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The waiting room, here viewed from the mezzanine, rises to a trestle-supported barrel-vault ceiling of leaded glass. Thirty-six Grueby Faience tile panels form a frieze circling the entire lobby at the cornice level below the mezzanine. The waiting room is now a restaurant and lounge. A Grueby Faience wall-fountain can be seen just to the left of the light standard.

The Grueby Faience Murals of Scranton, Pennsylvania: A Documentation

Texts by RICHARD D. MOHR and Photographs by ROBERT W. SWITZER

On September 1, 1906, the prosperous Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad, whose routes stretched across New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York, broke ground on what was to be a showplace for the company's central business offices, while doubling as its depot for Scranton, Pennsylvania (cover photo). The station was part of a system-wide renovation and upgrade that had begun in 1903 and would have this building as its star. By its dedication on November 11, 1908, the palatial structure housed one of the most important art tile installations in America – a frieze that circles the waiting-room and consists of thirty-six murals composed of Grueby Faience tiles.

Each mural depicts a different scene along the railroad's lines beginning at the Hoboken Ferry slips (panel 1) and ending at Niagara Falls (panel 34). Along the way, we enjoy landscapes, waterscapes, city-scapes, even the Brooklyn Bridge (panel 4). The tile installation must have been designed fairly late in the building's construction, because a panel depicting New York City's Christopher Street Ferry dock includes the Singer Building – briefly the world's tallest building – which was only completed on May 1, 1908 (demolished 1968) (panel 19).

The murals are laid out in horizontal grids of ungrouted six-inch by six-inch tiles. All of the panels are two feet high, but they vary in length from four to nine feet. The murals contain a total of 1,676 tiles, each unique of design and individually hand-decorated. In the lower right corners of the fifth and twentieth panels, the installation is signed with Grueby Faience's logo, a three-petaled lotus placed within a circle.

PANEL 1. Hoboken Ferry slips. The Ferry terminal was built in 1907 after a fire destroyed the old docks in 1905. The architect for the new terminal was the same as for the Scranton railroad station itself, Kenneth M. Murchison.

The panels are numbered in the order in which they are placed around the lobby beginning at the entrance and moving clockwise. The descriptions here take as their point of departure an undated flyer by Laura G. Flanagan, titled *Historical Perspective: Radisson Lackawanna Station Hotel Scranton*, produced by the hotel and based on information from the Cultural Resources center of the National Park Service's Steamtown National Historic Site (Scranton, PA), though the flyer fails to identify the tiles as being by Grueby Faience.

PANEL 2. Cayuga Lake, Ithaca, New York.

The Scranton station was designed by Kenneth MacKenzie Murchison (1872-1938), a New York City architect who was better known in his own day than he is now, for he failed to develop a signature style. He worked closely within the Beaux Arts and Classical Revival styles and even served as a president of the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design (founded 1916), a club of the elite educated architects of New York dedicated to training the next generation of American architects, sculptors, and painters in the principles and practices of the French Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Murchison is now best known for the Munson (Steam Ship Company) Building at 67 Wall Street, familiarly referred to as the Wall Street Flatiron Building (1906, restored 1997). In addition to the Scranton station, Murchison also designed for the Railroad the Hoboken Ferry terminal (1907, restored 2004) and the combined train station and boat depot in Buffalo (1917, largely demolished 1979).

The Scranton station was built at a cost of $601,780.96 or roughly twelve-million in today's dollars. For that sum, the Railroad got a five-story, 240' by 88', steel and brick framed building clad in Indiana limestone. (A sixth story was added in 1923.) The imposing neo-classical façade sports six Doric columns rising three stories to support an entablature that thrusts twenty-feet beyond the face of the building. All this is topped with a story-tall clock, screaming eagles, and other terra cotta trimmings in the Beaux-Arts manner.

