I claim that public markets under Municipal rule are a failure, and must give way to private enterprise such as the Manhattan Market Company has demonstrated in the erection of their magnificent building.  

Paul J. Armour, New York, 1873

A distinct characteristic of the private market house, distinguishing it from a public market, was its splendid (and costly) facilities. Market companies hoped to attract families and middle-class shoppers by advertising the latest in construction, lighting, ventilation, and refrigeration as well as orderly aisles and luxurious stalls. Such features were affordable to a corporation, whose power to issue stock provided the initial capital. In contrast, city-owned markets suffered from the bad reputation of city government in general, which by the 1850s was understood as an inferior public entity, lacking in rights, privileges, and immunities. Caught in a vicious circle, cities could not afford to repair or improve markets because revenues were declining owing to unexpected competition from private markets.

Different management styles in the public and private markets also contributed to the landscape of deregulation and reinforced a public/private divide. Owners of market companies considered themselves modern and for-
ward-looking, while those who defended municipal ownership were labeled old fogies. Citizens watched as their old market sheds were torn down, never to be replaced. Some watched with delight, others with regret.

The public/private divide was nowhere more apparent than in Pennsylvania, where more market house companies were incorporated than in any other state of the Union. City council minutes reveal the fears and anxieties expressed by mayors and councilmen who struggled with the movement to privatize. Most were left with little choice but to remove their market sheds from the middle of streets or town squares and leave the construction of markets to private enterprise. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is a particularly rich site for the study of the public/private struggle over market houses. The market house company mania that began in Philadelphia in 1859 continued unabated throughout the rest of the state, particularly during the 1870s and 1880s. Cities and towns tore down their market sheds, and in their place there sprang up new off-street market houses owned and run by private companies. The story was repeated over and over, and by the end of the nineteenth century more than one hundred market house companies had received legislative charters from the Commonwealth.2

Deregulation played out differently in New York City, where public markets suffered not so much from competition from meat shops and private companies as from corruption, mismanagement, and neglect. It is here that De Voe enters the story again, not as an antiquarian and amateur historian, but as a bureaucrat charged with resurrecting New York’s public market system. In short, De Voe understood that private shops, market house companies, and public markets were not mutually exclusive and that there was a need in New York for several forms of food distribution. Unfortunately, as De Voe pointed out, the potential of public markets had been compromised by corruption, inefficient public officers, and the lack of a coordinated system for marketing and distributing food. His opinions, naturally, were not popular with city officials, who ran the markets only to siphon off revenues for themselves or for other public projects—a fact that would come to light with the downfall of the Tweed ring and De Voe’s appointment as superintendent of markets in 1871.

The Public/Private Divide in Philadelphia

In 1875 Earl Shinn praised the private market houses in his history of the architecture, life, and manners of Philadelphia, written for the forthcoming
national centennial. His chapter on market houses touted the privately owned Farmers’ Market at Twelfth and Market Streets as a dazzling sight of continuous color, movement, and life—with an inexhaustible supply of food, high ceiling, large stalls, good ventilation, and crowds coming and going in the main aisle (fig. 6.1).³ In contrast to the splendor of the privately owned markets were Shinn’s descriptions of the municipal markets still owned and operated by the city of Philadelphia: New Market, on South Second Street between Pine and South, was described as small and dingy, with low ceilings, and as lacking modern conveniences.
The press, too, assured readers that the private markets “combine all the advantages of being light, clean, comfortable, well ventilated, and last, though not least, of not being built in the middle of the street and in everybody’s way.”

In contrast, the city’s street markets not only stood “in everyone’s way” but also offended the middle class, who shunned them for their chaos and their appeal to the lower sort (fig. 6.2). The press heaped insults on the city market vendors who had “monopolized” the stalls with the sale of goods that were incompati-

**Figure 6.2** “Mrs. Livewell and the Farmer,” from a short story by T. S. Arthur. Courtesy of the Roughwood Collection.
ble with family needs, such as chops, soup, stewed oysters, fried sausages, cake, gingerbread, cheese, coffee, and spruce beer. These vendors, the press argued, chased away the families and housekeepers and catered primarily to “errand boys and heavy clerks [who] resort to the sheds to procure a cheap meal.” The middle-class consensus in Philadelphia, popular by the 1870s, was that the preferred market houses, in terms of service, modern facilities, and atmosphere of civility, were those owned and managed by private companies.

Privatization Moves Inland

Harrisburg

One of the earliest market companies established outside Philadelphia was in Harrisburg, where William Verbeke, a Dutch émigré and pharmacist, and Jacob Haehnlen, a former resident of Philadelphia, founded the West Harrisburg Market House Company in 1860. Haehnlen may have gotten the idea from his native Philadelphia or from the local Harrisburg paper. The Patriot Union, for example, regularly printed bills that were before the legislature, including those for the incorporation of the Philadelphia market house companies.

Verbeke had begun building a stone market in the part of Harrisburg known as “Verbeke town” in 1856, but he ran out of money. The Haehnlen family contributed property and funds to the enterprise, and together they formed a stock company, chartered by the legislature on April 2, 1860. The stone market house in the middle of Broad (today Verbeke) Street, between Third and Elder Streets, three blocks from the Susquehanna River, opened for business in 1864. When the market opened, the number of stockholders had grown from the original ten at incorporation in 1860 to over fifty, including five women.

