



THE
HERITAGE HANDS
OF
IRVA FORD

FEBRUARY 1985

"HANDICRAFTS OFFER A MEANS OF PERSONAL SATISFACTION
THROUGH SELF-EXPRESSION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
SKILLS AND GOOD TASTE. BY SO BENEFITING THE INDIVIDUAL
THEY ENRICH THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE IN
GENERAL OF COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY ARE PROMOTED."

IRVA FORD TO HOME AND SCHOOL COUNCIL, 1947

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
EMILY IRVA FORD
AND
ARTHUR LLEWELLYN FORD

WRITTEN BY:
SUSAN FORD RICKETTS
PETER FORD
DAVID FORD

EMILY IRVA FORD, NEE PEARSON, WAS BORN IN HANOVER, ONTARIO, ON APRIL 26, 1905 TO MARY AND WILLIAM PEARSON, WHO WERE CHILDREN OF ENGLISH IMMIGRANTS (1871). MOTHER AND HER SISTER JESSIE WERE RAISED ON A FARM IN BENTINCK TOWNSHIP, GREY-BRUCE, BEFORE MOVING TO HANOVER IN 1923. THAT YEAR MOTHER FINISHED MIDDLE SCHOOL, MOVED TO OWEN SOUND TO COMPLETE UPPER SCHOOL, AND IN 1924 MOVED TO TORONTO FOR HER PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER'S CERTIFICATE FROM THE ONTARIO NORMAL SCHOOL.

FROM 1925-1928 MOTHER TAUGHT GRADES 1 TO 8 IN A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL AT CAMPBELL'S CORNERS, NEAR HANOVER, AND FROM 1929-1935 TAUGHT AT THE WILLIAM BURGESS PUBLIC SCHOOL IN TORONTO.

"I TAKE CHARGE OF ALL GIRLS' SPORTS (600 GIRLS). I ENCOURAGE PUPILS TO HAVE SOME HOBBY OR ACQUIRE SOME SORT OF SKILL. THERE IS NO Surer ROAD TO REAL ENJOYMENT OF LEISURE."

FROM 'EXPERIENCES AS A SCHOOL TEACHER', 1932.

MOTHER WAS ALWAYS BUSY WORKING AND LEARNING. SHE WORKED AT HER FARM CHORES AND SCHOOLWORK AND WAS ENCOURAGED AT HOME TO PURSUE ARTISTIC INTERESTS. SHE TOOK PIANO, MUSIC THEORY, AND VIOLIN LESSONS, AND PRACTISED INTENSELY. AT 17 SHE WAS GIVING PIANO LESSONS TO TWO PUPILS AND WAS PLAYING THE CHURCH ORGAN WHENEVER ASKED, AFTER ONLY TWO YEARS OF LESSONS HERSELF!

MOTHER LEARNED MANY OF THE BASIC NEEDLEWORK SKILLS OF THE DAY AT HOME: SEWING, TATTING, KNITTING, EMBROIDERY, CROCHETING, ITALIAN HANDSTITCHING, NEEDLEPOINT, WEAVING, SMOCKING, AND SWEDISH WEAVING. HER STRONG INTEREST IN CRAFT WORK APPEARED EARLY.

"DATING BACK TO CHILDHOOD, I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN KEEN TO SEIZE ANY OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ANY KIND OF CRAFTS-WORK. AS A CHILD, I CAN WELL REMEMBER WHEN MY FAVORITE DOLL HAD 32 DRESSES WITH LITTLE HATS AND SHOES TO MATCH IN MANY CASES. THESE I CUT OUT AND SEWED BY HAND, OCCASIONALLY WITH HELP FROM MY MOTHER."

OTHER EARLY HOBBIES INCLUDED PHOTOGRAPHY, PAINTING ON GLASS, TEXTILE DESIGN AND PAINTING, WICKER WORK, POEM AND SPOON COLLECTING,

COOKING, SHOWCARD WRITING, FELT DESIGN, CALLIGRAPHY, BLOCK PRINTING ON CHRISTMAS CARDS, COPPER ENAMELLING, ALUMINUM ETCHING, AND UPHOLSTERING. IN 1934 MOTHER WON SECOND PRIZE (\$150) IN A PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST, JUST MISSING THE FIRST PRIZE, A SPECIAL 5 PASSENGER CHEVROLET COUPE.

