Rare Quiver Donated to Alutiiq Museum

A rare red cedar quiver is the newest addition to the Alutiiq Museum’s collections. The 35 inch, nineteenth century piece is a family heirloom, passed through generations of Kodiak’s King family. The quiver arrived at the museum this month, after surfacing at an artifact identification event held at the Burke Museum in Seattle last fall. Roger and Donna King brought the artifact to the Burke Museum, where they met former Alutiiq Museum Executive Director Sven Haakanson Jr. Haakanson recognized the piece a unique Alutiiq quiver, and suggested that the Kings donate it to the Alutiiq Museum.

Haakanson explained. “Family-owned items like this are so important to our people. They help us to learn about our history and reawaken traditions. Our carvers are just starting to relearn how to make such quivers. Thanks to access to this piece, carvers on Kodiak will be able to study in detail the craftwork of our ancestors and bring this tradition to life once again.”

Alutiiq hunters carried their darts and arrows in quivers. These graceful wooden cylinders protected the projectiles used to hunt birds and mammals of many sizes. Quivers are rare in historic collections. Haakanson, who has traveled the world studying Alutiiq artifacts noted that the King Family piece was unique for its square shape and manufacturing technique. He has only seen one other square quiver. According to Haakanson, the piece is carved from a single piece of wood. The craftsman shaped the outside of the quiver, then split the object in half, hollowed out each side, and lashed the two sides back together.

The quiver came with a single arrow, a piece with a wooden shaft, eagle feather fletching, and a rounded metal tip. This arrow tip is unusual. It has a cylindrical metal cap designed to screw into the shaft, and may have been removable at one time. Haakanson thinks that the arrow was a practice piece, used by an archer for target shooting.

Marnie Leist, Alutiiq Museum Curator of Collections received the donation and worked with the King family to document its history.
“The piece is in excellent condition and it came to us with a detailed family history,” said Leist. “King obtained the quiver and arrow from the late Walter (Vo) King, his nephew. In turn, Walter King obtained quiver and arrow from his dad Alexander King, who is Roger’s uncle.”

For now, the quiver is resting in collections storage, while the museum considers the best way to display it. “We are planning an update to our subsistence exhibit and this would be a great addition,” said Leist. “But a large piece like this it needs a specially fabricated case to protect it. Our next step is to find support for the construction of such a case.”

Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Laktonen Counceller, expressed her gratitude for the donation. “We are so grateful to the King family for preserving and sharing this historic quiver. Many of our ancestors’ artifacts are out of reach in distant museum. It’s so important to have objects like these in Kodiak where craftsmen can study them. We also thank Sven Haakanson for helping to return the piece to Kodiak. He not only directed the King family to us, he helped to pack the rare piece for shipping, insuring its safe return home.”

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.

Photo 1: Nineteenth century wooden quiver and accompanying arrow. Gift of the King Family. Photograph courtesy the Alutiiq Museum.

Photo 2: Detail of arrow tip. Gift of the King Family. Photograph courtesy the Alutiiq Museum.

Photo 3: Roger and Donna King hold the quiver and arrow at the Burke Museum in Seattle. Photograph courtesy Sven Haakanson Jr.