

## G. FOX: GRAND EMPORIUM OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper represents an initial inquiry into the policies of G. Fox & Company which contributed to the store becoming the largest privately held department store under one roof at the time of its sale to the May Company in 1965. Beatrice Fox Auerbach, President of the firm from 1938-1965, built the store into "A Grand Emporium." Personnel policies which instilled an intense employee loyalty. Merchandising policies including an emphasis on quality, value, assortment, and exceptional service culminated in customer loyalty which led to the business growing tenfold during the period.

### G. FOX--GRAND EMPORIUM OF THE 20TH CENTURY

As recently as the 1960s G. Fox & Co. was the premiere department store in Connecticut, and unique for its time, it operated only a single store located in downtown Hartford. Beatrice Fox Auerbach, granddaughter of the store's founder and President of G. Fox from 1938-1968, held to the belief that branch stores would dilute the business. In this period, when department stores across the country were actually losing market share to mass merchandisers and chains (Ferry 1960; Entenberg 1961), the business of G. Fox & Company in downtown Hartford grew tenfold. In 1965, the year the store was sold to the May Company, G. Fox was the largest privately owned department store in the country under one roof. More than twenty thousand customers were said to have passed through the store on a single day during the Christmas season and they were graciously served by 5,000 employees (Sloane 1965). This paper briefly reviews the history of G. Fox & Company, and examines the management and merchandising policies of Beatrice Fox Auerbach to assess the factors associated with G. Fox's unrivaled growth in the twentieth century.

### SOURCES

G. Fox and Company and Beatrice Fox Auerbach are given brief mention in books on the evolution of the department store such as Hendrickson (1979), Entenberg (1961), Harris (1977), and Mahoney and Sloane (1966). Because the store was privately held until 1965, no public documents exist which provide financial records of the store. According to Notable American Women (1977), the best sources of information on Mrs. Auerbach are the archives of the Hartford Courant and the Hartford Times newspapers. These newspapers, were the primary sources for this inquiry. Some records of store activity were located at the store, and information on other activities of Mrs. Auerbach, such as the hiring of black employees in 1942 were received from the Connecticut Historical Society, and the Hartford Jewish Historical Society.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Georgette Koopman and Mrs. Dorothy Schiro, Beatrice Fox Auerbach's daughters, and Shirley Munson Koplowitz, Mrs. Auerbach's secretary, were the only persons

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<sup>1</sup>Nearly every central Connecticut resident has anecdotes to relate about experiences with G. Fox as it was the most prestigious and largest store in Connecticut. However, anecdotal accounts were not used in the study.

interviewed for historical data.

## EARLY HISTORY OF G. FOX AND COMPANY

G. Fox and Company began much like other department stores that grew up in the nineteenth century. Like R.H. Macy and Edward Filene Sons, the initial retail venture of Isaac and Gershon Fox was a "fancy dry goods store".<sup>2</sup> The store was opened under the banner of I. & G. Fox in 1847 in downtown Hartford (at 126 1/2 Main Street). An April 1847 advertisement in the Hartford Courant, "French, German, English and American fancy goods....particular attention given to calls from the ladies...Call and see our fresh goods arriving weekly from New York," indicated a level of specialization which was typical of the first half of the nineteenth century (Hower 1940, p.73). Similar to many fancy goods stores of the 1800s, G. Fox soon outgrew the small quarters and moved to another location. In (1850) G. Fox moved to a new and larger facility three blocks from the initial store, Isaac's name was dropped from the banner, and the business became known as G. Fox & Company. At this time, Gershon Fox was able to employ several "helpers" to assist him in waiting on customers ("Modern Facade 1934; Just a Year After...", 1918).<sup>3</sup>

Little is known about the growth of the business in the intervening years of 1850 and 1880 or when the store actually became a department store;<sup>4,5</sup> however, it has been stated that by the time of the Civil War, G. Fox "had begun to be known as a leading Hartford Institution" ("Modern Elevator Facade...", 1934). In 1880 Gershon Fox passed away leaving his young son, Moses, to head the business and to manage a newly erected four story building. Initially the store occupied only the first floor, the basement, and half of the second floor with the remaining space rented out. Six years later, the store occupied the entire building. In 1895 G. Fox & Co. took over the George O. Sawyer department store, the Brainerd Upholstery Store, and the Ballerstein Millinery store. These acquisitions would lead one

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<sup>2</sup>According to Hower, fancy dry goods seem to have included lace, ribbons, gloves, hosiery, handkerchiefs, edgings and the like (Hower 1940, p.438). Later accounts of G. Fox & Co., however, describe the first store as being lined with bolts of "bright-hued cotton stuffs with line of notions popular in that day ("Modern Elevator Facade...", 1934).

<sup>3</sup>Accounts of the store history do not tell us much about the expansion in merchandise lines. A careful examination of the two local Hartford News paper for articles (not indexed) as well as G. Fox advertisements could shed light on the topic.

