

HERMAN C. MUELLER

1854 — 1941



Herman C. Mueller with a faience tile panel. (E. Stanley Wires, "Decorative Tiles", *New England Architect and Builder Illustrated*, Number 16, 1960)

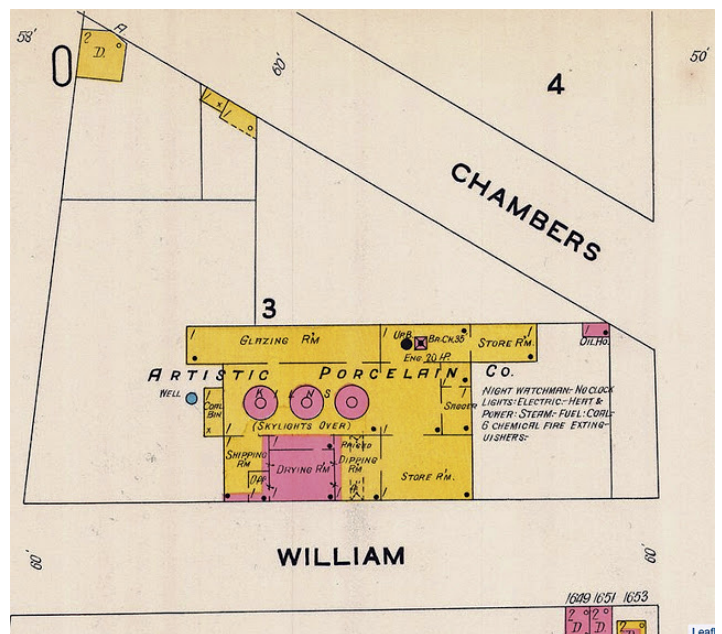
Born in Rodach, Germany, near Saxe-Coburg in 1854. Herman Carl Mueller, was educated in the art centers of Europe. His parents recognized early that young Herman was artistically talented so they encouraged him at age 14 to enter the Nuremberg School of Industrial Arts. There he discovered his talent and interest in sculpture and at 16 he began his formal training at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. After finishing his formal education, he worked as an apprentice with different sculptors throughout Germany.

In 1878, at the age of 24, he emigrated to the United States because he heard it was "a land of opportunity," settling in Cincinnati, one of the burgeoning ceramic regions in the country. There he worked for Matt Morgan Art Pottery 1882-1884 and then Kensington Art Tile Co. of Newport, Kentucky. In 1885 he did sculptures for the Indianapolis State House in Indiana. He was employed at a pottery at Zanesville, Ohio where Rozane ware was made and awarded a medal by the Franklin Institute for his contributions to ceramics. His decorative ceramic tiles would decorate many buildings in America. One such building was the tile for the Canadian-Pacific Railway in Quebec, New York's subway stations and many hotels owe much of their embellishment to Mueller's work.



The Westward Journey, limestone and bronze sculpture (1886-1887) by Herman C. Mueller on the Indiana Statehouse in Indianapolis, Indiana

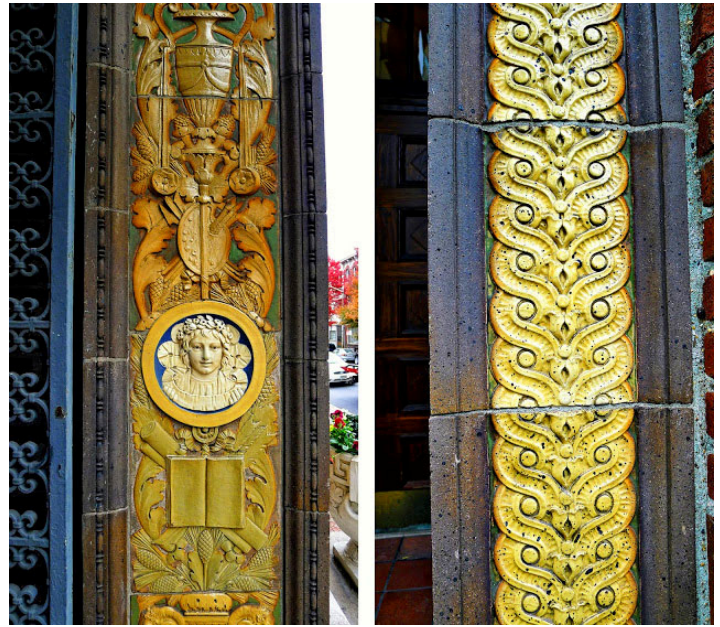
Mueller moved to the Delaware valley and became the technical manager of Robertson Art Tile Works in Morrisville. In 1908 he established the Mueller Mosaic Tile Company in Trenton, where he promoted the importance of Industrial art schools as Germany had recognized the co-operation of school and factory, for the growth of arts industries.



