BOLD CENTURY
1868-1968

THE STORY OF SIBLEY, LINDSAY AND CURR COMPANY OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
ROCHESTER still had a green village look when Sibley's was founded in 1868, not long after this lithograph was made looking east on Main St. from the Erie Canal bridge at the present day Broad St.
1868-1968
BOLD CENTURY
100 Adventurous and Happy Years of Merchandising / The Story of Sibley, Lindsay and Curr Company of Rochester, Monroe County, New York

By Andrew D. Wolfe — Rochester, New York, 1968
Dedication

ARTHUR J. O'BRIEN

PRESIDENT, Sibley, Lindsay & Curr. 1958-1967

PRESIDENT, Associated Dry Goods Corporation, 1967--

From his friends and co-workers at Sibley's
"Meet me under the clock at Sibley's"—this giant timepiece has been familiar to generations of Western New Yorkers.

SIBLEY, LINDSAY & CURR CO.

OFFICERS – 1968

WILLIAM E. LEE, President

WILLIAM J. SANDER, Treasurer

WARREN C. NEW
Vice President & General Merchandise Manager

HAROLD O. WOODWORTH
Vice President & General Merchandise Manager

JOHN G. HART
Vice President & Operating Superintendent

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Author's Foreword

THIS BOOKLET is a modest effort to contribute to our knowledge of the economic history of Rochester and Monroe County, a subject which touches the lives of all citizens, but which so rarely is the subject of historical study.

All who have been connected with the project are proud that the booklet will take the place of the 1968 Fall Issue of the "Genesee Country Scrapbook" of the Rochester Historical Society, and we hope it will meet the standards of accuracy and readability of that publication.

Sibley's has been extremely generous in supplying information, and has insisted that the writing and editing of the booklet be completely independent, except for minor stipulations concerning current business activities. This has made the task easy and enjoyable.

A great many people have helped by submitting to interviews and by providing a great variety of historical information and photographs. It would be impossible to name them all, but special mention should be made of Kenneth C. Townson, Douglas C. Townson, Mrs. F. Hawley Ward, Mrs. Mary Whittington, Mrs. Gertrude Weltzer, William H. Stackel, Bernard E. Finucane, Mrs. Charles T. Crouch, Robert B. Lindsay, Alexander L. Beach, Ernest A. Paviour, Russell A. Sibley, Mrs. John Sibley, The Local History Division of Rochester Public Library, and Mrs. Eve Rapelye. Linn Duncan took the color pictures, and made copies of the old photographs and documents used in the booklet, a demanding task. William Hegle is responsible for the design, and Ralph Avery for the cover and the drawings on Pages 46 and 47. Mrs. Francis M. Blodget, Jr., did much of the research in most skillful fashion.

Andrew D. Wolfe
SIBLEY'S is the story of 100 years of history in the life of one of America's finest communities and regions.

For the story of any great store is the story of the people it serves. Between this great store, its associates, and its customers, there is a bond of confidence and affection.

Without that bond, the story of Sibley's would be solely one of facts, figures and store fixtures. And the chances are that the story would be a short one, for a store which does not build that bond with its customers and the people cannot last long.

This story will stress the challenges met and overcome during 100 years of adventurous business history. And it will recount the activities of people who played conspicuous roles in the development of one of the nation's great stores.

To focus on such events and personalities is only a means of giving structure to this narrative; it should not obscure the fact that Sibley's hundred years of history has been forged by many thousands of people, each contributing in a special and individual way. All share equally in a magnificent accomplishment.

Finally, one should emphasize that a centennial observance is meaningful only if its true focus is on the future. The men and women who built Sibley's would be fascinated if they could see the store of today, could see its services spreading to suburbs which only yesterday were country towns, and in the next few years spreading more widely in the state.

In this booklet we will watch as these men and women, in a world which is now far away to the point of quaintness, struggle and overcome the challenges of their day. But we will understand them only if we see that they were consistently searching for excellence, their concern always looking towards tomorrow.

This is the heritage Sibley's has received from its past—an abiding concern for excellence and an unswerving tradition of honesty and fair-dealing as we look ahead in a fast-changing world.

William E. Lee
President
THE ORIGINAL STORE—Victorian flourishes gave elegance to the 25-foot wide store at Main Street East, in Rochester, just east of St. Paul St.
Beginnings

"SINCE my arrival, there has been quite enough for me to do."

Rufus A. Sibley, a 27-year-old New Engander, six feet, three, and red-haired, wrote this to his sister in Massachusetts on March 8, 1868.

Three weeks later, he and two Scottish-born partners, Alexander M. Lindsay and John Curr, were to launch a store which would grow into one of the largest merchandising businesses of their time in the United States.

Sibley and Lindsay would live to see their business celebrate its 50th birthday, and Sibley would live a month and a few days after the firm's 60th birthday. John Curr would disappear forever from the store in 1875, but his name would go marching down in New York retail history like the Roebuck who left a floundering two-year-old Chicago retail business which in later years would make his name world famous.

The store that Sibley, Lindsay and Curr opened on far-off March 30, 1868, (the weather bureau reported the day unusually warm), was small according to the standards of later years, but it was by no means contemptible.

It was located at 73 Main St. E. in Rochester in a relatively new five-story building with a gingerbread Victorian facade called the Marble Block. (The location was 150 feet east of St. Paul St. on the site of the present H. L. Green Co. store). It was 25 feet wide and 160 feet deep, for a respectable total of 4,000 square feet. The location was east of the river, and a quarter of a mile from the old Four Corners, heart of the Rochester of 1868.

In that same letter to his sister, Rufus Sibley explained the location:

"After heavy rains which cleared the ground of snow in March 1865, raising the river and of course breaking the ice, the ice floated down and the water went over into the streets, doing immense damage. The stores will probably be erected hereafter up Main St. as it is high ground and cannot be flooded. I have taken this space as there is every reason to believe the river will repeat its action of 1865."

He went on to tell how merchants even then were removing their goods to higher floors to avoid flood danger.

Laconically, he added: "As 73 Main St. is many feet above high water mark, I am not particularly interested."

The partners came to a city of about 60,000 at a key period in its development. It was a pleasant, green city, noted for its garden nurseries, and distinguished for its fine plantings and its flowers.

The city's first dynamic period of growth had come to an abrupt halt in the panic of 1837, which ended Rochester's brief reign as the nation's flouring capital. Now, following the troubled economic days of the 1850s and the desperate wartime years 1861-1865, the city was moving into the mainstream of American economic development of the later 19th century. It was beginning to lay the groundwork for the technological industry which would make it world-famous in the following century.

But the city to which the partners came in 1868 was still small and semi-rural, a town in which one could see much of pre-1850 America as well as the beginnings of a great industrial city.

The store's first newspaper advertisement indicated that its chief stocks in trade would be "cloths, silks, dress goods, velvets, shawls, laces, embroideries, notions, trimmings, hosiery, gloves, handkerchiefs and underclothing."

Arriving in Rochester on March 1, the partners are said to have built much of the interior fittings themselves, and the initial payroll showed 19 people, another indication that the venture was a fairly sizeable undertaking for its day. The staff reflected many national and ethnic backgrounds and included two Negroes, an unusual circumstance for that era.

Although the partners styled themselves as "Sibley, Lindsay, and Curr," the store was labelled the "Boston Store."

This told something of the kind of merchandising they would pursue. It also told of the background of the partners.

For "Boston Stores" were a fixture on the American retail scene for many years. "Boston Stores" were given that name because Boston
was in considerable degree the scene of the invention of the department store of the mid-19th century.

Boston dry goods houses, many operated by Scotsmen, had evolved away from the old merchant establishments of earlier years. They emphasized dry goods, including imported fabrics. They pioneered in store display and arrangement, and stressed salesmanship. Even today, a century later, many communities boast businesses which still go under the name of "Boston Store."

The new store in Rochester's Marble Block came by the name naturally.

All three partners had received training in one of the leading Boston dry goods establishments, the firm of Hogg, Brown and Taylor. Sibley had come there in 1864, Lindsay and Curr a year later.

It was the practice of firms like Hogg, Brown and Taylor to help able employees set up businesses of their own, businesses to which the parent firm then sold large supplies of goods at wholesale. Sibley, and the two young Scottish clerks at Hogg, Brown and Taylor, observed enviously the successful businesses of some of the former employees. They began to lay plans for a venture of their own.

They first wished to go to New York City, but later shifted their planning to Western New York. It is interesting to speculate what might have happened had they persisted in their original plan to go to New York City. There is a story that their choice narrowed to Canandaigua or Rochester, the latter winning out because the partners thought its growth potential greater. History justified their choice.

In any case, they decided on Rochester, and arrived in the city at the beginning of March, 1868.

From the company's first journal, which has survived the century, it seems that Lindsay contributed about $6,500 of capital, and Sibley about $5,500, with a much smaller amount coming from Curr. It also seems that Hogg, Brown and Taylor had agreed to allow their former employees about $25,000 of credit for stocking the store.

The investment must have taken virtually all the cash of the partners, with Sibley using proceeds from the sale of a farm and equipment which had belonged to his mother. Lindsay's funds must have included some assistance from his family in Scotland since in three years he could hardly have saved $6,500 from a salary of $10 or so a week at Hogg, Brown and Taylor.

And so the store opened.

When the partners closed the doors after business on that eventful March 30, they had recorded sales of $291.49, not a bad achievement for those days. And the second day of business brought in $381.76. The first week's sales totalled about $3,000.

The partners must have felt satisfied. Their business was successfully under way.

