

Tanning — it's historic business

Industry to 1990

THE BUSINESS of tanning leather is historic business in Santa Cruz. It's been going on for over a hundred years along the banks of the San Lorenzo River.

Salz Tannery is one of the area's oldest manufacturing businesses. "A hundred years ago, every town had a tannery," says Salz president Norman Lezin. "Today it's hard to believe how important leather was. Horses pulled wagons. Oxen did work. And they needed leather harness. You couldn't operate a day without leather.

Today, Salz still makes leather but it goes for shoes and purses, instead of harness and saddles.

The process has changed, too. Leather used to be tanned with the bark of the tanoak tree. Today, chemicals are used. Hides used to come from local cattle. Today, they're shipped in from the Southwest.

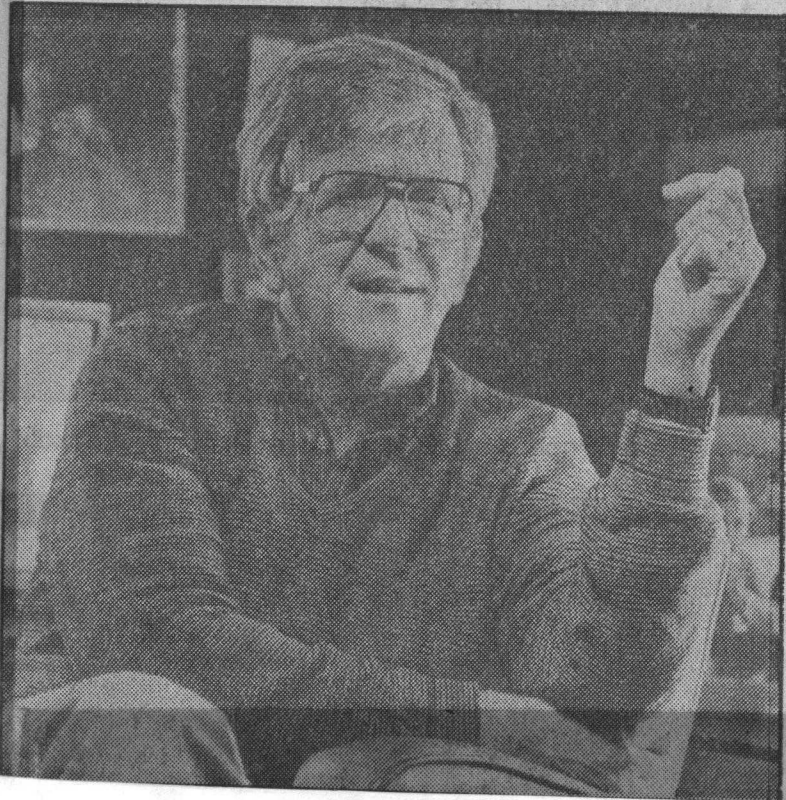
The times haven't been totally favorable to the

tannery. Employees recently voted to accept a 30 cent per hour cut in pay (57 cents an hour counting fringes) under threat of the tannery's closing. The move stopped losses and Lezin says he now feels optimistic about the future.

The hides come into the plant stiff, salt cured and covered with hair. After a complex series of chemical baths and treatments, they go out as supple pieces of leather, colored and oiled the familiar nut brown and a variety of other colors.

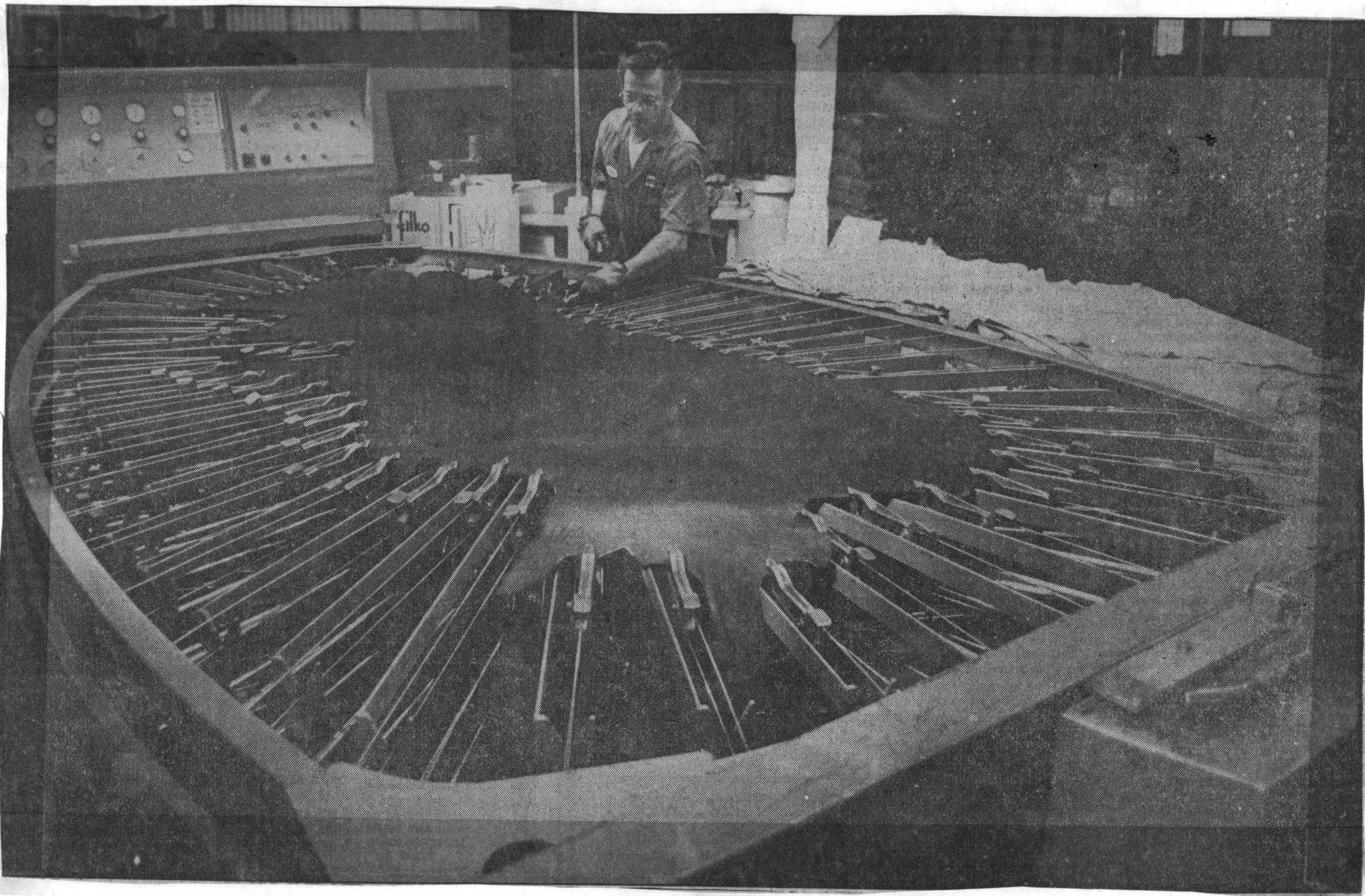
Salz employs 275 workers, most of whom are related.

