

43/
W936

NEW YORK
HISTORICAL SOURCE
STUDIES II

SIMEON DEWITT
and
MOUNTAIN TRACT TOWNSHIP NAMES

Assembled by
ALBERT HAZEN WRIGHT
WILLIAM HEDT, JR.

Studies in History No. 25

university of
connecticut
libraries



hbl, stx

F 117.W7

Simeon DeWitt and military tract t



3 9153 00668298 5

F/117/W7

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
Boston Library Consortium Member Libraries

Simeon DeWitt
and
Military Tract
Township Names

By Albert Hazen Wright

∴

1961

Published by the Author for
DeWitt Historical Society
of Tompkins County, Inc.
Ithaca, New York

974.7
W935

TO

William Heidt, Jr., and James C. W. Bailey
whose devoted and intelligent service for
the DeWitt Historical Society and the
Southern Tier of New York State is
unmatched.

Simeon DeWitt and Military Tract Township Place Names

By ALBERT HAZEN WRIGHT

INTRODUCTION

Did Simeon DeWitt name the 28 Military Tract townships? No. He disclaimed it as his act, yet for three-quarters of a century authors heaped derision and scorn on him for the accomplished fact.

Our DeWitt Historical Society honors DeWitt as the generally ascribed father of Ithaca, and it is fitting that we review some of the supposed juiciest wit of European travellers from 1800 onwards. These canards even to 1853 and sometimes today dub DeWitt as the culprit. It is generally held that the Secretary of the Land Board, a graduate of King's (Columbia) College did the deed and not DeWitt of the State University of New Jersey or Queen's (Rutgers). Gov. George Clinton and Gen. James Clinton were DeWitts on their maternal side and relatives of our Ithacan, the first surveyor-general of New York State. It is true he and his brother Moses surveyed much of these townships, originally called 1-28.

We may not agree with their "wonderful" pieces of inspired composition but as the present executive of the society named for Simeon DeWitt, we nevertheless assembled them. No family did more for New York State in its first 50 years, from Governor Clinton and General Clinton to Gov. DeWitt Clinton, all DeWitts on the female side.

We therefore present 14 such travellers' accounts from 1802-1849, not all such of this period. Therefore, laugh with us at their juxtaposition but assess no blame on Simeon DeWitt.

We discuss this topic under four headings, namely: (1) Who is Simeon DeWitt; (2) His Ithacan history; (3) The comment of travellers from 1802-1849; (4) Lansing's relinquishment of its Military allowance of today.

20 Oct 1967

1. Review of Simeon DeWitt's Life

Simeon DeWitt. Who was he? Rather than attempt an improvised appraisal we will include in its entirety the following:

1930. Guy H. Burnham. Simeon DeWitt in Dictionary of American Biography V: 274, 275.

DeWitt, Simeon (Dec. 25, 1756-Dec. 3, 1834) surveyor-general of New York, was born at Wawarsing, Ulster County, N. Y., the son of Dr. Andries and Jannette (Vernooy) DeWitt. After having received such an English education as a colonial rural community could afford, he was placed with the Rev. Dr. Romeyn of Schenectady to prepare for college, and in due time entered Queen's (now Rutgers' College) in New Jersey. His course, however, was sadly interrupted by the Revolution, for the British burned the college buildings and dispersed the students.

In spite of this break he was awarded the bachelor's degree in 1776 and twelve years later received from the same institution the master's degree. With the closing of the college he returned to his home and pursued his studies as he found opportunity; but when the whole state rose in arms to repel Burgoyne's invasion, he joined a battalion being formed in Ulster County and was given the rank of adjutant. Upon reaching the scene of action, this unit was absorbed into another regiment and DeWitt, deprived of his commands, became a private, and in this capacity participated in the battles that led to Burgoyne's surrender.

