



Canadian Leathercraft

Volume V Number 1

Autumn, 1955

KITS AND CRAFTS

For several years social workers have noted the gradual decline in the intellectual level in entertainment and the results of this decline are now becoming apparent in the crafts. Beginning with the numbered painting sets where the real art work is done before the craftsman buys them, the trend has continued through to the juvenile kits for the "leathercraftsman". Such partially-carried-out craft work is fine for camps and junior craftsmen, but even juniors need the satisfaction of completing a true craft project by themselves.

This trend probably became most noticeable with the advent of television which drew the masses away from participating forms of entertainment. Here was a pre-crafted diversion moulded on the juvenile level for mass consumption and because of its appeal and availability, few people are left with time for concentration on work with their hands.

The trend to "do-it-yourself" therefore is actually a contradiction in terms, for many of these projects are in kits with most of the craft work done before they are sold.

Little kits have their place, but to say that they will lead to an interest in leathercraft is mere alibi-ing. People buying these kits seldom realize that there are further avenues to the craft, avenues which are vastly more entertaining than simplified construction. As a good many of the kits have plastic lacing, people purchasing them do not even find out about leathercraft.

Craft dealers and teachers everywhere have watched this trend grow and are wondering where it will lead. It is a current in the stream of modern living which they have found it necessary to recognize and follow in order to meet the demand for activities which fit

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into this modern pattern. Although the real craftsman and those interested in the promotion of crafts have resented its unhealthy growth in our social structure, there seems little hope that it can be cut out completely, for it is becoming a part of our way of life.

Here is a challenge to all members of our Society to become missionaries in the cause of handicrafts again. There are many avenues through which we may endeavour to rekindle interest in work with our hands, and television itself holds possibilities for this promotion of craft work. Just what we can do, or how, may be questions that only time and each individual can answer. As a Leathercraft Society we cannot over-emphasize the value of true craftsmanship or of keeping its identity separate from the hobbycraft which threatens to undermine our new prestige among the arts and crafts.

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THIRD INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The dates for the Third International Assembly of Leathercraftsmen have now been set as May 12th and 13th, 1956, at the Hotel Statler in Detroit, Mich. Plans are well underway for this Assembly under the direction of the very energetic Detroit Guild guided by Chairman Bob Hartmann. "Bigger and better" seems to be the motto and more space will be available for the Guild and commercial displays. A continuous stream of activities is planned for the two days, with hours of demonstrations by expert craftsmen. More details will be published in the next issue as to program, etc.

C.S.C.L. HIGHER AWARDS

With the change in our fiscal year-ending which was approved at the last Annual Meeting, the next Annual Meeting will probably take place early in April, 1956, and at that time judging will be done for the Associate and Fellowship awards. Members who wish to become Associates and Fellows should now be planning their qualifying submissions. Requirements will in general be the same as were published in our issue of Summer, 1954, Volume III No.4. Further information will be available from the Secretary and will also be published in our next issue.

LAST CALL

This is your last notice for renewing your membership. With the Third International Assembly to take place in May, you will not want to miss any news. If you have not renewed this year, do so now by sending your renewal to Miss E.A. Prince, 153 Close Ave., Toronto 3. Rates are: General member, \$2.00; Associate, \$3.00; Fellow, \$5.00; Sustaining, \$10.00.

ORGANIZING A LEATHERCRAFT COURSE

by Robert Muma

Finding good leathercraft teachers has always been a problem. There are probably many good craftsmen qualified to teach but who lack the initiative to work out a course of their own. Only experience can give them the real confidence they need but the results of someone else's experience may be sufficient to help them get started. Following are a few notes which should be helpful in this way.

The beginning teacher of course should deal only with beginners in the craft and will therefore be fortified with the knowledge of his own superiority in that field; and in organizing a course he will have to assume that the members of his class know nothing whatever about the subject to begin with. Too often, a teacher takes for granted a certain amount of knowledge on the part of his pupils with the result that their understanding is hazy and their progress slow. It is rarely that we expect a tree to grow by pushing a stick into the earth and leaving it there. The ground must first be prepared, seed planted, and roots allowed to become firmly established in the soil. So in a leathercraft class, the pupil cannot be expected to develop very rapidly as a craftsman by merely being pushed into the environment of a leathercraft class and left to take root by himself. The teacher should attempt to build a solid foundation firmly rooted in a basic understanding of the subject. To do this, his course must consist of a balance between closely-allied theory and practice. Most classes unfortunately deal only with practice, but theory is the root structure by which we understand or comprehend the practical part.

