

# THE FILENES

by  
**George E. Berkley**

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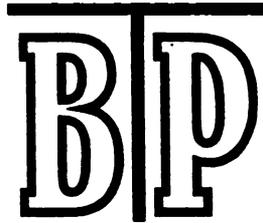
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brother cheerfully accepted a subordinate role and the three of them, William, Edward and Lincoln, all worked strenuously to advance the family's enterprises.

William decided to dispose of his Lynn, Salem, and Bath, Maine shops and concentrate the family's efforts and resources on their Boston operations. In 1878 he sold the Bath store. Bertram was managing it and unfortunately had not demonstrated the merchandising capability of his two brothers. The store had never done well.

The Lynn and Salem stores were operating in the black but they were draining too much of the family's time and energies. William had always wanted to escape from the toil and trouble of worrying about small sales, of wrapping countless small parcels. He now felt he was ready to do so. A year or two later, these stores were sold as well.

Once the Lynn and Salem stores had been disposed of, William and his sons began looking for a site for an expanded Boston enterprise. They eventually found a suitable structure at 445-447 Washington Street. The building not only offered an excellent location but also plenty of room. It contained five stories, which, with a basement, would give them six floors of selling space. It would make William Filene's the largest women's wear and accessory shop in Boston.

The move to their new address in the fall of 1890 marked a major triumph for the father and his two sons. It also marked a major change in the ethnic makeup of Boston retailing. Up to then, old-time Yankees had owned and operated every major store in Boston. No outsider had ever succeeded in breaking into their select circle. Now William Filene had done so. There was certainly no indication that his Yankee colleagues and competitors welcomed this German-Jewish emigrant to their ranks. But they had no choice. William Filene had arrived.

But having arrived, William Filene decided that it was time to go. He was now sixty and despite the wonderful way his sons had eased much of the burden since his stroke, he was feeling the strain of age and ill health. So he calmly informed Edward and Lincoln that he was turning the business over to them.

The father, so the boys learned, truly meant what he said. Not only was he placing them in charge, he was making them sole owners of the firm he had founded. The new store would be incorporated as