much as adults could be appropriately segregated by class and gender. These new play experiences would make unnecessary the earlier methods of control: striving toward the impossible goal of genteel parlor behavior or imposing the military discipline of directed gymnastics and pageantry. In a new environment of scientific nurture safely removed from the street, Parker hoped, the boys would happily let play experts help them meet their instinctual needs.

Parker failed, however, to isolate children in their own special environments. The new segregated play spaces supplemented but did not replace children’s play in the street, and not even the murderous force of the automobile was enough to dislodge them. Yet while the reformers fell short of fully achieving their goals, by the end of the 1920s, the geography of urban play had been transformed. Boys no longer treated the city streets in general as their playground but usually resorted to certain selected spaces—quiet side streets and alleys away from adult traffic, the Goodwill Club, playgrounds, and parks. The play movement in Hartford, like the campaign against the newsies, contributed to a partial separation of children’s activities from adults’ use of the streets.

Much to the annoyance of some members of the middle class, street peddling was inescapable throughout the entire city of Hartford in the 1890s. A woman emerging from the post office after mailing a letter would make her way past newsies, bootblacks, and a man sharpening knives. As she continued west through City Hall Square, she would pass a row of expressmen waiting to deliver packages, and might have to endure their catcalls. Once she got home, she might find the quiet of her neighborhood broken by the heavily accented cries of a peddler.1 To the peddlers, expressmen, street musicians, bootblacks, and newsboys, the streets were a marketplace that gave them opportunities to climb out of poverty. Middle-class reformers and city officials, however, saw street trades as nuisances to be regulated, confined, or suppressed. Changes in consumer habits were helping them, and by the late 1920s the entrepreneurial chaos of the street had been brought under control. Just as newsies had been restricted and regulated, expressmen had been banished from the streets, while produce peddlers had been pushed into the immigrant East Side.
In their fight against adult-dominated street trades, reformers and city officials raised aesthetic objections and complained that such activities interfered with traffic. Though they made similar complaints about both expressmen and peddlers, they achieved different results. Expressmen—who delivered bulky packages, large merchandise and other items—stoutly resisted efforts to bin them from soliciting business on downtown streets, but succumbed when business declined. Produce peddlers were ultimately confined to the East Side slum as a result of official harassment, the construction of an off-street marketplace, and a change in shopping habits. They were able to stay in business there until the 1950s, but they served a dwindling clientele. The segregation of street peddling into a small area of the city left outlying streets somewhat more orderly and more dominated by vehicular traffic. More important, though, was its reinforcement of the growing differentiation of public space.

Expressmen's Last Stand

Expressmen performed an essential service in late nineteenth-century American cities. In addition to such major national companies as Wells Fargo, Adams, and Railway Express, which offered intercity transport of packages and money, numerous smaller express companies provided local delivery. Expressmen delivered not only packages but also large items—furniture, iceboxes, bicycles, pianos—which had been purchased in downtown stores or ordered by mail and which clearly could not be taken home on the streetcar. The expressman would pick up the item at the store, the railroad station, or any other location, bring it to the customer's back door, and put it in its proper place inside the home.2

In late nineteenth-century Hartford, most expressmen waited for business at an officially designated stand they shared with hackmen at City Hall Square, not far from the post office. The expressmen would stand with their long wagons backed up to the curb on the State Street and Main Street sides of city hall, horses facing into the street. In 1886 sixteen expressmen owned a single wagon and team each, and nine others owned two or more teams and hired their drivers. In the 1890s the expressmen moved south from State Street to the Central Row side of the square to make more room for the trolley. After that, hacks occupied the space on Main Street, while express wagons stood on Central Row.3

Initial complaints about expressmen and hackmen focused on problems of aesthetics and decorum. "The walk across Main Street from the Asylum Street corner, which is the main approach to the post office [behind city hall], and much traveled, is most of the time hemmed in by standing carriages, and travel, especially for ladies, made exceedingly unpleasant," the police commissioners reported in 1889. Businessmen also raised complaints about "hack and expressmen lounging about" at the small stand near the railroad station on Union Place.4

City officials' handling of a separate dispute in 1898, in which they persuaded lunch wagons from the streets, showed that they could impose even the harshest of restrictions. The enclosed wooden lunch wagons—originally kitchens on wheels—had been parked on downtown streets, especially at night, when most restaurants were closed. People who worked late or were downtown for pleasure could buy hot dogs, sandwiches, or coffee there instead of eating in a saloon or a restaurant. As the number
of lunch wagons increased rapidly in the mid-1890s, the few restaurants open at night complained of unfair competition.

The issue became a matter of public dispute in 1897, when a Common Council subcommittee urged that the city stop licensing lunch wagons on the grounds that they obstructed traffic. Another group of councilmen investigated the matter and rejected the argument that the wagons obstructed traffic, noting that most of the wagons were on well-lit streets at night after traffic had subsided: “We are of the opinion that they cause much less obstruction than do some other private enterprises regularly allowed on the streets, and that the question of obstruction would not now be raised but for the complaint of keepers of regular restaurants.” The councilmen agreed with the restaurateurs that the keepers of lunch wagons had an unfair advantage because they did not pay taxes, but concluded that the city could not forbid night lunch wagons while allowing hacks and express wagons to park on City Hall Square during the middle of the day.5

