



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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On the night of November 6, 1945 there was a fire at the old Defreest Hotel. No mention of this fire appeared in either the Troy or Albany newspapers. Perhaps this was because the fire occurred on election night and voting news was deemed worthier than a local fire. Or perhaps this abandoned edifice was long since forgotten. However in its heyday the building variously known as the Defreest, or Reeds or McQuade Hotel, located at the northeast corner of Washington Avenue and Bloomingrove Drive, was the cornerstone of social activities in this part of town from the late 18th century until the early decades of the 20th.

David M. DeFreest, a Revolutionary War veteran, was the first innkeeper. The hotel served as a tavern and a store for locals. Other proprietors included Jonas Smith, Martinus Lansing, John Mason, Henry Couch, Christian Veeder, John Reed and into the 1900's-Michael McQuade and Tom Coleman. William P. Witbeck ran another hotel/saloon about ¼ mile south of the Defreest Hotel. Charles Ostrander kept a tavern about a mile and a half "up the hill" from Defreestville (probably about where Art Dell's garage is now). This building was nicknamed the "slaughterhouse". We can only guess what occurred there.

Hotels of those days contained a "ballroom" in the upper floor which besides being used for dances served as large meeting rooms for civic gatherings. The first town meeting of North Greenbush was held at "the house of John Mason"-this probably refers to the Defreest Hotel which Mr. Mason was running in 1855.

With today's high speed travel, we should remember that in the 18th century travelers' average speed might be a whopping four miles per hour. Farmers, "coalers" (charcoal distributors) and others traveled long distances from the eastern part of the county to Albany to bring their goods to market. A place such as the Defreest Hotel was a handy overnight stop for these travelers. Of course the fact that the hotel was also a tavern didn't hurt business with these overnighters.

Besides the allure of alcohol, the well water at the hotel was of such exceptional quality that people from as far away as Rensselaer would come to Defreestville to get water. Water was also a perk in later years when the McQuades ran the hotel. Just as full service gas stations wash car windshields, Mr. McQuade lathered the horses' ears when buggies stopped at the hotel.

What led to the demise of rural hotels? The advent of automobiles meant farmers and tradesmen didn't have to make overnight stops. Also Prohibition in the 1920's killed off the liquor trade. The proud old building was reduced to being a candy store before the fire in 1945.

However all is not lost. The ice house and storage shed from behind the hotel still exist; the ballroom was moved down the road and is now a private residence. The Defreest Hotel lives on!