

# MUNICIPAL HAWKING: JOHANNESBURG'S MOBILE MARKETS, 1944—1952\*

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Markets, market-place trade, and food distribution in general are subjects of long-standing academic interest.<sup>1</sup> Economists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and geographers have contributed to a burgeoning literature concerning, *inter alia*, the organisation and rôle of periodic and daily markets,<sup>2</sup> their spatial and temporal synchronisation,<sup>3</sup> and debates on the advantages of municipal as opposed to spontaneous markets.<sup>4</sup> The historical evolution of markets and of systems of food marketing also has received considerable attention.<sup>5</sup> Most recently, concern for understanding food distribution systems has channelled a growing stream of research into the 'informal sector' in general and into street hawking in particular.<sup>6</sup> In South Africa, there have appeared recently a series of studies seeking to probe facets of the organisation and functioning of street trading in both historical and contemporary contexts.<sup>7</sup>

It is the aim of this paper to contribute to this emergent literature by investigating the mobile food markets which were features of several South African cities during and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Specifically, attention is focussed on the municipal mobile markets of Johannesburg and on the rise and fall of the phenomenon of municipal hawking there. Mobile marketing (like municipal fixed suburban markets which came to nothing) is an aspect of retail marketing history in Johannesburg that has been largely neglected; notably, J.R. Shorten's otherwise comprehensive description offers a mere paragraph on mobile markets.<sup>8</sup>

## BACKGROUND AND PLANNING

### The origins of mobile food marketing in South Africa

We thank Mr P. Stickler for preparing the diagram which accompanies this paper.

See R. BROMLEY, *Periodic markets, daily markets, and fairs: a bibliography* (Melbourne, 1974) and R. BROMLEY, *Periodic markets, daily markets, and fairs: a bibliography supplement to 1979* (Swansea, 1979).

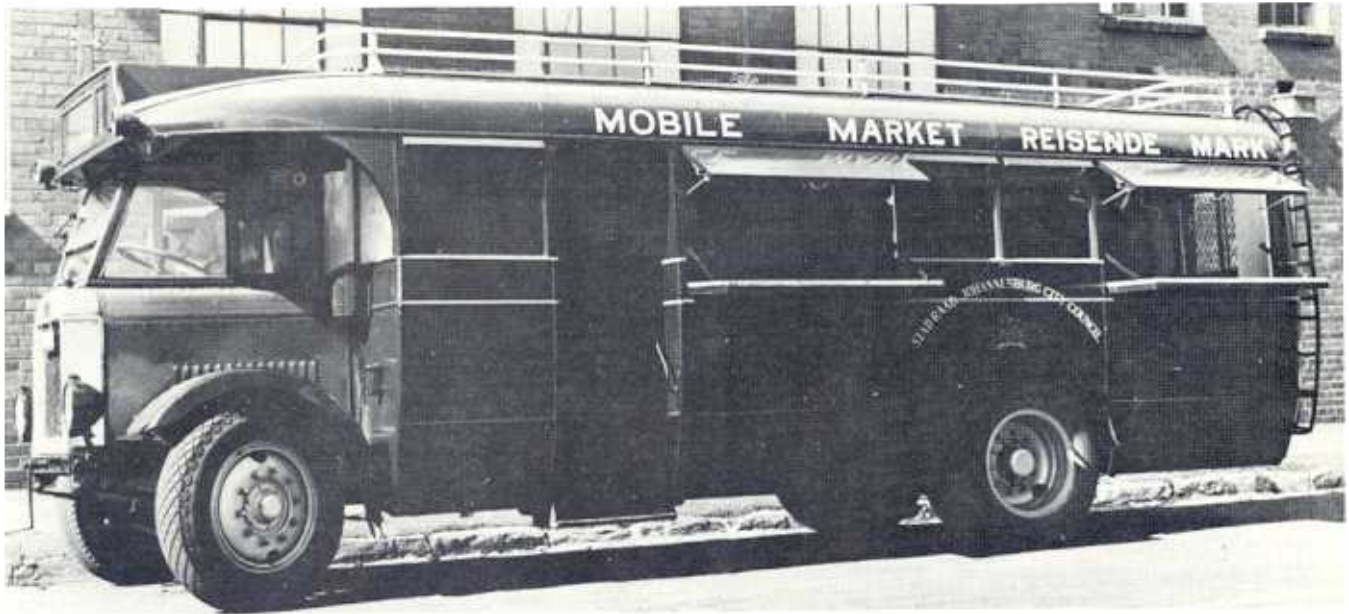
Amongst a large literature see R. BROMLEY, The organization of Quito's urban markets: towards a reinterpretation of periodic central places, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 62, 1974, pp.45–70; C.M. GOOD, Periodic markets and travelling traders in Uganda, *Geographical review* 65, 1975, pp.49–72; A. NORTON and R. SYMANSKI, The internal marketing systems of Jamaica, *Geographical review* 65, 1975, pp.461–475; C.A. SMITH, Economics of marketing systems: models from economic geography, *Annual review of anthropology* 3, 1974, pp.167–201; R.H.T. SMITH, Periodic market-places, periodic marketing and travelling traders, in R.H.T. SMITH (ed.), *Market-place trade: periodic markets, hawkers, and traders in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Vancouver, 1978), pp.11–25; and, R. SYMANSKI and R. BROMLEY, Market development and the ecological complex, *The professional geographer* 26, 1974, pp.382–388.

