# A "SHOTT POUCH" LIKE LEMUEL'S

IT WAS SEPTEMBER 8TH, 1755. The English and their Provincials were fighting the French and Indian forces at a place called Lake George and Lemuel Lyman had been shot.

Lemuel was a provincial soldier from East Hampton, Massachusetts. He had been on a morning scout when he and his companions were ambushed and fired upon by the enemy. Some accounts say that the ball that lodged in his side had grazed his fingers, shattered his rifle stock and passed through his shot pouch and clothing before it struck him. Either way, his wound must not have been as terrible as it sounds because Lemuel reportedly continued with the campaign until he was sidelined by a severe fever much later. His shot pouch was saved and passed down through the generations and still serves as a rare documented example of what a pouch from the mid-18th century was like.

Curiously, if you are not familiar with it, it's not exactly what you might imagine. First off, it's a belt pouch, meaning

The completed pouch like Lemuel's based on surviving examples and period descriptions.
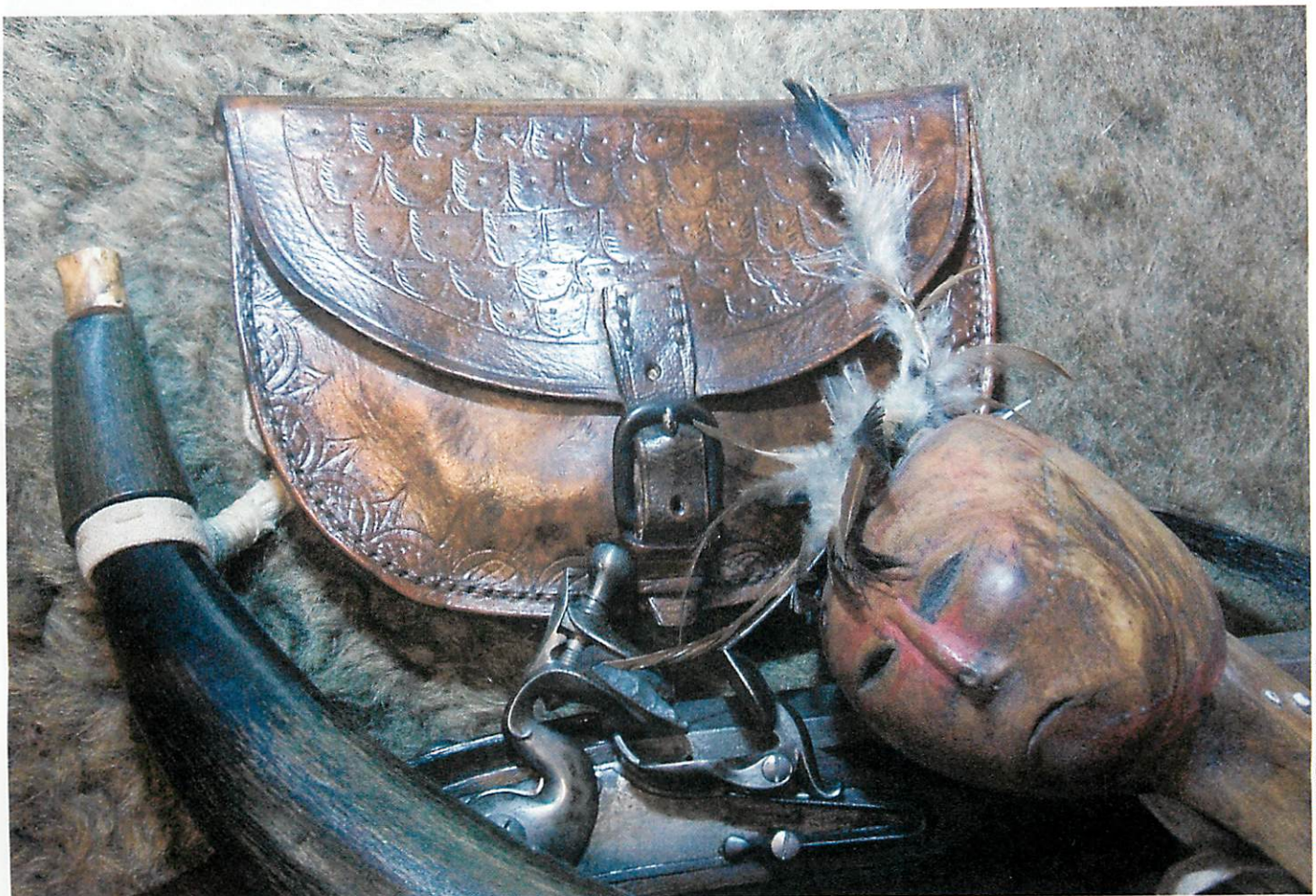
that it had a pair of leather loops sewn to the back so it could be worn on a waist belt. Secondly, it's rather small, measuring just 7" x 5", but based on similar examples I think that was normal for the times. Although made to use a shoulder strap, a British Ordinance pouch from the era is about the same size. It also shares other similarities with the Lyman pouch, like a single internal divider, a simple "D" shaped construction style, and a button to hold the flap closed.

