

# THE CANAL AND THE CREEK

# A LESS-THAN AUSPICIOUS MEETING

What will the current economic crisis mean for the so-called 'improvement' of the Gowanus Canal or the Newtown Creek? Will the infrastructural re-evaluation necessary to clean up the worst oil spill in U.S. history now floating on the surface of the Newtown Creek as well as penetrating the soil of the surrounding neighborhoods - be shelved? Will the Butler Street pump house continue to circulate the sludgy Gowanus Canal water, leeching its toxic waste out into New York Harbor, or can a sustainable solution be developed to clean the Gowanus's water while curbing irresponsible industry and recidivist dumping practices? Now that the money has blown away through the hole in the housing bubble, and the condo developers have rolled up their high-concept redevelopment blueprints and walked away, will the Canal and the Creek be left all alone? As neighbors turn back to the basic concerns of feeding their families in the first and worst economic depression of most of our lives, will environmental concerns go by the wayside? The Canal and the Creek share more similarities than differences. They are faced with the same insurmountable obstacles, the same lack of consistent vision or care. And they barely know each other, separated as they are by just three miles of Brooklvn drv land. If they are going to be left to their own devices again, we at Mare Liberum feel they ought to have a chance to meet each other, and have endeavored to give them that chance. This broadsheet constitutes a special issue of the Mare Liberum boatbuilding collective publication. In the past we have published plans for building a 15' Liberum Dory out of found construction materials, histories of urban water squatters and adventures on the 'low seas,' and instructions on kitting out your new Dory for urban waterway exploration. For this edition, we take a look back at the history of these two troubled waterways, drawing on articles from the Brooklyn Daily Eagle (1841-1902) archive at the Brooklyn Public Library, and a couple of stories from our own, shorter history with the Gowanus Canal. We will discuss the present state of the Canal and the Creek as it currently appears to us. Without pretending to know 'The Way,' we hope to use these sources to suggest a hypothetical way forward. A way to bring the two bodies of water together to see that they can at least keep each other company as the spotlight on the development of their surrounding neighborhoods fades. New York City faces a 4 billion dollar budget shortfall over the next three years, not including the revenue to be lost as the collapsing financial 'industry' clears its roll sheets of tens of thousands of New York City workers and these workers are left in turn to seek work elsewhere. Standards of living will fall, and educational, cultural and environmental initiatives are already being threatened with sharp cuts. At the same time, real estate development, which by most accounts is the true financial drive of the city, has stalled out, leaving many projects unfinished as monuments to haste and hubris, and proving that short-sighted, bottom-line focused building initiatives are anathema to sound urban planning.

Creek and the Canal have seen some of the worst occupations human beings ever thought to pay someone else to do. Their stench is legendary (see: 'Calls it Cologne Gulch, below), as is their filth, as is their neglect. The Gowanus still needs to be cleaned up, as does the Newtown Creek. Their pollution poses health risks to the residents and workers of the surrounding, mixed-demographic neighborhoods. Presently, the two areas still furnish some of the last industrial and light-industrial manufacturing zones within New York City itself, providing jobs, resources and necessary services to the city as a whole. During the recent real estate boom, the security of these jobs and services were threatened by higher rents and encroaching developers.

On the private development front, the bursting of the housing bubble has caused the private developments that were slated for construction in the Gowanus Canal or Newtown Creek adjacent neighborhoods to be put on hold or scrapped entirely. Most emblematic of the private developments around the Gowanus, The Toll Brothers complex was slated to be 'deployed' around Carroll Street, alongside the waterway, but has since been withdrawn for "lack of community support" (and no doubt would have been scrapped for financial reasons today). Architectural renderings leaked by Toll Brothers early in the project made clear that theirs was a vision that would have completely divorced the surrounding neighborhood from the Gowanus that we know today While Toll Brothers plans hint at who the future residents of the Gowanus were to be and how they were to live (one is left with the impression that the current residents of the neighborhood were invited to come and watch, but not exactly participate in this new vision) there was something that always charmed us in how overtly utopian they were in thinking they could take a geographical and historical incident of place and re-place it with something entirely different. Their sketches envisioned the Gowanus as a future Venice of New York City, replete not only with compact water taxis (their answer to Venice's gondolas) and private kayaking docks but with jogging paths and picnic areas, and lots and lots of greenery. Their sketches could fill an update to Rem Koolhaas's 1978 book "Delirious New York," the Dutch architect's study of urban optimism in the history of New York City development. The truth is that the utopian is far too often absent from ideas about urban planning in New York City. Compared to other economic and cultural capitals of the world, New York has few if any large-scale architecture projects of any aesthetic or artistic merit. The buildings being built look like other buildings. They are distinguishable only in their size where the 30-story glass condos tower over 6 floor pre-war walkups. Distinguishable in stature only when a 'great name' (of an architect: Calatrava for example - or a corporation: the New York Times building, the Time Warner Building – all thematically, demographically, and resolutely boring architectural projects, not to mention resourcesquandering ones at that) is attached to the project. New attention is paid to LEEDcertification and so-called Green Building Code, when little is paid to questions of social justice in relation to the treatment of residents in the surrounding neighborhood (the Williamsburg and Harlem rezonings, The New Museum on the Bowery, for example). Nor is the more important question of why do we need more office buildings at all in a city with a 14% commercial vacancy rate - low on the national average - or more luxury condos in a city with a lack of affordable housing options and a growing number of homeless families. Infrastructure is for its part unadorned and unembellished and suffering from the failings of bureaucratic design processes. For the most part, a bridge is a bridge; a skyscraper a skyscraper; a condo a condo. In this respect, even the otherwise visionary Toll Brothers redevelopment was still conventional in its architecture, and the version of utopia they invited us to visit was clearly not one of progressive ideals or refined social consciousness. The majority of building and development in New York City is residential, destined to benefit only those who can afford

to buy a condo, with little concern for other residents in the community except where

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expressly required by the planning boards. There are few civic-minded building projects, and few new developments, that do not go hand in hand with re-zoning and high-end condominium construction. In this way, developers such as Toll Brothers pushed the issue of cleaning up the Gowanus, though so did community organizations who for their part were also fighting to keep areas zoned industrial, to keep housing accessible to middle and lower-income families, and to keep green space public. But must the fate of the city's natural resources and infrastructure always depend on attention from real estate interests? Must quality of life always be purchased at the rate of '1+2 bedroom units starting at \$800,000?' Can we work to improve the ecosystem of the Gowanus Canal and the Newtown Creek without sacrificing our right to live beside and participate in that ecosystem?

