Origins of County Names

Adams — President John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State under President James Monroe, U.S. Representative and leading defender of free speech.

Alexander — William M. Alexander, early settler of the district and state Representative in the second and third General Assemblies.

Bond — Shadrach Bond, first Governor of the State of Illinois.

Boone — Daniel Boone, pioneer hunter and explorer.

Brown — General Jacob Brown, soldier in the War of 1812 and later commanding general of the U.S. Army.

Bureau — Pierre de Bureo, French trader with Native Americans.

Calhoun — John C. Calhoun, Southern statesman and U.S. Vice President under Presidents Adams and Jackson.

Carroll — Charles Carroll of Carrollton, signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Cass — General Lewis Cass, presidential candidate, U.S. Senator, Secretary of War under President Jackson and Secretary of State under President Buchanan.

Champaign — County in Ohio.

Christian — County in Kentucky.

Clark — George Rogers Clark, Revolutionary War soldier and captor of Fort Vincennes and Kaskaskia.

Clay — Henry Clay, U.S. Representative and Senator, author of the “Missouri Compromise” and three-time presidential candidate.

Clinton — DeWitt Clinton, Mayor of New York City and Governor of the State of New York; promoter of the Erie Canal.

Coles — Edward Coles, second Governor of Illinois.

Cook — Daniel P. Cook, pioneer lawyer, first Attorney General of Illinois and member of Congress (1819-27).


Cumberland — The Cumberland or National Road was a 19th-century highway extending 800 miles from Cumberland, Maryland, to Vandalia, Illinois.

DeKalb — Johann DeKalb, German soldier who served in the Revolutionary War; killed in 1780.

DeWitt — DeWitt Clinton (see Clinton).

Douglas — Stephen A. Douglas, U.S. Senator (1847-61); ran against Abraham Lincoln for President in 1860.

DuPage — DuPage River.

Edgar — John Edgar, pioneer merchant and politician.

Edwards — Ninian Edwards, Illinois Territory Governor (1809-18) and Illinois’ third Governor.

Effingham — Lord Edward Effingham, resigned his post in the British Army rather than fight the colonies in 1775.

Fayette — Marquis de La Fayette, French nobleman who served in the Revolutionary War, commanding French troops at the battle of Yorktown.

Ford — Thomas Ford, Illinois’ eighth Governor.

Franklin — Benjamin Franklin, Founding Father, inventor, scientist, famed statesman and U.S. ambassador to France during the Revolutionary War.

Fulton — Robert Fulton, first successful builder of steamboats on American waters.

Gallatin — Albert Gallatin, financier and member of Congress from Pennsylvania.

Greene — General Nathaniel Greene, commander in the Southern colonies during the Revolutionary War.


Hamilton — Alexander Hamilton, Founding Father, Revolutionary War soldier and first Secretary of the Treasury (1789-95).

