

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: DISCOVERING MAIL-ORDER DREAMS: HOW TO
IDENTIFY SEARS, ROEBUCK & COMPANY
CATALOG HOUSES

Degree Candidate: Cynthia Anne Liccese-Torres

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Thesis directed by: Michael S. Leventhal, Chair
Welch Center for Graduate and Professional Studies
Goucher College

This thesis establishes two objectives: (1) how to authenticate genuine examples of Sears, Roebuck & Company mail-order catalog houses, and (2) whether or not they can be distinguished from similar examples of local stick built houses of the same period. The thesis categorizes specific architectural and stylistic details that may suggest mail-order origins and outlines a detailed identification process using three methods of verification: an exterior examination, an interior inspection, and historic research. Although various local studies suggest that Arlington County, Virginia, contains about 200 mail-order catalog homes, these claims have not been proven in any systematic or comprehensive manner. Four homes within the Lyon Park neighborhood were analyzed to demonstrate the effectiveness of each of the methods in the search for authentication. The analysis involved studying, photographing, and comparing exterior and interior

architectural features to copies of original catalog advertisements, as well as seeking original forms of Sears documentation.

Mail-order homes did not introduce new architectural design, but merely represented the popular styles and trends of the period in which they were built. Their uniqueness was demonstrated in their marketing and influence in providing a dream home for the rising middle class in America during the first half of the 20th century. Catalog houses are visually indistinguishable from stick built dwellings since both feature the same types of materials, massing, proportions, and even architectural detailing. Despite these visual similarities, this thesis proves that mail-order architecture can be identified and differentiated only after completing an extensive three-phase analysis involving exterior and interior investigations and historic research. As illustrated by the case studies, genuine examples of Sears homes were both proven and refuted, based upon the discovery of original structural markings, shipping documents from Sears, mortgage loans issued by Sears, and local building permits. Thus, this thesis proves that not all homes presumed to be Sears mail-order catalog houses are indeed true examples of Sears houses.

**DISCOVERING MAIL-ORDER DREAMS:
HOW TO IDENTIFY SEARS, ROEBUCK & COMPANY CATALOG HOUSES**

Cynthia Anne Liccese-Torres

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Goucher College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Historic Preservation

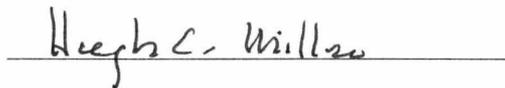
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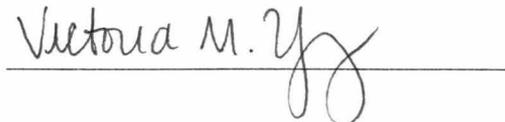
Michael S. Leventhal, Chair

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Hugh C. Miller, FAIA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hugh C. Miller", written over a horizontal line.

Victoria M. Young, Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victoria M. Young", written over a horizontal line.

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2003

This thesis is dedicated to my husband George, who always reminds me to simply do the best I can, and to my baby daughter Sophia Grace, who already has taught me one of life's most valuable lessons – if you have faith in yourself, anything is possible.

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The property owners of the Lyon Park homes highlighted in this thesis, including *Susan and Ken Bell* of 102 North Fillmore Street; *Jeffrey Digregorio and Timothy Duggan* of 315 North Garfield Street; and *Erik and Renee Gutshall* of 800 North Highland Street. Thank you for sharing your time and genuine interest in telling the story of your homes. Thank you also to two friends and colleagues, *Anne Morrison* and *Marlene Terreros-Oronao*, for braving the courthouse with me, helping me collate the numerous drafts of this thesis, and offering support when I needed it most.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Statement of Hypothesis

One of the most fundamental elements of historic preservation is the architectural survey, both at the reconnaissance and intensive levels. Each type of survey seeks to locate, identify, and record historic and architectural resources within a given area. The architectural survey is a valuable tool that allows preservationists to recognize significant buildings and styles, as well as gain an understanding of the history and development of a specific area as a whole and the individual resources of which it is comprised.

This thesis topic was developed after having participated in and evaluated architectural surveys of early- to mid-20th century, single-family residential neighborhoods. These particular environments conceivably contain examples of conventional stick built homes, in addition to dwellings purchased as complete kits from a mail-order catalog. Although not true in all cases, both stick built and mail-order catalog houses often feature indistinguishably similar stylistic elements, materials, and dimensions. During fieldwork for an architectural survey, it would be useful to be able to easily identify genuine examples of mail-order catalog homes. This would prove especially valuable in understanding the development pattern of a particular community.

This thesis will set out to prove how one can authenticate Sears, Roebuck & Company mail-order catalog houses and distinguish them from similar examples of local

stick built houses of the same period. The investigation will establish what specific exterior and/or interior architectural and stylistic features can be used to identify Sears homes. The thesis also will determine which particular methods of verification are required to confirm authenticity, including an exterior examination, an interior structural inspection, and historic research. The early-20th century neighborhood of Lyon Park in Arlington County, Virginia, will be used to demonstrate the methods required to authenticate genuine Sears, Roebuck & Company mail-order catalog homes.

Scope of Thesis

The field investigation of the hypothesis occurred in the neighborhood of Lyon Park, located in central Arlington County, Virginia. First platted in 1919 by prominent local developer Frank Lyon, Lyon Park contains approximately 284 acres and features a central public park and community house. Predominantly comprised of single-family dwellings, the housing stock consists of a diverse range of forms and styles, with bungalows and Colonial Revival style homes among the most prevalent.

Findings from the County's ongoing Historic Resources Survey, now in its seventh year, have indicated evidence of dozens of mail-order catalog homes throughout Arlington. This claim, however, has been substantiated in only small measure and presumed for the majority. Additional historic studies suggest that Arlington may contain approximately 200 catalog homes. According to both the countywide survey and various historic documentation, it is reasonable to assume that at least three dozen Sears houses are located in Lyon Park specifically. Yet these findings are based only on a

reconnaissance level architectural survey and preliminary research. These initial efforts involved simply comparing advertisements and illustrations in mail-order house catalogs to actual buildings on the street or from presumptions passed between property owners and their neighbors or previous occupants. To date, little if any effort has been made to provide substantial proof verifying with certainty the presence of genuine examples of Sears homes in Arlington.

Sears, Roebuck & Company revolutionized the mail-order retail industry, which had a direct impact on the success of its mail-order house sector. Its “send no money” sales philosophy, combined with its ability to relate to and persuade potential customers, was an unprecedented marketing strategy. It is important to identify and study Sears houses for several reasons. First, their positive identification will help establish more precisely the extent of the role Sears played in the overall early-20th century housing market. Second, their identification will result in a better understanding of Sears’ motivations for its Modern Homes Program and other catalog sales. Lastly, the continued analysis of Sears houses as a genre will help further sort out the several different classifications of Sears homes that exist – the type and quantity of models sold as official kits with Sears plans, those that were built using materials and products purchased from Sears, and those that were financed by Sears.

Literature Review

There are three main categories of literature available on the subject: (1) general books on domestic architecture of the early-20th century period; (2) books specifically

about the various mail-order companies and their catalog houses; and (3) both primary and secondary sources exclusive to Sears' houses by mail. The works highlighted in this literature review are examples of some of the most relevant and thorough sources, all of which are cited throughout this thesis. However, this review does not address the various journal, magazine, and newspaper articles pertaining to the topic, nor does it reference those sources that are available on the Internet. Examples of these additional categories can be found in the Bibliography of this thesis.

One of the most prominent works in the first category is *The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture, 1890-1930* by Alan Gowans. Focusing on suburban domestic architecture, Gowans chronicles its origins and evolution from the late-19th century through the first few decades of the 20th century. He gives special consideration to the several new house types that emerged during this period, as well as introduces the popularity of mail-order architecture to the development of suburbs. In *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*, Gwendolyn Wright examines a broader variety of residential forms beyond those of just the suburbs and explores the social, political, and architectural factors that shaped their overall design and popularity. Of most significance is Wright's analysis of the changing forms and roles of the residential dwelling and how domestic architecture illustrates family and social life. Both Gowans and Wright were referenced in this thesis in order to provide a basic historic context for single-family house types of the early-20th century period.

The second grouping contains two detailed works that discuss mail-order architecture as a genre. In *Houses from Books: The Influence of Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950*, Daniel D. Reiff discusses the

influence of published plans and pattern books on American vernacular architecture, particularly single-family detached dwellings, from colonial times to the mid-20th century. Reiff provides extensive insight into the leading mail-order companies of the early-1900s and compares and contrasts their services, fees, and overall popularity. To illustrate both obvious and obscure similarities and differences, Reiff pairs advertisements from original mail-order home catalogs with photographs of built examples nationwide. Another worthy source is *America's Favorite Homes – Mail-Order Catalogues as a Guide to Popular Early 20th Century Houses* by Robert Schweitzer and Michael W.R. Davis. This book provides an overview of the mail-order catalog phenomenon and focuses on the architectural styles and housing types popular between 1900 and 1941. The authors also explore the histories and catalogs of several of the leading mail-order companies of the period. For this thesis, both *Houses from Books* and *America's Favorite Homes* were used to establish a contextual framework for the mail-order house movement in general, as well as for Sears, Roebuck & Company in particular.

The third category of sources includes those pertaining only to Sears, Roebuck & Company. There are several works that chronicle its founders, origins, and evolution into a leader of the mail-order industry. These books include: *Send No Money* by Louis E. Asher and Edith Heal; *Catalogues and Counters – A History of Sears, Roebuck & Company* by Boris Emmet and John E. Jeuck; and *Sears, Roebuck, U.S.A. – The Great American Catalog Store and How it Grew* by Gordon L. Weil. Each of these works was referenced for this thesis in order to gain a general understanding of Sears as a corporation, and especially to reveal details about its mail-order house sector.

Another type of source includes original house and building materials catalogs. Whether contained within a private collection or at a public library, these valuable records provide a first-hand glimpse into the promotional periodicals of the era. The catalogs feature detailed illustrations, product descriptions, sizes, prices, alluring prose, and often the written testimonials of satisfied customers. Such catalogs are particularly useful if researching or trying to authenticate Sears homes, examining Sears' marketing strategies, or simply studying the general preferences of American home design. An alternative to these original catalogs, and perhaps a more accessible option to the general researcher, is the reproduction catalog. One of the most popular is *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 Catalog – An Unabridged Reprint* published by Dover Publications. A complete reprint of Sears' original 1926 *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* catalog, this book includes illustrations of exteriors, interior floor plans, prices, and a written description of each model available that year. A second example is *Sears, Roebuck Home Builder's Catalog - The Complete Illustrated 1910 Edition* also reproduced by Dover Publications. A reprint of the original 1910 edition of Sears' *Our Special Catalog for Home Builders*, this source features a wide collection of building materials ranging from the plain and inexpensive to the elaborate and extravagant. Materials included lumber, doors, windows, columns, hardware, light fixtures, and architectural elements, among others. The work also contains building plans for homes and cottages, as well as satisfied customer testimonials, rates for freight shipments, and assorted marketing advertisements.

Although not an official reproduction of one specific catalog, *Houses by Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company* by Katherine Cole Stevenson and H.

Ward Jandl is perhaps the most comprehensive guide available on Sears homes. The book's introduction provides a general overview of the history of Sears' mail-order home industry. The remainder of the book, which is arranged according to roof type and number of stories, features reproduced pages from assorted original catalogs that highlight the nearly 450 ready-to-assemble models available from Sears between 1908 and 1940. In addition to descriptive text, these advertisements contain interior and exterior illustrations, interior floor plans and dimensions, prices, and even the locations of where particular models have been identified. Both *Small Houses of the Twenties* and *Houses by Mail* served as main points of reference during the research phase for this thesis.

A fourth reference work, though not a catalog reproduction, is the newest resource available on the subject. Rosemary Thornton's *The Houses That Sears Built - Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sears Catalog Homes* offers a casual, yet informative approach to the history of Sears' mail-order houses. In addition to including illustrations of rare Sears models not included in *Houses by Mail*, Thornton offers practical suggestions and tips to aid in identifying authentic examples of Sears homes. Of particular significance is the section about conducting courthouse research to locate original mortgage records issued by Sears. To date, this is the first known source to include such detailed information on identifying Sears homes through historic research. This thesis used this method as the basis for conducting local research and identifying Sears homes in Arlington County, Virginia.

Methods

To highlight the process necessary to authenticate Sears houses, four Lyon Park homes were used as case studies. The findings of the investigation were based upon the completion of a detailed architectural survey, an interior inspection, and extensive research for each of the subject properties. Considering the fact that Sears offered approximately 450 different models of mail-order catalog houses between 1908 and 1940, this analysis involved only a sampling of representative models and architectural styles. Since Lyon Park was platted in 1919, only those houses erected between 1919 and 1940 were considered for inclusion in this study. In particular, exterior and interior architectural elements and features were examined and compared to copies of original catalog advertisements. Original Sears documentation also was sought for each property, ranging from interior structural markings and documents to mortgage records and building permits. Of the four homes selected, two are classified as bungalows, one as a Dutch Colonial, and the other as an English cottage. Three of the owners granted full access to their property, including the interior.

This thesis contains a total of six chapters. Immediately following this Introduction is Chapter II, which summarizes the new housing types that emerged during the early-20th century, as well as provides the contextual background for the mail-order catalog house phenomenon. Chapter III is dedicated exclusively to a discussion of Sears, Roebuck & Company, including the establishment of its Modern Homes Program, why its houses were so popular, a description of the various types of Sears homes that were available, what the kits included, and how orders were placed and received. Chapter IV establishes a framework for identifying genuine examples of Sears houses through a

detailed three-part process of an exterior examination, an interior examination, and historic research. The chapter also details the numerous challenges that hinder the identification process. Chapter V illustrates how each of the three steps of the authentication process is executed, using examples of Lyon Park residences. The chapter provides historic background on the neighborhood, highlights the local studies conducted to date, and features a detailed analysis of each of the four homes to either prove or disprove their authenticity as genuine examples of Sears mail-order houses. Lastly, Chapter VI contains a summary of findings, describes the limitations of this study, as well as offers suggestions for conducting further research on Sears homes and aiding in their continued identification.

CHAPTER II

LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM THROUGH MAIL-ORDER

Did you ever really consider the wonderful difference in the meaning of the words house and home? A house is a structure to live in. Home - the dearest place on earth - is that structure that is part of you - made so by its association with your family, their joys and sorrows, their hopes, aspirations, and fears. It is a refuge from the trials and struggles of the outer world. It is a visible expression of yourself, your tastes and character. *Advertisement in Aladdin Company 1919 Homes Catalog*

New Attitudes and New Architecture

Between 1890 and 1930, more homes were built in the United States than in the nation's entire previous history, due in part to the use of partial or total prefabrication construction methods.¹ During this period, the construction industry benefited from the abundant quantities of available land and raw materials, while at the same time promoting both the progress of the nation and the upward social and geographical mobility of the individual.² Consequently, this period created the ideal of the "comfortable house," defined by self-sufficiency and independence and considered to be realistically attainable by all.³ The "comfortable house," especially of the suburban

¹ Alan Gowans, *The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture, 1890-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1986), xiv-xv.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., xv.

variety, conveyed three distinct qualities: a sense of security from the outside world; a shared connection with the past, especially a colonial and English past; and an emphasis on the virtue of family stability.⁴ Communities of comfortable houses fulfilled a new social function by being remote enough from urban centers to still maintain rural qualities such as open spaces, gardens, and yards, yet still located close enough to cities to allow a daily commute to work.⁵ Such an innovative function called for an equally new concept for a house, one that could occupy its own parcel and also relate to neighboring homes.⁶ Often such neighborhoods used restrictive deed covenants to regulate the quality of community life, from the ethnic background of the residents to the minimum costs and uses of the buildings.⁷

New early-20th century attitudes evolved as the standard way of life rapidly became faster-paced, more urban, and influenced for the first time by technological breakthroughs such as electricity and modern appliances. The urban landscape that emerged was a departure from the formality of the preceding Victorian era, stressing a modern lifestyle that emphasized science, technology, and standardization in order to improve home and family life.⁸ As early as 1910, this idea for a progressive home was similar to that of an efficient factory.⁹ The decorative ornament once adorning the

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 155.

⁹ Ibid., 156.

Victorian home was removed, the amount of interior space decreased, and new technological, time-saving advances added to the design and cost of homes.¹⁰ This simpler, more modern form lessened housekeeping demands and granted housewives the time to pursue activities and/or careers outside the home.¹¹ Not only were families decreasing in size on average, lifestyles also were less formal, as illustrated by shared living and dining spaces, less elaborate meal preparation, the decreasing number of household servants, and the disregard for a formal parlor and entrance hall in the home design.¹²

A revitalized home economics movement reinforced the need for such housing reform by encouraging advances in science.¹³ Regarding the home as a laboratory promoted the notions of better health and families and more contented women.¹⁴ Elaborate styles of architecture and ornament, previously popular in Victorian designs, now were considered impractical, uncomfortable, unhealthy, ugly, and simply unnecessary.¹⁵ Such details as decorative stencils, white wall treatments, linoleum floors, and built-in furniture emerged as uncluttered spaces and smooth surfaces became the new housekeeping ideal. Interiors were seen to be more functional with minimal ornament, emphasizing a sense of purity, simplicity, and sanitary awareness.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 172.

¹² Ibid., 171-2. Such generalizations made by Wright do not necessarily reflect the specific house designs available from Sears.

¹³ Ibid., 158. This home economics movement is explored in detail in Wright's book.

¹⁴ Ibid., 159.

¹⁵ Ibid., 160-2. The remainder of the information in this paragraph also came from this source.

Along with architects, reformers, and housewives, furniture makers like Gustav Stickley helped popularize this housing transformation. One movement within this transformation was known as the arts and crafts movement, to which Stickley was its leading champion.¹⁶ Stickley believed that the Craftsman style was “largely the result not of elaboration, but of elimination.”¹⁷ He preferred simple rectilinear plans adorned with plain natural surfaces of wood or stone, and even felt his design approach could solve social problems within the middle class by creating jobs and promoting homeownership.¹⁸

Several new domestic architectural forms and styles, including the bungalow, American foursquare, and gable-front house, emerged and were popularized in the early-20th century period. The bungalow (Figure 1) emphasized the interpenetration of interior and exterior space to create a sense of spaciousness and naturalness.¹⁹ Typically one to one- and one-half stories in height, the form had no basement and featured a low and broadly sloping roof line over a porch or verandah.²⁰ Additional characteristics included the use of heavy front porch supports and exterior walls clad in either stucco or wood shingles.²¹ Without the need for kitchen servants, the galley-type kitchen was efficiently

¹⁶ Ibid., 162.

¹⁷ Ibid., 163.

¹⁸ Ibid., 163-4.

¹⁹ Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, 77.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wright, *Building the Dream*, 166.



Figure 1: Typical example of the bungalow form. Note the broadly sloping roof line with dormer and the prominent front porch with heavy supports; Illustration of the Hollywood model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 124.

designed and suitable for the maneuverings of one person.²² The family dined in a large combination living/dining area on the first floor, and the bedrooms were merely bunk spaces used for sleep and privacy.²³ After 1905, the compact bathroom, with its porcelain fixtures, was considered a standard component of most middle-class homes.²⁴ The decreased amount of interior space in the bungalow also eliminated the need for single-purpose rooms, such as the library or pantry typically found in Victorian homes.²⁵

Whereas the bungalow represented naturalness and open spaces, the American foursquare exhibited feelings of massiveness, strength, and solidity in its symmetrical form (Figure 2).²⁶ Two-stories in height, the typical example sits on a raised basement, is accessed via steps leading to a full-width front porch, and is topped with a pyramidal or hipped roof often accented with at least one dormer.²⁷ Its interior contains four rooms of nearly equal size per floor with a side stairwell.²⁸ Still emphasizing the horizontal lines of the form, more picturesque examples of the four-square emerged by the early-1900s and boasted such elements as gables, bays, turrets, and other similar ornamentation.²⁹

²² Ibid., 166; 170.

²³ Ibid., 166.

²⁴ Ibid., 168.

²⁵ Ibid., 171.

²⁶ Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, 84.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 88.



Figure 2: Typical example of the American foursquare form. Note the raised basement, full-width front porch, and pyramidal roof with dormers; Illustration of the Hamilton model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 264.

And lastly, the gable-front house is one- and one-half to two stories in height, and often features prominent porches and windows in the gable end (Figure 3).³⁰ The main entrance door is not centered, but rather set to the side of the main elevation and opens directly to a straight staircase leading upstairs.³¹ The gable-front form could be easily adapted to accommodate single- or multi-family living, and unlike both the bungalow and American foursquare, the gable-front house is not an obvious suburban form.³² Yet all three of these new housing forms – the bungalow, American foursquare, and gable-front house - emerged as the preferred and dominant housing forms of the early-20th century period. They rapidly began to define the American residential landscape, in part due to their widespread promotion in the popular architectural magazines, pattern books, and mail-order house catalogs of the era.

The Early-20th Century Mail-order House Movement

The mail-order catalog house was the most successful and practical type of home purchasing arrangement that offered a means by which to combine both city and country tastes without sacrificing personal comfort and convenience.³³ By the 1920s, the high demand for as many as one million new small homes could not have been met just by

³⁰ Ibid., 94; 98.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 33.



Figure 3: Typical example of the gable-front form. Note the prominent entrance porch and the off-center location of the main entrance; Illustration of the Springfield model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 167.

architects individually designing homes or designers/builders.³⁴ Nor could the potential customers afford the architects' fees or the skilled construction labor. Besides which, the low profit margin of small home construction was not enticing enough to most architects.³⁵ Into this problem came a manufacturing and marketing opportunity. The solution to help meet this new housing demand was mass-produced, pre-cut, and ready-to-assemble modern housing available via mail-order.³⁶ Such an arrangement made home ownership an attainable goal, emphasized the individuality and understood the economics of its potential owners, promoted a sense of privacy and family life, and contained the latest technological innovations. However, it should be stressed that mail-order architecture was a universal type of architecture in that it could be built virtually anywhere – in rural areas, suburbs, or urban centers – as long as there was access to a railroad line. Because of the quality, affordability, and wide availability of mail-order catalog homes, a modern house based on comfort and modern convenience could be obtained by the working, middle, and upper classes alike.

The concept of mail-order architecture dates to the late-1840s with the introduction and increasing popularity of the adhesive postage stamp, architectural pattern books, balloon-frame construction, and shipment of goods via railroad.³⁷ Even before the Civil War, it was possible to purchase ready-made building components and

³⁴ Ibid., 63.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 41.

materials from mail-order catalogs.³⁸ Requesting architectural consultant services via mail-order also became a common practice and allowed catalog readers to modify individualized plans and/or drawings prepared by an architect, the final versions of which could be erected by local builders or contractors.³⁹ The mail-order homes phenomenon was a direct result of two separate but related movements – the growth of the building components industry following the Civil War, and the development of the wholesale lumber business at the turn-of-the-20th century.⁴⁰

Let the Mail-order Competition Begin

Between 1883 and 1951, more than 75 companies issued house plan books and catalogs, not counting the additional dozens of individuals, groups, and magazines who also published house plans and catalogs, to try to meet the seemingly insatiable demand for mail-order architecture.⁴¹ Several companies, including the E.F. Hodgson Company of Dover, Massachusetts, sold mass prefabricated sections of homes and other small structures as early as the 1890s. By 1904 the Aladdin Company of Bay City, Michigan,

³⁸ Ibid., 46.

³⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁰ Daniel D. Reiff, *Houses from Books: The Influence of Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 150.

⁴¹ Ibid., 149.

was the first company to sell complete kits of build-it-yourself homes.⁴² Sears, Roebuck & Company entered the market of the houses by mail industry soon after around 1908.⁴³

During the first three decades of the 20th century, some of the most successful mail-order house distributors along with Sears included the Radford Architectural Company of Chicago, Gustav Stickley, the Chicago House Wrecking Company, the Aladdin Company, and Montgomery Ward & Company. William A. Radford founded the Radford Architectural Company in 1902.⁴⁴ His company grew from the Radford Brothers lumber and millwork business in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in the 1880s. Between its founding to when Radford retired in 1926, the Radford Architectural Company published more than 40 catalogs of house plans, technical and instruction books, and three monthly trade journals. Due to the expense, Radford would not modify its house plans at the request of its customers, though the firm did sell plans printed in reverse. Blueprints and building specifications were available for purchase for just five dollars.

As mentioned previously, Gustav Stickley was an advocate of the Arts and Crafts movement, a turn-of-the-20th century effort to transform American home life into a simpler, less formal, and more efficient and hygienic lifestyle.⁴⁵ Stickley began his career in the 1890s as a designer and builder of furniture in Syracuse, New York. He first published *The Craftsman* magazine in 1901 to showcase his furniture and interior designs, then included house illustrations in the 1902 edition. Stickley's influence

⁴² Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, 48.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁴ Reiff, *Houses from Books*, 150-1. All of the subsequent information in this paragraph is from this source.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 172-8. All of the subsequent information in this paragraph is from this source.

spanned two decades, in which homes were built from his plans and new types of single-family dwellings emerged from his ideas, including the bungalow and craftsman cottage. Sets of house plans were available free of charge with a paid subscription to *The Craftsman*. Architects even could be hired to modify available house plans or design completely new dwellings.

Established in 1893 by four Harris brothers, the Chicago House Wrecking Company first purchased and dismantled building materials from the Columbian Exposition and later expositions and then marketed the secondhand and slightly used items they salvaged at reasonably low prices.⁴⁶ The company also bought items from sheriffs' and manufacturers' sales and bankruptcies. By 1915, the firm became the Harris Brothers Company, and continued to sell materials, mill work, plumbing, and fittings for its house plans until about 1938. The Harris Brothers offered their plans with building specifications and material lists for just two dollars, which could be refunded if unsatisfied upon inspection or deducted from the purchase cost of materials. Although masonry materials and plaster were not provided, the firm was willing to incorporate minor changes upon customer request, or even draft original designs.

Originally founded by brothers William J. and Otto E. Sovereign in 1906 as the North American Construction Company, The Aladdin Company of Bay City, Michigan, likely was the first mail-order house firm to offer precut and fitted lumber.⁴⁷ Using the same methods employed by a local mail-order boat building enterprise, the Sovereigns first advertised precut boathouses, summer cottages, and garages, the precursors to their

⁴⁶ Ibid., 178-82. All of the subsequent information in this paragraph is from this source.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 196-99. All of the subsequent information in this paragraph is from this source.

trademark Aladdin Read-Cut Homes. Though nearly every material used in construction was precut, all pieces of the same length were interchangeable rather than being specifically marked for an assigned location. Like its other larger competitors, Sears, Roebuck & Company and Montgomery Ward, Aladdin offered a wide range of dwelling types and styles from simple, modest cottages to expensive high-end residences. By 1915, the company owned its own lumber and mill yards and no longer had to send its top quality lumber off-site to be cut. Aladdin Company sales peaked in 1920 at just over five million dollars. Aladdin was an active figure in the mail-order home industry for more than 75 years. The company's consecutively numbered records indicate more than 50,000 homes were sold.⁴⁸

Considered to be Sears' arch-rival, Montgomery Ward & Company first began selling mail-order building plans around 1910.⁴⁹ Unlike Aladdin, both Sears and Montgomery Ward encouraged their customers to buy not just a home, but also all of the appliances and furniture they needed to complete the package.⁵⁰ Montgomery Ward adopted the name Wardway Homes in 1918 and offered both "Ready-cut" and "Un-cut" designs. Considered to be more style conscious than some of its competitors, early catalogs featured "Elizabethan," "Swiss Cottage," and "Southern Colonial" styles. Many models, though slightly more expensive, were identical to those available from another mail-order house firm, Gordon-Van Tine. Perhaps the latter supplied homes to

⁴⁸ Robert Schweitzer and Michael W.R. Davis, *America's Favorite Homes – Mail-Order Catalogues as a Guide to Popular Early 20th Century Houses* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁰ Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, 52.

Montgomery Ward or both companies obtained their designs from the same source.

Wardway Homes published its last catalog in 1931.⁵¹

Regardless of the company of origin, the numerous housing types and styles found in the early-20th century mail-order house catalogs truly represented “America’s Favorites.”⁵² The catalogs themselves were of considerable size, featuring homes on large landscaped lots and containing photographs and illustrations of the models with prices. Floor plans showed the building’s overall dimensions, layout and sizes of rooms, and locations of such elements as doors, windows, and stairs. Detailed promotional literature and descriptive text were also prominent. In addition to the actual kits, the catalogs offered plans for garages and outbuildings, as well as photographs of practically any other product needed to complete or decorate the kit, from heating and plumbing systems to furniture and interior treatments.⁵³ Inspiration for the hundreds of available house models came from designs featured in popular magazines, architectural journals nationwide, and even from the very catalog pages of the competing mail-order firms. Though mail-order house designs are remarkably similar, they are significant because they illustrated the most popular designs and trends of the era in which they were built.⁵⁴

In conclusion, the mail-order architecture movement literally was an idea whose time had come. The incredible demand for single-family housing in the early-20th century was such that it could not be satisfied by architects and designers/builders alone.

⁵¹ Schweitzer and Davis, *America’s Favorite Homes*, 69.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 76-7.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

Mail-order firms such as Sears and other companies highlighted in this chapter realized the tremendous marketing opportunity that was available to promote their ready-made houses, innovative in this regard rather than in the styles and designs they advertised and sold. The mail-order house movement inspired and successfully resulted in increased homeownership by making it a cost-effective and realistic goal. The thousands of potential customers were lured easily by these notions and the mail-order house movement rapidly emerged into a national phenomenon.

CHAPTER III

SEARS, ROEBUCK & COMPANY AND ITS HOUSES BY MAIL

Own your own home! Save your rent money. Give the kiddies a chance. Get close to nature. Have real friends and neighbors. Be independent in old age. Our easy payment plan makes it possible. Why pay rent? To get the full share of Good Health, Long Life and Happiness for yourself and kiddies, to get the most out of life as our Creator intended it should be, A HOME OF YOUR OWN is an absolute necessity. *Advertisement in Sears, Roebuck 1926 House Catalog*

The Modern Homes Program

Richard W. Sears began his mail-order retail empire in 1886 by selling watches and jewelry.¹ Watch repairman Alvah C. Roebuck joined Sears in 1887, and by 1893, the pair established Sears, Roebuck & Company in Chicago, Illinois. Although Roebuck retired only a few years later, Sears quickly expanded his enterprise with two new partners. The company first began to advertise building materials in its general merchandise mail-order catalogs in 1893. The building materials department featured such items as hardware, interior and exterior woodwork, trim, doors, roofing materials, metal siding, building paper, paints, varnishes, and stains. By 1906, however, Sears considered closing this department because of its low profits.

¹ Reiff, *Houses from Books*, 185. All of the background information in this paragraph on the origin of Sears is from this source.

Sears employee Frank W. Kushel was reassigned to the struggling department as the new manager and is the individual responsible for beginning Sears' Modern Homes Program.² It was Kushel's simple, yet breakthrough, realization that Sears could save millions of dollars annually by shipping its home building materials directly from the factories to the customers, thus eliminating the need for storage costs and resulting in increased profits. Richard Sears marveled at Kushel's idea and the Sears Modern Homes Program emerged into the mail-order architecture market.

From 1908 to 1940, the mail-order house industry of Sears, Roebuck & Company had a profound effect on American domestic architecture, contributing to the residential landscape of rural areas, cities and suburban communities, and even entire company towns. Though other companies also actively promoted mail-order homes, Sears was by far the largest and most successful of the catalog home firms.³ Although Richard Sears did not invent the mail-order house movement, he likely was the first individual who offered a total home package for sale, complete with generous financing options.⁴ Sears' mail-order venture also helped boost lagging sales of particular home furnishings. Catalog illustrations of interiors emphasized not only the fashionable tastes of the era, but offered suggestions for locating Sears products such as a piano or furniture set.⁵ Unlike Aladdin, however, Sears and fellow competitor Montgomery Ward emphasized selling

² Sears Modern Homes Website, "A Brief History;" available from <http://www.searsmodernhomes.com>; Internet; accessed January 2003. All information in this paragraph on the role of Kushel is from this source.

³ Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, *Houses by Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company* (New York: John Wiley & Sons and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1986), 19.

⁴ Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, 41.

⁵ Kay Halpin, "Sears, Roebuck's Best-kept Secret," *Historic Preservation*, September/October 1981, 28.

the consumer an entire package -- the house, all necessary building materials, and a seemingly endless selection of appliances, furniture, and interior decorations.⁶

Research for this thesis has concluded that what set Sears, Roebuck & Company apart from its competitors – and what is responsible for both the popularity and success of its Modern Homes Program – was its unprecedented marketing genius. Other mail-order firms effectively advertised their products, as did Sears. But Sears went one step further, truly understanding the potential market that existed and the profits that could be made in the emerging mail-order and home construction industry. Indeed, Sears advertised hundreds of different house plans, but its main concern was not designing and selling mail-order architecture. Rather, Sears realized and capitalized on the incredible opportunity that its housing line represented. Its kit houses were merely the vessels in which customers could store all of Sears' other wares, and Sears actively promoted the sale of anything its customers could possibly need or want to furnish, decorate, and personalize their new homes. The ultimate result was not only the sale of new houses, but also increased company profits from the sale of all of these other Sears products.

Sears executed this strategy by using creative advertising tactics and drafting persuasive catalog text specifically targeted to potential homeowners, luring them away from wasting their hard-earned salaries on rent. Homeownership, and all of the attractive ideals it represented, required different responsibilities and types of products than the rental market. Houses offered more interior living space than apartments, so more furniture and decorative finishing were needed, ranging from bedroom and dining sets to

⁶ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 52.

fireplaces and French doors. To make a modern home most comfortable, a variety of individual systems, fixtures, and appliances – such as electrical, heating, and plumbing – were necessary. Like its house designs, Sears offered all of these items in a range of appealing styles and prices. The creative marketing strategies that Sears established nearly a century ago, coupled with its generous financing options, had a lasting impact. This remains evident by the continued presence and success of Sears in today’s modern-day retail industry.

By 1931, Sears had sold 57,000 homes, and it is reputed that an additional 15,000 to 20,000 were sold by the time Sears officially closed its Modern Homes Department in 1940.⁷ Yet some sources claim – including the 1934 Sears homes catalog – that more than 100,000 families had purchased Sears catalog houses. Such a statement is rather misleading, considering the sale of 43,000 homes within the three year period of 1931 to 1934 would have been quite a challenge, even without the financial hardships of the Great Depression. Interestingly, the Modern Homes Department was reorganized in 1931 as the Home Construction Division, which was involved in construction, design, and home improvement projects. It is likely that some of these projects were added to the grand total of mail-order home sales, thus accounting for the inflated total. The fact that Sears operated a real estate development business in the 1920s and early-1930s undoubtedly contributes to the confusion of determining how many Sears homes actually were built nationwide. This enterprise of the Home Construction Division, though concentrated in Chicago, in Ohio, and in the Northeast region between Philadelphia and Connecticut,

⁷ Rosemary Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built - Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sears Catalog Homes* (Alton, IL: Gentle Beam Publications, 2002), 3-4; 23. All information in this paragraph pertaining to the number of homes sold by Sears came from this source.

could have branched out to other parts of the nation as well. Unfortunately, when calculating its totals, Sears never distinguished between its prefabricated mail-order line and those conventional stick built homes they erected like any other developer.⁸

Sales of Sears homes peaked in 1929 at just over \$12 million, with sales dropping to \$8.4 million by 1931.⁹ The Modern Homes Department began operating at a loss just one year later when sales dropped 40 percent.¹⁰ In 1932 alone, the company foreclosed on 1,081 homes with a total unpaid balance of \$4.3 million.¹¹ The mortgage department closed the next year, and in 1934, Sears was forced to liquidate \$11 million in mortgages, ironically foreclosing and evicting some of its best customers.¹² Even with continued sales through the mid- to late-1930s, the number of liquidated mortgages was too great and company profits were not substantial enough to warrant the continuation of its mail-order house sector.¹³ Unfortunately for researchers, when the Modern Homes Department closed, all of the company's records of sales, promotional materials, and catalogs were destroyed.¹⁴

⁸ Schweitzer and Davis, *America's Favorite Homes*, 14; 65.

⁹ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 22-3.

¹⁴ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 4-5.

The Appeal of Sears

There are many reasons for the astounding success of Sears, Roebuck & Company in the mail-order catalog home industry. Within a period of 32 years, Sears offered approximately 447 different ready-to-assemble “modern” designs in a wide range of building sizes, styles, and amenities to satisfy the needs, tastes, and budgets of prospective homeowners nationwide. Sears’ architects highlighted the most popular trends and fashions of the era, ranging from simple vacation cottages, to more substantial bungalows and foursquares, to colonial, Spanish, and Tudor-influenced styles. The company’s reputation for offering quality merchandise at affordable prices undoubtedly strengthened its business, combined with its company policy stating that “the customer must be satisfied for a lifetime for every house we sell.”¹⁵

The appeal of Sears homes was national in scope since they could be built anywhere quickly and easily due to the use of labeled, precut lumber that corresponded to detailed building specifications, instructions, and blueprints.¹⁶ Perhaps most significant was Sears’ desire to offer popular styles and fashionable materials and amenities, while still encouraging its customers to be as creative as possible throughout the buying process. The customer could modify practically any building component to truly customize his order and create a personalized modern dream home. Customers could even design their own house plans, send the blueprints to Sears, and then receive a

¹⁵ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

shipment of the necessary precut and fitted building materials.¹⁷

Sears, Roebuck & Company's generous payment and financing options allowed virtually any potential buyer to purchase the home of his dreams. Sears first offered loans to its customers in 1911. On the average, the mortgages lasted for a five-year period at six percent interest with regular monthly payments. Sears also was willing to extend the loan period to as many as 15 years and provide loans for purchasing lots. By 1918, Sears offered credit for nearly all of the building materials and even for labor costs.¹⁸ By the late-1920s, Sears mortgages had a 75 percent loan-to-value ratio, which included the value of the lot. If the customer owned the lot without debt, then the lot counted as the 25 percent down payment. And if the customer agreed to assist with or complete all of the building construction, this sweat equity also could be credited toward the down payment.¹⁹

The financing offered by Sears was both very generous and simple in comparison to other lenders. Sears customers were not subject to annual mortgage renewal fees, financing fees, high interest second mortgages, or large down payments. Monthly mortgage payments conveniently started four months after shipment of the house in order to allow the customer adequate time to construct the home and move in.²⁰ The payment options were equally lenient. The 1928 catalog listed four different ways to purchase a home: cash with the order form, "payment as the building goes up," letter of deposit, or

¹⁷ Sears Modern Homes Website, "Questions and Answers," available from <http://www.searsmodernhomes.com>; Internet; accessed January 2003.