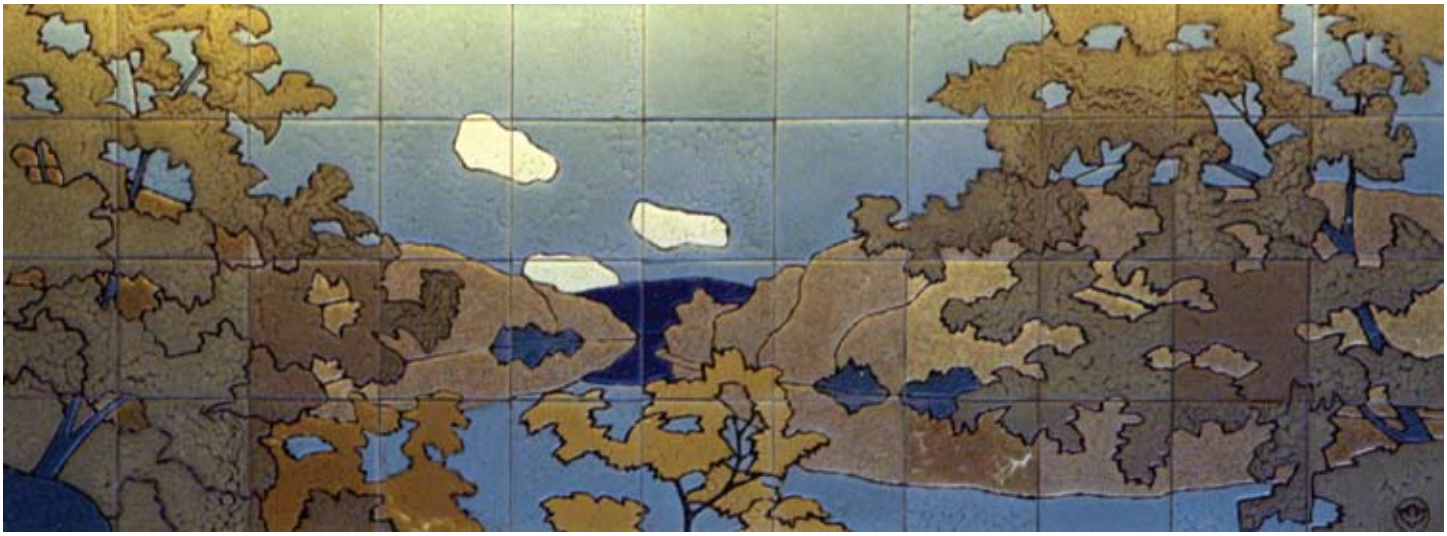
The interior is equally sumptuous, if more restrained. The 105' by 40' waiting room rises two and a half stories through a mezzanine to a barrel-vaulted ceiling of leaded glass. The room is sheathed in marble. The walls proper are of breche violette, an Italian marble veined with inky purple. They are segmented by twenty-eight pilasters of Sienna marble streaked with a yellow-ish, green-ish brown. A foot-tall baseboard of Alpine green marble rings the room. The Grueby murals are each framed with a band of pure white marble, which sets them off crisply from the mottled walls in which they are embedded just below the mezzanine overhang.

The tiles were modeled after paintings by Clark Greenwood Voorhees (1871-1933). Voorhees was the American tonalist and impressionist landscape painter who founded the group of paint-

PANEL 3. A Hoboken Ferry boat, one of five identical boats built in 1905.

PANEL 4. The Brooklyn Bridge.

PANEL 5. Autumn scene, probably on the Delaware River. The tile in the lower right corner is signed with the Grueby Faience logo – a conventionalized lotus flower within a circle.



PANEL 6. An unidentified resort lake.

