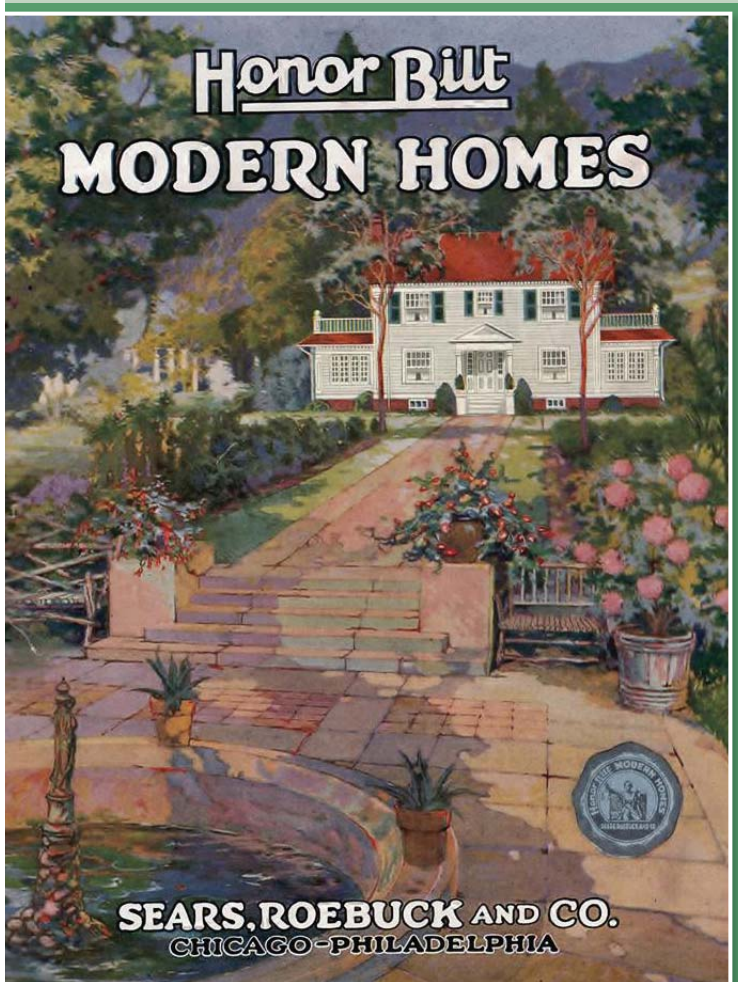
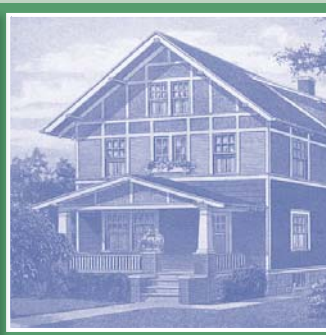
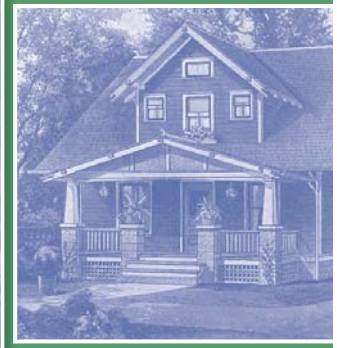
Walking/Driving Tour

Village of DOWNERS GROVE FOUNDED IN 1832

SEARS CATALOG HOMES







OVERVIEW OF SEARS HOMES

In 1895, the idea of a self-assembled, mail order home was realized by companies such as The Hodgson Company, Aladdin Homes, Montgomery Ward, and of course the largest and most successful of these enterprises – Sears, Roebuck and Company. Before Sears even began selling kit homes, Richard W. Sears (founder of Sears, Roebuck and Company) already had a distinct advantage over these competitors. Sears could boast that one out of every four Americans was already a customer at Sears.

Between 1908 and 1940, the Sears Roebuck specialty catalog offered more than 450 different models of 'kit' homes and many variations of them with prices ranging from $146.25 for the Golden Rod Cottage up to $5,140 for the Magnolia – the grandest of all the kit homes.

The average kit home had 30,000 parts, not including nails, screws, etc. It included everything except the lot, foundation, and energy to assemble it. Each precut piece was perfectly shaped, no sawing was required, and all parts were number-keyed to a blueprint. These ready-to-assemble homes reflected the American taste of the period complete with modern conveniences such as indoor plumbing and electricity. They were shipped mostly by rail car to buyers across the country.