¹⁸ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 20-1.

¹⁹ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 97.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

“easy payments.” This last option involved completing a simple credit application and proving title to the lot.²¹

Sears relied heavily on its solid reputation in the mail-order business to encourage customers to buy its homes. Before even entering the houses by mail market, Sears claimed that one out of every four Americans was already its customer.²² Even in its first catalog in 1908, Sears included copies of letters of credit from financial institutions to promote its financial integrity. In addition to captivating slogans and text flaunting cost savings, easy construction, and the benefits of home ownership, most Sears catalogs featured copies of letters and testimonials from satisfied customers nationwide.²³ Equally enticing was the availability of such modern household innovations as tiled and enameled kitchens, breakfast alcoves, wardrobe closets, laundry chutes, coal chutes, wall safes, and built-in ironing boards and bookcases.²⁴

Even from the very beginning, Sears asserted that its free building plans “bring out the ideas of the best posted contractors and builders in this country, as well as the very best architects.”²⁵ Prospective clients could simply order the specific blueprints with detailed material and labor specifications. Sears offered considerable savings to its customers by initially offering free building plans without architects’ fees, which ranged from \$50 to \$200 for comparable plans and specifications. The company also promoted

²¹ Schweitzer and Davis, *America’s Favorite Homes*, 68.

²² Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 6.

²³ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 25.

²⁴ Dennis Preisler, Sears Corporate Historian, “Sears and the Mail Order House,” Undated draft manuscript provided via electronic mail, November 2000, 5.

²⁵ Reiff, *Houses from Books*, 185.

saving its customers 25 to 50 percent off high quality building materials if purchased through Sears rather than from local building suppliers.²⁶ It was not until 1914 that Sears began charging one dollar for its detailed blueprints.²⁷ Sears actually made the most profit through the sale of its finished materials such as flooring, clapboards, and shingles. Since Sears made most of these materials, the company could sell them at “manufacturing cost” with a marginal profit added. This amount was still cheaper than if the customer bought the same materials from a local supplier.²⁸

Because the lumber selected by Sears was of a strong and dense quality and likely first growth lumber, the company earned a reputation for quality framing and millwork.²⁹ Most often, exterior siding was of cypress and exterior trim was always of cypress. In average price homes, interior floors were usually oak on the first level, maple in the kitchen and bathroom, and yellow pine on the second floor. In less expensive models, yellow pine was standard throughout for doors, trim, and flooring. Three coats of paint were provided for the exterior.³⁰ By 1928, Sears replaced balloon framing with platform construction to provide extra fire protection and insulation. Called “Air-Sealed-Wall Construction” by Sears, each floor was built individually one at a time rather than having

²⁶ Ibid., 186.

²⁷ Preisler, undated draft manuscript, 3-4.

²⁸ Reiff, *Houses from Books*, 186.

²⁹ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 15-6. All information about lumber and wood types in this paragraph is from this source.

³⁰ Schweitzer and Davis, *America's Favorite Homes*, 94.

large one-piece vertical framing members extend from the bottom to top of the house.³¹

In 1908, the first catalog devoted entirely to homes, the *Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans*, featured 22 different styles ranging in price from \$650 to \$2,500, including all plans, specifications, and most building materials. The success of this initial publication led Sears to construct lumber mills, lumber yards, and millwork plants throughout the country to meet the increasing demand. By 1912, Sears' house catalogs included illustrations and descriptions of the various models, in addition to testimonials of satisfied customers.³² To appeal specifically to its rural customers, Sears created two additional catalogs in 1923 entitled *Modern Farm Buildings and Barns*.³³ Sears stopped offering mail-order houses in its general merchandise catalog in 1937, though sales continued until Sears' last house catalog, the *Book of Modern Homes*, appeared in 1940.³⁴

From Advertisement to Reality

Sears offered five different grades of housing to suit the various budgets of its customers: the modest "Simplex Sectional" cottages, the slightly more substantial "Lighter Built," the cost effective "Econo-Built," the more average "Standard-Built"

³¹ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 16-7.

³² Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 20; 25.

³³ Sears Modern Homes Website, "A Brief History;" available from <http://www.searsmodernhomes.com>; Internet; accessed January 2003.

³⁴ Schweitzer and Davis, *America's Favorite Homes*, 66.

houses, and their top-of-the-line, most expensive “Honor-Bilt” homes.³⁵ The frame Simplex Sectional cottages, which could be built in as little as eight hours and easily disassembled, were typically one-story in height, most ideal for vacation use, and only lightly framed (Figure 4). As with the Lighter Built and Econo-Built lines, the Standard Built houses (Figure 5) were of lesser quality than the premium Honor-Bilt models. The Lighter Built, Econo-Built, and Standard-Built houses had wall studs on 24-inch centers, single headers over doors and windows, no subflooring, and no underlying exterior wall sheathing. Sears most avidly promoted its elite Honor-Bilt line (Figure 6) with traditional construction techniques -- wall studs on 16-inch centers, double headers over doors and windows, double flooring, and exterior sheathing underneath cedar shingles or clapboards.

Sears boasted that “one order brings it all,” including lumber, lath, shingles, hardware, plumbing, lighting fixtures, paint and varnishes, millwork, eaves and downspouts, heating, building papers and roofing, wall paper, and even furnishings and a wardrobe for the family if budgets permitted.³⁶ Yet this statement is not entirely accurate. Since the first homes available from Sears were sold without any of the framing lumber, customers had to purchase these pieces separately from local suppliers. In the early-teens, lumber began to be sold with the kits, but had to be measured and cut at the building site. By 1914, precut lumber was available as an option.³⁷ Still most building materials were

³⁵ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 14. The details presented in this paragraph are all from this source.

³⁶ Sears, Roebuck advertisement in Halpin, *Historic Preservation*, September/October 1981, 24.

³⁷ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 12.

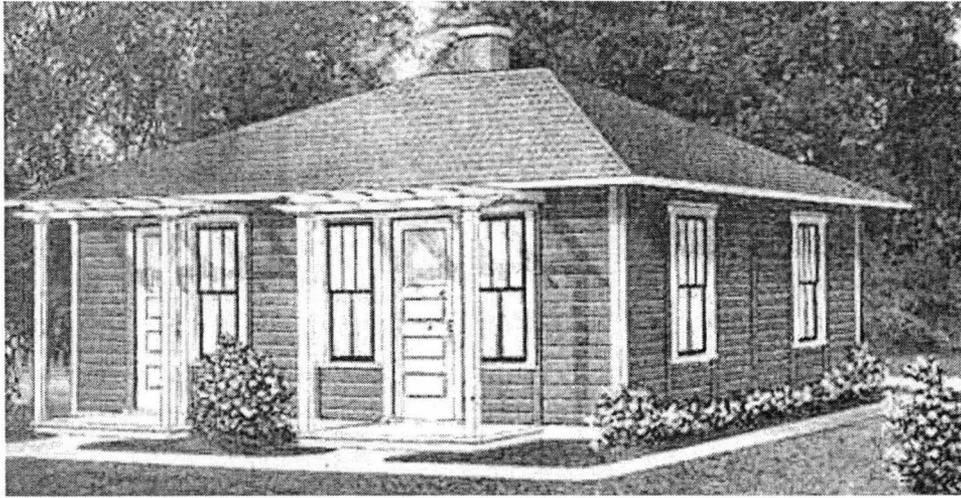


Figure 4: Example of a four-room and one bath Simplex Sectional building; Illustration of the Double-duty model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 345.

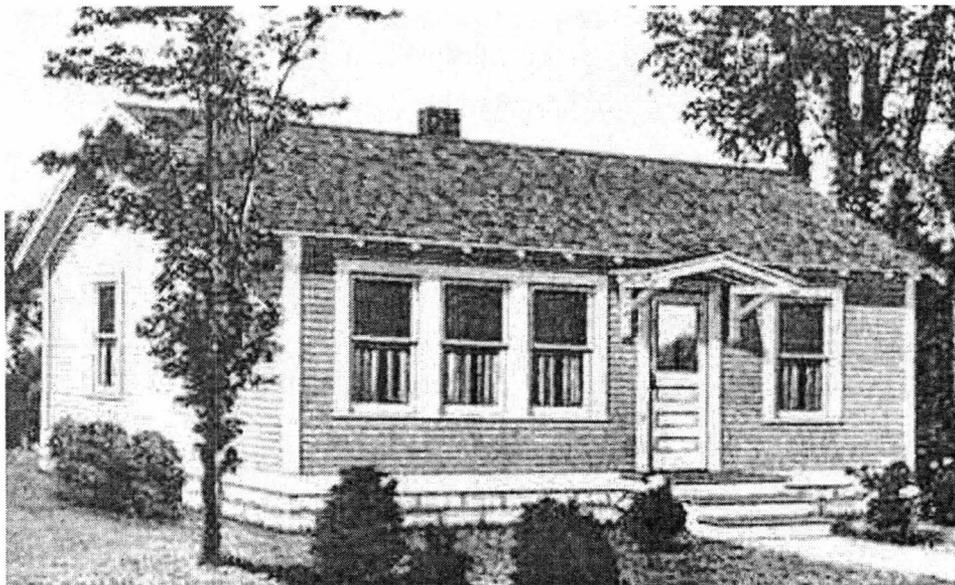


Figure 5: Example of a four-room and one bath Standard Built home; Illustration of the Selby model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 99.

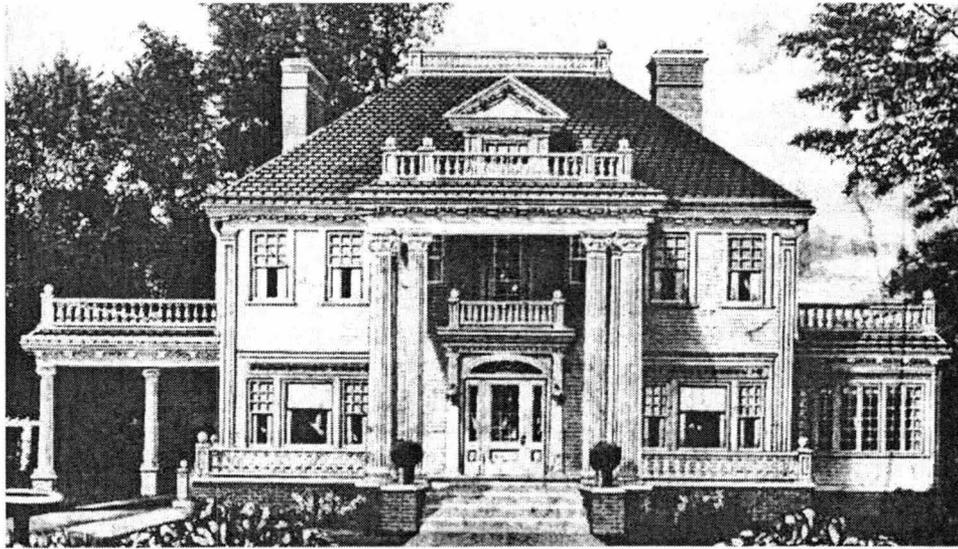


Figure 6: Example of Sears' grandest Honor-Bilt home, which featured eight rooms and 2½ baths and cost between \$5,140 and \$5,972; Illustration of the Magnolia model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 285.

included in the package costs, with the exception of masonry materials such as brick, concrete block, cobblestone, and plaster that were available for an extra charge.³⁸ Due to the shipping costs of heavy masonry materials, it is also feasible that these items were purchased locally instead of from Sears. Other extras, such as electrical equipment, plumbing, and furnaces also were available for purchase separately since different regions of the country required different types of fixtures and systems.³⁹ Customers also had the option to select different grades of these add-on items depending on their needs and budgets.⁴⁰ So in addition to the majority of the materials, the remainder of the package included the following items: blueprint plans; “complete erection plans” that showed all of the marked framing pieces and where they fit together; a list of materials; a contractor’s proposal form; a “legally correct” construction contract; a detailed “How to Build” instruction book with easy directions and more than 90 illustrations; free pamphlets for installing heating, plumbing, or wiring systems; and Sears’ trademark “Certificate of Guarantee,” which was a money-back guarantee promising that each Sears home would “be exactly as represented and give perfect satisfaction.”⁴¹

Upon choosing a particular model from a catalog, the customer could simply complete the one-page order form, select his preferred method of payment, then anxiously await the staggered shipments of his home at the local train depot. If having trouble deciding which particular model to order, the customer could visit a local Sears sales

³⁸ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 29.

³⁹ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴¹ Reiff, *Houses from Books*, 235.

office to receive personalized assistance in selecting a model or modifying the floor plan or materials. While the first sales office was established in Akron, Ohio, in 1919, there were 48 in operation by 1930.⁴² The Sears showroom at 704 10th Street, NW, in Washington, DC, opened on April 10, 1922, and attracted residents of the surrounding Maryland and Virginia suburbs who wanted to see models, furnishings, and finished interiors on display.⁴³ Whether or not modifications to an order were made, each customer was assigned a service representative responsible for sending all necessary instructions and specifications, the shipping schedule of materials, a paint catalog, and the certificate of guarantee. This agreement insured that all of the materials would not only be shipped safely, but would be of adequate quality and quantity or Sears would pay for all shipping expenses and refund the customer's purchase price. Furthermore, all instruction manuals were written for both experts and novices, thus allowing the buildings to be built by either hired professionals or the new homeowners.⁴⁴

Since Sears homes were shipped via railroad, most are situated in the Northeast and Midwest, as well as in other areas of the country that were located along railroad corridors.⁴⁵ A distance of one to two miles from the station to the building site was the typical and comfortable maximum for hauling all of the supplies and materials.⁴⁶ On average, an unassembled house usually fit in two box cars, was comprised of nearly

⁴² Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 21.

⁴³ "Sells Ready-Cut Homes - Sears, Roebuck Company Office to Open Here Monday," *The Evening Star*, 8 April 1922, 14.

⁴⁴ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 29-30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁶ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 90.

30,000 individual parts (excluding nails and screws), and could be constructed in approximately 352 carpenter hours. This was a considerable time savings of 40 percent, when compared to the 583 hours required for the construction of a conventional house.⁴⁷ Sears claimed the average customer could erect a Sears Modern Home in approximately 90 days, weather permitting of course.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 29-30.

⁴⁸ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 13.

CHAPTER IV SOLVING THE MAIL-ORDER MYSTERY

Sears can't tell you that you've got a Sears house. *You've got to tell us.*
Former Sears archivist Lenore Swoiskin.

Identification 101: Cracking the Mail-order Case

Of the approximately 75,000 Sears houses assumed to have been built nationwide, only five percent have been discovered to date.¹ This fact presents historians and researchers with the daunting task of proving the authenticity of more than 71,000 unknown Sears homes. The gradual identification of these homes will establish a better understanding of the contribution of Sears' Modern Homes Program to early-20th century American residential architecture. The identification process also will result in an increased appreciation for the rarity of genuine mail-order homes, help promote their local and national importance, and create a standard for authentication. The process also will reveal the specific locations of Sears houses throughout the different regions of the country. This information would be especially useful to create a master list of genuine Sears houses, as well as to determine which models were the most popular and where the highest concentrations of homes are located. Such a list also would be a useful tool to help determine how many Sears homes still exist and how many have been demolished.

¹ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 1.

In the case of demolished examples, information provided in such a comprehensive database could very well be the only documentation that the homes were ever built.

To assist in this effort of documenting and authenticating Sears mail-order catalog houses, there are three generally recognized methods of investigation that can be used.

These methods are:

- (1) Examining exterior stylistic and architectural details;
- (2) Examining the interior structure, room layout, and decorative elements; and
- (3) Conducting historic research.

Each method of documentation is addressed separately in this thesis, with detailed guidelines provided for each. It is important to realize from the onset that each method has the potential to reveal many clues that will assist in the authentication process, or perhaps provide only limited information at best. It also is recommended that all three methods be undertaken prior to making any formal conclusions about whether a specific property is a mail-order home. By doing so, an accurate and thorough determination can then be made, one that is based on all known facts and evidence about the history and appearance of a given property rather than being based simply on speculation or assumption.

Exterior Examination

When conducting an architectural survey, a building is examined and categorized by each of its individual components and details. Typically, a building is read from the

ground up, describing the type, quantity, location, and materials of each of its parts, ranging from the foundation, windows and doors, to the decorative ornament and roof line. This same approach to reading a building can be applied when searching for genuine examples of mail-order catalog homes.

Mail-order catalog houses, despite their company of origin, are remarkably similar. This similarity - seen in not only form and style, but also in the use of materials and decorative detail - is a reflection of the willingness of early-20th century mail-order companies to continuously borrow ideas from one another. As stated in Chapter II, mail-order architecture was not a revolutionary movement that created new building forms or styles. Rather, the mail-order architecture phenomenon was based upon the established and popular architectural trends of the era, while emphasizing the financial and personal individuality of its consumers. Yet it is this emphasis on individuality that allowed mail-order architecture to become personalized, both in the specific offerings of each of the competing firms, as well as by the eager market of potential home buyers attracted to the image of a modern home that reflected their needs and tastes.

Residential examples of early-20th century architecture, whether locally stick built or shipped as a kit by Sears or any of its competitors, are comprised of the same basic elements. Both mail-order kit houses and stick built homes contain foundations and roofs, windows and doors, and such decoration as porches, dormers, or brackets. Through careful observation, one can learn to identify specific stylistic and architectural details that are unusual, different, and may even suggest mail-order origins. The architectural elements identified in this study are merely suggestions of specific building

components that are unusual enough to at least warrant closer examination during an architectural survey or when attempting to identify genuine mail-order houses.

However, data gleaned from analyzing these particular elements would not be sufficient documentation to prove or disprove the mail-order origins of a building. This is due to the fact that the elements addressed here are not unique to Sears alone and were just as commonly used and borrowed throughout the same period by other mail-order firms and local builders, whether as part of house kits or stick built homes. The descriptions and images that are presented suggest popular characteristics of the period. The building elements are separated into five categories: (1) building materials; (2) porches; (3) fenestration; (4) roof lines; and (5) decorative ornament. The featured details were compiled from several sources: a personal familiarity with building forms, styles, and decoration of the period; personal observation of reproduction mail-order catalogs and advertisements for Sears houses; and observations made by other Sears house researchers, as cited. Figures of various Sears models are included in each category to illustrate specific descriptions and building elements.

Building Materials

Mail-order catalog houses, including those distributed and sold by Sears, Roebuck & Company, were built with a variety of building materials. Depending on the item, these materials were obtained either as part of the kit or purchased separately from local suppliers, or possibly even a combination of these two methods. Homes could be of

frame, brick, or concrete block construction, and such materials as clapboard siding, stucco, or wood shingles often served as exterior wall treatment. All of these same materials, however, were readily available during the early-20th century and just as commonly obtained from other mail-order home suppliers, as well as used in the construction of stick built houses. An interesting factor to consider is whether the use or location of specific building materials on a house is indicative of possible mail-order origins.

In comparison to either frame or brick, concrete block construction for an entire house is considerably more unusual. Sears offered several concrete block models, which represented only a marginal portion of its designs. Since not included with the price of the house kits, concrete block could be either purchased locally or manufactured by the homeowner or builder on-site. Depending on the locality, concrete block foundations may be considered quite rare if most of the other homes in the area have brick or stone foundations. Concrete block did not require as much skill as working with natural material such as stone.² Yet regardless of the types and placement of building materials used, materials alone are not a sufficient method by which to identify mail-order houses.

Porches

Another element to consider is the decorative attention given to the entrance porch on the main elevation. Two types of entrance porches are most common. The first can be

² Rosemary Thornton, "Sears Modern Homes Part 3: How to Spot and Identify Catalog Houses;" *The Old House Web*; available from <http://www.oldhouseweb.net/stories/Detailed/707.shtml>; Internet; accessed 13 January 2003.

classified as a small entrance porch or covered stoop, located in the center of the elevation or on either the left or right side of the front facade. This entry type can be as simple as being topped with a hooded roof with or without decorative brackets, or more elaborate with flanking full-length columns. A popular example of a small central entry porch can be found in Sears' Crescent model (Figure 7). The Crescent features a central opening flanked by a pair of rounded full-height columns topped with a broken pediment with prominent gabled returns. A similar variation is the Rodessa, which incorporates pairs of squared full-length columns topped with an angular gabled pediment (Figure 8).

The second type of predominant entrance porch is larger, extending up to the full width of the front of the house. This type can be found in three forms: (1) as a typical porch projection off the main elevation, (2) as a projection that is distinctly separate, protrudes outward from the facade, and with a roof line that mimics the main roof of the house, or (3) as a unified element within the slope of the main roof line. These three basic porch forms are illustrated in the Winona, Clyde, and Westly models respectively (Figures 9-11). To decorate these porch forms, Sears designed several variations that differed in the quantity, type, and degree of ornamentation of the porch supports. A popular combination used by Sears included single or paired wood post supports on top of masonry piers. The size of the posts and piers varied between squared or flared, with the surfaces either smooth with a plain front or textured with paneling or applied ornament.

A simple example of a porch treatment can be found in the Wellington model (Figure 12). Although this model does not feature the typical ornamental wood posts, it



Figure 7: Typical example of a small, central entrance porch accented by rounded columns and a broken pedimented gable; Illustration of the Crescent model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 95.

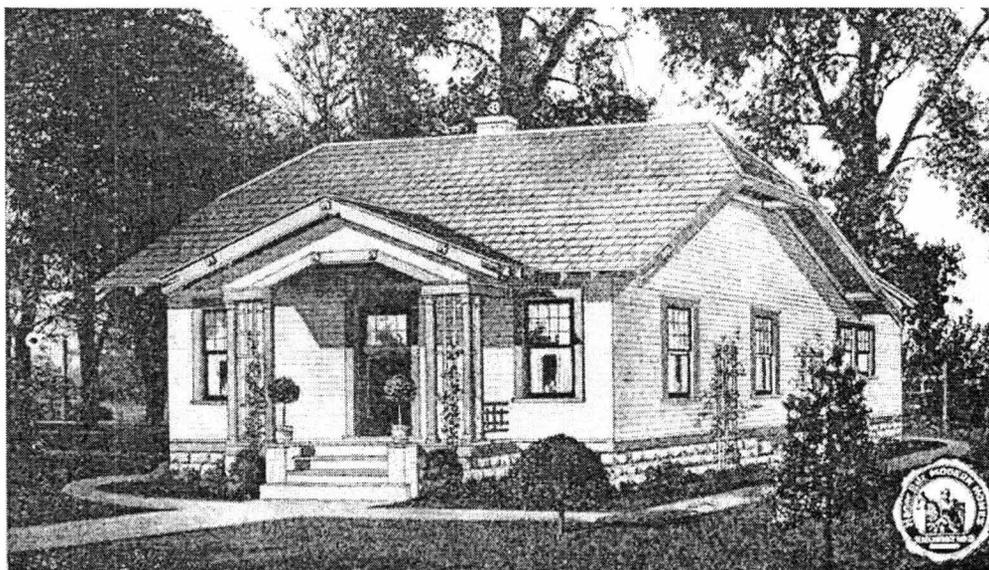


Figure 8: Another example of a small, central entrance porch, instead adorned with squared columns and an angular pedimented gable; Illustration of the Rodessa model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 302.



Figure 9: Example of a larger, full-width entrance porch that projects off the main elevation; Illustration of the Winona model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 68.

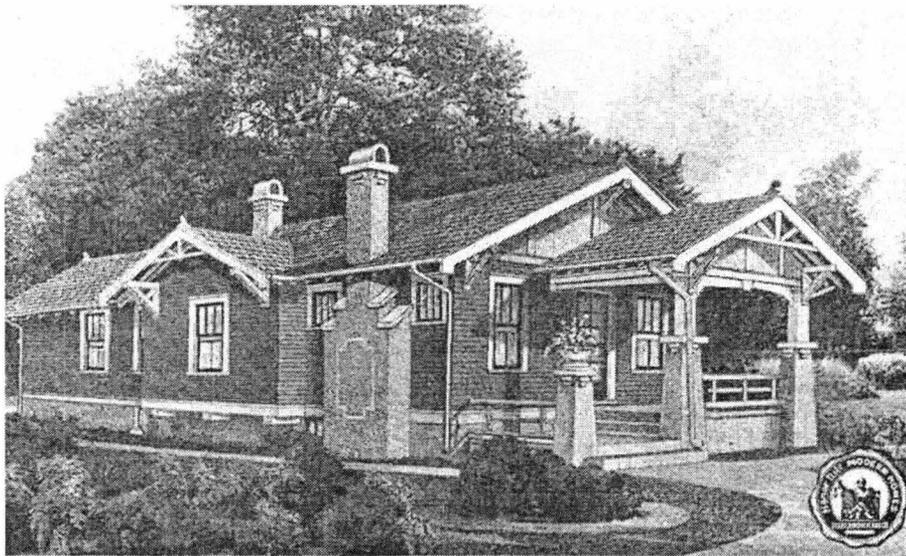


Figure 10: Example of a 3/4-width entrance porch that projects outward from the main elevation and has a roof line and detailing that mirror the main roof of the house; Illustration of the Clyde model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 48.

illustrates the large masonry piers supporting a projecting gable that matches the main roof line of the house. More common are porch examples with both wood posts and masonry piers. While the Clyde model features single, tapered, plain wood posts atop squared piers (see Figure 10), the Cornell model has pairs of squared plain posts on masonry piers (Figure 13). These latter two examples illustrate another unusual porch feature, which is the presence of either end or center piers without any supporting columns above. Whether to allow room for plants or an unobstructed view, these plain piers stand out visually and are worth noting. In contrast to the plain post treatment, the Fullerton model (Figure 14) illustrates the use of single squared wood posts with a raised panel surface atop slightly flared masonry piers.

Another variation of the posts and piers combination, and which can be considered one of Sears' most unusual porch treatments, is found in the Vallonia and Americus models (Figures 15 and 16). These porches boast pairs of small, squared plain wood posts atop large flared masonry piers. Smaller rectangular two- by two-inch wood pieces intersect and project from the top half of the posts, while a small wood block is applied to the outside surface of the posts. The trademark feature of this variation are the small pieces of flared wood projecting from the tops of the posts and abutting the porch roof line. The same treatment also can be found on the Westly model (see Figure 11), with squared masonry piers substituted for the flared piers. The Avalon model (Figure 17) features a modified version of this stick work motif, with pairs of undersized squared wood posts atop large flared masonry piers. Sears only offered this stick work column



Figure 13: Example of a front entrance porch supported by pairs of squared plain posts resting on masonry piers. Also note the empty central pier without any columns; Illustration of the Cornell model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 292.



Figure 14: Example of a front entrance porch with single squared wood posts with raised panels and resting atop slightly flared masonry piers. Also note the empty and shorter middle pier; Illustration of the Fullerton model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 291.

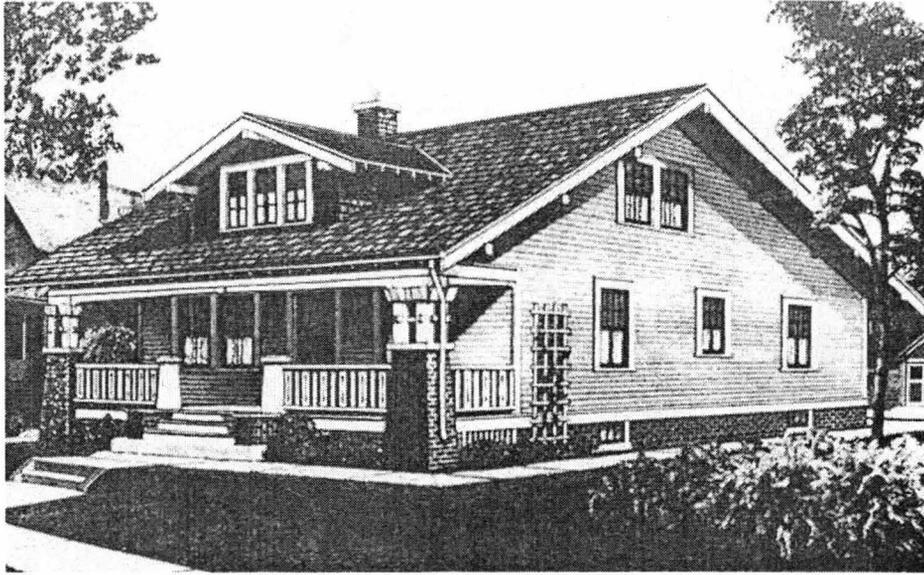


Figure 15: Example of an unusual porch support treatment consisting of pairs of small squared posts atop large flared masonry piers. The posts are adorned with smaller rectangular wood pieces in their upper half, and are topped with small pieces of flared, projecting wood. Also note the two empty central wood piers; Illustration of the Vallonia model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 131.

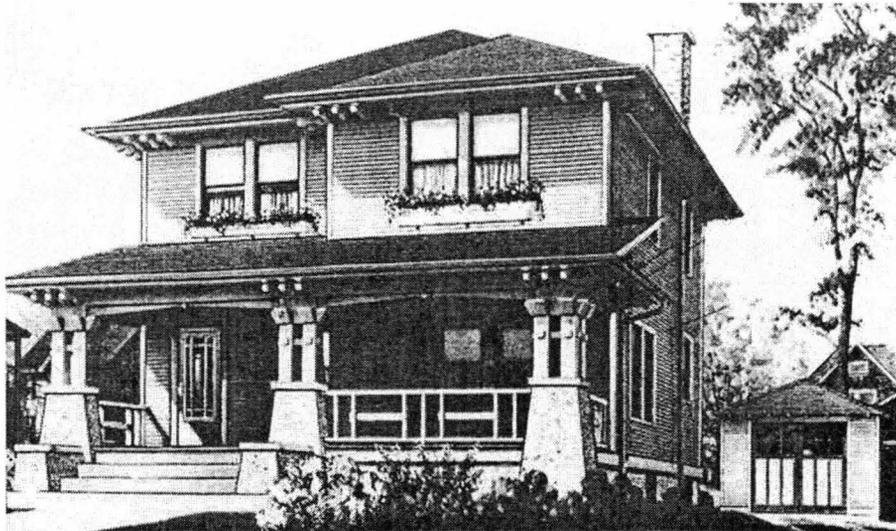


Figure 16: The same stick work porch treatment adorns this American foursquare. Note that all three flared masonry piers are topped with posts and decorative stick work; Illustration of the Americus model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 289.

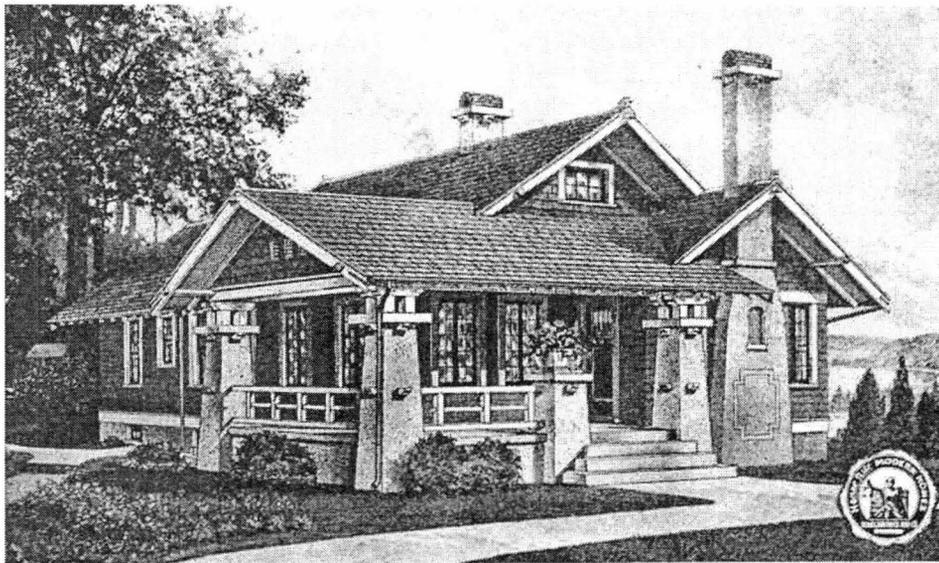


Figure 17: A third version of the stick work porch decoration, featuring pairs of undersized squared posts atop massive flared masonry piers. Note the central empty pier along the front elevation; Illustration of the Avalon model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 71.

ornament in about two dozen of its approximately 450 designs that were available.³

Additional characteristics of porches that are worthy of note include: keystone-like center blocks and slightly arched bays along the front and sides of the porch (Figure 18); “floating” half-timbering stick work at the apex of the porch gable (Figure 19); half-timbering exterior wall treatment in the gable (Figure 20); sunburst pattern stick work in the gable (Figure 21); u-shaped notches at the ends of the bargeboards (Figure 22); applied wood squares along the bargeboards (Figure 23); and board and batten-type vertical siding with diamond-shaped cutouts along the top portion of the siding (Figure 24). Again, the presence of any of these porch configurations, materials, or details is not sufficient proof in itself to suggest a building has Sears mail-order origins.

Fenestration

Sears houses, as with mail-order and stick built homes in general, contain a variety of types of windows and doors. Double-hung sash wood windows with one-over-one light glazing or multi-light glazing, as well as decorative glazing patterns, stained glass, casement windows, and fixed sash, all were common. Similarly, doors ranged from plain with minimal ornament and glazing, to elaborate doors with panels or glazing and sidelights. Almost as varied was the fenestration, or the arrangement of the doors and windows on the building facades. Windows, for instance, could be located singly, in pairs, in ribbons, or within projecting bays. A more unusual arrangement of a two-story

³ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, Figure 74 (located between pages 74 and 75).



Figure 18: This porch features keystone-like center blocks and slightly arched bays along its front and sides. Also note the stick work motif porch columns and empty central pier; Illustration of the Woodland model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 281.



Figure 19: This porch example features "floating" half-timbering stick work at the apex of its gable, as well as a stucco and frame half-timbering exterior treatment. Also note the two empty central piers; Illustration of the Elsmore model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 251.

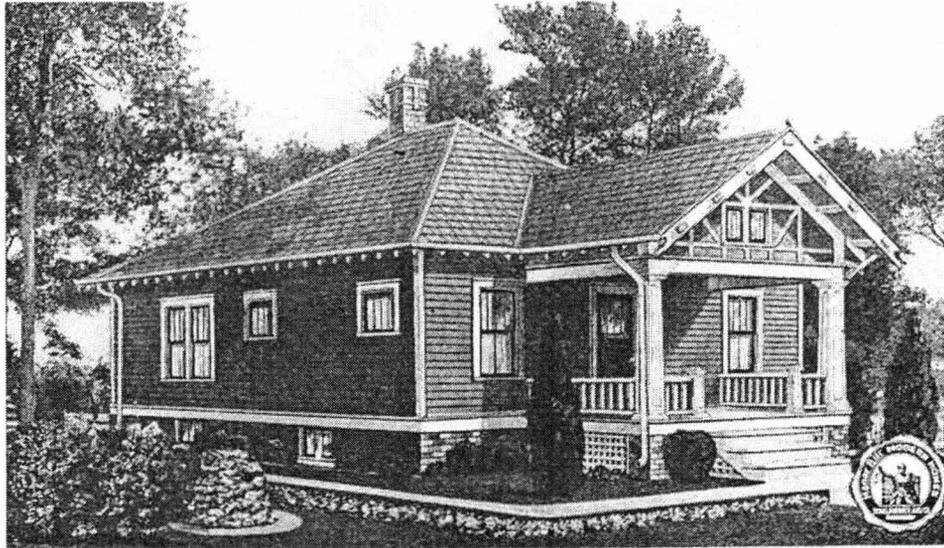


Figure 20: This porch features frame half-timbering in its projecting gable; Illustration of the Josephine model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 258.

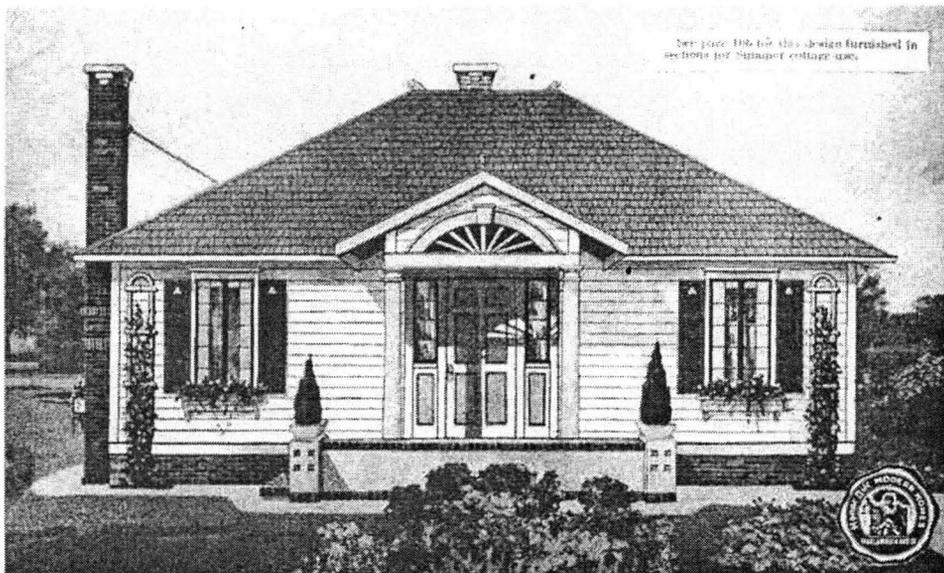


Figure 21: This central porch is adorned with a sunburst pattern stick work in its gable; Illustration of the Mt. Vernon model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 256.

