

It's 'history' in the making

Dyker Heights moves to honor the legacy of developers and designers

BY GREG HANLON

Two prominent figures from Dyker Heights' past will soon be immortalized when neighborhood streets are named in their honor.

Pending the city's approval, the southwest corner of 82nd Street and 11th Avenue will soon be called "Walter L. Johnson Corner." And the Parks Department recently approved a request to rename the driveway at Dyker Beach Golf Course for General Rene De Russy, restoring an original street name at this site before the golf course was even constructed.

The requests were the brainchildren of Christian Zaino, a medical student at NYU and a Dyker Heights native and resident. Zaino wrote his undergraduate thesis on Dyker Heights' history. In 2007, he successfully pushed for the famed "Saitta House" at 1135 84th Street, a 110-year-old masterpiece at 1135 84th Street, to be added to the national registry of his-



Walter L. Johnson.

toric places.

Johnson (1873-1953) is credited for being the initial developer of Dyker Heights. Beginning in 1895, he turned a woodland portion of the recently annexed town of New Utrecht into a sub-

urban luxury housing development.

The southwest corner of 82nd Street and 11th Avenue marks the location of Johnson's home, one of three that he built to launch the development. It was right across

the avenue from that of his parents, which they had bought years before from the wife of De Russy (more on him later).

It is speculated that Johnson based his plans for Dyker Heights on the nascent but successful Bensonhurst-by-the-Sea community, which was built from 1880 to 1890. To ensure a luxurious development, he mandated that each house be erected on a lot no less than 60 feet wide by 100 feet deep, and cost at least \$4,000.

At the time, there were only a handful of unpaved roads that went through the area, like Kings Highway and 86th Street. Johnson continued Brooklyn's street grid to the south and paved the streets. He also installed gas, water, and telephone and electricity lines.

Combined with its bay views that were enhanced by the high ground on which the area stood, Dyker Heights quickly became a desirable locale for members of New

Continued on Page 22

History

Continued from Page 2

York's high society.

De Russy (1789-1865) was a military engineer credited with building many forts in the United States, including Brooklyn's Fort Hamilton.

He built his homestead at 82nd Street and 11th Avenue, the tallest natural point in southwest Brooklyn, because it afforded a clear view of the harbor and its defenses. He died in 1865, and his wife sold the property in 1888 to Frederick Henry Johnson, father of Walter, who probably passed his plans to develop the nearby area onto his son.

From 1870 to 1930, a street named after De Russy existed. The street ran in a north-south direction perpendicular to and south of 86th Street, approximately 130 feet west of 11th Avenue.