Extant company records show that the Broad Street Market operated in much the same way as a municipal market, with a salaried superintendent, fixed public hours, and strict rules for tenants and farmers. The market was successful for several reasons. Stockholders were local, construction costs were modest, and the market was closely regulated by dedicated long-term superintendents. In addition, it was in a growing neighborhood, where it was closer to consumers than markets in the commercial district.

Borough and city council minutes reveal, however, that the local government in Harrisburg, not to mention vendors from Market Square, had deep
anxieties about the incorporation of the West Harrisburg Market House Company. Several months before the company received its corporate charter, the town council unanimously passed a resolution opposing the incorporation bill. The council argued that “there seems to be a general hostility to said measure because the same is not necessary and will seriously prejudice the revenues of the Borough.” 10 Harrisburg’s own charter from the Commonwealth required the city to maintain public markets, which it had been doing on the square since 1807.11

The legislature did not consider the council’s opposition, and competition from the West Harrisburg Market House Company was felt almost immediately. The company was so successful that it expanded its facilities with a new brick market house just east of its original structure (fig. 6.3). In addition, several other companies formed to build and manage market houses in Harrisburg.12

FIGURE 6.3 Broad Street Market, Harrisburg, about 1880. Pennsylvania State Archives.
Having suffered from declining revenues, the city-owned sheds at Market Square (fig. 6.4) had deteriorated so much that in 1884 retired Pennsylvania senator Simon Cameron called them “a disgrace to the city; they are things of the past, and could not be permitted to exist in this age of progress.” Nonetheless, some residents still demanded the right to an adequate and convenient public market on the town square. After receiving a lengthy citizens’ petition in favor of a new market house on the square, the city contracted for a building 65 feet wide by 173 feet long, with a ventilated roof supported by iron trusses. But the project prompted opponents to take the matter to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. In October 1887 the court declared the existing structures a nuisance, not because they were unsightly but because they obstructed a public thoroughfare. State intervention therefore forced marketing on the square to cease, and the city tore down the sheds in early February 1889.

In the midst of the demolition, the Daily Patriot declared that corruption in the office of Thomas G. Hargest, city solicitor, had delayed the removal of the sheds. The Hargest ring had been blocking the removal of “these old eyesores” for years, but now the taxpayers would finally “see the debris of the sheds and the Hargest ring both ‘cleaned up’ together.”
The market sheds not only stood “in the way of progress” but also were visual reminders of corruption in the city government. The purge of market sheds from the town square symbolized the purge of cronyism and old alliances in the city government. It also paved the way for the streetcar, which completed the transformation of the street from a meeting place to a conduit for transportation and a traffic artery (fig. 6.5).

York

A similar movement to demolish the market sheds on the main square in York, just thirty miles south of Harrisburg, came as no surprise. On May 20, 1887, the York common council resolved that the market sheds “greatly interfere with the convenience of public travel, and have become a public nuisance” (fig. 6.6). Pushing the councils to remove the sheds was Edward D. Ziegler, a prominent York attorney and officer of the stock company that had built the privately owned City Market House in 1879. City Market House, aptly named to attract York residents, was an imposing structure designed in the High Vic-

Figure 6.5 Market Square, Harrisburg, 1906. Pennsylvania State Archives.
torian Gothic style by John Augustus Dempwolf. Located on the southeast corner of Duke and Princess Streets, not far from the center square, City Market House was a death blow to business in the municipal market sheds (fig. 6.7).15

Fearing demolition of the market sheds on the square was the antiquarian Henry L. Fischer, who explained in his celebratory publication of 1879 the reason for “Market sheds, butchers’ stalls and sheep shambles, instead of statues and fountains in our Centre Squares.” Steeped in the German tradition, some of the Pennsylvania towns, Fischer argued, tolerated “no suggestion of removal” of markets from their squares. As in England, “the very thought of removing these ancient marts . . . would be denounced as a violation of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and the sublime sentiments of Washington’s Farewell Address.”16

York, Fischer declared, “adheres to its central idea—its Centre Square market houses with a stubborn yet commendable tenacity, semipatriotic.” He defended the market against the “shortsighted people” who knew little “of its history, its high and royal origin, its Revolutionary associations, the revenues and the countless substantial blessings, and luxuries which it has brought and must ‘forever’ bring to the citizens of York.”

Figure 6.6 Market Square, York, about 1875. The York County Heritage Trust, Pennsylvania.
Fischer’s strongest claim in favor of York’s public market was its benefit to the common man. Without the market sheds, he asked,

where would the average, hungry, York County Pennsylvania-Dutchman procure a cheap dinner? Where would the Sallie Puddings, the Schmack-worschits, the vendors of Fresh roasted Pea-nuts, Ginger-cakes, Pretzels, Hard boiled eggs, Cold Puddings, Pop, Raspberry-ade, Oysters and Coffee and their successors forever find a “commodious” place for their business? Where would the Dixie Pluff’s the “City Krafft’s” and the other loafers “and their successors forever,” find a “commodious” place to loaf? Where would the unemployed street laborer, woodsawyer, coal heaver “and their successors forever,” find a “commodious” place and shelter to spend a rainy day and sit and talk and tell their simple stories o’er? Where would the Pennsylvania-Dutch boys and girls “and their successors forever,” find an equally “commodious” place to meet and spend their Whit Mondays and their small change for the exquisite luxuries above in part recited? And where, oh! where, would that last refinement of
modern civilization, the respectable Tramp, in search of employment “and his successors f-o-r-e-v-e-r,” find a “commodious” and comfortable place to lay their weary heads . . .

