

IS YOUR HOME A KIT HOUSE?

By Catherine Morley

Over 100,000 kit houses were built in the United States between 1908 & 1940. Many people live in kit houses without knowing the historical and architectural significance of these homes.

Kit homes began in 1906 with Aladdin Homes of Bay City, Michigan. In 1908 Sears, Roebuck and Co entered in the market and became the largest company providing this type of construction. In the years that followed, Wardway Homes (Montgomery Ward), Harris Homes of Chicago, The Ready Built House Company and Robinson's also got into the kit home market.

Perhaps due to their market share, Sears Roebuck is the most well-known of kit home manufacturers. They produced and sold over 75,000 kit homes. Ordering directly from a catalog entitled Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans, prospective buyers enjoyed the convenience and affordability of a pre-fabricated dwelling. These homes came in a wide variety of styles, designs and prices. The purchaser would receive all of the necessary supplies in shipments by rail car. A typical house could fit into two box



The CASTLETON **SEARS** \$1,989.00
No. 227 - Not Cut or Filled

As an illustration of our well known "Kit House" plan, we have selected this one for our "Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans" which we are now offering for sale.

Second Floor: 10'0" x 12'0" (12'0" x 12'0")
Third Floor: 10'0" x 12'0" (12'0" x 12'0")
Height of Outside: 20'0" (22'0" x 22'0")

DESCRIPTION: This is a well known "Kit House" plan, which we are now offering for sale. It is a two-story house, with a front porch, and a full basement. The house is built of wood, and is finished with a high quality of work. It is a well known "Kit House" plan, and is one of the best of its kind. It is a well known "Kit House" plan, and is one of the best of its kind.

SEARS **ROEBUCK** **CO.**
The National Retail Store
The National Retail Store
The National Retail Store



A typical 1921 ad from the Sears archives

cars which contained 30,000 pieces, including 750 pounds of nails, 27 gallons of paint and a 75 page instruction book. They would be assembled by either the new homeowner or a local contractor. Sears estimated the average carpenter would charge \$450 to assemble those 30,000 pieces. Prices to purchase the homes ranged from \$600 to \$6,000.

How to tell if your home is a Sears Kit Home:

- Every piece of framing lumber was numbered at the factory for assembly at

the construction site. Look for framing numbers and the Sears logo on the beams in your attic and under the house. Also, the Sears logo may be seen on doorknobs, hinges and miscellaneous hardware. Check inside built-in cabinets, cupboards and drawers for numbers as well.

- Look in the eaves in the attic. Sometimes building plans and the instruction book have been tucked away.
- Check with your neighbors. As Sears homes were often built in groups, their

home may be a kit house or they may know of others in the neighborhood.

- Check at the County Tax Assessors office, and building records at City Hall.
- It is possible to locate old copies of catalogs which could provide matching photos for identification of a compatible style.

If you think your home could be a kit house, more information is available on line through sources such as : www.oldhouseweb.com. Also, there are many books available on the subject. "The Houses That Sears Built: Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Sears Catalog Homes" author Rosemary Thornton and "Houses By Mail" author Katherine Cole are good resources to start on your detective search adventure.

During the month of January Long Beach Treasures, a local Charter Cable



A charming example of a kit home in Bull Heights

television show, will be doing a segment on Kit Houses. A kit home in our own neighborhood will be featured. The show will be aired on channel 3 each Sunday and Tuesday at 6:00pm.

If you have a kit home please let us know. We would like to have photographs of the homes in future newsletters and on our web site. ♦



A home from the 1912 Sears Catalog