



Built From Sears Kits

A Guide to Houses Mail-Order Chic:

HISTORY

Because Blue Island was founded in 1835, the buildings in our community include a wide variety of structures that represent just about every style and method of construction that has been popular in this country for the

past century and a half. While the buildings by

Bertrand Goldberg,

Robert Seyfarth and

George Washington

Maher may attract

attention because of their

architectural distinction,

the more commonly

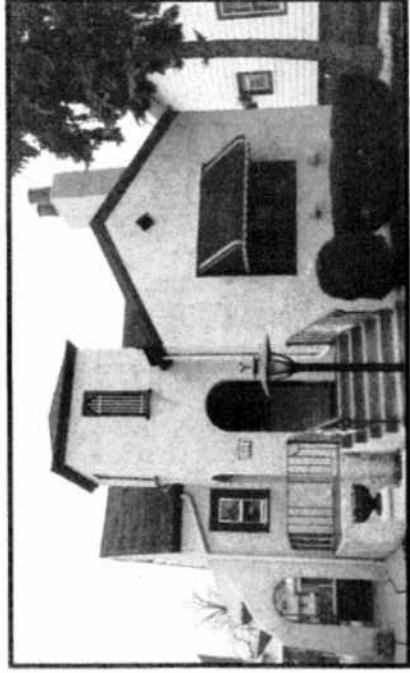
encountered buildings in

which most of us live and

work are worthy of note and may represent an

equally interesting aspect of our history.

One facet of this architectural heritage that is often unacknowledged is the "pre-packaged" houses that were offered by companies such as Sears, Roebuck and Company; Alladin and Montgomery Ward. These houses, which today we might call pre-fab construction and consider a modern innovation, were being built by the companies already mentioned and others in the early part of this century. The houses by Sears that are listed below represent over 100,000 such houses built across the country during the thirty-two years the company maintained this line. What is so unusual about these buildings is that they were sold as a kit which contained everything that was necessary to complete the building. Sears also offered optional features at additional cost. The package purchased for the price shown in the



The "San Jose" at 2324 W. 120th Place. This plan offered "...every modern comfort possible in a design...combining the beautiful Spanish Mission lines with the latest idea in a splendid floor plan."

tools were readily available to the general public,

the Sears method had a distinct advantage. Sears

had plants in Cairo, Illinois; Mansfield, Louisiana;

and Norwood, Ohio that took stock lumber and

pre-cut all of the

components of the

house so that all the

customer or his

contractor had to do

was nail the pieces

together at the site.

The instructions

provided were

written "so that

any. . . working man

would understand

them perfectly." But

if the customer felt

the erection of a

catalogue included millwork, cabinetry, lath,

roofing materials, flooring, siding, building paper,

downspouts, doors, window sash, shutters, various

styles of hardware, nails, paint and varnish.

Options included screens, storm windows, plaster-

board, plumbing,

heating and electrical

fixtures. Sears

guaranteed that,

when used according

to specifications, the

materials provided

would complete the

building and if they

did not Sears would

pay all shipping costs

and refund the

purchase price.

Before power

Please note that all of these sites are private residences, and are NOT open to the public. We thank you for respecting this privacy.

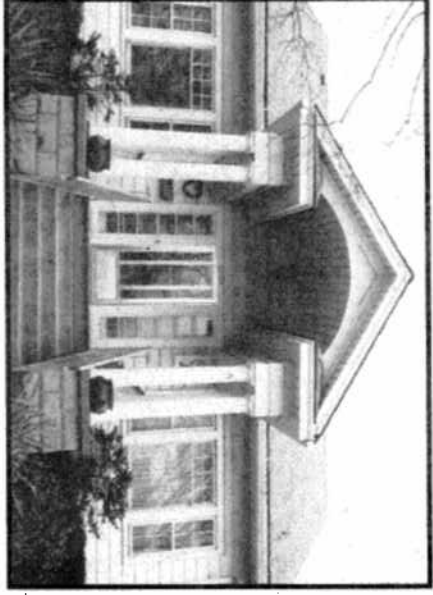
taste."

