

John G. Wells
8 December 1929 - 23 August 2018)

John Wells, one of the true pillars of the tool collecting community passed away peacefully on August 23rd, 2018, secondary to Alzheimer's dementia. He would have celebrated his 89th birthday in December of 2018. John was introduced to the building trades as a very young boy. His father was a building contractor and John recalled going to a shop where his father would cut lumber to dimension. John was only 2 or 3 years old at the time and would play in the "sawdust bin" while his father was working. As he grew he helped his father on the housing construction sites, learning by doing, and by the time he was in high school he was running his own cabinet making shop with several employees producing cabinet work for his father and other contractors as well.

His family didn't have money for college, so John saved money and entered the University of California at Berkeley to study architecture. He worked his way through college by working as the "maintenance man" at one of the college dormitories. He graduated with honors in 1956 and received the award for the most outstanding architecture student at the graduation ceremony. The very same day he was offered a job at the Demars and Reay architecture firm in Berkeley. When Mr. Reay left the firm, John became a partner in the firm of Demars and Wells. When Mr. Demars' wife became ill the firm was dissolved and John became the head of the engineering department at Kennedy Jenks where he worked until his retirement. John was directly involved with the development and building of many prominent buildings in the San Francisco Bay area and throughout the United States.

John's greatest love in his life was his wife Janet who enthusiastically supported John's second great love, collecting antique tools. John told me about sending away for a Stanley #34 tool catalog when he was only about 12 or 13 and thinking that he'd like to have one of each woodworking plane shown in the catalog. Once his career in architecture was under way, he began his quest for those planes. With a sharp eye and perseverance John began collecting and never quit. He joined both The Mid-West Tool Collectors Association and the Early American Industries Association early in his collecting career and almost immediately began writing articles. John wrote over 240 articles for *The Gristmill* and other tool collector publications! John eventually served as the treasurer and eventually the president of MWTCA. He and Janet loved to travel and regularly attended tool meetings and auctions throughout the country and made regular trips to the David Stanley Auctions in England. John's comprehensive knowledge about woodworking planes and his discerning eye led to the creation of the finest collection of patented American woodworking planes anywhere in the world. Janet jumped in as well and assembled her own wonderful collection of miniature woodworking planes.

John loved researching and learning about woodworking planes and their inventors and makers. He readily shared that knowledge with all of us through his articles and his willingness to answer questions. His research on Leonard Bailey continued until his advancing dementia brought that to a halt. However, John's legacy will live on. He stipulated in his trust that all of the proceeds from the sale of his tool collection be given in equal portions to both the Early American Industries Association's and the Mid-West Tool Collector's Associations to encourage continued research into early American tools and trades. His book on Leonard Bailey has been finished and once published, all the royalties from the sale of that book will also be given to EAIA and MWTCA. He will be greatly missed but his legacy will live on in his writing and his incredible generosity to all of us who cherish hand tools and hand craft. Dear friend, may you rest in peace!

Paul Van Pernis