



# TYJESKI TILE CO.

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN



NEWSLETTER, JANUARY - MARCH 2024

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

**HISTORIC MILWAUKEE, INC.**

About Tours Events Doors Open Membership Shop Support

— TOURS AND EVENTS · SPECIAL EVENTS

### Living with Continental Tiles Virtual Book Talk

February 8 @ 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Cost: \$Free

[Register](#)

[+ Add to Google Calendar](#)

Ben Tyjeski, tile artist and author of *Carl Bergmans and the Continental Faience & Tile Co.*, co-authored with Kelly Dudley and Kathy Roberts, will present on the legacy of handmade art tiles in the Milwaukee area and the role these tiles have in contemporary design. Tyjeski will talk about the extraordinary tiles from the historic



### *LIVING WITH CONTINENTAL TILES*

**Thursday, February 8, 7:00pm**

Historic Milwaukee Inc.

[Click here to register.](#) Virtual lecture is free!

## NEW STORE HOURS:

**2nd Saturdays of the month  
10AM to 12PM**

**February 10  
March 9  
April 13  
May 11  
June 8**

**1334 N 58th St  
Milwaukee, WI**



### EPHEMERAL TILE SALE

**Saturday, April 27, 10-3pm**

Decorative tiles featuring woodland, floral motifs will be available for purchase, including trilliums, bloodroots, liverworts, shooting stars, and more!



# THE ARTIST IN NATURE

## NOTES FROM

### BEN'S SKETCHBOOK

It is no surprise the artist finds adoration for plants, for plants are quite like artists as well. They collect sunlight and water so they may sprout from the ground like it's a substrate. As their portraits blossom, they collaborate with other plant organisms that, as a whole across the landscape, they create panoramic compositions that have us human beings agape over and over again.

August 7, 2023

INSPIRING QUOTE

"Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet."  
 Jean-Jacques Rousseau




WWW.TYJESKITILE.COM

CARL BERGMANS

AND THE

CONTINENTAL FAIENCE & TILE CO.






BEN TYJESKI   KELLY DUDLEY   KATHY ROBERTS

**NEW BOOK!**  
Go to [www.continentalfaience.com](http://www.continentalfaience.com) for details and to purchase your own copy of the book!



View of a kitchen backsplash with blue glazed tiles before being filled in with grout. Located in a lake home in Delafield.

TILE TOWN FEATURE

## ORIENTAL THEATER

Latest Tile Town article reveals the tiles at the Oriental were made by the American Encaustic Tiling Co. from Zanesville, Ohio, as well as surprises found by Facilities Manager Ryan Putskey that lie underneath the carpet. *Click on the photos to read the article.*

