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NATURAL RUSSET LEATHERS

by Deane H. Russell

This is an article written by one of the earliest Presidents of the Society in 1952.

Fred Brown asked us if we would reprint this article.

A discussion about some important craft characteristics of russet leathers.

Probably no other tannage or finish of leather is so important to the decorative leathercraftsman.

An understanding of the term "russet leather" is necessary for the student craftsman for appreciate its special craft possibilities. The term "russet" suggests different meaning to different branches of the leather industry.

"Russet" may refer to colour, or to tannage, or both. Hides and skins which are subjected to the ling and involved process of "vegetable" (bark) tanning are rendered into leather of a type most suitable for ornamenting and finishing with the hand tools and materials of the decorative leathercraftsman.

When referring to colour, it should be understood that no colouring agents are added leathers during tanning. Variations from light to dark natural russet result from different vegetable extracts favoured by different tanneries for their special products. Certain very light russet leathers may, however, undergo an extra "bleaching out" process.

Skins, hides and sides which have been "vegetable tanned" but nota further finished, are often referred to as being "in the crust". It is at this stage that serious grading or sorting is commenced for the many industrial, manufacturing and craft uses expected of russet leathers. By fat, the greater bulk of vegetable tanned

russet leathers whether calfskins, horsehides, cowhides, sheepskins, goatskins, pigskins, buffalo hides, and others, are made for industrial and manufacturing purposes, while selection for use by handcraftsman is only incidental as far as volume of pieces tanned is concerned. The natural russet finished leathers which are finally selected for fine personal leather goods and for use by decorative leathercraftsmen number well under 5% of the total of the many hundreds of thousand of pieces tanned each year.

It is well, therefore, for the leathercraft instructor and student to keep this fact constantly in mind, as beginner leathercraftsmen are generally much too prone to insist that their craft leather be "blemish free". While industrial and manufacturing users of vegetable tanned russet leathers (as well as of coloured bark tanned products) have many ways of using 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and even 5th grade leathers, they too must claim a reasonable share of the comparatively limited supply of #1 selected pieces completing the long process of making leather at the tannery. Because of the numerous factors which may cause natural and accidental markings of hides and skins during growth (see article "What is Good Leather" Bulletin No 2, 1951), the finding of really "blemish free" skins or hides is so rare among tanners as to be all but a nil factor for those who, through ignorance, try to insist on "blemish free" super sections for all orders.

It is up to the Craftsman - to discover and understand the limitations of leather as a natural product, while, at a

challenging craft material. Experience will suggest how numerous natural markings may be included in your work without detracting, but in some cases even enhancing the final appearance of a well planned, carefully worked and finished leathercraft article.

Following are some important characteristics, problems and possibilities to explore when working with natural russet leathers:

Advantages - a good material for beginner students, as it show in clear detail the effects of tooling upon leather. -natural russet leathers offer the best medium for modelling, incising, embossing, carving, or stamping techniques for decorating.

-well planned and carefully worked, natural russet tooling and carving leathers can result in finished articles displaying the maximum of a craftsman's "capacity" with leather.

Problems - Natural russet leathers may soil easily while "making up". However, finger and tool stain marks may often be lifted with a mild bleaching solution (1 tablespoon of Oxalic Acid to 1 pint of water). When using any bleaching agent, take the precaution of wiping over work with clear water dampened swab, as any concentrate of bleaching agent left in the leather may seriously affect subsequent hand colouring operations.

Oxidizing of Natural Russet Leathers

- Some russet leathers "mellow" rapidly; all mellow eventually . The same oxidizing process takes place on many light-to-medium dark toned leathers - particularly with aniline dyed leathers. This effect, if produced evenly, is not necessarily undesirable. In fact, it is often hoped and planned for by skilful

craftsmen that their work appear more "mellow" after use over a period of weeks or months or even years.

Often, however, beginners are disappointed when they plan to "leave their work natural" and expect it to stay in the same light tone after use for a season as when articles were first completed. To learn what will happen to "natural" leather when left uncoloured or when just superficially finished, students may observe the strong oxidizing effects of sunlight (or daylight) on russet leathers, by putting a strip in the window, half covered with a close fitting brown paper sleeve. Pull the sleeve back a couple of inches every other day for a week and notice the distinct gradations of "mellowing". Multiply this effect of one week's light exposure the "natural finished" article will receive during a whole summer of outdoor use, and the beginner may think twice about leaving his work natural.

