

# Gowanus Canal Flushing Tunnel Pumping Station and Gate House

**201 Douglass Street (aka 196 Butler Street), Brooklyn**  
**Tax Map Block 411 Lot 14 (in part)**

**Built:** 1909-11

**Architect:** Arthur L. L. Martin; Edwin J. Fort, Chief Engineer, Brooklyn Bureau of Sewers

**Style:** Neoclassical

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



**Gowanus Canal Flushing Tunnel Pumping Station and Gate House, 2017, LPC**

Built between 1909 and 1911, the Gowanus Canal Flushing Tunnel Pumping Station and Gate House were constructed to house the vital mechanical equipment used to flush pollutants from the waters of the Gowanus Canal. The Pumping Station and Gate House reflect the monumental classicism favored for civic structures of the time. Executed in brick with limestone trim, the sophisticated design draws from ancient and Renaissance precedents to give these sturdy vernacular buildings an appearance worthy of their important role in the infrastructure of the Gowanus Canal.

First proposed in the 1840s, the Gowanus Canal runs from Gowanus Bay to its terminus just south of Butler Street and was completed after the Civil War. It was originally presumed that the twice-daily ebb and flow of the tides would maintain water quality within the canal, but it was quickly determined that this method was insufficient to handle the effluent from storm water, sanitary sewer run-off, and waste from canal-side businesses. In 1904, after several failed proposals it was announced that the Brooklyn Bureau of Sewers would build a tunnel linking the canal to Buttermilk Channel. As proposed by Edwin J. Fort, who became Chief Engineer of the Bureau of Sewers, a large propeller was to be used to create a flushing action that would draw the polluted water from the canal and replace it with cleaner water from Gowanus Bay.

To house the pumping equipment Arthur L. L. Martin, architect of the Bureau of Sewers, designed two buildings; the Pumping Station housed the pump, motor, and northern sluice gate, while the smaller Gate House contained the southern sluice gate.

The Station opened with much fanfare on June 21, 1911 and continued to provide the vital function of pumping foul water from the canal into Buttermilk Channel until the 1960s when the mechanism failed. The Station remained dormant for 30-years until the City's Department of Environmental Protection reactivated the flushing tunnel in 1999 at which time the flow was reversed in order to bring oxygenated water to the head of the canal. The flushing tunnel underwent a second upgrade between 2009 and 2014 at which time the tunnel was inspected and repaired and the single motor and propeller replaced with three vertical turbine pumps. Today, the well-preserved facility remains in active use as part of the system that maintains the water quality of the Gowanus Canal.

