

## **Photo Detectives**

Photographs are great ways to learn about history! Take a long look at the photograph of Fonthill under construction on page 2, and try to answer the questions below based on the details you can find in the picture.

- What kind of building materials do you see in the photos of Fonthill's construction?
- What devices or forms of transportation do you see that show how they got the work done?
- What building is in the picture that is no longer there today (or is it)?
- Does this photo give any clues as to how Fonthill was built, or how the work was organized?
- What other details of the picture do you see?

Aerial photograph of Fonthill not long after it was completed, with the Terrace Pavilion in the background.



## Photo Detectives



Photograph of Fonthill under construction, April 1911, from a photo album of Henry Mercer's. Located at the Spruance Library of the Bucks County Historical Society, Manuscript Collection 291, Series 18:5.

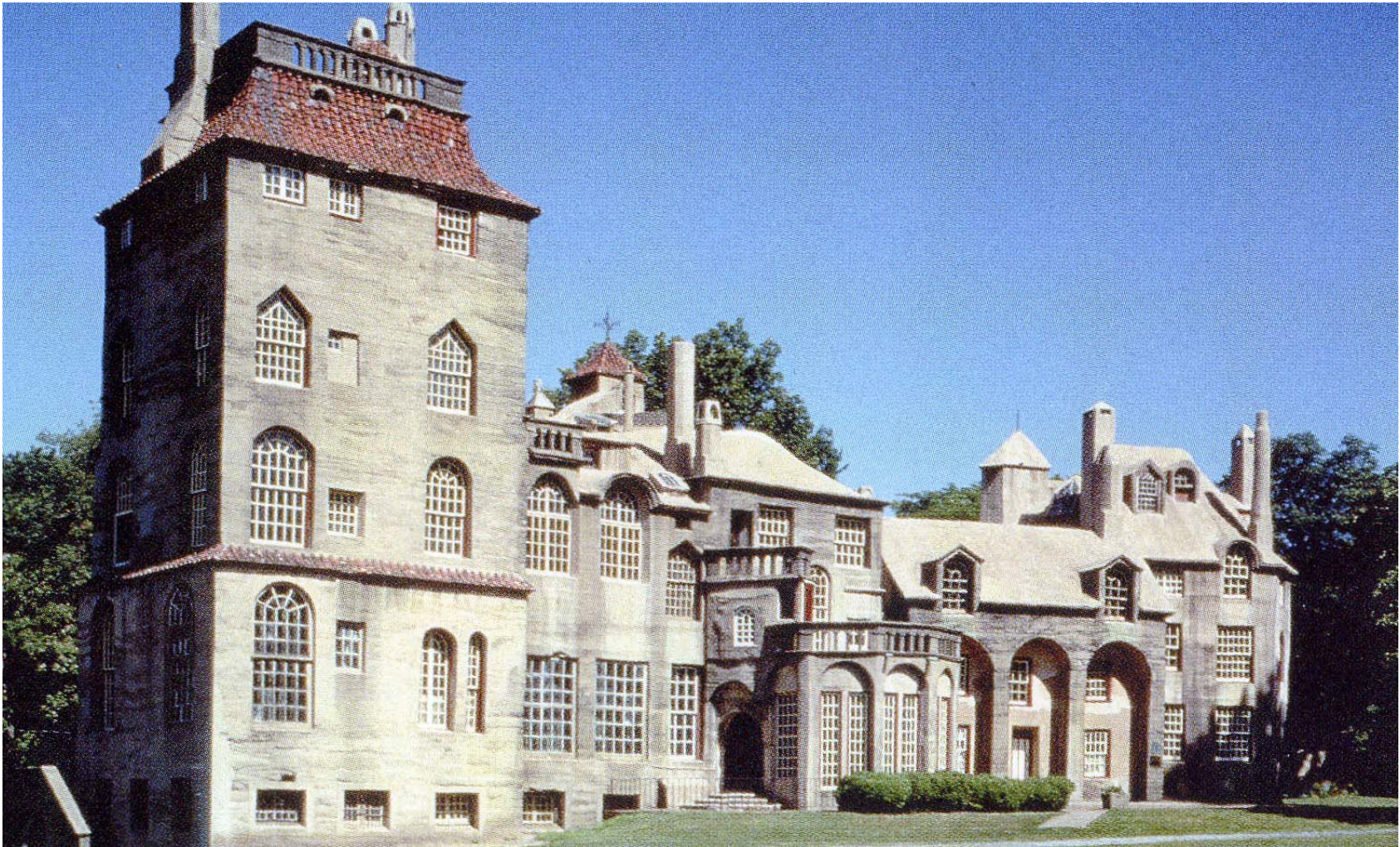
Fonthill Museum Castle of Ideas	<b>A Fonthill Collage</b>	Pre-Visit Materials
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Collage is a great form of art to understand how to incorporate old designs and stories in new ways, just like Henry Mercer at Fonthill. Using the image provided on page two, make a collage portrait of Fonthill using different types of materials: construction paper, newspaper articles, fabrics, aluminum foil, magazine advertisements, or whatever else you can think of and use creatively. Start by looking closely at the picture of Fonthill and drawing an outline of the building. What basic shapes can you see that it's made out of (such as squares, triangles, rectangles, circles or half-circles)? Use these basic shapes as the outline for your own artwork.



