The Batak: Tradition and Transition in Northern Sumatra

The Logan Museum features some of its rarely-seen South-east Asian collections in the new exhibition The Batak: Tradition and Transition in Northern Sumatra, through September 17.

The exhibit showcases the culture of the Batak, a society of about 6 million people who live on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. Museum visitors will experience Batak art, architecture, and religious items in a visually exciting blend of artifacts and photographs.

The family of Dr. Harley Harris Bartlett donated the Batak objects to the Logan Museum in 1961. Dr. Bartlett was a professor of botany at the University of Michigan and director of the university's botanical gardens. He began his collection in 1918 while in Sumatra for the United States Rubber Company.

The Batak are composed of six ethnic groups centered on a large lake, Lake Toba. They trace their ancestry to the ancient seafaring Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) peoples who migrated from Taiwan around 5000 years ago and who ultimately colonized an area extending from Madagascar to Hawaii. Because of their crossroads location, the Batak have absorbed cultural and religious influences from many sources, yet have retained their identity and customs. The new exhibit illustrates this remarkable adaptability and resilience.

George Ulrich, curator emeritus from the Milwaukee Public Museum, developed the exhibit as guest curator along with Logan Museum staff members Nicolette Meister and Bill Green. Mr. Ulrich will present gallery talks during a public reception on Tuesday, July 18 at 4:00 and 5:30 p.m. The museum also will sponsor a noon program featuring Columbia College professor Andrew Causey, author of Hard Bargaining in Sumatra: Western Travelers and Toba Bataks in the Marketplace of Souvenirs, on August 31.

Above: In addition to Batak material from Sumatra, Harley Harris Bartlett collected objects elsewhere in Southeast Asia. This case exhibits a wooden figure and knife and sheath from Taiwan and an embroidered child’s jacket from the Philippines.

Left: Textiles of great variety and beauty are essential in Batak life. Ulos (gift) weavings, the most valued textiles, are necessary for all ritual and ceremonial exchanges, literally weaving Batak society together. Women weave cloths on a back strap tension loom using twining and braiding techniques. Men and women wear cloths on the head, shoulder, and hip. Ulos and less valued cloths are exchanged between family groups and displayed at weddings. They also wrap ancestors’ bones in mortuary rituals. Batak textiles have changed over the years but remain a key element in Batak identity.
The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has awarded Beloit College a grant of $355,126 to improve preservation of and access to Logan Museum collections. We are very excited about this project, the Logan's largest since the mid-1990s renovation.

The purpose of the project is to enhance the learning potential of our collections—to make them more intellectually and physically accessible. Although the “Cube” displays and preserves a large part of the collection, even more material is housed out of sight in the basement, where it is crowded, difficult to manage, and subject to deterioration in non-archival containers. As reported in the last issue of the Logan Letter, the museum has been making a concerted effort to improve collection preservation and access.

Starting in August, we will move collections, install new storage equipment, and rehouse collections in better, more accessible conditions. The Cube display won’t change much, but we will add new shelving there. Most of the changes will occur in the basement, where new furniture and movable shelving will alleviate overcrowding of ethnology and archaeology collections. We will hire new staff and lots of students to conduct this work over a two year period.

To accommodate the displaced collections on-site during the project, we will temporarily house them in the second floor Shaw Gallery after the Batak exhibit closes on September 17 (see page 1). Therefore, the gallery will be closed during the project. It will reopen in 2008 after the collections have been completely rehoused. The first floor exhibits will remain open to the public during the project.

The NEH grant funds are matched by an equal amount of local cost-sharing. Museum staff will contribute a great deal of effort to ensure the project’s success. Stay up to date on the Collections Accessibility Project web site we will set up this summer, under “Collections” on the museum’s home page.

