

Paul “The Tool Man” Margelony

By Jean Luddy



For the last few years, VHS Board member Paul Margelony has appeared at the Strong Family Farm Harvest Festival. From within his truck, he pulls out an amazing assortment of tools to put on display. With the help of VHS volunteer, Barbara Muldoon, the labeled tools are arranged by category on display tables.

Some tools are unique to specific occupations while others were used on farms or in homes. Tools such as rakes, pitchforks and picks are familiar to suburban dwellers. Others remind us of the era before mechanization.

Margelony displays a version of a tool used as an early “weed wacker.” This tool had a blade with sharp indented notches which was slightly angled at the end of the wooden handle. The tool was swung vigorously across light brush. The short notches sheared the plants near ground level. Margelony also has a smaller version used for edging along garden beds.



Tools serve as an extension or expansion of our physical capabilities. They reduce physical strain and allow us to do a job more efficiently. One of Margelony's block and tackle devices can lift up to two tons. This Coffin's Hoist Jack has two hooks. One is attached a sturdy place above a load. The other is attached to the load itself. A lever within the tool's housing is moved up or down to move the chain that lifts or lowers the load.

Pipe wrenches also came with ratchets, allowing the worker to fit two sections of pipe together without crushing them and causing leaks.



Margelony's collection has another unusual example of tool that made a job easier and safer. A small handled implement with a revolving hook was used in the potato harvesting process. After the potatoes had been dug up, sorted and bagged, the bags had to be closed for shipping. Potato bags came with a wire inside the edge of the opening.

This wire had a loop on each end which had to be knotted together to close the bag. With this tool the loops were caught by the hook and, with a flick of a wrist, tied together.

Several collections of tools were designed for specific occupations. Saws and axes from the lumbering trade appear in the exhibit. A metal tub designed to mix concrete for laying bricks or cinder blocks contains tools used by masons. Square or rectangular shaped trowels were used to put the concrete between brick or blocks. Masons use special type of trowel to smooth the cement in walkways.



One of the items on display on the “Pick and Grub Axes” table has an historic background. This pick head below, designed to be attached to large wooden handle, was included in a set of tools used by the US Army during World War II.

Margelony explained that the “Pioneer Kit” consisted of an axe, a shovel and a pick. They were stored on racks of vehicles ranging in size from pick-up trucks to cargo trucks. These tools were used to take trees down to open roads and to erect defensive barriers. With this set of tools, soldiers built fox holes, bunkers, trenches, and headquarters for unit commanders. All done by hand. Each Pioneer Kit was assigned to a specific vehicle within a unit and marked with a vehicle number. Versions of these kits are still in military use today.



When asked how he came to possess such a wonderful collection, Margelony said that most of the tools had been used by his father who had been a farmer. His father also worked as an oil burner repairman. He maintained and fixed boilers in large tenement in Hartford. He would acquire the tools that he needed for his different jobs.

Over the years Paul Margelony has used his father’s tools and ones that he has added to the collection. He has an appreciation for the utility and dependability of these tools. Some of these can’t be bought any more. He is intrigued by the variety of tools. Even within a category of tools, such as pick heads, there are subtle differences in the designs reflecting different needs and adaptations.

Paul Margelony's tool display always attracts visitors, young and old. Kids are curious about a tool's purpose and how it worked. Older people smile and remember when they used tools like these at home or on a job.

The display reminds us that until recently tools did not come with gasoline or electric motors. Early tools were hand made by local blacksmiths or farmers. Ingenious people studied a job or procedure and invented tools to get the work done better or faster with less strain on the worker. Old tools quietly testify to the value of imagination and to pride in taken in using the right tool for a job done well.