Divisions of Course

Theoretically, as in all the arts and crafts, there are three things with which we have to concern ourselves: (1) The material with which we are working, that is, leather; (2) The tools with which to work that material, and (3) The techniques by which we learn to use tools in conjunction with the material. Centered around this triple aspect of leathercraft, the resourceful teacher should be able to find enough material to fill a good-sized course.

The nature and content of these lessons will depend on the particular knowledge and training of the individual teacher. No one else can organize a successful course for you because it must be based on your understanding of the subject. Every course, then, will be tempered by the things the teacher does or likes best. One teacher may specialize in construction, another in tooling or carving, and still another in color techniques, etc. Construction of course is basic and will automatically be a part of every course of tooling or carving. A well-balanced course should be as comprehensive as possible. If yours is a course in carving, why not begin with a lesson in the basic use of tracer and modeller? And if it is a course in tooling, why not somewhere include some experience in cutting and stamping

leather? In each one of these techniques we learn something of the nature of leather that we do not learn from the other. Dyeing or coloring leather is now also in demand and naturally allies itself with a course in any other phase of the craft.

Outline

No matter what decorative process you are teaching, the projects should be selected to progress from simplest to more complex forms of construction. Lay out a framework for your course based on this principle somewhat as follows:

- (1) Bookmark or Coaster -- Project in tooling or carving techniques only.
- (2) Change purse, no lining -- Involving tooling or carving plus lacing and domes.
- (3) Key case -- Including lacing and domes and introducing lining and eyelets for the keyplate.
- (4) Billfold -- Including lining and lacing, and introducing skiving and assembly of pockets.
- (5) Small purse of some kind -- Introducing the use of gussets.

On this framework you can also build progressive lessons in techniques of tooling, carving, or coloring as well as various types of lacing and methods of doing a certain operation.

Determine the number of lessons to be in your course and set aside a page in your notebook for each lesson. Now determine how many lessons will be needed for each project and correlate your projects with the number of lessons, filling in each page in your notebook with what you feel is necessary to carry out the principles involved in that project.

The course should be so organized that the group has plenty of work to do in class as well as some work to do in preparation for the next lesson.

Present your course in a way that will be as interesting as possible. Wherever you can, use charts or diagrams, samples of techniques, finished projects, etc. The pupil should keep a notebook which gives him a reference for work already covered, as well as a place to keep his own samples and ideas, etc.

Divide your time equally among all the members of the class. Although some will naturally need more individual assistance than others, there should be no favoritism and everyone should feel that he is getting all the attention that he needs.

A successful teacher depends on the success of his class in learning what he has taught them, and this success can be achieved only by his developing each individual's ability to the satisfaction of both teacher and pupil.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR MODELLING TOOL?

by Deane H. Russell

Though we realize that "no one tool will do everything", it is an opinion of fours that a skillful leathercraftsman can produce 90% of his surface decoration with one well-designed and finished combination modeller-bent tracer. Unfortunately, too many beginners, and quite a few instructors and experienced craftsmen still think of the modelling tool as just an instrument intended for "flattening or pushing the background down". The very term "flat modelling" (so freely used by instructors and textbooks) may have something to do with the great abundance of "flat looking modelling" to be seen on so much leatherwork today.

We like to think of the modeller in the same sense as a sculptor thinks of his modellers -- they are intended to assist in the creation of maximum modelling relief -- modelling delicately from one plane to another so that a decorated area presents best values of light and shadow to enhance, without exaggeration, the finished sculptured effect.

Study Your Modeller

To understand the numerous possibilities of a good modeller the craftsman should study his tool carefully -- under a strong light and under a magnifying glass. Most mass produced modellers will be found to be so inconsistently formed and finished that no two appear alike even without the aid of good light or magnification.

Common Faults

Modeller End--too spoon billed, oversize, thick, stiff feeling, blunt pointed, sharp edged, rough surfaced, or presenting working surfaces to the leather at awkward holding angle.

Tracer End -- Too thick, too needle sharp, clipped off flat or rough offering digging, scraping or tearing point.

