

## What's in a Name?

By Dr. Preston E. Pierce, county historian

What's in a name? That question recently served as the theme for the "Archives Week" presentations at a conference hosted by Ontario County RAIMS. County Records Management Officer, Dr. Hans Finke; Assistant Records Management Officer (and Brighton Town Historian), Mary Jo Barone; and former Records Manager, Steve Walker; made interesting presentations based on municipal record holdings. County Historian, Dr. Preston Pierce, took conference participants on a brief slide "trip" around the county looking at the place names we usually take for granted. Ontario County place names come from several sources. Over the years, the authority to fix place names has rested with the state legislature, the county courts, and the postal service.

Some place names, like Ontario, itself ("beautiful"), come from Native American words. Other examples include Canandaigua ("Place chosen for settlement"); Ganondagan ("peace town, white town"); Honeoye ("finger lying"); and Kanadasaga ("new settlement"). Canadice ("long lake") and Kashong ("creek of two branches") are other examples.

A few places like Seneca Castle, Seneca Lake, and Squaw Island, are named for Native Americans but do not come from the words spoken by natives of this area. Names of several of our towns and villages honor entrepreneurs who played a major role in settling large sections of western New York. Most obvious are the villages and towns of Phelps and Gorham. Chapin is named for Israel Chapin.

Most of our place-names commemorate the pioneer families who cleared the land, tamed the water power, and carved a thriving new county out of the wild. Shortsville is named for Theophilus Short, Oaks Corners for Jonathan Oaks, Stanley for Seth Stanley, and Reed's Corners for Seth Reed.

Some of our communities have names that are a bit mysterious--until you unravel their history. The Town of Richmond got its name from the maiden name of the wife of the first Supervisor (Abigail Richmond Pitts, wife of Peter Pitts). Victor was the middle name of the one of one of the founders of the Town--Claudius Victor Boughton. Hill Cumorah is named for the people of that name mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

A few of our place-names reflect some association with another place of the same name. Geneva is named for Geneva, Switzerland, although no one knows exactly why. Perhaps it is related to the strength of the Presbyterian Church in both places. Manchester reflects the hopes of its founders that it would become an industrial town like its namesake in England. Farmington got its name from a town near Hartford, Connecticut, home of Judge Hosmer who named the town. Cheshire is named for another village in Connecticut, and Bristol, Massachusetts, home of many early settlers, gave its name to two of our towns. Naples, Italy, is reflected in the name of our southern village.

Natural phenomena also have provided place names. Clifton Springs, first known as Sulphur Springs, is partly named for the mineral water found there. Gypsum takes its name from the mineral mined in the vicinity. Mud Creek is obvious!

A final group of place names reflects some special activity for which the locale is known. Such names include Port Gibson (Erie Canal), Factory Hollow (water power on Honeoye Creek), and Arsenal Hill (state weapons depot in Canandaigua).

What's in a name? When it comes to places in Ontario County, lots of history and some interesting stories.