FANCY RECEIPT given by Sibley's to Elizabeth Conkey in 1875. Ten years later she married Rufus Sibley.
AFTER ALMOST A YEAR in business, Sibley's February, 1869, financial standing is shown in the balance sheet at left. Ten years later, the 1879 balance sheet (right) shows net worth had advanced from $55,499.37 to $280,811.55. Sibley had left more money in the business than Lindsay and had acquired a greater interest, possibly because his family was much smaller than Lindsay's. But their share of the profits was equal—one-third to each. Both balance sheets are in Sibley's magnificent bookkeeper's script.
THREE determined partners, some capable employees, a rented store, $53,585.79 worth of merchandise—and $99.85 in cash!

That was how an evaluation of Sibley's might have been written Feb. 1, 1869, ten months after the business started.

But Messrs. Sibley, Lindsay, and Curr had gained a footing in the retailing world of Rochester.

The payroll now numbered about 25 regular employees, and, toward the end of 1868, the partners even had begun cautiously to draw modest living expenses from the company—Sibley and Lindsay getting $12.50 per week, and Curr $12.00.

In another year, the net worth of the business would be $75,168, twice the original value, and the company would double its floor area by leasing the store next west on Main Street.

And in 1870 the company would launch a wholesale business destined for a half-century of notable success.

By mid-1871, when the partners would have been in business three years and four months, the net worth of the company would have shot up to $115,917, and a six months' profit of $20,039 would be recorded. Borrowings would have been reduced, and the company's growth would be financed almost entirely from within, the partners leaving virtually all profits in the firm, and taking out as salary only what they needed for living.

What was making the infant company move so rapidly?

After so many years, it is hard to document the reasons for the growth, but certain patterns seem clear.

First, the partners knew the dry goods business. Obviously, they knew what to buy, where to buy, and how much to pay for goods. Lindsay was a master of buying and selling, and Sibley provided brilliant control of finances. With virtually no working capital, he was able to keep the bills paid, keep full stocks, and still finance expansion.

The partners emphasized volume, and they emphasized price. They were the first major store in the area to clearly mark all merchandise, treating all customers alike. This was a break from tradition, as the oldtime merchant had varied his prices from customer to customer, and bargaining had been a fact of mercantile life.

STORE INTERIOR — clean, neat and lively in appearance, the old Main St. store was a generation ahead of the drab merchants' rooms of its era.
Sibley, Lindsay, and Curr were aggressive merchants. They brought in new lines of merchandise, and would not be undersold. They relied on volume to offset lower mark-ups.

As contrasted with the drab, haphazard appearance of many of the older retailers, their establishment was bright, clean, and well-lighted. They laid great emphasis on counter display, and apparently were quick to extend credit. In August of 1868, accounts receivable totalled $500. A year later, they totalled $6,752.34. And on Aug. 11, 1870, the total was $15,604.27.

The new storekeepers also were advertising minded. The third item in the journal kept by Rufus Sibley records the payment of $1 to J. F. Kenney for advertising. And on Apr. 11, 1868, less than two weeks after the doors opened, the journal records the payment of $2.00 for "distributing circulars."

Recruitment of able employees was another notable skill the partners evidenced. Thomas S. Johnston, later himself to be a partner, was on the original payroll, and the name of Andrew J. Townson, also to become a partner and an outstanding business leader, appears on the payroll for May 2. He got $1.25 for a week's work as an office boy.

The 1870's were explosive years in the United States. They saw the great panic of 1873, the Credit Mobilier scandal, the famed Centennial Exposition of 1876, the Custer Massacre, the end of Reconstruction in the South, and the bloody railroad riots of 1877.

For Sibley's they were years of extraordinary growth.

The wholesale business, which catered to country stores throughout New York State, northern Pennsylvania, and New England, soared. With it had developed an unusual dry goods manufacturing business. This was supervised by Curr.

By as early as 1873, as many as 100 girls were employed in this operation, which took up most of the four upper stories of the two Main Street buildings occupied by Sibley, Lindsay and Curr. The girls turned out a wide variety of goods, with men's shirts apparently a major item. Underwear and night shirts, and blouses were also important among the more than 400 different items manufactured.

The wholesale business was headquartered in the basement of the Main St. buildings. By 1880 more than 35 salesmen were travelling the northeast, and the buggy of the Sibley's man must have been a familiar sight on the streets of rural towns and small cities.

All of this progress took its toll on the partners, who literally worked around the clock to develop the business. There is a pathetic tale that Sibley's young wife, Martha Havens, used to come to the store late at night when he was opening crates so that she could be with him for a few hours. And when, alone and isolated in a strange city, she suffered a nervous breakdown, it was blamed in part on the demands the business had made on her husband.

Even her husband, a tremendously powerful man physically, broke under the strain and had to take a long leave of absence in 1876.

John Curr's exertions contributed to the development of lung trouble, and he withdrew from active participation in the firm in 1875. He moved to Colorado for his health, retaining a financial interest in the company until Sibley's was incorporated in 1897. Replacing him in the partnership in 1875 appear the names of Thomas S. Johnston and Robert Liddle.

And the business rolled on.

In 1877 the properties at 69-73 Main St. were acquired, and in 1880 a major stride was taken with the purchase of the Osborne House hotel property at the northeast corner of St. Paul St. and Main. The Osborne House, built in 1857, had been, until the opening of the Powers Hotel in 1880, the city's leading hostelry. The acquisition of the large five-story building reflected the fact that within 12 years of its establishment Sibley's had gained primacy in the city's retail field, topping the long established giants, Burke, Fitzsimons, Hone & Co., and A. S. Mann & Co.

Net worth of the company jumped from about $290,000 in 1879 to $430,000 in 1881 to $621,705 in February, 1884.

For a time the hotel continued to operate rooms on the upper floors, with a small lobby on the ground floor. And several small stores continued as tenants on the street floor. But gradually, the needs of Sibley's growth forced the company to take over all of the building.

Nevertheless, by the late 1880's it became apparent that even this
new space was not enough. So land to the north of the Osborne House in St. Paul St. was acquired. On this was built a seven-story building specially designed for the wholesale business and its manufacturing divisions.

In the decade 1880-1890, gross volume done by the store jumped from about $500,000 to approximately $1,500,000, and the number of employees climbed from 350 to 600.

By the time the store observed its 21st birthday in 1889, it had become a nationally known business.

Ramiifications of its growth included such things as buying offices in New York, Paris, London, Manchester, Chemnitz, and St. Gall.

And, in addition to the Rochester-based business, the partners had helped former employees start their own stores, in much the same manner as they themselves had been set up in business by Hogg, Brown and Taylor. But instead of requiring prompt repayment, Sibley, Lindsay & Curr took ownership interest in the new stores, and ended up with substantial equities in stores in Kansas City, Mo.; Minneapolis; Erie, Pa.; and Jamestown, N.Y.

From this growing business the various partners profited in the year 1889 to the amount of nearly $200,000. Twenty-one years of unremitting toil had made Sibley and Lindsay millionaires, and had started many others on their way to financial success. Sibley's store had become a familiar and vital force in the life of Western New York. By many yardsticks it was the area's leading business enterprise and should remain so until overtaken by Eastman Kodak Company in the early 1900's.

ERA OF EXPANSION - This is Sibley's in 1890. At left is the newly-completed headquarters of the wholesale division on St. Paul St. Center is the old Osborne House hotel, by this time used completely for store operations, and at right are the original Main St. buildings. Soon after this drawing was made, the Osborne building was demolished to make way for the Granite Building.
SIBLEY, LINDSAY & CURR!

OUR OPENING DAY!

The Great Reduction Sale Continues This Week. Facts and Figures Tell the Story.

BIGGEST

DEPARTMENT HOUSE

BETWEEN

NEW YORK and CHICAGO.

FLOOR SPACE

OCCUPIED BY OUR STORE,

195,841 SQUARE FEET

OR 4 1-2 ACRES.

SILKS.

RETAIL GOODS.

Only the prices of a few of

bargains to be found at the

prices of a few of

bargains to be found at the

FUR CAPES.

Undoubtedly by far the

largest and best assortment of

undoubtedly by far the

largest and best assortment of

LINEN DEPT.

Values still hold out; interest

still centers here; many items

more lower.
New Heights and New Elegance

BY the standards of the day, Sibley, Lindsay and Curr Co., might have been expected to rest on its oars as the 1890's opened. It dominated the Western New York retail scene, and its wholesale jobbing business was a major success. It had major interests in department stores in four other cities.

Rufus Sibley and Alexander Lindsay after 22 years of backbreaking labor would both turn 50 in 1891. It could have been time to relax.

But they did not. Nor did their younger partners, Andrew J. Townson, Thomas S. Johnston, and Thomas B. Ryder, nor did others who held executive posts.

The company had built up momentum, and nationally the downtown department store was about to enter a golden era. American cities were flooding with immigrants - from America's farms and small towns, and from abroad. Street railways made the big downtown stores accessible to the growing urban populations, and railroads and interurban trolleys made the cities easily accessible to residents of rural areas.

America's economy, despite periodic panics, was growing with tremendous speed, and people had money to spend.

The departments stores had things on which that new money could be spent - dry goods and trimming materials, laces, china, carpets, and furniture. Mass production was sweeping away the final vestiges of craft work, and the city department stores were pivotal in the distribution of the new mass-produced goods.

Riding the crest of these economic developments, Sibley's pressed expansion plans. In 1890 it completed the giant new wholesale building on St. Paul Street. And just a year later ground was broken for GRANITE BUILDING bedecked with flags for its grand opening in 1893 - from an old postcard.
the most ambitious enterprise to date — the Granite Building.

It was constructed by a separate company, the Granite Building Co., individually owned by Sibley and Lindsay, and their three junior partners, Johnston, Townson and Ryder. So as not to interfere with daily business, it was built in sections, and completed in 1893.

