

TILE HERITAGE

A Review of American Tile History



EARLY 20TH CENTURY TILES



TILE HERITAGE MISSION

THE TILE HERITAGE FOUNDATION
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The Tile Heritage Foundation, a nonprofit charitable organization, is dedicated to promoting an awareness and appreciation of ceramic surfaces in the United States. The Foundation serves the need for a historical perspective regarding all ceramic surfacing materials, both past and present. In addition to aiding in the education of the general public about the rich and varied history of tile, the organization has become a major voice in the preservation of existing installations of rare and unusual ceramic surfaces while enhancing the visibility of contemporary tile work as well.

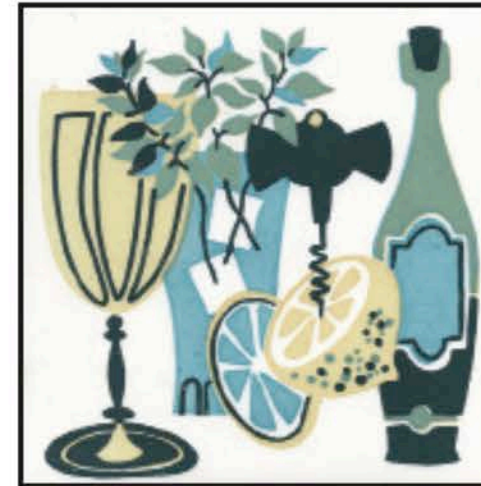
Tile Heritage involves more than the promotion and protection of tiles, murals and mosaics. The Foundation represents the need to preserve a perception of ourselves. From the time of the earliest cave paintings and molded clay forms, people have always sought to conceptualize themselves and inspire others through artistic endeavors. Safekeeping ceramic surfaces today is an integral part of preserving ourselves, a means of being remembered and understood by future generations.

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Volume XI, Number 2

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6" x 6" silkscreen tile by Designed Tiles, New York, NY. 1950s
Courtesy collection of Zoe Ambellan.

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Covers

Front Cover: The Great Seal of the United States produced by the Mosaic Tile Company of Zanesville, Ohio, for the floor of the Old Pension Building in Washington D.C. (now the National Building Museum) for the inauguration of Theodore Roosevelt in 1901. Photo by Liz Roll.

Back Cover: Sample of the Seal's 6" x 6" border tile from the Tile Heritage Foundation Collection. Gift of Kirby Brown.

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Inside the back cover: *Tile Heritage* is made possible by the generous support of the companies featured on the inside of the back cover and by Foundation members who contribute to the Publishing Fund.

Articles on tile-related subjects, either historic or contemporary, are welcome and must be accompanied by digitized imagery. Scholarship and quality photography are of prime importance.

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The Mosaic Tile Company

From Four Small Buildings and a Single Kiln to the World's Premier Tile Manufactory

by Michael S. Sims



Fig. 1. Early panel crafted by Herman Mueller.
Mosaic Tile Company archives.

When, in 1893, artist-mechanic Herman Mueller and ceramist Karl Langenbeck, both valued employees of the American Encaustic Tiling Company of Zanesville, Ohio, observed some “fat cat” A.E. stockholders from New York City sporting expensive clothes and jewelry when touring the plant, they independently came to the conclusion that while the company’s prosperity was due in large part to their labor they were not receiving a commensurate share of the profits.¹ Moreover, both men wanted the freedom to pursue fresh ideas and develop a new technique for making mosaic-like dust-pressed encaustic tiles, things the company’s conservative management was disinclined to encourage. Consequently, they decided to sever their relationship with American Encaustic and organize their own tile company.

Zanesville capitalists were receptive to investing in a new tile enterprise, so Mueller and Langenbeck had no trouble raising \$100,000 in capital stock subscriptions. Incorporation papers for the venture they decided to call the Mosaic Tile Company were secured on September 4, 1894, and its shareholders held an organizational meeting the following week. They elected a board of directors, who in turn elected David Lee president, William Bateman vice president, and William M. Shinnick, Jr. secretary and treasurer of their company. Mueller and Langenbeck were to act as co-superintendents of the factory and take turns going on the road to promote and sell the company’s tiles.

Mosaic’s founding immediately caught the attention of the trade journal *Clay Record* and a brief article about the new company that appeared in its September 14, 1894,

issue noted that “It is the object of the new company to manufacture Mosaic tile to take the place of Mosaic marble now being used extensively.”

Plans for the factory were drawn up, with care being taken to design the buildings so they could accommodate additions without having to undergo substantive alterations. Three or four sites for the plant’s location were considered, and the company ultimately chose the one in Zanesville’s new Brighton addition.² Herman Mueller praised the choice in the October 15, 1894, issue of *Clay Record*:

We had several good propositions, but none of them possessed so many splendid advantages as Brighton. It has everything that a manufacturing enterprise would want in the way of a location, railroad facilities, gas and water, and the finest of building lots for such of the workmen as may want to own a home near the factory. ... It certainly was a magnificent donation on the part of the Brighton people, as the tract of land upon which the plant will be located is worth in the neighborhood of \$10,000.³

The company put up four small brick buildings on the five-acre plot of land it had been given and began operations in March 1895 with thirty employees and a single kiln having a diameter of approximately ten feet.⁴ The firm’s products consisted of square, hexagonal, and octagonal dust-pressed floor tiles in a few basic colors while Mueller worked on his new encaustic tile process and the firm cultivated a market for its output.

About the author: Mike Sims, a docent at the Zanesville Museum of Art who specializes in ceramics, has been an ardent tile historian for over 30 years. A frequent contributor to *Tile Heritage* publications, among others, Mike’s primary interests are in American tiles of the late 19th century.

Acknowledgments and Dedication: The author acknowledges Joe Taylor for his continuing patience and assistance and Janet Debray for reviewing the manuscript and photographing the ceramic mosaic sample with the resin daubs. This article is dedicated to the memory of Elaine Coconis, a fellow Mosaic employee during the 1960s who, shortly after the company went out of business, rescued historically significant company archive items from a dumpster and later presented them to the author.



Fig. 2. Herman Mueller at American Encaustic Tiling Co. c. 1990.
Zanesville Decorative Tiles, p. 5

Mueller perfected his new technique for producing dust-pressed encaustics and was awarded a patent (No. 537,703) for his "Process of and Apparatus for Manufacturing Mosaics" on April 16, 1895. Tiles made by his new process were easy and inexpensive to produce compared to previous methods because it employed paper stencils and a reusable 6-inch by 6-inch square metal cell frame subdivided into a honeycomb-like grid made up of 2,601 1/8-inch by 1/8-inch square "cells" that could be used to reproduce any single-tile design or section of a multi-tile design instead of the usual single-purpose metal stencils and cell frames that had to be individually fabricated for each single-tile design or section of a multi-tile design. By way of example, in 1896 the company made a large and elaborate mosaic which was installed over the entranceway of the Moerlein Brewery in Cincinnati, Ohio (Fig. 6). It is composed of 2000 six-inch tiles, none of which, reportedly, are alike. All were made using the same cell frame, whereas had the earlier method been used it would have required the fabrication of 2000 specially crafted single-purpose metal cell frames and stencils to make the tiles.

Mueller's process was hailed a significant advancement

in the ceramic arts, and tiles made by it soon won an award at an industrial arts exposition. The January 14, 1896 issue of *Clay Record* informed its readers of the following:

The Zanesville Mosaic Tile Company, Zanesville, O., has been awarded the first gold medal for the finest display of ceramic and mural mosaic tile exhibited at the Boston Exposition of Industrial Arts. ... The Mosaic Company is also in receipt of a request from the National Museum of Art at Washington, D. C., for specimens of the "Zuni panel," a style of decorating in imitation of the ancient Indian products found in Mexico which Professor Mueller is trying to revive.

On February 8, 1898, Mueller was awarded the John Scott Medal and Premium (\$10,000) by the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia. It was a prestigious award, one not ordinarily given for as mundane a thing as a tile-making process.

Mueller and Langenbeck had done a good job of promoting the company's tiles during their road trips. Mueller's new type of encaustic tile turned out to be a popular product which customers used for elaborate murals on interior and exterior surfaces as well as floors

and the number of tiles it had sold motivated the company to enlarge its plant in 1896. In 1898 three new kilns, each more "modern" and twice the size of the original one, were put up and a spur line connecting the factory with a branch of the Belt Line Railway was laid. The plant enlargement and new kilns enabled the company to add lines of ceramic mosaics and other kinds of tiles to its products. An advertisement in the October 1899 issue of *The Brickbuilder* informed its readers that Mosaic's products now included Ceramic Roman Mosaic (3/4-inch square and 1-inch hexagonal tesserae); Ceramic Florentine Mosaic (Mueller's new encaustics); Ceramic Frescos and Sgraffitos (tiles meant for "indestructible" exterior friezes, panels, and interior mural decorations); Parian Vitreous Tiles (floor tiles for bath rooms and "toilet rooms"); and Aseptic Tiles (tiles for sanitary floors in hospital operating rooms).

In 1898 the young company landed, probably through contacts Mueller and Langenbeck had cultivated during their road trips, an important foreign contract. It was announced in the July 1898 issue of *Brick*:

The Mosaic Tile Company of Zanesville, O., has been awarded the contract for furnishing its tile for the corridors and halls of a large and magnificent government building that is in the course of erection in the City of Mexico. The victory for this firm is considered a very important one as it had some of the leading English and German tile manufacturers to compete with.

In 1899 Mueller and Langenbeck made it known that they wanted the company to initiate the manufacture of glazed and enameled ceramic mosaics in "several popular shades and colors," a profitable product marketed at the time by nearly every other tile company in America. Mosaic's plant, however, lacked the floor space required for pasting and storing sheets of such mosaics and its kilns were already being used to capacity. Moreover, fabricating them was, as Mueller put it, "cumbersome and costly" since each of the 144 1-inch by 1-inch tiles making up a square foot of mosaic had to be individually glazed by hand. However, glazing experiments Mueller and Langenbeck had conducted in 1898 met with some success and they wanted to pursue the matter. Consequently, on July 27, 1900, they wrote a letter to Mosaic's directors in which they outlined their ideas for overcoming the difficulties associated with producing the mosaics in the company's works and advocated their manufacture. First, the lack

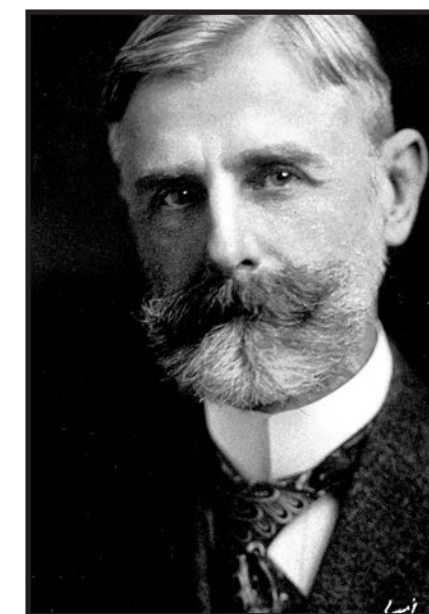


Fig. 3. Karl Langenbeck.
Journal of the American Ceramic Society,
January 1923, p. 23.

of floor space was easily circumvented by leasing the idle Muskingum Stoneware Company's plant in the nearby Putnam section of Zanesville and utilizing it to manufacture the mosaics. It had, they said, adequate floor space and its two kilns could easily be adapted to firing tiles. Second, they had developed and were in the process of patenting (No. 693,420; February 18, 1902) a new procedure by which tiles for the mosaics could be easily glazed at an acceptable cost. The process consisted of pasting suitably spaced bisque tiles face-side-up onto a sheet of paper and then glazing the group all at once either by dipping their faces into a layer of glaze or by running a glazed-covered roller over them. The sheet of tiles would then be placed in a kiln and fired and the paper holding the tiles would burn away, leaving loose glazed tiles that were ready for assembling into mosaics. The directors approved of their proposal, and Mosaic secured a lease on the Muskingum Stoneware plant that ran from the fall of 1900 to the fall of 1901. Bisque tiles, glazes, and enamels were made in the main plant and hauled to the "Putnam secondary plant" for pasting and glaze firing. The company was pleased with the results, and when the lease expired it transferred the Putnam operations to its main plant.⁵



Fig. 4. Fabrication of Mueller encaustics. “Turning to the pressing room, our illustration shows in the foreground a circular bench, around which a number of young women are at work. The number of these depends upon the number of different colors in the tile. Each girl has her box of clay and her perforated card, by means of which she puts in her portion [color] of clay and then passes the frame to her neighbor. When it has made the round and all the divisions are filled, the frame passes to another operative [press operator] who lifts out the cell-frame, with a dexterous straight-up movement, leaving the little mosaics standing undisturbed side by side. The plain clay backing is then put on, the whole is put in the hydraulic press and the tile is ready or drying and burning.” Mueller and Langenbeck can be seen standing just behind the operatives and the circular table.

Brick, March 1897, p. 193.