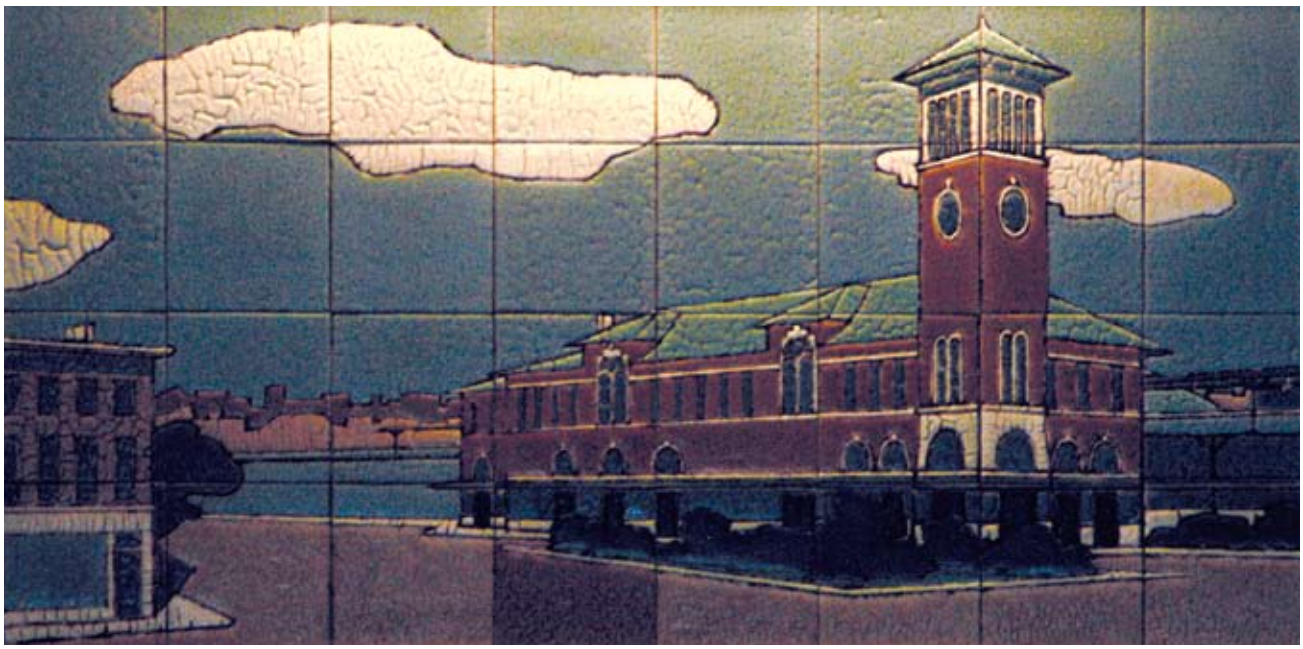
PANEL 7. An unidentified rural stream.

PANEL 8. The old railroad route between Clarks Summit and Hallstead, PA

ers now referred to as the Old Lyme Colony or Connecticut Impressionists – fellow tonalists and impressionists who clustered around Childe Hassam (1859-1935) in Old Lyme, Connecticut during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The 'translation' of Voorhees' paintings into tile designs was probably the work of Grueby Faience's in-house director of design during this period, Addison B. Le Boutillier (1872-1951). In her book The *Ceramics of William H. Grueby*, Susan Montgomery suggests that Le Boutillier in 1902, while working as a free-lance designer for Grueby Faience, had probably performed similar service in translating paintings and drawings by Vesper Lincoln George (1865-1934) into some of the Grueby tile designs used at Thomas Lawson's elaborate Dreamwold estate in Scituate, Massachusetts. The translations necessary for the Scranton station must have been particularly tricky, for the technique used to make the Scranton tiles is not really suitable for the fuzzy, atmospheric effects of impressionist paintings. Most of Grueby Faience's representational designs were executed using what is variously called the raised

PANEL 9. The railroad station at Newark, New Jersey (1903).



line, cuenca, or cloisonné technique, in which glazes can be pipetted with the equivalent of an eyedropper into tiny contiguous flat-bottomed tubs of clay in a way that, when the tubs are filled to the brim, the raised lines of the tubs' edges, the divisions between glazes, virtually disappear. Grueby tile designs executed using this technique include the horse, waterlily, turtle, and galleon friezes, all of which are probably designed by Le Boutillier, plus "The Pines" (1906), which is known to be by him.

But the Scranton murals are executed in what is called the dry-line or cuerda seca technique, which uses the surface tension of glazes in their liquid state to keep them from running together. An outline design is drawn or silk-screened onto the flat face of a tile blank using as 'ink' a

PANEL 10. The Delaware Water Gap, the geological notch where the Delaware River forming the border between New Jersey and Pennsylvania cuts through a large ridge of the Appalachian mountain range.

PANEL 11. The station at Boonton, New Jersey (1905).

unguent of mineral oil and manganese. If glaze is then pipetted carefully onto the blank, it will run up to the waxy outline, but not pour over it, even though the outline offers no physical barrier to the glaze in the way a raised line does. When the tile is fired, the unguent evaporates leaving behind a black line that feels dry to the touch as one brushes one's finger across the tile. This technique keeps glazes crisply wedged apart from each other, leaving the visual equivalent of a black trench between them. The outlines can be surprisingly intricate, sinuous, and detailed, but the separations remain. At bottom, the dry line is a cartoon technique, producing an effect opposed to the blending and muting, the fuzzy boundaries, of colors in impressionism.

