



# E-NEWS FROM TILE HERITAGE

November & December



2008



(Available each month to Tile Heritage members who e-mail the Foundation from the address they would like E-News sent to. Contact: [foundation@tileheritage.org](mailto:foundation@tileheritage.org))

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From 1890 in Peoria, Illinois, note the 6x6 Providential morning glories on the hearth. If you can identify what appears to be a 3x9 decorative tile around the fireplace opening, please email Tile Heritage at [foundation@tileheritage.org](mailto:foundation@tileheritage.org).

Photo courtesy of Jerry Hawksworth.



Laurel True shows off her "Sun Spheres" prior to their installation in San Francisco.

Photo courtesy of the artist.

## News Flash! Can it be True?

**Laurel True of True Mosaics Studio** in Oakland, California has written that her "Sun Spheres" have been a long time in coming. She contracted for the job with the San Francisco Arts Commission in 2004, and the spheres were installed and dedicated on September 27, 2008. "I love these!"

The three mosaic sculptures are located at the intersection of Ocean and Granada Avenues in **San Francisco**. Ranging in size from three to five feet in diameter, and collectively weighing in at almost 2000 pounds, the spheres rest on short steel poles bolted to the sidewalk. Their bright oranges, reds and yellows serve the dual purpose of referencing the sun and bringing warmth to an area renowned for its

fog. Swirling waves of mirrored tile interrupt the colored tile, a reminder of the nearby Pacific Ocean. The surface of the spheres will constantly change as morning passes into night, reflecting the changing light.

**Laurel True** is a mosaic artist and educator. In addition to her personal business, **True Mosaics Studio**, she is the founder and executive director of the **Institute of Mosaic Art in Oakland** where she has taught and mentored hundreds of students at all skill levels.

### “Tribute” in Clay: Central Insurance Company

“Tribute,” a series of six tile murals by artist/designer/sculptor **Nancy McCroskey**, honors the values and history of the Central Insurance Company in **Van Wert, Ohio**, a town just east of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Words expressing corporate values of integrity, relationships and excellence are integrated with historical images and subjects such as the “Fidelity Medal,” the “Pumper,” the “Van Wert Courthouse,” the “1876 Founding Date” and the “Purmort Family Crest.”



**Bill Purmort, president of Central Insurance Company, admires the “Tribute” to his industry.**  
Photo courtesy of the artist.

sculpting phase of the project. She worked with two assistants, **John Hrehov and Deborah Miller**, using oil clay to sculpt all of the images. Metal letters and other materials were used for the geometric framing devices. Once the prototypes were completed, plaster molds were made of the original sculptures. Next, ceramic water clay was pressed into the plaster molds, creating a hollow form with interior walls, much like architectural terra cotta. After drying and bisque firing the

The Central Collection of Fire Marks provided inspiration for the other images. Fire marks, relief sculptures dating from the early days of the insurance industry, use imagery and text to identify an insurance company. For example, an early fire mark, the “Fireman’s Grip,” was used by an insurance contributorship founded by Ben Franklin in 1752. This fire mark image has been reinterpreted by sculptors at different times and places for a variety of insurance companies. Nancy’s reinterpretation of the “Fireman’s Grip” can be found repeated in three of the murals.

When the overall design concept for the murals was completed, Nancy proceeded with the



**Note the “Fireman’s Grip” featured at the center of these fire marks.**  
Photo courtesy of the artist.



**Fire marks date to the early days of the insurance industry.**  
Photo courtesy of the artist.

ceramic tiles, she sprayed glaze on them and fired them to stoneware temperatures.

The tiles in the murals are designed and arranged to allow the relief, color, images and text to play off of one another. Themes of trust, courage, and service—beauty, mercy and truth—emerge from the broad theme of a tribute to Central Insurance Company. The project was completed in June 2008.



**Schematic rendering of the mosaic floor inspired by galactic impressions and the currents of the winds on Earth.**

Photo courtesy of Howard Schreiber.