Now I want to emphasize that these are actually "shot pouches" used by militias and armies during wars fought here in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and not cartridge boxes. Although paper cartridges were a soldier's stock in trade, a letter by Col. Henry Bouquet in 1758 explains why shot pouches and powder horns were still vitally necessary to some of the troops, especially provincial militias.

"I have noticed a great inconvenience in the use of cartridge boxes for the provincial troops. They do not know how to make cartridges; or rather they take too much time. In the woods, they seldom have time or places suitable to make them. These cartridge boxes hold only 9 charges, some twelve, which is not sufficient. I think that their powder horns and pouches for carrying bullets would be more useful, keeping the cartridge box, however, to use in case of a sudden night attack." (1)

With their hodge-podge of shoulder weapons is it any wonder that

Detail from *General Johnson Saving a Wounded French Officer from the Tomahawk of a North American Indian* by Benjamin West. This painting depicts Major General Sir William Johnson preventing Baron Dieskau from being scalped at the Battle of Lake George. During the French and Indian war Lemuel Lyman was wounded in this same battle while serving with a provincial militia unit from Massachusetts.

Left: The original *Lemuel Lyman* shott pouch, front view. **Below:** The Lyman pouch, back view showing the remaining belt loop.

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Above: The old pouch from the author's collection used for this project, front view.
Below: Back view of the author's pouch showing a belt loop arrangement very similar to Lemuel's.

would have to be loaded with buck or swan shot, however standard "buck and ball" cartridge loads were to be used by the regularly armed troops. A general order from the "Orderly Book" dated October 11th 1758 mentions that and directs how all firearms were to be handled for parade.

All parties are to load upon the General Parade before they march off & the Officers commanding parties are always to see that their men draw their charges, return their powder into their powder horns and the ball & buck shot into their pouches upon the parade before they are dismissed. The troops are immediately to examine their cartridge-boxes and replace those that may be damaged by the late rain and each man to be completed to 36 rounds of cartridges. Loose powder, ball and what buck shot they will have occasion for they may receive by applying to the Artillery. (3)

This letter implies that besides cartridge boxes, even regular troops carried shot pouches to hold loose ammunition. Like Lemuel's, these pouches would have had a divider to keep the shot separate from the ball. Though fitted for a buckle-on shoulder strap, a surviving example of a British regulation shot pouch from the 1770s certainly does.

So it seems that all sorts of bullet pouches were used during the French and Indian War and to some extent during the Revolution. Even so, as different as they may have been individually, they all seem to share a few basic traits.

