SEARS MAIL ORDER HOUSES

We have all at some time or another purchased an item through a mail-order catalog. But, would you ever consider ordering your dream home through the mail? That is just what some 100,000 families did between 1908 and 1940 when they ordered from the Sears, Roebuck and Company Modern Home catalogs.

In that three decade period, Sears offered its customers 450 ready-to-assemble house designs ranging from large mansions to moderate-sized bungalows to two-room summer cottages. These “modern” homes (modern because they included provisions for electricity and indoor plumbing) were sturdy, inexpensive and easy-to-build. Anyone could own a Sears home. There was one stipulation, however — the building site had to be accessible by railroad. Since the materials were shipped by rail, most Sears homes were/or located in the Northeast and Midwest — it is conceivable that there are Sears homes in Champaign County.

The Sears Modern Homes Program had its beginning between 1895 and 1900 when Sears, Roebuck and Company started selling building materials through its catalog. In 1908, Sears issued its first catalog devoted exclusively to the selling of complete house kits. That first Modern Homes catalog illustrated 22 different styles of houses ranging in price from $650 to $2,500. For your money you received plans, specifications and most of the materials (even the nails) necessary to build your dream home. Also included in the package were cost estimates for such items as labor and excavation — no detail of the building process was overlooked!

While other companies later on also sold homes through their catalogs, in 1908 Sears’ approach was unique. An early key to their sales success rested on Sears’ reputation for reliability — in essence, a guarantee of the finest quality available at an affordable price. The 44-page 1908 catalog stressed the cost savings to be had by ordering from the catalog. But, perhaps the key selling point was the ease of construction — anyone could build their own home.

Each Sears Modern Home kit came complete with an instruction manual written in such a way that a construction novice could easily complete the task at hand. There were detailed instructions and blueprints for every phase of construction; each blueprint included a list of materials needed for that portion of the house. Every piece was numbered and corresponded to an illustrated piece — it was literally “fit end A into slot B” and the beauty of it all was that it went together exactly as it was supposed to!

Sears houses fell into three categories. The Honor Bilt home was their finest home. These houses were of the best construction and used materials of the best quality. The joists and studs were 14 3/4 inches apart; the walls were lined with high-quality wood sheathing and were frequently sided with cypress. The Standard Built homes were the more “ordinary,” more “everyday” houses; these were the homes most frequently built. The Standard homes had joists and studs spaced farther apart and were admittedly not as warm as the Honor Bilt houses. The third category was the Simplex Sectional cottages, which were recommended for summer use only.

In terms of architectural style, Sears was a follower rather than a leader. The Modern Homes catalogs included such traditional styles as colonial, English, Spanish and Norman. The only true modern examples offered by Sears were two Prairie style homes: The Aurora (1918 — $2,740) and The Carlton (1918 — $5,118).

The Sears Modern Homes Department provided thousands of families with the opportunity to own their own homes. These homes have stood the test of time because of their fine quality and construction, and as a result, many are still occupied today.

Houses By Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company by Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl (The Preservation Press, 1986) is an aid in locating surviving Sears Homes. In a manner reminiscent of the original Modern Homes catalogs, Houses by Mail looks at the history of the Sears homes, their impact on the home construction industry and their acceptance by homeowners. Since Sears homes embrace so many traditional designs, identifying them can be difficult; to help alleviate this problem, Stevenson and Jandl include in Houses By Mail a guide to searching out Sears homes. This guide breaks the Sears designs down into identifiable components, such as roof types and number of stories, and then groups the nearly 450 designs according to like attributes. You simply identify your house type and you are off and running.

Being so close to Chicago and on the Illinois Central Railroad line; Champaign County and surrounding areas are sure to have many mail-
THE AMHERST

With its colonial front doorway, iron-railed stoop and varied wall covering, this home is an attractive realization of the factors which are favored in better suburban and city home developments today. Some home builders prefer these homes of brick, others of siding. The Amherst is a good example of satisfactory results by using both materials. The brickwork at the corners of the front wall is built out to form pilasters against which the frame projection of the second story finishes. The rear wall is treated full height with brick, while both gables have wide beveled siding.

Details and features: Seven rooms and one and a half baths. Brick and wood exterior; six-panel front door. Fireplace in living room: built-in bookcases in library.

