

## Edward J. Smits (1933-2024): Honoring His Memory and His Legacy

Edward J. Smits was nominated to become Trustee Emeritus and elected by acclamation at the Annual Meeting of the Nassau County Historical Society on October 27, 2024. We were saddened when we learned he died on December 7, 2024.

Edward Smits began his connection with the Historical Society as its Assistant Curator in 1958. He was first elected a trustee of the Nassau County Historical Society in 1963 and was a devoted and valuable trustee of the Society for 61 years. In 1964 he became Assistant Editor of this *Journal*. For many years, he wrote “Historical Notes” for each issue. He prepared the first Index for this *Journal* in 1958, covering the years from 1937 to 1957 (now available on our website). In later years, he published fifteen articles in this *Journal* on topics dealing with Nassau County government, its museums, historical tours of the county, and other subjects. He is also the author of *Long Island Landmarks* (1970) and the definitive history of *Nassau County, Nassau Suburbia, U.S.A.* (1974).



Edward J. Smits

Edward Smits served as Nassau County Historian (an unpaid, pro bono position) beginning in 1983. He chaired the Nassau County Centennial in 1999, which included a three-day conference at Hofstra University and a conference volume, *Nassau County: From Rural Hinterland to Suburban Metropolis* (2000). Ed stepped down this year after more than four decades as County Historian. This was commemorated in a ceremony at the Long Island Fair on September 14, 2024, an appropriate location since he was a driving force behind that annual event for many years.

Historical museums are Edward Smits’ most significant contributions to local history. In 1956, he became curator of the new Nassau County History Museum. He was secretary at the organizational meeting in 1964 of what became the Friends for Long Island’s Heritage, a support group for museums. Ed became Director of Nassau County’s Museum Services in 1971. He developed and directed the Museum in Eisenhower Park, Old Bethpage Village Restoration, and many other county historical museums. After he retired from his government position, he was the Planning Coordinator for the Cradle of Aviation Museum from 1993 to 2000 and President from 2000 to 2004 (see Gary Monti’s article, on its history in this issue, pp. 1-23). Edward J. Smits was responsible for excellent historical museums that will benefit future generations and are an enduring contribution to our Island.

— Natalie A. Naylor