

ARCHITECTURAL CERAMICS IN PHILADELPHIA

**A Center City Walking Tour with Vance A. Koehler
June 13, 2015**

A fundraising activity for the Preservation Alliance

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PHILADELPHIA CITY HALL

Broad and Market Streets

City Hall was designed by Philadelphia architect **John McArthur, Jr.**, with **Thomas U. Walter**, and built **1871-1901**. It is recognized as one of the best and most impressive examples of Second Empire style architecture in the country. In 1973, John Maass wrote, “The building has . . . been regarded as a marvel of the age, as an obsolete relic, as a grotesque monstrosity, as a period piece of quaint charm, and now as a masterpiece of American architecture.”

Tiles can be found in the pavements of the covered walkways leading into the large open courtyard on the exterior ground floor. Walk through the arched portals leading in from North Broad Street, South Broad Street or East Market Street and you will see running borders of encaustic tiles in geometric patterns of cream, blue, red, brown and buff. The tiles were made in Germany circa 1880-1900 by **Villeroy and Boch, Mettlach**, and by **Mosaic Fabrik** in Sinzig-am-Rhein. This type of tile was commonly used throughout public buildings in the area, although most are now gone. The tiles are in fair to excellent condition, but have suffered from years of neglect.

Tiles are located throughout the interior, too. Some fine, colorful relief tiles made in Trenton, New Jersey, especially by **Trent Tile Company** and the **Providential Tile Works**, can be found throughout the endless hallways and in many offices and public rooms. The main corridors on the fifth and sixth floors are especially impressive. An extremely fine tiled fireplace with classically inspired figures, possibly modelled by Isaac Broome or William Gallimore and probably manufactured in the late 1880s or early ‘90s by Trent Tile or Providential Tile Works, can be found in a small chamber adjacent to the Supreme Court rooms. English-made tiles are found throughout the building, too. In an office on the sixth floor are two large wall panels each composed of twenty-one 8-inch square tiles made by **Minton China Works** of Stoke-on-Trent, England. They are black and white transfer-printed tiles with scenes from Sir Walter Scott’s popular *Waverley* novels, a series of twelve different scenes that were designed by the British artist, John Moyr Smith (1839-1912), and first offered in 1878. Only eleven in the series are represented here though: “The Antiquary” was not used in either panel.

Public tours of City Hall, including the tower with the statue of William Penn by Alexander Milne Calder (1846-1923), who did all the sculpture found throughout the building, are available daily.

ONE EAST PENN SQUARE BUILDING

1-21 N. Juniper Street, at Market Street and East Penn Square

This outstanding Art Deco building was originally the home of the Market Street National Bank and was designed by Philadelphia architects **Ritter and Shay** (fl. 1920-c.1936) in **1930**. The unique, colorfully glazed architectural terra cotta, including the “Mayan necklace” wrapping around the lower part of the building, was manufactured by the local firm of **O. W. Ketcham Terra Cotta Works**, originally located north of Chester in nearby Crum Lynne, Pennsylvania. Detailed drawings of this building’s terra cotta exist in the collections of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. It was converted into a hotel in 2000-01 and is now the Marriott Residence Inn.

WITHERSPOON BUILDING

1319-1323 Walnut Street, at 120-150 S. Juniper Street

Built for the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath Schoolwork between **1895 and 1897**, the Witherspoon Building, named for John Witherspoon, founder of Princeton University, displays an elaborate (and excessive) mixture of sculptural terra cotta elements, including heads, evangelists, angels, medallions and shields over its entire façade. Much of the terra cotta was manufactured by the local firm of **Conkling Armstrong Terra Cotta Company**, which was founded in 1895 and was located on Wissahickon Avenue at Juanita Street. Several statues were designed by Alexander Stirling Calder (1870-1945), including a series of twelve large figures of historically prominent clergymen, six of which were removed in 1961 and are now displayed in the courtyard of the Presbyterian Historical Society on Lombard Street. Some terra cotta elements may have been made by **O. W. Ketcham Terra Cotta Works**, too. The building’s architect, **Joseph M. Huston**, is best known today for designing the Pennsylvania State Capitol Building in Harrisburg after the turn of the century.

