

As anyone can see, this tile at the Farmington Community Center certainly is beautiful. For years many residents believed it to be the rare Michigan-bred Pewabic tile. But two experts on the subject think otherwise. But what the heck, it still is pretty. (Staff photo)

Center's Pewabic tiles exposed as pretty imposters

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

For years, the Farmington Community Center has been proud of the pretty tile in the upstairs bathrooms of its old home location on Ten Mile. Administrators point to it as an example of valuable and beautiful Pewabic tile. That assessment was based on word of mouth which amounted almost to a local legend. But the esoteric bubble has been burst by two Detroit area authorities on pewabic pottery.

The community center's tile is pretty. But it's not pewabic.

After looking at photographs of the tile in the center's brochures, Thom Brunk, architect for Michigan State University's Pewabic Pottery Museum in Detroit said they weren't products of the Pewabic process.

"These tiles are not Pewabic, but are typical of a number of tile companies' production and are clearly machine made," Brunk said.

The repetitious pattern of the tiles, he explained, indicates they were probably made by one of the mass producers of such ceramic in 1918.

Pewabic tile strove to resemble hand made work. The tile at the community center looks stamped instead of hand formed, said Roger Ault, director of the Pewabic Pottery Museum.

"I can tell from looking at the photos they're not Pewabic. They're flat and Pewabic tile looks raised. The corners are too sharp and the grouting wouldn't be this," he said.

COMMUNITY CENTER publicity director Sharon Zamechek was surprised when told this week of Brunk and Ault's assessment of the center's tile.

She said the center would look into printing a new brochure that corrects the mistake.

Pewabic tiles were made in the early 20th century by such firms as the American Encaustic Tile, Flint, Falence and Tile Co. or the Mosaic Tile Co., which operated in the midwest.

Ault said the grouting, or empty space between the tiles, would be more narrow in Pewabic tile than what he saw in the center's. The empty space would be incorporated into the scene if

the tile were truly Pewabic, both he and Brunk said.

Another indication that the tile is machine made instead of hand made is the lack of work orders for the house, which was owned in 1918 by Luman Goodenough.

Known as Longacre House, the building was given to the Farmington area by Goodenough's heirs for use as a community center in 1967. The center opened in 1969.

THE ORIGINAL house was built in 1869 by Palmer Sherman, a farmer who cultivated seeds for the Ferry Seed Co. of Detroit.

In 1915, the Goodenough family bought the home which was a simple square building facing Farmington Road. Once Luman Goodenough acquired the building he kept on adding to it and remodeling it as his family grew in size and age.

The 20-room home contains a solarium which originally was a greenhouse, a 40-foot long living room with a specially woven oriental rug and a library with wide pegged floors and a beam ceiling.

Although the library looks like the oldest addition in the house, it is the newest. Goodenough built it in 1930. One of the bedrooms has a tiled fireplace. Originally, the room was part of a library but changed functions during remodeling.

The flower patterned tile around the fireplace was thought to be Pewabic. If it were it could have cost anywhere from \$85-\$1,500 depending on the amount of area covered by the tile.

In 1964, the year before Henry Ford began paying workers \$5 a day, a Pewabic lamp and shade could cost between \$85-\$150, Brunk said.

IN 1911, the tile was selling for \$3 a square foot. In 1919, three chimney pots were sold by the pottery for \$108.

Pewabic Pottery, known and prized throughout the world, originated in Detroit under the guidance of Mary Chase (Perry) Stratton. The pottery museum's present location on East Jefferson was used in 1907. Mrs. Stratton developed the art of making Pewabic tile and its distinctive iridescent glaze. She used such costly items as silver nitrate, tin oxide and cobalt for an Egyptian blue effect in her work.

But Brunk is quick to point out that the glaze isn't the only noteworthy factor in the work. The kiln used, the temperature and the firing technique helped to make Pewabic pottery.

Mrs. Stratton used a cooler temperature than present day potters at the Pewabic Museum. Her technique died with her in the late 1930s. She didn't put into writing her pottery technique or the recipe for the glaze because she believed that each potter should work to find an individual style of glaze and craftsmanship.

Pewabic tile in architecture can be seen in the Detroit Public Library on Woodward, the former Women's City Club on Park downtown, the Stoh Brewery, the Scott Fountain on Belle Isle and the Guardian Trust Building.

An exhibit of Pewabic tile in architecture can be seen until June 3 at the Detroit Historical Museum.

Canoe course offered free

The American Red Cross and the Detroit Department of Parks and Recreation will jointly sponsor two free canoeing courses on four consecutive Saturdays beginning April 7.

Those interested in learning the basic techniques of safe canoeing should register for the basic canoeing course. Participants must be at least 14 years old.

Persons 17 or older who hold a Red Cross certificate in basic canoeing may enroll in the canoeing instructor course.

Registration will take place at the first session at Patton Pool, 2301 Woodmere, Detroit from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Textbooks can be purchased for a nominal fee.

Correction

Bill Nova was incorrectly referred to as sales manager of Dameron Chrysler Plymouth in last Thursday's edition of the Farmington Observer.

Nova is sales manager of Dick Green Chrysler Plymouth, 29301 Grand River.

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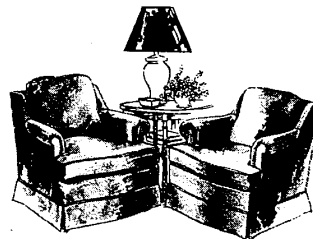
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