New History in a New Long Island Room

The only thing new in the world is the history you don't know. --Harry S. Truman, 33rd President of the United States

Simple yet eloquent, President Truman's statement about the newness of history may seem paradoxical, but it is actually quite accurate, particularly when it comes to the study of local history. Generally, in school we receive a relatively broad historical education that aims to give us an overview of the important people, places and events that have shaped the past. While such information is essential because it provides us with a basic understanding of how the world and our nation have evolved over time, it represents only a fraction of the whole. What is often missing from this wider view is an appreciation of how major historical happenings influenced life at the local level. To many then, local history is, as President Truman pointed out, "new" history. It is the history we don't know, but can come to know if we look in the right places-- places like the Long Island Room.

The Long Island Room, like many local history archives, houses a wealth of primary source materials that allow researchers to better understand how the past shaped the local community. These materials, including original documents, ledgers, account books, scrapbooks, journals, personal correspondence, business records, pamphlets, photographs, postcards, contemporary books and many other similar items, tell the story of daily life in a particular location at a specific moment in time. Their contents are often quite fascinating and tend to reveal a much more intimate version of history than what we learn in school. Such materials capture the triumphs, tragedies and mundane details of everyday life for everyday people in the community, a quality that makes this "new" history much easier to personally connect with.

In 2013 the Long Island Room re-opened to the public after months of renovation (see "Grand Re-opening of the Long Island Room" below). During this period, its reading room was completely revamped and its storage facility was expanded and reorganized. Revived by the changes, the Long Island Room staff is busier than ever, working hard to improve access to the collection and plan engaging programs, exhibits and other outreach efforts for the community.

It is now a "new" Long Island Room and it is a great place to learn some "new" history! Come and see for yourself!