NEH approved only 11 grants out of the 63 Preservation and Access applications it received this year. Beloit’s grant is the fourth largest of the funded projects. NEH also announced that our project was designated as a We the People project, “a special recognition by the NEH for model projects that advance the study, teaching, and understanding of American history and culture.” We are pleased and proud of this recognition.

For information on this and other NEH grants, visit these web sites: 

Other Collection Improvements

Even before beginning on the NEH project, we are improving collection storage and accessibility in our low humidity storage area. This room primarily stores archaeological and ethnographic metals that are most stable in a low humidity environment. In June we installed a compactor storage unit to increase storage capacity and properly house these items. The unit was transferred from the Morse Library where it had been used to store audio visual and media library holdings. The unit has been overhauled to accommodate the storage of museum objects. Rehousing objects in the compactor unit will be complete by the end of the summer, just in time to start on the NEH work.

The ethnology storage area currently uses open wooden units such as this one to store fragile collections. These units will be replaced by compactors fitted with closed cabinets.

Grants and Gifts

Speaking of grants... One measure of the Logan’s growth and vitality over the past five years is our success in attracting grants and other external support.

Since 2001, the museum has received grants totaling $860,214. Sources include federal agencies ($521,194), private foundations ($200,000), state agencies ($120,000), and non-profit museum support organizations ($19,020).

In addition, the museum has received $83,438 in cash gifts from individuals over the past five years, for a total of $963,652 in external support.

These figures include only grants and cash gifts to the Logan Museum and exclude gifts to the museum studies program, the anthropology department, and the Wright Museum. The figures do not account for the value of donated collections or services, nor do they include program revenue (fees, sales income, etc).

Grants and gifts cover the costs of staff, equipment, supplies, and other expenses above those of College-allocated salaries, student worker wages, and operating costs. Projects supported over the past five years, as reported in previous issues of the Logan Letter, have included public educational programming, collection surveys and upgrades, and archaeological research, among others. These projects supply hands-on museum opportunities for many students and recent graduates. External funds even supported revival of the popular Practicum in Museum Education course.

We are grateful to the granting agencies and individual donors for their generous support.

The museum and the anthropology department are developing a long term plan along with the College’s strategic planning process that will continue to direct grants and gifts to the highest priority needs for anthropology at Beloit. Watch for news on this plan in the next Logan Letter.
Paul Thistle Moves North

Logan Museum curator of exhibits Paul Thistle bid farewell to Beloit in January as he departed to take the position of Museum Curator at the Langley Centennial Museum near Vancouver, British Columbia.

Paul arrived at the Logan in 2003 after holding curatorial and administrative positions at several museums in Canada. His wealth of experience in Northern and First Nations (Native) material culture and history served him well in developing a wide range of exhibitions. Some of the exhibits he curated at the Logan were:
- Beads Communicate!
- Stars & Eagles: The American Flag in Native American Art
- Floating on the Surface of the Softest Snow: Native American Snowshoes
- Both Binding & Separating: Braided Sashes as Symbols
- “The History of Mankind” Then and Now
- Important Points: Awls in Native American Material Culture
- Sealed With Smoke: Pipes and Cultural Interaction in Eastern North America
- Inuit Kayaks
- Melanesian Images Revisited

Paul helped advance the Logan and the College in many ways—for example, he taught the first Exhibit Design and Development course in the museum studies program. Museum staff and students will miss Paul’s expertise, good humor, laid-back attitude, and helpfulness. We wish him the best in his new position.

Loran Berg and Anna Goodwin

The Logan Museum welcomed Loran Berg on staff this spring to research and catalogue archaeological objects bequeathed to the museum by James E. Lockwood ’34 estate. Loran completed his B.S. in public history with a museum emphasis from North Dakota State University in 2005. He spent the past spring sorting Mr. Lockwood’s correspondence and photographs and cataloging 139 lots of artifacts from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Florida.

