



# NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

Jim Greenfield Town Historian 283-6384

## JOHN E. VAN ALLEN'S SLAVES

We may think of slavery as being a "particular institution" existing only in southern states prior to the Civil War. However, Greenbush had slavery until 1827 as exemplified by the household of John E. Van Alen, our first congressman.

I am indebted to the work of architectural historian Walter Wheeler for sharing his research on slaves and free blacks in the Van Alen household.

The 1800 census lists seven slaves living on the property: John Van Alen's will lists them by first name only: Tom, Jim, Pomp, Gus, Jack, Dine and Mol.

Family correspondence affords us a glimpse into the lives of these slaves. Van Alen's nephew wrote: "I cannot help remarking how well our domestics have behaved themselves in keeping Christmas and New Year's. Gus has yet his usual faults in being out at night, exceptive of this never could a family the number of them that we have live more in peace and harmony."

Van Alen's will instructed that Mol and Gus were to be freed at the death of his wife (which occurred in 1819). The 1830 census lists two freed persons of color in the household. At least one of the Van Alen former slaves adopted their last name after being freed: "Pomp Van Allen" died in 1833 and was buried in Troy. By 1840 there were no more

African Americans living in the Van Alen House.

The Van Alen house still stands on Washington Avenue Extension in Defreestville. Evidence in the house suggests that the southeast room on the second floor was used by slaves as a sleeping area and work space. Many of the rooms in the basement may have also been slave quarters.

Freed slaves may have rented a house across the street (no longer in existence) and another house nearby may have been constructed for freed slaves. There may have been an African-American burial ground on the property, but it has never been located.