On the cover...

The "Crescent," the Lillie Price House at 2257 W. 122nd Street.

This house weighed over 27 tons when it was shipped. The model

was chosen by "folks who like a touch of individuality with good



builders across the country.

At first the different models were given

numbers, such as the C2009 mentioned above, but

later alluring names, such as the "San Jose" (at

2334 W. 120th Pl.) and the "Sunlight" (at 12221

Artesian), were provided. With the inducement of

quality material, attractive financing plans, help

with the actual construction, the services of a

decorating department (if the customer wanted to

provide his new house with Sears furnishings) and

an unbeatable guarantee ("...the customer must be

satisfied for a lifetime..."), Sears quickly became a

leader in this area of the home building industry.

These homes represent an important aspect in

the development of home construction in this

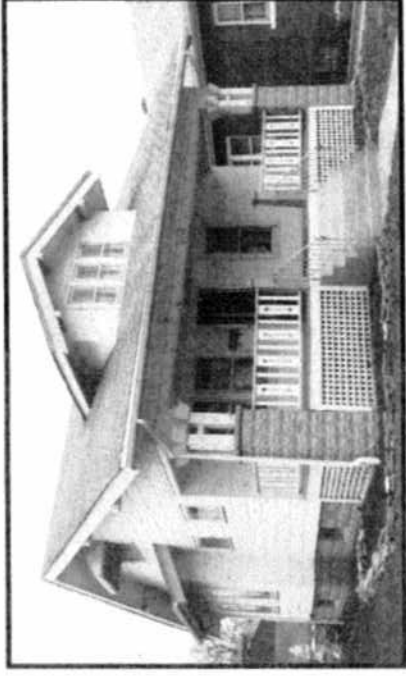
country, and our understanding of them adds an

important dimension to our appreciation of our

unique architectural heritage. To quote The Wall

Street Journal, "after decades of obscurity, Sears

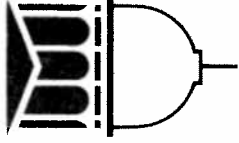
houses have become chic."



The "Vallonia" at 12546 S. Elm Street. This model was built three times in Blue Island. According to the Modern Homes Catalogue, "Perfect harmony in all details marks the architecture of the Vallonia."



The "Belfast" at 12139 S. Ann Street. This home, built circa 1935, was described as "reminiscent of beautiful colonial architecture [that] reflects that good cheer and gracious dignity which made their hospitality famous."



Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

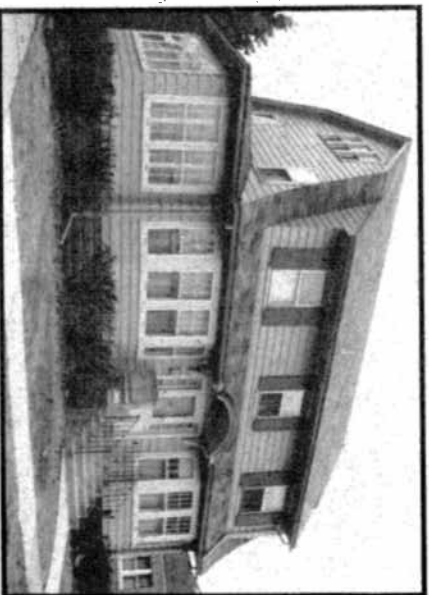
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Visit the Blue Island Historical Society's award winning Museum in the lower level of the Blue Island Public Library, located at 2443 York Street.
The facility is a designated visitor's center of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor.