## A Fonthill Collage





## The Ancient World

Henry Mercer was fascinated both with antique maps and the discovery of the “New World.” Fonthill includes rooms such as the Columbus Room and Bow Room, in which colorful tile installations illustrate Columbus’s journey and the civilizations of Native American groups such as the Aztecs. Compare some of the antique maps with modern maps of the world to see how knowledge of geography and map-making has changed over the centuries.

- Compare the ancient map to the right with a modern map of the world. Which continents are missing? Which continent might “Frigida” (at the bottom) be on today’s map? What are some other major differences?



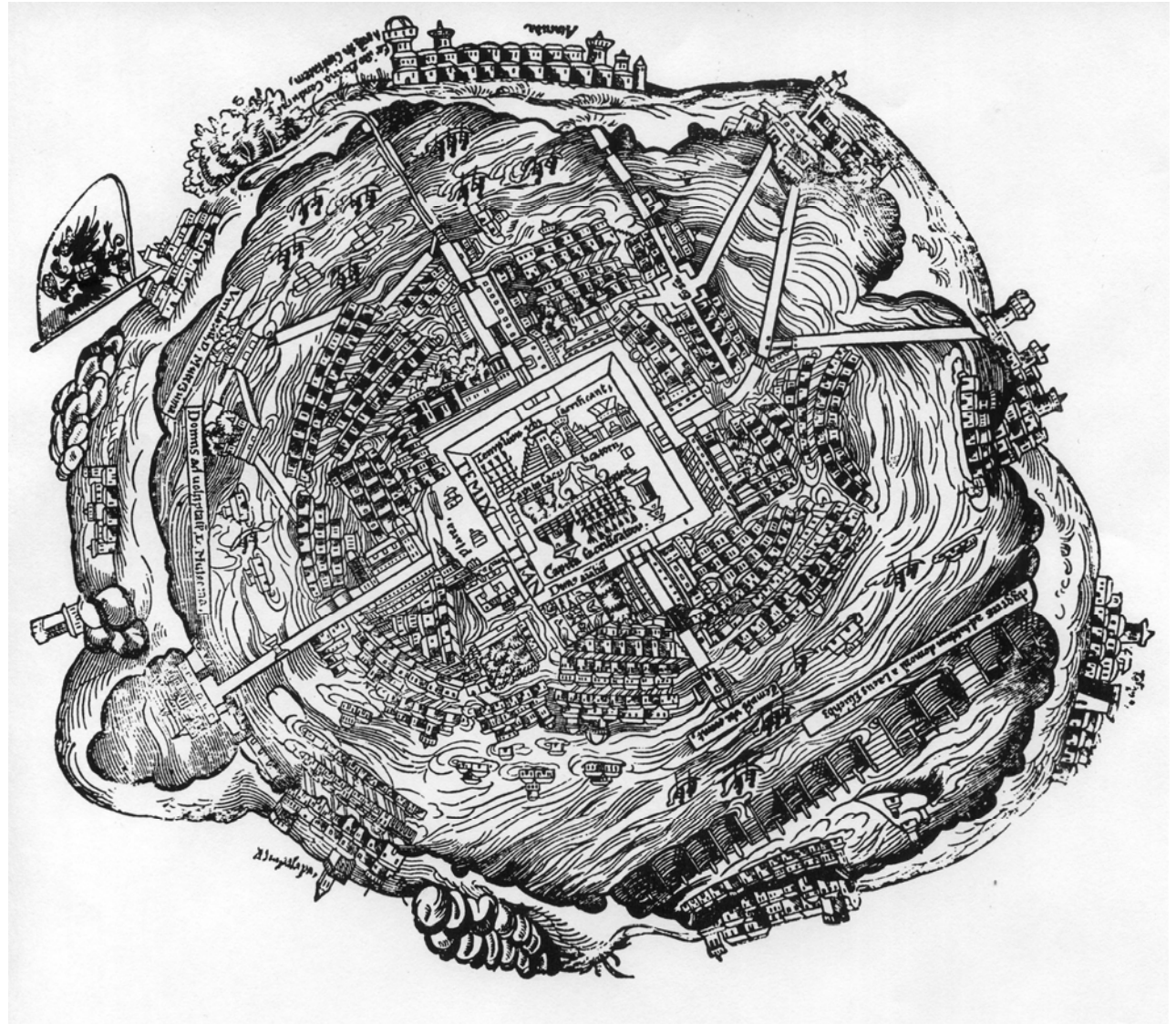
1483 world map based on the theories of the philosopher Macrobius who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. From Pierluigi Portinaro & Franco Knirsch, *The Cartography of North America, 1500-1800* (Edison, NJ: Chartwell Books, Inc., 1987), p. 10.

