

Historian Seeks To Honor Dyker's Founding Fathers



This sketch was based on an 1893 photo of Walter L. Johnson.

By PAULA KATINAS

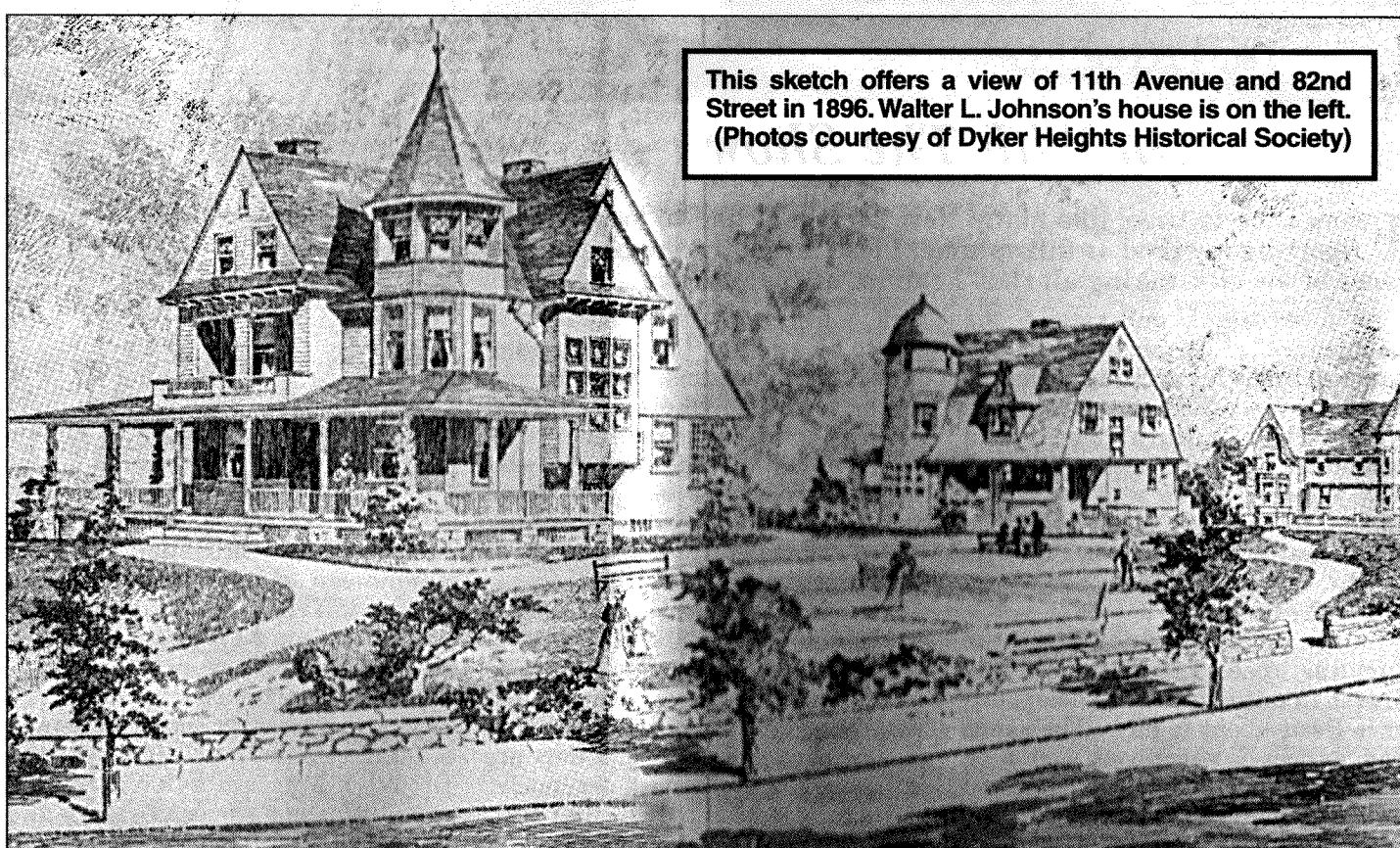
The Dyker Heights community wasn't founded by a guy named Dyker.

His name was Walter L. Johnson and from 1888 to 1910 he lived in a house on what is now the corner of 11th Avenue and 82nd Street.

Johnson developed Dyker Heights in 1895. He built houses, installed gas lines, planted sugar maple trees and was the new community's main proponent.

Christian Zaino, a medical student who founded the Dyker Heights Historical Society, is calling for the corner where Johnson lived to be named after him.

Zaino is also calling for another slice of the community to be re-



named in honor of a historical figure.

The circular driveway that serves as the entrance to the Dyker Beach Golf Course should be named after Gen. Rene E. De Russey, said Zaino, who spoke at the Dyker Heights Civic Association meeting on April 14.

De Russey helped build the Fort Hamilton Army Base. The fort opened in 1825. De Russey's work on the fort began in 1817.

"He also helped inspect the mason's work at the New Utrecht Reformed Church," Zaino said.

In 1827, De Russey purchased from the Cropsey family the property in what is now a piece of land extending from 11th to 12th Avenue from 80th to 81st Street and built a house.

The house came to be known as "The Look Out" because it afforded the general a clear view for miles around.

"He could see from Sandy Hook to the Palisades," Zaino said.

In 1831, De Russey paid \$318.75 for another parcel of land located on what is now the area between 11th and 12th Avenues from 82nd Street to 83rd Street.

The general died in 1865. In 1888, his widow sold the property to Johnson's father, Zaino said.

Walter L. Johnson was the man who founded Dyker Heights as a community.

He called it Dyker Heights after the Dyker Meadow and Beach, which the community overlooked.

But it's not clear where the name Dyker Meadow and Beach came from, Zaino said.

The Dyker in Dyker Meadow might have been a reference to the Van Dyke family, whose members built dikes, according to Zaino.

Johnson developed Dyker Heights as a community for the upper classes, according to Zaino, who said the neighborhood was located next door to Bensonhurst, another area where the wealthy lived and played.

"Bensonhurst used to be called 'Bensonhurst by the Sea.' People thought it was beautifully developed," Zaino said.



Young Brig. Gen. Rene Edward De Russey went on to help build the Fort Hamilton Army Base.

Fran Vella-Marrone, president of the civic association, said Dyker Heights was originally "like a gated community."

The original boundaries of the community were 10th Avenue to 13th Avenue and from 79th Street to 86th Street, Zaino said.

Johnson also donated the land on which St. Philip's Episcopal Church now stands at 1072 80th St. The civic association holds its meetings in the church hall.

Vella-Marrone said the civic association fully supports Zaino's effort to get the two renamings.



The corner of 11th Avenue and 82nd Street as it appeared in 1940.