Mosaic’s directors appreciated the accolades and business generated by Mueller’s new kind of encaustic tile, but they were also aware of the latest trends in architecture and building construction. Marble, widely used as a flooring material for public buildings at the time, was not durable enough to withstand “northern traffic,” and floors made from it were porous and absorptive and therefore difficult to keep clean and sanitary. Vitreous ceramic mosaics, non-porous and more durable than marble, had recently come onto the market and were beginning to find widespread use. Consequently, in 1900 the company’s directors ordered Muller and Langenbeck to stop turning out the popular line of encaustics and to concentrate instead on producing vitreous and semi-vitreous floor tiles. Langenbeck then

applied his expertise to expanding the company’s range of those kinds of tiles by developing new colors and body formulas. Mueller devoted much of his time to designing elaborate mosaics for floors, murals, and fireplaces. The installation he designed for Zanesville’s Rogge Hotel, built in 1900, is a good example of his craftsmanship.

In 1900 Mosaic put up six new kilns, which gave it ten altogether, and placed two new products on the market: a limited line of wall and trim tiles for wainscoting and its innovative Plicaro Mosaic Flexible Tile Floors, invented and patented (No. 664,169; December 18, 1900) by Mueller and Langenbeck. The significance of Plicaro was outlined in a brochure distributed by the company when the product came out:

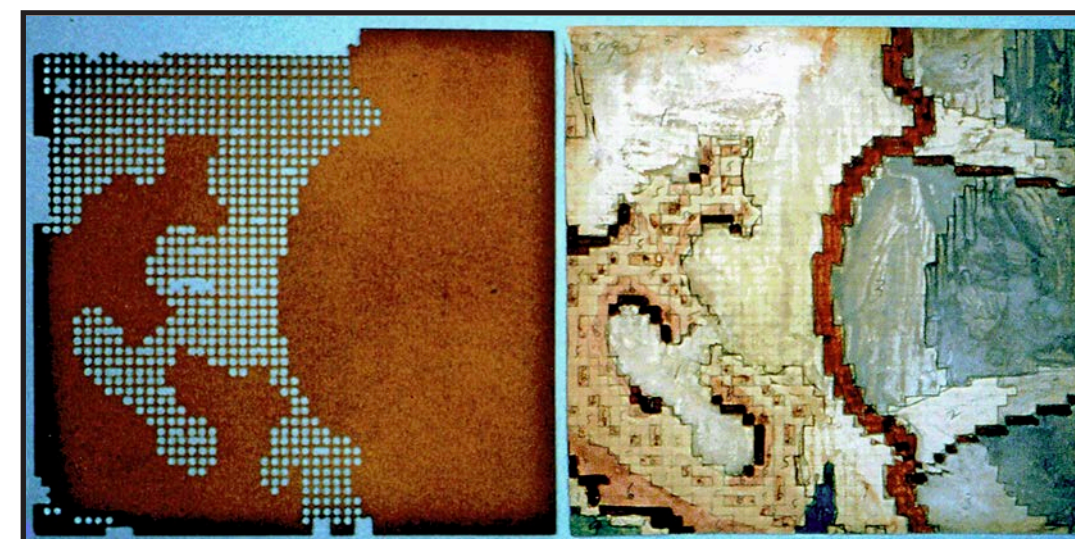


Fig. 5. A paper stencil used for fabricating one section of a Mueller encaustic tile and the original design drawing which was followed to make the stencil.

Photo courtesy Ohio Historical Society (now known as Ohio History Connection).

Tile floors have so far been laid on sub-foundations consisting of solid masonry or heavy concrete. The only reason for such heavy and cumbersome foundations existed in the inability to fasten tile securely otherwise. The mortars used for the bedding of the tile in the usual way are of a rigid and brittle nature when set, and consequently need the support of a strong, solid substructure, to prevent their shattering and breaking, caused by concussion or swaying. If tile can be laid securely without the support of a heavy concrete, they may be applied with as little ceremony as a wood or board floor.

The problem has been solved by the invention of the Plicaro Mosaic, which combines the elasticity of the wood floors with the aseptic, impervious and hard surface of the Ceramic Mosaic Tile. The Plicaro Mosaic is simply a tile floor set in a flexible cementitious mortar which holds the tile in place, is tough and springy, and may be applied to any surface.⁶

The January 1901 issue of *The Monumental News* reported that the company had laid a Plicaro tile floor in the Illinois Building at the Pan-American Exposition which was “examined by engineers and architects, and pronounced durable and satisfactory.” The introduction of Plicaro made

it possible to install lasting ceramic mosaic tile floors in the bathrooms and kitchens of pre-existing structures that had wooden floors and the floors of vibration-prone spaces like elevators, railroad dining cars, and ships.

Growing east coast consumer awareness of the high quality of its products and attendant sales prompted the company to open a branch office and warehouse in New York City, the nation’s largest market for tiles, in 1901. It soon afterwards established warehouses in Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Detroit as well as sales agencies in other cities.

The October 1901 issue of *Brick* described a new addition the company was making to its works and the changes to the plant’s layout that would follow:

The Mosaic Tile Co. has almost completed a large addition to its plant which will be built entirely of brick and will be 60 x 90 ft. in size. A section along one side has been nicely fitted up and will be used entirely for office. The rest of the building will be used as a pasting room and the mosaic room will then be taken for a kiln room and possibly two additional kilns will be built.



Fig. 6. Herman Mueller's encaustic tile mosaic (12 x 25 feet) decorated the entrance to the Moerlein's Bottling Department in Cincinnati. The installation has since been painted over.
Taft, p. 15.

In 1902 R.G. Dun reported that Mosaic's estimated pecuniary strength was between \$50,000 and \$75,000 and gave the company a high general credit rating. In May of that year Mosaic rented, for a two-year period, the idle plant of the Matawan Tile Company of Matawan, New Jersey, and manufactured tile in it. The following year Mosaic contracted to market the products made by the year-old New Jersey Mosaic Tile Company, also of Matawan. Karl Langenbeck moved to New Jersey and oversaw the latter firm's operations for several months.

Mueller and Langenbeck quit the company in 1903 because, reportedly, they felt that Mosaic's directors did not fully appreciate their talents and ideas (as had been the case at American Encaustic). Mueller became the Technical Manager of the recently organized National Tile Company and established a consolidated design and estimating department for the firm at its Robertson Art Tile

Company branch in Morristown, Pennsylvania. Then in 1908 he established his own company, the Mueller Mosaic Company in Trenton, New Jersey. Langenbeck went on to be a consulting engineer for the National Bureau of Standards, then worked for the Grueby Pottery Company, and later became chief chemist for the United States Tariff Commission.

Mosaic had lost the services of Mueller and Langenbeck, but their successors were competent men; operations, the introduction of new products and plant expansions continued without interruption. In 1903, for example, the company purchased three acres of land that adjoined its original five acres, and four buildings and several kilns devoted to producing some of the "more popular shapes and colors of glazed tile" were erected on it. The November 1905 issue of *The Clay Worker* announced the following:



Fig. 7. Back of an aseptic floor tile, a product introduced in 1899 that was used for sanitary floors in hospital operating rooms.
Author's collection.

The Mosaic Tile Company, of Zanesville, Ohio, is now completing a large new addition to their works in Zanesville, in which is installed several thousand dollars-worth of new equipment, making the plant one of the best and one of the largest in the business. The company has the name of being the most progressive tile factory in the world.

These and other additions, which doubled its plant's capacity, enabled the company to keep up with the growing demand for the wares that it was already manufacturing as well as putting two new products on the market: durable floor tiles with non-slip surfaces that simulated granite in 1905 and glazed white wall tiles along with some white trim tiles and ceramics in 1906.

William M. Shinnick (above), the company's secretary and treasurer since 1894, became its general manager in 1907, a position he held until he died in 1923. After Mueller and Langenbeck, Shinnick is held to be the most

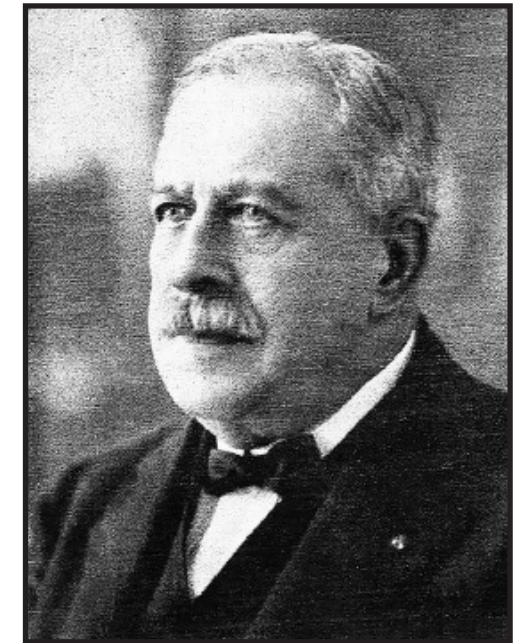


Fig. 8. William M. Shinnick.
Mosaic's 50th Anniversary program booklet, p. 3.

important figure in the company's history. When Mosaic celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1944, its program booklet said the following of his tenure:

During Shinnick's management of the company most of the factory expansion was made, popular and staple lines of tile were placed on the market, and a national reputation for Mosaic tile was established. Shinnick was in complete charge of finance, employment, design, production, and marketing. Through his interest in the welfare of his employees, he built a loyal and efficient organization. To him, more than any other single individual, must go the credit for guiding the destiny of the Mosaic Tile Company through the uncertain years of organization to the present prosperous and flourishing condition.

When Mosaic began operations in 1895 a cumbersome steam-powered overhead shaft and pulley system supplied the power for operating the plant's machinery. By 1909

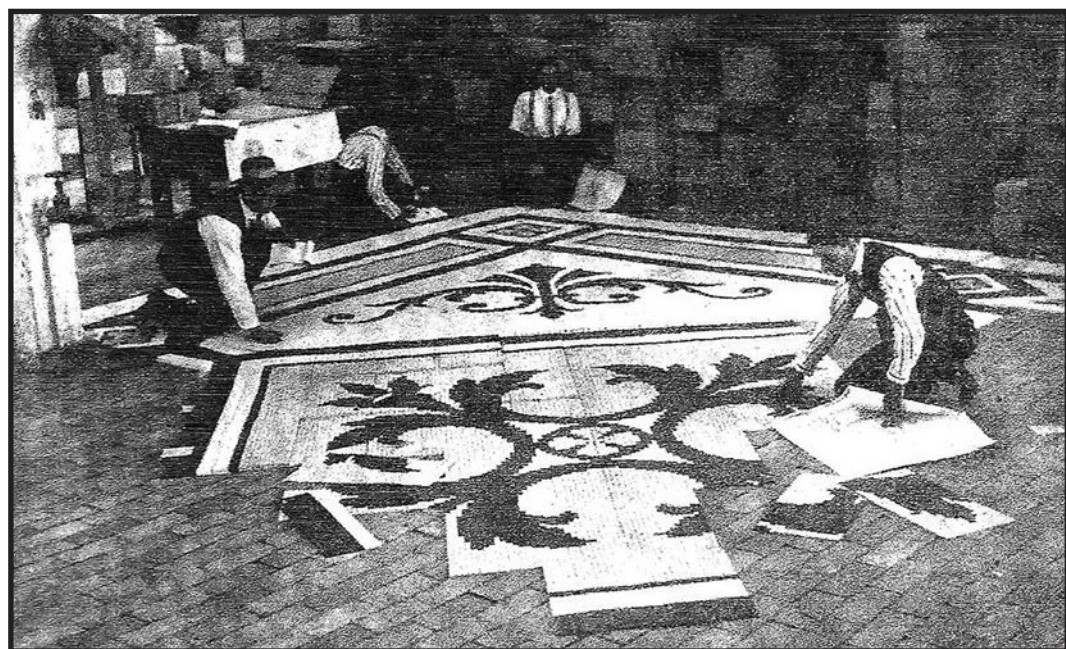


Fig. 9. Operatives laying out a ceramic mosaic floor design on the factory floor c. 1902.
The Clay-Worker, January 1903.

