



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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Bath-Our Former Village

Recently I had a disagreement with a man about an area in the City of Rensselaer that used to be named Bath. He claimed it had always been a part of the City. I countered that it had once been a village in North Greenbush. At the time, I couldn't convince him otherwise but perhaps if he reads this, it will change his mind.

First, we need to learn some geography. The City of Rensselaer used to be three different communities: East Albany was the area just across the Dunn Memorial Bridge from Albany; Greenbush was a village which encompassed what is now central Rensselaer and finally Bath was the area north of MacNaughton Ave. going north and east to about the I-90 interchange.

Bath was an early settlement in North Greenbush. Located on the Hudson River, there was a ferry landing where traffic and trade entered the town and led to travel up what is now Washington Avenue.

Even before 1800, travelers remarked about the medicinal springs and baths (hence the name) which would allow the village to rival Saratoga. Well we didn't get a spa like Saratoga Springs (heck, we didn't even get a race track!). Bath did develop into a modest village with some businesses, stores and hotel/taverns. By the 1880's North Greenbush town offices were located there.

In the 1890's statewide events forever changed life and the character of Bath. Cities such as New York and Troy were growing and looking to expand their borders. In 1897 Brooklyn merged into a "Greater New York". Likewise, there was a successful movement to enlarge Troy by adding parts of Brunswick and the northern part of North Greenbush.

There were also calls for Rensselaer to expand. Actually, the City had just been formed in 1897 when the village of Greenbush and the community of East Albany had merged into the new City. Pressure began to grow to add parts of East Greenbush and the village of Bath to Rensselaer.

After several false starts, in 1901, the State Legislature took up and finally passed a "Greater Rensselaer" bill allowing for the annexation. Proponents hailed this as good news for the inhabitants. They touted an increased tax base and a consolidation of offices. A citizen claimed that if Bath didn't annex itself to Rensselaer it would "dry up and blow away. We have more Rip Van Winkles to the square inch than any other village in the State."

The arguments against annexation were no less vehement. Taxes would increase, land values would go down and the State legislature hadn't allowed the citizens to conduct a referendum to see if they really wanted annexation.

Actually it had all come about due to politics. The Republican legislature had wanted to dilute the Democrats power in Rensselaer by adding Republican votes from the "countryside". Did it work? Well, Rensselaer and North Greenbush have seen both parties in and out of power. One thing is sure: Bath lost its status as an independent community and North Greenbush lost its only incorporated village.