This emergency over, he again went home and continued his mathematical studies, combining with these an attention to the practical business of surveying which served him in good stead when General Washington wrote to his uncle, Gen. James Clinton, inquiring if he knew of any person qualified to act as geographer to the army. DeWitt was immediately recommended and in 1778 was appointed as assistant to Col. Robert Erskine then geographer-in-chief. Upon the death of Colonel Erskine in 1780, DeWitt became the head of the department. Ordered to headquarters by General Washington in December of that year, he remained attached to the main army until the end of the campaign. This led him to Yorktown where he wit-

nessed the surrender of Cornwallis. Besides making the necessary surveys and maps for conduct of military operations, he prepared an interesting series of maps showing the cause of the war. This he tried to induce Congress to publish but the state of the public finances forbade it.

At the close of the Revolution, he planned to go on with his surveying work and, on May 13, 1784, upon the resignation of Gen. Phillip Schuyler as surveyor-general for New York State, he was appointed to the office. For over fifty years he served the state in this capacity. In 1786-7 he was one of the commissioners actively engaged in delineating the boundary between New York and Pennsylvania and during this same period began work upon a map of New York which was finally published in 1802. This map is an index even to this day of what the state was at that time.

Offered the position of surveyor-general to the United States by Washington in 1796, he reluctantly declined the honor and remained with his work in New York. When the state adopted its canal policy, the surveyor-general was naturally chosen one of the commissioners for "exploring the whole route, examining the present condition . . . navigation and considering what further improvement ought to be made therein." (Whitford p. 63).

Although busy with these regular duties, he found time to engage in educational and scientific matters. He served the University of the State of New York from 1798 until his death, first as a regent, then as vice-chancellor, and finally, after 1829, as chancellor. In this latter office, he originated the taking of meteorological observations by every academy under the board. As early as 1790 he was a member of the American Philosophical Society, and he contributed to the sixth volume of its *Transactions* (1809), a communication entitled "Observations on the Eclipse of the Sun, June 16, 1806, at Albany."

He was also one of the charter members of the Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts and Manufactures, founded in New York in 1793, and in 1813 became its second president. Upon the establishment of the State Board of Agriculture, the Society was merged with the Lyceum of Natural History as Albany Institute, and for many years DeWitt served the body as vice-president. To the older organization

he contributed two papers: one "On a Plan of a Meteorological Chart" and the other on "Establishment of a Meridian Lane in the City of Albany" while his writings for the **Transactions of Albany Institute** were "A Table of Variations of the Magnetic Needle," "Observations on the Functions of the Moon, Deduced from the Eclipse of 1806" and "A Description of a New Form of Rain Gauge." In **American Journal of Science** he discussed the theory of meteors; and in 1813 his writings upon drawing and perspective were published in book form under the title, **The Elements of Perspective.**

DeWitt married three times. His first (275) was Elizabeth Lynott, whom he married on Oct. 12, 1789. Her death occurred in 1793, and he later married Jane Varick Hardenberg, by whom he had six children. After the latter's death, he married on Oct. 29, 1810, Susan Linn, daughter of the Rev. William Linn. DeWitt died at Ithaca, N. Y., on Dec. 3, 1834.

Romeyn Beck, *Eulogium on Life and Services of Simeon DeWitt* (1835); B. J. Lossing, *The Empire State* (1887); Cuyler Reynolds, *Hudson-Mohawk Geneal. and Family Memoirs* (1911) I, 364-366; N. E. Whitford, "Hist. of the Canal System of the State of N. Y." **Annual Rept. of (N.Y.) State Engineer and Surveyor**, Supp. 1905; Jas. G. Wilson, *Memorial Hist. of the City of New York*. Vols. III and IV passim; Thos. G. Evans, *The DeWitt Family of Ulster County, N. Y.* (1886).—G.H.B.

2. His Ithaca History

- a. His dealings with his Ithaca predecessors.
- b. His and Bloodgood connections.
- c. His efforts for Ithaca.
- d. His connection with a possible college in Ithaca, 30 or 40 years before Cornell.
- e. Places or events in his honor.
- f. His possible ties with mapmakers after he came to Ithaca, e.g. David H. Burr.
- g. Who is Simeon D. Bloodgood, the author?
- h. Many other topics could be mentioned for Ithaca scholars.

