



National Soaring Museum Historical Journal

Winter 2025

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Soaring Personalities and the Arts



TOM TUNNICLIFF

For many years, Tom Tunnicliff was a part-time staff member at the National Soaring Museum, working in the gift shop and spreading cheerfulness everywhere. We never saw Tom in a bad mood. He was a free-lance artist in the local area and had his studio at home. At NSM, we were fortunate to have Tom to help us with the introduction of our new point-of-sale system in the gift shop. Being very tech-oriented, he understood the system immediately and wrote out an operations manual for the rest of us. As fate would have it, Tom's wife got an excellent job in the Pittsburgh area, and the family moved there in 2017. We still miss Tom!

As a native of Corning, NY Tom spent his youth wandering the beautiful rolling hills of the Allegheny Plateau. With a life-long exposure to the vibrant colors of nature's canvas, brought on by the

Southern Tier's distinct seasons, Tom's appreciation of beauty formed during his early years. Despite his strong connection to the area, he strapped on boots and toured the world as a United States Marine. His exposure to new environments and culture encouraged him to pursue a more flexible art program at the State University of New York at Potsdam. The emphasis in studio art allowed him to concentrate in sculpture and painting and excel as an art student, achieving a Bachelor of Arts Cum Laude in Studio Arts.



Last Tow - Tom Tunnicliff



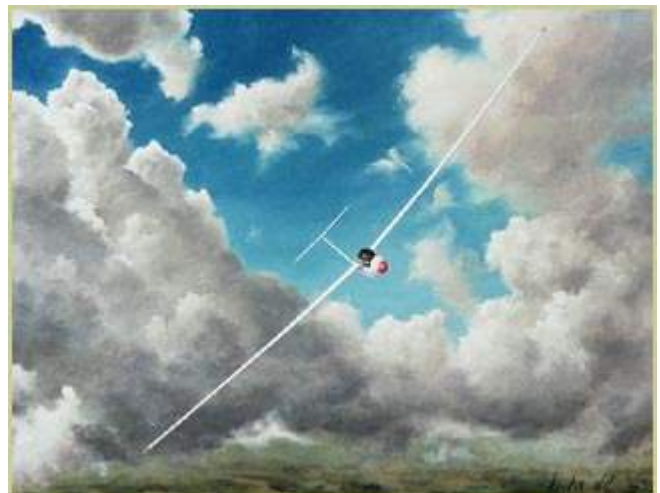
KRISTIN HILL

We were so pleased when Kristin became a member of NSM this spring, and we hope she will visit often and soak up some artistic inspiration from all of the flight activity on the Hill this year. Kristin lives in beautiful Lancaster County, PA and has had a professional career as an aviation artist for four decades, creating fine art oil paintings of aircraft in their environment.

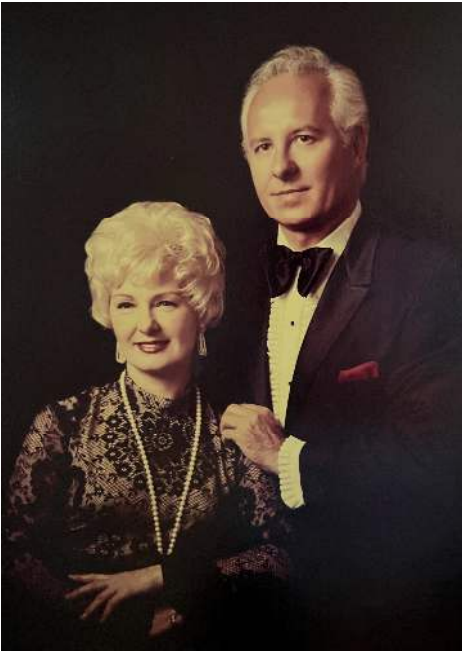
Kristin's aviation art works depict both the man-made aspects of aviation and the natural environment encountered during flight. In the skyscapes and landscapes, the fleeting beauty and power of the skies and environment in

which we live are captured for repeated enjoyment. Drawing upon her formal education in fine arts, experiences in a family aviation business and a broad diversity of flight experiences, she depicts the richness of flight and the skies we explore. Kristin's firsthand research includes flights in the high altitude U-2, contemporary military fighters, refueling and transport aircraft; World War II fighters and bombers; contemporary, antique, corporate, aerobatic and soaring aircraft; hang gliders, balloon and the parachute canopy.