<sup>4</sup>According to Nystrom the term department store is applied to stores in which dry goods, apparel, and home furnishings are handled (Nystrom 1930, p.125). Nystrom goes on to describe A. T. Stewart in 1870 as having total daily receipts averaging \$60,000 and accounts maintained separately for fifteen departments. Approximately 2,200 persons were employed in the store (Nystrom 1930, p. 127-131).

<sup>5</sup>Hower's account of Macy's development poses the same question. He then determined that R. H. Macy became a department store in the fall season of 1860. The shift from specialized to diversified merchandise was so gradual, that it was difficult to pinpoint. By 1877, however, it is certain that R. H. Macy's was a *full fledged department store*. This was the same year that John Wanamaker's *new kind of store* came into existence (Hower 1940, p.98-102).

to the conclusion that by 1895, G. Fox & Co. was a department store in the strict sense of the definition.<sup>6</sup> Through the teens, G. Fox continued on a path of expansion buying up several adjacent buildings, much the same as R. H. Macy had done between 1866 and 1877 (Hower 1940).<sup>7</sup> By 1914, G. Fox had 176 feet of frontage on Main Street and by 1917 the store employed nearly one thousand persons ("Just a Year After...", 1918).

In January 1917, fire destroyed the entire business and Moses Fox immediately began construction on a new eleven story building at the same site. This edifice, with nearly one half million square feet, was larger than anything Hartford had seen. The store became known as "Fox's Folly," as no one believed that a city the size of Hartford could sustain a store of this size (Dove 1955).

### Local Competition

During the early years of the business, G. Fox was not without formidable competitors. The Brown Thomson store opened as a dry goods store in 1855 with a downtown allocation of 2000 square feet of selling space, within five years the space was doubled. Through several nearby acquisitions; the store had grown to a "full fledged department store" by 1891 ("City of Merchants 1942; Brown Thomson Marks...", 1941). A second worthy competitor to G. Fox & Co. was Sage-Allen which opened its doors in 1889. As contrasted with G. Fox and Brown Thomson, Sage-Allen & Co. early on was heralded as "one of the most attractive establishments in the city" ("Sage-Allen & Co...", 1936). The Sage-Allen store was established as a department store by the early nineties--a store which catered to the "carriage trade." A final competitor, Albert Steiger, Inc. entered the scene later, in 1918. The store, known as the Steiger, Vedder store until 1923, was to become a departmentalized specialty store with a series of departments operated as individual shops ("City of Merchants", 1942).

### The Grand Emporium

After the 1917 fire, Moses Fox persuaded his elder daughter and her husband to come east from Salt Lake City to join the business.<sup>8</sup> George Auerbach was appointed general manager and treasurer of G. Fox & Co. He managed the store along with his father-in-law until his early death in November 1927.

The new eleven story G. Fox & Co. building, which opened fourteen months after the 1917 fire that destroyed the business, was said "to excel anything in New England outside of Boston, and the equal of anything in the department store line that Boston can offer" ("Just a Year After...", 1918). The store

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<sup>6</sup>Hower reported that a department store did a large volume of business (Bureau of the Census included only those stores whose annual sales totaled \$100,000 or more); organization by merchandise departments with centralization of operating functions; a wide range of merchandise including ready-to-wear, dry goods, and home furnishings; catering primarily to women; located in an urban shopping area; and having many *free* services available (Hower 1940, p.69).

<sup>7</sup>Parallels to the development to R.H. Macy are drawn for two reasons: (1) Hower's History of Macy's 1858-1919 provides an excellent account of the development of the department store in the United States and (2) G. fox & Co., like Macy's grew to a store where families within the trading area would obtain from it practically everything they required (Hower 1940, p.113)

<sup>8</sup>George Auerbach was member of the Auerbach family which owned and operated the largest non-Mormon (department) store in Salt Lake City, Utah.

contained a half million square feet<sup>9</sup> and the largest selling space of any establishment in the city. It was said to be "a touch of the metropolis and will show Hartford women what the big New York stores are like in equipment--and variety of stock" ("Just a Year After...", 1918). Accounts on the new store state that no customer or employee need was overlooked.<sup>10</sup>

Moses Fox looked to the grand emporiums of New York and Chicago in building his new store. He looked to the trends in store design and store interiors. He employed the New York architect, Cass Gilbert, and the Equipment Architects Tansig & Flesch of Chicago. The structure was architecturally elegant with a white brick exterior and a limestone facade, marble interior on the first floor, and eight marble pillars stretching from the eighth to the tenth floors. Its design followed the trends begun in the 1890s in New York stores, and then utilized in the Marshall Field Building completed in 1906. The interior was planned for efficiency and customer convenience in line with the latest "conventional wisdom" (Benson 1988, p.44). For example, small articles and those most frequently purchased were placed on the first floor along with men's clothing and furnishings, dress and yard goods were located on the second, women's clothing on three, ladies undergarments along with lounges and "sick rooms," hair dressing and manicuring departments were on four, childrens' on five, home furnishings and furniture occupied the sixth through ninth floors, with offices on the tenth, and a dining room with a roof garden on the top (eleventh) floor. The *Big Store* evidenced department store trends of the period. Just as the major stores in New York, Chicago, and Boston were competing on services, so did G. Fox provide ancillary services such as restaurants, lounges, and free delivery.