Sanborn map from 1908, the year that the Mueller Mosaic Company replaced the Artistic Porcelain Company in its William and Chambers Street plant. (<http://map.princeton.edu/mapviewer/#/vd66w1458>)

“Schools of Progressive Education...what is considered a great privilege in Europe for artisans and mechanics is looked upon as a burden in this country”, he noted at a talk at the Trenton School of Industrial Art in 1913. As a trustee at the Trenton School of Industrial Arts he felt the focus should be on art industries, not on scholarly work, but the development of the whole student.

Mueller Tiles can be found throughout the greater Trenton area and although the first tiles were mainly used for fireplaces many were used to decorate swimming pools and public buildings, including the State House Annex, the doorway on the Kelsey Building and Crescent Temple façade. Many of his early designs were classical figures of the ancient world used as fireplace surrounds – to his Art Deco style and then his later Impressionistic pastel-shaded mosaic tiles. For the Walker-Gordon Rotalactor, the design of the tiles combined many of these styles at the end of his career. The Mueller company continued producing tiles until his death in 1941.



Trenton's Kelsey Building: Detail of the arched vestibule with Mueller Mosaic panels



Animal scenes in the New Jersey State House Annex



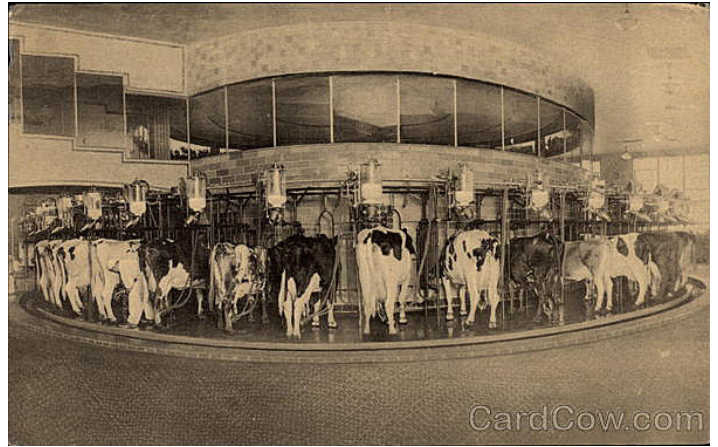
Trenton's Crescent Temple: Mueller Mosaic's tiled panel with a Middle Eastern flavor



Trenton's Kelsey Building: The arched vestibule with Mueller Mosaic panels



Trenton's Crescent Temple: detail of Mueller Mosaic's tiled panel with a Middle Eastern flavor



Mueller Mosaic's ceramic tile and decorations on the Rotolactor of the famous Walker Gordon Dairy in Plainsboro, NJ (Photo post card courtesy of www.cardcow.com)



Herman C. Mueller's summer home in Titusville, NJ where he died in September, 1941

The above information on Herman C. Mueller is taken from <https://tilesinnewyork.blogspot.com/search?q=mueller>

MUELLER and the TRENTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

Education was always important to Mueller and as a resident of Trenton he became involved with the Board of Education, serving from 1911-1918, including several terms as president.

Educators across the country were promoting new standards for schools with the 6-3-3 plan and Mueller was instrumental proposing to build a new junior high school in Trenton. For years, elementary schools were eight grades and high school nine through twelve. Educators felt many students were bored by the time they reached eighth grade and often dropped out of school with no skills. The Junior school prepared students at a younger age to prepare for their future; a college tract, commercial training or to develop skills that would give them a trade for life. The junior school curriculum offered courses in many technical trades such as printing, carpentry, pottery and other skills.