<http://www.hillaviationart.com>



Cloud Dancer by Kristin Hill



Dita & Alex Aldott

ALEX ALDOTT 1923-1987 DITA ALDOTT 1922-2013

The National Soaring Museum is so fortunate to have received from the Aldott estate, a large collection of Alex Aldott's photography, representing some of the best images of sailplanes in flight created during the 1960s and 70s. NSM trustee, Steve Leonard, has facilitated this gift, and we are so grateful for his help.

Before Alex Aldott was an internationally renowned photographer, both he and Dita were accomplished acrobatic dancers. They loved to dance and danced all over the world with such famous partners as Bob Hope and Zsa Zsa Gabor. In Odessa, Texas, they owned and operated a photography studio at 3600 Maple Street. Alex took photos for dance studios locally and all over the USA. He had such renowned subjects as Neal Armstrong. Alex and Dita also flew sailplanes together. They were members of the Soaring Society of America and had a tremendous number of flying hours with the Caprock Soaring Club, based out of Littlefield.

Alex and Dita's soaring photographs have appeared in all national and international soaring magazines -

the Chicago Tribune Magazine, National Geographic and Time Life, to list a few. In 2005, Dita accepted an award on Alex's behalf at the annual convention in Washington, D.C. from the International Institute of Aeronautic Photography and she also accepted the ISAP Lifetime Achievement Award for Alex's contribution to aviation photography. Their life's work was working as a team in portrait, ballet, and aerial work.





PETER MCLEAN

Peter McLean is an artist and Professor Emeritus of Fine Arts at the Hartford Art School/University of Hartford, in West Hartford, Connecticut.

He works in a diverse range of media including watercolor, oil paints, etching, sculptural materials, and lithography, but he has received the most critical attention for his striking large-format charcoal drawings.

During his twenty-seven year tenure at the Hartford Art School, McLean co-founded the Experimental Studio Program where he taught courses in Structures and Materials, Systems, Art/Environment and Objective Drawing among many others. He also taught within the Foundations, Experimental

Drawing and Painting Programs. In addition he directed the Graduate Seminar, served as the MFA Graduate Program Coordinator and taught Native American Studies within the All University Curriculum.

Peter McLean's work has been exhibited throughout the United States and Europe. In the course of his more than forty-five year artistic career, he has participated close to one hundred group and solo exhibitions at galleries and institutions including Trinity College, Hartford, CT; Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT; Loughbrough University College of Art, Loughbrough, England; Mystic Art Association, Mystic, CT; and Sculpture House, London, England among others.

He has been the recipient of many awards for his work shown in group exhibitions including: American Talent: The 10th Exhibition, LaGuna Museum, Austin, TX; Rutgers National, Camden, NJ; Bradley National Drawing and Printmaking, Peoria, IL; The 8th International Drawing Exhibition, Cleveland County Museum, Middlesbrough, England.

His work is included in numerous private and institutional collections including the Institute of Native American Art, Washington Post, CT; the Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT; Syracuse University, NY, and the Museum of Modern Art, Middlesbrough, England.

Peter lives and works in the Berkshire Mountains of Western Massachusetts.



Chris Wills by Peter McLean



Home Equity Loan at the Casino - Peter McLean



STEPHEN NESSER

Stephen was born on an army base in Tacoma, Washington. Airplanes frequently flew from the base airstrip, and that started Stephen's life-long interest in flying.

By the time Stephen was eight, he lived in Columbus, Ohio with six brothers and sisters who filled the house with laughter and chaos. While his brothers and sisters did amazing and wonderful things, Stephen jumped off the garage roof with sheets as parachutes, trying to fly. His parents shook their heads.

One autumn day, when Stephen was 12 years old, he drew a thistle with a calligraphy pen. The drawing turned out well. For the first time he dreamed of becoming an artist. His parents suggested that engineering would be a good career.

Rather than engineering, Stephen graduated with a degree in photography from Ohio State University. His first professional job was as an artist designing packaging art. After three years as a commercial artist, Stephen returned to Ohio State University to earn a Master's of Fine Arts degree.

Realizing that he wasn't cut out for the starving portion of starving artist, he moved to San Francisco and studied dance/movement therapy.

He then traveled to Japan to teach English as a foreign language. There he studied sumi-e painting, climbed Mount Fuji, and hiked the coast of the Noto Peninsula. In Japan he studied the art practice of wabi-sabi - an appreciation of the beauty and loneliness in humble, impermanent, and simple things.