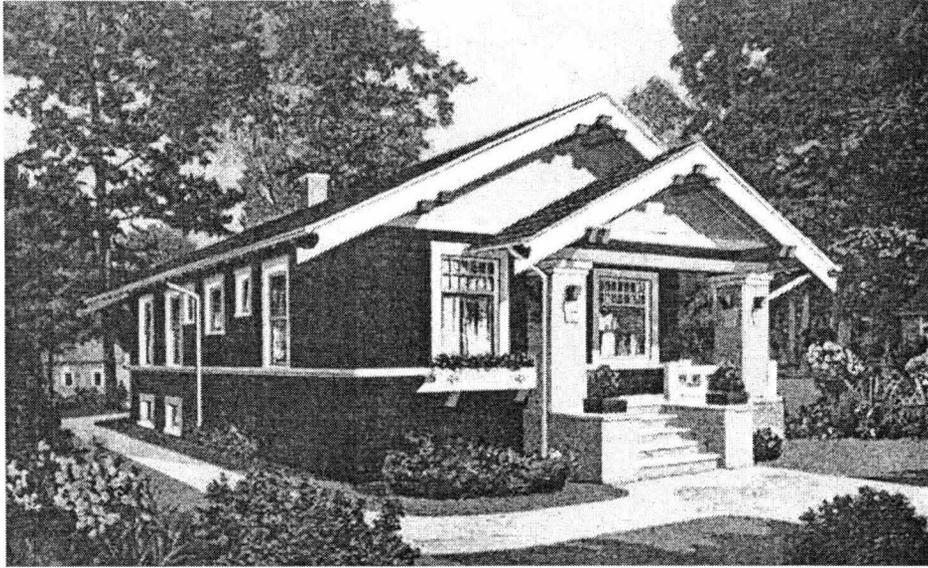


Figure 22: The ends of the gabled bargeboards of both the porch and main roof line are adorned with u-shaped notches; Illustration of the Argyle model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 45.

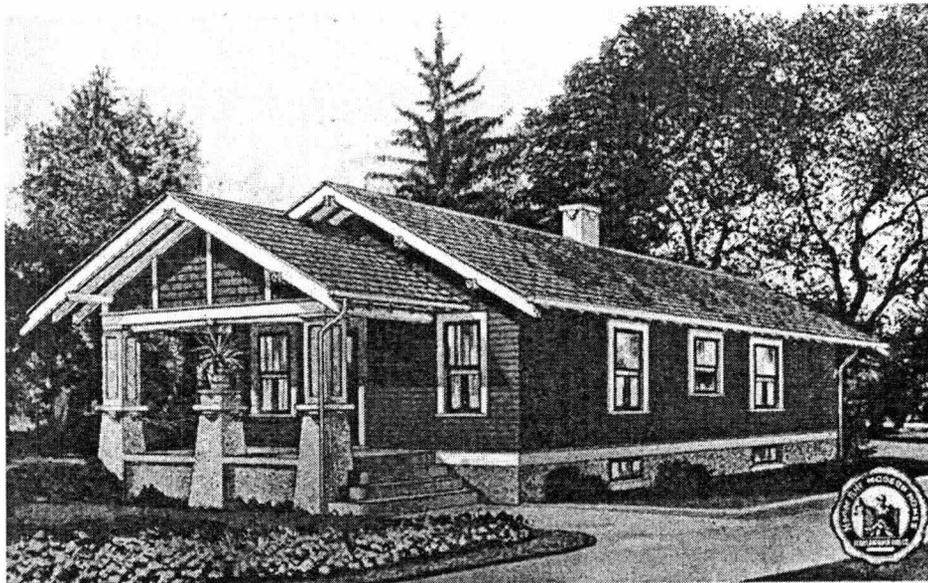


Figure 23: The gabled bargeboards of both this porch and the main roof line are decorated with applied wood squares; Illustration of the Olivia model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 49.

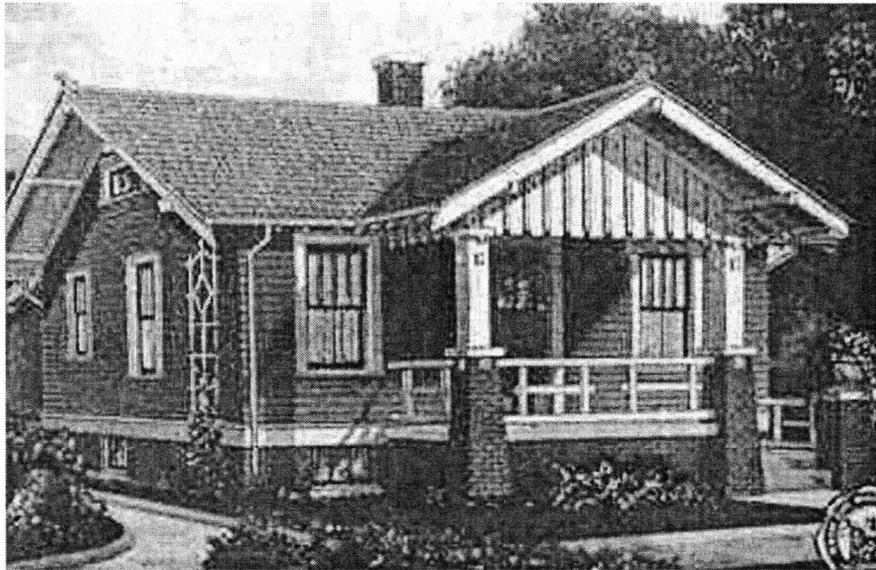


Figure 24: The gabled pediment of this central porch is adorned with board and batten-type vertical siding. Diamond-shaped cutouts pierce the top portion of the siding and mimic the outline of the gable roof; Illustration of the Dundee model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 92.

projecting bay is seen in Sears' Whitehall model (Figure 25). When examining the fenestration, one should pay close attention to the placement of the window and door openings, especially as compared to the catalog advertisements and illustrations. In many cases, such openings will correspond or suggest that original openings have been concealed or removed over time.

According to the Sears Archives, the Norwood Sash and Door Manufacturing Company in Norwood, Ohio, served as the central location for the materials for Sears' Modern Homes Program.⁴ This plant manufactured and supplied all of the doors and windows for the house kits, and likely prepared all of the flooring and trim as well. The products at the Norwood plant were sized according to the specifications established by Sears.

To determine if Sears offered millwork products and other building materials of distinctly different sizes than those readily available from other manufacturers, research for this thesis consulted two sources that provided specific dimensions and measurements. These included: (1) the 1910 *Our Special Catalog for Home Builders*, reprinted by Dover Publications in 1990 as *Sears, Roebuck Home Builder's Catalog – The Complete Illustrated 1910 Edition* and (2) an undated, circa-1931 *Honor Bilt Building Materials* specialty catalog.⁵ Both catalogs illustrated a range of available products from double-hung window sash, doors, and frames to moldings and hardware.

⁴ Dennis Preisler, Corporate Historian at the Sears Archives, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Telephone interview by author, 25 February 2003. All information in this paragraph about the Norwood, Ohio, plant was obtained in this telephone conversation.

⁵ Sears, Roebuck & Company, *Honor Bilt Building Materials* catalog, circa 1931. The only reference to a date for this catalog was found at the bottom of the enclosed order form, which stated that the form was revised on March 12, 1931. Therefore, this catalog dates to at least 1931, possibly even later.

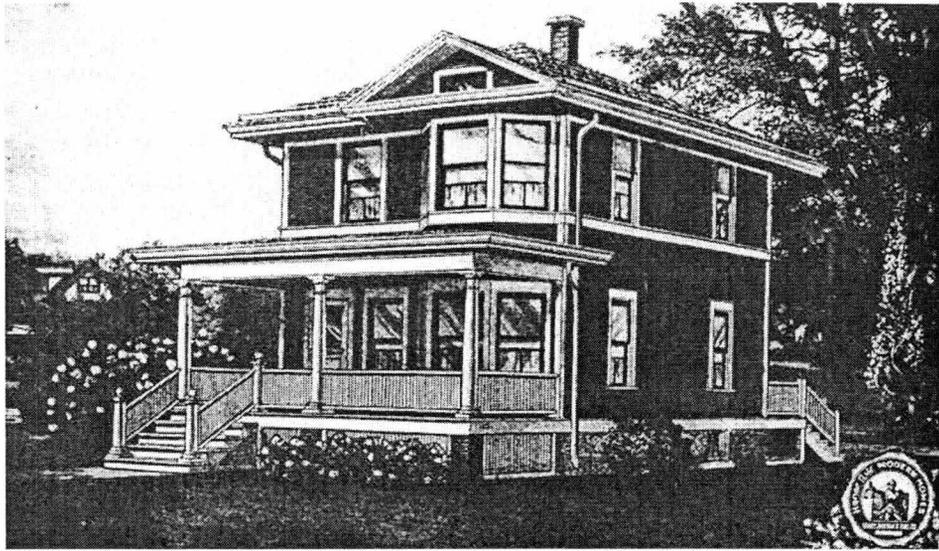


Figure 25: This home features a two-story projecting bay window on its front elevation; Illustration of the Whitehall model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 278.

The *Honor Bilt Building Materials* catalog also featured built-in cabinets, bookcases, and shelves. Every product was detailed with exact dimensions and pricing information.

Of particular interest is the fact that Sears guaranteed all its millwork products to be “exactly as represented” in its advertisements.⁶ Sears also claimed that “the sizes listed... are standard sizes. They are the same sizes handled by all of the leading manufacturers in the country.”⁷ An examination of general builders’ journals of the period further validated that Sears offered products with standard, comparable dimensions.⁸ Therefore, Sears did not sell building components sized and measured to fit only their house kits specifically. The building materials and products available from Sears could be used anywhere in any type of building, including a genuine Sears kit house or a stick built home. Thus, in the examination of such features as fenestration and millwork, the placement, type, and sizing is not enough to prove that a building is a mail-order house.

Roof Lines

The roofs of Sears houses, as was common for other mail-order homes and also stick built homes, were available in a variety of shapes, including side gable, gable-front, cross-gable, pyramidal, and gambrel. Many bungalows and foursquares of the period,

⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The Foster-Munger Company of Chicago, Illinois, *Official Price List for Doors, Blinds, Glazed Sash, Mouldings*, 1905. The products advertised in this sales brochure were of comparable size to those featured in the two Sears building materials catalogs that were examined during research for this thesis.

regardless of origin, feature exposed rafter tails along the eaves. Yet Sears also boasts some more unusual roof detailing, including the clipped-gable roof shape as seen in the Rodessa model (see Figure 8). Roof slope is also worth noting, as sometimes the pitch is much steeper in the rear than in the front as seen in the Vallonia model (see Figure 15). The opposite is true for the Sunbeam, in which the roof pitch is considerably steeper in the front than in the rear (Figure 26). Several Sears models feature peculiar ornamentation along the roof ridge itself. In the Osborn model (Figure 27), a flared peak juts above the apex of both the porch gable and the main gable roof line. The Marina model (Figure 28) includes flared notches that stand atop each of the gable ends, as well as at the apex of the porch gable.

Chimneys are another important decorative element. Many Sears models have a massive brick (or stone, though not as common) standing exterior end chimney that extends from the ground straight through the roof line of the dwelling. Some chimneys are simply plain-surfaced, as in the Kilbourne model (Figure 29). Other examples boast ornamental brickwork patterns and decorative stepped stacks at the base, as in the Clyde (see Figure 10) and Barrington models (Figure 30). Still some models include prominent chimneys adorned with a decorative built-in flowerbox opening, such as in the Mt. Vernon (see Figure 21) and Sunbeam models (see Figure 26). At least one model, the Strathmore (Figure 31), features a decorative S-shaped motif in the center of the large masonry chimney on the front elevation. It is unknown whether this decorative accent simply reflects the Tudor-styling of this particular house design or if this marking is a subtle tribute to its company of origin. Regardless of its location along either the interior

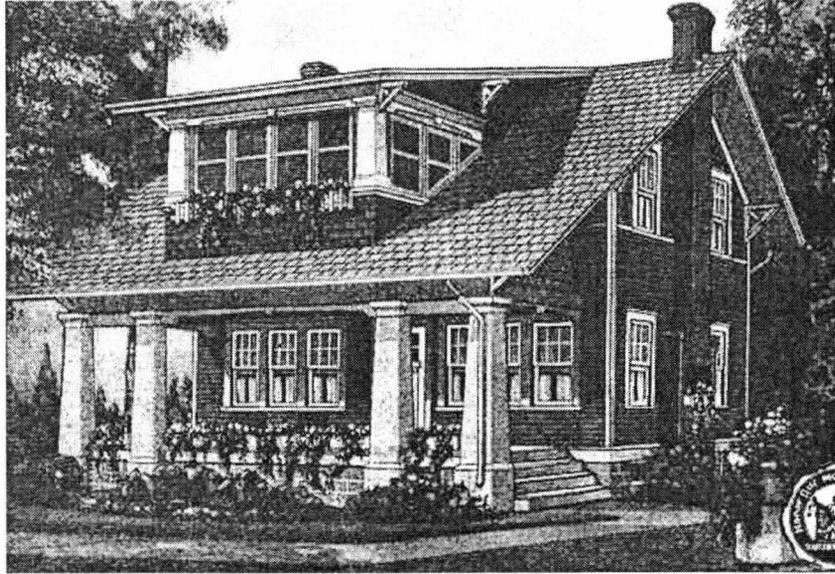


Figure 26: This example shows a front roof slope considerably deeper than that of the rear slope; Illustration of the Sunbeam model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 115.



Figure 27: This unusual example features a flared peak at the ridge of both the porch gable and the main roof line of the house. Note also the u-shaped ends of the bargeboards; Illustration of the Osborn model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 203.



Figure 28: In addition to frame half-timbering in the porch gable, this example features flared notches at the apex of both the porch and main roof lines. Note also the applied square blocks along the bargeboards of the porch gable and roof dormer; Illustration of the Marina model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 129.

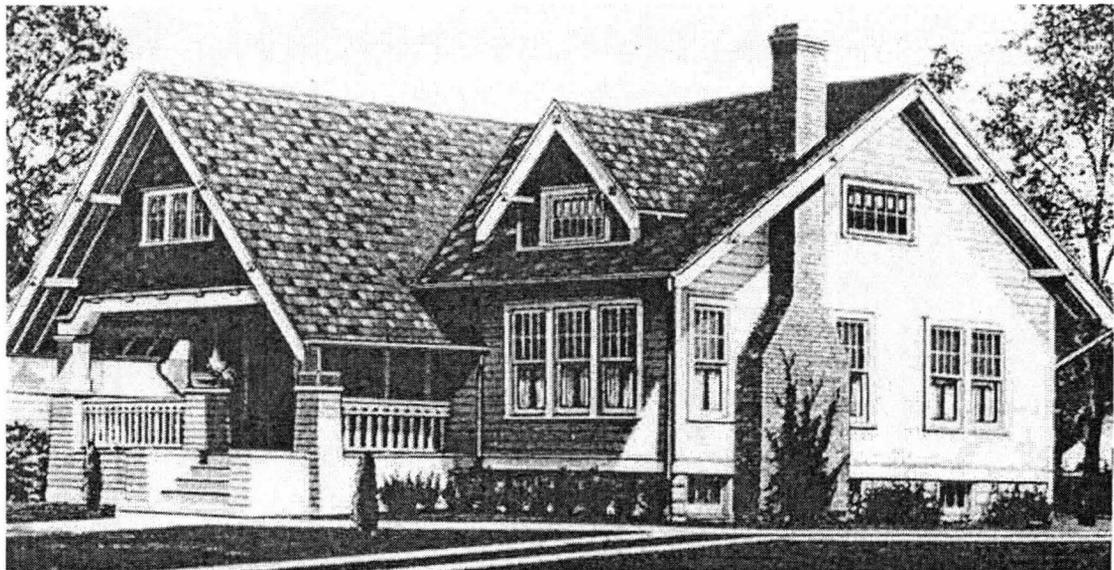


Figure 29: This home features a plain-surfaced standing exterior end chimney, as well as applied square blocks along its bargeboards; Illustration of the Kilbourne model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 211.

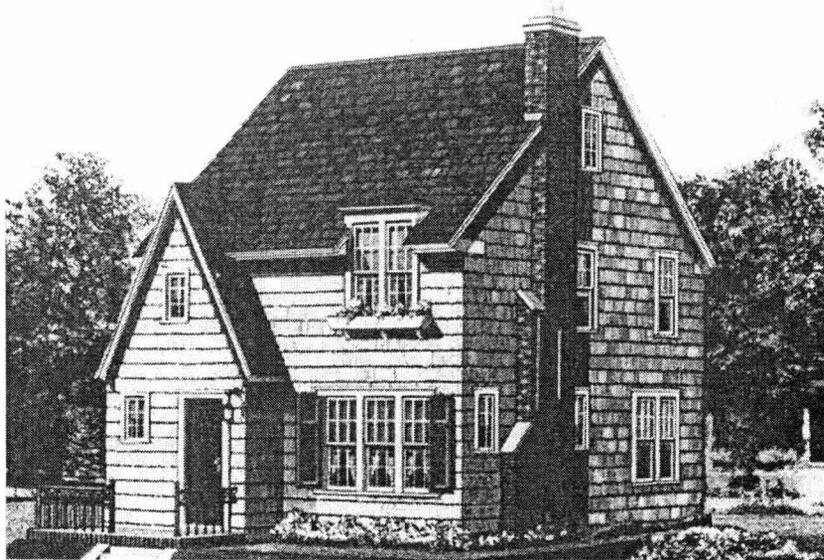


Figure 30: The end chimney of this home is adorned with decorative stepped stacks at the base and along the shaft; Illustration of the Barrington model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 154.

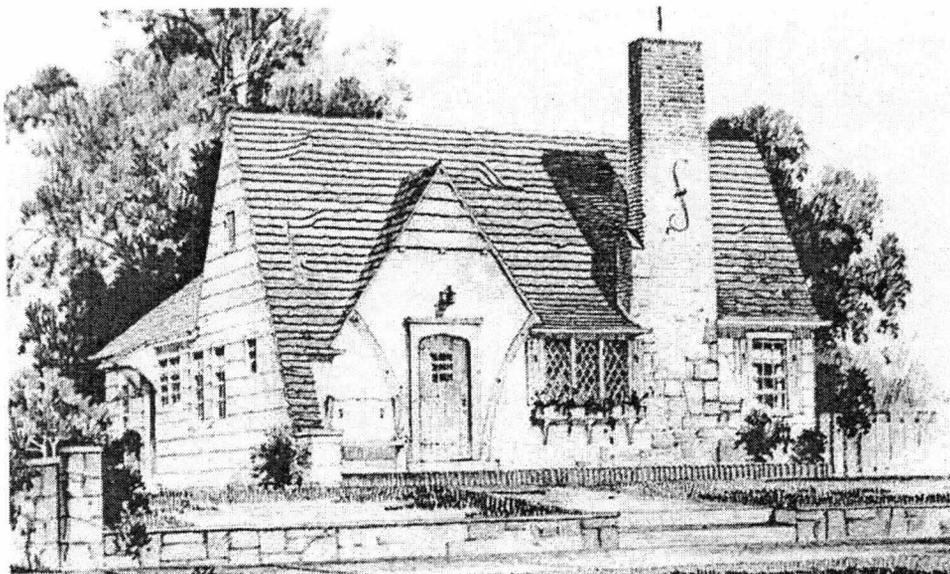


Figure 31: A massive chimney dominates the front elevation of this Tudor-Revival home. Note the S-shaped motif in the center of the chimney; Illustration of the Strathmore model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 159.

or exterior ridge of the roof, chimney placement is likely one of the few architectural features that will not have been altered over time, even during the most drastic of remodeling efforts.⁹ Yet roof shape and decorative treatment do not provide sufficient evidence alone to identify mail-order houses.

Decorative Ornament

Sears homes also contain other decorative ornament that can be found in various locations throughout the exterior. Many models, including the Sunbeam, have decorative flower boxes along the front porch or directly below window openings (see Figure 26). Other models advertised garden trellises, including the Mt. Vernon (see Figure 21) and Homewood (Figure 32). These latter two examples, as well as many of the other Colonial styles offered by Sears, illustrate another decorative element of non-functional shutters adorned in their upper half with cut-out shapes such as clovers and diamonds.

Wood bracketing, whether accenting the main roof line, front porch, or dormers, is another significant exterior detail. Both the Americus and Argyle models feature simple brackets in groups of three along both the front porch and the main roof line (see Figures 16 and 22). Another type of bracket is the five-piece bracket or knee brace. While three- and four-piece brackets are more common, the five-piece version is more distinctive and unusual. Sears used the five-part bracket, as did its competitors Wardway Homes and Gordon-Van Tine, and possibly even local builders who borrowed the detail

⁹ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 71.



Figure 32: Garden trellises were considered a standard feature of this home; Illustration of the Homewood model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 136.

in their designs. Yet the element is unusual enough that it suggests mail-order origins.¹⁰ Several Sears examples contain the five-piece bracket, including the Carlin (Figure 33) and Elsmore (see Figure 19).

In summary thus far, it should be emphasized again that none of the building elements described in the previous discussion can serve alone as adequate evidence during the process of authenticating mail-order architecture. All of the characteristics highlighted were merely typical building elements and features that were common during the early-20th century period and not used exclusively by Sears. Yet recognizing such popular details can still prove useful to the authentication process. Noticing particular exterior architectural and stylistic details, or their lack thereof, is valuable documentary evidence when it is combined with findings obtained during a subsequent interior examination and historic research.

Interior Examination

A thorough examination of a building's interior also can reveal valuable information that can be used to determine whether or not it is a genuine example of a Sears mail-order catalog home. The interior investigation can be divided into three phases: (1) examining the structural framing; (2) analyzing the floor plan; and (3) searching for specific interior decorative features. Each phase of the examination is addressed separately with guidelines provided for each.

¹⁰ Ibid., 73-4.



Figure 33: The five-piece bracket, also called a knee brace, adorns the eaves of both the gabled dormer and main roof line of this home. Also note the deep front roof slope as compared to the rear slope; Illustration of the Carlin model by Sears, as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 130.

Structural Framing

As mentioned in Chapter III, all Sears kit houses were comprised of labeled parts that corresponded precisely to the construction drawings and detailed written instructions. The labeling, which consisted of a stamped combination of a letter followed by several numbers, could be found either on the actual ends or near the ends of structural members in the basement and attic, as well on certain types of millwork throughout the house (Figure 34).¹¹ The stamps were typically in dark blue or black ink, though Sears used red ink after 1934.¹² Examples of structural pieces that would contain these stamped markings include the sill plate, roof rafters, joists, and floor boards. Pieces of original millwork, such as molding, trim, flooring, doors, and windows, also could contain the stamped markings on the back side or even a label from the Norwood Sash and Door Manufacturing Company.¹³ Although not structural elements, hardware and bathroom fixtures would also contain an identifiable Sears marking,¹⁴ most likely the name of the company as opposed to a combination letter and number as on the framing lumber.

¹¹ Ibid., 71.

¹² Leslie Mann, "Charm Included – Decades Later, Historic Kit Homes Convey a Sense of Stability," *The Chicago Tribune*; 10 September 2000, sec. 13, p. 8. Interestingly, according to Sears house historian Rebecca Hunter, Montgomery Wards also developed a system of labeling its building pieces. Wards used blue carpenter's chalk to write the part numbers by hand on each piece, then stamped on the name of each part. Aladdin also used blue carpenter's chalk to mark both the part numbers and wood sizes.

¹³ H. Ward Jandl and Katherine Cole Stevenson, "Special Delivery – Houses by Sears," *Timeline*, February/March 1989, 13.

¹⁴ Ibid.

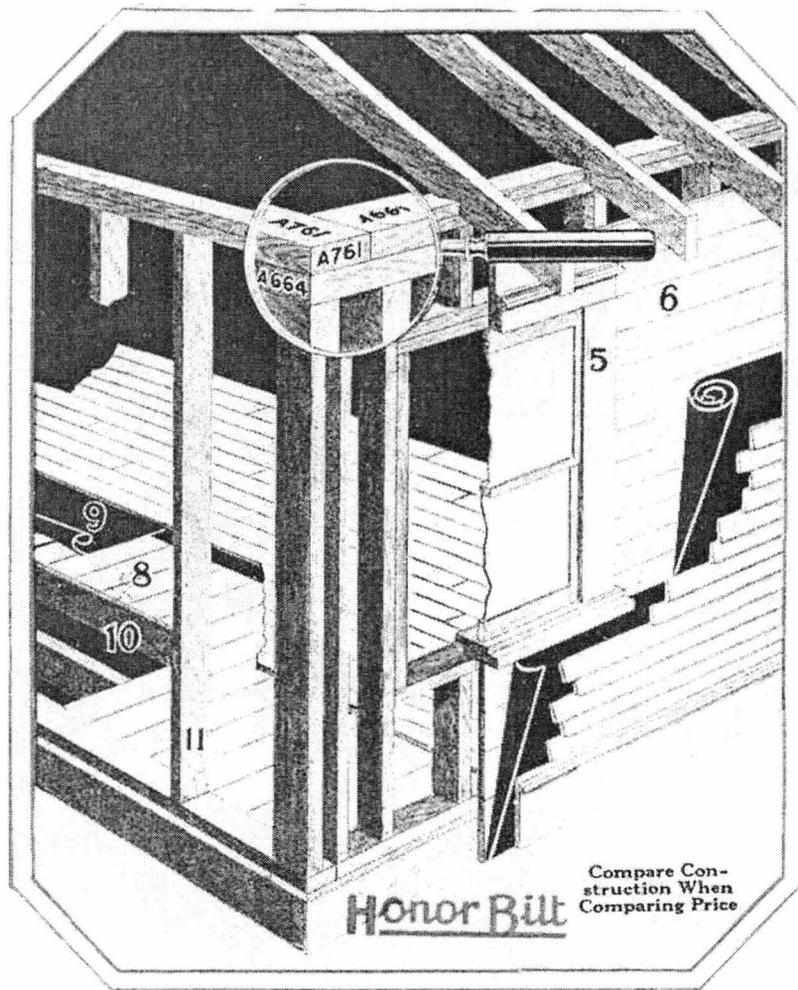


Figure 34: An illustration of the type of stampings Sears used to label each piece of lumber in its house kits. The markings consisted of a letter followed by several numerical digits. Each combination corresponded precisely to the detailed instruction manual; Illustration as appears in Dover Publication's *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 House Catalog – An Unabridged Reprint*, page 13.

Floor Plan

An analysis of the existing floor plan of the house is the next step in the interior investigation process. One first should examine the existing layout and circulation pattern of the rooms and make comparisons to catalog advertisements and illustrations. One should note and compare the location and functions of rooms, as well as the placement of walls, doors, and windows. It is also recommended to take general measurements of the rooms since many of the floor plans depicted in the catalogs included referential dimensions.

It is important to realize, however, that prospective buyers and builders had the option to completely reverse most of the available floor plans or request modifications to the depicted layouts. Such modifications could include changing the location of the stairs, front entrance, or room function or circulation. Thus, some floor plans as they exist today may match the catalog descriptions exactly, be only slightly modified, or be drastically different. As testament to the customers' willingness to take advantage of the opportunity to personalize Sears' house designs, as many as one-half of the Sears homes built likely were customized to some extent.¹⁵

It should also be stressed that the floor plans depicted in mail-order catalogs were not exclusive to the company publishing the catalog. As with the exterior architectural and stylistic treatments, the interior floor plans represented the common trends of the period in terms of room function, layout, and sizing. The coincidence of a floor plan matching one illustrated in a mail-order catalog does not prove that the home is of mail-

¹⁵ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 98.

order origins. The similarity should be noted and considered once all the data is collected from all three methods of the documentation process.

Decorative Features

The final phase of the interior examination involves the identification of specific decorative features that were common during the period and often used and promoted by Sears and other companies in their house designs. The extent to which these items were available locally, as well as nationally via the mail-order companies, remains unknown. Examples of such decorative elements consist of original built-in pieces such as bookcases, china cabinets, kitchen cupboards, or breakfast alcoves. To appeal to the modern consumer and emphasize convenience, Sears often incorporated a built-in ironing board on a kitchen wall and created built-in wall nooks specially sized for a telephone.

In addition to house kits, Sears also advertised and sold separately a variety of decorative elements ranging from light and plumbing fixtures to door hinges and other decorative hardware. Illustrations, dimensions, and descriptions of such extras are easily referenced in reproductions of Sears house and specialty catalogs. One should become familiar with the different styles of such treatments and fixtures Sears offered in order to compare them to period pieces in existing homes.

Sears house catalogs also promoted the use of a new wall finishing material known as Goodwall Sheet Plaster. Advertised as a more modern alternative to traditional plaster and lath, the sheet plaster was a predecessor to gypsum board. The 1926 Sears

homes catalog described the product as “a fire resisting gypsum rock composition plaster of even thickness between two sheets of heavy cardboard.”¹⁶ Available in sheets “in convenient sizes,” the product was applied directly to the wall studs and topped first with a coat of hard plaster and then a top coat plaster finish.¹⁷ Listed as an option for many house kits, it is unknown if Goodwall Sheet Plaster could also be purchased in Sears’ specialty building materials catalogs or if this product was exclusively attributed to Sears. Regardless, its presence would suggest a Sears mail-order catalog home. In keeping with Sears’ standard of labeling and marking its products, it can be assumed that the sheets were labeled in some way, likely on the back with some type of Sears stamping or logo.

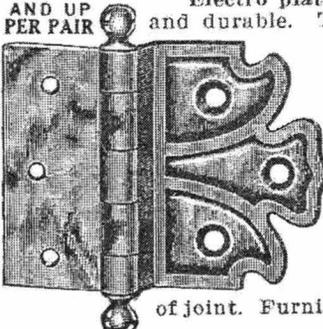
Another decorative item used widely by Sears and other mail-order house companies was a scalloped door hinge mounted onto the surface of the door (Figure 35).¹⁸ Introduced into Sears house kits in the 1910s and early-1920s, these hinges were easier to install than the typical hinge that was mortised into the door frame. Another popular hinge type of the period was the half mortise hinge, in which half of the hinge mounts onto the door surface and the other half is mortised into the side of the door frame. However, the presence of any of the decorative elements presented in this section does not substantiate that a building is an example of a mail-order house. The presence or lack of any of these details should be considered upon the completion of all three phases of the authentication process.

¹⁶ Dover Publications, *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 Catalog – An Unabridged Reprint* (Philadelphia: The Athenaeum of Philadelphia and Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), 109.

¹⁷ Ibid.

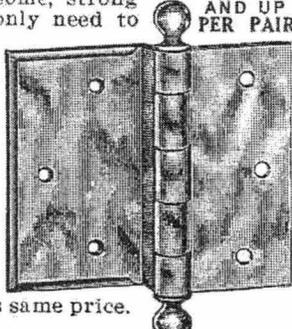
¹⁸ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 72 and Figure 72. The information provided in this paragraph about door hinges, as well as the theory that surface-mounted door hinges are indicative of mail-order homes, was first introduced and explained by Thornton.

10c
AND UP
PER PAIR



Ornamental Half Mortise Butts.

Electro plated polished wrought steel. Very handsome, strong and durable. To hang a door with these butts you only need to mortise regular butt part in jamb, set door, wedge to proper height and insert screws in ornamental part. Reversible for right or left hand doors. Sizes, 1½, 2 and 2½-inch, intended for boxes, cabinets, cupboards, etc. Larger sizes for house doors, 3-inch size for 1½-inch doors or thinner, 3½-inch size for 1¾-inch doors and 4-inch size for 1¾-inch doors. Butts have loose pins and are ball tipped. Size given is length of joint. Furnished with screws to match. Both finishes same price.



10c
AND UP
PER PAIR

<p>No. 9P47762 Old Copper Finish.</p> <p>No. 9P47769 Lemon Brass Finish.</p> <p>Size, inches... 1½ 2 2½ 3 3½ 4</p> <p>Weight, ab't... 3 oz. 4 oz. 6 oz. 1 lb. 1½ lbs. 2 lbs.</p> <p>Price, pair.. 10c 15c 18c 21c 24c 29c</p>	<p>No. 9P47752 Old Copper Finish.</p> <p>No. 9P47759 Lemon Brass Finish.</p> <p>Size, inches... 1½ 2 2½ 3 3½ 4</p> <p>Wt., about, lbs. ¼ ¼ ¼ 1 1½ 2</p> <p>Price, per pair. 10c 16c 21c 24c 26c 33c</p>
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Figure 35: This advertisement originally appeared in the 1914 Sears *Building Materials* catalog. The illustration to the left is a sample of the decorative scalloped door hinge commonly used by early-20th century mail-order house companies, including Sears; Illustration as appears in Thornton's *The Houses That Sears Built: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Sears Catalog Homes*, Figure 72 (following page 72).

Historic Research

Conducting historic research is the third method that can be used to authenticate genuine examples of Sears houses. Since there are numerous types of records available that can yield important information, the key is knowing where to look and how to get started. The research methods suggested here are divided into three categories according to where information can be found: (1) the Sears, Roebuck & Company Archives; (2) local municipalities nationwide; and (3) personal collections.

The Sears, Roebuck & Company Archives

The Sears Corporate Archives, headquartered in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, was established in the early-1960s to help preserve the history and corporate identity of Sears.¹⁹ The company's archival function was created in response to inquiries from employees and the general public about Sears merchandise. The archives continues to serve an internal purpose only and is not open to the general public. The collection contains photographs of stores and products, public relations materials, employee publications, corporate press releases and documents, and a mixture of original and xeroxed copies of merchandise catalogs either discovered or donated. The Sears Archives is managed by The History Factory, a company that specializes in researching corporate histories and managing corporate archival collections. The Sears Archives collection actually is stored in The History Factory's Chantilly, Virginia, facility. The

¹⁹ Dennis Preisler, Corporate Historian at the Sears Archives, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Telephone interview by author, 25 February 2003. All information in this section about the Sears Archives and its collection was obtained in this telephone conversation.

History Factory is under contract with Sears to maintain and service its collection, catalog items, and conduct research.

To owners and researchers of Sears houses, however, the Sears Archives is not quite the treasure trove of invaluable resources that one might expect. There are no collections of blueprints for every model Sears offered, there are no inventories of the materials used in each model, there are no names and addresses of every satisfied Modern Homes customer, nor are there manifest lists or shipment records indicating when and where Sears kit houses were delivered. Rather, the collection consists primarily of an assortment of general merchandise catalogs and specialty catalogs. The specialty catalog line focuses on specific categories of merchandise ranging from boys' clothing to building supplies. A sampling of specialty catalog titles within the collection includes: concrete machinery (1917-19 and 1928), building materials and millwork (assorted years between 1907 and 1938), mantels and fireplace furnishings (1915), roofing (1902 and 1907), farm buildings (1918, 1921, and 1924), summer cottages (1928 and 1929), and houses (about 28 catalogs total between 1908 and 1939). It remains unknown exactly how many catalogs Sears issued throughout its history, as product sales dictated which catalogs were reprinted each year and in which catalogs merchandise was advertised.

The archives also maintains a set of the company's annual reports, including editions dating to the period of the Modern Homes Program. Dennis Preisler, the corporate historian, has cross-referenced these reports searching for information pertaining specifically to the origins and success of the program.²⁰ The issues between

²⁰ Dennis Preisler, Corporate Historian at the Sears Archives, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Telephone interview by author, 22 April 2003. All information in this paragraph was obtained during this conversation.

1907 and 1931 are each only one to two pages in length and only provide highlights of corporate assets, liabilities, and capital, among other financial statistics. The first year a more substantial annual report emerged was in 1933, with a descriptive “Message from the President” included as a public relations tool to inspire both employees and investors. The year 1934 marks not only the first time the Modern Homes Program was mentioned in an annual report, but was the first indication that the program was in financial trouble. Although this collection of annual reports does not offer as much insider information as researchers might hope, they do document the financial demise of the Modern Homes Program.

The archives staff is respondent to public inquiries and willing to share general information with interested researchers.²¹ But since the archival collection is closed to the public, Sears created the Sears Modern Homes website to help satisfy public curiosity and provide more specific information about the history and significance of its houses by mail.²² The website features dozens of catalog advertisements and illustrations arranged both chronologically by decade and model name, a question and answer forum, and an on-line registry for owners of Sears homes. The archives staff continually updates the content of the website, and hopes to scan as many images as possible from its catalog collection for Internet viewing. The Sears Modern Homes website is an excellent place to begin researching Sears homes in order to gain a basic understanding of their history and to become familiar with an assortment of different models and designs offered by Sears.

²¹ To contact the staff, the telephone number is (847) 286-9555.

²² The official Sears-sponsored website on the Modern Homes Program is <http://www.searsmodernhomes.com>.

Local Municipalities

Local municipalities across the country are another potential source for finding information about Sears houses. Though each jurisdiction is undoubtedly different in its organization and how files are maintained and kept, there are still several types of sources that are universal. In this phase of conducting research, at least three types of repositories should be consulted – the county courthouse or city hall, the local government record repositories, and the local library or historical society, especially if it contains a local history collection.

The county courthouse or city hall contains all of a given locality's land records, ranging from deeds and plats to mortgage records. Deed records are useful in tracing a chain of title, which is simply a detailed list of all of the current and past owners of a specific property. This record of ownership not only reveals who lived there when, but it can help establish a building's date of construction. This is especially useful when trying to date early-20th century catalog homes and comparing the results to when particular models were available in mail-order catalogs such as those distributed by Sears. Legal plats or surveyed maps may be found for either a specific parcel or an entire subdivision. Plats can also help in the dating process, as well as reveal both property boundaries and the names of previous owners.