### **Jurs/Stout: Resonance & Dispersion**

Artists **Robert Stout and Stephanie Jurs** created the spectacular 28-foot ceramic mosaic that adorns the floor of the entrance rotunda to the new Southern Oregon University Hannon Library in **Ashland, Oregon**. The colorful piece, an abstract swirl with shades of blues, pinks, yellows and browns, is titled “Resonance & Dispersion.”

The artists are an American husband and wife team with their own business, **Twin Dolphins Mosaics**, based in Ravenna, Italy. Robert and Stephanie have been designing and creating broken-tile mosaics since 1990. In 1998 they moved from their home in Albuquerque, New Mexico to Ravenna, Italy, an internationally known center of Byzantine mosaics, to study traditional Roman and Byzantine

techniques. Their current work combines elements of broken-tile mosaics with those of traditional marble and glass mosaic. In 2003 they were selected in a competition to create this unique art piece for the Hannon Library at Southern Oregon University.

To document the creation of the new mosaic in the library’s rotunda for historic, artistic and educational purposes, a production team comprised of the faculty and selected students from SOU’s new Media Arts concentration videotaped the process of assembling the ceramic in Italy and installing it at SOU. To access the video you will need to download a player from Real Media, which requires a special application/plugin to play. If you go to <http://www.realplayer.com> you can download the player for free. After you have the download, you will be able to access the video at <http://rvtv.roguedatavault.net/ramgen/sou/videos/mosaic.rm>. It’s well worth it!



**Robert Stout engages in lofting his mosaic for the Hannon Library entry at Southern Oregon University.**

Photo courtesy of Howard Schreiber.



**The map of the eastern end of Long Island was reconstructed from a map fragment representing only 25% of the finished piece.**

Photo courtesy of the artist.

### **Shelter Island Mapped in Tile**

**David Patrick**, a veteran in tile sales and design currently working out of **Chelsea Arts Tile + Stone** in New York City, wrote that he had just completed an installation he thought might be of interest to Tile Heritage. He was approached by an architect who had a fragment of a historical map of Shelter Island (at the eastern end of Long Island) circa 1846 and who was interested in translating it into a large tile panel for a residential kitchen on the island.

The project involved a lot of graphic work on David’s part in building a context around a low resolution scan of the map fragment, basically drawing the surrounding areas in matching detail and with geographical/nautical accuracy.

Research included sourcing 19th century copperplate border and font details as well as melding together a variety of modern maps and satellite imagery for the underlying framework. Only about 25% of the overall panel, the central area in particular, was generated directly from the original map.

The artwork was expertly transferred and fired on Spanish bisque tile by a trusted tile artisan, **Dennis Caffrey** at **Tile Guild** in Los Angeles, with whom David has worked for over 15 years. The finished mural measures 10 by 15 feet, a site-specific period piece in a rather contemporary setting. All of the added landmasses are accurate—you could practically sail using this map. David added the thick border to contain the piece by giving it visual structure and acknowledged that he was a little dazed by the whole process.



**A detail of Shelter Island.**  
Photo courtesy of the artist.



**Typical of the 1890s a fireplace mantel in Peoria adorned with tiles from the American Encaustic Tiling Company.**  
Photo courtesy of Jerry Hawksworth.

### **American Encaustic in Peoria**

Jerry Hawksworth from Peoria, Illinois was referred to Tile Heritage by **Suzanne Blackburn** of the new **Rookwood Pottery Company** in Cincinnati. Finding that he must sell his historic home, Mr. Hawksworth sent a CD of images of his three fireplace mantels hoping that we could identify the tiles and determine their value. Of course, the value of a tiled mantel in a historic home is in the existing installation; and although the tiles themselves would have a market value, to remove them from the mantel would seriously diminish the value of the real property.

The house was built in 1890 for **Jokichi Takamine**, who developed a phosphate fertilizer in Japan and later a revolutionary distilling process used in the production of whiskey, which he put to good use in the Chicago area where he worked in conjunction with several different distilleries.