#### BEATRICE FOX AUERBACH JOINS THE BUSINESS

Shortly after the death of her husband in November 1927, Beatrice Fox Auerbach began assisting her father in managing the store and was soon named treasurer of the company (New 1976). Moses Fox and his daughter ran the store "as a team" until 1938 when the senior Fox passed away and Beatrice Fox Auerbach assumed the presidency (3rd Generation at Helm 1965).<sup>11</sup>

#### Beatrice Fox Auerbach: The Treasurer of G. Fox & Co.

According to Hower (1940) and others (Entenberg 1961; Nystrom 1930) the department store's growth era peaked in about 1914 and from 1923 to 1929 sales increased, but at a lower rate. The Depression of 1929 was disastrous for department store sales and from 1929, sales increases were modest and the department store began to lose market share (Entenberg 1961, p.21-22).

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<sup>9</sup>Both R. H. Macy Herald Square and Marshall Field were completed in 1902 and both had over one million square feet of selling space. Macy had three thousand employees in 1898 and Jordan Marsh of Boston employed between three and five thousand.

<sup>10</sup>In the 1890's department stores began to focus heavily on services that would induce consumers to linger and to meet and chat with their friends, comparing purchasing and trading tidbits about the latest styles (Benson 1988). Nystrom stated that due to the myriad of services offered, that the modern department store had become a *club-house* and amusement place for women (Nystrom 1930).

<sup>11</sup>According to Mrs. Georgette Koopman, elder daughter of Beatrice Fox Auerbach, Moses Fox and his wife Theresa (Stern) Fox moved in with Beatrice and her two daughters shortly after the death of their father, George Auerbach. The business of the store was the business of the family. Decisions were made jointly by father and daughter. Details of renovation and expansion were handled primarily by Beatrice Fox Auerbach after 1928.

The years 1929-1935 were perhaps the worst for the department store. Industry sales fell from \$4,350,000,000 in 1929 to a low of \$2,542,000,000 in 1933, not to recover to the 1929 figure until 1940 (Entenberg 1961, p.28). While figures are not available for G. Fox & Co., the store must not have experienced a sales decrease of this magnitude. During this period (1928-1934), G. Fox & Co. planned and completed a major renovation. Beatrice Fox Auerbach is credited with carrying out the plan and managing the renovation which converted the store into an "Art Deco Palace" featuring every element of "modernity" ("87th Anniversary ....", 1934). At this time escalators and air conditioning were installed,<sup>12</sup> a new warehouse constructed, fur storage for 15,000 garments added, and the store layout was shifted to assembling complementary departments within easy reach of one another. For example, mens clothing and shoes were located on the second floor along with sporting goods nearby ("87th Anniversary...", 1934).

This modernization, under the direction of Beatrice Fox Auerbach, added some customer service features to the store which were undoubtedly unique for the time period<sup>13</sup>. Interior decorating services complemented model groups of furniture designed for certain types of rooms and to fit different household budgets. These model displays, begun in 1934, eventually became a major feature of the store known as "The Connecticut House." In addition to providing help to the homemaker in decorating her home, free lectures were given on care of home and garden under the auspices of the *Fox Kitchen Modernization Bureau* ("87th Anniversary...", 1934).<sup>14,15</sup> These services along with those offered by other department stores, such as free delivery, beauty salons, and restaurants were generally not profitable in and of themselves, but served to draw people into the store (Nystrom 1930). The provision of service to her customers as well as residents of the Greater Hartford Area and the State of Connecticut, and her efforts to draw customers to downtown Hartford were extended and expanded during Beatrice Fox Auerbach's tenure as president of G. Fox & Company.

#### THE GRAND ERA: 1938-1965

Beatrice Fox Auerbach assumed the presidency of the store in 1938 upon the death of her father. Certainly her father's tutelage deserves some credit for the forward thinking in the growth and expansion of the downtown store that were to characterize the years she was president, but Beatrice Fox Auerbach was, herself, responsible for building the business that was to become the largest privately held department store in the country. As Harris stated, "In a few cases--such as Stanley Marcus, Beatrice Fox Auerbach, and Barry Goldwater--the greater figures (of Merchant Princes) were in the second and

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<sup>12</sup>The installation of escalators and air conditioning in the 1930's was clearly in advance of the industry. According to a "Survey of Building" in 1951, only 11% of department stores reported having escalators and 63% reported having air conditioning ("Survey of...", 1951).