Fischer published his commemorative in the wake of the by now familiar movement in the Commonwealth to remove market sheds from town squares. While the councils bickered indecisively over the “market shed matter,” the local butchers claimed the right to some protection. Anxious about the uncertainty of having their leases renewed, the butchers claimed that until a final decision was made on the removal of the market houses they demanded their basic right to a clean, regulated, and policed market.

The matter came to an end on June 27, when a vote of fourteen to ten in the councils resolved that the market sheds in the Centre Square “encroach upon a public highway of the City, thereby greatly impeding and rendering dangerous travel through the said square.” The York councils declared the market sheds a public nuisance, and Mayor D. K. Noell ordered their immediate removal.

The councils also passed a resolution of thanks to Mayor Noell “for the noble and fearless manner in which he made effective the concurrent resolution for the removal of the market sheds, thereby subserving the will of the people, and ridding the City of that which has so long disgraced its public square and the spot made sacred by many revolutionary memories.”

Despite the councils’ confidence that the mayor had acted in the public interest, the mayor signed the resolution for removal of the sheds on June 30 at 12:05 A.M., and by 2:00 A.M. the demolition team began its work “under cover of darkness.” Firemen and people in the vicinity arrived on the scene after someone sent in a fire alarm from the Centre Square call box. The event created a public uproar, as “some threatened arrest for destroying public property, others frantically searched for the county judges to secure last-minute injunctions.” Efforts to stop demolition failed; laborers flattened the sheds by 3:00 A.M., and by dawn the market’s skeletal ceiling beams were all that remained (fig. 6.8).

Reflecting on the year’s activities, Mayor Noell reported on December 31, 1887, that “some of these changes and improvements were at the time they were made, especially the removal of the market sheds, quite severely criticized by a few, whose hearts cling fondly to the relics of the past, but the young people, to whom so strongly belongs the spirit of progress, said, ‘the
sheds must go,’ and the Mayor obedient to the direction of the Councils, instantly removed them.” The mayor also bragged that those who had most violently opposed the removal had since congratulated him. Among his advocates certainly must have been investors in the City Street Railway Company, which received the mayor’s support to move its tracks to the center of the square just six weeks after demolition of the market sheds.

Harrisburg and York were not alone in the Commonwealth in joining the movement to rid their streets and town squares of “unsightly” sheds. In south-eastern Pennsylvania alone, street markets were demolished in West Chester (1869), Reading (1871), Hanover (1872), and Lebanon (1884), as were the open-sided but off-street market sheds in Columbia (1869) and Carlisle (1878). Much of the pressure for their removal came from prominent local businessmen who either had a personal stake in a private market house com-

\textbf{Figure 6.8} Market Square, demolition of the sheds, York, 1887. The York County Heritage Trust, Pennsylvania.
pany or had investments that would profit from improved railway service through the town.20

The Pennsylvania German preference for convenience and economy over beauty and ornament, however, interfered with the movement to remove market sheds from the main squares in some of the smaller, more conservative towns such as Lancaster. In 1873, when a group of investors approached the Lancaster city council to build a new market house on the city’s market square, Mayor William D. Stauffer refused to succumb to private interests. Stauffer vetoed an ordinance that would have charged the Lancaster Central Market Company $2,000 per year for a ninety-nine-year lease on market square—property that yielded the city over $5,000 a year in net income. Stauffer, having done the math, could not believe the city council was willing to forfeit $3,000 “of the people’s money every year for ninety-nine years to a company of private individuals.” “This money,” he added, “belongs to the public; it is for its use and cannot be given away without perverting the trust for which it is held.”21 Stauffer concluded, “If at any time within this period or after it, the citizens of Lancaster want new market buildings, they can erect them as cheap and as good as any company, without the payment of a large bonus.”22 The veto was sustained, and the city did not lease its market property to the company, although it was fifteen years before municipal funds built Central Market.23

Return of the Mixed-Use Market House

As one would expect, the removal of city-owned market sheds typically coincided with the construction of private market houses. Company managers, as they attempted to win the public trust, searched for a distinctive look that would distinguish their buildings from the old market sheds. At the same time, they looked for ways to combine rent-producing functions under one roof. Their solution was to revive the mixed-use market house, the two- or three-story building with marketing on the ground floor and public meeting space above. Companies chartered for this purpose were established in Altoona (1863), Mechanicsburg (1865), New Castle (1866), Williamsport (1866), Lock Haven (1866), Germantown (1868), West Philadelphia (1868), Milton (1870), Mantua (1870), Wheatland (1871), Sharon (1871), Bridgeport (1874), and Hanover (1887). These companies supplemented market revenues by renting the upper hall to numerous social and ethnic clubs, professional entertainers, church groups, and political parties.
Likewise, fire companies and “opera house” companies financed new buildings by renting market space on the ground floor. Fire companies that received legislative charters to erect market houses in Philadelphia included the Mantua Hook and Ladder Company (1863), the Lincoln Steam Fire Hose Company (1867), and the Union Fire Company (1867). The Grand Opera and Market House Company of Reading incorporated in 1879 to maintain an opera house and a market, as the Fourth and Kelker Street Market Company of Harrisburg did in 1889 (fig. 6.9). The term “opera house” was highly flexible, an affectation that companies used to describe the market’s upper floor—basically a meeting hall with a gently sloping floor, balconies, and elaborate decorative schemes.  