Unless natural leathers are frequently refinished with cleaning solutions and neutral creams or waxes, they tend to absorb finger and hand marks which in time become so ingrained into the surface fibres as to permanently soil the original fresh appearance. While there are methods which students may study and practise applying clear shellacs, lacquers or waxes to natural russet articles, the more experienced craftsman prefers to treat his leathers with at least a light toning of colouring medium.

Remember - as different leathers take the same dyes differently, from piece to piece and even from area to area of the same hide, the careful craftsman will ALWAYS experiment or test on scrap leather of the type to be used in major projects.

Fine leatherwork demands sufficient finishing time. Therefore, remember also, that when you spend hours, days, or weeks, designing, decorating, and preparing major work for assembly, you risk spoiling your work and wasting your time and materials if you rush your leathercraft finishing operations.

The more you study the craft of hand colouring and finishing natural russet leathers, the more you will enjoy leathercraft and have your work admired by others.

Deane H Russell

Deane Russell was one of the founding members of the Society. He started leathercraft at the YMCA Golden Lake Summer Camp in 1938. For five years he was the Secretary for the Interdepartmental Committee on Canadian Hand Arts and Crafts for the Dominion Government. In 1946, Deane Russell wrote a feature column "Leathercraft Lobby" for "RA NEWS". This was a monthly newspaper for the Civil Service Recreation Association. He organized Canada's two largest leathercraft exhibitions. The 1948 display included entries from coast to coast in Canada and from 14 Foreign Countries. He resigned from the Dominion Civil Services after 12 years to undertake full-time management of the Ottawa Valley Leathercraft Studios. In 1950, Deane Russell was appointed President of the newly formed Canadian Society of Creative Leathercraft. In 1951, he was appointed Editor of the newly formed "Canadian Leathercraft". His early work commissions were a photograph frame presented to the President of the United States; A book cover presented to the Emperor of Ethiopia; and photograph folders presented to visiting Chiefs of Staff, European Armies.

CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR CREATIVE LEATHERCRAFT

Final Report on "Leather '92", October 23, 1992

INCOME

Entry Fees	\$ 170.00
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DISBURSEMENTS

Prizes	\$ 150.00
Judging Facilities	100.00
Judging Honorarium	100.00
City of Etobicoke	30.00
Printing Costs etc.	75.34
Return of Cases to Woodstock	30.00
Postage	<u>44.94</u>

Total Estimated Expenditures	530.28
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Expenditures Over Income	<u>\$ 360.28</u>
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Lea Love, Treasurer

CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR CREATIVE LEATHERCRAFT

1992 Annual Statement of Income and Expenses

INCOME

Registrations (56 x \$15.00)		\$ 840.00
Banquet Ticket Sales (54 x \$25.00)		1350.00
C.S.C.L. Deposit	\$ 200.00	
Deposit Returned	<u>200.00</u>	0.00
Draw Table - Main Draw	322.00	
- Special Draws	<u>86.00</u>	<u>408.00</u>
M.S.C.L. Coffee Break		60.00
Bank Interest		<u>15.18</u>

TOTAL INCOME

\$ 2673.56

DISBURSEMENTS

Banquet - Meals and Extra Food	\$ 1125.50
Room Rental	600.00
Refreshments (Hospitality Room)	31.39
Service Charges, Sales Tax & GST	391.46
Guest Speaker (Gift & Expenses)	160.00
Early Registration Prize	15.00
Advertising	24.05
Entertainment	24.05
Money Order Expenditures	<u>15.25</u>

TOTAL EXPENDITURES

2386.85

NET INCOME OVER EXPENDITURES

286.71

MISCELLANEOUS OTHER EXPENSES

Postage	\$ 60.41	
Ribbons and Weston Trophy	132.25	
Salon Prize	50.00	
Film & Developing	23.00	
Printing - Annual Report	89.70	
Room Allowance (Pres.)	62.09	
Judging Facilities	<u>150.00</u>	<u>567.45</u>

TOTAL EXPENDITURES OVER INCOME

\$ 280.74

Dear Madeleine Mitchell,

Thank you for sending me the membership card. First, I congratulate you the exhibition. The problem of sending my leather articles to Canada proved to be unsolvable for me. By the end of this year a new service branch of sending parcels by Air Mail will start functioning. So, Let's hope that in future I'll be able to take part in similar events.

