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## Item of the Week *from the* Long Island Collection

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

*A Song upon Long Island's Distress. By Mrs. Molly Corwithe. 1776*  
1<sup>st</sup>

*My country men and maidens all, pray lend an ear to what I have to say,  
It's of the troubles and vexations that has happened in our day,  
It's for the sins we have committed and the deeds that we have done,  
For they have reached unto heaven and have pulled these judgements down.*  
2<sup>nd</sup>

*But we must reflect upon King George the Third of Tyranny,  
He intended to have robbed us of our rights and property,  
So an army quickly raised and with speed sent them away,  
And the first landing that they <sup>made</sup> was in Massachusetts Bay.*  
3<sup>rd</sup>

*And there they lived like the heathen knowing then not what to do,  
But at length they all concluded for to strike the fatal blow,  
But unto their own destruction for many of their men were slain,  
Their noblest generals with their captains returned back with shame.*  
4<sup>th</sup>

*At New York they next arriv'd, on the Island they did land,  
General Washington with his army thinking there to them withstand,  
But unhappy was the day their providence did seem to frown,  
To see the enemy advancing and our troops a losing ground.*  
5<sup>th</sup>

*Our bravest general then resigned up the Island unto them,  
Saying if he longer staid more of them would there be slain,  
So he gave orders to his captains saying, remove your lines with speed,  
For the enemy is pursuing and will cause your hearts to bleed.*  
6<sup>th</sup>

*Sunday evening the news arriv'd that the Island was resigned,  
And our brave generals <sup>with their wives</sup> had fled off and left their lines,  
Such bitter mourning and lamentation there was heard all over the plain,  
Parents weeping for their children thinking that their sons were slain.*  
7<sup>th</sup>

*Pretty maidens were a weeping for their lovers they thought were slain,  
While the tears like floods of water from their eyes did stream a main,  
They stood amazed and a gazing crying out where shall we run,  
For the enemy is passing and so speedily will come.*

**A song upon Long Island's distress,**  
**by Mrs. Molly Corwithe, 1776, transcribed 1838**

This original song was written by a local woman identified only as Mrs. Molly Corwithe, possibly Mary Halsey Corwithe (1755-1843, daughter of Matthew Halsey) of Bridgehampton, in 1776. This Mary Halsey married Caleb Corwithe (also spelled Corwith) in 1779. Caleb Corwithe of Bridgehampton served in Colonel Josiah Smith's Continental Regiment, and fought in the Battle of Brooklyn.

The song describes the retreat of Washington's army following the Battle of Brooklyn, which Calvin Halsey of Southampton transcribed in 1838. On July 2, 1776, Congress voted approval of the Declaration of Independence, and British warships landed men on Staten Island. Molly's lyrics chronicle the arrival of British

forces in New York, and the events after Long Island fell under British control on August 30, 1776. Molly writes of these events "Our bravest general resigned up the Island unto them" and continues to report "General Washington he gave orders onto all that here remained. That they should take all they possessed and with speed fly to the main [land]."

Long Island remained under British occupation until November of 1783 when the last British troops left America, and the families that stayed on the island were subject to constant harassment and raiding parties from both sides during the occupation. Many of the Long Island families that left fled to Connecticut, which Washington's army controlled. Her wording suggests Molly may be among the refugees when she writes "my dearest friends that on the Island still do dwell..."

Regardless of which side of enemy lines Molly wrote from, she captures both the emotional distress from Washington's defeats in New York, and the daring optimistic "spirit of 1776" that fueled the ideals in the Declaration of Independence at a time when Washington's victory-let alone a country without a king-seemed incomprehensible to many.

## EXPLORE MORE

**The Digital Long Island Collection** is part of New York Heritage Digital Collections. Included are searchable scans of deeds, drawings, etchings, inventories, letters, maps, paintings, pardons, patents, photographs, plans, postcards, prints, sculptures, sketches, textiles, tiles, yearbooks and more to come.

**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 Andrea Meyer, Librarian/Archivist, Long Island Collection.**

*Andrea Meyer began working in the Long Island Collection in January 2015. Her responsibilities include updating Digital Long Island, scanning, processing new collections, and assisting patrons with research. She earned her M.L.I.S. through Long Island University, and completed her M.A. in Archives and Public History at New York University through the dual-degree program. Andrea started working in archives in 2005. Prior to working for the East Hampton Library, Andrea worked at the New Jersey State Archives, at NYU Libraries, and as a private research consultant. Her clients included the New-York Historical Society. She is also involved with the Sag Harbor Historical Society.*

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