<sup>13</sup>In 1930 services offered included credit granting, delivery, use of telephones, return and exchange privileges (Nystrom 1930, p.10). The consumer movement of the 1930s is said to have led department stores to provide information and education for consumers (Duncan and Phillips 1953, p.573)

<sup>14</sup>This six year expansion and modernization plan which also included enlarging the selling space, complete refixturing, renovation of the employee cafeteria to serve 900 employees, and employee recreation rooms, and expansion of the delivery fleet to 40 trucks ("G. Fox moves...", 1933).

<sup>15</sup>In 1935 a luncheonette with an adjacent Tea Room to serve 1800 customers was opened ("Luncheonette...", 1935) and in 1936 the Brown Thompson store was purchased for \$1,540,000 ("Realty deal...", <sup>15</sup>1936). One year later the eight story Brown Thompson building was moved 125 feet to permit further expansion for G. Fox ("Store to Run...", 1936).

third generations" (Harris 1977, 94).

Between 1938 and 1965 Mrs. Auerbach's expansion and revitalization efforts in downtown Hartford, personnel and employment policies, attention to changing customer wants and needs, and philanthropic contributions to the region, all contributed to intense customer loyalty and a sales volume that, by today's standards would be rivaled by competitors. G. Fox & Co. in Hartford, in the tradition of the department store, offered something for everyone and everyone shopped G. Fox. But perhaps most importantly, in the tradition of the department store, G. Fox traded on prestige, status, and fashion and attracted "the right people" (Barrett 1970). Mrs. Auerbach persisted in making the store a major Hartford attraction and one of the last of the great retail emporiums.

### Growth and Expansion

Expansion and modernization, characteristic of department stores, were ongoing activities at G. Fox. However, the growth of G. Fox & Co. under Beatrice Fox Auerbach, differed from many department stores in the 1930s and 1940s. As the population had migrated to the suburbs across the country, the department stores followed.<sup>16</sup> No branch stores were opened by G. Fox.<sup>17</sup> The floor space in the downtown store doubled during the years Mrs. Auerbach was president, and to compensate for lack of branch stores, G. Fox developed the largest telephone order system in New England. New parking facilities, a community room, and a formal dining room, were among the amenities that were designed to draw customers, not only from the surrounding communities, but also from the entire state to downtown Hartford to shop at the store that was to become known as *The Center for Connecticut Living*.

### Amenities to Attract Customers

Not unlike department store owners earlier in the century (Leach 1984), Beatrice Fox Auerbach viewed her store as a vehicle for conveying culture. She attempted to bring the fashions and trends of Paris and New York to Hartford as well. To this end, Centinel Hill Hall, an auditorium with a seating capacity for 1,100 with four adjoining meeting rooms for club women and community organizations was opened in June 1940 ("Centinel Hill...", 1940).<sup>18</sup> During the first year and one half it was open, the hall, located on the eleventh floor, drew well over 50,000 customers up the escalators, past the displays of fashions for the home and the family ("Gateway to...", 1941). The rooms were used by civic, cultural, religious, professional, political and educational groups. The rooms, along with support services such as models for fashion shows, visual merchandising staff to set up exhibits, and kitchen staff for catered

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<sup>16</sup>Entenberg (1961) reported three alternative approaches to expansion. The first was to build branch stores in the suburbs, the second to expand merchandise lines, and the third to expand the downtown stores. He also commented that between 1929-1960 department stores sales decreased from 9.0% to 7.1% of the total retail store sales, and that programs of geographic expansion failed to have a noticeable effect on competitive position (Entenberg 1961:125).

<sup>17</sup>Auerbach's only experiment occurred in 1947 with the opening of a "Foxmart" store in rural Connecticut. Foxmart specialized in the home and garden needs of the agricultural customer as well as major farm and dairy equipment and repair services. The operation, which was unsuccessful, closed in 1952 (Auerbach 1947; Feinberg 1968).

<sup>18</sup>The provision of meeting rooms for local organizations became a trend in department store public relations during the 1950s ("Lit Branch...", 1951), ten years after G. Fox opened Centinel Hill Hall.

events, were available without charge to Connecticut organizations. Centinel Hill Hall, under the sponsorship of G. Fox or community organizations, was to host prominent national figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt, famous entertainers such as Gloria Swanson, and Lillian Gish, and fashion leaders including Helena Rubenstein and Adele Simpson. The facility was used for Annual Housewares expositions, do-it-yourself shows, an annual book fair evolving into book/author luncheons which filled the room to capacity with Hartford area women. Centinel Hill Hall was reportedly without a counterpart in the country (Dove 1955).

