

W. L. BOUTTE
MARKETING BRANCH
NOVA SCOTIA
1978

A SPECIAL REPORT

THE HALIFAX CITY MARKET, 1750 - 1977

D. E. Robinson
Marketing and Economics Branch
Nova Scotia Department of
Agriculture and Marketing
HALIFAX, Nova Scotia

February 10, 1978

A SPECIAL REPORT

THE HALIFAX CITY MARKET, 1750 - 1977

The Halifax City Market, or "Farmers' Market", has operated since 1750. In June 1750, a year after the founding of Halifax, the Governor and Council designated the site for a market. During the period spanning the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century the "Green Market" and later "City Market" was one of the most well known and colourful features of the City. It remains today the oldest living institution in Halifax and perhaps the oldest of its type in Canada. It has had an interesting history with many different turns. This report outlines the history of the Market in Halifax.

The First Century: 1750 - 1854

The original market was on the site of the old City Court House and Police Station on George Street between Bedford Row and Upper Water Street, just east of the present Bank of Montreal Building. This was the old "Flesh", "Meat" or "Cattle" Market often mentioned in early accounts of the City. Produce as well as livestock was delivered here from Acadian farms prior to the Expulsion. By 1755 local farm production was well under way. The driving of cattle and sheep from Annapolis Valley farms to this market continued after the Acadian farmland was resettled.

In 1799 the old Cattle Market was deteriorated and commissioners were appointed to build a new market house for butchers and for a vegetable market. The new "Country Market House" or "Public Market" was built in 1800 across George Street from the Meat Market on the north side of the present Post Office Building. This is where the Old Custom House (20th century) used to stand. The Old Market House remained standing until 1807. In 1808 the site was granted for a County Court House.

The preamble to the 1799 Market House Act stated "....it would greatly tend to the benefit both of the town and country if a separate Market House were erected in Halifax for the sole use of persons bringing from the country meat, poultry, butter and other victuals and in which they might expose such articles for sale". This Act also granted special privileges to country people as opposed to City Vendors—"it shall be lawful for any country people by themselves, their servants or agents, to sell and expose for sale, their meat or poultry alive or dead, at any time and in any place within the said town and suburb as well within the market house as without...".

The Market House built in 1800 was a flat roofed wooden building (later a pitch roof was added) and was intended to accommodate the butchers only. There was a small green market building constructed at the same time next to the north line of the old military fuel yards (present site of Post Office) which was afterwards removed. These buildings were erected at the expense of the Government. The House of Assembly granted £2,252 for the purpose.

In 1815 the Colonial Government passed an Act transferring the Country Market House, the responsibility for operating and regulating it as well as the rents obtained from its operation to the Justices of the Peace for the County of Halifax. Market clerks or keepers had been appointed by the Commissioners of Public Markets to oversee the daily operation of the Market since the 1700's.

At some time during the 1800-1854 period the small Green Market building along the north line of the fuel yards was removed. In his History of Halifax City, Dr. T. B. Akins makes no mention of this facility but notes only that after the construction of the new market in 1800 "There being no convenient accommodation for the vegetable market, the country people were permitted to sell in the streets and the square in front of the Market House". This practice would continue until the second decade of this century.

In 1848 the City of Halifax was incorporated.

The original City Charter conveyed the Country Market property to the City "for the public and common benefit and use of the City of Halifax according to the true interest and meaning of the original grant".

The Green Market and Market House: 1851 - 1916

At the time of the City's Incorporation the Market Building was in poor condition and the replacement of what the newspapers called "that most disgraceful Old Shanty—the Halifax Market House" was a prominent civic issue. Acquiring part of the old military fuel yards for the property's extension would be discussed on and off for the next 68 years. On January 13, 1851, the Novascotian reported that a tender of £8,000 had been accepted by City Council from Robert Malcom for an extension of the Market "to be erected south of the present shanty in accordance with Alderman Murdock's suggestion, extending across the locality by an arch—provided the fuel yard is obtained".

