Market House Company
Mania in Philadelphia

Since the city has determined to provide no more public markets, the business is falling into the hands of companies and private individuals, in which probably the public will be better accommodated than by having all the markets in one street.

*Philadelphia Public Ledger*, March 24, 1859

In 1859 two events occurred in Philadelphia that would have been unimaginable only a decade earlier. The famous High Street Market sheds were demolished, and the Pennsylvania legislature authorized the incorporation of thirteen market house companies. Several factors led to these events: the railroads’ demand for access to the streets, widespread acceptance of the private corporation, and lack of faith in municipal government. These factors were not new or unique to Philadelphia, but they were particularly influential at midcentury, when the consolidation of twenty-four boroughs and districts of Philadelphia County with Old City Philadelphia created investment opportunities and a climate for change.

Urban Philadelphia in the 1840s, when the movement for consolidation began, was a growing port and mill city whose population was rapidly increasing and becoming socially and economically diverse. It had grown from 232,000 in 1840 to 389,000 in 1850—an increase of 68 percent in just a
decade. Moreover, the city encountered the usual problems caused by rapid growth and industrialization, as exemplified by the riots of 1844.

Market houses, because of their central location and high visibility in the city’s streets and squares, were vulnerable to the volatile social forces that characterized big cities of the time. These forces included nativist activities, gangs, and strikes by labor. In some cases the market house itself was a victim of civil unrest, such as Philadelphia’s Washington (Nanny Goat) Market, an important rallying point for hundreds of striking Irish weavers that retaliating nativists burned in 1844 (fig. 5.1). Nearby a famous gang known as the Killers would strike clubs against the hollow cast-iron pillars of the Hubbell Market shed to alert their members.1 Markets were such common sites of civil unrest that several riots were named after them, not only the Nanny Goat Market Riot in Philadelphia, but also the Northern Liberty Market Riot in Washington, D.C., in 1857, and later the Haymarket Riot in Chicago in 1886.2

In addition to the sensational events surrounding market houses were the everyday affronts to middle-class sensibilities. Public markets, such as the Delaware Avenue Fish Market near the docks attracted loiterers, vagrants, alcoholics, and prostitutes (fig. 5.2). Equally offensive were foul odors from decaying fish and produce, numerous rats, and loose animals (fig. 5.3).
Figure 5.2 Representation of the Philadelphia Fish Market, about 1860. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Figure 5.3 Runaway pig on Front and Market Streets, Philadelphia, about 1848. The Library Company of Philadelphia.
The 1854 consolidation was intended not only to restore order in the streets but to unify and modernize public services. Its proponents hoped that eliminating the old committee system of councils, extreme localism of politics, and large numbers of elected offices would move the city in a new, forward-looking direction. They aimed to improve a number of public services—not only waterworks, schools, and police security but also public markets. ³

A New Vision for Market Street

On the eve of consolidation the principal market still stood where it had since the eighteenth century—in the middle of High Street—though now it was a continuous row of sheds extending from Water Street to Eighth Street, with two more sheds from Fifteenth Street to Seventeenth Street (fig. 5.4). High Street was so deeply associated with the market that an ordinance was passed on September 1, 1858, changing its name to Market Street. This belated recognition was ironic; the city demolished the market houses the following year.⁴

Merchants and city boosters envisioned Market Street as a broad business thoroughfare, unencumbered by traffic and lined with professionally designed commercial buildings of uniform character, proportion, and design. Improvements in this regard began as early as 1853, when merchants invested in elaborate three- to five-story buildings with imposing cast-iron facades, designed by established architectural firms such as Philadelphia’s Sloan and Stewart and Collins and Autenrieth.⁵ The city’s mercantile elite, however, hesitated to invest further in Market Street until the city removed the market sheds. Its members argued that the street’s extraordinary width of one hundred feet was ruined by the presence of the sheds. Removing them was considered a move toward modernity, one that would encourage new development and change the neighborhood’s village appearance. Market Street promoters believed that the two-mile-long street, if “given up entirely to our increasing commerce, would be a business thoroughfare such as few cities could boast of.” In this vision of a metropolis there was no place for open-air markets.⁶

