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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 Mr. Deane Russell of Ottawa as the first President. He was followed in the office 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 McKinnon, 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. 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, and exhibitions.

Since it was impossible to hold more than one meeting a year for the entire membership, groups of five or more 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 best 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 Exhibition 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, and Mrs. Olivia Smith 1969. Only a few exhibitions can be mentioned here. The first was a Travelling Exhibition - Canadian Handmades in Leather - which started a 16 month tour in February 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 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, 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. Bridgen, 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 guild 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 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 year's activities and to see what other branches are doing. New members are always welcomed and memberships can be accepted at that meeting.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BARRIE BRANCH

When C.S.C.L. was formed in 1950 by a nucleus of gifted craftsmen and women it attracted many others who were interested in improving the quality and design of Canadian leathercraft. One of these was Clara Cavanagh of Barrie. She travelled to Toronto by bus during the early years to avail herself of classes in leather given by such masters as Don MacKinnon and Bob Muma.

She was a good student and by 1953 had attained her Associate standing, and in 1955 she earned her Fellowship in C.S.C.L. She was soon teaching an adult night school class at a local collegiate. From this group enough interested leathercrafters gathered to start a Barrie branch of C.S.C.L. in 1958 with Kay Yasunaka (Assoc.) as the first President. Kay was employed at the Clarke & Clarke Tannery at Barrie and along with Garn Pratt (a salesman with the same firm and an excellent leather carver) and Sherle Bottrill Secretary and Receptionist, they cemented the relationship between our members and this producer of fine leather. Eventually, Robson Lang took over the tannery operation and some years later the retail portion of Clarke & Clarke was purchased by Tandy. As a location for a C.S.C.L. branch we feel that Barrie was ideally situated.

The fall session of night classes was overbooked in 1960. Picture that! In order to avoid disappointment for some new pupils, four members withdrew and convened in May Corbett's recreation room to continue working and learning together. Sherle Bottrill, Eleanor Coutts and Jepp Trew were soon joined by other who were lured by the good fellowship and fun that went along with the hard work. May's room quickly became our "club house" and several Weston Trophy plaques hang there today. We were the first branch to win this

trophy for three consecutive years. Barrie branch boasted such noted teachers as Nora Huyck and Helen Anderson and the membership was made up of workers from the Barrie, Orillia and Newmarket areas.

Under the watchful eye and good example of these fine teachers, many of our members were gently persuaded to work and obtain Associate standing. We won our share of Weston Trophys and were represented in many Craftsman and Salon ribbon presentations and at CNE or other competitions and sales. Unfortunately, the lack of sufficient enrolment at night school or summer classes led to a falling off of new C.S.C.L. members in our area, and time and health problems have taken their toll on the membership, which at one time reached twenty workers.

In 1985 we no longer had sufficient membership to continue as a branch and therefore regretfully surrendered our charter. Nonetheless, the friendships formed continue and we still gather at least twice a year for a social time and reunion. At times like these we reminisce about past events such as the time we attended the Park Plaza Hotel in Toronto for a meeting (perhaps the IALC Annual 1967). Clara was to demonstrate moulded leather trays, so several of us embarked from the car at the front door to troop through the lobby to the desk, each armed with a scrub pail. Sole leather for trays has to be soaked, right? Curious glances served only to confirm that we were from the "Sticks". Or the time May Corbett attended her first C.S.C.L. branch meeting, only to be elected Treasurer. All before she had time to pay her membership! This was only the beginning of many years of service to C.S.C.L. both on the local and the national Executive.

As Members-at-Large we try to attend Annual Meeting and workshops and depend on the Bulletin to keep us abreast of C.S.C.L. doings to date.

Submitted by Kay Cloughley

TORONTO BRANCH

The Toronto Leathercraft Guild, a branch of the CSCL, was founded in 1952. Members met at the YWCA located at 21 McGill Street. Mrs. Margaret McFarlane, Mrs. Edith Roscoe and Mrs. Reta Larmour are listed as contacts in the original notice of the meeting.

Edith Roscoe's letter of July 2, 1952 to Mr. A.H. Pearson encloses a copy of the minutes of that first meeting of June 24th. In the letter Mrs. Roscoe encourages Mr. Pearson to telephone if he required help. The phone number, Cherry 1-3924, is on the Toronto Exchange and not long distance she says! We should have a very active and interesting group she goes on to say.

This "Toronto Section" planned to form a "Workshop Group" and included on it's programme demonstrations, lectures, and discussions on leathercraft. The original mandate was for leathercrafters to meet with each other, to get help with their problems, inspiration, and ideas from others in the group.

An active Toronto Group, the CSCL announcement reads, could well become an important influence in the Canadian Leathercraft field.

The "Special Feature" shown for that first meeting was colour slides of pieces from the Travelling Exhibition and other interesting leather articles. J.L. Scobie was the first President and by the Fall of 1952 membership was "about fifty" as Mr. Scobie writes in one of his letters (Sept. 22, 1952).

Mr. Don MacKinnon, late husband of Honourary Life Member Mae MacKinnon, was one of the first Workshop Speakers with 'Line Rhythm in Leather Technique, Nov. 26, 1952.

