

Can you find these tiles?

Number **45**



"The Elk"

An animal that was once abundant in Pennsylvania, until about 1850 when hunters stamped out the population.

Number **216**



"Factories"

Homage to the places that powered industry.

Number **307**



"The Telephone"

Documents perhaps the most significant invention in the history of communication.

Number **378**



"Gettysburg"

Depicts the battle in 1863.



Your State Senator

A PENNSYLVANIA MOSAIC:

The Tiles of **HENRY CHAPMAN MERCER**



Compliments of
YOUR STATE SENATOR

Nearly a century ago, Philadelphia Architect Joseph Miller Huston blended art with architecture to create a magnificent representation of Pennsylvania's history: The State Capitol.

Huston intended to showcase Pennsylvania's achievements in labor, industry and history. He sought the most talented artisans in the world. And to realize his vision for the floor of the Main Capitol, he looked no further than his own home state, to Henry Chapman Mercer, a renowned tile-maker from Doylestown.

Brick by Brick Tile by Tile

It had been a long road, paved with a disaster and financial fall-out, to the Capitol that Huston finally was given a chance to create.

The very first Capitol in Harrisburg, designed by Stephen Hills in 1822, was destroyed by fire in 1897. Architect Henry Ives Cobb was commissioned for a new design. His original plan was ornate and funding problems forced him to redesign it as a basic brick structure, the roof of which was never finished.

In 1901, a Capitol Building Commission was created. The Commission awarded the contract for expansion of Cobb's Capitol to

Huston. He was only 35. Huston's vision was to create a palatial Capitol inspired by the Italian Renaissance. He modeled his Capitol dome after Michelangelo's dome of St. Peter's in Rome. In the Rotunda, he borrowed many aspects of Charles Garnier's Paris Opera House, most notably the grand marble staircase.

Inside the Capitol, Huston aimed to express Pennsylvania's achievements in labor, industry and history. That's when he hired some of the finest artists and craftspeople in the world, among them, Bucks County's Henry Chapman Mercer.

MERCER: *A Tilemaker and An Artist*

HENRY CHAPMAN MERCER, a native of Doylestown, Bucks County, was commissioned to produce 16,000 square feet of quarry tile for the first floor of the Capitol. Mercer's signature style blended his affinities for art, archaeology, history and travel into tiles that told a story. Mercer chose as his general theme the history of Pennsylvania.

"It is the life of the people," Mercer wrote, "rough, powerful and absolutely real, that seems to struggle in this plastic pavement for expression." The floor is commonly referred to as the Mercer Tiles, but the correct terminology is the Moravian Tile Floor. Mercer himself referred to his tiles as "artistic pottery" and apprenticed himself to a Bucks County redware potter. And later, Mercer started his own tile factory. The Moravian Pottery and Tile Works. Mercer firmly believed that the tiles should utilize local clay and that they should be made by hand. Eventually, Mercer developed a method using plaster molds, which allowed the designs to be reproduced by workers without losing the original integrity. The molds also allowed tiles to be

produced in quantities large enough to maintain affordability, while enough hand-work was needed that the tiles retained the look and individuality of hand-cut tile.

The floor of the Capitol Building is made of two types of tiles: field tiles, the smaller background tiles; and mosaic tiles, which make up the "pictures" on the floor. The field tiles are various shades of red, and some have tile numbers or the MOR logo of Moravian Tile.

"It is the life of the people, rough, powerful and absolutely real, that seems to struggle in this plastic pavement for expression."

-Henry Chapman Mercer

Tile making wasn't just a trade for Mercer. It was art. He wrote, in 1925, "If tiles could tell no story, inspire or teach nobody and only serve to produce aesthetic thrills, I would have stopped making them a long time ago."

Mercer's Capitol tiles certainly do tell a story, starting at the north west end of the Mahogany



Row in the Capitol, the Senate side, by depicting Native Americans. The tile sequence is roughly chronological with Pennsylvania's history, continuing to tell the story of European habitation in the New World as well as the Commonwealth's progression into the 20th century. Along the way, Pennsylvania's natural resources, animals, trades, tools – and even insects – help bring together the big picture of the state.

In 1908, Mercer wrote and published, at his own expense, his Guide Book to the Tiled Pavement in Pennsylvania Capitol so that visitors could read along as they strolled through the corridors and the Grand Rotunda. Each mosaic had a story to tell.