

# Origin of the Town of Sennett

## Military Tract Lands-1790's

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## Inhabitants of Sennett

When the soldiers of the Clinton-Sullivan Expedition against the Iroquois Indians came into what is now the central part of New York State in the summer of 1779, they were much impressed by the fertility of the soil, the fine crops raised, the general lay of the land and the abundant supply of water available for power and water travel. They were much interested in the Finger Lakes Region and the Genesee Valley, and many decided to return at a later date. Many did start out to make settlements in the Genesee Valley and reached there; but some became tired of traveling, and seeing that the Finger Lakes Region was a good place to locate, remained there and became early settlers of Cayuga County and the Town of Sennett.

They came from Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and the eastern part of New York, especially the counties of Columbia and Dutchess. They were primarily of English descent, they or their ancestors having come from England in the late 1600's and early 1700's to Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

When the Military Tract was set up January 27, 1789 and sections were allotted to the soldiers and officers of the Revolution, these openings also influenced settlers to locate here. **Sennett is part of the original townships of Brutus** (Lots 97-100) **and Aurelius** (Lots 7-12, 18-23, 28-32, 39-43, and 48-52). Many of those to whom lots were assigned never saw them, but sold them to others. One example is John Sunderlin of Vermont who drew Lot No. 43 in Aurelius and sold it to Nation Leonard of Shaftsbury, Vermont, who came in and built a log residence on what is now Franklin Street Road. One Revolutionary War soldier who **did settle** on his allotment was Sergeant Jacob Hicks who drew Lot No. 99 of Brutus. He settled here in 1797, apparently sold part of his property to Amos and Susannah Bennett. He made his farm home across the road, facing onto Jericho road. He and Polly Hicks were charter members of the Baptist Church.

It was not until 1794 that white people made permanent settlements in this section. The first were made on Lot 21 by Deacon Ebenezer Healy, Joseph Atwell, Thomas Morley, Sr., and Thomas Morley, Jr. In 1795 came Judge Daniel Sennett, Amos Bennett, Jacob, Rufus and Daniel Sheldon, and Thomas Barnes.

Adapted from *Along the Roads Through Sennett's Past: Town of Sennett History*, p. 5-6 (1977).

For listing of land grants in Sennett and Cayuga County, visit:

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~nycayuga/land/mtractac.html>