JACOB REED’S SONS STORE BUILDING

1424 Chestnut Street

Jacob Reed’s Sons Store was designed by the architect **William L. Price**, whose firm, **Price and McLanahan**, was located at 1624 Walnut Street in Philadelphia. Completed in **1904-05** for Alan H. Reed, owner of the well-established men’s clothing store, it is considered an important transitional work for Price, who planned it late in 1903. Although the building is progressive in its use of reinforced concrete (perhaps the first commercial use of it in the city), it remains moderately traditional in the choice of stylistic sources, drawing upon Northern Italian models of the fifteenth century. The façade, which articulates the functional spaces of the interior, is composed of dark red brick embellished with colorful tiles and is topped with a red tile roof. The interior is dominated by a sculptural barrel vault over the original sales space, which is flanked by two side aisles and is supported by a series of large concrete columns also decorated with tiles.

William L. Price (1861-1916) is best remembered today as the architect and theorist who founded the Arts and Crafts utopian community at Rose Valley, near Media, just west of Philadelphia. He was also a highly creative architect of both residential and commercial buildings; his masterpieces are considered to be Atlantic City's Traymore Hotel (1906 and 1914-15; now demolished) and Chicago's Freight Terminal (1914-19). In most of his mature works, Price attempted to merge craft values with the scale and materials of modern architecture. He was committed to the social ideal of improving life through art.

Price often revealed his Arts and Crafts interests by his selection of handmade tiles from Henry Chapman Mercer's Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. To get the product he desired, Price often submitted his own designs for tile panels, which Mercer produced to his specifications. In the case of Reed's, however, the architect allowed Mercer a free hand in designing the mosaics that are found on the exterior and interior. **"Use stone, plaster, brick, concrete, tile, anything you will,"** Price later wrote in 1909, **"but use them for what they are, and let their qualities be shown forth as well as their purpose, and above all keep ornament out, unless you can get real artists to put it in, and even then it must tell some story of purpose or interests."**

Pottery records from 1904 indicate that Price and McLanahan placed their orders for tiles with Mercer on July 23rd and December 29th (MPTW Job #1904-07). It was a large and costly commission. The elaborate design for the soffit of the monumental arch in the main entrance totaled **\$726.40**. The soffit was composed of three round and two half-round mosaics, each nearly five feet in diameter (or 116 square feet total), depicting subjects relating to the American garment industry, past and present: (left to right) **"Pattern Making," "Spinning," "Shearing Sheep," "Indian Weaving,"** and **"Tailoring."** The mosaics are tied together with a border of green-colored tiles against a background of plain red quarries. Mercer sent his own man in Doylestown, Herman Sell, to Philadelphia in late 1904 to personally set this complicated composition.

Tiling for the exterior totaled just over \$1,000.00, a substantial amount for the day. This not only included the tiles and mosaics for the soffit, but also allowed for the frieze border containing small, round mosaics in the coved cornice near the roof, the tile arrangements over and under the windows, and the tiled ceiling border in the arcaded loggia on the top floor.

In addition, nearly \$500.00 was spent in early 1905 for tiles used to decorate the interior. Mercer created little tulip mosaics based on motifs derived from Pennsylvania-German stove plates, and produced 116 of them in three different shapes and sizes to be used on the walls and around the capitals of the concrete columns. Some of these finished mosaics remained in the Pottery's stock afterwards and were later used to decorate Mercer's new factory during its construction in 1911-12.

When the Jacob Reed's Sons Store closed in February 1983 and the building's future preservation was in peril, Thomas Hine, architectural critic for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, wrote that it "is probably Philadelphia's best commercial building of its size, and it has few peers nationwide. Its excellence does not overwhelm the viewer, although anyone who has ever taken a close look at the building, both inside and out, must conclude that it is mildly outrageous. Its three-story arched entrance can still surprise people who have been walking past it for years."

Although it is now a retail drug store, the building looks much the same today as it did when it opened in 1905.

CROZER BUILDING

1420-22 Chestnut Street

Philadelphia abounds with great examples of architectural terra cotta, but one of the best is the Crozer Building next door to the Jacob Reed's Sons Store on Chestnut Street. The building was designed by **Frank Miles Day** (1861-1918), a well-known Philadelphia architect at the turn of the century. Day is chiefly remembered for his neo-Gothic buildings for major American universities, including Princeton, Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania.

The Crozer Building was built in **1896-99** for the American Baptist Publication Society and named after one of its principal benefactors. The exterior, made of Pompeian brick and elaborately textured terra cotta, was derived from Italian and French Renaissance sources. The street level has been completely altered, but most above that is original, including the terra-cotta balcony projecting from the fifth floor and all the trim surrounding the windows. The top of the building, which is reminiscent of a Loire chateau, is a profusion of fanciful terra cotta roofs, chimneys, pilasters and ornament that works as an integrated whole chiefly because of the building material. The local firm of **Conkling Armstrong Terra Cotta Works** was the contractor for the terra cotta.