## The Ancient World

### The Aztec City of Tenochtitlán (Ten-Oak-teet-lahn)

- Find Mexico City on a modern map—that is where Tenochtitlán once stood. What is especially unique about this city? What are some of the main features of the city?
- Discussion Questions:  
What do the features visible on the map and tile tell us about the Aztecs and their civilization? What happened to Tenochtitlán?

Early Spanish map of Tenochtitlán.  
From Justin Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America*, 8 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1884-1889). Mercer personally knew Winsor and used his book to design many tiles at Fonthill.



## A Mosaic Fireplace



Remember that one of the ways Henry Mercer designed his concrete castle was by borrowing designs from lots of sources, particularly history and literature. He made tile illustrations of Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* around one of his fireplaces, and covered a ceiling of Fonthill with tiles showing Columbus's journey to North America.

Use construction paper, old magazines and your imagination to design a tiled fireplace of your own, using the examples provided above. What designs will you use to build your fireplace, and why?

If you can, try to tell a story with your designs—you can use crayons, pencils or colored pencils to invent and draw in details.

### Materials:

- Requires: magazines or newspapers, crayons or colored pencils, glue or tape, scissors.
- Imagination!

Tip for Teachers: For a 3D version of this activity, you can also make a simple cut-out fireplace using foam core and stick "tiles" on it.