Speaking of Loran, congratulations to him and to Anna Goodwin ’05 on their marriage in Marinette, Wisconsin, on May 20. Anna and Loran met at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck where they interned in 2004. Since her graduation last year, Anna has been serving as the Logan Museum’s curatorial assistant in collections.

Recent Acquisitions

The Logan Museum recently acquired the following objects and collections:
- Archaeological artifacts from 47RO217 collected by the Great Lakes Archaeological Research Center, Inc.; donated by David F. Overstreet.
- Two fish traps from Sierra Leone collected and donated by Kris Hardin, former Beloit College Associate Professor of Anthropology (fall 1996-spring 1997).
- Two pieces of whale baleen donated by Kristina Mickelsen ’07.
- Collection of conservation and preservation supplies donated by Allen Bohnert ’69.
- “500 Nations” video series donated by David Burdick.
We thank the donors for their generous contributions.

“Chopper Guy”

Daniel Mills’ October 7, 2005, arrival by helicopter at Beloit College led students to refer to him as the “Chopper Guy.”

After touring the Logan Museum, Mr. Mills donated 3,285 African and European Paleolithic stone tools to the museum. Although this landing was a memorable event, the College security office requests that in the future, visitors land their helicopters at designated helipads or airports rather than on the central campus. Photo by Rich Kasper ’07.

Staff Presentations and Publications

Nicolette Meister, Curator of Collections, and Karla Wheeler, Curator of Education, attended the American Association of Museums (AAM) annual conference in Boston. They hosted a Beloit Regional Alumni Group (BRAG) event that was attended by many museum studies and anthropology alumni; watch the Beloit College Magazine for a photo.


Bill Green presented “Decades of Digging and Discovery: The Archaeology of Louisa County and Vicinity,” an Iowa Archaeology Month event at the Louisa County Historical Society, Wapello, Iowa. He served on the Minnesota Department of Administration’s review panel and final interview team for hiring the new State Archaeologist. Bill also serves as president of the Roy Chapman Andrews Society and vice president of the Three Rivers Archaeological Society. In those capacities he helped bring several well known speakers to Beloit in 2005 and 2006, including underwater explorer Robert Ballard and Mars Rover scientist Steve Squyres.

Bill continued his research on the history of the Ioway Indians, working at the Missouri Historical Society and Princeton University archives, and he presented a paper titled “From Oneota to Oklahoma Via the 1837 Ioway Map” in the Early American Cartographies Conference at The Newberry Library in Chicago. Also presenting at that conference was Bill Gartner ’85 (Logan Teaching Fellow in fall, 2005), on “Encountering Cartographic Performance: The Pawnee Star Chart Viewed from the Perspective of Skiri-Band Cosmology and Ritual.” The two papers are slated for inclusion in an edited volume based on the conference.
“Creating Culture” Summer Camp

This year’s Logan Museum summer camp focused on culture. Creating Culture campers learned what culture is, the differences between cultures, and how cultures view other cultures. They tried interpreting another culture’s objects and created their own cultures, including gods, rules, and objects. Campers displayed their created cultures in a museum exhibit and concluded their week-long adventure with an exhibit opening and presentations. Crystal Singleton ’06, art history major and museum studies minor, helped Brett Lobello design and lead the camp.

Honors Terms

Each year, a select few Beloit College seniors receive Honors Term awards, enabling them to conduct advanced research or service projects and take additional classes in the semester following completion of their regular coursework. Students selected for honors terms receive full tuition remission in exchange for undertaking a project that contributes significantly to the academic or co-curricular programs of the College and simultaneously furthers their own academic or professional development.

Jennie Primrose ’06 conducted an Honors Term project this spring. She inventoried, identified, and organized the stone tool collections in the archaeology lab and helped to separate the unprovenienced material for hands-on use (the anthropology department collection) from documented material to be retained in the Logan Museum permanent collection. Jennie also served as archaeology lab manager and volunteer coordinator.

