PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-26

“Postmarked ‘Niles’”: Hezekiah Niles’s own notice of the naming of Niles, Michigan, 7 November 1829

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SUMMARY

The village of Niles, on the St. Joseph River, was platted for the traders Walling & Lacey on 1 August 1829 and its plat recorded in Lenawee County on 29 August. The county histories give no reason for the name until Orville W. Coolidge in 1906, who says Obed Lacey chose it after the editor of the *Niles Register*. The earliest printed explanation cited until now was Benjamin Lundy’s *Genius of Universal Emancipation* of 20 November 1829: a town “called Niles, in honor of Hezekiah Niles, of Baltimore,” for his “efforts in behalf of the American System.” Thirteen days earlier, on the front page of *Niles’ Weekly Register* of 7 November 1829, the editor himself had printed the news: “We were surprised a few days since to receive a letter postmarked ‘Niles’—and, on opening it, found that it was from a new town laid out on the St. Joseph’s river, not far from lake Michigan; and so called in compliment to the senior editor of this paper, because of his long and zealous support of internal improvements and domestic industry. The editor wishes to return thanks for this compliment.” It is the earliest notice of the name in print yet found, and its postmark shows that by the first days of November 1829 letters were leaving the new town marked “Niles.”

THE RECORD

1. ***Niles' Weekly Register*** **(Baltimore), fourth series, vol. 1 [whole vol. 37], 7 November 1829, p. 1 (front page)**

   > *"We were surprised a few days since to receive a letter postmarked 'Niles'—and, on opening it, found that it was from a new town laid out on the St. Joseph's river, not far from lake Michigan; and so called in compliment to the senior editor of this paper, because of his long and zealous support of internal improvements and domestic industry. The editor wishes to return thanks for this compliment, and many other unpublished acts of kindness extended towards him—which continually beget a fear of not deserving them."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/sim_niles-national-register_1829-11-07_37_947)

2. ***Genius of Universal Emancipation*** **(Baltimore), 20 November 1829, p. 87**

   > *"A town in the territory of Michigan has recently been laid out and called Niles, in honor of Hezekiah Niles, of Baltimore. This compliment is intended on the part of the founders of the place, as a testimony of their deep sense of gratitude for Mr. Niles's unceasing and disinterested efforts in behalf of the American System."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/sim_genius-of-universal-emancipation_1829-11-20_4_11)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The name's explanation is in print in the year of the plat, from the man it honours, two weeks before the notice in Lundy's paper and seventy-seven years before the county history that first explains it. The founders' reason, as Niles gave it, was his support of "internal improvements and domestic industry," the American System that Lundy also names. The postmark puts mail leaving the town as "Niles" by early November 1829.

LIMITS

The notice does not name the writer of the letter, the date of the postmark, or the founders; “a few days since” dates the letter only to late October or early November 1829. Coolidge’s attribution of the choice to Obed Lacey (1906) is neither confirmed nor contradicted by it.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

Internet Archive full text of the *Register* for 1829; the Berrien County histories of 1880 and 1906; McCoy, *Old Fort St. Joseph* (1907); Wikipedia’s articles on Hezekiah Niles, the *Weekly Register* and Niles, Michigan; web searches for the notice’s wording (October 2026). None cites the *Register*’s notice.

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

“New” means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note’s version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Michael Urbanski, “How Niles Got Its Name,” *Project Scroll* (2026). https://projectscroll.com/news/how-niles-got-its-name/
2. Orville W. Coolidge, *A Twentieth Century History of Berrien County, Michigan* (Chicago, 1906), pp. 141–142. https://archive.org/details/twentiethcentury00cool

3. *History of Berrien and Van Buren Counties, Michigan* (Philadelphia: D. W. Ensign & Co., 1880), pp. 155, 160. https://archive.org/details/historyofberrien00ensi

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THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in How Niles got its name (projectscroll.com/news/how-niles-got-its-name/). In the discoveries register:

- `niles-register-1829` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#niles-register-1829)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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