Lastly, the courthouse or city hall maintains mortgage records, also known as deeds of trust. Searching for mortgage transactions issued by Sears (or other mail-order companies) is one of the best methods to identify mail-order catalog homes in a given jurisdiction. Yet the luck of discovering a Sears-issued mortgage also comes with a few

stipulations. Not every early-20th century homeowner who purchased a Sears house obtained a mortgage directly from Sears. Despite the company's extremely generous financing options, there still were other competitors, such as local banks and building and loan associations. In the 1920s, approximately one-half of potential owners of Sears homes secured their mortgages through the company's easy payment plan.²³ Secondly, Sears only offered mortgages from 1911 to 1933,²⁴ even though it entered the houses-by-mail market three years earlier in 1908 and officially closed in 1940. Though Sears mortgages do not exist before or after this 1911 to 1933 period, mortgage releases issued by Sears and recorded after 1933 when the loan balance was paid in full may be found.²⁵

To locate Sears mortgages, one should first begin in the grantor index to deeds, which is an alphabetical listing of sellers of real estate property. Though each locality may separate these indexes by different date ranges, focus on those volumes that contain the 22-year period between 1911 and 1933. There are several names to look for within the grantor index, starting with the most obvious, Sears, Roebuck & Company. As detailed in *The Houses That Sears Built*, Thornton reveals that Sears mortgages also were issued through trustees. Thornton specifically mentions two known trustees, Walker O. Lewis and Nicholas Wieland (sometimes spelled Weiland), who also may be individually listed in the index. Lewis served as a trustee until January 1930 when Wieland assumed the role. Two additional Sears trustees to search for include E. Harrison Powell and John

²³ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 75.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 and 75.

²⁵ This methodology for locating Sears mortgage records as highlighted in this chapter can be found in Thornton's *The Houses That Sears Built*, 75-6. These detailed instructions provided by Thornton are the first known guidance in this aspect of Sears house research.

Higgins,²⁶ with the potential for additional trustees to be discovered as research efforts continue.²⁷

However, even the staff at the Sears Archives knows very little about the trustees responsible for executing mortgages on behalf of Sears.²⁸ The trustees that have been identified to date have been stumbled upon during deed research. Unfortunately, the Sears Archives does not have a master list with the names of all of the Sears trustees, where their offices were located, or the various regions of the country to which they were assigned. It also remains unknown what the exact relationship was between the trustees and Sears – were they employees of Sears assigned to a special mortgage or loan department, did they have prominent corporate status and serve as officers of the company or on the Board of Directors,²⁹ were they local lawyers or accountants in private practice and hired as consultants, or were they even employees of an outside organization hired to actually underwrite the mortgage loans? Dennis Preisler, Sears Corporate Historian, recalled reading that Prudential served as the financial underwriter of Sears

²⁶ Rosemary Thornton, “Sears Modern Homes Part 3: How to Spot and Identify Catalog Houses,” *The Old House Web*; available from <http://www.oldhouseweb.net/stories/Detailed/707.shtml>; Internet; accessed 13 January 2003.

²⁷ Rosemary Thornton, personal communication with author via electronic mail, 11 February 2003.

²⁸ Dennis Preisler, Corporate Historian at the Sears Archives, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Telephone interview by author, 22 April 2003.

²⁹ The 1931 Sears Annual Report lists Nicholas Wieland as holding the office of Assistant Secretary. According to Preisler, the names of corporate officers and members of the Board of Directors first appeared in the annual reports beginning in 1931. Although Wieland is the only known trustee mentioned in the reports, the potential exists to locate newly discovered trustees in the annual reports. Trustee names and other relevant information also may exist in the official Minutes of the Board of Directors, but according to Preisler, these are confidential documents and cannot be accessed.

loans at one time, but could not remember the source or any additional details.³⁰ This information was verified in Boris Emmet and John E. Jeuck's *Catalogues and Counters – A History of Sears, Roebuck & Company*. According to Emmet and Jeuck, Prudential Life Insurance Company bought mortgages from Sears between 1916 and 1920.³¹ The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York had a similar arrangement with Sears that extended into the mid-1930s though the starting date is not specified.³² When Sears calculated its loan sales, those mortgage loans that were converted to the ownership of Prudential or Metropolitan Life were not separated out from those continued to be held by Sears.³³ Perhaps then, trustees Lewis, Wieland, Powell, and Higgins, in addition to any other trustees yet to be discovered, may actually be affiliated with either Prudential or Metropolitan Life rather than Sears. Yet regardless of the trustees' affiliation, identifying these individuals in local deed records will result in revealing genuine examples of Sears homes all across the country.

To begin searching for Sears mortgages, the grantor index includes the following information: the name of the seller, in this case Sears, Roebuck & Company or one of its trustees; the name of the grantee or purchaser; a reference to a deed book and page; and perhaps a date of the transaction. When consulting the deed book for the specific reference, read through the deed to find the legal property description. The challenge

³⁰ Dennis Preisler, Corporate Historian at the Sears Archives, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Telephone interview by author, 22 April 2003.

³¹ Boris Emmet and John E. Jeuck, *Catalogues and Counters – A History of Sears, Roebuck & Company* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 527.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

continues as one must consult historic maps and plats of the area or neighborhood to translate this legal description into a modern day street and house address. The types of maps available and how accessible they are to the general researcher will vary by locality.

During research for this thesis, a search for Sears mortgages was conducted in the Land Records Division of the Arlington County Courthouse. The research was performed to confirm if any of the four known trustees actually signed mortgage documents for Sears houses in Arlington. Prior to 1920, the Arlington County Grantor Index to Deeds consists of several separate volumes. Of these, only volumes 6, 7, and 8 were consulted since they contain deed records from approximately 1900 to 1919. Only Walker O. Lewis was identified in 16 separate listings. A complete chain of title search was conducted for each and the current building addresses verified using a combination of the legal property descriptions, current tax parcel maps, and historic County maps. This research determined that 13 of the properties associated with Lewis prior to 1920 are now located in the City of Alexandria, formerly part of the County of Alexandria which included what is now Arlington. The remaining three properties are located in the Arlington neighborhoods of Ashton Heights and Aurora Highlands.

The Arlington County 1920-1950 Grantor Index to Deeds then was consulted. This index consisted of multiple volumes arranged alphabetically by surname. No references were found for either E. Harrison Powell or John Higgins, two trustees proven to have signed Sears mortgage documents, at least within the state of Illinois.³⁴ Only one

³⁴ Rosemary Thornton, "Sears Modern Homes Part 3: How to Spot and Identify Catalog Houses," *The Old House Web*; available from <http://www.oldhouseweb.net/stories/Detailed/707.shtml>; Internet; accessed 13 January 2003.

reference was found for Nicholas Weiland. In a mortgage release dated October 4, 1926, Weiland was listed as a substitute trustee for Walker O. Lewis in a transaction involving an Arlington property in the Aurora Highlands neighborhood.³⁵

In the Arlington County 1920-1950 Grantor Index to Deeds, Lewis had nine individual listings. A chain of title search was conducted for each of these listings in order to determine the names of the original owners and the exact locations of the homes within the County. The legal property descriptions then were compared to both current tax parcel maps and historic County maps to determine the current property addresses. Of the nine listings, seven were for properties located in Arlington County and two were found to be within the current City of Alexandria. None of Lewis' transactions involved properties in Lyon Park. Lewis signed one vacation deed in Rosslyn in 1925, as well as mortgage releases for one property in Clarendon, two in Virginia Highlands, and three in Rosslyn. According to the County's computerized tax assessment database, only the two Sears houses in the Virginia Highlands neighborhood in southern Arlington are still standing.

Additional listings under the corporation name of Sears, Roebuck also were found in the Arlington County 1920-1950 Grantor Index to Deeds. Sears, Roebuck had a total of 14 individual listings, and as before, a chain of title search was conducted for each and the current building addresses determined. This revealed that only six of the listings involved properties within present-day Arlington and the other eight transactions involved properties now part of the City of Alexandria. Though none were located within

³⁵ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 248, 429.

Lyon Park, one property was listed within each neighborhood of North Highlands, Cherrydale, Lee Heights, Virginia Highlands, Tuckahoe Village, and Alcova Heights. According to the tax assessment database, at least two of these six Sears homes have been demolished (in Virginia Highlands and Tuckahoe Village).

The second repository to consult at the local level is the city's or county's government building where property records are filed and maintained. An assortment of both historic and current records can be found in such a facility. Depending on the structural organization of the jurisdiction, the following types of materials may exist: building and alteration permits, historic maps and photographs, subdivision plats, and tax assessment records. These documents will aid in authenticating catalog homes by providing clues to construction dates, previous owners and occupants, as well as how a property has been modified or altered over time.

Historical information on each of the four Arlington properties addressed in this thesis was obtained from various departments in the Arlington County Government building at 2100 Clarendon Boulevard. The Department of Management and Finance in Suite 611 offers public access to the County's computerized tax assessment database. Each of the four homes was accessed in this database in order to obtain estimated dates of construction and the names of the current property owners. The Department of Public Works Engineering Division in Suite 813 stores copies of the three-volume Franklin Survey of Arlington County. This set of historic County maps, dating to 1935, 1943, and 1952, contains a block by block depiction of the County and includes street names, property addresses, and building footprints. The Franklin Survey was consulted for each

of the subject properties in order to gain an understanding of how the buildings evolved during this time frame.

The Historic Preservation Program, housed within the Office of Neighborhood Services in Suite 701, maintains all of the survey files from the ongoing countywide Historic Resources Survey. The survey files for each house highlighted in this study were examined. The files each contained several black and white photographs, a multi-page survey form with a detailed description of the appearance of and materials composing the buildings, and at least one map indicating the location of the buildings. The photographs for both 800 North Highland Street and 315 North Garfield Street proved especially useful since the current appearance of these buildings is noticeably different than the views depicted in the survey photographs. The survey files for 315 North Garfield Street and 102 North Fillmore Street also contained a photocopy of a catalog advertisement from *Houses by Mail*, indicating the possibility that these two residences may be examples of mail-order houses.

The Office of Neighborhood Services also has a copy of the “House Card” database on CD-ROM. Saved as scanned versions of the original House Cards, the system was created in 1935 after all of the streets in Arlington were renamed. Depending on when the cards were filled out, they contain valuable historical information on every street address in Arlington. The types of data listed may include the names of previous owners and occupants, names of builders, old and new house numbers and street names, blocks and lots, dates and numbers of building and alteration permits issued, as well as a brief permit description. Copies of the permit documentation can be accessed on

microfilm. This microfilm collection is housed in the same suite, but remains unindexed. A House Card was obtained for each of the four Lyon Park houses analyzed in this study. The names of property owners were confirmed with those found during the deed research, and additional information on property alterations over time also was obtained from these cards.

Yet another source to consult is the local library or historical society, or whichever location maintains a local history collection. Although the quantity and quality of the materials available will differ by locality, sources to consult include: books on mail-order architecture and reproductions of mail-order house catalogs; historic maps and photographs of the area; city/county directories or old phone books; or published items (i.e., newspaper articles on catalog houses in the community, reports assessing or inventorying local architectural resources, collections of journal articles on local history, etc.). These types of sources will prove useful in gaining a basic understanding of the mail-order house movement, as well as determining if the catalog house trend already has been documented within a given community.

For this thesis, research was conducted at the Virginia Room in the Arlington Central Library on North Quincy Street. The Virginia Room maintains an extensive collection on local history and is the best Arlington source for historical information. Background information on both Sears houses in general and their presence in Arlington was found in the vertical file folder on Sears houses. This file contained various reports prepared by college students, as well as assorted newspaper clippings. Similar types of information pertaining to Lyon Park, including a 1936 neighborhood directory, were

found in the two vertical file folders for Lyon Park. The *Arlington Historical Magazine*, published several times per year by the Arlington Historical Society, contained relevant articles on the role of Frank Lyon in the development of Arlington, as well as an article specifically about Sears houses in the County. Lastly, a collection of County directories from the early-20th century provided insight into the professions of some of the previous occupants of the selected Lyon Park homes, as well as a description of the names and number of people residing at a given property at a specific time.

Personal Collections

Accessing personal collections is the last method of historic research that can yield important information useful in authenticating mail-order catalog houses. These collections, owned by the current or previous owners or occupants of a house (or possibly their descendants), are valuable because they contain original, irreplaceable documentation that can indisputably affirm or invalidate a property's mail-order origins. The most substantial form of proof within a personal collection is that of an original paper document. Examples of such original materials include the: completed order form or bill of sale, shipping receipt, shipping labels, architectural blueprints, instruction book or manual or pages thereof, a copy of the original advertisement, or a brochure containing a description of the house that was ordered.

Some catalog house owners already have found such paper records; for those who have not, they should at the very least be encouraged to be on the look out for them. In

the personal opinion of a modern day Sears house researcher, it would have been ideal if the original owner had gathered all of this important documentation, kept it in a safe place, and passed it on to the subsequent owners for them to follow suit! Though undoubtedly some of these original materials still exist and have been found over the decades, some are still hidden within the structure itself, waiting to be happened upon. For those presumed mail-order catalog homes that have yet to be authenticated, gaining access to a personal collection of original records would provide valuable insight into the building's unique history and origins. And for those properties whose original written testimonial remains undiscovered, the quest for finding such documentation should not be overlooked during the authentication process.³⁶

Personal memories of previous owners or their descendants, as well as those of long-time neighbors and area residents, are another form of proof within this category. Although not as reliable as actual paper records since memories and details can fade or be recounted incorrectly, oral interviews can still prove useful in understanding the history of a given property or neighborhood. Such oral traditions may simply consist of previous owners sharing information they were told with new owners, or descendants of original or early owners visiting the old neighborhood again and sharing glimpses of their occupancy. Some long-time neighbors or descendants of original owners may recall a

³⁶ Of the four Lyon Park homes analyzed in this thesis, only one of the property owners had an example of such original paper documentation. The owners willingly shared this evidence and it is documented in detail in Chapter V of this thesis.

mail-order catalog house being selected or ordered, remember watching it being delivered to the rail station or building site, or even being assembled.³⁷

Challenges of Identifying Mail-order Catalog Homes

Even when taking into consideration the broad body of knowledge that already exists about the history and success of the Sears Modern Homes Program, as well as the guidelines for assessing authenticity as presented in this analysis, there are still numerous challenges in the identification and authentication process. The challenges can be classified into two separate categories – those that are general in scope and those that are influenced by local circumstances. In order to conduct a thorough investigation of mail-order catalog homes, one must acknowledge these limitations.

The category of general challenges relates primarily to Sears' lack of historic corporate documentation, combined with the company's substantial role in the early-20th century mail-order and building industries. Unfortunately, only limited original corporate documentation remains in the form of annual reports and an incomplete collection of Sears' specialty line of house and building materials catalogs. Any other original records that detailed the Modern Homes Program operation – such as a tally of which homes were sold to whom and where – were thoughtlessly discarded for whatever reason upon closure of the department, if they even existed at all. This is especially unfortunate for

³⁷ Research for this thesis relied on information obtained solely from current property owners. In three of the four cases, the current owners cited information that was told to them by either previous owners or their neighbors. Three of the four present owners claimed that either descendants of original occupants or previous owners were believed to still be in the area. These claims were not substantiated during the research for this thesis.

researchers and owners of Sears homes since any notion of using corporate records to research and verify the authenticity of homes must be discounted immediately.

As a point of comparison, Michigan-based Aladdin Homes, another early-20th century mail-order house firm and competitor of Sears, maintained and retained detailed corporate records. Donated in 1996 to the Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University, the collection contains nearly all of the company's house catalogs from 1906 to 1981, a complete set of sales records, more than 15,000 architectural drawings from the post-World War II period, and an assortment of other records and documents.³⁸ As if the volume of these resources is not impressive enough, the sales records and other materials are easily accessible to the public, provided one can visit the library. If only a comparable collection existed for the Sears Modern Homes Program, a considerable portion of the challenge of identifying Sears homes would easily be eliminated.

As emphasized throughout this thesis, the house designs promoted by Sears, Roebuck & Company were neither distinctive stylistically nor considered to be architecturally innovative. The designs simply mirrored the popular architectural trends of the period in which they were built, which is exactly what the consumer desired. Coupled with this idea is the fact that in addition to house kits, Sears also was a major supplier of building materials and supplies. These items, whether advertised in the house catalogs or in specialty building materials catalogs, could be purchased separately and not as part of the kits. Thus, the reality is that there are actually two types of "Sears houses" that were built: (1) those true examples that were built from a complete Sears kit, with

³⁸ Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Michigan, "Aladdin – Homes Built in a Day," available from <http://www.lib.cmich.edu/clarke/aladdin/Aladdin.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 October 2002.

Sears blueprints and materials; and (2) those that were built piecemeal (rather than with a kit) with Sears materials and without the official Sears plans. The difficulty lays in being able to distinguish between these two versions of Sears houses, and what kind of proof can be gathered to authenticate either version.

Still another challenge related to the business aspect of Sears pertains to its use of stamped lumber. As stated in Chapter III, Sears did not include any framing lumber with its house kits until the early-teens, several years into the existence of the Modern Homes Program. Even though those models sold prior to this time were authentic Sears kit homes, they did not contain the standard Sears stampings on the framing members. Instead, these structural pieces would have been purchased separately from local suppliers. This actually results in a third category of a “Sears house,” one that was purchased as a Sears kit, but not built exclusively of Sears parts. Additionally, depending on where the kit was being shipped, Sears even instructed customers to save money on freight charges by purchasing the framing pieces and other large and bulky materials separately from a local supplier rather than Sears.³⁹ And lastly, one must consider the location and condition of the lumber markings. It is possible that many are no longer legible, having faded over time. Still other markings remain unseen simply because of their location on the butt end of the framing pieces or on the back sides of original millwork that is still in good condition and being used. In either case, the markings may never be discovered until a renovation or demolition project reveals them.

³⁹ Dennis Preisler, Corporate Historian at the Sears Archives, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Telephone interview by author, 25 February 2003.

There are also local circumstances that impose challenges on identifying and authenticating Sears houses. The first lays in the lack of original documentation that has been discovered or saved by both current and previous home owners. If some property owners have no idea that they even own a Sears home, they likely are unaware that they can search their basement, closets, attic, or porch for original records such as shipping labels, receipts, blueprints, instructions, structural markings, etc. Other property owners may not care that they own a Sears house and express no desire to try to find original documentation. Still other owners may have found such items, saved or recorded them, shared them with subsequent owners or interested parties, or just kept the information to themselves. Regardless, original proof does exist, hidden in the nooks of genuine Sears homes nationwide, and waiting to be revealed. Discovering this valuable documentation is especially important since it cannot be found or verified within Sears' corporate records.

Another challenge emerges when conducting Sears-related historic research in local jurisdictions nationwide. Each locality has the potential to be different not only in how it is governed and organized, but how it organizes and maintains records. Depending on what types of records are kept, how they are organized, where they are stored, and whether or not they are readily accessible to the public, it will be easier to locate relevant information in some jurisdictions than others. An understanding of these basic concepts as they pertain to the locale where information is being sought is essential to ensure that the research process is as thorough as possible.

The ability to authenticate Sears mail-order catalog homes also is impacted by local building trends and practices. For those novice and adventurous customers with the 75-page instruction manual in hand, some degree of confusion in the construction process could be expected. Even with detailed plans corresponding to numbered building parts, there was the potential for human error in the handling of thousands of individual pieces. Although Sears *claimed* that the average, individual prospective homeowner would be able to figure out how to properly connect all of the 30,000-something parts so it looks just like the image in the catalog and plans, undoubtedly there were some hesitant customers who hired a local builder to tackle the task instead.

The speculative local builders and developers were yet another market of customers for Sears. The company's house catalogs boasted testimonials of satisfied builders and developers who were enticed by Sears' claim that they could earn up to 50 percent more profit if they purchased several kits from Sears and erected several houses at once.⁴⁰ As early as 1912, Sears offered a "matched set" of six houses with the same basic footprint and that could be built on the same type of foundation. The set was an ideal opportunity for speculative building since each of the homes had subtle differences in floor plans and exterior treatment and appearance.⁴¹

But even with plans in hand, professional builders had the knowledge and skills to make slight alterations to the given design during the construction process. This leads to several interesting points: (1) that professional builders could readily modify the project; (2) that professional builders could purchase and use true Sears kits and plans for each

⁴⁰ Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built*, 89.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

house they built, or simply borrow “used” plans from a colleague or another successful construction project; and (3) that there is the potential for copies or “look-alikes” of Sears houses to exist, since professional builders had both the expertise and labor force needed to recreate an existing example of a mail-order catalog house, albeit their own version. All of these factors need to be taken into account when examining period homes and trying to distinguish between true examples of mail-order homes and similar local stick built examples. Having an understanding of historical building practices within a given jurisdiction would prove helpful in this process.

And then one must consider the influence the prospective home owner had on the final product. As explained in Chapter III, the customer had the opportunity to customize his purchase immediately from the start. Sears even encouraged this practice in its catalogs and showrooms, stating how simple it was to alter roof lines, reverse floor plans, select different materials, rearrange the placement of certain features, request different sizes or styles of materials, add a sun room or enclosed sleeping porch, just to name a few of the myriad of available options. Sears advertised its own “Complete Architectural Service” was available to those customers interested in modifying given designs or incorporating their own ideas into the design.⁴² Sears even claimed that “our engineers will be glad to help you build your home as you want it.”⁴³ With all of these factors in mind, one can add a fourth and fifth type of “Sears house” to the list begun earlier in this study – (4) those that are exact replicas of the Sears catalog illustrations and blueprints,

⁴² Ibid., 67.

⁴³ Ibid. Quote about the Complete Architectural Service can be found on page three of the 1930 Sears Modern Homes catalog.

and (5) those that have been modified from the established design, either moderately or drastically.

But the above only covers the preferences and desires of the original customer, the one who initially placed the order with Sears. Then there are the modifications made by subsequent owners of the property, as their personal tastes and needs dictated over the decades. A sampling of the types of changes that could occur include: masking or replacing original building fabric with modern materials, altering the floor plan and circulation pattern between the rooms, demolishing original sections of the house, or constructing incompatible additions. Thus, the challenge of identifying the historic elements and determining a building's original appearance becomes increasingly more difficult as time passes, owners change, and buildings continue to be threatened by the natural elements, fire, poor maintenance, neglect, and even demolition.

As stated in the Introduction, this study intends to prove how one can identify genuine examples of Sears mail-order catalog homes. The three-part process of authenticating mail-order architecture – exterior examination, interior examination, and historic research – as presented here will be applied to four specific examples in the following chapter. However, the framework established in this chapter for how to undertake the process stresses an underlying point. Each method of gathering data is indeed valuable to the authentication process. Yet the information obtained during each separate phase is not enough evidence in and of itself to prove the mail-order origins of a building. Rather, a determination of authenticity can only be made upon analyzing the

factual evidence gathered as a whole upon completing all three methods of the authentication process.

CHAPTER V REVEALING MAIL-ORDER DREAMS

My wife as well as myself are highly pleased with 'The Hamilton.' The quality of material fur[nished] and the services rendered could not be excelled. I am sure that I saved anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000 by building one of your 'Honor Built' Homes. Plenty of material was furnished. It will always be a pleasure to recommend your Homes.

John L. White, a satisfied Sears customer from Clarendon, VA, whose written testimony appeared in the 1927 Honor Bilt Modern Homes catalog. His home, located at 310 North Barton Street, still stands today.

Lyon Park

The investigation of the hypothesis of this thesis occurred in the neighborhood of Lyon Park, located in central Arlington County, Virginia (Figure 36). Originally, Arlington County was the rural portion of the ten-square mile parcel surveyed in 1791 as the nation's capital.¹ Arlington, historically referred to as the Alexandria County of the District of Columbia, included present-day Arlington County and part of the City of Alexandria. In 1846, the United States Congress returned Arlington to the Commonwealth of Virginia. The County did not officially separate from the City of Alexandria until 1870. Throughout the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, Arlington's character remained rural, sparsely populated, and agricultural-based. Though corn was the area's most important crop by the mid-19th century, livestock farms, dairy farms, and

¹ E.H.T. Traceries, Inc., *First Phase of an Architectural Survey in Arlington County, Virginia* (1996), 1; 13; 15; 27-28. All information in this paragraph came from this source.



Figure 36: Arlington County Neighborhoods; Source: Arlington County census data website at <http://www.co.arlington.va.us/census/civic/index.htm>.

timber harvesting also were common. In 1860, more than 15,000 acres of land were being farmed in the County. Despite the lack of such formalized services as water and sewer systems, rural Arlington was noted as a vacation and hunting destination for neighboring Washingtonians. With the introduction of the electric railroad in the 1890s, Arlington began its gradual transformation from an isolated rural community into the heavily populated and bustling commuter suburb that still thrives today.

By 1910, Arlington County contained 10,231 residents and boasted more than 70 new subdivisions.² Within the next ten years, the population rose to just over 16,000 people, and jumped to more than 26,600 by 1930.³ Between 1920 and 1929, the central portion of Arlington, including the subdivisions of Clarendon and Lyon Park, experienced its greatest period of growth, as indicated by the construction of 60 percent of its residential buildings.⁴ This building trend continued into the next decade. By 1935, Arlington experienced a 1,000 percent increase in construction activity compared to 1933 figures.⁵ This overwhelming growth was due to “the almost miraculous appearance of legions of residences throughout the county, long lines of homes which have grown into little towns themselves ... [and the need for] the construction of stores, filling stations and all kinds of business establishments.”⁶

² C.B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County Virginia: A History* (Arlington, Virginia: Arlington Historical Society, 1976), 156-7.

³ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁴ E.H.T. Tracerics, Inc., *Third Phase of an Architectural Survey in Arlington County, Virginia* (1998), 13.

⁵ “Construction Figures in Arlington Reveal 1000 P.C. Increase over 1933; Record Building in Falls Church,” *The Northern Virginia Sun*, 12 December 1935, 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*

By 1924, numerous building and construction-related establishments were active in Arlington, especially in the Rosslyn and Clarendon areas. These vendors included 20 real estate dealers, ten building contractors, four woodworking and lumber businesses, three hardware stores, six plumbing and heating contractors, four electricians, and a total of 25 suppliers of cement block, brick, stone, or fire proofing products.⁷ Brick making was one of the County's most viable industries, with claims that "more bricks [were] made in Arlington County than in any other county in the State."⁸ The need for concrete blocks also was apparent, as the 1924 demand exceeded the available supply.⁹ An examination of County directories and local newspapers revealed that two of the area's most prominent purveyors of building supplies included W.A. Smoot & Company of Alexandria and Murphy & Ames, Incorporated in Rosslyn.¹⁰ It is apparent that an extensive range of materials and services was widely available to those homeowners who needed local supplies for their mail-order plans or for those who were erecting stick built homes.

The development of the County's roads and railways significantly influenced the evolution of its suburban character by establishing reliable and relatively inexpensive means by which to travel to and from the surrounding region and Washington, DC. Lyon

⁷ *Arlington County [VA] Directory and Yearbook* (1924), 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ An undated newspaper advertisement for Murphy & Ames claimed that "when better homes are built, Murphy & Ames, Inc., will supply the building material." The ad further stated that the company furnished most of the materials used to construct homes illustrated in a catalog. Although the source of the catalog is unknown, as is whether or not the catalog contained mail-order house designs, the ad proves that Murphy & Ames was a leading local supplier of construction materials. The advertisement is located in the Murphy & Ames vertical file at the Virginia Room in Arlington Central Library.

Park was conveniently located along the routes of several railways and electric trolley lines. The Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad originally served the community and offered a route between Great Falls to the west and Rosslyn in Arlington. Its electrified line remained the fastest mode of transportation in the region until it was abandoned in 1935. By 1912, the Bluemont Branch of the Washington and Old Dominion Railway ran through Arlington from Bluemont Junction near Glencarlyn and present-day US Route 50 to Thrifton Junction, which is now the site of the Lyon Village Shopping Center on Wilson Boulevard. The Washington and Old Dominion line followed the route of present-day Interstate 66 and had 35 stops throughout Arlington, many of which were near Lyon Park. By 1924, a third line, the Washington-Virginia Railway (previously known as the Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon line), had 64 stops in the County.¹¹ Lyon Park was an official stop on the Clarendon-Fairfax Branch of the Washington-Virginia Railway line.¹² Such an ideal location not only allowed Lyon Park residents to commute daily to work in Washington, DC, it also resulted in the shipment of mail-order homes into the community. The existence of several railroad sidings within the County facilitated the unloading of these large shipments of materials that arrived by boxcar. Stations with such freight sidings included Barcroft, Bluemont Junction, Cherrydale, Douglas, Glencarlyn, Livingston Heights, and Thrifton.¹³ The sidings located

¹¹ E.H.T. Tracerics, Inc., *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Lyon Park Historic District* (2002), 175. All information in this paragraph pertaining to the various rail lines in Arlington came from this source.

¹² *1924 Arlington County Directory*, 50. Contains train schedule and lists of stations throughout the County for the Washington-Virginia Railway Company.

¹³ Darline Hannabass, "Sears Roebuck Houses in Arlington," *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, October 1993, 9.

closest to Lyon Park were Rosslyn and Thrifton.

The dramatic rates of new construction that were transforming the character of Arlington County during the early-20th century were equally astounding within Lyon Park specifically. During one week alone in April 1922, lot sales totaled \$20,000, a considerable figure since average lot prices ranged from \$350 to \$500 each. This large sales total marked the highest level of sales reported thus far within a seven-day period.¹⁴ It was predicted that “the amount of home-building in prospect in Lyon Park will eclipse any former building operations in the history of Arlington County.”¹⁵ Although only platted in 1919, the population of Lyon Park already was reported to be 1,100 by 1927-28.¹⁶ The construction of single-family dwellings continued, with 48 new homes built in 1931 and 67 in 1932 within Lyon Park and the nearby neighborhood of Lyon Village (also developed by Frank Lyon).¹⁷

Located approximately three miles west of the nation’s capital and immediately south of the commercial center of Clarendon, Lyon Park extends from 10th Street on the north, Arlington Boulevard (US Route 50) on the east and south, and Irving Street on the west (Figure 37). The neighborhood contains approximately 300 acres, a central public park and community house, and a diverse range of modest-sized, detached single-family houses in a variety of types and styles, with bungalows and Colonial Revival homes

¹⁴ “Lyon Park Home Site Sales Break Record,” *The Evening Star*, 29 April 1922, 15.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Polk’s Washington Suburban Directory of Maryland and Virginia Towns Adjacent to the District of Columbia*, (1927-8), 643.

¹⁷ “Home Construction in Arlington Gains - More Single-Family Dwellings Built in Thickly Populated Sections Than in 1931,” *The Washington Star*, 31 December 1932, B1.

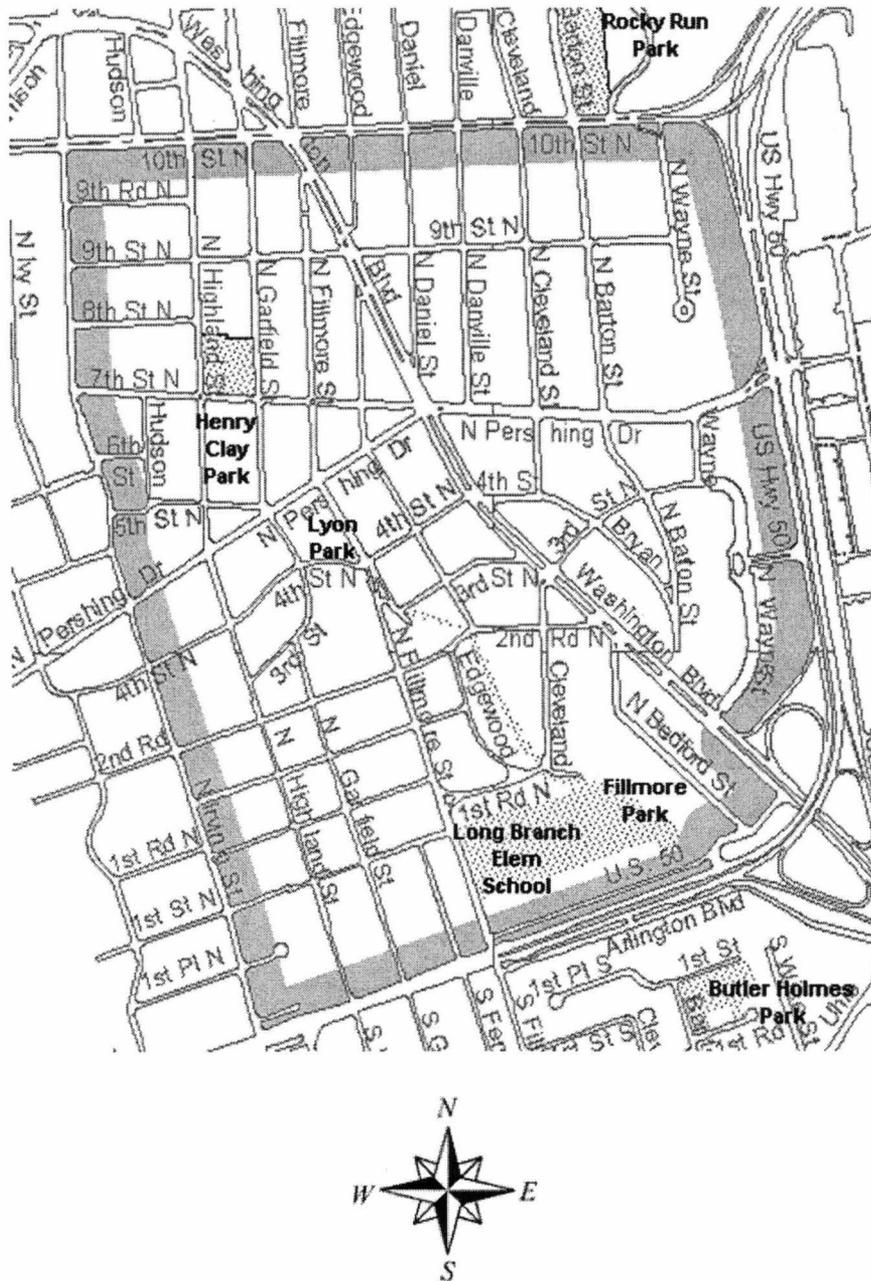


Figure 37: The Lyon Park Neighborhood; Source: Arlington County website at <http://www.co.arlington.va.us/dpw/planning/civmap/lypkct.htm>.

among the most prevalent. Named for its founder and developer, Frank Lyon, Lyon Park began in 1919 as an extension of Clarendon. Besides being active in the turn-of-the-century campaign to rid the County of such corrupt institutions as gambling, brothels, and saloons, Lyon was one of the most prominent figures in the residential development of central Arlington. His development company, which originally contained only his name and then was changed to Lyon and Fitch, Incorporated, when C. Walton Fitch became his partner in 1920, eventually became Lyon Properties, Incorporated.¹⁸

Lyon Park is a typical example of the types of subdivisions that characterized Arlington County in the early-20th century. The community featured lots with or without trees, deferred payment plans, discounts for cash transactions, and such amenities as gas, electricity, individual wells with electric pumps, sewer lines, cement sidewalks, and paved streets.¹⁹ Lyon and Fitch promoted that they designed and built many of the homes in Lyon Park, and even constructed homes according to plans provided by their customers. Regardless of whether Lyon and Fitch or the buyers built the dwellings, each house was required to be approved by the firm's architect and erected "of the best type and material and workmanship that the art commands."²⁰ Each deed originally contained several clauses that prohibited the sale or dispensing of liquor on the premises, restricted future ownership or occupancy to only those of Caucasian descent, and required a

¹⁸ Ruth P. Rose, "The Role of Frank Lyon and His Associates in the Early Development of Arlington County," *The Arlington Historical Magazine*; October 1976, Vol. 5, No. 4, 46-9; 52.

¹⁹ *Lyon Park* brochure, (2002 reproduction of an original promotional brochure printed by Byron S. Adams and published by Lyon and Fitch in 1920), 21; 13; 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

minimum house cost of \$2,000 (except for outbuildings) and a minimum purchase of two lots per buyer.²¹ Promotional literature further highlighted the new community:

Elevation 260 feet above Washington. Three miles west of White House. One mile west of Arlington Amphitheater. Original shade and pure water. Schools, Churches, Stores, City Deliveries. Mail by Carrier. Gas. Electricity. Sewers. Cement sidewalks. Playground and Park. Macadam Road to Georgetown via Key Bridge, and to Potomac Park via Military Road through Fort Myer, Arlington and Highway Bridge. Falls Church cars of Washington-Virginia Railway from 12th and PA. Ave. reach property in 20 minutes. Also cars via Georgetown and Rosslyn. Commutation rates.²²

Prior Studies of Sears Houses

There have been four preliminary studies conducted to date that have attempted to identify Sears homes in Arlington County. The first is the countywide Historic Resources Survey, which began in 1996 and is now in its seventh continuous year. Findings to date suggest evidence of dozens of mail-order catalog homes throughout Arlington. During the fieldwork, architectural historians identified particular dwellings that closely resembled homes illustrated in assorted mail-order catalogs, such as those distributed by Sears. If a “match” was made during the survey, the corresponding catalog advertisement was photocopied and placed in the survey files for those properties. However, the final written reports for each phase of the survey recognized that positive identification of mail-order catalog homes is virtually impossible during a reconnaissance level

²¹ Rose, 50; 56.

²² As quoted in Amy Ballard, et al, “Historical Analysis of Lyon Park, Arlington County, Virginia,” May 1988, 4. Unpublished college paper.

architectural survey.²³ Thus, any preliminary identifications from Arlington's survey were based solely on book and catalog references, which alone does not offer enough substantive evidence.