The articles chosen from the Daily Eagle are remnants of a time in which New York City was still in a state of changing boundaries and shifting demographics. Brooklyn would only be absorbed into New York City in 1898. It was a time where it would not have been inconceivable to, for example, sell a portion of the city to private interests or to the e state in the hopes that they would be better able to manage it. The neighborhoods surrounding the Canal and the Creek remain to this day contested territory, but the water itself is mostly undesired, or undesirable, and (for the most part) unsettled and uninhabited. Dirty as all hell, it is still open space in a city where there is little. - ML

"Do I look like a sickly specimen?" asked the robust al lorman. "I five within a short dis-tance of the canal now and I have lived in the neighborhood forty-five years. We have better health down our way than the people on the canal is unhealthy." "Do people in South Brooklyn want it filled up?" was the next question. "There isn't a man in the Tenth ward who wants it filled up, and I haven't heard of any-body in South Brooklyn. Why, there are 4,000 to 5,000 men get their living on that canal, and if it is closed they will move away. Then it would cost the city from \$5,000,000 to \$6,000,-000 to fill the canal and pay the damage to property which its closing would cause." The alderman said further that he had heard noth-ing of \$20,000 or any other sum being raised to oppose the bill. "I don't believe there's 20 cents." he declared. "There is no organized opposition at all." The canal supplies an immense manufacturing district in which there are three large gas works, lumber yards, coal yards and baking powder and chemical works of several sorts. General James Jourdan, president of the Municipal Gas company, said: "The closing of the canal would practically

company, said: "The closing of the canal would practically confiscate our property. We have a plant worth about \$4,000,000 down there which we have built relying upon the fact that we were on an arm of the sea which nobody but congress could control. If the city close it and wind our procontrol. If the city closes it and ruins our prop-erty the city will pay for it, that is all. We shall Johnson, will oppose the bill." By "our rights" General Jourdan explained that he meant the rights of the Municipal Gas company and not those of any other property owner along the line of the canal. "We shall go it alone," the general said, "and I suppose the other owners will do the same, but I have not heard a word from any of them. I haven there asked to subscribe a cent to any fund and have not even heard of a fund or of any organized oppo-sition whatever." As to the sanitary con-dition of the canal the general said: "The dition of the canal the general said: "The odors from the Gowanus canal are un-pleasant, particularly at low tide, but there isn't a particle of evidence that they are injurious to health. The odor of oil, for instance, is offen-sive, but it is not in the least unhealthy. We employ 100 men, who live close by our works for convenience and are subject to all the deleterious influences of the canal, if there are any, but the sweare of health is are deleterious influences of the canal, if there are any, but the average of health is as high among them as among men in the same circumstances in any part of the city. There is nothing offensive in the condition of the canal which might not be remedied by proper cleaning out and at vastly less expense than fifting if up. I am told that these sewers empty into the canal, and that ought not to be tolerated, but it will cost no more to extend them to the bay with the canal open than if it should be filled up. Dr. Watt, who used to practice in the neighborhood. Watt, who used to practice in the neighborhood devised a simple system of locks by which the water should be locked in at high tide and let out with a rush at low water, thus scouring ou the canal twice a day. That is a simple engi-neering matter and would keep the canal inoffen-

though claimed to be stagnant, could hardly have been so, as they were in such constant use. I write especially of the one situated use. I write especially of the one situated on Willoughby street, near Jay. I never passed that pump-and that was several times a day-that I did not see some one enjoying the water. It was very cool and sparkling and that indicated its depth. It had a little of the limo taste, common to all of our pump water. Its nearness to the liquor saloon might suggest by what power the pump had been closed. It has never seemed right that a sewer pipe, if propnever seemed right that a sewer pipe, if prop-erly constructed, should leak and affect the water, but, even in that case, the lay of the land there is such that it was very improbable. I understand there was a similar pump on Warren street, near Henry, where, on a summer's evening, the women in the neighborhood took their pitchers for a cool and refrashing drink, and seems to indicate and he here about the problem of the pitchers for a cool and refreshing drink, and seems to indicate how naturally the prople take to what is good and wholesome, if it is only put within their reach. An article published in your valuable reach. An article published in your valuable paper some time after the last pump was closed confirmed my belief in the healthfulness of pump water. It was headed, "The Water We Drink," and ran as follows: "The Kings County Medical society held a meeting last night, during which a discussion arose on the pre-valence of typhoid fevor in Brocklyn, Dr. Johnson claimed that the adjacency of several cemeteries to the reservoir at Ridgewood was the principal cause. \* \* Ex-Houlth Commis-sioner Raymond and Dr. Griffin, the present health commissioner, both disputed this statehoalth commissioner, both disputed this state-ment. • • • Years ago, he said, it was claimed that the springs and wells throughout the city were impure and the department of health ordered them to be filled up. It was noticed

## THE GOWANUS CANAL IMPROVEMENT

Twelve Thousand Feet of Docks to be Provided-The Canal to be Deepened Twelve Feet-Business Done on the Canal-Hise in Value of Property along its Length.