One of the tannery's customers is Levi Strauss. Salz makes the little leather label that goes on the back Levi pocket. The tannery had to develop a type of leather than could be washed to fill the order. Other customers are Acme and Tony Lama cowboy boots, Birkenstock sandals and Swank wallets.

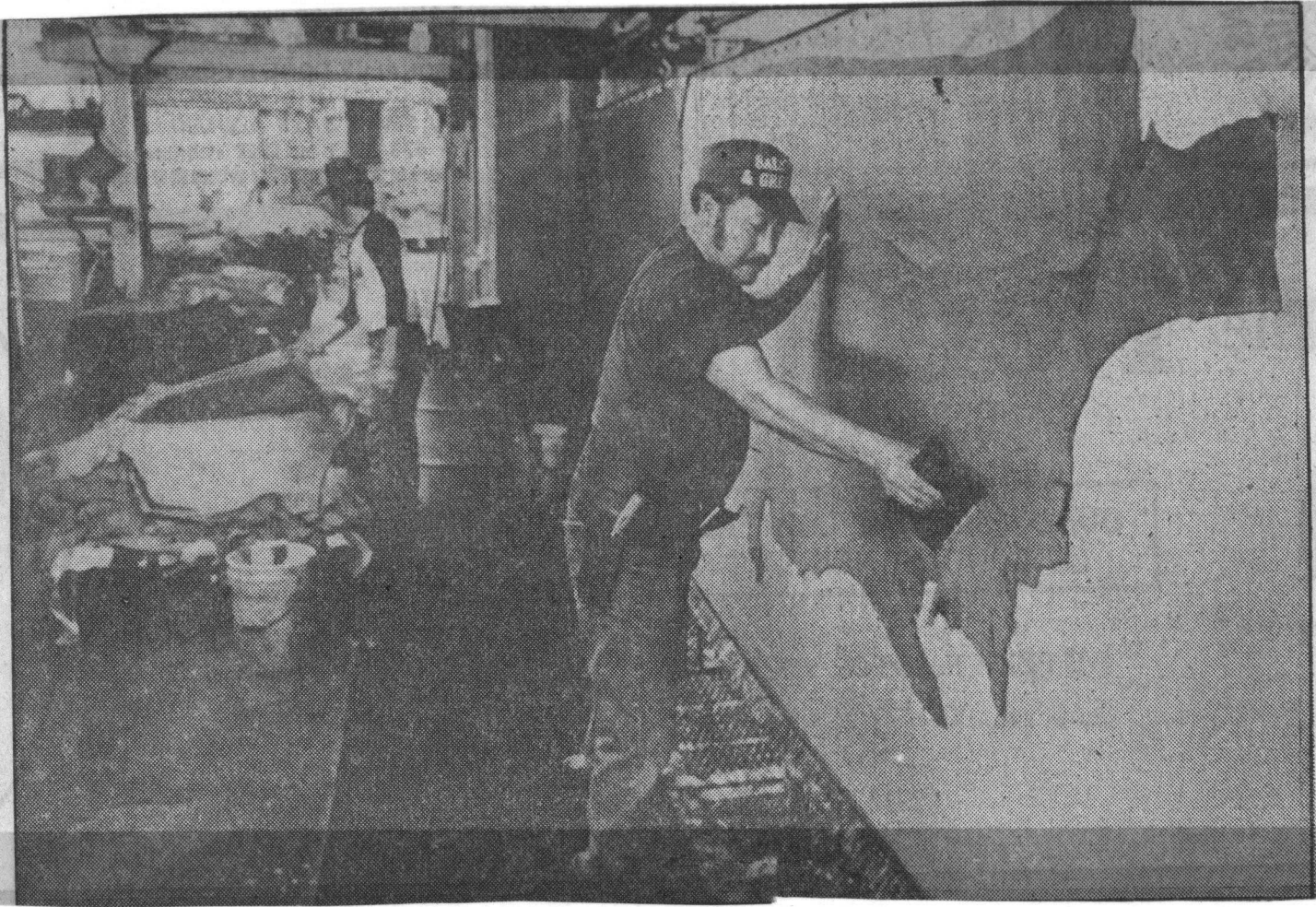


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