This is examined by R. BROMLEY, Trader mobility in systems of periodic and daily markets, in D.T. HERBERT and R.J. JOHNSTON (eds.) *Geography and the urban environment: progress in research and applications III* (Chichester, 1980), pp.133–174; J.R. BROWN and M.E. HARVEY, The concept of market components and the spatial organization of periodic markets, *Environment and planning A* 9, 1977, pp.1259–1280; P. HILLS and R.H.T. SMITH, The spatial and temporal synchronization of periodic markets: evidence from four emirates in Northern Nigeria, *Economic geography* 48, 1972, pp.345–355; W. MCKIM, The periodic market system in northeastern Ghana, *Economic geography* 48, 1972, pp.333–344; G.W. SKINNER, Marketing and social structures in rural China, *Journal of Asian studies* 24,

may be traced to the marked changes in the availability and cost of consumer goods that occurred during the period of the Second World War. Evidence given by the Minister of the Interior showed that percentage price rises in the period August 1939 – April 1944 had taken the following course: clothing 64%, footwear 39%, fresh milk 36%, beef 44%, mutton 40%, pork 74%, fresh fish 12%, potatoes 86%, other vegetables and fruit 64%, certain grades of butter and cheese 13%, groceries 37%.<sup>9</sup> As is typical, inflated food prices most seriously affected the living standards of the poor. National and municipal governments as well as private individuals responded in various ways to this situation. Efforts of the national government included the regulation of both food supplies and prices. In 1942 the State formed the Food Control Organisation which later assumed responsibility for initiating food depots and mobile markets established in Pretoria and Cape Town.<sup>10</sup> Two years later the position

1964–5, pp.3–43, 195–228 and 363–399; R.H.T. SMITH, Periodic market-places and periodic marketing: review and prospect, *Progress in human geography* 3, 1979, pp.471–505, and 4, 1980, pp.13–31.

4. For examples see R. BROMLEY, Municipal versus spontaneous markets?: A case study of urban planning in Cali, Colombia, *Third World planning review* 2, 1980, pp.205–232 and R. BROMLEY, From calvary to white elephant: a Colombian case of urban renewal and marketing reform, *Development and change* 12, 1981, pp.77–119.
5. For a bibliography see R. BROMLEY, *Periodic markets, daily markets and fairs*. African examples include R.T. JACKSON, Nineteenth century market systems in Ethiopia and Madagascar, in R.H.T. SMITH (ed.) *Market-place trade: periodic markets, hawkers and traders in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Vancouver, 1978), pp.64–80, and J.B. RIDDELL, Periodic markets in Sierra Leone, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 64, 1974, pp.541–548.
6. A review of the relevant literature as it concerns South Africa is provided by C.M. ROGERSON and K.S.O. BEAVON, The awakening of 'informal sector' studies in Southern Africa, *South African geographical journal* 62, 1980, pp.175–190. See K.S.O. BEAVON and C.M. ROGERSON, The persistence of the casual poor in Johannesburg, *Contree* 7, 1980, pp.15–21; K.S.O. BEAVON and C.M. ROGERSON, The 'informal sector' of the apartheid city: the pavement people of Johannesburg, in D.M. SMITH (ed.), *Living under apartheid* (London, forthcoming); and C.M. ROGERSON, Making out in the 'city of gold': the coffee-cart traders of Johannesburg (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Louisville, 1980).
8. J.R. SHORTEN, *The Johannesburg saga* (Johannesburg, 1970), p.849.
9. *The Star*, 11.11.1944.
10. *Pretoria News*, 20.1.1945 and 3.7.1948; *The Cape Times*, 20.2.1945.