Situated at the top of the rise in East Main Street, its 12 stories were the equal of any building in the state for elegance and quality of construction.

It was constructed in the semi-classical style which was becoming the raging fashion in architecture and would gain national acceptance as a result of the popularity of the building designs at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.

Basic exterior materials were granite and a cream-colored brick, with white terra cotta used for decorative floral swags at the 11th floor. Despite its ornateness, however, it had a clean, practical look. Even today, 75 years after its construction it retains a forthright, workmanlike character.

The building was of steel frame construction, with walls and floors of heavy tile. It was strong enough to withstand a bombardment, and it was proudly proclaimed as a fireproof structure.

Inside, it was elegant to a degree unknown elsewhere. Upstate, with massive mahogany counters and cabinets, and what for the day were myriads of electric lights.

A tea room was installed on the second floor, and soon grew into a full-scale restaurant. With brass chandeliers and tapestry wall paper it reflected all the opulent grace of the 90's.

This elaborate quality reflected a national trend which in a generation had turned department stores from simple merchants' rooms into ornate dry goods palaces.

Shopping had become a major social diversion for all classes, and people from small towns would make a day's outing going up to Rochester by rail and spending much of the day in Sibley's and other stores.

The store had developed an unusual image. It was excitingly large and modern. But it fought aggressively not to be undersold, and it was a bargain hunter's mecca.

At the same time, it had a kind of old world elegance.

To this atmosphere, the Scottish and British background, personalities, and accents of Lindsay, Townson, and Johnston undoubtedly contributed. Even Ryder, who had been born in the nearby town of Brighton, but whose parents were English, contributed to this impression, which is remembered by many oldtime customers.

Sibley, the autocratic Yankee, exercised his control from his office and his ledgers, and it was the others who met the public and were remembered years later by customers.

The new building was completed in 1893, year of one of the nation's more serious panics, but this created hardly a ripple for Sibley's.

Sales, which had totalled about $1.5 million in the retail department in 1890, were to reach $4,016,270 in 1900. And in 1900 the small Erie Store, in which Sibley's and its partners had a controlling interest, was to turn up $341,537 in sales, and the Minneapolis Dry Goods Company reached $990,005.

The Rochester store's profits in that turn-of-the-century year were $651,282, or about 16 per cent of gross volume.

Changes also had been made in the store's financial structure, with the dissolution in 1897 of the partnership which with various changes had endured since the start of the business in 1868.

The company was incorporated, with Sibley named as president and Lindsay as vice-president. Sibley and Lindsay split 55 per cent of the capital stock evenly among themselves. The three younger partners, Johnston, Townson, and Ryder, divided the remaining 45 per cent of the stock into three equal parts. John Curr, who had not been active since 1875, ended his participation in the firm, as did Robert Liddle, an active partner from 1875 to 1890.

As the 20th century opened, the business sprawled out over several acres of the Main Street-St. Paul Street area in Rochester. It included the old Marble Block in which the business had been started, the adjoining structure at 85 Main Street, the Granite Building, the seven-story wholesale building to the north on St. Paul Street, a large stable adjoining on Division Street, and several smaller properties.
ELEGANCE of the Gay Nineties marked the tea room-restaurant in the old Granite Building. Note elaborate gas chandeliers. Walls and ceiling were covered with impressive designs.
Regular employment had reached more than 1,200, with several hundred more employed at Christmas time.

Sibley and Lindsay were 59 at the turn of the century, but they continued every bit as aggressive in developing the business as they ever had been. By about 1901, they apparently were considering still further expansion, an extraordinary step considering that the Granite Building had been completed less than eight years before.

By 1903 they were already acquiring property a block to the eastward on Main Street, running from Clinton Avenue east on Main to North Street and north on Clinton to the vicinity of Mortimer Street.

Here they envisioned building a store which would dwarf almost every other store in the United States, and would permit an even broader and more elegant approach to retailing than had been possible in the Granite Building.

Most of the property had been acquired by Townson, perhaps the most astute assembler of large pieces of real estate whom the city ever has known. Planning for the new store advanced steadily, and the partners looked forward to an orderly and carefully-planned transition into the new store.

But no-one reckoned on a bit of faulty wiring in the five-story Rochester Dry Goods Co. on Main Street, east of Sibley's old Marble Block.
THE story of Sibley’s first century is the story of people—and the store’s success story is their success story.

In the 100 years more than 100,000 persons have worked at Sibley’s, and there is hardly a family which has lived in Monroe County for any period of time which hasn’t at one time had a member working at Sibley’s.

There have been sales people and buyers who became veritable institutions, as familiar to the public as the now-vanished statue of Mercury or the hands on the Sibley Tower clock.

There have been bookkeepers and waitresses, clerks and delivery men, cleaners and receptionists, wrappers and grocers, bakers and electricians, advertising artists and interior decorators, display designers and plumbers.

The association of many with the store ran to 40 to 50 years, sometimes even more. Others have worked but a few weeks at Christmas time, or during vacations. Some, over long periods of years, have served as “part-timers,” filling extremely valuable roles in a business which must be ever flexible and adaptable to customer buying patterns.

They have come from every walk of life, and every ethnic and national background. Like department stores elsewhere, but even more so because of its prominence in the Rochester business community, Sibley’s has played a key role in the process of giving immigrant and minority groups a start toward fulfillment in American life.

It is all these people working together, sharing ideals of service and honest trading, who have made Sibley’s a great institution. The next pages list some of the men who have led this effort. But they would be the first to emphasize how much is owed to those others who are not listed here, but who have contributed so much over so many years to Sibley’s.
STARK NEW ENGLAND SIMPLICITY of Rufus Sibley's background is exemplified by these few objects which have survived from his boyhood home in central Massachusetts. The highboy was a wedding gift to his grandmother in 1771. The man who came from this home, almost pre-Revolutionary in its feeling, was to live to see Lindbergh fly the Atlantic.
UNBENDING determination which carried Rufus Sibley to success is evident in this photo taken about 1888, when he was 47 and Sibley's was becoming the city's largest business.

"THE man has no mathematics," was the way Rufus A. Sibley once characterized a man whose business thinking he didn't like.

The remark tells as much about the man who said it as about the man it concerned.

For Rufus Sibley had an extraordinary genius for financial analysis. A business man with whom he worked for many years says today: "I never knew a man who could sift through figures and make financial judgements so surely and so rapidly as he could."

RUFUS ADAMS SIBLEY 1841-1928
Partner, President, Director

He was an austere man ("I never saw him laugh" comments a man who knew him well), but he is a fascinating personality.

He came from the simplest of backgrounds. His father was by turns a farmer, an artisan, and an innkeeper in Spencer, Mass., a small town in central Massachusetts where his ancestors picked a frugal living from infertile soil. He was born in 1841, more than 125 years ago. As a boy he knew people who remembered Washington's visit to the small town, and the ethic of colonial New England can be seen in every facet of his personality.

He apparently mastered the offerings of the local school rapidly, then did bookkeeping in a Spencer store, and later went back to the school to teach.

When he was 23 he went to Boston, intending to enter Harvard to become an engineer. To earn money, he took a job as bookkeeper at the Boston department store of Messrs. Hogg, Brown and Taylor. This changed his life, for retailing became his life's work.

He was a tall, powerful man, standing about six feet three. His hair was red, and in a frigid, New England way, his anger could be overpowering. He had high coloring, deepset sombre blue eyes, and an exceptionally high domed forehead. In the days of his success, in frock coat and high collar he was an uncommonly handsome man.

From the beginning of the Rochester store, he appears to have functioned as the leader of the partners, and he apparently ruled financial policies with an iron hand.

The company's first account journal, which still survives, is in his spectacularly beautiful bookkeeper's handwriting, a script which looks as if it had been engraved.

He went at business with the ferocious determination so characteristic of the business geniuses of New England background who did so much to build modern day America. Unlike his partner, Lindsay, who enjoyed good living, Sibley had little taste for the luxuries his business success made possible.

In his family circle Sibley was warm, generous, and his charitable donations, logical and carefully thought through, were widespread. But the public image was dignified and remote.

He mellowed a little under the influence of his second wife, Elizabeth Conkey, a warm and outgoing personality. It was under her guidance, that he built a lavish music room with red damask wall covering as an

(Continued on page 44)
SCOTTISH BARONIAL splendor highlights "great room" added by A.M. Lindsay to his home in East Ave. about 1900. It looked out on a formal rose garden which further recreated the atmosphere of his beloved Scotland. Sconces were made like medieval torches, and Lindsay's beautifully crafted English humidor is on the table, together with a bowl of his favorite roses. The tapestry on the far wall shows Edinburgh Castle.
LIKE his lifelong partner, Rufus Sibley, Alexander Miller Lindsay was born in the year 1841.

But there the similarity ends, for two successful businessmen of their period could not have been more different than they.

Sibley was a financial genius, Lindsay was one of the great merchandising men of his period, an expert in the buying and selling of goods.

He was a man of about medium height, with a twinkling eye and a Scottish burr in his speech that never disappeared. He was a proud man whose carriages made the daily trips in style from his Victorian East Avenue mansion to his store. And when he returned to visit relatives in Scotland, he would hire a private railroad car in London and journey in style to his birthplace near Glasgow.

To the eyes of a later generation, this might seem showy and purse-proud, but it must be remembered that to one bred in the Scots Calvinist ethic, material success was equated with moral worth and godliness.

And the man behind the picture, Scottish-proud and Scottish-stubborn though he may have been, had warmth and personality.

Lindsay came of a family of physicians, and had hoped to become a doctor. But funds for education ran out, and he was apprenticed to a draper in the small city of Kilmarnock. Then he joined a draper’s establishment in Glasgow. At that early stage in the industrial revolution, Great Britain was the acknowledged leader in machine-made fabrics, and Scottish and English drapers were in a class by themselves.

