



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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Potatoes in North Greenbush

I can say with some assurance that the residents of North Greenbush ate lots of potatoes in 1865. How do I know? Its from information found in the 1865 New York State Census. More about the potatoes claim later.

People doing family research often make use of the Federal Census begun in 1790 and occurring every 10 years. You can find names, dates and occupations etc. in these censuses. However I like what I call the "social detail" found in the state censuses and especially the 1865 version.

Since the Civil War had just ended, the census includes name, rank unit, term of enlistment and remarks such as wounded or discharged. The War information also includes deaths, whether they were killed in battle or later died of wounds and where the soldier is buried.

Also included is information regarding marriages and deaths during the year ending June 1, 1865. Bride and groom names, dates, ages, where they lived and religious denomination are given. Data concerning deaths lists name, age, date of death, country of origin and cause. Common causes include cholera, diphtheria, scarlet fever, consumption and dropsy. You have to wonder if modern medicine could have cured many of these diseases.

If you think government collects a lot of data today, look at the 1865 agriculture statistics. There are 135 different categories. Some seem relevant such as the acreage in use, the different kind of farm animals, and crops (lots

of wheat and surprisingly many fruits and vegetables.) I do quibble on why the government needed to know the amount of manure produced on each farm.

There are miscellaneous statistics broken down separately by what is generally Wynantskill and Defreestville. In the former, there were two churches: the Reformed Church and the True Reformed Church (the name is a story for another time). There were two churches in Defreestville: the Reformed Dutch and the Baptist Church.

Defreestville had five inns/taverns, 1 wholesale store and four retail stores while Wynantskill had one retail store and only two inns/taverns. I guess most of the drinking took place in the southern part of town.

Now back to potatoes: In Wynantskill about 10 percent of the crops were affected by drought while in Defreestville "all crops except potatoes were materially affected."

See, there's lots of good stuff in the census.