3. Comments of Travellers, 1802-1849.

1802

1802. Vanderlyn, John. John Vanderlyn's Niagara Visit

in 1802. Buffalo Historical Society Publications 15: 164-167.

Simeon DeWitt, the State Surveyor General, had already passed over the country with his Lempriere in hand, erasing the Indian nomenclature, and giving to townships and villages names ludicrous in their misapplication, and provoking the most biting comparisons. (DeWitt not the guilty party.—A.H.W.). Rome then existed, but it was an aggregation of small, temporary dwellings redolent of discomfort, and a half-century could not efface from the artist's memory a most vigorous remembrance of the activity and sleeplessness of the Roman fleas.

1818

1819. Darby, William. A Tour from the City of New York to Detroit, in the Michigan Territory . . . New York: pp. 54-56.

This is one of the few towns in America named from a town in Europe, where common sense and analogy were consulted in the borrowed nomenclature. Geneva stands in Seneca, Ontario County, at the lower extremity of Seneca Lake.

1821

1821. D'Arusmont, Fanny Wright. Views of Society and Manners in America; in a Series of Letters from that Country to a friend in England, during the years 1818, 1819 and 1820. By an Englishwoman. London: pp. 178 . . .

There is, it must be confessed, the strangest confusion of names in the western counties of this state that ingenuity could well imagine. In one district, you have all the poets from Homer to Pope, nay, for ought I know, they may come down to Byron; in another, you have a collection of Roman heroes; in a third, all the mighty cities of the world, from the great Assyrian empire downwards; and, scattered among this classic confusion, relics of the Indian vocabulary, which I must observe, are often not the least elegant, and are indisputably always the most appropriate.

For the Roman heroes, bad, good and indifferent, who in one district are scattered so plentifully, the new population is indebted to a land surveyor, (p. 221) and classical dictionary. Being requested, in parcelling out the lots, to affix a name to them, the worthy citizen, more practiced in mensuration than

baptism, shortly found his ingenuity baffled, and in despair had recourse to the pages of Lempriere.

There is something rather amusing in finding Cato or Regulus typified by a cluster of wooden houses; nor, perhaps, are the old worthies so much disgraced as some indignant scholars might imagine. (The surveyors, Simeon DeWitt and his brother Moses DeWitt, did not name them.—A.H.W.)

1822-23

1824. An English Gentleman. (W. N. Blane). An Excursion through the United States and Canada in the Years 1822-23. London: 1824. Chapter XXII. The Grand Canal . . . Buffalo.

Nothing can be more ridiculous, than the names that have been given to the little insignificant villages in all this part of the country, as Rome, Athens, Sparta, or what is still more absurd, Tully, Pompey, Virgil, Dryden, Milton, &c. Thus bad taste infects to a certain degree the whole of the United States, innumerable little towns being designated by the names of London, Paris, Madrid, Calcutta, Constantinople, &c., as if on purpose to excite laughter and contempt of the traveller.

1827

1829. Hall, Captain Basil. Travels in North America, in the years 1827 and 1828. Edinburgh. 3 Vols. Vol. 1: pp. 123-159.

It has been the fashion of travellers in America, I am told—for I have read no travels in that country—to ridicule the practices of giving to unknown and inconsiderable villages, the names of places long hallowed by classical recollections I was disposed, however, at one time to think, that there was nothing absurd in the matter. I did not deny that, on first looking at the map, and more particularly on hearing stage-drivers and stage-passengers, talking of Troy, Ithaca, and Rome, and still more when I heard them speaking of the towns of Cicero, Homer, or Manlius, an involuntary smile found its way to the lips, followed often by a good hearty laugh. The oddity and incongruity of the thing were much heightened by the admixture of such modern appellations as Truxton, Sullivan and Tompkins, jumbled up with the Indian names of Onondaga, Oneida and Chitteningo.