Regretfully on February 12, 1851 the same paper "learned that the opposition has been manifested in certain quarters to the erection of the new Market House on the old site". The acquisition of the fuel yard was now doubtful and there was a feeling that the whole project was too costly. This point of view was not accepted by the Novascotian and the paper commented;

"Nothing is better established than the fact viz. that the new Market House will pay its own expense and that the citizens will not be taxed to make good any deficiencies.....we are at a loss to know why any person should kick against the proposed improvement on the eve of its consummation. "

A committee of the House of Assembly disapproved of allowing the City to borrow money for the Market and the project was temporarily dropped. In carrying this decision on March 24, 1851 the Novascotian showed disapproval.

"We recommend that a glass case be at once procured and the building in question be enclosed for exhibition at the World Fair in London.

It would be an apt illustration of the utter want of public spirit which characterizes a rising City with a population of 25,000 souls."

In April this Paper noted that the shops and stalls in the old Market were to be let for a two year period and hoped that the negotiations for the fuel yard property would be successful. "If not", the writer claimed, "the next civic election should be run on this question".

Over a year later on June 21, 1852 the Paper continued this theme noting the refusal of the Imperial Government to transfer the fuel yards property but suggested going after the Ordinance property. The writers were still convinced of the commercial viability of a new Market. "We were reminded the other day by our contemporary of The Sun, that the tax gatherer had quite enough to do to collect the rates now levied on the citizens without increasing them for the purpose of putting up a new Market House. It should be considered that 18 businessmen serving on the 1850-51 Council were unanimously of opinion that the Edifice they concluded to erect would be self-sustaining." It was further expressed that "Public spirit begets private enterprise".

In 1853 the City finally called tenders for the construction of a new Market building. Mr. Robert Davies was the successful bidder on the brick and stone building which was opened in the Spring of 1854 at a cost of £100,000. A contemporary account of the facility prior to its opening described it as follows;

"The new Market House is rapidly approaching completion. That portion of the edifice east and west was appropriated for the reception of vegetables etc., while the main body of the building fronting on Bedford Row and Water Street was fitted as a meat market. There are 49 separate divisions in the former and 14 capital stalls in the latter. There are also four excellent shops in the basement story fronting on Water Street.

The whole will be let at public roup on the 1st day of May ensuring we doubt not the rents realized will convince the most skeptical that this long required city improvement so far from being a burden to the community will not only pay

the interest on the cost but leave something handsome in the civic treasury. It is satisfactory to learn that the new Market is to have a clock in the cupola also a suitable bell which will be rung every day at the commencement and closing of business."

On April 27, 1854, stalls were leased and the bidding was reported as spirited. "The hucksters stalls in the Green Market were disposed of to the number of 14, the remaining 34 being reserved for applicants from the country. The price of each stall is £2 per annum, half the money in advance, the purchasers to draw lots for preference." The building was let for the sum of £205. This was more than enough to pay the interest, said a contemporary newspaper.

The country people, however, never did occupy the Market House. The Occasional Letter Column of the Acadian Recorder in 1918 recalled the event as follows;

"The new brick Market contained stores underneath it on the Water Street side which was always occupied at a good rental. A number of butchers rented stalls in it for many years. But the country people could not be induced to offer their products in it and out of this refusal grew up the historic street market."

The same source also referred to this situation at another time in a slightly different way.

"All the best stalls being let to the Halifax butchers the country people from the first refused to use the Market as a place for the disposal of their produce and in spite of the fines and threats gathered their teams and wares around the Post Office block and with the coloured people and the Mic Macs established the picturesque street market which again became a feature of Halifax."

From 1854 on the circumstances of the country people and their outdoor street market would keep the market an ongoing topic. This situation would reach a climax in 1916. In the meantime the "Green Market" had its most colourful and historic era. It became a unique feature of the City, well known in the U. S. and one of the sites that no visitor missed. In his History of Halifax, published in 1915, Eaton wrote;

"A highly picturesque feature of Halifax has always been the "Green Market" held on Wednesday and Saturday mornings on the sidewalks near the Post Office and the Market Slip. All summer through as regularly as these mornings come a mixed company of "Chezzetcookers" and Negroes, the former some of the dark-skinned descendants of the Old Acadians, have been accustomed to troop into town across the Dartmouth Ferry, their rude wagons laden with farm produce, poultry, flowers and small domestic wares of various sorts and ranging themselves along the sidewalk unobtrusively offering their goods for sale."

In Glimpses of Halifax from 1867 to 1900, Blakely observed that not everybody enjoyed and appreciated the Green Market.

