



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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In springtime, potholes appear in our roads due to winter ice melting and refreezing (this winter being an exception). People complain about potholes and impatiently await highway crews to come along and patch the holes. Before we carp too loudly about the condition of our roads, we should be thankful that we weren't living 150 years ago in North Greenbush. Back then highway upkeep was the responsibility of property owners whose land abutted the roads.

When North Greenbush was formed in 1855, one of the first actions of the new town government was to appoint prominent citizens Rinier Defreest, Mathew V.A. Fonda and Francis E. Ritchie Commissioners of Highways.

These men in turn divided the expanse of roads into twenty one districts and assigned property owners along these routes a certain number of days each year that they had to work on highway upkeep-based on the amount of their land that fronted the roads. Citizens had to work an average of three days, although there was a wide range of days assigned. However, you could hire someone else to perform your duties. I can't imagine the Patroon William P. Van Rensselaer was out there with a pick and shovel for his 41 days.

Most citizens gladly performed their duties. Nevertheless, there were problems. When farmers' crops had to be harvested, road work ceased. Also since people performed their upkeep at different times of the year, a highway's condition would be uneven at best. This led to the placement of tollgates on the roads.

From what I can determine, there were three toll gates in North Greenbush around 1855. One was located near the site of the present day Knights of Columbus on Washington Ave. in Rensselaer (originally part of North Greenbush); a second was on the West Sand Lake Road near Mammoth Spring Road and a third was on the north side of Route 66 just past Sharp Road.

I haven't been able to determine what the tolls were, but in other Rensselaer County towns the tolls were: horse and rider 5¢; herd of twenty cattle 20¢; sheep or hogs 8¢; team of wagons 12¢; and pedestrians-unknown. New York State Law exempted certain tolls from being collected. For example people traveling on family business, those attending church services or funerals, town meetings, blacksmith's shops, those on military duty and those who lived within one mile of a toll gate. To avoid tolls, some people used a path called a "shunpike" to go around the toll gates. I'm sure none on the good people of North Greenbush did that.

This system of road repair came to an end by the start of the twentieth century when machinery to lay macadam became available.

So a tip of the hat to our highway crews, 150 years ago, we would have had to do their work. Please contact me for comments and story ideas: 283-6384 or email nghistory@aol.com