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by advertising with the use of such statements as "our low prices for building these houses have amazed everybody in the building line", and "a home, residence or building, built according to our plans and specifications will make you a splendid investment which will bring you large returns." In 1926 Carl Benzling built his eighth room, five bedroom, two bath house (including three bedrooms and one bathroom unfinished in the attic), including the materials to finish the house, all

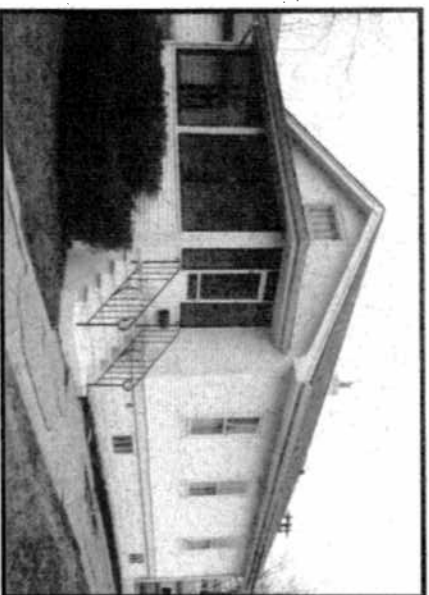


The "Verona" at 2235 W. 121st St. The catalogue described it as follows: "Its simplicity and beauty make it a classic in architecture. Built many times in exclusive suburbs of New York, Chicago, Washington, Cleveland... and other large cities."

electrical and plumbing supplies, millwork, maple and oak flooring, sheet plaster and finishing material, paint to finish the outside of the house, varnish for interior woodwork, shades, clothes rods, a hot water heating system, the services of carpenters, excavators, painters, plasterers, masons, plumbers, heating men and electricians to put the house together and the building permit for less than \$4,900. Sears wrote a fire insurance policy on the property for \$6,800.

After a house was completed, Sears would often write the owner to ask if the house could be shown to prospective customers. Whether or not these houses were open to the public in Blue Island is not known, but at least two designs, the Vallonia and the Crescent, created a favorable enough impression at least from the outside, that more than one example of these models was built here.

Sears "Honor Bilt Homes" were a phenomenon that almost never happened. Sears was founded in 1886 and quickly became America's foremost mail-order retailer. In 1895 the company began to sell building materials through its catalogue, but by 1906, after over 10 years as a division that was only marginally profitable, Sears



The "Hampton" at 2338 W. 121st St. Although relatively small in size, the house was "...planned to promote the comfort of the family."