THE RACQUET CLUB OF PHILADELPHIA

215 S. 16th Street

The Racquet Club of Philadelphia, founded in 1889, remains one of the largest and most important social clubs in Philadelphia. After many years in its original location at 923 Walnut Street, the membership, composed of some of the city's wealthiest and most prominent men, decided they had outgrown their building. In 1905 they formed a committee to secure a new location further uptown and to raise funds needed to build a new clubhouse. They purchased the present site on 16th Street between Walnut and Locust Streets and then hired **Horace Trumbauer**, one of Philadelphia's most preeminent architects, to design an appropriate structure. Trumbauer, who was well-

versed in architectural history, chose the fashionable neo-Georgian style for the new building. To give the façade a mellow look, he insisted that recycled old bricks be used, although some members objected to this added expense. Construction began in **April 1906** and the building was ready for squash and tennis matches to begin by **mid-summer 1907**.

In the building's lower level, special functions are still held in the **grillroom**, or "**wine room**" as it was originally called, which contains a major tile installation designed and created by one of the club's own members, Henry Chapman Mercer (1856-1930). Although he resided in Doylestown, Mercer belonged to several social clubs and organizations in Philadelphia throughout his lifetime. The grillroom's vast floor is composed of 1,736 square feet of red, medium-sized hexagons made by Mercer's **Moravian Pottery and Tile Works**. The tiles were ordered in early July and were delivered in September of 1907.

While the pavement was being laid, Mercer drew up plans for a special fireplace that would be the focal point of the room. He convinced Trumbauer to allow him to design and install a Gothic-style fireplace based on an example he had sketched in the castle of Trebbio, near Florence, Italy. Instead of using traditional materials, however, Mercer chose to construct it entirely of poured-in-place concrete, with a generous application of his tiles added on after the fireplace was cast. Relief tiles in various colors were used to trim the shelf frieze and side columns, "after the Byzantine manner." The four sides of the room's large support column were handled in a similar manner. The marks of the molds were left exposed because Mercer believed them to be admirable for the frank, honest surface they produced. He wanted the low, neutral-gray tint of the natural concrete to harmonize with the colors of his tiles. Unfortunately, in more recent years, the background surfaces of the fireplace and column have been given a coating of white paint, distorting this original artistic effect that was so important to Mercer.

Along with the fireplace and central column, Mercer also provided two large, rectangular "Gothic" panels encrusted with relief tiles that were set into the walls on either side of the fireplace. Four pilasters and four small panels of varying tile arrangements were set into the upper walls near the room's entrance. The large column at the grill's counter was also treated in a similar way. Although four additional large tile panels were ordered for the spaces between the windows, these do not seem to have ever been installed. Curiously, Mercer's ledger and order books do not indicate that this part of the job was canceled, however. The fireplace and wall panels, which totaled \$116.15, were presented as a gift to the club by Mercer. In December 1916, not even ten years after its completion, tiles were sent gratis to the Racquet Club to replace those pieces that had either dropped off or been damaged.

The finished fireplace and central column represent Mercer's first application of tiles to concrete in such an expressive manner. It is also a pioneering use of his highly original "brocade" tiles, those relief, silhouette tiles representing designs like castles, flowers and birds which he was developing during this period. Many of Mercer's questions concerning color, the form of surface decoration and the amount of decoration to be used were addressed in this experimental installation. Soon after its competition he

published “Where Concrete Stands for Concrete” (*Cement Age*, January 1908), in which he discussed his work and reiterated A. W. N. Pugin’s influential principle of architecture: decorate construction, do not construct decoration. Mercer illustrated this article with several details of the fireplace, columns and wall panels from the grillroom.

The installation at the Racquet Club was a pivotal project for Mercer that would influence all his future work. While he was completing the room during the winter of 1907, he was also beginning to image and plan Fonthill, his castle-like house in Doylestown, which he began in 1908 and finished in 1911. There, Mercer took the medium of concrete to an artistic level never previously attempted by himself or anyone else before him.