After hearing protests from the Board of Street Commissioners, the council secured an opinion from the city attorney that the city lacked the power to license any obstructions to public travel. The rights of traffic took priority over the interests of street trades. The council called a halt to licensing lunch wagons and announced that all existing licenses would be revoked on April 1, 1898. One councilman argued that other New England cities had already succeeded in ridding their streets of lunch wagons and that Hartford should do the same. The owners of lunch wagons who remained in business did so only by parking on privately owned vacant lots. They eventually removed the wheels and turned the wagons into small stands selling carry-out food.6

The expressmen, therefore, were on shaky ground by the late 1890s. Councilmen had drawn parallels between express wagons and lunch wagons and had decided that lunch wagons had no right to street space. The expressmen’s own troubles began in autumn 1901, when local businessmen and city hall employees petitioned the Common Council to move the hackmen and expressmen to a new stand away from City Hall Square. The hackmen and expressmen fought back by submitting a counterpetition asking that they be allowed to stay. The counterpetition displayed the influential signature of the president of Aetna Life Insurance, former mayor Morgan C. Bulkeley, followed by those of dozens of more obscure people, including downtown office workers who were probably the hackmen’s customers.7

But those who favored moving the express stand quickly dominated the debate, while the expressmen’s defenders fell silent. The reasons for moving the stand—as presented in newspaper articles, in letters to the editor, and at a public hearing—included concerns about traffic flow, safety, aesthetics, decorum, and proper urban atmosphere. According to one letter writer:

The hacks occupied about two thirds of the street [Main Street] from the curb line to the street railway track, leaving a narrow channel for teams, and making a very dangerous place for people to alight from the trolley cars, often in front of a fractious horse. Many narrow escapes from being run over have occurred there. The street at this place should be free of obstructions, as it is one of the most congested places on Main Street. Then the effluvia arising from so many horses standing all day and part of the night around City Hall, especially since the streets were asphalted, constitutes a nuisance that should be abated. The view of the City Hall would be greatly improved by the removal of the hacks and express wagons, as at present it reminds one of an overgrown village, where the farmers drive in and hitch their horses to a post.

Another writer objected to the removal of the hacks, which he said performed a valuable public service, but agreed that the expressmen should be forced out. The better expressmen already had offices to which customers could telephone to request express service, argued this writer, so there was no need for a stand on a public street.8

Neither the expressmen nor the hackmen had any legal or moral right to use downtown streets as stables, argued one city official anonymously. He suggested that they be dispersed to their own neighborhoods or to several locations around the edge of the downtown—or that they be forced off the streets altogether.9 Another enemy of the expressmen, Postmaster Edward B. Bennett, argued that Central Row was so badly choked with express wagons that it was difficult to carry mail to and from the post office. Bennett added that the men waiting at the express stands used foul language that offended the female clerks at the post office. Other speakers told of the stench rising from the stand and of the profanity used by
quarreling expressmen. One man called the stand a moral nuisance. "I do protest against the stands, on the ground of good citizenship, against the blasphemy and obscenity on the Square," he said. "I have been insulted. Ladies have been insulted."  

After submitting their initial petition, the hackmen and expressmen found that they could not count on much support from members of Hartford's middle class. That job fell on their own shoulders and those of their spokesman, the workingmen's advocate John F. Gunshanam, who had once been an expressman himself. Gunshanam and the expressmen dismissed complaints about their behavior, insisting that any problem could be solved by stricter enforcement of city ordinances against profanity. They argued that the centrally located stand was a valuable public convenience and that it had been a Hartford tradition for seventy-five years. They acknowledged that some express companies already had telephones for dispatching expressmen, but they insisted that the stand was still needed because some self-employed expressmen could not afford telephones. They also said that the smell was not so bad as some people claimed. Without solid middle-class support for the expressmen, however, the issue turned into a conflict between affluent defenders of public order and workingmen who were branded as offensive louts. Predictably, the Board of Street Commissioners ordered the express wagons and hacks to vacate the square by May 1, 1902.11

May Day, however, found the expressmen and hackmen stubbornly in their usual place. They ignored orders from the superintendent of streets that they move and tried once again to plead their case before the mayor. On May 3, after a police officer ordered them to leave immediately or face arrest, they all pulled away except for one expressman, who parked on the opposite side of Central Row, and one hackman, Herbert W. Arnold, who defiantly kept his carriage backed up to the Main Street curb as usual. Arnold was arrested and released; he returned to the curb along with several other hackmen and expressmen.12

City officials wavered and ultimately gave in. Mayor Ignatius A. Sullivan, a newly elected Democrat with strong ties to organized labor, refused to revoke the hackmen's licenses. He said he hoped some way could be found for them to stay, and he questioned whether they were really a nuisance. According to the Hartford Courant, Sullivan "thought they were entitled to as much consideration as one of the manufacturing interests." Despite his support for the hackmen, though, Sullivan did not defend the expressmen. There was less public sympathy for the expressmen, who had a reputation for misbehavior. The Courant reported the "drunken staggerings" of one expressman and stated, "Frequently when 'hack stand' is referred to as a nuisance, it is not hack stand but express stand that is meant." Expressmen had acknowledged in the past that the rudeness of a few had given them all a bad public image, but they did little to improve their reputation during this dispute. An expressman named Joseph Carlin disrupted a public hearing before the street board by angrily arguing with the board president. Carlin insisted, "We have as good a right to use the streets of this city as any man, and as for me, I am not going to sell my horses and wagons and harnesses just because this board says we must get out." He ended by grabbing his hat and stalking out of the hearing, declaring that the president was "a damned fool and a damned nuisance." The hackmen were better behaved but equally defiant, threatening that if they were not allowed to park they would simply circle around and around City Hall Square, creating traffic jams, while waiting for fares. The city attorney acknowledged several technicalities that left the street board on shaky legal ground if it chose to pursue the matter. The board finally backed down with no word of explanation and let both the hacks and the express wagons stay at City Hall Square.13