In 1986, the Arlington Historical Society initiated a reconnaissance level study to identify Sears homes throughout the County and host a house tour. Using mail-order house catalogs as their point of reference, volunteer members identified the addresses and model names of 51 possible Sears homes in the neighborhoods of Alcovia Heights, Arlington Heights, Ashton Heights, Aurora Highlands, Barcroft, Glencarlyn, Falls Church Park, Lyon Park, and Lyon Village. Of these, 28 homes representing 19 different models were preliminarily identified within Lyon Park alone.²⁴ A Sears home tour created by Kathy Holt Springston, resident and local historian of the Cherrydale neighborhood, is the third known study of Sears houses.²⁵ According to her brochure, Springston identified the model names and addresses of 82 mail-order homes from both Sears and Montgomery Ward. The tour, which is sponsored by the Smithsonian Associates, highlights houses in the neighborhoods of Ashton Heights, Aurora Highlands, Cherrydale, Clarendon, Crescent Hills, Livingston Heights, Lyon Park, Lyon Village, and Maywood. Ten homes are listed in Lyon Park. However, the brochure does not indicate if Springston has formally authenticated all of these examples or what method of authentication was used.

²³ For example, 31 possible mail-order homes were listed on page 23 of the *Third Phase of an Architectural Survey in Arlington County, Virginia*, prepared by E.H.T. Tracerics, Inc., in 1998.

²⁴ Arlington County's Historic Preservation Program has only limited information on the Arlington Historical Society survey. Copies of some of the survey forms exist, as does a summary of findings list dated July 21, 1986. This list includes the model name, address, assumed year of construction, and neighborhood for each identified house. The survey revealed that the Americus, Betsy Ross, Crescent, Vallonia, and Westly models were among the most popular found in Arlington.

²⁵ Kathy Holt Springston, "Sears Houses of Arlington," undated and unpublished brochure.

Springston also maintains that there were three primary builders of Sears homes in Arlington - Arthur Orr, Benjamin Sales, and Edward Donaldson. Her research claims that it was often just as common for customers to hire one of these builders to construct homes according to the kit specifications as it was for customers to copy and modify other area examples or purchase materials at the local stores and build their own homes.²⁶

Additional studies undertaken by interested researchers comprise the final source of known information on Sears houses in Arlington County. Researcher and Arlington Historical Society member Darline Hannabass claimed as many as 200 Sears homes existed in the County in 1993, and has identified and photographed more than 100 Sears homes in Arlington.²⁷ Hannabass believes at least 14 Sears houses exist in Lyon Park.²⁸ In 1987, as part of a graduate class project analyzing the historic significance of Lyon Park, student Russell Lee identified 19 presumed Sears dwellings in the neighborhood.²⁹ Lee cited the addresses, dates of construction, (then) current owners and contact information, as well as page references to the corresponding *Houses by Mail* advertisements.

In conclusion, these investigations, ranging from the countywide architectural survey to individual research projects, have revealed the almost certain likelihood that

²⁶ Kathy Holt Springston, Arlington County resident and local historian; Interview with author, 5 February 2000. However, the author of this thesis has not yet found any information verifying the building practices of Orr, Sales, or Donaldson.

²⁷ Darline Hannabass, "Sears Roebuck Houses in Arlington," *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, October 1993, 7; 14.

²⁸ Russell E. Lee, "Neighborhood History Preservation Study – Neighborhood of Lyon Park, Arlington Virginia," 16 December 1987, 3. Unpublished college paper prepared for George Mason University graduate level history course.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-4.

Sears, Roebuck & Company mail-order catalog homes exist throughout northern, central, and southern Arlington. Yet all of these findings are based only on streetside assessments of architectural traits and comparisons of illustrations in mail-order house catalogs to the current appearance of actual buildings. Some investigations also may have involved some degree of preliminary research or relied on information obtained from presumptions shared among property owners, previous occupants, and their neighbors. However, until the completion of this thesis, none of the studies conducted in Arlington County to date have sought to prove the authenticity of mail-order Sears homes using three distinct methods -- an exterior examination, a detailed interior investigation, and extensive historic research.

Testing of Hypothesis

The testing of the hypothesis involved a detailed architectural survey of four presumed Sears, Roebuck & Company mail-order catalog homes in the Lyon Park neighborhood. The analysis presented here is based only upon a select number of residences, although as many as several dozen Sears houses are believed to exist within Lyon Park. An attempt was made to choose examples available within each decade that Sears offered mail-order houses -- 1908-1919, 1920-1929, and 1930-1940.³⁰ The sampling also represents an assortment of building forms and styles that were popular during the early-20th century, ranging from the bungalow and an English cottage to a

³⁰ It should be noted that when the research component was completed for this thesis, the selected residences were determined to date from either the 1920-1929 or 1930-1940 periods only. When conducting further research on Sears homes in Arlington, it would be beneficial to attempt to discover genuine examples from the earliest decade of Sears' mail-order operation, 1908-1919.

more stylistic Dutch Colonial example. The selection of homes illustrates a diverse mix of Sears models in a range of sizes, costs, materials, and ornamentation. The particular models that are highlighted are the Marina, Rembrandt, Kilbourne, and Randolph.

Several sources were consulted prior to selecting the group of homes presented in this study. Survey forms and photographs from Arlington's ongoing reconnaissance level Historic Resources Survey provided information on specific dwellings that preliminarily were flagged as being possible mail-order homes in general or Sears houses specifically. A list compiled in a 1986 reconnaissance level survey of Sears homes conducted by the Arlington Historical Society offered building addresses, model names, and estimated dates of construction. To initiate the research and fieldwork component of this thesis, a brief article requesting information about Sears houses in Lyon Park was published in the October 2002 edition of the community's newsletter, *The Lyon Park Citizen*. Five responses were received from interested residents willing to share information about either their own house or others in the neighborhood. Each of the individuals who responded was contacted by telephone for a personal interview, though only one property owner agreed to meet in person at their home. Lastly, various student reports that cited examples of Sears houses in both Arlington and Lyon Park were useful to gain a sense of the different house types and styles believed to exist, as well as to help determine approximate dates of construction. With the exception of one of the personal interviews conducted with property owners, all of these sources, however, merely suggested homes of Sears descent rather than positively identifying them.

The exterior architectural investigation, which occurred during Fall 2002 and Winter 2003, consisted of two phases. Both phases were conducted simultaneously for each selected house. The first phase involved the completion of a survey form checklist (Appendix I). This format provided a simplified and organized method to record detailed descriptive information about each residence. The checklist, designed also to be used in subsequent surveys of potential Sears houses, addressed architectural style, massing, materials, fenestration, porches, decorative detailing, and physical measurements.

The second phase of the architectural survey was the photographic documentation of the properties' exterior elevations. All photographs were taken from the public right-of-way, unless a property owner granted free access to the grounds. A digital camera was used to record at least two views of those elevations visible from the street, as well as significant or unusual stylistic and architectural details. The photographic record was supplemented by one property owner who provided copies of photographs from his personal collection.

The data gathered from the checklists and photographs then was analyzed to determine if the identified exterior features could offer sufficient proof to verify which homes are Sears, Roebuck & Company catalog homes, and which are examples of local stick built houses. Upon evaluation of the exterior survey, the individual property owners were contacted by telephone to request permission to examine the interior of their homes. Interior access was granted to only three of the four residences. The interior examination involved the visual inspection of the floor plan, arrangement of rooms, structural

members (if accessible), and decorative elements. Information gathered from this insider's view was used to supplement assumptions gleaned from the exterior survey.

The findings from the exterior and interior examinations also served as the basis for the research component of the authentication process. The data was compared to other known sources in order to further substantiate the authenticity of the selected Lyon Park models. Examples of the types of materials used as reference include reproductions of Sears, Roebuck & Company house catalogs, illustrations and advertisements available on the Sears Modern Homes website, data from the countywide Historic Resources Survey, Arlington County records (deeds, mortgages, maps, and permits), and the testimony of property owners and other neighborhood residents. Personal interviews with owners were held in person and via telephone, and recorded with hand-written notes.

Discussion of Findings

800 North Highland Street

The residence at 800 North Highland Street,³¹ situated in the northwestern corner of Lyon Park, is a modest example of a two-story, frame bungalow (Figures 38-41). The house is located at the intersection of North 8th and North Highland streets. Originally, the side-gabled house contained only five rooms and one bathroom. Shortly after construction, a small, one-room addition was built on the rear elevation. The current owners, Erik and Renee Gutshall, have been undertaking a renovation of the building

³¹ Originally known as 219 Virginia Avenue until Arlington renamed its streets in 1935.



Figure 38: Front and right elevations of 800 North Highland Street; photograph by author, February 2003.



Figure 39: Right elevation of 800 North Highland Street, showing the alteration of the original side-gable roof line for the construction of a new rear addition; photograph by author, February 2003.

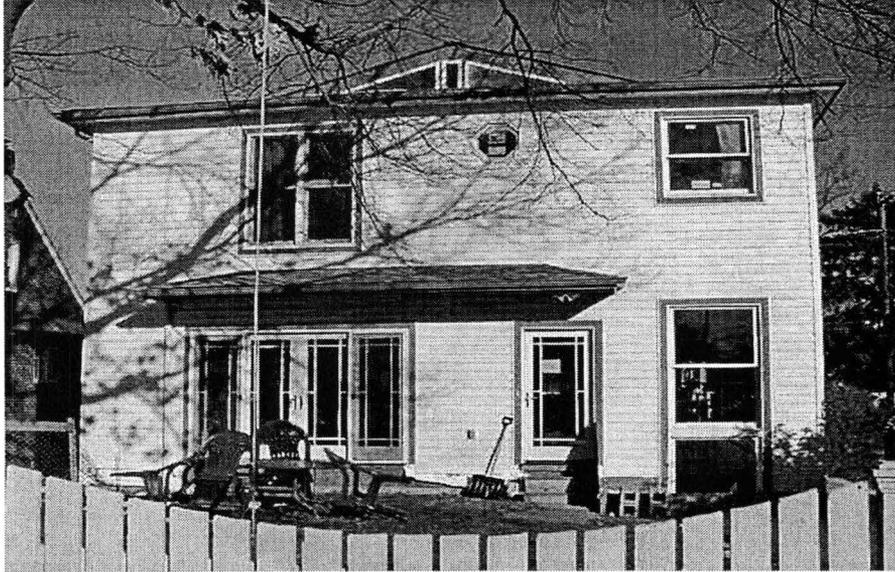


Figure 40: New two-story rear addition at 800 North Highland Street; photograph by author, February 2003.



Figure 41: Left and rear elevations of 800 North Highland Street, showing the original side-gable roof and massing and the new rear addition; photograph by author, February 2003.

since 2000 and have almost completed a large, two-story rear addition.³² This replaces the early-20th century addition and contains an eating area and family room on the first floor and a master bedroom on the second floor. In the 1970s, the owners used the home as a rental property and unfortunately removed or concealed the exterior siding and gutted the interior as part of their “home improvement” efforts. They removed all of the original doors and windows, interior trim and moldings, most of the original flooring, some of the plaster walls, and the original claw-foot bathtub. When the Gutshalls purchased the property in 1997, very little remained of the original house, with the exception of its overall massing, location of the fenestration, the concrete block foundation, most of the front porch and its detailing, and the interior structural framing.

The home’s most dominant features are its projecting gabled porch and the second story gabled dormer, both of which are located on the front elevation (Figures 42 and 43). The porch extends across the full-width of the facade and has four squared, brick masonry piers with a corbelled cap. Only the two end piers are each topped with a slightly tapered wood column that supports the pedimented porch roof. Keystone-like blocks centered in slightly arched bays adorn the front and sides of the porch. The pediment itself is clad in stucco with frame half-timbering. According to the Gutshalls, the front porch is original in design, though the porch railing, balustrade, ceiling, and bargeboards of the pedimented gable have been replaced. The second story dormer pierces the center of the roof line and features a central double-hung sash window topped with a rectangular

³² Erik and Renee Gutshall, owners of 800 North Highland Street. The Gutshalls responded to the article in *The Lyon Park Citizen*, and graciously extended an invitation to tour their home, both outside and inside. All information in this paragraph was obtained during these visits on 17 October 2002 and 12 February 2003.



Figure 42: Detail of front porch at 800 North Highland Street, with original masonry piers, wood columns, arched bays with keystone detailing, and stucco half-timbering; photograph by author, February 2003.

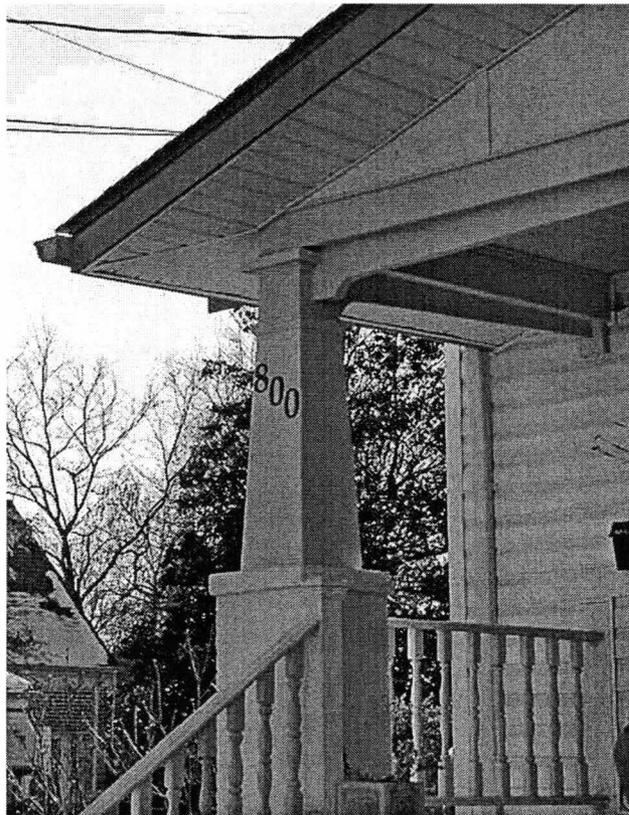


Figure 43: Detail of original front porch support at 800 North Highland Street, with brick pier and tapered wood column; photograph by author, February 2003.

fixed sash window just below the apex of the gable (see Figure 38).

The exterior walls now are clad in vinyl siding, which replaced an earlier pressboard siding. The original wall treatment most likely was wood siding. The location of the window openings in the original portion of the house has remained unchanged, but all of the original windows and doors have been replaced. A combination of wood and vinyl one-over-one double-hung sash and sliding sash now are fitted in these openings. Additional exterior modifications ranged from the removal of the brick chimney and exposed rafter tails, to the lining of the open soffit. Photographs of the property taken during the countywide Historic Resources Survey in March 1998 illustrate several of these alterations (Figures 44 and 45). Of most significance is the exterior detailing that was removed and not replicated, including the u-shaped notched ends of the bargeboards along the porch and dormer, as well as the raised wood square-shaped blocks applied to the surface of the bargeboards.

Upon completion of the site visits, and despite the loss of the majority of the original building fabric, it was determined that the home's original massing, front porch treatment, and prominent gabled dormer suggested a resemblance to the Marina model offered by Sears, Roebuck & Company (Figure 46). Available in 1918, 1919, and 1921, this Honor-Bilt model ranged in price from \$1,289 to \$1,632.³³ The written description, illustration, and floor plans of the Marina model that are depicted in *Houses by Mail* are comparable to the residence at 800 North Highland Street. Of particular significance in this model are the unusual and original porch and dormer treatments that were removed

³³ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 129.



Figure 44: East (front) elevation of 800 North Highland Street in 1998. Note the u-shaped notched bargeboards, the applied square-shaped blocks along the bargeboards, and the brick chimney; photograph by E.H.T. Tracerics, March 1998.



Figure 45: South (left) elevation of 800 North Highland Street in 1998, showing original massing with early one-story rear addition, u-shaped notched bargeboards, and modern skylight in the front dormer; photograph by E.H.T. Tracerics, March 1998.

THE MARINA



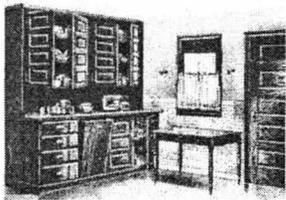
This house is quite out of the ordinary in many respects. Note the concrete block posts surmounted by graceful wood columns. The paneled stucco porch adds much to the appearance, and the Fire-Chief Shingle Roll Roofing sets off the house to the best advantage. You have the choice of two different exterior designs. This house can be built with the rooms reversed.

Details and features: Five rooms and one bath. Full-width front porch supported by concrete and tapered wood piers; gabled or shed dormer with flower box; exposed roof rafter tails. Beamed ceiling in dining room.

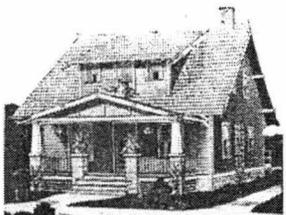
Years and catalog numbers: 1918 (2024); 1919 (2024); 1927 (2024, 7024)

Price: \$1,289 to \$1,632

Locations: Blue Island, Dundee and Oak Glen, Ill.; La Fontaine, Ind.; Hastings, Minn.; Cincinnati, Cleveland and Youngstown, Ohio



Kitchen



No. 2024

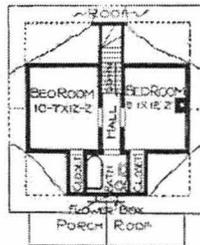
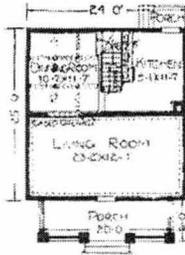


Figure 46: Advertisement for the Marina model; Illustration as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 129.

from the Gutshalls' residence. These u-shaped ends of the bargeboards and the raised square medallions that adorned the bargeboards correspond to the catalog illustration. However, the overall shape and treatment of the front porch as seen in the catalog also is nearly identical to that which remains on the Gutshalls' home.

Yet there are several notable differences, both exterior and interior, between the catalog illustrations and the Highland Street example. In the Gutshalls' home, the entrance is located on the left side of the front elevation as opposed to the center. The tapered wood porch columns rest on brick piers, as opposed to the concrete block piers advertised in the catalog. The gabled dormer in the Gutshall residence contains one central double-hung sash window, with a smaller fixed rectangular sash window directly below the gable peak. The catalog also shows a smaller double-hung sash window on each side of the central opening. Perhaps these openings have been concealed by modern siding or filled in during the 1970s remodeling. It is unknown if the 800 North Highland Street house ever featured a flower box below the dormer's central window, or the unusual flared notches standing atop each of the gable ends and at the apex of the porch gable.

The advertisement states "this house can be built with the rooms reversed."³⁴ The original owners of 800 North Highland Street elected this option, as the dining room and kitchen are reversed when compared to the catalog illustration. According to measurements taken by the Gutshalls, the room dimensions match those depicted in the catalog. As for interior differences, the staircase is oriented along the left side of the

³⁴ Ibid.

house. In the catalog floor plan, the stairs are located beyond the far wall of the living room in the center of the house and oriented parallel to their existing arrangement in the Gutshalls' home. Additionally, the first floor circulation pattern may have changed slightly. Several years ago, the son of the original owners visited the house and seemed disoriented by the current layout of the living room. It is probable that originally the living room was one big open space (as pictured in the catalog) with the stairs to the far left and a pass through to the kitchen adjacent to the stairs. Today, a coat closet abuts the stairwell and the kitchen is accessed by passing through the living room into the dining room and then turning left. Also, it remains unknown if the North Highland Street house ever featured a beamed dining room ceiling or if the original kitchen resembled the one illustrated in the catalog advertisement.

In summary thus far, the exterior architectural examination of 800 North Highland Street revealed obvious similarities to Sears' Marina model. Additional evidence was substantiated by speaking to the Gutshalls, touring the interior of the home, and comparing it to the catalog illustration available in *Houses by Mail*. Yet, the loss of such a drastic portion of the original building fabric – from the exterior siding, some of the porch and gable details, to all the windows and doors and interior trim – warranted further investigation before concluding this example was a genuine Sears house. Confirmation would not be possible without first inspecting the interior structural members and conducting historic research on the property.

During their renovation efforts, the Gutshalls made three exciting, highly valuable, and irrefutable discoveries. They had uncovered three types of original Sears

documentation. Prior to construction of the new rear addition, the Gutshalls discovered original Sears stampings on the framing lumber (Figure 47). The markings initially were found on the starter joist and sill plate in the southwest corner of the basement, which is the corner of the original kitchen now abutting the new addition. These pieces of lumber are labeled C569 and C529 and marked in dark ink. As their renovation progressed, the Gutshalls continued to find similar markings on other framing members, including the rafters. Another piece of evidence was found when they modified the height of the interior stairwell near the second floor. The Gutshalls found a piece of plaster stamped on the back "Patented June 11, 1912, and August 6 191[?]." Although there are no other markings on it that might identify it as such, it can be assumed that this is a remnant of the Goodwall Sheet Plaster sold and promoted by Sears in its house catalogs.

The current owners' renovation work also revealed a third piece of original documentation -- two original shipping tags -- on the underside of the front porch ceiling (Figure 48). The tags were stapled against the sheathing of the house in the porch gable. The tags were from "Sears, Roebuck & Co., 4640 Roosevelt Boulevard, Philadelphia, Penna.," and addressed to "Leslie J. Collier, Rosslyn, VA." Other than the various title headings printed on the label, the return address and shipping destination are the only sections that appear to have been completed, or at least that are still legible. It can be deduced that these tags were for the two separate shipments of materials for the home that were received by rail at the Rosslyn station, located approximately two miles to the east.



Figure 47: Original lumber stampings found in the southwest corner of the basement of 800 North Highland Street, prior to construction of the new rear addition; photograph taken by owner Erik Gutshall in May 2000 and included here with his permission.

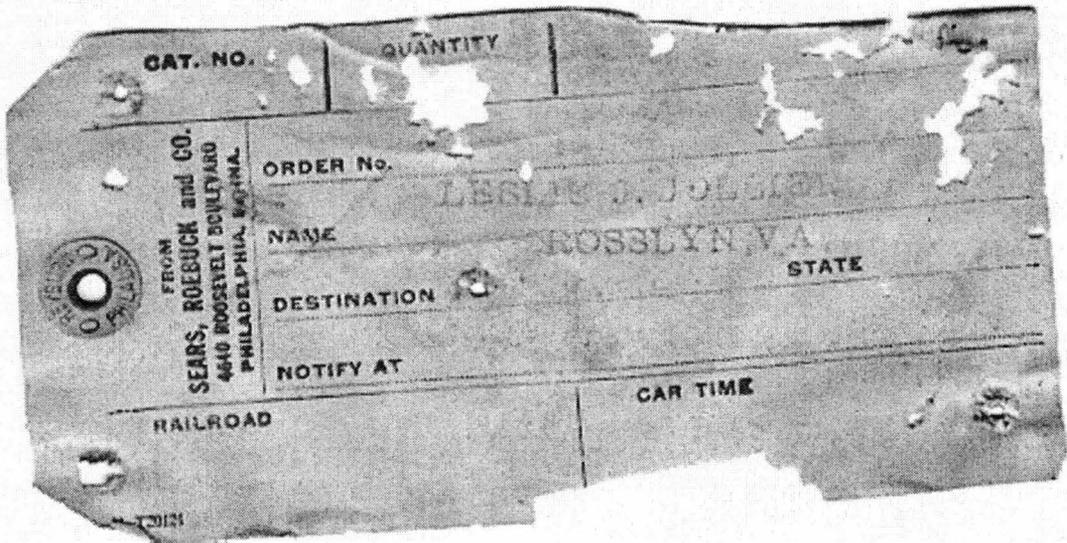
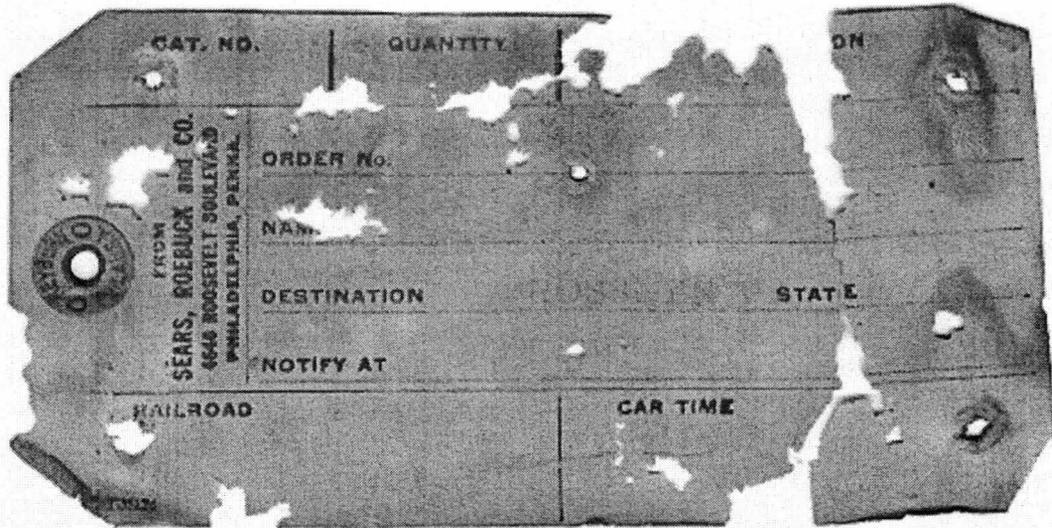


Figure 48: Two original shipping labels for the house at 800 North Highland Street, showing recipient Leslie J. Collier of Rosslyn, VA, and sender of Sears, Roebuck & Company, at 4640 Roosevelt Boulevard, Philadelphia, PA; scanned images provided by owner Erik Gutshall and included here with his permission.

Therefore, this original documentation indeed verifies that 800 North Highland Street is a true example of a Sears, Roebuck & Company catalog home. It can be presumed from the previous discussion that the Colliers ordered the Marina model, though it was unclear when the kit was purchased and when the home was actually constructed. To determine this information that would conclude the history of this Lyon Park property, a complete chain of title search was conducted at the Arlington County Courthouse.

On May 25, 1909, Peter Latterner and his wife Pauline filed a Deed of Dedication to subdivide a 17.457-acre tract of land at Clarendon, Arlington District, Alexandria County, Virginia. The subdivision was to include public streets and be designated as Blocks 1, 2, 3, and 5 of Peter Latterner's Addition to Clarendon.³⁵ Frank Lyon and his wife Georgie later assumed ownership of this entire tract.³⁶ On January 6, 1922, the Lyons sold all of lots 9 and 10 in block number 3 of Latterner's Addition to L.J. [Leslie] Collier.³⁷ Lyon and Fitch, Incorporated, Frank Lyon's company that developed Lyon Park, reserved a lien on the land as security for payment of \$700, presumably for the purchase of the two lots. The sale was contingent upon six restrictive covenants requiring that:

- the property not be used to conduct any business;
- any dwelling to be constructed must cost at least \$4,000;
- no two-family houses or apartments be erected before December 31, 1930;

³⁵ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 120, 332.

³⁶ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 167, 193.

³⁷ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 183, 5. On a side note, Leslie J. Collier's profession was listed as clerk on page 19 of the *1924 Arlington Directory and Yearbook*.

- all dwellings be built within the building lines indicated in the subdivision plat;
- any outbuildings be built at least 50 feet from the front line of the lot and at least 15 feet from any side streets; and
- the property, or any part or interest thereof, could not be sold or leased to any non-Caucasians.³⁸

The deed further stated that the aforementioned lien would be released upon the request of Collier in order “to allow a first trust to be executed to secure Sears, Roebuck & Company, for the payment due for material to be used in the house to be erected upon this property and [for] a second trust [to be] taken to secure the amount of the indebtedness remaining unpaid...”³⁹

Six months later on June 27, 1922, Leslie and his wife Mary A. Collier, of the City of Washington, District of Columbia, secured a deed of trust on lots 9 and 10 in the total amount of \$3,400. Of this amount, \$969 was to be paid in installments of \$17 per month beginning in September 1922, while payments for the balance of \$2,431 were to commence immediately and become due in five years at six percent interest.⁴⁰ William C. Reed of 4640 Roosevelt Boulevard, of the City of Philadelphia, was listed as the trustee, with David C. Wikoff, also of Philadelphia, deemed Reed’s successor in trust.⁴¹ In addition to lots 9 and 10 in block C, the trust included “all apparatus and fixtures for the purpose of supplying or distributing heat, light, water, or power and all other fixtures

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁰ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 184, 555-6. This corresponds with Sears’ policy of granting the customer several months to build the house and move in before payments officially started. The five-year loan at six percent interest was also typical of Sears mortgages.

⁴¹ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 184, 555-6, 558.

that may be placed in any building now or hereafter to be placed or erected on said land, including all building material which is to be used for the erection of the proposed dwelling referred to herein....”⁴² The Colliers further agreed “to erect a dwelling on the premises and completely finish [the] same in good workmanlike manner and to be ready for occupancy within three months after date hereof, said dwelling and other improvements, after being completed to cost not less than the amount of \$4,300.”⁴³

The address stated in the deed of trust for trustee William C. Reed, 4640 Roosevelt Boulevard, Philadelphia, matches the return address imprinted on the two original shipping tags for 800 North Highland Street. Therefore, this thesis has identified William C. Reed as another official Sears trustee, and one who was affiliated with the Philadelphia Catalog and Merchandise Distribution Center at the same Philadelphia address.⁴⁴ Research for this thesis also identified 184 individual transactions involving Reed that are listed in the Arlington County 1920-1950 Grantee Index to Deeds. This proves the abundant presence of genuine examples of Sears homes throughout the County. However, to determine the current address for each of these properties, as well as how many are still extant, would require many hours of additional research in the Land

⁴² Ibid., 556.

⁴³ Ibid., 556-7.

⁴⁴ Sears had a total of 12 Catalog and Merchandise Distribution Centers (CMDCs) located in major cities nationwide. The first opened in Dallas in 1905. Since catalog sales occurred nationwide, Sears created these regional supply centers to better service its customers and provide the most economical way to ship merchandise. Since it did not have its own CMDC, the Washington, DC, area would have been serviced by the facilities in Atlanta, Boston, or Philadelphia. This information on CMDCs was obtained during a telephone interview with Corporate Historian Dennis Preisler on 5 March 2003. Additionally, the last page of the *1926 Honor Bilt Modern Homes* catalog mentions a store at 4640 Roosevelt Boulevard, Philadelphia. All of this evidence, combined with the corresponding return address on Collier’s shipping tags, suggests that this particular CMDC was a broad operation, with a retail store, some type of warehouse and shipping facility, and a financial office.

Records Division at the County Courthouse and referencing the property files compiled during the countywide Historic Resources Survey. The Collier deed of trust transaction is also significant because it revealed that David C. Wikoff was yet another Sears trustee affiliated with the same Philadelphia address as Reed.⁴⁵

The above deed and mortgage record further confirms the Sears origin of the house at 800 North Highland Street. According to the stipulations set forth in the contract, the home was to be completed by the end of September 1922. Interestingly, the sum of the cost of the lots, the lien to Lyon and Fitch, and the deed of trust to Reed fell \$200 short of the minimum \$4,300 requirement. One can assume that Collier purchased additional fixtures, systems, or upgrades for his home in order to satisfy this requirement. Perhaps Collier also purchased a Sears garage.⁴⁶ On July 8, 1927, William Reed released the Colliers' deed of trust for their two lots and "the buildings and improvements thereon erected."⁴⁷ Both the Arlington County deed and mortgage records and *Houses by Mail* suggest that a 1922 date of construction for the home at 800 North Highland Street is more accurate than the 1924 date provided in the County's tax assessment records. Since the Marina model was available in 1918, 1919, and 1921, Collier likely ordered the 1921 kit version that was actually completed and ready for occupancy by autumn of 1922.

Members of the Collier family retained ownership of the property nearly 50 years,

⁴⁵ However, there were no additional listings for David C. Wikoff in any of the Arlington County Index to Deeds volumes.

⁴⁶ The 1936-1959 edition of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (Sheet 19) shows a one-story frame garage to the rear of the house and fronting North 8th Street on the site of the present parking pad. It is unknown if this garage was purchased from Sears when the house was ordered.

⁴⁷ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 265, 326.

selling it to John Bryan and Clare Ellen Caruso in November 1972.⁴⁸ The Carusos only owned the property until December 1978 when it was purchased by Linwood Ted and Janet Irene Lloyd.⁴⁹ The fourth and current owners, Erik and Renee Michelle Gutshall, assumed ownership in January 1997.⁵⁰

In conclusion, the analysis and positive documentation of the dwelling at 800 North Highland Street as a Sears house reveals several important points. Firstly, throughout the authentication process, one must be able to disregard and look beyond the use of modern materials, the loss of historic fabric, the construction of new additions, and the alteration of both exterior and interior appearances. By doing so in this case, semblances of the Marina model could be discerned in the existing residence now more than 80 years old. Secondly, periods of renovation and new construction offer an ideal opportunity for homeowners to discover original authenticating evidence that was previously hidden or not known to exist. Knowing where to begin looking for such important proof, as well as being lucky enough to locate some, is invaluable to the authentication process. Thirdly, the importance of the historic research component should not be underestimated. Actual deeds and mortgage records may reference Sears, Roebuck & Company specifically, or provide simply the names of trustees affiliated with Sears. As learned in this particular case, it is important to thoroughly document the names of the individuals listed in the deed and mortgage transactions, since their affiliation with Sears may not be clearly stated. Completing a chain of title can prove

⁴⁸ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 1806, 328.

⁴⁹ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 1981, 1277.

⁵⁰ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 2811, 1574.

extremely helpful in estimating a property's date of construction, perhaps even more so than local tax assessments or maps that may not be entirely accurate, verified, or easily located. Using deeds as a dating system, however, is limited by the fact that land records refer specifically to parcels of land that are either with or without "improvements" or buildings. Exact construction dates are not given, but rather can be inferred by when improvements first appear on the parcel. Deed research also provides a means by which to determine and verify current property addresses by comparing the legal property description with maps and survey plats.

Even though 800 North Highland Street began as the purest form of a Sears mail-order catalog house in that it was ordered as a complete kit and constructed with Sears parts, it has been drastically altered by subsequent alterations and modifications over time. If classifying Sears houses according to the amount of original materials that have been retained and the various levels of intervention that have affected its appearance over time, the example at 800 North Highland Street has evolved into a less pure state. Today, the only method by which to positively confirm its mail-order origins is a combination of a thorough exterior and interior examination, and extensive historic research and documentation.

315 North Garfield Street

The residence at 315 North Garfield Street,⁵¹ located in the central portion of Lyon Park, is a two-story, frame Dutch Colonial-styled house (Figures 49 and 50). The

⁵¹ Originally known as 424 Latterner Avenue until Arlington renamed its streets in 1935.



Figure 49: Front and right elevations of 315 North Garfield Street, showing original front entrance portico and original sunroom with new second story addition; photograph by author, March 2003.



Figure 50: Rear elevation of 315 North Garfield Street, showing original fenestration and side porch additions; photograph by author, March 2003.

house is situated near the intersection of North 4th and North Garfield streets. The gambrel-roofed house maintains its original configuration of seven rooms and one bathroom, including a one-story sun porch off the south elevation. The current owners, Jeffrey Digregorio and Timothy Duggan, recently have completed landscaping the grounds and renovating the period garage.⁵² The integrity of the home, both on the exterior and interior, is in excellent condition. Still clad in the original beveled wood siding, the home has undergone three phases of interior renovation, the first in the 1950s, the second in the 1970s, and the last in the early-1990s. According to Digregorio and Duggan, interior modifications have been limited to adding a coat closet and half bath in the first floor entrance hall, removing the first floor newel post of the staircase, modernizing the kitchen, replacing an original living room window with patio doors leading to a rear deck, enclosing the side porch on the north elevation, and installing a second upstairs bathroom off the master bedroom and above the original sun room. This original sun room was converted to a bathroom in the 1970s and its original windows were too damaged to be salvaged. To their knowledge, these are the only replacement windows in the house.

The home's most dominant features are its front entrance portico, fenestration, sun room on the south facade, and gambrel roof. The central front porch (Figure 51) projects slightly from the main entrance and is flanked on each side by a rounded Doric column and topped with a plain, wide entablature and a flat roof. The entrance consists of a 12-light wood panel storm door with four-light paneled sidelights on each side. The

⁵² Jeffrey Digregorio and Timothy Duggan, owners of 315 North Garfield Street. All information in this paragraph was obtained during a telephone conversation on 18 March 2003 and a site visit on 27 March 2003.



Figure 51: Original front entrance porch and main entrance of 315 North Garfield Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

fenestration of the dwelling (see Figure 49) consists of a combination of single and paired eight-over-one light and six-over-one light, double-hung wood sash windows. Another decorative element is the south facade's original sun room, which is now topped with a second story, one-room addition clad in vinyl siding (see also Figure 49). Lastly, the gambrel roof (see also Figure 49) is clad in asphalt shingles⁵³ with an exterior end brick chimney on the south elevation. The original full-width, shed-roofed, second story dormer pierces the roof line and extends across the front elevation. The roof line with its substantial dormer is the most stylistic element that gives the residence its Dutch-Colonial character.

Another unique feature of the property is the period one- and one-half-story, frame, gambrel-roofed garage that mimics the architectural style of the house (Figures 52 and 53). Located to the southeast at the end of the modern driveway, the walls of the outbuilding are clad in wood siding and the replacement roof in asphalt shingles. The garage contains a pair of original triple sliding wood doors, each fitted with a fixed four-light window in the upper half and a rectangular panel in the lower section. The half-story gambrel end contains a rectangular six-light fixed sash window. According to the current owners, this garage is original and was constructed at the same time as the dwelling.

Upon completing the exterior examination of both the dwelling and garage outbuilding, as well as after analyzing the information on the property available in the countywide Historic Resources Survey files, it was determined that the home's massing,

⁵³ According to the current owners, the original roofing material presumably was slate shingles.