Comparative Studies

A study of many different French, British, Scandinavian, other European and American modellers has suggested to us what seems to be the "ideal general purpose modeller."

Note: Although it is comparatively easy to draft out on paper the specifications for a so-called "ideal tool", manufacturers cannot capture all such fine points if the tool is to be mass produced at a reasonable cost to the craftsman.

When selecting a modeller-tracer, remember that all bright finished tools are not necessarily good modellers. Check carefully for important features.

Desirable Features

- 1) Modeller Tip -- should be medium-fine (even bold work can be done with a fine pointed modeller.)

- 2) Running Working Edges -- $1/64$ " polished to eliminate friction or drag -- edges to be "flat-polished" not knife-sharp or round - blunt.
- 3) Bottom Working Surface -- should be "off-flat" rounded and highly polished.
- 4) Angle of Set -- working tip should rest on leather when tool held at comfortable pencil holding angle.
- 5) Finger Control -- tool should be designed to allow maximum finger control as close to actual working tip as possible ($7/8$ " from tip to beginning of finger grip)
- 6) General Form and Finish -- last but not least -- some tools may incorporate most of the above features yet leave something intangible but vital lacking for the skilled craftsman. The "ideal modeller" should include such features as above but also offer a form and finish which helps the craftsman enjoy a feeling of "flexibility" for delicate modelling.

Discovering New Tool Uses

While new uses are being explored by clever craftsmen all the time, the following suggestions may help those who have developed too-set habits too quickly:--

- 1) Medium fine tip -- learn to tilt and control at all angles, required by fine detail of decoration.
- 2) Thin flat running sides -- use to set up incised or tooled lines into sharp relief for straight, outside or inside curved lines.
- 3) Bottom working surface -- use to bevel lines and incisions and lay down background.
- 4) Combination use of fine tip, bottom and side surfaces -- for texturing effects (unlimited according to imagination of craftsman -- e.g., veining, cross hatching, shading tip stippling, decorative swirls.)
- 5) Heel of bent tracer -- for lining or tracing.
- 6) Tip of bent tracer -- for lining, stippling, tracing.
- 7) Some embossing or repousse may be worked with various surfaces of such a tool (from flesh side of leather) although we greatly prefer to use the specially designed fine and large double ball repousse tool for such work.
- 8) Most important of all -- develop light, imaginative modelling or sculptoring touch and control of all working surfaces of tool and your work will reflect "good modelling technique" instead of "flat modelling technique".

Suggestion

Canadian leathercraft students can learn much about the finer points of leather modelling by studying examples of work by European leatherworkers. New students of such work are surprised to realise that the greater part of surface decoration, displaying: good beveling, lining, stippling, backgrounding, shading, texturing, swirling, are all accomplished by skillfully manipulating a single modelling tool. Use scrap leather for a series of experiments to discover and practise more uses of your modeller-tracer and you will greatly increase your enjoyment of the art of leather modelling.

HOW TO EMBOSS by Dorothy Muma

Many people like to have their tooling or carving present a three-dimensional effect. The ultimate in achieving this effect is by embossing and we have many queries as to the proper procedure in doing this. Good embossing gives life to figure carving and tooled designs. An embossed effect can be achieved by careful modelling or stamping on some leathers, but for high relief the leather must be worked in a different manner. Through experience, craftsmen usually work out some variations of techniques for themselves, but below are three of the most common methods used.

There are several methods of embossing leather, each of which is particularly suited to a special purpose or leather. For embossing, the leather should be well dampened right through and allowed to stand until the surface begins to return to natural color.

The simplest method is actually a debossing process, and is suitable for tooled or carved work in any kind of light-weight leather. This consists mainly of using a yielding surface for tooling, such as wadding, thick papers, etc. (See Fig. 1) This soft surface allows the tooled lines to sink into the leather, holding up the untooled parts in relief. For carving, the same principle is used by cementing the leather to cardboard, allowing for deeper stamping impressions. This is an effective method where only a slight degree of embossing is desired.