This success made the expressmen more cooperative when the issue reemerged a few years later. They agreed to a compromise proposed in 1906 by Councilman Charles A. Goodwin, the president of the Municipal Art Society, that would banish express wagons but not hacks. The expressmen agreed to move to a new stand if the Common Council would raise the rates they could charge customers. In the petition they submitted jointly with the City Beautiful advocates, the expressmen declared that they "fully realize[d] the unsuitable nature of the present stand." Yet the compromise solution was frustrated by city officials' inability to find a satisfactory new site for an express stand. Major downtown business interests—including the Hartford Fire Insurance Company, the Charter Oak National Bank, the National Fire Insurance Co., G. F. Heublem and Bro. distillers, the Case, Lockwood and Binnoard publishing house, and the Allyn House hotel—united in opposing an express stand proposed for Trumbull Street for fear that it would bring "annoyance and unsanitary conditions." Working-class residents of
Village and Windsor streets north of the downtown succeeded in keeping the express stand out of their own neighborhood by protesting vigorously against the idea at a public hearing.¹⁴

The deadlock was broken a few years later by a peremptory order from Mayor Edward L. Smith, also a Democrat, but not one so closely wedded to working-class interests as Sullivan had been. Smith had a lawyerly zeal for public order that led him to close the red-light district, and he had come from office in 1910 promising to ease downtown traffic jams. "The growth of the city, the congestion of traffic about the center, and the general use of the automobile have produced a problem that requires much ingenuity in solving to make the solution fair to everyone," he said in his first speech to the Common Council. During Smith's two-year term, the city adopted new traffic rules that included limiting the length of time a vehicle could park and making State Street the first one-way street in Hartford. According to a later account, Smith acted on his own in having the police clear the expressmen from Central Row. The expressmen were banished by his order to the sole remaining stand, on Union Place at the far western edge of the downtown. In contrast to their behavior in 1901-02, the expressmen did not resist. The action left little or no trace in city records and gained little attention from the press.¹⁵

Expressmen who solicited business on the streets were becoming a marginal part of city life for reasons that went far beyond Hartford politics. Their banishment from City Hall Square came at a time when ever-increasing numbers of middle-class people could order express service by telephone or could transport items across town by private automobile. To make matters worse, the express business throughout the country soon suffered a devastating blow from the federal government. Congress created a national parcel-post system that started operation in 1913, and in that same year authorized the purchase of motor vehicles to deliver packages cheaply and efficiently. As a result, the express business suddenly lost most of its profitability.¹⁵

The expressmen were in a very weak position by autumn 1915, when property owners and merchants on Union Place petitioned the city to get rid of the "nuisance" posed by the express stand near the train station there. Union Place, once the site of old tenement houses, was developing into a commercial street with large new buildings. The merchants saw the crowd of loitering expressmen and their horses as an unsightly and unsanitary obstacle to business. The Common Council rejected the request, noting that the expressmen had no other stand. The property owners then took their complaints to court and had the good fortune of finding a sympathetic listener in Judge Edward L. Smith, the very man who had forced the expressmen out of City Hall Square. This time Smith ruled that the city had no power to license an obstacle to traffic and ordered the twelve remaining expressmen away from Union Place, closing down the last express stand in the city. Again the expressmen left without a fuss. Though it was Smith's injunction that closed the express stand, wrote the Courant, "Modern conveniences have in many ways changed conditions from the days when the express . . . stands were regarded as a necessary part of municipal service." The newspaper favored the change but added wistfully, "Even though there may be an improvement in Union Place by the removal of the expressmen, there will be a sort of lonesomeness for a time at least, because of their absence."¹⁷

The Growth and Decay of Produce Peddling

Produce peddlers fared better than expressmen, but not by much. Like expressmen, peddlers came under fire for being disruptive and experienced various official attempts to suppress or relocate them. Also like expressmen, they saw their business decline because of changes that could not be blamed on city officials or reformers. Yet by holding onto a clientele in the slums, they managed to survive even when banished to a single marginal street.

Storekeepers dominated the sale of groceries in Hartford in the 1870s and 1880s despite competition from a few peddlers who hawked fresh meat and produce in a dilapidated market house and from farmers who sold turkeys on the street before holidays.¹⁸ The grocers seemed to have accepted this competition without much complaint, but they watched with alarm as dozens of additional "transient traders" began peddling produce on streets throughout the city in the 1870s and 1880s. The grocers complained repeatedly through the late nineteenth century about the peddlers' supposed uncleanliness and dishonesty, but their real objection seems to have been that the peddlers were able to undersell storekeepers, minimizing overhead by transacting business in public space rather than in private shops. Many peddlers were serving a specialized
turned to the immigrant slums later in the day to sell off what was left at lower prices.21