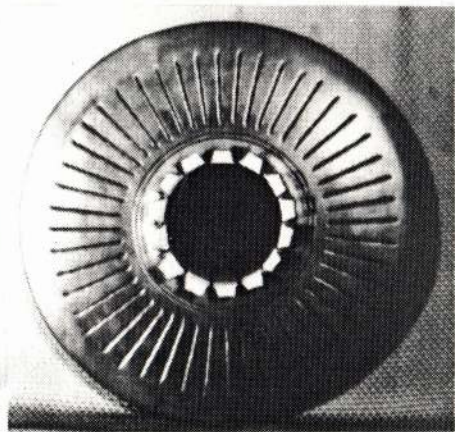
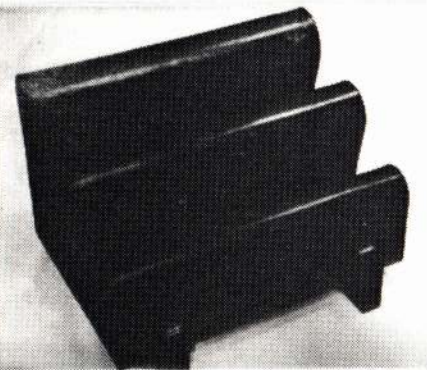
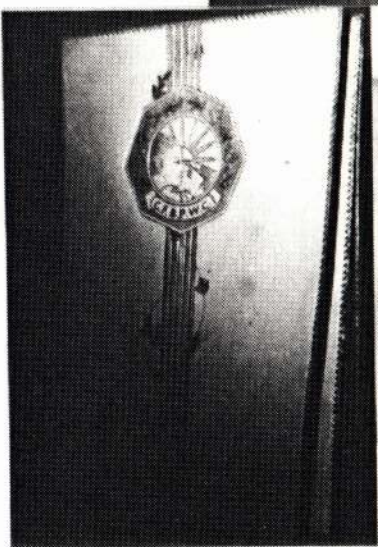
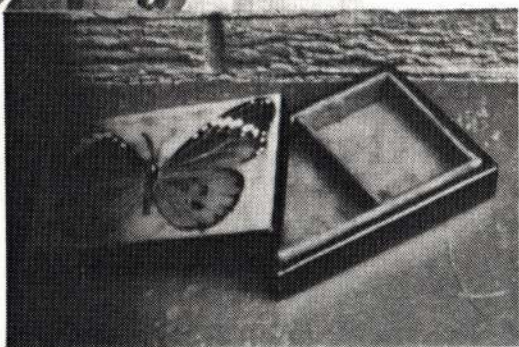
IN 1933 MOTHER TOOK WOODCARVING AT DANFORTH TECHNICAL NIGHT SCHOOL, FINISHING AT THE TOP OF HER CLASS. THIS WAS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN HER CREATIVE LIFE. SHE BEGAN BY CARVING A CIGAR BOX, THEN MOVED ON TO BOOK ENDS, BAG HANDLES, MIRROR FRAMES, TABLES, CHAIRS, CHESTS, TEA WAGONS, AN OTTOMAN, TWO FIREPLACE MANTELPIECES, A KNEEHOLE DESK, A 3 PIECE NEST OF TABLES, AND A SIX FOOT OAK CORNER CUPBOARD WITH INCH THICK PIERCED, CARVED DOORS BACKED WITH GLASS. SHE DID MUCH OF HER OWN DESIGNING AND PREFERRED TO WORK IN OAK OR WALNUT. MOTHER WROTE,

"I FIRST LEARNED TO CARVE WOOD IN A BOARDING HOUSE ON A PORTABLE IRONING BOARD. HOWEVER, THIS WAS INADEQUATE FOR SOME OF MY WORK, AND I FOUND IT NECESSARY TO WAIT UNTIL HOLIDAY SEASON TO CARVE DESK LEGS AND OTHER LARGE PIECES ON MY FATHER'S WORKBENCH. I STARTED WITH 9 TOOLS. NOW I HAVE ABOUT 40, AND HAVE CARVED 6 DIFFERENT KINDS OF WOOD."

IN 1936 MOTHER MARRIED ARTHUR LLEWELLYN FORD, A PHARMACIST AND FORMER CLASSMATE FROM HANOVER. THE FORDS MOVED TO HAMILTON WHERE FATHER OWNED AND OPERATED FORD'S PHARMACY, AT THE CORNER OF DUNDURN AND TOM STREETS FOR OVER 25 YEARS. THEIR 3 CHILDREN, PETER (1937), DAVID (1940), AND SUSAN (1942), ARE ALL PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS.

FATHER, LIKE MOTHER, HAD MANY HOBBIES AND INTERESTS. HE LOVED MUSIC. AS A YOUTH, HE PLAYED THE VIOLIN. HE HAD A FINE TENOR VOICE AND SANG FOR YEARS IN THE MASONIC MEN'S CHOIR. FATHER GREATLY ENJOYED HIS STAMP COLLECTION, HIS SLIDE COLLECTION, AND CHIP WOOD CARVING. AN AVID AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER, HE WON 3 AWARDS OF MERIT AT THE HAMILTON BRANCH OF THE CANADIAN PHOTOGRAPHY ASSOCIATION. SUSAN REMEMBERS,

"WE SAW THE BOND OF LOVE AND MUTUAL SUPPORT BETWEEN THEM AND FOR US, THEIR CHILDREN, WAS MUTUAL IN ALL THEIR ACTIVITIES."





AFTER WOOD, IRVA BECAME INTERESTED IN LEATHER AS A CRAFT MEDIUM. THROUGHOUT MANY YEARS OF STUDY IN LEATHERCRAFT, HER ATTITUDE, STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE, REMAINED THE SAME. IRVA'S TRAINING BEGAN IN GLOVE-MAKING WITH MURIEL BURNABY IN 1935. HER TRAINING CONTINUED AND HER LEATHERCRAFT FLOURISHED AS SHE APPLIED HER TALENT FOR WOODCARVING AND SCULPTURE TO IT. SHE STUDIED LEATHER CARVING WITH JACK McDougall AT THE HUMBER VALLEY LEATHER STUDIO, FOLLOWED BY CLASSES AT TORONTO'S CENTRAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL, AND AT McMASTER UNIVERSITY SUMMER SCHOOL WITH DON McKINNON. LATER SHE STUDIED ADVANCED LEATHER WORKING TECHNIQUES AND BOOKBINDING WITH BOB MUMA AT THE MUMART STUDIOS OF CREATIVE LEATHERCRAFT. SHE ALSO ATTENDED NUMEROUS WORKSHOPS AND COURSES GIVEN BY THE VARIOUS LEATHER SOCIETIES AND AT ASSEMBLIES OF CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL LEATHER WORKERS. IRVA BECAME PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN WORKING WITH TOOLED, CARVED, SPATTER-DYED, AND MOULDED LEATHER. SHE HELPED TO PIONEER CUIR BOUILLE, A METHOD OF USING WET-FORMED LEATHER, DRIED WITH SLOW HEAT TO PRESERVE THE SHAPE. SHE SAID, "LEATHER IS TRULY THE SLEEPING GIANT OF DESIGN MEDIUMS."