Planning Demolition

Most of the market houses scheduled for demolition were those rebuilt from 1835 to 1837 under the direction of architect William Strick-
land, who also served at that time as the city’s “engineer of the rail road.” Sharing Market Street with the sheds was a new branch of the Philadelphia and Columbia Rail Road, which passed the sheds to the north, from Eighth Street to Third Street, before turning down Dock Street to its Delaware River terminus. City ordinances of the late 1830s restricted railroad cars to three miles an hour and forbade trains altogether on market days. Strickland had chosen a slender design for the market houses—basically sheds supported by columns and capped with slightly convex metal roofs without projecting eaves (fig. 5.5). His design incorporated the latest architectural features such as cast-iron columns, popular for market houses in England and on the Continent and highly regarded for their beauty and utility. Strickland’s market houses replaced the earlier ones that had brick piers supporting gable roofs with plastered ceilings. At the eastern market terminus stood the 1822 Jersey Market, still admired in the 1830s for its classicism and its ornate cupola decorated with cornucopias (fig. 5.6).7

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**Figure 5.4** Bird’s-eye view of Philadelphia, about 1850. The line of market sheds can be seen in the middle of Market Street, at the right. Toned lithograph (hand colored) by G. Matter. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, 1971.40.
On December 8, 1853, less than two months before the consolidation act passed, the common council authorized the Committee on City Property to secure sites for new market houses in four quarters of the city with a view toward removing the Market Street sheds. Moving quickly to secure funding, the city council passed an ordinance on January 30, 1854, authorizing $1 million in debt for the project.8

Any practical, or even visionary, reason for removing the sheds from Market Street was quickly swept away by accusations from the market vendors that the city was committing itself to an unnecessary capital project in order to take advantage of the impending consolidation. Two sections in the proposed consolidation act gave rise to these claims. Section 6 prohibited new debt after the passage of the act, and section 36 provided that the current debt of the various municipalities would be consolidated into a shared debt pool. These provisions tempted local authorities to initiate

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{market_sheds.jpg}
\caption{Market sheds in Market Street, between Fifth and Sixth Streets, Philadelphia, about 1859, just before their demolition. Free Library of Philadelphia.}
\end{figure}
last-minute capital projects. On February 2, 1854, a special committee of the city councils announced contracts with four property owners for new lots and with John Rice for new market construction, for a total project cost of $650,000. Governor William Bigler was awakened just before mid-
night on February 2, 1854, to sign the consolidation act into law before the city councils authorized any more debt.\textsuperscript{9}

Litigation Ensues

The following week Edward Wartman, who had leased a stall in the market for twenty-five years, and John F. Gross, a “taxpayer,” filed a bill in equity in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court for a special injunction to restrain the city authorities from proceeding with the contracts. Joining the city as defendants were property owners of the future market sites, George W. Brown, John McCrea, Anna Hertzog, and the First Reformed Dutch Church, as well as contractor John Rice. At the same time, Thomas Pratt and his fellow residents of the counties of Delaware, Chester, and Montgomery—all of whom rented stalls to sell produce from their farms—filed a second motion in equity to prevent the city from demolishing the market houses. The plaintiffs argued in both cases that the city’s plan to remove the sheds and to contract for new market houses would interfere with the legal rights of farmers, increase taxes in the newly consolidated city, and harm the public interest.\textsuperscript{10}

In addition, the plaintiffs argued for the superiority of open market sheds over “close walled and roofed houses, which the experience of other cities has not recommended.” According to Thomas Pratt, “the plan of open well ventilated market houses” allowed for “free and unobstructed circulation of air, such as cannot be had in buildings of the latter kind.” An open plan, he added, was “indispensable to the preservation of meats and other provisions when brought together in large quantities in warm weather.” Beyond addressing the popular concern for public health and sanitation, Pratt also hoped to win the court’s sympathy by pointing out that the “open” and “public” market shed was the very feature that had given the Philadelphia markets their high reputation. Architectural issues aside, Pratt also argued that the city had no authority from the legislature to remove the sheds and that their removal would injure the market’s business. The Pratt motion, moreover, claimed that the few people who supported the move were chiefly wholesale merchants who lived in “remote parts of the City and adjoining districts” and who had “but little occasion to use said Markets, and . . . no regard for the many families who are now dependant upon them.” In conclusion, Pratt reported to the court that the city had received 4,831 petitions to keep the street markets versus 2,835 petitions to remove them.
Mayor Charles Gilpin, defendant, felt otherwise. The present market houses, he believed, interfered with the street’s use by “a railroad, connecting with the improvements of the Commonwealth, as well as private corporations, and the consequent daily increasing demand upon that street for the convenient transportation of merchandise and produce.” Gilpin’s remark implied that railroads took priority over markets. Whereas the city had earlier protected markets from traffic by blocking off streets or restricting wagons, and later trains, during market hours, by midcentury it hoped to eliminate street markets so that trains could travel on Market Street on what had been market days.

