

Alutiit Caqillrit – ALUTIIQ OBJECTS IN MUSEUMS



In the 18th and 19th centuries, wealthy men from Western powers ventured across the globe on missions of exploration. Alaska was a popular destination. Entrepreneurs, military officers, naturalists, illustrators, and anthropologists came north in search of land, resources, and information. Visitors to Kodiak made detailed accounts of the island and its Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people, and they took examples of Alutiiq clothing, tools, and artwork home. Why did they collect Alutiiq cultural belongings?

Some bought or commissioned items as souvenirs. Russian sailors impressed by Alutiiq skin sewing paid seamstresses to make European-style caps and capes from gut skin. Other collectors sought to document distant places and cultures. Following a brutal century of conquest, many people assumed Indigenous societies were vanishing. Collectors rushed to document Native traditions and amass objects, as they expected these “primitive” cultures would soon disappear. Between 1870 and 1930 huge quantities of Native objects flowed out of communities and into museums—sometimes through unethical means. American and European audiences flocked to exhibits of cultural curiosities. Yet Native communities rarely knew where their cultural objects went.

In the 1980s, Alutiiq people began to learn of ancestral cultural belongings in places like Finland and France and to study these treasures. Each historic object preserves valuable details about its construction, design, material use, fabrication methods, and decoration. Reconnecting with cultural belongings is helping artists learn and reawaken artistic traditions suppressed by colonialism. Studies of these objects are also helping museums learn about Alutiiq traditions from culture bearers and better document their collections.

Date	Collector	Collection Location	Objects in Collection
1762-1867	S.G. Glotov, J. Billings, G.A. Sarychev, Uri Lisianskii, V.M. Golovnin	Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology & Ethnography (Kunstkamera), St. Petersburg, Russia	Harpoons, spears, throwing boards, animal figurine, hunting hats, stone tools, arrows, bows, model boats, paddles, fishing hook, feast bowls, oil lamps, baskets, bags, mats, spruce root hat, bentwood visors, headgear, parkas, raingear, footwear, masks, dance rattles, drums
1818-1846	Arvid Adolf Etholén, Finnish naval officer	National Museum of Finland, Helsinki	Clothing, headgear, footwear, bags, spruce root hats, hunting visors, figurines, basket, drums, dance rattle, arrows, wooden objects, kayak models, ulu, stone tools, bows, harpoons, throwing boards, sinew line
1872	Louis Alphonse Pinart, French anthropologist	Musée Boulogne-sur-Mer, France	Masks, beaded regalia (headdress, cuffs, and sash), bow, spoons, harpoon heads, tools, bowls, drum, model boats
1879-1894	William J. Fisher, American naturalist	National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC	Stone and bone tools, beaded regalia, headgear, bentwood visors, masks, amulet, doll, spoons, boat model, throwing board, sewing bags, spool, spruce root hat, ivory figurines, drum, rattles
1888-1889	Hugh Cecil Lowther, British aristocrat	British Museum, London	Model kayaks, masks, paddles, stone tools, bows, arrows, quivers, skin clothing, spruce root hat, grass socks, baskets, spoons, beaded regalia, bag

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Captured Heritage, 1985, by Douglas Cole, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

Amutat Database, <https://alutiiqmuseum.org/museum/collections/amutat/>