

IÑUPIAQ SMOKING AND SIBERIAN REINDEER

By: Margaret Bruchac



(<http://www.penn.museum/collections/object/297627>)

“Eskimo Tobacco Pipe” from Alaska collected by Captain David Henry Jarvis, and donated to the Penn Museum by Mary E. Jarvis. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum. Museum Object Number: 39-10-1 (<http://www.penn.museum/collections/object/297627>).

This semester, my students in Museum Anthropology conducted close examinations of objects from Arctic locales in the collections of the Penn Museum. During our object analysis of this walrus tusk ivory Inupiat pipe (item# 39-10-1 (<http://www.penn.museum/collections/object/297627>)) in the Collections Study Room, I was intrigued by the idea that it was used for smoking opium, given the absurdly small hole in the bowl. After further research, a very different story emerged. The pipe’s shape was, indeed, inspired by Chinese opium pipes, but a survey of Arctic scholarship revealed cultural exchanges from Siberia. Inupiat pipes like this—with a curved tusk shape, wide bowl, and very narrow bore—closely resemble the *chukch* pipe used by the Indigenous Sami of northern Asia.



(<http://www.penn.museum/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/n3386.jpg>)

“Siberian Eskimo Pipe” sold at Cowan’s (<http://www.cowanauctions.com/auctions/item.aspx?id=11249>)2004 American Indian Art Auction. Formerly in the collections of the First People’s Museum of the American Indian and Eskimo. Photo from Cowan’s Art Auctions.

First-hand accounts indicate that this pipe style, sometimes called a “Siberian Eskimo” pipe, was particularly prevalent at Point Barrow, Alaska, where Captain David Henry Jarvis acquired it. There, it was called a *kuinya* or *kui’nye* (an apparent loan word from the Siberian *koy’nin*).[1]. Its use was described as follows:



(http://www.penn.museum/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/gn_03099a.jpg)

“Portrait of Su-Ku-Uk in Native Dress and Holding Pipe MAR 1894.” ([http://siris-archives.si.edu/ip.session=14301A0R537K7.53703&profile=all&uri=full=3100001~!13732~!6&ri=2&aspect=subtab157&menu=search&source=~!siarchives&ipp=20&spp=20&staffonly=&William Dinwiddie, Glass Negatives of Indians, collected by the Bureau of American Ethnology. BAE GN 03099A 06510000, National Anthropol](http://siris-archives.si.edu/ip.session=14301A0R537K7.53703&profile=all&uri=full=3100001~!13732~!6&ri=2&aspect=subtab157&menu=search&source=~!siarchives&ipp=20&spp=20&staffonly=&William%20Dinwiddie,%20Glass%20Negatives%20of%20Indians,%20collected%20by%20the%20Bureau%20of%20American%20Ethnology.%20BAE%20GN%2003099A%2006510000,%20National%20Anthropol))

“A little wad of hair (reindeer hair, at Point Barrow)...is first pushed down to the bottom of the bowl to prevent the tobacco from being drawn into the stem. The narrow bore is then filled with tobacco cut up very fine...lighted with a bit of tinder and smoked entirely out with two or three deep inspirations. The smoke is deeply inhaled and allowed to pass out slowly through the mouth and nostrils... a sort of temporary intoxication [is] produced by this method of smoking... we

found the Eskimos at Point Barrow passionately attached to it, preferring their own pipes to those of the civilized pattern even when there was no question of economy of tobacco.” [2]

This pipe style is widely distributed in museums and private collections. The Penn Museum has at least a dozen, collected by George Byron Gordon, William Van Valin, and Edward McIlhenny. A similarly decorated ivory pipe (<https://www.peabody.harvard.edu/node/2061>) is housed at the Harvard Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. [3] An 1894 portrait of an Iñupiat, Su-Ku-Uk, shows him holding just such a pipe carved from wood, with a metal bowl and mouthpiece. [4]

