



Centennial Celebration: April, 2010



E.W. Merrill Exhibit

In April, as part of our 100 Year Anniversary, the Visitors Center at Sitka National Historical Park will feature a rotating exhibit of E.W. Merrill's stunning photographic work. Through his photographs, E.W. Merrill defined for the outside world what was then called Sitka National Monument. Set aside to commemorate the Battle of 1804, the monument was given an expanded mandate to display totemic art of Southeast Alaska Natives in a natural setting. Merrill's photographs are an invaluable record of the park in its beginning years, and a reminder of how little it has changed since its establishment as a National Monument in 1910. Sitka National Monument it might have been to the outside world, and Sitka National Historical Park it may be today, but to locals, it was, and still is, "Totem Park," and the walkways through the rainforest are still "Totem Trail" or "Lover's Lane."

A Window to the Past

Based in Sitka, Merrill's photographic work spanned portions of four decades, from the 1890s until his death in 1929. With his box cameras and glass plates he recorded the lifeways of Sitka. First and foremost, he documented the Tlingit local clans, the last authorized Potlatch in 1904, the work of artists like totem carvers and basket weavers, the formal and informal gatherings of clans, school girls and elders. He and his cameras ranged far beyond the Park and the Tlingit community, too, capturing scenes of the bustling town, images of the Russian American community, the waterfront and the stunning natural setting of Southeast Alaska. All aspects of his work will be on display beginning March 23 and running through April at the Visitor's Center.



More Than a Photographer

E.W. Merrill's connections in the East brought the Sitka federal land to the attention of officials in far-off Washington, D.C., leading to the establishment of Sitka National Monument. Territorial Governor John Brady then commissioned him to find suitable sites along the monument's paths for totems to be sited. He was then hired to maintain and repair the totems – sometimes using chunks of wood and a hammer and spikes to do his repairs. Without Merrill, "Totem Park" would not exist in anything like its present form, 100 years later.



An Open House

The public will be invited to an Open House with free tours of the Russian Bishop's House and the Sitka National Historical Park Visitors Center exhibits, as well as demonstrations by artists of the Park's in-house partner, the Sitka Cultural

Center. Rangers will lead interpretive walks through Totem Park focused on nature, culture, the totem pole collection and the Battle of 1804.