

THE CANADIAN SOCIETY OF CREATIVE LEATHERCRAFT

In the late nineteen forties, interest in making articles by hand from leather was developing rapidly in Canada. At the time there were few qualified leathercraft teachers and the quality of both design and workmanship was poor. Serious leathercrafters became concerned and realized there was a need for an organization to provide some guidance for those interested in creating original design and in improving the quality of their work.

On June 8, 1950, 17 leathercraftsmen met at the central Y.M.C.A. in Toronto to discuss the formation of such an organization. As a result of that meeting, the Canadian Society for Creative Leathercraft was formed with Deane Russell of Ottawa as the first President. He was followed by Dr. Ralph Larmour in 1954, Mrs. Jean Newton 1956, Mr. Fred Brown 1957, Mr. Harold Wilson 1961, Miss Viola Harris 1963, Mrs. Dorothy Muma 1965, Mrs. Irva Ford 1969. Of those present at the first meeting, six are still members of the Society - Mrs. Reta Larmour, Mr. Don Mackinnon, Mrs. Margaret McFarlane, Mr. Robert Muma, Miss Clarice Packham, Mr. Deane Russell. The membership list for the current year contains 183 names. The present chairman of the membership committee is Mrs. Kay Cloughley, 5 Shannon St., Barrie.

While the two major objectives of the newly formed society were to encourage originality in design and to establish high standards of craftsmanship, it was decided not to restrict membership to those interested in creative design, but to accept all those interested in working with leather as an art craft. The first year was a busy one for the charter members. A constitution was drawn up and plans were discussed as to how best to serve the interests of the members of the new Society. Four major spheres of activity developed - the branches, standards, a quarterly bulletin, exhibitions.

Since it was impossible to hold more than one annual meeting a year for the entire membership, groups of five or members were encouraged to meet together monthly as branches of the C.S.C.L. There are now six active branches in Ontario - Barrie, Belleville, Hamilton, London, Toronto and Woodstock. The highlight of the year is the display set up by each branch at the annual meeting. Each branch also selects four of its pieces to enter the competition for the Weston Trophy. When the Weston Leathercraft Guild - the first in Canada - disbanded, the funds in its treasury were turned over to C.S.C.L. and used for a trophy to perpetuate the name of the Weston Guild. The afternoon of the annual meeting features demonstrations by skilled craftsmen.

A graded system of membership was instituted in the early years of the Society - general for anyone interested in the craft, associate for those who meet certain standards of excellence, especially in workmanship, fellow for those who meet still higher standards with the emphasis on creative design. The fellows form a council to watch over the quality of the work offered for exhibitions, sales etc., and to act as judges for competitions. In 1958 a point system of judging was set up by Dr. Ralph Larmour and is the basis of the system now used.

The Bulletin, called Canadian Leathercraft was first published in September 1951. Mr. Deane Russell was editor, followed by Dorothy Muma in 1954, Mrs. Margaret McFarlane 1960, Mrs. Gerry Mills 1965, Mrs. Joy Hutcheson 1970. The bulletin contains technical articles, articles on design, society activities, workshop tips, etc. In 1970, publication was changed to two bulletins a year, each branch in turn preparing the contents for it. Newsletters are sent out as often as necessary.

From the beginning the Society has been most active in presenting to the public, exhibitions of handcrafted leather articles which are outstanding in design and workmanship. Mrs. Reta Larmour was the first Exhibitions Chairman and her tireless efforts set a very high standard for her successors to follow - Mrs. Nora Huyck in 1955, Mrs. Irva Ford in 1960, Mrs. Clara Cavanagh 1963, Mrs. Gwen Prestwich 1967, Mrs. Mae Corbett and Mrs. Helen Wheaton 1968, Miss Olivia Smith 1969. Only a few can be mentioned here. The first was a Travelling Exhibition - Canadian Handmades in Leather - which started a 16 months tour in Feb, 1952. On invitation it appeared at The Canadian Shoe and Leather Fair in Toronto and M'Lady Fair in Montreal. The second - Canadian Originals in Leather - started out in March 1954, and toured 29 centres across Canada. In 1954, an Exhibition was sent to England and received high praise. In 1960 a display was set up at the Lord Simcoe Hotel in Toronto. In 1967, the articles for a travelling exhibition - Ontario Crafts - Leather To-day were selected from the works of the members of the Society. To celebrate its twentieth anniversary, a prestige exhibition was on view at the City Hall, Toronto, in February 1970. In 1954, the Society became affiliated with the Canadian Guild of Crafts. The following year the Guild offered its upstairs room for an exhibition and sale of articles handcrafted by members. This continued as an annual event until 1967. Since 1964, C.S.C.L. has taken part in the Arts, Crafts and Hobby Show at the C.N.E. with an exhibition, sales and demonstrations.

The original constitution was adopted March 15, 1951. When the next few years revealed many inadequacies in it, Mrs. Reta Larmour was appointed to make preliminary revisions. She was aided in the final revision by Miss Viola Harris and Mr. Fred Brown. It was put into its proper legal form by Mrs. G.G. Brigden, wife of a member, who had also given much help with the earlier revision. This was adopted in 1960 at the tenth annual meeting and is the

framework within which the Society operates to-day.

In 1954, sixteen American Leathercrafters from Rochester visited a C.S.C.L. display at the International Hobby and Homecraft Show in Toronto and another interesting and educational ^{annual} event began. The International Assembly of Leathercraftsmen Canada was the host ^{group} ~~group~~ on several occasions. At the fourth Assembly, C.S.C.L. proposed the inauguration of a Salon of Leathercraft. All articles were reviewed by competent judges and those worthy were awarded Salon ribbons. A few years later Craftsman awards were started. Canadians have been well represented both in the Salon and in the Craftsman group. Unfortunately, membership in the American Guilds is decreasing and there will not be an Assembly this year.

Our Annual meeting is being expanded ~~this year~~ to include a dinner at the end of the day - giving more time for demonstrations and viewing of displays. While the Annual meeting is an opportunity for members to review the previous years activities and see what other branches and members have been doing, new members are always welcomed and memberships can be accepted at that meeting.