



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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Greenbush in the War of 1812

2012 marks the 200th anniversary of the start of the War of 1812. Although no battles occurred in the old town of Greenbush (Rensselaer, East and North Greenbush) the area does have a claim to fame in the history books. The U.S. Army constructed a large military post called the Greenbush Cantonment here. This several hundred acre cantonment was located near the present day Red Mill School in East Greenbush. During the War, over 5,000 troops trained here. The Greenbush location was strategically well placed. It was near the action occurring both in the Niagara frontier and Lake Champlain.

The commanding general, Henry Dearborn was a veteran of the Revolutionary war, and one suspects, well past his prime. Rather than a "fighting general" he was an "administrative general" far from the battlefield: think General Halftrack from the Beetle Bailey comic strip.

When General Dearborn took command, the cost overruns began. He bought the land on behalf of the government for \$9,000 and construction of the Cantonment began. It wasn't until a year later that Dearborn discovered the government didn't have clear title to the land, so he had to pay an additional \$1,250 to perfect the title. Additionally, the government purchased a large field of standing rye nearby ready for harvest. However a cavalry unit arrived and the horses promptly devoured the entire crop.

The Cantonment consisted of eight barracks for enlisted men, three units for officers, the general's house, surgeon and physician's quarters, a hospital, horse stables, armory, arsenal storehouse, guard house, kitchens and many latrines. I haven't discovered if local units were stationed at the Cantonment. Major John Defreest, who lived in what is now North Greenbush, was an officer in Col. Carr's New York Militia. Carr was one of several Rensselaer County soldiers who served in the War.

Depending on which story you believe, Col. Carr's soldiers arrived just in time to turn the tide of the Battle of Plattsburg, or were too late to tip the balance for an American victory.

After the war ended in 1815, the government continued to station a few soldiers at the Cantonment and finally sold the property to Hathhorn McCulloch for \$8,007 in 1831.

Today the only building left the site is one of the officers' former quarters and is a private residence.