



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

Jim Greenfield Town Historian 283-6384

Wynantskill Businesses in 1876

In the past I've written a story about businesses in Wynantskill in 1960. I thought it might be interesting to write about businesses a century earlier. Hint: this will be a short article.

The source of information is from a 1876 Rensselaer County Atlas by F.W. Beers. The map of Wynantskill places the names of businesses and home owners along Main Avenue, West Sand Lake Road and Church Street.

The area at the west end of Main Avenue referred to as "The Flats" was vacant land. No Hannaford, no McDonald's no businesses or houses at that time.

The center of town is where businesses were located. There were two hotels: Witbeck's and Casey's. Although listed as hotels, they were primarily taverns at this time. Did the good folks in Wynantskill drink a lot? Well perhaps. Winters were harsh and long in those days and a local tavern made the seasons a little more bearable. These were places where business could be transacted and politics discussed. Men could gamble and gossip over hearty food and a tankard of ale.

We can place Casey's where the brick EMS building on the corner of Church and Main is today. The other tavern/hotel was run by Henry Frazee in the early 1800's. This ultimately became Frank Houser's store (now where the Jack & Jill day care building is). In tavern lore you have Frazee who begot Witbeck who begot Gillette who begot Houser.

There were three blacksmith shops in town. One was across from the Evergreen Cemetery; another was at just south of the four corners near the Wynantskill Creek and the other blacksmith across the street from Witbeck's hotel. Lots of horses in those days!

In 1876 there was one general store in town. This was Sanford Ketchem's and was located about where G & J car dealer is today at the four corners. A wagon shop operated across from Witbeck's and there was a building identified as a "hotel shed" where "Cabbage & Kings" shop is today. There is some indication that at the turn of the 20th century this building was — you guessed it—a blacksmith shop. That's all there was.

In the 1870's there were many blacksmith shops. When I wrote the article on businesses in 1960 there were lots of gas stations. Progress?