*The Connecticut Room*, an elegant dining room, and the store's third restaurant with a seating capacity of 176 was opened in 1939. This formal restaurant was completely designed around an 1847 theme commemorating the year in which Gershon Fox opened the first store. Hand painted murals depicting scenes from Connecticut history covered the walls, and miniatures of the murals were to be found on every piece of table service. Mrs. Auerbach's impeccable taste and attention to detail were evident in the dining room ("Restaurant...", 1939).

### Expansion and Renovation

In 1953, Auerbach embarked upon a \$5 million expansion plan which included \$1.25 million for a parking garage, \$1.5 million for the flooring over of air space in an adjacent building to be used for expansion and \$2.25 million for the renovation of the retail areas in the store (Dove 1955).

Of the three components of this 1953 expansion, the construction of the parking garage was probably the most important to G. Fox in terms of drawing customers in from the suburbs. Just as was true of other cities during the 1950s, Hartford became strangled in congestion as vehicular traffic increased at a rate of more than 20% in a 10 year period. Parking availability did not keep pace with this increase and downtown merchants faced the erosion of their business as suburban centers with ample free parking lured the second car homemaker (Anderson 1953). Auerbach built the city's first ramped public parking garage which eventually provided space for 1,100 cars. This contributed to Hartford's reputation as being one of the most accessible retail central business districts in the country (Dove 1955). Several years later, in response to shoppers' complaints concerning rates and the lack of space availability due to the use of the garage by Downtown workers, Auerbach developed a rate scale that reduced short term parking rates, thus further encouraging the suburban shopper to come downtown ("G. Fox Cuts Parking...", 1956).

A second building expansion and renovation program of G. Fox was announced in 1956; construction began in 1959. This \$8,000,000 program was planned as part of a downtown revitalization project in Hartford. As Mrs. Auerbach stated, "The store's expansion program is simply a concrete affirmation of my faith in the future of Hartford as a major commercial center for New England." She went on to say that "our expansion program will serve as an additional incentive for the immediate redevelopment of downtown Hartford" ("G. Fox & Co. Expansion...", 1959, p.1).<sup>19</sup> The 1960 expansion doubled the size of the store to one million square feet. This project included an eleven story addition for both retail and warehousing functions, the purchase of an adjacent parcel of land from its competitor, Sage-Allen, for further expansion, and a planned pedestrian walk to connect the store to Constitution Plaza, the downtown revitalization project ("G. Fox & Co. Expansion...", 1959; "G. Fox

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<sup>19</sup>by the 1950s the decay of downtown shopping areas jeopardized the status of department stores. In the latter half of the decade several major metropolitan areas were embarking on revitalization projects with flagship department stores as an integral part of the plan (New Spirit 1957). A subsequent era of downtown redevelopment featured retail, office, hotel and parking complexes (Talbot 1956). In addition, many stores having diverted investment capital to the development of suburban branch stores, were now renovating their aging downtown facilities (Ketchum 1958).

Buys...", 1956).

#### A Telephone and Delivery System

Before the turn of the century, G. Fox was reported to have delivered parcels by wheelbarrow (Fox Celebrating...", 1942; Mahoney and Sloane 1966). During the expansion in the thirties, telephone orders were accepted from across the state and a fleet of forty trucks delivered the merchandise the day it was ordered ("87th Anniversary...", 1934).

In October, 1958, G. Fox installed the largest telephone system of its kind in New England ("New Phone...", 1958) allowing customers to call toll free from the entire state of Connecticut over enterprise lines, the precursors of WATS lines. At peak times, ninety operators handled as many as 20,000 calls a day ("The Big Store", 1963). Telephone ordering was supported by a delivery system that delivered 2,000,000 packages a year with a fleet of over 170 trucks that traveled daily to every part of the state. The company boasted of customers from all (then) 48 states who bought by mail or phone as well as customers from Indonesia, Israel, Iceland and India who made purchases ranging from wedding trousseaus and baby layettes to furnishings for a complete household. Sometimes the cost of shipping the goods exceeded the value. Most international customers were former Connecticut residents who remained loyal to G. Fox. The store was known to have one of the most liberal free parcel post policies in the country (Dove, 1955).<sup>20</sup>

#### PERSONNEL POLICIES

At the time of the 1917 fire, G. Fox employed 1,000, by 1938 the number had doubled to 2,000 and during Mrs. Auerbach's tenure as president the staff grew to between 3,500 and 5,000.<sup>21</sup> G. Fox & Co. was ahead of its time in recognizing the significance of personnel management.<sup>22</sup> As early as 1929, Moses Fox employed Maurice Berrins as director of personnel. Berrins reported directly to Mr. Fox and later to Mrs. Auerbach (Schiro 1991). Attention given to personnel was evidenced by the physical facilities, recognitions, and personal concern shown to employees. For example, a revolving, no-interest loan fund for employee emergencies was established. Repayment schedules were based on the employee's ability to pay. Payments were sometimes as little as \$1 per week (Dove 1955).