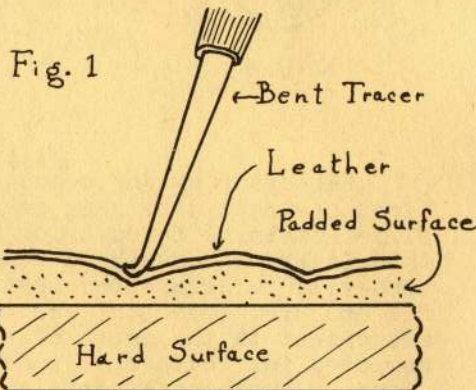


Fig. 1

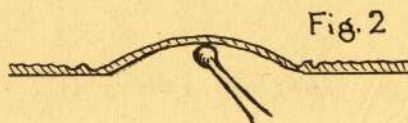


Fig. 2

The second method is the one most commonly used and is especially suitable for smooth leathers. All tooling or carving should be completed before embossing. Tooled lines should be smooth and firmly packed down. The tooling should confine the embossing and if the lines are firmly packed there is not so much danger of stretching the fibres beyond the tooled outline. Press up the section to be embossed from underneath with ball-point tool or modeller. (See Fig. 2) A better method is to turn the leather over and press down with modeller into the palm of the hand. Go over the outline again from the grain side, pressing down the lines to make the surrounding area flat.

When tooling in Morocco or Mission Grain Steerhide, there is a much more satisfactory method of embossing. In these leathers, a contrast of textures is possible by using the modeller to erase the

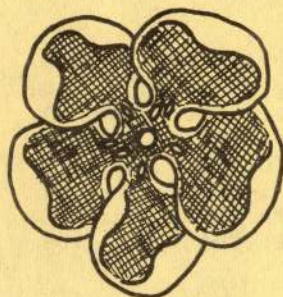


Fig. 3

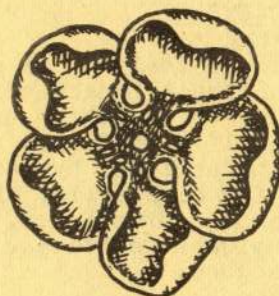


Fig. 4

grain from the parts to be embossed. (See fig.3). If modelled sufficiently, the fibres will be stretched to a saucer shape. Turn over into palm of hand and gently press the underside with modeller. Press harder to stretch the fibres to the degree of relief required. Turn back and outline again with tracer in order to keep the rest of the leather flat. (See Fig.4).

Filling Embossing

Embossing by any method should be padded or filled. It should first be treated by some means to preserve its form and prevent the filler staining through or absorbing the oils from the leather. A thin layer of Household Cement, Plastic Wood, or Flexible (Bookbinders') Glue are the best methods of doing this. Some possible fillers are: absorbent cotton and cement (alternate pieces of cotton and cement to the depth of embossing); papier mache; leather skivings cemented in; leather or wood carved to shape; plasticene or modelling clay; or anything lightweight which will stick or can be cemented in without shrinking or warping. Most of these fillers can be smoothed into place with knife blade or spatula. Be careful not to leave any filler on leather outside of embossed parts as these may stain through.



WORKSHOP TIPS

Here are more tips given as answers by the panel of experts at our last International Assembly:

- 1) The best way to make gold kid stick to other leathers when used as a background leather in filigreed work, is to scuff the gold leather so that it is rough and will hold the cement. This applies also to other metallic-surfaced leathers.
- 2) In some cases, mildew may be removed by the use of a household bleach or detergent, though over-use of these may harm the leather. The best preventive is to avoid the cause; that is, do not dampen leather which you will not be using reasonably soon. If necessary to put damp leather away for a time, inspect it frequently.

CANADIAN HANDICRAFTS GUILD COMPETITION
CANADIAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION, 1955

C.S.C.L. gave splendid support to this competition, and all entries received were from our members. Our Society may well be proud of the quality of the work displayed. Comments on the variety of the articles, their design and craftsmanship, indicated that we are succeeding in our objective to make this particular competition the show window for the best in Canadian leathercraft.

Prize winners in the various classes were as follows:

Tooled or Carved Work -- 1st prize - Endel Ruberg, Montreal, Que., for his handbag. Honorable Mention -- Edith Roscie's leather-covered box; Sadie Roebuck's tote bag.
 Neither Tooled nor Carved, any other treatment -- 1st prize - Nora Huyck, Willowdale, Ont., for her framed handbag in suede and morocco.
 Leather Gloves -- 1st prize - Clarice Packham, Weston, Ont. Honorable Mention - Edith Roscoe.
 Best Design - not more than 20% decoration -- Robert Shaw for his tote bag. Honorable Mention - Clarice Packham's framed handbag; Endel Ruberg's writing case.
 Best Original Entry -- Anne Hook, Toronto, Ont., for her coaster set. Honorable Mention - Endel Rubert's Bound Book. Special Mention - Lara Russell's shoulder bag.

