

Senate Report:

Berlin Granted by Wentworth in 1763

by Senator Bill Doyle



Berlin's charter was granted during the reign of King George III by the royal governor of New Hampshire, Benning Wentworth, to Reverend Chelsea Graham and 63 others on June 8, 1763. Originally,

Berlin was six miles square. On the very same day, Middlesex and Worcester were granted by Wentworth. Many of the grantees were members of the Onion River Company established by Ira and Ethan Allen.

The proprietors first met in Arlington, Vermont on May 17 1785. Governor Thomas Chittenden was chosen as moderator, and he was part of a committee to divide the lots of land, which contained over 100 acres each.

Berlin's first settlement was made by Ebenezer Sanborn and Joseph Thurber in the summer of 1785. They located on what was later known as the "Bradford Farm" about 1/2 mile from the mouth of the Dog River.

There are many different explanations as to the origin of the town name. Some historians say it was named for the German city Berlin, which then was Frederick the Great's capital. George III had great respect for Frederick and Governor Wentworth used many place names that would please King George III.

The second explanation for the origin of the name Berlin came from Massachusetts, where Worcester and Berlin are neighboring towns. Evidence that supports this theory includes the fact that Worcester and Berlin were granted the same day. There are 15 other Berlins in the United States.

The first post office opened in 1825, was located at Berlin Corners. The second post office was located at West Berlin, now known as Riverton. Interestingly, the Central Vermont Railroad Station, which stopped at West Berlin, was Riverton. During World War I, anti-German feelings were so strong that the post office was renamed Riverton. The Berlin Corners Post Office was closed in 1908.

The level stretch of land on the Stevens Branch of the Winooski River was originally known as Shepardsville or Berlin Street, but today is known as the Barre-Montpelier Road. This area at one

time contained a tannery and several small businesses.

In the 1870s, Benjamin Falls was a busy place. The miller who owned this area believed in advertising. The advertisement read: "Josiah Benjamin, Farmer and Dairyman Proprietor of sawmill and one mile of the best water privilege in the country, embracing Berlin Falls in the same." In the early 1900s, the Falls was a favorite place to picnic, and the dance hall was very popular.

Interest in the Berlin airport was greatly increased in 1927, the year that Charles Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic and Vermont's great flood occurred. The flood caused massive damage around the state, wiping out highways and railroads and sweeping building off their foundations. The U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, remarked that he had seen Vermont at its worst, but Vermonters at their best. Much of Vermont was inaccessible except by air travel. Barn-storming pilots who delivered medical supplies to remote parts of Vermont were the heroes of the flood.

The Berlin Airport Committee bought land in 1929 and the airport was dedicated on June 6 and 7, 1930. The event was celebrated by an air show with Governor John Weeks as master of ceremonies. The first commercial flight took place in 1933 and Amelia Earhart touched down in 1934, trumpeting the message of aviation to the Vermont General Assembly. The early landings took place on grass, but in 1936 two two-thousand foot paved runways were dedicated.

The airport was known as the Barre-Montpelier Airport until 1970, when it became the Edward Knapp Airport in honor of the man who had served as the state's aeronautics engineer for forty years. Commercial airlines which were located at the airport included Northeast, Green Mountain Airline and Precision Airline. Although the period of Berlin's commercial air business is over, the airport is still very active today.

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