Lindsay developed a fabulous competence in yard goods and other lines.

SIMPLE FARM COTTAGE near Glasgow was the boyhood home of Alexander Lindsay.

ALEXANDER MILLER LINDSAY 1841-1920
Partner, Vicepresident, Director

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SIMPLE FARM COTTAGE near Glasgow was the boyhood home of Alexander Lindsay.
THE short span of seven years was pivotal in the life of John Curr.

They were the years he spent with the company which to this day bears his name, 93 years after he left its active service, and 71 years after he severed all connection with it.

Like Alexander Lindsay, Curr was Scottish born and like Lindsay he entered the employ of Hogg, Brown & Taylor in Boston soon after his arrival in the United States.

In 1868 he joined with Sibley and Lindsay to establish the Rochester store. His original investment was much smaller than theirs—probably about $1,200—and it appears that his role was in a sense subordinate to theirs.

Yet his contribution was a very real one.

A mechanical genius, he quickly gravitated into the wholesale end of the new business, notably its manufacturing activities. His skill in manufacturing must have played a key role in the notable early success of the company's workshops, which by 1873 employed more than 100 women.

But two years later Curr was threatened by lung trouble and he resigned from the business and moved to Colorado. He retained a partnership interest in the company until it was incorporated in 1897, receiving $140,000 for his partnership interest at that time.

Despite the threat of bad health in the 1870's, he apparently thrived in Colorado, living until 1918 when he died at the age of 81. But after leaving the store, he never afterwards held a regular job, although as an investor he was active in a number of other ventures. The seven eventful years in Rochester had provided him with a satisfactory competence, and he is said to have made shrewd real estate investments.

Curr remained on friendly terms with his partners, and visits to him in Colorado Springs were recorded by them many decades after he left Rochester in 1875.

LEAST known of the five early partner-directors of Sibley's was Thomas S. Johnston, a tall, self-effacing Scot whose whole life centered on the business.

The barren, windswept Orkney Islands, off the North coast of Scotland, where he was born, are traditionally the home of people who are dour, intense, and withdrawn. Theirs is a difficult existence, and only by intense labor do they earn their bread.

There was much of the Orkney Islander in Johnston, and with it he combined notable business skills. His first job was as an apprentice in a drapery shop in Stromness. He then moved on to Glasgow, coming to the United States and entering Sibley's in 1868 at Lindsay's suggestion. Reliable, and deeply versed in merchandising, he quickly made his mark in the firm. He became a partner in 1875, when John Curr became inactive.

He was a quiet man, not given to humor or frivolity, intensely devoted to his family, his church, and his business.
ANDREW J. TOWNSON 1856-1920
Partner, Treasurer, Director

ANDREW J. TOWNSON, notably in his personal style, was the most modern of Sibley's early director-partners. After nearly half a century, he comes down to us as a man of winning personality—able, sympathetic, and gifted with a light, sometimes whimsical sense of humor.

Born in Carlisle in the North of England in 1856, he was brought to London and later the United States as a boy. He started work as a messenger at Sibley's in April, 1868, a connection which endured until his death in 1920. He very early caught the eye of Rufus Sibley, and was trained in the financial end of the business. In 1886, aged only 30, he was made a partner. After the incorporation in 1897, he was made treasurer.

More than any other partner except Rufus Sibley, he played a key role in the life of the community. As president of the Rochester Board of Education in the early 1900's he was given credit for a masterful reorganization of the city schools. So widespread was his reputation for skill at educational finance, that he was asked to become treasurer of Vassar College.

And he gained Rochester fame in 1910-11 by buying up 278 pieces of property for a new New York Central Railroad Station, a feat which ended an intense civic battle as to whether the station should be built east or west of the Genesee River. Among his other business interests was the old Stecher Lithographic Company, which he reorganized and headed as president.

Essentially a communicator and coordinator, it seems clear that it was he who was able to bridge the gaps between his highly individualistic partners and to keep them working in harmony. He was one of the notable business and civic leaders of his time in Rochester.

THOMAS B. RYDER 1857-1942
Partner, Director, President 1919-1930

LATE in his life, the national "Believe It or Not" newspaper syndicate told the story of Thomas B. Ryder. It cited him as virtually unique in that he had worked for the same business for nearly 70 years, much of it at the same desk!

That record was to be extended until his death at 85 in 1942, at which time he had worked steadily for the firm for more than 72 years. His devotion to his company and his success as a merchant is the story of the life of this unassuming, but appealing man.

Ryder was born in a small farm in the Town of Brighton, barely three miles from the business area in which he was to work for so long. His parents were British, and there was a bit of British reticence and reserve in his manner. This was to become more pronounced in adult life when deafness overtook him and communication became difficult.

Like Lindsay and Johnston, Ryder was primarily a merchandiser. Starting in the business at the age 13 at a salary of $2.00 a week, he went through rigorous training, and apparently satisfied the older partners of his skill and reliability. By 1886, when he was only 29, he was taken into the firm as a junior partner. After 1920 and on until his death 22 years later, he remained the only one of the early director-partners active in the company.

He was mild and courteous of manner, and one longtime associate said he never heard him raise his voice. But he was punctilious in all his activities and expected others to be the same. He is said to have been a superb merchant.

Because of his deafness and shyness, he ventured little into community life. For years he maintained the notable Italian Villa style residence at East Avenue and Hawthorn Street. It was noted for a large old-fashioned garden in which he took great interest and pride.
LOUIS W. JOHNSTON 1881-1963
President 1930-1945
WHEREAS his father, Thomas S. Johnston, was a taciturn, undemonstrative Scot, his son, Louis, had a jovial, outgoing manner. He had joined the company upon graduation from Yale in 1905 and went through the demanding apprenticeship that the original partners had set up for their sons. After the death of his father in 1915, he represented his family interest on the directorate and played a central role in the business in the 1920's and 1930's.

He was regarded as particularly adept in personnel matters, and was in considerable degree responsible for remodelling portions of the store in the 1930's and early 1940's.

A special interest was community affairs, notably community planning. He was a member of the Rochester City Planning Commission for many years, and was a leader in the downtown redevelopment plans developed after World War II. Thrifty and good-natured, he was a popular figure in the store and in the metropolitan community.

EGIL E. KROGH 1901-1964
President, 1954-1958
EGIL KROGH was born in Oslo, Norway, and at age five with his family came to Chicago. After graduation in 1923 from the University of Chicago, where his father was a professor and where he won fame as a track athlete, Krogh joined the Marshall Field Company.

Krogh achieved widespread success as manager of the budget floor and became a vicepresident. He then moved to the Marshall Field subsidiary in Seattle, Washington, Frederick and Nelson, becoming vice president and general manager.

After coming to Sibley's he devoted his principal interest and energies to the branch store program, and successfully directed the planning and organization which led to the opening of the Eastway, Newark, Southtown and Irondequoit stores. Later he took part in several U.S. trade missions to foreign countries.

Although he lacked the bookkeeper's mind which is so important in the retail business, Krogh had great skills as a promotional merchant, and his vigor and audacity in developing the branch store program eventually meant much to Sibley's.
ONE of the most attractive figures in Sibley's history was Charles T. Crouch, president from 1946 to 1949.

Crouch had joined the store in 1919. Married to Florence Ryder, a daughter of Thomas B. Ryder, he had entered Sibley's on returning from World War I military service. He had been a football star at the University of Rochester, and to his work in retailing he brought the same headlong drive and enthusiasm which had distinguished him as an athlete.

He early displayed notable skills as a merchant, and showed the competitive spirit which had distinguished the business in its earlier days. He became a merchandise manager in 1932, and vice president in 1940. In 1946, a year of great success for the business, he became president. His brief tenure as president was marked by an emphasis on merchandising, much of which he personally directed. He had barely embarked on a program of personnel development when he succumbed to a heart attack at the tragically young age of 53.

A tall rugged man who drove himself unsparingly, he had a notable gift for leadership. His death was a major loss to the store.

ARTHUR J. O'BRIEN  
President, 1958-1967

"A BRILLIANT PROFESSIONAL" was the way a competitor analyzed Arthur J. O'Brien, who served as president of Sibley's from 1958 to 1967 and who then became president of the Associated Dry Goods Corporation.

O'Brien came to Sibley's following the merger into the Associated company. His wife was the former Anne Remington, a granddaughter of T.B. Ryder, and he had been a member of the Sibley's board since 1952, but the family connection had little to do with his success in the retailing business.

He had joined R.H. White & Co. after graduation from Boston College in 1932. Later he became a vice president of Stern's and then of McCreery's, New York City stores. Then he joined the Associated firm, and was made president of its Stewart & Co. store in Baltimore.

To Sibley's he brought cost-conscious, profit-conscious management, and management which laid maximum emphasis on the basic skills of store-keeping. With few changes in personnel, he was able to make Sibley's one of the most successful and profitable stores of its size in the nation.

His leadership gave a final brilliant decade to Sibley's first century.

E. WILLARD DENNIS  
President, 1949-1954

FROM 1903 until shortly before his death in 1964, E. Willard Dennis was connected with Sibley's. He first came to the store as a 15-year-old parttime Christmas employee in 1903, and held other parttime and summer jobs until he was graduated from the University of Rochester in 1910.

From then until his retirement from active work in 1958, he worked in virtually every department and phase of the business. He was made store superintendent in 1921, vice president in 1943, president in 1949, and chairman of the board in 1954.

Intensely devoted to the store and its people, Dennis was held in great affection by store personnel. Unpretentious in manner, he had a notable gift for organization.