The 1934 expansion included air conditioning and reequipping the employee cafeteria and enlargement of employees' recreational rooms ("G. Fox moves...", 1933). Auerbach initiated a meals at cost program for employees and hired a french chef for the cafeteria (Dove 1955; "New Cafeteria...", 1962). While state laws required nurses on duty, G. Fox opened a seven room employee hospital in 1940 that included two dressing rooms, a treatment room, a waiting room, and eight beds ("Fox's

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<sup>20</sup>Company legend tells of a spool of thread that was delivered to a woman in a town thirty miles away, who upon returning home from the store discovered that she had purchased the wrong color. In 1947, as part of the store's centennial celebration, Auerbach hired four helicopters to make deliveries to various parts of the state landing on golf courses, town greens and playing fields, thus dramatizing the store's claim that it will deliver to anyplace in Connecticut (Go-Getter 1947).

<sup>21</sup>These figures are for a single unit; today G. Fox employs 4000 in a twelve store operation (Carter 1991).

<sup>22</sup>A Princeton study which analyzed the experiences of leading department stores between 1935 and 1950 revealed that, in 1935, only two stores had a corporate officer with duties restricted to personnel; by 1950, only eight had a vice-president for this purpose, and nine others had the top personnel man reporting to the president. (H. Baker 1950 cited in Duncan and Phillips 1955. p.188).



Store....", 1940).

### Employee Recognition

Cognizant of the importance of employee recognition, Auerbach established the Moses Fox Club to honor veteran employees for service of 25 years or more. The club was launched with seventy-seven charter members in 1940. At that time, 500 (25%) of the employees had been with the store for ten years or more ("Moses Fox Club...", 1940). The first banquet honoring these employees was held in the newly completed Connecticut Room restaurant. As the numbers grew, these annual festive events were held in Centinel Hill Hall and were reputed to have been among Hartford's most elaborate affairs. Decorations by the store's visual merchandisers included fountains, imported flowers and live exotic birds. A Paul Revere bowl engraved with the Club's own insignia was presented to each employee at induction. At one point, a full 10% of the staff at G. Fox were members of the Club (Dove, 1955, Case, 1986).

Mrs. Auerbach's interest in her employees, demonstrated by her ability to call several hundred by name, is legendary (Dove 1955; Case 1986). In a 1947 effort to maintain close ties to her employees and to express her interest in their perspectives on the business, a tradition of "Family Circle Luncheons" was established. These daily in-store luncheons were attended by sixteen representatives from diverse departments including sales support areas; each G. Fox employee would attend at least once. The luncheons took place at a designated round table in the employee cafeteria and the honored guests were served by a waitress who had no other responsibilities for the time. Initially, Mrs. Auerbach attended each luncheon, taking the time to speak individually to each employee present. She shared new plans for the store while reinforcing the importance of team effort and providing a forum for employees to discuss problems relevant to the business (Auerbach 1958; Auerbach 1964; Case 1986; Dove 1955).

### Innovative Policies

G. Fox & Company under Mrs. Auerbach, has been recognized for two innovative employee policies. The store is credited with having been the first department store to hire blacks in visible sales and executive positions,<sup>23</sup> and during World War II the store initiated a five day week which was to continue to the time of its sale in 1965 (Schiro 1991).

In 1942, Auerbach made the decision to employ blacks in visible sales and executive positions. One of the black executives hired was Martha Taylor Shaw, a woman active in black civic affairs and an expert in the area of minority subculture. Shaw was hired to coordinate the black employment program at the store (Black Women...", 1984; Case 1986). Before placing a black employee in a department, the department manager was interviewed to determine that the manager was not racially prejudiced. Eventually, it was not necessary to screen for non-prejudiced department managers as blacks gained acceptance by proving their worth as employees and were hired and placed on an equal opportunity basis. In 1948, the National Urban League gave the G. Fox program national recognition as other stores throughout the country began to follow its lead (Dove 1955).

During the war years, Auerbach reduced the store's hours of operation to a five day schedule, a practice which continued to 1968 (Feinberg 1968). The store was open Tuesday through Saturday, and Thursday evening. Apparently Auerbach persuaded other Downtown Hartford merchants to do likewise in an effort to provide consistent work schedules to all downtown retail employees ("Go-Getter 1958).

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<sup>23</sup>Numerous local newspaper accounts indicate that G. Fox was the first in the country to hire blacks in this capacity; however, a study of negro employment states that during the 1940's a small number of blacks were salespersons in New York department stores, and sixteen were known to hold sales positions in Boston department stores. (Perry 1971, p.31-32).

The rationale for the five day store operation was two fold, first this enabled all key personnel to be in the store during the hours of operation, and second, this enabled G. Fox to effectively compete with Hartford's numerous insurance companies for qualified personnel (Feinberg, 1968).

