



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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Growing Pains at the Wynantskill Reformed Church

There is a small overgrown family cemetery just outside of Wynantskill. One of the stones is for a man named George Sharpe and the inscription reads “a member of the True Dutch Reformed Church.”

I thought there was only one Reformed Church in Wynantskill. Turns out there were two, maybe three in the immediate area. Recently I received a copy of a letter, written in 1841, by a pastor of what today we call the Wynantskill Reformed Church, which helps clarify this mystery.

First a little church history: The Dutch Reformed Church was formed in the 1790's with members who had belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church in Albany. As the population of Wynantskill grew a congregation was formed and they built a church.

For the first few decades, the church prospered. However in the early 1820's a succession movement formed which badly split the membership. The reasons for this split are lost in time, but probably related to conservative and more liberal interpretation of church doctrine. Both churches filed incorporation papers at the same time, but the Wynantskill Reformed Church beat the secessionists by a single day, which probably saved the church. They got to keep the church property and the secessionists had to meet in a barn or home designated as their church. Nevertheless, the secessionists called themselves the True Dutch Reformed Church. This was located near where Whiteview, Williams and Winter Street Extension meet. Later, the secessionists built their own building on Church Street (where the Fire Station is located), across the street from the Wynantskill Reformed Church.

By 1841, things weren't going well for the original Wynantskill Church. Their church building needed costly repairs and they ran up a large debt. More importantly, the True Dutch Reformed Church, an unnamed church called “the Deforest party” and a New School Presbyterian Church drastically cut into the membership. When the new Pastor Cornelius Gates arrived in May, the membership was down to thirty seven members.

With the approval of the Consistory, Gates wrote a letter to three affluent churches in New York City requesting funds to retire the debt. Would the Wynantskill Reformed Church be successful in their request for assistance? As they say, “stay tuned” for the answer in my next column.