URBAN

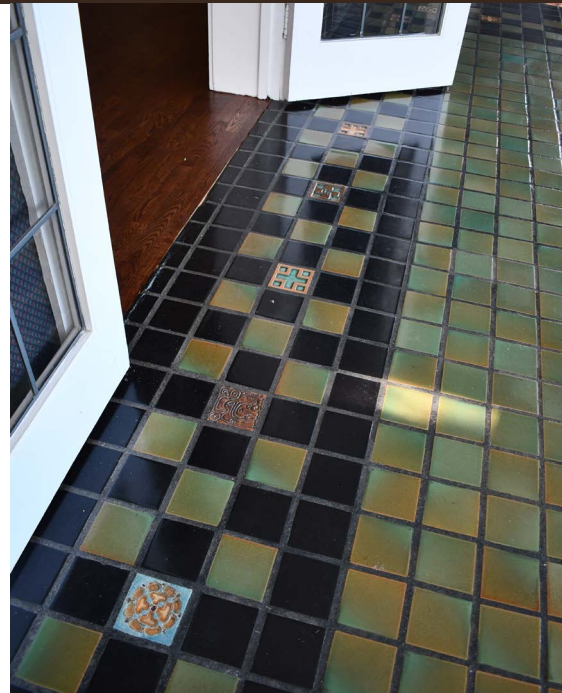
TILE

MILWAUKEE

TOWN

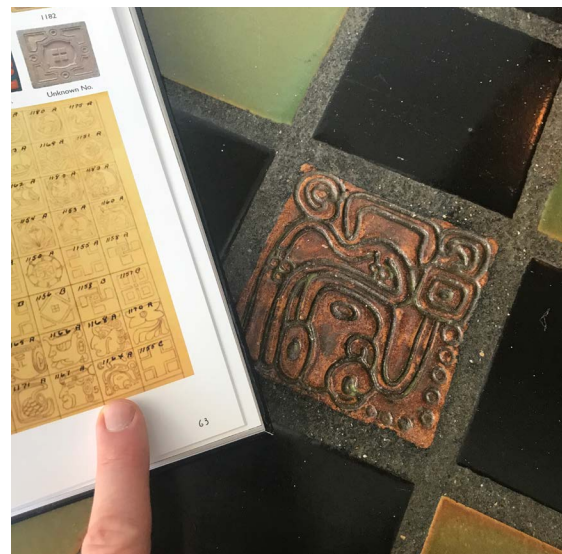


## TILE & TERRA COTTA NEWS: ART DECO TILED SOLARIUM IN RACINE, WI



**Top and above:** Views inside the solarium with patina-like green matte tiles and various Continental deco. inserts.

**Right:** Detail of a decorative insert design no. 1164 from Continental that was not printed in the recent Continental book, but is featured in old drawings from the company (where my finger is pointing).



This move-in-ready Tudor Revival home retains many original/historic features, all the while, has essential updates and is move-in-ready. It has 5 spacious bedrooms, 3.5 bathrooms, and lots of rooms to entertain and relax. Not to mention, it's generous views cannot be beat with a faience tile floor solarium facing Lake Michigan!

The elegant, Art Deco design of this lakefront home's floor tiles in the sunroom is one of its most treasured features. Sprinkled among the black and green crystalline matte glazed tiles are handmade tiles by the local Continental Faience & Tile Co., of South Milwaukee, in the late 1920s. Their bright, multi-colored glazes are as charming as a rainbow and include rare-to-uncommon designs that are nostalgic of the Mayan civilization.

**And it's only \$675,000!**

Contact real estate agent Kristen Hamilton for viewing!

**Email at**  
[kristen.hamilton@compass.com](mailto:kristen.hamilton@compass.com).

## TILE & TERRA COTTA NEWS: CUDAHY SCHOOL WITH 1960'S TILES

The last great wave of schools in Wisconsin to install faience art tiles were in the late 1930s, or so I thought. Underwood in Tosa, Senior High in Wausau, Adams and Washington in Janesville, West Side in Rhinelander, Pulaski High in Milwaukee, were a few. However, I was delighted to learn I was wrong when Cudahy Superintendent Tina Owen-Moore proved otherwise.

Inside the former Parkview Elementary School between the kindergarten rooms are pictorial tiles telling stories about the early days of the Nation. There are 8 total designs, including Molly Pitcher, the Minute Men, Johnny Appleseed, Besty Ross, Native Americans, and more.

The school was constructed in 1962, so these tiles are impressively from the 1960s.

I'm not sure exactly how these 6"x6" tiles were made, but the glazes on them are matte crystalline, and I'm guessing the designs were applied with stencils or, perhaps, screenprinting? I'm not sure. They are not dry-line/cuerda seca; the surface is completely glazed.

Unfortunately, the school will be torn down in the coming year. Superintendent Owen-Moore hopes that these tiles can be salvaged and reincorporated into another building. She hopes the district can find a skilled person / contractor who can remove these tiles safely.







## TILE & TERRA COTTA NEWS: THE REMAINING WILDLIFE IN TERRA COTTA ON THE WELLS BUILDING

Following the previous newsletter on Art Deco birds in terra cotta across Wisconsin and Illinois, this newsletter I focus on terra cotta fauna on the Wells Building in downtown Milwaukee.