## MERCHANDISING POLICIES

Wingate (1953) stated that a merchant can choose to make his store one of three kinds: (1) a depot store--carrying standard merchandise which customers buy because the location is convenient, (2) a bargain store--where volume merchandise is sold at low prices or, (3) a selector or purchasing agent store--where the major emphasis is placed on selecting the right merchandise for its customers and maintaining assortments (Wingate 1953, p.213). G. Fox, during the Auerbach era, epitomized the third type. The store boasted of complete assortments in every department: "If something can be bought anywhere, it can be bought at G. Fox & Company" ("The Big Store...", 1963) and if the merchandise was not in stock, it would be special ordered. In an era when department stores were scaling back on assortments (see Marcus 1963), G. Fox was dealing with 16,000 sources of merchandise around the world.<sup>24</sup> The single store's 90 buyers traversed the country as well as traveled abroad to select distinctive merchandise. Mrs. Auerbach, on frequent trips, made numerous purchases for the Boutique shops which feature unusual accessories. For example, she placed orders for gloves in Italy, glass in Yugoslavia, sweaters in Switzerland, and mats in India. (Dove 1955).

The store catered to the prestige customer by offering a full assortment of upscale and designer fashion goods; however, in the tradition of the department store, G. Fox offered something for everyone. The bargain basement store was first opened in 1919. During the 1960 modernization program, 20,000 square feet of selling space were added nearly doubling its size to 55,000 square feet.<sup>25</sup> The basement store carried a complete line of apparel for men, women, children as well as a complete assortment of home furnishings.<sup>26</sup> Auerbach delivered the same level of service in the basement as in the upstairs departments ("G. Fox Basement...", 1963).

## CUSTOMER SERVICE

Attention to customer needs was a hallmark of G. Fox & Co. Service went far beyond those typical of department stores such as shoe, jewelry and radio repair, optical departments, pharmacies, restaurants, lounges, bridal registries and beauty salons. At G. Fox staff nurses were available in the corset and infants' departments. In the former, nurses advised customers on garment support and fit, and in the latter, they offered advice to new mothers on proper child care. G. Fox was one of the few stores in the country with a staff of four full-time models available to "help harassed husbands select suitable

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<sup>24</sup>The 16,000 resources of G. Fox can be contrasted with the combined divisions of U.S. Shoe (Caren Charles, Casual Corner, Petite Sophisticates, and August Max), collectively dealing with approximately 500 resources for a combined annual volume of over one billion dollars.

<sup>25</sup>The growth of the discount store industry severely eroded department stores' basement business which led some to believe that these were "vestiges of the past." Others, however, contended that as middle classes moved to the suburbs, the basement store was essential to meet the needs of lower income consumers ("Basements...", 1960). Auerbach's 50,000 square foot basement store was the average size of discount stores of the era ("G. Fox Basement...", 1963).

<sup>26</sup>As department stores concentrated efforts on the development and operation of branch stores from the mid 1940's through the 1950's, little attention was given to refixturing or modernization of basement stores. The most common changes in basement operations during the time period were to reduce selling costs through self-selection, and limited stock ("The Basement...", 1960).

dresses for wives" by modeling the garments (Dove 1955). Six (multi-lingual) personal shoppers handled mail orders from customers around the globe. The shoppers maintained files of customers' measurements, photographs and important dates; they selected merchandise to be shipped to Europe, Africa, and Asia. For example, in 1954 a complete trousseau including the wedding gown was sent to an American government girl in Greece. Much of the merchandise requested by these far away customers required special orders. The personal shopper would locate the resource, order the item, and ship it to the customer. Another function of the personal shoppers was to guide non-english speaking shoppers as well as blind disabled shoppers through the store (Dove 1955).

#### SUMMARY: GRAND EMPORIUM OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Beatrice Fox Auerbach inherited the presidency of a newly remodeled "mature" department store in 1938. Between that time and 1965, the year in which the store was "joined with the May Company,"<sup>27</sup> the business had grown to the country's largest, privately held single unit department store (Feinberg 1965). Through two expansions, she doubled the size of the downtown store. The store gained national recognition for many of its innovative policies, as well as becoming known internationally due largely to loyal customers. Mrs. Auerbach was recognized as one of eleven top outstanding women in retailing (Hendrickson 1966). Mrs. Auerbach instilled a loyalty in her work force through policies of fairness, sincere interest, and recognition, and she earned the loyalty of her customers through quality, value, assortment, and exceptional service.

The tenfold increase in volume over the period can be contrasted with the industry average. In 1939, the average department store volume was \$1.9 million ("16th Census of the U.S., 1940) By 1963, the industry average increased only 2.5 times to \$4.8 (1963 Census of Business); a small increase when contrasted with that of G. Fox & Company. It is particularly noteworthy that the G. Fox volume increase was accomplished without the aid of branch stores. Auerbach was perhaps able to achieve this success by compensating for the convenience of suburban shopping by offering same day delivery service to the surrounding communities, an exceptional assortment of fashion merchandise for home and family, a liberal return policy, amenities to bring shoppers to downtown Hartford, and ample parking.