When the Sears Modern Homes Department closed in 1940, the sales records and promotional materials were destroyed, leaving it up to individual communities and homeowners to identify Sears Homes. Alongside Elgin and Carlinville, Downers Grove boasts one of the largest collections of Sears Homes within Illinois with nearly 150 homes.

For more information about Sears Homes, visit: **http://www.searsarchives.com/homes/1908-1914.htm**

For more information about historic preservation in Downers Grove, visit: **http://www.downers.us/govt/historic-preservation**

DOWNERS GROVE SEARS HOMES

Establishing a home's identity can be tricky. It is unusual to find a house in its original condition. Many have been remodeled or the original floor plans may have been customized or reversed. Also, some Sears models are similar to those offered by other mail-order companies. On the walking tour, you will notice many homes which have characteristic features similar to the Sears models. To the best of the Village's knowledge, the homes listed in the brochure have been determined to be Sears Catalog Homes. Unique architectural features to notice during the walking tour are shown in the brochure.

Many Sears Homes include details such as:

- ***unique shaped steps on the side of the chimney exterior***
- ***a half moon door with a 180 degree arch***
- ***a cat slide roof***
- ***a crescent or eyebrow window under the eaves***
- ***double-hung windows with a single pane bottom and multiple pane top***
- ***arches over vestibules***
- ***narrow pane windows***

TOUR OF SEARS HOMES

Each home description will have a numbered symbol which coincides with its location on the map.

Whitehall ..... Page 4
Barrington ..... Page 5
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Cornell ..... Page 7
Avondale..... Page 8
Arlington..... Page 9
Alhambra ..... Page 10
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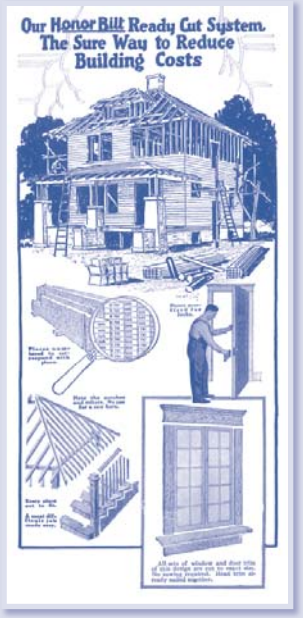
1 WHITEHALL

Offered 1912 – 1926
Cost $687 – $1,863

4706 Highland Avenue

Designed with economy in mind, the home features six rooms and one bath. The dining and living rooms are connected by a large cased opening, which appears to make one large room. The front façade features a two-story bay window and a full-width front porch with wood columns. Recent renovations altered the front steps and front door.



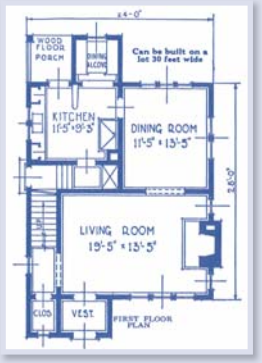
Sears FACT

A skilled but mostly anonymous group of architects designed the 447 different kit homes for Sears. Each of the designs could be modified in numerous ways, including reversing the floor plan, building with brick instead of siding, and many other options.

2 BARRINGTON

Offered 1926 – 1929
Cost $2,329 – $2,606

911 Lincoln Street



This Barrington model features six rooms and one bath and was built as a rental unit just prior to the Depression. The living room features a fireplace flanked by high casement windows, while a breakfast nook is provided in the rear. The home is in the English Country Revival style with the practical interior of American architecture. The Barrington model is similar to the Brookwood model and is identical to the Cambridge model, with the only difference being the exterior siding.

History FACT

In 1910, only 10% of homes had electricity. By 1930, that number jumped to 70%, providing a more convenient home for buyers.

BROOKWOOD

Offered 1932 – 1933
Cost $1,328

3 4540 Forest Avenue

The two-story Brookwood model features six rooms and one bath. The Brookwood model is similar to the Barrington model but does not feature a fireplace nor a breakfast nook. A 1950's addition has been added to the west side of the original home. During construction of the addition, uncovered plaster bedroom walls had notes written on them about President-elect Roosevelt visiting President Hoover at the White House in December 1932.

7 4905 Parkway Drive

This Brookwood model, unlike the 4540 Forest Avenue Brookwood model home, does not feature an addition. The steeply pitched vestibule roof with an arched window opening is the primary feature of this property. The home was built by Otto Hummer, founder of the Downers Grove Park District system, and is adjacent to historic Prince Pond.