The tile surround in the parlor (pictured here) was produced by the **American Encaustic Tiling Company** in Zanesville, Ohio, a company that was one of the largest in the United States at that time. The pattern of the actual surround is No. 1013 F; the hearth is composed of a linear rose pattern No. 370 (3x3) and No. 374 (6x3) and a dual linear strip of No. 359 (6 x 1 ½) and No. 369 (1 ½ sq.) at the corners. A second fireplace has **Providential** tiles from Trenton in the hearth and currently unidentified tiles in the surround (see Mystery Tile above). The third is composed of green slate.

## Unitile Surprise!

**Pete Johnson, Jr. of Architectural Ceramic Products** in Canfield, Ohio called recently having heard about a house in nearby Akron with a curious fireplace mantel in the parlor. The house, designed by Harpster and Bliss in 1919, was originally owned by Bryon Barder, who ran a boiler company in downtown Akron. Currently occupied by Braun & Steidl Architects, the house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Tile Heritage was able to identify the tiles on the mantel as a rare installation of **Unitile** made in Uhrichsville, Ohio. The small company (1917–1927) was not founded by people from the ceramics industry but by three brothers: **James Harrison Donahey**, a cartoonist for the Cleveland Plain Dealer; **William**, who illustrated children's books and was well known for the "Teenie Weenies"; and **Alvin Victor Donahey**, who became Governor of Ohio.

If you have historic tiles or know of some and wish to have them identified, email digital images of the individual tiles or installations to Tile Heritage ([foundation@tileheritage.org](mailto:foundation@tileheritage.org)) and we will do our best!



**A rare Unitile fireplace mantel in Akron, Ohio.**

Photo courtesy of Phil Steinberg, AIA, CSI.



**Riley Doty rallies the troops in front of City Hall in Oakland. Note the decorative terrazzo designed and installed by Donna Billick.**

**Menzies** and **Joe Taylor**, made two road trips on I-5 in the late summer and early fall of 2008, first to the south and then to the north; and although we couldn't see it all, what we did experience is definitely worth sharing.

Our initial stop wasn't that far away, as THF board member **Riley Doty** was giving a terra cotta walking tour in downtown Oakland for the **Oakland Heritage Alliance**. Only Riley can draw the kind of numbers that make our heads swim—there were about 70 enthusiasts who ended up parading around with us, including quite a number of Tile Heritage members, past and present.

Between Grand Avenue to the north and 14th Street to the south, and between Broadway and Telegraph to the east and west, one discovers a marvelous selection of buildings clad in either tiles or architectural terra cotta, the latter

## Tiles on the I-5, Part I: A Southland Sojourn

I-5 is the major thoroughfare that runs north and south through California, Oregon and Washington, between the Mexican and Canadian borders, approximating 1500 miles. It is not surprising that so much tile is produced and sold along this well traveled corridor as it passes through or adjacent to most of the largest cities in the west from San Diego to Seattle.

Tile Heritage founders, **Sheila**



**The Breuner Building in Oakland designed by Albert Roller in 1931 with architectural terra cotta and ceramic veneer by Gladding, McBean.**



The Paramount Theatre with its towering tile murals produced at Gladding, McBean's Tropico Potteries in Glendale. Timothy Pflueger, 1931.

almost exclusively from **N. Clark & Sons** of Alameda. Walking south on Broadway from Grand, there's the **Breuner Building** (Albert F. Roller, 1931) with terra cotta from **Gladding, McBean**; then the **Paramount Theatre** (Timothy Pflueger, 1931) with its two massive tile murals above the marquee; followed by the **I. Magnin Building** (Weeks & Day, 1931), strikingly beautiful with its deep blue-green façade.

Walking west on 19th Street to the corner of Telegraph, the **Floral Depot** (Albert J. Evers, 1931) is newly restored; the **Fox Oakland Theatre** across the street (Weeks & Day, 1928) sports Indian-Hindu design featuring both tiles and terra cotta; the **Mary Bowles Building** (Douglas Stone, 1931) is next followed by the old **Dufwin Theater** (Weeks & Day, 1929) a half block west on 17th Street with three dramatic tile murals by **Gladding, McBean**. Capping off the route is the remarkable **Cathedral Building** (Benjamin Geer McDougall, 1914). Patterned after the famous Flatiron Building in New York that was erected 12 years earlier, this ornately decorated structure stands where Telegraph and Broadway meet.

