, and salmon. The absence of historic materials in this level may suggest that it represents pre-Russian Tlingit use of the site.

Old Sitka (St. Archangel Michael, 1799-1802) was selected for testing for several reasons. Now the site of a state historical park, it was felt that testing would contribute information useful in the State's ongoing effort to prepare a management plan. The team was encouraged by the discovery of a Russian axe and trade bead in the roots of an overturned tree in recent years. Due to time constraints and heavy rain, the testing was limited to a close inspection of the roots of the upturned tree, the excavation of two small test pits, and the excavation of a single 1x1 meter test unit near the caretaker's house. The test unit was abandoned when it encountered highly compacted gravels from a nearby septic field. The smaller test pits, one on the small islet and the other near the boat launch, were likewise negative. Despite the lack of success, the archaeologists were able to identify other areas that appear promising for future survey and testing.

In general, the 2010 testing project achieved its modest goals. The tests confirmed the information potential of several important sites, promoted interaction and information exchange, and enriched the conference by giving participants the opportunity to interact with the field team.

Dave McMahan, Alaska Office of  
History and Archaeology

## A Letter From Isabelle Miller

(Former Museum  
Director)

*We are pleased to share  
the following letter  
which was rediscovered  
recently among the  
Historical Society  
archives.*



Isabelle Miller

September 1, 1946

Editor of READER'S DIGEST  
Pleasantville, New York

My dear Sir:

I have read many testimonials as to the worthwhileness of the READER'S DIGEST, and I know that you have received thousands more, but I doubt that anyone has used and appreciated its qualities in quite the same way as I did last Thursday night and Friday morning.

Our orphanage celebrated the warm, sunny day on Thursday with a picnic, and I wandered off to pick berries, and to enjoy the solitude with the September READER'S DIGEST, NEGRO DIGEST, and the chance to finish a letter to a friend. In my newcomer's ignorance, I underestimated the vastness of Alaska, and tried a short-cut back to the picnic, my eyes on a glacier landmark which did a record job of receding as I struggled toward it over a beach of jagged rocks. After five hours, I knew I would have to spend the night out there with bears and whatnot. Up under a cliff, out of reach of the tide, I got together some half soggy drift wood for a fire. I decided that I could sacrifice the cover of the DIGEST, but it proved almost fireproof. "The Boom" did better, and in a little while I had the comfort of a fire to discourage bears and to encourage my rescue by passing boats as well as keep me warm. There was light enough to read by, too, but I thought, "Not now!" when I saw "Your Flesh Should Creep" for a title, and the pro and con of DDT could not catch my attention either. I turned to the Book Section, but having the hero find things tough at the Waldorf was too much. I grinned at the contrast of his bed and mine, as I half lay draped across two drift wood trees with my shoulders against a rock and jagged branches gouging me while my legs scorched and my shoulders shivered in my thin blouse. But it was then that the DIGEST came into its own when I

remembered paper is a good insulator and began dissecting it to stuff my blouse. I saved a back section to use as a torch in case of bear or boat, and during the night I read with appreciation of the struggle to get cheaper milk to the citizens of Detroit, but protected by my paper underwear I even got some sleep, and the night passed much more quickly than I had expected.

I walked on at five o'clock and was neither cold or hungry when a little sea plane picked me up, almost to Seduction Point and twenty miles from where I started, about nine-thirty that morning. The whole town had hunted most of the night, imagining all sorts of disasters and suffering much more than I deserved, but after they had given vent to their amazement and relief to find me still alive and not needing the stretchers, splints, hot water bottles, and flowers they had ready, they all had a good laugh at my use of the READER'S DIGEST. I am finishing this letter over a month after I started it, so busy is one in exciting Alaska, and just yesterday when I started out on another walk, one of my would-be-rescuers called to me that he was sorry he hadn't a copy to lend me to take along.

Thank you for your handy little magazine.

Very sincerely yours,  
Isabelle Miller

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## Another Blast From The Past!

From the June 5th, 1970, Sitka Sentinel

### Historical Society Sets Museum Session

The Sitka Historical Society will meet Sunday evening in the Centennial Building at 7:30 p.m. This is an important meeting to members and interested persons in that there is much work to do on the new museum. The tourist season is here and the museum is one of the things that visitors want to see. The show cases have arrived from the state museum and need to be cleaned and filled. There also will be further discussion on the fall annual meeting of State Historical Society here at Sitka in November. There will be a short program before the close of the meeting. There is no admittance fee.