Stephen completed his Masters of Creative Arts Therapies in Philadelphia, after which, he "interviewed" cities to find a great place to live and moved to Minnesota. There he canoed and snowshoed deep into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in summer, fall and winter, and painted the glistening lakes, autumnal trees, and jack pines.

Stephen started flying sailplanes in 1986, and eventually became a flight instructor. Rising silently on thermals of warm air, he flew side-by-side with hawks and bald eagles. His paintings of gliders are in museums around the world, including the Smithsonian Institution.

Stephen still lives in Minnesota with his wife, Teddie.



TED WILLIAMS

Ted has done some fabulous artwork for the National Soaring Museum over the years, including a painting of the Zanon and poster designs and logos for our 50th anniversary and IVSM 2021 and 2024. <https://www.tedwilliamsaviationart.com>

Working from his studio overlooking Canandaigua Lake in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, Ted Williams has created a focused body of aviation fine art and illustration. Noted for his stunning realistic approach, he has created paintings and illustrations for a broad clientele, which includes private commissions for aircraft owners, pilots and corporations, as well as historical illustration work for numerous museums and publishers of

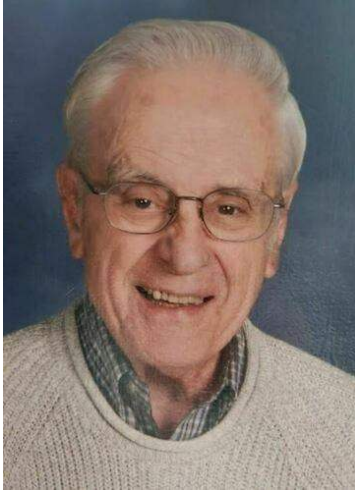
magazines and books. Ted primarily works in oil for his fine art and in digital media for his illustrations, but he is also proficient with acrylic and watercolor. However, as Ted is known to say, everything begins with a pencil, "Competent drawing skills are the foundation of any good painting."

Beginning with his art training at the Rochester Institute of Technology, Ted has followed a career in commercial art that has brought him many awards and accolades. He has expanded his work in aviation history by entering the world of publishing as an author and illustrator of his own books. Most notably, his master work is *The American Fighter Plane* (Metrobooks, Barnes and Noble Publishing).



As a skilled independent artist, Ted's has garnered much praise from among aviation enthusiasts, engineers and historians, "but the best rewards I have received are the many friendships I have established over the years with people who love airplanes as much as I do." says Ted, reflecting on his years as an aviation artist and illustrator.





Cal Weiss

CALVIN WEISS 1925-2025

Cal earned a Bachelor of Science Degree from Baldwin Wallace College in 1946 following his service as a naval officer in the Pacific Theater during WWII. He was recalled during the Korean conflict and served aboard the LST 1073 in Japan and Korea as the Operations Officer and later, Executive Officer.

Cal began employment at NACA (which eventually became NASA) in 1946 as a technical illustrator, and retired in 1979 from NASA Lewis Research Center, as Chief of

Educational Services, Public Affairs Office. As such he was responsible for overseeing the design, construction and operation of the Visitor Information Center. In 1980 he was one of five recipients of the Crown Circle Award, presented by the National Congress on Aerospace Education for outstanding performance and leadership in the field of Aerospace Education.

His great interest in aeronautics continued in retirement through art work and model building, having several aviation paintings accepted in seven Experimental Aviation Association (EPA) international art contests. Calvin's highest award was third place. Several of his paintings and models are on display at the National Soaring Museum in Elmira NY. One of Cal's paintings, showing a Super Cub after releasing a sailplane, hangs in the NSM lobby.



Release Over Harris Hill - 1985



Admiration for the Home-built - Cal Weiss





PAUL VILLINSKI

Paul Villinski has created studio and large-scale artworks for more than three decades. Villinski was born in York, Maine, USA, in 1960, son of an Air Force navigator. He has lived and worked in New York City since 1982. A scenic route through the educational system included stops at Phillips Exeter Academy and the Massachusetts College of Art, and a BFA with honors from the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in 1984. He lives with his partner, the painter Amy Park, and their son, Lark, in their studios in Long Island City, NY.

