

The East River was the place for swimming...and the refreshing waters of the river... offered the small boy all the joys that now come...on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

Alfred E. Smith, 1931

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...

Donald McKay, 1934



1860 - 1900 STREET OF SHIPS

After the Civil War, a wave of technological and urban change would sweep through South Street, especially the blocks around the Fulton Market. The rise of ocean-going steamships put a sudden end to the romantic clipper era, and shifted the center of the port from the East River to the Hudson, where longer piers and deeper channels could better accommodate large-hulled steamers. As the primary funnel for goods and people between the nation's largest city, New York, and its third-largest, Brooklyn, the Fulton Ferry and its adjacent market remained busy 24 hours a day. But the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in May 1883 provided a much faster and more reliable link between the two cities - the start of the Fulton Market district's gradual but steady transformation from bustling central thoroughfare to neglected fringe of the city. Big, square-rigged "Down-Easters" continued to fill South Street's piers with their bulk cargoes of coal, wheat, and lumber, but increasingly it was the smaller trawling schooners, delivering seafood to the ever-growing Fish Market, that were the characteristic vessels along the river.



















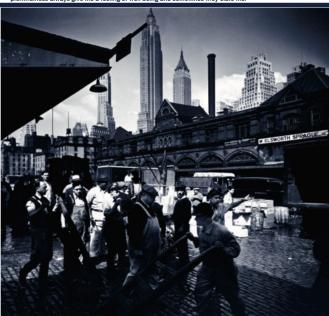
Left: View of the Manhattan anchorage of the Brooklyn Bridge, rising amidst the warehouse of South Street, cs. 1881.

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

If it swims, we handle it.

Motto of the Fulton Market Fish Mongers Association



1900 - 1945 PORT INTO MARKET

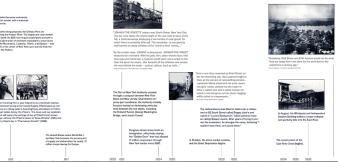
The coming of the new century accelerated South Street's shift in fortunes. Though its piers were lengthened and modernized in the I9IOs, the area was increasingly considered a backwater - especially when compared to the Hudson, whose piers now hosted immense transatlantic liners, the largest and most glamorous ships in the world. The East River docks, by contrast, were frequented by aging cargo ships, humble stick 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 seaman, 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, busier 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 plays, novels, paintings, photography, and films.

"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 stevedore 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,

Donald McKay, South Street, 1934

water."

and filling the air, once redolent with foreign spices, with the stench of steam from its exhaust and bilge











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.

1945 - 1980 DECLINE AND REBIRTH

In the decades after World War II, the in the decades after World War II, the cataclysmic energies of postwar American urban life would transform the Fulton Market district once again – and ulti-mately threaten its very existence. The era's pervasive shift away from transit and toward the automobile could be felt as the old devated railroad along Pearl Street to the state of the state of the state of the automated the automobile could be felt as the old devated railroad along Pearl Street old elevated railroad along Pearl Street was demoished and a new elevated high-way 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 redevelop-ment program for downtown Manhatan, eventually leveling the entire historio wa-ventually leveling the entire historio waterfront south of Fulton Street and coming to a halt only when, in the late 1980s, a group of committed citizens managed to save a few remaining I9th century blocks for a "South Street Seaport Museum," comprising the old waterfront buildings and a new collection of sailing ships as-sembled on the adjacent piers.

"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







1980-2008

The startling if sometimes contested renaissance in American urban life in the late 20th century was strongly felt in the Seaport area, which was dramatically reshaped by the arrival in the early I980s of a massive "festival marketplace" project sponsored by the city, the state, and the privately owned Rouse Company. The new retail environment would co-exist with and was intended to help financially support - the South Street Seaport Museum, which would be transformed during the coming decades from a quasi-volunteer operation to a fullfledged cultural resource with major permanent exhibit space. Meanwhile the area north of the marketplace continued to evolve, as a program of sensitive rehabilitation and new construction attracted a sophisticated residential population along with a host of retail and restaurant uses. The departure of the Fulton Fish Market in 2005 after I83 years of operation marked the end of the area's last active maritime-related use, but - together with the emergence of a vibrant new residential community - also opened the opportunity for a new phase in the ongoing evolution of the area.

Left: Opening day of the South Street Seaport Marketplace project, October 1983



the model of historical 'recycling'...and, if the finances fall into place, Rouse will try the same formula here. The main emphasis will be on lively, trendy shops and restaurants, and Fulton Street would become the area's retail spine. The plan is a far cry...from the original idea of a nostalgic street of sailing ships. Yet if the project in Boston is a model, Rouse's standards will be high. And if the result is a shopping center rather than a Seaport, it will be the answer to the museum's most ardent prayer: income thrown off by the commercial activities would pay its debts and support it in the future." Ada Louise Huxtable, The New York Times



"[The Rouse Company's] Faneuil Hall Marketplace has become