

## Section I:

### General Information

1. Proponent's Name: CHRISTIAN ZAINO
  1. Founder and President, Dyker Heights Historical Society
  2. Historian, Dyker Heights Civic Association
2. Proponent's Address:
  1. Permanent: 1126-84<sup>th</sup> Street Brooklyn, NY 11228
3. Proponent's Contact Information:
  1. Email address: historian@dykerheightscivicassociation.com
4. Proposed Public Area to be named: Curved driveway in front of the Dyker Beach Golf Course connecting 86<sup>th</sup> Street to the north and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the west.
5. Proposed name for the Public Area (see Figure 1):
  1. De Russy Drive
  2. General De Russy Drive
  3. Gen. Rene De Russy Drive
  4. Gen. Rene E. De Russy Drive
  5. General Rene E. De Russy Drive
  6. I am open to any variation on the above names.
6. Does the Public Area currently have a name: No
7. If yes: N/A
8. If you propose that the Public Area be named after an individual or organization, please indicate which: Individual

## Section II:

### Requests for Namings after an Individual

1. Full name of the proposed 'Individual Honoree': Rene Edward De Russy (some spellings also show René and "DeRussy") (see Figures 2 and 3).
2. Date of death of the proposed 'Individual Honoree': 11/23/1865<sup>1</sup>
3. Place of death of the proposed 'Individual Honoree': San Francisco, California
4. Cause of death of the proposed 'Individual Honoree': Unknown
5. Date of birth of the proposed 'Individual Honoree': 02/22/1789
6. Place of birth of the proposed 'Individual Honoree': Haiti
7. Relationship of proponent to proposed 'Individual Honoree': None
8. Has any other public area been named after the proposed 'Individual Honoree': YES
9. If yes: There are four Forts and one battery in the United States named after a "De Russy." They may be named after Rene, his son Gustavus, or his brother Lewis. This information came from the Friends of Fort De Russy website.<sup>2</sup>
  - a. Fort De Russy, Columbus, Kentucky (Lewis)<sup>3</sup>
  - b. Fort De Russy, Washington, D. C. (Rene)<sup>4</sup>
  - c. Fort De Russy, Grand Ecore, Louisiana (Lewis)<sup>5</sup>
  - d. Fort De Russy, Waikiki Beach, Hawaii (Rene)<sup>6</sup>
  - e. Battery De Russy, Fort Monroe, Virginia (Rene → Gustavus)<sup>7</sup>
  - f. I have not found any public space named for De Russy in this area.
  - g. From about 1870 until 1930, a street named after De Russy existed. The street ran in a north-south direction perpendicular to and south of 86<sup>th</sup> Street, at approximately 130 feet west of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This current

location is now occupied by the Dyker Beach Golf Course. The street ran between 86<sup>th</sup> Street and Atlantic Avenue (now de-mapped) which was approximately 100 feet north of 92<sup>nd</sup> street (**see Figures 4 – 7**).

10. Has the proposed 'Individual Honoree' ever been convicted of a crime: No
11. If yes: N/A
12. Has the proposed 'Individual Honoree' ever been accused of actions involving moral turpitude, unethical behavior or similar actions that could reasonable been seen by members of the community as tending to bring disrepute on the community if a public area is named after the Honoree?: No
13. If yes: N/A
14. Indicate if you claim the proposed 'Individual Honoree' meets any of the following criteria:
  - a. Member of a uniformed force killed in the line of duty: No
  - b. Died while engaged in a heroic act: No
  - c. Died under circumstances of crime, accident, social circumstance or the like that lead to greater awareness within society of the cause of death and a concerted effort to address that problem: No
15. If yes: N/A
16. If the proposed 'Individual Honoree' was a member of a uniformed force who died in the line of duty, please provide following: N/A
17. Did the proposed 'Individual Honoree' live in the community at the time of death:  
No
18. If yes: N/A
19. Did the proposed 'Individual Honoree' maintain significant connections with the community as explained in the guidelines: Yes.
20. If Yes, please provide the address or addresses where the proposed 'Individual Honoree' grew up: N/A
21. Did the proposed 'Individual Honoree' have close relative who lived here at the time of his or her death?: No
22. If yes: N/A
23. Did the proposed 'Individual Honoree' maintain significant connection with the community as explained in the guidelines: Yes
24. If yes:
  - a. **Fort Hamilton** – De Russy held many military positions in the USA. The most relevant position to this area was Assistant, and later Superintending Engineer of the Defenses of New York Harbor from 1817 to 1821 and again from 1825 to 1833. The *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that De Russy was the “engineer under whose direction Fort Hamilton was built, the corner stone of which was laid on June 11, 1825, and which was first garrisoned by troops on November 1, 1831.”<sup>8</sup>
  - b. **New Utrecht** – According to the Friends of Historic New Utrecht<sup>9 + 10</sup>, De Russy as well as local contractor James Cropsey, inspected the masons' work of the New Utrecht Reformed Protestant Dutch Church. This gothic-Georgian church was built in 1828 on Eighteenth Avenue and 84<sup>th</sup> Street from stones of the first church which was built in 1700 on the corner of

Sixteenth Avenue and 84<sup>th</sup> Street. It was demolished in 1828 and replaced with the newer, bigger church two blocks away (**See Figures 8-10**).

- i. The 1828 church still stands and was one of the first designated landmarks in New York City, designated in 1965.
- ii. When the 1828 church was built, 84<sup>th</sup> Street was King's Highway and Eighteenth and Sixteenth Avenues had different names.