CORNELL

Offered 1925 – 1938
Cost $1,360 – $1,785

4 4605 Forest Avenue

The Cornell model includes six or seven rooms and one bath. Originally, the home featured a full-width front porch supported by brick piers. A renovation to the home eliminated half of the original porch. The rectangular layout of the house permitted this model to be placed on narrow lots.

6 4819 Prince Street

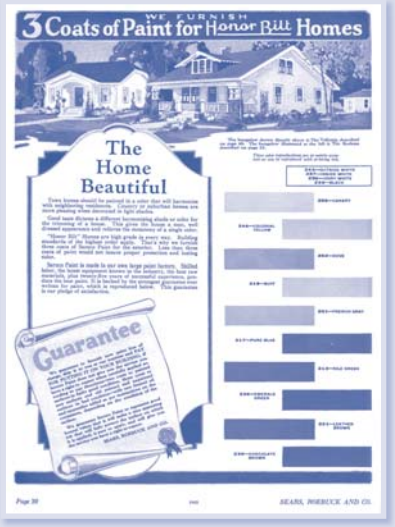
The Cornell model features a front dormer, hipped roof, and a front porch, which has been enclosed. The home features numerous windows, which made the Cornell a popular model. A side addition was made to this house incorporating the same materials as the original structure.

5 AVONDALE

Offered 1911 – 1912
Cost $1,198 – $2,657

4808 Forest Avenue

This modern bungalow includes six rooms and one bath. The home's exterior features include a projecting bay, a front porch with tapered columns, and a hipped roof. Interior features include a built-in buffet and mirror in the dining room, a living room fireplace flanked by window seats, and a beamed ceiling in both the living and dining rooms. A rear addition blends in with the historic home.



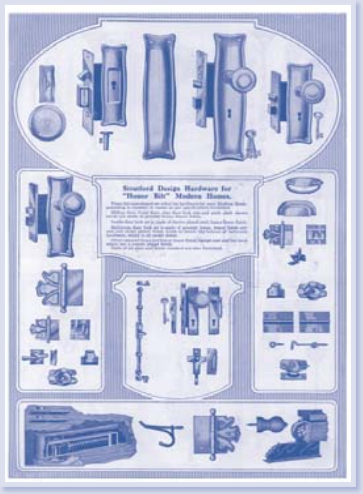
Sears FACT ***Central heating, indoor plumbing, and electricity were all new developments in home design that 'Modern Homes' incorporated, although not all homes were designed with these conveniences.***

8 ARLINGTON

Offered 1913 – 1922
Cost $1,294 – $2,906

4817 Linscott Avenue

This Arts and Crafts Style home includes seven rooms and one bath. Originally constructed with a wrap-around front porch with tapered, paired columns, this porch has since been enclosed. The interior features include beamed ceilings in the dining room with a fireplace in the living room.



Sears FACT ***In the early 1930s, bungalows such as the Arlington model, became the house of the future. In a new bungalow home, living rooms and dining rooms were essentially one room, separated by only colonnades or an arch. Kitchens were also made smaller and more efficient with an increased emphasis on organization.***

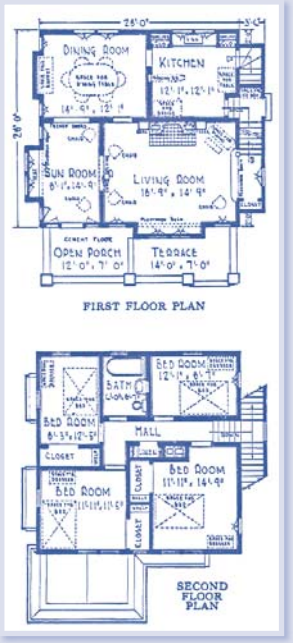
9 ALHAMBRA

Offered 1918 – 1929
Cost $1,969 – $3,134

4743 Saratoga Avenue

The Alhambra home includes eight rooms and one bath. Original catalog renderings show the Alhambra with many Spanish Revival details that were not built on this house. But it does detail a stucco exterior with a front dormer, overhanging eaves, and an open porch and terrace (which has since been converted to living space). The living room features a fireplace while the dining room has built-in sideboards. The Alhambra model is similar to the Monterey model, but with a different roof and porch design.

This Sears home was built in 1924 at the prominent corner of Saratoga Avenue and Prairie Avenue in the E.H. Prince Subdivision. This home is one of the largest kit homes in Downers Grove.