Johannesburg's first mobile market vehicle.

PHOTOGRAPH: AFRICANA MUSEUM, JOHANNESBURG

of Food Controller was created.<sup>11</sup> At the municipal level, mobile markets were introduced in Johannesburg, Durban, Germiston, and East London.<sup>12</sup> These last-named markets under municipal aegis must be distinguished from those state-sponsored markets operating in Cape Town and Pretoria. Functioning also at the local scale to temper the effects of price increases, the Johannesburg Social Welfare Department launched vegetable clubs, communal restaurants, and canteens in 1944. In addition, it was responsible for distributing surplus produce from the wholesale market at Newtown and dispensing state-aided milk, butter, fruit, and vegetable supplies through the food depots.<sup>13</sup> Paralleling these attempts by national and municipal governments were the spontaneous privately-organised efforts, articulated through the People's Food Clubs; they sprang up in Johannesburg during the 1940s and sought to harness the advantages of bulk purchase of foods from the wholesale market.<sup>14</sup>

The introduction of mobile markets under municipal control was, perhaps, the most notable of several responses to the inflation of food prices which occurred during the Second World War. In March 1944 the Johannesburg City Council decided to inaugurate a novel scheme

Converted interior of the mobile market van.

PHOTOGRAPH: THE STAR, JOHANNESBURG



for selling fruit, vegetables, eggs, and butter from a mobile van.<sup>15</sup> The scheme was to be financially self-supporting, with produce priced at a little over the daily wholesale market price so as to cover operating costs.<sup>16</sup> In the first instance the mobile market was to serve poor Whites unable to attend the wholesale market in Newtown and obliged to purchase supplies at inflated prices from the limited stocks held at suburban shops or peddled by hawkers.<sup>17</sup> It was anticipated that if the mobile market was a success, others would enter service, and that mobile marketing would be extended to include middle-income suburbs.<sup>18</sup> Also the possibility was mooted of introducing municipal mobile marketing into the Black townships where the very poorest section of Johannesburg's community lived. However, in this regard, the reported remarks of Johannesburg's Market Master reflect both a patronising attitude and commercial motives: "The market should consider getting lorries or vans to take surplus produce to the native townships. The non-European population provides an enormous field for consumption. Bringing more and better produce to the native would improve their health and happiness and open up valuable new markets for the producer".<sup>19</sup>

The first mobile market was at first to serve selected White suburbs in an experimental weekly cycle of six routes. A motor bus, which had previously been converted from a municipal passenger bus into a medical station for the Civilian Protection Service,<sup>20</sup> was bought for use as the mobile market van; it cost £200, conversion £328.<sup>21</sup> The van was equipped with storage space for be-

11. *Government Gazette* No. 3300, 4.2.1944: War Measure No. 5, 1944 and Proclamation No. 16, 1944.
12. For Germiston see *The Star*, 10.1.1945; Durban, see *South African municipal magazine* 28(325), 1944, p.7; and for East London see H.E. MOTYER, Mobile market distribution in East London, *Municipal affairs* 10, 1946, pp.32 & 35.
13. Johannesburg City Council (J.C.C.), Annual reports of the Director of Social Welfare.
14. *The South African outlook* 74, (April) 1944, pp.43–44.
15. J.C.C., Minutes, 1944, I 337.
16. *Rand Daily Mail*, 10.4.1944.
17. Johannesburg's mobile market: Remarkable success of experiment, *South African municipal magazine* 27(323), 1944, p.9.
18. *Rand Daily Mail*, 10.4.1944.
19. *The Star*, 30.6.1944 (emphasis added by authors).
20. Johannesburg's mobile market, *op. cit.*
21. J.C.C., Mayor's minute, 1943/44, p.88.