The little longer personal acquaintance with the subject, however, led me to a different conclusion. All those uncourteous, and at first irrepressible, feelings of ridicule, were, I hoped, quite eradicated; and I tried to fancy that there was something very interesting, almost amiable, in any circumstances, no matter how trivial, which contributed to show, even indirectly, that these descendants of ours were still willing to keep up the old and generous recollections of their youth; and although they had broken the cords of national union, that they were still disposed to bind themselves to us, by the ties of classical sentiment at least. For these reasons, then, I was inclined to approve, in theory, of the taste which had appropriated the ancient names alluded to. I had also a sort of hope, that the mere use of the words would insensibly blend with their present occupations, and so keep alive some traces of the old spirit, described to me as fast melting away.

By the same train of friendly reasoning, I was led to imagine it possible, that the adoption of such names as "Auburn,"—"loveliest village of the plain,"—Port Byron, and the innumerable Londons, Dublins, Edinburghs, and so on, were indicative of a talent or lingering kindness towards the old country. The notion, that it was degrading to the venerable Roman names to fix them upon these mushroom towns in the wilderness, I combated, I flattered myself, somewhat adroitly, on the principle that, so far from the memory of Ithaca or Syracuse, or any such place, being degraded by the appropriation, the honour rather lay with the ancients, who, it is the fashion to take for granted, enjoyed a less amount of freedom and intelligence than their modern namesakes.

"Let us," I said one day, to a friend, who was impugning these doctrines, "let us take Syracuse for example, which in the year 1820 consisted of one house, one mill and one tavern; now, in 1827, it holds 15 hundred inhabitants, has two large churches, innumerable wealthy shops filled with goods, brought there by water-carriage from every corner of the globe; two large and splendid hotels; many dozens of grocery stores or whiskey-shops; several busy printing presses, from one of which issues a weekly newspaper; a daily post from the east, the south and the west; has a broad canal running through its bosom;—in short, it is a great and free city.

“Where is this to be matched,” I exclaimed, “in ancient Italy or Greece?”

It grieves me much, however, to have the ungracious task forced upon me of entirely demolishing my own plausible handiwork. But truth renders it necessary to declare, but after a longer acquaintance with all these matters, I discovered that I was all in the wrong, and that there was not a word of sense in what I had uttered with so much studied candour. What is the most provoking proof that this fine doctrine of profitable associations was practically absurd, is that fact that even I myself, though comparatively so little acquainted with the classical-sounding places in question, have, alas! seen and heard enough of them to have nearly all my classical recollections swept away by the contact. Now, therefore, whenever I meet with the name of a Roman city or an author, or a general, instead of having my thoughts carried back, as heretofore, to the regions of antiquity, I am transported forwith, in imagination, to the post-road on my way to Lake Erie, and my joints and bones turn sore at the bare recollection of joltings, and other nameless vulgar annoyances by day and by night, which, I much fear, will outlive all the little classical knowledge of my juvenile days.

1 8 2 9

1833. Boardman, James. *America, and The Americans. By a Citizen of the World.* London: pp. 126-132.

We passed among a succession of places of minor importance, . . . Rome, Syracuse, Canton, Jordan, Byron, Montezuma, Lyons, and Palmyra; all flourishing villages, but bearing no more resemblance to the original cities from which several derive their title than the meanest hovel to Windsor Castle.

They are chiefly built of wood, and the edifices painted white, or often yellow; and the churches have cupolas or spires of the same material, with green Venetian blinds, or weatherboards in the steeple windows; all looking very neat, certainly, but at the same time most unpicturesque.

