

volunteered at ASC during her fall semester at University of Alaska Anchorage where she is currently an anthropology graduate student, focusing her studies on museum studies and Alaska Native cultures. Candice worked with Tlingit research materials – editing bilingual transcripts, creating an object names list, determining questions for review by a Tlingit translator, and compiling museum catalog information. Originally from Abbotsford, BC, Canada, Candice moved to Fairbanks, Alaska to attend UAF where she graduated in December 2004 with a BA in art history and anthropology. Since graduation, she has worked in museums, galleries and government research.

ROSITA WORL RECEIVES AAA KIMBALL AWARD

By William Fitzhugh



Rosita Worl

Rosita Worl, a long-time friend of the ASC, was awarded the Solon T. Kimball Award from the American Anthropological Association at the association's annual meeting in 2008. The Kimball Award honors outstanding achievements that have contributed to the development of anthropology as an applied science and have had important impacts on public policy.

Rosita, whose Tlingit names are Yeidiklats'okw and Kaa.hani, is Tlingit, Ch'áak' (Eagle) moiety of the Shangukeidí (Thunderbird) Clan from the Kawdliyaayi Hit (House Lowered From the Sun) in Klukwan, Alaska. She has managed Sea Alaska Heritage Institute since 1996 and has served as assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Alaska Southeast. She has a PhD and a MS in anthropology from Harvard University and holds a BA from Alaska Methodist University.

Rosita has worked on behalf of Native people in various capacities. As an adviser on Alaska Native and rural affairs to **Governor Steve Cowper** in the mid-1980s, she was instrumental in developing the governor's policy establishing the state's relationship with tribes for the first time in Alaska. As a Director of the Alaska Federation of Natives, she fought for Alaska Native rights to subsistence resources while seeking legal means to protect those uses into the future. As a member of the National Repatriation Review Committee, she has strived to protect rights of Native people seeking to repatriate cultural objects under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. She also recently helped guide the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution's new National Museum of the American Indian. As a Director of Sealaska Corporation, Worl successfully fought to include shareholder descendants as shareholders. As President of SHI, she has led efforts to document and perpetuate Native languages in innovative ways and to weave Native language and culture into curriculum used by public schools. She has authored or co-authored more than 60 publications, papers, and books, editorials and reviews.

For many years Rosita has assisted the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center in a variety of undertakings, serving on the ASC Advisory Committee and participating in several exhibition projects. Most recently she was instrumental in securing a Tlingit Raven canoe for the National Museum of Natural History's new Ocean Hall and has been a member of the development team for the Smithsonian Alaska Native Peoples Gallery, to be installed in 2010 in the expanded Anchorage Museum. Congratulations Rosita!

A COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION PROCESS: CONSERVATORS AND ALASKA NATIVE CONSULTANTS AT THE SMITHSONIAN

By Landis Smith

A homecoming of sorts will be the successful culmination of the Arctic Studies Center *Living Our Cultures* exhibition due to open at the Anchorage Museum in May 2010. Smithsonian conservators have been busy preparing close to 600 Alaska Native objects for their return, display and close study by Alaska Native people. From the inception of the *Living our Cultures* project, increased access to collections has been an organizing principle of research, curation, and design.



Central Yup'ik consultant, **Chuna McIntyre**, demonstrates the use of dance fans in Yupik dance, and the importance of restoring the missing feathers.

In keeping with the Arctic Studies Center exhibition approach, consultations with Alaska Native advisors continue as a central and essential component of the conservation process. In a series of successful collaborations, conservators at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and National Museum of Natural history (NMNH) have worked with Native partners in Washington, DC to inform and refine their approaches to treating the objects. To date, participants have represented the Central Yup'ik, St.

Lawrence Island/Siberian Yupik, Iñupiaq, Tlingit and Tsimshian regions. It is anticipated that additional Alaska Native consultants from other culture groups will participate as the work continues. The insights, information and perspectives gained during these sessions have been an invaluable component of the conservation decision-making process as well as the documentation of objects and their conditions.

In many ways, conservators are uniquely suited to this sort of collaborative work with collections. They share common ground with Native consultants in their focus on technologies, materials, the processing of materials, the ways objects were used, what condition can tell us about use, the extent of use, whether the objects were made for sale or trade, traditional care of different kinds of objects, and aesthetic issues. These areas are best explored when the conservators are well-prepared in terms of the cultural background of the objects at hand. Basic collections research is part of the process for contextualizing the objects in terms of their pre-collection and post-collection histories. For each object, museum records such as catalog cards and conservation reports, early collectors' museum reports, archival materials, curatorial input, exhibit histories and, if called for, scientific analysis, provide the foundation for the full evaluation of objects. This background information, compiled in individual object dossiers, has proven to be an invaluable reference during consultations, for conservators and Native advisors alike.