Other members whose work qualified for exhibition included: Mrs. Jean Frost, Wallaceburg; Mrs. Isobel Hanna, Weston; Mrs. Mabel Holman, Aurora; John Opariek, Montreal; and Mrs. J.M. Robinson, Sussex, N.B.

Mr. Nicholas Hornyansky, A.R.C.A., O.S.A., C.P.E., A.C.P.S., teacher at the Ontario College of Art and well-known Canadian artist acted as a member of the jury. He congratulated the Society on the advances made in the quality of the entries submitted, and felt that we were indeed making progress in raising the standards of Canadian leathercraft.

Demonstrations in leathercraft were given daily. Demonstrators this year were Reta Larmour, Don MacKinnon, Robert and Dorothy Muma and Endel Ruberg.

The cooperation, assistance and encouragement given our Society during the C.N.E. by Mrs. Kemp Waldie, Guild Gallery Supervisor and Mr. S. G. Hazell, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (Ont.), were greatly appreciated.



THIS IS YOUR BULLETIN

Many times as the Editorial Board of C.S.C.L. has approached another publication date for "Canadian Leathercraft", we have wrung our hands for a lack of interesting material to present in its pages. Again and again we have asked ourselves "What does the membership want in the way of articles?" The only way we can answer this question satisfactorily is for members to write in to the Editor their wishes. What kind of technical information do you want in the Bulletin? What kind of informative articles? Have you workshop tips of any kind? Do you think the general format of the Bulletin as now presented is satisfactory? Answers to any or all of these questions would be of vital assistance to the Editorial Board.

In the past, the Bulletin has been kept filled by a few interested members but we feel it would add to the value of the Bulletin to widen the scope of its writers. If the Bulletin is to continue and if it is to be the voice of The Canadian Society of Creative Leathercraft, other members must contribute in some way to its publication. You do not have to be a writer. That is what the Editorial Board is for. Just send in your ideas. If every member would send in just one suggestion it would keep the Bulletin interesting for all members for some time to come. Editor is Mrs. Dorothy Muma, 62 McGill Street, Toronto 2, Ontario.

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CORRECTION

In Volume IV Number 3, we ran an article under the heading of "Leathercraft as Therapy". The Occupational Therapists Association has brought to our attention the fact that only one of the authors, Mrs. Sheila Irvine, is a registered occupational therapist, although we mentioned all three authors as being such. We trust this has not occasioned any difficulty for the Association and draw the correction to the attention of our members.

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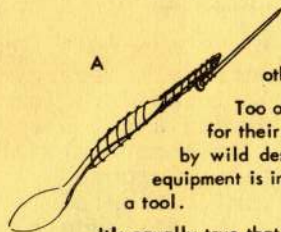
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YES, It's TRUE! Illustration (A) — a tool conjured up in our minds when asked this actual question not so long ago: "Have you a tool with a SPOON on one end and a PIN on the other?"

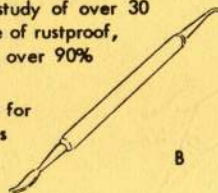
Too often, beginner craft students don't bother to learn correct names for their tools. They seem content to order by catalog number alone, or by wild description, without realizing that learning of proper names for equipment is in itself an aid to better understanding of the special functions of a tool.

It's equally true that some of the finest decorative leathercraft in Canada today was produced with tools little better than tool "A" — tools quickly beaten from nails and crudely bound with cord or tape for handles. But such work represents exceptions — accomplished in spite of tools used, and only because of highly developed skill in tool manipulation by the craftsman.

It is our firm belief that such masters of leather modelling could increase their enjoyment of leather decorating, if not their already excellent work by becoming the proud owner of a new OVLS "Canadian Modeller-Tracer" (B) — developed after long study of over 30 different typical modellers from Europe and North America. Made of rustproof, nickel silver, individually hand finished — this one tool suffices for over 90% of all modelling needs.

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