1 8 3 1

1834. Tudor, Henry. *Narrative of a Tour in North America: . . . 2 Vols.* London. Vol. I: pp. 185, 186.

On stepping out of our boats we found ourselves suddenly

transferred to the plains of Troy, and beheld Mount Ida rearing his romantic head to the eastward of the city. The name is rather startling (as well as a diversity of others) to a traveller in America, on first hearing it and beholding its application—associated, as it is, with bygone times of a remote antiquity, and the consideration of its present nonentity. But the Americans, I find, have quite a passion for classical names as the designations of their cities, towns, and villages; for, on looking over a list of them, contained in the nomenclature of the State of New York alone, I perceive the following illustrious titles, giving them “a local habitation and a name” in the New World—drawn from the pages, principally, of ancient history—viz. Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Sharon, Hebron, Salem, Bethany, Carmel, Ephratah, Macedon, Palmyra, Tripoli, Utica, Ithaca, Troy, Rome, Sparta, Corinth, Attica, Arcadia, Pharsalia, Greece, Marathon, Athens, Cairo, China, Venice, Alexandria, Florence, Genoa, Homer, Virgil, Cicero, Tully, Pompey, Ovid, Aurelius, Brutus, Cincinnatus, Minerva, Camillus, Fabius, Marcellus, Seneca, Hannibal, Hector, Ulysses, Manlius, Cato, Sempronius, Diana, Ossian, Romulus—besides a great variety of other names, drawn with good honest feeling for the mother country, as Yorkshire, Windsor, Brighton; as, also, from almost every country in each of the four quarters of the globe. These names, it must be acknowledged, sound rather oddly to ears unpracticed in the American vocabulary, as the appellations of towns and villages just rising into existence, and would induce a blind man to suppose—were he journeying, like the indefatigable blind traveller, Mr. Holman, to **hear** the world instead of **seeing** it—that he was coursing, by some magical operation, over all the countries of the earth, without moving (like the poor horse in the tow-boat) from the spot. I have merely given you the classical vocabulary of a single state, from which you may judge of the “multitudinous” array, were the remaining twenty-three added to the list . . .

1833

1833. Hamilton, Thomas. *Men and Manners in America*. 2 Vols. Second American Edition. Philadelphia. Vol. II: pp. 152-157.

The Americans are dilettanti in nomenclature. In following

the course of the Erie Canal, a traveller will pass through Troy, Amsterdam, Frankfort, Manlius, Syracuse, Canton, Jordan, Port Byron, Montezuma, Rome, Smith's, Dunkin's, Carthage, Salina, Rochester, Ogden, Geddes, and Palmyra. The Eternal City here dwindles into "a half-shire town which contains a courthouse and gaol, and is pleasantly situated on the old canal!" So says the guide book. Amsterdam is more fortunate, for it boasts "a post-office, a church, and about fifty houses or stores." Palmyra is charmingly located on Mud Creek. Carthage derived its consequence from a bridge which "fell under the pressure of its own weight!" The maxim, **delenda est Carthago**, therefore, is likely to be realized in the new world, as well as in the old.

Such absurdities are fair game, for they have their origin in vanity. To adorn their cities by monuments of art is an expensive indulgence, from which Americans are contented to abstain. But pretension of name costs nothing, and is found every where.

1835

1835. Lieber, Francis. *The Stranger in America; or, Letters to A Gentleman in Germany: . . . Phila.*

Letter XIII . . . I had now arrived, in the course of my journey, in that country, which might be called, by way of excellence, the Land of Silly Names, though I own they are abundant all over this country, especially in the eastern and western parts, and not infrequent wherever it was necessary to invent names for places. The French names adopted by the great Frederic, such as Monbijou, Sansoucci, &c.—in a German Country—did not show, I think, much tact on his part; yet they were infinitely better than hundreds in this country, in some parts of which a traveller might think that history and geography had been chopped into small pieces, well shaken in a bag, and then strewn over a state. You have already met with the long lists of such names as Homer, Manlius, Paris, Paradise, Montezuma, Rome, Demosthenes, Ithaca, Ovid, Cicero, Syracuse, Ulysses, Lodi, Eden, Hamburg, Aurora, Alexandria, Scio, Bolivar, Palmyra, Parma, Greece, Russia, Egypt, mixed up with downright English names, such as Bath, Perry, Thompson, Greenfield, Newfield, Rochester, Pembroke, together with