THROUGH TRAINING AND PRACTICE, IRVA ACQUIRED A WIDE RANGE OF SKILLS IN LEATHERCRAFT. IN 1957 SHE BECAME AN ASSOCIATE IN THE CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR CREATIVE LEATHERCRAFT, A STATUS GRANTED AFTER THE APPLICANT HAD "DEMONSTRATED THE ABILITY TO PRODUCE WORK OF A HIGH STANDARD OF CRAFTSMANSHIP". IN 1958 SHE QUALIFIED AS A FELLOW IN THE SOCIETY, A TITLE GRANTED TO A LEATHERCRAFT TEACHER WHO HAD A "WIDE GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF LEATHERS, TOOLS, AND HANDLING OF SUCH; A WIDE GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL IN TOOLING, CARVING, COLOURING, AND CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES; A MINIMUM OF 5 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN LEATHERCRAFT TECHNIQUES AND TEACHING". FELLOWSHIP APPLICANT'S WORK MUST BE ORIGINAL IN DESIGN AND SHOW NEW FORMS AND USES. IRVA FORD, F.C.S.C.L., WAS VERY PROUD OF THOSE LETTERS AFTER HER NAME, EARNED WITH SO MUCH EFFORT AND SO WELL DESERVED.

IRVA WAS ALWAYS CONSCIOUS OF GOOD DESIGN. SHE DESIGNED ALL HER OWN WORK AND ENCOURAGED OTHERS TO DO LIKEWISE. HER SENSITIVITY TO WHAT WAS GOOD FORM AND IN GOOD TASTE MEANT THAT EACH PIECE SHE PRODUCED WAS UNIQUE AND AS CLOSE TO PERFECTION AS SHE COULD GET IT. ONLY WHEN SHE WAS SATISFIED WOULD SHE PUT HER OWN UNIQUE SIGNATURE ON HER WORK.

IRVA USED HER SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE TO TEACH. SHE TAUGHT GENERAL LEATHERCRAFT AT THE BEGINNERS' AND SPECIALISTS' LEVELS THROUGH SUCH AGENCIES AS HAMILTON HOME AND SCHOOL GROUPS (1940's), UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S CLUB (1947-49), NIGHT SCHOOL AT WESTDALE SECONDARY SCHOOL FOR OVER 20 YEARS, AS WELL AS OTHER HAMILTON BOARD OF EDUCATION CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS FOR THE VARIOUS LEATHER GUILDS.

"MRS. FORD WAS NEVER SATISFIED WITH ANYTHING LESS THAN HER OWN BEST PERFORMANCE. THESE QUALITIES PLUS HER BOUNDLESS ENERGY HELPED TO MAKE HER A VERY SUCCESSFUL LEATHERCRAFT TEACHER TO ALL AGE GROUPS."

CANADA CRAFTS, DEC. 1977

IRVA'S VERSATILITY AS A MASTER CRAFTSWOMAN WAS ILLUSTRATED AT COUNTLESS DEMONSTRATIONS: MAKING LEATHER POINSETTIAS, NOTE AND DESK BLOTTER PADS, PURSES, BELTS, TRAYS, AND FINE LEATHER LACING; LEATHER DYEING; AND INVERTED CARVING. SHE DEMONSTRATED AT THE CSCL ANNUALS AND INTERNATIONAL LEATHER ASSEMBLIES, THE HAMILTON LEATHERCRAFT GUILD, THE ARTISANS GUILD OF HAMILTON, AND AT CRAFT EXHIBITIONS AND SALES IN CANADA AND THE U.S., AS WELL AS ANNUALLY FOR YEARS AT THE CNE HOBBY AND ARTS AND CRAFTS DIVISION. AS AN ACKNOWLEDGED EXPERT IN LEATHER, IRVA WAS SELECTED TO DEMONSTRATE AT THE ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE SHOW "IN PRAISE OF HANDS", HELD IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE WORLD CRAFTS CONFERENCE IN 1974.

IRVA WAS WELL QUALIFIED AS A JUROR AS WELL. SHE BEGAN JUDGING CRAFTS AT THE 111TH ROCKTON WORLD'S FAIR IN 1963, AND WENT ON TO JURY AT MANY EVENTS INCLUDING LEATHER AND CRAFT GUILD EXHIBITIONS, ESPECIALLY AS A CSCL FELLOW.

ALONG WITH TIRELESS TEACHING AND DEMONSTRATING, IRVA APPLIED HER ARTISTIC SENSITIVITY, INTUITIVE GOOD TASTE AND HARD-WON SKILL TO PARTICIPATING IN CRAFT AND LEATHER SHOWS LOCALLY, PROVINCIALY, NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. SOME OF THESE EXHIBITIONS INCLUDED: STRATFORD FESTIVAL ('62, '63 LEATHER BOUND BOOK); WOODSTOCK PUBLIC LIBRARY AND ART GALLERY; HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY; HAMILTON ART GALLERY; WOMEN'S ART ASSOCIATION OF HAMILTON SHOWS; PACIFIC NATIONAL EXHIBITION ('61), 3 CENTENNIAL TOURING EXHIBITIONS, 'OPERATION ONTARIO '67' FOR THE ONTARIO COUNCIL OF WOMEN, THE CSCL TRAVELLING EXHIBITION, AND THE CANADIAN GUILD OF CRAFTS SHOW; CSCL PRESTIGE SHOWS IN TORONTO; ONTARIO SOUVENIR AND HANDCRAFT EXHIBITION ('63); CANADIAN GUILD OF CRAFTS EXHIBITIONS AT THE CNE ('69, '71-'73); LEARNING RESOURCES CENTRE, TORONTO; GUELPH PUBLIC LIBRARY ('73); AND THE GUELPH CREATIVE ARTS SHOW ('74). AND AS IRVA GREW IN HER CRAFT, HER WORK BECAME IN DEMAND FOR MORE PRESTIGIOUS SHOWS: FESTIVAL CANADA (OTTAWA, '72, CARVED TOP BOX, WEED POT); MASTERS' SHOW FOR THE CANADIAN GUILD OF CRAFTS ('73, HANGING ROUND POT, 2 SMALL BOXES, BANK); ONTARIO MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND TOURISM ('73, TOURING SHOW); MASTER CRAFTSMAN'S EXHIBITION AT THE WORLD CRAFTS CONFERENCE ('74); "CROSSROADS" A SHOW TO OPEN THE ONTARIO CRAFTS COUNCIL'S NEW GALLERY ('75); AND THE OCC'S FIRST TRAVELLING EXHIBITION ('76).

