

Siouxland History... & Mystery!

By Jim Jung

Everyone likes a good mystery-right? In the Siouxland area there are probably several mail-order houses that were brought here in pieces by rail. The company that manufactured them did not retain their records and there is no local history of them. Hopefully, this article will stir some interest or responses as to their location.

From 1908-1940, Sears Roebuck and Co. sold 70,000-75,000 homes through their mail-order program. During that time, Sears designed 447 different house styles and, rather than offer new designs, they copied existing ones and even allowed the buyer to design their own home.

Mail-order catalogs have been around for a long time. Between 1895 and 1900, Sears began to sell building materials from a catalog. Sales of building materials were slow, so in 1908 they introduced their first catalog devoted to mail-order homes. It was entitled Book Of Modern Homes and Building Plans and contained 22 styles with price ranges from \$147 to \$6,000. Expanding their holdings, Sears purchased lumber yards in various states. To further boost sales, they offered attractive financing plans with a typical loan running five years at 6%. Railroads were the sole means used to deliver materials which accounts for the Midwest and the Northeast having the highest concentrations of the homes.

The process of designing or selecting a home began as soon as a catalog arrived and the owner placed an order. Thereafter, a Service Representative was assigned and wrote to the buyer to confirm the style, provide a manual and set a delivery date. At the height of production there were 350 of these personnel

in 48 states. Two weeks after an order was placed two boxcars full of materials arrived at the local train depot. Each piece was precut and numbered. Included in the shipment was mill work, cabinetry, lath, roofing, gutters, flooring, siding, building paper, doors, window sash, hardware, nails, paint and varnish. Concrete block, brick or stone was purchased locally. Optional items included screens, storms, plasterboard, plumbing, heating and electrical fixtures. An average home contained 30,000 pieces, 750 pounds of nails 27 gallons of paint and a 75 page instruction book. The average carpenter would charge \$450 to construct a home.

Drawings of a house included furnished interior pictures that showcased the home well and, of course, Sears just happened to have a catalog full of interior furnishings.

After the stock crash of 1929 and the resulting depression, this concept began a slow decline and ceased in 1940. However, in 1929 they gave a big push and offered more loans, better rates on loans and would provide on-site construction. However, by 1934 they had begun to slow production.

Another article could be written on the methods of identifying an existing Sears home. The book Houses By Mail written by Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl covers this well and includes many photographs.

These pieces of history are out there waiting for us to discover them, but we need to look for them. There is no national directory of them. If anyone has a Sears house or knows of one please contact the Sioux City Historic Preservation Commission at www.siouxcityhp.org.

Siouxland Faces

Moments from Artists Choose Artists



Terri McGaffin,, Shea Hartmann Hodges & Dolie Thompson

Boys and Girls Home and Family Services hosted over 300 fans and supporters at Tailgating for Our Kids held Friday, October 14 at the Marina Inn Center. Over \$123,950 was raised for the agency; Leonard Gill, Honorary Chair, was recognized for his outstanding support and generosity to Boys and Girls Home and Family Services and the Siouxland community.

Visit www.boysandgirlshome.com for more information!



Mark Kochen & Ray McAvoy



Becky Bowers and Christine McAvoy