The **Howden Building** (McWethy & Greenleaf, 1925) at 17th and Webster



The Dufwin Theater with three tile panels by Gladding, McBean's Tropico Potteries. Weeks & Day, 1929.

served as the rendezvous for the 2-hour tour. Clad completely on its exterior with tiles and terra cotta (thought to be produced by the **American Encaustic Tiling Company**), the building provided a showroom for the **Howden Tile Company**, a contracting firm founded by **Robert Howden, Sr.** in 1893. Howden, then in his early sixties, with one other tile setter and two helpers, tiled the entire exterior. Inside what is now **The Spice Monkey** restaurant there are historic California tiles everywhere that date to 1925: **Batchelder, Claycraft, Muresque** and **Solon & Schemmel**. Riley pointed out that this is the only tile showroom from the "Golden Era" known to have survived intact!



The Fox Oakland Theatre with its exotic architecture and tiles by Gladding, McBean. Weeks & Day, 1928.



Detail of the exterior of the Howden Building. Presumed to be American Encaustic tiles from Los Angeles. Designed by McWethy & Greenleaf, 1925.



**Majolica painter Irene de Watteville at her studio in Solana Beach oversees the techniques of the seated artist.**

Our grand tour of the area took us to installations of other THF members as well, including the studio of **Betsy Schultz in Del Mar**. Betsy has been working most of the year on an amazing tile and mosaic mural project, “**The Tracks We Leave Behind,**” covering ten columns with forty storied panels, comprising a narrative of San Diego history. It is a visual treat, even in the making! Over the coming months all of the panels will be installed on the columns just north of the Santa Fe Railroad Depot in downtown San Diego. For more about the breadth of Betsy’s talents visit: <http://www.adesigngarden.com>.



**A sampling of Betsy Schultz’s mosaic “The Tracks We leave Behind,” which will be installed in San Diego later this year.**



**The showroom at Ed Pawlack Tile in Brea, east of Los Angeles. Note the painted mural depicting the chronological history of the company.**

From Solana Beach and Del Mar we headed north and east of Los Angeles to the city of **Brea** and the tile distributorship and showroom of **Ed Pawlack. Ed Pawlack Tile Inc.** is a strikingly expansive dealership taking up most of a city block. The company was formed by Ed’s father as a tile contracting business in 1938. Since that time it has grown and changed to the form it takes today as an important player in the distribution of tile and stone in Southern California as well as a fine showroom for colorful tiles from around the world and specialty art tiles from many recognized American tile artisans. We had a delightful visit with Ed, who engaged us with an endless number of tile stories gathered over a lifetime. The company has been a generous supporter of the Tile Heritage Foundation for many years and has recently come ‘on board’ as a **THF Publishing Sponsor**, joining a fine group of companies and organizations that form the backbone of support of

Driving south from Oakland we headed directly to the San Diego area, specifically to **Solana Beach** where we were hosted by tile artist, and THF board member, **Irene de Watteville**. Her ocean view home and studio are a delight, a perfect place to paint French and Italian inspired majolica, for which Irene is well known. Her murals and tiles grace many local homes as well as public areas. Some of Irene’s accomplishments are listed at: <http://www.tileheritage.org/Irene%20de%20Watteville.html>

the Foundation. For more information about Ed, his family, business and history, visit: [www.edpawlacktile.com/index.html](http://www.edpawlacktile.com/index.html) , a most informative and enjoyable website.

After a quick bite of lunch we headed west to Los Angeles to visit **California Pottery and Tile Works** for the first time. We have known **Sean McLean**, the founder and principal magician behind the company, for quite a few years. Stepping into this tile wonderland, which incorporates a number of large buildings in an industrial area of the city, is like the ultimate candy store for diverse and colorful artistic tiles. We were graciously hosted to a ‘grand tour’ of every nook and cranny from raw materials to finished products.

