

# UW-Marathon County Library Restroom Reader

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Ever wonder where your town's name came from?  
Below are a few localities and the origins of their name based on  
Native American languages.

**Wausau**—Before 1839 Wausau was known as Big Bull Falls due to the cataracts and rapids in the Wisconsin River. Then W.D. McIndoe proposed the adoption of the Ojibwa name **Wausau** to the settlement which grew up there. This translated to “far, afar off, a great way off, distant.” This could refer to either the distance and time it took to travel to the settlement or it could refer to the far-off view from atop of Rib Mountain.



**Tomahawk**—The word “Tomahawk” has no close resemblance to any Wisconsin Indian term. This term first appeared in tribes found in the eastern portion of the United States as “Tamahake.” This term was quickly adopted into English and applied to both clubs and cutting tools. Most often, towns, cities, and rivers derive the name **Tomahawk** from a nearby lake which acquires this name because of its shape.



**Minocqua**— The lake, town, and village, all in Oneida County, appear to be named from the Ojibwa term *minakwa*, “a number of trees standing together.”

**Antigo**— The city and town are reputedly named from the Ojibwa name of the Spring River which runs through the city. **Antigo** is clipped from a longer name which has been written *Neequie antigo seepi* which translates to “balsam evergreen river.” The word *antigo* alone is said to signify “evergreen.”



**Mosinee**— This city was originally known as Little Bull Falls. However, according to one account, the postmaster at this location thought the name sounded vulgar. So when a trapper came along and asked for the Indian name, he suggested **Mosinee** to honor Chief Mon-so-ne (Chippewa for “Moose Tail”) who was a chief at Lac Courte Oreilles in the early 19th century. The citizens of the area approved this name.



**Keshena**—A son of a Menominee chief was fasting and in a vision thought he saw a multitude of hawks flying swiftly by. From this incident his son became known as *Ke shi ene*, “swift flying,” written as Keshena. **Keshena** is now the principal town of the Menominee reservation.



## American Indian History Online



is a database the UWMC Library subscribes to and can be accessed from our list of article databases. This resource contains more than 15,000 years of culture and history through event and topic entries, biographies, images, maps and charts, primary sources, and timeline entries. *Please ask a librarian if you have any questions about this resource!*

This information was taken from the book Indian Names on Wisconsin's Map by Virgil J. Vogel.  
Located in the UWMC Library @ E78.W8 V64 1991

Restroom Readers can be accessed electronically online through the UWMC Library's homepage.