View of a mobile market van ready for sales operations (1944).

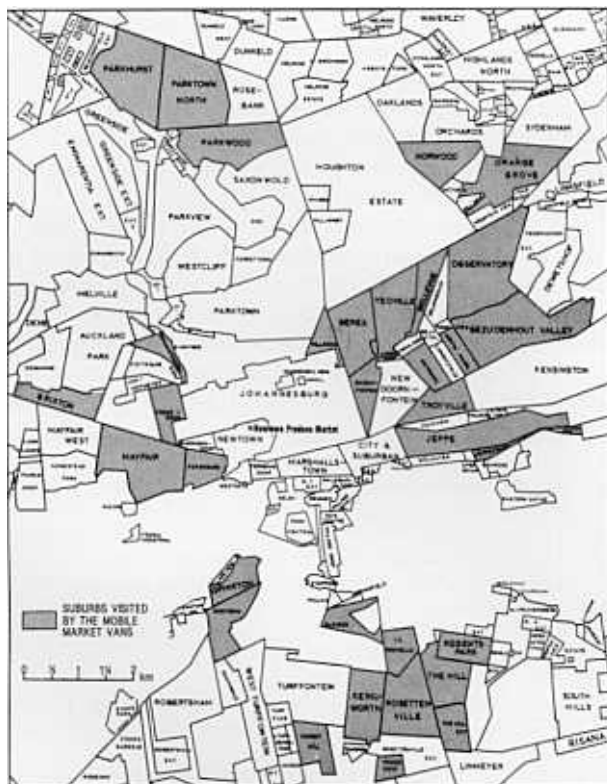
PHOTOGRAPH: THE STAR, JOHANNESBURG

tween four and five tons of produce, with counters, shutters, weigh scales, and a till. After an inauspicious start in which a railway truck collided with it, mobile marketing got under way on 21 June 1944.<sup>22</sup> The van was routed through Braamfontein, Hillbrow, Berea, Yeoville, Bellevue, Observatory, Orange Grove, and Norwood (Fig. 1). Three assistants and a driver constituted the personnel of the van. The schedule for the first day of trading was announced beforehand in the press: it comprised eleven stops of about thirty minutes each.<sup>23</sup>

## VARIED SUCCESS IN THE FIRST YEAR

Public response to the mobile market exceeded all expectations. A long queue of people at the first morning stop

Fig. 1. The geography of municipal hawking in Johannesburg.



soon stretched supplies and interrupted the itinerary. Replenishment stocks were taken to the mobile market by a second feeder van. Further sales assistance was called, and officials went ahead of the mobile van to inform others of delay. Trestle tables were set up at the second stop so as to expedite sales of small purchases.<sup>24</sup> At the end of the day the mobile market had made only four of its eleven scheduled stops, serving more than 1 000 people.<sup>25</sup>

The pattern established on the first day of trading was repeated on each of the other routes. Stops varied from between 1½ hours to 3 hours, and the feeder van became a feature of mobile marketing. The number of staff was increased and schedules were redesigned so that successively fewer stops were planned and publicised for each day. Whereas eleven stops had been scheduled for the first and second days, the number planned for the fifth day was four, and for the sixth (a half-day) three. The second-day market cycle was to take the mobile market through the southern suburbs: Glenesk, La Rochelle, Regents Park, The Hill, The Hill Extension, Rosettenville, Townsview, and Kenilworth. Less ambitious and more practicable routes planned for subsequent daily tours were through Jeppe and Troyville, through Fordsburg, Mayfair, Brixton and Vrededorp, through Doornfontein, Bertrams, Judiths Paarl and Be-zuidenhout Valley, and through Forest Hill, Booyens and Ophirton (Fig. 1).<sup>26</sup>

The first week of experimental trading was a resounding success. More than 5 000 people were served and the Market Master was officially asked to prepare a second mobile van for use within a fortnight.<sup>27</sup> The success of the mobile marketing scheme received a wide and very favourable press in which considerable space was devoted to quoting patron reactions and to listing fruit and vegetable prices on the mobile van. Broadly speaking, prices were between 25% and 50% lower than those at which shops and hawkers were selling, and quality was reputedly superior.<sup>28</sup> Prices varied daily in concert with market conditions; those given in Table 1 provide a fair