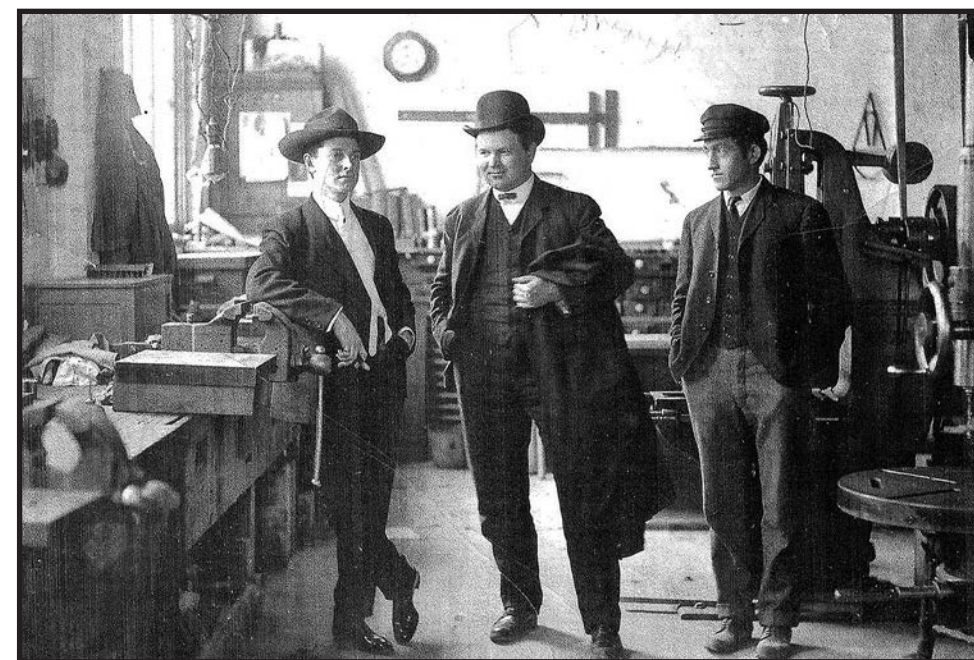


Fig. 10. Machine shop operatives, c. 1910. One of them, reportedly, is Herman Mueller's son.
Mosaic Tile Company archives.

the increased demand for operating power brought on by plant extensions and additional equipment exceeded the generating capacity of the shaft and pulley system, so the company replaced it with "modern" electric power. It installed sixty electric motors in the plant and bought electricity from the Ohio Electric Railway Company of Zanesville to run them.⁷

The company landed a prestigious contract when it was selected over other American tile makers to furnish tiling for Panama Canal construction projects that took place between 1909 and 1914. Tiles made by Mosaic were installed in the canal's administration building; the Gatun hydroelectric station; the Gatun, Miraflores, and Pedro Miguel control houses; and the baths and lavatories of the canal zone's Tivoli Hotel. The company's most significant contribution to the canal project consisted of specially fabricated ceramic water depth gauges needed for proper functioning of the canal's locks:

Gauges for registering the depth of the water in the locks of the canal are an important feature of the lock mechanism, and it was necessary to secure gauges constructed of material that would be as

lasting as the locks themselves. The final decision was in favor of the gauges manufactured by the Mosaic Tile Company of Zanesville, Ohio. The gauges are now in use in the Gatun, Pedro Miguel, and Miraflores locks, and no doubt is entertained as to their wearing qualities.⁸

New machinery which enabled the plant to increase its output was installed in 1913 and 1914. Fourteen new Bergstrom hand presses were installed in February 1913. Large double-deck presses for producing six-inch square floor tiles and two- and three-inch octagonal and hexagonal floor tiles were installed in March 1913 while the plant was shut down until April 14 because the 1913 Flood had caused the plant's gas and water supplies to be cut off.⁹

In 1914 two brick presses which had been converted to automatic tile presses run by electricity were installed.

The company came out with its first line of vitreous trim tiles in 1914.

An "infomercial" that appeared in the Tuesday, September 28, 1915, edition of the *Zanesville Times Recorder* said of Mosaic's products:

The output is about evenly divided between Floor and Wall Tile. In the Floor Tile Department the ever popular ceramic mosaic is turned out in immense quantities. It is made in six different sizes and eighteen different colors, thus allowing great scope for the designer in making the intricate patterns for which the factory is famous.

Flint and Hydraulic pavers is a trade name applied to a comparatively new line of floor tile in large size block and made three quarters of an inch thick; indestructible even though it is subjected to the severest tests, giving a floor that is practical. The great demand for this grade of tile has kept the factory running to almost normal capacity during the recent depression.¹⁰

When the United States became involved in World War 1 the company was forced to curtail the number of tiles it produced due to a slump in domestic construction and government-imposed restrictions on things like fuel consumption and non-military rail shipments. On August 17, 1918, for example, the Fuel Administration imposed restrictions on the amount of fuel that could be used for firing ceramic wares. The amount of gas Mosaic was permitted to burn was reduced to fifty per cent of the

average it had consumed during 1914, 1915, and 1916. In October 1918 the Priorities Division of the War Board issued an order that glaze firings were to be limited to three per month. The order, however, never went into effect because the war ended in November. The restrictions were lifted after the armistice and the company was subsequently able to resume regular operations, and it soon came to manufacture over five million square feet of floor tile per year.

Two Dressler tunnel kilns were installed in 1917, and the manufacture of faience tile was begun in 1918. The nature of these attractive and popular tiles was outlined in a company catalog dated 1951:

Faience is a specially crafted tile of many virtues. Its slightly irregular surface and edges distinguish it from other tile and make it ideal for custom design. Faience is hard, tough, weather-proof and can be used for exterior as well as interior installations.

Faience tiles were hand-made by female operatives who used leather pouches filled with lead shot to pound coarse "plastic" clay into plaster molds, and the bisque tiles were hand-decorated with heavy opaque enamels. Faience

tiles were more expensive to produce than other kinds of tiles because of their being hand-made, and later efforts to reduce the cost of manufacturing them by replacing the hand-making processes with mechanical methods were unsuccessful. Consequently, the company discontinued the line in January 1959.

In 1918 also, the nearby Ohio Pottery Company, a manufacturer of porcelain laboratory equipment and “blanks” for large commercial studios as well as women who painted chinaware for a hobby, was going to shut down because it could not afford to buy the boxcar load of English china clay it needed to conduct operations. Mosaic came to its rescue and sold the company wagonloads of the clay from its own stocks on an “as needed” basis.

The 1920s were a time of company growth, innovations, and prosperity. In 1920 Mosaic bought the Atlantic Tile Manufacturing Company of Matawan, New Jersey, a small manufacturer of floor tiles conveniently located near New York City and the other east coast markets. Atlantic had begun operations in 1910, and its plant consisted of one “beehive” kiln and a long one-story building that had around 7,500 square feet of floorspace which Mosaic increased to 90,000 square feet after taking over so it could increase production. The ten new round kilns erected to accommodate the increased production were later torn down and replaced with tunnel kilns.

In 1922, approximately three years before any other American tile company made them, Mosaic began the manufacture of matte and gloss glazed wall and trim tiles in pastel shades, a revolutionary alternative to white wall and trim tiles which had been the primary option since around the turn of the century. The popularity of these tiles was such that the company devoted one of its two tunnel kilns to their production alone. It turned out 20,000 square feet of the tiles per week, but even that was not enough to keep up with the demand for them. In 1923 the company began the production of another well-received line, tiles with bright glaze colors. The popularity of these lines significantly increased the volume of Mosaic’s business.

The convenience and economy of firing wares in continuous tunnel kilns had become apparent, so the company installed two Marlow tunnel kilns in its Zanesville plant in 1923, one in August and the other in September. The new kilns received a lot of attention from trade journals since, while used by several companies in Europe, they were the first Marlow kilns to be installed in an American facility. The Marlow kilns differed from Mosaic’s other tunnel

kilns in that they were larger, which made their capacity thirty per cent greater; they used preheated air mixed with producer gas to fire wares; and cars were pulled through the kilns instead of being pushed. The kiln installed in August, according to the August 16, 1923, edition of the *Zanesville Times Recorder*, would be devoted to firing bisque tiles.

In March 1924 Mosaic announced it was going to build a \$250,000 addition to its Zanesville plant. The addition was going to include an “increased” faience department and a large four-story concrete building that would be used for shipping, storage, and various other departments of the plant. More land was acquired to accommodate this and other additions, and Mosaic ultimately came to own approximately thirty contiguous acres altogether. Between 1925 and 1927 the plant’s 1,250 employees turned out the greatest volume of products in its history except for the year 1941.

In 1927 the company issued an illustrated catalog entitled “Colored Tiles” which featured and extolled the virtues of the lines it was manufacturing at that time: Mosaic Satin Matte (wall tiles with a matte glaze); Mosaic Vitromat (vitreous or semivitreous floor tiles that had the same type of glaze and color range as the satin matte wall tiles); Mosaic Faience; Mosaic Ironstone (“unglazed floor tiles developed by us to produce floors of a true, old-time craftsman character”); Mosaic Bright White (white wall and trim tiles); Mosaic Ceramics (vitreous ceramic floor tiles); Mosaic Granitex (“a new, unglazed type of vitreous floor tiles with a stippled or granite effect”); Mosaic Flint and Hydraulic (paving tiles); and Mosaic “All-Tile” Accessories (bathroom accessories). According to the catalog the company had offices and showrooms in New York City, Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco at the time.

The growth and prosperity of the 1920s were replaced by cutbacks and hardship during the Great Depression. Construction had come to a standstill because of the economic conditions, and companies that specialized in manufacturing construction-related products like tiles lacked a market for their wares and they struggled to survive. Mosaic did not fail as did major competitors American Encaustic, J.B. Owens, and United States Encaustic, but the lack of business forced it to operate only three days per week. Numerous plant improvement projects were initiated as a means of providing employees with as much work as possible, and in order to maintain a modicum of production the company turned out a variety of novelty and souvenir items whose manufacture incorporated a

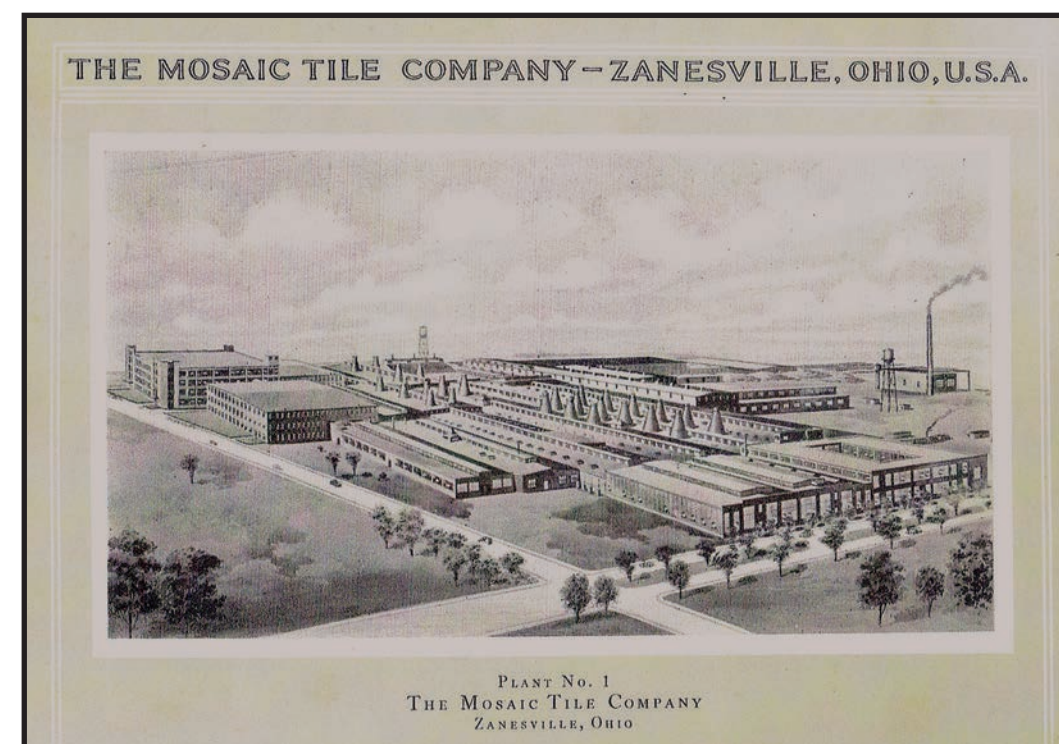


Fig. 11. Mosaic’s Plant No. 1, Zanesville Ohio, circa 1930s. Mosaic catalog entitled “Colored Tiles” dated 1927, p. 30. Author’s collection.

variety of fabrication and decorative techniques.

In 1935 Mosaic purchased a controlling interest in a brick and quarry tile manufacturer, the Carlyle Tile Company of Ironton, Ohio, and added quarry tiles to its product lines. The marketing appeal of the Carlyle quarries lay in their pleasing colors, indoor-outdoor heavy-duty use capabilities, and being available in “regular” smooth surfaces as well as non-slip ones. There were two types of non-slip surfaces: abrasive, which had abrasive aggregate impregnated into the surface, and golf club, which had an irregular rippled surface which afforded excellent traction for cleated golf shoes.

Mosaic acquired a second out-of-state subsidiary company in 1937 when it took over the General Tile Company of El Segundo, California. The acquisition was a wise investment on Mosaic’s part as the market for tiles in California was surpassed only by New York City’s and it accounted for around fifteen per cent of all tile sales in America at the time. General had the capacity to produce around 600,000 square feet of tile per year and was, in

effect, a suburb of Los Angeles, the greatest consumer of tiles on the west coast.

In 1939 the company put out a catalog entitled “Hand Book of Mosaic Clay-Tiles” that featured color illustrations of some of the tiles it marketed along with pictures of installations that were made with them. The catalog also listed and described its products, which included: All-Tile Accessories (bathroom fixtures); Bluestone (highly vitrified plastic clay flooring tiles that had non-slip surfaces and came in a blend of grey hues only); Carlyle Quarries; “regular” ceramic mosaics; abrasive non-slip ceramic mosaics; Velvetex ceramic mosaics (“regular” ceramics that had stippled instead of solid coloring); Granitex ceramic mosaics (made from “natural clays” that had flecked colors throughout their bodies and unglazed non-slip surfaces); Decorated Strips, Inserts, and Panels; Faience tiles; Flint Floor Tile and Pavers (unglazed vitreous or semi-vitreous heavy-duty floor tiles suitable for both indoor and outdoor applications); Glint Tile (tiles made with a red body that came in weatherproof versions suitable for storefronts and



Fig. 12. Postcard showing Mosaic's subsidiary company, the Jordan Tile Manufacturing Company of Corona, California c. 1950.