John Rice, contractor for the proposed off-street market houses, naturally sided with the city on the grounds that “it is believed that in every large city, it has been found wise and not pernicious to remove the market houses from the public highways.” Rice’s high regard for off-street market houses was predictable, coming from a recent founder of the Broad Street Market House Company, newly incorporated by the state legislature on May 2, 1853. The company’s market house, built by Rice on the southwest corner of Race and Juniper Streets, was purchased by the city for the new market project. In rejoinder, Pratt pointed out to the court that the city had purchased the Rice property in order to bail out Rice’s “deserted” market.

On April 3, 1854, Chief Justice Jeremiah Sullivan Black decided in favor of the city of Philadelphia (fig. 5.7). As he himself stated, it was the responsibility of the court to judge not the moral nature of the city’s actions but their legality. The court argued that

> a municipal corporation, comprising a town of any considerable magnitude, without a public market subject to the regulation of its own local authorities, would be an anomaly which at present has no existence among us. The state might undoubtedly withhold from a town or a city the right to regulate its markets, but to do so would be an act of mere tyranny, and a gross violation of the principle universally conceded to be just, that every community, whether large or small, should be permitted to control, in their own way . . . the daily supply of food.

Black emphasized that the authority to establish public markets was “seldom, if ever, vested in individuals,” referring to Pratt and his fellow plaintiffs, who were trying to stop “the progress of a contemplated improvement which concerns so many other persons.” The city acted within the law by its decision to remove the market sheds and to replace them with four off-street
market houses. Its actions may not have been just, Black concluded, but they were legal.12

These two cases, Wartman v. The City of Philadelphia and Pratt v. The Same, demonstrate that the public market imperative was still alive in the commonwealth in 1854. Neither the court nor the plaintiffs questioned the right of a municipality to establish, maintain, or regulate public markets. The consensus was that public markets were necessary, but that they did not need to stand in the middle of a main thoroughfare. At question in these two cases was whether the city was behaving justly in replacing the Market Street sheds with four new off-street market houses at such great expense to the taxpayers and alleged inconvenience to retailers and customers.

The City Stalls

Despite the court’s sanction in 1854, the city did not remove the sheds until 1859, nor did it ever construct the four public market houses. During the intervening years, inaction best describes the city’s handling of the market issue, beginning with the administration of Robert T. Conrad, first mayor of the newly consolidated city.
Although the city unified the markets under one department, W. D. Newell, the market commissioner, repeatedly complained that the old municipal ordinances, still in effect, rendered consistent enforcement all but impossible. The councils therefore spent more time discussing the need for uniform market ordinances than considering plans for the new market houses; moreover, inaction was cheap. Although the city had purchased the market house properties before consolidation, the new administration was reluctant to spend money on the necessary construction. Builder John Rice had to remind the councils of his contract with the former city government to build the four new market houses. Besides being unwilling to spend the money, officials of the newly consolidated city continued to receive numerous petitions against removal of the Market Street sheds. Until that issue was resolved, there was no rush to complete the new market houses.

Hostility and impatience nonetheless ran high among the city’s leading merchants, who demanded that the “blemish” of the market sheds be removed so that the Pennsylvania Railroad could build tracks down the street to the Delaware River. “We ask for room,” they demanded of the councils. “We ask for a removal of this unsightly obstruction! Only give us what we require, and we pledge ourselves, as the merchants of Philadelphia, to perform our part, to place our cherished City second to none in the land.”