Hancock — John Hancock, Revolutionary War soldier and first signer of the Declaration of Independence.
Hardin — County in Kentucky.
Henderson — Henderson River.
Henry — Patrick Henry, famed orator, Revolutionary War soldier and Governor of Virginia.
Iroquois — Native American tribe.
Jackson — President Andrew Jackson; national hero known as “Old Hickory” during the War of 1812.
Jasper — Sergeant William Jasper, Revolutionary War hero at Charleston and Savannah.
Jefferson — President Thomas Jefferson, Revolutionary War leader and author of the Declaration of Independence.
Jersey — State of New Jersey.
Jo Daviess — Joseph Hamilton Daviess, Kentucky lawyer and soldier; slain at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811.
Johnson — Colonel Richard M. Johnson and U.S. Vice President (1837-41).
Kane — Sen. Elias K. Kane, first Secretary of State of Illinois.
Kankakee — Native American tribe.
Kendall — Amos Kendall, postmaster general under President Jackson and partner of S.B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph.
Knox — General Henry Knox, Revolutionary War hero and President George Washington’s Secretary of War.
Lake — Lake Michigan.
LaSalle — Robert de La Salle, French explorer who navigated the length of the Mississippi River and claimed the Louisiana Territory for France.
Lawrence — Captain James Lawrence, commander of the USS Chesapeake; killed in naval battle in 1812.
Lee — Richard Henry Lee, orator and statesman of the Revolutionary War.
Livingston — Edward Livingston, U.S. Secretary of State under President Andrew Jackson.
Logan — Dr. John Logan, pioneer physician and father of General John A. Logan.
Macon — Nathaniel Macon, Revolutionary War soldier and U.S. Senator.
Macoupin — Native American name, named for Macoupin Creek.
Madison — President James Madison, primary author of the U.S. Constitution and known as “father of the U.S. Constitution.”
Marion — General Francis Marion, known as the “Swamp Fox,” distinguished soldier in the Carolinas during the Revolutionary War.
Mason — County in Kentucky.
Massac — Fort Massac.
McDonough — Commodore Thomas McDonough, defeated the British on Lake Champlain in 1814.
McHenry — General William McHenry, fought in the War of 1812 and the Black Hawk War; served in several early General Assemblies.
Menard — Pierre Menard, first Lieutenant Governor of Illinois.
Mercer — General Hugh Mercer, killed at the Battle of Princeton during the Revolutionary War.
Monroe — President James Monroe, Revolutionary War soldier, diplomat; co-negotiator of the Louisiana Purchase and author of the Monroe Doctrine.
Montgomery — General Richard Montgomery, Revolutionary War soldier of Irish birth; killed at Quebec in 1775.
Morgan — General Daniel Morgan, earned distinction during the Revolutionary War at Quebec and Saratoga.
Moultrie — General William Moultrie, successful defender of Fort Moultrie at Charleston, South Carolina, during the Revolutionary War.
Ogle — Lieutenant Joseph Ogle, member of the territorial militia.
Peoria — Native American name.
Perry — Commodore Oliver H. Perry, won distinction in the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813.
Piatt — James A. Piatt, Sr., settled in the area in 1829.
Pike — Zebulon M. Pike, General in the War of 1812 and American explorer for whom Pikes Peak in Colorado was named.
Pope — Nathaniel Pope, first territorial Secretary of State (1809-16).
Pulaski — Count Casimir Pulaski, Polish hero who was killed in the attack on Savannah, Georgia, in 1779.
Putnam — General Israel Putnam, Revolutionary War soldier.
Richland — County in Ohio.
Rock Island — A rock island in the Mississippi River.
Saline — Saline Creek.
Sangamon — Native American name meaning “the land of plenty to eat.”
Schuyler — General Philip Schuyler, Revolutionary War soldier and U.S. Senator from New York.
Scott — County in Kentucky.
Shelby — Isaac Shelby, soldier of the Revolutionary War, the Indian Wars and the War of 1812; Governor of Kentucky (1792-96).
St. Clair — General Arthur St. Clair, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Army after the Revolutionary War and Governor of the U.S. Territory northwest of the Ohio River.
Stark — General John Stark, Revolutionary War soldier; won fame at Bunker Hill, Trenton, Princeton and Bennington.
Stephenson — Colonel Benjamin Stephenson, Adjutant General of the Illinois Territory (1813-14).
Tazewell — Lyttelton W. Tazewell, U.S. Senator from Virginia.
Union — Federal Union of the American states.
Vermilion — Vermilion River.
Wabash — Native American name, named for Wabash River.
Warren — General Joseph Warren, pioneer physician and Revolutionary War soldier killed at Bunker Hill.
Washington — President George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Army during the Revolutionary War.
Wayne — General Anthony Wayne, Revolutionary War commander and soldier.
White — Leonard White, member of the Constitutional Convention of 1818.
Whiteside — Samuel Whiteside, Representative in the first General Assembly and Brigadier General in the Black Hawk War.
Will — Conrad Will, member of the Constitutional Convention of 1818 and member of the first nine Illinois General Assemblies.
Williamson — County in Tennessee.
Winnebago — Native American name, named for Native American tribe.
Woodford — County in Kentucky.

See Map of Illinois Counties on page 438.