

Museum grant acquires camera and scanners for bigger jobs

By **DAN RUDY**
Sentinel writer

A state grant to the Wrangell Museum is allowing its staff to take on larger projects as they continue to digitally archive its collection.

Museums Alaska awarded \$9,212 to Wrangell through its Collections Management Funds, one of three it has to benefit the state's historical and art institutions. Underwritten by Rasmuson Foundation, this particular grant will go toward acquiring equipment and materials necessary for the museum's oversize archives.

Museum archivist Greg Acuna explained the oversize collection includes maps, charts, posters, artwork and prints, any documents larger than a legal 11-by-17 inch format.

"Things that won't fit in your regular filing cabinets," added Terri Henson, director of the museum and Nolan Center.

As an example, on Tuesday Acuna was working with an oversize map of the Stikine and Iskut rivers. The document is nearly 90 years old, and though it has been repaired in places it remains quite fragile. While the museum has been able to scan hardier oversize items in segments, "stitching" together smaller images to create one complete picture, the map's delicate state rules out the method in digitally archiving it.

For it and similar items, the museum grant paid for a new camera that can be suspended overhead. Because of the map's size Acuna still needs to take multiple shots, stitching them together at his computer sta-

tion. Because the camera is taking shots from slightly different perspectives, Acuna admitted there was a slight distortion to the finished image.

"It's not totally fixed, but it's workable," he said.

The picture becomes part of the object's profile on the museum's PastPerfect software. Used in museums and galleries worldwide, the program allows curators to create a digitized archive of their items. Accessible to the public online, it both enables wider viewing and research of the museum's collection, and preserves fragile original texts in a digital format.

Wrangell's museum staff have been cataloguing its collection for the program since early 2015. Cindy Kilpatrick has been working primarily with the museum's objects, starting with those on display in its main gallery and working through its items in storage. She estimated about two-thirds of the entire collection has been added so far.

The new camera will aid her work as well, set up to take shots of objects against a blank backdrop. As with Acuna's documents, the photographs are part of a detailed profile, which includes all its known background information. Objects in the gallery tend to be the best documented and in the best condition, while items in storage have varied in quality and detail.

"With a known donor we might have a date with it, and additional background information," said Henson. The archivers follow up as best they can on each individual item, rounding out its information as far as

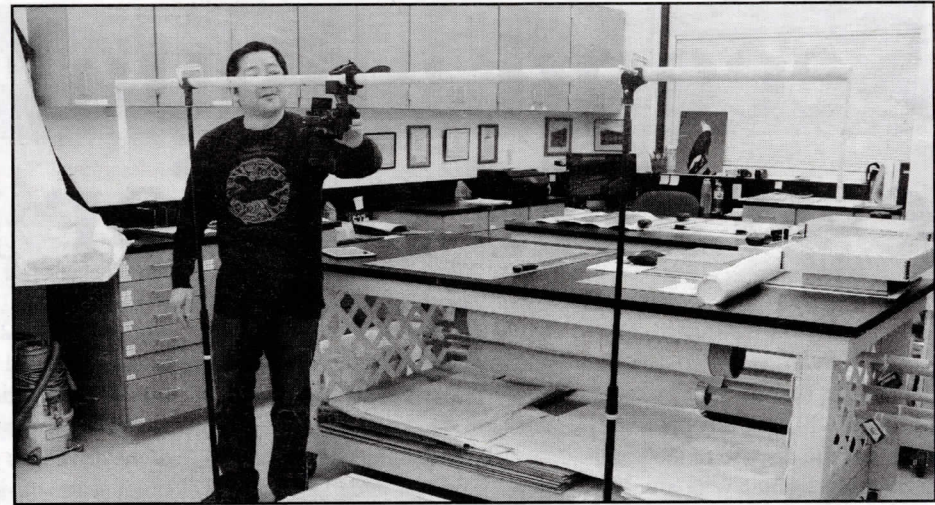


PHOTO BY DAN RUDY

Greg Acuna sets up to capture an photograph of a 1929 river systems map in the Nolan Center's archival offices. Acuna and other museum staff are in the process of cataloguing the entire collection, to be made available to researchers and interested viewers online.

possible.

Acuna's map was used by a governmental department in British Columbia, and was printed in 1929. It was donated to the museum by Paula Samson in 2005. With Wrangell shown at its far southeastern corner it has some local pertinence, and once logged can be tagged to other items in the collection on the PastPerfect program. Keywords are connected to every item, allowing them to be searched for online.

With this latest state grant, the museum has been able to purchase a pair of new scanners, one of which is geared toward books and other text-based documents. This device creates a PDF file that allows individual words and phrases to be searched for, making the hunt for specific documents that much simpler.

Once the map has been photographed

and logged, it gets placed in a protective plastic sleeve and stored in a horizontal file. The museum has two cabinets specifically designed to store such oversize items in a flattened fashion, but the state grant will enable it to get two more for additional storage. The pair are currently in the process of being barged up.

"I'm hoping they're here this week," Henson said Tuesday.

Originally envisioned as a three-year project, the archival process still has a way to go.

"We're still at maybe 20 percent of what needs to be done," Acuna said of the oversize collection. "As of now we're still trying to collect everything and record everything."

"Hopefully when this is all said and done this will be a really good resource for the community," Henson said.