



Item of the Week *from the* Long Island Collection

LONG ISLAND COLLECTION | DIGITAL LONG ISLAND | EAST HAMPTON STAR ARCHIVE

JEWELS VALUED AT \$400,000 STOLEN FROM CARUSO'S SUMMER RESIDENCE

"Jewels Valued at \$400,000 Stolen from Caruso's Summer Residence," The East Hampton Star, June 11, 1920

Whether or not you enjoy opera, chances are you're familiar with Maria Callas, The Three Tenors, and Enrico Caruso. Born in Naples in 1873, Enrico Caruso's career pre-dates the latter performers, spanning from 1895 to 1920. Being one of the first global media sensations of his day, Caruso appeared in numerous newspapers, books, magazines, and newsreels. He served as the lead tenor for New York's Metropolitan Opera for eighteen consecutive seasons in over 850 performances and was heard live on stage during the first public radio broadcast transmitted in the United States. In addition to this, Caruso produced over 250 commercial sound recordings, which helped to bring opera music out of the opera house and into the ears of the general public.

As can be gathered, Enrico Caruso was quite famous and, much like his profession, drama followed him everywhere. In 1906, he was fined \$10 for pinching a woman in the Monkey House at the Central Park Zoo. In 1910, an extortion racket known as the Black Hand sent Caruso letters demanding money while threatening to damage his voice or hurt his family. Fortunately, the perpetrators were eventually arrested.

In 1918, Caruso eloped with Dorothy Benjamin, who was twenty years his junior. She was the daughter of Park Benjamin Jr., a patent lawyer and writer, who used to rent the W.S. Everest cottage on Buell Lane in East Hampton. The marriage was not consented to as stated by Dorothy's parents to the press.

Following their marriage, the Carusos rented The Creeks on Georgica Pond for the summer. At 10:30 p.m. on June 8th, 1920, a robbery occurred at the home, where a strong box containing an estimated \$400,000 worth of Dorothy's jewelry was stolen from her bedroom. The Caruso's chauffeur chased down the sound of the alarm attached to the jewelry box while firing a revolver. The box was eventually discovered on the lawn with most of the items missing. The robbery

was believed to be an inside job, as Dorothy told police she had let two servants go before the incident. The chauffeur was also suspected in the case. Later that year, a suspect was apprehended in a trap arranged between the police and sisters Katherine and Charlotte Poillon, who said a man named Harry C. Toback offered to sell them \$45,000 worth of unset diamonds from the Caruso jewels.

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The East Hampton Star Archive is a fully searchable, online digital archive of our local weekly newspaper, that features each complete issue of the paper from 1918-1968, exactly as it appeared in print. Visit the archive online, for a tour of our Town's history that will fascinate both the amateur and professional historian!

The Karl Grossman Research Archive is an extensive collection of materials digitized from the personal archive of Karl Grossman, an investigative reporter, columnist, author, and current professor of journalism at SUNY Old Westbury. The archive brings together a decades long career in reporting and journalism with topics ranging from the economy and pollution to fishing and East Hampton Town. Patrons are capable of searching this 9,500+ item collection by collection name, year, title, or keyword search.

The Local Artist Research Archive is a collection of over 19,000 items digitized from Guild Hall, containing materials including personal letters, photographs, news clippings, and art catalogs concerning artists of the East End. Patrons are capable of searching this archive by collection, title, or keyword search.



Welcome to the Long Island Collection's "Item of the Week."

We are an archive dedicated to the history and people of Long Island, with a special interest in all things East Hampton and East End. Unlike some small local history rooms in other public libraries, we have over 100,000 items including, but not limited to, rare books, maps, photographs, deeds, postcards, letters, newspapers, and whaling logs. We also have a dedicated and hardworking staff ready to help you with any questions you may have. Unable to make it to the library? No problem! We upload images from the collection to [Digital Long Island](#) on a weekly basis, so there's always something new and interesting to behold.

Please visit us at the Library, make use of our extensive online digital resources, or contact us for assistance. Public hours are: Mon. - Tues. and Thurs. - Sat., 1:00-4:30 p.m.

Researched and written by Gina Piastuck, Department Head, Long Island Collection.

Gina Piastuck joined the East Hampton Library in 2007 as a librarian and archivist and has served as the Head of the Long Island Collection since 2009. She's a graduate of LIU Post's Palmer School of Library and Information Science and holds both an M.L.I.S. degree and a Certificate in Archives and Records Management. Her responsibilities managing the Long Island Collection include providing reference and research assistance to patrons on and off site, as well as the acquisition, arrangement, description and conservation of rare and new materials pertaining to the history and people of Long Island.

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