



Tile Heritage Foundation

for research and preservation of ceramic surfaces

Founded in July 1987 Tile Heritage is celebrating its 33rd anniversary this year. Supporters like YOU... members, major contributors, industry sponsors, generous grantors... everyone... have made possible the continued fulfillment of the Foundation's mission to Document and Preserve tile history in the U.S., both past and present. THANK YOU!

E-News for Fall 2020

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American Tile Industry...
this is your Archive!

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The Finley's prairie style home in Bloomington, Illinois, designed by architect Arthur L. Pillsbury in 1910.

Photos courtesy of Matt Finley, June 2020.

Grueby's Pine Trees

From Matt Finley

Hello, we purchased a 1910 prairie style home in Bloomington, IL last fall. I was wondering if you could assist me in identifying the tiles that surround our fire place in the parlor. 6x6 tiles surround the fireplace and cover the hearth. I've included some photos of numbers/ letters I found on the bottom exposed side of the scenic tiles across the top. The prior owner left copies of some old photos of the home including the same fireplace dated 1922 (oh how I wish those genie lamps were still there). We love the house and want to make sure we preserve these tiles and possibly repair some of the damaged areas. Please let me know if you need any additional information. Thank you for your time.



"Pine Tree Landscape" designed by Addison Boutillier for Grueby Faience Co., South Boston, Massachusetts, dated 1910.

Grueby's Pine Trees...



Old photo of the same fireplace dated 1922.

Matt, you've made my day!

These are Grueby tiles, specifically "The Pines" designed by Addison Le Boutillier for Grueby Faience Company in c.1906. Grueby tiles are among the most respected and sought after of American historic tiles of the early 20th century. This is quintessential Grueby!

I have copied in Susan Montgomery, the Grueby historian (see *The Ceramics of William H. Grueby*, Arts & Crafts Quarterly Press, 1993 where your frieze is illustrated). Hopefully she can comment on the numbering system used by the company.

It is rare when people seeking identification about their tiles provide us with such extensive information. I especially love the 1922 picture of the fireplace. This is priceless!

Do you know the architect of your home?

Joe Taylor

Joe, thank you for the information! That's very exciting to hear that these tiles have such a rich history. Looks like I've got some research to do!! The architect's name was Arthur L. Pillsbury, who's well known for his work across central Illinois. I've attached a picture of the home I took this morning and I give permission to feature the tiles/photos in a future newsletter. It's intriguing to me that this set of tiles had been "lost" to time, so I would love for them to be shared with those who would appreciate them.

Matt



"Pine Tree Landscape" designed by Addison Le Boutillier for Grueby Faience Co., South Boston, Massachusetts, dated 1910.

From Susan Montgomery

Dear Matt and Joe.

I've been studying your photographs and must admit I am a bit puzzled. I have seen numbers on the edges of Grueby tile friezes before but these have always been the tile setter's notes to ensure that the tiles are in the correct order. In this case, I would expect 1-8 handwritten in black ink or paint of some kind. Your tiles, Matt, are in the right sequence, the only one that works visually. You'd be surprised how many times they were installed out of order, either accidentally or in an effort to extend the frieze to fit a space more than 48 inches wide.

Grueby's Pine Trees...

That said, the numbers on your tiles appear to be incised into the damp clay before the tile was fired at the factory, but they do not correspond to any Grueby catalogue numbers I know of. In company literature the frieze is consistently referred to as "Pine Tree Landscape." One possibility is that the numbers indicate an in-house job order. Even then, I would expect the numbers to be the same.

Knowing when your house was built might help. These tiles were certainly made well before your photograph of the fireplace wall was taken. Grueby's Boston factory was closed down in 1919 and all further orders were handled by the C. Pardee company in New Jersey. As far as I can tell, Pardee never produced these thick tiles. Your tiles seem to be very consistent in glaze color, indicating that they were all fired at one time and that the frieze was not pieced together from different sets. That leaves us with the possibility that a contractor or tile supplier in your area already had your frieze in inventory and did not order it from the factory.

I'm sorry I can't be more definitive. Most of Grueby's business papers were destroyed in a fire in 1913. No company correspondence or records of orders, clients or architects survived. We occasionally find paperwork from Grueby kept by clients, architects and institutions who purchased or commissioned tiles. For the most part I've had to rely on tiles and tile installations like yours to interpret the facts. I'm afraid that leaves us with a lot of lapses in our understanding. I do hope this is more helpful than disappointing, Matt. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have further questions.