Still, the Scranton tile designs are for the most part very successful. The most successful are those which manage to draw their painterly models into the aesthetic principles laid out in Arthur Wesley Dow's much-reprinted design manual *Composition* (1899). According to them, designs are to be flattened and conventionalized into color patches that interlock background and foreground shapes, like pieces of a picture puzzle. Both the raised-line and dry-line tile techniques are finely suited for this aesthetic. Dow's principles are perfectly exemplified in Le Boutillier's raised-line design "The Pines" and are clearly at work in the Scranton dry-line panels 5, 6, 10, 21, 22, 23, 25, 32, 34, and 35 – all landscapes.

PANEL 12. Canoeing at night on the Delaware River.

PANEL 13. Night scene on the Delaware River at the Delaware Water Gap.

Some of the panels showing individual stations are successful (panels 11 and 27), but the dry-line technique is less suitable for multiple buildings (panels 1 and 15) and city-scapes (panels 4 and 19). The technique's cartooning outlines instantly render such complex, unrhythmed designs busy, busy, busy. These panels are cutesy, but then cuteness was one of the pitfalls of American art tile design more generally.

Two of the most successful murals (panels 13 and 33) cleverly deploy a distinctive potential of the dry-line technique – its black-line residue used as a purely-graphic element in design. In these panels, the technique lays down etching-like lines not to keep different glazes separate, but, just on their own, to represent denuded tree branches set against a nighttime or winter sky.

The panels use virtually the whole spectrum of Grueby Fa-

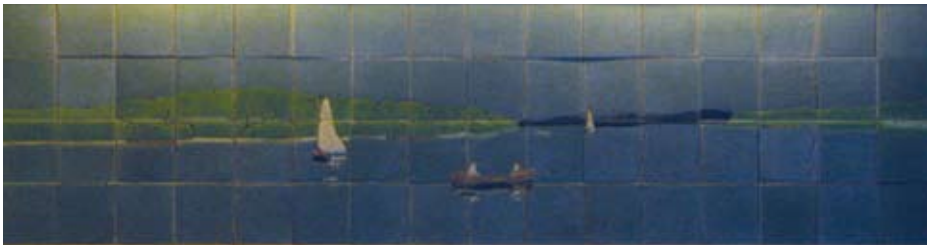
PANEL 14. Bridge over the Morris Canal at Boonton, New Jersey.

PANEL 15. The station at the Delaware Water Gap and the Delaware House, a hotel.

PANEL 16. Squaw Island in Canandaigua Lake, west of Owego, New York.

PANEL 17. Lake Hopatcong in northern New Jersey.

PANEL 18. Budd Lake, near Netcong, New Jersey.