## Town of Sennett

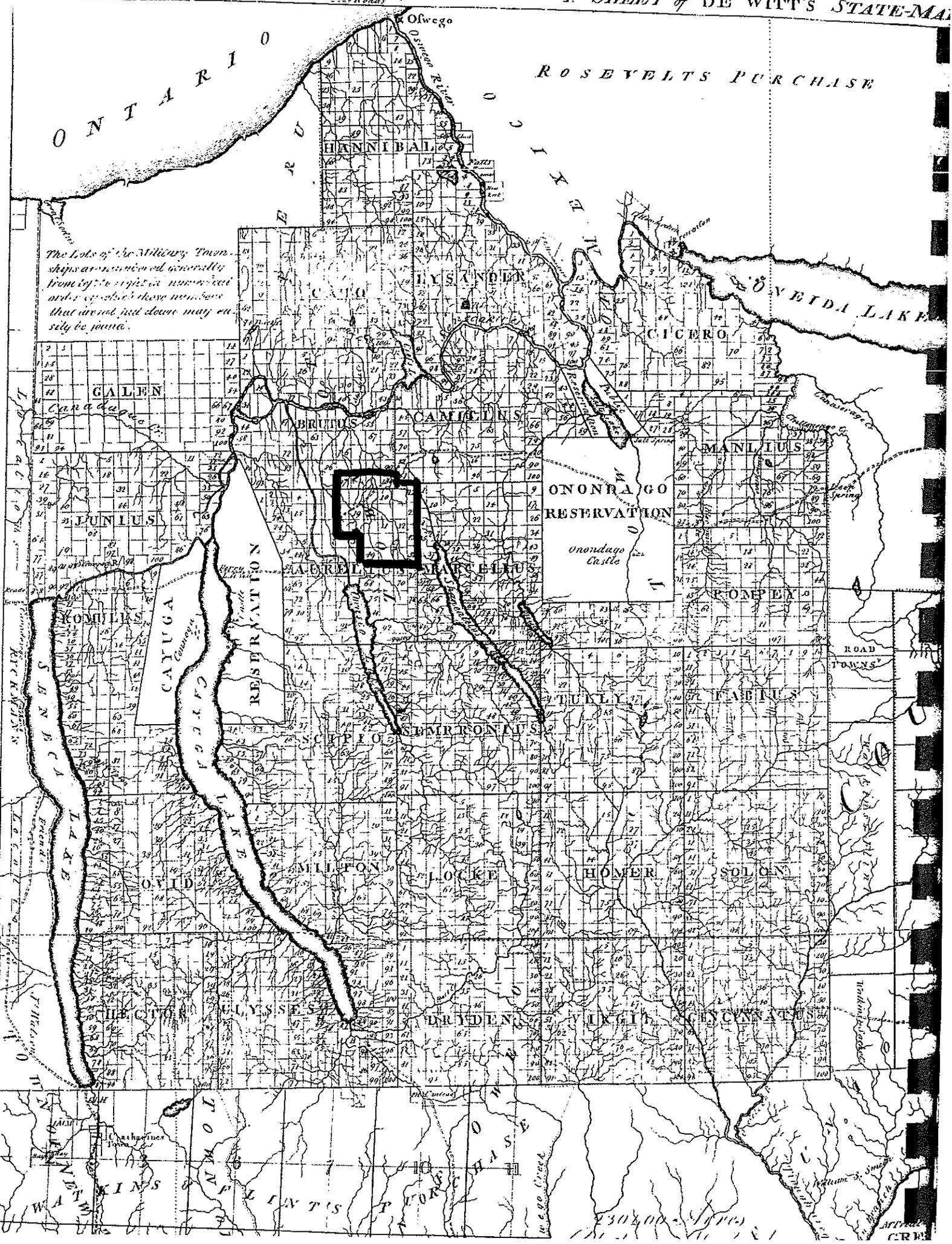
In the early days, in 1722, Sennett was part of Tyron County, changed to Montgomery County in 1784. It was part of Herkimer County, formed in 1791, and of Onondaga (which included the original Military Tract) March 5, 1794; and as the land was further subdivided because of increased settlement, it became part of Cayuga County on March 8, 1799.

The Town of Sennett was organized March 19, 1827 at the house of Ebenezer Phelps, and the first town meeting was also held there on April 3, 1827.

Adapted from *Along the Roads Through Sennett's Past: Town of Sennett History*, p. 5-7 (1977).

ONTARIO  
ROSEVELTS PURCHASE

The Lots of the Military Townships are numbered generally from left to right in numerical order, and the above numbers that are not set down may easily be found.



ROAD TOWNS

30200

CRM

**This summary history of the Military Tract of Central NY, was compiled by Bernie Corcoran for the Cayuga County NY GenWeb Project (<http://www.rootsweb.com/~nycayuga/index.htm>).**

'The Military Tract of Central New York' was about 1.75 million acres of bounty land and extended roughly from Lake Ontario southward to the south end of Seneca Lake and from the east line of present Onondaga County westward to Seneca Lake.

The present NY counties of Onondaga, Cortland, Cayuga, and Seneca were included, as were portions of Oswego, Schuyler, Tompkins, Yates and Wayne. The 1st Sheet of DeWitt's State Map of New York is dated circa 1792 or 1793 and displays the military tract area, minus the township of Sterling.

The laws passed by the U.S. Congress stated that all officers and soldiers who should remain in the service till the close of the Revolutionary War or till discharged by Congress, and the representatives of such as should be slain by the enemy, should be entitled to receive from the U.S. government, upon the ratification of the treaty of peace, a grant of the United States' land in Ohio, or a bounty.

Consequently, the Continental Congress guaranteed every fighting man in the Revolution a bounty of 100 acres in the public domain and officers in proportion to their rank.

