



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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ABRAM WITBECK-OUR FIRST SUPERVISOR

While researching our town's early history, I came across the name of Abram Witbeck, our first supervisor. Since he was only listed as being supervisor for one year (1855), I thought he might have been merely a little known local resident temporarily filling a newly created position. However, as I did more research regarding Mr. Witbeck, I realized that our first leader was a prominent man in both town and county affairs.

Thanks to Barbara Jeffries' fine genealogical work, I discovered the first Witbeck of this line in America was Jan Thomessen who was born in Witbeeck, Holstein and when the English decided the Dutch must take surnames, Jan Thomessen became Van Witbeck, from his place of birth. Later the name was shortened to Witbeck. Our subject's grandfather, Abraham Witbeck was a prosperous farmer who lived in Greenbush from 1747 to 1832. His son John A. Witbeck died in 1828 and our subject Abram Witbeck who was born in 1809 became his sole heir.

Abram's address in early records is Greenbush, since it wasn't until 1855 that North Greenbush became a separate town. He is listed as town Justice of the Peace for 1843; from 1845-1849 he was Greenbush town supervisor. During this time (in 1846), Witbeck was one of the three Rensselaer County delegates to the State Constitutional Convention. One of the important issues this Convention debated was "tenants land rights" -or whether the Van Rensselaer Patroons or his tenants really owned their farms -many of which were in Rensselaer County.

From 1849-1852 Witbeck served as Rensselaer County Sheriff. He must have been glad that most of the violence and strife from the Anti-Rent "wars" were over by then. I'll write a future article in more detail about this subject. During this period, Witbeck held the position of Engineer with the rank of Major in the twenty fourth regiment of the State Militia.

In 1854 Witbeck was once again named Greenbush supervisor and of course in 1855 he became our first supervisor. Although he was only North Greenbush Supervisor for one year, Witbeck continued in public service with the town. He was chosen as Justice of the Peace in 1855, 1858 and 1862, the year of his death. In those days, Town Justices seemed to have assumed many of the duties our present Councilmen perform today.

The Troy Daily Record of December 30, 1862 provides us with an interesting report of his funeral: "The funeral of ex-sheriff Witbeck, who held the position of Engineer with the rank of Major upon the staff of Brig-Gen Allen, took place yesterday at North Greenbush. Besides numerous friends from this city (Troy) and area, appeared all the inhabitants of his native town where he had always lived and where he died. It was attended by Brig-Gen Allen and staff and the companies of Captains Rapp, Colden and Cusick. The military escort was under the command of Major Steenberg and he elicited the praise of every person present for the skillful manner in which he discharged his duties.

Preceded by Dorings Band, the funeral cortege passed from the house of the deceased(Washington Ave. Extension) to the neighboring village church(Bloomingrove Reformed Church) where an impressive and appropriate discourse was delivered by the pastor. Thence a line of march was taken to the cemetery about one mile distant, where three rounds were fired by a squad selected from the three company's names. Appropriate remarks were made at the grave by Hon. Martin Miller, who formerly was Brig-Gen of the militia of the brigade now commanded by Gen. Allen.

Afterwards the people of the town provided a bountiful collation for the military and then conveyed them to the Bath station, upon the Hudson river railroad. Here the escort had to remain for a tedious two hours and arrived home at about six o'clock. The hearse used for the funeral was handsomely draped with the American flag, and was drawn by four black horses with plumes. The staff of Gen. Allen and some of the officers of the twenty-fourth regiment acted as bearers."

So our first supervisor went off in style. His grave (with a Masonic marker) is a bit weather-beaten but still standing in Bloomingrove Cemetery.

Thanks for the many responses to my first column. Does anyone remember the DeFrest Hotel which burned in the 1940's? I would like to write a future article about hotels in the town . Other suggestions for articles are welcome. Please contact Jim Greenfield at 283-6384 or nghistory@aol.com.