Investors flooded the Pennsylvania Assembly with so many bills for the incorporation of market houses and other profit-making ventures that it passed a general corporation law in 1874. This law permitted the general establishment of corporations for a “hotel and drove yard or boarding house, theatre,
opera and market house, livery or board stable,” so that companies no longer had to apply for individual charters from the legislature. Companies incorporated under the act had the power to buy property, erect buildings, and borrow money equal to their capital stock. The West Harrisburg Market House Company, for example, erected its second market house under the new incorporation law.

New York City

While the market house mania confronted small-town officials throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the situation was quite different in New York City, which envisioned itself as one of the great food depots of the world. Unfortunately, the city had a long way to go before living up to its claim. Even Junius Browne, in praising the “great metropolis” in 1869, was doubtful that New York’s market houses could impress anyone. He found more hope in the markets of Philadelphia, where “the City of Brotherly Love may be an overgrown village; but its market-houses are what they should be, and its municipal government won’t steal more than fifty cents on the dollar. Would we could say the same for Gotham!”

On December 15, 1871, Thomas De Voe was appointed superintendent of markets of the city of New York. This was no routine appointment. De Voe was charged with restoring the public markets from near physical and ideological collapse after years of corruption and neglect. His appointment coincided with the establishment of the Committee of Seventy, whose larger task was to topple the Tweed ring. Armed with a strong commitment to well-regulated public markets, and in the spirit of the Committee of Seventy, De Voe aimed to seek out the abuses, collect outstanding revenues, and appoint new clerks, with the hope of making the public market system work again.

De Voe was prepared for the task. He came to the job at age sixty, after decades of experience as a butcher. He had also made a name for himself as an expert on the history of public markets with his two books, *The Market Book* (1862) and *The Market Assistant* (1867). Beyond his research in the confines of the New-York Historical Society, De Voe had accumulated knowledge about markets in other parts of the country. He conducted fieldwork, sketching floor plans and collecting stories and anecdotes from the established vendors and their customers in Philadelphia. He also solicited
copies of market laws and ordinances from city clerks in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Louisville, Montreal, New Haven, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Raleigh, and Providence and issued circulars asking for information on the types of food sold in their markets. In 1867 he and his wife journeyed west to Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Ohio, documenting markets along the way, most notably the large markets of Chicago and the new Union Market in St. Louis. The trip also enabled him to gather information for his voluminous manuscript “The History of Cattle in America.”

When he was appointed superintendent of markets in 1871, De Voe was a well-known “market man,” noted for the books he enthusiastically promoted, his lectures on public markets and abattoirs, and his opinions in the newspapers. He had a reputation for honesty and good citizenship, to which his fellow butchers and his customers attested. Anyone who visited the Jefferson Market could find “in the recess of one of the avenues . . . , the excellent and abundantly supplied stand of Colonel De Voe—a noble specimen of an American citizen, military as well as civil.”

Congratulating De Voe just a few days after his appointment, John C. Wandell, a retired officer of the New York State National Guard, wrote:

I think the Political Melenium [sic] is close at hand, having laboured for the last 25 years for not Whig nor Democrat nor Republican but Political Reform in regard to our City affairs. I begin to realize that my labours have not been in vain. You my dear Colonel [De Voe] have the experience and the ability to rescue our Markets from the deep slough of corruption which, for many years past has steadily and surely made them highly unpopular with our citizens and has compelled many worthy men to sacrifice their business in order that they might cease to be black-mailed by the hand of Clerks, Collectors, Inspectors, etc. I for one have the confidence that you will speedily put an end to such practices.

Wandell alluded to the frequent frauds committed at Washington Market, as well as the “system of terrorism” exercised by the Tammany Ward at Clinton Market. Market clerks and superintendents randomly revoked stall permits, issued fines, and demanded unjustified stall premiums from any vendor whose political leanings they considered incorrect. These unexpected “costs” of doing business in the public markets had given many vendors little choice but to move elsewhere.
Hope for Market Reform

A demand for market reform had been in the air since Peter Cooper proposed selling the public markets in 1867. Cooper, then president of the Citizens’ Association of New York, calculated that the city was losing an important source of revenue by wasting valuable commercial real estate on public markets. According to his calculations, the market property was worth $5 million but generated a paltry average net annual revenue of $110,000. Cooper complained to the notorious comptroller Richard “Slippery Dick” Connolly (ultimately to no avail): “It is unnecessary to detail the method by which the city has received so small a portion of the revenues actually collected from the markets—it forms part of the system which has been the growth of dishonest and incompetent government for thirty years. If the custodians themselves are dishonest, who shall watch them?”