Author's collection.

non-weatherproof versions for interior walls); Ironstone (unglazed plastic clay tiles made in natural clay colors such as buff and salmon suitable for floors and wainscoting); vitreous and semi-vitreous floor tile (similar to the flint pavers); Vitromat (matte- and enamel-glazed vitreous and semi-vitreous wall tiles); wall tiles (white or variously colored glazes). At that time, according to the catalog, the company maintained offices and showrooms in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Washington, D.C., and Detroit.

During World War II over a hundred Mosaic employees served in the Armed Forces and the company made a significant contribution to the nation's war effort by turning out thousands of square feet of flooring tile. A multitude of new buildings were being erected because of war-related construction projects and many of them needed tile floors. Floor tiles made by Mosaic were installed in hospitals, kitchens, and bathrooms on army and navy bases, and vitreous ceramic mosaic flooring tiles made by the company were laid in the galleys, sick bays,

and bathrooms of newly constructed warships as well as 531 wartime merchant vessels known as "Victory Ships," a roomy and efficient new class of cargo ship constructed under the Emergency Shipbuilding Program to replace cargo ships that had been sunk by German submarines. On Monday, September 27, 1943, the company was presented with the U.S. Maritime Victory Fleet Flag award as a tribute to its "efficient production of tile interior fittings for Victory Ships."

In 1945 the company made a small group of Delft-like 6 1/8-inch by 6 1/8-inch tiles which were used to decorate the fireplace in the new White House library. The previous year, when the project was initiated, government architect William D. Hargroves made pen and ink drawings of proposed images to be duplicated on the tiles which President Roosevelt examined and approved of. Each of the nineteen images portrayed a building or symbol of personal interest to him: the Naval Medical Center; St. John's Church; Shangri-La (later known as Camp David); the Lee Mansion; the Washington Monument; the Jefferson

Memorial; the Treasury Building; the East Wing of the White House; the South Portico of the White House; the Seal of the President of the United States; the North Front of the White House; the West Wing of the White House; the U.S. Capitol; Monticello; Mount Vernon; the Lincoln Memorial; the Tomb of the Unknown; The Octagon; and the "Little White House" in Georgia. One image the President wished to be included, but was not, was his dog Fala's doghouse. The record is unclear, but it appears the tiles were not installed until late 1946 or early 1947, long after Roosevelt's death. The tiles were removed in 1962 during Kennedy Era White House renovation projects.

The company resumed regular operations after the war ended in 1945, but they came to an abrupt halt in 1946 because the firm's 1,100 Zanesville employees went on strike. The contract Mosaic had with its employees' union expired on September 15, 1946, and it had not been renewed as of October 15 despite ongoing negotiations. Consequently, the members of Zanesville Tile Local No. 79, Ceramic Workers, CIO, voted to go on strike beginning at midnight on Friday, October 18, and picket lines formed at the plant's entrances the following morning. Company executives, watchmen, and a few specified maintenance men were permitted to cross the lines. A few kiln burners were also allowed to enter the plant so they could maintain steady temperatures in the kilns to prevent their being damaged by temperature fluctuations. Meetings and negotiations took place over the next few weeks, but the two sides could not come to an agreement.

As the strike wore on the strikers and their families began to suffer the consequences of not having an income, and many of them applied for relief aid from the Muskingum County Relief Administration. An article in the Friday, November 1, 1946, edition of the *Zanesville Times Recorder* described the assistance strikers received:

... money is being given for groceries only, for a 15-day period. It was explained that the amount of money received is based on a scale set up by the State Welfare department and depends on the number and age of all members of the family. Special allowances also are made for nursing and pregnant women, it was reported.

Fifty relief applications had been approved as of November 1. The two sides finally came to an agreement on Thursday, December 5, 1946, and operations were to resume on a limited basis the following Monday.



Fig. 13. Souvenir paperweight made by Mosaic in 1956 to commemorate the dedication of its new out-of-state subsidiary, the Jackson Tile Manufacturing Company of Jackson, Mississippi.

Author's collection.

Operations flourished after the strike was settled and the company soon marketed around thirty lines of tiles. Mosaic acquired a third out-of-state subsidiary tile manufacturer, the Winburn Tile Manufacturing Company of Little Rock, Arkansas in 1948, and two more, the Jordan Tile Manufacturing Company of Corona, California in 1949 and the Jackson Tile Manufacturing Company of Jackson, Mississippi in 1956. Jordan made ceramic mosaics and wall tiles, while Winburn and Jackson specialized in producing ceramic mosaics. All three catered to nearby regional markets.

In 1956 the Roseville Pottery Company went out of business and sold its plant on Linden Avenue in Zanesville to Mosaic in November 1957. Mosaic converted the former pottery into an auxiliary plant in which it produced soap holders, towel hooks, toothbrush holders, robe hooks, cup holders, and other ceramic bathroom accessories.

Innovative products that sold well were placed on the market during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. In 1948 the company came out with "Lockart Expanset," a Plicaro-like mortar for installing wall tiles.

In the early 1950s the company created two products that significantly reduced the risk of anesthesia explosions in hospital operating rooms due to sparks generated by an electrostatically charged individual coming into contact with a grounded object. During the winter of 1951 it developed electrically conductive adhesive and grout with which a tile floor could be set, thus preventing the accumulation of static electricity by drawing it away through the floor. Further research led to the development in 1952 of tiles that were themselves conductive. Mosaic was awarded a patent (No. 2,851,639) on September 9, 1958 for its electrically conductive floor tiles and floors made from those tiles, which the firm marketed as its Impervious Conductive Tile line. The line came out in ceramic mosaic form in 1966.

Other innovative products Mosaic developed in the 1950s were its "Harmonitone Palette," the industry's first completely coordinated color system; the "Swif-Way" method of mounting wall tiles as connected groups of eight instead of individually; "modular tiles," tiles manufactured in standard one-inch sizes which eliminated a setter's having to cut tiles when working within standard units of measurement; and "Formfree" ceramic mosaics and wall tiles whose decorations "would flow together to form a pattern no matter how you positioned them."

In the 1960s the company perfected "single-fire" production, in which glazes were sprayed onto the faces of unfired 4 1/4-inch x 4 1/4-inch wall tiles immediately after having been stamped out by automatic presses. The tiles thus only had to be fired once instead of twice in order to obtain a finished product, a significant savings in fuel and labor costs.

The firm was awarded patents (No. 3,041,785 July 3, 1962 and No. 3,185,748 May 25, 1965) for a revolutionary method of assembling sheets of ceramic mosaic floor tiles. Previously, the standard method of preparing sheets for setting was to paste a sheet of paper on the assembly's face which would not be removed until after the tiles had been laid and the mortar had set. This sometimes created "alignment problems" since the paper obscured the tiles from view making it difficult for the tile-setter to see if the sheets were properly aligned. Mosaic's new method dispensed with paper sheets and employed daubs of resin that connected individual tiles across the undersides of their corners. Consequently, tile layers were now able to make needed adjustments before the mortar had set.

In 1961 operations in Zanesville were interrupted by a



Fig. 14. Cover of a Formfree decorated wall tile catalog showing a close-up of one of the tiles and how the line's tiles could be arranged in any order but would still line up to make an attractive pattern.

Author's collection.

strike which ran from September 18 to November 22 and involved around eight hundred employees. The company's contract with its employees' union expired at midnight on September 13 but ongoing negotiations had failed to produce a new one.

The union voted to strike. They agreed to an orderly shutdown with no damage to the plant, and picket lines were to form at both Zanesville plants' entrances beginning Monday, September 18. The company then assigned unfilled orders to subsidiary plants and in some cases cancelled them outright.

On Friday, September 22, the company announced it was in the process of shutting down kilns and stated that once they were cold it would take a month to six weeks to get the plant back into production when it reopened,

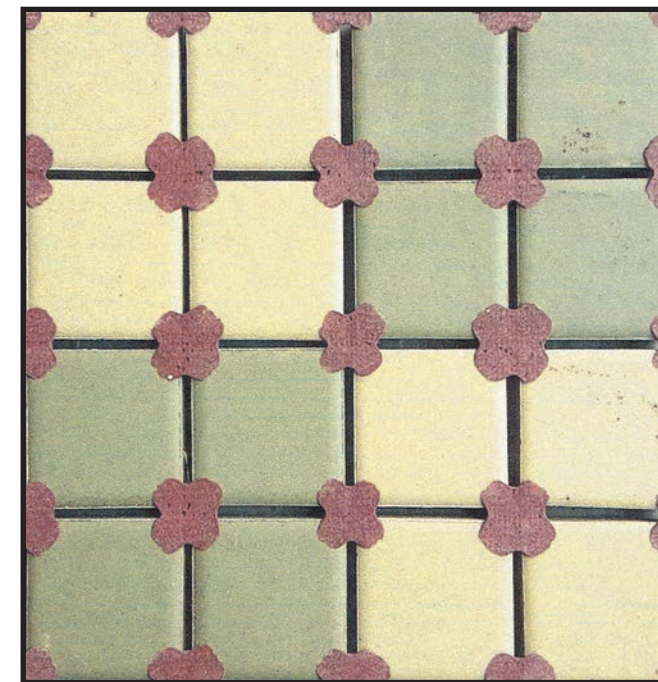


Fig. 15. Underside of a section of Mosaic's innovative ceramic mosaic line showing the daubs of resin which connected the individual tesserae across their corners allowing sheets of the mosaics to be installed without their surfaces being hidden beneath a sheet of paper.

Photo by Janet Debray. Author's collection.

an event the company contended might not occur given the circumstances. The following Monday, however, it reopened the plant and invited striking employees to come back to work. The company kept the plant open, and as of October 31 one hundred and forty-three strikers had crossed the picket lines and returned to their jobs. On Wednesday, September 27 Common Pleas Court Judge Clarence Crossland issued a restraining order that limited pickets to two per plant gate, and they were forbidden to obstruct the passage of persons or vehicles passing through the gates.

On Thursday, October 5 it was announced that strikers could apply for relief in the form of government-supplied surplus food through the County Welfare Department. Those who qualified for assistance would be given butter, eggs, rice, lard, flour, beans, pork and gravy, rolled oats, dried milk, and peanut butter.

On November 2, despite the restraining order and fellow union member "scabs" returning to work, union

members voted overwhelmingly to continue the strike. After two months of unproductive talks it was reported on Wednesday, November 22, 1961, that a strike-ending settlement had finally been reached and would soon be ratified by both sides. The company announced that operations would resume on a limited basis on Tuesday, November 28.

The following year, the headline of an article published in the Saturday, April 7, 1962, edition of the *Zanesville Times Recorder* read: "Third Attack - Five More Become Ill At Mosaic Tile." The previous Monday and Tuesday, the 2nd and the 3rd, women working the day shift in the ceramic mosaic pasting room suddenly became ill just after clocking in. They complained of headache, nausea, numbness, and chills. Seven of them had to be transported to local hospitals for observation and treatment on Monday, and on Tuesday eight were taken to hospitals. Then, on Friday, five women working the night shift in the pasting room were suddenly taken ill and had to be transported to hospitals. Several other women had also become sick the same three days, but not as severely as the ones sent to hospitals and they were treated in the plant's first aid room and sent home.

Plant officials were unable to determine why the women had fallen ill or why only they had become sick and none of the men who also worked in the pasting room. Consequently, they brought in safety inspectors from the Zanesville Fire Department, Ohio's Division of Factory and Buildings, Ohio's Bureau of Safety and Hygiene, and the State Division of Mines Laboratory who were to ascertain the cause of the illness so it could be dealt with. The inspectors conducted numerous checks for toxic fumes, but none were detected. Canaries left in the pasting room over Tuesday night showed no ill effects the next morning, and the paste the women worked with was deemed to have no toxic effect. In the end, the inspectors were "frankly puzzled" as to why the women had become ill. Zanesville's newspapers published no further reports about Mosaic employees becoming sick in the plant, so the illness appears to have disappeared as quickly and mysteriously as it had struck.

On Tuesday, May 15, 1962, the company announced that after several years of consideration it would be transferring its executive offices to Cleveland, Ohio, effective August 20. The relocation, according to Roy Jordan, Mosaic's president, would facilitate the separation of administrative and plant responsibilities, the value of

which had become apparent after the company moved its administrative offices from its main plant on Pershing Road to downtown Zanesville. A non-plant large city location, the company believed, would best contribute to improved supervision and coordination of the firm's extensive nationwide network of factories, warehouses, and showrooms.

In 1965 the company installed a computer system in the Distribution Service Office at its main office in Cleveland which "stored, retrieved, and computed" information about all phases of its business. The system was to be linked by teletype to all eight of its plants and was expected to be particularly effective in managing inventories, handling orders, and speeding shipments.

In 1966 Mosaic had 2,200 employees. Its facilities included a main plant in Zanesville, an auxiliary plant in Zanesville, and subsidiary plants in Matawan, New Jersey; Ironton, Ohio; El Segundo, California; Corona, California; Jackson, Mississippi; and Little Rock, Arkansas. The floor space of Mosaic's main plant was estimated to comprise at least six acres, and its operatives numbered over a thousand during times of peak production. The company had showroom-warehouses in forty cities, and its products were sold in every state in the nation as well as in Canada, Mexico, Central America, Cuba, and South America. Mosaic had become the largest tile manufacturing concern in the world.

