

A Genealogy of New York County Names or How We Get to Tompkins

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In 1693 there were ten counties in the colony of New York: Albany, Dutchess, Kings, New York, Orange, Queens, Richmond, Suffolk, Ulster, and Westchester. Albany County was thought to extend into the west, but the land from Unadilla to Niagara was known more generally as Iroquoia for the Iroquois Indians who lived on it. It was land prohibited to settlers of European extraction by tradition and by proclamation in 1763 of the King of England.

In 1775 the colonies in the New World were engaged in a conflict with Great Britain and the colonists were forming themselves into Americans. The Iroquois Confederacy sided, for the most part, with the English and so the Americans needed a name that indicated their own ownership of the western part of New York rather than allowing the Indian name to stand. At first Albany County was used but the land was so extensive it needed a clearer designation. The name selected was Tryon County, which embraced nearly all of central and western New York.

During those war years the State of New York wrote its first constitution (1777) and its first set of laws about the towns within the state. This establishes towns as the primary unit within counties.

Tryon County became Montgomery County in 1784 to honor the

American general who fell at the battle of Quebec. Out of Montgomery came Herkimer County in 1791, which encompassed several counties we know today: Onondaga, Oneida, Hamilton, and part of Otsego.

Onondaga County was created in 1794 from Herkimer and was within the Military Tract. Out of Onondaga came Cayuga County in 1799, Seneca in 1804, and Cortland in 1808. Only in 1817 was Tompkins County created from parts of Seneca and Cayuga counties, and a portion of the Watkins and Flint Purchase.