



# NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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## North Greenbush in the Civil War

The headline may seem misleading. There was no “War in Wynantskill”, or Skirmish at Snyders Lake”, or “Defeat at Defreestville”. However North Greenbush did play a part in the War by supplying a large group of soldiers.

The War began in 1861 and for the first two years, volunteers filled the ranks. By 1863 the need for manpower was so great that the first draft by the federal government was initiated.

All men between the ages of 18 and 45 were eligible but there were many exemptions: telegraph operators, railroad engineers, judges, and men with mental disabilities (this may have included some of the above). Physical disabilities included imperfect vision, lack of front teeth and loss of more than one finger of the right hand or more than two fingers of the left hand.

The actual draft was the responsibility of the states who passed the quotas to the towns. If a draftee volunteered before the final muster, he was eligible to collect a bounty of \$100 from the federal government plus additional bounties from the state and local communities. Rensselaer County Board of Supervisors’ Journals report paying bounties of up to \$500, which was about the average yearly wage in those days.

The bounty system also made possible the enrichment of a large number of unscrupulous persons called “bounty jumpers.” These men would enlist to collect their bounty, then desert and enlist somewhere else and collect another bounty. Of course this wouldn’t have happened in North Greenbush.

One of the most interesting rules of the draft is that a man could gain an exemption by paying a fee of up to \$800 by hiring a substitute. This made it a “rich man’s war, but poor man’s fight.” Future President Grover Cleveland hired a substitute and although it was legal, it hurt him politically. North Greenbush records show members of the Hidley, Craver, Lape, Snyder, Defreest, Koon and Vandenburg families hiring replacements. Many of these substitutes were first generation immigrants who presumably needed the money.

A final irony: according to North Greenbush records, there were 10 men who were credited with naval service. Perhaps they were preparing for a “Skirmish at Snyders Lake” if it ever would occur.

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