But most produce peddlers were concentrated in poorer neighborhoods, particularly the East Side, where immigrants were arriving by the thousands in the late nineteenth century. Their reason for working there was not that language barriers forced them to sell to fellow immigrants. Although some of the Jewish and Italian peddlers who dominated the business in the early twentieth century might have preferred to communicate with customers who shared their language, many peddlers learned English or managed to trade with English speakers without knowing the language well. Many Jewish peddlers even traveled out of Hartford to sell dry goods or notions to farming families, who were highly unlikely to speak Yiddish.22

A more important reason for selling on the East Side was that it required a smaller capital investment for peddlers, who usually started their business on a shoestring. A peddler could build the pushcart himself or buy it cheaply, but could not cover as large an area as he could have with a horse-drawn wagon.23 The daily routine of a pushcart peddler was grueling enough when limited to the East Side; few felt inclined to add to their exertions by pushing their unwieldy carts to distant streets. Typically a Jewish or Italian pushcart peddler in the 1910s and 1920s would start work before dawn not far from his East Side apartment, buying his produce after much haggling at the farmers’ market on Connecticut Boulevard and the wholesale merchants’ establishments on Allyn Street. One Italian immigrant recalled how his father would “get up at 4 o’clock in the morning and buy his produce—his vegetables and fruit and so forth—and bring them back with him and then travel through the east side of Hartford to sell them. And he might have to make one or two trips in the course of the day, pushing that [pushcart] up the hill, the Morgan Street hill, up around the east side, come back, load up again and do it all over again. And that would take him to maybe 11 o’clock at night.”24

Official harassment gradually became another factor in the concentration of peddling on the East Side in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. Some members of the middle class had little patience with the cries of vendors hawking their wares in residential streets. Peddlers traveling down the street had to advertise their presence somehow, either by yelling or by knocking on doors, both of which annoyed some

 clientes made up of those poor enough to be willing to save money by eating low-quality food. Though this clientele might not be the most desirable one in the grocer’s eye, a matter of principle was at stake. Merchants were not willing to concede even this clientele, especially as the numbers of peddlers continued to climb.19

Some peddlers who could afford wagons served the more prosperous people who were settling in semisuburban residential areas. The peddlers continued to do business in these outlying neighborhoods well into the twentieth century. One man who grew up on Asylum Hill recalled a variety of street trades even in that prestigious neighborhood in the years before World War I. “Each summer a German band worked its way down the street stopping periodically to pass the hat for coppers. Similarly, we could expect visits from the organ grinder with his monkey, a hurdy-gurdy, the ragman calling out ‘Cash paid for rags,’ the eggman, vegetable peddlers and so on.”20 Many vegetable peddlers in the 1910s started their day by hawking the best produce in their wagons in Hartford’s wealthiest residential neighborhoods, typically following a daily route. They re-
people. In 1888 the Common Council passed an ordinance banning peddlers from announcing their presence by the use of any bell, gong, horn, or other noisemaker, or by yelling too loudly. In 1894 the council considered an even more restrictive measure, forbidding peddlers to step onto private property to offer their wares at the door. The Hartford Times supported the measure, arguing that “relief . . . from the peddling nuisance would be hailed with gratitude by the housekeepers of Hartford, especially those who live more or less remote from the center of the city.” But this time the council backed down in the face of opposition from peddlers. As one councilman observed, “The peddlers of small fruit, etc., . . are in most cases doing what they can in a small way to obtain support for themselves and their families. Without the right to go upon private premises in a proper manner their means of livelihood would be taken away.”

Despite the passage of the 1888 noise ordinance, peddlers continued to cry their wares loudly. According to a 1913 Courant article, Hartford residents were often rudely awakened in the morning “by the noisy solo of a leather-lunged peddler driving his decrepit horse down the avenue, and, in a voice loud enough to be heard in Newington, Windsor, or Glastonbury, inviting, entreaty, even demanding that you buy vegetables, or ice, or sell him some rags.” Particularly annoying, according to the paper, was the fact that the loud cries were often indistinct or heavily accented. “In nine cases out of ten—almost—it is impossible for the woman of the house to tell what the peddler is shouting. Generally it runs something like this: ‘Rade-RUMPH, VerenYAH, nice walderMEPS, beranraah!’” As this mockery suggests, the hostility of homeowners toward peddlers may have been influenced by a dislike of immigrant intrusion into Yankee neighborhoods.

By crying their wares in outlying residential neighborhoods, peddlers made themselves vulnerable to arrest whenever neighbors chose to complain. Among those complaining were members of the Municipal Art Society, the elite organization that aimed to make Hartford more attractive. “The cries of vendors in the street, and the use of bells, gongs, and whistles to attract attention to one’s wares, may help the vendor a little, but are a nuisance to the community and should be suppressed,” the chairman of the group’s Special Committee on the Suppression of Unnecessary Noises reported in 1908. “Cities . . . where there is a perpetual carnival of racket are undesirable places of residence for decent people.” It is uncertain whether the Municipal Art Society’s complaints had any effect, but residents of the city’s South End were equally annoyed and persuaded the police to arrest several noisy street vendors in spring 1909. In response, two hundred Jewish peddlers held a mass meeting that June to organize the Hebrew Peddlers’ Association. In hope of having the law overturned, the association agreed to hire a lawyer to defend any member arrested for crying his wares. The law stayed on the books, and peddlers continued to be arrested occasionally, but the association survived into the 1930s as a mutual benefit society and as a political organization fighting such dangers as high license fees and tougher noise ordinances. In addition to problems with the noise ordinance, peddlers occasionally ran into trouble on licensing technicalities, and Jewish street traders who worked in Christian neighborhoods on Sundays risked being reported for violating blue laws.

