

For immediate release:

March 28, 2017

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## **Fitchburg Historical Society Presents “If These Walls Could Talk”**

### **History of the Fitchburg Fire Department**

#### *Historical View of the Struggle to Prevent and Fight Fires*

**The Fitchburg Historical Society has searched through its collections to find the history of Fitchburg’s fire department and fire fighters for its new exhibition, expanded its popular summer exhibition of classic Iver Johnson Bicycles to include documents and photos dating from Fitchburg’s “Golden Age” of bicycle production.** From now through August 17, 2017, the Fitchburg Historical Society is presenting *Iver Johnson: Pioneering Bicycle Design*, a display of the popular and historic bikes that were made for decades in Fitchburg by the Iver Johnson Arms and Cycle Works. The majority of bicycles have been loaned by a number of local and regional collectors; others come from the Fitchburg Historical Society collection, which includes bicycles, tools and ephemera donated by Richard Hansen.

This year’s exhibition includes the oldest remaining Iver Johnson bicycle currently known: it was built in Worcester in 1890, before the Iver Johnson Company moved to Fitchburg. In addition, the Olympic racing bicycle used by Fitchburg athlete Arthur Longsjø, Jr. is on view at the Historical Society’s exhibition. The bicycle was purchased from France by Longsjø’s supporters and he rode it in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.

From 1891 to 1941, Iver Johnson’s Arms and Cycle Works in Fitchburg manufactured nearly 700,000 bikes. The bicycle models on exhibition are a favorite among bicycle historians for the quality of their construction and their capacity for high speed in long-distance bike races. These included racing bikes, standard and touring bikes, as well as children’s bikes and tricycles. They are known as some of the highest quality bikes ever made.

The skilled metal workers who created Iver Johnson bicycles were known for the quality and consistency of their work. Some worked for as many as 60 years at the factory, which also produced Iver Johnson guns until the 1970’s. This year’s exhibition will feature images and records documenting the factory and workers that produced the famous bikes. The Iver Johnson

Arms and Cycle Works were also skilled at advertising, marketing, and distribution, and examples of their memorable advertising campaigns will also be included in the exhibition.

The exhibition also includes the story of American Olympian bicyclist Arthur Longsjö, a Finnish-American athlete from Fitchburg who was considered one of the greatest bicyclists of his generation and who died tragically young. His memory is honored with the Arthur Longsjö Classic Bike Race, and the exhibition will be open extra hours on Sunday, June 26, when the Arthur Longsjö Classic Bike Race comes to Fitchburg. On that day, the FITchburg Rides program will also offer bicycle events for riders of all ages. The *Iver Johnson: Pioneering Bicycle Design* exhibition at the Historical Society will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The normal opening hours for the exhibition are Monday and Tuesday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Wednesday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The exhibition is free and open to the public, though donations are accepted. For more information, call 978-345-1157, write [welcome@fitchburghistoricalociety.com](mailto:welcome@fitchburghistoricalociety.com) or visit [www.fitchburghistoricalociety.org](http://www.fitchburghistoricalociety.org) or <https://www.facebook.com/FitchburgHistoricalSociety>.

The Fitchburg Historical Society and Crocker Family Center for the History of Fitchburg is located at 781 Main Street, Fitchburg in the historic Phoenix building. There is abundant on-street parking near the Historical Society and free parking behind the building. The building is handicapped accessible.

- 30 -

***If These Walls Could Talk: The History of the Fitchburg Fire Department***

March 27 -- June 7, 2017

George R. Wallace Jr. and Alice G. Wallace Exhibit Hall, Fitchburg Historical Society

***Free and open to the public.***

***Open Hours for Hidden Treasures***

Additional exhibition hours: ***If These Walls Could Talk: The History of the Fitchburg Fire Department***  
Saturday, May 13, 2017, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

George R. Wallace Jr. and Alice G. Wallace Exhibit Hall, Fitchburg Historical Society

Fitchburg Fire Department Central Station will also be open for an Open House and Fire Safety Day.

**About the Fitchburg Historical Society:** Founded by James F.D. Garfield in 1892, the Fitchburg Historical Society is an independent non-profit that was created to collect, preserve, and interpret the history of Fitchburg. Now located in an historic H.M. Francis-designed building on Main Street, the Society hosts lectures, exhibits and annual events relating to the city's history. Exhibitions and educational programming about Fitchburg history are supported by a

grant from The George R. Wallace Foundation, and are presented in the George R. Wallace Jr. and Alice G. Wallace Exhibit Hall.