

HOW DID THE ISLAND GET ITS' NAME?

Our Island, like most of Canada, was first inhabited by Indians who gave it the musical and descriptive name, Kaounesgo. This name meant "the drowned land" or "land under water". Why such a name should have been given is very hard to see unless, perhaps, the first Indians did land near the marsh and the name given to that part of the Island was given, eventually, to the whole place.

The first explorers were French. LaSalle, one of their foremost workers, with his right hand man, Tonti, explored the land around our Island. LaSalle claimed much of this land as an estate for himself. The estate included part of the mainland, Wolfe, Howe, Simcoe, Brother and Amherst Islands. It was the first land ever claimed by a white man in what is now Ontario. To honour Tonti, LaSalle named our Island after him. Tonti had lost a hand. To hide his defect he wore an iron hand covered by a leather glove. Of course, the Indians did not know this and one blow from Tonti's iron fist was enough to discipline any of the superstitious savages. And so Isle Tonti got its second name.

While the French owned Canada they did not try to make any settlements in what is now Ontario for very obvious reasons. They were interested only in hunting and trapping; and, of course, lack of roads and the density of its forests made settlement next to impossible. Only some very vital event would make settlement come about. That event came after the British took Canada from the French. In fact, it was another war; this time the American colonies to the south declared war against Britain. Some of the colonists refused to fight the Mother Country. After the war they found that living in the States could be very uncomfortable for those who had remained loyal to England. England, to show her gratitude, offered these loyal people refuge in Canada. These United Empire Loyalists became our first settlers. With settlers in Upper Canada a Governor was appointed in 1792. This Governor, Colonel John Graves Simcoe, changed many of the French names to ones of English origin. He changed the name of Isle Tonti to Amherst Island; Amherst was a British general of that period.

The January *Beacon* printed an excerpt from the W I Tweedsmuir Book which repeats the myth of the meaning of the Iroquoian name for the Island, "Kaounesgo." The First People's experience with the Island related to marine contact, decidedly not to viewing the land from an elevated tractor cab. They would never have described the Island as "the drowned land or land under water." The Iroquoian meaning is, in fact, "big long island": a very appropriate, descriptive name for our Island. This myth was first recorded by Canniff, and sequentially repeated in Herrington, Burleigh, Hogeboom and Wilson (see p2, Sylvester, *Amherst Island: a Detailed Survey ...*).

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