LEXINGTON

Offered 1921 – 1933
Cost $2,958 – $4,365

10 1240 Chicago Avenue

This model includes seven to nine rooms and one-and-a-half baths. This Colonial Revival house includes a small front porch with stately pilasters and a sun parlor on the west façade with a balcony above. The interior includes a fireplace in the family room and French doors throughout the ground floor.

18 1340 Gilbert Avenue

This home includes a gabled front porch and, in addition to a sun parlor on the east side, it also features a dining porch on the west façade. Both house extensions include balconies above. This home is the largest Sears home in Downers Grove.

11 COLCHESTER

Offered 1929 – 1939
Cost $1,527 – $2,037

4641 Seeley Avenue

The Colchester model includes five or seven rooms and one bath with an optional second floor. The front façade features a round-arched front door, a crescent window in the front gable, and a brick chimney. Interior features include a fireplace in the living room and a telephone room in the main hall.

Downers Grove FACT

In the 1920s over 5,000 people moved to Downers Grove and the real estate market was booming. The 1920 population was 3,543 and in 1930 it was 8,977. During that time, Chicago residents who were tired of paying rent were moving to the suburbs, including Downers Grove.

12 LYNNHAVEN

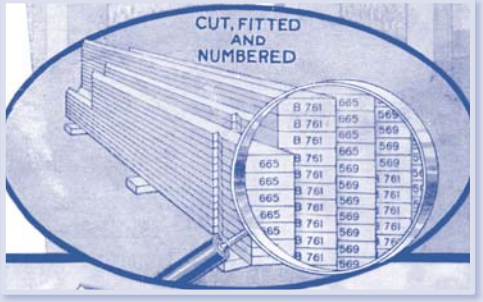
Offered 1932 – 1933
Cost $2,600

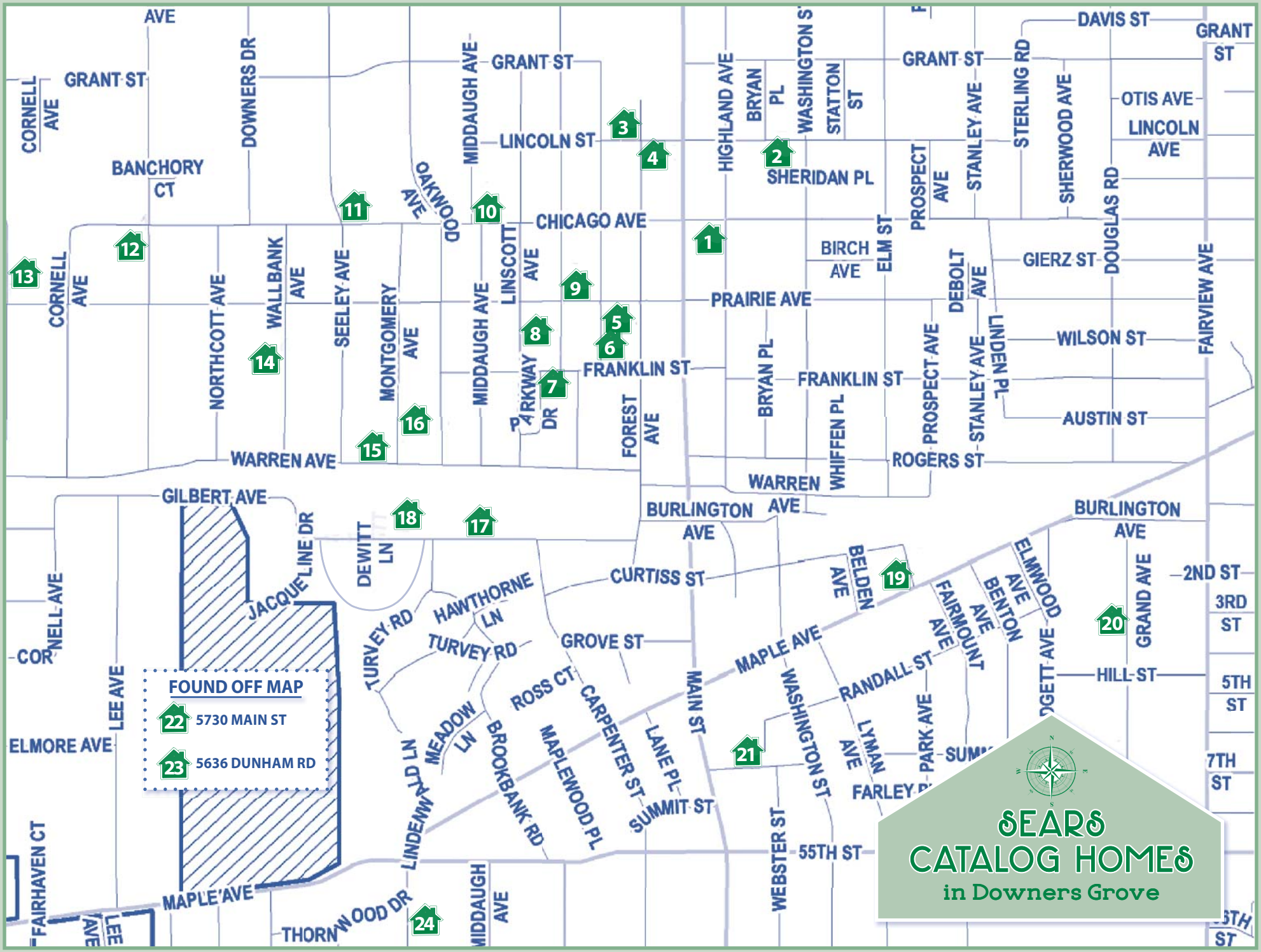
4716 Lee Avenue

This Country Revival influenced home includes six rooms and one-and-a-half baths. The steep front gable façade features a recessed entrance porch with a stone surround. The front façade also features a shed dormer. The interior includes a breakfast alcove off of the kitchen.

Sears FACT