fine-sounding, or, at any rate, appropriate Indian names, as Canandaigua, Cayuga, Seneca, Saratoga, Cayuta, Genesee—in the same country with names as flat as Temperance and Tariffville, the whole appearing like a most indigestible mince pie. Oh, these historiomastices!* These are not “picked names” but taken, at random, from memory and a map; I might continue the list for whole pages, as you will convince yourself by looking at the accompanying map, which I send you not, however, for the sake of tracing our tastelessness in these absurd appellations, but, because it contains all the canals and railroads, finished or making, in this rapidly rising State of New York.

Nearly every author, foreigner or native, who has travelled in the United States, has animadverted upon this ludicrous naming of places; and I hold it to be the duty of every man who touches upon this subject continually to renew the attack against this barbarous habit. I have often conversed with Americans on this topic, both seriously and jocularly, and always found that they were of my opinion; or, if they were of the less educated classes, and had, perhaps, hardly ever before thought on the name of their birthplace, that they easily yielded to my arguments or jokes, with that good-naturalness which I find so prominent a trait of the American.

P. 227-257 (re: American fickleness in names and diverse name forms. We give only one paragraph of p. 227).

Now, then, again the lance is couched for an attack upon the names met with in this country.—I am perfectly well aware of the difficulty of giving names in the United States is often exceedingly great. You remember, undoubtedly, scenes in the families of your friends, which show that Mr. Shandy was not the only person puzzled at what name he should choose from the endless number before him. It is always a difficult matter to decide when there is no distinct rules to direct our choice, and we are at liberty to select among a great number of objects. If parents are puzzled at the choice of one name, what shall an official secretary of one of the United States do, be-

*The author seems to have formed this word after the Greek Homeromastix (scourge of Homer), the unenviable surname of Zoilus, bestowed upon him for his hypercriticism on the works of Homer.—Editor.

fore whom lies a list of a large number of newly surveyed townships to be christened by him? He takes a six-cent geography, a twenty-five cents history, peradventure, and chalks off the names of the index. Or a committee is appointed to name the places; each member writes down a name; they are put into a hat, and the lot is drawn. It was thus that the charming city of Utica came to its inappropriate name. Or, to take another instance, a surveyor has laid out townships or counties, and fixes names to the list, as a circumnavigator names what he discovers; thus you may find on every large map General Jackson's whole first cabinet sticking in the north-western territory; a geographical immortality long surviving the personal one. However, perhaps, after all, this is not so very improper a way to make names; a poor fellow may, in this way, learn history from maps, and acquire the spelling of names which he might not have learned otherwise. I remember a county, I think I know of two or three, in different states, called after several distinguished politicians, which petitioned their respective legislatures to change their names, when the counties' politics had changed. . . .

1837

1837. Wilkie, D. Sketches of A Summer Trip to New York and the Canadas. Edinburgh: p. 83.

After passing several places with high-sounding names, we arrived at the City of Utica; and although it is well enough as an American city of third, or perhaps fourth rate importance, on visiting places with such names, we seldom failed to entertain an idea that we had before us a quizzical representation of the classical, historical and important sites of the Old World; for alas! in nine out of ten instances, they were but sorry substitutes for the venerable originals. As an instance of the mistakes which are made by travellers drawing their impressions of the character of places from the names they have received:—I parted with one of my travelling friends at Schenectady, he to follow in another boat. I agreed to wait for him at **London**, unconsciously deeming such a town would be a pretty prominent landmark, on the banks of a canal at least; but I found, on enquiry, that were I resolved to stop on shore at the doughty nameson of our British metropolis,

it was more likely I would not get a bed! I (p. 84) therefore resolved to pass on, and enjoy the hospitalities of the more commodious city of Utica.