The stories represented in the Wells Building in downtown Milwaukee are grandiose, although it would be impossible to know this when walking by the building today. The tall u-shaped building has two main wings that rise tall but appear understated due to the lack of ornamentation. This wasn't always the case.

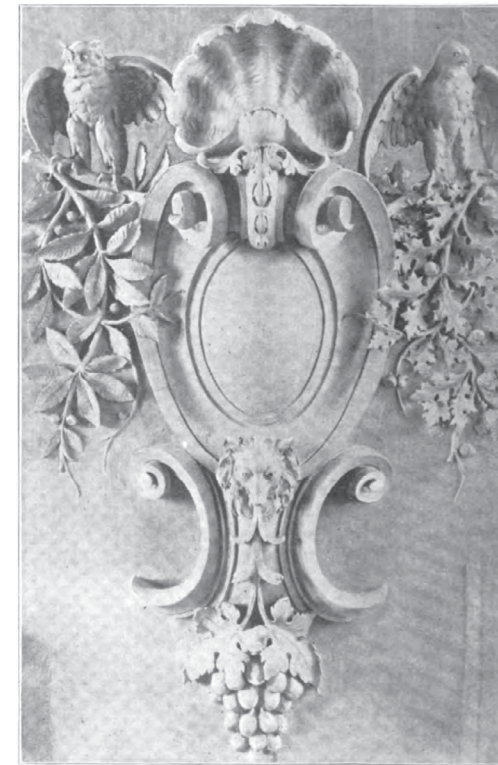
All one can observe from the façade today is on a band of terra-cotta decorations above the third story. Cartouches graced by owls, raptors, wolves, and foxes appear there on the façade (seen on the next page). Their naturalistic representation gives the impression that these are real animals, mounted to the walls, almost as if they were taxidermy trophies of a great hunt.

When the Wells Building was completed in January

1902, American architecture was favoring the Beaux-Arts, yet the symbolism-loving, post-Victorian era was still present in Milwaukee. Hence, the animals were definitely chosen symbolically. By symbolism I don't mean the owl signified wisdom, the wolves strength and courage, and so on, I mean their collective symbolism as fauna that represented Milwaukee's position in the wild and epic Northwest.

Again, this was in 1902, at a time when many institutional and large buildings were embodying Beaux-Arts classicalism. Terra cotta masonry was fashioned into eagles and lions, as well as festoons, rosettes, and grotesques, and although the Wells Building follows much of that design formalism, it stood out for its time in its representation of American fauna. Was this the architect's idea or the property owner's and why?

