

Eskimo Exhibit New Collection at Bristol Museum

By GERALD F. McLAUGHLIN

A glimpse of the long-secret life of America's earliest inhabitants awaits Rhode Islanders at the Haffenreffer Museum of the American Indian in Bristol.

A recently opened Eskimo Indian exhibit at the museum presents for public view a collection of weapons, sculptures, engravings, and tools collected by Dr. James L. Giddings, Brown University associate professor of sociology and director of the museum.

The collection and wall diagram and map trace the development of an Indian culture believed by Dr. Giddings to be more than 6,000 years old. The kayak, arrow and spear heads, jewelry and all of the Eskimo artifacts were collected by Dr. Giddings throughout his Alaskan travels dating back to 1934.

Dr. Giddings, travelling this summer through the rugged West Alaskan coastal area with two Brown University students, resides with his wife, Ruth, and two sons, Jimmy, 12, and Russell, 8, at the former Haffenreffer house near the museum.

He completed preparation of the Eskimo room shortly before he left for Alaska May 29 to investigate further his beach ridge theory. Dr. Giddings believes that the beaches of the Alaskan coast hold the secrets of ancient Indian history. This includes the theory that the American Indian originally crossed into North America from Siberia at the Bering Strait.

The finely-planned arrowheads that line the walls of the Eskimo room provide evidence for his belief. Ages of

ancient Eskimo culture are divided into periods in the exhibit.

The ages are labeled according to the areas in which the arrowheads were found. Oldest, according to Dr. Giddings' arrangement, is the Denbigh Flint Complex, which he believes to have existed between 3,000 and 500 B.C.

The Denbigh period arrowheads, flat, sharp and evenly pockmarked, were hewn and shaped by a heavy-pressure method which later Eskimo cultures were unable to imitate.

Other ages, represented by spear, harpoon, and arrowheads are:

1. The Choris period—1,000 B.C.
2. The Ipiutiak period — 200 A.D.
3. Krusentein period — 1,100 A.D.

Differences in the age of the artifacts are apparent in several instances even to the untrained eye. Later Eskimo cultures says Mrs. Giddings, who is directing museum activities in her husband's absence, stamped a circle and dot design on miniature seals, walruses, and other walrus tusk and wood sculptures.

The coming of the white man to the far northern waters is dramatically sketched on several six-to-nine-inch pieces of ivory tusk. On tusks in finely engraved detail are scenes depicting Eskimos sailing in sealskin kayaks to meet high-masted whaling ships.

Still another example of Eskimo ingenuity and craftsmanship on exhibit is a pair of walrus tusk snow goggles. The exhibit holds much



Jimmy Giddings inspects an Eskimo manikin at the Haffenreffer Museum.

—State Staff Photo

more than casual interest for Mrs. Giddings and for her son Jimmy, who flew into Alaska last summer with Dr. Giddings. Mrs. Giddings who holds a master's degree in anthropology observed in a recent interview that the cold war had extended to the frigid Alaskan coast. She re-

called her surprise at learning of a clampdown on travel across the Bering Strait between Alaska and Siberia.

In 1947, she said, Eskimos in the Bering region stopped sailing across the narrow straits because those who had done so at the time were not allowed to return.

All of the Giddings family at home, including Russell who was too young to travel last year, hope to accompany Dr. Giddings on his next Alaskan trip. But until he returns with new finds and plans for next year, they will be busy maintaining the Eskimo exhibit.

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