



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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John W. Defreest-Civil War Vet.

While researching Defreest families (are there were many of them in North Greenbush history), I came across a photograph of John W. Defreest-a soldier in the Civil War.

John is shown in a Civil War uniform-complete with cape and sword. The photo was probably taken at a studio in Troy at the time he enlisted. He was 18 years old at the time of enlistment and he would be dead within the year.

Although he was born in Troy, his branch of the Defreest family traces back to Jacob, one of the earliest settlers in what is now North Greenbush.

John's father Ezra was prominent man. He served as Rensselaer County Coroner, High Constable, Overseer of the Poor, and U.S. Marshall.

Military records show that John enlisted at Troy in the 125th Regiment, New York Volunteers in August 1862 with the rank of corporal. Was this due to his father's influence?

Other soldiers in the unit came from Troy and other towns in Rensselaer County. Interestingly, John's brother, Daniel also enlisted at the same time.

Within one month of enlistment, the regiment was engaged in battle at Harper's Ferry and the entire unit surrendered to Confederate forces under Stonewall Jackson. In what may seem quaint by today's standards of war, the unit was paroled (meaning they couldn't fight again until a similar Confederate unit was "traded" from them). They were sent on parole to Camp Douglas in Chicago during the winter of 1862-63, the regiment returned to battle at Chancellorsville and later at Gettysburg. It was there, during Pickett's Charge, that John was killed by an artillery shell on July 3, 1863.

Records indicate he is buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Troy. The mystery is why he isn't buried at Gettysburg. Perhaps the answer is that his brother Daniel was also at Gettysburg and he survived. It's possible that Daniel contacted his father in Troy who used his influence to have John's body transported to Troy.

I'm left pondering the photo of John I uncovered. Here is in an army uniform, with what may be an uncertain smile toward the camera. He was a young man, like many others in the Civil War who potentially had his whole life before him, but never lived to attain his hopes and dreams.