City officials never actually prohibited peddlers from making retail sales in outlying neighborhoods, but in 1912 they did force wholesale trading off the street and into a newly created “Hucksters’ Market” on the East Side, where it remained through the 1920s. In the years before the market’s opening, farmers from the countryside around Hartford would drive their wagons into the city every summer morning around 5 A.M., backing up against the curb on Main Street between Morgan and Temple streets on the northern edge of downtown. For the next two hours or so, farmers would sell their produce to the street peddlers who met them there. Part of the street would be blocked during this time by as many as 150 wagons, and the sidewalk would be packed with marketing activity, forcing pedestrians into the roadway. When the crowd dispersed after 7:30, the sidewalk and street would be left strewn with refuse. Some local shopkeepers turned the situation to their advantage and did a brisk business selling breakfasts and drinks to the men. Other merchants and property owners considered the trading a nuisance and petitioned the city in 1908 to put an end to it.

The city finally responded by opening the Hucksters’ Market on land that had been cleared during a recent bridge construction project, on Connecticut Boulevard between Kilbourn and Morgan streets. The marketplace was nothing more than an empty, sand-covered lot, with some stands available for rental by farmers and feed troughs and water barrels
selling chickens on Charles Street, ca. 1910. Health officials and middle-class consumers considered such practices offensively dirty. (The Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford)

for horses. As city officials had decided to ban wholesale marketing in the street, on opening day (July 22, 1912) police were stationed at the old marketing place to direct farmers and peddlers to the new market. The Hucksters’ Market proved to be too small for the crowd, which spilled out into the East Side streets, but the city immediately began preparing an expansion project, completing it that autumn. By 1920 the number of farmers selling at the market every day averaged three hundred. The market later moved to a larger location, also on the East Side, and remained in business at least through 1930.11

The Hucksters’ Market also served some limited retail purposes. In addition to the handful of bargain hunters who rose early to meet the farmers each day, many East Side residents came to the Charles Street side of the market on Thursdays to buy eggs and live chickens. Actually, the hen market had been held on Charles Street long before the Hucksters’ Market opened, and it appears to have been changed very little by

kosher chicken butcher, Charles Street, 1910. (The Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford)

...being shifted from the street to the marketplace. As before, Jewish and Italian women would gather to inspect the chickens and bargain with the farmers and peddlers, and rabbis would be on hand to perform the ritual slaughter of the birds.12

Peddlers accepted the Hucksters’ Market only grudgingly. Now that the city forbade street purchases, peddlers were denied their earlier right to buy from farmers before they reached the market. Peddlers complained that by prohibiting the practice of “forestalling,” the city allowed farmers to command higher prices. Chicken peddlers objected to being charged for the use of stands on the Charles Street side of the market. “We do not derive any benefit from said stand, it being merely a convenience, and having been established with the idea and purpose of providing a place for the transaction of business by peddlers so that they would not be widely scattered in any other part of the city,” members of the Hebrew Peddlers’ Association insisted in a 1913 petition. Farmers also had to bear the new expense of renting stalls. Though the peddlers claimed the farmers benefited from the Hucksters’ Market, at least one farmer wrote to the newspaper to disagree. He complained about being
banished to “an out of the way place . . . in the rear of a row of dilapidated buildings,” where his sales suffered. The unenthusiastic reaction of the people who traded at the Hucksters’ Market underscores the fact that the market was created not to please them but to satisfy the complaints of Main Street property owners. Significantly, the city treated the wholesale produce dealers on Allyn Street much more indulgently than it treated the farmers. These taxpayers' property owners were allowed to continue using the sidewalks in front of their businesses for marketing fruit and vegetables to peddlers—even though the activity blocked traffic and inconvenienced pedestrians. Traffic police interfered occasionally by harassing the peddlers who made purchases there, but usually they ignored the situation. 19

After the successful establishment of the Hucksters’ Market, the city began planning an indoor “Public Municipal Market” that would be a center for retail grocery sales, a modern version of the old Market House that had closed in the 1880s. The Common Council had been toying with the idea at least since 1906, but had never committed itself. Starting in 1912, working-class and consumer organizations began pressing for action. The council received letters and petitions from such diverse groups as the Hartford Central Labor Union, the Housewives’ League, the Hartford Motherhood Club, and the Socialist Party. 14 From the way it was described by its advocates, the indoor market should have threatened the livelihoods of the food dealers who supplied Hartford’s working class, including the pushcart peddlers. Supporters of the market claimed that it would help hold down food prices by “getting rid of the middleman” and allowing food producers to trade directly with consumers. Yet only the beef dealers opposed the market proposal, and other food dealers sent word that they did not see it as a threat. The Republican mayor, Louis R. Cheney and other city officials supported the idea, holding a public referendum on the matter in 1914 at which voters decisively approved a proposal to spend $100,000 to build the market. 15

