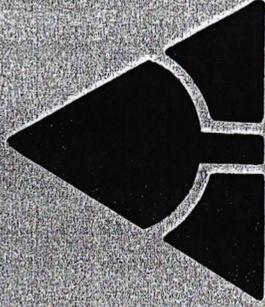


# **"LONG-A-COMING" A HISTORY OF BERLIN N.J.**



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## HISTORY OF BERLIN

Berlin, one of the oldest settlements in the upper part of Camden County, was known for more than a hundred years as Long-A-Coming. There are many legends as to the origin of the name. Some tales credit the Leni Lenape Indians who inhabited the region with coining the term. Others attribute the name to the colonial travelers who rode stagecoaches between the seashore and Philadelphia. The long stretch of barren pineland between Egg Harbor and the next stop was a monotonous ride and made the village appear to be long-a-coming.

George R. Prowell, author of "A History of Camden County," states in that work that the crew of a vessel wrecked on the South Jersey coast near Absecon was making its way on foot over an Indian trail leading to Camden or Cooper's Point as it was then known. Apparently, according to Prowell, the sailors had learned from the Indians of a cool stream running through the pine barrens. At last, weary and faint, they saw a beautiful stream coming into view with water kept cool by low hanging pine boughs. Hastily, throwing aside their packs, they ran to the brook exclaiming, "Here you are, though long-a-coming." The sailors made their way to Philadelphia much to the surprise of the mariners who had presumed them to be lost. The description by the sailors of the life saving stream and its surrounding country soon established Long-A-Coming as a desirable location in South Jersey. The stream was the Great Egg Harbor River which rises in Berlin. This story is credited by historians to be the actual origin of the name.

Shortly after the naming episode, Prowell relates, the first settlers arrived at Long-A-Coming. Peter Rich and Richard Moss staked out the land and started farms,

thus becoming the first citizens. John Scull and Joel Bodine opened inns at opposite ends of the settlement and found sufficient trade for both to prosper.

Though settled for farmland, the residents of Long-A-Coming found the land would produce only a sparse living for the farmers. Turning to lumbering they more than doubled their earnings, and soon Long-A-Coming became the lumbering center of the area. The loggers hauled their timber by ox team to Chews Landing where it was loaded on ships for transport to Philadelphia.

Another industry which grew in Long-A-Coming was charcoal burning. Thomas Wright's Charcoal Works was the chief manufacturing interest in the town and used wood from the pine forests. The charcoal, in turn, found a ready market at the distillers who used it to rectify whiskey.

As the town progressed, it became a regular stop on the stage routes. A poster advertising the stage line can be seen today in the Marie Fleche Library in Berlin. The route passed through Camden, Haddonfield, Long-A-Coming, Blue Anchor, Penny Pot, Weymouth Furnace, Somers Point to Absecon. The Egg Harbor Road, a street in the present town, follows the original stagecoach route.

Traders made the village a regular stop and business began to thrive. Several retail stores were opened and each was self sufficient.

Before the Revolutionary War era, the land now known as Camden County was a part of Gloucester County. In 1845, an act of the New Jersey Legislature created a new county. Camden County from Gloucester County. At the time, no county seat was named, and Long-A-Coming and Camden were bidders for the honor. Also interested in the title were Gloucester, Mt. Ephraim, and Haddonfield. The law required a majority of

the voters to favor one of the sites or no choice could be made. In 1845, an election was held and none of the towns could swing a majority vote. Camden, however, had a plurality. In 1846, another vote was taken. The three smaller towns realized that not one of them could control enough votes to win over Camden if each voted for itself. So they formed an alliance to defeat the big city and Long-A-Coming was selected as a neutral site. When the votes were counted, Long-A-Coming had won the honor by a hands down majority and it became the county seat. Old records show that land was purchased for the necessary court house buildings from the lands of Jacob Leach. This is now the site of the Berlin Branch of the First Camden National Bank and Trust Company. Camden politicians, however, engineered plans for another election in 1848. The alliance was split and Camden won what proved to be the final contest.

So the village of Long-A-Coming grew. Its houses and stores were mainly built along the stage coach road, now the White Horse Pike. In 1853, the Camden and Atlantic Railroad was completed as far as Long-A-Coming, and in 1854, it was completed to the shore. In 1856, a station was located in town, and the Land Improvement Company laid out a number of acres into lots and sold them at public auction. A number of fine houses were built and the town grew.

One of the most frequently asked questions is, "When and why did Long-A-Coming become Berlin?" Old postal records show that the office was established under the name of Long-A-Coming, Gloucester County, New Jersey in 1812. Thomas Wright was the first postmaster. The name of the office was changed to Magnolia, February 5, 1867, and to Berlin, May 7, 1867, Joseph Shreve was postmaster at that time. November 11, 1961, a red brick post office located on Harker Avenue, was opened with appropriate ceremonies.

Another division of public lands was made in 1895. Long-A-Coming and its environs were part of the territory taken from Gloucester Township and added to Waterford Township. The Township of Berlin was created by the Act of June 11, 1910. The Borough of Berlin was formed in 1927. Dr. Frank O. Stem was the first mayor.

