

DISCOVERIES

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Brack, H.G.

THE CLASSIC PERIOD OF
AMERICAN TOOLMAKING
1827-1930

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An in-depth, invaluable guidebook for tool-making enthusiasts—and an unorthodox glimpse into American history.

The Classic Period of American Toolmaking is the eighth volume in a series—*Hand Tools in History*—sponsored by the Davistown Museum in Maine. As such, this exhaustive piece of scholarship gives one crucial chapter in a detailed history of hand-tool craftsmanship in maritime New England. Author Brack—who is responsible for the entire *Hand Tools* series—brings an aficionado’s passion to his task, and his work on postcolonial-era tool production is both fascinating and thorough. However, the author never mistakes the trees for the forest, and even his more arcane comments—on, for instance, the carbon content of “mild steel”—don’t distract from the big picture. His exploration of 19th-century toolmaking also gives valuable insights into the development of an American economy that eventually made the United States a world power. The analytical chapters are admirable for their concision—though Brack has a scholar’s eye, he does not have the academic’s long wind, and the narrative portions of his study take fewer than 100 pages. But perhaps more valuable for researchers and enthusiasts are the nearly 300 pages of supplementary material. After a timeline and glossary, a bulky third appendix provides what seems a comprehensive list of period tool-making companies, many of whose entries feature extensive “remarks” sections that provide fascinating background information. A fourth appendix—titled an “annotated bibliography”—is short on annotation but long on relevant titles. Divided by subject, the bibliography stretches to over 100 pages and features a gold mine of research material. The book is likely more useful as a reference manual than as an introduction to the field—and therefore more helpful to specialists and academics. But as such, it is a necessary addition to any professional library.

An exceedingly thorough research guide.

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