I just reread your original message to Joe and found that you can date your house to 1910. This places it squarely in Grueby's better days where your Pine Tree frieze makes complete sense. I'm sorry I missed it. Unfortunately, this does not change my thoughts on the significance of the numbers on your tiles, but when I googled Arthur Pillsbury I found that many of his records are held by the McLean County Museum. If you have not already been in touch with them, you should. They may have records of your house and, if we are very lucky, some indication of how Grueby tiles came to be part of the project. I've seen architect's blueprints with Grueby tiles stipulated for fireplaces in the design phase. Perhaps you might also find correspondence with the contractor who installed your frieze. Good luck. Do let me know what you find.

Susan J. Montgomery



Numbers/letters (2 perhaps, 8 above and Y 3 below) on the bottom exposed side of the scenic tiles across the top of the opening.

West Texas Tile Treasures!

From Rahnee Gladwin

Rahnee Gladwin, a tile designer, now living in Fredericksburg, west of Austin, wrote to Tile Heritage hoping to identify the colorful tile installations in two historic hotels in West Texas, Hotel El Capitan in Van Horn and Hotel Paisano in Marfa.



Hotel El Capitan in Van Horn, Texas was built in 1930 and designed by Henry Charles Trost, Trost and Trost architecture in El Paso. See <http://www.thehotelcapitan.com/history/> for details.



Lobby of Hotel El Capitan in Van Horn, Texas.

Wheatley Tile & Pottery Company in Cincinnati, Ohio (1880-1932). The brightly glazed tiles were no doubt specified by Henry Charles Trost of Trost and Trost architecture in El Paseo, an office that designed hundreds of homes and other buildings during the first half of the 20th century.

Rahnee sent pictures with her request that were then forwarded to historians Vance Koehler and Richard Mohr, both of whom responded within an hour of one another with the same designation:



Wall tiles throughout the lobby were produced by the Wheatley Tile & Pottery Company.





Another Texas Tile Treasure!

Hotel Paisano in Marfa, Texas, a hour's drive south of Van Horn, has a similar layout to El Capitan, both designed by Henry Trost and constructed in 1930 by the McKee Construction Company of El Paso. The architect with his propensity for adorning his buildings with decorative ceramics chose Batchelder tiles for this hotel.

Hotel Paisano in Marfa, Texas, also built in 1930, was designed by architect Henry Trost of Trost and Trost in El Paso. See <https://hotelpaisano.com/history/> for the complete story.

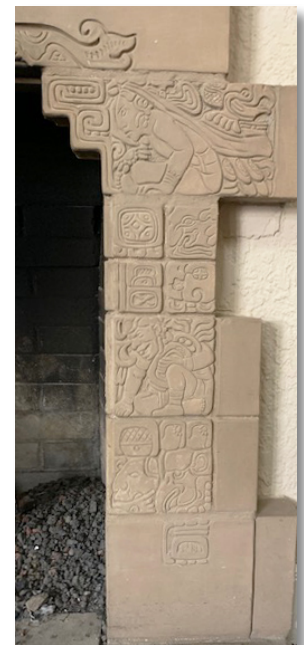
Warming the guest sitting room adjacent to the hotel lobby stands a historically significant fireplace mantel and hearth with Batchelder's Mayan Derivatives, which (quoting the company's catalog) "offer a fertile field of inspiration. Much of the Mayan work shows positive genius with technique of a high order. A thoughtful student finds increasing respect for this people in any conscientious effort to adapt their forms and motifs to a definite project. We have attempted to work in the spirit of Mayan ornament rather than merely copy the various symbols pertaining to fire, wind and sun. If this work is worthy of study, it is entitled to serious thought and craftsmanlike execution."



Lobby at Hotel Paisano, Marfa, Texas.



Lobby and mantel photos courtesy of Rahnee Gladwin; all other imagery courtesy of Joe Duncan.



Design No. 930, Batchelder mantel produced by Batchelder-Wilson Co., Los Angeles, illustrated in the company's 1927 edition of "A Catalog of Mantel Designs."