As general superintendent in the 1930's, he was responsible for many steps of modernization, notably the establishment of the central receiving and marketing system.

And as chairman of the board from 1954 to 1958, he played a central role in the development of the branch stores.

Dennis used to tell how his first assignment at Christmas time in 1903 was to sell mechanical climbing monkeys in the toy department of the old Granite Building store. And he told, too, how he was scheduled to start working Saturdays late in February, 1904. He was to have reported the day after the Great Fire!

Nevertheless, he went to work in the store's temporary quarters a month later as a "bounder" on a delivery wagon, aiding the driver by "bounding" between wagon and homes with the packages.

WILLIAM E. LEE  
President, 1967-

A NATIVE of Boston and a 1938 graduate of Harvard College, William Lee joined Sibley's in 1966, and was named president of the company in the Fall of 1967.

From 1938 until 1960, he was associated with Wm. Filene Sons Company in Boston, where he became a member of the management board and was responsible for the development and operation of branch stores.

He then went to J.C. Penney Co. to direct its national women's apparel operations, heading a multi-million-dollar program designed to improve that company's activities in the fashion field.
TOTAL LOSS: $2,935,750

One and Three-Quarters Acres
In the Retail District
Completely Destroyed.

LOSS IS THREE-QUARTERS
PROTECTED BY INSURANCE

Loss Equally Evenly Divided—Rates May Be Raised
in Consequence—Step Under Consideration
Since the Baltimore Fire—All of the
Burned Structures to be Replaced.

DESPITE MAGNITUDE OF THE FIRE
NOBODY WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED

Chief Jaynes Arose—Disabled—Buffalo and Syracuse
Companies Fought Valiantly Beside Local Men.
Help From Other Cities Not Needed—Wall
on Main Street Pulled Down in the
Afternoon—Many Out of Work.

Looking West in Main Street East.
Out of Disaster... New Triumphs

FEBRUARY 26, 1904, was a very cold day in Rochester. It was destined to be one of those days by which a whole generation arranges the dates which are important in its life.

"Before the Sibley fire" or "after the Sibley fire" were expressions which for more than 50 years would preface reminiscences of Rochesterians.

It was about 5 a.m. on that morning when a police detail led by Sgt. Frank Mehle came marching up Main Street. As they approached South Avenue someone in the squad, an instant ahead of his fellows, noticed smoke and flame coming from the roof of the Rochester Dry Goods Company.

Alarms were sent in immediately, and horse-drawn fire equipment came on the run.

But in the frigid dawn they could do nothing to stop the rush of the flames. Starting in an elevator shaft at the dry goods firm, the fire quickly spread across two intervening buildings to the Marble Block. At the same time, it was working its way across the rear portions of the buildings on Division Street towards Sibley's stable and the wholesale division.

Huge crowds gathered and watched in awe as the old buildings along Main Street crashed down in fiery debris. The old photos show, too, how the streams of water played on the fire by the firemen quickly became fantastic mountains of ice.

Rufus Sibley was returning from a visit to the Minneapolis store by train, and detained at the old Rochester station to learn of the fire. Lindsay was vacationing in Florida. Andrew Townson, hearing of the fire, got a buggy from a livery stable near his Oxford Street home and rushed to the fire with two of his sons, Kenneth and Douglas.

Despite the fury of the flames, it was thought the Granite Building would resist the fire. So efforts were directed to saving stores of merchandise from the wholesale building. Kenneth Townson, later to be a noted U.S. army commander and Rochester commissioner of public safety, recalls carrying massive amounts of silks to safety in other buildings. And he remembers the confidence placed in the huge fire doors which separated the Granite Building from neighboring structures.

But it was all to no avail as the handsome 11-year-old building was engulfed in huge flames.

The basic fireproof structure of the building survived, but everything else — floors, doors, fittings and furnishings — was incinerated in the fantastic heat and flame.

The fire continued for 40 hours, and when it was finally deemed under control, almost all of the entire block between Clinton Avenue and St. Paul Street was a ruin. The Granite Building, a gutted hulk, still stood, but everything around it was flattened.

Not only had Sibley's lost merchandise and structures valued at close to $3,000,000, but the safe containing the accounts receivable had fallen six floors, and split open. The accounts were spilled into the flames and lost.

There is a story that the partners gave some thought to the idea of taking insurance payments and retiring.

But there is also the story that Jesse Lindsay, son of Alexander M. Lindsay, was on his way to New York with a group of buyers while the flames still smouldered. It was said the young man had instructions to buy every bit of worthwhile merchandise he could put his hands on so that the store could reopen as soon as possible. From what is known of the determination of the store's directors, and considering that the store in 1903 had returned them more than $700,000, it doesn't seem likely that they were ready to quit in the face of disaster.

Hundreds of stories were told of the fire and its aftermath. Two had particular pertinence for the five partners as they set about to rebuild their business.

One story concerned inventories of the destroyed merchandise,
OLD EMPIRE theater at Main and Clinton was one of the buildings into which Sibley's moved just weeks after the great fire of 1904. Vital for insurance claims. At first it was thought that all such records had gone up in smoke. But Townson discovered that he had retained some pencilled notes on the store's January inventory. He showed these to an insurance man, James Johnston, who was responsible for much of the coverage.

A Scotsman like Lindsay and Thomas Johnston, Johnston is supposed to have looked at the notes and said in his Scots-accented voice "If you say this is the record, Andrew, it is good enough for me."

On the basis of such substantiation of its claims, Sibley's received more than two million dollars in insurance settlements.

The second tale concerns the customers' accounts receivable, running into hundreds of thousands of dollars. The store now had no record of what these people owed, and there was nothing to force them to pay.

But the singular position the company had built for itself in the Rochester area now became evident. In the months after the fire, the company received voluntary payments on bills which amounted, according to the partners' estimates, to more than 90 per cent of what was owed—an extraordinary testimonial of the honesty and sense of responsibility of the customers.

In just 30 days following the fire Sibley's reopened—in the old Empire Theater Building at the corner of Main Street and Clinton Ave., in quarters in the old Archer building, and in adjoining structures.

It was the plan of the partners to press forward to build two-thirds of the new building they were planning, and to operate in makeshift quarters until this portion was completed. They would then move into the new building, and the temporary quarters next would be torn down.

NEW STORE was built in sections, with the Empire Theater and adjoining structures used until other sections were completed. Then they were demolished, and the building completed. Photo shows work in progress.
so that the new building could be completed.

Largely under the supervision of Townson, this plan was carried out. Early in 1905, the store moved into the L-shaped first section of the new building. By Fall of that year the entire new structure had been completed. A mammoth grand opening celebration was held in 1906.

If the Granite Building had been impressive, this structure was doubly so. It involved more than five acres of floor space, including five regular floors and a basement selling area. The frontage on Main Street was 360 feet, and that on Clinton Avenue North was more than 300. For its period, the building was simple and severe. Only the tower, which ever since has been a familiar part of the Rochester downtown scene, made any special concessions to fancy. Sixty-four years later the structure designed by J. Foster Warner still escapes the dowdy look which overtook so many of its contemporary downtown department store buildings. It was constructed of slender Roman-style bricks, orange-brown in color, with granite trim.

Inside, the building included everything from a marble-columned soda fountain in the basement, to an ornate tea room where there was a raised area on which musicians amid potted palms could play the popular tunes of the day.

On the selling floors, mahogany cabinets and counters held goods imported from all parts of the United States and the world at large.

Those early years of the century were smiling, happy years in the United States, nowhere more so than in Rochester. Companies like Eastman Kodak and Bausch & Lomb were growing rapidly, and the city had gained a reputation for its stately homes, its tree-filled parks, and an exceedingly comfortable, attractive way of living.

Whether or not they thought of it in exactly these terms, Sibley's partners provided an atmosphere in which even the humblest citizen, for a few minutes or a few hours, could enjoy the comfortable, affluent existence of the well-to-do.

Sibley's was a carriage trade store, but it made certain that virtually every customer, by passing through its golden doors, felt himself a member of that privileged group.

Competitive merchants to the core, however, the partners also fought to make certain the customer felt he could buy here more advantageously than anywhere else.

Within two years of the fire, the business was so prosperous that it seemed as if the holocaust had never happened. By speeding this new expansion, the fire must have been something of a blessing in disguise. It catapulted the store into the van of American retailing, and resulted in a store building which was one of the three or four largest in the nation—and in a multitude of ways the most modern.

The year 1910 represented a turning point in the history of the store. It was the last year in which the original partners, Sibley and Lindsay, still functioned as a team with the three younger partners in the management of the store. In 1911 both of the senior men would turn 70, and Sibley planned retirement.

And in 1911 another major addition to the store building would be completed. This was the Mercantile Building, and it would carry the store all the way to North Street and Franklin Street. Once again the superlatives would be dusted off.

The store now would compose 13 acres of floor space, it would employ about 2,400 persons at Christmas time, and the center aisle, so familiar to generations of customers, would reach 373 feet in length—one of the longest store aisles in the world. The new Mercantile Building was six floors in height, addition to more retail space, contained special quarters for the still very active wholesale division.

With the advent of better transportation and the proliferation of the chain stores, the day of the country dry goods store, principal customer of the wholesale division, was fading. But the division, nevertheless, contributed more than $1.5 million of the store's gross income of about $5.5 million in 1910.

These final months of the old partnership were halcyon days. Sibley and Lindsay may have been along in years, but they watched every detail of the business as closely as ever. An employee of those days remembers that Lindsay would inspect the store from basement to fifth floor, paying special attention to retailing imperatives like cleanliness, the appearance and dress of the employees, display of goods, and
HORSES PRANCE in front of elegant carriages in this drawing of the new Sibley's at Clinton Ave. and Main St.
the stocking of each department.

