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Museum shows off its awesome oddities

Historic relics have lots of stories to tell

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CAMDEN

Three years ago, a male beluga whale named Helis wandered up the Delaware River, sending researchers, environmentalists and ship operators into a frantic debate over how to keep the large mammal from harm during its short visit to the area.

Some of Helis' predecessors weren't so lucky.

There was absolutely no concern over the well-being of the whale that visited the Delaware Valley back in the 1600s.

"Basically, they skinned the whale," said Sarah Hagarty, director of the Camden County Historical Society museum.

A piece of that whale's skin, along with a letter from a man describing the fond memories of taking his children to see a public display of the whale's rotting carcass, is one of several curiosities on display as part of the museum's "Relics: Remembering the Unforgettable" exhibit.

"This exhibit is kind of a cabinet of curiosities," Hagarty said. "We have all this cool stuff in the basement that kind of doesn't go with anything else."

"We are highlighting some of the more unusual items in our collection that are not normally exhibited," added CCHS Executive Director Lin-



CHRIS LaCHALL/Courier-Post

Debris from the 1977 Garden State Park fire is part of the Camden County Historical Society exhibit 'Relics: Remembering The Unforgettable.'

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da Gentry. "Pretty much everything in our collection is related to Camden County and the South Jersey area. With the relics, they are from different areas and they encompass a broader range, so they don't really fit into our permanent exhibits."

Among the most valuable relics is a small piece of linen soaked with the blood of President Abraham Lincoln.

"We don't know how we got

See **RELICS**, Page 5B



Relics/Exhibit has odd artifacts



CHRIS LiCHALL/Courier-Post

Sarah Haggerty, director of the Camden County Historical Society's museum, displays a commemorative key from the State Bank of Camden, which was founded in 1812 and was the city's first bank. The key is part of the museum's exhibit, 'Relics: Remembering The Unforgettable.'



CHRIS LiCHALL/Courier-Post

At left, a fragment of Napoleon Bonaparte's camp bed is part of the CCHS exhibit, as is a shoe mold for William Penn (right) which dates back to 1689.

Continued from Page 1B

it," Haggerty said. "We don't know where it came from."

The small piece of cloth was accompanied by a letter that explained its origin. According to the letter, the linen was a piece of the sheet Lincoln was placed on immediately after being shot at Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865.

It is now framed below an original printing of a broadside

poster advertising the President and the First Lady plans for attending the show — also a very rare relic.

"I consider a relic to be something that was part of an important historical event or somebody in history used it, touched it, that kind of thing," Haggerty said.

Some, like a piece of Martha Washington's dress or the mold used to make one of William Penn's shoes, are more histori-

cally significant than others, but all are interesting.

Penn's inscribed shoe mold, for instance, tells a bit about the idealistic man who built the City of Brotherly Love.

"You can actually see it's quite a large shoe, which is very unusual for an 1800s shoe," Haggerty said.

The exhibit also features a railroad spike President James Garfield traveled over on his way to the Jersey Shore to re-

IF YOU GO

■ 'Relics: Remembering the Unforgettable' opens today with a special reception from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Camden County Historical Society on Park Boulevard in Camden.

■ The exhibit will remain open through April during the museum's operating hours: from noon to 4:30 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays and from noon to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Admission is \$5 and includes a museum tour. For \$8, visitors can also tour historic Pomona Hall, the 18th-century Georgian mansion of the Cooper family.

■ For more information or for tickets, call (856) 964-3333 or go to www.cchsnj.com.

cover from the injuries from an assassination attempt that proved fatal.

"It didn't work, so he made his last trip, dead and alive, over this spike," Haggerty said.

Most of the relics on display at the museum have been part of the society's collection since its early days in the 1920s and 30s, Gentry said.

With the exception of Lincoln's blood relic, which is displayed every year around Presidents Day, most have never been seen before.

The whale skin, for instance, is new. It was donated to the society within the last six months, Gentry said.

"This is our first opportunity to show it off," Gentry said.

"They all have some association with somebody historically important and they all have a story," Haggerty said. "We know the stories, but it's really important that everybody else know the stories."

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