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REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

TOOLS TEACH

An Iconography of American Hand Tools

Brack, H. G.

Photos by Balise, Sett

Pennywheel Press (254 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

A liberally illustrated encyclopedia of hand tools, enhanced by perceptive essays.

This 13th volume in Brack's (*Handbook for Ironmongers*, 2008, etc.) ongoing series marries American hand tools, art and history. The author's impetus for the series was his observation that many of the pre-Civil War tools he'd collected across New England weren't forged in England but were American-made. This volume is illustrated with over 800 photographs and divided into three parts. The first provides an overview of hand tools and describes early American iron metallurgy; the second explores the typical tool kits of various early American tradesmen—such as cobblers, coopers and wheelwrights—in the context of the Wooden Age. The third part looks at hand tools that continued to be used in the industrial age after 1742, including those specifically developed to work on machines in the American factory system. The book also provides context from outside the United States when appropriate. A concluding essay explores the author's notion of “a cascading series of Industrial Revolutions that culminate in the Age of Information Technology,” which is intriguing if a bit overlong. The book includes two appendixes of images—one an instructive collection of 101 axes, the other devoted to steel-making techniques and terms. The book shows a high level of technical expertise, as evidenced by its extensive bibliography, which ranges from broad works like Isaac Asimov's *Understanding Physics* to focused works on sharpening, and will likely make readers overlook a Wikipedia citation. The book will prove most interesting to toolmakers, physicists who study simple machines, and aficionados of early-American history and the rise of the American factory.

A thoughtful exploration of the evolution and iconography of early American hand tools.