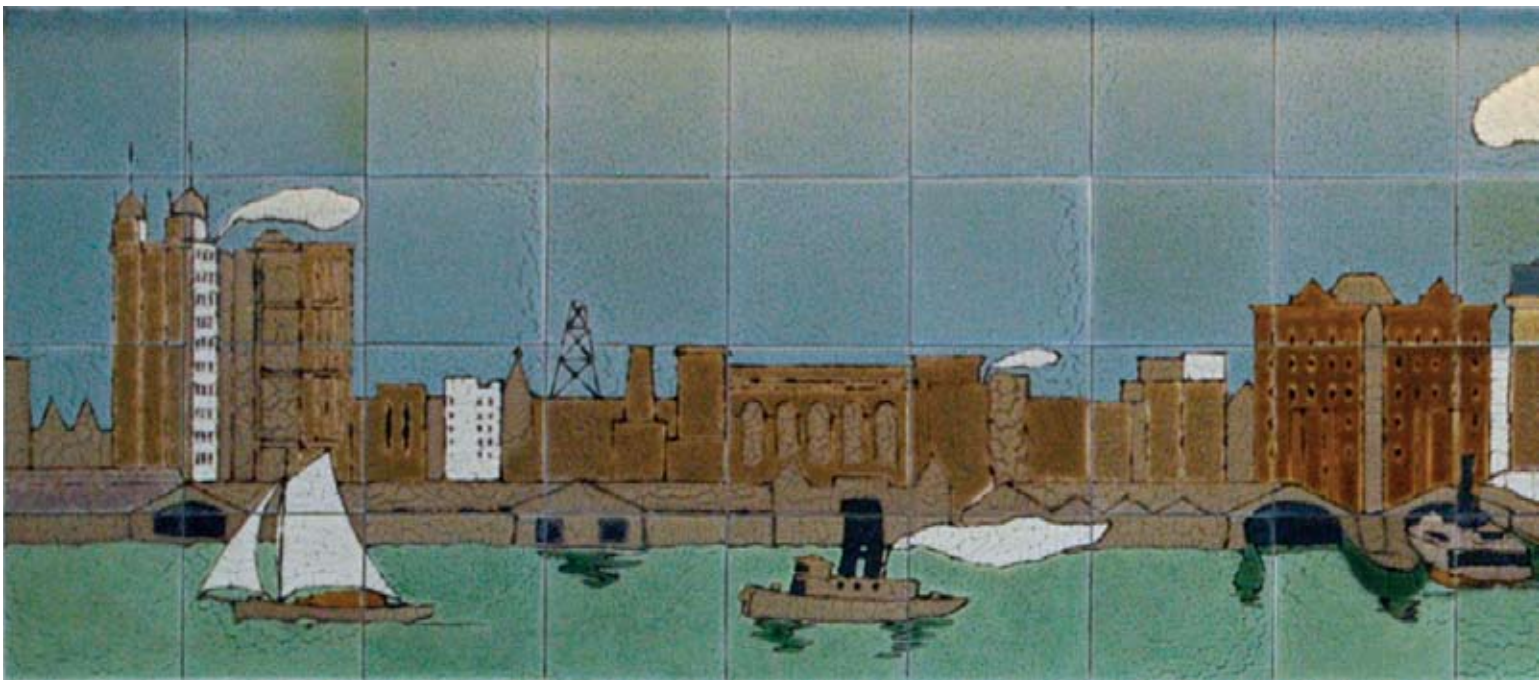


PANEL 20. Looking upstream at the Delaware Water Gap. A somewhat blurred version of the Grueby Faience lotus logo is placed in the lower right corner.

ience's glazes, but that spectrum was not very broad. The Grueby glazes are rich and have great 'depth', but are small in number. The Grueby palette was less than a third the size of Rookwood's and Van Briggle's in this period. It consisted of several different saturations of a very few hues – four of a brown, a green, and a blue, two of a lavender, with a mustard-yellow, rust, plum-burgundy, and white thrown in. Grueby had a true red-pink at this stage, but it does not appear to have been used in the murals. The recycling of this narrow color palette across the murals gives the whole installation, even apart from its thematic continuity, a highly unified feel.

In general, the tiles make creative uses of color. There is no dogged commitment to realism, which, in any case, would have been silly to attempt given

PANEL 19. The Christopher Street Ferry dock, New York City, featuring, at center, the spanking new, pennant-topped Singer Building (1908) – for one year, the world's tallest building.



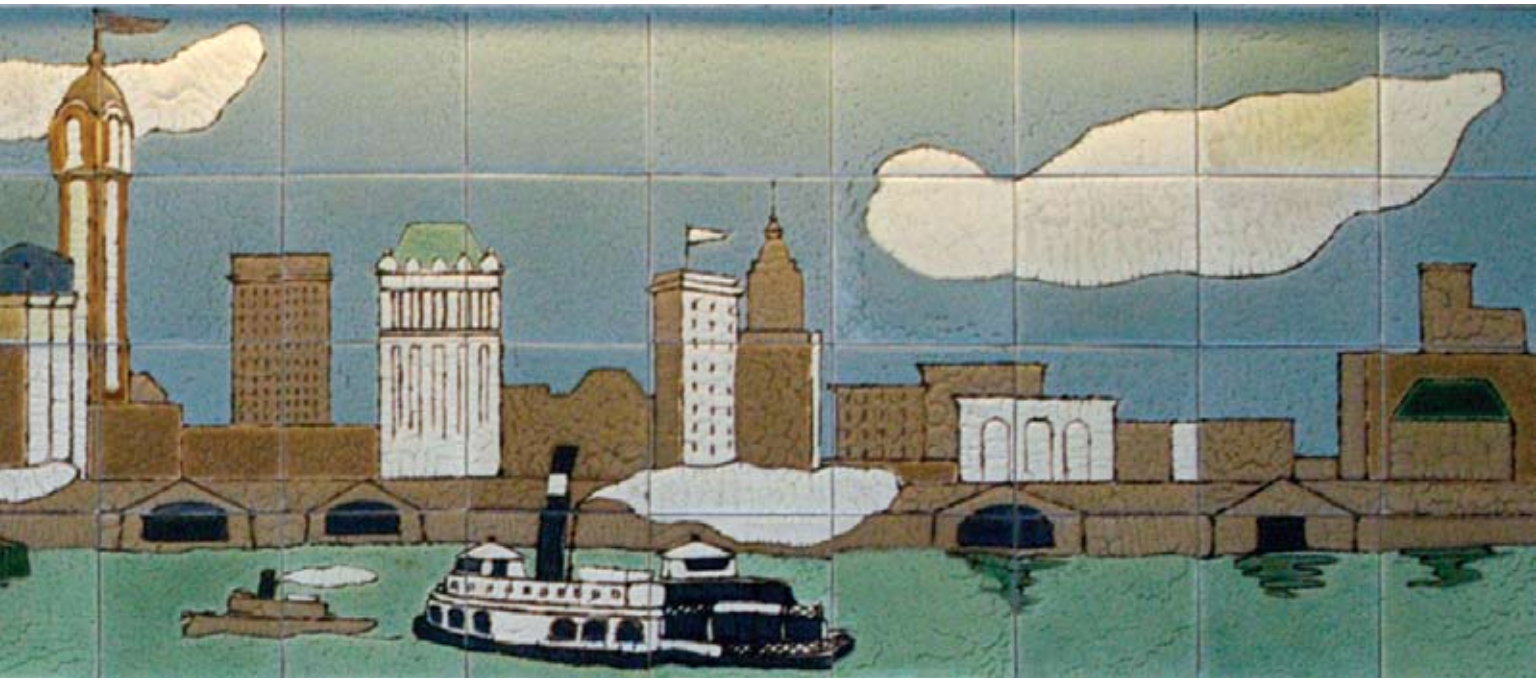
the limited palette. Unexpected uses of color abound. Brown might be the expected color for train track ties and their bed, and in one panel they are brown (panel 8), but two have them in blue (panels 15 and 28) and one in plum (panel 29). In several panels, mountains or rocks are shown in blue, while the sky or water are shown, not in blue, but in white (panels 10, 26, 31, 33, 34, 35). The lavenders and the plum are never used as these colors appear in nature.

