

# What's in a Name?—The Streets of Pittsfield

Put the address in your GPS. Or stop and look up. This street has a name, sometimes to orient us, but often to recognize the contributions of an individual. What can that name tell us, about ourselves, about our past? In our rush through the city, we look past the name on the street sign, a name given long ago to help us remember and to honor. By reviewing the histories of our streets, we learn about what unites us, what gives the city its unique and broad history. We also can see who has been overlooked or forgotten, and what we can do to add to the richness of our history.

## WENDELL AVENUE



1. In 1735, King Solomon Masanimake of the Stockbridge Mohicans granted three tracts of land in western Massachusetts to the General Court in

Boston. Jacob Wendell, a wealthy merchant from Boston, purchased at public auction a plot extending 24,000 acres along the Housatonic River for 120 pounds. Wendell, who never visited the area first known as Pontoosuck, promptly set out to sell off smaller plots to settlers, but kept for himself and his heirs a tract of 240 acres near Canoe Meadows.

## CROFUT STREET

3. One of the original seven “proprietors” of the Pontoosuck plantation, Stephen Crofut was named tax assessor for needed improvements in the village. He had staked a claim in the 1740s on the east branch of the Housatonic River, but the threat of Indian attack delayed his permanent settlement, until 1752. Crofut served as deacon in the first church and also built the first dam for a grist mill near present-day Elm Street, not far from the street that bears his name.

## Pittsfield's Founders



## MERRILL ROAD

5. Approved in 1929, the new road connecting the eastern neighborhoods of the city bore the name of Captain Hosea Merrill who enlisted as a 19-year old in the Revolutionary War, and started a sawmill after the war that provided lumber for numerous buildings around the growing town. His son, Justin, owned properties around the town, including one near Pontoosuc Lake that later became the Y camp in his name (below.)



## STODDARD AVENUE

2. Early, hand-drawn maps of Pittsfield, show a few names over and over again as land owners, including John Stoddard. One of the richest land speculators in western Massachusetts, Stoddard was instrumental in establishing the Indian mission in Stockbridge and convincing the Mohican elders to take titles to their land, making it easier for later purchase. He joined Jacob Wendell as an investment partner in the first bulk land purchases in Pontoosuck before dividing them up for resale.

## DEMING STREET

4. Deming Street lies along the east branch of the Housatonic River, not far from where Solomon Deming built his log cabin to house his young wife Sarah. In the summer of 1752, they were the first English family to move into Pontoosuck. Solomon carved out a farm in the area and was active in the politics of the town's incorporation. Deming Field is named after their daughter, Dorothy, the first white baby born in Pittsfield. Her mother lived through the hardship of life on the frontier until the age of 92 as a witness to more than sixty years of Pittsfield history.