## Membership

The Sitka Historical Society has been in existence for 54 years thanks to a strong membership base. Your membership is key to the protection of Sitka's History and Culture. A membership form, and levels, is included here or on our website. Please won't you join us to help continue our mission. You may join or renew your membership by mail, phone, or visiting the museum. Thank You!

### Some of the benefits of membership include the following:

- Information and updates to the Sitka History presentations, publications and recent articles
- Participation in our annual "Explorations" program that focuses on a new theme each year
- Free admission to the Museum
- 10% off on all Museum Store purchases, now including jewelry and native art
- Invitation to the annual meeting, including special presentations, awards, and door prizes
- Newsletter mailings
- Early access to special Sitka Historical Publications and special offerings throughout the year
- Knowing that your contribution is helping to preserve the vital history of Sitka

Call us at 747-6455 if you would like to serve on one of the following committees

### Sitka Historical Society Committees:

**Membership/Marketing:** Ernestine Massey, Doris Bailey, Sabra Jenkins, Pat Alexander, Chris Todd, Bob Medinger, Shirley Dahlquist

**Fund Development:** Pat Alexander, Bob Medinger, John Stein

**Newsletter:** Ernestine Massey, Bob Medinger

**Annual May Cemetery Cleanup:** Doris Bailey, Sabra Jenkins

**Finance Committee:** Ernestine Massey, Jerry Dzugan

**Collections Committee:** Jerry Dzugan, Jere Christner, Sabra Jenkins, Jackie Fernandez, Bob Medinger

Climb with us as a Member the  
**Sitka Historical Society**



Please Circle Membership Level

Castle Hill	13 feet	Senior over 62	\$ 20
Krestoff Mountain	1598 ft	Under 25	\$ 20
Gavan Hill	2530 ft	Individual	\$ 40
Cross Mountain	3031 ft	Family	\$ 50
Arrowhead Mountain	3048 ft	Donor	\$100
*Mount Verstovia	3117 ft	Business	\$ 250
<i>*Business Membership includes link on our website</i>			
Three Sisters	3599 ft	Sustaining	\$1000
Mount Katlian	3999 ft	Benefactor	\$5000

Name (s) \_\_\_\_\_

Other Family Members (Family Membership) \_\_\_\_\_

\*Business Name (and contact person) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City State Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Enclose Check payable to Sitka Historical Society  
or Charge to Credit Card (specify card type below)

Card Type \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Circle Membership Type New Membership or Renewal

Mail to:  
Sitka Historical Society  
330 Harbor Drive  
Sitka, AK 99835

Fax to:  
907-747-6588  
**Online Membership Form**  
[www.sitkahistory.org](http://www.sitkahistory.org)

### Our Mission:

To preserve and promote the events, stories and artifacts of the human history of the Sitka area for the inspiration, education and benefit of the public and future generations.



# Sitka Historical Society

330 Harbor Drive Sitka, Alaska 99835  
(907) 747-6455

Address Service Requested

## Rasmuson Foundation Award to The Sitka Historical Society

The Sitka Historical Society and Museum is pleased to announce the generous award of a grant from the Rasmuson Foundation that will produce a professional publication from proceedings of the "2010 International Conference on Russian America" held in Sitka and co-sponsored by the Sitka National Historical Park.

Alaska, and for a time, much of the west coast of North America, was "claimed" by the Russians, with the 19th century administrative capital located in Sitka. Nearly seventy scholars and historians from six nations presented their research papers on a wide variety of topics, including:

- *The conflicts between Russian and Native peoples*
- *Alaska's Creole Peoples*
- *A Small Colony with a Big Drinking Problem:  
Alcohol in Russian America*
- *The exploration of Alaska*
- *The role of women in Russian America*

A committee of distinguished scholars will select the best presentations from the conference and the publication will be distributed to Alaska's community libraries, universities, museums, historical societies and influential scholars in the field. The book will include color reproductions of appropriate images and maps from the selected presentations.

*For more information :* <http://2010rac.com/>

*Contact:* Bob Medinger 747-6455