

Credit Union History ...

Filene Sets the Stage in the United States

Edward Filene was a modest person who, when asked to describe himself, would say “I am a shopkeeper from Boston.” In reality, he was far more than that. He was a self-educated intellectual who had a deep concern for others. Although shy and awkward socially, he had a deep commitment to solving social ills. For those efforts, he spent extraordinary amounts of his time and money trying to establish credit unions in the United States.



Filene fully realized that the success of the credit union movement depended on the development of the **cooperative** ideal. Credit unions, he firmly believed, must be different from an ordinary profit-making business. The **equality** of opportunity in credit unions also appealed to Filene. Although very wealthy himself, Filene never lost perspective of what it was like to struggle economically.

So while banks in the United States offered credit, it was available only to high-income customers only. Class equality just didn't exist when it came to the banking industry.

After hearing about Alphonse Desjardins' work in Canada, Pierre Jay and Filene corresponded and met with Desjardin several times to determine what made his credit union successful. Filene knew that by learning from the entrepreneurs who preceded him he would (1) capitalize on Desjardins' success and (2) propose a sound business model to community leaders and legislators in Boston.