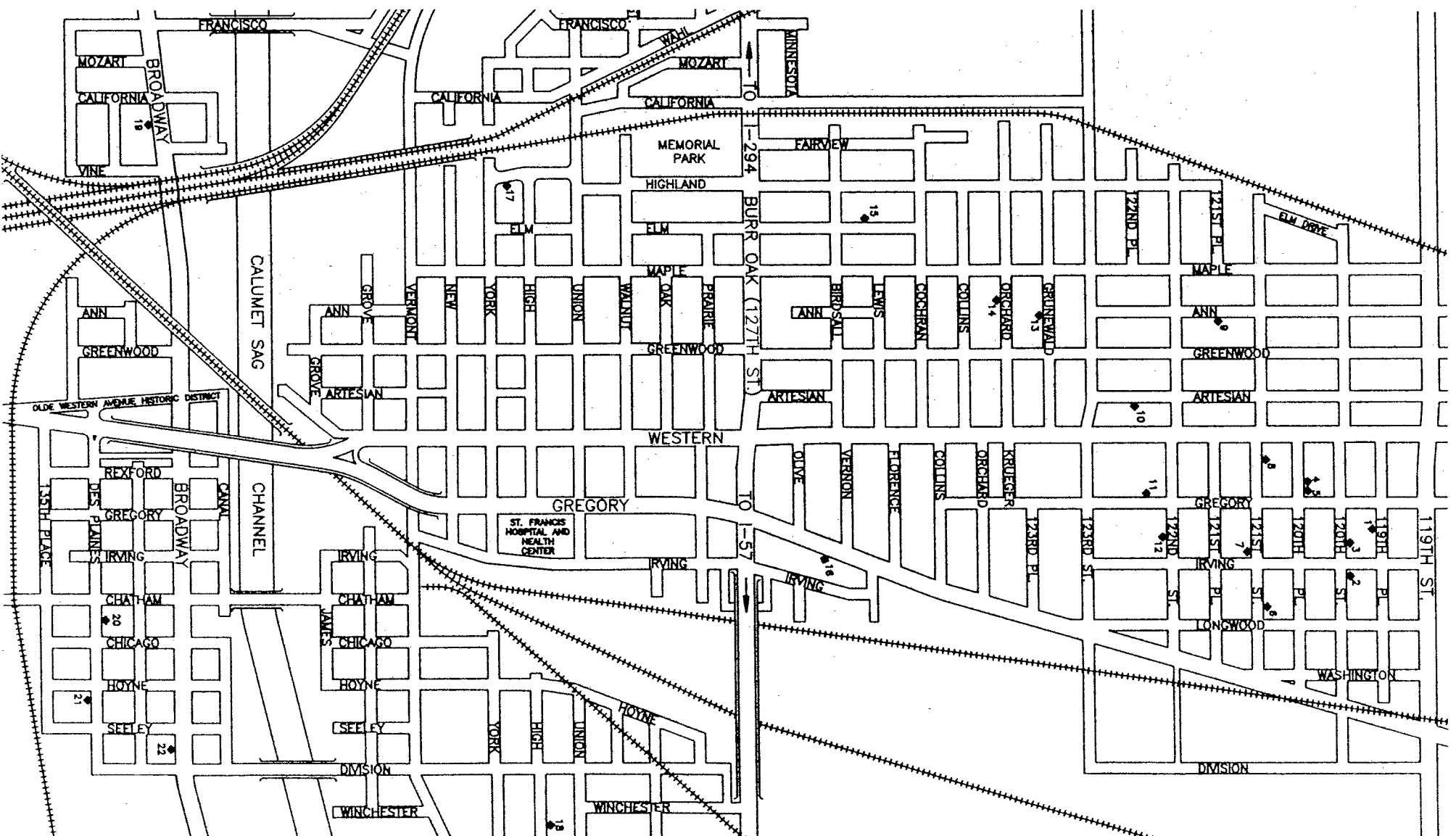
considered discontinuing this portion of its business. Frank W. Kushel, at that time manager of the china department, was appointed to carry out this task. But Kushel felt that with the proper management the department could turn a profit, and urged the company to give him an opportunity to prove it. The first catalogue devoted strictly to home building, entitled "Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans" was published in 1908, and offered floor plans for 22 different homes. By the time Sears discontinued manufacturing homes thirty-two years later in 1940, the number of

selections offered by that time amounted to almost 450 different designs, and over one hundred thousand houses had been built.

The prices ranged from a few hundred dollars for a small cottage to almost six thousand dollars for the "Magnolia", an elegant eight room "Colonial" mansion with two and one half baths that was offered in 1918 and again in 1921. The designs

varied widely in style. While Sears would not have been considered a trendsetter, the variety of styles and floor plans they offered reflected the popular tastes of the day. Handsome Craftsman bungalows and Dutch Colonial Revival houses, several fine examples of which can be found in Blue Island, were well-received by eager home

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Sears kit houses can be found in Blue Island at the following addresses:

NO.	MODEL	ADDRESS			
1.	Rodessa	2255 W. 119th Place	12.	Crescent	2257 W. 122nd Street
2.	Crescent	2220 W. 120th Street	13.	Starlight	2515 W. Grunewald Street
3.	Crescent	2238 W. 120th Street	14.	Corona	2529 W. Orchard Street
4.	San Jose	2324 W. 120th Place	15.	Vallonia	12546 S. Elm Street
5.	Vallonia	2318 W. 120th Place	16.	C 2009	12561 S. Vincennes Road
6.	Somerset	2148 W. 121st Street	17.	Van Jean	12947 S. Highland Avenue
7.	Verona	2235 W. 121st Street	18.	Vallonia	1906 W. High Street
8.	Hampton	2338 W. 121st Street	19.	Starlight	2749 W. Broadway
9.	Belfast	12139 S. Ann Street	20.	Hampton	2152 W. DesPlaines Street
10.	Sunlight	12221 S. Artesian Street			(Second story added)
11.	Vallonia	12210 S. Gregory Street	21.	Collingwood	2061 W. DesPlaines Street
			22.	Hampton	2049 W. Broadway