

A LITTLE HISTORY OF BATCHELDER TILES

BY

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The "Birthplace"

in a Pasadena garden under the shade of the olive trees. The clay was brought home from a brickyard wrapped in gunny sacks, all mixed ready for use. In spite of its humble origin it possessed potential beauty when brought into contact with adequate ideas. We had the ideas and sought to give them expression. We soon went into "quantity production" by making twelve six-inch tiles at a single process—a commendable bit of enterprise. Our kiln permitted us to fire nearly forty six-inch tiles at one fell swoop. It took three firings to satisfactorily produce our first mantel order. The mantel was laid out on the kitchen floor and personally delivered at the job because we had doubts as to the trustworthiness of expressmen—and, incidentally, feared the owner of the house might change his mind.

The olive trees still weave sunlight and shadow over the roof of the little shop but its activities remain only as a pleasant memory. The kiln soon sputtered itself into premature old age—it tried hard to keep the pace; the neighbors objected to the soot—and so withal we established ourselves down among the gas tanks in a galvanized iron shed in regions remote from neighborly solicitude.

Our second kiln appalled us by its yawning cavity. It required nearly five hundred six-inch tiles to appease its demands. We exulted in the roar of its fires but worked day and night to keep it going. Dawn often caught us on the way

THE history of an industry is often more entertaining to the writer than to the reader. It is like bringing out the family photograph album with the relatives in their Sunday clothes. We all have to start—somewhere and at some time.

The early stories of industries have points of striking similarity. They generally center about personalities—men who had dreams and who have persisted in pushing their cart-load of dreams along a single track road, uphill and down, in season and out. Retrospection means merely to rest for a moment by the wayside to look back along the track littered with debris commonly called experience. This is written in one of those moments.

Twelve years ago Batchelder Tiles were made



The "Nursery"

home to last night's supper. Our tiles were sun dried in a yard at the rear of the shed where cats and chickens frequently walked over them offering a "pleasing variation of texture." We watched them—the tiles—as a cook watches a pancake on the griddle. As fast as the tiles were dry they were whisked away to the insatiable kiln. But even California sunshine refuses to work nights. Artificial drying appeared as a logical helpmate. Our first drying room was built with the aid of tarpaulins and a gas stove. It rendered valiant service in a good cause.

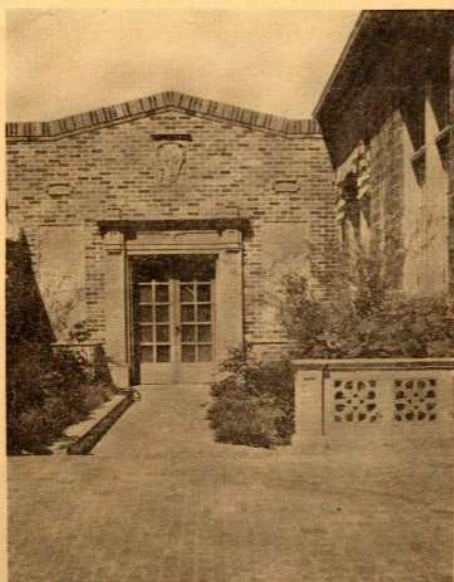
Expansion became an early habit. For some reason or other people liked our work—in fact have continued to like it. We hope they will always like it. When kilns Number 3 and 4 were built—they came as twins—Number 2 lost its power to overwhelm us. The day came when it was even referred to as the "pup." The shed which sheltered our infant industry grew in size and dignity until it filled the narrow limits of the property. To expand further meant that we must dig in or climb over. We did the latter. A portion of our present location was secured in 1920. Building was started on a comparatively modest acquisition of an acre of ground. There was an old red barn on the property and this served as a nucleus.

The expansion habit remained. With various additions to our property we have now seven acres with a plant covering a considerable part of the ground. Kilns 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 followed each other from year to year—each bigger than its predecessor. And now comes Number 11—a tunnel kiln which demands a minimum of 6 tons of material daily—to say nothing of the generations of kilns preceding it, big and small.

We have a reasonable pride in our plant as it stands today. It is a wholesome place in which to work—clean and well lighted. Our employees have increased from four in nineteen fourteen to one hundred seventy-five in nineteen twenty-five. We believe our equipment will compare favorably with any clay working plant you have ever visited. We are pleased to extend to you an invitation to visit our factory in its various departments.