AS A MASTER CRAFTSWOMAN, IRVA EXECUTED MANY COMMISSIONS. SOME OF HER OUTSTANDING COMMISSIONED WORKS INCLUDED AN ANNIVERSARY BOOK COVER FOR THE WOMEN'S CLUB OF HAMILTON, 4 TOOL BOXES FOR THE CANADIAN TEAM ATTENDING THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MOTORCYCLE COMPETITIONS IN IRELAND, AND VARIOUS PRESENTATION PIECES, E.G., LEATHER CASES FOR SOLID GOLD TOOTHPICKS. ONE COMMISSION IN WHICH SHE TOOK GREAT PRIDE WAS A SECRETARY WITH A DOUBLE COWHIDE COVER WITH THE COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S CREST ON IT FOR THE HON. ELLEN FAIRCLOUGH. THE PIECE WAS COMMISSIONED BY THE CANADIAN BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S CLUB OF HAMILTON FOR USE IN PARLIAMENT, 1958. ANOTHER IMPORTANT COMMISSION WAS A FULL-SIZE

BINDER FOR AN 1868 GERMAN NEWSPAPER TO BE PRESENTED TO THE MAYOR OF HAMBURG, GERMANY BY THE TOWN OF NEW HAMBURG, ONTARIO IN 1971.

"YOU HAVE GONE OUT OF YOUR WAY TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT WE HAD EXPECTED.... MRS. FORD, YOU ARE A MARVELLOUS PERSON. THE BINDER IS SO BEAUTIFUL."

THANK YOU LETTER FROM M. LAMBERT, NEW HAMBURG

SUPERIOR CRAFTSMANSHIP AND EXCELLENT DESIGN EARNED MANY AWARDS FOR IRVA'S WORK. THE LIST OF AWARDS INDICATES HER DRIVE FOR PERFECTION AND HER RESPECT FOR COMPETITIONS:

- 1949 3 FIRSTS, WESTDALE HOBBY FAIR
- 1955 2 HONOURABLE MENTIONS, CHG AT CNE
- 1958 SINGLE CANDLE HOLDER, AWARD FOR ORIGINAL DESIGN, CHG AT CNE
- 1960 LUXON PURSE, WESTON TROPHY
CANDLE HOLDERS, THIRD, PNE
- 1961 BOUND BOOK, PNE
SPOON RACK, BOUND BOOKS, SALON AWARDS, CSCL
- 1962 STAMPED BELT, SALON AWARD, IALC
- 1963 TRAY, ONT. SOUVENIR AND HANDICRAFT COMPETITION AND EXHIBITION
CANDLE HOLDERS, SMALL TRAY, CRAFTSMAN'S AWARD, CSCL
- 1964 LADY'S BELT, SALON AWARD, IALC
- 1965 CARD BOX OF BATIK MOROCCO, SALON AWARD, IALC
RED OASIS BOX, WESTON TROPHY, AND HONOURABLE MENTION, CNE
MOULDED GROOVED TRAY, BEST MOULDED PIECE, CHG AT CNE
PAIR OF CANDLE HOLDERS, CRAFTSMAN'S AWARD, PNE
LEATHER BRACELET, HONOURABLE MENTION, CNE
LADY'S BELT, AWARD FOR ORIGINAL DESIGN AT HHG EXHIBITION
BELT, SALON AWARD
- 1966 TWO-TONE RECTANGULAR TRAY, CRAFTSMAN'S AWARD, IALC
RED CARD BOX WITH STONE, WESTON TROPHY
BRACELET AND EARRING SET, HONOURABLE MENTION, CHG AT CNE
- 1967 CENTENNIAL PEN, SALON AWARD, IALC
HANDBAG AND SMALL TRAY, CRAFTSMAN'S AWARD
- 1968 ANTIQUE CALF CLUTCH BAG, WESTON TROPHY, CSCL
DESK PAD, PRAYER BOOK, POCKET SECRETARY, CRAFTSMAN'S AWARD, CSCL
BRACELET, POCKET SECRETARY, CRAFTSMAN'S AWARD, IALC
- 1969 PICTURE FRAME, SPATTER-DYED GREEN TRAY, STACKED PENCIL HOLDER,
SALON AWARDS, IALC
PENCIL HOLDERS, TRAY, CRAFTSMAN'S AWARDS, IALC
PICTURE FRAME, LEWISCRAFT AWARD, CGC AT CNE
- 1970 PEN STAND WITH SLANTED SIDES, SALON AWARD, IALC
SET OF 4 COASTERS, POCKET SECRETARY, CRAFTSMAN'S AWARDS, IALC