Years and catalog numbers: 1933 (3388); 1934 (3388); 1935 (3388); 1937 (3388); 1939 (3388)

Price: $1,608 to $1,917

PROPERTY INSURANCE AVAILABLE TO HISTORIC HOME OWNERS

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has an insurance program specifically designed for members who own historic homes. The program, operated by Marsh and McLennan, Inc., is tailored to replace unique features often found in old homes and addresses the special concerns of owners of historic houses.

The program's features include:
- guaranteed replacement cost coverage on the dwelling providing replacement with like kind and quality.
- an appraisal survey to determine an accurate replacement value for the home, excluding land and foundations.
- an analysis of one's personal insurance program including recommendations for improving existing coverages, the need for appraisals of fine arts, antiques, etc.
- replacement cost coverage on the contents of the home with no deduction for depreciation.

To qualify, the following criteria apply:
- the home must be an owner-occupied, single-family dwelling.
- the dwelling must be in good general condition with plumbing, heating, roof and electrical systems updated within the last 30 years.
- commercial and business activities are not allowed.
- homes must be insured to 100 percent of their replacement value.

For more information and program brochures, contact Susan Shaw, Center for Historic Houses (202) 673-4025.

PACA ANNUAL MEETING

The sixth Annual Membership Meeting was held February 1, 1987 at the historic (and warm!) Heath and Sons Funeral Home (Mattis house) at 201 North Elm Street, Champaign. Over sixty members and guests attended.

President Gregory Hargus conducted the business portion of the meeting which included a discussion of the highlights of 1986 and plans for 1987. The 1987 budget was also presented by Norman Baxley, Treasurer.
The membership elected three directors to serve on the Board through 1989: Angela Finet, Patricia Jensen, and Kennedy Hutson. Currently serving are Kevin Cullen (87), Norman Badley (87), James Dobrovolsky (87), Herminia Kruidenier (88), Marylee MacDonald (88), and Joan Severns (88).

Michael Lambert presented a lecture entitled “Of Greek Temples and Prairie Grass.” The Third Annual Heritage Awards were also presented and David Heath gave an account of the history of the Mattis-Heath House.

OLD HOUSE JOURNAL

SUBSCRIPTIONS AT A REDUCED RATE

Need help with repairing your porch? Do you know the best and easiest way to patch plaster? What about repointing masonry? The answers to these and many, many more old house questions can be had in the OLD HOUSE JOURNAL, the only magazine devoted to restoration and maintenance techniques of the old house. And GOOD NEWS!, new subscriptions or renewals of current subscriptions to the JOURNAL are available from PACA at the reduced rate of $14 (normally $18). So for the best how-to information on the old house field, send your check for $14 (payable to PACA) by March 10 along with your name, address and new or renewal information to: PACA, P.O. Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, IL 61820.

Free copies of the JOURNAL are available from PACA for those unfamiliar with this publication. Back issues are also available to people needing help with a specific problem.

THIRD ANNUAL HERITAGE AWARDS PRESENTED

Presentation of the third annual Heritage Awards was made at the Annual Membership Meeting. The purpose of the Awards is to increase awareness of the important buildings and sites in the community, to promote the interests of preservation and conservation, and to acknowledge all of the special efforts and hard work that the owners expended in the renovation of their building.

This year’s recipients are:

**Outstanding Heritage Contribution Award:** Ahrens-Divan-Wojnar House, 212 East University Avenue, Olampign Landmark Heritage Award: Gere-Meharry-Crackel House, 305 North Second Street, Tolono Landscape Heritage Award: Downtown Streetscape, Urbana Honorable Mention: West Side Park, Champaign; Bald Cypress Trees, Illini Union area, University of Illinois Residential Heritage Award: Davidson-Vennum-Kirby House, 1110 Davidson Drive, Champaign; Fisher-Melander House, 710 West University Avenue, Champaign Honorable Mention: Somers-Macomber House, 301 West Oregon Street, Urbana; Rogowski-Kent House, 604 East Elm Street, Urbana Institutional Heritage Award: Alpha Xi Delta, 715 West Michigan Avenue, Urbana Honorable Mention: Masonic Temple Building, Urbana; Canaan Missionary Baptist Church, 402 West Main Street, Urbana

Environmental Heritage Award: South Broadway Avenue and West Main Street Rezoning Efforts, Urbana; Champaign Community Development Rehabilitation Loan & Relocation Program Honorable Mention: Prairie Restorations: Educational Resources in Environmental Science, Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois, Rantoul Public Library, Champaign County Forest Preserve, Urbana Park District Special Heritage Award: Lachlan F. Blair

COTTAGE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

The Cottage Capital Campaign needs you! So far we have raised $3,000 from individual contributions and the board of directors of PACA has appropriated $2,500 of general revenue toward the project. The Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, the statewide preservation organization, has granted PACA $750 for new exterior doors at the Cottage. But more funds must be raised to buy materials and supplies.