Some of the most successful murals draw on just a small number of related colors from within the already limited field. A nighttime canoeing scene is executed in just the four saturations of blue plus white for the moon and its reflections in water (panel 12). A Hoboken ferry scene is executed in just two blues, two browns, and white (panel 3). In general, the higher the number of glazes the greater the risk of clutter. In a bridge scene, an embankment of boulders uses virtually the whole palette, with the result that it flies apart into a storm of confetti (panel 14).

PANEL 22. A small stream near Buffalo, New York.

PANEL 21. The Delaware Water Gap looking northwest.

The Grueby 'artists' who glazed the tiles were sometimes sloppy in keeping track of the tiles' color schemes. Too often, when, in a mural's overall



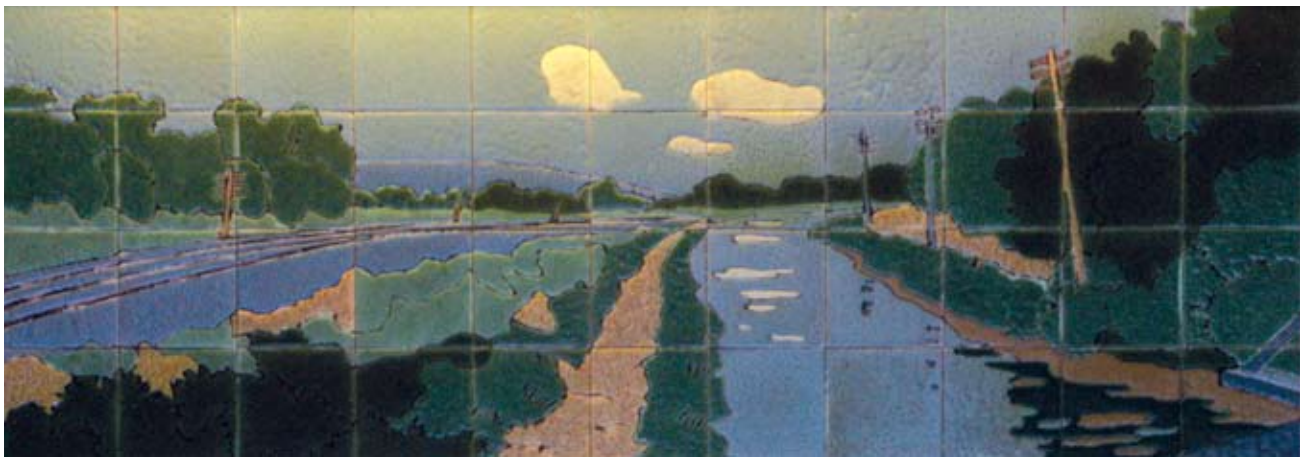
design, a single color patch is to lap over the boundary between two adjacent tiles, it is executed in a different color on each tile. This is clearly apparent in the browns of panels 5, 22, and 32 and there are lots of other easily spotted examples elsewhere. One also suspects that there are places where the same color is used in adjacent patches which should be in different colors (panels 5 and 35).