There was little faith in the currency at the time, but NY did have a vast surplus of land and a need to persuade NY soldiers to enlist. So, it was decided to offer 500 more acres to the prior 100 acres offered. Thus, the state decided to survey and divide central NY into Townships (not to be confused with current Towns) of 100 lots, being 600 acres per lot. The relationship between a Military Tract Township & a Town is illustrated by the fact that Cayuga County, NY now has 23 Towns, that were comprised of what was originally all or part of 8 Military Tract Townships and part of the Cayuga Indian Nation Reservation area. Deeds in Central NY commonly still refer to these "Military Tract Lots" today as "Great Lots" or "Farm Lots"

Originally there were 25 Military Tract Townships, but they added 3 more to make a total of 28, because they needed more land to satisfy claims. At first the Townships were only given numbers, but later they were named. The names of the Military Tract Townships are: **Aurelius, Brutus, Camillus, Cato, Cicero, Cincinnatus, Dryden, Fabius, Galen, Hannibal, Hector, Homer, Junius, Locke, Lysander, Manlius, Marcellus, Milton, Ovid, Pompey, Romulus, Scipio, Sempronius, Solon, Sterling, Tully, Ulysses, and Virgil.** Some history books credit these early Greek / Roman names to the State Surveyor General of the time, "Simeon DeWitt". Most historians today, believe that the names for these Townships may have come from a clerk in the office of Simeon DeWitt who was a student of the classics, named "Robert Harpur".

After they balloted off 94 lots in each Township, the remaining 6 lots would be reserved for the development of gospel and schools, certain commercial offices and to compensate for water-covered land.

If this land was sold by the state, the money was to be set aside to build churches and schools.

In the center portion of the book, *The Balloting Book and Other Documents Relating to Military Bounty Lands, In The State Of New York*-Pub. Albany, Printed By Packard & Van Benthuyzen in 1825, is a list of Townships, numbered lots from 1 thru 100 with the name of the soldier who was balloted to receive the lot.

In the last portion of the book is a list of names that were entitled to lots and who actually was issued the patent (deed). Because it took so long for the soldiers to actually get their land, they were only given script (an "I Owe You") prior to 1790. Many got tired of waiting years for the land they were promised and resorted to selling their claims.

In the end, Non-Commissioned Officers would get the 600 acre lots, but Officers would get larger areas depending on the rank they achieved.

If the soldier decided to take the 100 acres offered by the Continental Congress in another state, the 100 acres in the south-east corner of the 600 acre lot, had to be given back to NY State. These became known as "The State's 100 acres". Another term that is in deeds still today, is "Survey 50 Acres of a Great Lot". This was because each soldier who was balloted to receive this land had to pay 48 shillings (to the state) to cover the cost of having the lots surveyed. If they didn't pay 48 shillings, they had to give up 50 acres.

The original Military Tract Townships that are within the present boundaries of Cayuga County, NY are #8 Aurelius, #4 Brutus, #3 Cato, #18 Locke, #17 Milton, #12 Scipio, #13 Sempronius, and #28 Sterling.

The east portion of the Cayuga Indian Reservation is also currently within the boundaries of Cayuga County, NY.

The following sources were utilized: *The Balloting Book and Other Documents Relating to Military Bounty Lands, In The State Of New York*-Pub. Albany: (Printed By Packard & Van Benthuyzen- 1825) *History of Cayuga County, New York 1789 - 1879*; by Elliot Storke (Pub. 1879 by D. Mason & Co.), *Auburn, N.Y. Its Facilities and Resources*; By D. Morris Kurtz (Pub. 1884 by Kurtz Publishing Co.), *The Military Tract Of Central NY*; by Robert S. Rose (A thesis composed in 1932 for a Master's Degree in history from Syracuse University), and *Weedspport - Brutus A Brief History*; by Howard J. Finley (Pub. for the Bicentennial in 1976).

*Please referred to the website for the complete account*  
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~nycayuga/index.htm>.