Place Names in Ohio's Western Reserve

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THE WAVE OF YANKEE MIGRATION that swept westward from the rocky New England slopes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries strewed Yankee place names throughout the West. Among the sections of the West, probably none bears the New England stamp so distinctly as that northeastern corner of Ohio known as the Western Reserve. Running 120 miles west from Pennsylvania's western boundary between Lake Erie's south shore and the forty-first parallel, this piece of land was withheld by Connecticut when that state agreed in 1786 to cede title to her western land claims to the United States government. Called variously "New Connecticut," "the Connecticut Reserve," and the "Connecticut Western Reserve," this land was sold in 1795 by the state of Connecticut to a syndicate of 35 promoters calling themselves the Connecticut Land Company.

The first official Company representative to set foot in the Western Reserve was stout, swarthy Moses Cleaveland, an attorney from Canterbury, Connecticut, who had ventured $32,600 of his own funds in the Company's real estate enterprise. Cleaveland, with a party of some fifty surveyors, chainmen, axemen and hangers-on, had left old Connecticut in May, 1796, and reached the mouth of Conneaut Creek just inside the Reserve from Pennsylvania on July 4. Recalling that memorable Fourth, just twenty years to the day earlier, Revolutionary War veteran Cleaveland ordered his party's riflemen under Captain Joseph Tinker to fire a 15-gun salute—one round for each state in the Union, adding a sixteenth in honor of the "state of New Connecticut." Then breaking open a barrel of New England rum, the men drank toasts all around and christened the place of their arrival in the Reserve "Port Independence."

As Cleaveland's surveyors stood on the bank of Conneaut Creek,

they stared at the endless forest spread before them and dreamed of villages and towns they hoped to see spring into being in their lifetimes. Virtually untouched, the land stretched nameless to the west. The men who stood dreaming would soon offer names for the nameless places. "Port Independence" was only the first of many names.

It was only natural that Cleaveland and the Connecticut Yankees who followed in the next half century should seek to perpetuate in "New Connecticut" the names of places they already knew in old Connecticut. Yet they found Indian names already attached to the rivers and bodies of water in the new region, the landmarks (or watermarks) by which the natives lived and traveled. In some cases the newcomers tried to change these, as did Cleaveland himself when he reached the Ashtabula River and offered his companions two gallons of wine for the privilege of christening the stream the "Mary Esther" river in honor of his daughter. The name lasted as long as the wine did. When the wine was gone, the river again became the Ashtabula, meaning "place of many fish." Despite white men's efforts, Indian names still cling to seven of the Western Reserve's fourteen counties today—Ashtabula, Cuyahoga meaning "crooked river," Erie from the tribal name meaning "cat," Huron and Ottawa from names of other tribes, Mahoning meaning "at the salt springs," and Geauga interpreted variously as meaning "racoon," "dogs around the fire," or "crooked."

The Indian habit of using names descriptive of the physical features they designated was soon copied by the white settlers. Counties like Portage, for example, described the canoe-carrying place between the Cuyahoga and Tuscarawas river valleys, and Summit the highest point on the Ohio Canal when it was built in the 1820's. But counties were also christened with such unlikely names as Medina (doubtless for the Yankee-settled town of that name in upstate New York, rather than for Mohammed's burial place) and Lorain for the French province of Lorraine that had caught proprietor Heman Ely's eye on a trip abroad. Only two Reserve county names honor famous Americans—Trumbull named for Connecticut's governor Jonathan Trumbull and Ashland for Henry Clay's famous Kentucky estate.

The naming of townships, despite the efforts of the surveying party, began at Hartford, Connecticut, in 1798 when the Connecti-

cut Land Company held its first drawing at which shareholders drew township parcels of land by lot, proportionate to the amount each had invested in the Company. Each properietor had at least one township named for himself, and occasionally two or more. Sometimes, however, actual settlers in a township, irritated by high land prices charged by the proprietor, later changed the name to one they liked better. But many of the original names remained, as Cleveland for surveyor Moses Cleaveland (although an "a" was dropped from the name through a newspaper misprint in the 1820's), Boardman for Elijah Boardman, and Streetsboro for Titus Street, all Company stockholders. Not always did the largest investor get an important town permanently named for himself. Oliver Phelps with a whopping $168,000 invested suffered the cruel fate of being uncommemorated, while Henry Champion with $85,000 ventured left his name with a community that has remained small to this day.

Oddly enough, outside the city of Cleveland, none of the Reserve's larger cities bears the name of a member of the charmed circle of Connecticut Land Company stockholders. Actual settlers and developers gained well-earned recognition, as did promoter Edward Paine at Painesville, squatter John Young at Youngstown, aristocrat Heman Ely at Elyria, surveyor Moses Warren at Warren and phenomenal Ohio Columbus Barber at Barberton. Akron's name stems from the Greek *akros,* meaning summit, referring to its location at the Ohio Canal's high point. Sandusky is of Indian origin, meaning "at the cold water," as applied to the river and bay of that name.