- 1971 PIGGY BANK
THIS BANK RECEIVED 99.4% IN THE WESTON TROPHY COMPETITION,
THE HIGHEST MARK GIVEN TO DATE. THE JUDGE DESCRIBED IT AS,
"CUIR BOUILLE, STYLIZED. STITCHED SO THAT IT MAY OPEN WHEN
LOCK IS REMOVED, 8 OZ. COWHIDE...A PIECE TO TICKLE THE FANCY."
PIGGY BANK, AWARD FOR BEST FUNCTIONAL DESIGN, CSCL, CNE
- 1972 PIGGY BANK, TIE BELT, STACKED BOX WITH CARVED TOP, POCKET SEC-
RETARY, SUEDE SKIRT, 5 FIRSTS, GMVF
HANGING WEED POT, CGC AT CNE
TIE BELT, BEST IN SHOW, ARTISANS GUILD OF HAMILTON, ALSO TANDY
AWARD FOR LEATHER DESIGN AND CRAFTSMANSHIP
- 1973 FRINGED HANGING POT, BOX, BELL STRIP, 3 FIRSTS, GMVF
BELT, BEST LEATHER IN SHOW, AGH AND CGC AT CNE
TIE BELT, EEDEE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN, MINISTRY OF
INDUSTRY AND TOURISM, ONT.
BELT, BOX, FIRSTS, WESTERN FAIR, LONDON
- 1974 CUIR BOUILLE JUG, HONOURABLE MENTION, CANADA CRAFTS AWARDS
COVERED BOTTLE, CSCL MEMORIAL AWARD, LEATHER '74
MOULDED BEER HOLSTER, BEST IN SHOW, GRIMSBY FESTIVAL OF ART
BOOK COVER, PICTURE, 2ND AND 3RD, DESIGN CANADA CRAFTS AWARDS,
NATIONAL DESIGN COUNCIL, MINISTRY OF TRADE AND COMMERCE
- 1975 TRAY, DESIGN AWARD, AGH
LEATHER VASE, ONTARIO CRAFT FOUNDATION AWARD
ST. CATHARINES FOLK ARTS FESTIVAL DESIGN AWARD
- 1976 SPOON RACK, MUSICAL INSTRUMENT WALLHANGING, BOOK COVER, SALON
AWARDS, CSCL
SPOON RACK, MIRROR, BOOK COVER, TRAY AND COASTERS, 'MUSIC HATH
CHARMS' WALLHANGING, CRAFTSMAN'S AWARDS, CSCL
MOSAIC BOTTLE, MOULDED JUG, BOWL ON STAND, 2 FIRSTS, 1 SECOND,
GMVF
- 1977 CHESSBOARD, HONOURABLE MENTION, OCC MIDWEST SHOW
RECTANGULAR BOWL, 3 CRAFTSMAN'S AWARDS, CSCL

*AN EXPLANATION OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS:

AGH-ARTISANS GUILD OF HAMILTON, FORMERLY HHG-HAMILTON HANDICRAFT
GUILD

CGC-CANADIAN GUILD OF CRAFTS, FORMERLY CHG-CANADIAN HANDICRAFT GUILD

CNE-CANADIAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION

CRAFTSMAN'S AWARD/RIBBON- GIVEN FOR SUPERIOR WORKMANSHIP AT CSCL

ANNUALS OR LEATHER ASSEMBLIES

CSCL-CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR CREATIVE LEATHERCRAFT

GMVF-GREAT MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FAIR

IALC- INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF LEATHER CRAFTSMEN

OCC-ONTARIO CRAFTS COUNCIL

PNE-PACIFIC NATIONAL EXHIBITION

SALON AWARD—GIVEN FOR SUPERIOR DESIGN AND WORKMANSHIP AT CSCL
ANNUALS OR LEATHER ASSEMBLIES
WESTON TROPHY—A COMPETITION WHOSE ENTRY CONSISTS OF 5 PIECES,
WITH TOTAL MARKS AWARDED THE TROPHY, AT CSCL ANNUALS OR
LEATHER ASSEMBLIES

IN 1950 IRVA SAID, "EVERY PROVINCE AND EVERY CRAFTSMAN, WHETHER
AMATEUR OR PROFESSIONAL, SUFFERS FROM ISOLATION (IN CANADA)." IRVA
RECOGNIZED THE NEED FOR ASSOCIATIONS OF PEOPLE WITH COMMON INTERESTS
FOR COMMUNICATION AND MUTUAL SUPPORT. SHE WORKED TO FILL THAT NEED BY
HELPING TO FOUND CRAFT GUILDS AND BY WORKING VERY HARD FOR THEIR GROWTH
AND SUCCESS, WITH THE BELIEF THAT "...ALL WE GET OUT OF AN ORGANIZATION
IS WHAT WE PUT INTO IT.". SHE STRONGLY BELIEVED IN THE SPIRIT OF CO-
OPERATION IN A GROUP.

"IN MOST CRAFTS AND CRAFT GROUPS YOU WILL FIND A GREAT
UNSELFISHNESS--ONE IS AS PROUD OF THEIR OWN WORK AND
AS DELIGHTED WITH THEIR NEIGHBOUR'S ACHIEVEMENT WITH
EQUAL FERVOUR.".

IRVA WAS ACTIVE IN MANY ORGANIZATIONS, BOTH AS A GENERAL MEMBER
AND OFTEN AN EXECUTIVE. SHE WAS A CHARTER MEMBER AND PAST PRESIDENT
OF THE LADIES AUXILIARY TO THE HAMILTON PHARMACISTS. SHE WAS A LIFE
MEMBER OF THE WOMEN'S ART ASSOCIATION OF HAMILTON, AS WELL AS A LIFE
MEMBER AND PAST PRESIDENT OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH WOMEN. SHE SERVED
AS PRESIDING OFFICER AND AN EXECUTIVE FOR THE KIWANIS MUSIC FESTIVAL
OF HAMILTON (WESTDALE KIWANIS CLUB OF HAMILTON). IRVA WAS A MEMBER OF
THE DUET CLUB OF HAMILTON AND THE HAMILTON AND REGION ARTS COUNCIL.
SHE WAS A MEMBER OF THE ONTARIO CRAFTS COUNCIL, THE CANADIAN GUILD OF
CRAFTS (BOARD OF DIRECTORS, '69-72), THE WORLD CRAFTS COUNCIL, AND
THE INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF LEATHER CRAFTSMEN.

