THE VARIATIONS ON THE ORIGIN OF A NAME

OR WHAT WAS TENAFLY CALLED BEFORE INCORPORATION

While Tenafly was incorporated as a Borough in Bergen County, New Jersey, in 1894, evidences of such a name exist on maps dating back to 1776. The spelling might be different, and there was at least one attempt to designate a village in the area as Mount Clinton. Early land grants also refer to Tenafly, or the Tiene Kill, the brook which was used as a marker in describing the land. In some instances, the Tiene Kill was even confused with the Over Peck, so that it is not surprising that there are so many variations of the spelling of the name of the town.

On the map that Robert Erskine prepared for General Washington, the spelling was 'Tienevly'. As Bergen County was settled mainly by the Dutch and French Huguenots, many historians attribute a Dutch origin to the word. One Dutch dictionary could give a literal translation of 'ten swamps', a physical characteristic which was apparent on certain maps. This translation would not appeal to any real estate agent interested in selling land, so that other, but similar translations are more generally accepted.

Using the same dictionary to translate a spelling of "Tuninifly' (sic) on an 1812 map, and allowing for an extra letter, one could find a reference to a garden in the first part of the word. An 1834 Gazeteer refers to the village laid out along the Palisades as Mount Clinton, but land deeds of the same period call the area 'Teanafly'.

When the Post Office was established in 1861, it was called 'North Englewood' for four years, and then renamed Tenafly. While an 1872 Atlas designated the village Tenafly as a part of Palisade Township correctly, the name of the brook known on deeds as the Tiene Kill became Franklin Creek, while Highland Lake was at the juncture of Ivy Lane and Tenafly Road.

An 1898 map spelled the borough's name as 'Tienevlie', which could be translated from the Dutch as 'ten yachts - or fly boats'. Evidently water drainage was a problem to residents at that time. A reference in 1900 to colonial documents of the state cited the word 'Teniefly' as coming from the Dutch 't'eene vallei', or 'at a meadow'. A letter to a newspaper in 1935 altered this a bit by writing about 'Tiene de vlei' or 'Alongside of the Swamp', and called Teaneck the neck section of Tenafly.

When the book "The Story of Tenafly" by Sisson appeared in 1939, 'Tenevlay' or 'Willow Meadow' was given as the name. An earlier book by Dr. J. J. Haring had also given this definition, and had added Highwood as another name by which the village was known. To further confuse the researcher a 1945 book listed Tenafly as 'Thyne-Vly' or 'Garden Valley'.

To further confuse the unwary, a 1964 publication shows a map of the 18th Century with the notation on it, "From Tinefly." An 1859 railroad map notes 'Terafly'. It is fortunate that incorporation as a Borough in 1894 definitely spelled out 'Tenafly', even though some of the words of incorporation have since been deleted.

The Borough seal. which was designed in the 1960's, includes a windmill to indicate the Dutch origin, and a willow tree, symbolic of those trees found in the area.

Virginia T. Mosley
Borough Historian

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