Kayak Project

Nearly 150 years after it was collected, a historic kayak is headed back to the Alutiiq world. Owned by Harvard University, the boat is a 14½-foot, single-man kayak. Although its precise origin is unknown, the boat’s construction is undeniably Alutiiq. It features an upturned bow, a hallmark of kayaks built for the rough, windy waters of the Alutiiq world. The piece is remarkable for its age and completeness, with a full skin cover with decorated seams. It is one of about 2,000 objects from Alaska collected by Army officer Edward Fass in 1868.

With grant funding from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the Alutiiq Museum will borrow the boat from the Harvard’s Peabody Museum and install it in a new gallery display. The historic watercraft will be the centerpiece of an exhibit on Alutiiq maritime traditions. A ten-year loan will allow patrons to enjoy and study the vessel, and the museum to create educational programs about kayak construction and life in coastal Alaska.

Fittingly, a part of the boat’s journey back to Kodiak will occur by water. This spring, professional art handlers in Boston will carefully pack the vessel for shipping. The boat, resting in its storage crate, will be placed a larger crate to provide two layers of protection. Then the huge package will be trucked to Seattle and brought across the Gulf of Alaska by barge. The boat will arrive in Kodiak in April. With help from a Peabody Museum Conservator, Alutiiq Museum staff members


“Kayaks were one of the most important pieces of our ancestors’ technology,” said April Laktonen Councillor, the Alutiiq 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 last June, and this project builds on that nice relationship.”