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How Leather was Sewn "Now this wax, this is stuff that's very poor. It's too old to begin with. I remember my grandfather used to [make this stuff. Used to make it from rosin and pine tar and I know he used to put a little grease in it. He had this one little ladle, he used to boil it in that. And when he had it all ready mixed up he'd just dump it in a pan of water. Cold water. Then he'd take it in his hand and was working it and working it until he'd get it right. Rosin and tar and a little grease. That would be cow fat or sheep fat. I imagine you can buy rosin in any drug store. Violin places are using it yet anyways." I Then Donald Garrett MacDonald took the ladle to the stove and put it into the fireplace, right into the wood coals. The mixture melted, soon began to smoke, and then [boiled. He'd take it out, stir it and put it back. Boiling down, the stuff began to thicken. He said that sometimes it has to be boiled three times to get the right consistency. Then, the stuff smoking furiously, he took the ladle to the sink and dumped the contents into a pan of cold water. It spread on the surface of the water and immediately became hard. It was like a sheet of thin plastic. He took it and cracked it up in his hands. The warmth of his hands made it pliable again. "If it wasn't *hard enough, my grandfather'd put it back and put in a little more rosin, and if it was too hard you'd put a little extra pine tar. You just have to try it." He put the wax on a small piece of leather to give it backing, and brought up the sides to make it comfortable to hold and run along the threads. "Well, I'll bet it's been 45 years since I didn't make that. My grandfather made it. I was always with him whatever he'd be doing. I remember he used to let us take some for gum. It was good. Then he'd want to stop us, so he'd put the wax on a piece of leather and lift the dog's tail and pretend to rub it on the dog's behind. It was the only way to stop us from taking it for gum." Making a good piece of wax is the first step in sewing leather. You want to end up with a sewing thread made of a number of plies of shoemaker's thread twisted together and thoroughly waxed, the ends tapering to a needle-like point, and (if available) a pig bristle added at each end. You buy a ball of shoemaker's thread and wind off about 4 feet. To break it properly, take it between your thumbs and forefingers and turn it against the twist of the thread, opening the separate strands and weakening the thread at that place. Take a tight hold at both sides of this opened place • Donald Garrett wraps the thread around his little fingers so it won't slip • and in one quick pull snap the thread. This will break and fray the ends, so they will later taper. Do this to two more threads, each 4 feet long. (This will make a finished sewing thread of 3-ply, which is good for most work. Heavier work might take 5-ply. It would depend, also, on the weight of thread you use. Donald Garrett's was Number 15.) Take the ends of three lengths and put them together, each a little bit back from the next, so as to taper the point and keep it from becoming blunt. Hold the three lengths back about 3 inches from the end between the left thumb and forefinger
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