1838

1838. Martineau, Harriet. Retrospect of Western Travel. 3 Vols. Vol. I: pp. 126-136.

I observed that the hotel parlours, in various parts of the country, were papered with old-fashioned papers, I believe French, which represent a sort of panorama, of a hunting party, a fleet, or some such diversified scene. I saw many such a hunting party, the ladies in scarlet riding-habits, as I remember the landlord of the inn at Bray, near Dublin, to have been proud of in his best parlour. At Schenectady, the bay of Naples, with its fishing-boats on the water, and groups of lazzaroni on the shore, adorned our parlour-walls. It seems to be an irresistible temptation to idle visitors, English, Irish and American, to put speeches into the mouths of the painted personages; and such hangings are usually seen deformed with scribblings. The effect is odd, in wild places, of seeing American witticisms put into the mouths of Neapolitan fishermen, ancient English ladies of quality, or of tritons and dryads.

There is taste quite as bad as this in a matter of far more importance—the naming of places. Syracuse in the State of New York! I often wonder whether it is yet too late to revert to the Indian names,—to undo the mischief which has been done by boys, fresh from their smattering of the classics, who have gone into the forest to hew out towns and villages. I heard many Americans say that the State of New York ought to be called Ontario, and the city, Manhattan. But so far from bringing back the nomenclature to a better state, we not only find Utica, Syracuse, Manlius, and Camillus, and the village of Geneva on Seneca Lake, with Ithaca at its other extremity, but the village of Chittenango actually baptised into Sullivan; and all this in the neighbourhood of the lakes Onondago, Cayuga, and Owasco. It is as bad as the English in Van Diemen's Land, who, if I remember rightly, have got Palmyra, Richmond, and Jericho, all in a line.

Some curious associations arise from a new nation using the language of the old. While speculating sometimes on what the

classical conceptions can be in the minds of youths who hear every day, in the most sordid connexion, of Rome, Utica, Carthage, Athens, Palmyra, and Troy, it occurred to me that some of our commonest English writing must bear a different meaning to the Americans and to us. All that is written about corn-fields, for instance, must call up pictures in their minds quite unlike any that the poets intend to create. "Waving corn" is not the true description to them; and one can scarcely bring one's tongue to explain that it means "small grain." Their poetical attachments are naturally and reasonably to their Indian corn, which is a beautiful plant, worthy of all love and celebration. But the consequence is that we have not their sympathy, about our sheaves, our harvest wain, our gleaners; for though they have wheat, their harvest, par excellence, is of corn cobs, and their "small grain" bears about the same relation to poetry with them as turnips with us. . . . Then, again, there is the month of May, about which we lose their sympathy. Over a great proportion of the country, May is one of their worst months,—damp, drizzly, with intervals of biting winds, as little fit for the climate of a poem as our windy and dusty March. Many other such particulars might be mentioned, which it would be a new employment to trace out.

1841

1855. Lyell, Sir Charles. Travels in North America, Canada and Nova Scotia with Geological Observations. 2 Vols. 2nd edit. London. Vol. I. Journal of a Tour in North America in 1841-42: 21-23. Aug. 16-Aug. 23, 1841 (pp. 167-181, 1st. edition).

The nomenclature of the places passed through in our short excursion of one month was strange enough. We had been at Syracuse, Utica, Rome, and Parma, had gone from Buffalo to Batavia, and on the same day breakfasted at St. Helena, and dined at Elba. We collected fossils at Moscow, and travelled by Painted Post and Big Flats to Havanna. After returning by Auburn to Albany I was taken to Troy, a city of 20,000 inhabitants, that might see a curious landslip which had just happened on Mount Olympus, the western side of that hill together with a contiguous portion of Mount Ida, having slid down into the Hudson and caused the death of several persons.

Fortunately some few of the Indian names, such as Mohawk, Ontario, Oneida, Canandaigua, and Niagara, are retained. Although legislative interference in behalf of good taste would not be justifiable, Congress might interpose for the sake of the post-office, and prevent the future multiplication of the same name for villages, cities, counties and townships. That more than a hundred places should be called Washington is an intolerable nuisance. An Englishman, it is true, cannot complain, for we follow the same system in our colonies; and it's high time that the post-master-general brought in a bill for prohibiting new streets in London from receiving names already appropriated and repeated fifty times in that same city, to the infinite confusion of the inhabitants and their letter carriers.