An easy way to identify if a home is a Sears Catalog Home is to look at the lumber. Most Sears' lumber was stamped with a letter and a number. Between 1908 and 1910, Sears sometimes used local mills who supplied lumber when demand was high so not all lumber will have those details.




SEARS
CATALOG HOMES
in Downers Grove
FOUND OFF MAP
22 5730 MAIN ST
23 5636 DUNHAM RD
GRANT ST
CORNELL AVE
BANCHORY CT
DOWNERS DR
MIDDAUGH AVE
LINCOLN ST
OAKWOOD AVE
CHICAGO AVE
HIGHLAND AVE
BRYAN PL
WASHINGTON ST
STATTON ST
SHERIDAN PL
PROSPECT AVE
STANLEY AVE
STERLING RD
SHERWOOD AVE
DAVIS ST
OTIS AVE
LINCOLN AVE
DOUGLAS RD
FAIRVIEW AVE
BIRCH AVE
ELM ST
DEBOLT AVE
GIERZ ST
PRAIRIE AVE
WILSON ST
LINDEN PL
AUSTIN ST
NORTHCOTT AVE
WALLBANK AVE
SEELEY AVE
MONTGOMERY AVE
LINSCOTT AVE
PARKWAY DR
FRANKLIN ST
FOREST AVE
WHIFFEN PL
ROGERS ST
WARREN AVE
GILBERT AVE
JACQUELINE DR
DEWITT LN
BURLINGTON AVE
CURTISS ST
BELDEN AVE
ELMWOOD AVE
BENTON AVE
FAIRMOUNT AVE
GRAND AVE
2ND ST
3RD ST
5TH ST
7TH ST
HAWTHORNE LN
TURVEY RD
GROVE ST
MAPLE AVE
RANDALL ST
HILL ST
ROSS CT
CARPENTER ST
MAIN ST
WASHINGTON ST
LYMAN AVE
PARK AVE
FARLEY
MEADOW LN
BROOKBANK RD
MAPLEWOOD PL
LANE PL
SUMMIT ST
LINDENWOOD DR
WEBSTER ST
55TH ST
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LEE AVE
FAIRHAVEN CT
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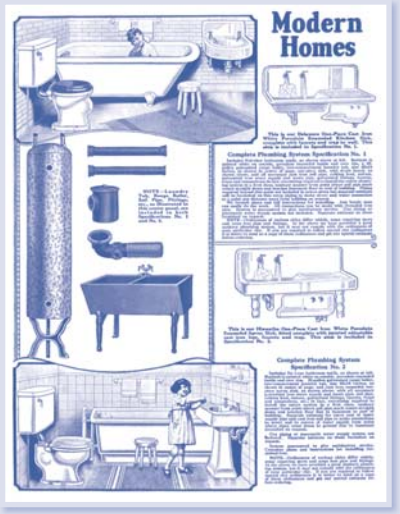
13 AURORA

Offered 1933
Cost $989 – $1,110

4725 Stonewall Avenue

This English Country cottage style home includes six rooms, one bath, and a built-in basement garage, which was rare in 1933. The front entrance extends out from the main house with a gable. The front façade features a prominent stone chimney. The home was built in 1933 by volunteer firemen for their chief.