Villinski's work is widely collected, including major public works created by commission. Permanent collections include the National Soaring Museum, Elmira, NY; the Museum of Arts and Design, NY; the New Orleans Museum of Art, LA; the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA; Miami International Airport; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, FL; and the University of Michigan Mott Children's and Von Voitlander Women's Hospital, Ann Arbor, MI. Corporate collections include Fidelity Investments; Microsoft; Progressive Insurance; the Cleveland Clinic; ADP; McCann Erickson International; New York Life; Ritz-Carlton and many others. He has been a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts grant, and has been an Artist-in-Residence at the Serenbe Institute, GA; Socrates Sculpture Park, NY; the Millay Colony, NY; the Ucross Foundation, WY; the Djerassi Foundation, CA; and the Villa Montalvo Arts Center, CA. He is represented in New York by Morgan Lehman Gallery; in New Orleans by Jonathan Ferrara Gallery; in Jackson Hole, Wyoming by Tayloe Piggot Gallery; and in Palm Desert, California, by Austin Art Projects.



A pilot of sailplanes, paragliders and single-engine airplanes, metaphors of flight and soaring often appear in his work. With a lifelong concern for environmental issues, his work frequently re-purposes discarded materials, effecting surprising and poetic transformations. <http://www.paulvillinski.com>



VICTOR SAUDEK 1915-1997 MARTHA SAUDEK 1923-2015



Well known in the world of soaring history is Vic Saudek, most famous for his involvement in the Sierra Wave Project where he served as Project Manager starting in 1951. Less well known in the soaring world is Vic's wife, Martha Saudek, a native Californian, who began painting at the age of five. Later she studied art at Scripps and Pomona College. She was a superbly accomplished

artist who passed away at the age of 92. The quality of her work and the vivid, clear outlook of her paintings make both her age and her history rather a surprise, for Martha Saudek

did not actually begin painting full-time until 1990.

Following World War II, teachers were desperately needed in Californian schools and Martha, having a degree in English, was in demand. Although at that time she had taken some art classes, she was convinced that she would not be able to make a living as an artist. However, following her retirement she was able to give in to her drive for artistic expression.

With her aim at the time merely to obtain personal satisfaction, she decided to begin with basic art courses at UCLA. In 1986, on an impulse, she entered two paintings in the San Fernando Valley Art Club's Spring juried exhibition and walked away with 1st, 2nd and 3rd place awards. Thus began a marathon of exhibitions and awards, followed by extensive international sales. She was an award winner in Grumbacher's National Gold Medal competition and a Region III Top Winner of the National Arts for the Parks National Competition. She exhibited at the Lincoln Center in New York, in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington DC and at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles. She specialized in landscapes, but her subject matter varied. All her paintings contain full-bodied colours, whether they represent sunsets, wooded glens, waterways or snowy hillsides.

Not only did Vic Saudek marry a very talented woman, he was also the son of Victor Saudek, flautist with the Pittsburgh Symphony.