Main Entrance to Offices



Main Entrance to Factory

A LITTLE JOURNEY

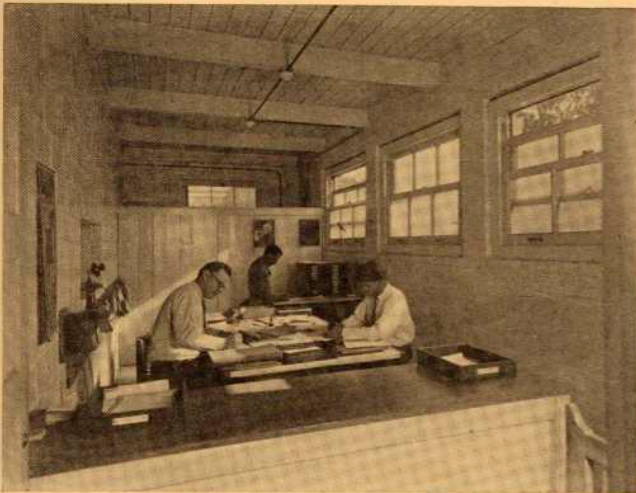
THROUGH THE

BATCHELDER FACTORY



SO many people feel that a tile plant must be a muddy, unwholesome place in which to work that we think a little journey through a modern tile factory may be enlightening. The Batchelder Tile Factory in Los Angeles offers a good example. It is strategically located on a seven-acre tract between two trans-continental railroads. From the mixing rooms with the roar of machinery where the crushers, dry pans and pug mills reduce the raw materials to plastic clay, to the layout room where designs are assembled, is an interesting journey.

Some of the members of the Batchelder Tile family will be introduced, because the factory could not have been built if it were not for the loyalty, good will and hard work of this organization. There are many whose pictures do not appear—they were too busy to be interested in the camera man. For years, with inadequate facilities, these people have been trying to get orders out on time. Now with improved conditions their ability to function more efficiently has been measurably increased.

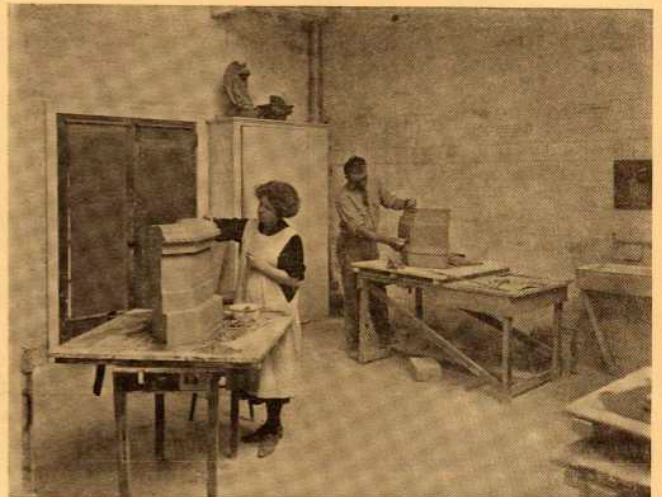


Before starting on the trip it would be interesting, if space permitted, to take a peek at the drafting rooms, laboratories and mixing rooms, where the first steps are taken. In the Drafting Room, the unique Batchelder designs are created and the drawings and blue prints for special orders made. The Laboratory is in charge of chemists who analyze all of the material that enters into the making of Batchelder Tiles. They also check materials through the various stages of manufacture. In the Mixing Rooms raw materials are reduced to proper working proportions by trained experts.

The Order Room When an order leaves the office it enters the plant through the factory order room, where it is subjected to the careful scrutiny of Mr. Anderson, at the left in the picture. Opposite sits Mr. Coleman, who is in charge of all green and fired stock. Between them they interpret the order into terms of factory production. A perpetual card inventory close by affords immediate information as to the progress of every piece of tile in the factory. In the rear of the room stands Mr. Condon, Factory Superintendent; like many of the others his association with the business dates back to the days when the clay was mixed with a hoe and the tiles dried in the sun.

