

Learning Places Summer 2019

# SITE REPORT #2

## “Good Ole Newtown Creek”



STUDENT NAME: Brandon Raeburn

### SITE OBSERVATIONS

“The Good”



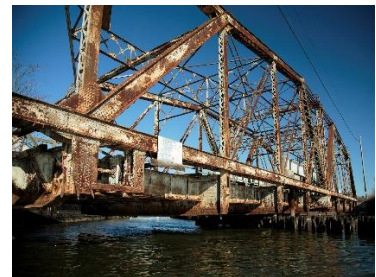
Steps leading to the shore.

“The Bad”



Waste management plant.

“And The Ugly”



Rusted out bridge over creek.

1. Historically, what are some of the important developments that have created the current landscape of the Newtown Creek area. Refer not only to the reading and Prof. Spellane's lecture, but also what you learned on the Newtown Creek Alliance tour (hint... estuaries, for instance)?

By the 1920s and 30s, the Creek was widened, deepened, and bulkheads were added to allow the use of bigger barges. Two islands; Mussel Island the most famous, were plowed and dumped into the estuaries to create the widening of the creek. All this was done to accommodate the production of over 100 distilleries on both sides of the creek. Sugar refineries, hide tanners, canneries, copper wiring producers and even soap makers joined the refineries and oil storage facilities that took over the area. The Kosciuszko and Palaski Bridge was also added in the 1930's to provide traffic between all the businesses. In 2011 the EPA made Newtown creek a superfund site.

2. Discuss the historical remnants that you observed in the current landscape.

The first historical remnant seen were two glacial erratic boulders found at the entrance of Newtown Creek Nature Walk park. The boulders were millions of years old and were carried down during the last ice age from the Catskills Mountains. The rusted-out bridge from the "And The Ugly" picture is another piece of historical landscape. (Not only did I forget to write the name during the tour, I also could not find the bridge name during research.)

3. In what ways is the natural environment contained or shaped by the architecture of the Newtown Creek Nature Walk designed by George Trakas? In what ways is the natural world repossessing spaces that have been over-polluted or industrialized?

The steps leading to the shore on the nature walk shown in "The Good" picture shows how the native fauna grows within the concrete flowerbed cutouts. These architectural cutouts allow the plants to grow in well-spaced areas of the steps, allowing the plants to retake their own space and still providing an area for transit. The earlier mentioned boulders along with the sweet-smelling lemon scented trees gives the area a peaceful and serene ambience. The ever-invasive princess tree can be seen growing through vertical slabs of concrete, ignoring the pollution within the surrounding area.

4. Discuss one instance of architectural semiotics. **Choose *only one* building or built structure.** If the building or designed structure could talk, what would it say?

The best interpretation of architectural semiotics can be found near the shore steps. Engravings of past timelines beginning with the earliest at the foot of the stairs to the present day at the top of the staircase adorn the structure. I believe the architect's vision engraved on the stairs shows the shaping of the present by past events. If this area could speak it would talk of tourist and local commuters enjoying its atmosphere in modern times. Then it would talk about all the hardworking refinery workers helping fuel the U.S. oil industry during the turn of the last century. Lastly, we would hear tales of the native tribes who lived harmoniously with nature before the appearance of settlers.

5. If you were to stage a performative intervention in a *specific* site (i.e., a single structural aspect of the walk or industrial remains) where would you stage it and what message would your performance convey?

The performative intervention would be done within the shore steps piece of the nature walk. I would try to convey the same message George Trakas did with his Nature Walk. Respecting our past and creating a better future by maintaining our environment. Cleaning the creek and its surrounding areas so generations can visit a healthy ecosystem.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

Research Question (should follow directly from your above observations, and be complex, specific, and researchable):

What is the name of the rusted-out bridge over Newtown creek?

Find an article from a journal, website, or newspaper that you believe will help you answer your question

MLA Citation for source:

Enman, Scott. "There are 3 active oil spills on Newtown Creek." *Brooklyneagle*, 20 May 2019, [variety.com/articles/2019/05/20/there-are-3-active-oil-spills-on-newtown-creek/](http://variety.com/articles/2019/05/20/there-are-3-active-oil-spills-on-newtown-creek/)

How many sources did you look at before selecting this one? Why did you select this source? How does it address all or part of your research question? Be specific.

Four different articles were used before selecting the Brooklyn Eagle post. This source was used because the MLA citation was given. None of the articles addressed my question however, learning more about the bridge became a personal crusade which I felt compelled to discover. Rather than change the question to something more easily searchable I continued on.

Is this source credible? How can you tell (what criteria did you base your evaluation on)?

Yes, the Brooklyn Eagle is one of the most credible newspapers within New York City. The paper has been around for decades without carrying a reputation of being a tabloid.

What other sources or further information would you need to answer your question? Where would you look for them?

I would need a map, of all bridges and bridge-like structures of Newtown Creek. I would check with the Department of Transportation website, and/or use the search que of local bridges. (I did not find the bridge name however; I did find its function and location. The bridge is still being used by the LIRR and Port Authority for transporting commuters from Long Island to the mainland of NYC. Also, it is located above Dutch Kills, a tributary of Newtown Creek.)