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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
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## Press Release

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### CONSERVATION TREATMENTS FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTIFACTS PRESENTED BY CONSERVATOR ELLEN CARRLEE FEBRUARY 16 AT THE ALASKA STATE MUSEUM

JUNEAU – The Alaska State Museum has been involved in the treatment and preservation of artifacts ranging from the most ancient archaeological basketry on the Northwest Coast to portholes and ordnance from the 1868 wreck of the *Torrent*. What does it take to preserve these kinds of collections? Conservator Ellen Carrlee discusses archaeology in Alaska from the viewpoint of artifact conservation and shares the latest developments in Alaska State Museum research and outreach.

Artifacts from the *Torrent*, the *Kad'yak*, the *Princess Sophia* and other shipwrecks will be brought out to illustrate various deterioration problems seen on marine archaeological objects and possible solutions. For example, brass and bronze archaeological artifacts often suffer from an aggressive bright green corrosion known as “bronze disease.” What is it? Can it be prevented? How do we treat it? An important component of the work at the Alaska State Museum is answering questions from Alaskan museums, cultural centers, historical societies, and the general public about the nature of problems they see on their collections and what solutions are possible. Some problems can be solved locally with little cost, and other problems are much more complicated.

Some treatments are even too complicated to undertake at the Alaska State Museum. The bronze Mountain Howitzer cannon from the *Torrent* is undergoing an electrolysis treatment at a conservation lab in Texas. The same lab treated the wheel hub from the *Kad'yak* with special silicone oil to deal with the specific challenges of its preservation.

Waterlogged basketry and wood often look amazing when pulled from the water, but then shrink, distort, and even fall apart upon drying. Treatment with polyethylene glycol can give good results, although it is more challenging for basketry and is the subject of recent research at the Alaska State Museum. Textiles can also become more fragile when dried, and a new collaboration begun just this year will be described.

Preliminary results will be publicly revealed for archaeological label adhesive testing underway at the museum and two other conservation labs. Museums standards involve the use of a finicky but very stable adhesive to put labels on archaeological collections. The question came up last year about the use of easier-to-use acrylic art gels that are locally available and widely used for labeling collections in Alaska. Are they OK? Can they be used on all materials? The full results will be formally presented at the Alaska Anthropological Association conference in March. The question of what locally available materials are safe for long term preservation is often an important issue for Alaska.

Admission is free for the lectures in this series taking place every Wednesday noon hour through March 9. The series is an annual program of the Division of Libraries, Archives, and Museums, held in honor of the institutions' first librarian and curator, Father Andrew P. Kashevarof, who served from 1919 until his death in 1940.

Discounted winter admission for museum visitation is \$3. Visitors 18 and under are admitted free of charge. Admission is free for this Wednesday noon lecture series. An annual pass that allows unlimited visits to the Alaska State Museum and the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka is available for \$15.

Assistance is available for visitors with special needs. Please contact visitor services at 465-2901 before the visit for more information.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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[www.museums.state.ak.us](http://www.museums.state.ak.us)

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