

1711. The Old Slave or Meal Market (Sometimes Called Wall Street Market)

Source: Abram Wakeman (1914). *History and reminiscences of lower Wall street and vicinity*. New York: The Spice Mill publishing co., pp. 21-23.

There are but few more interesting locations in our city than those in the neighborhood of lower Wall street. Just above the present Nos. 87-89 was the old slave market. "On the 4th day of October, 1709, the inhabitants of the East Ward petitioned for liberty to erect a Market House at the south end of Clark's Slip at the east end of Wall street." And permission was granted them "to erect same at their own charge, provided it would be finished within two years from date."

We find November 30th, 1711: "Later the Market House became a place of meeting for slaves during the period when their masters had no work for them. All negroes and Indian slaves that are let to hire within this city to take up their standing, in order to be hired, whereby all persons may know where to hire slaves as occasion shall require and all masters discover where their slaves are hired." November 16, 1720, orders, "That the neighbors of Wall Street Market House have liberty to remove said Market House higher up into said Wall street or repair it where it now stands at their own expense and charge." Six years after, "a law was ordained that the House is hereby appointed a public market place for sale of all sorts of corn, grain and meal and that from and after the 25th day of March next, 1726, no corn, grain or meal to be sold at any other public market under heavy penalty." After this period it became known as the Meal Market. In 1739 William Cornell had farmed (leased) the ferry between this city and the Island of Nassau (Long Island) and petitioned to "amend and enlarge the Market House at Clark's Slip (then at foot of Wall street), as it is mightily out of repair and sundry conveniences wanting for the better landing, and preserving the ferry boats, at their own cost and charge with assistance of such as will contribute to same, which privilege was granted." The previous year Joseph Read "had repaired this Market at a cost of 28 pounds, 16 shillings and 10 pence." As the streets improved the Merchants Coffee House being a meeting place of the city's aristocracy a petition was made to the Common Council which read, "Said Meal (Slave) Market greatly obstructs the agreeable prospect of the East River, which those that live on Wall street would otherwise enjoy. That it occasions a dirty street, offensive to the inhabitants on each side and disagreeable to those that pass and repass to and from the Coffee House, a place of great resort, that same be removed." The petition was successful, for in February, 1762, it was taken down.

In our city's early days it was a great slave market; nearly all the advertisements in the little weekly papers were either offering men, women and children for sale, or reward for those who had run away. We have tried to excuse our forefathers with the plea the slaves they owned were those brought from the West Indies or other colonies. The names given in the slave advertisements of that day are many whose descendants this day occupy the highest social positions.

1711. Law Appointing a Place for the More Convenient Hiring of Slaves

Source: Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, vol. II, 458, December 13, 1711.

Be it Ordained by the Mayor Recorder Aldermen and Assistants of the City of New York Convened in Common Council and it is hereby Ordained by the Authority of the same That all Negro and Indian slaves that are lett out to hire within this City do take up their Standing in Order to be hired at the Markett house at the Wall Street Slip untill Such time as they are hired, whereby all Persons may Know where to hire slaves as their Occasions Shall require and also Masters discover when their Slaves are so hired and all the Inhabitants of this City are to take Notice hereof Accordingly.