Sears FACT

Towards the end of Sears offering its kit homes, their popularity was shown by the many children who learned to read by only using the Sears Roebuck Catalog and the family Bible. In many rural homes, those were the only two books in a household.

14 ROCHELLE

Offered 1929 – 1933
Cost $1,170

4832 Wallbank Avenue

Described in the 1932 catalog as "Americanized English architecture", the Rochelle includes four rooms and one bath. The double gable front façade is a unique feature along with the arched front door. The home was recently renovated with a large addition on the north façade to provide an attached garage and additional living space.

Sears FACT

In 1929, Sears' popularity was booming as they were shipping an average of 250 units per month just from Cairo, IL.

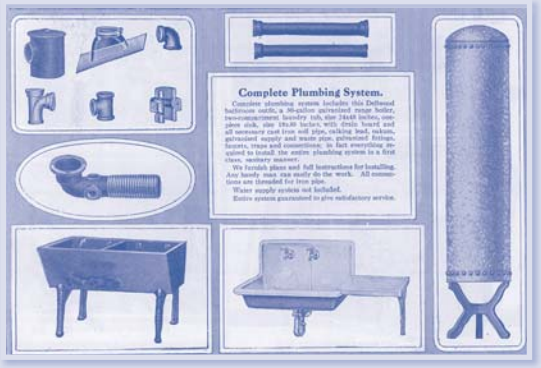
Downers Grove FACT

Due to the state of the economy between 1929 and 1931, many Village residents were without jobs, and money was scarce. The entire community worked together to find jobs for the unemployed and provide food and coal to those in need.

15 MOUNT VERNON

Offered 1921 – 1925
Cost $851 – $1,221

1416 Warren Avenue



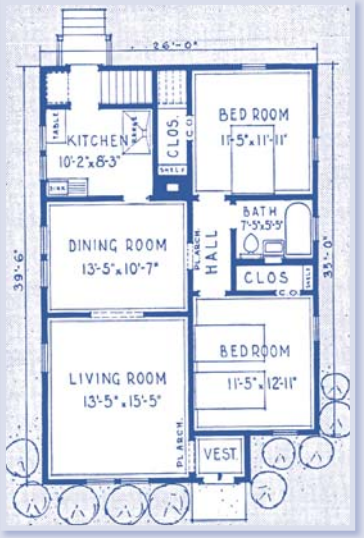
The Mount Vernon model includes four rooms and one bath with a gabled front porch and hipped roof. The interior features a fireplace in the living room and breakfast alcove off of the kitchen. The Mount Vernon model is one of a few Sears homes that was not a pure kit. The four outside walls were small enough to be constructed in a mill and shipped with the rest of the kit. This was called a Simplex Sectional Home.

The Simplex Sectional Home, as the name suggests, contained simple designs. The Mount Vernon model could be assembled with basic tools and required no sawing or nailing. Simplex homes such as these were frequently only a couple of rooms and were ideal for summer cottages.

16 BELLEWOOD

Offered 1931 – 1933
Cost $1,259

4927 Montgomery Avenue



This small English Country Revival cottage includes five rooms and one bath. The exterior features a steep front gable with a cat slide curve over the arched front door.

Downers Grove FACT

In the early twentieth century, Downers Grove attracted not only homeowners, but also a number of businesses that became pillars of the community.

Sears FACT

Sears was still selling mail order homes in the early 1930s but their best sellers were the modest homes such as the Bellewood model.

17 STARLIGHT

Offered 1913 – 1933
Cost $543 – $1,645

1244 Gilbert Avenue

This bungalow style features five rooms and one bath. The home includes a clipped-gable dormer and hipped roof. The original full-width open front porch has been enclosed. The home also f eatures a pantry off of the kitchen.

Sears FACT

Downers Grove FACT

A house kit was shipped in a railroad car, and because of the switching roundhouse and railroad sidings in Downers Grove, there was track room for the car to remain for seven to ten days as it was being unloaded. The new owners could then follow the meticulous instructions to build the house themselves, or they could have a contractor complete the house. Downers Grove has one of the largest collections of Sears homes, due in part to its convenient railroad sidings.