**California Pottery & Tile Works** was established in 1994 continuing the rich tradition of California tile making and decoration perfected by the Malibu and Catalina potteries in the late 1920s and early '30s. Most importantly the



**Sean McLean and Sheila Menzies discuss the custom projects at California Pottery and Tile Works.**



**Albert is one of several designers of custom projects at California Pottery and Tile Works.**

company’s heart is as a custom studio producing historical reinterpretations of classic designs customized to meet the exact color and size specifications of projects. Innovation, technical know-how and a ‘can do’ philosophy are the order of the day. The breadth of their portfolio, especially in historic tile restoration, is impressive indeed.

Today the factory and studios have the production capacity, both in the US and in Monterey, Mexico that allows for the efficient production of both large and small custom jobs for commercial, civic, hospitality and residential projects. We left with our heads swirling with tile delights! To learn more about **California Pottery and Tile Works** visit: <http://www.calpot.com>.



**The glazers, Leticia, Alma and Sandra, apply color to the tile using bulb syringes.**



**Sheila Menzies (left) joins John Blenkinship and Karen Patterson at K.J. Patterson Ceramics in Baldwin Park.**

Another stop on our tour found us in the neighborhood of long time friend and consummate tile artist **Karen Patterson of K.J. Patterson Ceramics** in Baldwin Park, north and east of Los Angeles.

Karen, together with her husband **John Blenkinship**, has been producing fine tile art to a discerning community for over 20 years, much of it in the historic context of early tiles reflective of the medieval period as well as a portfolio of Arts & Crafts styles. She is a master ceramist and glaze artist, superbly conscious of the grand scale of tile history internationally, is elegantly innovative, stretching the medium to new levels with the technology available today. We had a great visit, catching up on all things ‘tilish’ and a most enjoyable studio tour.

For a final tile studio tour we visited **Malibu Ceramic Works**. We were greeted warmly by **Bob Harris**, who started the company twenty-eight years ago, his wife **Roz** and son **Matthew** who, together with his father, run the design and production studio in the hills of Topanga as well as their larger factory facility in Long Beach where **Handcraft Tile** is produced.

A bit of history: Bob purchased a collection of **Malibu Potteries** tiles in 1979 before much, if anything, was known about what today is considered to be one of the most important tile companies in California's history. Intrigued by his collection and spurred on by an exhibition of Malibu tile at the **Los Angeles Craft and Folk Art Museum** in 1980, he teamed up with ceramist **Jim Sullivan** to reproduce the now famous tiles that were produced on the beach in Malibu from 1926 to 1932.

The new company was named **Malibu Ceramic Works**, founded in response to a growing demand for ceramic tiles with designs and colors that reflected the vitality and brilliance of the 1920s and 1930s when the **Malibu Potteries** and other tile manufacturers flourished in Southern California. Rather than the company attempting to reproduce these famous tiles exactly, the goal at **Malibu Ceramics** was to provide architects, designers and their clients with a striking alternative to what was then offered in tile showrooms, tiles that reflected the ceramic traditions of California and provided the finest craftsmanship available at that time.



**The kiln room at Malibu Ceramics in the coastal mountains of Topanga, California.**



**Matt, Roz and Bob Harris are the principals at Malibu Ceramic Works.**

Over the years the company has continued to specialize in custom work in addition to offering many of the historic Malibu patterns and designs as well as standard field tiles and trim shapes. What distinguishes **Malibu Ceramic Works**, and differentiates it from others, is that it was the first in the modern era to reproduce the now famous Malibu and Catalina tiles; and importantly, the company has served as a training ground—unintentionally—for many ceramic artists who are making these tiles today. It is a great legacy and one that the Harris family rightfully takes pride in.

We had a most enjoyable tour of MCW amidst all of the California colors prevalent in the glazed clay as well as in the rugged, rural landscape of Topanga sparkling above the Pacific. To further explore **Malibu Ceramic Works** visit: <http://www.malibuceramicworks.com/>

It was then time to head home, driving north well satisfied with our weeklong sojourn amidst so many talented tile people in Southern California - sponsors, members and friends of the Tile Heritage Foundation.



**Sheila Menzies reviews the wide range of decorative tiles at Malibu Ceramics.**