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### **Sámi Reindeer Project Exhibit at Finlandia through February 15**

HANCOCK – A slice of the Sámi experience is in Michigan’s Copper Country this winter.

The exhibit, “The Sámi: Reindeer People of Alaska” is on display at the Finlandia University Finnish American Heritage Center Archive, Hancock, through February 15, 2009. It honors the Sámi herders who traveled to Alaska from Norway in the late 1800s to teach reindeer herding subsistence skills to the Yup’ik and Inupiaq Peoples of Alaska.

The exhibit’s appearance in Hancock is sponsored by Finlandia University, Finlandia Foundation National, Suomi Seura, and the Center for Environmental Economic Development, which administers the exhibit.

On Thursday, January 22, Finlandia will host an “Indigenous Night” at the Finnish American Heritage Center from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. At this event, Sámi scholars Nathan Muus and Faith Fjeld will give a presentation about the exhibit, and Muus will perform *joik* (Sámi throat singing). Muus and Fjeld will also visit several area schools.

Also part of “Indigenous Night” is an opening reception for Native American artist Carl Gawboy. An exhibit of Gawboy’s work is featured January 12 to February 13 at the Finlandia University Gallery, which is in the Finnish American Heritage Center.

In 1894 and 1898, 137 indigenous Sámi reindeer herders and their families from Norway were hired by the United States to teach reindeer herding subsistence skills to the Yup’ik and Inupiaq. After their three-year tours of duty in Alaska, many of these Sami Reindeer Project herders remained in Alaska, married into Alaskan Native families, and helped build the large reindeer herds that provided food, clothing, and transportation for Alaskans during the Gold Rush and into the 1920s and 30s.

“Until this exhibit, the public has largely been uninformed about the contribution of the Sámi herders and reindeer husbandry to the history of Alaska,” said Gary Kaunonen, archivist and curator of the

Finnish American Heritage Center and Archive. “There is growing public interest in this chapter of Alaska history.”

The exhibit focuses on the first two generations of the Sámi reindeer families who settled in Alaska. It includes photographs of these early settlers; a map of the Alaska reindeer stations, including the locations of the Sámi herding families; route maps of the two expeditions; and a Source Book containing a Reindeer Project chronology and abbreviated genealogies of the Sámi Reindeer Project families’ first two generations in Alaska.

Also part of the exhibit is a collection of authentic examples of decorated tools, household items, and clothing used in nomadic reindeer herding. These items include scrimshawed knives, a carved reindeer bone spoon, a hand loom for band weaving, a pair of winter reindeer fur boots, a wooden pack saddle for reindeer, and reindeer skin purses and coffee bags.

From 2004 through 2007, “The Sámi: Reindeer People of Alaska” exhibit traveled to seven Alaska village and native community museums, the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage, and the Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle. For more information about the Sámi exhibit, visit [www.baiki.org](http://www.baiki.org).

For additional information about the exhibit’s appearance at Finlandia University, please contact Gary Kaunonen at 906-487-7347 or [gary.kaunonen@finlandia.edu](mailto:gary.kaunonen@finlandia.edu).