19 IVANHOE

Offered 1912 – 1918
Cost $1,663 – $2,618

744 Maple Avenue

The Ivanhoe includes seven rooms and one bath. The home features two front hipped dormers and a wide front porch which extends nearly the entire width of the home. This particular Sears home is a combination of the Ivanhoe and Model 200 called Model 264P230. The home originally had a walk-in ice box with outside access.

This home in Downers Grove is a rare, fully documented Sears home with plans, construction documents, and Sears correspondence still in existence.

Sears FACT

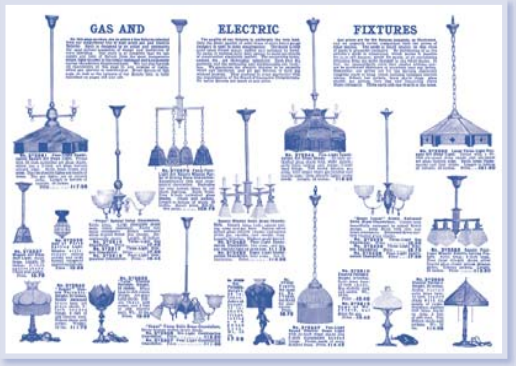
Sears estimated that the average man could erect a 'Modern Home' in about 90 days in good weather.

20 ELSMORE

Offered 1916 – 1926
Cost $858 – $2,391

5210 Grand Avenue

This bungalow includes five rooms and one bath. A projecting front porch features triple columns and bargeboard trim at the gable. The home features a reception room, now commonly called a foyer.



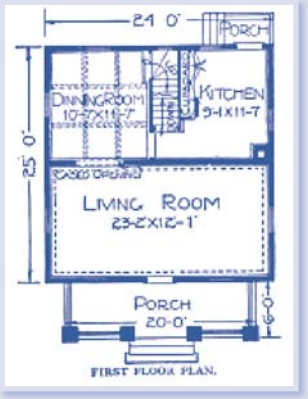
Sears FACT

During the time Kit homes were offered, Sears homes were an attactive option and a good value, immediately drawing prospective homeowners to the possibility of having a fine new home at a modest price.

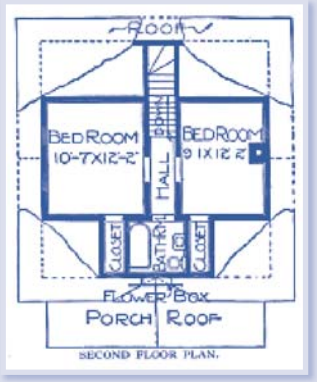
21 MARINA

Offered 1918 – 1921
Cost $1,289 – $1,632

930 Summit Street



This bungalow includes five rooms and one bath. The home features a front gable and a nearly full-width front porch with concrete columns and tapered wood piers. The interior includes a beamed ceiling in the dining room.



Sears FACT

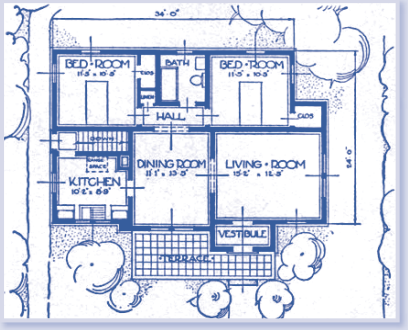
To advertise the company's new and improved line of building supplies, a Modern Homes specialty catalog, the* Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans, *appeared in 1908.

22 WILMORE

Offered 1933 – 1939
Cost $1,191 – $1,414

5730 Main Street

This English Country Revival house includes five rooms and one bath with an arched opening between the living and dining rooms. The two front gables are prominent features as well as the half-moon front door. The home is identical to the Jewel model and similar to the Roxbury model.



Sears FACT

Sears offered loans beginning in 1911, and by 1918 it offered customers credit for almost all building materials as well as offering advanced capital for labor costs. Typical loans ran at 5 years, with 6% interest, but loans could be extended over as many as 15 years.

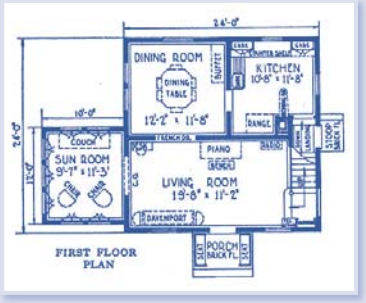
History FACT

A bill for dairy products in 1934 was only $3.44 for 18 quarts of milk and 14 jars of cream.