One of the most important improvements now being carried on in this city is that of the Gowanus Canal It is under the charge of a Special Commission, which differs from nearly all the brood of that designation by baving among its members some who are directly elect. ed by the people and responsible to them. The Commission consists of the Mayor, (Bon. Martin Kalbmission consists of the mayor, (non. Mattin Ano-fielsch) the County Treasurer (lion. Thomas A. Gardi-ner) and Messra. W. M. Harris, Cornelitas Devyr, D. S. Voorhees, F. P. Bunker, Chauncey M. Felt, W. D. Veeder, W. M. Thomas, and James H. Walson. The funds placed at the control of the Commission consist of an appropriation of \$850,000, within which limit the bonds of the City of Brooklyn are issued as required by the progress of the work, and when the improvement is completed the amount expended is to be charged by the city upon the property benefitted as a local assessment.

ment. The work has been placed by the Commissioners under the charge of Mr. L. N. Vibbard, an experienced city surveyor, and civil engineer, who has drawn plans for the dredging of the canal, and docking it, which are being carried out under his personal supervision. Four thousand feet frontage of aockage is now being built. The intention is to deepen the canal at Perel-val street to twelve feet at low water, which will give seventeen fect depth at high tide; and at the termi-nation of the canal at Douglas street the depth at low water is to be seven feet, which will give twelve feet at high tide. The length of the canal from Percival street to Douglas street is 6000 feet, so that when the dockage on bolk sides is complete there will be no

As far back as memory runs, Gowanus Canal and the Newtown Creek have been key sites for New York City industry, and repositories for many of the most hazardous trades. Back when the Canal was a creek itself, it was a route of trade and oyster fisheries. Since then, tanneries, metal foundries, gasoline and heating oil refineries have come and gone, and some have stayed on. The

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Sunday, December 14, 2008

# HEARING ON PLAN TO FILL UP **GOWANUS CANAL**

## Opposition to the Pending Bill by Property Owners.

# MAYOR BOODY WILL PLAY A WAITING HAND.

His Honor Says That as the Bill is Permissive No Action is Required From Him Unless It is Fassed and Comes Up for Consideration as a Law-Alderman McGarry Declares the Gowanusians Are Realthier Than People on the Heights and That the Tenth Ward to a Man Stands by the Waterway-General Jourdan Explains the Position of the Gas Companies and Suggests a Plan for Scouring Out the Ditch.

The city will take no part on either side in the contest over the bill to give the mayor, controller and president of the board of aldermen power to fill up the Gowanus canal in their dis-cretion and at the expense of the city. Mayor Boody said this morning that he did not think it proper for the mayor to advocate or oppose a bill purely permissive in its character like this one. "It was at first proposed," the mayor said, "to grant this power to fill the canal to a commission, and I told the promoters that in such a shape I should oppose it. As long as the matter is left in the discretion of the city authorities I see no reason for acting on it at present. If the bill becomes a law and comes before me as such I will cause a thorough investigation into the facts and take such action as they seem to call

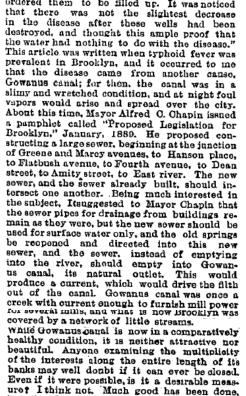
for." The reporter suggested that the mayor probably had a pretty accurate knowledge of the facts already. "None that would justify my talking about it," his honor replied. "I have asked questions of a great many men as to the condition of the canal, but the interests involved are too important to be settled in any such off hand way as that. There is, for instance, the question whether, if the canal is filled, the city must pay for the property along its banks and whether the property along the Litchfield branch must be paid for even if the rest is not. There is no use making a decision on such points in advance."

The bill is being pushed by the Brooklyn Sanitary league, of which F. K. Winslow is sce-retary and J. S. T. Stranahan, General John B. Woodward, Omri F. Hibbard, John F. Henry, General Robert Avery and Lucien Birdseye are members. The ground on which it is urged that the canal is practically a big sower and is dangerous to the health of the people of South Brooklyn. Mr. Winslow says that everybody in South Brooklyn is in favor of filling the canal, and that he has heard of a fund of \$20,000 being and that he has heard of a fund of \$20,000 being raised by the opponents of the bill to defeat its passage. The reporter met Alderman McGarry of the Tenth ward in the mayor's office and found that he did not agree with Mr. Winslow as to the attitude of the South Brooklyn people, "Is the Gowanus canal a danger to the health of the inhabitants in the neighborhood?" the reporter asked.

# Wednesday, March 01, 1893

#### ABOUT THE GOWANUS CANAL. An Interesting Letter From a First Ward Woman.

To the Editor of the Brooklyn Eagle: Having lived in Brooklyn since I was a child, I have always felt a great interest in the city's welfare and have taken note of various changes. It was with doop regrot, therefore, that I saw. some years ago, the last of the pumps closed. They gave much refreshment and al-



ure? I think not. Much good has been done, but the flow should be still more increased. This, as before mentioned, can only be accomplished by reopening and directing the springs, and all the surface water from the Bergen hills into the canal. Wednesday, April 18, 1894



wnus Tunnel, and current Flushing e've always liked the idea that Brooklyn needs more water. A tunnel to co us Canal, to be called New Of course, this would not solve

street to Douglas street is 6000 feet, so that when the dockage on bolh sides is complete there will be no less than 12,600 feet of dock front on the canal. Some portrons of this have already been sufficiently well docked by the owners of the adjacent land, so that the work of the Commissioners will be to that extent di-munished

mnished. The width of the canat at Percival street is 300 feet, at Hamilton avenue this width diminishes to 1000 feet, and continues at about that width up to Douglas street. The first bridge which crosses it is the old wooden structure at Hamilton avenue, where the Court street cars : cross. Four blocks above, or at a distance of one thousand feet, is the Ninth street bridge where the Coner fielded care cross. The port

