

History of Darjeeling

Source: <http://www.exploredarjeeling.com/history.htm>

The success of the hill stations of Western India had induced the Government to do something for the citizens of Calcutta and the Bengal Presidency. An experimental station for ailing troops was opened at Cherrapunji in Assam, but it proved to be a wash-out-literally- as it turned out to be one of the wettest places in the world. But the government continued to look for an alternative place, and asked G.W.A.Lloyd to follow up the recommendation of J.W.Grant, the Commercial Resident at Malda, an enthusiastic explorer of the Himalayan foothills. The place Lloyd and Grant inspected in 1829 was an old and deserted **Gurkha** military station 'Dorjeeling' or 'Darjeeling'.

The name Darjeeling is thought to be a derivation of '**Dorjeeling**' meaning the place of the Dorjee, the majestic thunderbolt of the Lamaist religion. In fact, the famous Buddhist Monastery standing at the top of the Observatory hill was known by this name. The district was the part of the dominions of the Raja of Sikkim upto the beginning of the 18th century.

In 1817, the East India Company struggled with Himalayan States on behalf of Raja of Sikkim, The Raja of Sikkim restored the country between Mechi and the Tista rivers. This was the result of the **Treaty of Titaliya** of 1817. Ten years after the treaty, disputes on the Sikkim-Nepal frontiers arose and the then Governor General sent two Officers viz. Captain Lloyd and Mr. Grant. They recommended the present place of Darjeeling as a site for a sanatorium. The Governor General then deputed Captain Herbert, the Deputy Surveyor General to examine the country. The court of Directors approved the project. General Lloyd was directed to start negotiations with Raja of Sikkim and he succeeded in obtaining the execution of a deed grant by the Raja of Sikkim on 1st February, 1835.

This deed of grant, which is commendably short, runs as follows:-

" The Governor-General having expressed his desire for the possession of the hills of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government, suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I the Sikkimputtee Rajah out of friendship for the said Governor-General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India, that is, all the land south of the Great Runjeet river, east of the Balasur, Kahail and Little Runjeet rivers, and west of the Rungpo and Mahanadi rivers." This was an unconditional cession of what was then a worthless uninhabited mountain; but in 1841 the government granted the Raja an allowance of Rs. 3,000 as compensation, and raised the grant to Rs. 6,000 in 1846.

(Ref. Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling by L S S O'Malley)"

1839 was the most important year in the history of Darjeeling, the year the road which connected the hill station with the plains 'its life line' was built. Right from the start it had been pointed out by the planners. No road-No Darjeeling, and 1839 was the critical year when the decision was finally taken to go ahead with the plans.

The District was in the Rajshahi sub-division till October, 1905 and as a sequence of Bengal partition in 1905, the district was transferred to the Rajshahi division in

March, 1912. The district was formerly a Non-Regulation district, that is, Acts and Regulations did not come into force in the district in line with rest of the country unless they were extended to it. Darjeeling had no representation in the Legislative Council. It was excluded and declared a backward tract. In 1935, the district was made partially excluded area by act.

The freedom movement in the district was much tempered by its moderate political ideology. One outstanding incident connected with the "terrorist movement" was the attempt on the life of Sir John Anderson, the Governor of Bengal, on May 8, 1934 by Bengali terrorists. The district with the rest of India attained independence as part of India in August 1947. According to the Constitution of India, the district no longer enjoys special privileges and all statutes, except the Bengal Tenancy act in certain of its particulars, apply to it.

However, the movement in the late 80's and early 90's has led to the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. This has resulted in more autonomy at the regional level with the participation of local people through their elected representatives by forming local council for management and development of the area.

Wrote **Mark Twain:**

"The one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once- by even a glimpse- would not give that glimpse for the shows of the rest of the world combined."