Often the settlers who chose the town name, frequently at the first town meeting in good New England fashion, remembered with pleasure, or perhaps with regret, the home communities they had left in New England or in upstate New York. Connecticut place names, quite naturally since the greatest number of settlers came from "the land of steady habits," are repeated most often in the Western Reserve. New Haven, Hartford, Norwalk, New London, Danbury, Greenwich, Bristol, Farmington, Windham, Windsor, Norwich, Southington, Hambden, Sheffield, and Lyme read like an atlas of the Nutmeg State. Upstate New York, peopled largely by Yankee migrants, stands second to Connecticut in contributing town names to the Reserve—Auburn, Troy, New Albany, Roch-

ester, Cortland, Cherry Valley, Palmyra and even Brooklyn and York itself. Some Massachusetts place names, recurring in Connecticut, appear once again in northeastern Ohio—Plymouth and Groton, for example, but other Bay State names migrated directly west, as did Boston, Deerfield, Pittsfield, Westfield, Northampton, Weymouth, Andover, and Marblehead, while Amherst reached Ohio only after a detour to New Hampshire.

The namers of Western Reserve places, however, did not suffer from horizons limited to their own country. Yankee imaginations, like Yankee clippers, roamed to distant lands and far-off provinces. Thus places like Denmark, Poland, Russia, Peru, Macedonia, Mesopotamia, Orange, and Brunswick and even the islands of Man and Ceylon gained notice thousands of miles away. When it came to foreign cities, the flights of fancy constitute virtually a grand tour of western Europe and the Mediterranean with a bit of Latin America thrown in for good measure—Liverpool, Bath, Birmingham, Coventry, Abbeyville (the Ohio spelling), Paris, Ghent, Geneva, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Florence, Milan, Ravenna, Mantua, Venice, Seville, Gibraltar, Mogadore (named by a bricklayer who had just been reading about that North African city), Mecca, Medina, North Lima, and Havana.

The imprint of the democratic heritage appears on the Western Reserve map at Freedom, Liberty and Columbia. But the selection of names with such monarchical trappings as Leroy and Kingsville leaves cause for wonder over those early days of the Republic. Strangely enough, George Washington, whose name alone or in combination is immortalized in more American town names than any other, received no mention in the Reserve, even though a majority of the early settlers appear to have been Federalist in politics, as was the first President. But Washington's elder contemporary, Ben Franklin, America's first postmaster, whose name fittingly adorns more United States post offices than any other, was remembered twice in the Reserve, although the number of Pennsylvania pioneers in the area was small. Presidents Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson, and Garfield all achieved the immortality of a town name here, while lesser politicians like Thomas Hart Benton (Missouri's fiery Senator), Joshua Giddings (ardent anti-slavery spokesman), Gideon Granger (Jefferson's Postmaster-General), and Oliver Ellsworth (Supreme Court judge) were also

honored. Military and naval heroes are commemorated at Perry (for Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry), Wayne (for "Mad Anthony" Wayne) and Bainbridge (for Commodore William Bainbridge), and so are clergyman Jean Frederic Oberlin, editor Hezekiah Niles, merchant Stephen Girard, and railroad president Daniel Willard. Chancellor Bismarck, Baron von Steuben, and General Lafayette also won recognition.

Although the Bible was not overlooked, these descendants of the Puritans might have been expected to consult it more often than they did in choosing their place names. But Berea, Hiram, Padanaram, Goshen, and Sodom carry the Biblical stamp. Classical antiquity ranked about equally with the Bible, contributing Troy, Delphi, Castalia, River Styx, Solon, Mentor, and Homer.

And certainly there were jokers among those who gave the names, as Soaptown, Novelty, and River Styx amply testify. The ever-present suffix "Heights" in table-flat suburbs today bears witness to the exuberant real estate promoter's capacity to make a mountain out of a molehill. Recurring usage and the erosion of time often did odd things to the names—Eddysburg became Edinburg; Seceders Corners turned into Cedar Corners; while Pudding Bay emerged as Put-in-Bay.

Here in its names stands the record of the Reserve. The natural setting of the land and water, the ambitions of the Connecticut Land Company entrepreneurs, the opportunity-seeking settlers, the speculators, the dreamers of faraway lands and cities, the builders of commerce and industry—all are here. As one stands in Cleveland's Public Square viewing the sturdy statue of Moses Cleaveland against the backdrop of the New York Central's terminal tower, or as one gazes out from under the elms at the neat white church on the Twinsburg green, or as one admires the straight simplicity of the chapel at Hudson's Western Reserve Academy (a duplicate incidentally of the old Yale College chapel), the feeling grows that the Yankee name-makers of a century and a half ago chose wisely and well for their "Yankeeland on Lake Erie."

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