

**CULTURAL RESOURCES ASSESSMENT  
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON CATALINA GARAGE  
AVALON, CATALINA ISLAND, LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

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*Founded by William Wrigley, Jr. in 1919, the Catalina Pottery and Tile Company produced the brick and tile for the transformation of Avalon into a vacation paradise and helped develop Wrigley's "Early California" vision for the island. By 2003, only one building of the many that were constructed for the factory between 1923 and 1937 was extant. Although industrial in design, the building exhibits some of the simpler forms of the Mission style, as well as retaining its original manufacturing elements. Other factory remnants include buried deposits of clay tile, primarily unglazed examples, and, of course, the glazed tiles on Avalon's buildings, fountains, benches, furniture, and other features.*

The last remnant of the Catalina Tile Company Factory on the island is an historic-era warehouse building located on Pebbly Beach Road in Avalon, within the boundaries of the Southern California Edison Company Power Plant. The land was developed in the 1920s by the Santa Catalina Island Company and acquired in the early 1960s by the Edison Company, which now propose to demolish the existing building and construct an office complex on the site. LSA was retained by Southern California Edison to survey and evaluate the factory building for its potential eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources.

### **THE BUILDING**

The warehouse building was constructed about 1923 by the Catalina Pottery and Tile Company, and was among the first buildings to be erected in a complex of kilns, warehouses, artists' studios, research laboratories, molding rooms, and other facilities to make the roof tiles, bricks, pavers, and, eventually, art tile and pottery for the development of Catalina Island as a tourist destination and to provide employment for the local residents. The company was in its heyday from 1927 to 1937, when it was sold to Gladding, McBean of Glendale.

The first building of the many that were constructed for the factory, the warehouse is also the only structure remaining from that operation. The former tile factory warehouse is located on a level area of land, surrounded by asphalt pavement and the buildings, structures, and facilities of the Southern California Edison Power Plant. Although industrial in design, it exhibits some of the simpler forms of the Mission style, including a parapeted roof, rough stucco cladding, and an arched entry on its primary west façade. The façade is constructed of reinforced concrete and finished with rough stucco. It features a projecting porch with a shed roof with exposed rafters, and slate wainscoting, while the north, south, and east elevations are clad in corrugated metal. The original hardware is extant, as is the exterior light fixture. The simple one-story, frame industrial building has a front-gable truss roof clad in standing seam metal, with skylights piercing the roof. Fenestration includes 6/6 and 1/1 light frame sash, double-hung windows.

The interior of the building consists of one large unfinished room with a small hallway and two offices in the west front, altered but little from its original appearance. The building has a concrete floor, with segments of the original trackage visible.

This is a pretty basic industrial building of its era, so why is it important?

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1919, William Wrigley, Jr., the scion of the chewing gum family of Chicago, began his involvement in the development of Avalon. Informed by a real estate firm about the upcoming sale of the property, Wrigley, his wife Ada, and their son Philip made their first visit to Catalina Island. Wrigley fell in love with the area, purchased the property, and began development of a resort that would maintain the charm and integrity of the island, while making improvements to increase tourism and create jobs for Catalina's residents.

Wrigley quickly put contractor David M. Renton in charge of the transformation of Avalon into a vacation paradise. Renton became general manager of all construction work for the Santa Catalina Island Company. New steamers were purchased, the sewer system was updated, and a power plant and reservoir were constructed. "Bungalettes" replaced the old tent colony, the Hotel Atwater and others were completed in 1920, as was Bird Park, another tourist destination.

### **Catalina Pottery and Tile Company Factory**

In 1923, Wrigley founded the Catalina Pottery and Tile Company, putting his son Philip and contractor Renton in charge, to produce the brick and tile for the transformation of Avalon into a vacation paradise and develop his "Early California" vision for the island. Wrigley had found a good source of red clay near a golf course and proposed to make all the necessary building materials locally. Face brick, floor tile, and "Mission" roofing tiles were produced at the factory, followed by patio tiles and *cuencana*-decorated pavers. By the late 1920s the company was producing glazed art tile not only for Catalina Island, but for shipping to the mainland to be sold all over California and, eventually, the rest of the country. In addition to bright, stylized Moorish designs, tile panels with images of birds, sea creatures, and airplanes were produced.

The most ambitious of Catalina Island's buildings was the Casino, which kept the tile factory operating at full capacity for three years. When it was completed in 1929, it received the Honor Award from the Southern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

By the early 1930s the company was known as "Catalina Clay Products," and a line of dinnerware and decorative pottery was being produced, as well as tile murals. The factory was now an impressive operation, including 12 kilns, artists' studios, research laboratories, molding rooms, assembling rooms, open-air dryers, and storage buildings, with 100 employees at the height of production. A complete line of vases, flower bowls, candle holders, lamps, and other decorative accessories were produced, averaging between 10,000 and 15,000 per week.

The Santa Catalina Island Company promoted the use of the ceramic products and sold them at the Casino Way Pottery Shop in Avalon, at their showroom on Main Street in Los Angeles, and at the Catalina Ceramics Shop on Olvera Street in Los Angeles. In 1932 Catalina tables were "the sensation of the Furniture Show in Los Angeles" and the following year were exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair. The last exhibition of the pottery products was at the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Diego in 1935. A waning interest in Catalina tile, the completion of two of their biggest tile projects in Arizona, and the realization that local clays did not have the strength needed to create truly sturdy tile and art pottery sounded the death knell for the company. In 1936 the Santa Catalina Island Company began negotiating with Gladding, McBean and Company to take over the ceramics plant. By World War II, Catalina Pottery was being phased out and integrated into Gladding, McBean's "Franciscan" ware, as more and more competitive art potteries were started in southern California in the 1940s.

Known for its beautiful and distinctive colors, stylish forms, good quality, and dynamic marketing, Catalina tile today can be seen on the facades, archways, murals, floors, wainscoting, fountains, and other structures in Avalon. Recent construction in the community has also used reproductions of the original tiles in the drinking fountains, serpentine walls, casino entrance, benches, archways, fountains, and other structures. As noted, Catalina Tile was "unique in being fully integrated into the culture of the island community." In addition, Catalina tiles were used at Pomona College, Long

Beach Auditorium, and the “Wrigley District” of residences in that same community, as well as the Arizona Biltmore Hotel and many residences, clubs, and public buildings in California and elsewhere.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The warehouse building is significant as the last remaining structure linked with the Catalina Tile factory, associated with the production of Catalina tile as a visual enhancement of the island experience and in the development of Avalon and Catalina Island’s culture and architecture, an event significant in state and local history (National Register Criterion A). The building is also eligible under Criterion B for its association with William Wrigley, Jr., Philip K. Wrigley, and David Renton, whose visions and construction activities were integral to the development of Avalon as a tourist mecca and architecturally cohesive entity. It also appears able to answer questions important in history (Criterion D), as no other buildings or facilities associated with the tile and pottery operations are extant or have been documented or recorded. In addition, it appears likely that associated archaeological investigations at the site will uncover more of the subsurface remains of the kilns, waster dumps, or other structures from the period of the company’s heyday.