FOUNTAIN, RITTENHOUSE SQUARE

Walnut Street, between 18th and 19th Streets

Rittenhouse Square was one of four original eight-acre public squares laid out by William Penn’s surveyor in his 1682 plan for Philadelphia. In the 19th century it was named for David Rittenhouse, the colonial astronomer, clockmaker and first director of the United States Mint. As the city grew and expanded northward during the mid-19th century, the area became a fashionable residential neighborhood and many of Philadelphia’s finest families built large, elegant mansions around the square. A few mansions remain, including the Fell-Van Rensselaer House at 1801 Walnut Street. The house was designed in 1896-98 by the Boston-based firm of Peabody and Stearns for Sara Drexell Fell and her soon-to-be husband Alexander Van Rensselaer of New York. Many critics consider the house to be one of the finest examples of Beaux Arts design in the country. Although it has been converted into a retail store (Urban Outfitters), some remnants of the sumptuous interior remain, including Mrs. Van Rensselaer’s Doges Room with its ceiling of Popes and large ornate fireplace with marble mosaic facing.

Over the years Rittenhouse Square has gradually transformed into its present appearance. Sculptures like Antoine Louis Barye’s famous *Lion Crushing a Serpent* (1832) was placed in the park in 1892. Early in this century, public funds were collected to further improve and beautify the park. Albert Laessle’s spirited bronze goat *Billy* (1914) was purchased and eventually set on its current granite base in 1919. Under the leadership of men like Dr. J. William White, the square was made into one of the most enjoyable open spaces in center city.

In 1913, architect Paul Philippe Cret was engaged to redesign Rittenhouse Square as part of a general improvement of the area. He prepared plans for a children’s pool and fountain that became the centerpiece of the park. Cret (1876-1945), a native of Lyons, France, came to Philadelphia in 1903 to teach architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. Over the course of his career, he won many important architectural commissions in the area, including the Delaware River (Benjamin Franklin) Bridge, the Federal Reserve Building, the Rodin Museum, and the gallery for the Barnes Foundation

in nearby Merion. His reputation was not limited to Philadelphia, however. Cret also designed the monumental Detroit Institute of Arts, the Indianapolis Public Library, the Hartford County Building and Courthouse in Connecticut, and the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D. C., among others. His application of classicism to the civic commissions received made Paul Cret one of the most accomplished architects of the twentieth century.

For many projects, Cret incorporated faience tiles into the designs. The fountain and pool in Rittenhouse Square was no exception. Cret's original specifications, dated July 9, 1913, indicate that "handmade" tiles were to surround a marble mask spout "provided by owner" on the fountain wall, with a simple line border of tiles edging the pool. The tiles were to be in turquoise blue and green in a "seaweed pattern in special shapes, with simple animal tiles of other colors, four shapes." Quotes for the tiles were solicited from only two companies: Henry C. Mercer's Moravian Pottery and Tile Works and J. H. Dulles Allen's Enfield Pottery and Tile Works. Mercer estimated the work to come in at \$580.00 for blue or green glazed mosaic tiles to cover the 90 square feet of wall space (MPTW Job #1913-57). Allen's quote is unknown but it must have suited the architect since Enfield won the contract for the tiles.

Cret prepared full-size cartoons for the all-over seaweed pattern, which survive in the collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. His design of blue and green mosaic pieces set into a concrete background and surrounding a white marble head of Neptune (after the original found in the Borghese gardens in Italy) was carried out by Enfield in late 1913 or early 1914. A photograph in the Philadelphia city archives shows the fountain soon after its completion, with children sailing toy boats in the shallow pool. The fountain wall is clearly shown covered with the seaweed pattern, with tile turtles, snails, bees and salamanders asymmetrically placed among the leafy branches. The delightful effect must have been very lively and colorful.

Unfortunately, this original scheme only lasted a few years. While Cret was fighting for France during World War I and was away from Philadelphia from 1914 to 1918, Eli Kirk Price, head of the city's Art Jury, decided that the Enfield tile needed to be removed from the fountain because he "objected to its effect." Something a little more subdued and dignified seems to have been desired. Joseph H. Dulles Allen, President of Enfield, wrote to his friend Cret in Paris about this situation on November 16, 1917, saying "the Committee was now considering doing something more there [in Rittenhouse Square], and that they would approach me about it. Since, then, I have received the impression that they would wait until your return, which is, of course, what I would advise them to do in any event." It is uncertain if the Art Jury waited for Cret's return or not, but the original tiles were removed in 1918 and replaced with the arrangement of turquoise faience tiles that remains in place today. These replacements were also made by the Enfield Pottery and Tile Works. Cret may have recommended this alternative scheme, though. A nearly identical tile arrangement was used in 1913 to line a similar pool and fountain in the "Blue Aztec Garden" of the Pan American Union Building (now called Organization of American States Building) in Washington, D.C., a site designed by Cret in association with Albert Kelsey in 1908-10.