Beauty in the Making

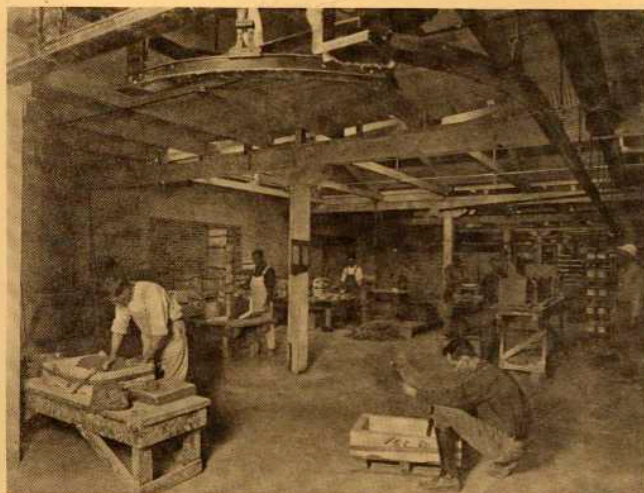
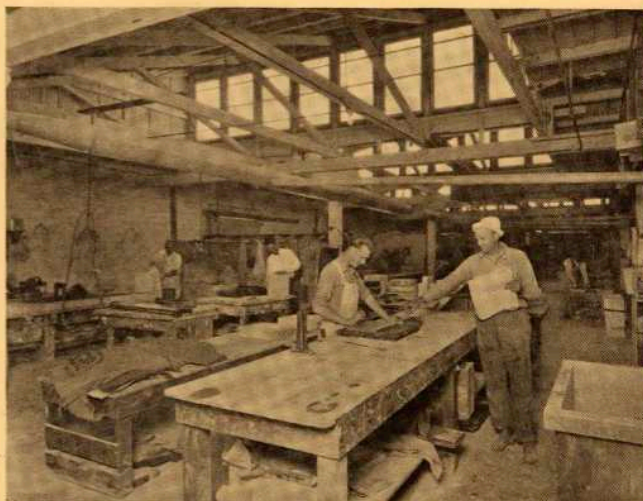
Very much of the distinctive character of Batchelder Tiles is due to the sympathetic interpretation of the designs at the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Ingels. The modeling room, although rather factory-like in its physical aspect, is a veritable hatchery of ideas. Many of the designs are worked out directly in the wet clay, insuring a plastic appearance not always to be found in the paper-made designs of a drafting room where too often full sized details indicate little recognition or understanding of the subtle difference between plastic clay, cast stone, tough oak, or hard grained marble. Some of the inspiration of this room comes from the walled garden at its doors where California flowers bloom the year through.



The Die is Cast

Adjoining the Modeling Room is the department devoted to Casting, the second step in the formation process. Here the moulds are made for all of the stock figured tile, borders, corbels, etc. Plaster is as necessary an adjunct to the clay industry as type is to the unfortunate printer who has to set up this dissertation. Every piece produced requires a mould, so you can see that this department is always well plastered, figuratively speaking, of course. Key moulds of each separate item are kept in a large fireproof vault. From these are made the production moulds. Mr. Shumway, the gentleman with the white hat and commanding attitude, is in charge of the Formation Department.

Further along in this room are divisions of space with facilities for making figured tiles and smaller forms for regular stock, mouldings, corbels, etc.



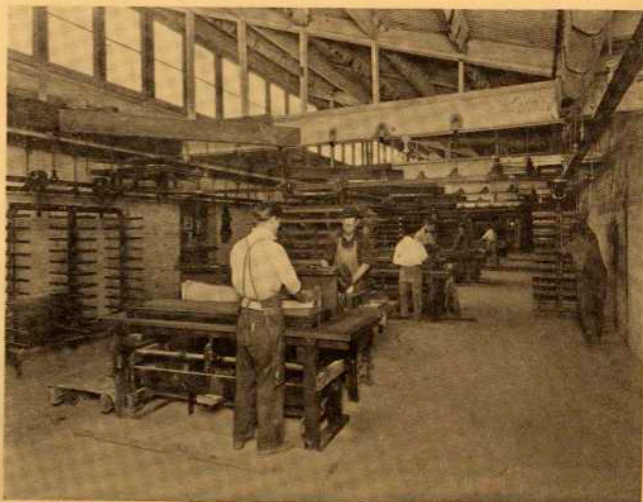
A Pressing Engagement

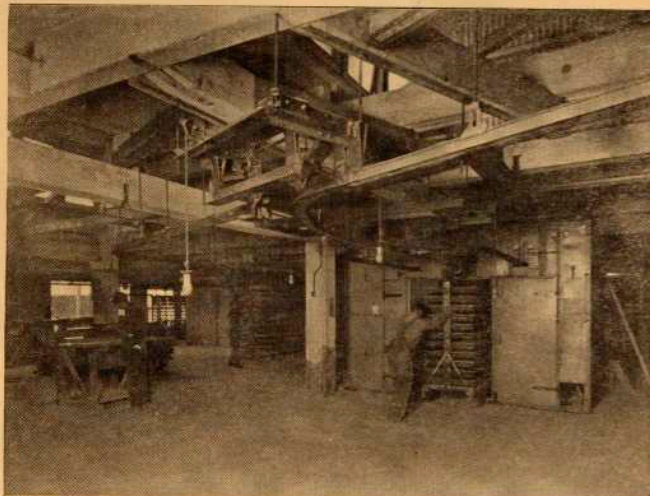
Now let us stop for a moment in the Pressing Room, probably a bit different from those in tailor shops. Here small forms and special features such as shelves, pilasters, spandrels, corbels, etc., are made. By way of diversion it might be interesting to know that, whereas tile shelves were rarely used until a few years ago, the all-tile mantel is rapidly coming into its own and the use of a carpenter-made shelf in connection with the tile mantel is practically obsolete. In fact, the all-tile mantel has so many arguments in its favor than any other treatment is now the exception. In the nursery days of the plant there was one man who occasionally made a tile shelf, but now, thanks to the artistic appreciation of the great American home-owner, several men do "nothing else but." Mr. Bayevich wields a shrinkage rule here to check dimensions of green materials.

