



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## LEATHER AND RAWHIDE

- Priority:** Begin drying within 48 hours to prevent mold growth. Leather with the condition known as "red rot", will be irreversibly stiffened and darkened by exposure to water if not treated quickly.
- Handling Precautions:** Wet leather may be fragile; leather with red rot or which is torn will require support to transport safely. Move items only after a place has been prepared to receive them.
- Packing Method:** Wrap items with freezer paper or plastic sheeting to prevent red-rotted leather from coming in contact with and soiling adjacent items and to keep it from drying before it can be treated. Support complex shaped objects with uninked newsprint or other absorbent material.

### Supplies Needed

**portable dehumidifier  
pallets or lumber  
clear water  
fans**

**freezer paper or plastic sheeting  
sponges, clean towels, paper towels,  
or unused newsprint**

- Preparation For Drying:** Rinse or sponge with clear water to remove mud or dirt before drying. Be careful in rinsing red rotted or painted/gilded surfaces. Keep red rotted leather damp, if it is still in that condition, until proper consolidation can be done.

- Drying Procedure:** Some leather was intended to be flexible (e.g. much native tanned 'buckskin', harness leather, and some rawhide) and will need to be manipulated during drying in order to retain its flexibility. Other leather was either not intended to flex (e.g. shields, fire buckets) or no longer needs to be flexible and may be padded out and allowed to dry slowly.

Sponges, clean towels, paper towels, or uninked newsprint may be used to absorb excess moisture. Pad out to correct shape using uninked newsprint or other absorbent material. Change padding material as it becomes saturated.

Air dry, using fans to keep air moving without blowing directly on the pieces. Raise items off the floor on trestles, pallets, lumber, or screens to allow air to circulate on all sides.

Use portable dehumidifiers to slowly remove moisture from the area and objects. Bring the relative humidity down to as close to 50% as is practical. Check daily for mold.