

QUIRTS And WHIPS

by Scott M. Thompson

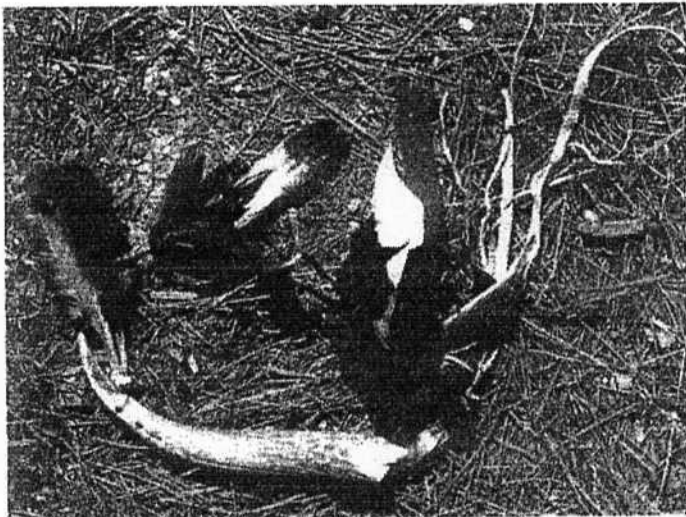


Photo Above: Contemporary dance chief's quirt; 12 inches long elk antler decorated with brass nails, hawk and split eagle feathers, otter fur wrist loop. Lashes are of thick, tanned elk hide. Matt Binsfield Collection. Photo by the author.

Every year we see styles change on the dance floor. Some things once reserved for special occasions and emblems of officials are now used by any dancer. So it is with quirts and whips. Although the names "quirt" and "whip" are sometimes used interchangeably, according to the sources for this article, a quirt is a leather lash used to get a horse moving faster. Anyone who has a horse and wants to get it moving can own and use a quirt. Quirts were utilitarian and not often highly ornamented. In the "old days" a dancer seen carrying a quirt could be identified as an individual noted for his association with horses. He may be an owner-of-many-horses, a successful horse stealer, or the fastest rider in camp.

In contrast, the word "whip" usually refers to a device looking much like a quirt but whose function is to designate a leader or officer. Unlike quirts, whips were highly ornamented. War chiefs, political leaders, and dance chiefs are reported to have carried whips, even using them to issue punishments by lashing.

Northern and Intermontane tribes often designate a person as "dance chief" or "whip man." (In the Plateau area, women may serve as whip carriers during the dances.) This person's job is to see that everyone in dance clothes dances and behaves. The whip carrier or dance chief is more easily identified during traditional tribally sponsored powwows than at modern styled intertribal affairs. As well as carrying a whip the dance chief may dance around the perimeter of the dance arena in the opposite direction of the dancers. He greets friends and visitors, encourages people to dance, and in extreme cases, directs uncooperative individuals to leave the dance floor!

For traditionalists who wish to retain the glory of the horse and buffalo days, or for modernists who need a fancy addition to their dance outfit, the accompanying diagrams will show the common "toggle" method of manufacturing a quirt and whip.

References

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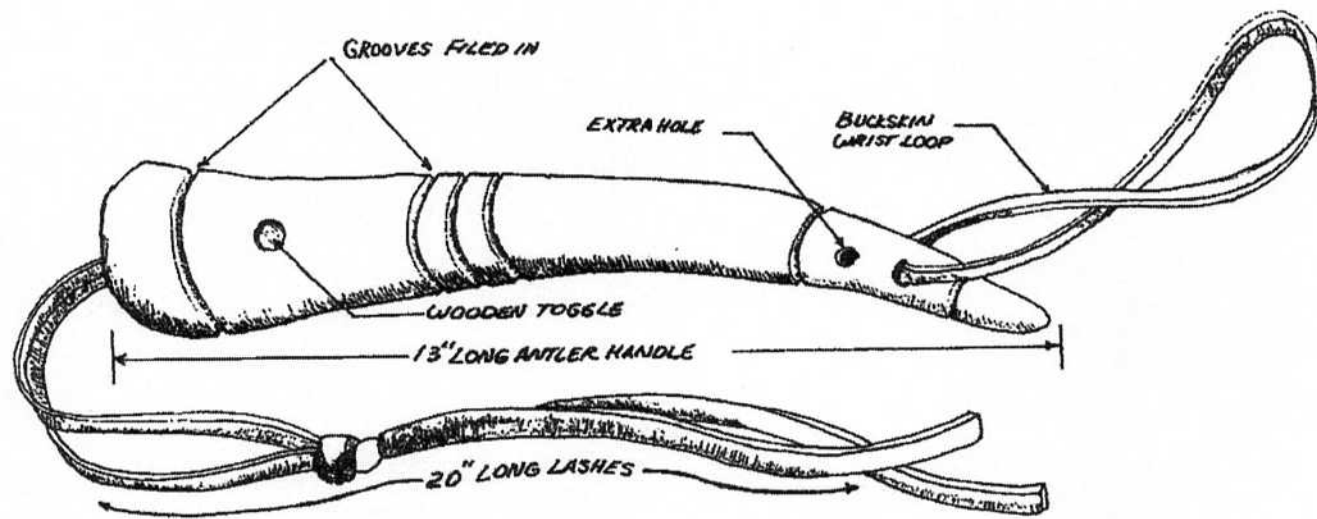
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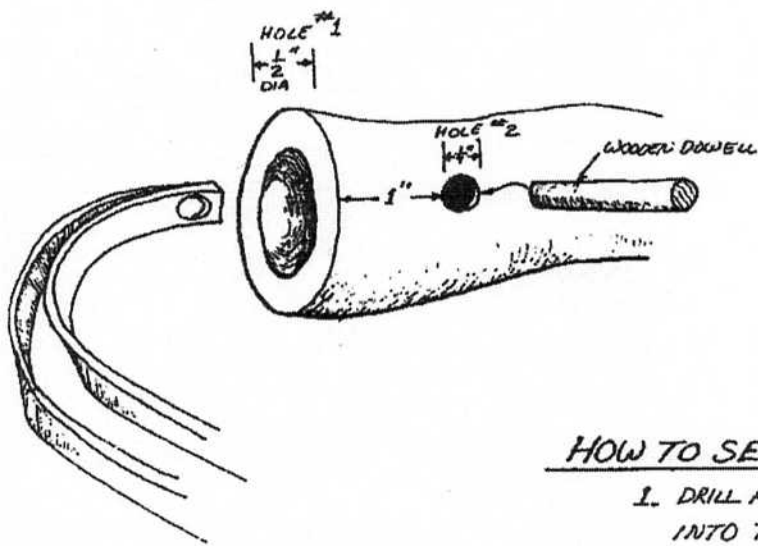
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Illustration by Kathy Brewer



Illustrated by Charles Smith



HOW TO SECURE LEATHER LASHES

1. DRILL A $\frac{1}{2}$ " HOLE $1\frac{1}{2}$ " DEEP INTO THE ANTLER OR WOOD HANDLE.
2. DRILL A SMALLER $\frac{1}{4}$ " HOLE ALL THE WAY THROUGH HANDLE SO IT INTERSECTS WITH THE 1ST HOLE.
3. MAKE LASHES FROM RAWHIDE OR HARNESS LEATHER.
4. CARVE A WOODEN DOWELL FOR A TOGGLE. IT SHOULD FIT TIGHTLY INTO HOLE #2.
5. INSERT THE LASHES + POUND THE TOGGLE THROUGH THE ANTLER + LASH HOLE.