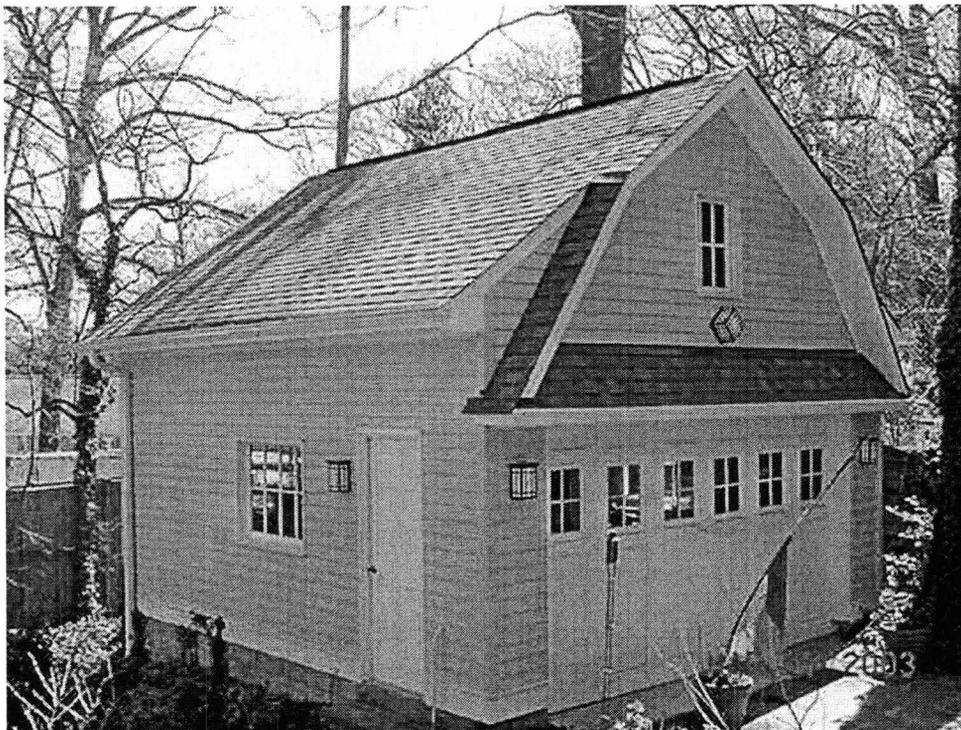


Figure 52: Detail of period garage behind 315 North Garfield Street, with original sliding wood doors and window sash. The loft area is finished and used for storage; photograph by author, March 2003.

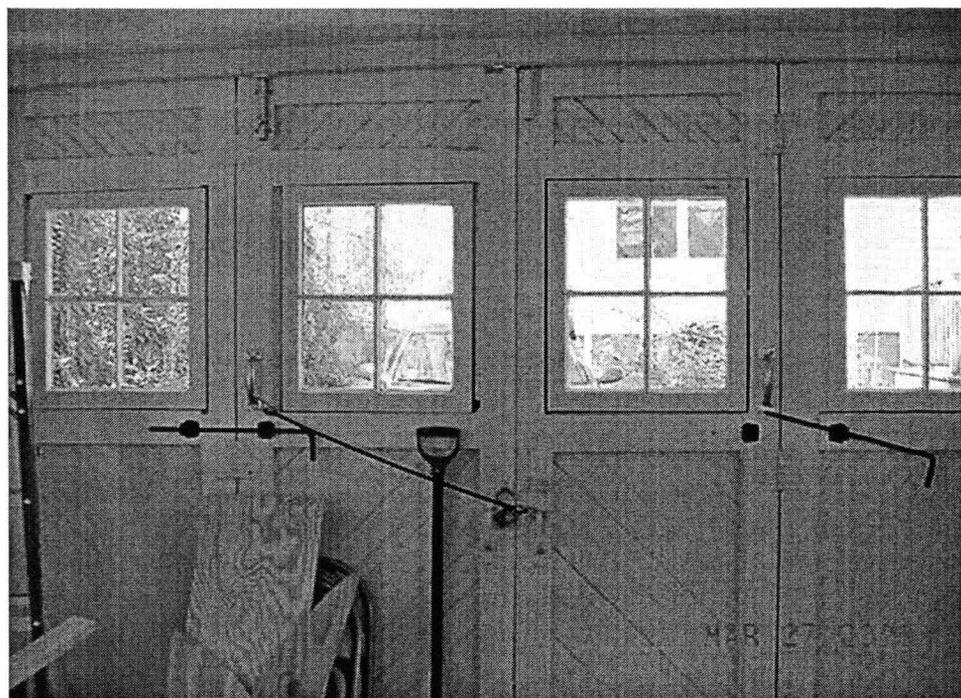


Figure 53: Detail of interior side of original garage doors at 315 North Garfield Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

materials, fenestration, and central front entrance portico suggested a resemblance to the Rembrandt model offered by Sears, Roebuck & Company (Figure 54). Available in only 1925 and 1926, this Honor-Bilt model ranged in price from \$2,383 to \$2,770.⁵⁴ The Rembrandt is very similar to the Van Jean model, which featured a gabled central entrance portico instead of a flat-roofed portico. The Van Jean was available in 1928 and 1929 and cost between \$2,499 and \$2,899.⁵⁵ The written description, illustration, and floor plans of the Rembrandt model provided in both *Houses by Mail* and the Dover reprint of the *1926 Honor Bilt Modern Homes* catalog are nearly identical to the residence at 315 North Garfield Street.

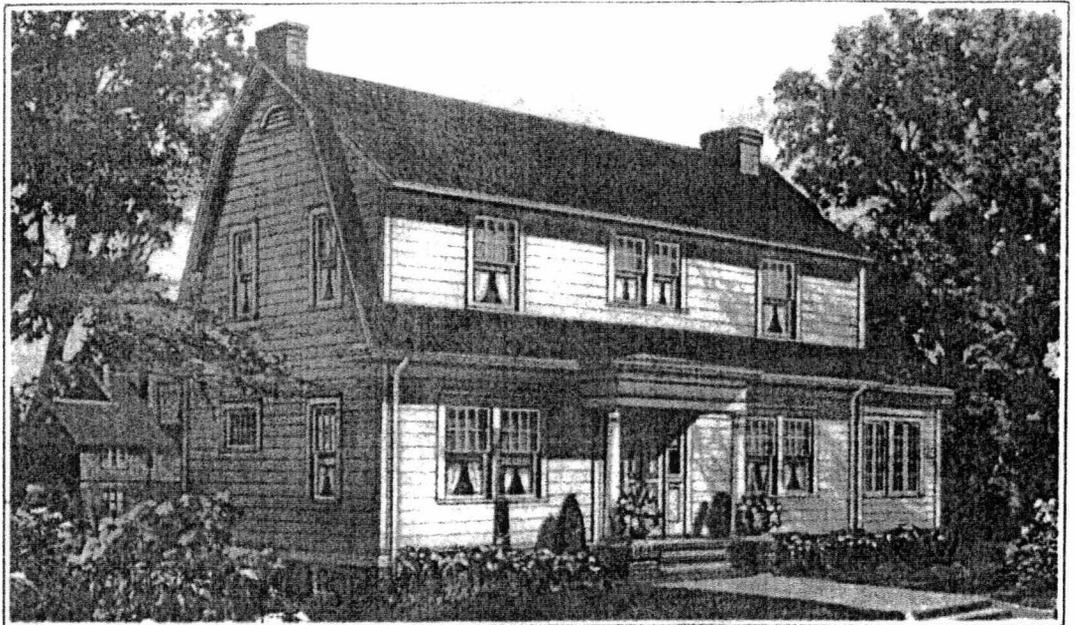
There is only a limited number of exterior differences between the catalog illustrations and this North Garfield Street home. In this Lyon Park example, the most obvious differences are the one-story porch on the north facade, changes that have been made to the original sun room on the south elevation, the decorative window shutters on the main facade, and the number of chimneys. The enclosed porch on the north elevation was a later addition to the house since a left side porch does not appear in the catalog advertisements.⁵⁶ The original sun room on the south facade contains double-hung sash windows that replaced the original French casement windows shown in the catalogs. The original pairs of narrow vertical sash, each fitted with ten lights, are illustrated in a

⁵⁴ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 334.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Digregorio, 18 March 2003. Research of historic Arlington County building and alteration permits revealed the permit for this porch (permit number 6721) was issued on February 14, 1951. The remark was listed as “open porch on side of house” on the house card for 315 North Garfield Street. Permit number 122884 issued in 1993 allowed the porch to be enclosed.

SIX-ROOM COLONIAL



THE REMBRANDT is an unusually well arranged Dutch Colonial house. It has many special features not generally found in houses of this price. It has a charming entrance that gives an atmosphere of welcome. It has Colonial windows with divided lights above and one light below. French windows in the sun room. Add to this the white siding and contrasting red or green roof with the red brick chimney and you have a home that is sure to charm the most critical.

The interior is cleverly planned. While it has the latest conveniences, the price is unusually low. Why? Because of careful planning and no wasted space. If a house of this size meets with your requirements, you will make no mistake in selecting the Rembrandt.

FIRST FLOOR

The Reception Hall. Entry into the reception hall reveals the splendid character of this Dutch Colonial home. An open stairway leads to the second floor. To the left of stairway is a coat closet with pole for coats and a hat shelf, accommodating a large number of guests. A grandfather clock can be set along the left wall. On each side of this reception hall are wide casement openings giving an excellent view of the large living room and the dining room on the opposite side.

The Living Room. To the right of hall you enter the living room, which is of the proper proportions to accommodate its furnishings to the best advantage. It is unusually large for a house of the size of the Rembrandt. See the floor plan. Almost directly opposite the wide casement opening is a brick mantel which is the central feature. All furniture may be grouped to your liking, as the space is ample. Windows on three sides afford plenty of light and air, making a cheery room.

The Sun Room. A French door opens into the sun room from the living room. If P3213A is ordered, seven pairs of French windows flood this room with sunshine. Fully furnished and draped, it can be made the chosen spot in winter or summer.

Honor Bill

The Rembrandt

"Already Cut" and Fitted

P3215A Price with Sun Room, \$2,770.00
P3215B Price without Sun Room, \$2,488.00

What Our Prices Include

At the prices quoted we will furnish all the material to build this six-room colonial house, consisting of:

- Lumber: Lath;
- Roofing, Oriental Slate Surfaced Shingles, Guaranteed for 17 Years;
- Siding, Clear Cypress or Clear Red Cedar, Bevel;
- Framing Lumber, No. 1 Quality Douglas Fir or Pacific Coast Hemlock;
- Flooring, Clear Grade Douglas Fir or Pacific Coast Hemlock;
- Plank Ceiling, Clear Grade Douglas Fir or Pacific Coast Hemlock;
- Finishing Lumber, High Grade Millwork (see pages 110 and 111);
- Interior Doors, Two Cross Panel Design of Douglas Fir; Trim, Beautiful Grain Douglas Fir or Yellow Pine, Birch Stair Treads and Rail;
- Mantel;
- Kitchen Cabinets, Medicine Case, Windows of California Clear White Pine;
- 40-Lb. Building Paper; Bash Weights;
- Leaves Trough and Down Spouts;
- Stratford Design Hardware (see page 132);
- Paint for Three Coats Outside Trim and Siding;
- White Enamel Finish for Trim in Living Room and Hall;
- 1 Also for Stair Risers and Balusters to Landing;
- Mahogany Finish for Doors in Hall, Stair Treads and Rail;
- Shallae and Varnish for All Other Interior Trim and Doors;
- Complete Plans and Specifications;
- Built on a concrete and brick foundation and excavated under entire house;
- We guarantee enough material to build this house. Prices do not include cement, brick or plaster. See description of "Honor Bill" Houses on pages 12 and 13.

OPTIONS

Sheet Plaster and Plaster Finish, to take the place of wood lath and plaster, with sun room, \$242.00; without sun room, \$230.00 extra. See page 109.

Storm Doors and Windows, with sun room, \$114.00 extra; without sun room, \$81.00.

Screen Doors and Windows, galvanized wire, with sun room, \$83.00 extra; without sun room, \$51.00.

For prices of Plumbing, Heating, Wiring, Electric Fixtures and Shades see pages 130 and 131.

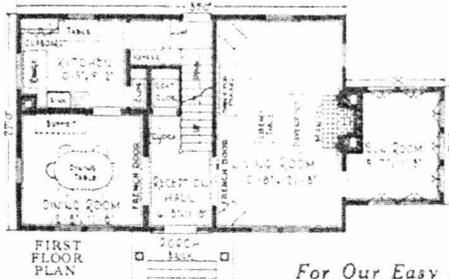
The Dining Room. To the left of the hall is the dining room. It is of good size. Windows on two sides give the desired light and ventilation.

The Kitchen. From the dining room you pass a swinging door into the model kitchen. Here the sink, the kitchen cabinets, the pantry closet and space for stove and table have been arranged with a thought to save the housewife (or servant) many steps each day. A high wash over the range gives plenty of light over the range and sink. The rear entry provides space for an ice box, which can be used without ice-man tracking the kitchen floor. To the right are stairs leading to the basement and to the left is the grade door to yard.

SECOND FLOOR

The Bedroom. The stairway hall has a good size window at the landing. A short hall connects with all bedrooms and bath. On one side is the main bedroom of large size which accommodates twin beds, dresser, chiffonier and other furniture. Two clothes closets are at one end of room. Between the closets and underneath a window is a built-in seat, with chest underneath. There are two other bedrooms, each with clothes closet. Ample ventilation and light are assured by the correct number of windows in each room. Close to the bathroom and handy to the bedrooms is a linen closet in the second floor hall.

The Basement. Room for furnace, laundry and storage. Height of Ceilings. Basement, 7 feet high from floor to joists, with cement floor. First floor, 9 feet from floor to ceiling. Second floor, 8 feet 7 inches from floor to ceiling.



Can be built on a lot 50 feet wide with sun room, and on a lot 40 feet wide without sun room.

This house can be built with the rooms reversed. See page 3.



For Our Easy Payment Plan See Page 144

Figure 54: Catalog advertisement for the Rembrandt model; Illustration as appears in Dover Publication's *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 House Catalog – An Unabridged Reprint*, page 30.

February 1998 photograph of the property taken during the countywide Historic Resources Survey (Figure 55). The North Garfield Street residence also boasts a modern one-room addition above the sunroom, which houses a master bathroom. The windows on the front facade of the 315 North Garfield Street home are adorned with non-functioning, louvered shutters. Since the advertisements indicate the windows had no such decoration, it can be assumed that the installation of the shutters also was a later modification. Lastly, the advertisements show the roof line pierced with a brick chimney at each gable end. The Digregorio/Duggan residence only features one chimney on the south side.⁵⁷

As for the floor plan, the original owners chose to purchase the south side sun room shown in the illustration, which added \$304 to the total cost of the house.⁵⁸ A personal tour by the current owners revealed only few interior variations compared to the advertised model. As mentioned previously, the original open reception hall on the first level has been modified to include a coat closet opposite the main entrance and a powder room to the rear of the stairs and opposite the kitchen. Although the catalog descriptions describe a coat closet in the model, the original closet would have been located at the far end of the hallway, where the powder room now exists in the Digregorio/Duggan house. This North Garfield Street example also features a built-in wooden china cabinet with a scrolled pediment in the northeastern corner of the dining room. It can be assumed that the original owners purchased this piece for installation with the house kit.

⁵⁷ A February 1998 photograph of the house taken during the countywide Historic Resources Survey shows the chimney was originally an exterior end chimney (see Figure 55). The shaft is now hidden by the second story addition atop the original sun room.

⁵⁸ Dover Publications, *Small Houses of the Twenties*, 30.



Figure 55: Front and right elevations of 315 North Garfield Street in 1998. Note the original French windows in the sun room, as well as the exterior end chimney that is now concealed by an upper master bathroom addition; photograph by E.H.T. Tracerics, February 1998.

The stylistic detailing of the frame garage suggests that it most likely dates to the same period of construction as the house at 315 North Garfield Street. However, an exact match of the garage was not found in Dover's 1926 reprint catalog. The triple sliding doors were common in many garages offered by Sears, as seen in the similar pair of triple doors found in the pyramidal-roofed Avenue model (Figure 56).⁵⁹

In summary thus far, the exterior architectural examination of 315 North Garfield Street resulted in finding many similarities to Sears' Rembrandt model. Additional evidence was obtained from meeting the current owners, viewing the interior of the house, and comparing it to the two catalog advertisements available in *Houses by Mail* and Dover's reprint of the *1926 Honor Bilt Modern Homes* catalog. The home was mistakenly flagged as the similar Van Jean model in the countywide Historic Resources Survey and identified as the Rembrandt in the Arlington Historical Society survey. The real estate agent who sold the home to the present owners advertised it as a Sears house, but offered no concrete proof. Before formally determining if the home at 315 North Garfield Street was a genuine Sears house, a more detailed investigation of the interior floor plan, detailing, and structural framing was necessary since no original Sears documentation had yet been found. Conducting historic research on the property also was warranted to try to locate a Sears-issued mortgage and to confirm if the estimated date of construction corroborated with when Sears offered the Rembrandt model.

There are numerous original decorative and built-in features remaining inside the Digregorio/Duggan residence. It is believed that the following interior details are

⁵⁹ Ibid., 122.

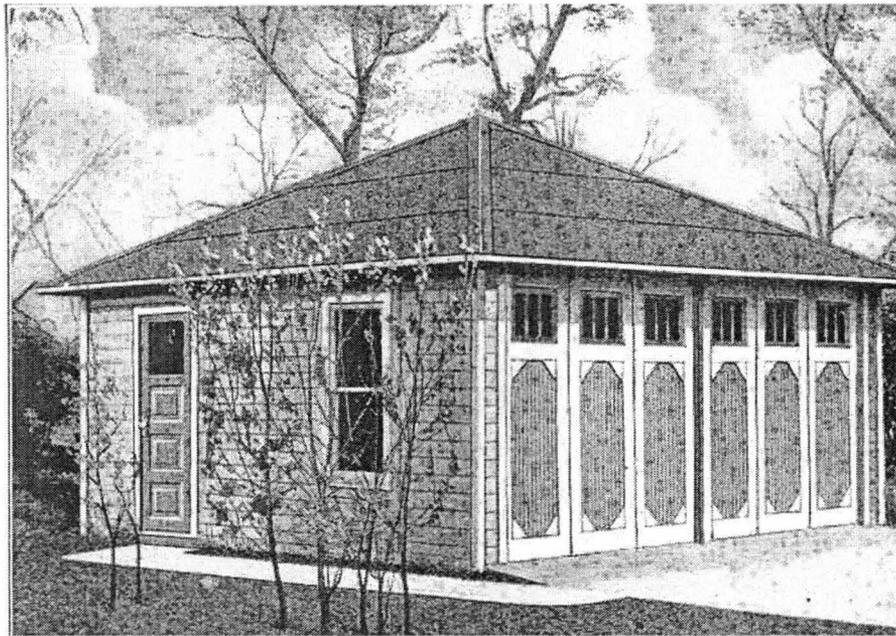


Figure 56: The triple sliding garage doors on this garage are similar to those on the garage at 315 North Garfield Street; Illustration of Avenue model garage by Sears, as appears in Dover Publication's *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 House Catalog – An Unabridged Reprint*, page 122.

original: the glazed and paneled front storm door; wood windows, panel doors, and trim found throughout the house; floor radiators; oak floors on the first level and yellow pine floors upstairs; brick living room fireplace with wood surround (Figure 57); French doors leading from the entrance hall into the living room (to be reinstalled by current owners) and from the living room into the sun room (Figure 58); built-in corner china cabinet in the dining room (Figure 59); tile flooring and angular-shaped porcelain bathtub in the original second floor bathroom (Figure 60); built-in window seat with storage chest in the master bedroom; and “Stratford” design brass door hardware available from Sears (Figure 61). With the exception of the modifications to the front entrance hall, the interior circulation pattern remains unaltered and the floor plan matches those shown in the advertisements. The most radical interior changes have been confined to the kitchen, with the removal of the original cabinetry and fixtures.

Neither Digregorio or Duggan has found any original documentation in the form of shipping tags, blueprints, or Sears stampings. To their knowledge, none was found during the most recent renovation work completed in the early-1990s. One of the previous occupants left behind reproduction copies of Sears plans for the Rembrandt model. Copies of the blueprints from the renovation projects undertaken in the 1950s and 1990s were found inside a drawer in the kitchen, providing a detailed account of the existing layout and work performed at the time of each project.

During the site visit conducted for this thesis, however, three original Sears stampings were discovered by both the author and property owners. The first stamping, “A 331,” was located on the post railing of the attic stairs (Figure 62). Another marking,



Figure 57: Detail of original fireplace mantel in the living room of 315 North Garfield Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

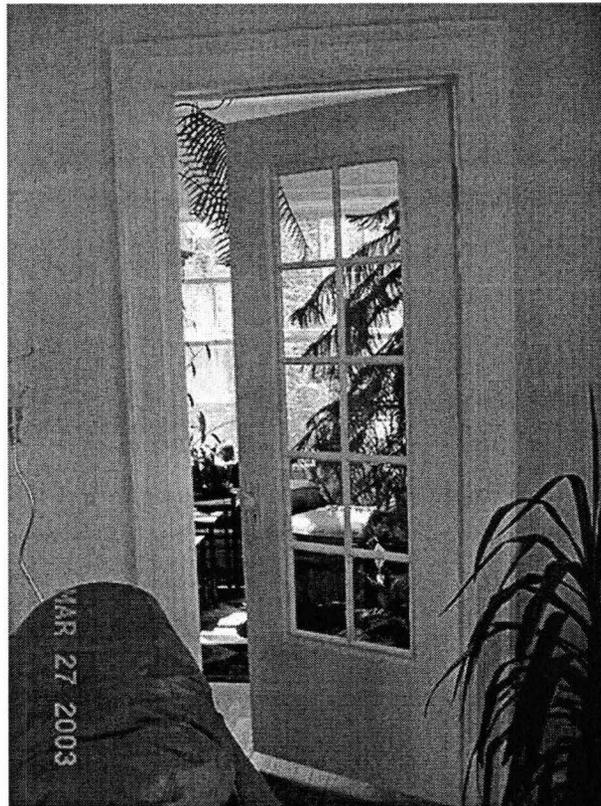


Figure 58: Detail of original French door leading from the living room into the original sun room at 315 North Garfield Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

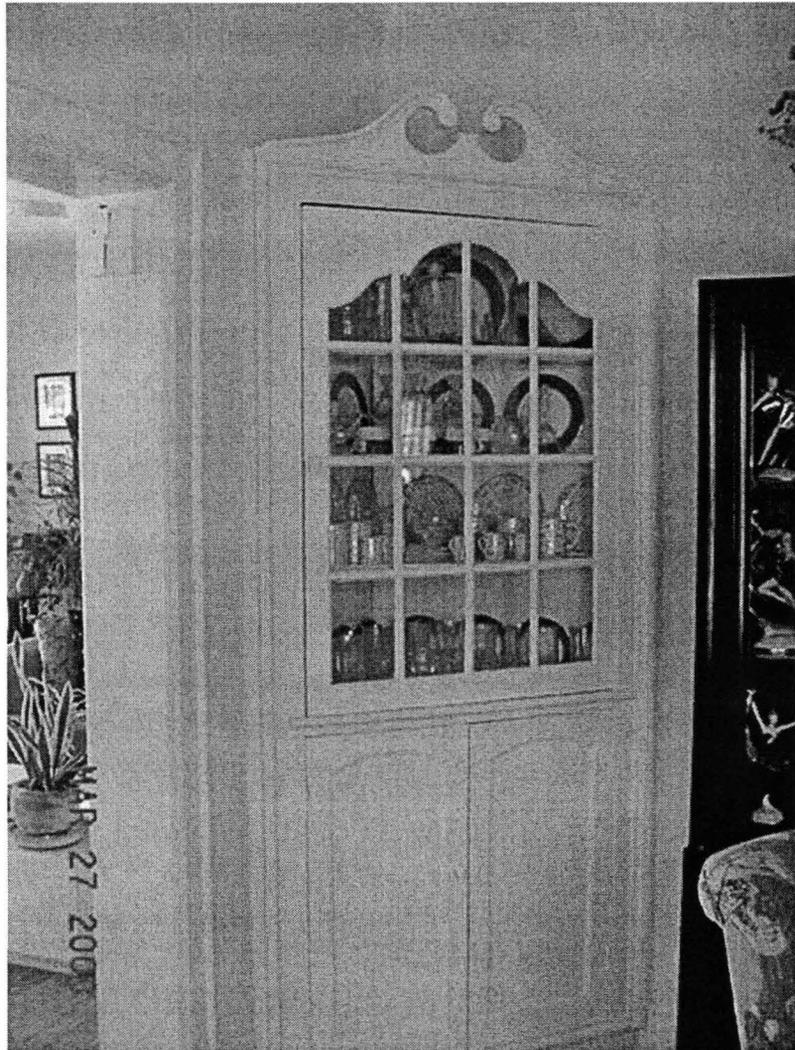


Figure 59: Original built-in corner china cabinet in the dining room of 315 North Garfield Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

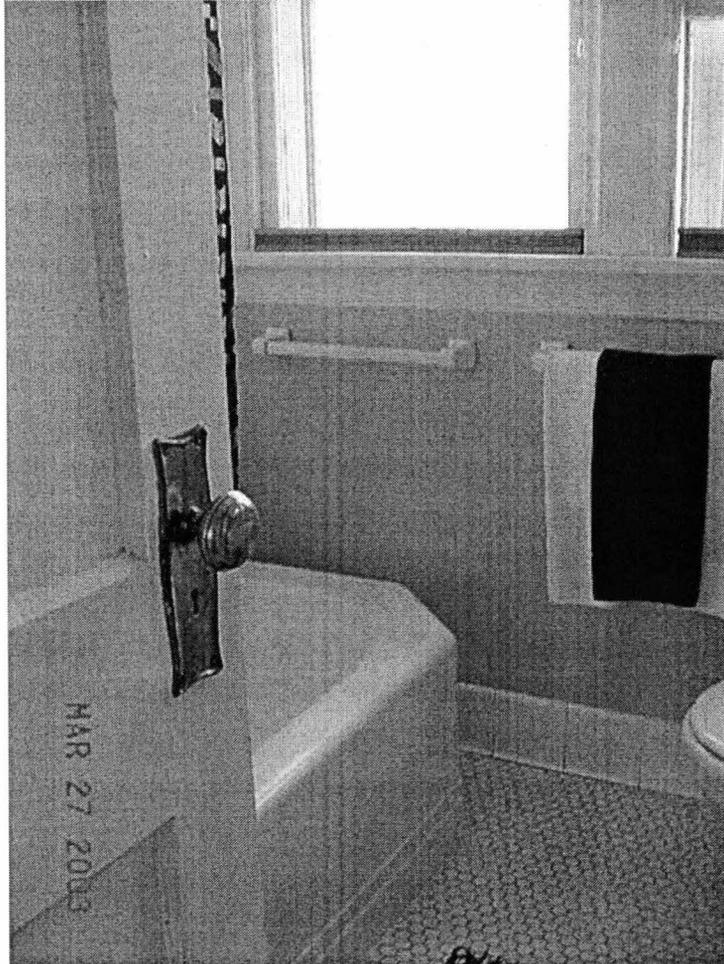


Figure 60: Original second level bathroom of 315 North Garfield Street, with original tile flooring, angular-shaped bathtub, and door hardware; photograph by author, March 2003.

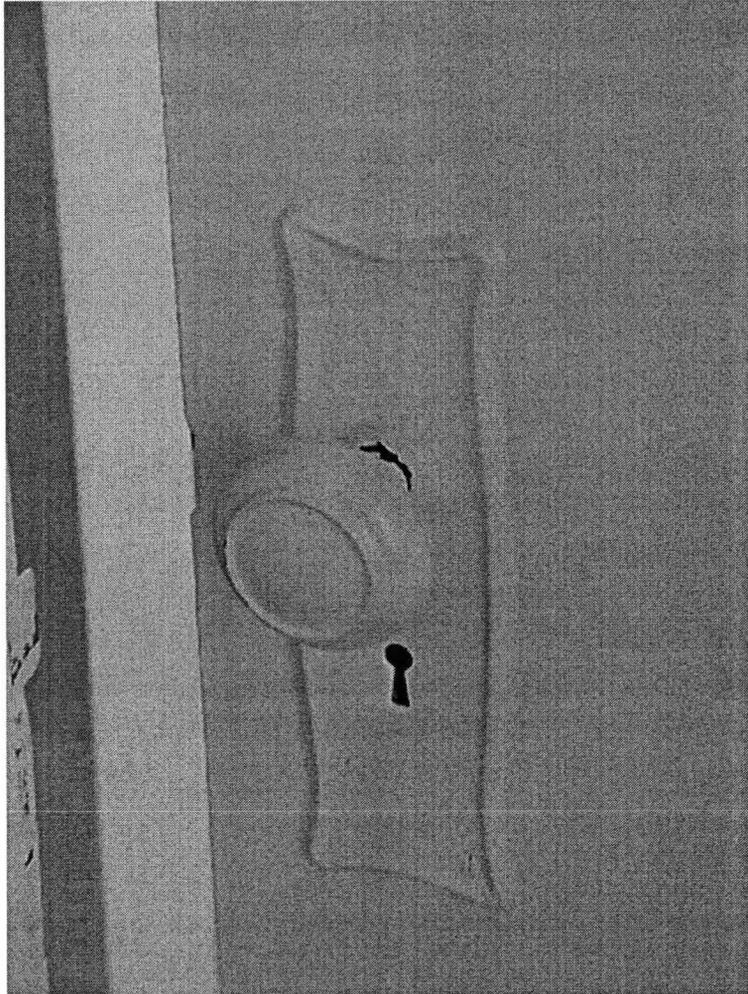


Figure 61: Typical “Stratford” design door hardware found throughout the interior of 315 North Garfield Street. This hardware design was one of several advertised by Sears in its various catalogs; photograph by author, March 2003.

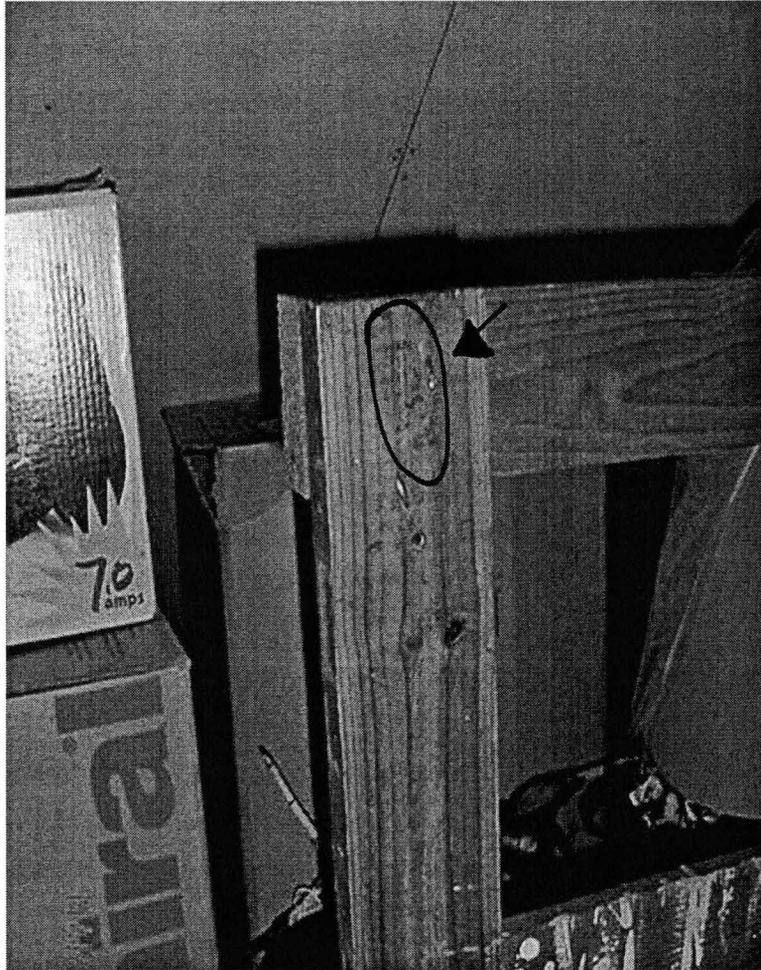


Figure 62: Detail of original Sears stamping "A 331" found by author on the stair railing of the attic at 315 North Garfield Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

“A 101,” was found on a floor joist next to the pull-down attic door. A third stamping, “C 1036,” was visible in the basement on a floor joist beneath the kitchen and near a basement window along the east side of the house (Figure 63). All of the stampings were in dark-colored ink and located near the ends of the framing pieces. These original markings were quite legible, did not require much searching to actually locate, and were found without the aid of a flashlight. The potential also exists for additional lumber stampings to be found all throughout the house, and possibly within the period garage.⁶⁰

Therefore, the discovery of these original Sears stampings during the interior structural examination proves that the residence at 315 North Garfield Street is a genuine example of a Sears, Roebuck & Company mail-order catalog house. This substantial evidence corroborates all of the other clues gleaned from examining the exterior and interior of the home and comparing these appearances and features to those in Sears house catalogs. It can be presumed from the previous discussion that the original owners ordered the Rembrandt model, though it remains unknown if the original owners purchased the 1925 or 1926 version of the kit. To help determine an estimated date of construction, a complete chain of title search was conducted at the Arlington County Courthouse.

On May 26, 1926, Lyon and Fitch, Incorporated, sold to Don B. and Ada E. Looney “all of the north 77 feet by the full depth thereof, of Lot 607, Section 4, Moore’s

⁶⁰ Although an interior examination of the garage also was conducted during the site visit, no similar structural stampings were found. The installation of insulation and drywall inside the garage has likely concealed any markings that may originally have been visible. Yet the potential still exists to find stampings now that the owners are aware of what the stampings look like from those examples found in their home. Such evidence would then confirm that the garage also was ordered from Sears.

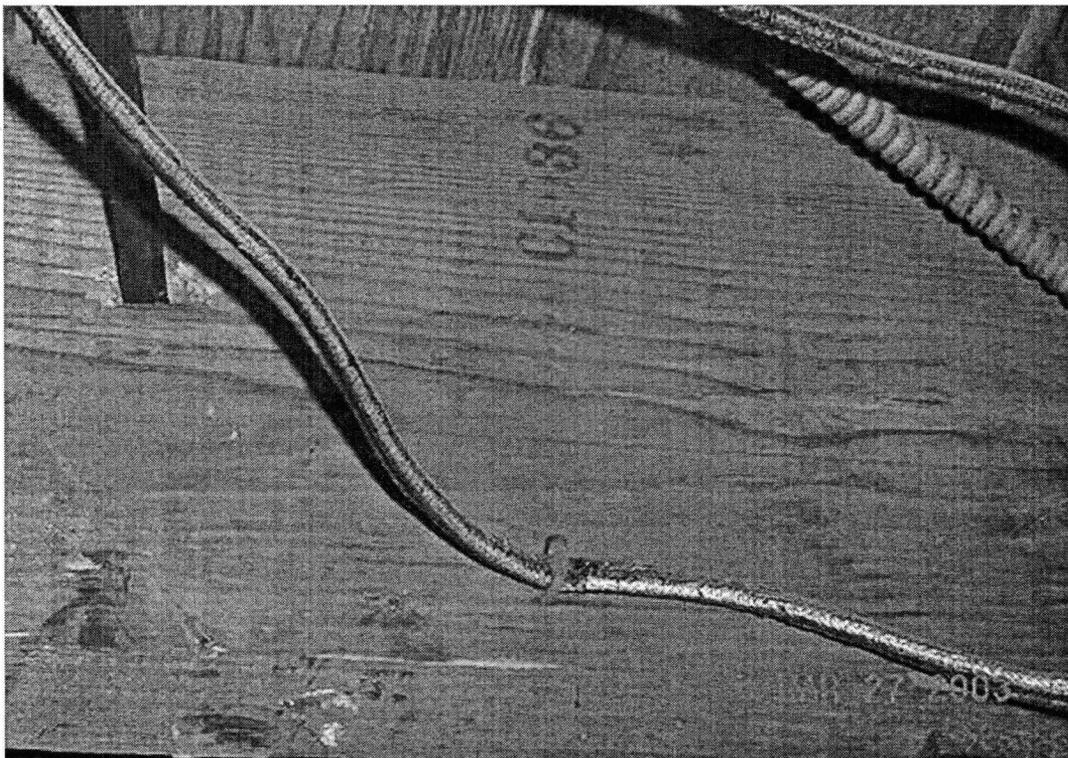


Figure 63: Detail of original Sears stamping “C 1036” found by author on a floor joist in the basement of 315 North Garfield Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

Addition to Clarendon.”⁶¹ The sale was contingent upon the same six restrictive covenants listed in the history of 800 North Highland Street. The Looneys’ transaction, however, contained an additional condition in the last clause that stated no part or interest in the property could be sold or leased to non-Caucasians for a period of 99 years commencing September 1, 1923.⁶²

Several weeks later, the Looneys secured three separate trusts on their property. The first loan, in the amount of \$528.25, was issued on June 5, 1926, to Harry R. Thomas and Clarence R. Ahalt, two trustees of Lyon and Fitch, Incorporated. The loan was payable at \$20 per month without interest,⁶³ and most likely covered the cost of the building lot. A second trust was issued the same day to both Thomas and Ahalt in the amount of \$575.65. This loan was to be paid specifically to Elizabeth P. Sheppard at \$30 per month without interest.⁶⁴ The third and most important deed of trust in the amount of \$6,600 was issued one week later on June 11, 1926, to trustee William C. Reed, of 4640 Roosevelt Boulevard, City of Philadelphia.⁶⁵ Of this amount, \$1,848 was to be paid in installments of \$33 per month beginning in October 1926,⁶⁶ while payments for the balance of \$4,572 were to commence in July and become due in five years at six percent

⁶¹ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 244, 7-8.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁶ This corresponds with Sears’ policy of granting the customer several months to build the house and move in before payments officially started.

interest. John M. Ogden, also of Philadelphia, was deemed Reed's successor in trust.⁶⁷ In addition to the northern 77 feet of lot 607, the trust included "all apparatus and fixtures for the purpose of supplying or distributing heat, light, water, or power and all other fixtures that may be placed in any building now or hereafter to be placed or erected on said land, including all building material which is to be used for the erection of the proposed dwelling referred to herein...."⁶⁸ The Looneys further agreed "to erect a dwelling on the premises and completely finish [the] same in good workmanlike manner and to be ready for occupancy within four months after date hereof, said dwelling and other improvements, after being completed to cost not less than the amount of \$9,500."⁶⁹

The Looneys retained ownership almost 20 years to the day, selling to E.A. and Claire L. Rowell on May 23, 1946.⁷⁰ The Rowells sold the property to Henry R. and Marguerite Graybill on September 10, 1957.⁷¹ Nearly 40 years passed before the widowed Mrs. Graybill and her co-guardian Christopher Graybill sold the property to Pamela Banning and Robert J. Veith on December 21, 1993.⁷² Leonardo M. Javier, Jr., then purchased the property on August 17, 1998.⁷³ The current owners, Jeffrey A.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 716, 249.