Cvijanovic's "City Tree"

Adam Cvijanovic, an extraordinary American artist who resides in New York City, paints in large-scale format to dramatize his subjects. Quoting from Wikipedia: "His work is concerned with exposing the historical and enduring hubris of American culture, painting forms that depict the search for and physical manifestation of American power and success on a monumental scale." There is no way to understate the visual impact of his work.



Cvijanovic's "City Tree" fabricated by New York Tilemakers. PS/IS 667, Brownsville, Brooklyn, NY. 2020



NY Tilemakers Dana Miller (left) and Amelie Gaulier cut out each piece of the mosaic from moist stoneware clay.

Having recently won a design competition for a new public school in Brooklyn, Cvijanovic hired Andru Eron and his team at New York Tilemakers to help translate his paintings and drawings into a permanent mosaic installation. Work on the 21' x 21' mural began in January 2020 and was completed in September. The stunning artwork is now installed on an exterior wall adjacent to the main entrance of PS/IS 667 at 3269 Atlantic Avenue in Brownsville, Brooklyn.

In addition to producing over 1500 handcrafted "subway" tiles, every piece of the mural was hand-cut from moist stoneware clay to exactly fit into a designated spot on a design template. Once dry, each piece was coded before being bisque fired to ensure their stability. Each piece was later glazed in one of 40 different colors prior to its final firing.



Bisque-fired pieces are placed on each of three 7' x 21' design templates. Note that the grout joints between pieces are created by the shrinkage of the clay during the firing.



Glazed mosaic pieces cooling in the kiln.

Cvijanovic's "City Tree"



Individual pieces are placed in their coded locations.

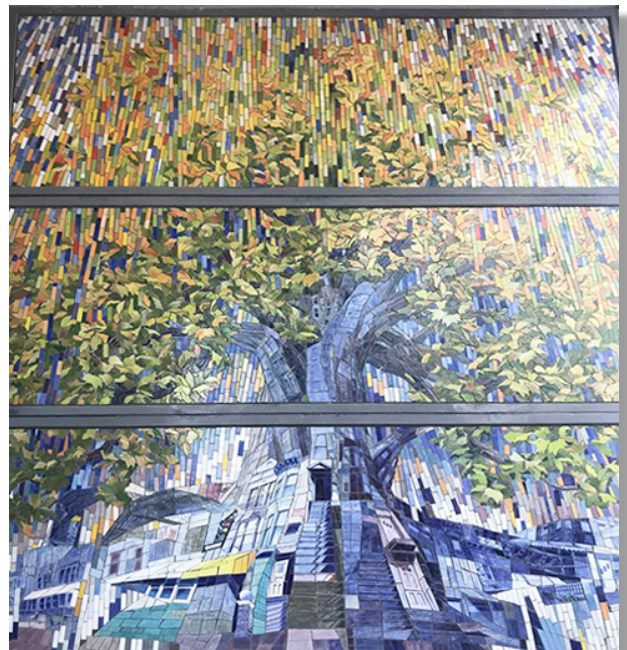


Layout of the bottom panel nearly complete.

NY Tilemakers also performed an in-studio pre-installation of the mural using over 100 backer boards to which the odd-shaped tile pieces were adhered and grouted, except at the "seams." Each board was then labeled with its proper position in the finished mural, packed carefully for the art movers to transport to the school. The installers mounted each of the three panels in pre-cast niches, next filling the seams with the designated pieces and then grouting over the seams.



Dana Miller adheres the mosaic to the backer boards leaving seams between each board for the installers to fill in on site.



Each of three 7' x 21' panels installed in pre-cast niches.

A Tile Heritage Salute to Andru Eron for taking on this challenging task that has resulted in such a mosaic masterpiece.

All images courtesy New York Tilemakers.
<https://www.nytilemakers.com>



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As a member you directly support the preservation of the archives and collections at the Tile Heritage Foundation, which feature publicly accessible information and examples representing U.S. tile makers, past & present, business records of some historic and contemporary dealers and installers, an extensive assortment of historic catalogs, periodicals and photography, all covering the last 150 years up to the present time.

As a member you will receive the THF Journal : *Tile Heritage, A Review of American Tile History* - published annually in the spring. In addition you will receive THF E-News & Shards 'n Snippets news from time to time to keep you abreast of the current affairs of 'all things tilish!'

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