Despite the merchants’ demand for removal of sheds and construction of off-street market houses, the matter also lay dormant under the administration of Richard Vaux, mayor from 1856 to 1858. During Vaux’s tenure, such a large building campaign would have been unpopular, particularly during the panic of 1857. Moreover, Vaux hesitated to build new market houses at a time when private stores or market establishments, called “provision stores,” were becoming “daily more numerous.”

Despite the alleged popularity of provision stores, in 1857 the city still owned and managed thirteen markets with a total of 3,442 rented stalls—885 in Market Street alone—for which there was increasing demand. In addition to stalls were the city’s curb markets, with their estimated five thousand farmers’ wagons. Farmers who had no desire to run a year-round shop or market stall sold their goods in curb markets. The public market remained the primary source of urban food supply and distribution, and market houses continued to be unquestionably more profitable than any other city investment. According to the journals of the common council from 1854 to 1858, annual market revenues averaged about $65,000.
Market rents contributed so much money to city coffers that the councils, in response to applications for additional stalls and a desire for more revenue, passed an ordinance to permit the sale of fish at the west end of the market houses at Fourth, Seventh, and Seventeenth Streets. Mayor Vaux vetoed the ordinance, chiding the councils for trying to rent portions of the public streets at high fees. Such action, Vaux argued, “cannot be sanctioned by any principle of public justice or municipal policy.” Vaux concluded, “Until the present system of renting the use of the highways to private citizens for private uses, outside the Market Houses, receives serious consideration of the Councils, and some legislation based on sound principles [is] enacted, I cannot approve this spasmodic legislation.” Vaux alluded to the unresolved issue of whether railroads, let alone fish vendors, could use the public highways for their own gain.19

Railroading the Market

Supporters of a railway on Market Street included not only the merchants but also the suburbanites who lived across the Schuylkill River in West Philadelphia. This pioneer suburb, boosted by real estate developers and land speculators between 1850 and 1880, attracted residents seeking a retreat from their urban workplaces.20 The West Philadelphia Passenger Railway promised to meet the increasing demand of commuters and began its “march” downtown in 1858, when the company received legislative authority to lay rails over the Market Street Bridge. In response to the encroachment, a defeated Mayor Vaux sighed, “We are fast becoming a corporation growing country. Our State Legislature devotes itself each winter to creating those irresponsible, power-accumulating monopolies.” It was “dangerous,” Vaux had decided, to try to stop them.21

Any question whether the railroads could use Market Street was settled during the administration of Mayor Alexander Henry, the Whig who defeated Vaux in the 1858 election and under whose tenure the market issue finally came to a close. In a fiery session on November 26, 1858, the select councils considered an ordinance to remove the market houses on Market Street. Some councilmen offered amendments to stagger demolition over a year, beginning with the two sheds between Fifteenth and Seventeenth Streets, since the public was not expecting destruction of the entire market. Others, however, opposed the ordinance altogether, like a Mr. Handy, who knew that in doing so he would be considered an “old fogy.” Councilman William C. Kelly
opposed the ordinance because it benefited only a railway corporation. Kelly reasoned that for all the railroad’s promise of making Philadelphia into a great depot, “Who could tell but that at some future day, a bridge would be constructed over the Delaware river and trade, by this means, be diverted to New York.” Kelly offered a compromise amendment that provided for the erection of eleven replacement market houses in various wards. This idea did not sit well with Councilman W. P. Hacker, who “thought the erection of buildings for the sale of meats and vegetables should be matters of private enterprise.” In agreement with Hacker was Councilman William L. Dennis, who believed that removing the sheds would not cause “one cabbage less raised and sold,” implying that the ordinance would have no significant impact on the city’s food supply or distribution.22

The bickering came to an abrupt and dramatic end when Councilman John Krider, who opposed tearing down the sheds, publicly announced that someone (whom he would not name) had offered him a $200 bribe to vote in favor of the removal. This statement caused considerable excitement, loud cries, and a final vote on the ordinance, which passed forty-nine to twenty-eight.

