

Museum loan puts new spotlight on Alaska's first car

*The Sheldon Car on display in the museum's Gallery of Alaska.
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A partnership between the University of Alaska Museum of the North and the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum will put a new spotlight on Alaska's first car. After more than 30 years on display at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, Robert Sheldon's 1905 runabout is moving down the road to the Antique Auto Museum, where it will be on loan for the next five years.

Skagway resident Robert Sheldon built the car in 1905 without actually ever seeing a car in person. He based the design entirely on illustrations he'd seen of cars in magazines and built the car from materials available in the Southeast Alaska gold rush town, including a two-cycle marine engine, wheels from a buggy and two carbide mining lamps as headlights. In 1934, according to the *Farthest North Collegian*, University of Alaska president Charles Bunnell made arrangements to bring the car to Fairbanks from Juneau, where it had been in storage for almost a decade. In Fairbanks, the car was incorporated into the University of Alaska Museum of the North's collection and later exhibited in the museum's Gallery of Alaska.

"For us, the Sheldon car is a part of the history of Southeast Alaska, and it has helped us tell that story for more than 30 years," said museum ethnology collection manager Angela Linn. "At the Antique Auto Museum, people will see the car in a whole new light – as part of automotive history. That's a story they tell very well."

Antique Auto Museum manager and master mechanic Willy Vinton will spend the next several months preparing the car for the auto museum's exhibits. He will supervise work to stabilize the car with period-appropriate materials, to restore the drive-train to its original form and to re-install the car's original engine, which has been located in Skagway. Ultimately, he also hopes to build a replica which could be driven around the grounds of the Wedgewood Resort like the other vintage cars at the auto museum.

<http://www.uaf.edu/museum/info/press/2010/03-sheldon-car/>