"Unlike the tourists the City Fathers were untouched by the picturesque scene in the Market Square because they were besieged by complaints from the Merchants of the streets surrounding the Post Office that the crowds and carts on the sidewalk and roadways interrupted their business. 'A Sufferer' declared that every Wednesday and Saturday hay carts were ranged along the curb-stones on Bedford Row from Walsh's Corner to Lithgow's building, blocking the traffic and leaving a litter. He grumbled that this was unfair to the Merchants who paid heavy taxes and who had built a row of houses that were an ornament to the City.^{1/} 'Besides this it is pitiful on stormy days to see so many country people especially women and children exposed to rain and tempest without shelter of any kind' observed Mayor J. C. MacKintosh.^{2/} It was impossible to secure the Imperial fuel yard, the site of the present Post Office, for a new Market Building. All attempts to find another site suitable for a market were futile, as loaded carts could not climb the steep hills from the ferry at the front of George Street even as far as the Parade.'

The debate concerning the plight of the country people and that of the area's merchants was continuous during this period.

^{1/} Colonist, Jan. 4, 1868, page 2, col. 3
^{2/} Annual Report, City of Halifax, 1884-85

There are conflicting contemporary views as to whether the country people choose to stay outside because of the fee involved (\$2 per year) and other reasons or if the facilities offered in the City Market House were inadequate.

The Unionist, on October 15, 1866 wrote;

"Prominent among the City's wants is the enlargement of the Market House. Everybody admits the desirability of some accommodation being provided for the Market people. With some trifling alteration the present Market House might be so arranged as to afford better accommodation. We cannot understand why the building which was designed for a Green Market should be occupied almost wholly by resident butchers. The butchers possess a good deal of wealth and are quite able to put up buildings of their own. At all events they can find eligible sites for businesses over any part of the city."

In January 1868, however, Alderman Gossip of the City Council proposed a resolution "that no person shall be allowed to sell vegetables outside the City Market while stalls inside are unoccupied and when owing to the crowded state of the market persons cannot obtain a place to offer their goods for sale they shall be allowed to use the space outside by paying the same fees as the occupants of the stalls inside".

The City Market House was taken down sometime during the turn of the century to make room for the Old Custom House Building. The Street Market of course continued as usual. In 1907 the Halifax Herald reported that the famous Green Market was soon to come to an end. The City Council had decided to purchase the fuel yard property and had \$36,000 set aside for construction of the facility. Country vendors, it was decided at the meeting, would be required to leave the streets and sell in the proposed building.

The success of the St. John Market which was always occupied and was a commercial success was noted. Alderman Hawkins said "Halifax should have as good a market as St. John".

The City Market: 1916 - 1969

As in the past, the accepted ideal site for the new market, the Imperial fuel yards, proved unobtainable. A location near the ferry wharf was desired. In 1911 the City Engineers reported to Council that in two cases, proposed purchases of market sites which had been submitted to arbitration had been awarded remuneration too high to consider their acquisition.

Eventually a new market building was constructed on Brunswick and Buckingham Street (the Old Police Station). The location under Citadel Hill but above the downtown and waterfront area was a difficult and steep distance from the Ferry Wharf. The country people had never asked for this facility and were sceptical to it. The Health Board was a new factor at this time; they were claiming that it was detrimental to sell food on the sidewalk. This may have been part of a deliberate strategy to end the old outdoor market. In 1918, the occasional letter column of the Acadian Recorder referred to "the great Microbe scare that was used to frighten purchasers to the new market".

The Brunswick Street market was opened on July 15, 1916. The Morning Chronicle which went to press before the opening described the new market as follows;

"The 'Green Market' which assembled weekly around the Post Office and for years, one of the historic sites of Halifax is supposed to be no more. The modern and what is expected to be a sanitary market, a concrete structure occupying an entire city block with all adequate facilities to make it an up-to-date place for the sale of food commodities will house the various large number of market people from the country and the city vendor of market produce as well. The opening of this market introduces a new system altogether and aims to do entirely away with street selling such as Halifax has known for years."

The Morning Chronicle also noted that no rents would be charged for the first two weeks and free refreshments would be served on opening day to the market people. When asked if he anticipated trouble in inaugurating the new system Mayor Martin said that he did not think there would

be any difficulty but the Police would be on hand if required to enforce the new civic law against the use of the sidewalks for the sale of market produce.