The company went out of business despite its predominance in January 1967, an unintended consequence of fighting Communism during the Cold War. Fearing a Communist takeover of post-World War II Japan and the

country becoming a member of the Soviet Bloc should its economy continue to falter, the U.S. government decided to stimulate Japan's economy by reviving some of its war-devastated industries and promoting the importation of Japanese goods. Accordingly, the State Department recruited ceramic engineers who were to go to Japan and "improve and increase" its production of ceramic wares. They accomplished their mission and Japanese-produced household china, ceramic novelties, and tiles began to arrive in the United States in the late 1940s. The number of Japanese tiles coming into the country at that time accounted for less than seven per cent of domestic tile consumption and thus had little impact on Mosaic's sales.

After 1950, however, Japanese-made tiles arrived in increasingly significant numbers. The volume of imported glazed wall tiles, for example, rose from 3.4 million square feet in 1953 to 54.3 million square feet in the early 1960s. Ceramic mosaics went from 5.1 million square feet in 1955 to 28.3 million square feet in 1963, an increase of 455 per cent. By 1963 98% of the ceramic mosaic floor tiles and 65% of the glazed wall tiles consumed in the United States had been manufactured in Japan.

The primary cause for the ascendancy of imported tiles was that their prices were significantly lower than Mosaic's due to the American firm's higher production costs. The price of imported ceramic mosaics, for example, averaged 32 per cent lower per square foot than those produced and marketed by Mosaic. The prices of imported tiles were, in general, half those of domestic tiles. American consumers tended to purchase the less expensive Japanese tiles and Mosaic was unable to withstand the competition.

A Personal Reflection from the Author

While writing the manuscript for this article, memories of my having worked for Mosaic kept coming to mind. I worked for the company two times, during summer breaks in the mid-sixties while a college student. My experiences working for Mosaic were pleasant ones. I remember the place had a relaxed, family-like atmosphere and a friendly workforce and supervisors. I liked the daily work schedule: work three hours, then a ten-minute break, work two hours, then the thirty-minute lunch break, work one-and-a-half hours, then another ten-minute break, work another one-and-a-half hours, and it was time to go home. Everyone worked swing shift. I remember that meant "long" weekends if you were switching from day shift to night shift, and "short" weekends if you were switching from night shift to day shift.

I remember a pleasant experience I had that was not directly related to my duties as an employee. To my surprise one day I ran into my grandfather. He was a retired brick mason who, as an independent contractor, was helping to build a new kiln. We would come across each other from time to time, and he would share the cookies my grandmother had baked and put in his lunch pail.

All of my "job duties" were associated with the press room. On my very first day I swept the floor and did other minor and introductory tasks. My first "real" position was the "off-bearer" on the ceramic mosaic tile production line, where I removed saggars filled with freshly pressed tiles from the work bench and placed them on a skid. I then placed the empty saggars on the bench.

I next worked as an "empty sagger trucker." I would cart away empty skids near the workstation where female operatives filled saggars with freshly pressed tiles and replaced them with skids loaded with empty saggars so the off-bearer could perform his duties.

I later operated a "trim press" and made the tiles which would form the lowest course of a tile wall where it met the floor. I pulled a "shaker box" towards myself, reached over to my left and filled the shaker box with clay from the nearby clay bin. I then shoved the shaker box into the space between the plunger and the die, "shook" the box to make the clay fill the die and then pulled the shaker box from the space between the plunger and the die. I next pressed the tile by pushing down on the press operating handle which caused the plunger to come down and compress the clay. A critical aspect of the pressing process was to first "bump" the clay in the die very lightly with the plunger before actually pressing the tile. That action expelled the air that was always present in the clay so that I would not produce what were called "wind-blown" tiles. Air that was trapped inside a pressed tile would expand when the tile was fired and cause the formation of cracks which in turn would cause the fired tile to crack and break apart. There was a belt in front of the press and two female operatives, seated on opposite sides of the belt, would take the two tiles I had just pressed off the belt, "fettle" (smooth) their edges with sandpaper, and place them into saggars.

My last job was tending the kiln and kiln cars of the "single fire" operation. I pushed cars loaded with saggars of unfired tiles into one end of the kiln, and "caught" the cars with fired tiles at the other end. Cars coming out of the kiln were hot, and every now and then someone would hand me a TV dinner or some food wrapped in foil to set on a car so they could enjoy a warm meal during the up-coming lunch break.

I value my having worked for Mosaic because it afforded me an otherwise unattainable opportunity to learn about and understand tile manufacturing processes and to develop acquaintanceships with fellow employees.

NOTES

1. Mueller is reported to have said: "Why, they're making more money by manufacturing and selling my tiles than I am by creating them. I'll go into manufacturing."
2. The potter J.B. Owens was given a parcel of land in the Brighton District in 1891, upon which he erected a plant and began operations in 1892.
3. After the company had erected its works and begun operations it learned that the parcel of land it had been given suffered from poor drainage and was waterlogged, which in turn resulted in water seepage that adversely affected kiln firings. The problem was largely resolved by constructing seven-foot-deep drainage outlets around the kilns that were filled with broken tiles. Later, new kilns were put up on taller foundations.
4. According to the firm's fiftieth anniversary program booklet, one building housed the clay preparation room and machine shop, another the boiler house and engine room. The stock shed was the third building, and the fourth contained the press room, kiln shed, and office.
5. In December 1901 the Roseville Pottery Company took over the facility, which came to be known as "Little Roseville" where stoneware cooking utensils were manufactured.
6. Plicaro mortar, according to the patent's specifications, was composed of sawdust, silicate of soda, and whiting.
7. The conversion to electric power increased the plant's overall capacity by twenty per cent and reduced the cost of producing operating power by \$250 per month. Another benefit of installing the motors was that the company was able to reposition much of the plant's machinery so it could conduct operations with greater efficiency and economy. The conversion also simplified maintenance of the plant's power generating system. If an electric motor failed, it only affected the particular piece of equipment it was powering; but if one of its old shaft and pulley system's two hundred-plus pulley belts broke or slipped off its drive wheel, the entire system had to be shut down in order to facilitate repairs.
8. Bennet, p. 284. Mosaic later supplied tile for swimming pools that were installed in army bases in Panama. The May 1948 edition of "The Mosaic News" noted with pride that "The interesting point is that all the tile for those pools was made here at Mosaic. There are five of them located in various forts in Panama, and they are reputed to be among the largest and most elaborate in the world. Each pool measures 155 feet in length by 60 feet in width and is 11 feet deep."
9. Mosaic was fortunate in that it only had to contend with the disruption of its gas and water supplies. The American Encaustic Tiling Company's plant, for example, was inundated by floodwaters. Several Zanesville potteries were severely damaged by floodwaters, and some of them never resumed operations.
10. The "breakdown" of Mosaic's output at that time, according to the company's fiftieth anniversary booklet, was "fifty percent wall and trim tiles, thirty percent ceramic mosaic floor tiles, and ten to fifteen percent vitreous tiles." The "recent depression" referred to in the informercial was a nationwide recession that took place between the middle of January 1913 and the middle of December 1914. During this period industrial production and real income declined, the stock market experienced "investor flight," and the unemployment rate was a relatively high 9.7 percent.

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Designed Tiles

A Silkscreen Studio in New York, NY 1939-1978

by Victoria Jenssen

[Unless indicated otherwise, images and tiles are property of the author.]

The Quest for Tiles by Designed Tiles, A Silkscreen Studio¹

There is a sizable group of unlabeled but similar silkscreen-decorated tiles which use Wheeling Tile Company's cushion-type tiles, 6-inch porcelain blanks, datable to the 1940s and 1950s according to the manufacturer's dates embossed on the tiles' backs. Until now, no one had thought to consider these silkscreened tiles as a group because no one needed to locate a specific group of silkscreened tiles made in the 1940s by just one studio. Nearly two decades ago, my research on the 1940s Manhattan tile decorator Carol Janeway led me to search for the tiles of Designed Tiles, a studio established by artist Harold Ambellan (1912-2006) and his wife, Elisabeth Higgins Ambellan (1913-2002)². In the opening of her 1950 book, *Ceramics and Pottery-making for Everyone*, Janeway thanked these two friends, not Designed Tiles, for introducing her to underglaze ceramic tile decoration.³

Initially, my quest had no guidebook, no catalogs, no advertisements illustrating the tiles by the Ambellans. Even the studio's name, Designed Tiles, was elusive. Admittedly, there were plentiful cork-backed tiles bearing a "Designed Tiles" logo, tiles often printed in overglaze, which appeared to be from the 1950s and later (see the end of this article on Designed Tiles during the Sklansky years). And so, I began collecting nearly any underglaze-decorated 6-inch Wheeling tiles factory-dated in the 1940s³, always unsigned, that looked to be silkscreened and had a certain palette, often using the colors used by Janeway. They needed to look like artistic projects, not kitsch. Often I found imprints of the fabric of the printing screens fired into a tile's design. The application of the underglaze paint was thin, diluted.

Sometimes the screens were out of register giving a tile a slight, yet charming, Warhol effect. Many such tiles appeared for sale and I bought dozens, then more dozens,





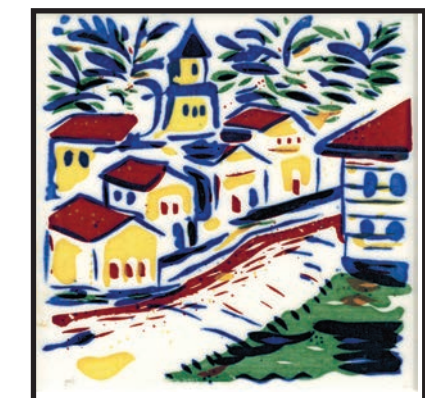
The tile designs in the left column are typical of 1940s output of Designed Tiles, as seen in an early 1950s Vanderlaan tile catalog which marks them as discontinued. Those at the right typify Designed Tiles' designs of the 1950s and, until recently, were the only proven examples of Designed Tiles' output available to this research. They were the personal property of Harold Ambellan (1912-2006), founder of Designed Tiles. (Left, collection of the author; right, courtesy of Zoe Ambellan)

all on a hunch. There were newspaper advertisements of 1943 offering anonymously decorated tiles that matched the tiles I was buying.

By 2008 I was in communication with the daughters of Harold Ambellan, who, fed up with McCarthyism, had relocated to France in the mid-1950s to make art and



Advertisement: tiles offered by the Robert Keith store as seen in the July 14, 1943 issue of *The Kansas City Star* (Missouri). Compare with the tiles to the right.



then to raise his new family. Zoë and Anne Ambellan provided me his 1950's business card, images of Harold's collection of some five tiles, and transcriptions of taped interviews that Ambellan had given in old age. Three of those tiles were clearly from the 1950s and understood by the family as commercial products of Designed Tiles, seen on in the right column, page 22. Although fearful of never confirming the identity of my silkscreened tiles as Designed Tiles' products of the 1940s, I continued to collect them.

Finally, I stumbled across a book published in 1949 that used five of my silkscreened tiles for illustrations: Howard Ketchum's *How to Use Color and Decorating Designs in the Home*. Although Ketchum did not credit Designed Tiles, he did bury the name of the firm Vanderlaan Tile Company in the acknowledgments.

A single Google search for Vanderlaan Tile brought me to Steve Visakay's site on White Cloud Faience, a Rockland County, New York ceramic studio whose tiles were sold through Vanderlaan Tile Company in New York City. Visakay shared his one undated early 1950's Vanderlaan illustrated catalog -- the pages with tiles by



Alphabet tile illustrated in Ketchum (1949) on p.169.



Dogwood tile illustrated in Ketchum (1949) on p.177.



Tulip tile illustrated in Ketchum (1949) on p.155.

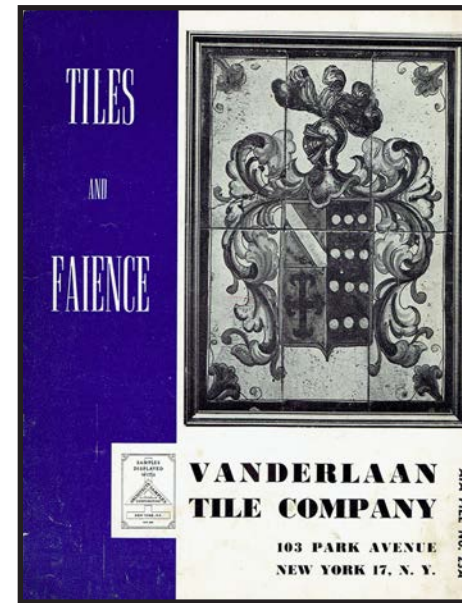


Two tiles illustrated in Ketchum (1949) on p.176.



Designed Tiles matched most of my silkscreened tiles (see catalog on pages 32-33). Nearly exclusively, the Ambellans' studio had sold to this eminent Manhattan tile merchant from sometime in the early 1940s through 1958.

Charles H. Vanderlaan, second-generation president of the Vanderlaan Tile Company, had branched out from selling new and antique Dutch tiles to marketing products of eastern North American studios by name: Designed Tiles, Soriano Ceramics, and White Cloud Faience. The archives of Tile Heritage Foundation supplied



Versions of early 1950s (undated) Vanderlaan Tile catalogs entitled "Tiles and Faience" came with covers printed in blue or black, suggesting several printing campaigns.

a second, later Vanderlaan catalog of 1957/58, supporting more Designed Tiles' identifications. One hopes that an illustrated Vanderlaan catalog of the 1940s will appear to confirm identifications of the early tiles by Designed Tiles.