Repercussions from the council’s decision to remove the sheds appeared two days later in the Sunday Dispatch. Losers of the vote blamed the “greedy, stingy, mean, and snobbish commercial classes of Philadelphia.” “The grand philosophers of the Board of Trade,” they argued, had ideas that were “not more elevated than the opinions of hucksters ought to be. It was these men who have long since imagined that they discovered that the whole prosperity of the city depended altogether upon the removal of markets from High Street.” They blamed the loss of a great convenience to the city, not to mention the anticipated loss of $30,000 in annual market revenues, on the “aristocrats” and “their parasite organs of the press.” The “commercial classes” had gotten their way at last—not by honest means, but with “corporation assistance.” That assistance came when the Market Street Railway Company received its charter from “a venal Legislature” for a “whole monopoly of what might indeed be a splendid street if it were clear of railroad tracks, all to themselves.”23

How could the appearance of Market Street, the article continued, possibly benefit from “four railroad tracks in the center, and with turn-outs breaking up the pavements in every square? What inducement will there be for anybody to walk in it, and to stumble over tracks crossing the pavements? What pleasure can it be for drivers of vehicles to ride in it, and damage their
wheels on the rails . . .? Take away the crowds that must go into it to attend the markets, and it will become the most silent, deserted, profitless street in the city.” The years-old controversy over the market sheds had just been settled in “the most disgraceful hurry” to accommodate the railroads, with the result that “corporations, purse-proud dealers in merchandise, and would-be market house builders” would now have control of Market Street. The latter referred specifically to builder John Rice, who “stands ready, no doubt, to build all the market houses in the city.”

Having covered the controversy closely for many years, the Public Ledger reported from experience that the question of removing the market houses was almost as difficult to settle as the issue in Congress over statehood for the territory of Kansas. Despite a majority vote to remove the sheds, bickering still ensued in spring 1859 over the timing of the demolition, and over paying for it, as well as the salvaging of materials, particularly the valuable metal roofs and iron posts and lintels.24

The Incorporation of Market Houses

With demolition pending, Mayor Alexander Henry assuaged any anxiety in the councils over the expected loss of market revenues. That loss, he stated, would be offset by increased trade along the city’s chief business thoroughfare. Henry also laid to rest any notion that the city would build new market houses to replace the sheds. In his mind, providing public accommodations for individual businesses—no matter how profitable—was “questionable.” Celebrating Henry’s position was the Public Ledger, which announced that “since the city has determined to provide no more public markets, the business is falling into the hands of companies and private individuals, in which probably the public will be better accommodated than by having all the markets in one street.”25

The notion of market companies also sat well with the state judiciary and legislature in Harrisburg. In 1859, when the Pennsylvania Supreme Court decided yet another case, hopefully the last, involving Philadelphia’s market controversy, the court’s opinion was completely the opposite of Chief Justice Black’s opinion of five years earlier. In Twitchell v. The City of Philadelphia, Justice John Meredith Read reported on the property dispute case that “none of the market-houses contracted for [by the city] have been or ever will be built, and the Broad street-market house has as yet produced no revenue.”
Accordingly, “the whole [market] scheme has utterly failed, with a most seri-
ous pecuniary loss to the city and their constituents.” Philadelphia’s “costly
outlay for nothing” (referring to the $650,000 spent on new market property
in 1854) “is now entirely superseded by private corporate enterprise, which
promises to supply the old city proper with well-arranged and convenient
market-houses.” After Read’s decision, the state legislature hastily considered
bills for the incorporation of market house companies in Philadelphia, and be-
fore the year’s end thirteen companies received legislative charters.26

By 1859 it was clear that corporations, which could raise capital with lim-
ited personal financial risk, offered unprecedented opportunity for specula-
tion in food retailing and market house construction. With their legal author-
ity to issue stock, officers of market companies raised the capital needed for
property and new buildings, including the latest innovations in refrigeration,
lighting, ventilation, and construction. The corporate ownership once re-
served for a small group of directors acting for the public good had become
a popular means by which the state promoted economic individualism.27

Market house company charters followed the trend in the antebellum pe-
riod of transferring economic power to private entities by modifying the legal
system. State legislatures, for example, revised not only the laws of “eminent
domain” and “nuisance” but also corporation law to favor entrepreneurial
groups and individuals with capital. In the colonial period, corporations en-
listed private capital to construct such public works as canals, bridges, turn-
pikes, and urban water systems, with investors entitled to revenues from tolls
and user fees.28 According to the public market tradition in America, some
cities and towns financed market houses in much the same way, but the in-
vestors’ claim to market revenues expired after construction costs had been
met. Moreover, it was always clear that such financing schemes did not enti-
tle investors to participate in the affairs of the market, because local authori-
ties maintained the right to regulate it and oversee its daily operation. For ex-
ample, the William Penn Market Company, chartered by the Commonwealth
in 1838, was subject to “the control and supervision of the proper municipal
authorities of the city of Philadelphia” with respect to weights and measures
and the soundness of provisions. After the company’s twenty-five-year char-
ter expired, the city had the right to take its stock, “whether the said company
shall agree or not.”29