The following Logan Museum and anthropology-related projects will be conducted this fall:

- Rebecca Bober ’06 will catalogue, describe, and analyze the collection of Paleolithic tools recently donated by Daniel Mills (see page 3), and statistically compare it to the Logan’s Algerian collection and a published sample from Morocco.
- Jason Marmon ’06 will focus on Asian metal objects in the museum and hopes to create a virtual exhibit, develop workshops, design exhibits, and bring in a metals conservator to speak to the campus and classes.
- Kelsey Sheridan ’06 plans to bring more Native American and indigenous resources to the campus and community through improvement of the on-campus presence of the Multi-Cultural Center, a Native American artist speaker series, and the construction of a bulletin board where clubs can post club information and multi-cultural issues.

Community Involvement

A variety of programs supplied opportunities for community involvement in the spring of 2006, primarily although not exclusively on weekends and evenings.

The Logan Explorations Program, a Saturday hands-on activity series for children in grades 1 through 4, centered on objects of visual adornment (feathers, beads, etc.) from many cultures. The final program in the series, developed by Leslie Mills ’06 in conjunction with the “Beads Communicate!” exhibit, focused on the uses and importance of beads. Leslie also conducted a two-part beading workshop for adults as part of her special project in museum studies. The programs served both beginning and advanced beaders, with participants making their own beaded creations.

Logan Lunch and Lecture programs this spring were:

- Exploring, Collecting and Expeditioning: The Lone Starr in Mexico, 1894-1903 (Donald McVicker, North Central College)
- Uncovering Strata: Nascent Hierarchies and Changing Economic Strategies in the Middle Romanian Bronze Age (Alex Barker, Milwaukee Public Museum)
- From Curiosity Cabinets to Dioramas: Thoughts about the History of Museum Display (Jasmine Alinder, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)

The museum offered a ten-week online course through the Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth. “Anthropology and Material Culture at the Logan Museum” challenged local school children ages 10-12 to examine what they thought anthropology was and how it was related to the museum. They researched objects in the museum’s collection and learned about professional museum practices through three on-site meetings. In the final meeting, they presented their research to the Beloit College community.

The museum co-sponsored the second annual Maple Sugar Fest with the Welty Environmental Center and the City of Beloit Parks and Leisure Services Division. The event, held at Big Hill Park, featured maple sugar collection hikes and a hands-on exhibit of Native American artifacts.

As reported in the last Logan Letter, the museum and the Beloit Public Library jointly developed a Heritage Hunt Program. This partnership used the museum’s collections to engage youngsters ages 8-14 in extracurricular reading. Participants read a short book and had a discussion at the library, then came to the museum for a tour and activity related to the book topic. Three Heritage Hunts were held, focusing on Native American history and culture.

Our hosting of Three Rivers Archaeological Society meetings brought the following programs to campus:

- Deep Cave Rock Art and A Doorway in Time: Watercolors of Wisconsin Rock Art and Beyond (Robert Boszhard, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, and artist Geri Schrab, held jointly with the Wright Museum of Art and Art League of Beloit)
- Behind the Scenes at Beloit College’s Logan Museum
- The John Chapman Site and Its Importance for Understanding Native American History in the Upper Midwest (Phil Millhouse ’93, University of Illinois)
- Paleolithic Collections from North Africa (Rebecca Bober ’06) and Historical Archaeology at Ferry Farm, Virginia (Patrick Johnson ’08)

The Logan Museum gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services. IMLS grant funds have supported the Museum’s public programming over the past two years.
Logan & Wright Asian Collections

“The museums at Beloit have extremely significant holdings in a variety of areas of Asian art and material culture. It is both the scope and quality of these collections that are impressive.”

This is the evaluation of Kathleen Ryor, chair of the Department of Art and Art History at Carleton College, in a 2006 report to the ASIANetwork consortium. Dr. Ryor visited the Wright and Logan museums this spring to assess the quality and usefulness of the museums’ collections for Asian studies and other programs at Beloit College and for other members of ASIANetwork.