The mysteries of the anonymity of the tiles produced by Designed Tiles and their prolific nationwide sprawl were solved: they were sold to one broker, Vanderlaan, who then marketed the tiles, mainly as a wholesaler, to merchants and fabricators around the nation through his national network of regional salesmen and his trade catalogs. As well, he retailed his colorful array of tiles to the public in his Manhattan showroom and headquarters at 103 Park Avenue, New York City.

My research confirms seventy-three (73) tile designs for 6-inch tiles as undisputed creations of Designed Tiles: one tile appears in a 1946 newspaper article about Lis Ambellan and the studio, images of seventy-one different tiles appear as Designed Tiles' products in two Vanderlaan catalogs of the 1950s, and one additional design showed up among tiles in Harold Ambellan's estate. Based on the look of these known designs, many more tiles in my collection are attributable to the Ambellan years of the firm: 1939-1958.

Harold Ambellan Established Designed Tiles: 1939

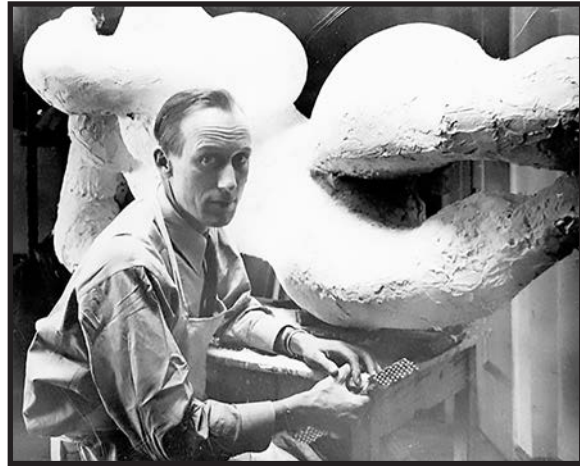
In the 1930's Depression, unemployed artists in New York could be paid to train as silkscreened poster designers and printers, a program initially set up by New York Mayor LaGuardia and later, in 1935, incorporated into Roosevelt's Federal Arts Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA).⁴ Silkscreen printing, initially a sign-painter's and textile printer's technique, was a faster and more versatile multi-color printing method than lithography, the extremely cumbersome traditional printing technique.

Harold Ambellan was not a FAP-trained printer, but he was attracted to silkscreen printing when watching a friend make exacting art reproductions using "20 to 30 screens with different relations of colors" using what he called "real pigments." In 1938, the Federal Art Project



WPA Federal Arts Project (FAP) poster printers register a silkscreen for printing the second color of a poster depicting the FAP logo. (from DeNoon, Posters of the WPA)

began drastically reducing its programs around the country, in part due to Congressional distaste for leftist participants. The closings released many newly-unemployed artists like



Harold Ambellan in 1937 with a version of a sculpture later exhibited at Salpeter Gallery, New York, in 1950. (Courtesy Anne Ambellan)

Ambellan and also a cadre of silkscreen poster designers, stencil-cutters, silkscreen stencil producers, printers, etc. Ambellan's contemporary, the Puerto Rican-born graphic artist Esteban Soriano (1900-1969) had worked in the New York FAP silkscreen workshop. He too would establish a silkscreen tile decorating studio in Manhattan: Soriano Ceramics. His story will be told separately.

Ambellan's opportunity to sell decorated tiles came when the United States was cut off from European imports by the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Ambellan recounted in 2005:

...I decided I'd make ceramic tiles with this method instead of brushing them individually. So I made some while the [WPA] project was being dismantled. I had made some 'essais' and I had some encouraging results. So the project ended and I was out of work. And I had some samples of this new technique of mine and they were very encouraging. I took them around to a Mr. S[alterini] who made iron tables, iron garden furniture. Some tables he made with tiles in, that I had seen and I liked very much. I knew where his shop was, his little factory. So I took some of my things and brought them around to him. He says, "My God, it's just what I'm looking for." He says, "You know I can't get any more Spanish tiles, I can't get any more Italian tiles and those were the only tiles for my business." So he says, "How

much do you want for them?" I say, "I don't know." And he says, "Well you figure out how much you want," and he says, "Well, how do you stand for money?" And I say, "I have to go easy." He says, "If I give you a thousand dollars, will you be able to put this thing on?" And I said "Yes." A thousand dollars was quite a piece of money at that time... We had five to eight people there and later about eight or ten people. We started in the New York wharf in the New York business area where we could print these things but we didn't have a kiln...so we made a deal with a place in New Jersey to do the firing. So a great deal of effort went into transporting these things two ways. So we took a new place with a little room and bought a large kiln and that worked like a charm for fifteen years.⁵

This interview strongly suggests 1939 as the foundation date of Ambellan's tile printing project, while dating the naming of Designed Tiles awaits evidence.

A letter dated June 10, 1941 from the Ambellan's star-boarder, Woody Guthrie, jokes about their tile business (see page 31) and puts their tile activity earlier than the first illustrated advertisement of December 1942 (see page 28). To date, no Salterini furniture inset with Designed Tiles has appeared and, by February 1942, the United States government was contracting Salterini to fabricate steel Jacob's Ladders for the Navy.



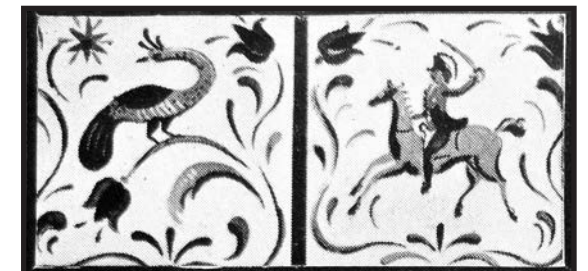
Elisabeth Higgins Ambellan. (Source unknown)

The Ambellans' Designed Tiles studio was located in a second story loft at 22 East 21st Street, in Manhattan's Flat Iron district, across the street from Harold and Elisabeth's first address at 31 East 21st Street, a top-floor apartment. The business continued beyond this "fifteen years" under Elisabeth Ambellan, by then his ex-wife, after he moved to France. At some point, the studio moved to 324 West 26th Street, reflected in their 1958 listing in the Industrial Directory of New York State. In 1958 they sold the business to friends familiar with the business, Stephen and Masha Sklansky, who operated it for another 20 years (see below: "The Year 1958 Marked Endings and Continuations").

Ambellan's description of their design themes helped focus my search for Designed Tiles in the online auctions. He recounted:

...[After WWII] Spanish tiles came back again and we had built up a clientele for a different kind of design, a little less Spanish. We did all sorts of things, some were floral design, some were pictorial, we had a tile with a poem about coffee drinking. All sorts of things, some things inspired by civilization in New England. At any rate, we had a rather nice collection. It wasn't art but it wasn't the worst kind of commercial art...

For Christmas 1942 the tiles were available from Dennison's and featured in "Pennsylvania Dutch furnishings for your country home," in the December 1942 issue of *House & Garden*, p.57.



Underglaze Tiles

\$1.00 each

Plate Hangers—25c each

True Americana—charming tiles with felt backing. 6" x 6". The Pennsylvania Dutch designs are unbelievably lovely in their traditional soft colors. Hang them as a pair of quaint pictures—use them as a frieze around a fireplace—or use them as intended, as a rest for hot or cold pots. They make the nicest gifts.

If you wish our Christmas Catalogue, drop us a penny postcard.

Add 10% for delivery—Sorry No C.O.D.'s

Delivery of this merchandise is governed by O.D.T. regulations.

Dennison's

411 Fifth Avenue

New York 16, N. Y.

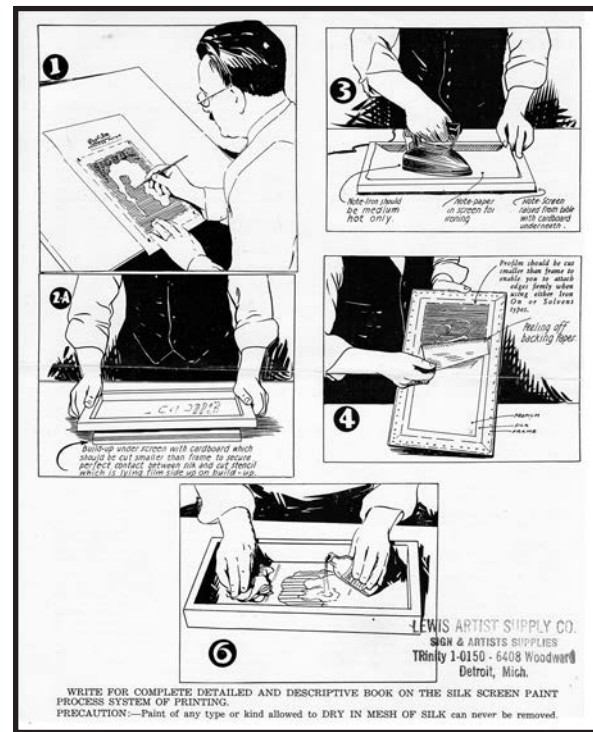
Advertisement: Dennison's store offered two tiles with Pennsylvania Dutch motifs. July 1943 issue of *House & Garden* magazine.

(See the two Designed Tiles sold at Dennison's on page 21.)





For a hearty tea. Colorful tracery of floral and hex design in teatiles; \$1 ea., Dennison. Massive old copper tea kettle in traditional style, \$28, and wooden handled copper country "school bell", \$10, B. Altman.



Instructions for making silkscreen stencils using the Profilm process. From Alfred S. Daneman, Profilm, (Dayton, Ohio: The Profilm Corp.) Undated.

Applying Silkscreen Process to Decorating Tiles in the 1940s

Historians of the New York WPA poster shop give sole credit to Anthony Velonis for establishing the silkscreen methods used there, a reputation bolstered by the publication of his 1937 booklet "Technical Problems of the Artist: Technique of the Silkscreen Process," circulated in the WPA shops. This elliptical narrative has been convincingly challenged recently by Guido Lengwiler in his *A History of Screen Printing: How an Art Evolved into an Industry*, published in English in 2016; there were other artist-silkscreeners in New York City. Velonis adopted and promoted Profilm stencil-cutting materials and kits which allowed see-through stencil-making, applying the partial designs cut from Profilm sheets by ironing or adhering cut-outs on each screen to produce a finished image with all colors in register.

Designed Tiles certainly used the Profilm method yet, until further information appears, we will not know what other methods they used.

Harold designed the early tiles. Most employees of Designed Tiles were artists. They could be laid off, collect unemployment insurance while making their own art, then return to the studio for another stint. One sees the hands of other designers like Tusnelde Sanders. Also, one suspects veteran textile and wallpaper designers were regular contributors. Textile designer Maxine Szanton (1911-1969), sister of illustrator Beatrice Szanton Tobey, conceived similar tiles for the Russian War Relief fundraiser of 1944. One suspects that versatile Manhattan textile artist Ruth Reeves (1892-1966), always in need of money and highly skilled in making silkscreen stencils with painted resists, contributed many of the anonymous designs. They match her principles of design that she taught at Cooper Union in the 1940s and 1950s. Eventually, by 1954, Designed Tiles produced a pair of decorated tiles by Ruth Reeves, signed in the stencil and using her later trendy commercial-art style of the 1950s. Her last address book contained a listing for Harold and Designed Tiles.⁶



Maxine Szanton (signed), Russian Summer Scene, Mosaic tile blank. 1944. One of a four-seasons tile set sold in a 1944 fundraiser for Russian War Relief, Inc.



Ruth Reeves (signed). Parlor Scene. 1954. Wheeling blank. One of a pair of Designed Tiles offered in the Vanderlaan Tile Co. catalog, 1957/58.



An early "Spanish-style" tile's attribution to Designed Tiles is confirmed by Adelaide Kerr's article of fall 1946.

Woman Discovers Career In Tiles

By Adelaide Kerr
Back in 1942 Elisabeth Higgins was trying to help discover how to produce smart, colorful design-tiles at low cost.

Now that the tile business is a going concern, she finds, to her amazement, that during those experimental years she also found the answer to some read-and-butter problems which bother a lot of people.

Climb the stairs to the second story loft where Design Tiles is housed in New York and you probably will find Miss Higgins darling around among stacks of bright gleaming tiles, her chestnut curls swooped back from her ears, her blue eyes twinkling above a gamine-like grin.

"After I was graduated from Cornell University," she says, "I worked awhile in advertising and publicity and then I married Harold Ambellan, an American sculptor. During the war an importer could not get hand-decorated tiles at low cost, because in America that kind of labor was much higher-priced than in Europe. So he asked my husband what to do. My husband began to experiment on how to produce the tiles here. He did the brain work and I ran the errands and things like that. The trouble we had!

Produce 10,000 a Week
"It took us a year to fill an order for 6,000 tiles. But at the end of that year we knew how. And now we can produce 10,000 tiles a week. In 1943 my husband went to war and left the business in my hands and now that he is back, he is concentrating on sculpture again. He comes in once a week to see about the designs and things like that."

The tiles come into the studio as plain white six-inch squares and



ELISABETH HIGGINS

leave it glazed and patterned with flowers, swans, dancing clowns or other colorful designs. Some are used as hot dish stands; others as wall decoration in cocktail spots or lobbies. A former ambassador has the fire-place in his hunting lodge paved with them.

