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The Mercer Museum Turns 100
Quirky, Concrete Castle Displays “The Tools of the Nation Maker”

DOYLESTOWN, PA: (March, 2016) – A century ago, the Mercer Museum opened to great acclaim. Noted tile-maker, Henry Mercer (1856-1930) constructed his unique concrete castle to display his encyclopedic collection of early American tools and everyday objects. Newspaper articles of the day proclaimed the museum “The Greatest in the World.” Today, the National Historic Landmark is still flourishing, continuing to delight visitors with its original collection while engaging 21st century audiences with modern exhibitions and programs.

“Today’s audiences enjoy the Mercer Museum because it allows them to connect to a time and place before technology,” said Douglas Dolan, the Mercer Museum’s Executive Director. “Visitors are inspired by the way early Americans accomplished their tasks by hand. Each one of the objects in the museum tells a different story of the resilience of the human spirit.”

Henry Mercer deliberately hung everyday objects from the walls and ceilings presenting history from a new point of view. When visitors step into the museum’s vast Central Court, they are treated to an amazing view of horse-drawn carriages, a whaling boat, and antique fire engine hanging overhead. Other artifacts representing more than 60 early American crafts and trades are densely packed into rooms and alcoves. Mercer’s collection (numbering some 40,000 artifacts with about one-third of the collection on view) runs from the everyday household items (kitchen utensils) to the more macabre (a hangman’s gallows and hearse).

The Mercer Museum’s castle-like architecture is as fascinating as the objects inside. Mercer insisted on a fireproof building to house his collection and was inspired by the castles he had seen on his travels in Europe. Working from sketches instead of blueprints, Mercer employed eight day laborers and a horse named Lucy, to build the museum, utilizing more than 6500 tons of concrete.

In 2011, the museum built a modern concrete addition to complement the castle, which featured a new Learning Center, museum shop and exhibition gallery. According to Dolan, “In order for us to survive, we needed to increase our repeat visitation from our local Bucks County audience and also reach out to new audiences in the Delaware Valley and beyond.” The museum has had success, increasing attendance by 30%, by balancing popular traveling exhibitions (*LEGO® Castle Adventure*, *America’s Road: The Journey of Route 66*) with exhibitions mounted by the museum (*Turning Points: Civil War, 1863- 1864*).

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In recent years, the museum has also tapped into pop culture to change its “Camps at the Castle” program by developing a Harry Potter-themed day camp, called the “Wild World of Wizarding School.” The camp has sold out every year.

In honor of the Mercer Museum’s Centennial, four museums of Doylestown will be free and open to the public on Saturday, July 16, from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Visitors will receive free admission to the Mercer Museum, the James A. Michener Art Museum, Fonthill Castle and the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works. A free bus will shuttle visitors between Doylestown’s Cultural District and Fonthill Park.

The Mercer Museum continues its 100th anniversary celebration into the fall with a series of storytelling performances called *Twilight Tales*. In each Twilight Tale, a spoken word artist will perform in the dramatic atmosphere of the Mercer’s original Central Court, in close proximity to the museum’s collection of early tools and artifacts. Each artist will incorporate material inspired by the museum’s collection. The *Twilight Tales* Performance Series includes “Henry Mercer, the Lenape Stone and First Peoples of the Delaware Valley,” (Sept. 24), “American Tall Tales and Larger-than Life Heroes,” (Oct. 8) and “Tales of Mystery and the Macabre,” (Oct. 27).

For more information on the Mercer Centennial programs, visit mercermuseum.org.

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 celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2016. On view in the museum’s Martin & Warwick Foundation Galleries from July 2 to November 6: *Long May She Wave: A Graphic History of the American Flag*. The Mercer Museum is located at Pine Street & Scout Way 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.

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