Court street cars cross. Four blocks above, or at a distance of one thousand feet, is the Ninth street bridge, where the Coney Island cars eross. The next bridge is at Third street, and was built of iron. by the Commissioners of the Third etrect improvement. This bidge is 2000 feet, or six blocks from Ninth street. Four blocks or 1000 feet more, from Third street, is the to into street bridger, which is new being built, of iron. The abattments and centre pier are being constructed of stone, leaving 31 feet width of draw on either side of the centre pier. The catal runs from this point three blocks further, to its termination at Douglas street. In the order was an old creek, running up to Fourth street. In 1851 and 1852 the owners of the abattment stand carter was an old creek, was in many places of piling, imperfectly constructed, and the tendency of the abatement is docent was been to be docked, was in many places of a piling, imperfectly constructed, and the tendency of the abatement of water, for about two hours a day, when the depth of water in it is increased by the tide to seven or cight free, for about two hours a day, when the depth of water in it is increased by the tide to seven or cight free. The resent which of course tends to foul and fill up the canal. The canal the better water in the sincreased by the tide to seven or cight free. There is a city sever comprise into the canal at Bond street, which of course tends to foul and fill up the canal. The Cammissioners will stop this severe.

water in the lacted by the tude to beyen or eight feet. There is a clust cewer emptying into the canal at Bond street, which of course tends to foul and fill up the canal. The Commuteioners will stop this server, and according to the plans of the Sewerage Board all the streets except for the block adjacent to the canal (where there will be no house drainage, but only sur-factories) will be drained into city sewers emptying into the East river. The targe quantity of business done now on the canal, in solid of the observe of the sewers emptying into the East river. The targe quantity of business done now on the canal, in solid of the observe of the sewers emptying docked snd derpened. Messrs. Morton and Canda, brick and hime merchants, have sluce the first of June landed on the canal wharves, 150 cargoes of brick alone. This is na vigation will become when it is permanently docked snd derpened. Messrs. Morton and Canda, brick and hime merchants, have sluce the first of June landed on the canal wharves, 150 cargoes of brick alone. This is na vigat as Carroll street. Immense quantities of brick and lime are also landed at various points on the Canal. The Citizens' Gas Company lund at their yard, above the Ninth street bridge, 20,000 tons a year of coal. The Pennsylvania Coal Company, just below the Ninth street bridge, have discharged about 18,000 tons during last year, and Messrs. Feit & German, ceal dealers, have loaded about an equal quantity. The sales of lumber ty Messrs. Watson & Poitinger, on the Canal, for 1567, amounted to \$180,000 worth, and an-other firm sold a still larger quantity of material brought by the canal. This larger amount of trade was done under conditions which rendered the canal un-navigable for more than two and a half hours of the working day. It is sefe to say that the working ca-pacity of the canal will be multiplied by bot less than eight times by the contemplated dredging, which will give a greater depth at lowest water than the canal in two years more. Not only is this improveme

Inprovement was commenced, a year and a wait ago. The cuite improvement is expected to be completed in two years more. Not only is this improvement of creat importance as multiplying the facilities for landing bulky goods and materials in the city, but it obviates the annoying and prolonged detention now experienced by city travel in crossing the canal bridges. At present vessels come in from the river and accumulate at the bridge during low water, waiting for the tide to fise sufficiently to enable them to pass. When the bridgees are once opened, there may be a fleet of fitteen or twenty vessels tendy to pass in and a similar num-ber waiting to come ont ; and thus a detention of hair an hear is experienced by the city railroad cars and other vehicles, while the bridges are open and the road crossing them are blocked. When the coust is dredged so that vessels can pass at any hour of the day, the bridges can be opened and closed again in three minutes, so that no detention or obstruction of road travel for any longer period than three or four minutes at a time need be experienced. The district of assessment on which the expense of this inprovement will be output bound to carsing

The district of assessment on which the expense of this inprovement will be ultimately levied to reim-burse the city for the issue of its bonds, extends two hundred feet back from the caual on each side. The streets leading to the canal have in many instances not yet been opened to the water, hat the owners have docked the foot of the street as well as their adjoining docked the foot of the street as well as their adjoining whaves, and use the while as private property. The Cemmon Council have now a bill before the Legista-ture which provides for opening these streets to the canal without requiring the consent of the property owners, as in ordinary street openings. The owners allege that this bill is unfait toward them in that it makes no provision for compensation to such of them street -that they are required not only to give up the street of the public, but to pay the expenses of open-ing, and to get no remneration for the cost they have incurred in docking. There can be no question of the propriety of opening the streets for public access to the canal, but if the public get the advantage of dock front provided by the property owner at the foot of the street, it seems only far that he should be compensat-ed for his oullay. Monday, February 17, 1868

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Monday, February 17, 1868





# THE OLD GOWANUS ROAD.

### Researches Into the History of Past Centuries.

#### A First Paper on the Line of Travel from the King's Highway Toward the South-An Antiquarian's Walk and Objects of Interest by the Way.

In investigating the origin and early history of the old roads of Brooklyn I have found two points which have given rise to dispute and my conclusions in regard to which might as well be stated in this article as elsewhere.