TABLE 1  
COMPARATIVE PRICES FOR FRUIT AND VEGETABLES  
SOLD BY HAWKERS AND MOBILE MARKETS,  
JOHANNESBURG, JULY 1944\*

	Mobile market	Hawkers
Beans	4d/lb. **	6d – 9d/lb.
Peas	4d/lb.	6d – 9d/lb.
Tomatoes	6d/lb.	6d – 9d/lb.
Naartjies	1s/14.	1s/6 – 12
Pineapples	4d – 6d ea.	6d – 9d ea.
Cauliflowers	1s – 2s ea.	9d – 1s 6d ea. (poor quality)
Onions	1s/4.5 lb.	1s/2.5 lb. – 3 lb.

\* *Rand Daily Mail*, 14.7.1944

\*\*1 lb. = approx. 0.45 kg

comparison between prices charged by hawkers and the mobile market in the early days of the programme.

Whereas the instant success of mobile marketing received a warm welcome from promoters and patrons alike, others were openly critical of the project. Before the mobile van had even served one person, the scheme

22. *The Star*, 22.6.1944.

23. *Rand Daily Mail*, 22.6.1944.

24. Johannesburg's mobile market, *op. cit.*

25. *Rand Daily Mail*, 23.6.1944.

26. *Ibid.*; see also *The Star*, 24.6.1944, 26.6.1944 and 27.6.1944.

27. *The Star*, 27.6.1944.

28. *The Star*, 22.6.1944; *Rand Daily Mail*, 23.6.1944.

was reported to have "caused a flutter in the dovescotes of private enterprise, which sees in it a threat to its livelihood".<sup>29</sup> From the start, the City Council had indeed been obliged to defend its proposal along the lines that it was not its intention to eliminate private enterprise. Rather, mobile marketing was being introduced to fill a need and to set a fair price which would curb the exploitation of temporary shortages by private entrepreneurs. This defence was to be reiterated on several occasions.<sup>30</sup>

Scarcely three weeks after mobile marketing was launched, a letter to the press pointed out that municipal trading adversely affected 'hundreds' of fruit shops and Indian and White hawkers.<sup>31</sup> A survey reported in October 1945 showed that in Johannesburg there were 414 hawkers and pedlars, 27 Portuguese market garden shops, and 1 337 shops trading in fruit and vegetables.<sup>32</sup> Fruit and vegetable hawkers apparently did not initiate any formal protest about the introduction of mobile markets. A member of the South African Fresh Produce Dealers' Association, however, did confront the City Council with charges of illegal and unfair competition.<sup>33</sup> Issued after two months of municipal hawking, the charges rested on, *inter alia*, a claim that the practice would bind the Council to enduring deficits. On the basis of the first month's trading loss of £131, excluding wage payments allegedly charged to other municipal departments, it was estimated that the City Council would lose some £8 000 in the first year. Further, it was alleged that mobile marketing involved a breach of the municipal by-laws applicable to hawking. Whereas the by-laws required hawkers to move at least every twenty minutes, the mobile market stopped at some places for up to two hours. Finally, it was protested that the City Council simply had no licence to trade.<sup>34</sup>

This challenge to the legitimacy of municipal mobile marketing was effectively rebuffed by the introduction in September 1944 of a State Emergency Regulation entitling any town council to trade.<sup>35</sup> Legal proceedings in defence of municipal hawking cost the City Council about £400, a sum which, on application, the Minister of Agriculture refused to pay.<sup>36</sup> As if to underline its claims still further, the City Council put a second mobile market van on the road in September,<sup>37</sup> some two months later than initially planned. The pattern of delayed vehicle introduction recurred throughout the mobile market programme.

