

## Ohio Town Names

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**T**HERE ARE A VARIETY OF REASONS why Ohio towns got the names they have today. Historical currents left their impression upon the Ohio map. The Mexican War, for instance, gave the state such names as: Mexico, Monteray, Montezuma, Vera Cruz, Santa Fe and Rio Grande. The coming of the railroads left many a name along their routes. There is Bellvue for James Bell, Civil Engineer for the Mad River and Lake Erie R. R. Forgy in Clark County was named for C. S. Forgy, stationmaster for the C. C. C. & St. Louis (Big 4) R. R.

Names often indicate the origin of the early settler. In Northeastern Ohio there are many New England names like: Avon, Greenwich, Hartford, Litchfield, New Haven, Norwalk, Southington and Windham. This area was largely settled by people from Connecticut who purchased land from the Connecticut Land Company.

In the southern part of the state between the Scioto and the Miami rivers was the Virginia Military Tract. This land was set aside for Virginians who fought in the Revolution. It was settled principally by families from that state. However, emigrants from some other southern states settled there too. Town names there tell the story. Some examples are: Buford, Culpepper, Charleston, Leesburg, Fairfax, Lynchburg, New Richmond, Staunton, Winchester, Williamsburg among others.

Names like Cumberland, Dover, Fredericktown, Newark, Utica, New Albany, and New Philadelphia in the east central part of the state are indicative of the fact that many early settlers in that area came from the Middle Atlantic States.

Thrifty Germans from Cincinnati, and some direct from the Fatherland, took lands in the Northwestern section of the state. They drained the swamps and became substantial farmers. Com-

munities grew up around some of the Catholic churches which dot the landscape. These people were largely of that faith. A study of the map reveals names like Berlin, Leipsig, Minster, New Bremen, New Bavaria and Glandorf.

From this it might be thought that the map of Ohio can be divided neatly into segments based on the origin of the first settlers. But such is not the case. If this were true the origin of the name of many an Ohio town would become apparent. Actually some of them are quite puzzling to the searcher. There are dozens of towns named for cities in other states and foreign countries like Rome, Paris, London, Vienna, Corinth, Toledo, Seville, Marseilles, Vigo among others; they have no connection at all with the origin of the founder or first settlers of the communities. Sometimes a search reveals the real reason for selecting a name of a foreign place. John Newton Huggins founded a little hamlet in Highland County in 1848 and called it "Sicily." He chose the name, he said, because his community was *near* "Sardinia," a hamlet four miles to the south across the line in Brown County. On the other hand some Welsh places like Radnor, Paddy's Run, Gomer and Venedocia were actually settled by Welshmen.

Historically romantic Indian names for the principal streams in Ohio predominate and over one-fourth of the counties are similarly named. But few towns in Ohio have Indian names, and it seems unfortunate from an historical point of view, that those towns which were founded on the sites of Indian villages could not have retained their Indian names. Certainly they would be more interesting and have more significance than the prosaic names many of these places have today. One can start with Amesville, Andersonville, Bettesville, Brownsville and go on through the alphabet to Youngstown and Zanesville. Compare these with the Indian names found on Ohio rivers: Ashtabula, Auglaize, Coshocton, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Hocking, Huron, Licking, Mahoning, Maumee, Miami, Mohican, Muskingum, Olentangy, Ottawa, Sandusky, Scioto, Tuscarawas and Walhonding.

In many instances the predominant physical characteristic of a place led to the selection of its name. A few of the many examples are: Ash Ridge, Bellpoint, Blue Ash, Cedar Grove, Flat Rock, Long Bottom, North Bend, Plain City, Red Bank and Stony Point. Rarely are such names misleading in their descriptive character. But there

is at least one instance where a name was given to a town which was misleading and this was the intention of the founder. The proprietor of a town-to-be gave it a name indicating that the site occupied a high place, hoping thereby to attract settlers, when in reality it was a low swampy place.

Ohio has its share of town names which are the result of some fanciful invention of the founder. Linworth, Alikanna, Elyria and Scroggsfield are but four of them. Linworth is halfway between the towns of Dublin and Worthington, and obviously derives its name from a syllable of each. A Mr. Ely founded Elyria, and concocted the name by taking a syllable from his wife's name, Maria and adding it to *Ely*. In the early years of the 19th century some residents of Carroll County invited Reverend E. N. Scroggs to do some missionary work among the people there. The Reverend accepted the invitation and preached several times under a spreading tree. The people of the countryside gave him a call to settle there and they built him a church, around which a community grew up. The minister, in accepting the call, remarked, "I am much encouraged by the response of you people. It's a wonderful *field* for my endeavours." Hence the name which attached itself to the town, Scroggsfield.

One of the most interesting stories about the origin of town names in Ohio is that concerning "Pitchin." In 1830 George Hansborough built a saw mill and laid out a little town in Clark County. He sold some lots and the community began to grow.

David Bennett, seeing a potential market, decided to open a grocery store in the yet unnamed town. On the night of the opening he invited everyone to the event. During the evening it occurred to Hansborough that it was time to apply for a post office. Therefore the town would need a name. Bennett opened a keg of beer and called out to the guests, "Pitch in everybody." Apparently every one pitched in because when the evening was over they had christened the town "Pitchin." It can be found on the map today a few miles below Springfield.

The author of this article published a preliminary study in 1951 entitled *Ohio Place Names*. It contains the origin of 500 Ohio town names and a complete list of Ohio city, town and village names arranged alphabetically by county. It was distributed by the Ohio State Historical Society in Columbus.