

Pennsylvania Township Names Reflect the Heritage and Hopes of Their Settlers

Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Township News magazine

Several years ago, the *Pennsylvania Township News* magazine started the “What’s in a Name” column to find out where townships of the second class got their names. Recently, the *News* took a broader view of the subject, looking for common threads among the more than 1,400 that make up the tapestry of township names in Pennsylvania.

Repeat after me

Some township names were just so popular that they kept getting used over and over again. For example, there are 22 Washington townships in Pennsylvania. There are also 18 Union and 11 Penn townships, many of them probably named for the commonwealth’s founder. Pennsylvania also has nine Perry and Wayne, eight Liberty, and seven Greene townships.

There are many township names that repeat five or six times, including Allegheny, Porter, and Eldred (*six each*) and Brady, Center, Clinton, Fairview, Greenwood, Hopewell, Limestone, Morris, Mount Pleasant, Richland, Rush, Salem, and Summit (*five each*).

Then there are derivations of the same name that pop up from county to county, such as Spring and its various forms, including Spring Brook, Spring Creek, Springfield, Springhill, and Springville. There are 19 vernal township names in all.

Some early settlers apparently decided to take the middle road when naming their communities because “middle” shows up in eight township names, including Middlebury, Middlecreek, Middlesex, and Middletown.

Other similarly named townships include three White townships, along with Whiteley and Whitemarsh; Wood, Woodbury (*two*), Woodcock, and Woodward (*three*); and Mill Creek (*two*),

Millcreek (*two*), Miller (*two*), and Millstone. There are also Cherry, Cherry Grove, Cherry Ridge, Cherryhill, and Cherrytree townships.

Presidential names were also used repeatedly. In addition to the aforementioned Washington, Jackson was used to name 18 townships, Jefferson for nine, and Monroe for seven. There are four Madison townships in Pennsylvania, and three each named Adams and Lincoln, plus a handful of other historically significant names, including Hamilton (*five townships*).

Native names

Many township names were taken from Indian terms for the area. There are too many to list all of them, but here are a few that are sure to give your spell-checker a nervous breakdown: Choconut, Connoquenessing, Cowanshannock, East Chillisquaque, Kiskiminetas, Lackawannock, Lackawaxen, Maxatawny, Monongahela, Nockamixon, Ontelaunee, Quemahoning, Sheshequin, Tunkhannock, Upper Mahantango, and Wiconisco.

The settlers' own heritage also came into play when many townships were named. The melting-pot nature of Penn's Woods becomes apparent through Irish and Welsh names such as Caernarvon, Cambria, Conemaugh, Croyle, Cumru, Donegal, Belfast, Derry, Dublin, Lower Gwynedd, Toboyne, Tredyffrin, Tyrone, Ulster, and Uwchlan.

English settlers felt at home in townships named Conyngham, Birmingham, Buckingham, Cambridge, East Manchester, East Nottingham, Exeter, Worcester, and London Britain, London Grove, and Londonderry. German immigrants gave their new homes names such as Heidelberg, Alsace, Berlin, German and Germany, Munster, Tulpehocken and Upper Tulpehocken, and Weisenberg. A few French names appear, too, including Le Boeuf and Napier, along with assorted foreign names such as Athens, Armenia, Sparta, and Zerbe.

The promised land

Given how many immigrants came to the New World to escape religious intolerance, it is not surprising that many graced their new settlements with biblical names. Such township names

include Ararat, Bethel (*five townships*), Bethlehem and East Bethlehem, Canaan, Damascus, East Providence, Ephrata, Hebron, Lower Nazareth, Mount Carmel, Paradise (*three townships*), and Palmyra.

Some settlers seemed to find promise in the area's natural features and took their communities' names from them. There are five Beaver townships in Pennsylvania and 14 named for pine trees, including Pine, Pine Grove and Pinegrove, Pine Creek, and Piney.

There are townships named Deer Creek and Deerfield; Sandy, Sandy Creek, Sandycreek, and Sandy Lake; and Sugar Grove, Sugar Creek, and Sugarloaf. Throw in Bear Creek, Fishing Creek, Snake Spring, Spruce Creek, Spruce Hill, White Deer, and Wolf and Wolf Creek and you've covered just about every major flora and fauna species in the state.

Township diversity

Then there are those township names that you have to love just because of their uniqueness. Who wouldn't like to be able to say he's from Broken Straw Township or Asylum Township? How about Broad Top, Brothersvalley, Ulysses, or Warriors Mark townships? Any of those names would be sure to spark a conversation.

The truth is, the names of Pennsylvania's townships are as diverse as the people who inhabit them. Whether named after presidents, Indian terms, natural features, locales in the Holy Land, or settlers' native countries, the commonwealth's townships are rich in history and cultural heritage. And they have the names to prove it.