The market house company charters of 1859, however, typically yielded all
responsibility for the market house to the company. The charter of the Western
Market Company, for example, vested authority for the ownership, maintenance, use, and management of the market house to a board of seven managers elected by the stockholders. Overriding traditional municipal market laws, the legislative charter also gave the company full power over the location of the market house, the selection of tenants, and the rules governing farmers.30

The Rise of the Businessman

The concept of a market house as a private business venture was new and could not have existed without widespread faith in the hero of the mid-nineteenth century—the “business man.”31 According to the principles of the moral economy, consumers had always expected government to protect the public markets, to enforce the ethics of trade, and to regulate the merchants and middlemen who stood between them and the producer. Now individuals who used to warrant close regulation were heroes. Merchants and middlemen, with legal protection from the state and the ability to raise capital through stock corporations, took the lead in urban food retailing and distribution. They were the same people Azariah Flagg and Fernando Wood declared would save New Yorkers from a failed public market system.32

Despite economic and political advantages, food merchants (as opposed to small retailers) still needed a public relations campaign to win the public trust. A new genre of “success” books promoted, among other things, laissez-faire, faith in the merchant and businessman, and the profitability of market gardening. Among them, Mrs. L. C. Tuthill’s Success in Life: The Merchant (1850) touted the qualities of a good merchant—one who was engaged in “self-government,” “economy,” “courtesy,” and “integrity.”33 More prolific was Edwin T. Freedley, whose works read like handbooks for would-be capitalists.34

Freedley praised the merchant and businessman by drawing analogies between their activities and those of the popular huckster and public market vendor. In A Practical Treatise on Business, or How to Get, Save, Spend, Give, Lend, and Bequeath Money . . . (1852), Freedley offered a broad definition of “merchant” as one “who buys and sells; who buys to sell, and sells to buy the more.” Merchants, Freedley explained, were important members of the community because they distributed goods between the classes. Within his definition of “merchant” fell “the whole class who live by buying and selling, and not merely those conventionally called merchants to dis-
tinguish them from small dealers. This term comprises traders behind counters, and traders behind desks; traders behind neither counters nor desks. There are various grades of merchants. They might be classed and symbolized according as they use a basket, a wheelbarrow, a cart, a stall, a booth, a shop, a warehouse, a countingroom, or bank. Still, all are the same thing—men who live by buying and selling.”

Capitalizing on the public perception that the “small” dealer was more trustworthy than a “large” one, Freedley relied on the imagery of the public market to defend the international merchant, noting that “a ship is only a large basket; a warehouse, a costly stall. Your peddler is a small merchant going round from house to house with his basket to mediate between persons; your merchant is only a great peddler sending round from land to land with his ships to mediate between nations.” By the terms of traditional market laws, the scope and method of trade Freedley described would have fallen into the category of the illicit practices of hoarding, engrossing, and forestalling. Now the formerly despised middleman was portrayed as an accepted, legitimate, and valued member of society.

Perhaps to assuage any fear that cities would be deprived of an adequate food supply while merchants sent goods wherever they commanded the best price, even abroad, Freedley made a direct pitch for market gardening. In *Opportunities for Industry and the Safe Investment of Capital, or A Thousand Chances to Make Money* (1859), published in the same year that Philadelphia was tearing down the market sheds, Freedley argued that “the cultivation of fruits and vegetables, especially in the vicinity of large cities, is, if skilfully managed, almost uniformly a profitable business.” Market gardening was an attractive occupation because “the attention of producers is so exclusively devoted to the raising of staples, that the markets of the cities are often illy supplied with garden fruit and vegetables.” Best of all, according to Freedley, market gardening required little experience, for “it is a singular fact, that many of the most important improvements made in Agriculture are traced to men who are not professional farmers.” Freedley advised the successful market gardener to base agricultural decisions on a careful reading of commercial journals and comparison of price currents. Market gardening was particularly profitable in the South, Freedley added, because “strawberries, peas, potatoes, etc, will ripen at least six weeks earlier in the Southern than in the Northern States; and a very profitable and extensive business may be done in shipping them to Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.”
Perhaps heeding Freedley’s advice was Thomas H. Elliot of Georgia, a former purser who in 1859 established a business on Market Street above Eleventh selling country produce from southern agents.\textsuperscript{37} The Philadelphia firm of Arthur, Burnham and Company also boasted a year-round business in fresh produce, importing from regions with long growing seasons.\textsuperscript{38}

