

# The Lopez Island Historical Society & Museum

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Newsletter

Spring 2007

*A note from Amy Frost, Exhibit Curator:*

**C**arried by Canoe: A Native History of Lopez Island is one part exhibit, one part thesis project, and new ground for all involved. When I began the Museology Graduate Program at the University of Washington, I was interested in Native history and the relationships between museums and Native groups. While an intern at the Lopez Museum in 2005, I became interested in developing the Native history exhibit the museum had planned—in part because it was a chance to establish a relationship with the local tribes. The Museum's Director and Trustees were very supportive of my bid to lead the exhibit project, and I owe them an enormous debt of gratitude for this opportunity and for the support they have continued to provide.

The exhibit itself is a peek into the history of the Straits Salish people who were, and still are, on Lopez Island. From the perspective of anthropology, the Straits Salish are one of the Coast Salish groups that live along the straits of Washington, British Columbia, and Vancouver Island. Lopez Island was one of many nearby places where the Straits Salish lived while they gathered plants and animals in season, socialized, traded, and developed traditions and crafts unique to our area.

This story of the Straits Salish is told using many sources, including historical documents, oral history, the ethnographic work of Wayne Suttles, and conversations with members of the Samish Indian Tribe and the Lummi Nation. We also have some thrilling artifacts to share with you—a Coast Salish-style canoe built by Bill Holm (and used by Camp Nor'wester); baskets, gambling disks, a bark

beater and several other ethnographic and archaeological items on loan from the Burke Museum; and dolls in Native dress made by Leslie Eastwood of the Samish Indian Nation. Many artifacts donated to the museum by Lopez pioneer families also help tell the story.



The exhibit works its way from time immemorial; past epidemics, raids, and the movement of winter villages; and finally to interactions with settlers. If you are a history buff, armchair anthropologist, woodworker, textile artist, fisher, or are just interested in learning about the Straits Salish who have lived on Lopez, there are some

fascinating displays here for you this summer.

We'll be open noon to four, Wednesday–Sunday from May 5 through September.

One last note—the Samish and Lummi Nations are the final word on their own history, and we could not have developed this exhibit without their cultural committees. Thank you.

By the way, it is illegal to knowingly disturb or dig in an archaeological site in the state of Washington, even on private property! Unprofessional excavation destroys the archaeological value of the site and the artifact, and it can be disrespectful to Native beliefs. So, please don't dig. For more information, contact the Dept. of Archaeology and Historic Preservation: 360-586-3065; <http://www.dahp.wa.gov/>

*Carried by Canoe* sponsors: Steve & Michele Heller, Lopez Village Market, Islanders Insurance, Holly B's, Spencer's Landing Marina, Doug James Floor Coverings, Islands Marine Center, Islanders Bank, Richardson Fuel, Lopez Sand & Gravel, Lopez Pharmacy, Spud & Karen Grimes, Keep It Clean Laundry, Lopez Paper, Jamie & Lauren Stephens, Edenwild Inn, Lopez Kiwi Farm, Islandscape Nursery, Karen Rousseau, Dick & Mary Schoenman, Todd & Diane Goldsmith, Ken & Linda Rose, with additional support from Humanities Washington

# Message from the Board

by Mike Ellis, President

During the winter your Museum has broken new ground. In preparation for our 2007 exhibit *Carried by Canoe: A Native History of Lopez Island* we have succeeded in forging an even closer working relationship with The Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture at the University of Washington. This relationship built on the existing interest of The Burke in early human settlement on Lopez. Two years ago Julie Stein, Director of The Burke, and her team spent considerable time at a dig on Watmough Bight beach and presented their activities to our community. The second connection was built by Amy Frost who was a summer intern at our Museum as part of her Masters degree work in Museology. Amy went on to develop the content of our 2007 exhibit as part of her thesis. We are delighted that she is now Amy Frost, MA.

The Burke is lending us several objects from their Archaeology and Ethnology departments for our 2007 exhibit. The centerpiece will be a diorama of a Straits Salish plank house built by our own Bill Holm who is also carving a model of the canoe style used here on Lopez. Also Bill has agreed to present a program titled, *People of the Salish Sea*

at the Center in the evening of Thursday, May 12th. Further, Laura Phillips, Archaeology Collections Manager at The Burke, is bringing more artifacts and a team of her graduate students for a special program here on July 21st.

