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Historic Alutiiq Kayak to be Exhibited at Museum

With a $49,612 grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the Alutiiq Museum will partner with Harvard University’s Peabody Museum to bring an historic Alutiiq kayak to Kodiak. Grant funds awarded to Koniag, Inc. will pay for shipment of the historic boat from Cambridge, Massachusetts to Kodiak, and its installation in a new exhibit in the Alutiiq Museum’s gallery. The exhibit will debut in the spring of 2016 and will be followed by a lecture series devoted to Alutiiq maritime traditions. The boat is scheduled to spend a decade in Kodiak, allowing thousands to enjoy this rare artifact and the museum to develop educational programs around boat construction.

Collected in 1868 by Edward Fast, a U.S. Army officer stationed in Alaska, the boat is a unique example of a complete, skin-covered kayak. In addition to its wooden frame, the boat retains its decorated skin cover. Alutiiq researchers discovered the boat in Peabody Museum’s collections in 2006. In 2011, it was the centerpiece of a skin artifact conservation project at the Peabody, funded by a Save America’s Treasures grant. Harvard worked with Alutiiq craftsmen Alfred Naumoff, Susan Malutin, and Sven Haakanson, Jr. to study and preserve the boat, with the goal of its eventual exhibition in Kodiak.

“Kayaks were one of the most important pieces of our ancestors’ technology,” said April Laktonen Counceller, the museum’s Executive Director. “The Harvard kayak preserves a wealth of technological information on kayak construction, especially in the ways that its skin cover was made and attached. We are very pleased to be working with the Peabody Museum to share the boat in Kodiak. We had the opportunity to collaborate with Peabody staff in June, and this project builds on that nice relationship.”

The Alutiiq Museum is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and sharing the history and culture of the Alutiiq, an Alaska Native tribal people. Representatives of Kodiak Alutiiq organizations govern the museum with funding from charitable contributions, memberships, grants, contracts, and sales.

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