Adverse reaction to municipal mobile markets was not stifled by merely declaring them legal, for it was still possible to object to their unfair commercial advantage. For example, at the stage when rationed potatoes became the primary drawcard of the mobile markets, it was charged that the Council had seized potatoes from private traders and refused them to hawkers.<sup>38</sup> This claim was made notwithstanding an earlier denial that the City Council made any attempt to side-track supplies which might be difficult to secure in the open market.<sup>39</sup> The objection was not settled easily and surfaced again in a statement made by the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce which drew attention to a special arrangement between the City Council and the State regarding potato sales.<sup>340</sup>

The statement by the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce amounted to a thinly-disguised attack on municipal trading and came at a time when the euphoria of the first weeks of municipal hawking had abated. Patron-

age had also eased somewhat, not least because of the patrons' dislike for queueing. In addition there occurred shrewd marketing practices by some suburban retailers: "many dealers have reduced their prices to those of the mobile market, or even lower, on the day it operates in their area".<sup>41</sup>

Included in the Chamber of Commerce's 'statement' of November 1944, was the observation that prices at mobile markets were no longer lower than in shops. This was endorsed by another report which revealed that the original markup of between 25% and 30% had increased to 60% within two months of trading.<sup>42</sup> It was also asserted that in fruit and vegetable selling which "economic experience has demonstrated to be particularly suitable for small scale traders",<sup>43</sup> it was a safe assumption that costs per unit turnover were higher for the municipality than for private traders. It was suggested that absence of the profit motive in municipal trading meant that there was no incentive to minimise costs. Moreover, the Chamber claimed that it was "not difficult for a municipality to charge prices somewhat lower than those charged by the private trader, for the municipality has the power to debit some of the costs incurred to public funds ...".<sup>44</sup> Finally, the Chamber argued that the service of the municipal markets was limited by virtue of their not dealing in all commodities which were scarce (e.g. meat), that they were immune to hawker regulations and that they enjoyed the benefit of free press 'advertising'.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, by the end of 1944 more than 2 000 lines of single column news reporting had been devoted to local coverage of the proposal and implementation of municipal mobile marketing.

In their first six months of operation mobile markets made a considerable impact on fruit and vegetable selling in Johannesburg. The value of fresh produce which had been purchased for sale in the mobile markets was over £13 000, and sales totalled nearly £16 000;<sup>46</sup> early trading losses had been reversed. Over 100 000 people had been served,<sup>47</sup> the monthly total being highest at the peak of the potato shortage in October when 31 000 patrons were served.<sup>48</sup> Potato availability was indeed key to the success of the mobile markets: a report in February 1945 pointed out that "when potato supplies returned to normal, the patronage of mobile markets dropped to 34% in one month".<sup>49</sup>

29. *Rand Daily Mail*, 10.4.1944.  
 30. *The Star*, 6.10.1944 and 29.1.1945.  
 31. *Rand Daily Mail*, 14.7.1944.  
 32. G.G. POULTNEY, Mobile and retail markets and some aspects of municipal market by-laws, *Municipal affairs* 10, 1945, pp.23, 25 and 29.  
 33. *The Star*, 14.8.1944.  
 34. *Ibid.*  
 35. *Government Gazette* (No. 3389), 4.9.1944: War Measure No. 74, 1944, Proclamation No. 182.  
 36. J.C.C., Minutes, 1945, I 82.  
 37. *The Star*, 29.1.1945.  
 38. *The Star*, 2.9.1944: Letter to editor.  
 39. Johannesburg's mobile market, *op. cit.*  
 40. *Rand Daily Mail*, 22.11.1944.  
 41. *The Star*, 6.10.1944.  
 42. *The Cape Times*, 15.2.1945.  
 43. *Rand Daily Mail*, 22.11.1944.  
 44. *Ibid.*  
 45. *Ibid.*  
 46. J.C.C., Minutes, 1945, I 81.  
 47. *The Star*, 29.11.1945.  
 48. *Ibid.*  
 49. *The Cape Times*, 15.2.1945.