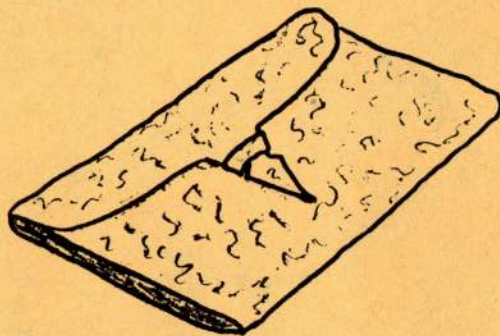
Submitted by René Hackstetter

DRAWING of FELLOW and ASSOCIATE PIECES

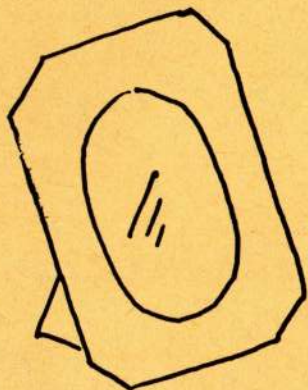


BETSY RENNIE - FELLOW

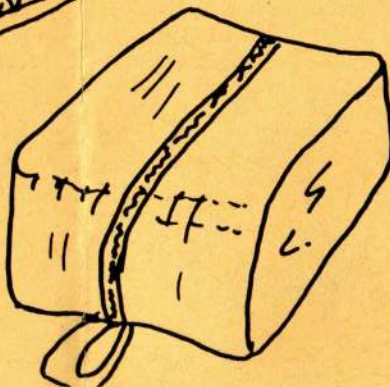
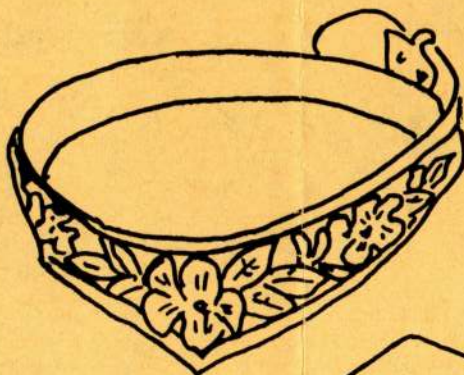
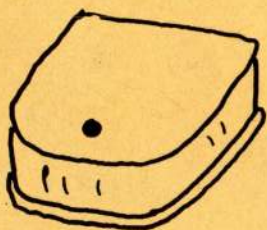
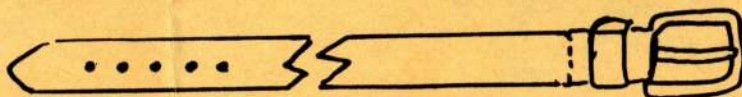
Free-standing Monarch Butterfly
"Rosemarie" Secretary
Waste Basket
Bear Jar



N.B. The critiques for the Weston Trophy, and the write-ups on new Fellow and Associates in the Spring issue were submitted by Dorothy Muma, FCSC.



RENE HACKSTETTER - ASSOCIATE
 Standing Picture Frame, with
 oval glass and removable back.
 Card Case
 Handbag with Accordion Gusset
 Plain Belt



CLIFF McTAVISH - ASSOCIATE
 "Loony Bin" with belt loop
 Contoured, Carved Belt
 Toiletry Case, with zipper
 Wool Case (Knitting Bag)

LETTERS from MEMBERS

Dear Betsy and Lois: Editors of C.S.C.L. Bulletin

Just a note to say I have received the latest Bulletin (Spring 1990) and find it very interesting - the annual report - the list of officers - the minutes of the first meeting, etc. It's great to keep up a little with my friends in C.S.C.L.

I have also received the photo taken by Harvey's at the 40th Annual meeting. I'm pleased to have so many pictures of my friends and I'm impressed with the number of new names and faces. It shows continuing growth in C.S.C.L. Also I am pleased to add my congratulations to Mississauga on having formed a new branch and on winning the Weston Trophy this their first year. It was close - there must have been many excellent pieces to judge.

Also, Betsy, I want to congratulate you on becoming a member of the Council of Fellows and René Hackstetter and Cliff MacTavish on obtaining their Associate membership.

I close with best wishes to you both as editors - may everybody support you by sending articles on time! And best wishes to all.

Sincerely,
Gertrude Hilder

P.S. It was nice to see my quilt square in the Bulletin!

June 16, 1990

Dear Betsy,

Thank you for your letter of the 15 last (May). Sorry I have not replied earlier.

I have already told Fred Brown there was no charge. In a small way it is my contribution to the continuation of the Society. As I worked at the sewing and various steps (and read contributions of people I liked and admired) I thought it would be nice to dedicate the volumes to Rita Larmour, Edith Roscoe, and Jean Hunter. Each one exemplified the spirit of Guildhood to the very highest degree - because of them the Society stayed alive and prospered.

Again many thanks for your kind words.

Yours sincerely,
Ray E. S. Potter

N.B. The above letter concerns the binding of the Canadian Leathercraft (bulletins). The three volumes were on display at the 40th Annual meeting.

WORKSHOP

DATE: Saturday, September 22, 1990
TIME: 9:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
PLACE: St. Martin's-In-The-Field Anglican Church, Toronto
FEE: \$25.00
DEMONSTRATOR: Fred Brown
PROJECT: Photo albums

PLEASE BRING:

Lightweight 2 - 2 1/2 oz cowhide, Morocco
Skiving tools
Cutting knife
Wellbond cement or alternative
Cement brush
Tools for decorating
Work surface (marble, etc.)
Lining leather

TO BE SUPPLIED:

Belting splits for stiffener
Millboard
X-ray plate
Inserts for album

BRING YOUR LUNCH: Coffee and tea will be provided.

SUPPORT YOUR C.S.C.L. BY PLANNING TO ATTEND THIS WORTHWHILE WORKSHOP.

TORONTO, ONTARIO