History

An important event in the early history of the Smithtown Library was the establishment of the Richard H. Handley Collection of Long Island Americana, a special local history archives. Richard Hockman Handley (1848-1914) was a wealthy businessman who lived with his family in neighboring Hauppauge. Mr. Handley dedicated much of his time and money to one of his greatest interests-- the collection of rare materials related to the local history of Long Island and the surrounding regions. With the help of various associates and dealers, Mr. Handley amassed a truly remarkable collection of books, documents, manuscripts, maps, atlases and ephemera.

In 1921, Richard Handley's widow, Mary, loaned her husband's extensive collection of rare and valuable local history materials to the Smithtown Library. Five years later, in 1926, Mrs. Handley, with the consent of her four children donated the collection to the library outright along with a fund for its maintenance. She wrote the following to the Smithtown Library Board of Trustees on April 2, 1926: "I desire to have a guarantee from your board that the Library of Americana presented to the Smithtown Library, will be held always as a memorial to Richard H. Handley."

Mrs. Handley's request has been, is still and will be continue to be met by the Smithtown Library. The Richard H. Handley Collection of Long Island Americana (more commonly referred to as the Long Island Room) is recognized as one of the most important local history collections on Long Island and its staff regularly welcomes researchers of all kinds. Over the years the collection has continued to grow, mostly through the donations of other local individuals, families and organizations.