Give an inch or so, they all measure roughly 7" x 5". The surviving examples I'm familiar with are all made of leather, often with simply-tooled decorations to the pouch front and flap and a button closure to hold them shut. Most are made in a "D" shape, though a few are rectangular. Either way they all have a center panel that serves as a divider. Most are flat-stitched and the divider doubles as the welt for the sewn edge seams. Finally, most are very simply made, often using a single piece of leather to form the flap, front and back panels. One more piece is used for the divider panel, and two small leather strips for the belt loops. That's it.

Like most of the shot pouches carried by the militia, Lemuel's would have been either homemade or bought from a local craftsman's shop. With that in mind, even though they were all

it took militia men "too much time" to make paper cartridges? Often a soldier would need to individually re-hammer the standard issue lead balls given to him so they would fit down the barrel of his personal firearm. In fact, shot pouches were deemed so

necessary for such troops that Bouquet went on to advise Col. Washington how in a pinch, eight suitable cloth "shott pouches" could be made from a single yard of osnaberg cloth. (2)

Because of the unique bore sizes, it was understood that some militia arms

Above: The elaborate tooling seen on the front panel of the Lyman pouch includes thistles and a crown. **Right:** Close up of stamped tooling seen on the author's old original shott pouch. Simple stamps like this could have been carved from hard wood.

roughly similar, it's easy to imagine all the different little details each pouch could have exhibited, with no two being exactly alike. You would expect to see differences in buttons, buckles, stitch spacing, leather, construction techniques and applied decorations at least, and even a little variation in size would be expected from example to example. That's the problem, though. There just aren't many examples that survive today.

I have an old example in my collection that looks like it could have seen use right alongside of Lemuel's. Although there are a few nice little touches incorporated into its construction that are not seen on his, they actually make it a little more user-friendly. Constructing one based on mine won't be all that difficult, and it will give you the chance to make a nice usable 18th century style "shott pouch" of your own.

It's a little more complicated than the Lyman pouch, but all you will need

are a few basic tools, a little good leather and a small buckle. To get started, as usual I made a measured pattern on stiff cardboard. The pouch measures 7 inches wide by 5 inches tall and has a "D" shape. The back panel and flap are one piece. Besides that, there is the front panel, the divider, a short spacer piece, a pair of belt-loop strips, a right and a left gusset piece, and the buckle strap and keeper assembly pieces. A strip of 3 oz. vegetable tanned leather about 8" wide by 24" long should be just enough.