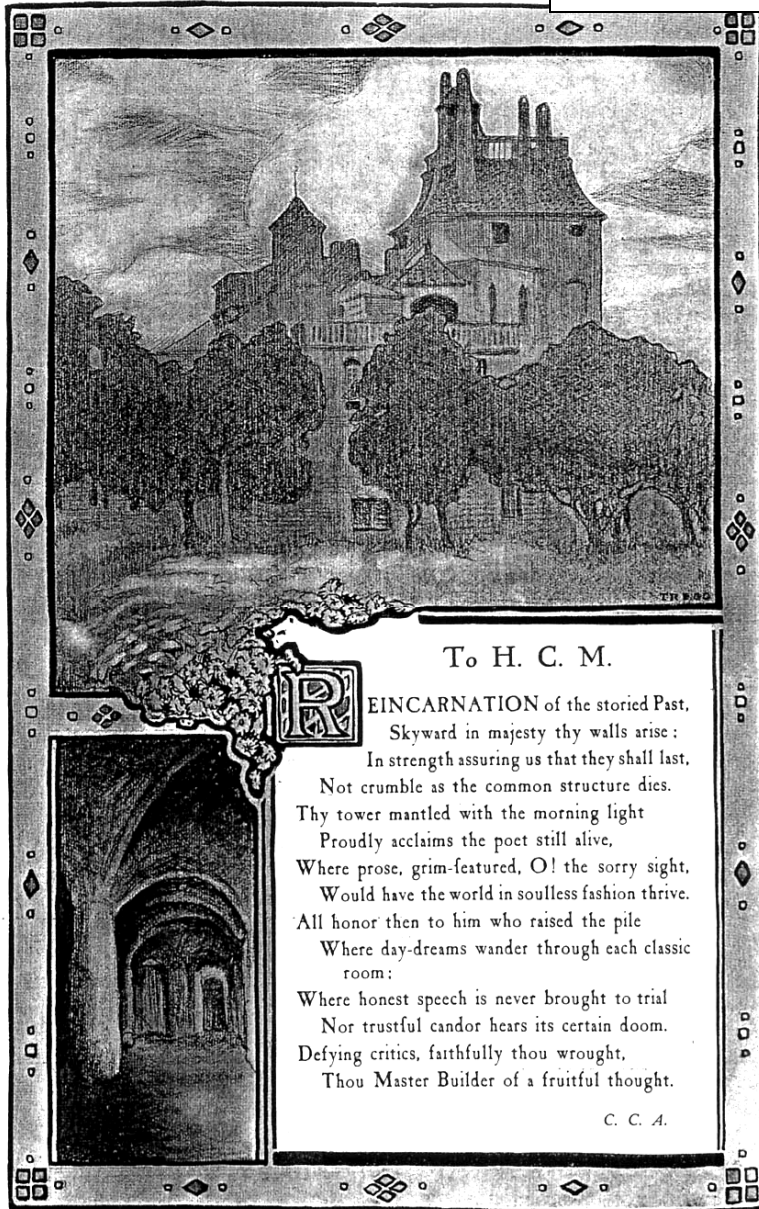


## A Mosaic Fireplace

**Use this template to design your own fireplace. Either print it out for a small one, or use a ruler to draw your own larger version.**



## Henry's Guestbook



Following the example of Mercer's acquaintance, Charles C. Abbott, write a brief poem (minimum four lines) to Henry about his concrete castle or how he decorated it. Your poem can express what you liked or didn't like about the building, or what you remember most about it. Work individually or in small groups. Most importantly, be creative!

"Reincarnation of the storied past,  
Skyward in majesty they walls arise;  
In strength assuring us that they shall last,  
Not crumble as the common structure dies.

Thy tower mantled with the morning light  
Proudly acclaim the poet still alive,  
Where prose, grim-featured, O! the sorry sight,  
Would have the world in soulless fashion thrive.

All honor then to him who raised the pile  
Where day-dreams wander through each classic room;  
Where honest speech is never brought to trial  
Nor trustful candor hears its certain doom.

Defying critics, faithfully though wrought  
Thou Master Builder of a fruitful thought."

Abbott's poem appeared with a picture of Fonthill in the May 1911 issue of *Cement Age*.