There were many Scots and Englishmen in the store, men enrolled by Lindsay on his frequent trips to Europe to check the buying offices and to visit his family in Scotland. The Scottish and English merchants continued to give the store its British atmosphere and an air of old country professionalism.

But these people were not the only clerks and buyers who held forth in the store, for personnel included individuals of many national and ethnic backgrounds.

Much of the strength of the enterprise was personnel who became minor institutions in the community—in departments like millinery, books, children's clothes, haberdashery, and the like. Customers became life-long friends of these Sibley's personnel, and it was in large measure these people who were to enable the store to maintain its high level of service once the firm control of the five early partners slackened.

In 1910 these five men shared more than $800,000 of profits, and Rufus Sibley in the next year reduced his activity. He took only a partial salary in 1911, and then moved his office to the new Mercantile Building. But he retained the title of president until 1918.

And he continued to exercise a dominant voice in the business. Almost since the beginning he and Lindsay had not been personally congenial and they did not see much of each other socially. But they respected each other's skills and relied on one another.

Together, in a relatively small city, they had built one of the nation's most successful stores. Their partnership in many ways was the most successful retail venture of its era in America.

But as old age closed in on them, their relationship deteriorated. By the time of Sibley's retirement, they were civil and cooperative, but cold. In 1914 a final estrangement occurred.

In retrospect, it is easy to understand why there were inevitable problems in the relationship, and remarkable that they were able to work so well together for so long.

Sibley was a relentlessly logical New Englander, a perfectionist, direct to the point of bluntness, disciplined to never let the personal or the emotional interfere with efficiency or with moral imperatives.

Lindsay was an old country Scotsman with an inbred sense of clan. The store to him was not a mechanism or an economic unit so much as it was an extension of himself and his clan.

In the end it was a disagreement over promotion of partners' sons, one of them Lindsay's, which led to a break between the two aging men. During a Sibley absence from Rochester, Lindsay made the promotions. On his return Sibley discharged the individuals and made the discharges stick.

But it was said the proud old partners never again spoke.

Yet six years later when Lindsay died, Sibley took pen in hand and wrote a graceful and sensitive tribute to his partner of so many years.

Lindsay left active management late in 1914, and in 1915 occurred the first death among the directors. Thomas S. Johnston, a partner since 1875 and a member of the original staff of the store, died at 70. The death of this dour, skillful Scot left the active management of the store much in the hands of A.J. Townson, Thomas B. Ryder and Jesse Lindsay, the Williams-educated son of A.M. Lindsay.

They continued to operate the store much in the manner of the original partners, who had functioned as a federation rather than in the centralized manner of more modern business. Each of the five directors had operated almost independently the phases of the business assigned to him. They were responsible to no-one except the other directors-partners as a body.

It was a system that promised some problems for the store's future, but as World War I approached for America, the store continued to grow with remarkable speed, and there was no arguing with success.

Gross sales in 1914 were about $7.5 million, with profits, interest, and salaries taken by the principals amounting to nearly a million dollars.

By 1920 total sales had risen to more than $13 million, and profits were still climbing. The Erie, Minneapolis, and Niagara Falls stores continued highly profitable, and only the wholesale division showed signs of slowing down. It had hit a high point of $2.7 million in sales in 1920 in the postwar boom, but the next year saw its start a spiral downward.

The year 1920 also saw the deaths of both Lindsay and Townson.
With Johnston already dead, and with Sibley almost 80 and spending most of his time at his farm in Massachusetts or in the South, the management team now consisted of T.B. Ryder, Jesse Lindsay, Herbert Bramley, a public relations and advertising man, J.D. Tulloch, a blustering Scot and skilled merchant, and Elmer Roblin, a reticent Canadian financial man.

With the death of A.M. Lindsay, his stock had gone into a trust controlled by the Security Trust Company of Rochester, and the family interest now was represented on the board by Jesse Lindsay and William H. Stackel, the bank's widely-known trust officer.

A prescient person could have sensed certain problems of management, but the company continued to grow and to remain remarkably prosperous. Gross sales moved upward from $13 million in 1921 to nearly $15 million in 1926, despite the continued decline of the wholesale division. In 1927 the wholesale sales were under $1.2 million, as contrasted with the $2.7 million figure of just seven years before.

But the optimism of the 1920's and the remarkable prosperity of the business in 1924 led Jesse Lindsay, who lacked the relentless cost consciousness of the earlier generation, to propose still another enlargement of the giant store building.

This program added another six floors to the Mercantile Building and resulted in the Sibley Tower Building of today. When completed, it was the largest office building in the city, and dominated the central downtown area. Unfortunately, its completion virtually coincided with the beginning of a real estate collapse in Rochester, and the building would not be commercially successful until the office space shortage which developed from World War 2 nearly two decades later.

The year 1926, however, was a banner one for the store overall, and a profit level of almost $2 million was reached, a figure which would not be surpassed for more than 30 years!

But the storm warnings were evident, and Sibley's would head into the depression with an aging management system and with limited middle management strength. Only the firmness of the structure built in previous years, plus the devoted and skilful work of many longtime employees, would enable the store to meet the challenges of the 1930's.
Middle Years

A STORE like Sibley's lives two lives - one life is as a public institution, an entity that plays many roles in thousands of lives. It is the place where one buys toys as a child, and one's first party dress. It is where one buys a bridal gown and takes one's children at Christmas, where one buys one's first set of china, and where one buys a birthday present for a sweetheart, or a grandmother.

In happy times and in sadder times, it is a part of one's life.

The other existence lived by a store like Sibley's is its functional life as a business institution.

In the generation which stretched from the early 1920's to 1957, Sibley's continued to live its life as a public institution much as it had done in the previous generation. It was Upstate's largest store, a fixture in countless lives, and the circle of its impact on people was constantly widening.

The story of its business and organizational life in those busy, often difficult years is a simple one - how to meet the challenges of changing times and how to replace the original men of genius and skill who had created it.

From 1868 until 1911, there had been hardly a tremor in the direction of the company. John Curr had left in 1875 and Robert Liddle had been a partner from 1875 to 1890. But Rufus Sibley and Alexander Lindsay, joined later by their younger partners, had controlled the company from the day it had opened. And Johnston, Townson, and Ryder had been in key posts since 1880 or before. But in 1911 Rufus Sibley retired, to be followed by Lindsay in 1914. Johnston died in 1915, followed in death in 1920 by Lindsay and Townson.

By the end of 1920, only Ryder remained, alert and active at 65, but handicapped by poor hearing.

Any company would have been hurt by losing so much of its leadership in less than a decade.

And the problem was increased by the fact that the firm still was operated as a partnership. The five principals had worked together as a close-knit committee of management. As long as Rufus Sibley was active, he exercised a kind of captainship over this group. When he went into retirement, the company began to lose central management.

Fortunately, the business had been so firmly established, and its buyers, salespeople, and other personnel were so skillful that the company maintained its momentum for many years despite the emergence of skilled, honorable competitors in Rochester.

But when the depression struck in 1929, it was apparent that sweeping changes were needed. Many of these were initiated by John R. Sibley, son of Rufus, who came to the store in 1932 as treasurer. Lacking a strong physique, he had not entered the store in his youth, but had developed his father's cattle farm in Massachusetts into a successful dairy business.

Now, aged 42 and with a keen analytical mind like his father's, he sought to bring modern management methods to a company whose most important business records were still kept longhand.

Most importantly, he strove to establish a modern administrative pattern, with buyers reporting to divisional merchandise managers, and all selling operations coordinated by a general merchandising manager.

Because the store in the old days had been operated almost as three or four separate stores, the changes involved were enormous. To carry this out in normal times would be difficult; to do it in a time of unprecedented depression posed major problems. Add to this the usual troubles experienced in reorganizing an old firm with ownership split among many families, and one sees that the task was not an easy one.

But John Sibley got the aid of Professor Malcom McNair of the Harvard Business School in working out the new pattern for operations, and by 1938 after much travail the store was operating along modern organizational lines.

And steps were being taken to change traditional ways of doing
business, ways which no longer were adapted to the times. For example, because of its emphasis on dry goods, the store had been slow to exploit the growing market for ready-to-wear clothes. This now was remedied.

Old-fashioned tea shops became modern restaurants, buffets, and sandwich shops. Potted palms and mahogany showcases went out, and improved lighting and display methods came in. Old ledgers and straight pens went out, and bookkeeping machines were installed.

Even into the 1930's, buyers were responsible for the unpackaging and marking of their departments' merchandise. Now came efficient warehousing, marking and inventory systems. And a remote delivery warehouse was built near the New York Central tracks to replace the old livery stable in Achilles Street.

By 1940 the company, after a decade of reorganization, looked to the future with renewed confidence.

Thomas B. Ryder, now in his 80's, still went to the office daily. He had retained the title of president until 1930. He then was replaced by Louis W. Johnston. The latter, son of Thomas S. Johnston, concentrated on personnel matters and on public relations and civic development, leaving much of the day to day administrative problems to John Sibley, now executive vice president. Bruce Lindsay, a son of A. M. Lindsay, now had entered the store and was serving as treasurer. It was he who attacked another of the problems which had handicapped the company, its antiquated capital structure.

This involved preferred stock paying 10 per cent a year, as well as common stock.

There could be no market for the common stock as long as the preferred stock existed. It was necessary for all stockholders to give assent before the preferred stock could be called in. The task was complicated, and required unending patience and diplomacy. But Bruce Lindsay persisted, and in 1942 the old preferred stock was retired. He also persuaded share holders to sell small amounts of their stock so that a market for it could be established. This was finally done when World War 2 had brought its problems and its tragedies to Upstate New York.

