



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

Jim Greenfield Town Historian 283-6384

Old and New at RPI Tech Park

I read that until recently, the RPI Tech Park had the most powerful university-based supercomputer in the world. Also, G.E. is building a health care facility for state of the art digital x-ray processing at the Tech Park. Lots of new things are happening at this North Greenbush location.

However, there is an "old thing" at the Tech Park which deserves mention- the old Defreest Homestead which currently houses the Tech Park administration.

The house, called the Philip Defreest Homestead on the National Register of Historic Houses, was built possibly as early as the 1720's. Philip Defreest was a master cooper who lived in Albany but who bought land on the east side of the Hudson, in present day North Greenbush. Whether Philip actually lived in this house is unknown. Albany businessmen of that time often bought land and leased it to their sons. It's not hard to imagine Philip saying to his son: "I've got good news and bad news". The good news is that I'm giving you some land, the bad news is that it is way over there across the river in Greenbush".

In any event, this land and the house stayed in the Defreest family until the late 1800's. The Jordan family lived there after that and we have pictures and narratives concerning fixing up the old place. In 1969 RPI purchased the land and the house for what would become the Tech Park.

The question soon became what to do with the old building. At first the sentiment at RPI was that since there wasn't money to fix it up, perhaps someone or some group would move it to a new location. The last option of course was to tear it down. The Greenbush Historical Society looked into taking it, but didn't have the funds to move and restore it.

Fortunately this story has a happy ending. An RPI trustee and his wife took special interest in the homestead and the money became available to restore the house. Today it is the administration center for the entire Tech Park-a great example of adaptive reuse of an old building.

So we have the "old" becoming the "new" and being joined by the other new things at the Tech Park. I wonder what the Defreests would have thought about this. Comments? 283-6384.