



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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Road Repair in the Old Days

All the news about the stimulus money upgrading our transportation system got me thinking about road upkeep in the old days.

Before we had highway departments, local residents were responsible for repairing the town roads. I have been studying the early town records and find that three men were elected each year to be Highway Commissioners.

The town was then divided into districts, roughly along geographic lines and individuals were appointed to oversee each district. Inhabitants of these districts had to put in a certain number of days repairing the roads based on their property's road frontage.

All adult males between the ages of 21 and 70, excluding clergy, veterans, paupers and the mentally infirm had to perform this service. Richer people probably hired out the work. I can't imagine the Van Rensselaer men were out there with a pick and shovel. North Greenbush had at one time 57 road districts.

Road repair was seasonal with brush removed in late June and August and loose stones were removed regularly except for the winter months.

Often maintenance work could actually worsen the roads. Workers would heap soft earth onto the center of the roadway but rain quickly turned fresh, loose packed dirt into large pools of mud. In some areas, road repair was a low priority for citizens living in the country. If a farmer had to choose, tending his crops would take precedence over filling in holes in the road.

Besides overseeing road repair, road commissioners approved the establishment of new roads. One of the town's richer citizens, John Fonda wanted a road from his property to the "main road" (current day Bloomingrove Drive). Evidentially he talked his neighbors into supporting his application and voila! that's how Snyders Lake Road came to be.

By the end of the 1800's macadam came along and roads started to be paved. State, county and finally town highway departments were established. The closest we come nowadays to road work is dragging tree limbs and brush to the road and let the highway department take it away.