The remedy Cooper proposed was selling the market property, for he believed that the original intent of public markets—for government to provide “a common ground for the meeting of producer and consumer”—was irrelevant in a city as large as New York. Farmers were crowded out of the markets and forced to occupy the public streets in the neighborhood, while the market houses themselves were occupied by self-seeking wholesalers. Cooper reported that the markets were misplaced downtown in the heart of the commercial district and that the 5,473 uptown meat shops and stores were forced to charge consumers a premium for the high cost of trucking goods from downtown. Cooper praised the markets in Paris, which were located so as to keep down the price of food in the shops. In Paris, Cooper reported, fresh food was retailed at a markup of 24 percent, while shops in New York and Brooklyn commanded 100 percent.

It was to be expected that Connolly would disregard Cooper’s proposal to sell the markets—especially since they offered a wide range of jobs for Connolly’s political cronies who looked for a place on the public payroll. Connolly’s “gang of rogues” included street sweepers, market clerks, and finally, in 1870, the superintendent of market rents and fees—a job he had given to his loyal supporter (and renowned street fighter) former alderman Richard Croker.

De Voe’s appointment as superintendent of markets on December 15, 1871, immediately followed Connolly’s arrest and the downfall of the Tweed ring in November. With a newly cleansed Tammany Hall, Andrew H. Green, deputy comptroller during the crisis, charged De Voe with reforming the
market system under his leadership. De Voe’s appointment was publicly endorsed by the market vendors and by the commission merchants in West Washington Market, who were convinced that De Voe was “the right man in the right place.”35 De Voe did not share Peter Cooper’s idea of selling the market property as a remedy for corruption and lost market revenues. On the contrary, he aimed to purge the markets of “thieves” so that honest men could return to their stalls knowing their rights would be protected. Within days of his appointment, he began to receive pleas for retribution from victims of the corruption.

Cleaning House

De Voe’s first task was to dismiss the “worse than useless officials” who managed the individual markets. Washington Market, one of the oldest and the largest in the city, employed a clerk, an assistant clerk, and a deputy clerk. During his investigation, De Voe reported that the head clerk ignored basic standards for order and cleanliness and the assistant and deputy clerks seldom reported to work. De Voe reduced the staff from three to two and increased the number of private watchmen, all selected for their “respectability and integrity.” He also identified several sweepers and cartmen who collected their pay without working for it.36 He concluded this after making random unannounced visits to the markets. The words of an angry sweeper confirm that De Voe made surprise visits and insisted on high standards of cleanliness. In his letter to De Voe, “Take the Hint” wrote:

Will you ever come into the market like a man you Steal in like a Snake to see if you would catch your Sweeppers idle no Shuperintend ever acted so you dont want to give us a minuts rest our business is to sweep the market and not the work of the common Street Scavengers by sweeping haf the streets it dont do you to sweep the market but we must sweep the ro[o]f also and do the work of every Tom Dick and Harry of the Tinkers Now you out to get a long ladder made and send us to sweep the dust of[f] the clouds when you come to the mar- ket come like a man and dont be Stealin in lik a Snak or a Spy.

[Signed] Take the Hint37

De Voe was not bothered by such threats and remained determined to improve conditions and increase worker efficiency at any cost. After two years
in office, he proudly reported a reduction from eighty-four to forty-two mar-
ket employees on the city payroll.\textsuperscript{38}

Improving the Facilities

In his 1873 report on the condition of the public markets, De Voe de-
tailed every market’s sad story of years of physical neglect. According to
the public market tradition, market revenues were supposed to support the
cost of routine maintenance and repairs. The “tradition” in New York, how-
erver, was to direct market revenues into the pockets of “official political
sinecure vampyres” and “leeches.” Washington Market was the most noto-
riously corrupt. De Voe claimed that most of its 528 stands generated
bonuses of $500 to $5,000 for market officials, who blackmailed vendors
in exchange for permit renewals for their stalls. Market officials also pock-
eted money from vendors who occupied unofficial spaces in the public pas-
sages and gangways.

Whereas Washington Market was declared the “greatest in the world” in
1853 (fig. 6.10), by the time De Voe took office twenty years later it had
eared the title as one of the “mean-looking markets of New York.”\textsuperscript{39} Harper’s
Weekly reported on November 30, 1872, that order was impossible because
of the market’s irregular lanes and makeshift sheds, descriptions that corre-
sponded to official reports from the city’s Office of Public Markets. As De Voe
described it, Washington Market’s neglected, insufficient, and exceedingly
narrow passageways were congested with produce wagons and teams loaded
with market refuse—those “obnoxious vehicles rapidly driven through the
various passage-ways, spilling portions of their offensive load along their
route, and thus creating a continual and intolerable nuisance.”\textsuperscript{40}

Much of the chaos occurred because the city had not upgraded the mar-
ket for several decades. Although it had considered rebuilding Washington
Market in 1851, the plans were caught up in rivalries and disagreements over
design. Wholesale merchants wanted a cast-iron market “after the manner
and plan of the Hudson river railroad depot.” Some members of the Com-
mittee on Repairs and Supplies preferred the plans of Frederick A. Petersen,
who proposed two stories of shops plus a third story that could be rented for
offices to help offset construction costs. Butchers disliked the idea of shops
on the second floor because they believed their customers would not bother
to climb the stairs. They argued that although Petersen’s plan “may have been
drawn by a skillful architect,” he was “unacquainted with the wants of the occupants and customers.” Plans were finally set aside altogether in 1854, when Mayor Fernando Wood vetoed the ordinance to rebuild the market, and the facilities had been ignored ever since.41

