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**Philadelphia's Volunteer Firefighting History on Display at the Mercer Museum**

*New Exhibit will feature more than 175 artifacts from the museum's collection*

**DOYLESTOWN, PA: (April 7, 2015)** – The sound of ringing fire bells terrified urban dwellers throughout the 1800s. Before the Civil War, huge fires destroyed more than \$200 million worth of property in the nation's largest cities. Although Philadelphia did not suffer a devastating fire like those that nearly destroyed Boston and Chicago, the city often saw terrible blazes. In the era before the establishment of a professional city-wide fire department, protecting the city's residents was an important and highly-regarded act of public service. The Mercer Museum will tell the exciting story of Philadelphia's volunteer firefighters in a new exhibit, *"To Save Our Fellow Citizens: Volunteer Firefighting, 1800-1875"*. The show will open on April 25 and run until September 7.

"We are pleased to put our collection of Philadelphia's firefighting history on display to the public," said Mercer Museum Executive Director, Doug Dolan. "Many of the artifacts were donated to the museum in 1919 by the Volunteer Firemen's Association of Philadelphia, and some are on exhibit for the first time in several decades. The firefighting profession still captures the imagination today of young and old."

Objects on view in *To Save Our Fellow Citizens* include an early hand-powered engine and a

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### *To Save Our Fellow Citizens/2*

hose carriage, fire helmets and parade hats, tools, badges, speaking trumpets, original prints and paintings, manuscript materials, and numerous photographs. Visitors will learn about the evolution of firefighting in Philadelphia from a city of volunteers to the beginnings of a paid workforce. The exhibit will also explore the debate that raged over the merits of volunteer firefighting, how fire companies were formed and why firemen used such elaborate artwork to adorn their engines and parade regalia. In addition to audio and video stations, interactive exhibit experiences include “Sound the Alarm,” which lets visitors try communicating the locations of fires using the firefighters’ bell code system from the early 1800s, and the board game, “Race to the Fire,” where players compete to see who can be the first on the scene of a fire. A children’s play area lets kids try out firefighter clothing, climb on a play fire engine and use a modern fire hose and nozzle for pretend firefighting.

Throughout the spring and summer, the museum has scheduled a number of firefighting-related programs for visitors to enjoy: *Shooting Fire: Memories of 30 Years as a Fire Scene Photographer* (May 2, 2p.m.), *From Horses to Horsepower-The Philadelphia Bureau of Fire 1871 to 1928* (May 30, 2 p.m.), *The Early Fire Companies of Kensington and Fishtown: An Archaeological Exploration* (June 20, 2 p.m.), *An Evening of Firefighting Memories* (July 29, 7-8:30 p.m.), *Working Hand in hand: Philadelphia’s Volunteer Fire Companies and the Insurance Industry* (August 8, 2 p.m.) and *Doylestown Walking Tour: Firefighting History* (August 14, 5:30 & 7 p.m., \$11 adults/\$6 youth).

The Mercer Museum will also host two special firefighting days on its grounds which are free and open to the public (regular admission applies to visits to the museum itself). A **Firefighting Day and Antique Equipment Muster** will take place on Sunday, June 7 from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., and a second **Firefighting Day and Modern Equipment Show** is scheduled for Sunday, August 16, from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Both events feature engines and apparatus from area fire companies, special demonstrations, fire prevention information and fun hands-on activities for all ages. The two programs are presented in collaboration with the Bucks County Fire Chiefs’ Association.

**-More-**

### **To Save Our Fellow Citizens/3**

“To Save Our Fellow Citizens:” Volunteer Firefighting, 1800-1875, is generously sponsored by Visit Bucks County, Tilley Family & Tilley Fire Equipment Company, *In Memory of Don Tilley’s Commitment to Volunteer Firefighting*, Bucks County Foundation, William & Laurie Schutt, Susan E. Kane, Brian & Louise McLeod, Mission Appeal Donors-2014 Cocktails at the Castle Gala, Adopt-An Artifact Campaign Contributors.

“*To Save Our Fellow Citizens:” Volunteer Firefighting, 1800-1875* is included with museum admission. Admission is \$14 for adults, \$12 for seniors (65+) and \$8 for youth (6-17). The exhibit is free for children 5 and under and members.

### **About the Mercer Museum**

The Mercer Museum, one of Bucks County’s premier tourist attractions, offers visitors a unique window into pre-Industrial America as seen through the implements used in everyday life. The Museum’s collection includes more than 40,000 objects exhibiting the tools of more than 60 different crafts and trades, providing one of the world’s most comprehensive portraits of material culture in America. The Mercer Museum is located at Pine & Ashland Streets in Doylestown and is open for self-guided exploration 7 days a week. For more information, call 215-345-0210, or visit: [www.mercermuseum.org](http://www.mercermuseum.org).

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