Founded in 1856 as Edsall & Co., the business that became known as Root’s Department Store anchored downtown Terre Haute for 121 years.

Andrew Jackson Edsall was only 28 years old when he first opened a one-room store at the southwest corner of Sixth and Wabash. Within two years, John McDougall of New York City joined the business, and Lewis B. Root, a native of Hartford, Conn., was named manager. Quick to expand, the business soon moved to the southwest corner of Fourth and Wabash.

In 1860 Edsall sent Root to Fort Wayne to launch a branch store. Three years later, Root became a partner in the business upon McDougall’s retirement. However, in 1865 — the year Edsall died at age 37 — Root moved to New York.

For several years Edsall & Co. was managed by a partnership consisting of George W. Knowlton of New York and Chauncey Warren Jr. and Charles C. Oakey of Terre Haute. In February 1869, Oakey withdrew from the firm to devote time to journalistic pursuits, and Max F. Hoberg, then store cashier, bought his interest. The firm moved into the new Terre Haute Opera House building in 1872 under the name “Warren, Hoberg & Co.” Soon thereafter, Warren retired and Knowlton, a resident of New York City, sold his interest to Root, also still residing in New York. The firm was renamed Hoberg, Root & Co. and Alfred Hoberg joined the partnership.

In 1882 Hoberg, Root & Co. relocated to 518-520 Wabash Ave. Root stayed in New York most of the time, serving as buyer. Under Hoberg’s management, the dry goods store outgrew its sizable building. In late 1893 Hoberg transferred wholesale operations to 30-32 N. Sixth St. while maintaining the Wabash Ave. retail store. Alfred Hoberg sold his interest to Robert O. Miller in January 1894 and Max transferred his interest to Root.

On April 9, 1896, the newly named “L.B. Root Company” announced it had entered into an agreement with Sophie Deming Wheeler, daughter of Demas Deming Sr., to erect a six-story facility at 617-623 Wabash. Homer Floyd was the architect. The exterior of the first two stories was Lake Superior sandstone, while the upper floors were brick and terra cotta. The building included an elevator and a spectacular 30-foot by 25-foot skylight. Ninety feet high, “The Great Dry Goods Palace” was the tallest building in the city when it opened Nov. 12, 1896. In 1898 George M. Johnson assumed control of L.B. Root Co. when the store was reorganized. In 1905 the name was changed to The Root Dry Goods Co., a name it retained for many years, even after Mercantile Stores Co. acquired it in 1914. A second store and an auto accessories store were later opened at the corner of Sixth and Ohio streets.

In 1968 Root’s became an anchor tenant at the new Honey Creek Square mall with a massive 168,000-square-foot store. The downtown store was closed in February 1977. The 84-year-old building on Wabash Ave. was razed in February 1980. Frank Schrohe was president and general manager during the transition. In September 1998 the store was acquired by the St. Louis-based May Department Stores Co. as part of its L.S. Ayres division.