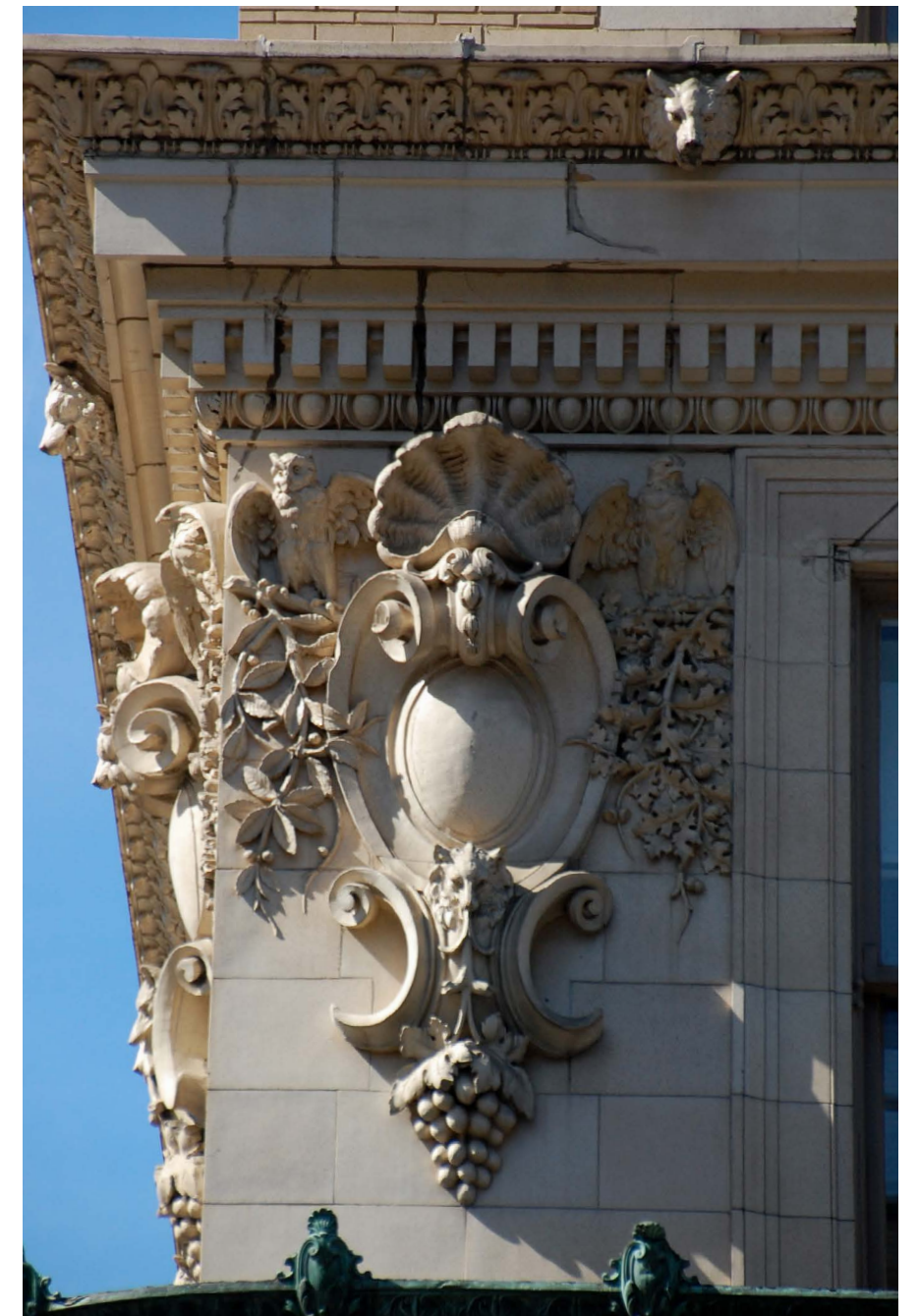
Certainly, the aesthetics of the building can be attributed to the architect, Henry C. Koch, or his son



THE "FOX AND THE GRAPES" IN TERRA COTTA.

**Above:** Detail of the wet-clay model sculpted by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Co. from Chicago, Illinois, printed in the July 1901 issue of *Brick*.

**Right:** Aspect of the terra-cotta decorations on the third story, including the flanking owl and falcon, laurel and oak branches, fox and grapes, and the wolves.



Armand. But the ideas behind the decorations were perhaps from the person who the building is named after, the man behind the money, Daniel Wells Jr. He engaged in several trades, from sawmills and lumbering to banking. He was also a lawyer and surveyor, and held many political positions that played an important role in the pioneering days of Milwaukee and Wisconsin. These included being at the first meeting to create the territory of Wisconsin, his service in congress that contributed to the development and building of railroads in Wisconsin and Minnesota, including the first railroad from Milwaukee to Waukesha, and attending the World's Fair in London as the state commissioner, among other roles.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Gregory's *History of Milwaukee*, Vol. 3

When this building was constructed, Mr. Wells was 93 years old. At that age, the purpose of this building was about memorializing his legacy. And he was successful in achieving this just in time as only two months after the building was finished, he died.