THERE WERE THREE ORGANIZATIONS IN WHICH IRVA WAS EXTREMELY
ACTIVE: THE CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR CREATIVE LEATHERCRAFT, THE HAMILTON
LEATHERCRAFT GUILD, AND THE ARTISANS GUILD OF HAMILTON. AS AN EARLY
MEMBER OF THE CSCL (F. 1950), IRVA WAS ABLE TO COMBINE HER PERSONAL

GOAL OF ENCOURAGING QUALITY AND ORIGINALITY IN LEATHERCRAFT WITH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE SOCIETY, "TO RAISE THE STATUS OF LEATHERCRAFT BY ENCOURAGING ORIGINALITY IN DESIGN, ESTABLISH STANDARDS OF CRAFTSMANSHIP, IMPROVING TEACHING AND JUDGING STANDARDS, AND TO CO-OPERATE WITH OTHER CREATIVE ART SOCIETIES". AFTER ACQUIRING HER ASSOCIATE AND FELLOWSHIP STANDING, IRVA SERVED ON THE EXECUTIVE AS EXHIBITIONS CHAIRMAN SEVERAL TIMES, AND AS PRESIDENT FROM 1969-1972. SHE ALSO SERVED ON THE COUNCIL OF FELLOWS AND WAS ACTIVE IN DEVELOPING LEATHERCRAFT STANDARDS FOR THE SOCIETY.

"AS ONE LOOKS BACK OVER THE YEARS, ONE REALIZES THAT THE CRAFTSMAN'S SITUATION HAS IMPROVED TREMENDOUSLY. OPPORTUNITIES ARE ALMOST UNLIMITED. THE DEMAND FOR PRODUCTION HAS INCREASED AND COMPETITION IS KEEN. IT IS A CHALLENGE TO OUR SOCIETY TO PRODUCE MORE WORK, ADHERING TO THE TRADITION OF FINE CRAFTSMANSHIP BUT REMAINING CONTEMPORARY IN OUR THINKING."

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS, CSCL ANNUAL, 1971.

IRVA WAS PRAISED AS "...ONE OF THE CSCL'S MOST ENTHUSIASTIC AND CAPABLE WORKERS" AND "...UNSPARING OF HERSELF AND SO WONDERFULLY SURE THAT YOU COULD DO JUST ABOUT ANYTHING, YOURSELF...".

IRVA WAS A CHARTER MEMBER AND THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE HAMILTON LEATHERCRAFT GUILD, 1956-1958. SHE SERVED AS PRESIDENT AGAIN IN 1977. IN THE INTERVENING YEARS SHE SERVED AS EXHIBITIONS CHAIRMAN ('62, '76), PROGRAM CHAIRMAN ('71-'73), AND LEATHERCRAFT REPRESENTATIVE WITH THE HAMILTON HANDICRAFT GUILD ('62-'67, '70). THE CHARTER MEMBERS AGREED ON THE NECESSITY OF FRIENDLINESS AND SHARING AS A BASIS FOR THEIR ACTIVITIES. THEY FELT THAT MEMBERS SHOULD EXHIBIT AND DEMONSTRATE THEIR CRAFT TO GAIN CONFIDENCE. THE GUILD WENT INTO COMPETITIONS AND SALES FROM THE FIRST, ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. IRVA PERSONALLY ENCOURAGED PEOPLE TO MAKE AND TO SEE THE BEST WORK POSSIBLE. AS EXHIBITIONS CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE MEMBER, IRVA SET UP DISPLAYS, TOTTED PIECES OF WORK, MANNED THE BOOTH, AND DEMONSTRATED

TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION. DISPLAYS OF MEMBERS' WORK WERE HELD AT ALMOST EVERY MEETING TO ENCOURAGE CRAFTSMEN TO GROW AND TO LEARN TO GIVE AND TAKE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM AND PRAISE. TO IRVA, THE GUILD WAS A GROUP "BOUND TOGETHER BY THE LOVE OF LEATHERCRAFT.". COMMENTING ON THE GUILD'S PROGRESS AT ITS 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION, SHE SAID,

"...WE NOW HAVE A SOUND FOUNDATION UPON WHICH TO BUILD
SO LET US ALL STRIVE TO BE CREATIVE, IMPROVE OUR
CRAFTSMANSHIP AND MOVE FORWARD.".

IRVA WAS ALSO A CHARTER MEMBER OF THE HAMILTON HANDICRAFT GUILD, (1961), WHICH LATER BECAME THE ARTISANS GUILD OF HAMILTON. THE GUILD WAS FOUNDED TO PROVIDE A UNION OF CRAFT GROUPS AND CRAFTSMEN TO PROMOTE INTEREST IN CRAFTS BY WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF WORK THROUGH WORKSHOPS, EXHIBITIONS, AND SALES. IRVA SERVED ON THE EXECUTIVE AS THE REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE HAMILTON LEATHERCRAFT GUILD, AS LEATHER CONVENOR, AND AS SCHOLARSHIP CONVENOR. SHE WAS VERY ACTIVE IN GUILD-SPONSORED DISPLAYS, DEMONSTRATIONS, SALES, AND EXHIBITIONS. SHE WAS VERY PROUD OF HER ROLE IN THE ARTISANS GUILD, ESPECIALLY ITS SCHOLARSHIP AND EXHIBITIONS PROGRAMS. ONLY HER DESIRE FOR A 'CRAFT CENTRE' FOR HAMILTON WENT UNFULFILLED.