The square has undergone various changes in more recent times, including some major planting done in 1941. In 1956 the children's pool was enhanced with the addition of Paul Manship's bronze *Duck Girl* (1911), which still stands amid the reflecting waters. Today, the park is maintained by the Friends of Rittenhouse Square and the Fairmount Park Commission.

CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY **1904 Walnut Street, Rittenhouse Square**

Located on the northwest corner of Rittenhouse Square, the Church of the Holy Trinity was completed in 1859. This Episcopal church was the work of Scottish-born architect **John Notman** and is a very early example of the Romanesque style in America. The tower, added in 1868, was designed by G. W. Hewitt. Inside, the church boasts one of the finest collections of stained glass in the United States, including four windows and a sky light by Tiffany Studios of New York.

A vast and impressive red quarry pavement made by the **Moravian Pottery and Tile Works** can be found throughout the aisles, chancel and altar area. The tiles were ordered from Mercer's Doylestown company during the summer of 1914. Over 10,250 four-inch "English Quarry" tiles, or 1,139 square feet, were provided, along with an assortment of other variously sized plain tiles and decorative inserts, including four large "Evangelists" tiles that can be found near the altar. The tiles alone cost \$878.14. In early January 1939, a small quantity of additional tiles, totaling 22 square feet, was ordered for "repair job."

RESIDENCE **2034 Locust Street**

Two four-inch Arts and Crafts tiles in dark green and turquoise mat glazes are embedded diagonally into the brick façade of this house. The tiles were made by the famous **Rookwood Pottery Company** of Cincinnati, Ohio.

VENEZ VOIR BUILDING **2050 Locust Street**

The restrained elegance of this Art Deco storefront has been beautifully augmented with tiles from the **Enfield Pottery and Tile Works**. Three large black and silver glazed panels, each molded in flattened relief with a stylized raven, top the fluted pilasters across the front. The bird design was repeated in the building's wrought-iron and brass door. The first deed for this building was recorded in 1926, when it opened as

“Venez Voir,” a retail shop selling objet d’art. The architect remains unknown. These tiles may have been specially created for this site in 1926, but the company used the same design in trade magazine advertisements as late as 1929. Since 1962 the building has been a doctor’s office. “Come and have a look!”

RESIDENCE

244 S. 21st Street

This house, built for James Spear *circa* 1882, was designed by the Philadelphia architect **Addison Hutton** (1834-1916). Hutton had a long and successful career designing schools, hotels, churches, hospitals, businesses and residences throughout the city. The rich and exuberant use of sculptural terra cotta displayed on the façade is typical of many urban dwelling during the 1870s and ‘80s.

MARCEL VITI HOUSE

2129 Spruce Street

The Marcel Viti House started out much like its neighbors in the 2100 block of Spruce Street. Originally built of red brick and trimmed with carved stone around its entrance door and over its tall windows, the house was typical of Second Empire style houses built for middle-class families in this area during the 1870s. As is the case for most of these row houses, the architect of 2129 is no longer known. Many of the residences along this street are constructed of brownstone, which became a popular building material in the mid-19th century because it was attractive, easily carved and inexpensive. By 1880 it was discovered that this soft sandstone badly deteriorated over time and therefore ceased being a popular material for construction. Amid these brownstones are several notable houses by prominent Philadelphia architects, including the Ellis residence at 2113, which was designed by Frank Furness, and the fine Colonial Revival-style house at 2123 by Wilson Eyre.

By the 1890s the Viti family had purchased 2129 Spruce Street. Marcel A. Viti, a lawyer and the Swedish vice-consul, owned the building during most of this time, and in the autumn of 1913 decided that it needed a “make over.” He had plans drawn up for the remodeling of the house’s façade by Thomas M. Seeds, Jr., his contractor. Viti seems to have acted as his own architect. He called upon the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in Doylestown and asked Henry Mercer to prepare designs to surface the house’s street front with hand-made tiles. Basically he wanted to remove the heavy, somber Victorian style of the house and apply a lighter, more fashionable Arts and Crafts treatment to it.

The tile installation as it appears today is composed of golden buff three-inch quarries set diagonally along the second and third stories. The windows on the upper levels are banded with glazed blanks and Mercer’s “Byzantine” decorative inserts. The

first-floor section is tiled with dark red quarries set in an all-over grid pattern. They are meant to contrast with the lighter tiles above and yet create a harmonious effect. The double arched windows are banded with dark red tiles and framed with fluted tile pilasters. Around the entrance a grapevine border composed of brocade grapes and leaves is set against golden buff plain tiles. Tiles also line the vestibule inside the main door.