Uses Silk Screen
The secret of producing the decorative tiles, in a country where hand labor is costly, is the silk screen. After the design is chosen, sheets of lacquer film are fitted over it (one at a time) and all of that part of the design which is to be in one color is cut out of the film stencil-fashion, the colors then being applied to the tile one at a time until the design is complete.

Also entitled "Tile Painting Aids Careers of Artists," this 1946 *Associated Press* article by Adelaide Kerr was seen in newspapers across North America. It unfairly downplays Harold's role and the large 10,000 tile-per-week through-put may be a mistake. (*Lancaster New Era*, Lancaster, PA, October 18, 1946, p.8)

The color layers of water-soluble underglaze paints, finely ground minerals with fixatives, were squeegeed onto aligned tiles which were dried between applications. The underglaze designs and the clear glaze layers of these porcelain tile blanks were likely “single-fired,” halving the firing time and expenses. Using a spray booth and perhaps protective masks, studio members would spray lead glaze over the printed tiles which were fired, achieving a glossy bright tile. The dangers of lead in North American ceramic studios were underplayed despite the warnings of industry scientists, Furneal’s tome on lead poisoning and lead-free glazes, and Bernard Leach’s dire warnings in his *The Potter’s Book* of 1940. Some mistakenly felt assured that fritting the lead would protect people. Janeway had adopted their methods and was diagnosed with lead poisoning before 1950. Lead exposure at Designed Tiles was unavoidable; however, the extent of the exposure is unknown.

Musings on the Price of a Tile by Designed Tiles

Unfortunately, no pricelists are preserved but the tiles are offered in 1940s advertising for a retail price of \$1.00 apiece. Assuming this reflects a 65% retail markup of the wholesale price, Vanderlaan was wholesaling them for 60 cents apiece which netted 40 cents for the retailer. Vanderlaan could well have bought the tiles from Ambellan at 40 cents apiece and sold them to the retailer at a 50% markup, for 60 cents, netting Vanderlaan 20 cents per tile. Ambellan was paying Wheeling tile Company some 2-5 cents per tile so that, of the 40 cents received, they had some 35-38 cents per tile to pay for their decoration, labor, studio maintenance, plus profit. In her 1946 newspaper interview with Adelaide Kerr, Lis claimed “we can produce 10,000 tiles a week.”⁷ This seems to be an improbably high throughput, perhaps a misprint: 1,000 tiles per week seems more probable.

The Ambellans' Social Life, WWII, Departures

Harold and Lis were both part of New York’s leftist scene of the 1930s and met in 1938 at a party. Harold was a sculptor who was forming United American Sculptors, a division of United American Artists, a CIO affiliate. Lis Higgins was a union organizer. She was with Harold at the beginning of Designed Tiles and her main



Advertisement: Liebermann’s gift store of Lansing, Mich., retailed for \$1.00 “hand decorated tea tiles” identifiable as Designed Tiles. (Lansing State Journal, July 6, 1944, p.10)



role became marketing, not the artistic end of the business. When they married on May 4, 1940, their friend and off-and-on boarder, Woody Guthrie, sang *It Takes a Married Man to Sing a Worried Song* for their wedding song.⁸ Harold, also a folk singer, performed with Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and others in the early 1940s.⁹ Lis kept to her death a letter from Woody postmarked June 10, 1941.¹⁰ In it he teased them about the tile business:

Dear Eliz + Harold -

Hello New York and 21 Street and so forth. Hows all of the folks around there? [...] How's the tile bizness partner? Any trouble with squatters or rustlers? Worlds full of tile rustlers you know. Constipation's another word ot it. Or maybe that is more properly called Tile Wrestling...

The Ambellans began a tradition of weekly tile-painting parties, inviting artists to their apartment after which one picked up one’s shiny fired tile at the next party. Carol Janeway was likely invited by her Cornell buddy Lis “Bibs” Higgins in 1940 or 1941 to one such party where she first experienced underglaze tile painting.

Ambellan’s interview records that the business was successful enough to hire a manager freeing them for other activities like sailing. While Harold served in the US Navy, Lis moved house in 1943 to an address in Greenwich Village, 232 Wooster Street, a notorious building full of artists and colorful types. Later FBI inquiries of the 1950s about the wartime activities of communist spy, Robert Soblen, focused on people who attended Lis’ parties there.¹¹

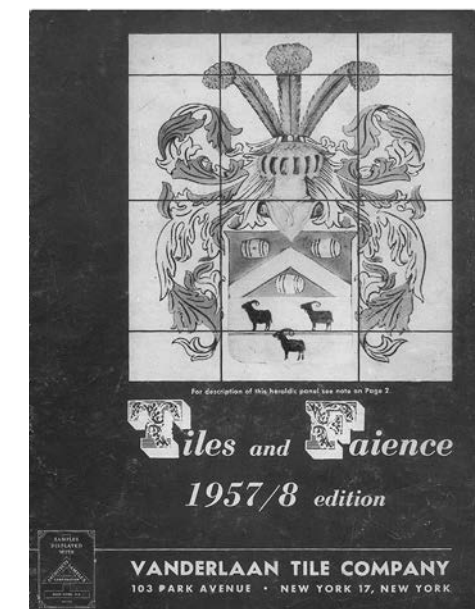
They divorced around 1948, remained friends, and both retained interests in Designed Tiles until its sale in 1958 even though Harold had already moved to France.

Catalogs of the Vanderlaan Tile Company

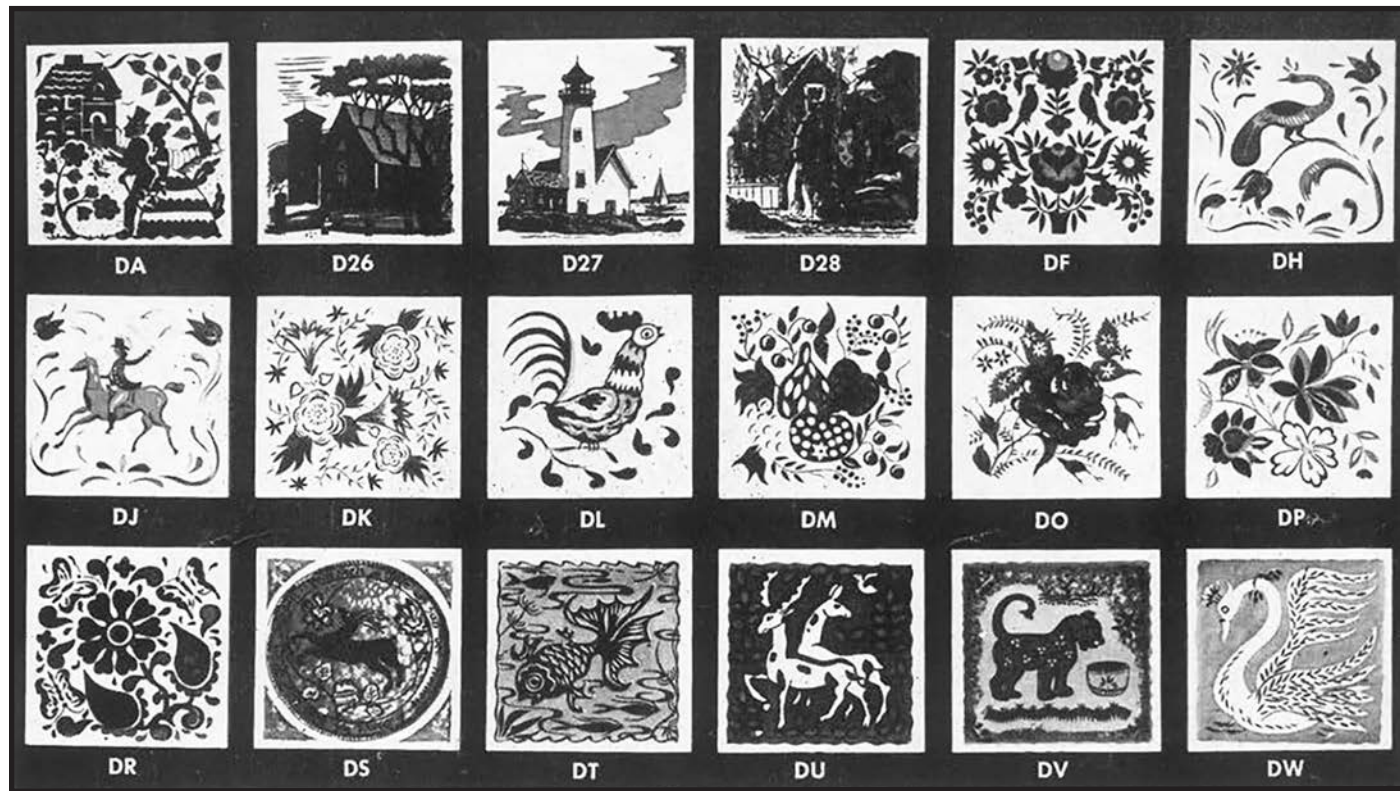
While no one knows yet how many catalogs Vanderlaan published during Charles Vanderlaan’s tenure, various copies of two catalogs are known. The one, with the blue cover is from the early 1950s, judging by the Designed Tiles offerings (see page 25), while the other catalog’s cover (below) is dated 1957/58. Vanderlaan benefited from product placement in the glossy journal *Progressive Architecture*, which would run illustrated stories about projects using his tiles. That journal also offered to send readers Vanderlaan’s catalogs identified with their identification number: “AIA 23A.” This classification number appears on both known Vanderlaan catalogs so it is not useful for dating them.

Designed Tiles Printed Custom Tiles

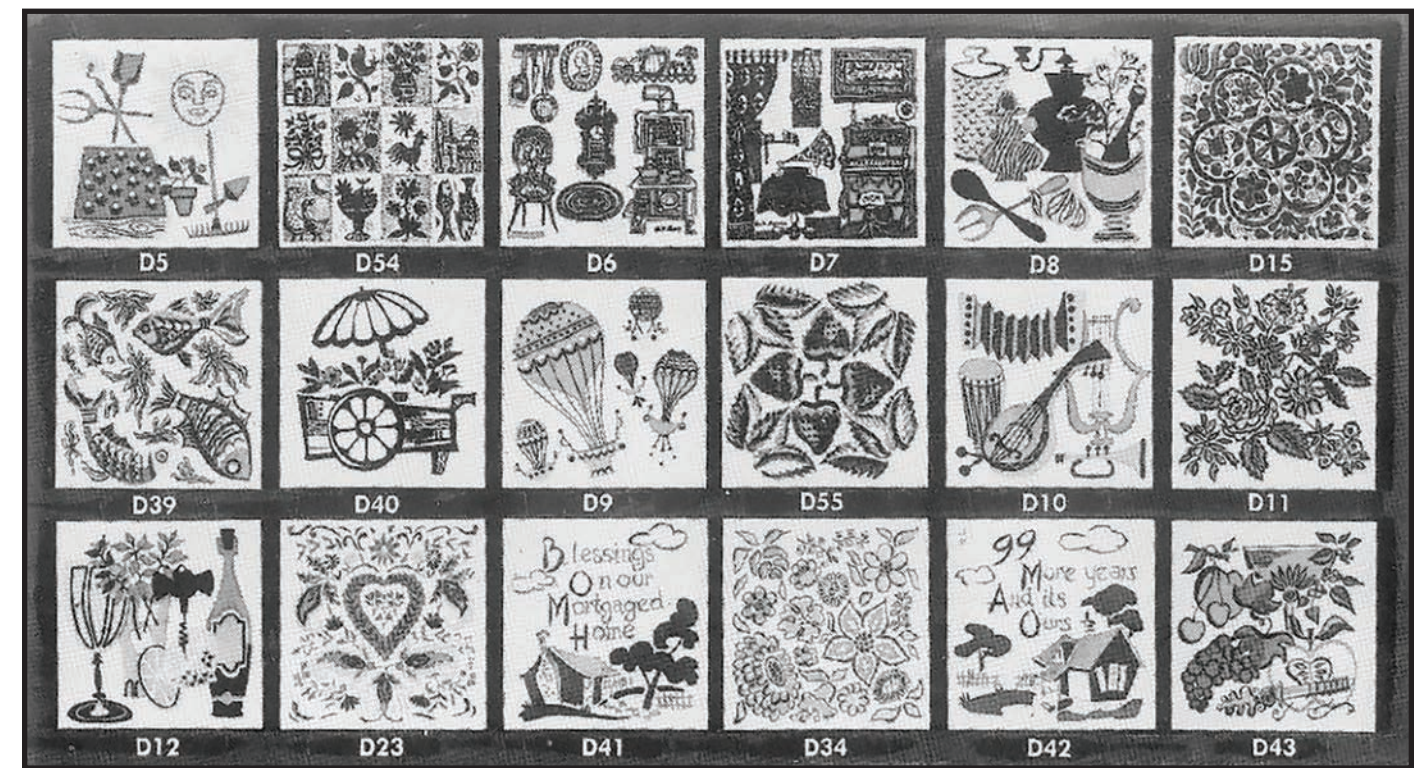
Designed Tiles produced the designs and printed tiles for clients such as hospitality people wanting to promote their establishments, merchants wanting to sell souvenirs, or established ceramists filling their own clients’ orders with printed versions of their designs. For example, after 1948 Carol Janeway turned increasingly to



Two versions of 1950s (undated) Vanderlaan Tile catalogs entitled “Tiles and Faience” came with covers printed in blue or black, suggesting several printing campaigns. See page 25.