The Acadian Recorder later that day gave this account of the opening;

"For the first time in over half a century the Green Market was unused this morning by country people selling their vegetables and other products of their farms. Acting Chief of Police, Bayers gave instructions that all men on night duty except those going home at 3 o'clock were to be at the Dartmouth ferry wharf to meet the boat and to direct all people with produce to sell to proceed to the new market. One Sgt. and eleven officers met the ferry. Quite a few country people were inclined not to heed their direction and took up position around the usual square on Hollis Street and Bedford Row. The officer, however, finally persuaded those to leave and most found their way to the new market.

Many of the occupants seemed satisfied with the condition but others had strenuous arguments to show that the building was not suitable. A number of coloured women when asked about the market said, 'It's fine'. One countryman said, 'It was all right but for the getting here'. He said with a large load it is a difficult problem. Another said he would have no objection to the market if it were free but the little profit he made now would be eaten in fees.

Some 10 or 12 other men were bitterly opposed to the building. They said it was not near large enough and claimed that not half of the country people were there. Many people would not come to the building and drove over the city streets to sell their goods. When the new vegetables were in their plenty, the building would not hold near half of the goods. Again there were not sufficient stalls for horses. They hoped the city would not stop them from going around the city or they might be obliged to ask the Government to interfere. The space at either end of the market was filled with teams and horses and all along Albermarie Street for a couple of blocks both sides were lined with teams.

The market was opened at 6 o'clock and the first arrivals were teams from the Nova Scotia Nursery.....

Many people who favor a market building claim everything is alright but the location,

expressing their views in favor of the large fuel site on Bedford Row."

A delegation of officials attended the opening and speeches were made. Councillor Wallace Peverill of Cole Harbour was the first speaker and in opposing the new market dwelt on what he termed the rights of countrymen to sell their produce in the City free of cost. He also claimed that it was not built in the proper location. He understood the market would operate only twice a week but was informed by the Mayor it would open every day. Councillor Bowes (also of the County) opposed the location and the loss of the privilege they had previously enjoyed. They had never asked for the Market, he said, and if it turned out to be a white elephant the City alone would be to blame. He also added that the size was not adequate.

Mayor Martin said the rights of the market people to sell their goods from door to door had not been stopped.

Mr. Bauld stated the Civic Circular issued the previous Saturday was very misleading as countrymen would still have the privilege of selling around the street without let or hindrance. He said the market was designed to save the country people from stormy weather. Judson Baker said it was "more of a hot house than a public market".

Apparently the outdoor market did experience a brief reprieve. It could have been that the City had enough confidence in the advantages of the market house to let up on the strict enforcement which introduced it to the citizens of Halifax City and County. On April 6, 1918, the Acadian Recorder reported;

"Last Saturday could be seen the old time spectacle of an open air market which had such an effect on our southern neighbors when they visited Halifax.....people in spite of long education to the contrary now buy market truck as if the Microbe had departed from the precinct of the old market square."

By 1921, however, the outdoor market was definitely a thing of the past. The Occasional Letter Column of the Acadian Recorder reported the incident below on October 1, 1921;

"Last week I met on George Street two ladies evidently strangers to Halifax who asked the way to the Old Street Market. They had arrived in a steamer from New York and were sightseeing having heard or read of a highly picturesque feature of Halifax which has passed away - the Green Market which used to be held on Saturday mornings around and about the Post Office building. I informed the ladies that the sidewalk market has ceased to exist and that vegetables, eggs, fruit, flowers and other commodities could be seen at top notch prices in a regular market building without the cheapness and picturesque of old days."

The new Brunswick Street market was damaged in the Halifax Explosion in 1917. Harold Ward's father was appointed caretaker and market clerk in 1917 and he lived with his family in the living quarters at the market. In 1928, after his father's death, Mr. Ward took this position and told a newspaper reporter in 1952 while still working and living in the market building that 3,000 birds in a poultry show were in the building at the time of the explosion and none were lost although every window was broken.

There was a restaurant in the building during its early days but it went out of business during the Depression.