This is the year we all learn more about and honor the first Lopezians. The exhibit will be our best yet and it will open to all on May 5th, with a preview party for members and sponsors only on May 4th.

On another note, thanks to the generosity of Lopez folk, we have been able to make great strides in cataloging our text and photo archives and making it accessible via the computer. This will make it much easier for people to use our archives for their research while safeguarding the original materials. Now we are moving on to catalog the huge number of objects donated to the Museum by Lopez families over the years.

We are confident that 2007 will be an exciting year in your Museum. The trustees, staff and volunteers look forward to seeing you in the Museum soon.

## LIHS News

Four years ago, we decided to develop a new exhibit every summer—to give Lopezians a good reason to visit at least once every year.

We are very excited about this year's exhibit, *Carried by Canoe*. Amy Frost has gathered stories from Straits Salish descendants, and also has found artifacts and photos that tell a fascinating story of the people who were here many years ago. We are borrowing more than 20 items from the Burke Museum's collection, and will display some fine examples of Straits Salish art, toys, tools, textiles and weapons.

Two new research tools are available this summer. You'll be able to search our 1,600 photo catalog by name, place, and event, or browse through binders organized by topic and family name to get a quick look at what is in the archives. We expect it will take at least two more years until every photo in the collection is cataloged (several thousand more.)

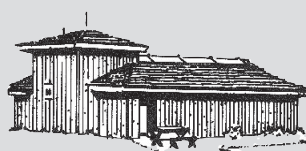
Please take a look at our re-designed website, [www.rockisland.com/~lopezmuseum](http://www.rockisland.com/~lopezmuseum). Adrienne Adams donated her services to revamp the site this winter and we are very happy with the results. While you are on the web, check out [www.shopformuseums.com](http://www.shopformuseums.com)—any items you purchase from several hundred on-line retailers will benefit LIHS (if you start your shopping at the shopformuseums site.)

We just completed the first part of the American Association of Museums/Institute of Museum & Library Services Collection Management Assessment program. The next step involves a visit from a collection management evaluator, who

by Mark Thompson-Klein, Museum Director

will make policy and practices recommendations to help us preserve our collection and make it more accessible.

We are deeply grateful to the generous folks at the Burke Museum. Laura Phillips, Archaeology Collection Manager has been our advocate and advisor, and she is primarily responsible for setting up the loan of some of the Burke's treasures. Dr. Julie Stein, Burke Director has been a strong supporter at every step. Curator Emeritus, carver, painter, scholar and historian Bill Holm, has brought his incredible energy and talent to our small museum to help create a beautiful and memorable exhibit. And finally, many thanks to Amy Frost who developed the concept, conducted the research, and wrote the text for *Carried by Canoe*.



The Lopez Island  
Historical  
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& Museum

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# Burke Museum Archaeology Projects on Lopez

by Julie Stein, Director and Amanda Taylor, Research Assistant

Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, University of Washington

The Burke Museum conducted two archaeology projects on Lopez Island over the last four years: an excavation on Watmough Bay during the summer of 2004, and a dating project on Mud Bay during the summer of 2006. We are only beginning to understand the lifeways of the prehistoric Native Americans of the San Juan Islands, but the information we have learned from our work on Lopez Island has provided several new pieces of the puzzle.

## Excavations at Watmough Bay

The Watmough Bay site is on BLM land on southern Lopez Island. Excavations in August of 2004 were conducted by Julie Stein, Laura Phillips (Collections Manager at the Burke Museum), Rich Bailey (Spokane District Archaeologist, BLM), and a number of University of Washington students, Samish Indian Nation students, and volunteers from the local community. Ethnographer Wayne Suttles described Watmough Bay as a prime location for reef-netting. But archaeologists hope to learn more about how this site was used in the distant past. Was fishing the main activity? How did people adapt to environmental change? An extensive excavation was conducted by David Munsell as a University of Washington field school in 1968 and thousands of artifacts and animal bones were recovered. Over the past few years, part of the site began to erode away.

