

# *The Many Names of Tompkins County*

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At the beginning of recorded time, the area we today call Tompkins County was the home of the Cayuga Indians, one of the five nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. They were identified as the Five Nations as early as 1609 when they were mentioned in the writings of Samuel D. Champlain and Henry Hudson. The name Iroquois was, according to William M. Beauchamp, writing in 1904, the name by which these people were known to the Algonquins and others, and it was the name that Champlain heard and recorded, six years before he ventured into their land. To the Iroquois themselves, they were the Hodanausee, meaning the People of the Longhouse, which compared the relationship of the different Iroquois nations to their log and bark homes that were open at each end and contained separate fires for each family living within.

Cayuga is the word naming the people and the lake by which they lived. The Cayugas were called the “little brothers” of the confederation because their population was small. The French, who first entered Iroquoia in the seventeenth century when traders, warriors, and Jesuit missionaries ventured south from Canada, heard and pronounced their name as Goyoguin, sometimes dropping the first letter, making it Oyoguins.

Moravian missionaries entered Iroquoia in 1745. Major among them were Bishop A. G. Spangenberg and David Zeisberger, who traveled

from southeast Pennsylvania. Both men, and those others who came, kept extensive journals that have been translated and appear in a number of publications. They called the Cayugas the Gajukas. David Cusick, who wrote *Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations* in 1826, defined Co-yo-goh as meaning “Mountain rising from the Water,” while Lewis Henry Morgan, the nineteenth-century anthropologist who lived in Aurora, believed the word was Gwe-u-gweh, meaning “at [or near] the mucky land.” Albert Cusick, according to Beauchamp, thought the name Kwe-u-kwe meant “where they drew their Boats ashore.” The name has been written variously but Horatio Hale, writing in 1883, said that a Cayuga chief had said to him that the spelling Kayukaw was very near the then-modern pronunciation of the word, and it is close to ours, too.

Others have listed variants for the name of the lake. The French called the lake Goyogouen, and various Iroquois named it Ti-che-ro, meaning the place of rushes, derived from the swamps at either end of the lake, or Goi-o-goh, meaning mountain rising from the water, or Ga-ni-a-ta-re-ge-chi-at, meaning, at the end of the lake.

The earliest English written form is Ca-i-ou-go; since then there have been any number of spellings. The most recent belief is that Cayuga is derived from the Iroquois word Tiohiro, meaning mucky land. What all of these names have in common are water, firm land, and the marshy, swampy area in between.

The Cayugas maintained three primary towns. One was Onnontare, on a hill near the Canandaigua; the second was Thiohero, near “the foot of Cayuga lake,” the word meaning “by the marsh or where the rushes are.” We need to remember that Cayuga Lake drains to the north and its waters are part of the Lake Ontario drainage system; hence, Ithaca is at the head of the lake and the foot of the lake is at the northern end. Lewis Henry Morgan located the third main Cayuga Indian village near Union Springs. Its name, he reported, was Ga-ya-ga-an-ha.

The northern reach of the lake was the primary locus of the Cayuga Indians, which not only gave them access to water but also to the

major trails established by the Iroquois across what we know today as New York State. Outside the three principal towns, the Cayuga Indians lived in villages located near streams where they settled for as long as game and firewood were plentiful; when scarcity threatened, they moved to another site. When the Sapony and Tutelo Indians came north, pushed out of the Carolinas by settlers, they sought a home among the Cayugas, who allowed them land at the southern end of the lake. It was an area within the Cayuga domain but relatively unused by members of the tribe. These Southern Indians lived among the Cayugas as vassal people, with no voice in council decisions.

The Iroquois Confederacy remained the Five Nations until 1714, when the Tuscaroras (meaning shirt-wearing peoples) were pushed out of North Carolina by settlers. They too moved north to live among people with whom they were linguistically linked. The Tuscaroras were not given full rights in the Iroquois council, which means they did not receive a seat or vote, yet the confederation of Five Nations acknowledged their presence and became known as the Six Nations.

In 1779 during the Revolutionary War, Major General John Sullivan and Brigadier General James Clinton marched an invading army into Iroquoia in an attempt to subdue the Iroquois and push them back toward the British at Fort Niagara and Canada. On this journey, which was described by several of the soldiers, the army burned Indian villages, destroyed crops, hacked down orchards. Lieutenant Colonel Henry Dearborn marched a platoon of 500 men down the west side of Cayuga Lake. He reported that on September 24, "a dozen houses were burned at the head of Cayuga Lake, and 25 houses were destroyed at Coreorgonel or Dehoriskanadia, 3 miles south." At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel William Butler, marched 200 men down the east side of the lake. On September 23, he was at Chonodote, or Peach Town (today Aurora), then on to Coreorgonel, located just south of present-day Ithaca.

The location of the village called Coreorgonel, south of Buttermilk Falls and occupied by Tuteloes and other subject peoples of the Cayugas, is better known than are the origins of the name. Major Norris of

Sullivan's Army noted in his journal the town was "Call'd Corcargonell, or Where they Keep the Pipe of Peace." Others are not quite so sure.

Following the end of the Revolutionary War, land in the Adirondacks was designated as the Military Tract, or payment for the soldiers who had fought in the war. The veterans of the campaign into Canada had a negative view, however, of that wooded hilly area and rejected it. New York then carved out a section of central New York to be surveyed. This land was located from the shores of Lake Ontario to the headwaters of Cayuga and Seneca Lakes, and spanned east to west from the edge of what is now Cortland County to the eastern shore of Seneca Lake. This was identified by the state as the New Military Tract, now simply called the Military Tract. The tract contained 26 towns, each of 100 parcels containing 600 acres. Four lots in each town were reserved for the support of education. In July 1790 veterans received ballots marked by town and lot. Thus Abner Treman received lot number 2 in town number 22, or the area that is now Trumansburg in the Military Tract Town of Ulysses [Town No. 22].