To compensate for the muted, blended, atmospheric effects of the murals' impressionist originals, Grueby Faience pressed as hard as possible many of the texturing effects in their glazes that make them so rich and highly prized – feathering, curdling, and crawling. Crawling glazes are particularly evident on a number of the murals (foreground of panel 10, all of 12, the sky of 22, all of 36). In some cases the effect is more exaggerated than would be pleasant on a fireplace surround or trivet, but it works fine at the distance from which the panels are actually viewed (see waiting room, page 8). The extreme crawling on the Scranton murals literally reveals that their clay bodies are white. Damage to two wall fountains made entirely of stock Grueby elements – one fountain at each end of the waiting room – reveals their bodies to be of heavily-grogged red clay (see page 23).

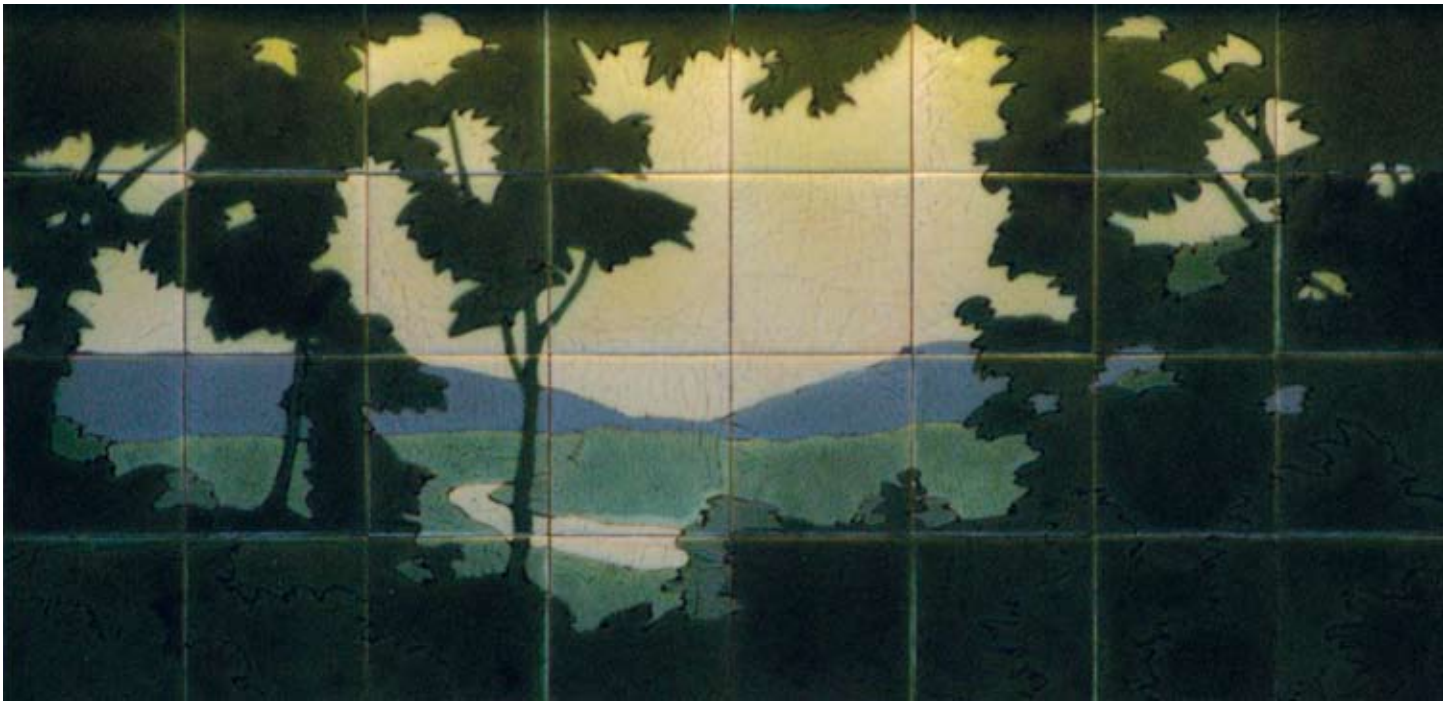
The subjects of the panels tilt strongly toward the romantic, the sentimental, and flirt with the

PANEL 23. Evening scene at the Delaware Water Gap looking downstream. This scene faces the one in panel 21.