Patronage of the mobile markets persisted at a high level in the second half of the financial year 1944/1945. A third van was pressed into service in March 1945, some nine months after it was first announced that a third and fourth vehicle would be quickly converted and equipped.<sup>50</sup> The third van's first itinerary took it through the middle income suburbs of Parktown North, Parkhurst, and Parkwood (Fig. 1);<sup>51</sup> ratepayers in higher income areas had demanded that their suburbs in addition to lower income areas of the city should be served from municipal markets.<sup>52</sup> At the close of the financial year in 1945, the mobile markets had served over 172 000 people, incurring a net loss of some £960 (Table 2). The operating loss led to an objection (which was defeated) by a handful of City Councillors to the mobilisation of a fourth van. Pointing to the cumulative loss in excess of £1 000 by August 1945, introduction of another van was judged "an absurd wastage of public money".<sup>53</sup> Mobile marketing continued despite the dim financial record. By contrast the Johannesburg City Council closed its fixed central city retail market which in seven months of trading, beginning in September 1944, accumulated a net loss of nearly £1 500.<sup>54</sup>

TABLE 2  
MARKETING RECORD, JOHANNESBURG MOBILE  
MARKETS, 1944/45 — 1951/52\*

Financial year	No. of customers served	Turnover		Net profit		Net loss	
		£.	s. d.	£.	s. d.	£.	s. d.
1944/1945	172 216	25 947.	5. 5			967.	1. 3
1945/1946	190 000	37 878.	6. 9	716.	1. 0		
1946/1947	200 000	42 666.	9. 10	1 179.	6. 8		
1947/1948	220 000	60 979.	9. 0	736.	17. 6		
1948/1949	342 738	93 573.	5. 11			357.	0. 8
1949/1950	277 634	78 287.	3. 2	81.	2. 9		
1950/1951	220 418	71 804.	19. 3			1 703.	9. 7
1951/1952**	117 649	57 996.	2. 8			3 862.	12. 3
	1 740 655	469 133	2. 0	2 713.	7. 11	6 890.	3. 9

\* Johannesburg City Council, Mayor's minute, 1951/52, p.171

\*\*Ten months only

### FROM SUCCESS TO COLLAPSE, 1945—1952

In the period 1945/1948 mobile marketing was financially self-supporting (Table 2) and talk of the death of the scheme following the first year of loss subsided. There were few press reports during these years; it seemed as if municipal mobile marketing had come to be taken for granted, a permanent element in local retailing. In a sudden reversal of fortune, however, a net trading loss occurred in 1948/1949, when patronage reached an all time peak of over 340 000. From 1949 onwards, patronage declined precipitously and this was accompanied by unprecedented financial losses in 1950/1951 and 1951/1952. In this last period the number of customers served by mobile markets was fewer than the number served during the first year of operations (Table 2).

The mobile markets were faced with increasingly difficult trading conditions towards the end of the 1940s. High costs were incurred in maintaining an ageing fleet of vehicles. In addition there was considerable competition from private traders; in Johannesburg it was estimated in 1947 that there were 3 000 hawkers alone.<sup>55</sup> Competition with the mobile markets had spawned imitative private hawking in areas covered by, and in vans identical

to, those operated by the City Council. This practice was apt to be confusing for patrons of municipal vans, and the City Council was sometimes wrongly criticised for selling items only on condition that others were purchased as well, a practice which the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce nonetheless asked the Price Controller to investigate.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, there were (reportedly) misdirected complaints of high prices, inferior produce, and indifferent service on the municipal vans.<sup>57</sup> The generally changed circumstances at the turn of the decade were summarised as follows by Johannesburg's Market Master: "The time has now passed when housewives and their servants queued up for the arrival of the mobile markets — the mobile markets now have to look for customers in keen competition with shopkeepers, market gardeners, and hawkers, and it is only by improving efficiency and constant supervision that the service continues to operate. It is felt that the mobile markets are playing their part in keeping down the cost of living as they are still regarded as a barometer for retail prices of fruit and vegetables. It is apparent, however, that many housewives still prefer to have their fruit and vegetables delivered to them and to pay their accounts monthly irrespective of the prices charged ..."<sup>58</sup> The useful rôle of the mobile markets as an index of fair selling prices was cited frequently. For example, as early as February 1945 it was countered that "a price corrective for the retail trade ... could be achieved just as effectively and much more cheaply in another way".<sup>59</sup>

