



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

Jim Greenfield Town Historian 283-6384

A Memorable Election

As Election Day for 2007 approaches, it might be interesting to relate the events of the 1977 town election—one of the most unusual and significant elections we've ever had.

To put things in perspective, North Greenbush had been a decidedly Republican town. With the exception of Jim Herbert's two years as Town Supervisor from 1965-66, the Republicans always won and controlled the Town Board too. You have to go back to 1937 when Charles Smith was elected to find the last Democratic Supervisor. No, C.B. Smith is not related to him (I asked).

However, by 1977 things were changing. The party enrollment edge of the Republicans was diminishing. Democrat Art Dell had been elected Town Councilman in 1975 and Bill Dedrick would head the ticket for the Dems in 1977.

Still, the Republicans were the favorites. Bob Baker was the incumbent Supervisor, winning with 55% of the votes in 1975. Two incumbent Councilmen, Jack Kelley and Gerald Willson were up for reelection as was Jay Gorham, who had been Town Clerk for six years. However things soon began to go wrong for the GOP. In August, Councilman Kelley announced that he had decided not to run for reelection. At the Republican caucus, he was quickly replaced by Patrick Higgins. A much bigger shock occurred in early September when Supervisor Baker, who had been unanimously endorsed by the caucus a month before, suddenly announced that he was pulling out of the election for business and personal reasons.

The Rensselaer County Board of Elections deadlocked as to whether Baker had missed the deadline for withdrawing and the matter landed in court. The Republicans won the first two rounds in State Supreme Court and the Appellate Division. With these courts' blessings, the GOP planned to slot Town Clerk Gorham into the position for Supervisor.

There was yet one more surprise for the Republicans. On October 17, the State Court of Appeals overturned the findings of the lower two courts and ruled that Baker's name had to remain on the ballot.

Baker once again announced that he wouldn't run, so this left the Republicans scrambling in the last three weeks before the election. Their campaign literature urged the public to vote for Baker, and when (if) he won he would step down and the Town Board would choose Gorham as the new Supervisor.

When Election Day came, it was clear that the voters didn't buy the GOP's argument. The Democrats swept to victory. Bill Dedrick won with 63% of the vote. Gorham lost his Town Clerk position to Doug Windover and Jim Flanigan began his long political career in North Greenbush.

What were the causes for this startling reversal of political fortunes? The Republicans would say that the Baker withdrawal led to their defeat while the Democrats would say they had the better issues, better candidates and ran the better campaign. Whatever the reasons, the Democrats would control town government for the next 24 years.