**c. Dyker Heights** – According to the Register's Office of Kings County, De Russy purchased a parcel of land from James and Jane Cropsey on July 31, 1827. This land is now part of block 6278, bound by Eleventh and Twelfth avenues between 80<sup>th</sup> and 81<sup>st</sup> streets. De Russy and Cropsey were friendly since they both inspected the stone masons' work at the New Utrecht Church during its construction in 1828. However, De Russy's most significant land acquisition came on July 13, 1831. The General purchased about eight acres of woodland from John and Cathy Van Brunt for what appears to be only \$318.75. The parcel of land traveled diagonally to today's street grid and covered most of 83<sup>rd</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> streets between Eleventh and Twelfth avenues. On this parcel De Russy built his homestead. Since this is the tallest natural point in south west Brooklyn, De Russy had a clear view of the harbor and its defenses, especially Fort Hamilton which was nearing completion. The *Brooklyn Eagle* referred to his home as "The Lookout" because of its location on top of the hill overlooking the harbor and perhaps for the three-story tower on the southwest corner. With General De Russy's intensive travels, the *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that his homestead "remained unoccupied for a number of years, with latterly an occasional tenant..."<sup>11</sup> However, in the Dripps 1877 Atlas of The Townships of New Utrecht, Gravesend, Flatbush, Flatlands, and New Lots, the property was identified as that of "J. J. Werner." Werner rented the parcel and probably cultivated market garden produce for the urban areas. The trees that once grew on this New Utrecht woodland were probably cleared by De Russy to provide the panoramic view of the harbor. On October 9, 1888 Helen A. De Russy, the General's widow, sold the land to Frederick Henry and Jane Elizabeth Johnson. This sale marks the "preface" of Dyker Heights because Fred and Jane were the parents of Walter L. Johnson, the developer of Dyker Heights (**See Figures 13-15**).

25. Did the act leading to the proposed 'Individual Honoree's' death occur in the district: No
26. If yes: N/A
27. Was the proposed 'Individual Honoree' generally acknowledged in the community as having been the primary driving force behind the establishment or construction of the public area proposed to be named?: No
28. If yes: N/A
29. Did the proposed 'Individual Honoree' demonstrate an extraordinary and consistent voluntary commitment and dedication to the community over a prolonged period of time as explained in the guidelines?: No
30. If yes: N/A

31. Was the proposed 'Individual Honoree' an elective or appointed government official who resided in the community at the time he or she held office, whose tenure was distinguished by extraordinary accomplishment bringing great benefit to the district or whose accomplishments would reasonably be viewed as a great source of pride to our community as explained in the guideline: No
32. If yes:
33. Did the proposed 'Individual Honoree' have accomplishment in business, philanthropy, the arts, the sciences, education, military, government, or otherwise of such extraordinary character as would reasonable be viewed be a great source of pride to our district: Yes
34. If yes to question 33, did the proposed 'Individual Honoree' live in the district at the time of death: No
35. If yes to question 33, did the proposed 'Individual Honoree' grow up in the district: No
36. If yes to question 33, please explain in detail and describe the evidence you intend to present to the board.
- a. See 24.a
  - b. See 24.b
  - c. See 24.c
  - d. De Russy is also credited with inventing the barbette depressing gun carriage.
37. Was the proposed 'Individual Honoree' of world, state or local fame and renown whose professional accomplishments in business, the arts, the sciences, education, military, government, or otherwise are of such an extraordinary character that even in an absence of a direct connection to this community, it would be appropriate to honor his or her memory?: No
38. If yes: N/A

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<sup>1</sup> Please see attached two-page document on Rene Edward De Russy, written by Lieutenant Frederick W. Herman, Corps of Engineers. This summarizes De Russy's life and accomplishments. It was given to the Dyker Heights Historical Society by the Collections of the West Point Museum.

<sup>2</sup> "The Other Fort DeRussys." Friends of Fort DeRussy, Inc. 20 December 2008 <<http://www.fortDeRussy.org/otherforts.htm>>

<sup>3</sup> "Vicksburg Campaign Trail." National Park Service. 20 December 2008 <<http://www.nps.gov/archive/vick/camptrail/sites/Kentucky-sites/ColumbusKY.htm>>

<sup>4</sup> "Rock Creek Park – Fort DeRussy." National Park Service. 20 December 2008 <<http://www.nps.gov/rocr/ftcircle/DeRussy.htm>>

<sup>5</sup> "The Official Fort DeRussy Fan Club Site." Friends of Fort DeRussy, Inc. 20 December 2008 <<http://www.fortDeRussy.org/>>

<sup>6</sup> "Fort DeRussy." HawaiianWeb.com. 20 December 2008 <[http://www.hawaiiweb.com/oahu/sites\\_to\\_see/fort\\_DeRussy.htm](http://www.hawaiiweb.com/oahu/sites_to_see/fort_DeRussy.htm)>

<sup>7</sup> "The Other Fort DeRussys." Friends of Fort DeRussy, Inc. 20 December 2008 <<http://www.fortDeRussy.org/otherforts.htm>>

<sup>8</sup> Brooklyn Eagle, "Bay Ridge Development." July 12, 1896, page 25.

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<sup>9</sup> “Home Page.” Friends of Historic New Utrecht 20 December 2008  
<<http://www.historicnewutrecht.org/>>

<sup>10</sup> Elligers, C. David, Treasurer, Friends of Historic New Utrecht. Personal Conversation, March 30, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Brooklyn Eagle, “Bay Ridge Development.” July 12, 1896, page 25.