Use the photos of the leather pieces I cut out to make your own pattern, but note that I didn't show the belt loops or the buckle strap. These pieces were cut to size when needed. You could also contact the office at **MUZZLELOADER,** via email at [custserv@muzzleloader. net], for a full size copy of my pattern in PDF format. Whether you make it or use a copy of mine, once you
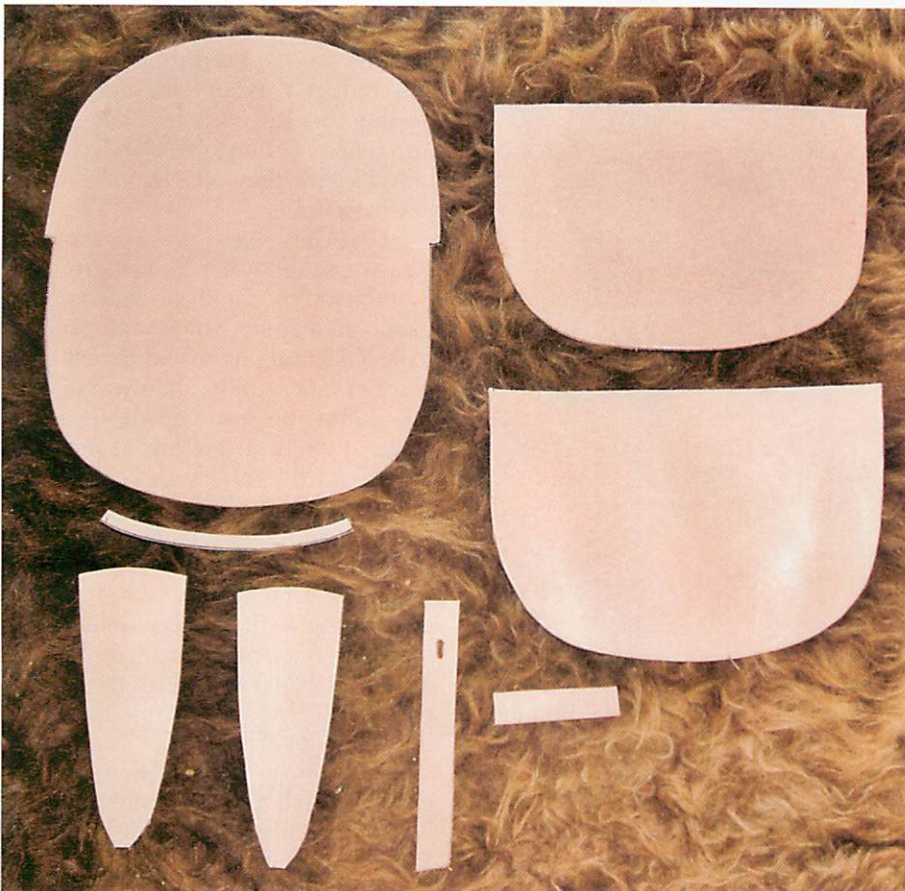
Left: All of the leather pieces except the belt loops. 3-4 ounce vegetable tanned leather was used to copy the pouch.
**Below:** The completed buckle strap and keeper loop assembly.
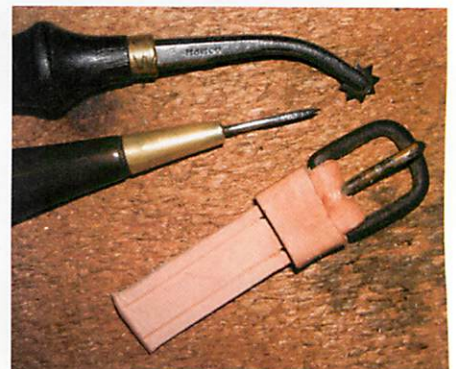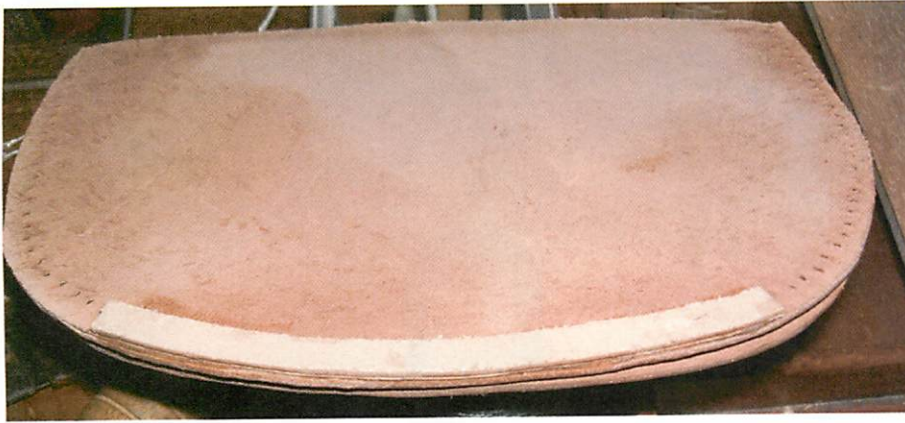
have the pattern, use it to trace the pouch pieces onto your leather and cut them out.

To begin assembling the pouch, lay out the stitch holes with a marking wheel and awl them into the front panel and the divider pieces. Make sure that the holes all line up as you go. I laid my stitches out at six per inch, which is pretty close to the spacing used on my original. If you don't have a marking wheel and are working by eye, do your best to keep everything even at about the same spacing. The front panel and the divider panel should be exactly the same size and all of the holes in them need to line up stitch for stitch.

