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The Development of Vinegar Hill

Vinegar Hill, Brooklyn in New York was named Brooklyn's edgiest enclave by the New York Post. Brooklyn is a hub of culture. It is filled to the brim with artists, musicians, and businesses all vying for a spot in the developing borough, and Vinegar Hill is no exception. However, many of the inhabitants of Vinegar Hill don't know the genesis story of the place they call home.

Brooklyn's story has been said to have begun long before Christopher Columbus sailed to the new world. The first inhabitants of Brooklyn were a group of American Indians known as the Lenape or the Nayack and Canarsee. Their land was taken by the Dutch from Manhattan after engaging in poor business transactions. The Dutch took advantage of the American Indians naivety of business and lack of experience, driving them out of their lands. The new owners founded many villages in Brooklyn and staked their claims by naming streets and avenues in their native Dutch. Brooklyn was known as a Dutch community until karma took hold and their lands were overtaken by the British in 1674, but Vinegar Hill earned its name from the Irish. The Battle of Vinegar Hill, during the Irish Rebellion of 1768 gave the unique John Hancock to the area. In Ireland, Vinegar Hill means "hills of the berries".

Vinegar Hill truly started to develop due to the work of the Sands brothers. Joshua and Comfort Sands were the sons of John and Elizabeth Sands. Comfort was born on February 26th, 1748 and Joshua on October 12th, 1757 in Cow Neck, Long Island. The two moved to Manhattan around the same time, Comfort working as a clerk, and Joshua looking into public office. In 1776, Comfort opened his own store and quickly became a very wealthy merchant. He was elected to the New York Provincial Congress and was appointed as the first New York State Auditor General. Joshua held many public office positions

both national and local. His wife Ann was a founding member of St. Ann's Church, now known as the Episcopal Church of Brooklyn, the oldest Episcopal parish in Brooklyn. Comfort, as well as Alexander Hamilton, was one of the founders and directions of the Bank of New York (Presa). The two brothers made names for themselves and through their accomplishments, had the flexibility to invest in the development of Brooklyn.

Dabbling in real estate ventures and even opening a rope-making manufacturing company in Brooklyn were two of the first steps in expanding the Sands empire. They formed a business partnership dealing with foreign trade and land speculation, and purchased 160 acres of land along the Brooklyn waterfront for roughly \$12,000 in 1784. This land would later become Vinegar Hill. The perimeters of the land included the Brooklyn Navy Yard, DUMBO and Vinegar Hill bordering east river in Brooklyn. More specifically the East River, Fulton Street, the Navy Yard, and Concord Street.

Joshua and Comfort Sands continued to develop Brooklyn. After helping to develop land in Brooklyn, the brothers decided to sell, for all good things must come to an end. The Sands brothers sold the majority of their land to the federal government for \$40,000, almost four times the original price of Old Brooklyn. The rest of the land was purchased by Irish refugees who came to the United States after the rebellion in 1798. Because of this, John Jackson, who was also as local land owner, named the site "Vinegar Hill" after the difficult battle fought in the rebellion in Ireland. This was a strategic tactic, implemented to try and attract more Irish immigrants. In 1801, John Jackson sold part of his land to the federal government for construction of the Navy Yard.

In 1812, New York saw the shift to becoming one of the leading trade ports. The easy access of the Brooklyn Navy Yard quickly hiked up production and instantly caused growth in the area both commercially and residentially. Not only was Brooklyn highly prized after the shift from farm to residential/industrial during the Industrial Revolution, it also had a lasting impact on how the borough is

viewed today. Visiting the area in person allowed for a view of the juxtaposition of old and new.

Buildings took influence from Greek Revival, as well as Italian design. Seeing Vinegar today compared to what it was, was very interesting. Looking around made me wonder, what would the Sands Brothers think of this land that they once invested in? How proud would they be of what it has become?