While the years spanning the two World Wars are today remembered fondly by many living visitors of the market and market people as well it was a time when the market did not make much news. This is to say that the Market was not a significant part of the "food chain" and everyday life of the City during this period. There were often as many as 175 tables in those days.

After World War II, the building was in need of expensive repairs and what to do about the market was once again discussed. On November 3, 1947 the Halifax Mail reported;

"The problem of what to do with Halifax's long neglected City Market which City Hall has deferred time and time again will be tackled 'in earnest' at a special City Council meeting within the next few days. Mayor J. E. Ahern says the 33 year old building is falling to pieces.

A frequent suggestion of converting the structure for a new Police Station will be considered.

The Works Department put \$28,000 in its budget this year for renovation but City Council knocked out \$25,000 of it when some aldermen protested against spending large sums for its continued use or a market."

One Council faction was reported as wanting to abolish the market at this time. However, the Council was "faced with an edict from the Provincial Government that the City must provide other quarter for the country vendors if the building is sold to private interests or used by another Civic Department". At this time the City definitely had an obligation which the Province was ready to enforce to provide the country people with market facilities. This dated back to 1815 and was in the City's original charter.

By 1951, the City had decided to renovate the Brunswick Street structure making the top part into a Police Station and using the basement for a market. The market previously had been quite spacious and floors were added for the police station. While the renovations were taking place the market was held on the Commons in the playground building.

Poor parking facilities at the Brunswick Street location became a noticeable problem in the 1960's though the market continued to be well patronized. There were 70-80 tables at the market at this time. Several editorials in the local paper cited the attractiveness of the market and complained about the parking situation. The Mail Star on May 31, 1961 made a plea for better parking and wrote;

"It is a colourful, worthwhile institution 211 years old and as one may see on Friday and Saturday mornings surprisingly well patronized. Here may be purchased wild flowers, vegetables from small truck gardens in the country, periwinkles, baskets, shrubs and seedlings - in fact a delightful and intriguing variety of commodities most of them from the country."

In the late 1960's the pending destruction of the Police Station - Market to make way for Scotia Square again posed

the question of the Market's future. For a time there was discussion of it being accommodated within the Scotia Square complex. The market people, however, felt that this proposal was unsuitable "from the point of view of costs, accommodation and parking".

While the new City charter did not contain the provision compelling the City to provide space for the Market, Mayor O'Brien said at this time the City would act "in the spirit of the old charter".

On June 6, 1969, the Market was held for the last time at the Brunswick Street building which it had occupied for fifty-three years. The Market then moved to the lower basement level of the Industrial Building at the Forum complex. This was an acceptable location for the Market with ample parking. Nearness to the Dartmouth Ferry had ceased to be a factor.

The City Market: 1969 - 1977

The facilities provided for the Market in the Industrial Building on Windsor Street, while not attractive, proved to be satisfactory. During the five years that this location was used there were normally 30 - 32 vendors at the Market. In December 1975 the Industrial Building was torn down and the Market moved to the Civic Arena at the Forum complex. This location enabled vendors to drive their truck into the market area for loading and unloading. Roller skating occupied the arena in 1977 however, and the expense of cleaning the floor after each Market for this purpose made it prohibitive for market purposes.

In 1977 the Market occupied the corridors of the Forum Building. These facilities are narrow and have a distinctive odour. In recent years the practise of selling through the winter has ceased and the marketing year normally begins about Easter and continues until Christmas. There are now approximately 20 vendors. In 1978 the Forum Commission

are considering using either the Civic Arena again or the main floor surface of the Forum itself.

The Prospects of the City Market

The City Market today is financially assisted by the City of Halifax and the County. In 1977 expenditures mainly for rental and maintenance totalled \$ 7,500. Revenue from table rentals paid by vendors was \$ 4,789 and the grant which has been paid annually by the County to the City to help support the Market was \$ 2,000. The City contribution was consequently less than \$ 1,000. Prior to the move to the cheaper corridor location and the shortening of the marketing season from 12 to 9 months the annual bill was \$ 14,400 and the City's share was greater.

These expenses are paid to the Halifax Forum Commission which is part of the City Government and is charged with operating the Forum complex on a paying basis. While there are cash costs associated with the Market's operation the bulk of these funds go as a return to the capital investment on the part of the City of Halifax.