Despite the vote, the project stalled out for the next several years. In 1917 another Republican mayor, Frank A. Hagarty, questioned whether the market should be built at all, noting that few shoppers went to the early-morning Hucksters’ Market even though there was nothing to prevent them from doing so. Hagarty suggested as an alternative that the city designate “sections of certain streets little used for traffic, so that curb markets might be conducted on those streets from about six to eight or nine A.M. daily.” The city quickly established one open-air curb market at Ward and Affleck streets in the Frog Hollow neighborhood and another at Bellevue and Pavilion streets, in a densely developed North End neighborhood. Hagarty was a strong advocate of easing traffic flow and thus an unlikely supporter of farmers’ markets in the streets, but the two sites chosen were on side streets, not major arteries, and the markets were open only in the early morning. Furthermore, they were a cheap way for Hagarty to sidestep the demands for an indoor market that had been strengthened by high wartime food prices. It was obvious from the beginning that the curb markets were not going to amount to much. On the first day the two markets drew one vendor each, neither of whom was a farmer. The markets survived into 1918 and probably into 1919, but, like wartime markets in other New England cities, appear to have been a short-lived phenomenon. 16

Representatives of Hartford’s working class continued to call for the construction of an indoor public market. At a public hearing on the matter in January 1919, union leaders strongly supported a proposal to build the market over the Park River between Bushnell Park and Main Street, despite opposition from the Municipal Art Society and downtown business interests. The market issue, coinciding as it did with a period of nationwide labor unrest, was charged with class conflict. Union representatives infuriated their opponents by suggesting that they were wealthy aesthetes with no sympathy for the workingman. James T. Manee, president of the Central Labor Union, argued,

These men who are getting excited over the beauties of the Hog river don’t mow their own lawns. I don’t care about the aesthetics of Hartford—I want a public market. . . . The voters have been put off time and time again and now we insist on having this market. . . . The organization I represent is interested in getting a reduction in the cost of food. I used to buy crackers for five cents a pack and now they’re twelve cents a pack. If the trust says boost eggs four cents a crate the dealer says mark them up four cents a dozen. We’re tired of dilly dallying. Hagarty gave us enough of that.

Opponents of the market project reacted angrily. “They have brought in that hateful word ‘class!’” Dr. John J. McCook said of the union leaders.
"Men with the mud of other places not yet dry on their shoes have made insinuations about some of us who have lived here more years than they have lived under the sun." 17

The council rejected the proposal for building the market over the Park River, even though it would have doubled as a parking garage for downtown shoppers. But an alternative plan to build the market on Connecticut Boulevard on the East Side, near the Hucksters' Market, met with the council's approval. Construction began in summer 1919. The new Public Market, complete with refrigerated showcases, opened for business on August 17, 1920, with most of the forty-two stalls rented. 18

The Public Market was a failure. There were hardly any poor or working-class shoppers to be seen. Philip A. Mason, superintendent of public buildings, reported in December 1921:

The class of patronage was very different from what had been expected. A very small proportion of the buying has been done by the people of the east side, they apparently preferring to trade with the numerous small stores in that section where credit could be obtained and with which they were familiar. The greatest proportion of patronage has come from persons operating automobiles, and had it not been for this trade the market could not have existed. It is also worthy of note that the type or class of people who were apparently most interested in the establishment of the market, and to whom it would have been natural to look for support, has patronized it only to a negligible extent.

Many of the stalls were vacant, and the market was losing money. 19 Though Mason did not mention it, the marketmen were not what had been originally expected either. From the time that the Public Market opened, it was obvious that it would fail to encourage direct trade between producer and consumer. The stalls were rented to middlemen, not to farmers. For example, greengrocers in the Public Market bought their produce at wholesale prices in the Hucksters' Market and sold it at retail prices. The marketmen's main advantage over grocers in private shops was merely lower overhead, an advantage that was not enough to keep them in business. Only eight marketmen were still renting stalls in January 1922, when city officials decided to close the market. The remaining marketmen had to vacate by February 1, less than eighteen months after the market had opened, and the building was turned into a school. 20

"Those who shouted loudest for the market have not patronized it sufficiently to keep the stall holders in business," explained the Hartford Times, alluding to the city's working class. 21 The Public Market posed no threat to the established middlemen who served Hartford's East Side; working-class neighbors continued to trade with the familiar mom and pop grocers who offered credit or with peddlers who sold cheap produce in the streets without bearing even the cost of a stall rental.

Although the Public Market was an insignificant part of Hartford's grocery trade, the reasons for its failure are worth considering more closely. Its surprising reliance on prosperous shoppers from distant neighborhoods, and its failure to attract the local working class, reflected the fact that grocery shopping habits in American cities were suddenly dividing along class lines. Until the early twentieth century, middle-class housewives and servants would shop frequently at grocery stores, meat markets, and bakeries, and would also buy from peddlers in their neighborhoods. When shopping at a store, they would buy food in quantities that could be carried easily or would arrange to have larger orders delivered. 22 By the 1920s, however, middle-class shopping habits were changing. More and more middle-class people were buying automobiles and using them for grocery shopping trips. Automobile owners now found it easy and economical to buy many grocery items at a time, particularly at the "cash-and-carry" stores that were spreading rapidly. These stores offered lower prices but did not provide credit or delivery, discouraging large purchases by those with limited money and without automobiles. By the mid-1920s, affluent households were also beginning to buy refrigerators, which further encouraged large purchases by allowing storage of larger amounts of perishable food. 23