Meanwhile, business volume had been growing slowly—from $13 million in 1930 to $15 million in 1935 to $17 million in 1940. But profitability still had to regain the heights it had reached in the low-tax days of the previous generation.

The Minneapolis, Niagara Falls, and Kansas City stores had been sold, but the interest in the highly-profitable Erie store had been retained.

John Sibley, after suffering two serious illnesses in three years, left the store in 1941, having largely accomplished the difficult reorganizational task he had set for himself. His role as the operating head of the business was taken by Charles T. Crouch, a son-in-law of T. B. Ryder. He had been in the business since 1919, and had gained respect as a skilled, aggressive merchant. He had flair and ability to motivate others.

He became president in 1945 and in the following year was able to report outstanding operating results. Volume went to $22 million, and profits of about $1.8 million, highest since 1926, were recorded.

After twenty years of meeting the problems of depression, reorganization, and war, the store family felt it was turning a corner with able management.

SIBLEY'S about 1920.
Under Crouch, operations of the store became even more centralized as he personally supervised many of the details of the business. Plans were established for seeking middle and senior management personnel who can take major responsibilities, but this effort was barely started when Crouch suffered a heart attack in 1949 and died at the early age of 53. This was a tragic blow for the company.

Once again the store faced the problem of finding management. Strong interim help was at hand in the person of E. Willard Dennis, who had worked for Sibley's as a youth back in the old Granite Building days and had joined it permanently in 1910. He had been active in virtually every phase of the business, but had concentrated on behind-the-scene operations and risen to the post of store superintendent and vice president.

He was a much loved figure, energetic and endlessly loyal to the store to which he had devoted his life. Now, at the age of 59, he became its president. He had at first declined the job, saying he lacked the broad merchandising experience he considered essential to the job. But when it became clear that a firm hand was needed immediately, he took the job.

The year 1949 was a successful one, with net income topping $1.1 million. But the following year saw the profits dip to under $800,000, with the dividends from the Sibley holding in Erie Dry Goods accounting for more than $200,000, and the Sibley Tower Building rents also contributing substantially.

Dennis defined his job as developing personnel, and he concentrated much of his efforts on that area. Substantial progress was being made, but this long range effort did not have immediate effect on profits.

And when it was decided that none of the present personnel would be ready soon enough to succeed Dennis, a wide search was launched for an experienced retailer to fill the void in management.

The man chosen was Egil E. Krogh, a former star track runner who had built a national reputation as a promotional merchant with Marshall Field in Chicago and its Seattle subsidiary, Frederick and Nelson Co.

He took over a company which continued unchallenged as Upstate's largest store, and which financially, with only a million dollars of long term mortgages and no other debt, was very strong.

Krogh moved into his new chores with tremendous energy in 1954.

An aggressive merchandiser, he was sold on the idea of the branch store. Sibley's, with a downtown real estate investment in Rochester running to seven or eight million dollars, had been reluctant to enter the suburban field.

Krogh argued that no major store could survive without going heavily into the suburbs. Gaining permission of the board of directors to proceed, he set up a branch store division, and developed an ambitious plan to invade the Monroe County suburbs on a broad front. By 1955, plans had been developed for four branch stores, and one, that at Eastway Plaza, the season Penfield, already was under construction. It opened in June, 1956.

Others followed in rapid succession. A branch in Newark, Wayne County, opened in 1957, and plans were developed for additional stores in Monroe County at Irondequoit Plaza, and Souhtown Plaza.

The plans Krogh developed thus called for the opening of four branch stores within two years at a total cost to Sibley's of more than five million dollars.

The expansion program drew management's attention and best efforts, and the earnings picture did not improve. Profits through the early and mid-50's remained relatively static, rising to $801,654 in 1951 dropping back to an average of about $550,000 from 1952 to 1956.

This slow progress in profitability forced the directors to again study the question of management, with which they had worked since the 1920's. They had confidence in the ultimate profitability of the branch store plan, but were concerned about the development of management which could provide the profits necessary to sustain the planned growth.

Entrusted with the direction of a major community institution, and with livelihood of more than 3,000 people, the directors always came back to the problem of creating consistently profitable management.

Sibley's, because of its firm foundation in the loyalty and ability of its organization, and the relationship built with tens of thousands of customers, moved ahead as an institution as successfully as it had in the past.

But the directors were convinced they would have to find an answer to the riddle of management.
Memorable Personalities

During 100 years a great many memorable personalities have been members of the Sibley's organization. Here are reminiscences of a few, written by a store associate who served Sibley's for 31 years and whose mother, during 38 years of service, was one of the store's best known personalities.

Going way back, I remember Charles M. Cumming, a salesman in the wholesale division. He regularly visited the mining towns in Pennsylvania and taught each new secretary how to spell Punxsutawny. Some may remember Thomas Farrell who laid the foundation for the operation of the present successful grocery, aided by Bernard Arquit, a most capable meat buyer. Then there was Thomas "Doc" Weaver who was known and respected throughout the community for his extensive knowledge of drugs.

James Benzie, who came to Sibley's in 1903, possessed a rare talent for selecting the finest domestic and imported fancy linens — and George Jameson, yard goods buyer, had an endless knowledge of the composition of all types of fabrics and their suitability. William Greenhagen, who served the public for 62 years, was able to gauge one's glove size at a glance. Floyd Austin annually scoured the European and domestic markets in his search for dolls, toys, games and delicately-crafted Christmas tree decorations to delight youngsters.

Elizabeth Cox was hailed as the nation's outstanding millinery buyer in the 1920's and was known across the country. She made semi-annual trips abroad to select hats, as well as fabrics and millinery accessories for use in the well-staffed workroom where originals were created. Beulah Carpenter knew every book on every shelf in the book department, and could tell you the author of each one.

Alice Lawler was proud on the day she first displayed nylon stockings on her counters. For 16 years Nora Sheehan gave her assistance and advice on cosmetics to many customers as well as the girls in her department. The best-dressed infants and tiny tots were proudly outfitted by Madeline Bahrenburg. During her many years as supervisor of the customer service bureau, everyone came to know Catherine Kelly. Over a period of 33 years, Alice McGuire served as an outstanding buyer of sportswear. Mrs. Anne Kamps had the distinction of being the first woman at Sibley's to hold the position of ready-to-wear manager.

Anne Skinner was always there with her ready smile to help one select special dresses for those special occasions. Mary Sexton, who first worked in the billing room, had a host of friends in the store, as did Stella O'Rourke, who originally came to Sibley's as an executive secretary and later served in various positions in the store. My mother, Mary Whittington, employment manager for many years, loved Sibley's so well and gave so much of herself to so many. Over the years she has kept in touch with the store's retirees, maintaining bonds forged in years of common effort.

Harris Williams, store superintendent in the 1920's, had a wide circle of friends. Hugh Eggleston, buyer of ribbons and trimmings, also later served as store superintendent. Jay Lesslie solved many a problem during his years as customer service manager. Arthur Solois, in charge of receiving and marking, contributed much to its fine operation. A familiar figure in the store for many years was Charles Page, buyer of budget store linens and bedding. Edward Leavens, buyer of yard goods for the store's wholesale business, later became purchasing agent.

Michael Volpe developed the shoe repair shop — and Willie Gilbert, who originally dispensed bright shoe shines and a smile to match, later manned one of the store elevators.

For 38 years Raymond Fisher worked as installer of carpets and floor coverings. Milton Glerum, as store architect, supervised the building of five suburban Sibley stores during the 1950's. John Schellinger saw to it that all purchases were correctly wrapped — and Roy Brierly's fleet of delivery trucks was a familiar sight on the streets of Rochester and surrounding towns. Robert Better and Mary Sweeney combined their talents to produce fine newspaper advertising.

Under the supervision of W. H. Klingler, the intricate hand-written records kept by his staff in the tip desk were truly amazing. Of course, almost everyone knew Everett Tack, who gave 57 years of service, first as buyer of corsets and later as section manager. Laurance Plass was also section manager for 25 years.

Samuel Schifrin successfully introduced the idea of promoting 88¢ housewares specials in his department. Thomas Redfern certainly had everyone's number — he was timekeeper for many years. Homer Lowden possessed a rare talent for repairing even the oldest and rarest clocks and watches. Over a span of years, Henry Sehm, as paymaster, no doubt thumbed through more greenbacks than John D. Rockefeller and Bess Lanctot handled tons of silver as general cashier. During his 47 years at Sibley's, Adam Graff installed custom-made displayers in the homes of countless customers.

Frank Borrelli, truly a master craftsman, was a furniture finisher for 25 years, and Tony Tempio, longtime elevator operator, was famous for the good cheer he poured out to his riders.

So many more could be mentioned that it is perhaps unfair to mention any by name. But all of us share wonderful memories — and all contributed so much to a wonderful institution. — Gertrude Weltzer.
Brilliant Decade

The final decade of Sibley's first century was to be one of growing brilliance.

The stage for this new era was set with the merger of the company into the Associated Dry Goods Corporation in August 1957. For their stock the Sibley shareholders received more than seven million dollars and 100,000 shares of Associated stock.

The merger was the logical solution to problems of financing and management development.

More important, however, was the fact that it enabled the company to realize more fully its potential as a community institution.

Associated Dry Goods was formed in New York City in 1914 with Lord and Taylor, established in 1826, as its most important unit. It now includes such notable stores as Joseph Horne of Pittsburgh, Pogue's of Cincinnati, and Robinson's of Los Angeles, stores whose histories are so parallel to that of Sibley's.

Over the years many merchandising firms had sought an alliance with Sibley's, but mergers had not seemed logical. The Associated proposal however, offered merger with a company noted for its emphasis on quality and fair dealing, for its concern for the communities in which its stores operated, and for its far-sighted, sympathetic, personnel programs.