⁷¹ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 1304, 581.

⁷² Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 2647, 1310.

⁷³ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 2918, 509.

Digregorio and Timothy J. Duggan, acquired the parcel on April 30, 1999.⁷⁴

The research for this thesis also identified a possible third Sears trustee, John M. Ogden. Since the Looneys' transaction listed Ogden as the alternate trustee for William C. Reed, it can be deduced that Ogden was affiliated with both Reed and David C. Wikoff in Sears' Philadelphia Catalog and Merchandise Distribution Center at the Philadelphia address of 4640 Roosevelt Boulevard. The above deed and mortgage record further verifies that the home at 315 North Garfield Street is a genuine example of a Sears house. According to the official deed of trust from Sears, the dwelling was to be completed and ready for occupancy by mid-October 1926. On a side note, the sum of the three loans totals only \$7,703.90. This amount falls about \$1,796 short of the minimum \$9,500 building requirement. It can be assumed that the Looneys purchased additional fixtures, systems, or upgrades for their home, as well as a detached garage, in order to satisfy this requirement. On July 29, 1931, William C. Reed issued a mortgage release to the Looneys for their lot and "the buildings and improvements thereon erected."⁷⁵ Both the Arlington County deed and mortgage records and *Houses by Mail* prove that the 1926 construction date is more accurate than the 1925 date provided in the County's tax assessment records. Since the Rembrandt model was available in both 1925 and 1926, the Looneys presumably ordered the 1926 kit version that was actually completed and ready for occupancy by autumn of the same year.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 2979, 1548.

⁷⁵ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 325, 38.

⁷⁶ On a side note, Don B. Looney was listed as a radiotrician in *Polks' Washington Suburban Directory of Maryland and Virginia Towns Adjacent to the District of Columbia* (1930-31), 555. His wife Ada also was

In conclusion, the analysis and positive documentation of the residence at 315 North Garfield Street as a Sears house reveals two key points to keep in mind. First is the fact that not all original Sears stampings on structural framing members are concealed. In the case of the home at 800 North Highland Street, original stampings were found only when exposed during renovation efforts. In contrast, structural stampings found during the analysis of 315 North Garfield street were readily visible, even during just a cursory examination. This confirms that original markings also can be found in ordinary everyday circumstances, as well as during renovation projects. Another point to consider is the limited amount of information that exists on the outbuildings and garages advertised by Sears in its various catalogs. At best, the period garage at 315 North Garfield Street can only be assumed to be from Sears since its roof line stylistically matches that of the genuine Sears house and since it features sliding wood doors that are remarkably similar to many doors illustrated in Sears catalogs. However, an exact match for the garage was not found to date in any of the accessible catalog documentation. Locating structural markings on the interior of the garage, as well as finding a matching model in rarer examples of Sears house and specialty catalogs (such as those maintained by the Sears Archives), would confirm the Sears origin of this outbuilding.

listed as residing at 424 Latterner Avenue, as well as G. Alf (a carpenter) and his wife Minnie B. Looney. Perhaps this relative helped Don and Ada Looney erect their home at 315 North Garfield Street. On page 19 of the *1936 Lyon Park Directory*, both Don B. and Ada, as well as Robert B. and Mrs. Minnie B. Looney, are cited as residing at 315 North Garfield Street. Don's occupation was given as a radio instructor.

102 North Fillmore Street

The residence at 102 North Fillmore Street,⁷⁷ situated in the southwestern corner of Lyon Park, is a considerably larger example of a two-story, frame bungalow (Figures 64-66). The house is located at the intersection of North 1st and North Fillmore streets. The cross-gabled house maintains its original configuration of eight rooms and one bathroom, including a one-story sun porch off the south elevation. The current owners, Susan and Kenneth Bell, recently have begun a restoration effort to update the kitchen and stabilize cracked plasterwork throughout the house.⁷⁸ The integrity of the home, both on the exterior and interior, is in excellent condition, despite some minor alterations and assorted “home improvement” projects undertaken by previous owners. According to the Bells the original owners, the Burnetts, converted most of the house for use as apartments for soldiers sometime during or after World War II. During this time, the Burnetts still maintained residency there. As many as four apartments existed, though the exact number is unknown. The Burnetts also owned the lot to the rear of the house that contained a pond and lawn tennis court, both of which no longer remain.

The home’s most dominant features are its projecting gabled front porch, the second story gabled dormer on the front roof slope, the exterior end chimney on the north elevation, and the sun porch on the south elevation. The front porch (Figure 67) is

⁷⁷ Originally known as 705 Spruce Street until Arlington renamed its streets in 1935.

⁷⁸ Susan and Ken Bell, owners of 102 North Fillmore Street. The Bells graciously extended an invitation to tour their home, both outside and inside. Susan is the current Director of the Arlington County Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development. Both are interested in learning more about the history of their home and are in the process of applying for Virginia’s rehabilitation tax credit for their restoration work. All information in this paragraph was obtained during a visit on 7 January 2003.



Figure 64: Front and right elevations of 102 North Fillmore Street; photograph by author, February 2003.



Figure 65: Rear elevation of 102 North Fillmore Street; photograph by author, March 2003.



Figure 66: Left elevation of 102 North Fillmore Street with original sun porch; photograph by author, March 2003.

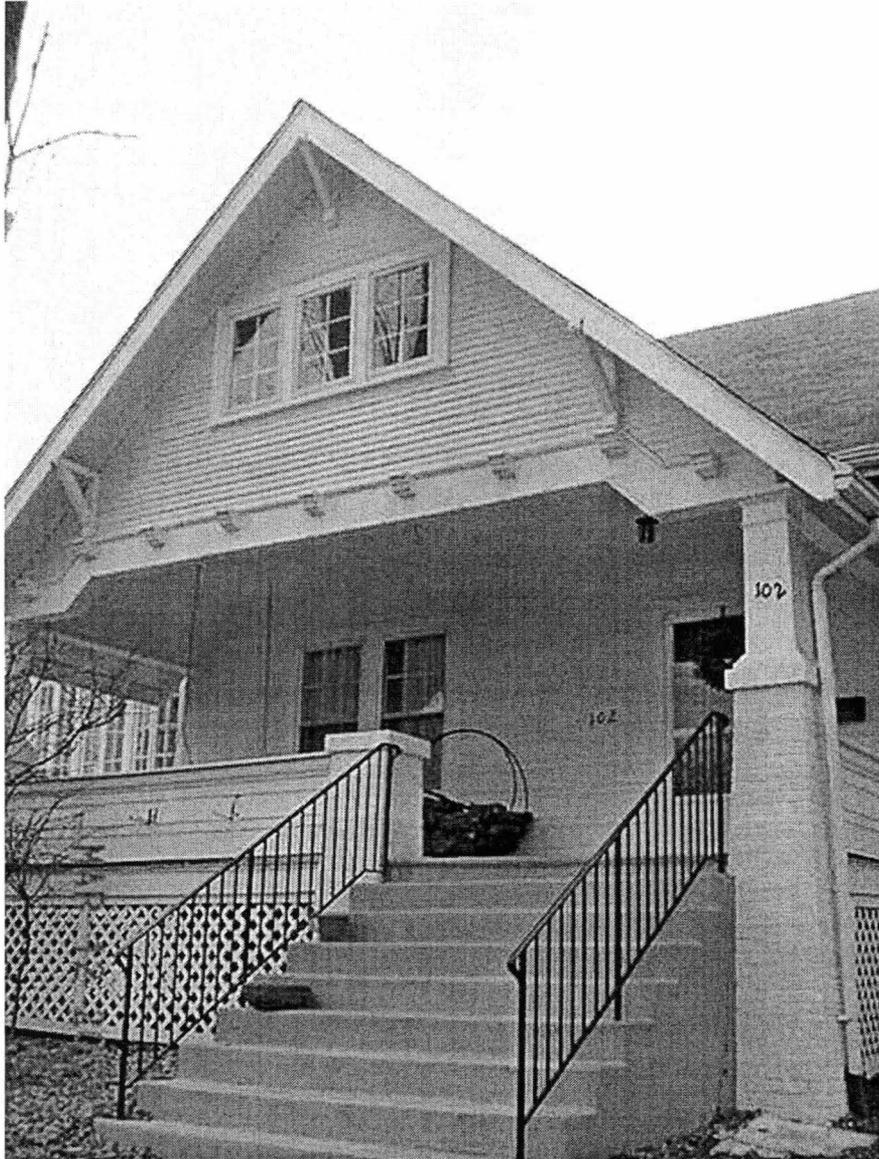


Figure 67: Detail of original front entrance porch of 102 North Fillmore Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

unusual in that it extends only half-way across the full-width of the front facade to shelter the main entrance. The porch roof contains a steeply pitched gabled dormer that pierces the main roof line. The roof is supported by two slightly tapered, brick masonry piers with a corbelled cap and topped with a proportionately smaller squared wood column. A third pier in the middle is empty without any decorative columns. The balustrade consists of a solid knee wall clad in the same wood siding as the house. The front of the porch features an angular-shaped bargeboard adorned with small rounded brackets resembling blocks of applied molding. The pediment itself is clad in narrow beaded wood siding, with a three-part knee brace bracket at each end and the apex. A small raised square block decorates the top and bottom of each of these braces. The gable also contains a tripartite rectangular opening fitted with three casement windows each with six lights.

The second story gabled dormer (see Figure 64) is located to the right of the porch's gable and mirrors it in roof slope and ornamentation. The dormer features the same three knee brace brackets with squared medallions, as well as exposed rafter tails. The dormer contains a rectangular opening fitted with paired casement windows each with four lights. The large, brick exterior end chimney extends through the roof line on the north elevation (Figure 68). At the foundation level, a square-shaped metal door for cleaning out the fireplace can be found that bears an emblem with the wording "Westal crafted with pride in the U.S.A." The mid-section of the chimney at the level of the first story window openings contains two rectangular-shaped metal doors with rounded tops and that each contain a raised image of a fireplace hearth. Above these openings at the second floor level are two decorative corbelled brick bands. The chimney is topped with

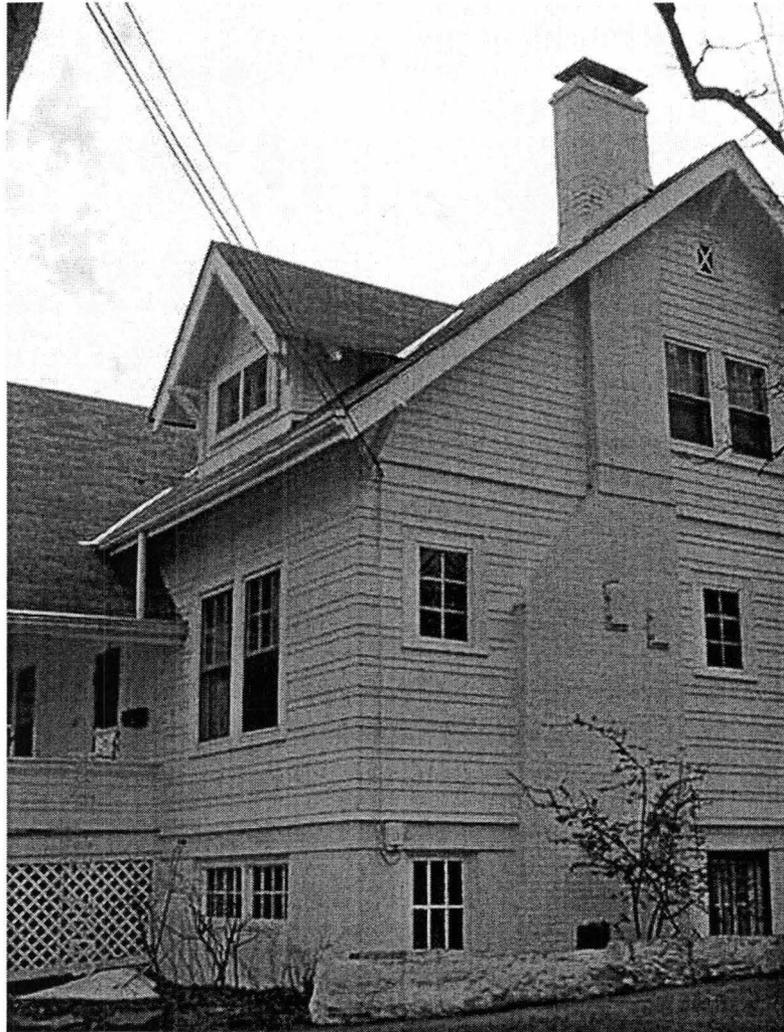


Figure 68: Detail of brick exterior end chimney on the right elevation of 102 North Fillmore Street. Note the three fireplace clean out doors, one at the basement level to the left of the shrub and two at the level of the first floor windows; photograph by author, March 2003.

a corbelled brick cap.

The one-story sun porch dominates the south elevation (see Figure 66). According to the Bells, it originally had a flat roof and has been modified to a slightly-sloping shed roof. The front of the porch is fitted with a large tri-partite window opening, consisting of three pairs of narrow French windows each with eight lights. While the porch's side facade contains a pair of identical window openings, the opening on the rear facade only measures two pairs wide as opposed to three. The porch is clad in the same wood siding as the rest of the house. Also of note is the enclosed second story sleeping porch located in the projecting cross gable on the rear elevation (Figure 69). This porch contains a continuous band of nine one-over-one light, double-hung sash windows, is clad in clapboard siding, and topped with a small brick interior chimney.

The exterior of 102 North Fillmore Street is clad in the original wood siding. The siding consists of a unique treatment of two separate beveled bands, one narrow and the other twice as wide. Both bands are scored randomly to resemble wood shingling. The upper gable ends of the house, as well as the cross gables and front dormer, are clad in a more typical smooth-faced, plain wood siding. The location of the window openings throughout the house has remained unchanged, and nearly all of the original wood windows and doors survive. The openings are fitted with a variety of sash, including one-over-one and six-over-one light, double-hung sash, as well as single and paired fixed and casement sash. The main entrance door is a heavy wood door with 18 raised square panels. Other than modifications to the rear entrance stoop and side sun porch roof line, the exterior appearance of 102 North Fillmore Street remains mostly unaltered.



Figure 69: Detail of original second story sleeping porch on the rear elevation of 102 North Fillmore Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

Another feature of note is the period frame, gable-front garage located to the north of the house (Figures 70 and 71). Clad in plain wood siding, the garage contains three sliding door openings, each fitted with what originally was an eight-light fixed window in the upper section and decorated with frame cross-hatching in the lower section. The gable end contains a rectangular window opening, now without any sash, though likely originally fitted with a six-light fixed sash window as found on the south side of the garage. The gable is adorned with similarly styled knee brace brackets as found on the dwelling and has exposed rafter tails. A small shed addition abuts the rear of the garage.

Upon completion of the exterior examination of both the dwelling and garage, as well as after analyzing the information on the property available in the countywide Historic Resources Survey files, it was determined that the home's massing, materials, and prominent front porch, gable, and end chimney suggested a resemblance to the Kilbourne model offered by Sears, Roebuck & Company (Figure 72). Available in 1921, 1925, 1926, 1928, and 1929, this Honor-Bilt model ranged in price from \$2,500 to \$2,780.⁷⁹ The written description, illustration, and floor plans of the Kilbourne model provided in both *Houses by Mail* and the Dover reprint of the *1926 Honor Bilt Modern Homes* catalog, are strikingly comparable to the residence at 102 North Fillmore Street.

Yet, there are still some notable exterior and interior differences between the catalog illustrations and this Fillmore Street example. In the Bells' home, the most obvious exterior differences are in the fenestration and wall treatment. The front living room window opening, located to the right of the porch, is fitted with a pair of six-over-

⁷⁹ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 211.

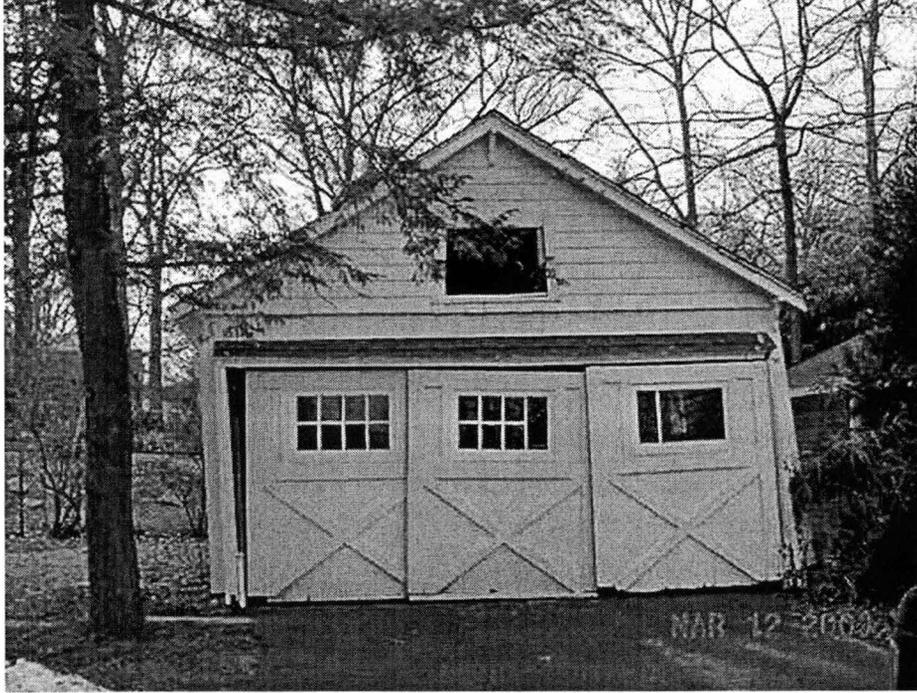


Figure 70: Front elevation of period garage at 102 North Fillmore Street, with original sliding wood doors and decorative bracketing in the gable; photograph by author, February 2003.

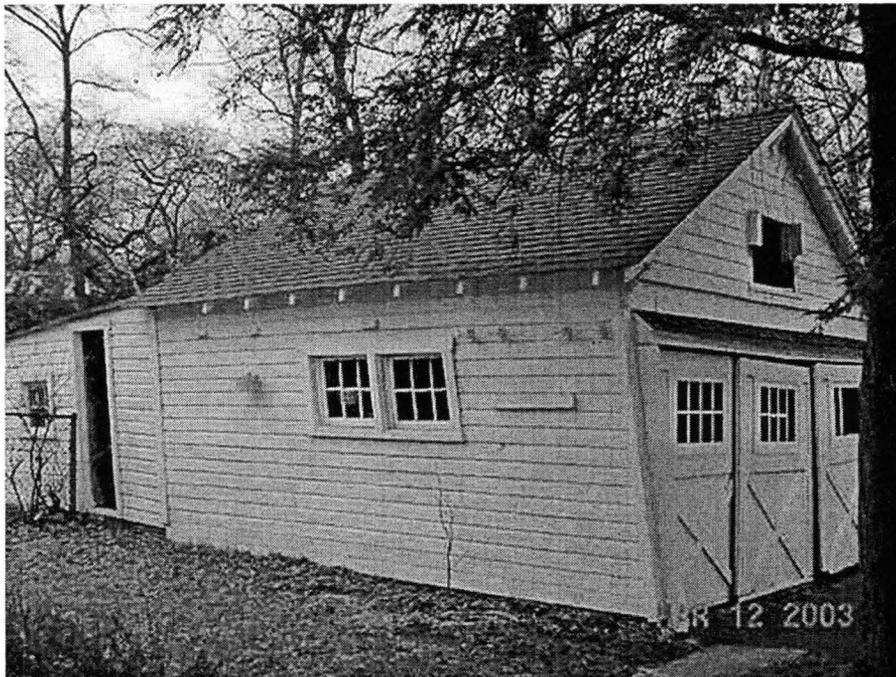


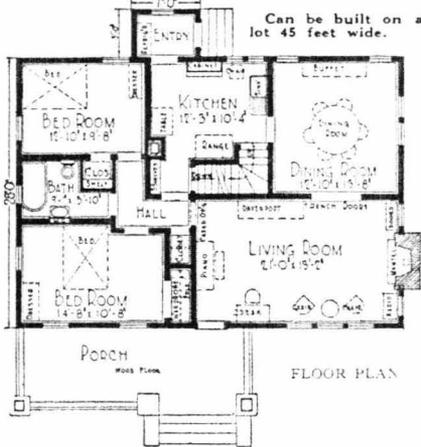
Figure 71: Front and left elevations of period garage at 102 North Fillmore Street. Note the exposed rafter tails and rear shed addition; photograph by author, March 2003.



A CUSTOMER who built The Kilbourne bungalow recently wrote us as follows: "Our house has been the object of much admiration, not only from our friends, but strangers, who in passing will stop to look at the artistic front. Many have remarked about the 'homey' porch. We have no hesitancy whatever in recommending Sears-Roebuck lumber, which came in plenty of time, and in splendid condition. Also must thank you for the courteous treatment and helpful suggestions you have given us. We know we saved nothing less than \$1,500.00."

The Kilbourne bungalow satisfies every family that has built it. Judge for yourself! The photograph and floor plan reproduced on this page shows the reason why The Kilbourne is such an outstanding value. See its sloping roof, the dormer, the overhanging eaves, the fireplace chimney, the large porch and the massive porch pillars!

The Living Room. Size, 21 feet by 13 feet 2 inches. Interest is centered on the fireplace and mantel, at each side of which is a window. There are three additional windows overlooking the front lawn. The large size of this room allows for a pleasing arrangement of furnishings.



Honor Bill
The Kilbourne
 No. P17013 "Already Cut" and Fitted
\$2,700⁰⁰

The Dining Room. French doors connect the living room and dining room. Floor size of the dining room, 12 feet 10 inches by 13 feet 8 inches, just the right size for the modern home. A double side window and two high sash windows provide light and air.

The Kitchen. From the dining room a swinging door opens into the kitchen. Size of kitchen, 12 feet 3 inches by 10 feet 4 inches. It has a built-in cabinet, Nos. P9260 and P9261 shown on pages 110 and 111, space for sink, range, table and chairs. A double window affords light and ventilation.

In one corner of the kitchen there are five shelves, and on the opposite side a door opens to stairway leading down to the basement. At another end a door opens to stairway leading to the second floor. A door leads to the rear entry, which has space for a refrigerator, and door to grade stairs.

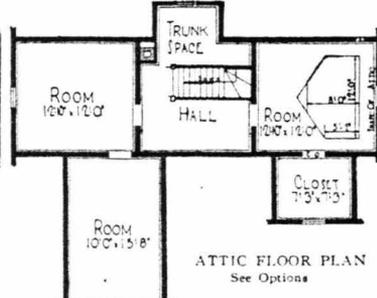
The Bedrooms. A hall connects the living room, the kitchen, the two bedrooms, the bathroom, and the hall coat closet. The front bedroom, 14 feet 8 inches by 10 feet 8 inches, has a big combination wardrobe, No. P9265, as illustrated on pages 110 and 111. Two front windows and one side window provide light and cross current of air. The rear bedroom, 12 feet by 9 feet 8 inches, has a clothes closet, and a window on each outer wall.

The Bathroom has a built-in medicine case.

The Basement. Room for furnace, laundry and storage.

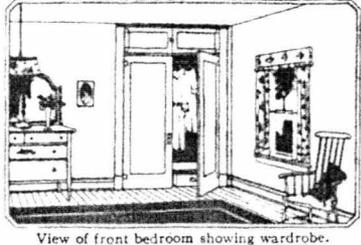
Height of Ceilings. First floor, 9 feet from floor to ceiling. Basement, 7 feet from floor to joists.

What Our Price Includes
 At the price quoted we will furnish all the material to build this five-room bungalow, consisting of:
 Lumber; Lath;
 Roofing, Best Grade Clear Red Cedar Shingles;
 Siding, Clear Cypress or Clear Red Cedar, Bevel, Best Grade of Clear Red Cedar Shingles on Porch Gable Wall;
 Framing Lumber, No. 1 Quality Douglas Fir or Pacific Coast Hemlock;
 Flooring, Clear Oak and Maple,
 Porch Flooring, Clear Edge Grain Fir,
 Porch Ceiling, Clear Douglas Fir or Pacific Coast Hemlock;
 Finishing Lumber;
 High Grade Millwork (see pages 110 and 111);
 Interior Doors, Two-Panel Design of Douglas Fir, Trim, Beautiful Grain Douglas Fir or Yellow Pine, Windows, California Clear White Pine,
 Medicine Case; Wardrobe;
 Kitchen Cabinet; Brick Mantel;
 Eaves Trough and Down Spouts;



40-Lb. Building Paper; Sash Weights;
 Chicago Design Hardware (see page 132);
 Paint for Three Coats outside Trim and Siding;
 Stain for Two Brush Coats for Shingles on Porch Gable Wall;
 Shellac and Varnish for Interior Trim and Doors;
 Shellac, Paste Filler and Floor Varnish for Oak and Maple Floors.
 Complete Plans and Specifications.
 We guarantee enough material to build this house.
 Price does not include cement, brick or plaster. See description of "Honor Bill" Houses on pages 12 and 13.

OPTIONS
 Furnished with three rooms in attic, with single floor, \$300.00 extra. See attic plan above.
 Sheet Plaster and Plaster Finish to take the place of wood lath, first floor, \$182.00 extra; for first floor and attic, \$293.00 extra. See page 109.
 Oriental Asphalt Shingles, guaranteed 17 years, instead of wood shingles, \$57.00 extra.
 Oak Doors and Trim for living room and dining room, \$84.00 extra.
 Storm Doors and Windows, \$73.00 extra; with attic, \$100.00 extra.
 Screen Doors and Windows, galvanized wire, \$46.00 extra; with attic, \$63.00 extra.
 For prices of Plumbing, Heating, Wiring, Electric Fixtures and Shades see pages 130 and 131.



View of front bedroom showing wardrobe.

Figure 72: Catalog advertisement for the Kilbourne model; Illustration as appears in Dover Publication's *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 House Catalog - An Unabridged Reprint*, page 79.

one light, double-hung sash windows, as opposed to a triple opening of eight-over-one, double-hung sash windows depicted in the illustrations. The fenestration of the gabled porch pediment and gabled front dormer also are different. In the Bells' house, the porch pediment contains a tri-partite rectangular opening fitted with three six-light windows. The catalogs show these same sash fitted with eight lights each. The gabled roof dormer contains a pair of four-light windows, rather than a single, fixed sash, 12-light window as shown in the catalogs. The window openings on the north elevation also differ. The North Fillmore Street home has both fixed, six-light windows and paired six-over-one light, double-hung sash windows. The catalogs, however, show eight-over-one light, double-hung sash windows on the first floor and a 12-light, fixed rectangular sash opening in the gable end. The exterior end chimney on this facade also is slightly different, as the catalog version does not show any metal door openings, corbelled bands in the mid-section, or a base that is angled only on one side.

In regards to the exterior wall treatment, the catalogs show a plain beveled wood siding throughout, with shingling in the pedimented porch gable and front dormer. The Bell residence has a more unique treatment of two varying bands of beveled siding, with plain beveled siding used in the porch pediment and gabled dormer. The front porch on the North Fillmore Street example features tapered masonry piers topped with squared wood posts, as well as a solid balustrade clad in identical siding as the house. The catalogs illustrate tapered piers clad in siding and an open balustrade with plain spindles and cutout work below the railing. The three-part knee brace brackets adorning the Bells' house also are not depicted in the catalogs. Rather, a simple wood post brace capped with

a raised square medallion are shown decorating the porch brackets, as well as the bargeboards of the main house and gabled dormer.

A personal tour by the current owners revealed that interior variations also exist. The staircase is oriented along the left side of the house so as to provide a small front entrance hall. The floor plan in the catalogs shows the stairs located off the far wall of the front living room and oriented perpendicular to their existing arrangement in the North Fillmore Street example. In the advertisements, there is no separate front entry space. As for the floor plan, the original owners elected at least two additional options that were available with the basic model. These options included the finished second story with three rooms for an extra cost of \$300, and the likely purchase of the sheet plaster and plaster finish for both floors for an additional cost of \$293.⁸⁰ Although the Bells' side sun room was not listed as an option in the catalog descriptions of the Kilbourne, similar sun rooms were available for purchase separately in the 1926 catalog.⁸¹

The frame garage resembles several that were offered by Sears, though an exact match was not found in Dover's 1926 reprint catalog. The triple sliding doors were common in many Sears garages.⁸² The Parkway model (Figure 73) is most similar to the 102 North Fillmore Street garage, especially the knee brace bracketing with raised square medallions. As pictured in the 1926 catalog, the Parkway ranged in price from \$162 to

⁸⁰ Dover Publications, *Small Houses of the Twenties*, 79.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 122-3.

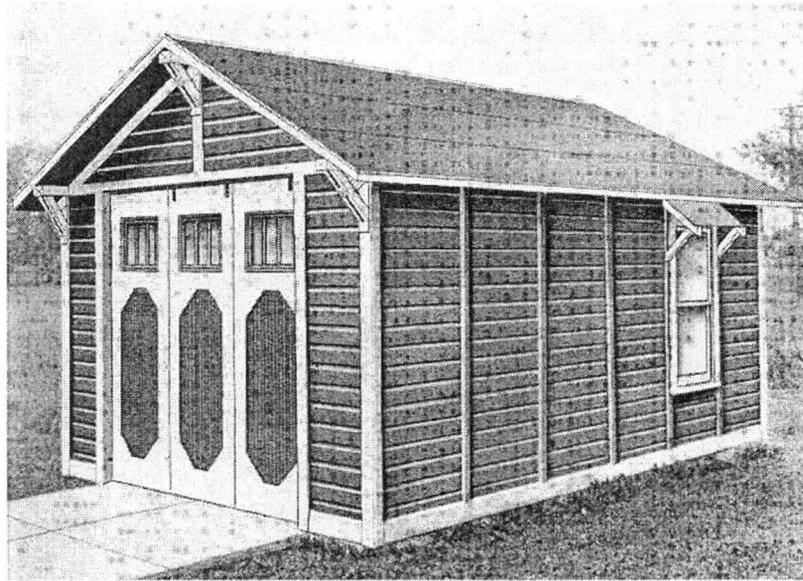


Figure 73: These triple sliding doors resemble those on the garage at 102 North Fillmore Street; Illustration of Parkway model garage by Sears, as appears in Dover Publication's *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 House Catalog – An Unabridged Reprint*, page 123.

\$299 and was available in six different sizes, including a two-car size with three sets of doors (two sets of glazed sliding doors and a service door).⁸³

In summary thus far, the exterior architectural examination of 102 North Fillmore Street revealed obvious similarities to Sears' Kilbourne model. Additional evidence was gathered while speaking to the Bells, touring the interior of the home, and making comparisons to the two catalog advertisements available in *Houses by Mail* and Dover's reprint of the 1926 *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* catalog. But no substantial proof had emerged, other than being flagged as the Kilbourne model in both the countywide Historic Resources Survey and the Arlington Historical Society survey. The real estate agent who sold the home to the Bells also claimed it was a Sears house, but offered no concrete proof. Before formally determining the authenticity of 102 North Fillmore Street, however, a more detailed investigation of the interior layout and structural framing was warranted since no original Sears documentation has been found to date. Conducting historic research on the property also was necessary to try to locate a Sears-issued mortgage and to confirm if the date of construction corroborated with when the Kilbourne model was offered by Sears.

There are many original decorative and built-in features remaining inside the house. It is believed that the following interior details are original: wood windows, doors, and trim throughout the house; some door hardware and glass door knobs; wood flooring, especially the living room and original dining room floor which is laid in a concentric rectangular pattern; iron floor grills for the heating system; brick living room

⁸³ Ibid., 123.

fireplace (Figure 74); French doors leading from the living room into the entrance hall and from the living room into the original dining room (now a sitting room) (Figure 75);⁸⁴ white cast iron sink (Figure 76) and built-in three-door wall cabinet in the kitchen;⁸⁵ built-in telephone nook in the hall outside the kitchen; pedestal sink and tile floor in the first floor bathroom; brick fireplace and fuse box in the basement; and most of the paneled plasterwork and electrical wiring. The interior circulation pattern remains unaltered, and the floor plan matches those shown in the advertisements. The uses of some of the interior spaces though have changed over time. The Bells have converted the original first floor bedrooms into a play room and dining room, and converted the side sun porch into two separate office spaces. The more radical interior changes have been confined to the kitchen and upper story bathroom. A large Hoosier cabinet was located on the left wall of the kitchen with a pull-out wall ironing board. The previous owners removed this cabinet and the Bells opened the wall in this area to provide access into a new dining room space (originally a bedroom). The original kitchen floor has been covered with linoleum. The bathroom on the second floor was remodeled drastically in the 1970s, though it is unknown when it originally was installed.

During the Bells' current renovation efforts, no original proof in the form of shipping tags, blueprints, or markings has been found to date. An examination of the basement framing members during the site visit did not reveal any visible stampings.

⁸⁴ A brick living room fireplace and French doors between the living and dining rooms are mentioned specifically in the Kilbourne advertisement in *Houses by Mail* (p. 211).

⁸⁵ Similar versions of the cast-iron sink, kitchen cabinet, and built-in ironing board (now dismantled) are found in Dover's reprint of the *1926 Honor Bilt Modern Homes* catalog, pp. 133 and 111.

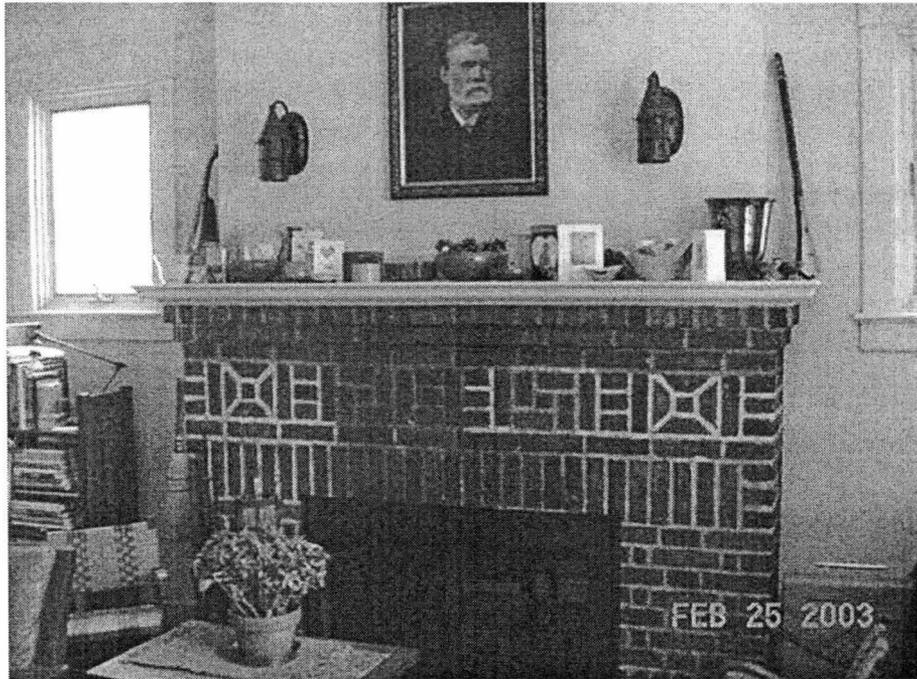


Figure 74: Original brick fireplace in the living room of 102 North Fillmore Street, with a decorative brick pattern above the hearth; photograph by author, February 2003.



Figure 75: Original French doors leading from the living room to the original dining room of 102 North Fillmore Street; photograph by author, February 2003.



Figure 76: Detail of original cast-iron sink with two turned legs in the kitchen of 102 North Fillmore Street; photograph by author, February 2003.

Access was not granted to the attic crawl space to search for lumber markings, so there remains the potential for original stampings to be found on structural members in the attic. As renovation projects present an opportunity to examine original building fabric that is usually concealed on a normal basis, the owners were made aware of Sears' distinguishing markings in the event that some may be revealed as the renovation continues.

Since the exterior and interior examinations provided only suggestive proof, historic research was conducted to determine if the dwelling at 102 North Fillmore Street truly had mail-order origins. A complete chain of title search was conducted at the Arlington County Courthouse. On May 1, 1922, Frank Lyon and his wife Georgie filed a Deed of Dedication to subdivide a 20-acre tract of land to be known as Section 6 of the Lyon Park Addition to Clarendon. The subdivision was to include public streets and lots numbered 901-966.⁸⁶ Nearly one- and one-half years later on November 12, 1923, Frank and Georgie Lyon sold lot 966 to Frank W. Burnett. The sale was contingent upon the same six restrictive covenants listed in the history of 800 North Highland Street.⁸⁷

Burnett secured two separate trusts on lot 966 on that same day in November 1923. The first loan, in the amount of \$3,650, was issued to a trustee named F.S. McCandlish, payable to both Anne Seymour Hopkins and Anne B. Moore.⁸⁸ The second loan for \$1,809.10 was to trustee Harry R. Thomas, Jr., to secure Lyon and Fitch,

⁸⁶ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 182, 345.

