

## REVIEWS

### *L. S. Ayres & Company: The Store at the Crossroads of America*

By Kenneth L. Turchi

(Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 2012. Pp. xii, 283. Illustrations, charts, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

Countless Hoosier shoppers retain fond memories of L. S. Ayres, the now-vanished department store. For 134 years, Ayres offered customers a wide spectrum of quality goods that ranged from top-tier designer clothing and elegant home furnishings to children's toys, kitchen wares, and more. It also offered exceptional customer services that reinforced customer loyalty. Generations of shoppers came to the Indianapolis flagship store at Washington and Meridian Streets to admire the holiday displays and to meet friends for lunch at the Tea Room. Downtown strollers told time by the big clock on the corner of the building. Ayres was firmly embedded in Indiana culture. It was large, comforting, tradition-bound, and always there for us—until it wasn't any longer.

Kenneth L. Turchi's *L. S. Ayres & Company* explains how Ayres rose

to regional prominence, held sway over generations of shoppers, but then tottered and collapsed after it left the control of the Ayres family. The book, with abundant illustrations and anecdotes drawn from the company archives, will be of great interest to nostalgic shoppers as well as to business historians. It offers an illustrated portrait of one of America's great stores, complete with bulleted "takeaways" that sum up the main points of each chapter.

The decline of Ayres followed its acquisition by the May Department Stores Company, which rotated executives in and out while frittering away customer goodwill. The loss left a huge gap in the Indiana shopping experience. Young people will never know the pleasure that their elders still remember: strolling into one of the Ayres locations with the expectation of spending several pleasant

hours shopping for quality goods, assisted by well-trained salespeople.

Although Turchi's account of the store's rise and fall is excellent in itself, he leaves several additional questions unaddressed. First, we know that Ayres was the most respected department store in Indiana, but how did it compare with other notable American department stores of its day, such as Lord & Taylor and Bloomingdale's? Turchi tells us that Ayres sent observers to fashion shows to keep track of the new trends; did it likewise send scouts to liaise with other leading department stores in an active attempt to emulate the best practices of those companies? It would have been interesting to know how Ayres's sales and services compared with other leading stores elsewhere.

Secondly, assuming that the Ayres archives included typical advertisements from different decades, readers would have been benefited from seeing historic prices listed alongside

their modern equivalents, adjusted for inflation. For instance, an illustration of one of the store's 1960s advertisements in *Ebony* magazine (p. 237) shows a model wearing a lacy pants suit listed at \$165—the equivalent in 2014 dollars of approximately \$1226 (See the inflation calculator at <http://data.bls.gov/>). Such cost comparisons would have allowed readers to better understand that Ayres's goods were truly top-of-the-line.

Finally, readers may also wish to know whether the shift to offshore sweatshop manufacturers played any part in the chaotic administration of the May Company. Still, even without this information, the book is a valuable trove of memories and photos.

CARROL KRAUSE is the author of *Showers Brothers Furniture Company: The Shared Fortunes of a Family, a City and a University* (2012). She has written for the *Bloomington Herald-Times* for ten years.



### *Gentlemen's Disagreement: Alfred Kinsey, Lewis Terman, and the Sexual Politics of Smart Men*

By Peter Hegarty

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Pp. 225. Illustrations, notes, works cited, index. \$75.00.)

*Gentlemen's Disagreement* involves what seems, at first, a slight topic: the negative review that psychologist Lewis Terman wrote for the *Psychological Bulletin* about Alfred

Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948). Author Peter Hegarty, however, weaves that review into a fascinating account of different world-views, explaining the acrimonious