



Myron H. Luke

Myron H. Luke died on July 7, 2000, in his 95th year. His name has been synonymous with Long Island history for decades as the pre-eminent local historian—the Dean of Long Island history.

Myron's father was a Congregational minister in Pennsylvania, and Myron was born on Christmas Day in 1905, weighing in at only two pounds. He grew up in Seneca Falls in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, received his A.B. from Oberlin College in Ohio, and an M.A. in Political Science from Syracuse University (1933).

Myron came to Long Island in 1937 to teach economics at the State Institute of Applied Agriculture on Long Island, Farmingdale (now SUNY College of Technology). Soon after he arrived, the daughter of his landlord asked him, "If you're teaching agricultural history, what do you know of Long Island history?" When he said he didn't know anything, she introduced him to Jesse Merritt who was the Farmingdale Village and Nassau County Historian (1936-1957). Merritt took Myron on numerous drives exploring Long Island and sharing his wealth of knowledge about its history. (See Luke's article, "Portrait of a Long Island Historian: Jesse Merritt," in the 1993 issue of the *Nassau County Historical Society Journal*.)

In 1945, Myron Luke began teaching at Hofstra College. He completed his Ph.D. in American history at New York University in 1950, writing his dissertation on "The Port of New York, 1800-1810: The Foreign Trade and Business Community." In 1963, Dr. Luke accepted an appointment at C.W. Post College as Professor of History and Chairman of the History Department and the Division of Social Sciences. He became Professor Emeritus of History on his retirement in 1973.

Many generations of students studied with Dr. Luke, and invariably they speak of him fondly as a wonderful teacher whose courses inspired them. One student, who wrote him in 1971, summed it up well: "You are positively delightful as a professor. Your approach is so refreshing and downright marvelous. You relate history so that there is a feeling for the period and a feeling for the excitement of the period. You give history meaning. You lecture the way I hope someday I can do half as well. I am truly pleased to have you as one of my professors." He cared about his students and was interested in them. He was delighted in 1999, when one of his former students published work which he had begun in his Master's studies at C.W. Post. Dr. Luke wrote an enthusiastic endorsement for the book jacket of Richard A. Winsche's *The History of Nassau County Community Place-Names*.

When he was preparing for his French language examination for the doctorate, Myron asked Juliet Geymet, who was teaching French at Hofstra, to tutor him. They

married on March 21, 1953. The Lukes have been active members of the Congregational Church of Manhasset. Myron served on the Board of Deacons and was Church Clerk and Church Historian for many years.

Myron H. Luke became a trustee of the Nassau County Historical Society and editor of its *Journal* in 1950. He served as president of the Society from 1968 to 1971. He edited seventy-four issues of the *Journal* during his forty-six years as editor. (In the early years, the *Journal* was issued quarterly and later twice a year; since 1980, it has been published annually.) He also edited the *Journal of Long Island History*, published by the Long Island Historical Society in Brooklyn, from 1961 to 1967, and the *Long Island Courant*, for the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (SPLIA), 1965-1966.

When Myron resigned as Editor of this *Journal*, in 1996, reluctantly accepting "the infirmities of advancing years" at 90, he wrote: "I will miss the *Journal's* editing. It has been virtually a half century of pleasurable activity and has literally been a part of my life." In his 1990 article, "Reminiscences of Forty Years as Editor," he reflected on some of his experiences. The editorship was certainly a labor of love for him. The trustees voted him Editor Emeritus and he has provided advice and counsel from his long experience. His last contribution to the *Journal* was the memorial he wrote for trustee emerita Virginia L. Calkins in the 1999 issue.

Specializing in colonial and Long Island history, Dr. Luke wrote numerous articles and lectured widely. He was an excellent raconteur of Long Island's history and his writing is always a pleasure to read. In this issue we have reprinted his article, "The American Revolution on Long Island," to which we have appended a list of his publications. The total of nearly one hundred issues of journals he edited for three different historical organizations and his own writings are an extraordinary legacy for Long Island's historians and local history.

Myron H. Luke was Historian of the Town of Hempstead for twenty-one years, from 1967 to 1988, and organized many activities during the Bicentennial of the American Revolution. He was one of the founding trustees of the Friends for Long Island's Heritage and a trustee emeritus. He was an active member and officer in many other historical organizations including the Cow Neck Peninsula Historical Society in Port Washington, Association of Nassau County Historical Organizations, Friends of Historic St. George's Church (president, 1967-1984), and Long Island Historical Society (president 1967-1970).

Among the awards he received were: the Howard Sherwood Award from SPLIA in 1983; the D.A.R. Medal of Honor from the North Riding Chapter in 1983; and the Presidential Medal from Hofstra University in 1993. Myron was active in Masonic organizations and some upstate historical organizations (near his summer home in the Adirondacks). He was elected and served as a delegate for the New York State Constitutional Convention in 1967.

Myron H. Luke graced the Nassau County Historical Society and many other organizations with the wealth of his historical knowledge, wise counsel, and friendship. He was truly a gentleman and a scholar. We all miss him.

Natalie A. Naylor