Following distribution of the land deeds, settlers, speculators, ministers, and lawyers, along with men and women who hoped to take up farming or open commercial ventures, began entering the area. At this time the land that we know as Tompkins County was part of Montgomery County, a huge area that was soon divided into new counties: Cayuga in 1799, Seneca in 1804 when it was taken from Cayuga, and Cortland in 1808.

In 1817 the state saw the need for a new county. That this new entity would benefit current landholders, and that the largest landholder in the center of the proposed new county was Simeon DeWitt, who was also the state surveyor general, worried no one much at the time. Nor can we today worry about this obvious aggrandizement of a state official's holdings because the records from this early period are among those lost in the giant fire in the New York State Archives in 1911. We can only imagine machinations that cannot be proved.

What we do know, however, was that in 1817 the state declared it would create a new county from towns in Cayuga and Seneca counties if the residents of Ithaca collected enough money, or \$7,000, to build a courthouse and jail. This they accomplished and Tompkins was carved out of the older counties. From Cayuga County came the entire Military Tract Town of Dryden, lots 51 to 100 from the Town of Locke (which became the Town of Groton), and lots 42 to 100 of the Military Tract Town of Genoa (which began as Milton, and in 1817 became the Town of Lansing). These pieces of land were added to lots 42 to 100 of the Town of Ovid (and renamed Covert), and all of the Military Tract Towns of Ulysses and Hector, which were taken from Seneca County. At this time, the unincorporated village of Ithaca, within the Town of Ulysses, was named county seat.

The state of New York named Tompkins County in 1817 for Daniel D. Tompkins. The name Tompkins was selected because that was the last year Daniel D. Tompkins was governor of the state, and it was his first as vice president of the United States. He held that position until 1824. He never saw this area, and certainly never set foot in the county named for him.

Daniel Tompkins was born in 1774 in what is now Scarsdale. He attended Columbia University law school, was a congressman, justice of the New York Supreme Court, governor, and then vice president of the United States under James Monroe. As governor, in 1817, Daniel Tompkins persuaded the state's legislature to pass a bill phasing out slavery in New York by the year 1827.

In 1819 the state adjusted the new county and returned the Town of Covert to Seneca County. In March 1821 two additional divisions were made from the 100 lots in the Military Tract Town of Ulysses. Residents at the southern portion of Ulysses formed the Town of Ithaca from 31 lots, while at the same time, 36 lots of the Town of Ulysses became the Town of Enfield. On April 2, 1821, the state designated Ithaca an incorporated village located within, and surrounded by, the Town of Ithaca.

In 1823 the state legislature increased the size of Tompkins County

by adding to it the Towns of Caroline, Danby, and Cayuta (which became Newfield), all originally from the Watkins and Flint Purchase and at that time part of Tioga County.

The southern portion of what became Tompkins County was originally deeded to speculators associated with a land development company called the Watkins and Flint Purchase. Watkins and Flint land stretched along the southern border of the state from the Unadilla River to west of Seneca Lake. Over time this land tract became Broome, Tioga, and Chemung counties.

On August 4, 1791 John W. Watkins, a New York lawyer, Royal W. Flint, and several business associates applied to the commissioners of the Land Office for ungranted lands lying east of the Massachusetts pre-emption lands and south of the Military Tract. This area constituted approximately 363,000 acres. The development company agreed to pay three shillings and four pence per acre, this amount recorded in the State Land Papers (vol. xi, p. 141). After a survey, a patent for the land was issued the developers in 1794. The land was not totally free, however, for the state had granted some parcels to individuals who had served the state interest in exchange for land. One of those was Peter Hinnepaugh (named as Himepough in the documents), who received 800 acres in Danby in 1791; John Cantine, who had served as a land judge, received three parcels in land in the town of Caroline in 1792, one parcel of 2,400 acres, another of 2,000 acres, a third of 800 acres. These were known as “Cantine’s Great Location” and “Cantine’s Little Location.”

Settlement within the Watkins and Flint lands was by means of private purchase and for this purpose the owners placed agents instructed to deal directly with those interested in buying land. One of those was James Pumpelly, who was located in Owego.

The prices were variable but ranged from two to three dollars an acre. What this meant is that people with wealth could buy and create large farms, while people with less means could buy smaller tracts of land. In the Military Tract, the size of the land grant was a uniform 600 acres. In Watkins and Flint, not only were the lot sizes variable,

but there were a great many small lots sold so the map of this southern area shows many more landowners on smaller pieces of land. This was not a problem if the land was of good quality. Nor was it a problem at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when only three to five acres could be cleared in a year. If too much land, however, proved not to be fruitful, or as more land was needed to sustain a farm when agricultural equipment could improve yields, it meant that those on the Watkins and Flint purchases, where the land was hilly and thin, were at a disadvantage.

The last significant change to the county's boundaries occurred in 1854 when a portion of the Town of Newfield, and all of the Town of Hector, became part of Schuyler County, which was formed at that time.

In New York, according to the Town Law of 1777, there are towns in the state, but not townships. The legally recognized names of administrative areas are county, town, and village. There are also unincorporated hamlets, which are populations that have no legal requirement, or need to maintain a separate government. They are administered within a town. In Tompkins County today, for example, Freeville is a village; it has responsibilities as an incorporated community within the Town of Dryden. Etna, in the Town of Dryden, on the other hand, or Jacksonville, in the Town of Ulysses, or Ludlowville within the Town of Lansing, are recognized geographic areas but not incorporated and therefore are not required to create or maintain village governments or services.



Tompkins County