The “success” literature of the period suggests that some critics worried that privatizing markets would disturb the city’s food supply by creating more distant markets and sources for food. Despite some skepticism, however, investors in market house companies eagerly awaited the business of Market Street’s displaced food vendors while the city planned to remove the sheds. Both parties closely coordinated their efforts, and the entire process took roughly one year, from April 1859 to April 1860.\textsuperscript{39}

The March Down Market Street

\textit{Western Market}

The first to organize was the Western Market Company, financed by butchers from the city’s two market sheds on Market Street west of Broad. The company hired architect John M. Gries and builder John Rice to construct a market house on the northeast corner of Sixteenth and Market Streets.\textsuperscript{40} On November 16, 1858, at the laying of the cornerstone, Philip Lowry, chairman of the committee of the Butchers’ Association, remarked that those gathered were helping to inaugurate “a system of conducting the markets that must, sooner or later, be adopted by all the principal cities in our Great Union.” Claiming that Philadelphia led the movement toward market privatization that was characteristic of large cities, Lowry remarked that a growing trade demanded use of Market Street and that the butchers had finally yielded their “time-honored rights” and consented to demolition of the old markets, as long as the new market house would be subject to the same municipal regulations.\textsuperscript{41}

At the inauguration, Mayor Henry commented on the importance of markets in general, conveniently (and deliberately) leaving out the word “public.” He claimed that the market was “closely associated with the progress of civilization, and, by the character, abundance and variety of its commodities, may justly be estimated the prosperity, wealth and refinement of the community in which it is established.” He described the market as a place that provides food to satisfy “the cravings of hunger, to give sinew to the arm of the work-
man, or to delight the palate of the luxurious.” He called the act of the Butchers’ Association in building a market an “unostentatious deed of charity.” Councilman Dennis also offered a toast, saying that unsightly street markets would be “remedied by the erection of closed markets.”

Opening day, April 20, 1859, was tense as the public watched the Western Market Company coordinate removal of the city’s market sheds (fig. 5.8) with the opening of its new market house. At 10:00 A.M. occupants of the sheds moved into the new Western Market, at 11:00 A.M. gangs of laborers tore down the sheds, and at 4:00 P.M. the new market house opened for business. The press noted cynically, “The city would have to talk about it for several years before that much work could be accomplished, and its performance would then be the work of weeks instead of hours.”

**Figure 5.8** The municipal market sheds on the eve of their demolition, with the new Western Market just visible in the background. Market Street, West of Fifteenth, Philadelphia, 1859. Free Library of Philadelphia.
Press accounts described the Western Market as a “market palace,” rivaling Quincy Market and by far the best market in the Union (fig. 5.9). Constructed of load-bearing brick walls supporting a clerestory and arched roof, the Western Market was praised for reflecting the “skill of our Philadelphia mechanics.” Inside, the market house boasted 280 stalls with Italian marble countertops, divided by wide paved aisles. Four underground vaults running the length of the building housed the wholesale trade of Jersey produce. John H. Jones operated a restaurant on the Market Street front. Two galleries 150 by 20 feet at each end of the building accommodated the sale of flowers, seeds, and ice cream. Sheds for selling fish stood on the east side of the building. Iron-framed doors with wicker inserts for air circulation lined the entire perimeter of the market house. One newspaper account reported that “the means of ventilating this market are so perfect that all objections to close[d] markets will no doubt, be removed.”