After the holes are awled in, find and mark the very center of the bottom of the divider panel, then find and mark the center of the little spacer strip. Next, using simple craft paste, affix the spacer strip to the rough side of the divider panel centered at the bottom. It's very important that the spacer strip is centered because it's used to properly position and attach the left and right gusset pieces too.

Once the paste has set up you can use the awl holes in the divider panel as guides to poke corresponding holes through the spacer strip. Next, wet the gusset pieces and crease them lengthwise down the middle and shape them to match the profile of your panels. After that, using the same 6-stitch-per-inch marking wheel, lay out a row of stitches down the edges of both gussets and poke those holes in them as well. Again, be sure that all of the holes line up. I clipped a little "V" notch into the very bottom tip of the gussets to help them butt right up against the spacer strip.

Now we can begin sewing. To do that, first lay the front panel in front of you smooth side down and lay the divider panel smooth side down on top of it. The spacer strip will be there on top of it all. Next position the bottom edge of a gusset piece against the spacer strip and begin stitching up
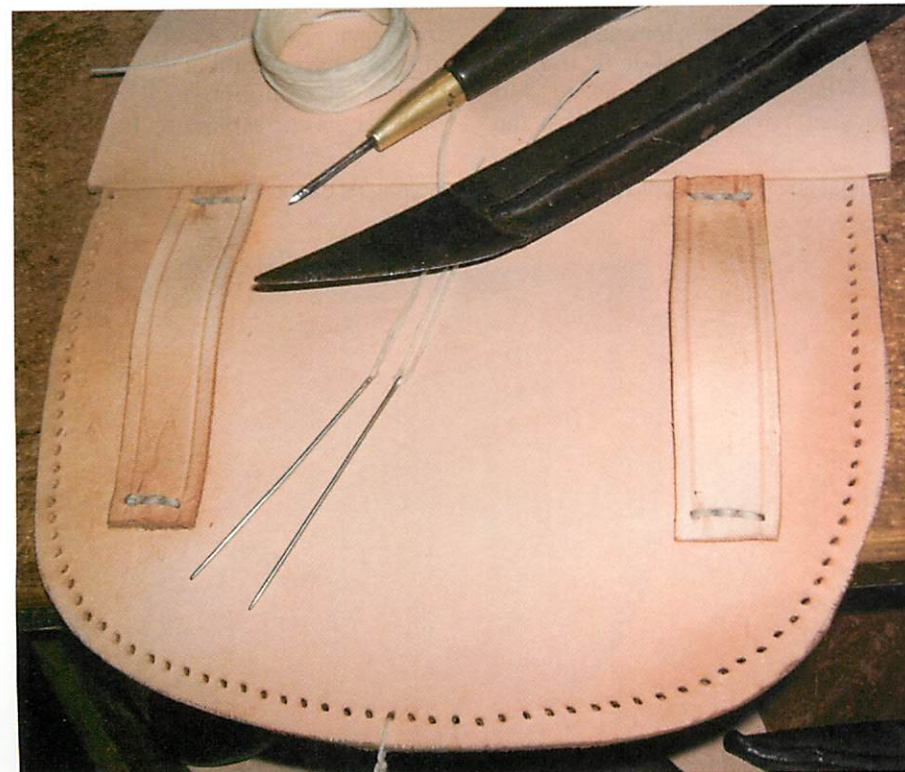
the edge of the gusset towards the top of the panels. Use a two-needle saddle stitch and waxed linen cord.

Repeat this on the other side to attach the remaining gusset to the other side, but don't put any stitches into the spacer strip at this time. Remember, before you sew, awl in your holes, or sew the gusset in place, shape the gusset by folding it in half, dampening it, and gently working it into a curved shape until it exactly matches the panel's profile. Pre-shaping the gussets will make laying out the holes and sewing them in a whole lot easier.