"This is the next logical step in the development of the business, an advantage for the store and its people, and an advantage for the community," was the way John Sibley summed it up. Subsequent events bore out the prediction.

The merger brought to Sibley's the resources and skills of one of the nation's most efficiently-managed retail firms. And a unified ownership approach now supplanted the still-persisting family partnership system.

Most importantly the merger brought skilled, aggressive, consistent management, largely in the person of Arthur J. O'Brien, who became president early in 1958. O'Brien had had broad retail experience in Boston and New York and in the mid-1950's had directed a period of notable success for Associated's A. T. Stewart and Co. in Baltimore. O'Brien's wife was a grand-daughter of Thomas B. Ryder, and for some years he had been on Sibley's board. But he had removed himself from discussions of the merger.

Now, aged 48, he was asked to build a future in a new age for Sibley's. This he did with such success that in 1967 he was elected president of the parent Associated Dry Goods Corp. His achievement at Sibley's was to take personnel and physical assets which had not been dynamic in profit sense, and make them over again into one of the nation's most profitable large department stores.

His effort was to give an organization employing about 3,000 people a sense of coordination and clearly-defined goals.

A key factor was installation of Associated's meticulous financial control system. Expense, a special problem in an old store, was rigidly controlled.

O'Brien and his executives moved constantly through the main store and branches, giving a new sense of personal leadership. Problems were pinpointed, and steps were taken to remedy them.

Someone asked O'Brien what his secret was and he replied that "We just try to be good storekeepers."

A sense of professionalism dominated all facets of the business. Fashion merchandising, a problem for many years, came to life under the leadership of John Ruppel, and with the aid of Associated and the Lord and Taylor connection.

The inventory system was revised, and unnecessary costs slashed. O'Brien felt that the branch store operation had been slighted. Space at the Southtown and Irondequoit stores was greatly expanded, and full stocking of the branches emphasized.

O'Brien developed the concept of budget store branches located adjacent to the regular branch stores, a brilliant innovation which was
copied by many other organizations throughout the nation.

Most important of all, O'Brien worked to develop a profit sense in his personnel. He told Sibley's people that every action should be measured in terms of profit and loss, and told his executives that instilling this concept was their most important task.

Although sales figures are not released, reliable estimates indicated that Sibley's was doing something over $30 million of business annually in 1958 when O'Brien became president. A decade later the estimates place volume between $50 and $60 million annually.

Meanwhile, a new branch of more than 160,000 square feet was opened in the fast-growing suburban town of Greece in 1967. And plans have been made for construction of a 500,000 square foot downtown store in the neighboring city of Syracuse to open in 1969. Another store is planned for southeastern Monroe County. When all these stores are acquired and in operation, Sibley's will have a total of eight regular stores, and four budget stores with a total of more than 1,860,000 square feet or 44 acres of selling space!

In 1967 a national investors' magazine reported that Sibley's ranked in the top group of Associated stores in profitability ratio in the preceding year. It had become one of the most profitable large stores in the nation.

Looking to the future, Upstate's largest store, confident in the dynamics of its region, could see the day not far distant when sales could soar past the $100 million mark.

Under O'Brien's leadership Sibley's exemplified a seemingly effortless precision and professionalism and a total identification with its region which made the final decade of Sibley's first century one of outstanding progress and accomplishment.

RUFUS ADAMS SIBLEY
Partner, President, Director (Continued from page 23)

addition to his rambling, but simple East Avenue frame home. And in 1899, on a high hill overlooking his hometown of Spencer, he built a towering, four-story Elizabethan mansion with 52 rooms.

But it was characteristic of this lonely man that one of the things he most enjoyed at the mansion was a telescope high in one of the eaves from which he could survey the tops of the Berkshires and the White and Green mountains.

In Spencer, too, was his only real source of recreation—the breeding of Jersey cattle. But this, too, became an exercise in mathematics, logic, and analysis. He was a pioneer in scientific breeding, and is credited with originating the now worldwide practice of measuring the individual cow's production and the butterfat content of her milk. Thus not even a cow's ability to produce milk escaped his passion for determining efficiency. For this his portrait hangs in the National Dairy Hall of Fame in Iowa.

Sibley's private life was full of tragedy and difficulty, which perhaps helps explain his austere, reserved personality. His first wife died at 37, following two of three children to the grave. And he was never to be on close terms with his eldest son. One of three children of his second wife also was to die young. Moreover, tough as his physique was, he many times worked himself to total exhaustion and illness.

He was a man of few words, and spoke very slowly, enunciating each word as if to make certain that what he said was being fully comprehended. And he often gave opinions by citing terse New England aphorisms:

A friend asked his views on the timing of a business proposition, and he replied: "Sell when you've got a buyer."
And the early balance sheets of his business, instead of listing various debits, used the blunt phrase, "We owe."

His business genius is demonstrated by the way he met the financial needs of the explosively rapid growth of his company. He and his partners made no major mistakes, fought tenaciously for every nickel and dime, and were always, chesslike, thinking several moves in advance.

In the 1890's and the opening years of the century, as head of what in many ways was the city's largest business, he stood at the crossroads of community life. He headed the board of trustees of the University of Rochester and played a central role in more than 20 banks, businesses, hospitals, and charitable organizations.

Sibley's directness, to the point of bluntness, his reserve, and his
old-fashioned pride undoubtedly made many aspects of his partnership difficult.

But few men in the history of American retailing have equalled his grasp of the business, and he was regarded as the peer of men like John Wanamaker and Marshall Field.

More important, however, than his business genius was the man’s honesty, the incandescent, compulsive, abrasive integrity which ruled his life.

When he was 82, ill and handicapped, a son-in-law died, leaving a mortgage business which was collapsing in the real estate troubles of the 1920’s.

Rufus Sibley had been critical of the business, and had told the son-in-law as much. But when disaster came, the old man, though in no way legally responsible, used a not-inconsiderable portion of his fortune to pay off the debts.

He said no one should suffer because of the failure of an enterprise with which a member of his family had been connected. And he is said to have added: “If you want roses, you have to put up with thorns,” meaning that financial success carried its responsibilities as well as its privileges.

His unconditional honesty and sense of responsibility were his greatest legacies to Sibley’s and the Rochester community.

ALEXANDER MILLER LINDSAY 1841-1920
Partner, Vicepresident, Director (Continued from page 25)

In 1865, when he was 24, he left Scotland to seek his fortune in America, going to Boston and the firm of Hogg, Brown and Taylor as a clerk.

Three years later he and his partners established the firm which would make the fortune he sought.

A storekeeper through and through, Lindsay was the most visible of the early partners, with Sibley busy with finance and administration, and Curr handling wholesale and manufacturing.

Lindsay was the same kind of ferocious worker as his partner. His non-business interests were principally a large and active family of seven children and the Presbyterian Church, an interest whose roots went deep into his Scots’ boyhood. But he served also as a director of Eastman Kodak Company for many years, George Eastman greatly valuing his knowledge of retailing.

He lived well, prizeing the roses he grew in the formal garden of his East Avenue home. And he set a good table, it being said that his Scots’ whiskey was sent around Cape Horn as ship’s ballast so as to age properly.

Formal and formidable at the store, he was warm and devoted to his family. He had the Scotsman’s sense of clan, and saw the business as an extension of his family’s life, ideals, and interests.

That Lindsay had a warm human touch is shown by the fact that it was he who is remembered as having brought into the firm many of the younger people who were to become mainstays in later years.

He was also capable of thoughtful human gestures. It was he, for example, who on Summer mornings for several years brought a rose from his garden for Mary Whittington, a young widow whose plight stirred the sympathy of the aging merchant.

He bought up the entire center of the block between East Avenue, Park Avenue, Barrington Street, and Berkeley Street and built in it a miniature British park. Handsome homes adjoining the park were built for two of his children.

Scots merchant and Scots patriarch he remained until the day of his death.

Competition--Old Style

From their earliest days, Messers. Sibley, Lindsay and Curr made it a cardinal rule never to be undersold on any basic item.

At one time this led to a price war on epsom salts.

A competitor would set his price a penny under Sibley’s, and Sibley’s then offered it at a penny less than the competitor.

This went on until epsom salts could be bought at a ridiculously low price.

When he heard that the competitor again had lowered the price, Alexander Lindsay decided he had had enough of this nonsense. He called a section manager and gave him instructions.

“Get a barrel of epsom salts,” he directed, “and place it out in the middle of the aisle with a big hand scoop in it. And put on it a sign to read: ‘Epsom Salts -- take all you want -- no charge.’ ”
1968 and 1969

SIBLEY'S TODAY INCLUDES

More than a million and a half square feet or thirty-four acres of floor space, soon to be more than two million.

A total of 191 individual departments, which, if spread out as individual shops, would form a street more than six miles long.

More than 3,000 personnel, and hundreds more at Christmas time.

One of the largest individual grocery stores in New York State, and one of the largest bakeries.

Four restaurants in the Rochester store and three more in branch stores.

A delivery fleet which includes more than 60 vehicles and which delivers each year more than 1.5 million packages. The trucks travel the equivalent of 30 trips around the world annually.

A wrapping and packaging department which uses 9.5 million bags and 1.5 million boxes each year, plus 8.5 million feet of twine and 20 tons of wrapping paper.

One of the largest telephone order departments in the United States.

A mailing department which sends out more than four million individual pieces of mail each year.

On a single day before Christmas it is estimated that well over 100,000 persons have entered the Sibley stores—with individual transactions in the hundreds of thousands.

Many things have changed since the three former Boston clerks opened for business that long ago Mar. 30 in 1868.