One point is in reference to the King's Highway. As far as my search has gone I have found but one road which went by the name of the King's Highway and that was the road from Brooklyn to Bedford, to East New York and on to Jamaica. As a matter of fact all the old roads fail out under the king's authority by the king's commissioners were king's highways, just as roads now laid out under orders of the commissioners of the counties are called county roads, and were so designated in legal documents; but the designation as a specific name attached itself only to the road mentioned above. Thus, as the Gowanus road was laid out by royal commissioners, according to their report of March 28, 1701 (the same date as the report on the road through Bedford), it was a king's highway, b unlike the Bedford road it did not carry that title, but was always called the Gowanus road. The other point is in reference to the legal status of the roads, whether Dutch or English, now in cluded within the limits of the city. By the tenure of Hollandish laws the title of all public highways was vosted in the State; and thus the British Crown became the lawful proprietor of the fee of the old Dutch colony roads. As the legal successor of this right the Common Council of the City of Brooklyn came into possession of the title. By English law the fee remains in the adjacent proprietors, and in disuse, or abandonment of the right of public easement the land in the roads of the English colonies may be selzed and occupied by them. But the land in the roads opened before 1664 (the Dutch roads) was the property of the City of Brooklyn, and I think that the adjacent property owner occupies them at his peril. I am satisfied, however, that a deed from the city will give the holder a perfect title.

Indian name for cove or creek, so that the Dutch settlers received it from them and continued the title. The Dutchman made the same mistake in their day that their English successors made and spoke of the bay and creek as Gowanus Bogt and Gowanus Kill. The English speaking people call them Gowanus Bay and Gowanus Creek. Bringing the terms down to their true meaning, both nationalities designated them the bay bay and creek creek. The Nyacks did better. They simply spoke of the Gowanus or Cojanes, thus indicating the creek or cove. It will thus be seen that when the young American of the present generation, in his inclination to be slangy and his desire to abbreviate, says that he is going down to Gowanus, meaning thereby the creek or bay, he strikes it wiser than he knows. At the point of junction of the Gowanus and Porte roads, between Garfield place and First street, Fourth and Fifth avenues, the Gowanus road made a near approach to Gowanus Creek and then beyond that point followed south in a parallel line the creek and bay. Branching off from the Gowanus road, right opposito the junction of the Porto route, there was in old times the mill road to Denton's and Freeke's mills, generally known as the yellow mill and the old Gowanus mill. The old Gowanus mill, the oldest in the Town of Dreuckelen, was erected some time between 1645, when the land was first patented, and 1661, when it is recorded as being run by Isnac DeForest and Adam Brower. It was located just north of Union street, west of Novius, be-

Gowawns, or Gowanes, or Cojanes, was the Nyack

tween that street and the canal." On March 28, 1701, the Commis road and landing place at, or near, the mill, of which the following is the record: "One common highway to Gowanus mill, to begin from the northeast corner of Leffert Peterse's fence, and so along the road westerly, as it is now in use, to the lane yt parts the land of Hendrick Vechte, and Abraham Brower and Nicholas Brower, and sos all along said lane as it is now in fence to the house of Jurian Collier, and from thence along the roade now in use to the said Gowanus mill, being In all four rod wide to the said lane; and that there be a convenient landing place for all persons whatsoever, to begin from the southermost side of said Gowanus mill house, and from said house to run four rod to the southward, for the transportation of goods and the commodious passing of travellers; and that said highway to said Gowanus mill, from said house of said Jurian Collier, shall be two rods only and where it is now in use; said common highway to be and continue forever; and further that the fence and gate that now stands upon the entrance into said mill neck, for the inclosing and securing of said neck, shall soe remaine and be always kept soo inclosed with a fence and hanging gate; and the way to said mill be thorow that gate only, and to be always shutt or put to by all persons that passes thorow,"

sewers and upon the Standard Gil works at the feet of the creek, each party of manufacturers lays the blame for past stenches upon the other. Under these circumstances it is difficult to get at the real facts or to silt and judge the various contradictory statements placed before the investigator. One finds almost as many theories as to the cause of the trouble as there are inhabitants along the shores of the creek. The representatives of Peter Cooper & Co. declined to discuss the matter in alvance of the trial of the complaint against them. But it is understood that they expect to prove that the offensive odors hald to their works were generated the other side of the creek and that certain establishments on Furman island and in Queens county have been exempted from prosecution because their owners had a potent political pull. If so it will be mighty interesting to see how they come out. Meahwhile there are some facts established be-

yond dispute. The owners of the fertilizer factories and fat rendering works have had their business driven away to New York, where the population affected is twice as large and not half as particular, and to New Jersey: they have dismissed one hundred and fifty or two hundred men with the prospect of lifteen hundred or two thousand others following and they are beginning to raise their voice in protest. They say almost with one accord that it is not their factories which make the trouble but Newtown creek itself, and that the offenders are the city of Brooklyn with its sewers and the Standard Oil works, with its sludge acid. Isaan Read voiced the general sentiment when he declared that if every fertilizer and hone boiling factory along the creek were removed the region would be just as offensive as it is now so long as the city continued to empty sowers into it and the Standard Oil works to discharge refuse there. The cause of this complaint is the Shields law, passed in 1892 with special application to this region and bearing with peculiar hardship on manufacturers of certain lines of product in Kings county.

# SECOND WARD PARKWAYS.

Chief Engineer Risse Submits an Elaborate Scheme for Beauti-

## fying Newtown.

TO HAVE A HEARING OCTOBER 18. He Has in View a System of Avenues,

Streets, Parks, Squares and Waterways, With a Fine Shore Driveway.

Chief Engineer Risse of the Topographical Bureau submitted to the Board of Public Improvements yesterday a general map or plan showing a design for a system of avenues, streets, public parks and squares, parkways and water ways in the Second Ward of Queens, formerly the Town of Newtown. The board determined to give a public hearing on the plan on October 18, before which time no action will be taken. Mr. Risse submitted with the map itself the foi-lowing report in exploration of its feetures.

lowing report in explanation of its features: I have the honor to submit herewith, for the consideration of the Board of Public Improvements, and for the purpose of giving

CALLS IT COLOGNE GULCH

A Writer in Harper's Weekly Describes the Varied Assortment of Smells Which Surround This City and Assail the Summer Traveler Who Attempts to Reach Long Island.