That said, no amount of conservation expertise or background research can substitute for the insights gained during consultations with Alaska Native people. Native partners and conservators may be examining the same object, but see it through their own cultural knowledge and understanding. In answering the deceptively simple

question “How should the object look on exhibit?” consultants offer perspectives and information otherwise unavailable. For example, upon viewing a pair of Yup’ik dance fans, Central Yup’ik consultant **Chuna McIntyre** immediately surmised that they were missing feathers, rather than a caribou hair ruff. This was confirmed under the microscope when quill remnants and the wood pegs that once secured them were located in each of the holes made along the edges of the fans. Apparently, the objects were collected in this condition, as indicated by a 19th century ledger drawing and old photographs in the 1881 report of museum collector, **Edward Nelson**. Chuna felt strongly that the missing feathers/plumes that once encircled the pair of dance fans ought to be restored; the fans would come to life, they would “sing.” Chuna demonstrated the use of fans in Yup’ik dance, and the way in which the long feather plumes would have accentuated the arm movements. In dancing the fans, Chuna clearly illustrated how essential feathers were in understanding both the use and purpose of these objects. By restoring the feathers, the meaning of the fans would be preserved. Discussions with curators followed, about how to balance preservation of the original objects as they



Inupiaq consultant, Sylvester Ayek, explains the use, traditional care, and proper configuration of the parts of this harpoon.

were collected, with the cultural imperative to restore the feathers. In the end, an innovative exhibit mount was designed to receive the feathers while preserving the full integrity of the original objects. The feathers will be restored once the fans are in Alaska, hopefully by Chuna or another appropriate Yup’ik person. The fans are but one example of the many ways in which Native input has impacted conservation treatment decisions for this project.

Ideally, consultations become exchanges that flow both ways. In particular, older objects inspire the work of visiting artists, the telling of stories and recounting of memories. A Yup’ik artist takes a tracing of an elaborate fur parka for a future re-creation. An Inupiaq artist snaps photos of the objects that will inspire his own art. A pair of Yup’ik boots stirs memories of a grandmother’s traditional care of footwear, thus explaining the unusual pattern of wear on the soles



Tsimshian Consultant, David Boxley, discusses the carving methods and paint types used on a wood hat with potlatch rings. From left to right NMAI conservator, Kelly McHugh, NMNH conservator, Michele Austin-Dennehy, David Boxley, and NMNH conservator, Landis Smith.

observed by conservators. Objects and the materials from which they were made are discussed and named in Native languages, the preservation of museum collections inextricably tied to the preservation of language and the traditions the objects embody.

Consultations in Washington, DC are necessarily limited by distance, time and funds, but serve an invaluable and essential role in the treatment of these collections. Once in Alaska the relative proximity of AK Native people will allow more ongoing discussions with more people. There will no doubt be more issues raised and hopefully more questions resolved. Either way, Alaska Native people will be at the center of the discussion about the care and presentation of their cultural heritage.

A special thanks to the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** for their generous grant to the NMAI, make the consultations possible, and to the **NMNH Anthropology Department** for additional support.

Living our Cultures project conservators:

National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) Anthropology Conservation Laboratory

Greta Hansen, Head of Conservation

Michele Austin-Dennehy, ASC/AM Project Conservator

Landis Smith, ASC/AM Project Conservator

Kim Cullen Cobb, Assistant Conservator for ASC/AM Project

National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Conservation Department

Marian Kaminitz, Head of Conservation

Kelly McHugh, ASC/AM Project Conservator

TAILS OF A YUP’IK GROUND SQUIRREL PARKA

By Molly Gleeson

This Yup’ik man’s ground squirrel parka was collected by **Edward William Nelson** from the village of Nushagak in northern Bristol Bay, Alaska and accessioned into the collection at the US National Museum in 1880. There is no record that the parka was ever exhibited or included in any publications since its acquisition, and it is likely that its existence is not known outside of a small group of people at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). After over a century in storage, however, its days of anonymity are numbered. The parka soon will be featured in the *Living Our Cultures, Sharing Our Heritage: The First Peoples of Alaska* exhibit, which opens in the Anchorage Museum in May 2010. As a garment that would have been worn during *Kelek*, a major winter festival, also called *Qaaritaaq, Itruka’ar, Agayuyaraq*, or the Inviting-In Feast, it will be featured in the “Ceremony, Celebration” section of the Yup’ik community case.

In the *Living Our Cultures* project, access is a key word, particularly for the conservation team. Once installed in the Anchorage Museum, the parka will be on exhibit for over ten years and made available to Alaska Native visitors for study and research. Due to some condition problems, the parka required conservation treatment in order to make it accessible for this type of use. However, work on the parka went beyond stabilization - through literature research, consultations with Native advisors, and utilization of special expertise and resources available at NMNH, important information regarding the cultural context, raw materials and construction techniques of the garment was discovered and recorded. This information not only informed the treatment decisions, but will also travel with the parka to Alaska and be

available to those viewing or studying the piece while it is on loan.