1844

1844. ———, *Journal of a Wanderer being A Residence in India, and Six Weeks in North America.* London: p. 144.

The Americans have the bad taste to name many of their towns and villages after cities renowned in Ancient History. As almost all the states adopt this practice, there are, in the different states, at least a dozen of towns called Athens, and about as many named Rome. Indeed, they seem greatly at a loss for names to their towns, having no less than fifteen counties and sixty-six towns called Jefferson; eight counties and sixty-six towns called Jackson or Jacksonvilles; twenty counties and eighty towns called Washington. This practice leads to great confusion, and might be easily obviated by adopting the Indian names, as has been lately done at York, in upper Canada, which is now called **Toronto**.

1849

1849. Mackay, Alex. *The Western World; or Travels in the United States in 1846-47: Exhibiting them in their latest development, social, political, and industrial; including a chapter on California.* 2 Vols. Phila. (Second London edition.) Vol. II: pp. 194-202.

The reader will be astonished at finding so many places in this modern scene named after those with which his schoolboy reminiscences are so intimately associated. They are jumbled together in ludicrous juxtaposition; sometimes one and the

same county in the New World containing two towns, living in peaceable intercourse with each other, for which there was scarcely room enough on two continents in the Old. New York, in particular, abounds in places having classical appellations; a rather singular circumstance when we consider the many beautiful and expressive Indian words which it might have appropriated to the purposes of civic nomenclature. Proceeding eastwards from the Falls, one of the first places you meet with is Attica, from which a single stage brings you to Batavia. A little to the east of Rochester you pass through Egypt to Palmyra, when you proceed to Vienna, and shortly afterwards arrive at Geneva. Ithaca is some distance off to the right, whilst Syracuse, Rome and Utica follow in succession to the eastward. It is a pity that the people in the New World should not content themselves with indigenous names. They are quite as pretty, and would in many cases be more convenient than those which have been imported. The inconvenience arises not so much from naming places after cities which have passed away as after those which are still extant and flourishing. There is a New London on the Thames in Connecticut, and there is a London on the Thames in Western Canada. There is scarcely a town of any note in Europe but has scores of namesakes in America, whilst the Indian dialects are replete with significant and sonorous terms. What a happy change did "Little York" make when it called itself Toronto!

4. Lansing's Relinquishment of the Military Tract Allowance of Today

1961. Heidt, William Jr. Bulletin DeWitt Historical Society, Vol. 9. No. 2:14.

During the Revolutionary War there were men in New York State who looked ahead to the end of the conflict and visualized the vast area of the Six Nations becoming a part of the State by right of conquest. In 1780, as a result of their efforts, an enactment by the Legislature encouraged enlistments in the army and laid the groundwork for opening the area to settlement by offering bounty lands in lieu of money payments for military service.

A land office was established in Albany to administer the disposal of what came to be known as the Military Tract.

Under direction of Simeon DeWitt, 28 military townships were laid out. This survey ran from Seneca Lake on the west to a line running along Unadilla Creek southward from Oneida Lake on the east, and from Lake Ontario on the north to the northern boundary of what became Tioga County. (Today's northern boundaries of the Towns of Caroline, Danby and Newfield mark this line.)

Each township was as nearly 10 miles square as it was possible to survey, and each divided into "great lots" that contained 640 acres. In each military township two great lots were to be sold and the returns devoted to the development of schools and churches. Trustees administered the funds at first but later this became a function of the town supervisor.

In 1947 legislation enabled the towns to close out these funds which were still accumulating interest but in such small amounts as to be scarcely an economical operation. In 1960 Town of Lansing electors voted to terminate the fund which existed for 180 years and amounted to \$12,000.



University of
Connecticut
Libraries

CONNECTICUT LIBRARY
CT.