Construction documents are being prepared now and a material take-off list is being compiled. We will need electrical, heating, plumbing, and other information from everyone. We also need help finding materials and supplies, and we are looking for volunteers to help with the construction. Contact PACA or visit the Cottage to learn more about how you can help.

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**Membership Application P.A.C.A.**

**MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:**

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<tr>
<th>INDIVIDUAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>□ Adult .................. $10.00</td>
<td>□ Over 100 members .............. $100.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Student (1/2 time or more) ... $ 5.00</td>
<td>□ 50-100 members .............. $ 75.00</td>
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<td>□ Senior Citizen ........ $ 5.00</td>
<td>□ Up to 50 members .............. $ 50.00</td>
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<td>□ Family, includes all members of a household with no more than two members being over age 21) ...... $15.00</td>
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| □ Additional Contribution ........................ |

**NAME ..........................**

**ADDRESS ..........................**

Make check payable to: PACA, Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820.
your membership is important. We are only as strong as our membership. Help make PACA stronger than ever.

COTTAGE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Things are beginning to move at the Greek Revival Cottage. Final negotiations are taking place and insurance questions are being answered so that work can begin very soon. But we will need the help and support of all PACA members to get this very large project completed in a timely manner.

We still need cash and material donations. So far Candaco has donated all of the windows needed to upgrade the building's addition; Thompson Lumber has donated kitchen cabinetry and Rogers Supply is donating a furnace. An electrical contractor has volunteered his time to coordinate and supervise the electrical work and we have a couple of plumbers lined up to help also. So far arrangements have been made with at least twelve people with carpentry skills to help on the structural work and a professional painter has agreed to supervise the painting aspects of the project.

Things are looking good, but we still need lots of help; remember, these people are volunteers, and, like you, have full-time jobs. They cannot be expected to carry the full work load; we need the help and support of all PACA members. There are jobs for all skill levels: site clean-up, demolition, debris removal, paint scraping (ugh!), new painting, electrical help, plumbing and mechanical system help, basic carpentry, insulation installation, telephone wiring, alarm system wiring, computer wiring, drywall insulation, drywall taping and sanding, site/landscaping, etc. Or we can use help in soliciting materials we need for the job: electrical, plumbing, insulation, lumber, drywall, paint, fixtures, tile (ceiling and floor), etc.

Please call PACA (359-0114) and let us know how you can help us at the Greek Revival Cottage. No amount of time is too little and lack of skills is no excuse.

NEW OFFICERS ELECTED

At the March Board of Directors meeting the following officers were elected: President, Joan Severns; Vice-President, Kennedy Hutson; Secretary-Treasurer, Patricia Jensen. Other Directors serving on the Board are Norman Baxley, Marylee Mc-Donald, Hermenia Kruidenier, Kevin Cullen, Angela Finet, and James Dobrovolsky. Please feel free to contact any of these individuals with your questions, comments or suggestions concerning PACA.

VIP's
Bob Swisher
Mark Replogle
Rex Kummer
John Frauenhoffer
David Garner
Greg Hargus

NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS
Marylee MacDonald Family
Julie Kosarin & Stuart Muir
Nina Rubel
Mr. & Mrs. Scott Finet
Mr. & Mrs. L. E. Doyle
Bill Kruidenier
Walter Allen
Paul & Marjorie Gordon
Mark Netter & Eve Harwood
Greg Hargus
Mr. & Mrs. Harold Jensen
Dr. & Mrs. Joseph Zalar, Jr.
Michael A. Lambert
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Weber

PACA Newsletter
Published by the Preservation and Conservation Association

President: Joan Severns
Vice President: Kennedy Hutson
Secretary/Treasurer: Patricia Jensen
Exec. Director: Karen Lang Kummer
359-0114

Please submit material for publication in the next newsletter before 15th of month.