The net financial loss in 1950/1951 was more than £1 700. Unlike the previous financial year in which there had been four months of loss and eight of profit, in 1950/1951 there were ten months of loss. During that year there were seven vans in operation, attended by a staff of eight drivers, seventeen Black and fifteen White assistants.<sup>60</sup> The large deficit would have been sufficient to drive the mobile markets from the streets had it not been for some hope of a revival. Interested in such a revival the Housewives League pleaded for a year's grace before reconsidering closure, and called on the City Council to equip the mobile markets with more adequate supplies and to operate the vans more punctually.<sup>61</sup> In addition the Market Master attempted to trim the wage bill and the high operating costs. In March 1951 economy measures reduced the staff complement to seven drivers, twelve Black and nine White assistants, and reduced the number of vans from seven to six.<sup>62</sup>

Resuscitation of the mobile markets failed, and a record massive deficit loomed in 1951/1952. Finally, in March 1952 the decision was taken to discontinue mobile municipal marketing. Heavy financial losses were given as the prime reason. These were attributed to high and rising operating costs, to more plentiful supplies of fruit

50. *The Star*, 28.6.1944.

51. *Rand Daily Mail*, 16.3.1945.

52. J.C.C., Mayor's minute, 1950/51, p.164.

53. *Rand Daily Mail*, 29.8.1945.

54. J.C.C., Mayor's minute, 1952/53, p.178.

55. *Libertas* 7(2), 1947, p.5.

56. JOHANNESBURG CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, *Commercial yearbook*, 1949/50, p.25.

57. *The Star*, 29.1.1949.

58. J.C.C., Mayor's minute, 1949/50, p.184.

59. *The Cape Times*, 15.2.1945.

60. J.C.C., Mayor's minute, 1950/51, p.163.

61. *The Star*, 29.8.1951.

62. J.C.C., Mayor's minute, 1950/51, p.163.

and vegetables, to the increased absence of housewives from home, and to the intense competition from private hawkers whose advantages included door-to-door delivery and trade on credit.<sup>63</sup> Not all were content to let explanations rest there, and the *Rand Daily Mail*, which had consistently championed mobile marketing, submitted that poor patronage was partly the fault of the Council itself: "...The Council conducted the mobile markets in a half-hearted manner, without foresight or business acumen ... the Council is to blame for not 'selling' the mobile markets to the public".<sup>64</sup> The case for terminating mobile marketing was the clearer in view of the pattern of patronage. Fewer than five percent of the White population of Johannesburg were using the service, and of that number eighty percent were from the higher income suburbs in northern and eastern Johannesburg. Outside of these areas, in suburbs which the mobile markets had originally been intended to serve, patronage was highest in Kensington.<sup>65</sup> In a curious turn about, the *raison d'être* of municipal hawking had been negated. Nothing had ever come of the proposal that the very poorest people in Johannesburg, the Black township residents, should be served by the municipal mobile markets. Indeed, the townships failed to benefit even from the half-hearted proposal to funnel into these areas surplus produce from the mobile markets. Rather, the Johannesburg City Council chose to sell such surplus to farmers for pig feed.<sup>66</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The bold experiment of municipal mobile marketing in Johannesburg was unique in South Africa when it began in 1944. Municipal hawking as practised in Johannesburg had few, if any, parallels elsewhere. In the course of eight years of operations, the mobile markets served upwards of 1 740 000 customers and turned over more than £469 000 of produce. Introduced so as to make scarce fruit and vegetable supplies more available and accessible to the city's poor Whites, the mobile markets had a chequered history. Patronage rose steadily for five years, then declined sharply. Financial performance oscillated, being best when produce (especially potatoes) was particularly scarce. Opinions on the desirability of municipal hawking were sharply divided: users and officials were ranged against shopkeepers and private hawkers and their representative organisations. It was ultimately the City Council's insistence that mobile marketing be financially self-supporting and not a social-benefit programme that put an end to the project. As one of the several attempts to counter the high prices of food, the mobile markets were survived by the state-subsidised food distribution scheme managed by Johannesburg's Social Welfare Department. The six mobile markets in Johannesburg made their last trips on April 30, 1952.<sup>67</sup> ■

*Ibid.*

*Rand Daily Mail*, 22.4.1952.

65. J.C.C., Mayor's minute, 1952/53, p.177.

66. *The Star*, 8.1.1948.

67. *Rand Daily Mail*, 29.4.1952.