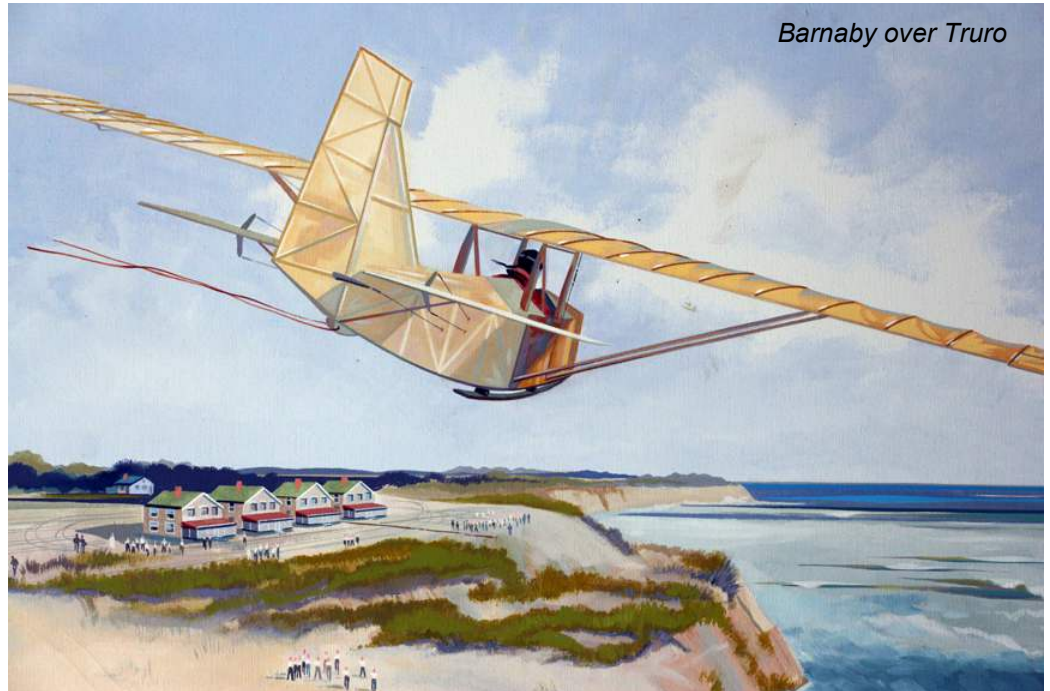
LEONARD W. MCCLAIN



Leonard W. McClain, 91, of East Goshen, PA passed away on Thursday, May 25, 2017. Born in Upper Darby, PA, he was the son of the late Leonard and Enmine (nee Fogasty) McClain. Leonard was the husband of the late Eleanor R. (nee Carr) McClain; father of Leonard M. McClain. He served honorably in the U.S. Marines and the U.S. Navy during WWII and the Korean War for nine years.

Back in 1975, Leonard was one of the founding members of the Vintage Sailplane Association, a division of the Soaring Society of America. He was a delightful friend, often joining in the festivities of VSA glider "meets" at various locations in NY, PA, VA, and DE.

He was an accomplished artist -- creating oil and acrylic paintings of sailplanes and WWII naval military aircraft. Also a meticulous craftsman in wood, Len built several gliders and powered light sport aircraft in his garage. Len flew a "Cherokee" wood and fabric sailplane in VSA events -- distinctive with its 'nose art' of a Cherokee Indian chieftain that he hand painted. Len was such fun to be with -- around a food table, campfire, or thermaling with other glider pilots in the air. He was a lover of people, with a desire to help others 'down and out' whenever he could. He freely added to the knowledge of thousands with his tales, mentoring, and restoration of historic museum aircraft.



Cherokee with Len's special artistic touch



aircraft.

GEOFF STEELE

Another “Renaissance Man” on NSM’s radar is longtime museum member and soaring personality, Geoff Steele. The opportunity to blend work with several hobbies led to Geoff’s deepening interest in soaring. Getting a pilot’s license and glider rating in 1971 led to his purchase of the prototype Schweizer 1-20. He brought it to Harris Hill for the first vintage sailplane gathering sponsored by the NSM and Paul Schweizer. There, Geoff and six other enthusiasts banded together to form the Vintage Sailplane Association, with Geoff as its first president, as well as creator and main editor, writer and photographer for VSA’s newsletter (now a magazine) *Bungee Cord* for 4½ years. (VSA just celebrated its 50th Anniversary during the 2024 IVSM.)

Supporting a family with four children and working full-time for the federal government, while also creating an active part-time free-lance photo business, kept Geoff too busy for any active flying. Nonetheless, he used his photo skills to contribute to the growth of the VSA and aid efforts at the National Air & Space Museum and National Soaring Museum to help document and preserve some important sailplane artifacts. He contributed photos and coverage of VSA meets to Soaring Magazine for several years, working with Doug Lamont. Geoff also began the effort to create VSA’s microfilm archives to preserve plans of historically significant gliders.



Geoff Steele

Geoff’s career in the federal government used several of his areas of expertise and was certainly never boring! He started off working for the Dept. of Interior and ended up in the Justice Department.

His activity in the VSA enabled him to meet some famous names in aviation like Hanna Reitsch, Rudi Opitz, Paul MacCready, Jim Marske, Al Bowers, and the Schweizer brothers, among many others .



“Geoff Steele approaching the entrance to the Paul Garber Facility at NASM. Geoff is toting a camera with a flash unit so powerful, when set to ‘stun’ it can stop an enraged bull moose at 50 yards.”

- Douglas Bullard



Geoff’s photo of Warren Eaton’s Senior Albatross at Udvar-Hazy

Geoff also edited books by David Myhra on the Horten Brothers, who designed the world’s first jet-powered flying wing and Austrian space engineer, Eugen Sänger. The flying wing has been an area of particular interest for Geoff.

Geoff and his wife, Sandy, are now retired, living in North Carolina, but he ventures forth to take photos for pleasure, family events, and at key soaring events, like the 50th NSM Anniversary and VSA’s recent 50th birthday celebration at Harris Hill where he hops into a Grob Twin or a vintage 2-placer to breathe “green air” whenever he can.



