



IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated December 22, 2023, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People’s Burial Ground, Oak Point Avenue, (Block 2772, Lot 170) by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on December 12, 2023 (List No. 535/LP No. 2674).

Pursuant to Section 3020.8(b) of the City Charter, the City Planning Commission shall submit to the City Council a report with respect to the relation of any designation by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, whether of a historic district or a landmark, to the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements, and any plans for the development, growth, improvement or renewal of the area involved.

On December 12, 2023, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People’s Burial Ground as a City Landmark. The landmark designation consists of the entirety of Block 2772, Lot 170 within Drake Park & Enslaved People’s Burial Ground and is bounded by Hunts Point Avenue to the east, Oak Point Avenue to the north, Longfellow Avenue to the west, and Drake Park South to the south in Bronx Community District 2.

The landmark site contains archeologically significant features related to settler families of the Hunts Point area and the African and Indigenous peoples that those families enslaved. The site is approximately 2.5 acres and contains passive meandering pathways, mature trees, and the Hunt-Willett-Leggett family cemetery plot located at the center of the site. Due to past landfill of marshlands in the surrounding area, the site’s topography takes the shape of a bowl. The cemetery is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence and contains the remaining headstones of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett families.

The site was initially named after Joseph Rodman Drake (1795-1820), a poet who lived in the area. Drake was a relative of the Hunt family, one of the early European settler families in what is now known as Hunts Point. Before Europeans settled Hunts Point in the 1600s, it was the home of the Munsee-speaking Siwanoy people, who called the area Quinnahung, meaning “long, high place.” The Siwanoy were part of the Wappinger confederacy, which extended northward along the east side of the Hudson River to present day Dutchess County. The Siwanoy primarily lived along the Long Island Sound shoreline between the Harlem River and Norwalk River in Connecticut; they shared Hunts Point with a smaller Wappinger tribe, the Weckquaesgeek, whose main territory was located along the Hudson River in what is now Westchester County.

The site was the private cemetery for the Hunt-Willett-Leggett families and contained the headstones of the family members, including Joseph Rodman Drake. These families were prominent landowners at the time and some members went on to make significant contributions to the Revolutionary War. From the 1600s to the 1800s, people of African and Indigenous origin were enslaved by members of the Hunt, Leggett, and Willett families. Some of these enslaved people were also buried in the vicinity of the family members at the site. Many headstones of the cemetery were lost over time due to vandalism, and there are no visible markers indicating the burial sites of the enslaved peoples.

In 1903, then-Borough President Louis Haffen recommended the creation of a 200 square feet park at the site. In 1909, the City acquired the site through condemnation and dedicated it as Drake Park in 1910. The park was renovated through a project in the 1950s which sought to protect the cemetery’s headstones from further vandalism, which resulted in the fence around the cemetery. The park’s design has remained largely unchanged since the 1960s.

Completed in 2017, students from nearby Public School 48 were awarded a State grant to fund a ground-penetrating radar study in a portion of the park. The study found evidence of additional human remains in an area to the immediate south of the fenced cemetery portion of the park. These are believed to be the remains of peoples enslaved by the Hunt-Willett-Leggett families. In January of 2021, the Department of Parks and Recreation installed new signs announcing the park’s new name: Joseph Rodman Drake Park & Enslaved African Burial Ground.

The site is 108,423 square feet in size and contains no existing structures. The site is mapped as Park and under the jurisdiction of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Pursuant to Section 74-79 of the Zoning Resolution, the unique regulations associated with the transfer of development rights from landmark sites are not applicable to this site, and no additional analysis has been conducted.

The subject landmark does not conflict with the Zoning Resolution. In addition, the Commission is not aware of any conflicts between the subject landmark designation and projected public improvements or any plans for development, growth, improvement, or renewal in the vicinity of the landmark.

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