It is important to note that David Henry Jarvis (1862-1911), the man who brought this pipe back from Alaska, was *not* an ethnographic collector. He was a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, patrolling the coast of Alaska along the Bering Sea, and he was said to be fully fluent in Iñupiaq (the language of the northernmost Inuit people, the Iñupiat). He photographed families, ceremonies, hunters, and herders, but this pipe is the *only* Indigenous object attributed to him that I have been able to find, in any museum. It was donated to the Penn Museum in 1939, long after his death, by his sister, Mary E. Jarvis.[5]



(http://www.penn.museum/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/R_RED_THUMB_PHOTO-ARCHIVE_2000.100.200.68.jpg)

Inupiat men with domesticated reindeer. Photo c. 1897 by David H. Jarvis. Albumen print, catalogue # 2000.100.200.68. Photo Archives, New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

During his time in the Arctic, Jarvis was keen to ensure the survival of both Iñupiat and whalers along the Alaskan coast. He was serving aboard the cutter ship *Bear* in 1891, when the first domesticated reindeer were delivered to Unalaska, as part of a strategy to provide the Iñupiat with herds that could offset the decline in indigenous game. A few years later, in 1897, Jarvis was in charge of an overland relief expedition sent to rescue 265 distressed whalers aboard eight frozen-in ships.[6] Before setting out, he negotiated with Charlie Artisarlook and his wife, Mary Makrikoff, and other herders to barter for 435 reindeer; some were harnessed, some were shipped, and others were driven across the ice to provide a source of fresh meat on the hoof for the stranded crews.



(<http://www.penn.museum/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/jarvis.png>)
David Henry Jarvis c. 1898, photo source unknown.

In his official report, Jarvis described the generosity of his Iñupiaq friends: “He and his wife, Mary, held a long and solemn consultation... They were sorry for the white men at Point Barrow, and they were glad to be able to help them; they would let me have their deer, which represented their all, on my promise of return, if I would be directly responsible for them.”

Jarvis hired Artisarlook and other Inupiat men as guides and herders, traveling over “...what at times seemed impassible obstacle, through frozen seas, and over snow-clad mountains.” [7] When the relief expedition finally found each of the stranded ships and crews (spread across 100 miles of coast), Jarvis oversaw the building of shelters and distribution of medical aid and food, and even organized baseball games on the ice to recover morale. He documented the men, dogs, sleds, reindeer, and ships in hauntingly evocative albumen photographs (<http://www.whalingmuseum.org/explore/collections/database/search-photographs>).[8]

Jarvis also fulfilled his promise to the Artisarlook family, returning nearly twice as many reindeer as he had taken. Charlie passed away in the 1900 measles epidemic,



(http://www.penn.museum/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/R_RED_THUMB_PHOTO-ARCHIVE_2000.100.200.43.jpg)

Frozen-in whaling ship. Photo by Captain David Henry Jarvis. Albumen print, catalogue # 2000.100.200.43. Photo Archives, New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

but his wife Mary eventually increased their reindeer herd to such a degree that she came to be known as the “Reindeer Queen.”[9]



(<http://www.penn.museum/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/P1010504.jpg>)

Side view of Inuit pipe. Photo by Margaret Bruchac with permission of the Penn Museum.

David Henry Jarvis became a celebrity, celebrated as an American hero, but the records of his exploits make no mention of this pipe. It may have been a keepsake or a touristic acquisition, but it seems like more than that. This object, made by an unknown Inupiat artisan, is wrought with elaborate imagery—dancing shaman figures, depictions of animals and arrows in flight, people jumping onto and falling off of sleds—that allude to hunting activities, while also evoking relationships among peoples, creatures, and other forces in the Arctic world. The pipe may have been designed as a talismanic object, to provide supernatural assistance during the ordeal of hunting. It appears to record transformative events; the shamanic figures move between human and animal forms. The documented practice of using reindeer hair (rather

than indigenous caribou hair) to stoke this style of pipe suggests that the pipe and reindeer may be related.