Shaming New Yorkers even further was the superior appearance of market houses in Europe, which the press described as “high-storied, arched-roofed, iron, stone, and glass built triumphs of architecture and convenience.”42 The writer was perhaps alluding to Les Halles, the central market of Paris, designed by Victor Baltard with cast-iron and glass pavilions, which served as a model for market houses throughout France and the rest of Europe (fig. 6.11). In New York, however, widespread demand for improved market facilities was not just a superficial desire to keep up with the Europeans. The city was indeed the nation’s largest market for fresh food, particularly meat. The estimated weekly per capita consumption of fresh meat in the 1850s and 1860s ranged from 2.9 to 3.6 pounds for beef and 4.2 to 4.9 pounds for all meat.43 Promoting New Yorkers’ reputation as the foremost meat-eating population in the world were the popular journals, which claimed that they spent $180,000 a day on meat, that over eight million pounds of livestock entered the city each week, and that a single hog slaughtering establishment—at Fortieth Street along the North River—generated annual sales.
of $15 million. Any city whose demand for fresh, affordable food was that high would have a big stake in ensuring that its markets could handle volume with the greatest efficiency.44

Solon Robinson, social reformer and agriculturist, called for more space, at least for the country wagons. As it stood, limited parking and crowded conditions hindered farmers from coming to the market or staying for any length of time. As a result, low-income shoppers accustomed to buying directly from the farmers had to bull their way into the market, where prices were higher. The high cost of food worried Robinson, who warned that food deprivation among the poor “breeds discontent, dissipation, crime, and ruin to any civilized society.”45

With De Voe’s campaign to collect outstanding revenues, he was happy to report that after he had been in office two years the Washington Market had received repairs to the roofs, flooring, doors, steps, and walks, and the sewage system was improved with additional branches, drainpipes, and water hydrants.46 But that was about all he could do. He understood that public expenditure on new market buildings was unthinkable until faith in (and revenues from) the system was restored. Until then, he looked for alternatives to new construction, at least for his first few years in office.

Figure 6.11 Les Halles, Paris, about 1853–1858. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
De Voe saw immediate hope for improving certain market buildings by accommodating the growing demand for armories. Jefferson, Essex, Centre, and Tompkins Markets were already home to National Guard regiments that rented their upper floors for drills, storage of equipment and uniforms, and meeting space. Tompkins Market, for example, was home to the Seventh Regiment, which in 1861 had persuaded the city to rebuild the market and give the regiment exclusive use of the upper floors (fig. 6.12). Constructed by Theodore Hunt according to the plans of Bogardus and Lafferty, the market was near the Cooper Union on the square bounded by Third Avenue and Sixth, Seventh, and Hall Streets. At the time of construction it contained the largest drill room in the country.47

After the Civil War, as more and more members lived uptown, regiments found downtown market houses inconvenient and inadequate, so they pressured the city to finance new uptown quarters for their exclusive use. Comptroller Andrew H. Green, however, firmly opposed using taxes to build new armories while the city debt was so large. De Voe thus received the city’s support for any proposal that encouraged the use of extant market houses for armories. In 1873 he proposed repairs to the second floor of Jefferson Market so it could “serve for any public use, or otherwise offer superb drill-rooms and armories for one or more of the state military organizations, by which many thousands of dollars would be saved to the city.” Other cities employed a similar strategy of combining market houses and armories. Baltimore’s Fifth Regiment, for example, persuaded local officials to build a new market house that would provide it with space on the upper floors, and the Richmond Market Armory opened in Baltimore in 1873.48

De Voe’s boldest move as superintendent of markets was his strong support for long-term leases of public market property to stallholders’ associations, an experiment that began in 1868 with the establishment of the Fulton Fishmongers Association. This organization built its own market house on city property with a ten-year lease at $5,000 a year. According to De Voe, these arrangements removed politics from the markets because vendors themselves were responsible for allocating stalls and setting rents. The leasing of market property would also ensure “that American citizens owning property in our public markets, and applying it to legitimate purposes for the benefit of the public at large, can retire to their beds and rise in the morning to find that what they owned yesterday is secured to them to-day.”49 A guaranteed long-term lease would encourage vendors to make improvements to their stalls without fear of random eviction.

The Manhattan Market Company

Much as he preferred public ownership of markets, De Voe was powerless against wholly private speculation in new market house construction. On April 28, 1871, shortly before he took office, the New York Assembly, like its counterpart in Pennsylvania, passed a general incorporation act for organizations “to carry on the business of marketing in the city of New York.” This act gave five or more persons the right to erect buildings for public markets and to rent stands, stores, and stalls in them for no more than fifty years. The mar-
kets of any company organized under the act would be subject to the sanitary rules and supervision of city health officials.\textsuperscript{30}

