



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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Early Education in Defreestville

Schools have existed in our town since the first settlers lived here.

Originally, they were located in private houses or even in barns. The Dutch Language was taught exclusively in the first schools. Why? Because early settlers were Dutch and the first teachers were Pastors of the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Town who combined the duties of teaching and preaching for which they were paid small salaries.

From the research of former Town Historian Sam Swanson, we have a narrative of how the Defreestville School operated. Named "The Blooming Grove Schoolhouse", it was built around 1809 on a plot of land originally owned by church member John E. Van Alen who deeded the land for the purpose of "erecting and establishing a school in the neighborhood".

The one-room schoolhouse served the 12-15 boys and girls who attended school. A single outhouse was outside the school building. A wood stove standing in the back corner of the room provided winter heat. When school opened in the winter mornings, one student was assigned the job of stoking the stove.

Another rang the bell signaling the beginning of class. Students took off their boots and hung them in the vestibule as they entered. A large ceramic jug on the table in the corner provided drinking water. The students brought their own food from home.

The teacher's desk was located at the front of the room with a blackboard behind. Discipline was enforced with the crack of a yardstick across the knuckles or the teacher's pointer across the thighs. A brief recess in the morning and again in the afternoon granted play time within eyesight of the teacher.

Remarkably, the Defreestville school situation remained the same into the 20th century. The Bloominggrove School remained a one room classroom for 27 students. In the 1930's, federal monies

became available to fund new school buildings throughout the State. In 1938, it was proposed to build a three room school on Reynolds Road and be named Belltop. Shortly afterwards, a civic group in Defreestville held a vote which opposed the chosen site and argued for the new school to be located in Defreestville.

The State prodded the voters in the District to make a final location decision or lose the funds to build any school. The school board chose the Belltop site and by 1940, there was a new school. This led to the closing of the Bloominggrove School in 1944, after 135 years.

The old building still had a life. For a time it became a travel agency and later it was run by a CPA. Most recently it was purchased to become a Cannabis Dispensary. However, during the remodeling of the building it was determined unsafe for occupancy and was torn down. A new building was erected whose contours closely resemble the old original school. When opened, there will a historical marker telling the history of early education in Defreestville.