During the past three years rental paid by vendors totalled \$ 4,800 (1977), \$ 4,600 (1976) and \$ 4,900 (1975). Fees have been frozen since 1961 when they were regulated by City Ordinance 150 at \$ 70 per year for a table without rack, \$ 100 per year with rack or \$ 2.50 per week and \$ 1.50 for a half table with or without rack. Prior to 1961 the rental had been \$ 1.50 per week with rack and 75¢ without. These rates had existed since 1916. A new fee structure would need the approval of both City Council and the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The Market people have often said that they would be willing to pay higher fees for better facilities. It is also felt that better facilities would draw more rent paying vendors. A superior Market location could perhaps generate \$ 15,000 - \$ 20,000 in annual fees.

Even these figures are restrictive when considering a single purpose or new facility. Other cities have often placed a monetary value on the recreational and aesthetic values of such a Market and supported their operations accordingly. These cities rarely have a Market tradition as old or as historic as the City of Halifax.

The Waterfront Development Corporation has tentative plans to offer the Market new facilities. One location mentioned is on the north side of the Post Office. This is the exact location of the 1800 - 53 and 1854 - 1900 Market House. The commercial viability of this project would be improved with the use of the Market for flea markets and other events.

Parking would be a problem with any downtown site. The Market people generally prefer a west end location. It is felt that their present clientele would be lost if they moved downtown. The Market has operated in the downtown area in association with the Joseph Howe Festival in recent years. Vendors have found that the purchasing pattern is different. Office workers represent the bulk of purchasers downtown and normally only buy what they can carry away. It is felt that their traditional customers did not and would not follow them because of parking and distance considering that many frequent the Market before work and school. Sales of various products would be affected differently in the event of a move however.

The Markets biggest volume sales are now bedding and potted plants. Many of the vendors have small greenhouse operations. Vegetable, an estimated 50% of which are produced by vendors, are another major product offered. Fruit, eggs, handicrafts, home cooking and canned products are also important.

While the number of vendors has fallen to a low of approximately 20 it is felt that this is largely a reaction to the poor facilities currently being used.

The vendors largely come from the Chezzetcook area as has been the custom for over 200 years. In the fall, it is customary to have 3 - 4 vendors come from the Annapolis Valley with seasonal produce, especially fruit. This has fallen off but again facilities are perhaps responsible. The urban growth which has taken place in the East Halifax farming communities is a factor in the declining number of Market people as well.

Across Canada and the United States generally there has been increased attention to direct farm marketing in recent years with roadside stands, U-Pick marketing and farmer markets achieving increased interest. In Nova Scotia the main evidence of this trend has been the increasing number of roadside markets and U-Pick operations. The popularity of the recreational aspects of consumers purchasing their farm products in these ways is largely responsible for this change. The Halifax City Market has not fully participated in these developments in recent years.

New developments may assist the Market to recover a dominant position in the life of Haligonians.

Hue Smith

422-1281

Kevin Mac Donald

429-1170



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
ATLANTA, GA 30303
FOOD AND NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

P.O. BOX 190
HALIFAX, N.S.
B3J 2M4

April 21, 1981

Mr. Reg Mannette
Halifax City Market Vendors Committee
R. R. # 1
CHEZZETCOOK
Halifax Co., Nova Scotia
B0J 1N0

Dear Mr. Mannette:

I returned to Nova Scotia in January and until seeing "City Market News" in today's paper was unsure about the market's situation. It is good to see that things seem to be going so well.

Since preparing the Report on the Market's History back in 1978, I have been interested in improving it for the general public. There are several really good photographs of the Old Green Market around that I would like to use as well. I always thought however that the best time to do this would be when the market secured a more permanent home - that way the story of the Market has a better ending and the publication may help to increase public appreciation of the Market at a time when business stands to really increase.

I would like to propose to my Director now that the Paper "Halifax City Market 1750-1977" be improved and 300-400 copies printed and turned over to the Market Association. If you have a treasurer and are interested you could sell these at the Market and use the funds for Association purposes. I would like to have your thoughts on this sometime and could also use any ideas on how to improve the Market's History. I am sending you another copy of the Paper in case you can't lay your hands on the one I sent three years ago.

Hope to see you at the Market someday soon.

Yours sincerely,

Dave

Dave Robinson

/slh