

Delft Tiles

Susan Coe *The Basenji*, January 1984, page 8

Henry Chapman Mercer 1856 – 1930

Henry Mercer was an ex-lawyer who found his life as an archeologist. He held many responsible positions in his field and was able to go on tropical explorations. He was doing exactly what he wanted to do, yet at the same time he was making contributions to science and history.

But he contracted malaria in the Yucatan, and in 1897, because of intermittent fever, he had to give up his activities. He was in luck when he received a large inheritance and with his broad range of interests, he was able to lead the life of an eccentric in style.

One of his many projects was the displaying of the ceramic tiles his company, the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works, made as well as his vast collection of tiles from around the world. He built his home, "Fonthill", to display these tiles in Doylestown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The structure was a generation ahead of its time being of poured concrete, even the roof. The building itself is an amazing castle built between 1908 and 1910 with twelve unskilled laborers and a single horse. It is a romanticist's dream come true.



In Henry Mercer's own bedroom, you can find a few "Delft" tiles of dogs, probably from the 18th Century. There is a mastiff, saluki and Basenji represented – just a few tiles of each breed.

The Moravian tiles produced at Fonthill are not just "tiles" but wonderful pictures in many colors. If you have the opportunity to attend the Bucks County Kennel Club Show some spring, you'll find a further influence of Henry Mercer. The best of breed trophies are Moravian tiles, originally designed by Henry Mercer, with a dog depicted on them.



Fonthill Museum "Delft tiles, probably from 18th century from Henry Mercer's tile catalog.