Tobacco was a prized substance in the Arctic, and it was often used for pay or gifts to the Inupiat. While preparing for his overland expedition, Jarvis's initial supply of provisions included 40 pounds of tobacco, plus another 10 pounds “for me personally.”[10] Did he barter some of that precious tobacco for this unusual pipe? In the end, regardless of how it came into his hands, it is intriguing to consider that perhaps this pipe was a gift to Jarvis from one of his Inupiat friends, ensuring his success in the grueling overland trek, and offering him some intoxicating refreshment to thank him for his efforts on their behalf.

NOTE: For more information about this pipe, see the related blog article—“Searching for Stories: Patiently Listening to an Inupiat Pipe” (<http://www.penn.museum/blog/museum/searching-for-stories-patiently-listening-to-an-inupiat-pipe/>)—by Sarah Parkinson.

Footnotes:

- [1] Murdoch, John 1892. “Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition,” pp. 19-441 in J.W. Powell, ed. *Ninth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution 1887-88*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- [2] Murdoch, John 1888. “On the Siberian Origin of Some Customs of the Western Eskimos.” *American Anthropologist* Vol. I, no. 4 (October 1888), pp. 325-336.
- [3] Eskimo Ivory Pipe, Early 19th-Century AD, Norton Sound, Western Alaska, PM 94-57-10/R139 at the Harvard Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- [4] “Portrait of Su-Ku-Uk in Native Dress and Holding Pipe MAR 1894.” (<http://sirir-archives.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=14301A0R537K7.53703&profile=all&uri=full=3100001~!13732~!6&ri=2&aspect=subtab157&menu=search&source=~!siarchives&ipp=20&spp=20&staffonly=&t=Dinwiddle,Glass+Negatives+of+Indians,+collected+by+the+Bureau+of+American+Ethnology.+BAE+GN+03099A+06510000,+National+Anthropological+Archives,+Smithsonian+Institution,+Washington,+DC.>)
- [5] Mary E. Jarvis, David's sister, was a member of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. The Penn Museum accession card lists her address as 4216 Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia, but no correspondence about the pipe can be found in the Museum Archives.
- [5] Strobbridge, Truman R. and Dennis L. Noble 1999. *Alaska and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service 1867-1915*. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland.
- [6] Johnson, Paul H. 1972. “The Overland Expedition: A Coast Guard Triumph (http://www.uscg.mil/history/articles/johnson_overland_expedition.asp)” in Coast Guard Academy Alumni Association, *The Bulletin* 34(5):63-71. Reprinted online on the website of the United States Coast Guard, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
- [7] U.S. Revenue Cutter Service 1899. *Report of the Cruise of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Bear; And the Overland Expedition for the Relief of the Whalers in the Arctic Ocean*. (https://books.google.com/books?id=TfzduwNBDB8C&pg=PA11&lpg=PA11&dq=seattle+jarvis+lieutenant&source=bl&ots=sBAEjL8Bfp&sig=41GAv9_BODGLVCLd1YtRbzyaSJ8&hl=en&sa=X&ei=rCs-Va2HF4_LsATX1ICYCA&ved=0CCwQ6AEwBQ#v=snippet&q=reindeer&f=false) Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, see p. 51, p. 137, p. 141.
- [8] Jarvis Collection. New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts.
- [9] For insights into the challenges of the reindeer introduction, and the unique success of Mary Makrikoff Artisarlook (“Mary Sinrock”), see Roxanne Willis, “A New Game in the North: Alaska Reindeer Herding, 1890-1940 (<http://www.foresthistory.org/fellowships/willis.pdf>)” in *Western Historical Quarterly* 37 (Autumn 2006):277-301.
- [10] U.S. Revenue Cutter Service 1899. *Report of the Cruise of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Bear*. (https://books.google.com/books?id=TfzduwNBDB8C&pg=PA11&lpg=PA11&dq=seattle+jarvis+lieutenant&source=bl&ots=sBAEjL8Bfp&sig=41GAv9_BODGLVCLd1YtRbzyaSJ8&hl=en&sa=X&ei=rCs-Va2HF4_LsATX1ICYCA&ved=0CCwQ6AEwBQ#v=snippet&q=reindeer&f=false) p. 141.