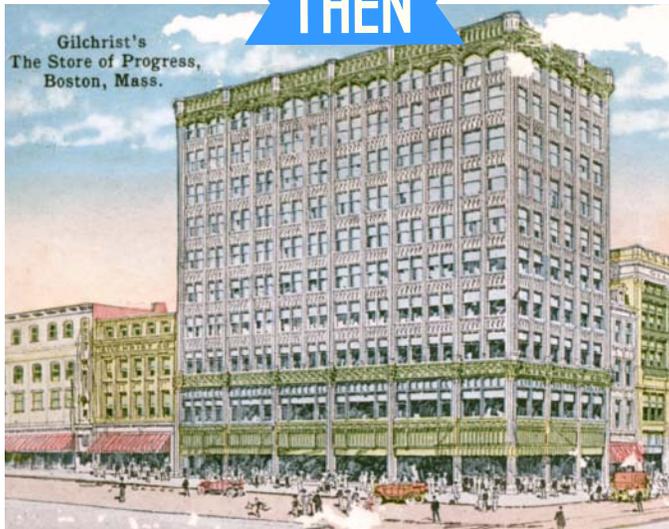


GILCHRIST'S DEPARTMENT STORE

417-25 WASHINGTON STREET EST. 1899 RICHARD CLIPSTON STURGIS, ARCHITECT

THEN



Courtesy of the Bostonian Society

NOW



HISTORY

Gilchrist's traces its origins to George Turnbull, a Scottish entrepreneur who opened a dry goods store in downtown Boston in the 1840s. Robert Gilchrist, who began working at Turnbull's as a clerk, became a partner when Turnbull retired in 1855. Richard, and eventually John Gilchrist managed the store jointly until Richard's death in 1893, at which point John became sole proprietor. Under John's leadership, the store continued to grow until, by the end of the 19th century, it was time for a major expansion.

The new Gilchrist's was designed around the corner on Washington Street by local, Harvard-educated architect, Richard Clipston Sturgis in 1899. At Gilchrist's behest, Sturgis designed the store to maximize natural light. This became a defining feature of the store, which came to be known as the Daylight Store. As a contemporary Boston Globe account reported, the store, which sold cloaks, capes, silks, French goods, flowers, feathers, etc., was a marvel to behold. "Gilchrist & Co. threw open the doors of their great new store this week and bid the public enter into the enjoyments of its elegance, its comfort, and its benefits as a place of trade for man and woman. The first floor is flooded with sunlight. So is every one of the five floors for that matter. The rays, unobstructed, shoot in from the front, which is all glass, from the rear, which has many windows, and down from above through a well, which descends from the roof clear to the ground apartment. No electric lamps are lighted in the daytime" (Globe, April 2, 1900)

Along with the generous affordance of daylight, Gilchrist's distinguished itself with elaborate product displays. In March, 1903, for instance: "On the first floor the wide aisles are arched with twining morning glories and graceful sweeps of roses, while everywhere on the counters spring time is suggested by the profusion of palms. Hundreds of golden cages in which canary birds sing cheerfully all day long, are suspended from the ceilings" (Globe, March 10, 1903). Continued success led to the construction of four additional upper stories in 1924.