Where Clay Becomes Tiles

What this room lacks in artistic beauty, it makes up in businesslike efficiency, resembling for all the world a large bakery. It is, in fact, what may be called, for want of a better term, "the bread and butter room"—the department where plain tiles in various sizes are made. Possibly you were not aware that these tiles are made by hand as are, of course, all of the products of this factory. The benches used throughout the process are of our own devising—of simple but ingenious construction.

Note the overhead trolley which carries material from one department to the next. As material is formed, the boards upon which it is made are placed in racks and started down the line towards the Drying Rooms.





A Few Dry Remarks

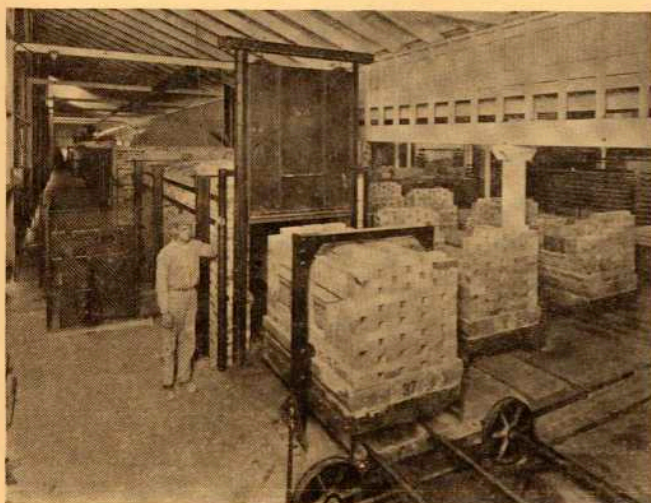
The formidable looking orifice in the right foreground is the cavernous entrance to one of the three-compartment drying rooms. Its big brother at the left has six compartments. Each of these industrial "Turkish baths" is 52 feet long, with the degree of heat continually and evenly increasing as racks of wet tiles pass through. These dryers are triumphs of modern engineering ingenuity susceptible to minute regulation from the humidity end where the material enters, to the whirlwind of heat at the outlet where the thoroughly dried product comes forth.

The loaded racks move automatically through the various stages of the drying process, which is one of the most important steps in a clay working plant. Hasty drying or an uneven distribution of heat often spell disaster. To force the process is always to invite trouble.

The Color Question

Emerging from the dryers the embryo Batchelder Tiles enter the green stock and glaze rooms where the first assembly of orders appears. Here orders are laid out and checked as to quantity, dimensions, etc. The orders are then sorted and stacked—ready for the glazing processes. This department is in charge of Mr. Bannister, whose modesty keeps him in the middle distance. To the layman this room seems in confusion, but the many stacks and piles of material are all segregated in perfect order. Through the open door in the center of the picture is a glimpse of the figured tile glaze rooms, where skillful workers apply the soft, rich subdued colors, or the sparkling, contrasting glazes that give the final touch of distinction to Batchelder Tiles.

