

1999 GENERAL TOOLS AWARD - Vance Packard

Ms Carolan's remarks below are from her prepared text as transmitted to the Secretary:

"This year's General Tools Award Committee is composed of myself, Jane Carolan, Chairman; Duncan Hay, next year's Chair; and David Simmons.

"The criteria for selection of the recipient of the General Tools Award are as follows: The recipient must have given noteworthy, beyond-the-call-of-duty service over an extended period of time to the cause of industrial archaeology. The type of service for which the recipient is recognized is unspecified, but must be for other than academic publications and it is desirable, but not required, to be a member of the SIA.

"The General Tools award was established in 1992 through the generosity of Gerald Weinstein, Chairman of the General Tools Manufacturing Company, and the Abraham and Lillian Rosenberg Foundation. The award consists of a brass plum bob in an inscribed wooden case and a cash award of \$1,000.00.

"When I called Gerry to tell him our selection for this year, he said, "That's terrific, that's just the kind of person we had in mind when we devised the award." Then entire committee is extremely pleased to announce that this year's winner of the General Tools Award is Vance Packard.

"And with thanks to Brenda Barrett [for help preparing this brief biography], Vance has had a long and distinguished career as a jack-of-all trades and a master of many. His contribution as a founding member of the Society for Industrial Archaeology is well known. With a background in prehistoric archaeology, Vance joined the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in 1969. He worked in classic prehistoric sites in the early seventies and then branched into historic archaeology, inspired by the Bicentennial. He did pioneering archaeological work at Valley Forge for two summers and at Washington's Crossing Historic Site. He then led an investigation of Benjamin Franklin's print shop in Philadelphia.

"Vance's mechanical instincts seem to be always in the forefront. His early experiments with power screens really shook-up the archaeology world and then he gravitated to backhoes, bulldozers and other big-boy excavating tools.

"With this background Vance jumped into the newly formed historic preservation program of the Pennsylvania Commission. He quickly established himself as a presence to be reckoned with. Yes, federal and state agencies feared his quick judgment "looks like a 4F to me" but they also respected his deep knowledge and his creative deal making.

"In 1979 Vance became the director of the Commission's Drake's Well Historic Site. There he brought the site alive making an elderly electric map functional again, rebuilding the Drake replica with a working steam engine, and setting up a maze of working oil equipment. You could hear the site before you saw it. And this does not even describe his dabbling with the management of the Titusville and Oil City short-line railroad.

“Vance was made Western Regional Director of the Commission's sites in 1983 and served in this position until 1994 when he became Director of the anthracite Regional Complex. There he used his many skills to rehabilitate exhibits and whole villages, and even was the licensed Sewer Officer for the Eckley Miner's Village.

“Vance was a mentor to many both in the Pennsylvania Commission and outside. He yelled, he complained and he explained and encouraged.

“He retired from the Commission in 1997 but never stopped moving. He was recognized as the Commission's Lumber Museum Volunteer of the Year in 1998. His contributions continue on.

“Vance is truly a Renaissance man, combining archaeology, history, and interpretation and most importantly, a hands-on feeling for how things really work and an interest in knowing more.

“And stealing a good line from Vance's retirement party from the Anthracite Museum: Vance will retire to his home at Bear Lake, where he resides with his wife, Bonnie Smith. He will fly fish, play in his machine shop, and presumably continue to defend the coast of New England from the invasion of the wily bluefish.

“Congratulations Vance.

As Mr Packard approached the podium, the meeting broke into applause and chuckles because someone had saved a blue tutu from one of the Society's Friday tours of a costume factory to drape it over the General Tools Award. Mr Packard was presented with the award, and Jane Carolan crowned him with the tutu for a photograph. Mr Packard came to the podium microphone and said that the award had come as a big shock, because a week and a half ago he had purchased a General Tools plumb bob in Home Depot. It has been a long career in some ways. He went to the first IA meeting because he had heard of a gathering of people to discuss industrial historical archeology. Trained as a prehistoric archeologist, he remembered a long discussion at the meeting whether the membership should stay within the aegis of the Society for Historical Archeology or form a new organization. He and other person were strong proponents of staying within the SHA, and he left the meeting thinking that this was what would happen. The following year, he learned that the SIA had been formed. Mr Packard thanked the membership again for the award, reiterating how much of a shock it was to him. He closed by saying he was not sure he was “in the same league” as Pat Malone, Robert Vogel and other prior recipients. The assembly applauded him warmly as he left the podium.