#### Local Competition

During her tenure as president of G. Fox, Auerbach dwarfed her once formidable competitors. The Brown Thomson Department store was purchased by G. Fox in 1936 and operated as an independent store. In 1958, she purchased a parcel of land from Sage-Allen, her closest competitor. Albert Steiger, Inc., a departmentalized specialty store closed its Hartford operation in 1962 to concentrate its efforts in Massachusetts (Feinberg 1968). In 1963, two years before the sale, G. Fox was one of 700 retail outlets in Connecticut and did 15% of the state's annual retail volume of \$350 million ("The Big Store...", 1963). Busy days saw the passage of 21,000 customers through its doors (Dove, 1955). The annual volume of G. Fox at the time of its sale to May Department Stores in 1965 was \$60 million. Its closest competitor, Sage Allen, achieved an annual volume of only \$13 million in its Downtown store and another \$12 million in its seven suburban stores. The sales volume of Korvette's Downtown Hartford, which occupied the site vacated by Steigers, was estimated between \$12 and \$14 million. A Lord and Taylor store, opened in 1951 in nearby suburban West Hartford, was estimated to be doing \$8 million. Projections for a Macy's opened in 1964 in New Haven, 30 miles south of Hartford were at \$30 million (Feinberg, 1968).

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<sup>27</sup>In all accounts of the announcement of the sale, Mrs. Auerbach used the phrase "we are joined with the May Company." The terms merged, bought, or sold were never used in references to the transaction.

## EPILOGUE

The urban retail emporium has become a vestige of the past. In those companies that have retained a downtown operation, the matriarch's position as the chain's prime volume producer has been supplanted by traffic congestion, crime, high taxes and aging facilities. Downtown stores often struggle to survive. Some have closed, many have downsized. G. Fox is no exception. On September 11, 1992, the May Company announced that, in January 1992, G. Fox of downtown Hartford will close its doors forever.

At the present time, a few art deco fixtures remain on the main floor, reminiscent of the 1930s expansion and renovation, but its 11 floors of retail space have been reduced to six. The remaining floors have been converted to office rental, replacing selling space that failed to meet the sales per square foot standards set by highly productive branches. Constitution Plaza never materialized as a shopping Mecca. A single jewelry store styled in vintage 1960s decor is the only indicator that the plaza level was designed for anything more than an infrequently used walkway. Subsequent attempts at retail revival in urban Hartford were equally disappointing. The Civic Center Shops, one block west of G. Fox, opened in the early 1970s in a mixed use of facility that included a convention center and hotel, struggle for survival. It is likely that Auerbach's refusal to open branches preserved downtown business for a period of time and perhaps delayed the development of major suburban centers in the Hartford area (the WestFarms Mall was not opened until 1972). However, an aggressive competitor would have recognized the fertile grounds of Hartford's affluent suburbs and would have eventually vied with G. Fox for the position of Connecticut's foremost retailer.

Today's merchandising catch phrases of "narrow and deep" and "key" items and resources would prohibit a merchandise selection from 16,000 vendors. Stores make strong buying commitments to a select group of vendors as a negotiating point in determining price and promotional support. Most department stores carry a limited mix of hard lines. Many of the categories of business such as toys and major appliances have been lost to the mass merchandisers. Many of the apparel customers who once shopped the basement and street floor selections have gone to the full line discounter and off-pricer.

The club woman for whom Centinal Hill Hall was dedicated in 1940 has been replaced by a new breed of consumer; the homemaker who works out of the home. This consumer wants convenient location and parking. Auerbach's 1,100 space parking garage would hardly meet today's standard of 5 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of retail space. The new consumer wants a selection of stores to insure one stop shopping and has become accustomed to evening and Sunday hours to accommodate her busy schedule. She would be unimpressed by informal modeling at lunchtime and incensed by a store that was open only five days and one evening.

As recently as two years ago, G. Fox stood out as one of May Company's shining stars. May's 1964 acquisition of G. Fox served to position May as a growing national chain. The prestigious reputation of G. Fox enhanced May's quest for an upscale image. G. Fox's \$60 million volume increased May's annual volume by 10%.

In 1988 the May Company acquired Filene's of Boston. Filene's carries the same prestigious reputation in Massachusetts as G. Fox once did in Connecticut. However, Filene's with its twenty stores and annual volume well over \$500 million, is larger than G. Fox<sup>28</sup> and its reputation more widely acknowledged. In January 1993, the G. Fox store in downtown Hartford will close its doors; the G. Fox name will come down from the thirteen stores in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, and these stores will be called Filene's.

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<sup>28</sup>In 1989 the sales volume for G. Fox was \$426 million.

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