23 VAN DORN

Offered 1926, 1928, and 1933
Cost $1,576 – $2,249

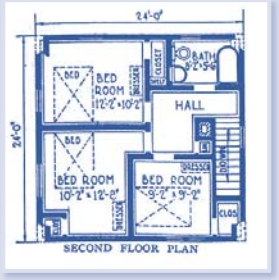
5636 Dunham Road



This Dutch Colonial style home includes six rooms and one bath with a semi-open stair and a full-width shed dormer on the front façade. This home was added onto and resembles the Van Jean model. An arch over the front door includes a crescent feature and paired columns.

Downers Grove FACT

Between 1930 and 1940, the population of Downers Grove increased by only 549 people due to the Great Depression. Families were combining households in order to survive, leading to very little real estate being sold.

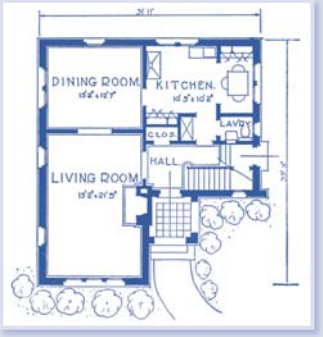


24 ELMHURST

Offered 1931 – 1933
Cost unavailable

5535 Dunham Road

This English Tudor style home features six rooms and one-and-a-half baths with a steeply pitched roof with a curve over the front entrance. The exterior is clad with brick and half-timbered wood and stucco. The home features a decorative telephone niche in the front hall and semi-open stairs to the second floor.

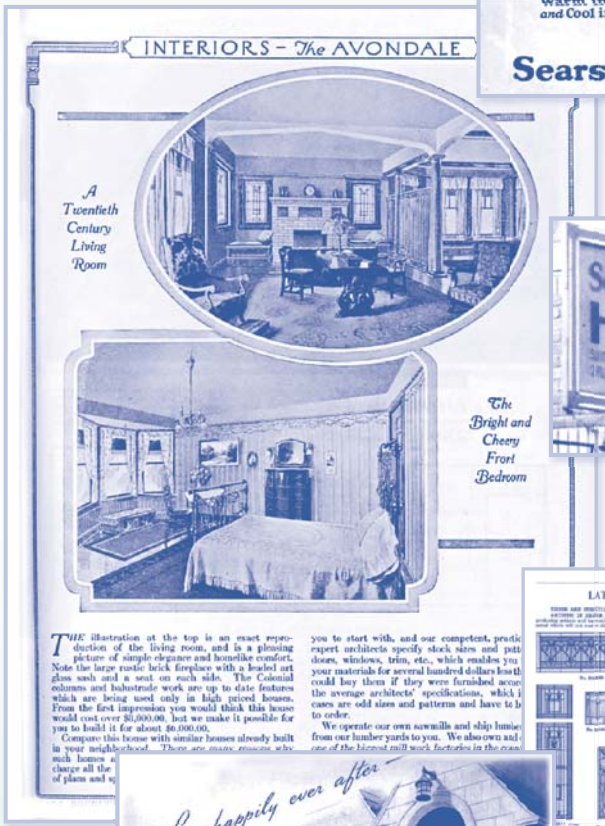


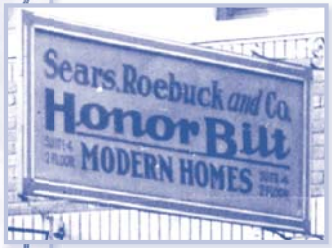
Sears FACT

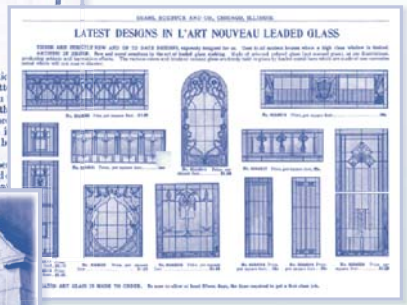
The growing middle class was leaving the city for suburbia as trolley lines and the railroad extended lifelines for families who needed to travel to the city. Likewise, companies were building factories on distant, empty parcels of land and needed to house their workers. Affordable, mail-order homes proved to be just the answer to such dilemmas.

Sears FACT

No official tally exists of the number of Sears mail-order houses that still survive today. It is reported that 70,000 to 100,000 houses were sold between 1908 and 1940 through Sears Modern Homes program with 447 different housing styles.







Preserving your property as a historic landmark is easier than ever and there's no cost, so call the Village or visit us on the web and let us help landmark your historic home today.

630.434.5515 | www.downers.us/govt/historic-preservation

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National Park Service
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or

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