

## 2. CIVIC STRUCTURE

### Jay Town

Jay was chartered on November 7, 1792 and again on December 28, 1792. The story behind Jay's other, previous names, Wyllis and Carthage, captures a bit of the history of the period. As a town, Jay is unique in holding two charters; the first, covering 7,600 acres in the southern section was issued to Governor Thomas Chittenden in lieu of several hundred pounds the state owed him for back salary. The December charter covered 15,360 acres to the north and was given to John Jay (the great New York statesman) and a colleague in appreciation for Jay's assistance in settling the land dispute with New York and thereby opening the door to Vermont's becoming the fourteenth state in the Union.

In the decade preceding this recognition of Jay, several forces displayed an interest in this specific land area. Initially 60 officers of a Connecticut line regiment, led by two officers from the Wyllis family, had petitioned Vermont for a northern land grant. The petition was honored by the legislature in March of 1780 for a town to be called Wyllis. This grant was forfeited in 1782 for reasons unknown, although Swift suggests we might assume the locale was a bit too northerly and remote. In October, 1783 the legislature, pressed to meet a debt to Governor Chittenden of 350 pounds, voted that it be paid by issuing one half of the forfeited rights in the town of Carthage to the Governor. Of unknown origins, this was the first reference to the Carthage place name. Still short on money, the legislature decided to pay Surveyor General Ira Allen's salary with land, telling him he could sell the rest of the forfeited rights in Carthage. Having no luck in selling the land, Allen basically returned the land to the state, negotiating title to a piece located elsewhere. Allen and Chittenden's political opponents turned these (and presumably other land dealings) into campaign issues and Chittenden was defeated in the 1789 election. In 1792, despite the acknowledgement that the Chittenden had done nothing wrong, legislators had moved on to address new and different challenges and eager to acknowledge Jay's statesmanship fixed the area's name at Jay.

The town was slow to be settled. No population is recorded in either the census of 1791 or 1800, and a post office doesn't emerge until 1836, closing in 1905. The post office was referred to as "Jay," indicating the longevity of a cluster in the immediate area of the unincorporated village. Today (at least through the late 1970s) most of the townspeople receive mail services from the office in North Troy (Swift, 1977, p. 362-3).

### Troy Town

Troy was chartered on October 28, 1801, initially as a town called Missisquoi (sometimes Missiskouie<sup>1</sup>). Originally the area had been granted as two separate parcels, each containing just over 11,000 acres. These were Avery's Grant (one of many to Avery in Vermont) in 1792 and a second piece of land granted to John Kelly, also in October, 1792. No significant settlement occurred under either of these grants and the town's name was changed from Missisquoi to Troy on October 26, 1803.

It is reported that, by 1803, the emerging community was doing a good business in potash and

---

<sup>1</sup> Swift reports many variations in the spelling of the Abenaki word Missisquoi, generally considered to mean "great grassy meadow" indicating the importance of the alluvial plains to both nomadic and seasonally settled pre-white cultures.

pearlash with Troy, New York. That connection may well have led Vermonters to change from Abenaki to Greek names. This was a period in the US when a classical revival was influencing Americans to rename places using ancient Greek titles, although this most typically happened to towns with names from British aristocracy. On another historic note, Swift calls attention to the fact that the second piece of the land given Governor Chittenden as the legislature sought to settle its debts was probably here in Troy. For more details see 1977: p.370-71.

The first post office in town was established at a residential cluster in South Troy in 1823, designated simply as Troy. A second office opened in 1828 at North Troy. Through the late 1970s both post offices in Troy were reported to be still be in operation.

## **Westfield Town**

Chartered on May 15, 1780, Westfield was one of six towns granted as part of a fund- raising effort. Colonel William Williams of Wilmington, Vermont, among others, had served on a legislative committee that came up with the solution of selling these lands for raising funds. Only two grantees paid their granting fees on time and were chartered that May: Enosburg and Westfield. Out of several explanations for Westfield's town name, the most plausible is that it was named after the Honorable William West, Esquire, a distinguished resident of Scituate, Rhode Island and one of several New England legislators supporting statehood for Vermont. West sold this and other lands he had been given for his political services in 1785, and there is no record of him ever visiting the area.

Westfield's only post office was located in the village in 1830 when the population of the town was just over 350. Although last reported in 1977, we assume the post office still serves inhabitants, numbering 503 in the 2000 Census, a 19% increase from 1990.

[Table of Contents](#)

Next: [Natural Resources](#)

Previous: [Location and Defining Features](#)