Miles of Tiles

By FOHP director, Tim Murphy

Long before joining the Friends of Hart Park board of directors, while visiting family in Los Angeles, I took a tour of the William S. Hart Museum. As we know now, and I learned at the time, Mr. Hart was a movie star during the silent film era, and was famous for playing a cowboy in many westerns. In 1927, he built his “dream house” (now the museum) in Newhall, north of Los Angeles. Mr. Hart had grown to love that town because many of his movies were shot on location in the area. When he retired from his acting career, he moved into his Spanish Colonial Revival mansion and spent the last 20 years of his life writing books and getting involved in his community. When he died in 1946, he left his home, property, furnishings, movie memorabilia and Western art collection to the County of Los Angeles. What ultimately became the Hart Museum was his way to give something back to the public who had given him so much.

I’ve always been interested to see the tile  in old homes from the 1920’s. The tiles in  Hart's house are still in surprisingly good  shape. The kitchen, pantry and guest bathrooms all have the same white tile. The wall tiles are 3x6, with small hexagon  mosaic tiles for floors and countertops. Even the trim is white, to emphasize cleanliness in these utilitarian areas, but then there are colorful 4x4 wall and floor tiles in the upstairs master bathrooms.

Back when these tiles were made, a lot of tile companies made these same shapes and sizes. I wanted to find out what company made the tile, but without any decorative tiles it might be difficult to identify the manufacturer. The one thing this house does have is distinctive soap dishes, toilet paper holders, towel bars, and toothbrush holders. Their shapes and designs are the same throughout the house, whether they have white or colored glazes on them. I was hoping they might be the key to identifying the manufacturer.

As if that wasn’t enough of a challenge, there was also a small tabletop made of many different tile designs on a wrought iron base.

Luckily, here’s where the Tile Heritage Foundation ([TileHeritage.org](https://www.tileheritage.org/)) came to the rescue. They are a group dedicated to the research and preservation of ceramic surfaces other ceramic surfacing materials, made and installed in the American tradition.

It didn’t take very long for the Tile Heritage Foundation to identify the tiles and their makers for the Museum. We were all glad to finally find out that the tile used throughout the house was made by the American Encaustic Tiling Company. The American Encaustic tiles required a two-step process. This involved the firing of the clay first, and then the firing of the glaze. The high temperatures used in their process resulted in a very durable product.

In 1927 the American Encaustic Tiling Company had production facilities in Vernon and Hermosa Beach, as well as its original factory in Zanesville, Ohio. Founded in 1875, it had offices in New York City, and by 1930 was reputed to be the largest tile manufacturing company in the world. The fixtures or “accessories” as they were referred to by AE, were appropriately called “AETCOTYPE” Accessories.

The tabletop tiles were all made by the D&M Tile Company from Los Angeles, which made tiles from 1928 to 1939.

Thank you Tile Heritage Foundation!