Still, there was a very marvellous event in Germany - Grunwald near Munich, which I was able to attend. Leather '92 Conference. I received an invitation and went there with my exhibits. When the conference and the exhibition were over I took my items back home. The Germans also printed a catalogue. If you don't have it, I can send you one Next time.

At the moment we are reorganizing our Leather Society. It has been functioning as it should, so far. It has been more like a trade union, dealing with material problems of leather artists. In spite of that I have been planning to organize a Leather Conference in Tallinn together with the Estonian Applied Art Museum. The possible dates for the event are May 4-9, 1993. You and members of your Society will certainly receive an invitation from us.

Still, I would like to know, if this conference is going to take place, how many leather artists would be interested in joining it and taking their work along?

I would appreciate if you could predict the possible participation from your Society.

Looking forward to you kind reply.

Yours Sincerely,
Riina Kermik

New Members

Riina Kermik	William Allen
Siili 7/9 - 11	1457 Colborne Rd.
EEOO34, Tallinn	Sarnia, Ont.
Estonia.	N7V 3M2

Raymond R. Clements
952 Parkhill Rd. W.
Peterborough, Ont.
K9J 6P3

David J. Haas
5-7359 Chestnut Ridge Rd.
Orchard Park, NY
14127

**IF ANYONE IN THE C.S.C.L. HAS A
PATTERN FOR A LEATHER SEWING
THIMBLE (STANDARD STEEL
THIMBLE SIZE) PLEASE WRITE OR
CALL GLENN NELSON, BOX 772,
CAMPBELLFORD, ONT. K0L 1L0
1-705-653-1899**

C.S.C.L. WORKSHOP

Making a Pattern for a Leather Vest.

This pattern making workshop will include your basic vest pattern and then if there is time, we will include different styles - yolks etc.

This workshop will be taught by BETSY RENNIE, FCSC. There is a \$25.00 fee and will be taught at St. Margaret's Anglican Church on 134 Emerson Street in Hamilton. The Workshop will be the last weekend of May 1993.

THE GOOSE STORY

*Next fall, when you see Geese heading South
for the Winter...flying along in V formation
you might consider what Science has discovered
as to Why they fly that Way.
As each bird flaps its Wings, it creates
an Uplift for the bird immediately Following.
By flying in V formation the Whole Flock adds
at least 71% greater Flying Range,
than if each bird Flew on its Own.
People who share a common direction
and sense of community
can get where they are going more quickly and easily
because
They are travelling on the thrust of one another.
When a goose Falls out of Formation
it suddenly feels the Drag and Resistance
of trying to go it alone...and quickly
gets back into Formation to take Advantage
of the Lifting Power of the bird in front.
If we have as much sense as a goose
We will stay in Formation with those
Who are headed the same way we are.
When the Head Goose gets tired it rotates back
in the Wing...and another goose flies Point.
It is sensible to take turns doing demanding jobs...
with people or with geese flying south.
Geese honk from behind to Encourage those up Front
to keep up their Speed.
What do we say when we Honk from Behind?
Finally...and this is Important...when a goose gets Sick,
or is wounded by Gunshops, and falls out of Formation,
two other Geese fall out with that goose and
follow it down to lend Help and Protection.
They stay with the Fallen Goose until it is able to Fly
or until it Dies, and only then do they launch out
on their own, or with another Formation
To catch up with their Group.
If we have the Sense of a Goose
We will Stand by each other like that.*

Source Unknown

CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

*A happy heart feels
the power of love
A tranquil spirit feels
the presence of peace
Wisdom will cherish these
always!
May your heart be happy
your spirit tranquil
As together we cherish this
loving peaceful season!*

*Christmas Inspires...
such friendly ways
the hugs and smiles
that brighten our days*

*Christmas Inspires
close feelings with all
and provides fond memories
we will later recall*

*Christmas Inspires
giving gifts large or small
though our gift of each other
is the best gift of all*

*The editors of the Canadian
Leathercraft would like to
wish the members of the guild
a "Merry Christmas" and a
"Peaceful New Year"
and let your hearts keep on
tapping.....*

From Lois and Betsy.