The flap and back panel are one piece, but before we begin attaching it to the rest of the pouch by sewing it to the other edge of the gussets we need to sew on the belt loops. Note on the pattern how the edge where the flap folds overhangs the back panel about 1/4th of an inch on either side. Dampen the leather and incise a line straight across it right there. This line shows us where to attach the top edge of our belt loops. The loops themselves are simply strips of leather 3/4" wide by 3-1/2" long. I made mine from the same stuff I made the whole pouch from, but the loops on my original are made from much thicker harness leather. You can use either. To attach the loops, awl 4 evenly-spaced holes across the top and bottom of the loop pieces. Then use these holes as guides to lay out the corresponding holes on the back panel. Position the loops about 3/4" from the edge of the panel, with the top of the loop touching the incised line you made across the back panel where the flap widens. Sew
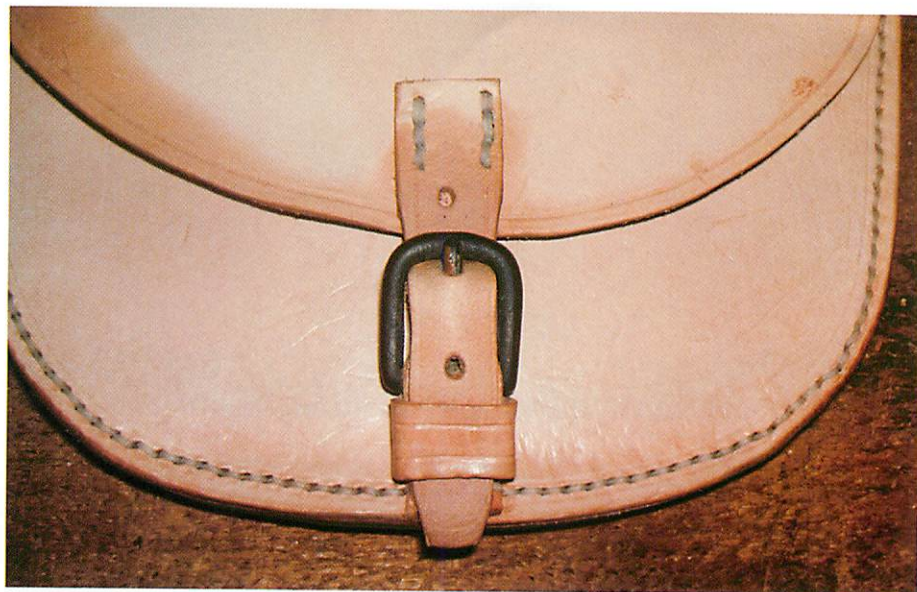
The buckle and keeper loop is sewn on when the front and back of the pouch are joined. Trim the excess flush with the bottom.

them in place with a harness stitch and waxed linen cord.

Before we can go on, the buckle and keeper loop assembly will need to be made as well. This is pretty straightforward. First, using a small buckle, cut a slot in a strip of leather for the buckle's tongue and fold it right there. Slide the strip over the buckle and awl 3 holes close to the heel on both edges of the strip. Cut a narrow piece of leather for the keeper loop. It needs to be long enough to wrap around the buckle strap but loose enough that a leather tongue attached to the flap will easily slide in and out of it when the flap is buckled and unbuckled. Awl three holes across the

ends of the keeper loop on both sides that correspond to the holes awled in the buckle strap, sandwich the keeper loop between the folds of the buckle strap, and sew it in place.

Although rivets can be used, this is the standard method used to secure a keeper loop and buckle to the end of a strap, and it was used extensively by old time harness makers. In fact, it's still the way buckles are attached to finer dress belts today, but it is a little tricky to do if you've never tried it before. Not to scare you away from trying, but if you don't want to attempt it you could always just use a simple pewter button sewn to the front panel and a corresponding button hole

The authors copy before tooling and final finishes are applied (left), and the original it's based on (right).