

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) Brooklyn Office, Shelter, and Garage

**233 Butler Street (aka 231-237 Butler Street), Brooklyn
Tax Map Block 405 Lot 51 in part, and a portion of the Butler
Street sidewalk in front of said lot**

Built: 1913; expanded 1922

Architect: Renwick, Aspinwall & Tucker (1913 and 1922)

Style: Neo-Romanesque

Action: Calendared June 25, 2019; Public Hearing September 24, 2019; Proposed for Designation
October 29, 2019



ASPCA Brooklyn Office, Shelter, and Garage, LPC, 2019

Constructed as an animal shelter in 1913 and expanded in 1922 into the ASPCA's Brooklyn office, shelter, and garage, 233 Butler Street is the city's finest surviving building associated with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Founded in New York City in 1866, the ASPCA was the first anti-cruelty organization in the United States. It was crucial in changing Americans' attitudes toward animals and in establishing New York as a national leader in expanding animals' rights and protecting them from neglect and abuse.

Upon its 1913 opening, the ASPCA hailed its new Brooklyn shelter as "the most modern establishment of its kind in existence" and the largest animal shelter in the country, surpassing in size even its own Manhattan shelter. Its construction followed decades of activism by Brooklyn ASPCA members and other anti-cruelty advocates, with support from prominent local philanthropists. The ASPCA opened its first Brooklyn shelter on Malbone Street in 1895; the new Butler Street shelter replaced this outdated facility with a modern, sanitary, fireproof structure in a location more convenient for most Brooklynites.

Both the 1913 shelter and its 1922 expansion were designed by Renwick, Aspinwall & Tucker. With the expansion, the ASPCA realized its long-valued goal of bringing its Brooklyn offices, shelter, and garage under one roof. Renwick, Aspinwall & Tucker had recently completed several high-profile projects; partner J. Lawrence Aspinwall was an ASPCA member. The shelter, housed in the expanded building's western end, was mirrored on its east by a new ambulance portal. A classical limestone entrance crowned by a relief of the Society's seal, depicting a sword-bearing angel protecting a fallen horse, provided access to the new second floor. The *Brooklyn Citizen* called the new facility "the most modern and up-to-date structure of its kind in the country," representing "all of the wonderful humane work being done by" the ASPCA.

During its time as a shelter, thousands of Brooklynites adopted pets from this building. Staff at 233 Butler Street investigated and prosecuted animal abuse cases, rescued cats from high places and horses from ditches, treated and released injured pigeons and squirrels, and inspected pet stores, poultry markets, stockyards, stables, equestrian paths, and Coney Island's animal shows. They also taught schoolchildren about caring for animals, coordinated Boy and Girl Scout programs, organized the 1935 Brooklyn Dog and Horse Parade, and awarded heroism medals to people who saved animals and animals that saved people. The ASPCA remained at 233 Butler Street into the 1970s but vacated the building by 1981, when it was sold to a pair of partners including master organ builder Lawrence Trupiano.

The design of the building is primarily neo-Romanesque, with classical features and patterned brick enlivening its main facade. Historically associated with fortresses, castles, and churches, the Romanesque was a fitting inspiration, expressing the building's protective function, reinforcing the Society's image as guardian of the vulnerable and reflecting the spiritual undertones of its work. Many of its features are consistent with the design of armories and other secure structures of the time.

The landmark site includes the sidewalk in front of the building, which contains an animal drinking trough funded by a major ASPCA benefactor, Edith G. Bowdoin, and installed with the opening of the original shelter building in 1913. Horses were ubiquitous on the streets of New York City into the early 20th century, and the lack of public drinking water caused many to suffer, especially during summer. The ASPCA was a leader in erecting public drinking fountains, and by the early 20th century, hundreds had been erected throughout the city. The trough-like granite fountain in front of 233 Butler Street is a rare survivor of these efforts. It is of a standardized design approved by the city's Art Commission in 1909 following a campaign led by Bowdoin to "erect a large number of simple, inexpensive drinking troughs ... where they are most needed." The only animal drinking fountain remaining in front of a historic ASPCA facility, this trough and the building behind it constitute a unique monument to the work of local advocates in promoting the humane treatment of animals, and to New York's historic role at the center of the national anticruelty movement.

**(Proposed) American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Brooklyn Office, Shelter, and Garage | LP-2637**

