

One needs to come down to the river quays to see the greatness of New York. Frederick F. DeRose, 1826

[Fulton Market] is a butcher's store, a fruiterer's stall, an oyster-counter, a coffee shop, a poultry yard, and a fish-monger's estate. It is everything in one. Harper's Magazine, 1867



1783 - 1860 FOREST OF MASTS

"All streets lead to South Street," New Yorkers once said. The city's meteoric rise across the 18th century to become America's commercial and cultural center was propelled largely by South Street, whose two-mile stretch of piers, merchant houses, wharves, and supply houses made New York the most innovative and dynamic port on earth, handling more goods by the 1830s than all other ports on the East Coast combined. By the 1840s and '50s — "the high noon of New York's maritime empire," one historian later said — a third of all the merchant tonnage in the world was sailing from South Street, whose growing wealth was laying the foundation, a few blocks away on Wall Street, for the city's role as the nation's financial capital. Onto those same piers, meanwhile, were pouring tens of thousands of newcomers — men, women, and children from Ireland, Germany, and elsewhere, hoping to build a better life for themselves. This flood of goods and people would later lead some to declare simply that South Street "built New York." The clipper carried the trade that made the city rich, and the packets brought in the immigrants who made it great."

Left: A view of South Street circa 1810.

From the 1780s through the 1850s, the city's growth was propelled largely by South Street, whose two-mile stretch of piers, merchant houses, wharves, and supply houses made New York the most innovative and dynamic port on earth, handling more goods by the 1830s than all other ports on the East Coast combined.

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"Ranges of buildings and wharfs extend...up the Hudson and East Rivers, and encompass the houses with shipping, whose forest of masts give a stranger a lively idea of the immense trade which this city carries on with every part of the globe. When I arrived...the wharfs were crowded with commodities of every description...All was noise and bustle. The carters were driving in every direction; and the sailors and laborers upon the wharfs...were moving their ponderous burdens from place to place...Everything was in motion; all was life, bustle, activity."

John Lambert, 1807



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The smoky riverbank dawn, the racket the fishmongers make...and the sight of this plentifulness always give me a feeling of well being and sometimes they elate me.

Joseph Mitchell, 1952



1900 - 1945 PORT INTO MARKET

The coming of the new century accelerated South Street's shift in fortunes. Though its piers were lengthened and modernized in the 1890s, the area was increasingly considered a backwater – especially when compared to the Hudson, whose piers now hosted immense transatlantic liners, the largest and most glamorous ships in the world. The East River docks, by contrast, were frequented by aging cargo ships, humble lighters, and coastal steamers to Brooklyn's beach resorts and New England port towns. The adjacent brick houses, now nearly a century old, had meanwhile become home to a raffish community of visiting sailors, retired seamen, saloon keepers, indigents, prostitutes, and others on the fringe of society. As the Fulton Ferry closed for good and the Fulton Market stopped selling general produce, the area's center of activity shifted increasingly to the Fulton Fish Market, which, basilar than ever, had become not only one of the most vibrant markets in the city, but – like the decrepit yet flavorful blocks of South Street itself – was taking on another role, as iconic presence in American culture, evoked and celebrated in films, novels, paintings, photography, and plays.

Left: View of Fulton Fish Market, ca. 1935. Above: The 1932 Fulton Market Building, designed by Clarence Blackett.

"Where formerly the broad wharves swarmed with longshoremen, busily unloading the cargo of tea, silks, and china goods...there arise pyramids of dilapidated boxes, rusty and old stvedore gear, and so forth. The hoarse orders of the landing have given place to a silence, broken only by the distant hum of the great metropolis to the north and westward, punctuated by the tremolo of a paddle-wheeled steamboat treading its way up or down the East River, and filling the air, once redolent with foreign spices, with the stench of steam from its exhaust and bilge water."

Donald McKay, South Street, 1934

1804 - A small fish market, called the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market**, is located in the area of the **Elsworth Sprague** building.

1807 - **Walking service** is introduced to lower Manhattan and includes service on **Fulton Street** to serve the **Fulton Market** and **Fulton Ferry**.

1808 - A **second fish market** is established in the area of the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market** building.

1810 - **First** **wholesale fish market** is established in the area of the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market** building.

1812 - **First** **wholesale fish market** is established in the area of the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market** building.

1815 - **First** **wholesale fish market** is established in the area of the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market** building.

1818 - **First** **wholesale fish market** is established in the area of the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market** building.

1820 - **First** **wholesale fish market** is established in the area of the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market** building.

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1844 - **First** **wholesale fish market** is established in the area of the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market** building.

If it swims, we handle it.

Motto of the Fulton Market Fish Mongers Association



"**SCENE** THE STREET between South Street, New York City. The cars were mostly horse-drawn at the time. In the foreground is a small structure (possibly a tea box) of an open stall, for which there is a wooden table. The structure, as viewed by half-barrels of cheap produce of the 'block' is about 'today'."

"In the center, the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market** building is visible. The building is a large, multi-story structure with a prominent entrance. The street is filled with people and horse-drawn carriages. The scene is a busy, bustling market area."



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"Conditions are not attractive of the fish market. The crowded nature and lack of light in the buildings make the business unattractive. The market is a busy, bustling area with many people and horse-drawn carriages. The scene is a busy, bustling market area."



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"A new series of 'transport' is introduced along the **Wholesale and Retail Fish Market** building. The building is a large, multi-story structure with a prominent entrance. The street is filled with people and horse-drawn carriages. The scene is a busy, bustling market area."



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A group of residents of New York City are interested in forming a maritime museum...
They are particularly interested in acquiring a deep-water square-rigger...
Norma Stanford, 1968

Norma Stanford, 1968

Some Friday soon...the fish sellers will spill their ice and shutter their stalls, pack their
grappling hooks and raise a final toast beneath the ba-rump and hum of the FDR Drive.
Dan Barry, 2005

Dan Barry, 2005



1945 - 1980 DECLINE AND REBIRTH

In the decades after World War II, the cataclysmic energies of postwar American urban life would transform the Fulton Market district once again – and ultimately threaten the very existence. The era's pervasive shift away from transit and toward the automobile could be felt as the old elevated railroad along Pearl Street was demolished and a new elevated highway constructed above South Street. The powerful forces of urban renewal, starting with the replacement of the Victorian-era Fulton Market by a bland brick box, would accelerate with a massive redevelopment program for downtown Manhattan, eventually leveling the entire historic waterfront south of Fulton Street and coming to a halt only when, in the late 1970s, a group of committed citizens managed to save a few remaining 19th century blocks for a "South Street Seaport Museum," comprising the old waterfront buildings and a new collection of sailing ships assembled on the adjacent piers.

Left: View of New City, New York's Water Works, ca. 1875 (Archival Photo by Dan Barry)

The New Yorker publishes "Six in the Streets" by Joseph Mitchell

The New Yorker publishes "Six in the Streets" by Joseph Mitchell, a landmark piece of non-fiction journalism that would inspire a generation of writers.

Raymond Chandler, for a generation the most famous writer of detective fiction, is hailed as the "Fulton Market man." He is the first to describe the market as a place where the lives of the poor and the rich are intertwined.

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"Remembering dimly, in confused fashion, how men built New York by driving windships across wide oceans, we have come back in our time to rebuild South Street. What we have discovered...has resulted in a great new museum for the City – a living museum that will always be part of the fabric of city life. And that is important. We need a place where people can see how New York grew and thrived and what it was really like along the way. We can learn from the men of South Street – men who built New York and did so much to build America."
Peter Stanford, 1972