ASIANetwork is a consortium of over 160 North American colleges that strives to strengthen the role of Asian studies within the framework of liberal arts education. The current survey is identifying objects whose images can be digitized and shared among the schools.

Dr. Ryor noted the following details about the Wright and Logan Museum collections:

“The Wright Museum of Art has an astonishing number of Asian art holdings – approximately four thousand objects. This is about 40% of the total art museum collection.”

She identified several areas and objects of greatest significance: Chinese imperial robes from the late Qing dynasty; other examples of Chinese costumes; Korean celadon wares of the Koryo period; Japanese prints of the Edo period and the early 20th century; Chinese metalwork, ancestor portraits, and ceramics; and Japanese kimono, lacquerwork, and a botanical scroll painting.

Dr. Ryor noted that “At just over 4,800 objects, the Logan Museum’s collection of Asian objects, particularly textiles, is also significant and is an excellent complement to the holdings in the Wright Museum. I only evaluated the East Asian and a few Southeast Asian objects, but the Logan also has a huge number of objects of artistic merit across nearly all regions of Asia, with an astounding collection of Southeast Asian materials.” Of greatest significance are: Japanese and Chinese armor and textiles; Indonesian textiles; Siberian beaded leggings and boots; a host of other textiles of extremely fine quality from India, Thailand, and the Philippines; a rhinoceros horn cup stand from the Qing dynasty in China; carvings from indigenous peoples of Taiwan, particularly carved pipes of the Paiwan people; and a battle flag of the Qing dynasty in China.

According to Dr. Ryor, the Wright and Logan collections possess great educational value. “Taken as a whole, Beloit has a unique situation in which Asian art and culture can be taught using textiles and costume, as well as other types of art objects. Textiles provide a truly interdisciplinary entrance into the study of Asian cultures, as students can learn about art (use of visual motifs, sophisticated techniques of decoration), social customs, political history, societal values, and religion from such objects. Indeed the intersections between the Asian costumes/textiles in both museum collections works dynamically with other objects in the collections.... Since ASIANetwork faculty are often teaching Asian art and culture through comparative courses, significant objects in the Beloit collections, such as the Asian textiles, ceramics, and lacquerware, lend themselves to larger cross-cultural comparisons in courses on art history, anthropology, and history.”

In August, the Wright Museum will welcome new director Joy Beckman, an Asian art scholar. Still, Dr. Ryor noted, “Without adequate museum staff..., effective classroom use of these materials may be difficult.... While the addition of Joy Beckman as director of the Wright Museum is an important step, increasing staff support seems essential to the responsible maintenance and use of these impressive collections.... Current museum staff is comprised of superior professionals who also divide their time between collections management, exhibitions and teaching. The sizes of the two Beloit collections are respectively equal to major regional museums in this country that have at least five times the staff.” The museums hope to use this endorsement and other reviews to develop and expand programs and staffing.

The report concluded that “Beloit has the potential to become a regional center for the study of Asian textiles and the college should be urged to devote the necessary resources to the preservation, maintenance and study of their superb collections.” In terms of supplying digital images to ASIANetwork colleges, Dr. Ryor states: “Because of the sheer size and importance of the Beloit collections, it is my recommendation that ASIANetwork digitally publish more than the thirty objects allotted to both museums.... all of the significant pieces in the Wright and Logan should be put in the digital database that will be accessible to ASIANetwork members and others.”

Alumni News

Jim Patterson ’57 is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Eastern Oregon University. He received his Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Colorado in 1969. He wrote in January:

“I taught high school for several years after graduating from Beloit with a major in sociology and minor in English. I wanted to get my Ph.D. in some social science field, and Bud Whitford, as well as Chad Walsh and Bob Fossom in English, all encouraged me to give anthropology a try, which led to a satisfying career of teaching and research on the Balkans and on the immigration of Balkan peoples to North America.