Geoff designed this poster for the 1976 VSA Regatta at Harris Hill

Gleb Derujinsky and the Watts Towers Trophies - Jean Doherty

Colorful soaring personality, photographer and craftsman, Gleb Derujinsky (*NSM Journal - Summer 2020*), took on the project of creating several trophies in the shape of the Watts Towers in Los Angeles for presentation at the Watts Community Summer Festival in 1974. I had not heard of the Watts Towers before. I had heard of the Watts riots, but not the Towers. The Watts Riots were a series of civil disturbances in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, from August 11 to August 16, 1965, sparked by the arrest of an African American man. Fueled by decades of racial injustice, economic disparities, and police mistreatment, the six-day event resulted in 34 deaths, over 1,000 injuries, and widespread property damage, becoming a pivotal moment in the Civil Rights movement. In August 1965 I was off to college and most certainly not focused on national news, so I never heard about the riots till sometime later in my personal history.

My lack of awareness of the Watts Towers was another story. Gleb Derujinsky's daughter, Andrea, had sent me some time ago a collection of photos of her father creating miniature Watts Towers to be used as trophies in 1974. My wonderment at what these were all about sent me on an internet adventure that led down several paths of research.

The Watts Towers are perhaps the nation's best known work of folk art sculpture. Using simple hand tools, cast off materials (glass, shell, pottery pieces and broken tile, much of it gathered by neighborhood children), Italian immigrant, Sam Rodia, spent 30 years building a tribute to his adopted country and a monument to the spirit of individuals who make their dreams tangible. Rodia's Towers inspired many to rally and preserve his work and protect it for the future.

Amazingly, the Watts Towers survived the riots of 1965, unscathed amid the vast destruction of the surrounding neighborhood. To the Watts residents, the Towers had become a symbol of freedom and individual initiative.

After the Watts Riots, the community of Los Angeles, particularly the Watts neighborhood, initiated its own healing process through community-led programs like the Watts Community Corps, which fostered cooperation and provided essential resources to residents. The area also saw efforts by community leaders to broker peace between gangs and remove guns from the streets, addressing the root causes of the unrest, such as police tension and economic hardship, and fostering human capital for rebuilding.

Among the photos that Andrea sent was one of Los Angeles mayor, Tom Bradley, holding one of the awards created by Gleb. That sent me down another research path, looking for information on Mayor Bradley.



Gleb Derujinsky



Mayor Tom Bradley



Los Angeles mayor, Thomas Bradley (December 29, 1917 – September 29, 1998), was an American politician, athlete, police officer, and lawyer who served as the 38th mayor of Los Angeles from 1973 to 1993. A member of the Democratic Party, he was Los Angeles' first black mayor, first liberal mayor, and longest-serving mayor.

There's lots to know about Mayor Bradley. He appointed more women and people of color to political positions than all his predecessors combined. He was widely respected and renowned for his hard work ethic. He was re-elected by landslides in 1977, 1981, and 1985. He was lauded for running the first profitable Summer Olympics in 1984. The Tom Bradley International Terminal at Los Angeles International Airport is named after him and opened weeks before the 1984 Olympics. Bradley's promotion of public transit led to the creation of the Los Angeles Metro in 1990.

It appears in the Derujinsky photos, that Mayor Bradley was master of ceremonies for the award ceremony in Watts in Summer 1974, and Gleb was most likely there in the front row, snapping photos. Details are remarkably unavailable on the internet regarding this awards ceremony or, indeed, any of the activities occurring in Watts on that weekend in 1974. We can assume, however, that Gleb had been contracted to create the awards, and spent at least a couple of months constructing them in advance of the event.









Finished trophies



Tommy Jacquette, founder of the Watts Summer Festival, receiving Gleb's trophy



"Over Harris Hill" by Cal Weiss

IBSN #0892-0516

The **NSM Historical Journal** is a publication of the National Soaring Museum

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Anyone is invited to contribute article material and photographs with identification about historical soaring activities, renovation of old sailplanes, soaring pioneers, unusual uses of sailplanes, etc.

Manuscripts are subject to whatever revisions, additions or deletions are necessary to make the material conform to the space limitations and standards of the NSM. Material that is to be returned must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. No compensation other than credit will be given. Materials sent by e-mail should go to: info@soaringmuseum.org. If we receive an overabundance of articles for the upcoming edition, your material will be saved for a future edition.