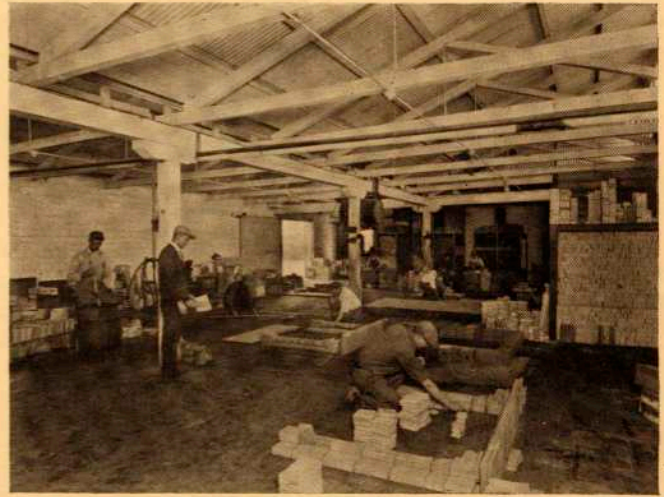
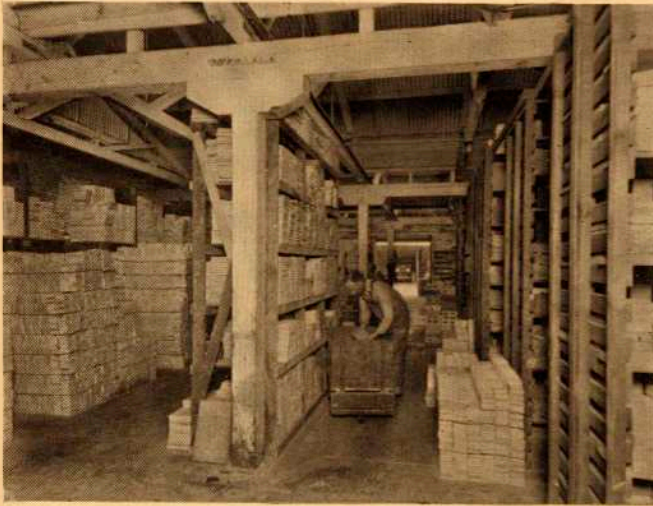
Stacked in the foreground are orders in line for the final step of their long journey—waiting for the kiln setters to place them on the cars.



A Burning Subject

Modesty, and an appalling lack of space, prevents a showing of more than one of the kilns—this one is No. 11, a tunnel kiln of the very latest type which pours forth its daily carloads of finished stock under the guiding hand of Mr. Attlesey, seen near its door.

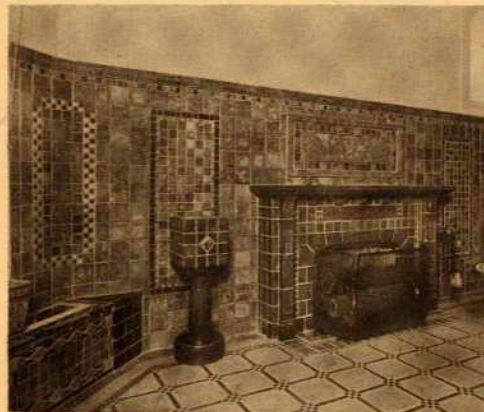
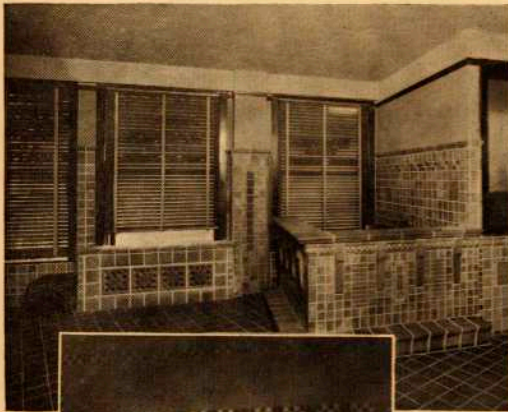
The endless chain of loaded cars moves day and night at an almost imperceptible pace through the length of the kiln, gradually entering the firing zone where the temperature reaches 2100° of heat, passing on through the cooling zone to the outlet. Each car that emerges gives place to another loaded car at the receiving end. Perfect control of temperatures is centered in an instrument room where fractional variations of heat are automatically recorded for the guidance of the burners.



While the firing process is under way let us prowl about in the Finished Stock Room, at the left, where the finished stock is stored. In spite of the tremendous quantity and variety of stock on hand in this department, every single piece is either "present or accounted for." The government overlooked a good customs official in Mr. Zangraft, custodian of this department, because even the best souvenir collectors cannot escape his scrutiny.

In the Finished Assembly Room, shown on the right, each order is laid out and carefully checked as to quantity, size, dimension, color, etc. This department is presided over by Mr. Phelps, standing in front of the post. Measuring the mantel in the foreground is Mr. Gregory, the factory inspector who has the most thankless job in the whole place. He is always hunting for the other fellow's mistakes. After being rechecked and assembled, each order passes on an individual truck to the Shipping Room where it is carefully packed.

TYPICAL DEALERS' DISPLAY ROOMS



—Permanent installations of Batchelder Tiles which serve as a welcome source of suggestion and information to architects interested in tile work. Illustrated are the establishments of Fred Wagner, Portland, Ore.; International Tile Co., Houston, Tex.; Bruner Marble & Tile Co., Los Angeles, Cal.