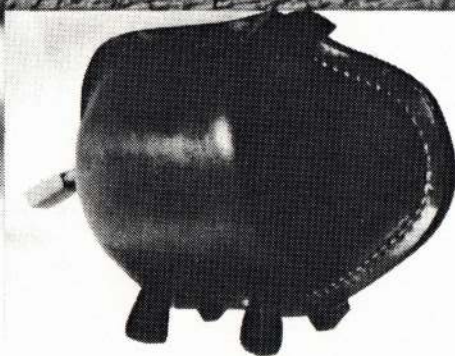
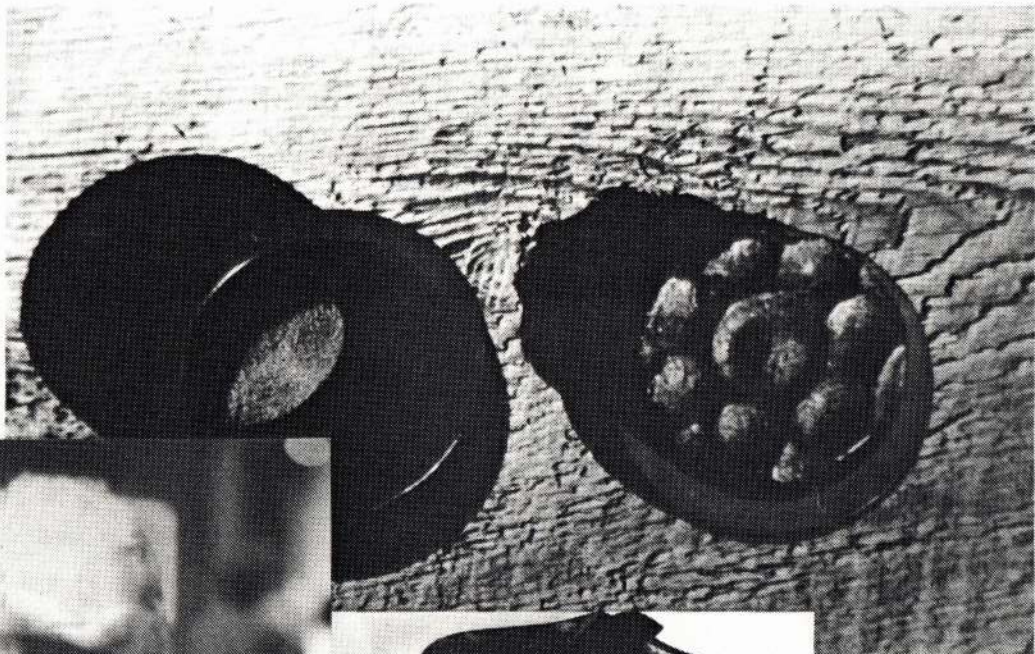
IN ADDITION TO HER OTHER ACTIVITIES, IRVA WAS A FINE SPEAKER. HER SPEECHES, DIRECT AND WELL-COMPOSED, YET PERSONAL, WERE DELIVERED TO MANY GROUPS ON VARIOUS TOPICS FOR 40 YEARS. SHE WAS ABLE TO ARTICULATE HER THOUGHTS ABOUT HER CRAFT, AND HER EXPERIENCES. IN ADDITION, SHE COULD ORGANIZE, GENERALIZE, AND PHILOSOPHIZE ABOUT THOSE PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS THAT CONCERNED HER AUDIENCES. QUOTING IRVA ON:

-THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS:

"THE ARTS MUST TAKE THEIR PLACE ALONG WITH ACADEMIC, SPORT
AND CITIZENSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH."

-CRAFTS AS ART:

"QUOTING FROM WM. CANLESS OF MCGILL, IF ART IS TO MEAN ANY-
THING TO US AT ALL IT MUST BE THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF THINGS
WHICH HAVE A REAL SIGNIFICANCE IN OUR LIVES. TO MOST OF





IT WILL BE THROUGH THOSE FAMILIAR OBJECTS OF EVERYDAY USE WHICH SURROUND US IN THE HOME. IT IS THERE, IF ANYWHERE, THAT ART CAN BECOME TRULY INTIMATE AND HUMAN. (SHE ADDS) IT WILL BE A PLEASURE TO LIVE WITH (CRAFTS) AND IT WILL GROW MORE BEAUTIFUL AND SIGNIFICANT AS THE TIME GOES ON."

-THE IMPORTANCE OF HOBBIES:

"HOBBIES BRING MORE PEOPLE TOGETHER THAN IN ANY OTHER WAY."

-PERFECTION:

"PLEASING PROPORTION AND BEAUTY OF MATERIAL TOGETHER WITH FUNCTIONAL DESIGN CONSTITUTE PERFECTION."

-THE CRAFTSMAN'S DILEMMA:

"I THINK I HAVE TOO MANY TOOLS."

-OPPORTUNITIES:

"OPPORTUNITIES DO NOT COME LABELLED WITH YOUR NAME AND ACCOMPANIED BY INSTRUCTIONS... NOT MANY OPPORTUNITIES ARE THE 'SOMETIME' SORT, TO BE ATTENDED TO WHEN YOU GET AROUND TO THEM. OPPORTUNITY IS TO BE GRASPED WHEN OFFERED."

"EVERY ACHIEVEMENT IS FIRST OF ALL IN THE MIND. THEN FOLLOWS VENTURESOME THINKING...BRINGING TO LIGHT ALL THE POSSIBILITIES INHERENT IN THE IDEA. ONE NEEDS TO HAVE A GENEROUS OPEN-MINDEDNESS TO NEW IDEAS AND NOTIONS. (THEN) COMES SOBER INQUIRY AND PLANNED ACTIVITY. TO EVERY PERSON, EACH OPPORTUNITY IS WORTH EXACTLY WHAT HE IS PREPARED TO MAKE OF IT."

"TO MAKE THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES REQUIRES ALERTNESS TO SEE, QUICK COMPREHENSION, INITIATIVE, PATIENCE, AND ENERGY."