The BLM hoped to stabilize the beach to slow down the erosion, and the Burke archaeology team excavated two 1 m by 1 m units to recover information from an area of the site in danger of being damaged by the stabilization efforts. Another goal of the project was to engage the local community in archaeology by offering public lectures, volunteer opportunities, tours of the site, and an exhibit at the Lopez Island Historical Museum.

One of the most exciting finds of the project was a large stone-lined hearth at the bottom of the excavation unit. Hearths are centers of household and community activity and provide archaeologists with a glimpse of daily life.

By collecting charcoal and shell samples from the excavation, we determined when native peoples lived at Watmough Bay. We were intrigued to find that people did not inhabit the site continuously, but rather came and left during three distinct time periods: approximately 950-550 BC, 390-AD 1, and AD 300-700. During all three periods, people relied heavily on marine resources including fish and shellfish but also hunted for waterfowl and land mammals and collected local plants. More detailed analyses of the avian remains were conducted by Kris Bovy (then a UW graduate student who is now a professor at the University

of Rhode Island) as part of her Ph.D. dissertation work. Phoebe Anderson (UW graduate student) is currently analyzing the shellfish remains from the site, and Alecia Spooner (UW graduate student) is analyzing pollen and plant remains.

## Investigations of Mud Bay

Burke Museum archaeologists returned to Lopez Island this past summer to conduct further investigations as part of the San Juan Islands Archaeological Project (SJIAP). The SJIAP is a project funded by the Raven Foundation to investigate the chronology of prehistoric occupations of the islands, and to contribute to the preservation of the archaeological record through public outreach and monitoring archaeological sites for human and natural disturbance and erosion. We took samples from shell middens

throughout the islands by sampling from eroding banks and by augering. This allowed us to obtain samples of shell and charcoal for dating purposes more rapidly than we could by excavating. Also, because we were on private property, a less destructive technique helped us to gain permission to access sites. To auger, we used a device called a Dutch Auger. It is a portable rod with a 4-inch diameter bit. We manually twist the auger into the ground in approximately 20 cm punches at a time, extracting it as the bit fills with deposits and saving the material recovered.

We investigated four archaeological sites on Mud Bay that are located on private property. Landowners gave



*Julie Stein supervising the Watmough dig in 2004.*

*Continued next page*

us permission to take samples from their sites before the fieldwork, and in some cases, they volunteered to help us. Two of the sites were unknown to archaeologists prior to this project and were brought to our attention by landowners.

By dating shell from our midden samples from Mud Bay as well as sites on San Juan, Orcas, and Shaw Island, we have begun to piece together a timeline of the prehistory of



Volunteers at the Lopez Museum sort through material from the Watmough dig in 2004.

the San Juan Islands. We found that people first arrived on Mud Bay by 3,500 years ago, making it the oldest known archaeological locality in the San Juan Islands. Settlement expanded to two sites at 1,500-1,000 years ago, and then increased to five sites at 1,000-500 BP during a dramatic

population expansion that occurred throughout the San Juan Islands. Lifeways must have changed dramatically at that time with bigger houses and villages, more intensive shellfishing to feed everyone, and more people on the landscape. It seems as though people left Mud Bay after 500 years ago, although evidence of a recent occupation may have been obliterated by erosion.

#### Plans for Future Work

Current archaeological research on Lopez Island involves more detailed analyses of shell midden samples and sharing information with the local community through public lectures and publications like this one. We hope to locate and investigate more previously unrecorded sites throughout the San Juan Islands to further refine our understanding of when and where prehistoric Native Americans lived in this area. We hope to explore the ways their hunting and fishing techniques changed over time, and human adaptations to a rich marine environment. We would like to thank the families of Mud Bay for their enthusiasm and support for archaeological investigations in their backyards.

#### Important dates:

Museum opens for the summer May 5, featuring *Carried by Canoe: A Native History of Lopez Island*

Bill Holm presents *People of the Salish Sea*  
May 10, 7:00 pm at Lopez Center

The Burke Museum on Lopez July 21  
1:00 pm at the museum  
6:30 pm at Lopez Center

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## Please support the Lopez Island Historical Society

*to help collect, preserve, interpret, and share local history.*

Memberships and donations are fully tax deductible. Thank you for your support.

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*The Lopez Island Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your gift is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.*

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