“I continue to work on Romanian research. I am researching ‘Anthropology in Romania Today: A Report From the Field,’ about which I am giving a lecture at the University of Oregon in March, and hoping to present at the AAA in San Jose in November. I also write book reviews for a literature journal, publish articles in Roundel, the magazine of the BMW Car Club of America (I just came out of the closet with academics on this issue), and serve on local and state boards in Oregon for long-term care issues for the elderly.”

Scott Whitford ’65 has been appointed director of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Arizona. He moved to Arizona in 2005 after having directed the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Michigan State University. Congratulations to Scott and the whole Whitford clan!

Chris Vallillo ’76 graduated with an anthropology major and worked as an archaeologist in the 1970s. For nearly 30 years he has been a professional musician, performing and recording his own music as well as conducting folklore research in Illinois. The Illinois Humanities Council recently named him as the Illinois State Scholar for the Smithsonian Institution’s traveling exhibit “New Harmonies.” The exhibit focuses on roots music around the country. Chris recently participated in a New Harmonies program training session in Washington, D.C. This summer he continues to perform throughout the Midwest and is co-producing the Hickory Ridge Roots Music Festival at Dickson Mounds Museum. Check out his touring schedule, CDs, folklore projects, and other information at http://www.ginridge.com.
2006 Anthropology Student Awards

Congratulations to this year’s anthropology student award winners:

James E. Lockwood Prize: Rebecca Bober ’06, Jennifer Moore ’06
Andrew H. Whiteford Award: Anne Griffith ’06
William Simpson Godfrey, Jr. Award: Carolyn Lanni ’09
James E. Lockwood Scholarship: Emily Culver ’07

Museum Studies Assessment

Hearty thanks to all of the museum studies alumni and current students who participated in the online survey conducted by Miles Van Reed ’06. Miles did this survey as part of his special project for the museum studies minor. He designed and implemented the survey in consultation with faculty sponsors Karla Wheeler and Bill Green.

The project’s goals were to collect and analyze information and opinions on the Museum Studies program, especially its curriculum, assess the program on that basis, and make recommendations. Miles surveyed alumni as well as current students, and he interviewed faculty and staff members, too.

The online survey reached nearly every museum studies alumnus. Perhaps because of the ease in completing and submitting the online forms, the response rate was much higher than anticipated: 58 of 110 alumni (53 percent) and 14 of 21 current students (67 percent).

Most of the respondents feel very positively about their museum studies experience. Analysis of the survey results will continue into the fall. Already, one of the key suggestions to emerge from the study is to split the introductory course—formerly “Museum Theory and Management,” now “Introduction to Museum Studies”—into two modules, a half-unit introduction for sophomores or juniors starting on the minor and a half-unit capstone for seniors. This suggestion makes sense to program faculty and students because the program now offers regular courses in museum education and exhibit design and development, as well as collections, so the introductory course does not have to strive to be comprehensive. It can continue to cover museum history and basic theory along with field trips and guest speakers. The capstone course can focus on current museum issues, review internship experiences, and foster discussion of special projects.

Museum Studies Graduates

Speaking of museum studies, congratulations to the great group of 2006 graduates: Zia Brucaya, Julie Chang, Craig Hadley, Rachel Harvieux, Lindsae Long, Patricia Lord, Leslie Mills, Jennifer Primrose, Megan Rooth, Crystal Singleton, Miles Van Reed, and Megan Workman.

These museum studies minors graduated with majors in anthropology (6), art history (4), classical civilizations (3), and creative writing (1), and additional minors in anthropology (3) and Asian studies (1).

Museum studies was established as an interdisciplinary minor in the early 1980s and continues to be one of Beloit’s most distinctive academic programs. The program has grown in recent years: the total of 24 museum studies minors who graduated in 2005 and 2006 is the largest two-year total of museum studies graduates since 1995-1996.