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## *Foreword*

This volume represents a happy convergence between this careful study of the first twenty years of the Society for the History of Technology and the desire of the society to recognize Melvin Kranzberg, the editor during those seminal years. Kranzberg was the principal founder of the society and, as first editor of its journal, was largely responsible for its character and direction of motion. Moreover, as first secretary of the society, he made most of the moves and decisions related to those foundations from which articles and books would emerge.

As editor, his greatest success was in reaching out to encourage people from many backgrounds to prepare and submit papers to *Technology and Culture*. In every possible way, he expanded the reach of the journal in order to justify its title. He wanted it to be international in scope and of as much importance for general historians as for historically minded engineers.

He started with a motley crew of scholars who were but slightly conscious of their common interest in the history of technology. Individually, they thought of themselves first as engineers, business historians, economists, sociologists, historians of science, or general historians who had wandered into a somewhat strange field. By the time Kranzberg withdrew from the editorship, the history of technology had been professionalized with its own educational and training patterns and its own standards of rigor; it had become a community of scholars.

Kranzberg sought never to cut down anyone who had a possible interest in the history of technology. Even when the person in question had inadequate understanding and wrote unacceptably, he tried to turn the author toward improving his work—not to discourage him. Even if a submitted paper was manifestly alien to the field, he would indicate needed improvement and point to a more appropriate journal.

He put together the best available panel of editorial advisors and relied fully on their reactions. He respected them and their knowledge—just as he respected the best efforts of those who submitted papers.

By recognizing an incipient new field, Kranzberg and those who worked with him in the early years brought the field into bloom. But like all inventors and innovators within the history of technology, he was bound by the state of the art. He might encourage new and expanded inquiries, but he could only accept the dimensions of the field for what they were at any given moment. The spectrum of existing knowledge, analysis, and synthesis kept changing, but *Technology and Culture* could reflect nothing more than what was emerging from the study of the history of technology as each number appeared. As a result, what the field was from point to point and how it changed is better reflected in *Technology and Culture* than in any other source.

But what was it? How is one to interpret the varied and often unrelated contributions? They might, of course, be catalogued and numbered. They could even be evaluated in terms of quality or influence, but the result would have to be somewhat sterile and short of the need. A conventional festschrift might have brought together experts in various subfields to explore varied dimensions of the world of Kranzberg's *Technology and Culture*. That would not have been enough; a more focused and more interpretive study was called for.

*Technology's Storytellers* provides that. John M. Staudenmaier has read the contributions to *Technology and Culture* through these years with a precision of purpose no one else has attempted. He has thought about each in terms of his own excellent preparation in the larger study of the field and in terms of his own background, which he carefully explains. He has interpreted the whole in a masterly manner.

The result is a creative study in its own right. It examines the course of *Technology and Culture* from the perspective of the current professional study of the history of technology. It reviews the field from the outlook of most emerging scholars of today. Because it represents a sensitive interpretation of very recent history, it will stimulate just the sort of discourse Staudenmaier has correctly identified as a characteristic of the present flourishing field. It will be an important resource.

It is appropriate that this study should be published by the Society for the History of Technology and the MIT Press, with the specific

aid of Bern Dibner, a longtime supporter of the field. The two institutions collaborated in an important Monograph Series that produced several books important to the field, some of them milestones. The present work represents a renewal of this collaboration and may predict a renewal of the series, as it points so clearly to the future in many other ways.

Brooke Hindle



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## *Introduction*

In every society the storyteller wrestles with the challenge and artistry of the historical endeavor. Whether the tale is told with the help of computerized data analysis or by means of delicate sketches on a Plains Indian winter count robe, the historian's account of the past is essential to the life of the culture. The stories create a context of origin, that the people may not live alienated from their ancestry and in ignorance of the events that have given shape to their present. By naming the central actors and events of the culture's heritage and by interpreting their meaning, the historian crafts a historically based language, which is the basis for the self-knowledge of any people.

In our present circumstances—I refer to the late twentieth century and to those cultures generally called “the West”—the profound influence of technology poses a challenge to the historical endeavor. It is a commonplace observation that increasingly complex technological networks have dramatically changed the cultural world of the West. Equally important, the extraordinary westernization of technologies in other societies has created a cultural problem involving the entire planet. For both reasons the contribution of the historian of technology is critical. How will we, in the West, tell the tale of our technological past? What interpretative language will shape our frame of reference for thinking about and responding to current technological issues? How will we understand the relationship between Western technology and nonwestern societies?

These are not idle questions. The technological mind-set and self-knowledge of a people so strongly influenced by technology not only will govern the integration of technical decisions within our larger culture but will shape our relationships with other societies in terms of technological exchange. These are the questions that led me to the work you are about to read.