PANEL 24. Scene along the Chemung Canal (1833-1878), which ran between Watkins Glen and Elmira, New York. By the 1870s, barge traffic could no longer compete financially with the railroads.



PANEL 25. The Delaware Water Gap.



PANEL 26. East of the Delaware Water Gap.

natural sublime. Their general feel is autumnal, crepuscular, liminal (panels 5, 6, 10, 22, 25, 26, 32, 36). It is getting towards time to stow the canoes and furl the sails. Three panels press into moonlit evenings (panels 12, 13, 23). There are no Spring pastels, no sunburst yellows. Two panels are explicitly nostalgic. One depicts an abandoned railroad route (panel 8), the other a barge canal that had not been used since the late 1870s (panel 24). Sentimentality was a specter that haunted American art tiles and the Arts & Crafts movement more generally. As sins go, it is venial. And the recycling of themes of water, mountains, and forests across the panels draws the installation into a satisfying formal unity.

The landscape panels are the core of the installation. In one way or another, eleven panels incorporate the Delaware Water Gap, the geological notch where the Delaware River forming the border between New Jersey and Pennsylvania cuts through a large

PANEL 27.
The station at Marathon, New York (1906) – one of the few concrete stations on the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western lines.

PANEL 28.
Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western tracks along the Delaware Water Gap.

PANEL 29.
The station at Maplewood, New Jersey (1903).

PANEL 30.
Swartswood Lake in northernmost New Jersey.

ridge of the Appalachian mountain range. The designer uses the immensity and dynamic of this gap to give the viewer a sense of the grandeur and transformative power of nature. The Niagara Falls mural does the same (panel 34). Oddly, people do not appear in any of the urban scenes or even the railroad station scenes. They only appear in scenes of nature, where generally they are dwarfed by their alluring, robust, awe-tinged surroundings (panels 2, 12, 17, 18, 34, 36).

Though we are presented several urban scenes, we see nothing industrial, nothing ugly. The canoeing and sailing scenes are numerous and verge on the mawkish, but, the official railroad theme notwithstanding, we never

PANEL 31. The junction of the Delaware River and Broadhead Creek, Pennsylvania.

PANEL 32. Autumn scene at the Delaware Water Gap.

PANEL 33. Winter scene in New York or New Jersey.

PANEL 34. Niagara Falls.

PANEL 35. The Delaware Water Gap.

PANEL 36. A resort at Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey.

actually see a soot-belching locomotive or indeed any locomotive, just the romantic traces of the iron behemoths – open rails, cute stations, and telegraph lines. It is as though the trains have emptied the cities and stations and deposited their denizens into the immensity of nature and its gentle wonders. Ironically, in the murals, nature emerges from culture rather than the other way around. It is as though the urban scenes are plinths upon which the murals of nature have been mounted.

Grueby's Scranton panels have been blessed with continued existence. Others have not been as lucky. A large Grueby railway installation was lost when, in 1965, architect Claude Bragdon's 1914 Rochester Union Station for the New York Central Railroad was demolished to create a parking lot. Its waiting room was ringed with a Grueby wainscot.

The Scranton station received its last passenger train in 1970. In 1972, its parent company went bankrupt and the building was taken over by Conrail, which continued some business functions in it until 1977, when it was closed. Ironically that year, the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 1983, after a thirteen-million dollar restoration, the building reopened as a Hilton Hotel. It now operates as the 146-room Radisson Lackawanna Station Hotel, which is easily accessed off of Interstate 81 (exit 185) by way of the Central Scranton Expressway. The exact address is 700 Lackawanna Avenue, Scranton, PA 18503 – telephone number 570-342-8300. The lobby is now half a fine-dining restaurant, half an upscale lounge. The tiles can be nicely viewed without making any purchases. But with a Cosmo in one hand and opera-glasses in the other, you will enjoy them all the more.

One of two matching chest-level wall-fountains, made entirely of stock Grueby Faience elements – high-relief dolphin, low-relief flower-&-vine border tiles, and glazed bricks. Damage to the fountain's bowl and central tile reveals the body of the elements to be of heavily-grogged red clay.

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