A good many thousands of people take the cars each day at Long Island City, bound for the favored resorts of "wind-swept Long Island." Each of these passengers, before he has journeyed far, receives something not called for on his ticket. But it is not a 'something" calculated to add to the pleasure of the passenger. It begins as a mild, ill-defined aroma almost as soon as the cars are well in motion, and it becomes rapidly accentuated, till it is an aroma neither mild nor ill-defined, though quite indescribable. The wise traveler at once endeavors to forestall further experience of the gratuitous offering by closing the window and, if sax permits, resorting to a perfumed handkerchief or a vinalgrette. But the ruse usually does not succeed, as some novitiate is almost sure to leave a window open, while for the traveler who is in an open car the case is quite hopeless. He may as well give himself up to resignation from the first, or, at most, attempt to accomplish something by holding his breath. The source of the first installment of odors is plainly a varnish factory, but soon one has passed beyond the pale of this particular emanation, and finds himself whirling between low, dingy buildings, apparently of some forgotten epoch of architecture, each of which belches forth volumes of smoke, and gives out an intangible but by no means undetected redolence that makes the effluvium of the varnish factory seem ambrosial by con-trast. Building after building files by in quick succession (evidently the engineer is under orders, or has regard to his own feelings), each exhaling a stench peculiar to it-self and seemingly different from all the others. Language is quite inadequate to de-scribe the peculiar noisomeness and extreme variety of these smells. They are niderous, empyroumatic, fetid, rank, rancid, olid, me-philic—run the entire list of the thesaurus if you like, not skipping even the words that are obsolete (for the occasion justifies their rejubaye done the subject scant justices that you have done the subject scant justice. What does it mean? Why does so ill-smelling a region margin the City of Brooklyn? From the train one cannot well discover. Most of the malodorous buildings are low and uppretentious, some are mere shanties or inclosed sheds, and exactly what objectionable purpose each is given over to is unrevealed to external view. If one would find out their secret he must seek closer acquaintance and a more leisurely inspection. But even a walk along the track, though calculated to give one a new idea as to the number and variety of unclassified odors in the world, will probably accomplish little in explanation of the mysteries of their generation, unless one is armed with credentials that will unbar the doors of the dingy buildings. If one goes so provided —and escapes being eaten by a troop of dogs —he will find rather an interesting, though certainly unesthetic, story hidden behind the smoky walls. But a far pleasanter method of investigation, and one that is by all means to be recommended to anyone who is not abnormally curious, is to seek a station on the hill that overlooks Cologne gulch and have some "old residenter" read the roster of unsavory institutions from a distance. Such a vantage ground is easily to be found on Lau-rel hill, just to the north of the guich. From this hill you look off across the pestilential valley to sloping, cultivated hill-sides be-yond, topping which, when one can see them through the noisome smokes and vapors that belch from numberless chimneys along the valley, are the towers and spiros and house-tops of the City of Churches seen in huddled perspective, with the Brooklyn bridge loomperspective, with the Brooklyn bridge loom-ing plainly through and above them (seeming less distant than it really is), and hazy domes of New York buildings yet beyond. It is a pleasing bird's eye background. But the foreground spells the plcture. It is true that a stream, which you learn is Newtown creek, the boundary line between Kings and Queens counties, coils along the valley just below you, but its banks, where they show at all, are low and unwholesome looking, and for the most part they are hidden by series of long low buildings, spread out in every direc-tion along the valley. These are the build-ings that greeted your nostrils as you jour-neyed in the cars, for the railway runs along the valley almost directly beneath your presthe valley almost directly beneath your pres-ent perch. If you are fortunate in finding a well informed old resident who is inclined to talk-which is not very difficult, as the sub-ject is one that naturally appeals to anyoneresiding in the vicinity—the vall may be lifted for you from the valley of Newtown creek somewhat as follows: "The buildings in which you are inter-ested," he will perhaps say, "and in which every one who lives within two or three miles of hore is or has been interested have many of hore is or has been interested, have many of them been hore thirty or forty years." "Is that all?" you interpolate. "They look as if they might have been there as many centuries. 'Yes, so they do; but you will notice that the new buildings on the hill behind us look very ancient and dark. That comes from the paint being blackened by the fumes of sulphureted hydrogen that come from this big building just below us. It's the Nichols chemical works, and it is about the worst smelling place there is left along the creek which is saying a good deal for it, as you know.' Thursday, August 02, 1894

## MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL REVIVED

### FLAMING WATERWAY TEEMS WITH LIFE

(Adapted from Manchester Evening News report, Manchester, UK.) Few of the spectators who flock to Salford Quays each May for the annual Twin Cities boat race realise that they are witnessing one of Britain's most remarkable transfor mations.

Teams from Manchester and Salford universities race on water that was once so polluted there were stories of it catching fire and signs on the canal banks warned people to extinguish any naked flames. Folklore even recalls that there were floating mats of sediment thick enough for dogs to walk on.

When the Manchester Ship Canal was opened by Queen Victoria in the 1890s it was regarded as a wonder of Victorian engineering. But a century later, the once thriving docks at Salford were idle after becoming the focal point of a dismal story of post-industrial decline.

Twenty years later, the scene could not be One reason

According to the records the Gowanus road was laid out in 1704, and ran southwest from the King's Highway at Atlantic avenue down along the coast, which gained for it the name of the Coast road-to New Utrecht. As there are matters of interest connected with it which can best be so treated, I shall divide it into two sections, the first and short section being between Atlantic avenue and the Porte road (about First street); the second extending from First street southwest to the city line.

