

The following was submitted by Robert Ridgeway, Curator of the Sanfilippo Musical Instrument Collection.

Fish Glue vs. Hide Glue

We do use fish glue for some applications in the restoration of automatic musical instruments but the OVERWHELMING product we use is hot hide glue. We buy it directly from the largest manufacturer in the country:

Milligan & Higgins
Maple Avenue P.O. Box 506
Johnstown, NY 12095 (518) 762-4638

You must specify the 2X-High Clarity Hide Glue. It is sold ONLY in 50# fiber drums for around \$3.00 per pound. It is finest hot glue we have ever used and find that it works for leather, rubber cloth, gluing wood back together, etc. It has excellent tack, low odor, and tremendous strength and you can remove it in the future with hot water and/or steam.

I cannot over stress the value of using a product like hide glue for proper restorations. Remember, we are restoring not only for the present but for the future and as one who has had to deal with previous white glue "restorations" on instruments, it is vital to think about the poor individual who will have to tackle all these machines in another 50-75 years. I cannot think of any legitimate reason for not using hot hide glue for all restoration work. The fish glue is useful for a quick fix "in the field" since it can be carried in a bottle in a toolbox but I would never consider rebuilding an entire instrument using it. Besides, the cost would become prohibitive as compared to hot hide glue if you were also to attempt to use it for releathering regulators, tremors, winkers, etc. We make up a fresh pot once a week and keep the glue pot liner in the refrigerator when not in use to maintain it. The first thing you want to do is discard the wire hoop that comes with most glue pots and cut a piece of hardwood dowel to span the pot liner near the top. You can use this to wipe your brushes against and it, unlike the wire hoop, will not react with the glue and water. It is vital to keep the glue pot covered at all times except when you are using it. The glue will evaporate and become far too thick in a very short time if you do not. It is also important to remember to hydrate the glue when making a new pot. You mix up the dried glue in a flexible container (such as an old quart cottage cheese container) with the proper amount of clean cool (NOT hot) water and let it absorb the water. It will, after a couple of hours, end up looking very much like moist oatmeal. Only THEN do you place this hydrated glue into the glue pot to melt. By properly preparing the glue in this way you nearly double the holding power of the product, according to the experts at Milligan & Higgins and borne out by our own experiments. Remember, hot hide glue has been used for

centuries for fine furniture, pipe organ pneumatics, etc. and some things just can't be improved upon.

Sincerely,

Robert Ridgeway, Curator
Sanfilippo Collection