De Voe delivered a short speech on January 22, 1872, at the opening of the Manhattan Market, one of the earliest private market houses in New York. The mammoth structure, funded entirely by private investors, covered a five-acre lot bounded by Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth Streets and Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues, including a bulkhead along the North (Hudson) River (fig. 6.13). The imposing brick, iron, and stone structure was capped with a series of graceful turrets, which made a visual contrast to the city’s unsightly market houses. At 160,000 square feet, it could accommodate up to a thousand wholesale and retail dealers in stalls of varying sizes. Twenty entrances gave access to the grand interior, illuminated by one hundred windows and a central dome fitted with two thousand electric lights. An ornate vestibule with an iron staircase led to company offices on the second floor, there were restaurants at each end of the building, and an ice cellar was constructed underneath the eastern end.\textsuperscript{51}

For all its grandeur, the Manhattan Market was not the kind of “large speculation” De Voe welcomed, perhaps accounting for his short speech at the opening. He had encouraged capitalists to invest in market houses, but specifically those that already existed.\textsuperscript{52} Given that all the public markets (still south of Fourteenth Street) needed major repairs or rebuilding, capital expenditure for mammoth market houses as far north as Thirty-fourth Street seemed frivolous to him. Moreover, the Manhattan Market Company, as well as the newly incorporated East River Market Association, did not involve the vendors as De Voe would have hoped.\textsuperscript{53} New markets, he believed, should be established by a select number of “practical men from our several public markets, to assist in locating such buildings where most required, or at points most accessible to the greatest number of citizens.”\textsuperscript{54}

Sour Grapes

One year after the opening, Paul J. Armour, president of the Manhattan Market Company, wrote a scathing letter to the editor in the \textit{New York Times} opposing the city’s plans to improve West Washington Market. Perhaps fearing that the municipal venture might hurt his own investment, Armour heaped insult after insult on Comptroller Green and Superintendent De Voe:
Both [are] equally ancient in their ideas when they write upon the subject of markets. Mr. Green proposes that all the great commercial interests of this Metropolis shall be subservient to the article of food. Mr. Devoe believes in the same doctrine, but would distribute the markets all along the river front, from Fulton to Fourteenth-street, in the face of the earnest demand of commerce, which is rapidly being driven to New-Jersey, owing to the blockade of the water front by just such nuisances as West Washington Market.55

Referring to the city’s plan to expand West Washington Market, Armour opined, “What a farce! Does Mr. Green know that two-thirds of the stand-

\[\text{Figure 6.13 Manhattan Market, New York City, about 1872. From Frederick Lightfoot, Nineteenth-Century New York in Rare Photographic Views (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1981).}\]
holders of Washington Market to-day are residents of New Jersey, and pay no taxes in New York! Does he know that the greatest portion of all the beef and mutton is slaughtered above Fortieth-street, and has to be carted down town, there sold, and then carted back to the great points of consumption!” Armour criticized the city for taking its lessons from the markets in Paris and London, “cities that are entirely different from New-York as to topography, being nearly as broad as they are long, while here we have but a narrow strip.” Furthermore, Armour argued that the markets in Paris and London were located where the densest part of the “consuming population dwells,” whereas in New York “it is exactly the reverse.” Armed with statistics, he showed that the downtown population was steadily declining, while the up-town population was on the rise. The population in the First, Second, and Third Wards was 36,754 in 1850 and had declined by almost half to 19,487 by 1870. In contrast, the population in the Eleventh, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Wards was 119,070 in 1850 and 219,239 in 1870—an increase of 90 percent. The population of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Wards more than doubled, to its current 96,000 inhabitants. Armour’s conclusion: “Nine-tenths of all the food eaten in New-York is consumed above Fourteenth-street. Where, then, is the parallel between the Paris and London markets? The comparison is absurd.”

Armour accused Green of visiting Washington Market for the sole purpose of giving speeches to the butchers to gain their votes for the mayoral nomination. His boldest claim, however, was that “public markets under Municipal rule are a failure, and must give way to private enterprise such as the Manhattan Market Company has demonstrated in the erection of their magnificent building, to which Mr. Green never refers, and entirely ignores, never having seen it himself, and going to England and France for patterns to our people.” Armour may not have approved of Green’s tour of model market houses in Europe, because Green would have learned that the most successful ones were owned, built, and managed by government, not by private individuals.56

Despite the Manhattan Market Company’s promise to allow stallholders to share in its profits, the venture never attracted enough vendors to survive. In 1877, only five years after it opened, the market was tomblike inside, lacking both dealers and customers. It was soon converted into a slaughterhouse, which survived until the acclaimed fireproof building burned in 1879 and the property was sold to the New York Central and Hudson Railroad.57
De Voe was highly critical of the New York market companies because they failed to manage their operations in the long run, and their vast capital expenditures had not resolved the city’s market problem. As he complained in 1873,

The first and great fault has been with the city authorities, by their not providing buildings that would be a credit to our city, or otherwise the present buildings should have been kept in proper order and repair. The city should have not only replaced these with suitable erections, but also placed one or more such in every ward in our long neglected city, and in places that would be most convenient to our citizens, so that provisions or every kind used for human food could or should be forced by law to be taken into these several marts, where they would be properly inspected or supervised daily; which can only be done successfully in large quantities thus collected and exposed.58

Still a believer in the public market system and in the principles of the moral economy, De Voe thought New York residents “should be protected, as well as have equal accommodation secured to them in all public markets.” He argued that the system would benefit not only the consumers but also the vendors, many of whom were wasting $10 to $20 a week in rent at shops or private market houses, while weekly rent at the public markets was only $1 or $2.