When the Gowanus road was laid out the King's Highway was also laid out across the depot grounds of the Atlantic avenue Railroad to the junction of Atlantic and Fifth avenues and into the center of the next block, and thence east to Bedford and beyond. The Flatbush road was also constituted a King's thoroughfare at the same time There had been old Dutch cartways to Bodford and Flatbush for over a hundred years previous to this time, and in all probability there had been a road down to Gowanus as early as to the other places, as the last named was the first locality settled in Brooklyn, and some of the houses on the line of the road were old, when the royal commissioners laid it out: but in order to make things all right according to their idea the English did over again everything the Dutch had done before them and laid out king's highways where the simple hearted Dutch had been content with cartways for half a century. But whether there was a road along the same line to Gowanus or not previous to that date, the line laid out by the English in 1704 made the Gowanus road branch off from the southerly side of the Flatbush road, at about the present junction of Atlantic and Fifth avenues, and run on the line of Fifth avenue to Bergen street; then, diverging a short distance to the east, running parallel with the line of Fifth avenue to Berkeley place, then across said avenue to the west, and down through the center of the block to the junction of the Porte and Mill roads, in the block between Garfield place and First street, Fourth and Fifth avenues.

In following the line of road now it will be found that there are no reminiscences of it for the first three blocks, which are all solidly built up. At Bergen street a deflection being made to the east of Fifth avenue, a depression in the ground through a vacant lot on the corner of the block toward St. Marks place shows the former line of the road

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Sunday, December 04, 1887

# A TRIP BY WATER. ------

## Newtown Creek Carefully Exam ined by an Eagle Man.

As the summer approaches the Newtown creek nuisances promise to take as prominent a place as a topic of newspaper discussion as they have done in the past. For years the citizens associations in the Seventeenth and Fifteenth wards have kept hummering away at the fertilizer factories on both sides of the stream and at the Peter Cooper Glue works. Congress has laid its restraining hand upon the mighty Standard Oil company with its horrible output of sludge acid and other refuse with which it has defiled the bottom of Newtown creek and driven the fish from one of the best fishing grounds about New York bay, and the summer of 1833 opens with the creek and the region along its banks in better condition, apparently, than t has been for years. Of course the condition during the cool weather of this week is an imperfect guide for August, but a thorough inspection of the creek from the dredging machines above the Grand street bridge, where the Johnson avenue sewer empties down to its mouth, walks through several fertilizer works and talks with all sorts of people living and working along the stream show that although the creek is still offensive there will probably be little danger to health and comparatively little outery from the Seventeenth warders. The talk about Newtown creek will come from the pending prosecution of the Peter Cooper Glue works as a nuisance, and the dispute be-tween the proprietors of the Cooper works and the fat rendering establishments just a-ross the creek from the glue works on Furman island as to who is responsible for the smells which the police claim to have discovered in March and for those from which the residents of the Seventeenth ward suffered last summer. The Coopers are fighting what they confidently expect to prove is a political persecution. The fat rendering and fertilizing factories have been closed under the Shields law, their owners have lost and are losing heavity and are fighting for the preservation of their business. The trodden worm has turned at last and the contest promises to be lively. It will also be "siluhtiv triangular," as Butteroun delicately described Dick Deadeve. That is, the Coopers and the fat rendering people are not united in fighting the enforcement of the Shields law. Doth sides admit that there have been nuisances in the neighborhood in the past and, so far as the responsibility those cannot be thrown upon the city

Saturday, May 20, 1893

# DR. BRUSH TO THE ASSEMBLY

# What He Will Advise in Improvement of Newtown Creek.

Special Committee Is Preparing an Exhaustive Report-He Fears That Country Members Will Not Be Willing to Appropriate Funds for a Water Connection With Flushing Bay.

The question of the best way to rid Newtown creek of its nuisances and at the same time to enhance its commercial advantages will be one of the first that will be considered by the assembly on its reassembling and a bill will be introduced in accordance with the report of a special committee to investigate the entire matter. Assembly man George W. Brush is chairman of the committee. He gave to an Eagle reporter to-day the points of his report to the committee, so far as he has come to conclusions. He has already settled upon the main considerations, but is still at work gathering material and information. He said:

"It will be remembered that Assemblyman Schulz at the last session introduced in the assembly a bill providing for a canal to connect Flushing bay with the head of Newtown creek, for the purpose of flushing the creek and also for commercial uses. That bill was defeated, so that the entire subject is open for consideration. Of the first importance, before coming to the canal is the matter of health, and to that end I have had conferences with the board of health and also with engineers connected with the city works department of this city. It appears that on the Brooklyn side of the creek for a long distance along the two and one-half miles of the stream or inlet the land is low and marshy. Dumping along this shore has been with altogether too promiscuous material. The land should be raised not by filling in refuse and organic matter and this will be one of the points in the report. In this connection is the question of emptying of sewage into the creek. There are now ers opening on the creek on both banks. This is entirely objectionable; no sewers should empty contents into these waters, on either side. It only adds to the deposits that are caused by the tide, carrying mud and silt up to the head waters and leaving them there So far as the Brooklyn side is concerned the city works department has plans underway now for doing away with the objectionable sewage system. These plans involve the diverting of all sewage from the bank of the creek to the East river. This will require some time, at least a year, and the remedy will be sufficient to check the evil from that source and the old sewers will be done away with. As to the sewers on the Long Island City side of the creek the same course should be pursued. All sewers should lead into the East river, and in a day or two an examination will be made of the situation. A long main sewer will undoubtedly be necessary and it should run from near the head waters along the bank and not far from it in a northeasterly direction with branch sewers from the bank of the creek. Thursday, September 28, 1899

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a public hearing prior to adoption, a map entitled, "Map of plan showing a general design for a system of avenues, streets, public parks and public squares or places, of parkways and waterways, in that part of the Second Ward of the Borough of Queens (forming part of the former Town of New-town), and bounded by the Borough of Brook-lyn, Cooper avehue, St. John's Cemetery, Remsen's lane, North Hempstead plank road, Flushing Creek, Flushing Bay and the East