Trenton's Soldiers' and Sailors' 'War Memorial showing Mueller Mosaic's wall tile (photo by Rich Hundley)

Frank Frederick, director of the Trenton School of Industrial Arts, advertised for students who had dropped out of school after 8th grade to continue their education taking evening classes to further their skills.

The United States enters the Great War (WW1) in 1917, nearly three years after the war started. The war would last through November, 1918.

Across the country, anti-German feelings prevailed about the Great War and Mueller was targeted even though he considered himself a very loyal American. He was accused of promoting a “gag” on teachers discussing “war” in their classes and he distributed flyers about the superior education of German schools.

In January, 1918, Mueller was invited by City Librarian Howard L. Hughes to speak on vocational education and the system of manual training at the Symposium. This was a small group of Trenton men who met often to discuss current events and other topics. Mueller took the position that he thought German methods were more efficient and effective, and thus bringing him criticism.

The Trenton Times analyzed the address and found nothing of a seditious character in it, but there was, however about it a suggestion of bad taste for a native of Germany to speak during the war so glowingly of anything German to the consequent disparagement of American methods.

Mayor Frederick W. Donnelly had endorsed the idea of a statue to be constructed by Mueller. The idea was to create a better feeling our between American-born and German-born citizens in line with the efforts of the National Government to have citizenship present a united front for it prosecution of the war effort.

The statue, “Columbia at War” was to have been formally presented to the city at its 1918 Independence Day celebrations. It was to be dedicated in front of City Hall. However the city commissioners learned that the general public in regards to the statue were against it and that threats were made that if the statue were erected in front of City Hall, it would be destroyed within 24 hours.

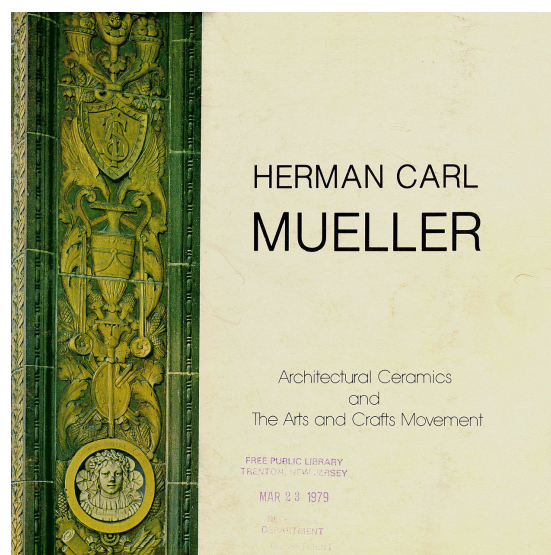
The statue was not presented and a few days later Mueller submitted his resignation from the BOE to Mayor Donnelly, however the mayor lauded his service as “given untiringly of his time and energy to further the welfare of the local schools...”.



Muller's rejected statue of "Columbia," which he later destroyed

Mueller would remain for the rest of his life an advocate for the training of trades in public schools.

Mueller continues on the board of the Trenton School of Industrial Arts and eventually would become its President.



Herman Carl Mueller, Architectural Ceramics and the Arts and Crafts Movement, Catalog from the New Jersey State Museum, Trenton exhibit from January 13 through March 18, 1979

(Click here for Part 1) (Click here for Part 2)



Image of George Washington created with Mueller Mosaic's tile that stands behind the Union Fire Company on Route 29 in Titusville

THE UNION FIRE COMPANY'S MONUMENT

Story has it that the mosaic had originally stood in front of the old Washington Hotel on Route 29, which was a resort of sorts for visitors who came by way of the Delaware-Belvidere Railroad to enjoy a few days in the countryside along the historic river. Created by Mueller who had a summer home in the area, the mosaic might have been commissioned by the hotel to further honor the hero the inn owners had named their establishment for.

The stone and mosaic stood proudly in front of the hotel until World War I, when anti-German sentiment prompted vandals to push it off its base and roll it across the road and into the Delaware and Raritan Canal. There it sat until the 1970's, when it was fished out by firefighters and again given a place of honor.

Note that Mueller donated to the new firehouse built in 1936 a bust of George Washington and name plate that was placed on the side of the building facing River Road.