**Pre-Visit Activities:**

Photo Detectives

- What kind of building materials do you see in the photos of Fonthill's construction?
  - A large pile of sand is visible on the left of the picture, and a mound of dirt that may also have been used lies on the right. On the exposed roof that the four men are working on you can see straw, sand and dirt being used to make a floor before pouring concrete. There's also some piles of lumber on the ground, and boards attached to the building so that concrete can be poured on and allowed to dry.
- What devices or forms of transportation do you see in the photo that show how the workmen got the work done?
  - There are a few simple but important devices. Attached to the back of the roof you can see a V-shaped pulley system. This was used to haul materials up the side of the building to the men working on top. To the right of the pulley, you can also see two men with a box full of earth in between them. Another important tool was the wheelbarrow, and you can see an empty one standing on a pile of sand on the left of the picture.
  - The main form of transporting materials to Fonthill was horse and cart. There are a few horses in the picture but they're hard to spot. In the background of the picture you can see a large barn—just to the left of it on a ramp is a draft horse wearing a harness for hauling heavy loads. In the nearby trees you might just make out two darker horses hitched to a carriage, but the carriage would have been for transporting people not building materials.
- What building is in the picture that is no longer there today (or is it)?
  - The barn in the background still stands next to Fonthill, although it doesn't look at all like it does in the picture. Always interested in using old things in new ways, Mercer remodeled and encased the barn in concrete to make the Terrace Pavilion.
- Does this photo give any clues as to how Fonthill was built, or how the work was organized?
  - Now that you have looked for the tools, materials and devices used to build Fonthill, you can probably guess by looking at the photograph how a great deal of the work was carried out. Materials would be hauled in by a horse-drawn cart and deposited at the foot of the building site. Using wheelbarrows and a pulley, men would haul dirt, sand and straw up to the level they were working on, spreading the materials around with shovels and boxes. Once everything was in place, concrete could be poured in and allowed to set.

- What other details of the picture do you see?
  - Students might mention the small outhouse in the shadow of the barn to the right background of the picture.
  - Beyond the barn, in the far background, there are merely fields and one or two farmhouses. When Fonthill was built there were far less residences in the area than there are today.

**Post-Visit Activities:**

The Ancient World

Ancient Map of the World:

- Which continents are missing?
  - Both North and South America are missing, as well as Australia. Africa, Asia and Europe are compressed into mini-continents.
- Which continent might “Frigida” be on today’s map?
  - Antarctica might readily come to mind, and that is close to the notion of map makers during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Notice that there is also a land called “Frigida” near the top and bottom of the map. Even the ancients believed that the earth had frigid regions at both the north and south poles.
- What are some other major differences?
  - A great ocean runs across the globe where the Equator should be. It is noted as the Alueus Ocean.
  - In a way, the map is symmetrical. It includes a frigid zone on top, then a mass of land, including Europe, Africa and Asia. Across the ocean there is another mass of land, called the “Antipodes” and a frigid zone at the bottom.

Image of Tenochtitlán

- What is especially unique about this city?
  - Tenochtitlán was built in the middle of a lake, called Lake Texcoco. As you can see on a modern map, the lake no longer exists.
- What are some of the main features of the city?
  - The lines going into and out of the city are either roads (straight lines) or aqueducts, which carried fresh water.
  - There are many buildings surrounding the central plaza, so that indicates the size of the city.
  - The central square is the heart of Tenochtitlán. The square contains the main temple to the Aztec gods that looks like a pyramid, as well as the animal menagerie (zoo) of Montezuma, indications of other important buildings and even crops.



- Tenochtitlán even has suburbs! You can make out roads that connect the city center to groups of buildings across the lake. Some of these were the private palaces of the Aztec king Montezuma.
- What do the features visible on the map and tile tell us about the Aztecs and their civilization?
  - Think about what it means to build a city in the middle of the lake. The Aztecs accomplished remarkable feats in building Tenochtitlán, such as the roads that crossed the water and the aqueducts that brought fresh water into the city. Many conquistadors described Tenochtitlán as the largest city they had ever seen. The temple indicates the role religion played in Aztec society. You can see ring-like fences towards the bottom right of the print—these are depicted as thin, curved tiles on Mercer’s installation—and they indicate the system of dykes used to hold the land in place on the shores of the lake and control the flow of water around the city.
- What happened to Tenochtitlán?
  - The city was besieged and destroyed by Spanish conquistadors under Hernán Cortes in 1521. In the Bow Room where this installation hangs, Henry Mercer made a tile inscription in Latin on the stairs that reads REGNUM MONTESUMAE FUIT: “The kingdom of Montezuma disappeared.”