The next aim was to make direct com-munication possible between the main settlements by diagonal wide avenues and to connect the parks by parkways from Brooklyn Long Island City and Jamaica. The chief points of interest will be the Shore Park and Park drive from North Beach, where a park is proposed to Flushing along the shore of Flushing Bay. This shore drive is des-tined to rival Riverside drive in beauty and extended scenery. A beautiful view can be had up the sound, for miles, and the waters of Flushing Bay will give opportunity for all kinds of water sport. The city is to acquire all the land from the drive to the shore and no obstruction to a full view will ever

be possible. The question how this section of Newtown will develop; which portions will be given to business and which to residential purposes, will show itself in the same way as in all inland sections where towns begin to spring up. The water courses and the railroads will attract business interests, and the higher ly-ing sections will be reserved for home sites. schools, etc. The unfortunate fact of having eight cemeteries scattered over this part o Newtown in the most attractive sections will probably prevent that people of means will select this part of the borough for the erec-

The main agitation in recent times was created by the proposition to construct a canal, thereby connecting Newtown Creek by way of Maspeth Creek, Horse Brook and Flushing Creek with Flushing Bay. The tide elevations at the two end points observed at the same time differ by two feet, and, since the water in Flushing Bay at high tide is kept longer on the same elevation, it is claimed that such canal would act as a purifier of Newtown Creek, which is noted for its extremely foul and unclean condition.

The open canal plan met with almost insur-mountable difficulties on account of the rail-road intersections, the wanton destruction of the most valuable property in Newtown, and the necessity of constructing and maintaining a number of drawbridges, and the difficulty of navigation on account of the sharp curves between Fisk avenus and Covert avenue, a dis-tance of nearly one and a half miles. I have some to the conclusion, therefore, that a plan come to the conclusion, therefore, that a plan showing a canal 200 feet wide from Newtown Creek up the Maspeth Creek to Covert avenue, and one up the Flushing Creek and Horse Brook to Newtown is best adapted to the future necessity of the district: both canals to be connected by an underground conduit. This conduit will follow the main avenues running at the lowest level and should be provided with gates in order to have the flow of water under perfect control. The length of the Maspeth Creek basin is

5,400 feet The length of the Flushing Créek basin and canal is 20,000 feet.

canal is 20,000 feet. Relative to the rapid transit facilities, I can say that the Long Island Railroad trav-erses the territory in every direction, and that the many wide avenues can accommodate all the electric railroads wherever needed. The submitted plan defines 115 miles of 100 foot stream and computer, 321 miles of 60 foot

The submitted plan defines its miles of foot foot streets and avenues, 321 miles of 60 foot streets and avenues, and 8½ miles of 150 foot parkways: 290 acres of parks; 217 acres mar-ginal park between the Boulevard and bulk-head line, and 6 miles of canals and basins. The water front facing on Flushing Bay has

The water front failing on Flushing bay has a length of three miles. Length of canal from Newtown Creek to New Calvary Cemetery is 5,400 feet. Length of canal from Flushing Bay to New-town (Hoffman Boulevard) 20,000 feet.

Length of underground conduit New Calvary Cemetery and Newtown 12,200 feet, making a total of 37,600 feet between Flushing Bay and Newtown Creek, equal to 7.1 miles. Friday, November 22, 1895

improvement in the ship canal has been the death of traditional industries - and the effluent they once poured into the region's waterways.

Another, is the introduction of tough new environmental laws from Europe. United Utilities has also invested millions of pounds upgrading its wastewater treatment works. Equally important has been a multi-million pound recovery programme. For the last eight years, liquid oxygen has been pumped into a 2km stretch of the canal at Salford Quays at the rate of 15 tonnes a day, helping to bring the waters back to life. The programme - funded by United Utilities - grew out of an innovative partnership between the company, the Manchester Ship Canal Company and the Environment Agency working with the Mersey Basin Campaign.

Later this month, Manchester-based aquatic researchers APEM will unveil the results of an 18-month study, also funded by United Utilities. Part of the report will chart the canal's remarkable environmental recovery.

Dave Cambell, APEM's senior consultant scientist, explained: "Ever since the decision to develop Salford Quays 20 years ago, it was understood that people and businesses would only want to locate next to healthy, clean water.

"Now there are fish, including perch, bream, pike, roach and gudgeon all living in the canal. It's an extremely impressive turn around." With wildlife returning to the water and economic life flourishing beside it, the long and varied history of the Manchester Ship Canal is entering its latest twist - as a weapon in the fight against climate change and road congestion.

Last year, the 3,000 tonne vessel Neptun became the biggest ship to navigate the canal's 36-miles in a quarter of a century, and recent months have witnessed a surge in cargo transported along the canal - as documented on page 11 of Greenlife.

Peel Ports, which owns the Manchester Ship Canal Company, is keen to see it become a thriving waterway once again, and says it is still operating at only a fraction of its full potential. Could this model work for the Gowanus

and the Newtown Creek? A search for either name in the archive of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle results in thousands of false leads, an endless series of demands and condemnations, over-ambitious recovery plans and inevitable failures. One is left with the impression that the Canal and the Creek are damned to an eternity of foul smells, dead fish (and an occasional maligned whale) and ill health for their surrounding communities. The Manchester Ship Canal project is not a readymade. UK environmental controls are different than those in New York City, as is public sentiment, as is the ability of local government to leverage business interests, or regulate them, without fear of economic reprisal. This is especially true in a climate of recession. But the Manchester example is at least proof that the fate of blighted urban waterways is all but sealed, that smart and reasonable, simple solutions to water pollution are being found elsewhere.

Tuesday, May 13, 2008 & Monday, December 15, 2008