Early 1950s Vanderlaan Tile Co. "Tiles and Faience" catalog: eighteen Designed Tiles: DA-DW.



Late 1950s Vanderlaan Tile Co. "Tiles and Faience" catalog: eighteen more Designed Tiles: D5-D43.



printed designs on tiles and other ceramics, subcontracted to Designed Tiles, first to the Ambellans and then to the Sklanskys.¹²

Metal Fabricators Set Designed Tiles in Their Products

The authorship of these copper and brass items with tile insets is unknown yet we know from newspaper accounts that decorative brass items were popular gifts in the late 1940s.¹⁴



During the wedding boom of the late 1940s and early 1950s, The Cellini Shop, Evanston, Illinois, issued many gift-suitable items made from "Argental," aluminum, called "poor man's silver" along with pewter, with tile insets, some by Designed Tiles.¹⁵



Brass ashtray set with tile by Designed Tiles. Seen in early 1950s Vanderlaan Tile Co, catalog code "DS." 8-1/4 x 8-1/4 inches.

Below: Argental Charger or Appetizer Tray inset with tile by Designed Tiles. The Cellini Shop, aluminum, late 1940s - early 1950s. Diam. 16-3/4 inches.



Carol Janeway. White Turkey Gourmet Shop tile, 1951.¹³ Printed by Designed Tiles. (Order Book 6- 373)

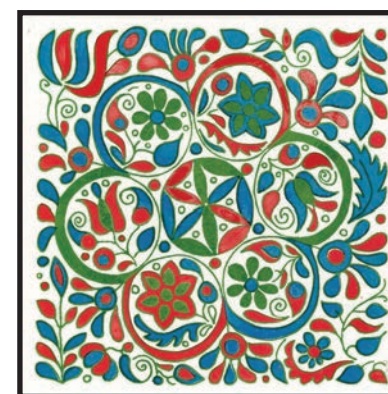
The Year 1958 Marked Endings and Continuations

Vanderlaan sold his tile company in 1958 to Herman Goldberg, who incorporated the business on August 3, 1958 as Vanderlaan Tile Co. Inc. The elaborate 1957/58 catalog would have been part of Charles Vanderlaan's sales pitch: a booklet illustrating his suppliers, his wares, his national sales network, his realm for prospective buyers. Goldberg continued the firm's name and, it appears, its tile lines. His tiny Park Avenue 4th floor showroom was described in the April 8, 1967 issue of the *New Yorker* magazine.

In 1958, Designed Tiles was purchased by friends of the Ambellans, Stephen and Masha Sklansky, whose studio was a 9th-floor loft at 714 Broadway near Cooper Union and NYU's Washington Square College. They continued for another 20 years to reproduce some Ambellan designs while concentrating on new, less adventurous single-tile designs, mostly in overglaze, often using imported transfers. The tiles are recognizable by the cork backings bearing the firm's new logo.¹⁶ Their daughter Nina recalled:

I clearly remember big, fat albums of decals that seemed foreign and getting Christmas gifts of pfeffernüssen and German wines...

Their trusted employee, Ronald Thompson, and their father formed a skilled and coordinated two-man printing team. Ronald would do the positioning, removing, replacing of tiles; Stephen would do the screen and squeegee part. Lyubamir Nikoloff, a Bulgarian émigré



A post-1958 Designed Tiles tile, printing in overglaze a popular design from the firm's Ambellan era.



Charles Vanderlaan added domestic tiles to his father's European tile lines. While he and the Ambellans shared a love for sailing, he regularly raced his Atlantic class sailboat, Minkie, in Long Island regattas. She flew the burgee of the Horseshoe Harbour Yacht Club, Larchmont, NY.

and printmaker, was another person who helped her father with technical things. At times Nina and her brother helped with labeling, gluing on the cork backings, and packing.

The Sklanskys moved away from using clear lead glaze over underglaze yet did not escape the solvents used in producing the overglazed tiles. Nina did not recollect there being a spray booth or fume hood.



Harold Ambellan mentioned his popular tile design about coffee. Here is such a tile printed in overglaze by the Sklanskys after 1958.



Designed Tiles. Billboard Tile series. Irma La Douce, 1960. Overglaze. A write-up in the *Brooklyn Daily*, January 18, 1961, describes the launch of this popular series of tiles adapting Broadway show poster art. The Masha Petrova in the interview is, in fact, Masha Sklansky. *Associated Press* picked up the story which ran nationwide without a photo.

While no subsequent Vanderlaan Tile catalogs have appeared, it seems likely that the Sklansky's continued selling to Vanderlaan's successor. The buyer of the Sklansky family's Designed Tiles, circa 1978, is unknown, as is the fate of the papers and designs, and the firm's name seems to have been retired. Screencraft Products, West Yarmouth, Massachusetts, printed one tile depicting Nantucket Island sites, a tile which the Sklansky's had already printed for its designer whose name was printed in the stencil: Phyllis G. Ritchie. She taught art at Skidmore College and, with her husband, ran a bookstore on Nantucket during the summers. It is possible that Screencraft, established in 1955, bought and absorbed Designed Tiles accounts in the 1970s, and information about that acquisition has disappeared. Or perhaps Ritchie just provided her art to Screencraft to print a subsequent edition.

In 1958 the Wheeling Tile Company was going out of business. Their tiles were no longer available to construction firms, much less to tile decoration studios that switched to blanks by other companies: Robertson, Richards, Pilkington, Mosaic.

The proceeds of the 1958 sale of Designed Tiles would have helped Harold, already living in France, and Elisabeth who was finishing her undergraduate degree at Columbia University. Harold and family living in Antibes



Designed Tiles. Nantucket tile by Phyllis G. Ritchie (signed) undated



Designed Tiles logo (1958-1978) on cork back of Nantucket tile.



Screencraft. Nantucket tile by Phyllis G. Ritchie (signed) undated.



Screencraft logo on cork back of Nantucket tile.

would visit with friends Tusnelda and Ross Sanders living in Cagnes-sur-mer on the Côte d'Azur. Lis, retaining the Ambellan name, would get her Ph.D. in 1961 from Ohio State University and go to research biochemistry at the University of Connecticut at Storrs until retirement. She

joined a Quaker Meeting there. At home, she entertained friends like Martha Wilson with her New York stories, serving martinis on her excellent cocktail table set with 18 tiles handpainted by Harold, not commercial tiles by Designed Tiles.¹⁷

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Zoe and Anne Ambellan and Nina Sklansky, all three virtual daughters of Designed Tiles, for their valuable information. Steve Visakay and Tile Heritage Foundation provided the Vanderlaan Tile Company catalogs, without which I could not have positively identified my tiles. Richard Gilbert of Linwood tirelessly corrected this article.
2. Her name is spelled with an "s," Elisabeth, and her nickname was Lis, not Liz.
3. Strictly, the Ambellans started out using ATCO and Wheeling blanks interchangeably but no Designed Tiles products using ATCO blanks dated later than 1941 have appeared.
4. See Christopher DeNoon. *Posters of the WPA*. Los Angeles: The Wheatley Press 1987.
5. There are two nearly identical transcriptions of Harold's taped interviews. These quotations use the first one I received from the family. The second transcription does not include the name "S---" which I have interpreted to be Salterini. It is published on line: Harold Ambellan Memoir, 2005, Special Collections and University Archives, UMass Amherst Libraries. <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/collection/mums855>
6. Reeves, Smithsonian microfilm.
7. Adelaide Kerr, "Tile Painting Aids Careers of Artists," an *Associated Press* nationally-syndicated article appeared in countless newspapers in October 1946.
8. See also Chapter 4 in the book by Nora Guthrie and the Woody Guthrie Archives. *My Name is New York: Ramblin' Around Woody Guthrie's Town*. (Brooklyn, NY: PowerHouse Books) 2012, pp.23 ff.
9. The notes made by Richard A Reuss, Woody Guthrie historian, from interviews in 1969 with Elisabeth Ambellan, give a cinematic impression of the Ambellan's scene on East 21st Street where Guthrie wrote the first draft of his autobiographical novel, *Bound for Glory*, published in 1943. Interview notes with Elisabeth Ambellan are preserved in Reuss's papers: Richard A. Reuss papers, 1888-1993, bulk 1927-1973, Indiana University Archives.
10. Woody Guthrie Archives Correspondence -1; Box -1; Folder -4. Letters contributed to Woody Guthrie Archive by Martha Wilson, Elisabeth Ambellan's executor. Letter to Elisabeth and Harold Ambellan by Woody Guthrie ©Woody Guthrie
11. This is seen in the FBI records of Carol Janeway, Harold Ambellan, and Elisabeth Ambellan. Harold's answers to the FBI, made post-divorce, reflect the decline of their marriage, saying that Lis was "a party girl," a cryptic damning label. For Robert Soblen, see also John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr. *Early Cold War Spies* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 2006.
12. See Victoria Jenssen, Chapter 15: "Printing Janeway Designs on Ceramics," *The Art of Carol Janeway*. Friesen Press, 2022.
13. The order for 500 felted tiles appears in Orderbook 6: #373.a, dated August 23, 1951, to be delivered on October 1, 1951. She was to bill National Gourmet Shops Inc., c/o White Turkey Gourmet Shops Inc., 16 East 49th Street. She noted that the price rate for this order was \$1.75 per tile and that she would charge \$1.65 per tile on the next order.
14. Searches for brass ashtrays on www.newspapers.com yielded articles about the popularity of brass decorative furnishings and items, falling in a narrow date range leading up to Christmas 1949.
15. While the tile insets are not mentioned, a reasonable history of the firm is presented: Janet G. Messenger, "History Center Highlights Contributions of Evanston's Cellini Shop to the Arts & Crafts Movement," in *Evanston Round Table*. <https://evanstonroundtable.com/2014/07/31/history-center-highlights-contributions-of-evanstons-cellini-shop-to-the-arts-crafts-movement/>
16. Their daughter Nina Sklansky provided recollections and invaluable information about her parents' business, including images of artistic tiles from their studio. Nina remembered an elderly Lis Ambellan who, living and working in Connecticut, remained friends with her family.
17. Wilson was Elisabeth Ambellan's executrix and presented a detailed eulogy at their Quaker Meeting for Worship memorializing her life.

About the author: Victoria Jenssen is a retired educator and object conservator trained at the NYU Conservation Center. An independent art historian, she specializes in ceramic tile decorating studios operating in New York City starting in the 1940s wartime and using either hand painting or studio printing techniques. Previously, Ms. Jenssen has written a two part series on Carol Janeway and her mid-century tiles for the *Tile Heritage Review*; and this year she presents us with her new book: *The Art of Carol Janeway*, published by Friesen Press, 2022. Visit www.caroljaneway.com.

A Tribute to our Founders



Judy Sutcliffe unveils her mural commemorating the meeting of Queen Elizabeth II with President Ronald Reagan in Santa Barbara, California, March 1983. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Judith Sutcliffe (1939-2021)

Back in the day when written letters weren't considered eccentric as a means of communication, I had written Judy a letter of inquiry, dated January 7, 1987 asking about her tile work.

"I guess I take it for granted that business is an adventure and delight, but, I have rather carefully (though intuitively) maneuvered myself over my nearly 20 years of entrepreneurship into this current state of generally enthusiastic enjoyment of what I do. A lot of small choices and large risks involved. I don't think about it much, but I do notice that invariably my customers will say at some point (and rather wistfully), 'You really enjoy what you do, don't you?'" (She might well have answered with an emphatic "Yes!" or a gentle smile.)

Were I to choose one word for Judy, it would be "joy," a joy reflecting an inner peace, a sincere caring for others, and not without a degree of frivolity. You could feel it in her manner, her tile work, her literature... truly a remarkable woman, who has enriched my life and the lives of so many others.

jt

Laird Plumleigh (1939-2021)

Quoting Laird from Lynne Blackman's interview published in *San Diego Home/Garden Lifestyles* (January 2010):

"I've never regarded myself as a tile maker, artisan or studio ceramist. I approach each tile as if it is a work of art. Nature is my inspiration. I am a native Californian, a gardener and a surfer. I draw on natural forms: kelp, beach rocks, flowers -- these are my reference points. My work reflects an aesthetic vision and tradition of the West.

"I take chances all the time. I am only semi-disciplined, but I have practiced my craft long enough to know what I'm doing. I am driven. I have certain goals and needs. My approach is reckless, experimental, pushing the limits.

"My personal philosophy has to do with illusion and impermanence. The non-tangible values and ideas of humans are more important than objects. Art expresses the soul. When you look at some work it is imbued with spirit -- other work is not. Work that expresses spirit lives on. All else is illusion."

Laird and I initially corresponded, my responding to an ad he had placed in *Ceramics Monthly* in the final months of 1986. I was engaged in researching the history of tile manufacturing in California, and Laird having established his studio six years prior, was enthusiastic about sharing his knowledge. Over the years we formed a close friendship, his hosting Sheila and me whenever we were in the Southland. We never left without a tour and a handful of his latest creations. Laird was a man immersed in clay, an inspiration for many of us. His spirit lives on.

jt



Laird Plumleigh in his studio. Encinitas, California.

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