

# 1997 SIA General Tools Award Presented to Margot Gayle

The Society for Industrial Archeology General Tools Award for Distinguished Service to Industrial Archeology was established in 1992 through the generosity of SIA member Gerald Weinstein, chairman of the board of the Abraham and Lillian Rosenberg Foundation. The award recognizes individuals who have given sustained, distinguished service to the cause of industrial archeology. Nominations for the award may be made by any member in good standing. Criteria for selection are as follows: The recipient must have given noteworthy service, over an extended period of time, to the cause of industrial archeology. The type of service is unspecified, but must be for other than academic publication. It is desirable, though not required, that the recipient be a member of the SIA. And, finally, the award may be made only to living individuals.

The following citation was read by General Tools Award Committee Chairwoman Carol Poh Miller at the SIA's Annual Business Meeting, Houghton, MI. The award consists of this citation, a commissioned sculpture (the famous Plumb Bob), and an honorarium of \$1,000.

For three decades, Margot Gayle has been a commanding figure in the historic preservation movement. As the founder and longtime president of the Friends of Cast-Iron Architecture, a national organization dedicated to the identification and preservation of architectural and decorative ironwork, Margot has played a pivotal role in bringing to public attention important aspects of the material that is, literally and symbolically, the foundation of the Industrial Revolution.

Convening a meeting of interested individuals in the parlor of her Greenwich Village apartment, Margot founded the Friends of Cast-Iron Architecture in 1970. The immediate object of her attention was SoHo, an as-yet-undiscovered neighborhood in lower Manhattan rich with magnificent iron-fronted buildings of the late-nineteenth century. In May 1972, in the midst of her campaign to win local landmark designation for SoHo, Margot led a walking tour of the district as part of the first annual conference of the newly organized Society for Industrial Archeology. For many, it was a challenge to keep up with the vivacious woman with the auburn curls, who walked backwards and defied traffic as she expounded on the glories of cast-iron architecture.



Jill Gill photo

Margot Gayle, 1997 SIA General Tools Award Recipient.

Margot reprised that tour in 1985 as part of the SIA annual conference in Newark, New Jersey.

In proselytizing on behalf of cast-iron architecture, Margot passed out small magnets, urging recipients to "test for iron" in their own cities; her nominator for this award, David Shayt, noted that this small touch – the issue of hand magnets – typified Margot's special ability to make the cause of historic preservation both fun and interesting.

As lecturer, advocate, and author, Margot Gayle has carried the message of appreciation for cast iron far beyond her own beloved city of New York, where she has resided since 1944. She is the author of numerous books and publications on cast-iron architecture, and is currently collaborating with her daughter, Carol Gayle, on a book about James Bogardus, the pioneer of cast-iron architecture in America, to be published by W. W. Norton next year.

Many of us, however, know Margot best as an advocate, energetic and indomitable, whose enthusiasm for a cause is contagious. Her ability to rally support and inspire others has been fundamental to the salvation of innumerable cast-iron building facades, street clocks, sculptures, bridges, and even whole neighborhoods. I particularly recall, at numerous annual business meetings, Margot's earnest appeals to the SIA to endorse resolutions she had prepared on behalf of one preservation campaign or another. For many of us, Margot was a model of activism, prepared to use any means from letter-writing campaigns to petitions that she hand-delivered to the Mayor of New York to defend her cause.

I am happy to report that, at age 89, she's still at it. Currently, Margot is working to secure landmark designation for a small collection of cast-iron buildings in NoHo, an area to the north of SoHo. And only last month, the New York Times reported on a successful citizens' campaign in Greenwich Village to re-activate the Jefferson Market Courthouse bell, cast in 1863 but silent for more than a century; the newspaper credited Margot as "the venerable activist" whose vision inspired that project.

Unfortunately, owing to health and age, Margot Gayle could not be with us today. Nevertheless, she was very excited to hear the news of this award and sends her appreciation. So, on behalf of the award committee, including Jane Carolan and Emory Kemp, it gives me great pleasure to present the 1997 SIA General Tools Award to the woman upon whom Robert Vogel once bestowed the apt title of "Mrs. Cast Iron": Margot Gayle. ■