The parka is made from the summer fur of the Arctic ground squirrel. Approximately 103 ground squirrel skins, plus additional pieces of squirrel fur were prepared to construct the double-layer parka. The main part of the parka, below the shoulders, was assembled from squirrel skins that were sewn together with sinew, side-by-side in five horizontal rows. Each squirrel skin was prepared by removing the head and front legs; then the bodies were cut across the inside of the hind legs and the skins were cleaned. It appears that most were then flattened, with the squirrel backs and tails exposed on the outside of the parka, and the bellies and front legs on the inside. The squirrel tails hang like fringe in rows across the entire surface of the parka and the sleeves. The hood has a ruff of wolverine fur, and the sleeves have cuffs of white caribou fur with narrow bands of short brown trim, most likely beaver or river otter.

The parka was flagged for treatment because many of the squirrel tails were already completely or partially missing; in addition the remaining tails were extremely fragile and distorted. The conservators were concerned that the remaining tails would be susceptible to breakage and loss during preparation for the loan and throughout the duration of the exhibit. Otherwise, the parka was observed to be in good condition - the skins retained some flexibility and had well-preserved color and luster. The treatment goal was to stabilize the remaining tails and to prepare the parka for presentation in the Yup'ik community case.

Few examples of this type of parka exist in museum collections today, and published information specific to the materials, techniques and cultural context of this garment is limited. Background research began with museum records and relevant literature regarding Yup'ik material culture and parka-making, work which informed the assessment of the parka and prepared the conservator for sessions with Central Yup'ik advisors, **Vernon Chimegalrea** (linguist) and **Chuna McIntyre** (artist). They helped to provide a cultural context for the parka and identified its different types of fur and construction techniques. Additional insights were gained in consultations with NMNH mammalogists **Jeremy Jacobs** and **Suzanne Peruach**, and with NMNH taxidermist/exhibits specialist **Paul Rhymer**. Their knowledge of squirrel anatomy and animal fur preparation helped to explain some of the fabrication features and to identify potential causes for the instability of the tails. Examining the parka with all consultants provided a much deeper appreciation for the parka, its careful craftsmanship and its relatively pristine condition, especially considering its age.

After gaining a better understanding of the cultural context, materials and



NMNH mammalogists **Jeremy Jacobs** and **Suzanne Peruach** (center) discuss the parka with project conservators (from left to right) **Kelly McHugh**, **Molly Gleeson** and **Landis Smith**.

This treatment would involve reshaping and repair of the squirrel tails. Standard conservation treatments for reshaping skin involve the use of water and solvents; treatments for repair include the use of a variety of adhesives and supports, either applied directly, or by using various solvents and/or heat. In order to determine which of these materials and application techniques would be suitable for the parka, various tests were conducted. The reaction of the squirrel skin to water and solvents was evaluated and both the pH and the heat shrinkage temperature of the skin were tested. In addition to helping decide on treatment, the pH and heat shrinkage tests also measured the extent of deterioration of the skin. Based on these tests, several adhesives were chosen as possible candidates. These adhesives were tested along with a range of different application techniques and supports, including Japanese tissue paper, synthetic non-woven fabrics and gold-beater's skin.

Finally, a suitable treatment protocol was determined. Each distorted tail was humidified and reshaped using a mixture of water and ethanol. After reshaping, each tail in need of stabilization was reinforced using a medium-weight Japanese tissue paper, cotton thread and Lascaux, an acrylic dispersion adhesive. In the end, forty-seven tails on the parka were treated. After carrying out further humidification and reshaping to reduce large creases in the arm and shoulder areas, the parka was deemed stable and the treatment was complete.

The treatment alone was critical to facilitate the safe travel and display of the parka. In addition, the research undertaken during the treatment provides a greater understanding of the parka and allows for further examination and study to be carried out. But perhaps one of the most important aspects of this project was bringing people together to examine the parka in Washington, DC as the first step to providing better access to this object. The next step will be taking it back to Alaska, to be seen by Native Alaskans for the first time in over 100 years.

This project was carried out under the guidance and supervision of the *Living Our Cultures* Project Conservators, **Landis Smith** and **Michele Austin-Dennehy**; and with the oversight of Head of Conservation, Anthropology Conservation Laboratory, **Greta Hansen**.

Molly Gleeson is a former UCLA/Getty Master's Program in Archaeological and Ethnographic Conservation intern in the Anthropology Conservation Lab.



Yup'ik men's ground squirrel parka from the collections at the NMNH.