His name lives on since it continues to be the name of the building, but his memory lives on in more ways that his name placed above the entrance. When Mr. Wells moved to Milwaukee in the 1830s, he was a pioneer in area inhabited largely by the Potawatami, Menominee and other tribes and nations here as refugees, as well as a fruitful, healthy natural landscape. Focusing on the wildlife, the wolf, fox, owl, and falcon were an expression of Well's memory of when he would go "about hunting quail in this





SPLENDID SPECIMEN OF TERRA COTTA WORK BY NORTHWESTERN TERRA COTTA CO.

location when he was a pioneer settler and the area was covered with hazel brush.” In having these terra cotta figures created, the animals are not just a memory of Wells, but they are also a memory of Milwaukee in these pioneer days, before Wisconsin was even a state.

In addition to the creatures already mentioned, there were approximately 50 bear heads along the cornice on the upper stories. There were also likely more bear heads (pictured above) between the 12th and 13th stories. The wet, terra cotta rendering printed in the July 1901 issue of *Brick* shows there was a panel designed with an arrangement of arrowheads and bundles of wheat centered with a bear head sculpture.

Furthermore, most prideful were two life-size bear sculptures above the portal. These freestanding statues held two shields that read, 1835, 300 and 1902, 300,002, representing the increased population of the city during those times due to Wells’ achievements in establishing railroads in the region. Apparently, this design feature was the idea of Armand Koch, which was a pretty elegant way to inscribe someone’s legacy, in clay, for all Milwaukeeans to remember his contribution to the growth of the city.

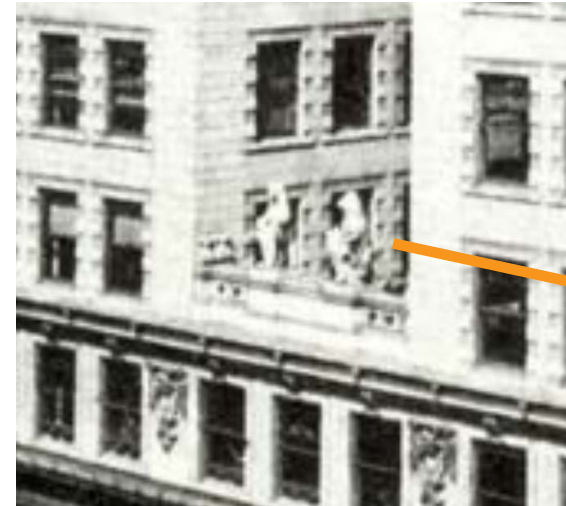
But the story of wildlife on this building was not about how it existed in Milwaukee, it was about how it was disappearing due to modernization of humankind. If this building symbolized progress, then it did not include wildlife but the absence of it. Mr. Well’s hunting lands were gone. The Milwaukee frontier was an industrial, urban center on the great lake. Forests were replaced with steel beamed structures.

It’s ironic that, in a way like the disappearance of natural wildlife habitat, many of the decorations have disappeared as well. In



**Top:** Detail of the terra-cotta panel that was likely installed on 43 spandrels in the recessed areas between floors 12 and 13. Photograph of the wet-clay model sculpted by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Co. from Chicago, Illinois, printed in the July 1901 issue of *Brick*.

**Above:** View of the Wells Building on September 17, 2014.



How the Wells Building looked like in the early 1900s. Notice the two bears above the portal, representing the growth of Milwaukee’s population from 300 in 1835 to 300,00 in 1902. Also notice the 50 bear heads projecting from the cornice on the 14th story. Photograph from the [Milwaukee Public Library Historic Photos Collection](#).



September of 1958, the two bear statues above the portal were removed and in the process, broken up into pieces. It was said that they were already deteriorating and were a safety hazard.<sup>2</sup> That next spring in 1959 the terra-cotta ornamentation on the upper 7 stories was also removed.<sup>3</sup>

It would be incredible if these terra cotta bears and decorations remained on the Wells Building, but they are gone and all we have left are a few photographs and postcards. With only a portion of the terra cotta decorations remaining, it is now mostly history.



In a Milwaukee garden, a remnant of the Wells Building survives and was apparently was dug up from the garden.

<sup>2</sup> *The Milwaukee Journal*, Sept. 23, 1958, pg. 7

<sup>3</sup> *The Milwaukee Journal*, Jan. 24, 1959, pg. 10