Memories of the past linger today in some of the landmarks found in Berlin. One of these is the Cemetery Chapel which bears the date 1776. This was about the time that Samuel Scull, a pioneer settler, set aside a tract of land which was to be "sacred to the dead." He put this purpose in proper form and conveyed the same to the trustees of the Presbyterian Church. The building was originally made of logs and was used for preaching by John Brainers, the Indian missionary. Though deeded to the Presbyterian trustees, the log meeting house was free to all denominations. The Cemetery Chapel served as a district school many years ago and also as a chapel where burial services were conducted. The cemetery is now under the able jurisdiction of the Berlin Cemetery Association incorporated in 1884 and still functioning today.

On the White Horse Pike stands a white frame church with dome shaped spire. This is Centenary Methodist Church which was organized soon after 1830. It is believed that the inspired Bishop of the Church, Francis Asbury, was among the earliest preachers. Among the leaders of the Methodist movement were Joseph Thackara and his wife, Elizabeth. The story is told that Mr. Thackara and Conklin Mayhew became interested in organizing a Sunday School. They solicited funds from the townspeople, walked to Camden and crossed the ferry to Philadelphia where they purchased supplies from the Sunday School. As the story goes, they were glad to get a ride home on a

charcoal wagon. A plain frame building was erected on the Main Street on the site of the present Baptist Church. This was used by the Methodist church group until the present edifice was built and dedicated in 1866. In 1960, a modern educational building was added upon land purchased in the rear of the church building. The present pastor, Harold P. Johnson, serving his seventh year has enjoyed the longest single pastorate.

Some of the older residents may recall a small frame building with steeple surrounded by a picket fence. This was the building formerly owned by Centenary Methodist Church and conveyed by deed in 1869 drawn to William S. Kain and others for Baptist Church purposes. On May 3, 1874, the Baptist Church of Berlin was organized and continued worship services in the frame church until July 22, 1917 when a beautiful brown stone building was dedicated on the site of the old one. The church has added a fine educational building on Broad Street, and will dedicate a new church building adjacent to the educational building in April, 1964. Reverend William Blackley is the present pastor.

Other churches in Berlin are the Episcopal Church of The Good Shepherd, which was established in 1904, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel which had its beginning as a small chapel in West Berlin in 1905. The present church was dedicated at a new site on Franklin Avenue and White Horse Pike in 1931. Our Lady of Mount Carmel School began its first term in 1956. In 1930, a group of about twenty Lutheran families felt the need of a Lutheran congregation in Berlin. After meeting in various public halls, in 1944 the congregation purchased the former Presbyterian Church at Taunton and Haines Avenues. This building was renovated and used until a modern church and educational building was built on Route 73 and dedicated in 1963.

A small white frame building with green shutters and with a colonial perch stands on the White Horse Pike adjacent to the brown stone Baptist Church. At present it is used as a dentist's office. One hundred years ago, it served the town as a one-room school, and continued to be used until a three-room two-story frame building was built in the 1870's on the site of the present Berlin Borough Hall. This frame building served at least two generations until the red brick building was completed in 1914. The frame building was torn down and a four-room two-story school erected on the Haines Avenue side of the school property. The Berlin Borough School Board purchased a twenty-acre tract of land on South Franklin Avenue where there was built a new modern eighteen-room schoolhouse. The new school was officially dedicated in September 1858. The Berlin Borough Council obtained the former school building on White Horse Pike and renovated it to become one of the most modern borough halls in the area. The Haines Avenue school was also renovated and is under a five-year lease to New Jersey Department of Motor Vehicles for use as a qualification center for obtaining New Jersey drivers licenses.

The former school buildings, the new Post Office, the Drive-In Bank of the Camden National Bank and Trust Company, and the Marie Fleche Library are known in Berlin as "Library Square."

The beautiful library building was completed in May 1957 and donated by Mr. Lucien P. Fleche in memory of his aunt. The library is open Monday through Thursday 1 to 4:30 and 7 to 9 P.M. Twenty-six volunteer librarians staff the library and it serves members from Berlin and surrounding areas. An interested Board of Trustees headed by Lucien P. Fleche keeps informed of the library's activities and goals.

Today, Berlin is a prosperous town with a population of 3850. Modern stores and office buildings line each side of the White Horse Pike, one of the main highways leading from Camden and Philadelphia to the shore. At the northern end of the town, there are neat rows of new houses in the Berlin Heights section. Likewise, the farmland at the southern section of the town has become a development of modern homes.

The leading industries of Berlin are the Formigli Corporation, supplying pre-cast concrete products for fifty-one years, and the Owens-Illinois Company - Kaylo Division. Both companies give employment to many residents of the town and surrounding communities.

The story of Berlin is similar to that of many towns in America - the establishment of homes, the building of businesses and industries, and the founding of churches and schools for the betterment of society. Though we live in a stream-lined age, still we like to turn back the pages to the days when the stagecoach went by the door, rumbling along on its way to the shore.