The famous Washington Market was finally rebuilt soon after the city recovered from the depression of 1873. Designed by architect Douglas Smyth, the attractive Victorian structure opened for business in 1884. According to Carpentry and Building, iron and glass were the principal materials used. On the inside Smyth employed the latest in “modern construction” to meet the city’s demand for “a maximum of room, light and ventilation with a minimum space consumed by construction as well as the smallest amount of material.”59 Butchers from the old Washington Market celebrated their new quarters with great fanfare, confirming their allegiance to the city (fig. 6.14).

De Voe Leaves Market Politics

In 1881, ten years into his job as superintendent of markets, De Voe was promoted to the collateral post of head of the Bureau for the Collection of City Revenue and head of markets, two jobs that he soon found overwhelming, not to mention “annoying and unsatisfactory.” Unable to collect the estimated
$600,000 in outstanding market revenues, De Voe asked Comptroller S. Hastings Grant to divide the two positions. On October 20, 1883, Grant appointed De Voe deputy superintendent of markets at the same annual salary he had been paid before—$2,750. Francis Tomes, former importer of cutlery and fancy goods, was appointed to the higher position of collector of city revenue and superintendent of markets. De Voe, however, resigned out of frustration within a few months. In a letter to Mayor Franklin Edson, dated February 8, 1884 (and marked by De Voe as “not sent, too much politics”), De Voe intended

**Figure 6.14** Butchers celebrating the opening of Washington Market, New York City, 1884. From *Frank Leslie’s*, December 27, 1884.
to inform the mayor that he was resigning because Tomes meddled too much in market matters by hearing complaints and issuing unwarranted permits.\textsuperscript{60}

De Voe’s departure guaranteed a return to business as usual. No sooner had he left office than Comptroller Grant authorized Tomes to erect a corrugated metal awning along two sides of the recently built Fulton Market in order to rent outside stalls. The market vendors were outraged, for several reasons. First, they objected to such an unsightly addition to their attractive new quarters, another Victorian brick and terra-cotta market designed by Douglas Smyth in 1882. Second, they believed that outside vendors would obstruct the entrances and sidewalks with their oyster shucking and fish cleaning, thus deterring the customers who were “\textit{just beginning} to come from uptown in their carriages to leave orders.”\textsuperscript{61}

City officials also received criticism for their handling of the new West Washington Market, built by a private association on public property near Washington Market (fig. 6.15). Accommodations were insufficient compared with the old market, and in 1888 twenty-three market men joined in a complaint against the comptroller and the superintendent of markets for denying them permits in the new market. Moreover, the Dock Commission was angry because the comptroller had sold city property to the West Washington Market Company—property that the commission had been using for a depot and equipment storage.\textsuperscript{62}

According to the Report of the Department of Public Works for 1879, the city’s ten markets—Washington, West Washington, Fulton, Catharine, Union, Essex, Tompkins, Jefferson, Clinton, and Center—collectively averaged $354,000 per year in revenue from 1874 to 1878, while expenditures for the same period amounted to $57,554. Although business was tremendous, the facilities decayed to such an extent that the 1886 \textit{Report on the Social Statistics of Cities} declared that “there is no capital city where the market accommodations, both for seller and for buyer, are so badly managed as here [in New York].” Bad as they were, New York’s public markets still survived privatization, giving the city a chance to launch a progressive campaign for improved public markets at the end of the century.\textsuperscript{63}

Thomas F. De Voe was ahead of his time. Although he managed to implement a few short-term improvements and to expedite new market house construction, his broader vision for public markets did not come to fruition until
after his tenure. He predicted in the early 1860s that large public market houses could provide more affordable downtown retail space than could shops. He also predicted the potential of public markets to service the wholesale trade, supplying not only the uptown shops but also the large steamers, hotels, and boardinghouses that demanded food in bulk. Washington Market, for example, became the city's largest wholesale market by the 1930s, doing a greater volume of business than all the other markets in the city combined. 64 Likewise, the downtown public markets provided a service to thousands of residents and daily commuters seeking quick meals and snacks from stands and sidewalk vendors. 65

In Pennsylvania, the privatization frenzy had a different outcome than in New York. The numerous private market houses of Philadelphia, for example, continued to earn the city high praise, especially from the 1886 report, which declared that “the provision supply of Philadelphia is superior to that of most cities, and her markets have always had a wide celebrity.” Likewise, other cities throughout Pennsylvania reported successful market houses, both public and private. 66 By generating large-scale, highly capitalized buildings, the market companies of Pennsylvania reinforced the concept of marketing under one roof, with the result that the market house, regardless of its form

**Figure 6.15** West Washington Market, New York City, 1885. From Mary Black book, neg. no. 50756. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.
of ownership, remains an important feature of the urban landscape in the Commonwealth.

“Cracks in the market walls” were most visible in New York and Pennsylvania, but they were also found elsewhere as cities throughout the country faced similar pressures to privatize market houses and to legalize shops. However, a few years of experience with the negative repercussions of deregulation had given other cities pause. Faced with potential losses in revenue, lack of control over food costs, and threats to public health, they looked for ways to strengthen, not abandon, their public market systems in order to maintain control over urban food supply and distribution.