Viti took great interest in the tiles made for his house and obsessed over every detail of their proportion, color effect and installation. All the tiles in his original order were made and sent to the site between November 1913 and March 1914 and were installed by Bernard J. Farnell, a tile setter recommended by Mercer. By early April 1914, the tile installation seems to have been completed. But the owner was not pleased with the results. Correspondence between Viti and Frank K. Swain, manager of the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works, exist in the company's records (MPTW Job #1913-76) and show that Viti did not like the coloration of the three-inch quarries facing the basement and first-story sections and that he insisted they be remade. Tiles were removed; tiles were reset. Viti was also tremendously concerned over the projection of the tile pilasters framing the double windows. He never was satisfied with any of the "corrections" that were made over the next two years. To this day the windows along the first story still do not seem quite right.

On January 23, 1915, Viti wrote to Swain at the Pottery and expressed his dissatisfaction with the façade:

"Nearly all the new tiles have been set at my house and the result is a marked improvement over the prior conditions, but unfortunately the change has served a double purpose through making more prominent the tile work above the first floor. . . .

"The appearance of the upper floors really makes the house uninhabitable with any degree of comfort. Entirely irrespective of the trimming of the windows the violent contrasts in colors and tones gave a result impossible to endure. I am absolutely indifferent to the opinion of others when satisfied with my conclusions, but I would mention, merely to show that my opinion is not individual, that the original front caused consternation and dismay to almost every passerby. Laughter, ridicule and sadness seemed to be expressed on all sides. And since the lower floor has been changed I have been astounded to be stopped on the street to be congratulated on the change. The criticism has not been confined to the immediate neighborhood, and now that persons I know realize I was not the father of the original idea they no longer hesitate to express their opinions and repeat the uncomplimentary remarks made by others, from which I realize that the subject has been one of wide comment. I would not be surprised if it has affected the market value of the house and as I told you it has had a bad effect on my health through the unpleasant sensation caused by having it recalled just before meals when I enter my house for that purpose."

Viti had attempted to paint some of the tiles so they would blend in and he also oiled them to make the whole harmonize, but he does not seem to have gotten the finish he wanted. After he wrote, the Pottery sent more tiles in February 1915 to alter what had

been done. After some doing, the tiling was eventually left as it appears today in the spring of that year.

The final bill totaled \$408.14, but because Swain was anxious to close the books on this whole matter and avoid some legal action, he asked Viti to just pay \$170.80. Viti complied and sent a check on June 21st, although he maintained reservations about the finished work. By this time, Frank Swain had clearly had his fill of Viti and rightly ignored his “concerns.” The Moravian Pottery and Tile Works took a loss of \$237.34 on this job.

Marcel Viti lived at 2129 Spruce Street until his death in 1952; his sister continued on until her own death in 1960. The current owner purchased the house in 1964, after it had set empty for four years. It is still a private, single-family residence.

PHILADELPHIA ART ALLIANCE **251 S. 18th Street**

The fireplace facing currently stored in a basement room used by the Art Alliance’s restaurant is an important and special work designed by Henry Chapman Mercer and made at his Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in 1918. The theme of the designs represents the “Four Seasons” and is carried out in Mercer’s mosaic process. Originally ordered by a Miss E. P. Stewardson for the Art Alliance located on Walnut Street on February 28, 1918, it was described as a “special fireplace facing” in the company’s order book for that year, “of flat strap brocade pattern, blue background & mosaic seasons.” When the bill was entered into the ledger book on April 1, 1918, it was noted that there was “no charge” for the order, that the facing and hearth were presented to the Art Alliance free of charge by Henry Mercer himself.

Before the facing was crated up and shipped to Philadelphia, it was laid out in the big room of the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works and photographed. The glass plate negative showing it still survives in the Tile Works’ archives. The plaster molds created to produce this design are also in the Tile Works’ collections, too. They were used at least once more: in 1929 this facing was duplicated for a fireplace in the entry hall of a house in Doylestown, less than half a mile from the factory.

At some point in time, the Art Alliance’s fireplace facing was removed from its former location at 1823 Walnut Street and transferred to the organization’s new quarters at 251 S. 18th Street, the former residence of Samuel Price Wetherill, which was acquired by the Art Alliance in 1926. The building was designed and constructed in 1906 by Charles Klauder of Frank Miles Day and Brothers Architects.

**Prepared and written by Vance A. Koehler
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