



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

Jim Greenfield Town Historian 283-6384

Border Wars

The Town of North Greenbush came into existence in 1855 when the old Town of Greenbush was divided. Along with North Greenbush, a town named Clinton (later to be renamed East Greenbush) was created. The remainder of the old town, which includes present day Rensselaer, kept the name of Greenbush.

By all accounts, the division of East and North Greenbush was accomplished peacefully. No militias patrolled the borders to keep out “enemy infiltrators”. The towns have remained good neighbors ever since, except for a short “border war” in the 1990’s, but we’ll come back to that story.

My question has always been, why were the two towns divided? They were both similar small farming communities in the mid 1800’s, so why not create a single town? I’ve heard several theories: The Defreest families had a falling out and decided to push respectively for their own town; or because the roads needed repair and one community (I don’t know which one) didn’t want to pay the extra taxes, they pushed for division. I think it may have been politics: a new party, the American Party was dominant especially in the North Greenbush area and perhaps they wanted to control an entire town. Any other theories? (283-6384)

Regardless, the two towns lived in relative harmony until the Phoenix Insurance Building was constructed in 1997. Both towns claimed it and sent out tax bills. This conflict was followed with a disagreement over the Shoppes at Greenbush Commons location (Home Depot). Again both towns claimed the land.

The problem was that there were no maps from the time the towns were formed and the boundary descriptions were vague. Property delineations would refer to “a stake and stones” or a “pine tree” or “the southwest corner of J. Pruyn Van Allen’s house. However, In this case, old J. Pruyn’s home was no longer there.

Both sides fought the matter in the newspapers and courts over the issues of who would provide utilities, safety protection and who would get the taxes.

In 1999 Senator Bruno brokered a settlement which was codified into law and the border wars were over. Now we won’t have to worry about checkpoints or troop concentrations – only the traffic jams on Route 4.