Eastern Market

The concept that markets need not be built and managed by the municipal authorities had indeed arrived in Philadelphia, but not everyone immediately accepted the idea. The market butchers east of Broad insisted on re-
maining in the city-owned sheds. The city, by now determined to get out of the market-building business, hoped that the first phase of the demolition, from Fifteenth Street to Seventeenth Street, would encourage the butchers east of Broad to organize their own market as their fellow butchers to the west had done. Only then could the city proceed with a “general sweep of all the sheds from Eighth street to Front.”

As soon as the sheds between Fifteenth and Seventeenth Streets were gone, the West Philadelphia Passenger Railway Company laid tracks where the sheds had stood and awaited passage of a bill in Harrisburg to extend their tracks to Front Street. With the railway on their heels and the city just standing by, the butchers east of Broad had no choice but to organize to build their own quarters. On February 18, 1859, they incorporated as the Eastern Market Company, whose principal shareholders included former mayor Richard Vaux as well as Edward Wartman, plaintiff in the 1854 case against the city.

According to the incorporation act, the Eastern Market Company was authorized to construct a market house on the block bound by Market, Chestnut, Fourth, and Fifth Streets. Officers had to be citizens of Pennsylvania, and farmers of the state would be entitled to occupy half of the stalls. The act also limited farmers to a maximum of three stalls each but declared no restrictions on the quantity or terms of their sales. The company received a thirty-year charter “unless extended or renewed by the legislature.”

The new market was equipped with 431 stalls that the company auctioned to the highest bidders on November 8, 1859. The next day the U.S. Gazette reported that the auction drew a large crowd: “Of course they were all males, females having no direct interest in the trade in chops and sirloins.” Bidders were “composed almost wholly of butchers,” one of whom paid a premium of $5,150 for a pair of stalls, in addition to annual rent.

Farmers’ Market

Farmers from the neighboring counties of Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Bucks, displaced by the removal of the city’s market sheds and not in a position to pay such high premiums for a stall in one of the new private market houses, met to discuss the matter. Feeling that the private market houses were governed by directors whose interests were inimical to their own, the farmers chose to incorporate as the Farmers’ Market Company. Located at Twelfth and Market Streets, the new Farmers’ Market, designed by Samuel Sloan and built by H. Phillippi, combined modern structural tech-
Techniques, including a sheet-metal roof and a ventilator that ran the length of the building, with a “false” facade inspired by the Venetian Renaissance (fig. 5.10). The pediment featured a lunette that held a marble relief carving of the farmers’ coat of arms. (Similar architectural and iconographic embellishments, such as reliefs of bulls’ heads and cornucopias, were popular features of market houses at this time.) The interior was laid out like the grid of a city, with six broad aisles running lengthwise and eighteen narrow cross aisles. The company numbered the 428 stalls in much the same way as the houses of the city. The market’s avenues were numbered from east to west, and the
stalls ran northward, with even-numbered stalls on the west side and odd-numbered stalls on the east.49

The companies of the Western Market, Eastern Market, and Farmers’ Market were among the twenty incorporated in Philadelphia from 1859 to 1861.50 De Voe’s unpublished essay, probably written after he returned to New York from a visit to Philadelphia in 1862, offered a skeptical view of the market house company mania. He was impressed by the beautiful market houses built by private enterprise, but he also feared they were too “numerous and costly.” He pointed out that they had “nearly all proved themselves unsuccessful for market purposes” and had only short life spans.51 Eastern Market, for example, was practically empty of vendors within two years of operation, and the property was sold. Likewise Western Market, hailed at its opening as one of the greatest market houses in the country, survived for only twelve years before the Pennsylvania Railroad converted it into a depot in 1871.

De Voe predicted that market companies would fail to survive in the long term because they were overcapitalized and highly speculative. Investors, he warned, “were led into the erection of these elegant and commodious buildings, from the fact that some of the first sold their stalls at public auction for high premiums, besides ground rents; which gave them the appearance of such a profitable nature, that it created a mania for them, and they grew up like mushrooms in every part of the city.” Eventually, however, few remained successful because of “their great expense, their excessive numbers, and [lack of] the proper knowledge to conduct them.”52 One exception was the Farmers’ Market, whose “perfect success” De Voe attributed to the farmers who were the exclusive owners and managers. His verdict on market companies was premature, however, for little did he imagine that they would proliferate throughout Pennsylvania and ultimately reach his home city of New York.