Working-class people, who often lacked refrigeration or adequate storage space in their tenements, continued to shop every day. They usually shopped in the immediate neighborhood that both served other members of their ethnic group and offered credit. Another incentive for daily shopping was that stores in ethnic and working-class neighborhoods doubled as social centers, places where women would go to exchange gossip or news. Grocers in working-class neighborhoods were slower to follow the trend toward brand-name, packaged products, which were changing the appearance of grocery stores for the middle class. Working-
class grocery stores continued to sell many of their goods in bulk even into the 1920s. At the customer’s direction, the grocer would scoop flour, tea, coffee, and sugar out of bins; pull pickles from barrels; slice cheese or butter from larger hunks; scoop beans, peas, and rice out of burlap sacks; or grab handfuls of crackers and cookies from display cases. In Hartford as elsewhere, the big, upscale groceries boasted in advertisements about refrigerated display cases and scrupulous cleanliness, while small, working-class grocers were lectured by health inspectors about their supposedly filthy ways of handling unpackaged food. The food inspector, hired in 1907, warned stores throughout the city to stop displaying vegetables, fruit, candy, and cakes outdoors, and to keep the interiors of the shops cleaner. Smaller merchants, particularly on the East Side, had been the ones most notorious for practices like wrapping meat in newspapers, and they remained the dirtiest. “The small stores give us the most trouble and need considerable supervision,” the inspector reported in 1911. True, they were changing: “They show a great improvement, noticeably in the matter of clean showcases and milk and butter boxes, as well as clean floors.” Nevertheless, outdoor displays of food remained common through the 1920s. The fear of disease had inspired an attempt at cleaning up, but as in the campaigns against unsanitary streets and tenements, and against prostitution, the reformers fell short of purifying the entire city.

As the grocery trade divided more clearly along class lines, street peddlers fell on the working-class side. Peddlers were much slower than grocers to adopt middle-class standards of cleanliness, which were more difficult to maintain on the streets anyway. For example, all Hartford grocers were forbidden in 1908 to ladle milk from large cans into containers brought by customers. The practice continued only among street peddlers, who added to the danger of contamination by periodically pouring the milk from can to can in order to mix up the cream, even on days when dry winds blew dust through the streets. The more numerous produce peddlers were also criticized for uncleanliness by city officials. “The push-cart vendors seem to give the greatest trouble, especially in the hot weather,” reported the food inspector in 1910. “They will buy and sell anything, no matter how badly decayed, and it is quite a job to watch them, as they move constantly from place to place.” The worst offenders were reportedly those known as “undertakers,” who would buy

rotting produce from grocers at the end of each day and sell it the next morning on the streets. At a time when grocery stores for the middle class were beginning to move their food displays off the streets, store food in coolers, and adopt ever higher standards of cleanliness, the street peddler appeared dirtier and more old-fashioned in contrast.

Whether primarily because of police harassment or a smaller clientele in middle-class neighborhoods, produce peddlers in the late 1910s and early 1920s were concentrating more and more on fixed locations in the East Side slum. Many peddlers continued to follow daily rounds in more distant working-class neighborhoods into the 1920s, and a considerable part of the population continued to depend on them for their food. Increasingly, though, produce peddling focused on the curbside markets that were growing on Front and Windsor streets, both east of Main. Windsor Street was in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood north of downtown, while Front Street, dominated by Italians, was the main commercial street of the East Side. By 1920, as a photograph of Front Street shows, it had become an outdoor market, with pushcarts lining the curb. Although peddlers had for years been selling vegetables at curbside only after completing their daily rounds, in the 1920s they were increasingly skipping the rounds in order to secure good spots on the two fenced streets. According to Morris Davidson, who helped his father sell fruit and vegetables in the period around 1920, “It seemed customary for [Jewish] peddlers to dispense their wares, in the early morning of each day on Windsor Street, then adjourn for evening business to Front Street.” Windsor Street was lined for several blocks on its west side with the pushcarts and horse-drawn wagons of Jewish peddlers. Standing by their carts, the peddlers would yell “bananas, oranges, apples” in energetic competition for the attention of pedestrians passing by. Front Street, the main commercial street of the East Side, was an even larger market. The part north of State Street was for a time lined on both sides with Jewish and Italian vendors, who would sometimes quarrel loudly over the best spots. Front Street’s atmosphere by the early 1920s was exotic enough to attract adventurers from the western neighborhoods.

The peddlers comprised only half of the sidewalk markets along Front and Windsor streets. Along the other side of the walk were the stores and outdoor displays of shopkeepers, who resented the competition and tried to suppress it. The peddlers’ right to use the street for marketing was
challenged repeatedly as merchants persuaded police to enforce strict limits on parking. A crackdown in the summer of 1915 was so strict that for a while peddlers were not allowed to park except for the time it took to make a sale. When another crackdown in 1927 forced peddlers to keep moving, Alderman Rocco D. Pallotti defended their interests by attempting to have parts of Windsor Street and four side streets reserved for their use. The other aldermen refused to go along because they expected that shop owners would object, and they called on the police to return to their old practice of not enforcing the law. This decision kept the peddlers at the mercy of the shopkeepers and the police, who exercised their power again in the spring of 1929 by strictly enforcing the parking limits and making some arrests. 50

Shopkeepers still opposed letting the peddlers park on Front and Windsor streets for even the forty minutes allowed for parked cars; they wanted them pushed off those streets altogether. The council experimented for a few months with setting up curb markets on two side streets as the only places where peddlers could park. It ended the experiment partly because of protests from Pallotti and the East Side Push-Cart Peddlers’ Association, but partly also because the shopkeepers changed their minds. To their surprise, the shopkeepers found that the shops and the pushcarts had actually complemented each other, banishing the peddlers hurt businesses on Front and Windsor streets because it meant the loss of customers who had been drawn by the presence of the pushcarts. Shopkeepers on those two streets even signed a petition in fall 1929 calling on the city to let the peddlers return. The council obliged them by expanding the permitted area of street trading to cover the entire East Side, except for the heavily traveled Connecticut Boulevard, but it imposed an unenforced forty-minute parking limit that still left peddlers at the mercy of police. The special status of peddling on the East Side was to some extent written into law, while curb markets in the outlying neighborhoods, which had failed anyway, were legally prohibited. 51

