

Canadian leather thimbles

Bancroft Ontario

I first came across leather thimbles for my own thimble collection in Jean Shoup's *Thimbles Only* spring 1987 catalogue from California. In the only advertisement I have seen, this mail-order business had a varied selection of eight different designs of these thimbles for sale.

I have now seen these thimbles for sale by *Gimbel & Sons*, of Maine in 1986-. *The Thimble Guild* offered four garden flowers thimbles for sale in July 1995.

The following useful information that accompanied the spring 1987 thimble photos:

"Helen Pitts first created her "life-like" leather maple leaf 20 years ago. She was encouraged to sell them in her gift shop and soon other shops were placing orders. Husband Carl, a tool and die maker, joined Helen, and their jewelry line began to expand. Each piece is still individually handcarved, tooled and H.P. by talented artists. Helen and Carl are now retired, but their company remains in the family under the capable direction of **Terry and Cathy Pitts**. Their thimbles are a "remarkable" addition to our catalog! Province shown beside their official flower where applicable. Our exclusive - 1" H."

Using this information of a start in 1967, the following information is available on Google.

The company was known as **Hinterland Handcrafts**, 195 Hasting St N, Bancroft, Ontario, Canada.

I have not been able to establish whether this name was used from the beginning, nor when the family firm first began to make leather thimbles to extend their range of jewellery.

Tilley of Canada Ltd purchased Hinterland Handcrafts, described as a manufacturer of leather flower and suede products - in 1998.

Tilley moved their own operations to Bancroft in 2003, using the original home of HH. Contact with Tilley in May 2014 revealed that they don't make thimbles (anymore).

HH also produced suede purses, and baby booties to accompany their leather jewellery, which consisted mainly of brooches and earrings - all for the souvenir market.



The first range of suede thimbles - tho I have noticed that some of their later leather thimbles have the smooth surface of leather, where the suede surface will be on the inside - have the shape of Canadian Provincial flowers affixed to the front of the thimbles. These are realistic portrayals of the twelve Canadian provinces and territories floral emblems, and it is often difficult to remember that these small miniatures are made of leather.

Most of the attached motifs are often slightly larger than the thimble - ie the leaves stretch up above the apex or in the case of birds, the bird shape affixed is wider than the thimbles. There is also a series of garden flowers, Canadian birds and miscellaneous topics.

My early leather thimble from *Thimbles Only* in 1987, was totally unmarked and was supplied without a backing card nor was it boxed. Whether this was how they were received from HH is unknown - are the backing cards and boxes a new marketing tool?

I have noted some examples with the word 'Canada' inside the apex of the thimble. Some are marked 'Alta.' which I now understand is for 'Alberta'. One of the maple leaf examples has 'Jasper' lettered vertically on the verso. The Alberta Wild Rose has 'Banff' lettered on the verso, confirming that these were sold in the tourist market. Ontario has the whole name lettered on the verso, other have Ont. Even a monogrammed example has surfaced eg *A.B*



There are also different shapes – all have a slightly domed apex, but some are a much squatter shape. As these are handcrafted thimbles, there will always be slight differences in the attached flowers etc. Note that some of the inner edges are ridged or fluted.

As Canada has two official languages, the backing cards are lettered in English and French. "Handcrafted in Leather by Hinterland/Fait a la main Cuir par Hinterland – Canada" with the HH logo in the corner. The Province flowers' backing cards also identify the name of the flower and the province – in both languages.

I think the third card illustrated is the most recent one? It is lettered only in one language "Canadian Naturals by Hinterland Handmade from leather". There is a background illustration of a tree and no company logo.

I don't recognise some of the flowers – please help if you know their names and I am missing one of the Province flowers photo.

Thank you, Betty Gerrits of Canada for sharing your knowledge and photos of these Canadian suede leather thimbles.



CANADIAN PROVINCES and TERRITORIES FLOWERS



Alberta

Wild Rose

R: lettered 'Alta.' On verso
lower: lettered 'Banff' on verso



British Columbia
Pacific Dogwood



Manitoba

Crocus

R: Canada lettered up in apex



New Brunswick
Purple violet



Newfoundland
Pitcher Plant



Northwest Territories
Mountain Avens



Nova Scotia
Mayflower



Ontario
Trillium



Prince Edward Island
Lady Slipper



Quebec
Madonna Lily



Saskatchewan
Prairie Lily



Yukon Territories
Fireweed

GARDEN FLOWERS

some of these flowers may have been made for Flowers of the Month – see Carnation, Gladioli
the flowers, being leather, are sometimes quite stylised



Carnation

R: lettered "Jan." as Flower of the Month



Chrysanthemum



Columbine?



Daffodil with pearl at centre



Day Lily



Geranium



Gladioli
lettered "Aug." as Flower of the Month



Hibiscus



Hippeastrum



Holly



Iris



Magnolia



Narcissus



Orchid - pink



Pansy

Flower of Grande Prairie, Alberta

R: no place markings



Poinsettia



Poinsettia - White



Rose

R: showing leather's tear



Viola



Sunflower



Zinnia



furry leaf



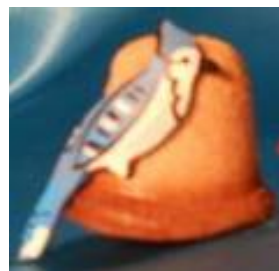
yellow
bigger leaf



BIRDS



Black-capped Chickadee



Blue Jay



Canada Goose



Cardinal



Loon



Mallard



Owl

OTHERS

many of these attachments depict Canadian icons



Beaver



Brown bear



Butterfly



Canadian salmon



Christmas - Candy Cane



Christmas - Santa



Maple leaf

symbol of Canada – in all their glorious colour
 the last example (bottom R) is lettered 'Jasper' vertically on the verso – 'Canada' at bottom L

NON-CANADIAN THEMES



Albuquerque Balloon Festival
 'Albq. NM'

References

Gimbel & Sons Country Store. 1986, 1990 [catalogue]
Thimbles Only. spring 1987 [catalogue]

Contributors

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This listing of Canadian leather thimbles does not purport to be complete or accurate in all aspects.
Rather it invites comment and contribution to add to our knowledge. My thanks to the contributors.

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