What's in a Name?

By Larry Ann Evans

Before there was Clyde, NY there was Blockhouse, NY. Before Palmyra, there was Swift or Swift's Landing. Many of these older names for our Wayne County towns came from an historical happening or named after a first settler. In the case of how Palmyra got its name, the story is quite involved. Swift and Swift's landing was because John Swift was the first settler. Soon after the Town of Swift became the Town of Tolland, or the District of Tolland. It was called so until January 4, 1796 when the historic name of Palmyra was decided on. It seems that Daniel Sawyer, brother of Mrs. Swift was engaged to Miss Dosha Boughton, the first school teacher. Sawyer decided that as she had been reading about Zenobia, the Queen of Palmyra, he thought it proper that his future wife should also have a Palmyra. The name was adopted without any dissent, but it might just have been called Zenobia.

Arcadia has many hamlets such as Fairville, Marbletown, Mud Mills, Zurich, Minsteed, Lockville, and Newark. Marbletown was named after Nathaniel Marble the first settler there; Zurich was named after Zurich, Switzerland by Steven Culver as the countryside reminded him of that place; Lockville became the Village of Arcadia and then became incorporated as part of Newark. The prevailing thought is that Newark was named after Newark, NJ which was named by a member of the Peirson family whose descendants later settled in Wayne County. The other is that Newark could have been named after Newark, England and lastly that Silas Peirson bought 78 acres in Arcadia from Ernest Augustus, Duke of Cumberland and Charles Herbert Perrepoint, comonly called Viscount Newark.

Butler was named in honor of General William Butler of Revolutionary fame. Galen comprises Township No. 27 of the new Military Tract. It was reserved for physicians and surgeons of the New York regiments in the Revolutionary War and so it was named in honor of Galen, a celebrated Greek physician. The village of Clyde was called Blockhouse, the name taken from one built there by Native American traders. Later it was known as Lauraville for Henrietta Laura, the Countess of Bath and lastly Clyde named by Scotish Settlers after the Clyde River in Scotland.

Huron was originally called Port Bay, and changed in 1834 in honor of the Huron Native American Tribe. Lyons was called the Forks by Charles Williamson because as he stood on the hill overlooking the junction of the two streams which met in that town, he was reminded of the junction of the Rhone and Saone Rivers in Lyon France. It is believe that Macedon was named after its counterpart in ancient history.

Marion was first called Winchester but then changed to Marion in honor of General Marion. Ontario was named Freetown in 1807 but I guess no one liked the name because just one year later it was changed to Ontario for the lake on its northern boundary. Rose was named in honor of Robert Rose of Geneva. Savannah was named because of the swampy low ground which characterizes much of the town.

Legend has it that Sodus was actually called Assorodus, a Native American word meaning Silvery Waters. Sodus has also been called East Ridge. In the town of Sodus, the hamlet of Wallington was called Arms Cross Roads. It owes it's present name to a nearby old stone tavern. Sodus Point was called Troupville named after Robert Troup of New York.

Walworth was named in honor of Chancellor Reuben Walworth. Williamson was named in honor of Charles Williamson the agent for the Pultney Estate who opened up much of the land in this area to settlers. And Wolcott was named for Governor Oliver Wolcott of Connecticut.

Near Savannah, just across the boarder of Wayne County lies Evans Corner in Seneca County. Sadly, it was not named after any of my relatives.