⁸⁷ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 200, 85-6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 86. It is unknown with what firm McCandlish was associated.

Incorporated.⁸⁹ Burnett purchased adjacent lot 965 on July 13, 1927, from Lyon and Fitch.⁹⁰ Just weeks later on August 1, 1927, Burnett and his wife Effie acquired two additional loans for both lots in the amounts of \$6,500 and \$1,700 respectively.⁹¹ Interestingly, the larger deed of trust, issued to two trustees of Weaver Brothers, Incorporated of Washington, DC, states that all of the interior features – such as gas, electric, plumbing, and heating fixtures, mirrors, mantels, ice boxes, cooking apparatus, and other goods and personal property – “as are ever furnished by a landlord in letting or operating an unfurnished building similar to the one herein described...” be considered inherent elements of the property.⁹² The smaller loan was payable to the Alexandria Trust and Mortgage Company.⁹³ This deed and mortgage history suggests that the home at 102 North Fillmore Street had been completed by fall 1927 and was ready for occupancy.⁹⁴ It can be assumed that the multiple loans obtained by the Burnetts covered the cost of purchasing the two building lots and erecting the house.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 86 and 88.

⁹⁰ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 265, 125.

⁹¹ Ibid., 127; 131.

⁹² Ibid. In the *1927 Polk's Washington City Directory*, Weaver Brothers, Incorporated, is listed as specializing in real estate, loans, and insurance. It can be assumed then that the Weaver Brothers were not local builders.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Frank W. Burnett was not listed in the *Arlington County, Virginia 1924 Directory and Year Book*. This suggests that the first two trusts he secured in 1923 had not yet resulted in the construction of the dwelling. The 1927 construction date gleaned from the deed research also is closer to the 1926 date provided in the County's tax assessment records. As stated previously, since the Kilbourne model was available as early as 1921, 1925, and also in 1926, Burnett could have purchased any of these kits to have the home completed by 1927.

Members of the Burnett family retained ownership of the property nearly 50 years until they were forced to sell it at public auction on November 22, 1957 as decreed by chancery case 8029. George S. Aldhizer, II, purchased the property for \$14,500.⁹⁵ Aldhizer owned the property for barely one year before selling it to Kingsley and Betty Jean Thompson on November 19, 1958.⁹⁶ More than 40 years later, the current owners, Susan and Kenneth Bell, acquired the property from the Thompsons on June 29, 2001.⁹⁷

Unfortunately, the research effort did not reveal a mortgage issued by Sears as in the case of either 800 North Highland Street or 315 North Garfield Street. However, as stated in Chapter III, a customer could still order either a total house kit or just materials from Sears, without electing financing directly through Sears. For whatever reason, the original owner of 102 North Fillmore Street chose to obtain financing through a local lender instead. Interestingly, research on Frank W. Burnett revealed he was a builder by profession.⁹⁸ This fact presents the possibility of several different scenarios for the origins of 102 North Fillmore Street: (1) Burnett could have purchased a Sears kit with upgrades and hired a builder to construct his home; (2) Burnett could have purchased a Sears kit with upgrades and built the home himself, which is especially probable considering his professional background; (3) Burnett might have hired a local contractor to use the catalog advertisements for the Kilbourne as inspiration to create a similar stick

⁹⁵ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 1315, 296.

⁹⁶ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 1350, 263.

⁹⁷ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 3163, 1753.

⁹⁸ *1936 Lyon Park Directory*, 4. In addition to Frank W., five other people were listed as residing at 102 North Fillmore Street: S.W., Arden, Elton, Waldo, and Quinter. It is probable that these individuals were either the Burnett children or relatives, though his wife Effie was not listed.

built version, using some Sears-bought interior built-ins and fixtures; or (4) Burnett might have just referred to the catalogs himself and built his own personalized version of the Kilbourne, with or without purchasing materials, built-ins, and fixtures from Sears. Any of these scenarios could logically account for the obvious variations in the exterior wall treatment, selection of fenestration, and interior location of the stairwell. Yet, all these modifications could simply have been requested by Burnett when placing his order since such changes were viable options within Sears' liberal modification policy.

The analysis of the dwelling at 102 North Fillmore Street yielded inconclusive results and this research was unable to confirm its authenticity as a Sears, Roebuck & Company house. This particular case study, however, yielded several important points. First, the authenticity of Sears homes cannot always be determined or verified by deed and mortgage records. Although this situation would be ideal for the modern day Sears house researcher, the reality is that not all Sears customers who purchased mail-order homes had Sears finance their purchase. In the case of 102 North Fillmore Street, the original owner sought financing from a local lender, which was an equally common trend. Secondly, even if there are obvious exterior and/or interior differences in a home as-built and as it appeared in the catalogs, it may still be a true Sears home if the proper documentation is found. These modifications could have been included as part of the original Sears package, or on the opposite extreme, suggest the home is a similar stick built version. With 102 North Fillmore Street, this distinction can only be made if original proof is discovered, such as stampings on the lumber or paper records. The likelihood of such a discovery is high, considering the renovation work that is now in

progress. And finally, the analysis of this example proved that some of the mail-order customers were indeed builders and tradesmen who were knowledgeable about building design and construction. If Frank W. Burnett purchased an official Sears kit or not, it seems more probable that he would have built the home himself as opposed to hiring a contractor. And as both the owner and builder, Burnett would have been at liberty to make changes throughout the construction process, which would account for the noticeable differences from the catalog advertisements.

124 North Fillmore Street

The dwelling at 124 North Fillmore Street, also located in the southwestern corner of Lyon Park, is a two-story, brick English cottage (Figures 77 and 78). The house is situated just north of the intersection of North 1st Road and North Fillmore Street. Originally, the Tudor-styled side-gable house contained only five rooms and one bathroom. The location of the window and door openings has remained unchanged, and these openings likely contain the original six-over-six light, double-hung sash wood windows and original front door. Since attempts to contact the current owner, Helena Neumann, by both telephone and a site visit were unsuccessful, it is unknown how the property has been altered over time. However, an exterior examination from the public right-of-way revealed that the only noticeable alteration is the addition of a shed-roofed second story dormer on the rear facade. The exterior appearance of the home suggests that it still retains its original massing and historic exterior building materials.



Figure 77: Front and right elevations of 124 North Fillmore Street; photograph by author, March 2003.



Figure 78: Front and left elevations of 124 North Fillmore Street; photograph by author, March 2003.

The most prominent features of the house are its steeply-pitched projecting front entrance gable, massive brick chimney on the front elevation, and the inset second story gabled dormer that pierces the main roof of the front facade. The entrance gable (Figure 79) is distinguished by its asymmetrically sloped roof line that extends downward past the mid-section of the first floor on its north (right) side. Other than the simple wood trim outlining the roof line, the only other decoration on the projecting gable is the central rounded door opening. This entrance is accented by a staggered pattern of decorative brickwork on the sides and two bands of header bricks outlining the arch. The door itself is wood with decorative iron strap hinges. The large brick chimney rises from the deeply sloping side of the entrance gable and extends upward past the house's main roof ridge (see Figure 79). A slightly recessed vertical brick panel in the center of the upper half of the chimney makes the top appear as two separate stacks. Lastly, the inset gabled dormer to the right of the chimney accents the otherwise plain slope of the front facade. This opening is fitted with a six-over-six light, double-hung sash window (see also Figure 79).

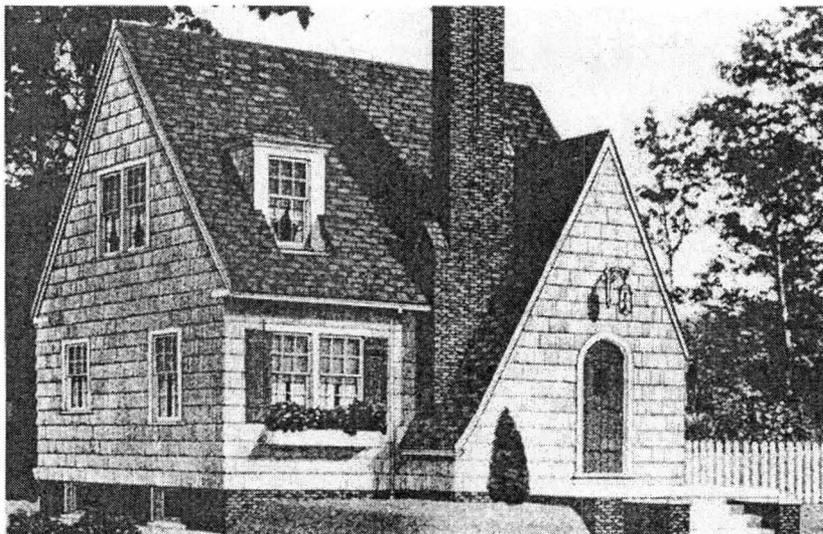
Upon completion of the exterior examination, it was determined that the home's original massing, projecting entrance gable, massive brick chimney, and inset gabled dormer suggested a resemblance to the Randolph model offered by Sears, Roebuck & Company in 1932 (Figure 80). This Honor-Bilt home was a variation of the frame, shingle-clad Willard model, available in 1928, 1929, 1932, 1933, and 1937. Although the price of the Randolph is unknown, it probably was similar to the Willard's cost of \$1,477 to \$1,997.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 155.



Figure 79: Front entrance and chimney detail of 124 North Fillmore Street. Note the decorative brickwork outlining the entrance door and adorning the upper portion of the chimney; photograph by author, March 2003.

THE WILLARD



The Willard is a two-story English cottage type of home and is a remarkable value due to careful planning and saving created by our Honor Bilt system of construction. The projection at the front, which forms the vestibule and closet, is very graceful in appearance. The exterior walls are covered with clear red cedar shingles, a very popular wall covering for this type of home. The front door is made of clear white pine of V-shape batten design and is decorated with a set of ornamental wrought iron hinges. The lantern over the front door is of English design. Batten-type shutters to match the front door design are used with the double windows in the front of the dining room on the first floor.

.....
 Details and features: Five rooms and one bath. Brick chimney in front; front terrace; arched front door with strap hinges. Corner fireplace with colonial mantel in living room.

Years and catalog numbers: 1928 (C3265); 1929 (P3265); 1932 (P3265); 1933 (3265); 1937 (3265)

Price: \$1,477 to \$1,997

.....
 Similar to: The Randolph

Difference: Stucco and brick exterior

Year and catalog number: 1932 (3297)

Price: No price given

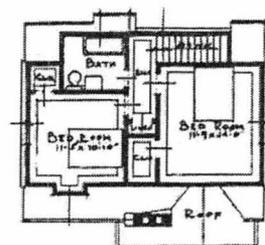
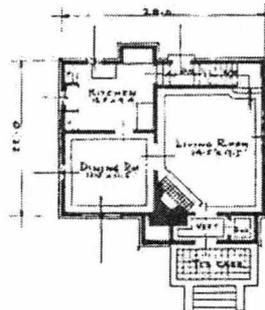


Figure 80: Advertisement for the Randolph and Willard models; Illustration as appears in Stevenson and Jandl's *Houses by Mail*, page 155.

The written description and illustration of the Randolph model provided in *Houses by Mail* are comparable to the residence at 124 North Fillmore Street. The most obvious exterior differences are the presumably reversed floor plan, use of exterior materials, and arrangement of the fenestration. Although the advertisement does not state the floor plan could be reversed, this was a permissible option available for most Sears models. Even though interior access was not granted, this assumption is suggested by the reversed placement of the entrance gable and inset dormer when compared to the catalog advertisement. The original owner of 124 North Fillmore Street also elected to omit the use of stucco on the exterior and instead opted for the exclusive use of brick. The fenestration also is slightly different than pictured in the catalog. The south elevation of the North Fillmore Street dwelling contains a triple opening of six-over-six light, double-hung sash windows on the first level and a pair on the upper story. The catalog illustration shows two single window openings on the first level and a pair on the upper level. Though it is unknown if the 124 North Fillmore Street house ever featured a flower box below the first floor living room window, the batten shutters flanking this window and depicted in the catalog are most likely original. Any interior differences could not be noted at this time since an interior examination was not conducted.

In summary thus far, the exterior architectural examination of 124 North Fillmore Street revealed obvious similarities to Sears' Randolph model. Additional evidence was provided by comparing the exterior of the house to the catalog advertisements for both the Willard and Randolph models in *Houses by Mail*. However, since access to the interior of the home was not granted, and since it is unknown if interior structural

markings either have been identified or exist, it was necessary to conduct historic research on the property before reaching any determination about its authenticity as a Sears house. A complete chain of title search was then conducted at the Arlington County Courthouse.

On February 4, 1929, Lyon and Fitch, Incorporated sold Fred Lee Woodson all of the northern 55 feet of lot 944 in section 6 of the Lyon Park Addition to Clarendon.¹⁰⁰ The sale was contingent upon the same six restrictive covenants listed in the history of 800 North Highland Street. The Woodson transaction, however, contained an additional stipulation in the last clause that stated no part of the property was to be sold or leased to non-Caucasians for a period of 99 years commencing September 1, 1923.¹⁰¹ Woodson retained ownership until September 27, 1933, when he sold it to Quentin D. Watson.¹⁰² Watson and his wife Mary owned the property not quite three years before selling it to Frederick E. Westenberger on April 18, 1936.¹⁰³ Edna A. Moormann purchased the property from Westenberger and his wife Marguerite on July 23, 1938.¹⁰⁴ Two days later, Moormann secured a loan in the amount of \$6,800 from the Vienna Trust Company in Vienna, Virginia. Her loan was payable at five percent interest, with monthly payments of \$46.31 due starting in September.¹⁰⁵ The current owner, Helana M. Neumann,

¹⁰⁰ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 292, 493.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 361, 359.

¹⁰³ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 387, 442.

¹⁰⁴ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 440, 241.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 242.

acquired the property from Moormann nearly 55 years later on January 29, 1993.¹⁰⁶

The above deed and mortgage record still does not confirm the possible Sears origin of the residence at 124 North Fillmore Street. According to the County's tax assessment records, the home was built in 1930. However, the mention of the six restrictive clauses in the Woodson to Watson deed -- especially the clause requiring any new dwelling to cost at least \$4,000 -- implies that the house still had not been built by September 1933. A mortgage was not acquired for the property until Edna Moorman did so in July 1938, which is a clear indication of construction activity.

Additional historic research revealed that Frederick E. Westenberger, the man who sold the property to Moormann in 1938, was a prominent early-20th century speculative builder in Arlington County. A German immigrant who worked as a carpenter in Norfolk before coming to Arlington, he quickly expanded his construction enterprise from building only one or two houses at a time to as many as ten to 15 houses at once. Many examples of his homes, especially of brick construction, exist in the neighboring communities of Ashton Heights and Lyon Village. All of his homes bear a similarity to one another, though each was made distinctive by a specific characteristic, such as wood shingling, a recessed window opening, or a decorative entrance portico.¹⁰⁷

Prior to August 14, 1935, the date when Arlington County first adopted its official Building Code Ordinance, new construction activity did not require that building permits

¹⁰⁶ Arlington County, Virginia, Land Records Office, Deed Book 2573, 922.

¹⁰⁷ E.H.T. Tracerics, Inc., *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Lyon Park Historic District* (2002), 170. All information on Westenberger in this paragraph came from this source.

be issued or building inspections be conducted.¹⁰⁸ Thus, while building permit records would not have existed for 800 North Highland Street, 315 North Garfield Street, or 102 North Fillmore Street, a record did exist for 124 North Fillmore Street. Frederick E. Westenberger, whose office was located at 3152 Wilson Boulevard in Arlington, applied for a building permit for the construction of the dwelling at 124 North Fillmore Street on April 5, 1938.¹⁰⁹ Official building permit number 5996 was issued to Westenberger just one week later on April 12 (Figure 81).¹¹⁰ The residence was to be erected with brick and cinder block, measure two stories in height, contain five rooms and one bathroom, have a roof clad in composite shingle, and cost an estimated \$6,800.¹¹¹

Of most significance is the fact that the building permit provided irrefutable proof that the residence at 102 North Fillmore Street was constructed as a stick built home rather than as a mail-order home purchased from Sears. The permit cites K.D. Hamaker as the project's official architect and designer.¹¹² Employed as an associate architect of the Clarendon firm Ernest Dorsey Stevens, Hamaker designed many of Westenberger's

¹⁰⁸ *Minutes of the Arlington County Board*, 14 August 1935, 594. The potential exists to locate pre-1935 building permits for Arlington properties that historically were part of the County of Alexandria prior to the official establishment of Arlington County in 1920. These records may be located in the collection of the present-day City of Alexandria, or may be stored in Richmond at the Library of Virginia archives along with the remainder of the County of Alexandria records.

¹⁰⁹ Application for Permit to Build submitted by F.E. Westenberger on April 5, 1938. A copy of the application is available on microfilm reel 1644, stored in the Office of Neighborhood Services Division of the Arlington County Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development.

¹¹⁰ Building Permit number 5996 approved April 12, 1938. A copy of the permit is available on microfilm reel 1644, stored in the Office of Neighborhood Services Division of the Arlington County Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Arlington County, Virginia
ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF ZONING AND BUILDING INSPECTION

N^o 5996

BUILDING PERMIT

Name of Owner F.E. Westenberger Address 3152 Wilson Blvd.
Name of Contractor/Builder “ ” Address “ ”
Name of Architect/Designer K.D. Hamaker Address Douglas Bldg.
Lot No. N. 55 of 944 Block _____ Section 6 Subdivision Lyon Park
House Number 124 Street N. Fillmore St.

Property certified by Commissioner of Revenue in name of: Fred'k E. Westenberger

NEW CONSTRUCTION:

Purpose of building Residence Material of building Brick and cinder block
Number of stories 2 Number of families 1 Number of baths 1 Number of kitchens 1
Number of rooms 5 Roof covering Comp. Shingle Estimated cost \$ 6,800

MATERIAL and THICKNESS of external walls: Foundation to 1st flr. 12" cinder block
1st to 2nd 4" brick 4" cin bl 2nd to 3rd same Size of footings 10" x 24"

MATERIAL and THICKNESS of party walls: Foundation to 1st flr. Steel beam
1st to 2nd 4" frame 2nd to 3rd 4" frame Size of footings _____

Electricity Yes Gas Yes Type of heat air conditioned Kind of fuel oil
Water Yes Sewer Yes Recreation room or game room in the basement _____

ACCESSORY BUILDING:

Purpose of building _____ Number of stories _____ Material and thickness of walls _____
Roof covering _____ Size of footings _____ Estimated cost \$ _____

ALTERATIONS, REPAIRS AND REMODELING: Explain in detail below: _____
Estimated cost \$ _____

ZONING:

Size of lot: Width: 55' Depth: 100' Height of bldg at front center from sidewalk to highest point of roof 25'
Set back 27' feet from front property line, same conforming with the set back of other bldgs in the block.
Side yard S-19' Side yard N-10' Rear yard 49'

Special instructions to Applicants: _____

Zone Res. A This permit approved 4/12/1938,
Fireproof _____ Non fireproof X subject to the Zoning Ordinance and Building Code
Total Sq. Ft. 2286 of Arlington County.

Fee \$ 5.72 Payment Order No. 1231

Date Received 4/5/38 P.O.S. _____
Initials _____

Zoning Inspector

Building Inspector

Chairman Board of Zoning Appeals

Figure 81: Reproduction of Arlington County Building Permit No. 5996 for the construction of 124 North Fillmore Street, issued to Frederick E. Westenberger on April 12, 1938; Copied from microfilmed version of permit records maintained by the Arlington County Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development.

initial architectural plans.¹¹³ Included with both the permit application and the building permit for the residence at 124 North Fillmore Street was a hand-drawn plat by Hamaker indicating the lot size, building footprint, and overall dimensions of the proposed house (Figure 82).

All of this evidence substantiates that the dwelling at 124 North Fillmore Street is not a Sears, Roebuck & Company mail-order catalog house. Despite the obvious similarities in style, massing, and use of materials, this dwelling instead represents a local builder's interpretation of an English cottage. Perhaps it will never be known what exactly served as the inspiration for this design by Westenberger and Hamaker, whether it was Sears' Willard or Randolph models specifically or simply the popular architectural trends of the period in general. This particular case study proved the importance of the research phase to the authentication process, which ultimately resulted in an accurate conclusion that was based on a variety of available historical sources. The study of the home at 124 North Fillmore Street also emphasized one of the most difficult challenges of identifying mail-order houses – being able to discern the differences between mail-order and stick built architecture. Though it may not always be possible to make this distinction through visual clues, as proven in the exterior examination of 124 North Fillmore Street, additional insight – and perhaps even concrete proof – can always be obtained by a thorough examination of historical documentation.

¹¹³ E.H.T. Tracerics, Inc., *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Lyon Park Historic District* (2002), 171.

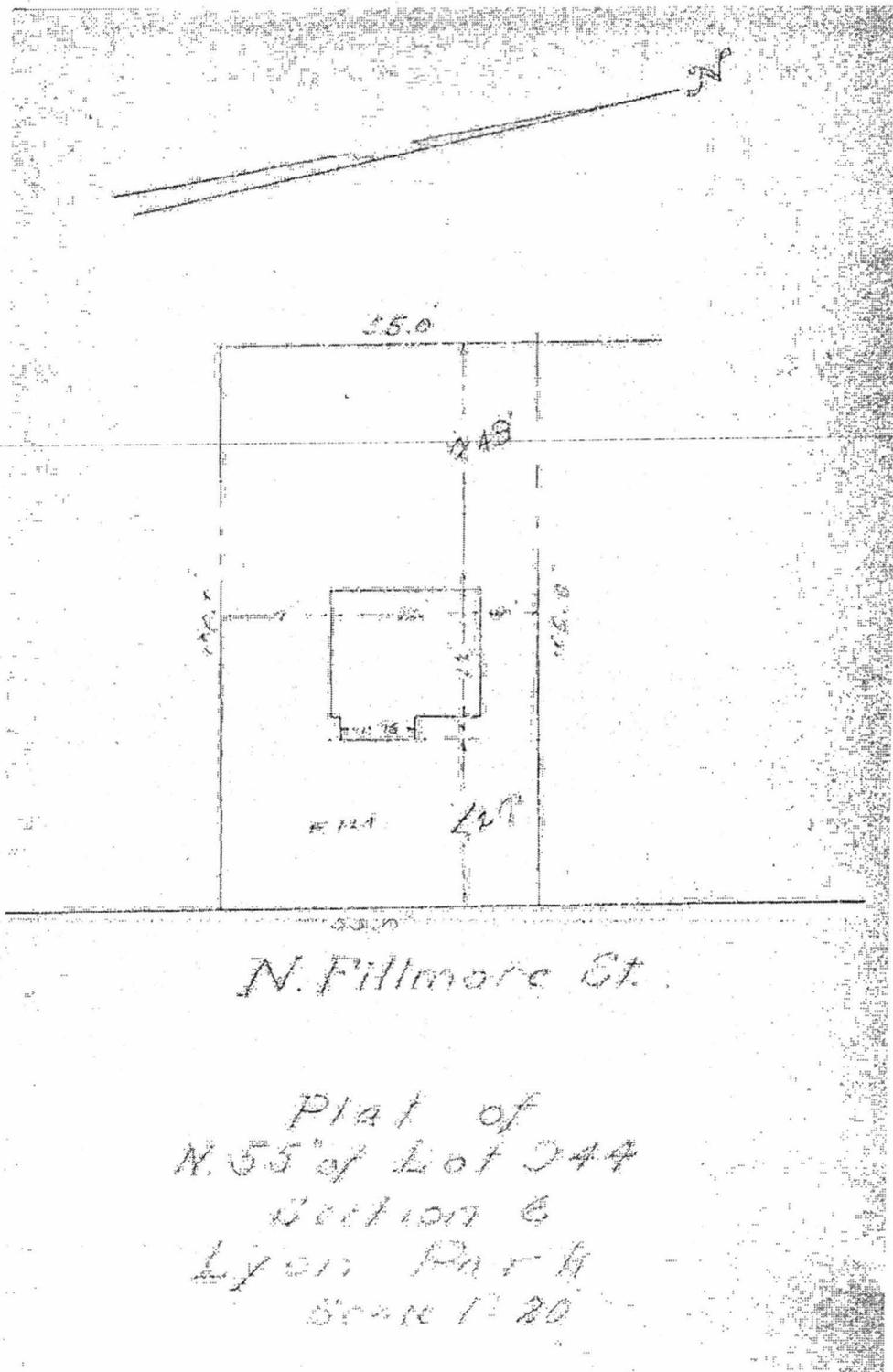


Figure 82: Plat of the proposed residence at 124 North Fillmore Street drawn by architect K.D. Hamaker on April 8, 1938 and submitted with the building permit application; Copy printed from microfilm of permit records maintained by the Arlington County Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development.

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION

Overall Summary of Findings

More than 50 years have passed since the phenomenon of mail-order catalog houses began to die out. Yet their continued popularity – intellectually and in their resale and restoration – remains high. This appeal of mail-order catalog homes is evidenced by the renewed interest in their identification, restoration, and adaptation for modern habitation. Despite the growing popular interest, it remains unknown how many examples of mail-order catalog homes, as a building genre, were actually ever constructed in the United States. It is also unclear how many of these dwellings are still extant and where they are located.

However, there is considerable knowledge of the degree of success of particular mail-order companies, such as the Aladdin Company, which maintained detailed sales and shipment records throughout its operation. On the other hand, any similar types of records maintained by Sears, Roebuck & Company, the largest provider of catalog homes, were destroyed upon closure of its mail-order house sector, if they were even recorded at all. Thus, the information that exists on how many homes were purchased from or financed by Sears is still based on speculation and estimations at best.

Mail-order house designs, regardless of their company of origin, were by no means architecturally innovative. Indeed many models boasted recognized modern

conveniences, such as central heating, electricity, indoor plumbing, and built-in furniture and storage. In addition, the designs simply mirrored the popular building forms, styles, and amenities dictated by the era in which they were built. Dozens of competing mail-order companies consistently borrowed designs and building elements from one another. Local builders and contractors nationwide also were known to copy examples of houses that were purchased as genuine mail-order house kits. What can be considered truly innovative about mail-order architecture were the opportunities of homeownership made a reality for thousands of eager customers. Equally significant were the advertising and promotional tactics that the mail-order firms employed in order to attract customers and generate sales.

Sears, Roebuck & Company was perhaps the most ingenious mail-order firm in this regard. Rather than just advertising and selling its line of houses, Sears used its mail-order kit homes as the means by which to promote the sale of all of its other products, many of which were ideally suited for use and display in such modern homes. Sears concentrated on marketing its houses not only to encourage homeownership, but more importantly, to gain additional customers and sell its wide range of catalog wares. In comparison, other mail-order firms that sold houses used these homes alone as their focus and primary selling point. Sears perfected the strategy of selling consumers a complete package of a modern home and everything else that could possibly be needed to comfortably outfit it. The company's reasonable prices, lenient payment and financing options, and solid reputation for quality and service made this strategy all the more effective. Sears clearly understood its market and the potential profits that could be gained by supplying both homes and house-related merchandise during a time in which

the demand for both was truly overwhelming. The epitaph of founder Richard W. Sears perhaps summarizes it best:

R.W. Sears was a mail-order man, had the mail-order viewpoint, knew how to use advertising space, knew the value of copy, knew the conditions surrounding mail-order publications, and he succeeded in a big way because he possessed those qualities to a greater degree than any other mail-order man who ever lived.¹

In research for this thesis, three previously unrecognized trustees were discovered who signed mortgage loan documents on behalf of Sears, Roebuck & Company. These individuals – William C. Reed, David C. Wikoff, and John M. Ogden – have now been documented and linked to Sears, though little if anything is known about their exact connection to and role within the company. Yet their discovery is significant because the number of known trustees has increased to a total of seven individuals. Researchers and historians nationwide can now undertake relevant deed and mortgage research using not only the corporate name of Sears, but also the individual names of these seven trustees. This will prove especially beneficial because it will expedite efforts to identify and authenticate Sears homes using historic documentation. As research efforts continue, the likelihood of identifying additional trustees will increase. Thus, it is important to maintain an accurate and comprehensive record of these individuals.

Additionally, this thesis has established a basic framework for undertaking a thorough process by which to authenticate Sears homes, one that is based on all available documentary evidence. The findings as detailed in Chapter V have demonstrated that

¹ Gordon L. Weil, *Sears, Roebuck, U.S.A. – The Great American Catalog Store and How it Grew* (NY: Stein and Day Publishers, 1977), 22. Richard W. Sears died at the age of 50 on September 28, 1914. His epitaph was written by *Printers' Ink*, the leading magazine of the advertising business.

authenticity cannot be proven simply by using any of the three investigative methods individually. An exterior examination can reveal obvious similarities and differences between existing buildings and those portrayed in catalog advertisements. An interior examination of the floor plan, decorative elements, and structural framing pieces likewise can offer useful information that can be compared to advertisements. The importance of historic research, using such tools as original mail-order documentation, historic maps and photographs, deed and mortgage records, building permits, and oral histories, must not be underestimated or overlooked. As illustrated in the four case studies presented in this thesis, it is possible that the research phase can provide the actual substantial proof to either prove or disprove documentation gathered in the other two phases. The data collected throughout the entire authentication process should be weighed as a whole, and this collective body of knowledge used in order to make the most accurate determination of authenticity as possible. By doing so, a reassurance will evolve that those homes determined to be genuine examples of Sears houses will be based on concrete proof and an extensive analysis. Accordingly, reliance on assumptions and speculation will become a less-practiced means by which to label and identify Sears houses.

Lastly, this thesis has proven that it is not possible to visually distinguish a true example of a mail-order catalog house from a stick built home of the same period. There is a general misconception that all Craftsman style houses, especially of the bungalow form, are mail-order kit houses from Sears. Coupled with this notion is the often misguided assumption that all mail-order houses are of Sears origin. It is important to emphasize that regardless of the architectural style or company of manufacture, mail-order architecture did not introduce new styles or designs. Rather, mail-order homes

provided an opportunity for thousands of customers to purchase their own truly modern homes, ones that represented the most popular styles and trends of the era in which they were built. Both mail-order and stick built houses of the early-20th century were constructed with the same types of building materials, share the same massing and proportions, as well as feature the same floor plans and exterior and interior detailing and ornament. It is because of these remarkable similarities in form and composition that mail-order architecture cannot be readily discerned from similar stick built examples. One can learn to look for and identify some of the architectural and stylistic characteristics identified in this study, although these visual hints can serve only as possible clues of potential mail-order origins. It is only after the completion of an extensive three-phase analysis involving exterior and interior examinations and historic research that genuine examples of mail-order catalog homes can be identified and differentiated.

Limitations of Study

The investigation conducted for this thesis was limited by several factors. The first was simply the length of time needed to conduct such a thorough investigation. Using more than four homes as case studies would have provided additional insight into the development of Lyon Park, the presence of mail-order homes in the neighborhood, and perhaps yielded more information about Sears trustees. But the time that would have been required to extensively document additional homes was in fact too great to be accomplished with the given time constraints and scope. However, it is hoped that the

evidence presented here will serve as the basis for the continued authentication of Sears homes in the neighborhood of Lyon Park specifically, throughout Arlington County, Virginia, in general, and perhaps even nationally.

Even though one of the four property owners did not grant access to their property, this did not have a negative impact on the outcome of the findings. Sufficient evidence was gained during the historic research phase to disprove the similarities noted in the exterior examination and to conclude that the home at 124 North Fillmore Street was an example of a stick built rather than a Sears mail-order catalog house. Yet the other three case studies proved the importance of interior documentation to the authentication process.

All buildings are constantly in a state of evolution and change as warranted by their various owners and uses over time. Such a fact poses a challenge as architectural historians and researchers attempt to document our nation's built environment. One must learn how to recognize original architectural features and materials, even when concealed by a modern framework. It is also necessary to be able to determine what these original features and materials may have looked like and where they were located, especially if they have been removed. This point was illustrated in the analysis of 800 North Highland Street, in which there were still semblances of the original Marina model Sears house in the overall massing and fenestration, even despite the loss of nearly all of the exterior and interior original building fabric. Both structural and aesthetic alterations will continue to pose a challenge during any type of architectural assessment, whether of stick built or mail-order catalog houses.

Continuing the Quest

There are several opportunities for collecting additional information pertaining to mail-order architecture in general and the designs and success of Sears, Roebuck & Company in particular. The first involves establishing a conscious effort to combine the findings of researchers and historians nationwide. Collating what has been discovered to date, as well as adding what is discovered in the future, will result in the creation of an accessible body of knowledge about the number of Sears homes that were sold, how many of which model were ordered, where they were shipped, how many are still standing, and which Sears trustees, if any, were involved in the transactions. It is important to share this information and make it available in order to prevent every researcher from starting from scratch or duplicating efforts. Having the knowledge readily available also would hasten the identification and authentication process. Perhaps the Sears Archives could take the lead in this endeavor and have its already popular Internet website serve as the storehouse for all of the research findings. Internet posting is ideal since this method could be easily accessed by researchers in any location. Periodic updates, perhaps on a quarterly basis, would ensure that the data is current and regularly maintained.

It would also prove beneficial to use this collective body of information to compile an accurate and comprehensive database of existing Sears homes throughout the country. Types of information that could be recorded for each known example could include the model name, date of construction, city/county and state, street address, original owner(s), and known affiliation with any Sears trustees. The database could include both extant homes, as well as serve as a means by which to document demolished

examples of Sears houses. Again, the Sears Archives could take the lead in drafting this database, overseeing updates, and making it available to all researchers by posting it on its Internet website. Such a prototype database also could be replicated to record the existence of catalog houses purchased from other mail-order companies of the era.

Since research for this thesis was not able to verify if the garage at 315 North Garfield Street was purchased from Sears along with the Rembrandt model house, another research opportunity involves gathering additional data on the different models of secondary buildings advertised and sold by Sears. This would include its summer cottages, outhouses, garages, barns, and other outbuildings. Other than the few pages of illustrations provided in *Houses by Mail* and Dover's 1926 catalog reprint, little is known about these accessory structures. Examining and recording information on outbuildings in Sears house and specialty catalogs, including those within the collection maintained by the Sears Archives, would help determine how many different models of each building were available, when and how long these structures were offered, and their materials, dimensions, and prices. Such findings would provide a better understanding of the range of buildings Sears offered via mail and help make their modern-day identification easier. Posting this information on the Sears Modern Homes website, or perhaps even publishing a book or reproduction catalog pertaining exclusively to these secondary buildings, would help make this data accessible to interested researchers.

Lastly, continuing to document trustees who were involved in Sears mortgage transactions is another significant area of research that must continue. Maintaining a list of the names of these individuals, as well as the areas of the country in which they operated, would be of great assistance to those historians and researchers trying to

positively identify Sears homes through historic deed and mortgage records. It is also important to determine the relationship of these trustees to Sears, whether they were employees, high-ranking corporate figures, or from a contracted outside party hired to underwrite the loans on Sears' behalf. As with previous suggestions, the Sears Archives would be a logical choice to initiate this effort and its Internet website an ideal location to disseminate the information.

The intrigue and aspirations of all that Sears catalog homes represented continues to endure. The testament of a modern day homeowner captures this sentiment and unyielding fascination best:

My Sears mail-order house...is unabashedly American, the kind of house you see in movies about the good old days when virtue triumphed.... Visitors often comment that there is something vaguely familiar about the house, which is quite true. They have seen versions of it all over America, in small towns and old suburbs, along streets lined with maple and elm trees. [My home] is straightforward and unpretentious yet without dowdiness. Inside, the rooms and hallways are large and airy. There are high ceilings, protruding bays, paneled doors, soft pine floors and oddly shaped closets for children to hide in. My Sears house allows me to connect with the past, to a time when the century was new and the country was optimistic, idealistic, and still innocent.²

² Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail*, 9. Excerpts from a letter written in 1985 by Mary Anne O'Boyle, proud owner of a Sears Modern Home No. 167, located in Takoma Park, Maryland, a suburb just outside of Washington, DC.

APPENDIX I ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY CHECKLIST

This appendix contains a sample of the brief, two-page form that was devised to complete the architectural survey component for this thesis. The form allows essential information about a given property to be easily recorded and then analyzed. In addition, the form provides space to record specific data useful when trying to differentiate between stick built and Sears mail-order catalog homes, including porch treatment, decorative ornament, and overall building dimensions.

APPENDIX I
ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY CHECKLIST

Property address: _____ Date of survey: _____

Owner information:

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

Familiar with property's history?

Sears model: _____
Source(s): _____

Estimated construction: _____
Source(s): _____

Architectural style: _____

Number of stories: _____

Description of massing (shape; any additions?): _____

Foundation type & materials: _____

Roof type & materials: _____

Wall treatment (materials and locations, including replacement materials):

Fenestration: Original
Type(s) of windows:

Replacement

Types(s) of doors:

Main porch:

Size and placement: _____
Type of supports: _____
Materials: _____
Trim (brackets, spindlework, etc.): _____

Other covered entrances or stoops (type and location):

Decorative ornament:

Chimney type and placement: _____

Brackets (5-piece; notched; other): _____

Eaves/rafters: _____

Dormers: _____

Other: _____

Dimensions:

Overall building: _____

Typical window: _____

Typical door: _____

Porch support: _____

Bracket: _____

Other: _____

Alterations to building:

Interior description (if accessible):

Outbuildings (location and description):

Setting/Landscape:

Overall integrity:

Other notes:

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