"TO DETECT OPPORTUNITY, ONE MUST KEEP IN TOUCH WITH WHAT IS GOING ON. TAKE NOTE OF NEW STYLES AND MODERN TRENDS. PUT YOURSELF IN CONTACT WITH EVENTS AND PEOPLE...TRANSLATE YOUR PLANS INTO ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE...WORK AT IT WITH WARMTH OF FEELING, FERVOUR AND ZEAL. DO NOT LET YOUR PRESENT LOAD OF WORK PUT YOU OFF. A CROWDED LIFE IS A HAPPY LIFE."

-A FAVOURITE QUOTE:

" I LOVE ALL BEAUTEIOUS THINGS. I TOO WILL SOMETHING MAKE AND JOY IN THE MAKING." ANON.

IRVA SPENT MUCH OF HER LIFE IN THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE AND ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO DO SO. THE IRVA FORD MEMORIAL AWARD, SET UP BY THE FORD FAMILY AND THE HAMILTON LEATHERCRAFT GUILD, WAS ESTABLISHED IN HER MEMORY TO ENCOURAGE AND REWARD EXCELLENCE. IT IS AN AWARD FOR THE BEST MOULDED LEATHER PIECE SUBMITTED IN COMPETITION AT CSCL LEATHER ANNUALS. IN 1980 THE RECIPIENT WAS CAROL MCLEAN FOR A MOULDED MASK, OF WHICH THE JUDGE SAID, "IT SHOWS A MASTERY OF MOULDED LEATHER TECHNIQUES FOR WHICH WE REMEMBER IRVA FORD SO WELL."

IRVA FORD IS WELL-REMEMBERED:

"TO HAVE KNOWN IRVA FORD WAS TO HAVE KNOWN A FINE LADY, A SUPERB ARTIST-CRAFTSMAN, A GREAT ORGANIZER, AND AN OUTSTANDING TEACHER... A SENSITIVE, SINCERE PERSON WITH A GREAT SENSE OF HUMOUR AND A WONDERFUL FRIEND. IT WAS MY PRIVILEGE TO HAVE KNOWN IRVA FOR MANY YEARS."

FRED BROWN, F.C.S.C.L., CHAIRMAN COUNCIL OF FELLOWS

"IRVA ALWAYS GAVE FREELY OF HER TIME AND EXPERTISE. HER WAY OF RELAXING WAS TO WORK INTO THE NIGHT."

SADIE ROEBUCK, F.C.S.C.L., FRIEND

"IRVA WAS METICULOUS AND DEMANDED PERFECTION. SHE WORKED NON-STOP TO KEEP HARMONY WITH EVERYONE."

MARGARET WELDON, A.C.S.C.L., FRIEND AND FORMER PUPIL

"IRVA ALWAYS SAID WHAT SHE HAD TO SAY. HER CRITICISM WAS ALWAYS CONSTRUCTIVE. SHE GAINED MANY FRIENDS BECAUSE OF THIS. WHEN IRVA WAS CONVINCED A STUDENT COULD PRODUCE BETTER (WORK), SHE WOULD COACH THEM ON TO BIGGER AND BETTER THINGS, WHICH TURNED OUT MANY FINE ARTISANS."

JESSIE LITTLE, F.C.S.C.L., TEACHER

"IN THE MID-'70's, IRVA AND I DEMONSTRATED AT THE CNE. LATER, AFTER SEEING THE PRIZE-WINNING PIECES, IRVA SAID TO ME, "ARE YOU ENTERING THIS COMPETITION NEXT YEAR, OR TAKING A BACK SEAT WHEN YOU KNOW YOU CAN DO BETTER?" I ENTERED THE NEXT YEAR- 4 CLASSES, 4 RIBBONS. I WAS PROUD, AND SO WAS IRVA."

RUTH HAIG, A.C.S.C.L.; HAMILTON LEATHERCRAFT GUILD; ARTISANS

"WHEN I WAS A NOVICE LEATHERCRAFTER AT MY FIRST CNE SALE, MY PURSE WAS DISPLAYED BUT NOT SOLD. APPARENTLY, WHEN THE PURSE WAS BEING HANDLED, THE GLUE HOLDING THE VELCRO TAB GAVE WAY, UNKNOWN TO ME. ONE EVENING, I GOT A LONG DISTANCE CALL FROM IRVA, WHO I KNEW AS A SKILLED LEATHERCRAFTER AND SENIOR CSCL EXECUTIVE. WHILE WORKING IN THE BOOTH, SHE SAW THE LOOSENED TAB, REPAIRED IT, AND PUT THE PURSE BACK IN THE SALE. IT SOLD THE NEXT DAY. I WAS VERY IMPRESSED THAT SHE HAD TAKEN THE TIME AND EFFORT TO REPAIR MY PURSE AND THEN TO CALL ME. ALONG WITH HER KINDNESS SHE OFFERED ME SOME ADVICE--A TRULY WELL-CRAFTED PIECE, BESIDES HAVING GOOD DESIGN AND FUNCTION MUST BE DURABLE ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND THE RIGORS OF DAY-TO-DAY USE."

MADELEINE MITCHELL, F.C.S.C.L., VICE-PRESIDENT CSCL

"WE, HER CHILDREN, KNOW NOW THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE IN APPRECIATING OUR MOTHER AND HER WORK. THE FINE COMMENTS FROM THOSE WHO ARE PROUD OWNERS OF HER CREATIONS REMIND US THAT HER WORK IS RECEIVING DUE RECOGNITION AND THAT THROUGH THAT RECOGNITION AND THROUGH HER STUDENTS AND THEIR STUDENTS, HER IDEAS AND THUS HER MEMORY REMAIN WITH US ALL."

PETER FORD.

HERITAGE HANDS WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE DIRECT SUPPORT OF:

MRS. RUTH HAIG

MRS. SUSAN FORD RICKETTS

THE HAMILTON LEATHERCRAFT GUILD

THE ARTISANS GUILD OF HAMILTON

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