

Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company (BRT) Central Power Station Engine House

153 2nd Street (aka 322 Third Avenue, 340 Third Avenue),
Brooklyn
Tax Map Block 967, Lot 1 in part

Built: 1901-04

Consulting Engineer: Thomas E. Murray

Style: Romanesque-Classical Revival

Action: Calendared June 25, 2019;

Public Hearing September 24, 2019; Proposed for Designation October 29, 2019



BRT Central Power Station Engine House, south facade, 2017, LPC

The former Brooklyn Rapid Transit (BRT) Central Power Station Engine House is a monumental link to the Gowanus Canal's industrial past and a significant structure in the development of mass transit in New York City. It was built in 1901-04 by the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, which gained a near-monopoly over Brooklyn's railroad and streetcar lines since being established in 1896. The new power station consolidated generating operations for Brooklyn's various mass-transit lines on a single site, marking the company's emergence as one of the country's largest transit providers and representing an important step towards the creation of an integrated mass-transit system.

The BRT Power Station originally consisted of two main blocks: a northern section, demolished prior to 1950, which served as the Boiler House, and the existing south section, the Engine House, which contained the engine and dynamo room. *The Brooklyn Eagle* called the facility "one of the largest as well as finest power plants owned by any street railway company in the country." The Engine House remained in operation, providing power to the Fourth Avenue subway, until 1972.

Thomas E. Murray served as consulting engineer for the Central Power Station. He designed and built numerous electrical facilities throughout the United States, including, in New York City, the mammoth Waterside and Sherman Creek stations (both demolished), as well as the Hell Gate station in Queens and Gold Street station in Brooklyn. At the time of his death, it was believed that Murray was responsible for more electrical generating capacity than any other engineer in history.

In its current form since the mid-20th century, the Engine House is a significant presence in the Gowanus neighborhood. Its original facades are bold yet restrained, gaining much of their impact from the structure's immense size, simple massing, and multi-story window openings. Faced with red brick and contrasting bluestone trim, the subdued ornament includes brick quoining, continuous arch moldings, shallow corbelled cornices, bluestone stringcourses, and on the west facade, facing the Gowanus Canal, a stepped entry portal. Despite many years of neglect, which included removal of the terra-cotta roof, the building remains largely intact. In 2012, the vacant structure was acquired by the Powerhouse Environmental Arts Foundation, which plans to reuse and rehabilitate the structure and building an annex.