The peddlers’ apparent victory was an ambiguous one. Having concentrated increasingly on the East Side—in response to police harassment and a dwindling number of customers in the outlying neighborhoods—they had managed to preserve their toehold only with the merchants’ permission. By the mid-1930s, the numbers of peddlers in Hartford were beginning to decrease except on Front Street. A few continued to serve the outlying neighborhoods at least through the 1930s and 1940s, driving trucks instead of horse-drawn wagons, but by then peddling was an old man’s trade. As the old peddlers died, retired, or went into other forms of business, younger men did not replace them. By the 1930s, peddling in the outlying neighborhoods was no longer a step in the journey toward prosperity. Pushcart peddlers had once saved their money to buy horses and wagons, but now many peddlers who had served the outer neighborhoods were selling their horses and spending their entire working days beside their pushcarts at the curb on Front Street, although business was only fair there except in the early morning. Competition for space was fierceer than ever as the remaining peddlers converged on the street. “Every day, another and another!” complained one peddler. Marginalized and struggling, a few peddlers stayed in business until the East Side was leveled in the 1950s for redevelopment. But even by the 1930s, peddling was little more than a bit of local color provided by aging immigrants. 52

No single cause can be cited for the decline of the street trades in Hartford. Some street trades would probably have disappeared even without any deliberate attempt to suppress them. The use of the telephone diminished the need for expressmen to solicit business on the street, and all express business—whether conducted at the curb or in the office—was badly damaged by the creation of a federal parcel-post service. Pushcart peddlers lost much of their clientele in the middle-class neighborhoods as a result of changing shopping habits made possible by the automobile and the refrigerator, as well as by a greater concern with cleanliness. Still, city officials, businessmen, and reformers contributed by suppressing or containing certain street trades. In the examples considered here, they were driven by a desire to improve public order, to protect taxpaying businesses from competition, and to clear away obstacles to traffic. Complaints about competition predominated in the campaign to force lunch wagons off the street. Local officials and merchants complained about the rude manners and uncleanness of the expressmen, and about the fact that their wagons choked Central Row. All three of these concerns combined in efforts to restrict the produce peddlers. Residents of outlying neighborhoods and members of the Municipal Art Society objected
to the peddlers' noisy cries, intrusions, and failure to keep the Christian sabbath. Businessmen objected to the messiness of wholesale trading on Main Street, while city officials noted the obstructions to traffic.

Complaints about public order, in the case of the street trades as in other aspects of street life, were influenced by a desire to make the streets conform to higher, feminine standards of decorum. The filth and foul language at the express stands were said to be particularly troubling to ladies. This distinction between men's and women's responses was more than just a sexist fiction: women had to keep their skirts from being soiled by horse manure, and they also had to deal with the possibility of sexual harassment as they passed the uncouth expressmen. Yet the distinction also presumed that women, particularly middle-class women, were more sensitive to disorder and needed to be protected from it. For example, the Times declared that the relatively privileged housewives in Hartford's outlying neighborhoods were the people most in need of relief from produce peddlers, although these women probably saw and heard fewer peddlers in the course of their day than anyone else in the city.

The produce peddlers' retreat to the East Side, however, allowed them to escape the hostility of middle-class people who might have been inclined to purge the streets of pushcarts. In this way the peddlers avoided the fate of lunch wagon owners and expressmen, whose desire for central locations had brought them into conflict with middle-class shoppers, office workers, and motorists. On the slum streets the peddlers found themselves comfortably isolated from such conflicts. Even the shopkeepers eventually accepted their presence. If the peddlers' standards of behavior were offensive to outsiders, the outsiders could simply stay away.

The segregation of produce peddling was thus a solution acceptable both to the peddlers and to members of the middle class, who were offended by public disorder. It was not a measure that was pushed in any organized way by a reform group, but rather a compromise solution that developed over many years as city officials tried to balance conflicting pressures. That this solution was achieved without being the major focus of reform activity is indicative of one important feature of the larger trend toward the segregation of public space: segregation was far easier than purification.

Though its western end cut through the heart of the bustling, smoky factory district, the eastern end of Capitol Avenue was still peaceful at the turn of the century. From its origin at Main Street, it was a residential backwater—a narrow street lined with dignified brownstone row houses and low wrought-iron fences. Climbing the gentle hill westward toward the capitol, the tree-lined avenue passed fine old brick homes divided into respectable lodgings for clerks, machinists, and salesmen. Early every morning, a thin stream of workingmen walked up the avenue from the poorer neighborhoods east and south of Main, the stragglers hurrying to avoid being docked a half-hour's pay for arriving at the factories after the seven o'clock opening. Trolleys served both Main Street and the factory district, but not eastern Capitol Avenue. Their routes looped north through the downtown, causing delays that made a brisk walk up Capitol the best way to work for those running late.

In 1906 an alderman suggested saving workers the walk by laying new trolley tracks to link the lines on Main Street with those on the western section of Capitol Avenue near the factories. The proposal marked the